



Management of Educational Policies in Argentina: Critical Challenges in a Context of Demographic Change

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the profound impact of demographic changes—particularly the sharp decline in birth rates—on Argentina's educational system. Over the past decade, Argentina has experienced a 46% drop in births, with fertility rates falling below population replacement levels. These shifts are reshaping household structures, increasing the elderly population, and reducing school-age cohorts, especially in early childhood and primary education.

The study explores how these demographic trends challenge the planning, financing, and management of compulsory education. It highlights the need for strategic policy responses, including optimizing infrastructure, reallocating human resources, and improving educational quality. The decentralization of education funding has exacerbated territorial inequalities, with provinces bearing most financial responsibility.

Key recommendations include transforming early childhood centers into formal educational institutions, expanding extended school hours, implementing co-teaching models, and enhancing teacher training and salaries. The paper argues that declining enrollment should be viewed not as a threat, but as an opportunity to improve educational equity and quality.

Ultimately, it calls for a reimagining of the educational system to address emerging social and labor demands, emphasizing the role of schools in fostering citizenship and social cohesion in an aging society.

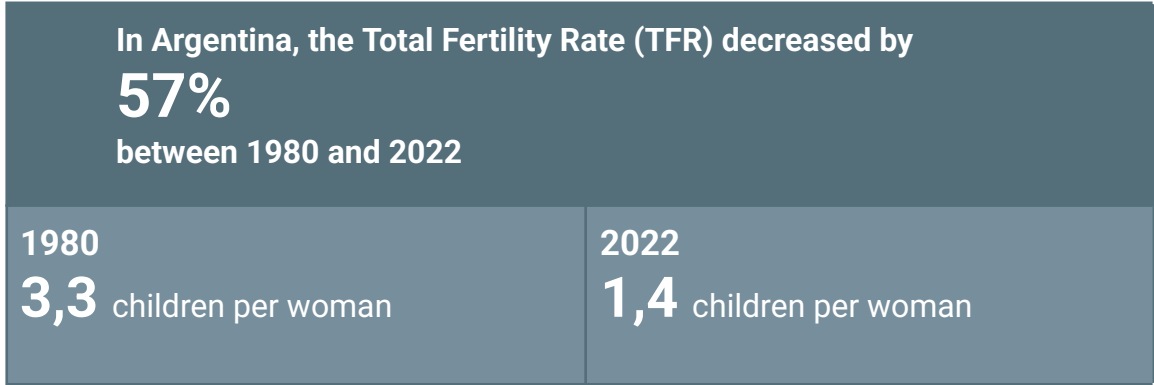
1. Decline in Birth Rates Over the Last 10 Years

Over the past decade, UN reports have shown that global population growth has slowed across most of the planet. In fact, the average number of live births per woman in more than half of the countries is below 2.1—the level needed for a population to remain stable over time.

Nearly one-fifth of nations have a very low fertility rate, with fewer than 1.4 children per woman. As a result, their populations are aging due to increased life expectancy and will shrink in volume in the coming years due to fewer births.

Argentina is not exempt from this process, but it has joined it with remarkable speed, much faster than other countries in the region. For more than 50 years,

our country has been experiencing a significant population decline due to a sharp drop in birth rates. Since 2014, this rate has decreased by more than 40%. Although this process had been occurring gradually, it accelerated in recent years. Between 2005 and 2015, about 700,000 people were born each year. In 2024, that number dropped to 400,000, and projections continue to decline¹. That is, between 2014 and 2024, the country's birth rate fell by 46%. This is likely one of the most drastic and overlooked changes Argentinians are currently experiencing.



The causes of this sharp decline are multiple: the strong development of reproductive health policies, the massive entry of women into the labor market, the postponement of the age of first pregnancy, economic factors —the cost of raising children, including health and education— job insecurity, and cultural shifts in societal expectations are key factors.

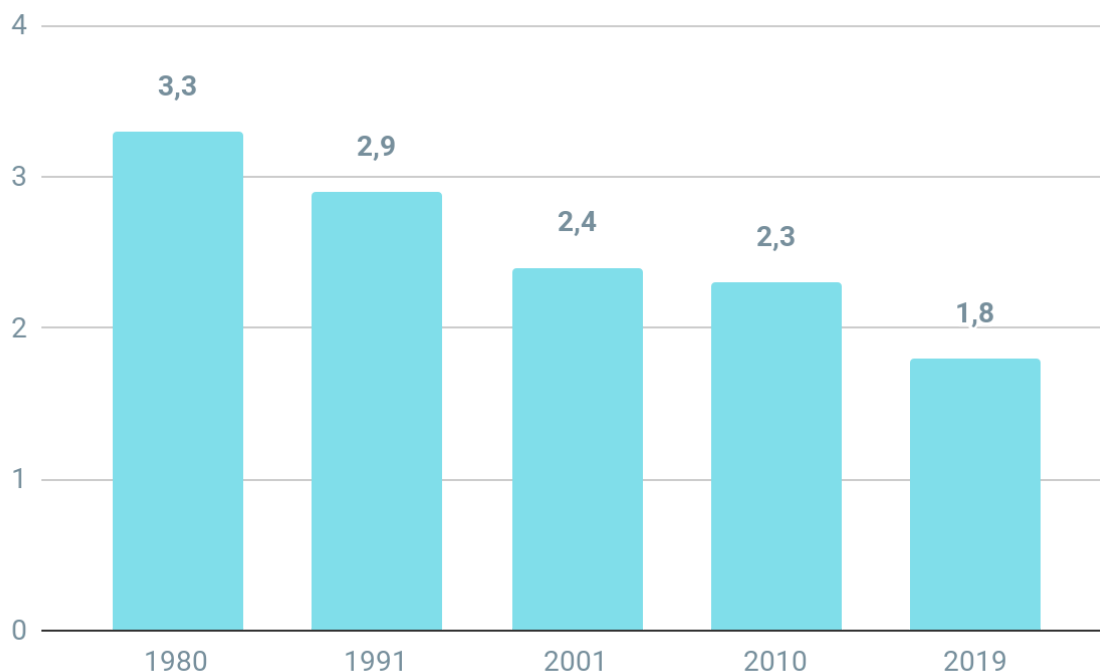
Various social studies (surveys, focus groups, case studies, among others) show a change in individual preferences: having children is no longer seen as a universal desire nor as the only —or main— form of personal fulfillment. Numerous studies conducted over the past five years reveal that nearly 50% of Argentine women aged 18 to 24 do not consider motherhood in their future plans, while 16% of all respondents are not mothers and do not plan to be².

In 2009, the average age of first-time mothers in Argentina was 26 years; today it is 32.

¹ Data obtained from the Directorate of Statistics and Health Information (DEIS) of the National Ministry of Health. Available at: <http://datos.salud.gob.ar/dataset/tasa-de-natalidad>

² In this regard, see Voices-UADE Study (2023). Available at: <https://www.voicesconsultancy.com/Prensa/El-50-de-las-mujeres-de-18-a-24-anos-descart-a-la-maternidad>

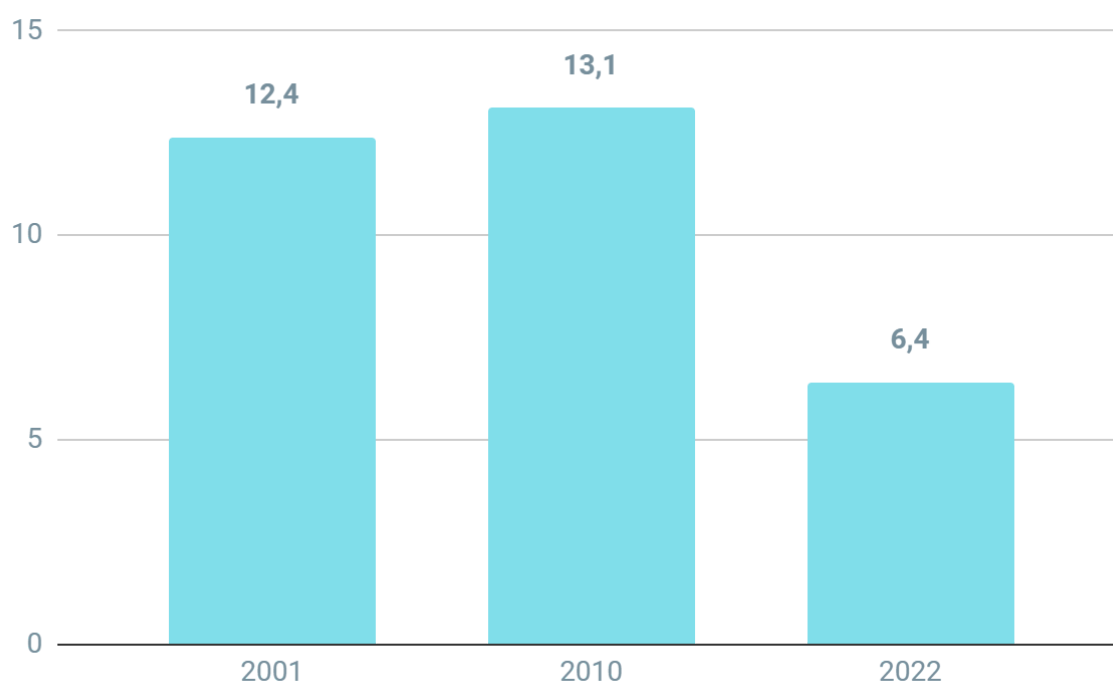
Graph 1 – Total fertility rate. National total. Years 1980, 1991, 2001, 2010, and 2019.



However, one of the few encouraging data points regarding the decline in fertility across all age groups is the sharp drop in teenage motherhood since 2020³ (which had already been steadily decreasing since 2014). The adolescent fertility rate (number of births per thousand women aged 10 to 19) has been declining since 2011, according to information from the National Ministry of Health.

³ According to data from the Directorate of Statistics and Health Information (DEIS) of the National Ministry of Health of Argentina, between 2019 and 2020, the late adolescent fertility rate (ages 15 to 19) decreased from 40.7 to 30.3 births per 1,000 adolescent females, while the early fertility rate (girls under 15 years of age) declined from 1.1 to 0.7.

Graph 2. Percentage of women aged 15 to 19 living in private households with live-born children. National total. Years 2001–2010–2022.



Source: National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC, in its Spanish acronym), National Population, Household and Housing Census 2022.

This decrease is explained, among other reasons, by various public policies such as the inclusion of comprehensive sex education in classrooms, the distribution of free contraceptives, the approval of the Voluntary Termination of Pregnancy Law, and the ENIA Plan (National Plan for the Prevention of Unintended Teenage Pregnancy), an unprecedented intersectoral and interjurisdictional initiative in the country that coordinated health, education, and social protection services⁴.

According to official data, the adolescent fertility rate in 2023 was 11.5 births per thousand women aged 10 to 19, representing a 64% decrease compared to 2005. That is, the rate dropped more than the general fertility rate nationwide during the same period (46.1%). According to experts, this decline implies greater opportunities for adolescents to complete their studies and improve their job prospects.

Among mothers with lower educational levels (up to completed primary school), births have decreased by 77% since 2005. In higher educational levels, the

⁴ The ENIA Plan was dismantled in 2024 due to budget cuts implemented by Javier Milei's government, which affected social, educational and health policies.

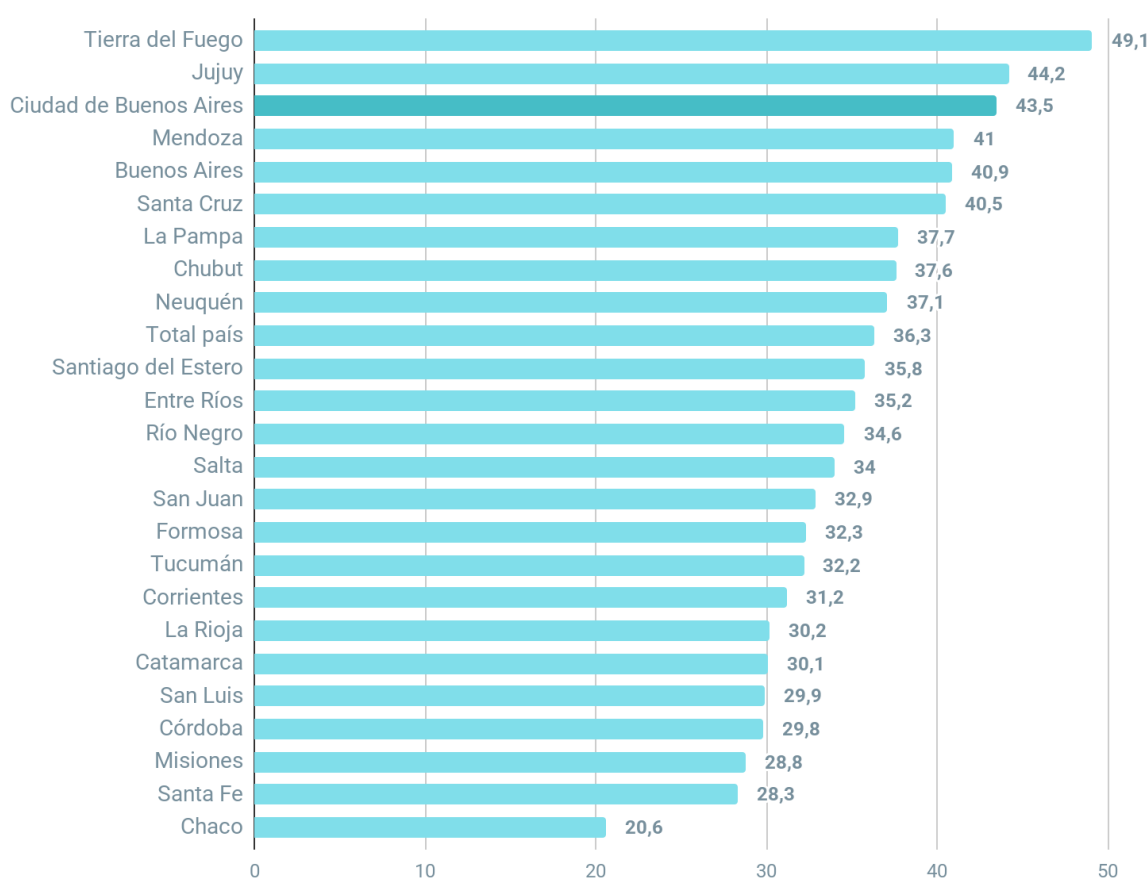
decrease was 13% (incomplete secondary) and 7% (completed secondary and above).

The decline in birth rates constitutes a pervasive phenomenon that transcends social strata, although lower-income sectors initiated this downward trend from historically higher fertility levels. This demographic shift extends across the entire national territory, with no jurisdiction exhibiting an opposite trajectory. Nevertheless, the pace of decline varies significantly among regions. Between 2014 and 2023, the most pronounced reductions were observed in Tierra del Fuego (49%), Santa Cruz (49%), Jujuy (44%), and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (44%).

In contrast, provinces such as Chaco (21%), Santa Fe (28%), and Misiones (29%) experienced a more gradual decrease. Similarly, Santiago del Estero and Tucumán registered comparatively moderate declines, ranging between 33% and 35%, thereby remaining below the national average. Overall, Argentina's birth rate fell by 43% during the same period. These disparities underscore the heterogeneous demographic and socio-economic realities across regions, shaped by factors such as age structure, internal migration patterns, and local conditions that exert a significant influence on reproductive behavior⁵.

⁵ Cifr. Dirección Nacional de Población (2025): Natalidad y Educación en Argentina. Perspectivas a futuro. [Birth rate and education in Argentina. Future Perspectives]. Registro Nacional de las Personas (RENAPER), marzo, pág. 18-20.

Graph 3. Percentage reduction in the number of live births, 2014–2022, by jurisdiction.



Source: Comprehensive Evaluation Unit for Educational Quality and Equity, Ministry of Education (GCABA), based on data from the National Directorate of Health Statistics and Information (Ministry of Health), Vital Statistics 2014–2022.

2. Demographic Changes in Argentina (2022 Census)

a) General Information

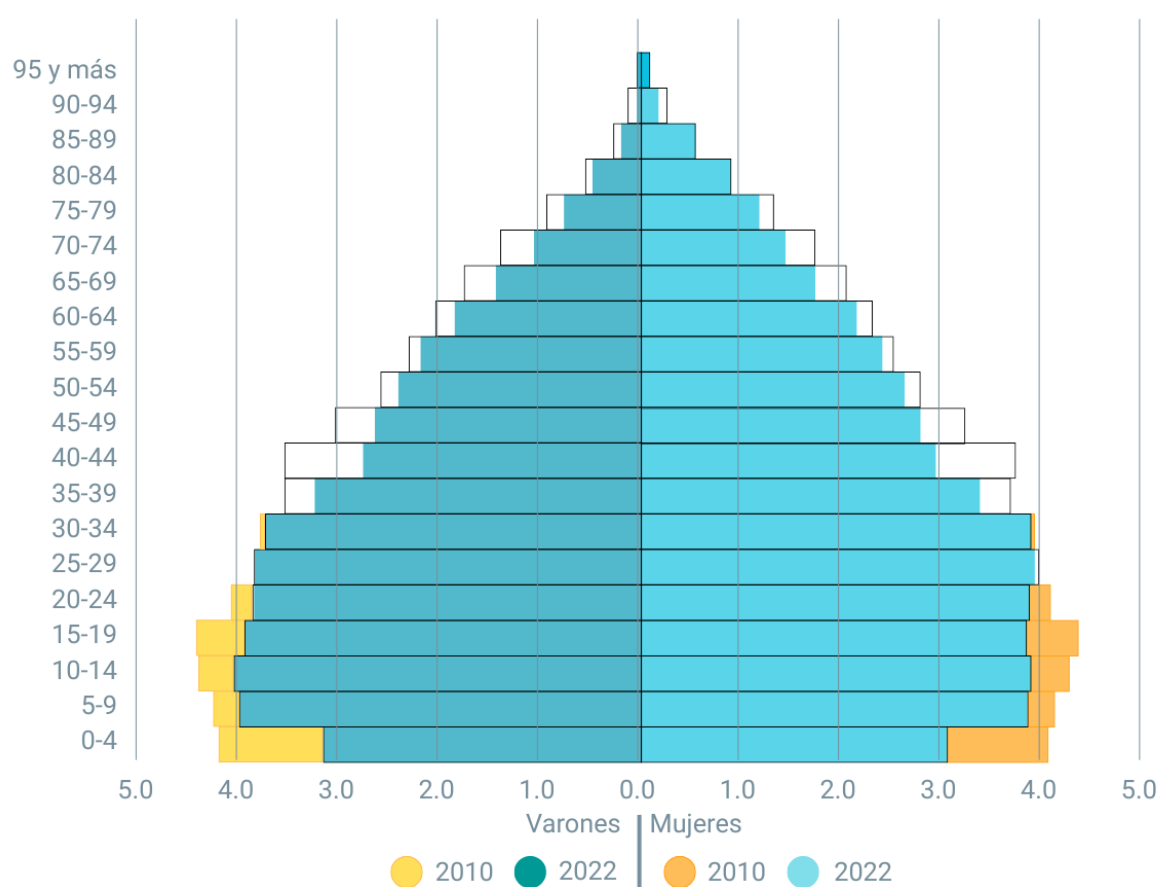
The Argentine Republic is located in South America. It borders the Plurinational State of Bolivia and the Republic of Paraguay to the north, the Republic of Chile and the Atlantic Ocean to the south, the Federative Republic of Brazil, the Oriental Republic of Uruguay and the Atlantic Ocean to the east, and the Republic of Chile to the west.

Argentina's territory covers an area of 3,761,274 km². It is divided into 24 jurisdictions, 529 departments, and 2,160 municipalities.

Argentina's Human Development Index (HDI) in 2025 ranks the country 47th globally and 2nd in Latin America (behind Chile). This value places the country at a very high level, standing out for its health and education.

The latest national population census, conducted in 2022 by the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INDEC), shows that Argentina's total population is 45,892,285, of which 51% are women (23,705,494); 48% are men (22,186,791); and the remaining 0.4% (196,956) are individuals who do not identify with the sex assigned at birth and chose to change it⁶.

Image 1: Comparison of Argentina's population pyramids, 2010–2022.



Source: Prepared by the National Directorate of Population based on the 2010 and 2022 Censuses.

⁶ Since 2012, Argentina has had a Gender Identity Law (Law N° 26743), which established the right of all people to be recognized and treated according to their self-perceived gender identity, recognizing that this may not coincide with the sex assigned at birth. The Law allows for name and sex changes on official documents (DNI), without the need for judicial authorization or medical diagnosis, and guarantees access to comprehensive health treatments for body adaptation.

b) Current Demographic Trends

INDEC data from 2022 show that the country is undergoing a demographic shift marked by:

- An increase in the elderly population,
- A rise in women heading households,
- A sharp decline in birth rates.

They also show that childless households have steadily increased, representing 57% of the total in the 2022 census, compared to 44% in 1991.

The percentages are nearly reversed between the two extremes analyzed: in 1991, 56% of homes had children under 18 and 44% did not. Today, the figures are 57% (without children) versus 44% (with children), showing how household composition has changed due to declining births and population aging.

Change in Household Composition: 1991–2022

1991 56% Households with children under 18 years old	2022 44% Households with children under 18 years old
13% One-person households	25% One-person households

Another significant change in family dynamics is the increase in single-person households, which now represent 25% of the total compared to 13% in 1991. At the same time, single-parent households, mostly led by women, have also shown a marked increase.

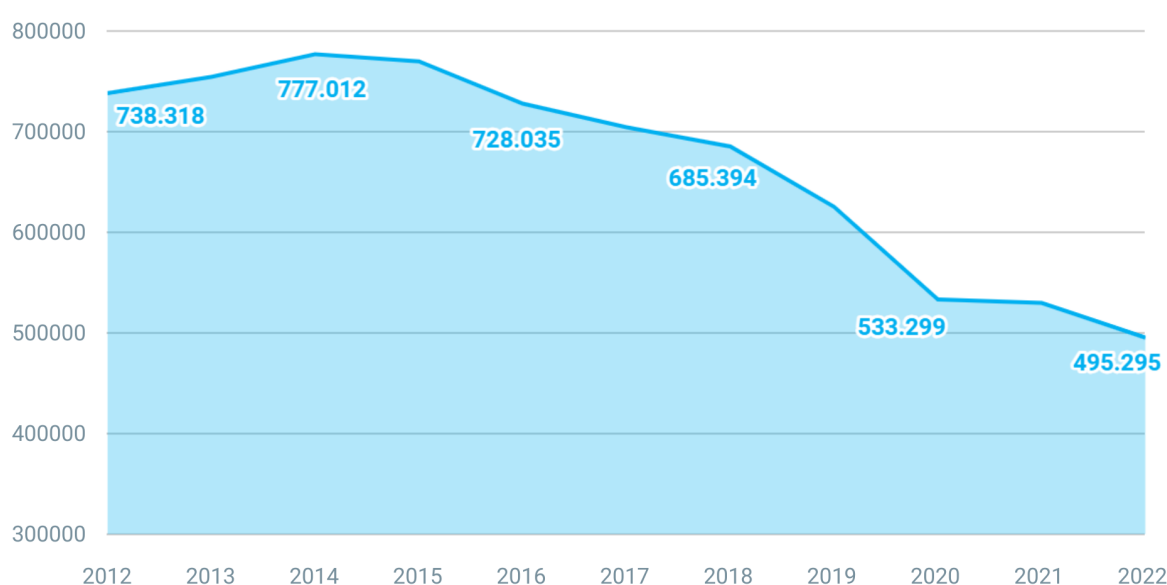
The elderly population has grown considerably, with those over 85 years old rising from 1.5% to 11.8% of the total population since 1991.

Today in Argentina, there is a more feminized gender composition and an older age profile. The population pyramid has a narrow base and a wider top, due to declining birth and mortality rates and greater female longevity.

Looking at the phenomenon in the regional context, the demographic transition in Latin America and the Caribbean is characterized by a sustained decline in birth rates, which have dropped from five children per woman in the 1950s to fewer than two today (CEPAL, 2024). This decline is coupled with an increase in life expectancy, which now averages over 75 years.

In Argentina, these trends are even more pronounced, with a total fertility rate of 1.54 children per woman in 2022, well below the population replacement level.

Graph 5. Evolution of the number of live births between 2012 and 2022. National total.



Source: Comprehensive Evaluation Unit of Educational Quality and Equity, Ministry of Education (GCABA), based on data from the Directorate of Statistics and Health Information (Ministry of Health), Vital Statistics 2012/2022.

3. Some Characteristics of the Educational System in Argentina

a) General Characteristics

Argentina is divided into 24 jurisdictions: 23 provinces and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (which is also the capital of the country), and 2,160

municipalities. It has a federal educational system with decentralized financing, in which the provinces retain their autonomy but are integrated into a federal system under the direction of the national government, which establishes educational policies and strategies.

The educational system is regulated by National Education Law No. 26.206, enacted in 2006, which establishes compulsory education to ensure free schooling, equal opportunities, and educational quality. The goal of this law is for the entire population to access quality education that guarantees inclusion and equivalent outcomes, regardless of origin. To achieve this, the national government must ensure the sustainability of public and free education through various programs, as well as the national unification of the educational system in terms of organization and the content taught in schools across the country.

The **National Ministry of Education** is responsible for defining educational policies and strategies at the national level and providing the necessary funding for provinces to fulfill their responsibilities. It must ensure compliance with the management structure established in the National Education Law, meaning it must guarantee that the objectives and principles set forth in the law and other national legislation are met. Although it does not manage schools directly, its role is to set public policy and the direction of education in the country to preserve cultural heritage and national identity and ensure the full development of all people living in Argentina.

The **provincial governments** and the **Autonomous City of Buenos Aires** are responsible for guaranteeing the right to education in their territories. This means they must plan, organize, manage, and finance the educational system in their districts. They define the school calendar, determine teacher salaries, develop curricula for each level, create new school places, build new schools, maintain existing infrastructure, and purchase equipment. Essentially, they handle everything that contributes to the functioning of the educational system.

b) Funding of the education system

The current configuration of the Argentine education system was outlined during the 1990s, when decentralization occurred and educational services were transferred from the national government to the provinces. This transfer included secondary and non-university tertiary education from the national level to the provincial level. These policies resulted in the shifting of financial and administrative responsibilities from the national level to provincial

jurisdictions and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. However, these responsibilities were transferred without accompanying the necessary financial resources for implementation, which increased the budget burden on the provinces. The survival of schools and the education system became dependent on each district's budgetary possibilities and political priorities. In this way, the decentralization processes reinforced territorial inequities, especially in early childhood, primary, and secondary education—i.e., the compulsory levels.

Currently, Argentine provinces exhibit significant differences in institutional, administrative, and financial capacity, with only a few successfully integrating all the transferred educational services in a harmonious and conflict-free manner. In many cases, this has led to a deterioration of local services and has contributed to increasing fragmentation within the national education system. The passing of the Educational Financing Law (LFE in its Spanish acronym) N° 26,047 in 2005, marked a societal consensus on the need to increase the educational budget across the country. The LFE established that from 2010 onward, consolidated education expenditure (i.e., the total investment by the national government and provinces) should represent a minimum of 6% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This goal was only achieved once, in 2015.

Between 2019 and 2022, expenditure ranged between 4.7% and 5% of GDP. Of this total, provinces contributed 80%, while the national government contributed only 20%. This demonstrates that provinces are not only the primary administrators and managers of the education system but also its main funders.

Responsibility for educational financing is distributed among different levels of government, with a predominant role played by provincial jurisdictions and a minor role by municipalities. Specifically, provinces fund nearly all basic education and part of higher education, while the national government manages most of higher education, as well as initiatives related to salary supplements, teacher training, infrastructure, and school equipment. Activities related to science and technology are mostly under the responsibility of the national government. In this context, municipal investment mainly focuses on basic education, particularly early childhood education.

Today, 78% of the investment in education is contributed by the provinces⁷, while only 22% comes from the national government⁸. This results in highly heterogeneous outcomes across different jurisdictions.

Furthermore, the majority of the educational budget —between 85% and 92%, depending on the jurisdiction— is allocated to cover administrative costs and operational expenses. In other words, most of the country's educational budget is spent on salaries. This becomes more significant as the budget grows because each additional peso spent beyond salaries and operational costs allows for expanding school infrastructure and improving teaching conditions. However, since December 2023, national government investment in education has decreased by 40% as a result of fiscal austerity policies implemented by the current government⁹.

In summary, our education system is characterized by multiple management levels. It is the Secretariat of Education dependent on the Ministry of Human Capital —on behalf of the national government—that must ensure the availability of financial, technical, and institutional resources to help minimize existing inequalities between schools in each jurisdiction. The ultimate goal is to ensure that the symbolic and material conditions of teaching and learning are the same across any location in Argentina.

Given this reality, it is also crucial to consider demographic changes occurring in the territories, particularly the decline in birth rates over recent decades, as these have a direct impact on the structure of the education system and, consequently, on the amount of resources required.

c) Understanding the structure: Compulsory education and modalities.

The mandatory schooling period spans 14 years and includes three levels: early childhood, primary (elementary school), and secondary (High school) education. Primary education has been mandatory since Law 1420 of 1884. In 2006, secondary education was made compulsory, and in 2015, the

⁷ The largest portion of provincial education spending corresponds to school management and operational responsibilities. Nearly 80% of provincial education expenditures are linked to salaries. Added to this are transfers to private education -which are also used to fund teacher salaries- so more than 90% of provincial education spending is concentrated on salaries. In relation to that, see Rivas, A. y Dborkin, D. (2018): **Qué cambió en el financiamiento educativo en Argentina [What changed in educational financing in Argentina]**. Documento de Trabajo N° 162, CIPPEC- Grupo Compromiso con el sistema educativo, Buenos Aires.

⁸ Morduchowicz, A.; Sáenz Guillén, L. y Volman, V. (2024) **Evolución del financiamiento educativo [Evolution of education funding]**. Observatorio de Argentinos por la Educación.

⁹ Curcio, J; Sáenz Guillén, L. y Volman, V. (2023) **Presupuesto Educativo Nacional 2024. [National Education Budget 2024]** Observatorio de Argentinos por la Educación.

requirement for 4-year-old children to attend early childhood education was established.

Currently, the Argentine educational system consists of four levels: early childhood, primary, secondary, and higher education, and eight modalities: Technical-Vocational, Artistic, Special Education, Lifelong Education for Youth and Adults, Rural Education, Intercultural Bilingual Education, Education in Contexts of Deprivation of Liberty, and Home and Hospital Education. All educational services are regulated by the State. Educational institutions may be managed by the State, private entities, cooperatives, or other civil society organizations. Those not managed by the State may or may not receive funding from the national treasury.

Early Childhood Education: Provides education to children from 45 days to 5 years old. Nursery schools serve children from 45 days to 2 years old. Kindergartens serve children from 3 to 5 years old.

Since 2006, the population of 5-year-old children attending educational institutions has remained stable, reaching approximately 95.5%. Attendance is mandatory from age 4.

Primary Education: Offers education to children from 6 to 11 or 12 years old, depending on the province. It is mandatory and nearly universal.

Secondary Education: Offered to children who have completed primary education. The reference age is from 11/12 to 17/18 years old, depending on the province. It has been mandatory since 2006. The proportion of adolescents aged 15 to 17 enrolled in school has remained stable since 2006, with approximately 88.5% attending secondary school.

Technical-Vocational Education: Comprises intentional training actions aimed at acquiring and improving job skills. It includes specialization and deepening of knowledge and abilities. This vocational training is offered both within and outside the educational system. It is a modality within the secondary and higher education levels, but is also offered outside the formal educational system in a non-formal modality (which does not allow for continued academic studies).

Higher Education: includes University and non-university higher education.

- Non-university higher education refers to academic degree training for teaching, technical performance, artistic professions, or scientific-technological knowledge and research, through its institutions.

- University higher education is offered in university institutes and universities, either state-managed or private, which have academic and institutional autonomy.

Table: Structure of the Argentine Educational System

Argentine Educational System					
Level		Ages		Modality	
EARLY CHILDHOOD	Nursery/ CDI	0 to 2	COM PUL SORY	Special education/ Lifelong education for young and adults/ Rural/ Intercultural bilingual/ Educ. in contexts of deprivation of liberty/Home and hospital education	High school/ High Technical school
	Preschool Kindergarten	3			
		4 and 5			
PRIMARY (ELEMENTARY SCHOOL)		6 to 11/12	COM PUL SORY	Special education/ Lifelong education for young and adults/ Rural/ Intercultural bilingual/ Educ. in contexts of deprivation of liberty/Home and hospital education	High school/ High Technical school
SECONDARY (MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL)	Basic Cycle	12 to 14			
	Oriented cycle	15 to 17			
SUPERIOR (HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION)	Tertiary	18 and up			

4. How Do These Demographic Trends Impact the Compulsory Levels of the Argentine Educational System?

The sustained decline in birth rates is already affecting school enrollment in Argentina. This effect is seen both in the reduction of students at each educational level and in the variations recorded across provinces, creating a scenario of lower demand that will require a redesign of planning and management for compulsory levels, which include preschool (ages 4 and 5), primary, and secondary education.

The most direct impact of population decline occurs in the early stages of schooling—preschool and primary levels. However, in the near future, these

demographic changes will also affect the demand for secondary and even higher education.

It is important to clarify that the following analysis is based on general information. To date, each jurisdiction has its own data system, collecting different types of information and measuring different indicators. This is reflected in the National Standardized Digital Educational Information System (SInIDe) of the National Ministry of Education, which contains very limited data from the 24 jurisdictions. This reality makes it difficult to compare and access the necessary data for accurate diagnostics.

A unified, federal-use data system is needed—one that allows for the construction of common indicators and the collection of real-time information: how many teachers are needed and in which subjects, how many school days are actually fulfilled each term, student absenteeism rates, etc. Because one of the key dimensions for addressing management challenges is information handling: the educational system needs data that is updated, reliable, representative, diverse, and both broad and specific.

Impact on Early Childhood Education

- **Nursery and Early Childhood Development Centers (CDI)**
- **4 Year-Old Classroom (first mandatory grade)**
- **5 Year-Old Classroom (Kindergarten)**

The main strength of the **Initial Level** of education is that it enables early literacy. Unlike other countries, it does not focus solely on socialization but has its own curricular designs with specific learning objectives.

Current regulations establish the **compulsory nature of the 4- and 5-year-old classrooms**, with the State committed to universalizing educational services for the 3-year-old classroom. This means that in Argentina, early childhood education is mandatory from younger ages than in other Latin American and European countries (e.g., Chile, Colombia, Czech Republic, or the United Kingdom, where it starts at age 5).

Until a few years ago, the lack of available spots in kindergartens (4-year-old classrooms) was a recurring issue in most provinces. Today, that situation has been resolved more due to biological factors than public policies: enrollment in Initial Level has steadily declined (except for the 2-year-old toddler classroom). This decrease is explained by demographic changes and the impact of the pandemic, which altered family organization dynamics.

Data indicates that in the next school year, simply maintaining the current number of available spots (unchanged since 2023), without increasing investment or closing any kindergarten classes, could allow for universal access to the 3-year-old classroom nationwide. Currently, only 53% of children that age attend. Due to lower birth rates, the projected number of children aged 3, 4, or 5 in 2026 is 1.53 million, while there are 1.56 million available spots¹⁰.

In a context where access to mandatory early childhood education is guaranteed, and there is a trend toward declining birth rates, educational systems should implement actions aimed at making more efficient use of available resources, prioritizing new dimensions such as:

- a) promoting access to and retention of children in early childhood education from the first months of life; and
- b) improving the quality of educational institutions¹¹.

In addition to the decrease in the number of births, another factor that may be affecting enrollment in Early Childhood Education is the organization of educational institutions, particularly regarding the schedule in which this level operates. Adjusting this could help accommodate changes in family organization dynamics that have emerged in recent years, especially following the pandemic.

Critical Challenges: Policies Focused on Access, Retention strategies to prevent school dropouts, and Quality education.

- **Transform the Early Childhood Development Centers** (CDIs) across the country into kindergartens under the jurisdiction of the provincial Ministries of Education. CDIs generally belong to the Ministries of Social/Human Development in each jurisdiction and operate as daycare centers. The individuals caring for the children are not trained teachers, and the space is intended for socialization and care, meaning the activities carried out are not based on any curricular design. These are spaces typically used by families with medium or low income to leave

¹⁰ On this topic, see UNICEF (2024): **10 años de la obligatoriedad de la sala de 4 en Argentina. Avances y nuevos desafíos en la cobertura del nivel inicial. [10 Years of Mandatory Preschool for 4-Year-Olds in Argentina. Progress and New Challenges in Early Childhood Education Coverage]**. Buenos Aires: UNICEF, also: Ministerio de Educación de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (2024): Impacto de la caída de la natalidad en la matrícula escolar en los niveles inicial y primario. [Ministry of Education of the City of Buenos Aires (2024): Impact of Declining Birth Rates on School Enrollment in Early Childhood and Primary Education], Junio.

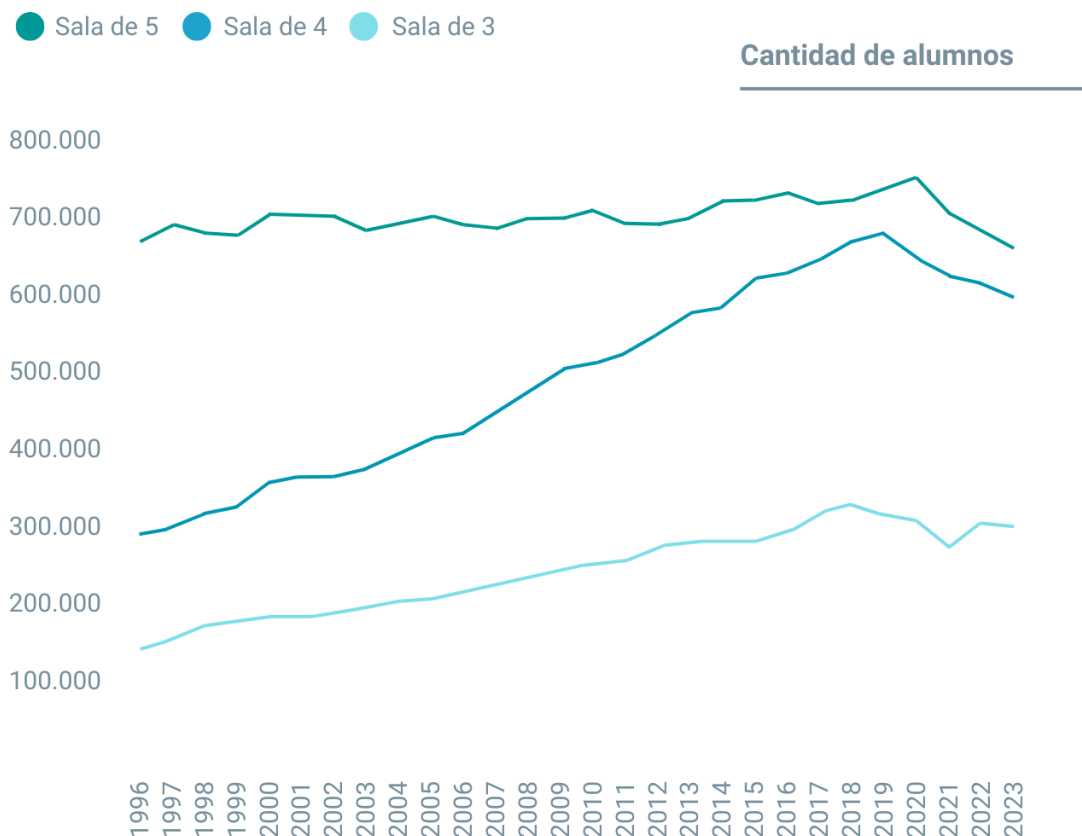
¹¹ Coordinación General de Evaluación de Programas y Políticas de la CABA (2024) **Evolución de la Matrícula en nivel Inicial. Análisis de evidencia y experiencias internacionales [The Evolution of Enrollment in Early Childhood Education: An Analytical Review of Empirical Evidence and International Experiences]**. Unidad de Evaluación Integral y Calidad y Equidad Educativa de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, junio.

their children during the workday.

- **Promote access to educational centers, and prevent early school dropouts in Early childhood education.**
 - a) The decline in enrollment in 4- and 5-year-old classrooms can be seen as an opportunity to strengthen access from earlier ages (for example, the 2-year-old toddler classroom, where enrollment has been increasing).
 - b) Achieve universal access to the 3-year-old classroom, aiming for greater school inclusion without necessarily expanding the educational offer.
 - c) Extend the school day and/or make entry and exit times more flexible to accommodate different family dynamics.
- **Nominal tracking of children:** Develop tools that enable the monitoring of children's educational trajectories, regardless of the type of educational offer in which they are enrolled. The goal is to monitor not only access but also their continued participation in the educational system, including children aged 0 to 3.
- **Expand extended day services:** In early childhood education, the majority of the offer (95%) consists of short school days, typically 3 to 4 hours depending on the district. The proposal to expand extended day services aims to increase that time by at least two additional hours.
- **Monitoring the quality of education in Early Childhood Education:** Strengthen new methodologies and teaching practices (for example, by reducing the number of children per teacher, which allows for more individualized work, or by reassigning roles such as tutors).
- **Specific content for 4-year-old classrooms,** focusing on deepening Language and Mathematics, socio-emotional development, and the inclusion of Environmental Education, Arts, and Science.

In summary, it is necessary to start a planning process aimed at restructuring, relocating, and repurposing the early childhood education offer, with a focus on access, retention, and educational quality.

Graph: Students enrolled in kindergarten by classroom, nationwide total



Impact on Primary Education (Elementary School)

A significant decrease in school enrollment for first grade is expected across all jurisdictions by 2028. The projected drop ranges between 20% and 25%, and by 2030, the decline will be even greater. However, this impact varies by province and school district: within the same districts, some schools have experienced sharp declines in enrollment, while others maintain average student numbers per grade.

Overall, the nearly 50% reduction in potential school enrollment raises questions about how the educational system should allocate resources to ensure access, equity, and inclusion—especially in a country where international assessments like PISA warn that 1 in 2 third-grade students (8 years old) fail to reach minimum reading comprehension levels.

Critical Challenges: Plan School enrollment in advance, and Increasing Effective Teaching Time

- **Optimization of School Infrastructure Based on Cross-Referencing Census Data:** If it is known in which specific areas enrollment will decline

in the coming years, resources can be relocated proactively instead of reacting late by closing schools.

- **Evaluate the Educational Offer in Relation to Student Mobility:**
 - Identifying how many students move from one province to another, at which educational levels, and how frequently, allows for anticipating demand in receiving schools and planning the offer accordingly.
 - Coordination Between Provinces to Manage Mobility
- **Planning and Development of Teaching Staff:** With continuous nominal data, it is possible to forecast the demand for teachers by level and modality, avoiding both overload and staff shortages in different regions.
 - Incorporation of Pedagogical Pairing
 - Classroom Planning:
 - Regular updates on the distribution of students in classrooms (by year/section) allow for the redistribution of teachers in heterogeneous classrooms.
 - Assessments of the learning environment within the classroom.

Since statistics are already anticipating upcoming challenges, it is important to take advantage of the window of opportunity to break equity gaps in primary education.

Impact on Secondary Education (Middle and High School)

The expansion of secondary schooling is an unquestionable achievement of recent decades. The enactment of National Education Law No. 26.206 in 2006 established the mandatory nature of secondary education and its academic structure within the framework of a comprehensive transformation of the educational system.

However, fulfilling this mandate presents a challenge for education policies in terms of enrolling young people and adolescents who are currently not attending school, while also offering a quality education that enables meaningful learning and ensures that all students can complete their studies. In concrete terms, this means guaranteeing access, retention, and completion of studies for all youth and adolescents, particularly those from the most vulnerable social sectors—those who have not historically been the primary beneficiaries of the system.

Although the decline in birth rates has not yet directly impacted secondary school enrollment dynamics, its effects will become evident in the coming years,

especially regarding the educational offer. The current academic structure of secondary education is situated within a context where its reorganization is being reconsidered in some districts (as the situation varies across provinces), and the level's educational offer and cycles are also undergoing transformation. The latest available data show that this transformation has already begun, with a decrease in the number of secondary education institutions resulting from the integration or articulation of previously independent cycles, as well as a process of course unification. At the same time, there has been an increase in total secondary school enrollment.

In this regard, the critical challenges are linked to promoting policies that encourage access, retention, and completion at this level.

Critical Challenge: Providing quality education that ensures Access, Retention, and Completion

- Promote strategies to support student's educational trajectories through comprehensive support systems that promote retention and prevent school dropout.
- Pedagogical and Curricular Innovation: Innovate in terms of content, strategies, and formats for knowledge transmission and classroom interaction.
- Complement Traditional Content: Incorporate new knowledge demands related to interpersonal and analytical-reflective skills.
- Promote Social Policies: Support secondary education trajectories through social policies aimed at closing learning gaps and breaking patterns of school exclusion associated with social background and geographic location.

Looking ahead, the decline in demand for educational systems and its impact on the secondary level (and even on higher education) will depend on the actions taken to address these issues and propose solutions. It will also depend on the long-term impact of policies aimed at transforming the Early Childhood and Primary education levels.

5. Possible lines of action to improve Quality in Compulsory Education in response to the decline in demand for educational services

Beyond the critical challenges faced at each educational level, the inevitable contraction in school enrollment can be seen either as a scenario with negative consequences (such as reduced investment in education, closure of educational institutions at all levels, and increased tuition fees in private

schools), or as an opportunity to implement public policies aimed at improving educational quality and optimizing available resources.

The first scenario currently dominates policy approaches: declining enrollment is accompanied by shrinking budgetary resources, school closures, and the elimination of grade levels. Regarding the financing of the educational system—a necessary condition for improving educational quality—it is worth noting that although most of the investment responsibility lies with the provinces (approximately 73%), the national government's role in sustaining and equitably distributing resources among provinces is crucial to closing inequality gaps. Over the past 40 years, the national government has tended to cut educational investment during times of crisis—when it is most needed—and increase it only during periods of economic growth. In just the last two years, national educational investment has dropped by 40%.

Secondly, the decline in demand particularly affects both public and private educational institutions, which often perceive it as a threat rather than an opportunity. In the case of private schools, the decrease in student numbers and the economic crisis have significantly impacted operations, increasing operating costs and making it harder for families to pay tuition. This has led to higher fees to sustain activities and contributed to the closure or merging of schools as a survival strategy. Regarding public schools, nearly all provinces are opting to reorganize the educational offer by merging grade levels and closing schools.

The second scenario suggests that, since school enrollment is decreasing in line with population projections, the budget per student could increase automatically—even if overall educational investment remains constant in real terms. This presents a unique opportunity to strategically plan how to invest these additional resources and could also serve as a catalyst for participatory educational planning, involving teachers, families, and school leadership teams in the diagnostic process. Based on this second scenario, several possible strategies will be proposed to drive a transformation agenda aimed at improving educational quality.

Action Lines to Improve Educational Quality:

Reassign human resources:

- **Reassign teachers to areas or institutions with greater needs:**

This aims to optimize the use of available resources, ensuring that schools with higher demand or vulnerable populations have the

necessary staff to maintain or improve educational quality. It helps balance staff distribution, avoiding overstaffing in schools with low enrollment while reinforcing those facing greater challenges, such as rural areas or underdeveloped neighborhoods. This contributes to educational equity, ensuring that all children, regardless of where they live, have access to quality education.

- **Lower the student-to-teacher ratio:**

This measure enhances personalized education and improves quality by allowing teachers to provide more individualized attention, adapt teaching to each student's learning style, and improve interaction quality¹². Smaller class sizes enable more effective use of participatory methodologies, cooperative work, project-based learning, and other activities that require greater interaction and personal resources. Its impact is greater when combined with teacher training and appropriate pedagogical approaches.

- **Implement co-teaching systems or pedagogical pairing:**

This approach is already being used in countries like Chile and in some Argentine provinces (e.g., Buenos Aires and La Pampa) with documented success. Benefits include reduced dropout and absenteeism, improved communication and coordination among professionals, and better support for students with learning difficulties. Evidence also shows it fosters a sense of community, motivation, professional growth, and job satisfaction among teachers. It also helps reduce teacher absenteeism, as one member of the teaching pair can continue the class if the other is absent.

- **Invest in teaching and non-teaching resources:**

Increasing funds for salaries and incentives is key—not only to counteract the historical deterioration of educators' and administrative staff's wages, but also to restore the profession's prestige and attract talented young people to teaching.

- **Redefine resource allocation criteria:**

This requires expanding the focus beyond strict enrollment numbers and incorporating indicators of social vulnerability, inclusion, and community needs. These should guide participatory educational planning, involving

¹² See Rofman, R.; Nistal, M.; and Sáenz Guillén, L. (2024). In this document developed by the Observatorio Argentinos por la Educación, the authors examine evidence demonstrating that smaller class sizes contribute to improving educational quality."

teachers, families, school leadership teams, and all stakeholders affected by these decisions.

Solve infrastructure problems:

- Focus resources on maintaining existing educational spaces (both kindergartens and primary schools).
- **Allocate resources to expand educational and childcare services for early childhood (from 45 days to 2 years):**
This would have a high educational and social impact. Evidence shows that children who access early childhood education and care perform better academically throughout life and are more likely to pursue higher education, improving their future opportunities.
- **Investing in early childhood education spaces also helps to reduce gender gaps in the labor market,** as it facilitates women's access to better job opportunities (since they are the primary caregivers in most families, according to official statistics).
- **Reassign school infrastructure spaces:**
This is done in advanced stages of enrollment decline, when schools lose a significant portion of their student population, leaving buildings underused. This opens the possibility of repurposing educational buildings for other uses. Some emerging examples include converting schools into community centers (e.g., senior residences, museums, even aquariums). In Argentina, this is not yet widespread, but schools may increasingly have unused space. One example of internal reuse could be transforming part of an existing school into an early childhood education and care center.
- **Adaptation of target groups:**
This involves restructuring educational infrastructure and training programs to serve other populations, such as adults needing job retraining, continuing education, or technical training. It may also include expanding educational offerings for older adults, distance learning programs, or creating more flexible learning spaces that promote social and labor inclusion.

Ensure adequate pedagogical conditions to improve educational quality

- **Reconsider the organization of school days:**

The coexistence of part-time and full-time school days reflects different family lifestyles and daily routines. For many families, part-time schooling supports work schedules, sibling care, or extracurricular activities. For others, full-time schooling offers more pedagogical time, support, and access to cultural experiences not always available at home. Studies show that full-day schooling has a positive and significant impact on academic performance, especially among lower-income students. In Argentina, only 22% of primary schools offer extended hours, reaching just 14% of students. The projected enrollment decline could be a key opportunity to expand school hours, allowing for more equitable resource distribution and better use of school time. However, policies should integrate both models rather than oppose them, ensuring primary schools adapt to diverse family realities instead of imposing a one-size-fits-all approach.

- **Personalize the learning experience: remedial classes and pedagogical pairs:**

Smaller class sizes could allow for more personalized learning. Pedagogical pairs (two teachers per class) could address different learning speeds within classrooms. Interdisciplinary teams could also improve inclusion for children with specific needs, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), dyslexia, etc.

- **Strengthen school support programs:**

Since 2011, the European Union has had a program to combat school failure, which includes educational support and reinforcement policies. Many countries have implemented institutional and individual support strategies, content reinforcement, and student follow-up. These programs aim to improve academic outcomes and, through early detection of at-risk students, provide personalized support—not only for curriculum content but also to foster better family relationships and improve the educational environment¹³.

- **Content adaptation:**

This involves analyzing the specific problems of each region's student population and incorporating relevant topics into curricula. Numerous experiences implemented in different countries show that including these aspects in classrooms leads to improvement in student's social and emotional learning.

¹³ Villareal & Gambau (2020).

Elevate the status of the teaching profession across all levels of education.

- **Empower teachers and raise their social status:**

The teaching profession is facing a deep crisis: loss of vocation, work overload, lack of support, poor working and hiring conditions, low salaries, violence, and the absence of support spaces are all factors contributing to an unprecedented shortage of teachers globally, which threatens access to quality education. Since the pandemic, UNESCO has been warning about this phenomenon: it is not possible to guarantee mandatory basic education without qualified teachers.

The teaching profession is experiencing a severe vocational crisis: the dropout rate among primary school teachers—the percentage who leave the profession—has doubled, rising from 4.6% in 2015 to over 9% in 2022.

To address these challenges, the state must strengthen its capacity to assess the needs of teaching staff by creating indicators related to the profession, including status, career development, working conditions, and participation. It must also develop strong, evidence-based policies for hiring, assignment, management, and professional development of teachers.

Another pending task is to support teachers in the use of digital technologies in education, which are inevitably transforming the profession. The goal is to empower the teaching profession through inclusive policies and fair employment conditions that support staff throughout their careers, increase their participation in decision-making, and promote strategies to elevate the social status of the profession.

- **Invest in teacher training and professional development:**

Improving initial training and ongoing professional development involves creating continuous learning programs aimed at promoting more flexible profiles—teachers who are trained to teach at different levels and/or in various subject areas, with greater adaptability to new teaching methods, especially those related to technological advances in education.

In this context, it is essential to prioritize training in inclusive education as a strategic axis. Continuous training in this area not only responds to current equity and education rights frameworks but also helps optimize

the use of infrastructure and human resources in heterogeneous classrooms with lower student density.

- **Increase Salaries:**

This could be a key policy—not only to counteract the historical deterioration of educators' wages, but also, to restore the prestige of the teaching profession and attract the most talented young people to become teachers.

- **Planning and Development of the Teaching Profession:**

With continuous nominal data, it is possible to forecast teacher demand by level and modality, avoiding both overload and staff shortages in different regions.

- **Enhancing the Prestige of the Teaching Profession:**

Argentina is the country with the highest number of teachers who have another paid job outside of school in the entire Latin American region. The percentage of primary school teachers with another job (14.4%) is well above the regional average (8.4%). Additionally, it is the second country where teachers work in two or more schools because a single salary is not enough to cover the cost of living. This figure reaches 30.5% of primary school teachers—far above the Latin American average (11.4%)—and is only surpassed by Brazil (38.6%). Multiple job holding was once thought to be a problem exclusive to secondary school teachers—the so-called “taxi teachers” who move from one school to another. However, it is now known that, although to a lesser extent, this is also an issue for primary school teachers. Working in more than one school means doubling or tripling the number of students, families, and professional teams with whom the teacher interacts, which intensifies the professional and emotional demands of their work. In this context of labor dispersion, even the best-trained teacher is likely to see their performance affected.

Conclusions

Throughout this work, we have analyzed how demographic changes in recent years are impacting the Argentine educational system. By examining how declining birth rates have affected enrollment across different educational levels, several critical challenges have been identified that must be considered in planning educational services in the coming years.

The decline in school enrollment reveals a deepening social change that follows an exponentially downward trend year after year. Far from being merely a challenge, it also presents an opportunity to redirect available resources and redesign certain aspects of the educational system in response to new social and labor demands. It is not enough to reorganize classroom work based on the number of students and teachers available. It is essential to rethink how schools are organized to deepen a pedagogical model that prioritizes socialization, the exchange of ideas, coexistence, and the construction of community spaces—so that schools continue to be the core of educational life.

However, the decline in birth rates does not yet appear to be a priority on the political agenda. Some avoid the issue, fearing that placing it on national and provincial agendas could open the door to narratives aligned with austerity policies. Some districts (Buenos Aires, City of Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Jujuy, and Tierra del Fuego, among others) are beginning to address the issue, particularly in relation to its educational impact. The topic also remains marginal in public discourse, despite representing a major social transformation that affects families, labor, and society at large.

The challenges posed by this issue are broader and more complex. It is estimated that in just five years, by 2030, Argentina will lose what is known as the “demographic bonus”—meaning the country will no longer have a majority of economically active individuals, and older adults who depend on others will become the majority.

How will these phenomena affect retirement and pension systems? What will happen to jobs and the services demanded by this new demographic configuration? How will social integration be sustained in a society where most of the population is significantly aged?

The answer to any of these questions should begin with the educational system. Because schools are the key space for building citizenship, where values, norms, and knowledge are transmitted—enabling individuals to integrate into society, interact with others, and actively participate in public life in pursuit of the “common good.”

The true critical challenge is to promote policies that strengthen the construction of a collective identity with the goal of sustaining and reinforcing the social fabric.-

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