

2025

THE STATE OF NURTURING CARE FOR ECD IN NAMIBIA

Where every
child's first
steps begin.

A RIGHT START REPORT
REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



INSIDE THIS REPORT

Namibia's progress
on the five
components of the
global Nurturing
Care Framework
for ECD – the
foundation that
helps young
children survive,
thrive and
transform.



Republic of Namibia



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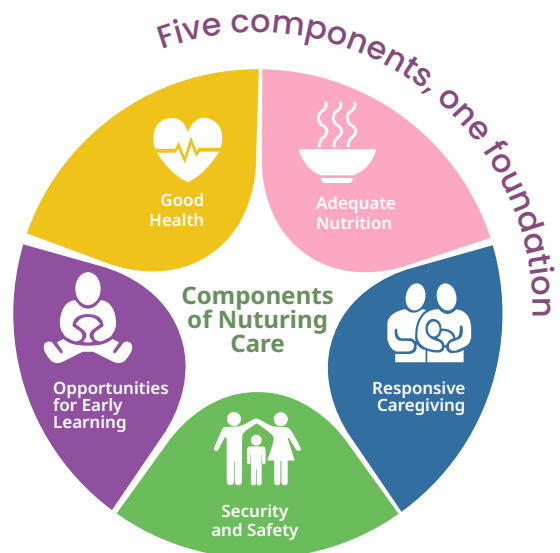
INTRODUCTION

A Framework for Thriving

What if a country's future was decided before its children turned five?

It is. The earliest years of life are when the brain develops faster than at any other time. By the time a child reaches school, the foundations for health, learning and behaviour are largely set. This is why early childhood matters – and why nurturing care is the bedrock of human development.

The Nurturing Care Framework for ECD, launched by the World Health Organization, UNICEF and the World Bank¹³, defines the conditions every young child needs to survive and thrive. It rests on five inseparable components, working together every day in the lives of caregivers and communities.



Good Health

physical and mental wellbeing of children and caregivers.

1.

Adequate Nutrition

maternal, infant and young child feeding.

2.

Responsive Caregiving

warm, attentive, attuned interactions.

3.

Opportunities for Early Learning

play, talk, books and stimulating environments.

4.

Security & Safety

protection from harm, neglect, poverty and violence.

5.

This report takes the temperature of each component in Namibia today. It draws on national surveys, ministry data and the Nurturing Care monitoring indicators recommended by WHO¹². The picture is mixed: real progress alongside real gaps. Where we stand now will shape what Namibia becomes.

“The first 1,000 days are the most important — and the most modifiable — opportunity any society has to invest in its people.”

Adapted from the Nurturing Care Framework, WHO / UNICEF / World Bank Group (2018).



GOOD HEALTH

A healthy mother, a healthy baby - Namibia's health system delivers strong coverage where it counts.



Good health begins before birth. Namibia's antenatal coverage and HIV-positive maternal treatment are at near-universal levels – among the strongest indicators in this report. Yet maternal mortality and adolescent pregnancy remain stubborn, signalling that **access alone is not enough** when quality, equity and reach into the most vulnerable communities still vary.

100%

HIV-positive mothers receiving treatment

91%

Mothers attending postnatal visits

16%

Adolescent birth rate

Key indicators⁶

• HIV-positive mothers receiving treatment ⁶	100%
• Pregnant women attending antenatal visits ¹⁰	95%
• Mothers attending postnatal visits ¹⁰	91%
• Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births) ¹⁰	60
• Neonatal mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) ¹⁰	6
• Adolescent birth rate ¹⁰	16%

WHERE THE SYSTEM SHINES — AND WHERE IT MUST REACH FURTHER

Universal HIV treatment for pregnant mothers and 95% antenatal coverage are major public-health wins. But teenage pregnancies (16%) put both young mothers and their newborns at higher risk – and remind us that early-childhood investment must start with adolescent health.

What this means

A strong start at the clinic - but opportunities for improvement in the community.

Namibia's maternal-health pipeline performs at world-class coverage. The next decade's gains will come from quality of care during birth, postnatal follow-through into the home, and prevention of adolescent pregnancy through schools and community programmes.

ADEQUATE NUTRITION

Namibia's children are mostly well-fed — but the rules protecting how babies are fed are not yet on paper.



Stunting rates are extremely high in the country with **almost a third of children aged 0-4 being stunted. This has a lifelong impact on children's health, wellbeing and educational outcomes.** While exclusive breastfeeding is aligned to global average, there is scope to improve this, and Namibia has not yet aligned with the international code of marketing of breastmilk substitutes, leaving infant formula promotion largely unregulated.

49%

Infants exclusively breastfed for the first six months

30%

Stunting prevalence (children 0-4 years)

9%

Anaemia prevalence (pregnant women)

Key indicators

• Infants exclusively breastfed for the first six months ⁸	49%
• Stunting prevalence (children 0-4 years) ⁸	30%
• Global malnutrition rate (children 0-4 years) ⁸	2%
• Anaemia prevalence (pregnant women) ⁶	9%
• National alignment with the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes ¹¹	Not aligned
• Number of malnutrition cases recorded (June 2024-May 2025) ⁹	19,444

THE GAP: PROTECTING BREASTFEEDING BY LAW

Status of the International Code on Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes: Not aligned. Without legislation, families face unrestricted marketing of formula — undermining the very behaviour Namibia's mothers are doing remarkably well at. **Short statutory maternity leave also impacts exclusive breastfeeding.** Extension of maternity leave to 6 months is recommended.

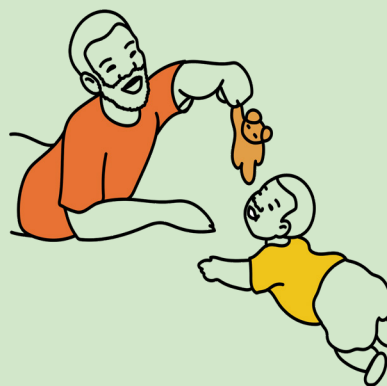
What
this
means

Behaviour is ahead of policy.

Just under half of Namibian mothers do the hard work of exclusive breastfeeding. The state's job is to protect that effort — by enacting the WHO/UNICEF Code on the marketing of breastmilk substitutes into national law, so that good practice isn't undermined by unrestricted formula promotion. Increased statutory maternity leave is recommended.

RESPONSIVE CAREGIVING

Caregiving in Namibia is warm — but it falls heavily on women, and the workforce that supports it is under-qualified and under-supported.



Three numbers tell the story: caregiving is **predominantly female**, hugs are **not as common as they should be**, and Namibia's preschool educators are largely unqualified. Combined with grade-3 numeracy and literacy results, the picture is of a system where loving relationships exist — but the structures around them need strengthening.

45%

Children hugged at home in past week (0–6 years)

57%

Households with one or more children's books

2%

Parents reporting that learning starts at age 0

Key indicators

• Mother / other females do most caregiving (0–6 years) ¹	74%
• Children hugged at home in past week (0–6 years) ¹	45%
• Statutory maternity leave ⁷	12 weeks
• Statutory paternity leave ⁷	None
• Households with one or more children's books ¹	57%
• Parents reporting that learning starts at age 0 ¹	2%
• Someone played with 0–6-year-old in past week ¹	58%

UNDERVALUING PARENTING AND VITAL EARLY BONDING

Roughly half of caregivers play or read with young children weekly — promising, but not enough. With only 2% recognising that learning starts at birth, public messaging around learning through play is the single highest-leverage investment Namibia can make. With no statutory paternity leave fathers are structurally locked out of important early bonding.

**What
this
means**

Care is happening. Now it needs company and competence.

Three reforms would change the picture: paid paternity leave that brings fathers in, extended statutory maternity leave, and parenting-skills programmes that normalise daily play, talk and physical affection between caregivers and young children.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR EARLY LEARNING



Most Namibian children miss early learning at exactly the moment when their brains are most ready for it.

Just 2% of parents believe learning starts at birth – yet that's precisely when it does. Only 26% of under-fives attend an ECD centre, and only 57% of households have a single children's book. When learning does happen, it's mostly through play and conversation – but the building blocks remain unevenly available.

26%

0–4-year-olds enrolled in any organised early learning

32%

Grade 3 learners passing numeracy (40% minimum)

17%

ECD educarers with formal qualifications

Key indicators

• 0–4-year-olds enrolled at an ECD centre ³	26%
• Educational activities in household (counting/reading/colouring) in past week ¹	47%
• Grade 3 learners passing numeracy (40% minimum) ²	32%
• Grade 3 learners passing literacy (40% minimum) ²	28%
• ECD educarers with formal qualifications ³	17%

OPPORTUNITIES FOR EARLY STIMULATION AND LEARNING

ECD access and attendance remains low, and the quality of ECD provided at available centres is also a challenge. While it's not expected that younger children aged 0-2 necessarily attend ECD centres if they can get safe, stimulating care at home, from age 3 children ideally would be benefiting from a structured, quality early learning programme.

What this means

Weak Learning Foundation

With low attendance rates, under-qualified ECD staff and limited home-based stimulation, it's not surprising that we see poor early literacy and numeracy outcomes for children at the end of Junior Primary.

SECURITY & SAFETY

Namibia gets the basics right — but poverty and childhood violence remain the most damaging threats to nurturing care.



5.

Four in ten Namibians live in multidimensional poverty, and roughly four in ten 18–24-year-olds report having experienced violence as children. These two realities — material deprivation and unsafe homes — are the gravity that pulls down progress in every other component of nurturing care.

40%

18–24-year-old females
reporting violence in childhood

73%

0–4-year-olds with
birth registration

60%

Households with
access to a toilet

Key indicators

• Population in multidimensional poverty ⁵	43%
• 18–24-year-old females reporting violence in childhood ⁴	40%
• 18–24-year-old males reporting violence in childhood ⁴	45%
• 0–4-year-olds with birth registration ⁶	74%
• Households with access to safe drinking water ⁶	91%
• Households with access to a toilet ⁶	60%

TWO SYSTEMIC HURDLES: POVERTY AND UNREGISTERED CHILDREN

Without a birth certificate, a child cannot fully access services, schooling or protection — yet 27% of Namibia's youngest children remain unregistered. Combined with deep multidimensional poverty, the conditions for thriving early childhood are uneven across the country.

**What
this
means**

Until poverty falls and violence stops, the rest is fragile.

Without a birth certificate, a child cannot fully access services or protection — yet 26% of Namibia's youngest children remain unregistered. Combined with deep multidimensional poverty and the violence experienced by four in ten young Namibians as children, every other gain in this report sits on uneven ground.

CONVENTIONS —

Namibia's Commitments to Children

Namibia has signed up to every major international instrument that protects young children.

The frameworks below set the legal and moral floor for the rights of every child in Namibia. They also establish the country's reporting obligations on the components of nurturing care covered in this report. Signing is the first step – implementation, monitoring and accountability are the work that follows.

INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS NAMIBIA HAS SIGNED

✓	UN	Signed	Convention on the Rights of the Child
✓	African Union	Signed	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
✓	African Union	Signed	Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want
✓	UN	Signed	Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030)
✓	UN	Signed	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
✓	UN	Signed	Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography
✓	Hague Conference	Signed	Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption

FULL CONVENTION COVERAGE (7 of 7)

Namibia is a signatory to all seven major instruments protecting children's rights and development. The next frontier is operationalising them – particularly aligning national legislation with the WHO/UNICEF Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes.

Namibia has an officially adopted national multisectoral ECD policy, The National Integrated ECD Policy of 2007, which is currently being updated for 2026–2036.



SOURCES —

Where the Numbers Come From

Every indicator in this report is numbered.

The numbers in superscript next to each statistic — for example ⁶ — refer to the corresponding numbered source below. Indicators are aligned with the WHO Concept Note (2019) for monitoring the Nurturing Care Framework.



PRIMARY NATIONAL SOURCES

- [1] Development Workshop Namibia (2024). Knowledge, Attitude and Practice Study of Early Childhood Development in Namibia. Windhoek: DWN.
- [2] Ministry of Education, Innovation, Youth, Sports, Arts and Culture (2025). Report on the 2024 National End-of-Phase Grade 3 Literacy and Numeracy Assessment. Windhoek: MoEAC.
- [3] Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare (2024). ECD Survey Report: 2024 Early Childhood Development in Namibia. Windhoek: MGEPEWSW.
- [4] Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare (2019). Violence Against Children and Youth in Namibia: Findings from the Violence Against Children and Youth Survey, 2019. Windhoek: MGEPEWSW.
- [5] Namibia Statistics Agency (2021). Namibia Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) Report. Windhoek: NSA.
- [6] Namibia Statistics Agency (2024). 2023 Population & Housing Census: Main Report. Windhoek: NSA.
- [7] Office of the Prime Minister (2007). Government Gazette of the Republic of Namibia, No. 3971, 31 December 2007. Windhoek: Office of the Prime Minister.
- [8] Ministry of Health and Social Services and UNICEF (2025). Namibia National Smart Survey 2024. Windhoek: MHSS.
- [9] Office of the Prime Minister (2026). Namibia 2025/26 Vulnerability Assessment and Analysis Main Report. Windhoek: OPM.
- [10] Ministry of Health and Social Services (2024). Administrative Data from Public Hospital Records.

GLOBAL FRAMEWORKS

- [11] WHO & UNICEF (2024). Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes: National Implementation of the International Code, Status Report 2024. Geneva: World Health Organization & UNICEF.
- [12] WHO (2019). Concept Note to Inform Development of a Monitoring System to Accompany the Nurturing Care Framework. Geneva: WHO.
- [13] WHO, UNICEF & World Bank Group (2018). The Nurturing Care Framework for Early Childhood Development: A framework for helping children survive and thrive to transform health and human potential. Geneva: WHO.

A NOTE ON THE DATA

Where multiple sources reported on the same indicator, the most recent national figure was used. Indicators are aligned with the WHO Concept Note (2019) for monitoring the Nurturing Care Framework. Some indicators are reported as percentages of children, households or caregivers; others as rates per 1,000 or 100,000 — the unit is shown next to each figure throughout the report.

Make a child's first steps, the right steps.

A nation's future is grown in its earliest years.
Namibia's children deserve the right start.



Republic of Namibia



Right Start
make a child's first steps
the right steps.



EUROPEAN UNION

