

2023

Global Annual RESULTS REPORT



Goal Area 2

Learning and skills acquisition

Table of Contents

Strategic context.....	3	Spotlight on the Global Education Thematic Fund	25
Goal Area 2: Learning and skills acquisition	4	Looking ahead.....	32
Introduction	4	Endnotes	33
Result Areas	6		
<i>Result Area 1: Equitable and inclusive access to learning opportunities, including in humanitarian and fragile contexts</i>	6		
<i>Result Area 2: Improved learning, skills, participation and engagement for all children and adolescents.....</i>	10		

Strategic context

Seventy-seven years after UNICEF was established and 34 years since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the organization's mission to promote the full attainment of the rights of all children is as urgent as ever.

Every child has the right to an education. But a range of factors – from economic circumstances to low-quality teaching and schools – prevent millions of children from accessing quality learning opportunities from early childhood to adolescence. While 2023 marked the halfway point to achieving the SDGs, globally, up to 250 million children are still out of school – up 6 million since 2021 (and up 12 million in sub-Saharan Africa¹) – accounting for 16 per cent of the primary to upper secondary age group.²

Despite progress, the world is off track to achieve SDG 4 on Quality Education. Globally, seven out of ten 10-year-olds cannot read a simple text or do basic mathematics. While significant progress has been made in increasing access to education, socioeconomic disparities persist in participation and attainment.³ To get back on track, 1.4 million children need to be enrolled in early childhood education every year, a new child needs to be enrolled in school every two seconds until 2030, 44 million teachers are needed, and annual progress in primary completion rates needs to almost triple.⁴

Learning and skills have improved slightly at lower and upper secondary education levels, with poorer regions exhibiting lower completion rates. Between 2015 and 2021, the number of out-of-school children and adolescents fell by 9 million worldwide but increased by 12 million in sub-Saharan Africa.⁵ Many children and youth are entering adulthood without the full range of skills they need to navigate personal, social and economic challenges.

The number of crisis-affected, school-aged children requiring educational support has grown from an estimated 75 million in 2016 to 224 million today, including 127 million children who are in school but not achieving minimum proficiency in reading or mathematics.⁶

The digital divide is growing. Most school-aged children lack internet access at home; one in three digital learning platforms active in 2020 are no longer functional; only one in five platforms include accessibility features for learners with disabilities. Furthermore, only one in three offer offline functionality, even though most disadvantaged children have limited or no connectivity.⁷

Although climate issues have become increasingly relevant in the lives of children, they can only learn about climate action and environmental degradation in schools in an estimated 50 per cent of countries worldwide, and only in about a third of countries worldwide do teachers feel supported to teach climate action.⁸

Encouragingly, the number of governments that have endorsed the commitments to action following the 2022 Transforming Education Summit (TES) increased from 10 in 2022 to 30 in 2023.



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ICDS, WCD, Gujarat has implement Project "PA PA PAGALI" in line with NEP 2020 for strengthening preschool education in anganwadis with 100% State budget project.

Goal Area 2: Learning and skills acquisition

Introduction

Education is a right enshrined in articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. UNICEF's work in Goal Area 2, including in humanitarian crises and fragile settings, advances the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4. UNICEF also contributes to many other SDGs, including SDG 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and SDG 8 on sustainable, inclusive economic growth and decent work for all.

In 2023 UNICEF achieved significant progress across Goal Area 2 Result Areas, with a 112 per cent and 99 per cent achievement against milestones in Result Areas 1 and 2 respectively.



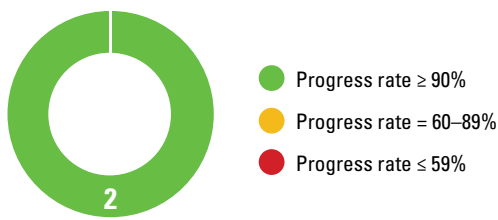
SDG 4: Quality education

Ensure that all girls and boys complete **free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education** (Target 4.1)

Substantially increase the number of youth and adult who have **relevant skills for employment** decent jobs and entrepreneurship (Target 4.4)

Ensure that all youth achieve **literacy and numeracy** (Target 4.6)

Figure 1. Progress against 2023 milestones: Strategic Plan Goal Area 2



In 2023, UNICEF received \$917.2 million in Other Resources (OR) for Goal Area 2. Public sector partners contributed the largest share of overall funding (84 per cent) while private sector partners contributed 16 per cent. UNICEF worked on Goal Area 2 in 144 countries, with total expenses of \$1.7 billion during 2023 across its two Result Areas, including \$525.8 million in Other Resources Emergency (ORE).



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Vanessa Namakula, 17, a youth climate activist at the NFA Head office, prior to presenting a statement on Climate Action for the Africa Climate Summit delegates representing Uganda. Ahead of the African Climate Summit and COP28, children and youth representatives in Uganda met with government representatives on 29th August 2023 to submit a statement and call to action to their leaders to take immediate and firm action on the climate crisis.

Figure 2. Goal Area 2 - OR contributions received by fund type, 2023

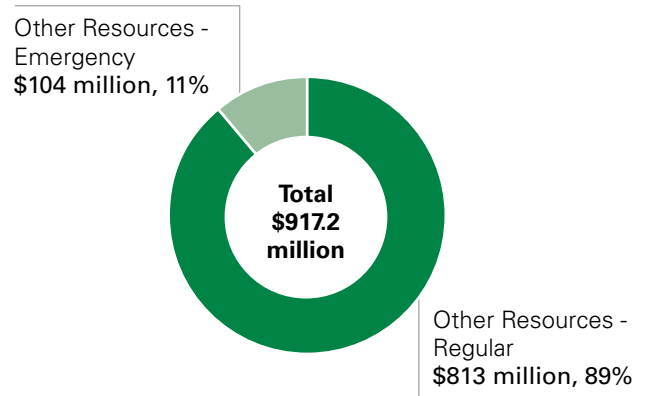


Figure 3. Goal Area 2 - OR contributions received by resource partner, 2023

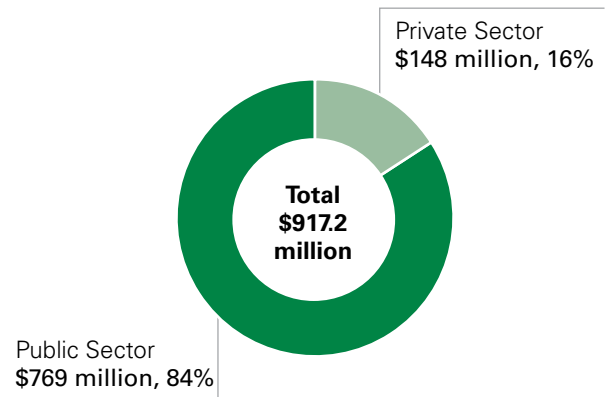
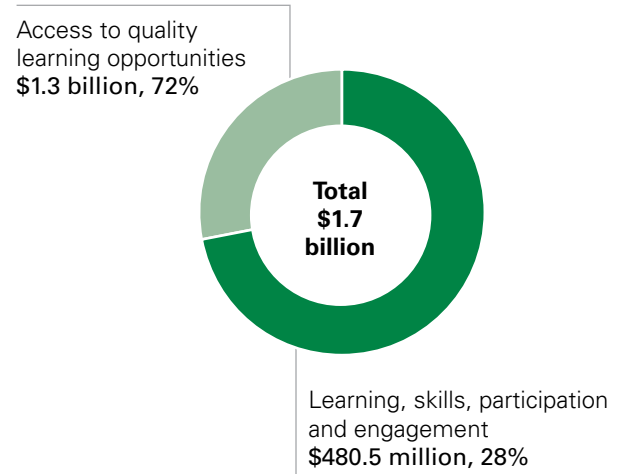


Figure 4. Goal Area 2 - Expenses by result area, 2023



Result Areas

Result Area 1: Equitable and inclusive access to learning opportunities, including in humanitarian and fragile contexts

GER in pre-primary education has been stagnating, requiring accelerated efforts to reach the 2025 milestone of 77 per cent, by 20 percentage points compared to 2023 rate of 57 per cent.

Out-of-school rates have also stagnated in primary and lower secondary education, requiring enhanced effort to reach the 2025 milestone and SDG target by 2030. Extended school closure during the COVID-19 pandemic has been a significant factor, with up to 250 million children still out of school, up by 6 million since 2021.

Reaching out-of-school children and adolescents with learning opportunities

In 2023, 37.7 million out-of-school children accessed education through UNICEF-supported interventions. UNICEF has already achieved its Strategic Plan target of reaching cumulatively 114 million children by 2025.

To address the needs of out-of-school children, UNICEF focused on access to non-formal education (NFE) and catch-up programmes. These are designed to offer alternative pathways to learning and development and are critical where formal education is inaccessible or interrupted. By offering tailored educational content, UNICEF has reintegrated many children into learning, ensuring that they acquire essential skills and knowledge for personal development and future opportunities.

UNICEF also helped to make school environments more conducive to learning. By building and equipping classrooms, distributing teaching and learning materials and improving school conditions overall, UNICEF supported children's return to, and retention in, school.

UNICEF implemented cash transfer and incentive programmes, reducing financial barriers to education. These programmes were effective at encouraging school attendance and retention, especially in low-income or crisis-affected regions by alleviating the economic pressures that often force children out of school.

Figure 5. Strategic Plan Outcome Indicator 2.3

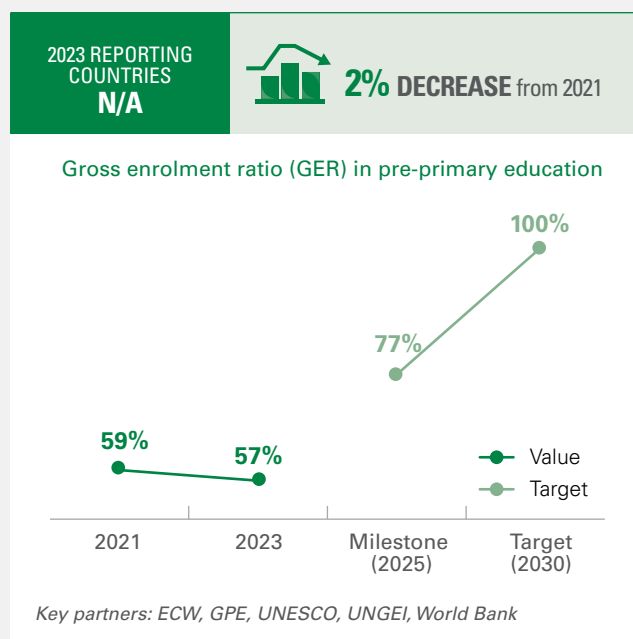
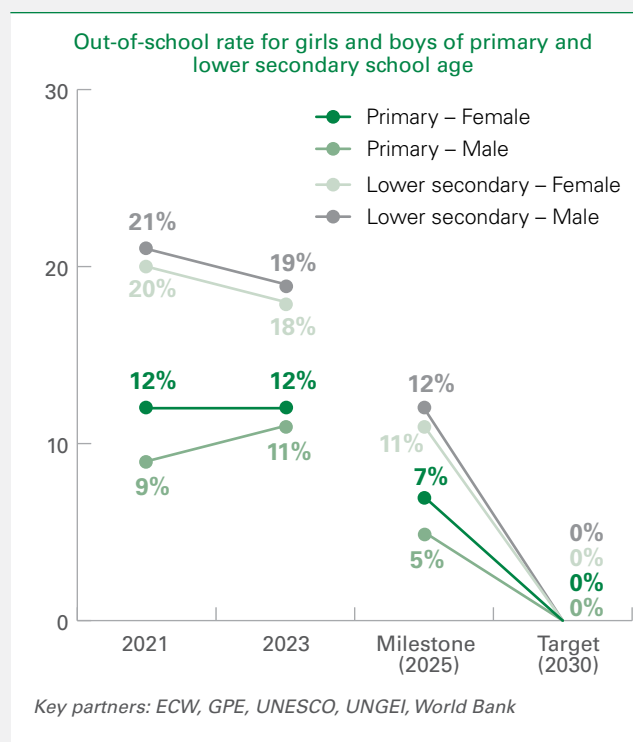


Figure 6. Strategic Plan Outcome Indicator 2.4



Together with its partners such as Education Above All (EAA)'s Educate A Child programme, UNICEF has prioritized countries with some of the highest incidents of out-of-school children, especially in Africa which is home to 30 per cent of all children out of school, and five of the top six countries with the highest incidence (the other is Afghanistan). One out of every five children is out of school in the African continent. To address this, in Kenya, through direct UNICEF programming, 684,000 children were enrolled in school and supported with learning materials, while in Somalia, UNICEF worked with regional governments and civil society organizations to enrol 594,000 children in alternative learning institutions. In Burkina Faso, more than 900,000 children were reached through non-formal learning opportunities, provision of school kits and school infrastructure. A high-impact intervention in Chad reached up to 2.5 million out-of-school children through formal education, community engagement and provision of learning materials. UNICEF, with its partners, consciously adopted a comprehensive approach that reached significant numbers, in addition to the adoption of multiple strategies, modalities, and a cross-sectoral approach that included WASH. Beyond Africa, in Iraq, 700,000 children were reached with formal and non-formal education opportunities, capacity development and infrastructure support. In Afghanistan, 686,000 children accessed community-based education programmes.

Education Above All

The Education Above All (EAA) Foundation's Educate A Child programme and UNICEF have partnered for over 11 years helping to remove barriers to education for more than five million previously out-of-school children across 17 countries. The longstanding partnership has been instrumental in advancing education opportunities and access to quality education for children and youth, particularly the most marginalized, and in advocating for the right to education, rallying partners and stakeholders to prioritize quality education for all children. In 2024, UNICEF and EAA signed a new five-year framework agreement, extending the scope of the global partnership to ensure access to quality primary education for many more of the 244 million children and young people who are excluded from education across the world.

Access to education in the early years

In 2023, UNICEF strengthened enabling environments for early childhood and promoted early learning in homes and pre-primary settings, to ensure that children have school-readiness skills and support when they enrol in primary

education. UNICEF has advanced the [Five Million Futures](#) action and advocacy framework to scale up a core package of evidence-based interventions around early childhood education (ECE), parenting support, and transition of young learners to primary education.

In 2023, UNICEF enabled 2.4 million children to access pre-primary education. Nonetheless, persistent funding gaps for pre-primary education are exacerbated by competing priorities for resources to address humanitarian situations, including large-scale floods, droughts, and conflicts globally. In Pakistan, flood response activities necessitated reallocation of resources. In the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region, establishment of 400 ECE classrooms in government schools faced delays due to these response activities, underscoring the region's vulnerability to unforeseen crises. In Myanmar, where mother-tongue based materials are critical for learners from ethnic minorities, distribution of early peacebuilding story books was jeopardized by transportation and communication challenges in the face of increasing tensions.

Nevertheless, of the 122 reporting countries, 69 per cent indicated having effective and accessible ECE systems. UNICEF has supported countries with ECE system diagnostics and prioritization; extension of an ECE systems approach to humanitarian situations in climate adversities, conflicts, and other crises; and strengthening equity through ECE programming. For the first time ever, systematic pre-primary subsector diagnostics in Sierra Leone's Education Sector Analysis enabled the prioritization of pre-primary education, with a dedicated budget in the Education Sector Plan 2022–2026. This not only mobilized political will for the integration of ECE as a key component of the national foundational learning agenda, but also generated stakeholder consensus on key priorities to strengthen the pre-primary subsector.

Applying the ECE systems approach to humanitarian situations, the ECE Technical Working Group of national stakeholders in South Sudan adapted the pre-primary subsector analysis to the country's protracted conflict. This enabled the government to position ECE in the new Education Sector Plan and to include humanitarian considerations in the new ECE policy.

Strengthening inclusive and gender-equitable education systems

UNICEF is committed to ensuring inclusive and equitable access to learning opportunities from early childhood through adolescence, with a focus on gender equality and inclusion of children from disadvantaged backgrounds or with disabilities. In 2023, 57 per cent of 130 reporting countries met the criteria for having progressed towards a more inclusive and gender-equitable system for access to learning opportunities, in part due to UNICEF support. However, regional disparities continue to be stark, with Africa and Asia home to the 10 countries with the most adverse education conditions for poor girls and young women: Africa alone accounts for 8 of the top 10.⁹

UNICEF's work to protect girls against violence and early marriage has been critical for ensuring access and attainment. UNICEF has helped to create safer and more supportive learning environments that enable children, especially girls, to pursue their education without fear or hindrance. Additional strategies that UNICEF used in its gender-responsive education initiatives included financial support and incentives, which helped mitigate the economic challenges that often prevent girls from accessing or continuing their education.

By championing policy changes and advocating for legislative reforms in particular, UNICEF played a pivotal role in eliminating systemic barriers to education,

particularly for girls and marginalized groups. For instance, in Nigeria, advocacy efforts led to the adoption of policies on educational reintegration of pregnant and married girls, illustrating how strategic advocacy can facilitate broader social change and enhance educational access for vulnerable populations.

In 2023, UNICEF and Chery Automobile launched a two-year \$6 million partnership to provide access to quality education to children around the world. The partnership supports education programmes with flexible funding in China, Mexico, South Africa, and Türkiye, reaching the most disadvantaged and marginalized children.

Inclusive education for children with disabilities

UNICEF made extensive efforts to accelerate progress in inclusive education for children with disabilities. Of all reporting countries, 55 per cent reported developing disability-inclusive education systems, up from 47 per cent of countries in 2022. The number of children with disabilities accessing education increased from 251,565 in 2022 to 273,644 in 2023. This number is likely to be an underestimate, however, due to data collection being insufficiently inclusive. UNICEF continues to advocate for and support collection of more inclusive data.

In partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO-IIEP), UNICEF delivered the Foundations of Disability-Inclusive Education Sector Planning course to 81 ministries of education and UNICEF participants from Somalia and Nigeria last year. Since 2020, the course has been delivered six times to nearly 500 participants from 48 countries. This is the only certified training of its kind and supports governments to better understand education systems through a disability inclusive lens and develop appropriate sector plans.

Programme implementation in 2023 cut across five dimensions of systems strengthening for inclusive education: law and policy, accessible physical environment, materials and communication, human resources, and attitudes.

In Belarus, the National Strategy of Inclusive Education 2035 was developed to strengthen inclusive education for learners with disabilities. This included standards to strengthen the capacity of educators in inclusive education. Under this framework, UNICEF collaborated with academic partners to update educational standards, curricula, and educational programmes for pedagogical universities. From 2024 onwards, all new teachers will be equipped with skills for inclusive teaching.

In India, nearly 300,000 children with disabilities (42 per cent girls) were provided with inclusive learning materials, and 800 teachers (25 per cent female) were supported with capacity development. In addition, 750,000 out-of-school children (including 14,131 with disabilities) were enrolled in formal education thanks to an out-of-school tracking system developed in three states.

In Lebanon, UNICEF supported the government to provide inclusive education for children with disabilities in 110 schools and strengthened school information systems and data collection procedures. UNICEF digitalized teacher training modules on child protection, gender equity, and inclusive education to increase accessibility and the reach of these learning modules. Infrastructural improvements, including accessibility for children with disabilities, were made in 28 kindergartens. A total of 286 ECE and primary teachers received training to develop their capacity on topics such as inclusive education, active learning modules, classroom management, and lesson planning.

In Zimbabwe, with support from the Global Partnership for Education, assistive devices were provided to 77,000 children with disabilities (35,000 girls), to enable access to quality basic education. To ensure that children with disabilities enrol in school, UNICEF supported the government to conduct community outreach programmes, reaching 32,776 people (19,144 female).

Social and behaviour change in education

UNICEF promotes education systems as a tool to transform societies and economies, challenging rather than replicating harmful gender and social norms. In 2023, 70 country offices implemented education-specific social and behavioural change (SBC) strategies. In the Central African Republic and Mali, community engagement proved to be a core strategy to enable behavioural change and drive demand for education and retention in school. In the Central African Republic, UNICEF developed a more sustainable and people-driven solution to addressing educational needs and lack of learning by applying SBC strategies to increase school access and retention for children. As a result, 20 communities piloted the new Kundukua (community platforms) approach and designed and began to implement financially sustainable action plans for the benefit of their children's education. The modules and tools for community dialogue around schools were validated by the government and scale up has begun in 250 localities. In Mali, community engagement and SBC awareness-raising campaigns resulted in increased school enrolment at primary and lower secondary levels. The primary gross enrolment rate increased from 79.6 per cent (77.4 per cent for girls) in 2022 to 81.7 per cent (79.6 per cent for girls) in 2023.

Violence in schools and the Safe to Learn initiative

In 2023, the Secretariat of the Safe to Learn initiative to end violence in and through schools transitioned to UNICEF, and the Safe to Learn coalition grew from 14 to 16 members. The coalition has effectively mobilized action on violence against children in schools through strategic positioning in global-level dialogues with key education donors and partners, and by securing education funding from the Global Partnership for Education to work with governments on violence prevention and response in, around, and through schools.

UNICEF has continued to work through education systems to create safe, inclusive and gender-equitable learning environments, and to capitalize on the role of schools and education systems in fostering social and gender norms and behaviours that protect children from violence.

In Nigeria, UNICEF supported 13 states to develop costed, safe school workplans that benefitted 15 million learners. A draft national policy on ending corporal punishment in schools was also developed to ensure violence-free school environments. In Burkina Faso, UNICEF supported the review of the child-friendly school standards and safe schools training module through a participative process involving government departments and key non-governmental partners. The scale up of the revised child-friendly school and safe school project has started with 455 schools.

In Mexico, a school-based violence prevention and gender equality programme was integrated into teachers' in-service curricula, allowing teachers to gain credits to advance their career while strengthening the capacity of schools to respond to violence. In Cambodia, adolescents raised concerns about access to quality education and violence against children and made suggestions on how to increase their participation in decision making. These contributions were embedded in the new UNICEF Cambodia Country Programme. Both Mexico and Cambodia are signatories to the Safe to Learn Call to Action.

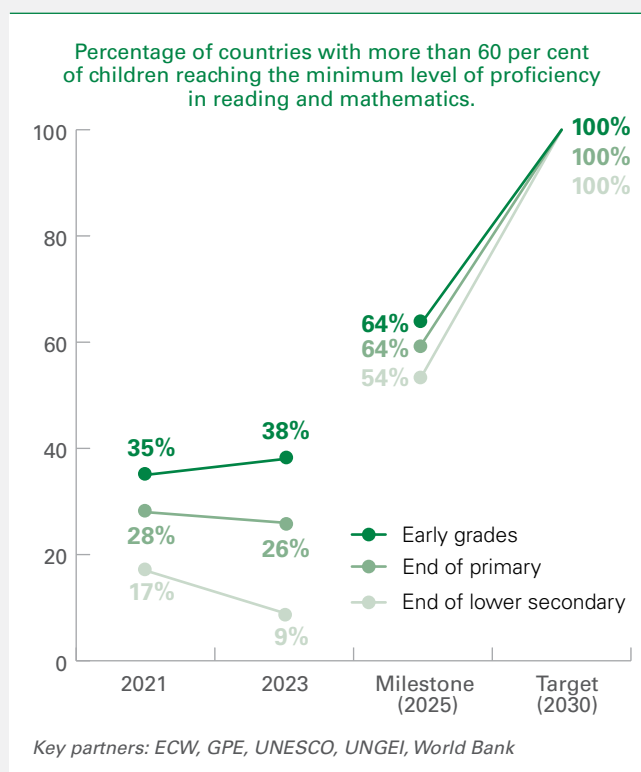
In South Africa, the Department of Basic Education (DBE), endorsed the Safe to Learn Call to Action in 2019. To support DBE's efforts, UNICEF commenced a review and update of the 'National School Safety Framework' (2016) to include online safety-related issues identified in the *Disrupting Harm in South Africa* report (2022). In Peru, the government with UNICEF's support rolled out the institutionalization of the school violence prevention strategy (PREVI) through close coordination with the technical staff of the ministry of education. This model was successfully implemented in 2,128 schools nationwide, benefiting 1,300,000 students. In parallel, UNICEF conducted training sessions for more than 1,000 education sector professionals. For the first year of implementation, the Ministry of Education invested approximately \$12 million from its budget in this initiative.

In Colombia, UNICEF furthered its collaboration with national civil society organizations, as well as the ministries of education, foreign affairs and defence, to integrate child-focused priorities into ongoing peace negotiations. With partners, UNICEF also pushed for an action plan for implementation of the 'Safe Schools Declaration', signed by Colombia in 2022.

Result Area 2: Improved learning, skills, participation and engagement for all children and adolescents

In 2023, 30 per cent of 76 reporting countries had an effective teacher development system while 52 per cent of 64 reporting countries had an effective learning assessment system; both require acceleration to meet the UNICEF Strategic Plan targets for 2025.

Figure 7. Strategic Plan Outcome Indicator 2.6



The percentage of countries with more than 60 per cent of children reaching the minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics, in early grades, end of primary and end of lower secondary education, remains desperately low (less than 10 per cent in lower secondary), requiring accelerated efforts to effectively address the learning crisis and reduce learning poverty.

Foundational learning

Globally nearly two-thirds of children are suffering from 'learning poverty'; however, the rate is as high as nine in 10 children in low-income countries. Despite this fact, only 22 per cent of low- and middle-income countries surveyed in 2023 had nationwide teacher-training programmes to

tackle foundational literacy and numeracy, and less than half of those surveyed had nationwide curricula focusing on foundational literacy and numeracy.¹⁰

Recognizing the urgent need to address learning poverty with action at scale, UNICEF and key education partners – making up the [Global Coalition for Foundational Learning](#) – continued advocating for governments and education stakeholders to endorse the [Commitment to Action on Foundational Learning](#), leading to an increase in endorsements from 16, in 2022, to 64 in 2023. The endorsing governments and partners have committed to halving the proportion of the world's children in learning poverty by 2030, and to making necessary investments – including increased budgetary allocations – to close the gap in education resources and effectively advance foundational learning.

UNICEF and Coalition partners also intensified advocacy for governments to operationalize their commitments by systematically integrating remedial education support into education systems, enabling all children to quickly acquire literacy and numeracy skills. In partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, UNICEF supported the scale up of remedial education in three countries – Ghana, South Africa and Zambia – with proven, effective government-owned models and provided technical support to 14 other countries in Africa. Through the [Accelerator Programme](#), a partnership with UNICEF, the World Bank and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, five countries – Niger, Mozambique, Rwanda, Nigeria (Edo State) and Sierra Leone – increased accountability by setting specific learning targets and defining concrete action and responsibilities for government, partners, local entities, communities and parents to achieve these targets.

In part thanks to work by UNICEF and its partners, many countries have set up successful and scalable practices to address the learning crisis and support foundational learning and skills development. For example, UNICEF supported the Government of Guinea to design and pilot a programme to enhance reading and mathematics outcomes in Grades 3, 4 and 5 by equipping teachers with tailored training and support based on the [Teaching at the Right Level](#) approach. The pilot trained 27 national trainers and 30 teachers across 10 schools and reached 1,551 students. After six months of implementation in classrooms, significant progress was observed in students' mastery of French reading and mathematics skills. In Jordan, UNICEF, in partnership with the government, developed the Jordan Reading Recovery Programme (RRP) to improve foundational literacy skills at Grades 5 and 6. The programme equipped teachers with tailored training and resources, which benefitted 3,759 children (49 per cent girls) across 27 schools and 26 NFE centres in refugee camps. The RRP yielded promising results with over 90 per cent of students demonstrating significant improvement in reading skills, reflected in scores exceeding 70 per cent in summative assessments.

Secondary education and skills

For adolescents and young people, especially the most marginalized, the learning and skills crisis remains centre stage, with limited improvements at lower and upper secondary education levels and poorer regions exhibiting lower completion rates. As such, many children and youth, especially out-of-school children and girls, are entering adulthood without the full range of skills (foundational, transferable, digital, green, entrepreneurial and job-specific) that allow them to navigate personal, social and economic challenges. Meanwhile, the rate of global NEET youth stands at approximately 22 per cent,¹¹ and has remained stable over the past decade.

In 2023, UNICEF worked with governments, civil society and the private sector in 86 countries to strengthen national education systems and alternative pathways to learning for adolescents, preparing them for re-enrolment in education and the world of work. This included strengthening curricula to ensure the full range of skills are integrated (including technical and vocational education and training – TVET); supporting learning-to-earning programmes that enable young people to engage in decent work or start their own enterprises; and supporting community-based skills-development programmes for adolescents. In 2023, 35 per cent of UNICEF-supported countries reported institutionalizing holistic skills development for adolescents and youth, up 12 percentage points from the previous year, exceeding the 2023 milestone and on track to achieve UNICEF’s Strategic Plan target of 42 per cent.

In Lebanon, UNICEF helped to implement the National TVET Strategic Framework, improving the quality and flexibility of Lebanon’s TVET system. This included accrediting NFE within TVET, digitalizing certification standards, and enhancing skills training. Through various initiatives, 10,204 vulnerable youth received market-relevant skills training, 4,341 benefited from [the Generation of Innovation Leaders](#) programme, and 3,463 youth in Palestinian camps gained life skills in conflict resolution and leadership. Additionally, 2,467 youth enrolled in vocational training aligned with market needs, and 51 secured internships.

In Egypt, 500,000 adolescents received skills training for adulthood, while in Viet Nam, UNICEF’s support benefited over 21 million children with competency-based education, focusing on various essential skills. In India, over two million adolescents, 49 per cent of whom are girls, participated in twenty-first century skills programmes. In Burundi, 135,000 adolescents, (50 per cent girls), developed life skills and entrepreneurship through solidarity groups.

The UNICEF-International Labour Organization (ILO) [i-UPSHIFT](#) programme in Uganda targets out-of-school youth with TVET and NFE, while a digital life-skills programme benefitted 100,293 adolescents. In Afghanistan, 2,784 adolescent girls accessed skills training through safe spaces, and 4,101 gained computer skills, with digital hubs supporting online market access for their products.

In DRC, UNICEF supported the finalization of vocational and inclusive education strategies, training nearly 5,000 adolescents, 2,854 of whom are girls, with job-market skills.

Gender-responsive systems for learning and skills development

The percentage of countries with gender-responsive systems for learning and skills development decreased in 2023 to 36 per cent compared to 41 per cent in 2022. Several factors, including global crises, political instability and policy changes, funding constraints, measurement challenges and resistance to change, may have led to fewer countries meeting the threshold. This points to the need to accelerate efforts to meet the target of 78 per cent in 2025.

Gender-sensitive curricula and pedagogies ensure that educational content and teaching methods address and counter gender biases and stereotypes, promoting an inclusive learning environment where all students, regardless of gender, can thrive.

The implementation of competency-based, gender-transformative curricula in Bangladesh is a prime example of how curricular reforms can promote gender equality and enhance educational outcomes for girls. This approach focused on system strengthening through curriculum reform, building capacity of teachers in addition to monitoring and evaluation coupled with adequate resourcing to support implementation. Burkina Faso was able to guarantee enrolment of 149,000 girls through direct advocacy to combat child marriage, while 200,000 girls benefited from the supply of dignity kits and action to prevent sexual violence. In Mali, 165,000 girls benefitted from an improved environment thanks to UNICEF’s support to a gender-sensitive policy, the promotion of behavioural change, and gender-sensitive teaching and learning.

In addition, community engagement and capacity building underscore the importance of local involvement and empowerment in fostering sustainable educational solutions. By mobilizing communities, training educators, and building local capacities, UNICEF has been able to create supportive educational environments that are attuned to the specific needs and contexts of different regions. This approach not only enhances the relevance and effectiveness of educational initiatives; it also ensures their longevity and resilience. For instance, in Ghana, equipping teachers with gender-responsive pedagogies exemplified how community-level interventions could significantly improve the quality of education for girls and boys alike.

In Morocco, UNICEF rolled out the Model for Improving Girls’ Transition Between and Lower Secondary School initiative in eight provinces that focused on keeping adolescent girls in school. Dropout rates in targeted locations decreased by 4.6 per cent on average in 2023, highlighting the impact of this important work.

United Nations Girls' Education Initiative

In 2023, the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) led or co-led six global networks,¹² bringing together local and global expertise and momentum to drive the gender-transformative education agenda. UNGEI programmes in collaboration with global and country-level partners and networks led to policy change and tangible impact for learners in gender equality through education. 2023 also saw the launch of the [Feminist Manifesto](#) to promote individual and collective well-being.

An independent evaluation in March 2023 found that the [Gender at the Centre Initiative](#) (GCI),¹³ coordinated by UNGEI and UNESCO-IIEP, "has been extremely effective in putting gender on the agenda and building awareness and support for the idea that education sector planning should not be gender blind".¹⁴ GCI held a multi-country, gender-responsive education sector planning meeting in Dakar. The meeting brought together government officials, civil society organizations and Global Partnership for Education (GPE) grant agencies from eight African countries¹⁵ to integrate gender equality in education sector plans and GPE partnership compacts. In Niger, GCI's Gender Equality in Education Snapshot (GES) Toolkit enabled analysis and dialogue on gender equality in education and supported the revision of the National Strategy for Accelerating Education and Training for Girls and Women. GCI established Feminist Youth Coalitions in Mali and Niger, which are now officially represented within the Local Education Groups. GCI is also working in seven countries to offer expertise within the education sector.¹⁶ GCI and its partners delivered over 20 training sessions and webinars on gender-transformative education system strengthening, reaching over 400 representatives from ministries of education, civil society and other key sector stakeholders.

Under the Ending Gender Stereotypes in Classrooms (EGSC) programme, UNGEI demonstrated the power of education through a play- and reflection-based curriculum, to enable children to question and reject gender stereotypes. UNGEI reached 7,364 students (45 per cent girls) in India, Bangladesh, and Niger through 391 teachers, and engaged 555 school management committee members and 11,081 parents and community members. Following the programme, in India there was an 81-percentage-point and 78-percentage-point increase among girls and boys respectively associating the word 'gentle' with both genders, while in Bangladesh, there was a 62-percentage-point and 61-percentage-point increase among girls and boys who knew how to recognize and identify gender stereotypes. The [Ending Gender Stereotypes in Schools: Good practices, experiences and lessons learned](#) learning brief, published with the UNGEI Partner Coalition for EGSC, shows that education programming on gender shifts attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. A [study](#) investigating the social determinants, norms and perceptions hampering girls' education in Sierra Leone found that positive role models are more effective than traditional sensitization campaigns in addressing deep-rooted beliefs about girls' and boys' roles in society.

UNGEI, in collaboration with UNICEF, Plan International, and Transform Education, launched a gender-transformative education [e-learning course](#). In partnership with UNESCO and the Global Working Group to End School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV), UNGEI launched the [School violence: Why gender matters and how to measure SRGBV](#) technical brief, which explores gender norms as a key factor in preventing and measuring SRGBV.

UNGEI ran the Feminist School in collaboration with Gender at Work, with 42 participants from 17 countries. Feminist School is an action- and peer-based learning programme focused on building leadership skills along with experiential learning on gender justice and education. In 2023, participants reported an increase in familiarity (38 per cent) and confidence (27 per cent) with feminist tools, concepts, and approaches.

Transform Education, a feminist youth coalition hosted by UNGEI, worked towards strengthening feminist solidarity and coalition building within the education space, such as the Education Cannot Wait High-Level Financing Conference, the 67th Commission on the Status of Women, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Youth Forum, the Asia Pacific Learning Symposium on SRGBV, Women Deliver, and COP28. Transform Education also launched the CommuniTE Teach-In and Learning series, an initiative to promote understanding of feminism for young activists globally.

Supporting learners' mental health and well-being

UNICEF made significant efforts to improve access to mental health support in schools and other learning environments globally. In 2023, UNICEF worked across 87 countries to strengthen education policies, strategies, and national plans to promote and safeguard the mental health and psychosocial well-being of children and educators in schools. In [Bangladesh](#), UNICEF supported the government to include mental health literacy in the revised national curriculum, which has reached over 30,000 secondary schools. Similarly, in Viet Nam, UNICEF's evidence-based advocacy for strengthening school-based services to support students' mental health and well-being led to the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training adopting a circular that mandates that all primary and secondary schools must have a school counsellor. In Rwanda, MHPSS services have been introduced into 713 schools, and newly trained school counsellors have reached 35,306 adolescents. In Syria, UNICEF trained over 8,000 teachers (90 per cent female) on MHPSS and socio-emotional learning.

Digital transformation of education systems

In 2023, UNICEF continued advancing the [Call to Action on Quality Public Digital Learning for All](#). UNICEF data from 100 reporting countries shows that the proportion of countries with effective systems for digital learning solutions – measured by quality of solutions as well as the availability of devices, connectivity, and youth engagement – increased from 16 per cent in 2022 to 22 per cent in 2023. UNICEF provided support to 17.8 million children (half of them girls) with access to education through digital platforms, bringing the cumulative total to 95 million children since 2021. However, this figure falls short of the planned milestone of 106 million, reflecting mixed levels of investment in digital transformation. A third of government digital learning platforms analysed across 184 countries in the 2023 report [Mapping National Digital Platforms](#) were found to have been discontinued or no longer maintained after COVID-19. The vast majority also lacked interactive content, accessibility features for children with disabilities, and offline functionality.

To combat challenges around ensuring effective digital systems for learning, UNICEF co-led the development of the Digital Transformation of Education Strategy, which enables countries to self-assess their progress towards holistic, inclusive and comprehensive digital transformation. The framework also guides countries towards more cost-effective approaches by encouraging investments that are well balanced across the key dimensions required for meaningful impact. The framework is one of the key tools of the Digital Transformation Collaborative, a new initiative within UNESCO's Global Education Coalition.

To advance digital learning as a public good, through UNICEF and UNESCO's [Gateways to Public Digital Learning initiative](#), a network of nine Gateways countries

was established. The initiative is dedicated to promoting and strengthening high-quality, inclusive national digital learning platforms and content. Gateways complements the Giga Initiative, led by UNICEF and the International Telecommunications Union, to connect all schools to the internet. Giga and Gateways share the aim that all children and young people are connected and have access to quality digital learning opportunities.

UNICEF continued to accelerate the [Accessible Digital Textbook \(ADT\)](#) initiative to reach children with disabilities alongside all learners through Universal Design for Learning (UDL). In 2023, the initiative won the [Zero Project Award](#) for its innovation and impact on inclusive education, making textbooks and learning materials accessible through features such as narration and sign language. In Paraguay, UNICEF provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Education to develop digital textbooks on communication skills for Grade 1 and 2 students. In 2023, these were introduced in 40 schools, complementing print books, and they are now formally integrated in the national education system and available on the national learning platform – Paraguay Aprende – to reach over 700,000 students (including 344,971 girls), with and without disabilities. Online training was provided to over 800 teachers, and impact assessments were used to address obstacles to improving ADT utilization in classrooms.

UNICEF continued to tackle gender disparities in education through innovative digital learning initiatives. In Syria, to address vulnerabilities to harm such as violence, coercion, child labour, early marriage, and harmful stereotypes faced by girls, UNICEF empowered 300,000 out-of-school girls with foundational skills, employability skills, skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), and digital skills for future job prospects, as part of youth training through 40 youth-friendly spaces and 156 mobile teams. In Afghanistan, digital hubs were established for girls to access tailored information, develop skills, and nurture social connections, resulting in over 4,000 adolescent girls acquiring computer skills in safe spaces. Additionally, these hubs served as gateways to online marketplaces for items created by women and girls who have participated in UNICEF-backed vocational training initiatives.

Teachers play a pivotal role in the successful digital transformation of the education system. In Malaysia, UNICEF collaborated with the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders to endorse Future Skills for All, an online platform to enhance the teaching and learning of digital skills and computer science. So far, the platform has reached 47,750 primary and secondary students (including 26,549 girls) and educators across more than 3,740 schools, accumulating 1.3 million views.

UNICEF's comprehensive, system-wide strengthening endeavours fostered the creation of strategies to support sustainability of digital initiatives across countries. Recognizing the adverse effects of extended school closure in Ukraine, UNICEF assisted with the development and implementation of a national learning recovery strategy to

minimize learning losses. As a result, more than 55,000 children (more than half girls and nearly 600 children with disabilities) benefited from the introduction of digital learning centres, as well as NFE institutions, youth centres, and digital skills development. Remarkably, 78 per cent of the 3,188 children (including 1,672 girls) involved in catch-up programmes saw enhanced learning outcomes after participating in these initiatives.

Learning Passport

Launched in 2018, the Learning Passport, UNICEF's flagship digital learning programme, seeks to democratize access to quality education resources by introducing a highly flexible and portable digital education platform that enables children and young people to continue learning anywhere, at any time. The platform provides a full range of educational content – from foundational learning to skills development – in different contexts, including formal and non-formal educational settings, and with and without internet connectivity.

In 2023, the programme expanded to 38 countries, with registered users more than doubling, from 2.8 million in 2022, and 13,529 courses offered. In 2023 it launched in Brazil, Eswatini, Ghana, Guinea, Jamaica, the Philippines, and Sao Tome and Principe. Compared to 2022, the number of trained users more than quadrupled to 2.73 million, and course completions also saw a significant increase, rising nearly fivefold to 2.49 million. In Syria, the Learning Passport programme operated in conflict-hit areas and in places affected by the earthquake that struck Türkiye and northern and western Syria in February 2023. The Learning Passport enabled thousands of out-of-school children, including those in camps for refugees and internally displaced persons, to resume their education in safe environments. One of the programme's features, Learning Cinema (using the Learning Passport on projectors in temporary learning spaces), was introduced in 8 learning centres, and is now being expanded to a total of 31 centres.

The Learning Passport emphasizes culturally relevant content wherever possible to make educational engagement more effective. In Ghana, for example UNICEF integrated a Ghanaian voice-over and worked with a local partner, Worldreader, to select more relevant content for learners and therefore help local students connect with the programme.

To build on the commitment to ensure uninterrupted inclusive digital education for all affected children and young people in conflict zones, UNICEF developed the Digital School in a Box prototype, currently undergoing testing. The prototype includes an offline hub device and is pre-packed with relevant, localized educational resources, educator and learner devices for accessing digital content and a solar power source. The Digital School in a Box also comes with curated educational and training resources that are focused on supporting children, young people and educators in emergency situations.

As part of its work to enhance digital and pedagogical skills for teachers, UNICEF collaborated with the SOK Foundation in Poland to design micro-courses for teachers, reducing content that was several hours long to 15-minute modules. As a result, there was a higher level of engagement with 3,000 enrolled teachers finishing their courses last year.

UNICEF remains dedicated to developing rigorous, evidence-based models and methodologies. Findings from Learning Passport pilots in targeted schools in Ghana, Guinea, Jamaica and Myanmar showed that effective integration of digital learning into classrooms is resource intensive and requires extensive planning. UNICEF has now developed guidance for creating Learning Passport accounts that can be shared by students, including establishing a device-usage schedule and organizing refresher training for teachers, to provide additional options when there is not enough device coverage.

In 2023, UNICEF improved and streamlined the management of community training for the programme's online version by optimizing infrastructure configurations in India and Nigeria to accommodate higher numbers of concurrent users. The offline solution for Learning Passport was also improved from the technological, management and user-experience perspectives.

Last year, the Learning Passport saw marked growth in strategic partnerships and global recognition, which provided essential support to meet demand, especially in low-resourced contexts. In addition to continued engagement with Microsoft and other core partners, new collaborations, for example with Sony Group Corporation, meant UNICEF was able to expand its reach by focusing on education accessibility, mental health, and STEM learning for millions of children in vulnerable situations.



School children attending Maths class at Addis Gebere learning Site Konso Zone Ethiopia.

Climate change in education

The escalating climate crisis is triggering more frequent and severe weather events, causing significant disruption to communities worldwide. In 2023, millions faced displacement or fatalities due to extreme weather occurrences. Every year, the education of around 40 million children is interrupted by climate-related disasters, and this number is increasing.

Marginalized children, particularly girls, residing in climate hotspots are disproportionately affected by the adverse consequences of erratic weather patterns. These effects extend beyond disruption to education, and jeopardize their mental well-being, food security, and livelihoods. Moreover, their heightened vulnerability places girls at increased risk of child marriage, violence, and exploitation. However, access to foundational and green skills necessary for climate adaptation remains limited for marginalized children, with only half of surveyed nations integrating climate change into their national curricula or requiring schools to develop climate action plans. Additionally, just over half of countries provide teachers with training on climate and sustainability.

UNICEF is actively addressing these challenges, collaborating with governments, civil society, and young people to develop solutions to climate-related threats to education. In 2023, UNICEF's efforts focused on mainstreaming climate initiatives in education systems across 50 countries. Strategies included integrating climate education into curricula, enhancing teacher capacities, and engaging adolescents in climate advocacy.

Greening learning opportunities: In 2023, UNICEF supported governments across diverse regions including Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East to mainstream climate education by upskilling teachers, formulating and rolling out curricular frameworks for climate action and improving the availability of quality learning materials focused on climate action and green skills for the benefit of millions of students.

In China, the strategic inclusion of green skills within the national Life Skills Framework saw 1,757 teachers and 274,389 students in technical and vocational schools benefit from enhanced capacities. In Cambodia, UNICEF followed a similar approach, benefiting 226,214 students aged 10-14 (53 per cent girls) with a life-skills approach that integrated climate action into the national curriculum.

In Viet Nam, the capacity of close to 400 teachers was built on greening schools and integration of gender-responsive climate and disaster risk reduction into lesson plans, reaching close to 250,000 students (55 per cent girls) and leading to reduced environmental impact.

Green skills in and out of schools: In eight countries around the globe, UNICEF used co-curricular approaches and training programmes to support adolescents to develop the green skills they need for green jobs and to drive climate adaptation in their communities. In Albania, UNICEF's UPSHIFT programme supported close to 30,000 young people with green and entrepreneurship skills. Moreover, the government took the initiative to over 1,000 schools, airing activities on national television, and engaging over 20,000 young people. In Kazakhstan, UNICEF focused on empowering adolescent girls with green skills through the STEM4Girls project. This initiative has created internship and mentorship opportunities for girls and supported them to develop innovative solutions, such as using nanosatellites to collect climate data that informs disaster risk reduction.

Greener and safer schools: UNICEF supported governments in countries like Libya and Nicaragua to enhance the resilience of disaster-prone communities and schools. In Kyrgyzstan, UNICEF supported the government to reach nearly a million schoolchildren (Grades 1-11) and 20,000 school administration staff with learning opportunities to develop skills on preparation and adaptation to events related to climate change. In line with the principles of Kyrgyzstan's national inclusive disaster risk reduction policy, 411 children with disabilities (65 per cent girls) benefited from this initiative. In Burundi, UNICEF managed construction and rehabilitation programmes, including renewable energy, in five schools and two district hospitals.

Child and adolescent-led climate advocacy: In countries across the globe and in forums such as COP, UNICEF supported youth organizations and youth advocates, and provided platforms for children to amplify their solutions and demands regarding their right to a healthy environment. In Madagascar, 15,079 students (51 per cent girls) engaged in reforestation activities through the One Child One Tree initiative thanks to UNICEF coordinated actions with regional education and environment directorates. UNICEF also supported the Malagasy Youth Alliance for Climate, Environment and Biodiversity (Aika), engaging young leaders from 23 regions and reaching over 50,000 members. In India, UNICEF supported 400,000 young people in Odisha with training to form the Youth4 for Water Plus Campaign: a collective taking action to protect the environment, in partnership with 50 stakeholders, including government.

Globally, UNICEF has worked with partners to advocate greater investment in strengthening the climate resilience of education systems and to improve access to green skills and climate education for marginalized children and youth. UNICEF continues to support the Greening Education Partnership, co-leading the Systems Capacities Working Group, thus building the capacities of over 1,000 members globally in collaboration with UNESCO, GPE and Education International, among others. UNICEF also partnered with ILO and the World Bank to highlight the need to support youth on-the-move with Green Skills, amplifying evidence and promising programmes. UNICEF also partnered with the Early Childhood Development Action Networks, using evidence to jointly advocate integration of climate education in early learning.

Adolescent development and participation for youth-led change

In 2023, UNICEF accelerated work to strengthen local and national systems for youth participation. As a result, 55 country offices (up from 46 in 2022) implemented specific policies and institutional mechanisms, and built capacities of adult stakeholders to support young people's participation in a meaningful and safe way.

A total of 53 per cent of reporting countries met the criteria for having effective student and community participation within the education system. This reflects an increase from 2022 (49 per cent), meaning UNICEF is on track to reach its 2025 target.

Around the world, adolescents and young people are campaigning for increased budgetary allocations for climate mitigation, changing perceptions on mental health, supporting their peers in avoiding adolescent pregnancy, leading relief efforts during conflicts and disasters, stepping in to support learning when systems falter, implementing solutions for improved menstrual hygiene, influencing community norms on child marriage and violence, and much more. In 2023, UNICEF accelerated work to strengthen local and national systems and institutions so they, in turn, provide systematic support for young people's meaningful participation beyond the life of UNICEF's investment.

In 2023, UNICEF promoted the rights of 21.8 million young people – more than half girls – to have their voices heard and views considered in decision making across 92 countries. This included the use of UNICEF evidence-based guidelines and global flagship tools such as the [Inter-Agency Standing Committee Youth Guidelines](#), [Youth Advocacy Guide](#) and the [Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation](#) (the 'Adolescent Kit'). Out of the total number of young people engaged, 975,500 actively participated in responding to humanitarian issues such as: the conflict in Gaza in the State of Palestine, the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, and the Syrian Arab Republic earthquake response.

In Croatia, UNICEF supported the development of a self-assessment tool to measure adolescent and youth participation in public life. In the Central African Republic, UNICEF worked with the government to establish a youth body that ensures adolescent participation at national level and to support the development of the National Community Engagement Policy.

In South Asia, UNICEF launched an open online course on [Leadership for Planning and Decision-Making with Adolescents](#), developed with adolescents and adult stakeholders to build the capacity of government, private sector and youth leaders. At global level, UNICEF recently launched the [Adolescent Data Portal](#), and the corresponding [Adolescent Girl Country Profiles](#), which further offered national policy makers and youth leaders a trusted data source to assist them with advocacy and policy efforts on their local youth agendas.

UNICEF supported young people to participate and make change meaningfully and safely. The [Adolescent Kit](#), for example, has supported over 1.6 million adolescents in more than 45 countries since its inception, with nearly 740,000 adolescents engaged and 6,400 partners, facilitators, teachers, and youth volunteers trained to implement it in 2023 alone. In Sudan, the Adolescent Kit was used to equip over 70,300 adolescent girls with information and skills to become active partners in UNICEF's emergency response. In Viet Nam, UNICEF partnered with over 605,000 adolescents on the climate change disaster risk reduction campaign 'Early Action for a Safe, Clean, and Green Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for Every Child', and on the mental health campaign 'Open Up & Connect'. In Zimbabwe, over 108,000 young people were supported to lead community child protection initiatives through child protection committees, including co-creating materials on child marriage and adolescent pregnancy for use in school-based, child-led clubs. In Latin America, UNICEF launched [CollectiveMINDS](#), an innovative card game co-designed with adolescents to encourage open dialogue with families and caregivers, while empowering adolescents as active participants in mental health conversations and in debunking mental health stigma.

UNICEF's global partnerships have been instrumental in amplifying young people's voices and change-making. Under the Netherlands-supported partnership, UNICEF established innovative partnerships with, and for, young people, such as the [Global Refugee Youth Network](#) and the Youth on the Move Fellowship programme, which provides fellowships to young people on the move to improve their access to education and opportunities by placing them in paid positions within UNICEF over several months. A key moment in 2023 was the [Global Refugee Forum](#), which placed young people at the forefront of humanitarian response, including a [Youth Leadership in Action Pledge](#) signed by member states, the inter-agency [Youth Compact](#) and youth-led organizations. During COP28, UNICEF, Generation Unlimited and partners launched the [Green Rising initiative](#) to mobilize millions of children and young people worldwide to advocate for the climate and implement solutions that increase community resilience and power a just transition. UNICEF is also a key supporter of the [Youth 2030 Agenda](#), an umbrella framework to guide the United Nations as it steps up its work with, and for, young people in the lead up to the Summit of the Future and beyond.

Research and evidence

Research and evidence production are vital for UNICEF programming as they enable informed decision-making, targeted interventions, and evaluation of impact. By gathering data-driven insights, UNICEF can tailor its policies and programmes to address specific needs and challenges faced by children and communities. Evidence helps in assessing the effectiveness of interventions, ensuring resources are used efficiently and enhancing accountability by providing transparency about outcomes and impacts, which is crucial for stakeholders. Research findings can be used for advocacy purposes and to mobilize support for child rights and well-being and also helps in long-term planning by anticipating future trends and challenges, enabling UNICEF to develop strategies to sustain progress in child well-being. Overall, research and evidence production form the foundation of UNICEF's efforts to improve the lives of children worldwide.

Below are key findings and impact from research in 2023:

- The [What Works in Pre-Primary Education Provision](#) report summarized evidence from 29 low- and middle-income countries on what works to improve access to and quality of ECE.
- Research from the Data Must Speak programme in the [Lao People's Democratic Republic](#), Togo and Mali demonstrates that headteachers at positive deviant schools¹⁷ engage more with teachers and parents, including in decision-making, and provide more instructional supervision and pedagogical support to teachers. These schools also tend to be higher performing. Research from Data Must Speak strategically influenced policy windows in Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Nepal, and the Lao People's Democratic Republic.
- The brief [Top 10 Reasons Why Digital Learning Succeeds or Fails](#) drew on research in more than 15 countries. In [Paraguay](#) and [Uruguay](#), evidence generated through the Accessible Digital Textbooks initiative informed improvements for scaling up the programme to improve inclusive education opportunities for children with disabilities. Research on the Learning Passport informed design, development and/or expansion of national digital education plans, strategies and programmes in [Kosovo](#), [Guinea](#) and [Mexico](#).
- Ensuring equity in teacher allocation is a key challenge for education systems. Findings from the Teachers for All research in [Zambia](#), Botswana, Lesotho, [Côte d'Ivoire](#), Niger, Senegal, [Madagascar](#), and Angola indicate that female teachers are inequitably distributed, and teachers are inequitably distributed within schools. In Zambia, findings were used by the government for teacher recruitment planning. In Angola, evidence was used to target new teacher training to high need municipalities.

In addition, to track foundational learning recovery and acceleration under the [RAPID framework](#), UNICEF produced a total of 50 documents. These include one global report and 12 briefs on [Education in A Post-COVID World](#); and two journal articles: '[Learning Loss during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)' and '[Understanding and addressing the post-pandemic learning disparities](#)'. RAPID refers to a set of policies to 'reach' every child and keep them in school; 'assess' learning levels regularly; 'prioritize' teaching the fundamentals; 'increase' the efficiency of instruction; and 'develop' psychosocial health and well-being. Data collected provide country, regional and global perspectives concerning progress on foundational learning, both on system effectiveness and policy action observed at national level.¹⁸ The 2023 data showed that progress appears strongest for 'reach' and weakest for 'increase' and 'develop' among low- and middle-income countries. More than a year after the Transforming Education Summit, UNICEF analysis highlights [what progress have countries made](#) and where accelerated action is needed.

In 2023, UNICEF and the Hempel Foundation launched an action tracker based on the RAPID Framework to monitor national and global foundational learning progress. Through the [Foundational Learning Action Tracker](#) (FLAT) initiative, 35 reports, briefs and country scorecards were developed to support government action and advocacy to advance foundational learning. Following positive engagement around FLAT in 2023, the partnership between UNICEF and the Hempel Foundation has been extended until 2026.

In addition to FLAT, countries' commitments to Transforming Education will be tracked through the framework of the [Global Platform for Gender Equality and Girls' and Women's Empowerment in and through Education](#), a TES global initiated spearheaded by UNICEF and UNESCO.

The [Transforming Education with Equitable Financing](#) report presents findings on equitable education financing, using the latest data from 102 countries and territories, highlighting the urgent need to target resources to reach the poorest and most marginalized, and suggesting what policy actions are available. "If every government were to reallocate 1 per cent of current public education spending to the poorest 20 per cent of households, 35 million primary-school-age children could be lifted out of learning poverty."¹⁹ Another area of focus related to education financing is the cost-of-inaction [When can children learn](#) study. The study warns that due to the war in Sudan, a generation of school-age children are missing learning opportunities projected to result in a net lifetime earnings loss for the war-affected generation of children, equivalent to 15.4 per cent of the country's economy in 2022. An update of this estimate is ongoing, based on the latest situation in 2024.

Case studies

Comprehensive approach to climate education and green skills in Egypt

In a pioneering initiative, UNICEF Egypt has taken strides towards integrating climate education and green skills into the fabric of the country's education system.

UNICEF is preparing children and young people to live in a climate-changed world, by improving their 'adaptive capacity', ensuring that their voices are heard and acted on, and their education and skills are enhanced so they can participate in creating a sustainable future. To achieve this, UNICEF led national initiatives to promote adolescent and youth engagement in climate action.

Led by 1,500 teachers, UNICEF trained 641,698 schoolchildren in 750 primary schools in Aswan, Luxor, Minya, Fayoum and Assiut governorates, deepening their knowledge and skills on clean water, hygiene, safe sanitation and climate change. These children made contributions to the national Climate Action Plan, which 42 children presented to parliamentarians in November 2023, proposing greater use of renewable energy, modern irrigation methods, reuse of treated wastewater, sustainability training and more investment in awareness raising.

UNICEF – in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Technical Education and partners – implemented science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) activities and camps focusing on topics related to climate change, across public schools, refugee community schools and non-formal learning contexts, reaching over 176,868 students in total, with 16,250 female preparatory school students in 125 public and refugee community schools benefitting from STEAM interventions, also focusing on climate change. The activity covered climate change topics and enabled them to develop prototype solutions using the design thinking process. Primary school students were introduced to climate change topics – particularly heatwaves and drought – through LEGO-STEAM camps, and their creativity was engaged to showcase their solutions through LEGO bricks. These two-day camps were held for over 1,000 schools that received boxes of LEGO, and reached a total of 160,618 children (54 per cent girls). Working through adolescent development and participation, 17,574 adolescents and youth led 300 climate and gender equality initiatives in 15 governorates, reaching over 237,055 community members.

UNICEF also supported youth leadership by establishing the EG Youth 4 Climate initiative, in partnership with the Ministry of Youth and Sport, the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the United Nations in Egypt. From 1,800 applicants, 9 youth were selected to represent Egypt at both national and international climate conferences. Following comprehensive training, the nine delegates represented Egypt as negotiators at COP28.

Creating classrooms that are responsive to the mental health needs of learners, including refugees, in Poland

After two years of war, the Ukrainian refugee crisis remains one of the largest displacement crises in the world. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), nearly a million refugees from Ukraine are hosted in Poland – about 40 per cent of them children.

Because of COVID-19, Poland's educational institutions and staff have been navigating unprecedented challenges related to learning. Polish schools have also been responding to the learning needs of children who have fled the war in Ukraine. This has posed various difficulties in classrooms, including differences in educational backgrounds, cultural dissimilarities, and language barriers. Children arriving from Ukraine have experienced life-threatening situations, and faced psychosocial distress related to forced displacement, separation from friends and families, and uncertainty about the future. In response, UNICEF, in collaboration with the Polish Ministry of Education and Science, launched the Learning Passport – a collaborative initiative between UNICEF and Microsoft. A comprehensive e-learning platform, the Learning Passport is supporting the inclusive education of refugee children in the Polish school system. Access to the platform, and all its courses, is free.

Poland's Learning Passport now offers teachers access to resources and training to support their students' learning, mental health and well-being. Due to the growing number of refugees in Polish schools, UNICEF, the ministry of education and science, and UNICEF's partner (SOK Foundation) developed a three-module teacher training programme. Training modules empower teachers to manage stress and prevent burn-out, communicate cross-culturally, create an inclusive classroom, and foster the resilience of their learners.

After completing the training, teachers can continue to learn and share their experiences with peers through periodic one-day online workshops. An evaluation of the Learning Passport training programme noted that the courses were well designed, with a balanced combination of theoretical and practical content. The programme provides users with various learning materials, such as videos, readings and podcasts, catering to different learning styles. The gradual introduction of new terminology and content is proving to be an effective approach in assisting users to learn. Most importantly, the programme is equipping teachers with practical tools to improve their teaching practices.

In total, 9,500 teachers and educators (pre-primary to upper secondary) have completed the three-module teacher training course, equipping them with the skills they need to create classrooms that are responsive to the diverse mental health needs of approximately 200,000 learners. More than 2,200 teachers and school counsellors participated in a day of online training, focusing on resilience building and cross-cultural communication. In addition, 635 school managers completed an advanced and comprehensive MHPSS training programme named 'Quiet Mind', covering crucial topics such as stress management, burnout prevention, adaptive leadership, psychologically informed classroom strategies, cross-cultural communication, and ways to foster kindness and inclusion. Feedback from teachers using the Learning Passport training programme has been overwhelmingly positive, with teachers reporting decreases in stress and tension levels among their students, as well as improvements in their cross-cultural teaching practice.



Across Poland, some 195,000 refugee children are currently enrolled in Polish schools at all ages, from kindergarten level through secondary school. It is estimated that more than 500,000 children are not enrolled in schools but are continuing learning in Ukrainian through online lessons.

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The systems-strengthening approach taken in the humanitarian response has proven an effective method to address the needs of vulnerable children in a country with multiple stakeholders, favourable socio-economic conditions, and robust governmental capacities.

UNICEF collaborated with the Ministry of Education, municipalities and civil society partners at national level to embed Learning Passport courses into the Ministry of Education's learning platform. This initiative has led to the courses being accessible to teachers across different municipalities in Poland, improving the learning experience of both Polish and Ukrainian children.

The capacity of the Learning Passport to engage with teachers and gather their feedback is an important feature. This feature enables the adaptation and continuous update of training content to ensure that the needs expressed by teachers are met.

With the ministry of education's recognition, the Learning Passport training certificate has become a valuable incentive for teachers to enhance their knowledge and skills. This recognition propels teachers to improve their performance and serves as an acknowledgment of their efforts and achievements.

UNICEF is committed to expanding the reach of the Learning Passport training programme across Poland's 10 largest municipalities. UNICEF is advocating expanding further by including this MHPSS content in both pre- and in-service teacher training. Moreover, UNICEF will develop new MHPSS training courses tailored to the current needs of teachers, with a focus on promoting the mental health and well-being of learners in the classroom, a crucial aspect of education that will benefit both teachers and learners.

Harnessing the potential of inclusive digital education to improve learning in Paraguay²⁰

All children, including those with disabilities, have the right to read and deserve equitable access to materials that support their learning. Often, however, having a disability can lead to exclusion from the education system: in Paraguay, only 36 per cent of children with disabilities aged 6 to 18 years attend school. Moreover, while 95 per cent of the country's total population is literate, only 57 per cent of people with disabilities can read or write.

To advance inclusive and accessible education for all students – with and without disabilities – in the same classroom, UNICEF Paraguay implemented the Accessible Digital Textbooks (ADT) for All initiative, incorporating principles of UDL, which recognizes the value of individualized and differentiated learning. The digital textbooks include accessibility features that enable children with different disabilities and learning preferences to engage with content in meaningful and appropriate ways. They include sign language, simplified text, and interactive exercises to foster multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression, eliminating barriers and expanding opportunities for all primary school students to improve their academic performance, regardless of their learning status or learning style.

In November and December 2021, UNICEF tested the ADT prototype in 10 educational centres with 133 students, 17 of whom had disabilities. Acknowledging that teachers are essential for student learning, the Ministry of Education and Science – in collaboration with UNICEF – trained teachers, principals, and other education staff on the UDL framework, and on the development and use of ADTs in classrooms. UNICEF conducted pre- and post-teacher training surveys to learn about teachers' familiarity with technology, experience with inclusive education, and perception of technology-enhanced education. To gather direct feedback on challenges and opportunities, UNICEF also engaged in direct classroom observations, conducted interviews, and led focus group discussions with students.

Results from the prototype testing showed that the ADT initiative has the potential to heighten student motivation as well as usher positive, inclusive teaching into the classroom, paving the way for improved school results. Teachers found the ADT to be useful in their daily teaching practices, especially in its ability to make reading more interesting for students, with features such as images, the glossary, and sign language videos. Plans to scale up, with a sharper focus on evidence generation, are underway in Paraguay, including rigorous research on how the ADT influences children’s learning and inclusion.

Since 2019, the ADT initiative in Paraguay has benefited over 700 students aged 6 to 10 years, providing accessible educational content in alternative formats to improve the foundational learning of students with and without disabilities. By 2024, the programme aims to reach 30,000 students from Grades 1-9 in 300 schools.

To enable full implementation, more professional development for teachers is needed on inclusive education pedagogy and diverse learning styles. Teachers need adequate time and freedom to practise and integrate digital learning tools into lesson plans. Moreover, before introducing the ADT in classrooms, caregivers and children also need support to acquire basic digital skills.

Functioning equipment and adequate digital infrastructure are fundamental to programme success. The government must also invest in equipment, safe storage of devices, and infrastructure contingent on specific school needs. Plans must be continually monitored and adjusted as needed, and roles well defined.

Digital learning can give students with disabilities the tools they need to access the same learning as their peers. Students with disabilities were more active participants in the classroom when using the ADT, raising their hands and commenting in sign language, orally, or by pointing to the prototype images. Student interaction and peer support also increased.

Preliminary research shows that the ADT, as an inclusive digital solution, will likely improve the ability of primary school students to read and write. For students to experience learning in a variety of ways, UNICEF is translating and developing 37 lessons in two textbooks, with accessible digital formats for first and second-grade students. Currently, UNICEF is training more than 300 teachers to ensure understanding of UDL principles and the effective use of ADT in the classroom. UNICEF is also conducting research in five additional countries in the region (Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Nicaragua, and Uruguay) to examine the introduction of accessible digital textbooks and explore its impact on student learning on a larger scale.



1st grade students learning sign-language through an Accessible Digital Textbook (ADT) in a inclusive classroom of the school Escuela Básica Medalla Milagrosa, located in Limpio, Paraguay during the 1st pilot of ADT in the country.

Humanitarian action: Education in emergencies

The escalating number of crises in the world threaten children's lives and their fundamental right to education. Globally, 224 million children affected by crises are in need of urgent education support.²¹ In 2023, there were 10 Level 3 and 14 Level 2 emergencies.²² This included the State of Palestine, where conflict has restricted access to education for more than 625,000 students in Gaza;²³ Sudan, where 19 million school-aged children remain out of school;²⁴ and Haiti, where over a million children face challenges in accessing education due to civil unrest and gang violence.²⁵ The surge in complex emergencies highlights the urgent need for continued advocacy to ensure that education is a first-line response in emergencies.

UNICEF's education in emergencies (EiE) response reached an estimated 17.7 million children (8.8 million girls) in 2023.²⁶ Additionally, UNICEF supplied individual learning materials for 5.2 million children in humanitarian settings. For example, in Afghanistan, UNICEF supported 685,974 students (60 per cent girls) to access community-based education. In Syria, UNICEF supported 584,226 children (290,000 girls) in earthquake-affected areas to access quality education by providing psychosocial support, NFE, school supplies and catch-up sessions. In Sudan, UNICEF reached nearly 230,900 children (118,100 girls) by creating 842 safe learning spaces.

To alleviate COVID-19 learning losses, UNICEF, with support from the Government of the United States, implemented the Mission: Recovering Education in Humanitarian Settings programme in 27 countries that ran until mid-2023, cumulatively reaching over 1.75 million children (half of them girls) with learning recovery interventions and building the capacity of over 55,000 teachers.

UNICEF and Save the Children continued their co-leadership of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee global education cluster (GEC). Education clusters and working groups were active in 33 contexts. The GEC bolstered its operational support to education clusters and working groups through 658 days of remote and in-country deployments to support coordination, information management and thematic priorities.

At the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, UNICEF joined forces with the World Bank, Germany, the United Nations Refugee Agency and other partners in a multistakeholder pledge to accelerate the transition and inclusion of refugee children into national education systems. This reflected a renewed commitment to addressing climate change and the rights of refugee, displaced, and crisis-affected children to continuous, safe and quality education. UNICEF – in partnership with refugee education advocates, the LEGO Foundation, International Rescue Committee and Right to Play International – also spearheaded a global multistakeholder pledge on education-based MHPSS and social and emotional learning that was endorsed by over 25 entities. It outlines 10 key actions covering policy,



March 1, 2023 - Attia (left) age 6 and Kashaf Zara (right) age 6 are all smiles after receiving school bags from UNICEF funded initiative in Temporary Learning Centre, established by UNICEF using a high-performance tent, in flood affected Government Girls Primary School in Aqil Pur, District Rajanpur, Punjab, Pakistan.

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financial, and technical dimensions, advocating for technical and financial support to education systems in order to provide quality and inclusive education. This would include programmes that are responsive to the socio-emotional skills development and mental-health needs of learners, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized children and youth.

Education under attack

Schools, teachers, educational personnel and students continued to be targets of increased armed violence throughout 2023. In addition, military use of educational facilities, recruitment of children by armed groups and targeted attacks on women and girls receiving education were ongoing.

In 2023, UNICEF continued to assist governments to implement the [Safe Schools Declaration and Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use in Armed Conflict](#). To date, 119 states around the world have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration,²⁷ with Australia, Guyana and Mauritius signing in 2023. UNICEF support includes developing school safety plans, promoting learning continuity, providing MHPSS and informal learning opportunities, training teachers, rehabilitating schools and delivering social cohesion activities.

In Burkina Faso, in 2023, one in every four schools – a total of 6,150 – were closed.²⁸ As part of the national Back to School campaign, UNICEF reached more than 200,000 children (half girls) in 12 regions, including in several towns besieged by armed groups where schools were reopened for the first time in several years, with age-appropriate school kits and learning materials. UNICEF also supported teacher training on the [Child-Friendly Schools](#) standards and the Safe Schools approach.

Non-formal and remedial learning in emergency settings

Emergency situations – including attacks on education and climate-induced emergencies – demonstrated the need for increased scalability of NFE, remedial learning, and accelerated learning programmes that measure learning. For example, in Ukraine, 56,648 primary and secondary school students (more than half girls) benefitted from targeted catch-up programmes designed to mitigate learning losses in mathematics, Ukrainian and English. Seventy-eight per cent of participating children showed improved academic results.

Support for teachers in humanitarian situations

Teachers who work in humanitarian situations are often overstretched, suffer from trauma, go without payment, and serve a multitude of roles beyond supporting students' learning. In 2023, UNICEF worked to ensure that teachers were supported to continue teaching and receive needed training. These efforts equipped teachers with the necessary skills to better support learning continuity and the mental health and well-being of students.

In Haiti, for example, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education with cash transfers for 2,500 teachers, enabling them to offer catch-up sessions for children. Payments ensured financial stability for teachers and strengthened the overall resilience of the education system.

Resilient education systems that can respond to humanitarian crises

In 2023, the resilience of education systems improved notably: 32 per cent of programme countries reported having resilient education systems, an increase from 23 per cent in 2022.

UNICEF continued efforts to strengthen education systems through risk-informed programming approaches and capacity development. These activities enhanced preparedness, prevention, responsiveness, and mitigation capacities, and empowered children and communities with positive coping mechanisms.

In Türkiye, UNICEF developed an Emergency Action Plan within schools, trained more than 2,500 Ministry of National Education search and rescue unit members, and executed emergency practice drills, engaging 60,000 students. These actions aimed to enhance the education system's resilience and response to disasters.

UNICEF continued to bridge humanitarian and development efforts by leveraging education to support peacebuilding and social cohesion, such as in DRC where UNICEF equipped more than 1,700 teachers (more than 500 women) with the necessary skills to foster social cohesion among children affected by conflict, while providing a nurturing and protective learning environment. UNICEF also focused on empowering young people to cultivate skills that facilitate effective social and political engagement within communities, with schools serving as pivotal entry points. In post-conflict contexts, UNICEF worked to ensure that education was administered as a crucial peace dividend, aligning with stabilization and recovery efforts and adhering to the principles of the do no harm approach.

During emergencies, MHPSS plays a pivotal role in enabling children to learn by equipping them with the knowledge, skills, support, and care to thrive both academically and personally. Early intervention is particularly important as it can reduce the risk of children developing serious mental health problems. In 2023, UNICEF published a [study](#) demonstrating the high costs of inadequate support for children's mental health in humanitarian crises, as well as the significant return on investment of school and community-based MHPSS interventions. One of the report's key findings was that failing to address the mental health and psychosocial needs of children in humanitarian emergencies would result in the equivalent of a global US\$203 billion loss of potential lifetime earnings.²⁹ The report, and its findings, are being used to support global advocacy around education based MHPSS. The findings were prominently featured and shared across various platforms and events, such as the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment, a blog on the World Economic Forum's site for World Mental Health Day, and the Global Refugee Forum, among others.

Intersectoral approaches in education in emergencies

A core aspect of UNICEF's humanitarian response is its intersectoral work to address the multiple barriers affecting the realization of children's rights. Using schools as an integrated service delivery platform, UNICEF education programmes collaborate closely with: health, nutrition, child protection, MHPSS, WASH, social policy and social protection, disability and gender programmes.

Humanitarian funding for education in emergencies remains a critical challenge, despite the rising scale of educational needs of children in emergencies globally. This threatens UNICEF's capacity to carry out its core mandate and requires stronger collaboration with development actors across the humanitarian, development and peace nexus.

Education must remain a frontline priority in humanitarian responses. UNICEF's Humanitarian Action for Children 2024 Appeal includes US\$1.5 billion targeted to education to reach 19.3 million children through access to formal and non-formal education, including early learning.



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Children attend an e-learning session at the UNICEF-supported Makana at El Gox gathering point located in Kosti, White Nile state. The Makana is open daily and utilized by over 300 displaced children and those from host communities.



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Sameera, Grade 7, in her accelerated learning class (ALC) on 30 April 2023, which was established and supported by UNICEF in Bamyan Province, Afghanistan.

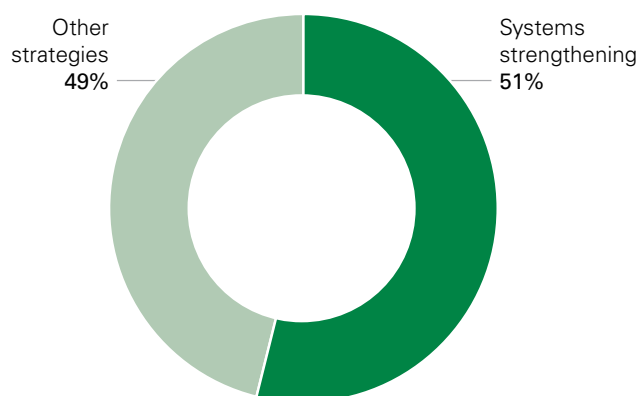
Spotlight on the Global Education Thematic Fund

Results achieved in 2023 to ensure every child learns

Financial results

UNICEF's Global Education Thematic Fund is a flexible funding pool that enables the organization to strengthen systems to ensure that every child learns.

Thanks to generous donors, in 2023 UNICEF's Global Education Thematic Fund received \$16.3 million. UNICEF is grateful for this support.



* Other strategies include advocacy and communications; social and behaviour change; data and research; innovation; partnerships and engagement; humanitarian and development nexus; and support to programme delivery.

The chart above illustrates how global thematic expenses are distributed across UNICEF's nine implementing strategies for education-related programming, noting that multiple strategies can be used to achieve results. In 2023, systems strengthening continued to be the core focus of education work, accounting for 51 per cent of all expenses.

Through its work on systems strengthening, UNICEF responds to education inequalities and gets to the root causes of these issues, by addressing access to schools, classroom infrastructure, national curricula, laws, behaviours and much more. Working in this 'big picture' manner is cost effective, sustainable and scalable, and it works.

Partner Type	Partner	Total (US\$)
Public sector	Norway	6,514,658
	Sweden	3,217,799
	Luxembourg	1,027,236
	Balance from previous year	675,495
Private sector	Finnish Committee for UNICEF	749,595
	United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF	730,661
	Dutch Committee for UNICEF	648,245
	German Committee for UNICEF	433,670
	United States Fund for UNICEF	432,104
	UNICEF Country Office PSFR	400,000
	Norwegian Committee for UNICEF	291,663
	Spanish Committee for UNICEF	252,296
	Portuguese Committee for UNICEF	206,755
	Korean Committee for UNICEF	193,091
	Swedish Committee for UNICEF	172,216
	Danish Foundation for UNICEF	146,387
	Japan Committee for UNICEF	107,196
	Polish National Committee for UNICEF	86,304
	Hong Kong Committee for UNICEF	38,396
	Australian Committee for UNICEF Limited	10,020
Grand Total		16,333,788

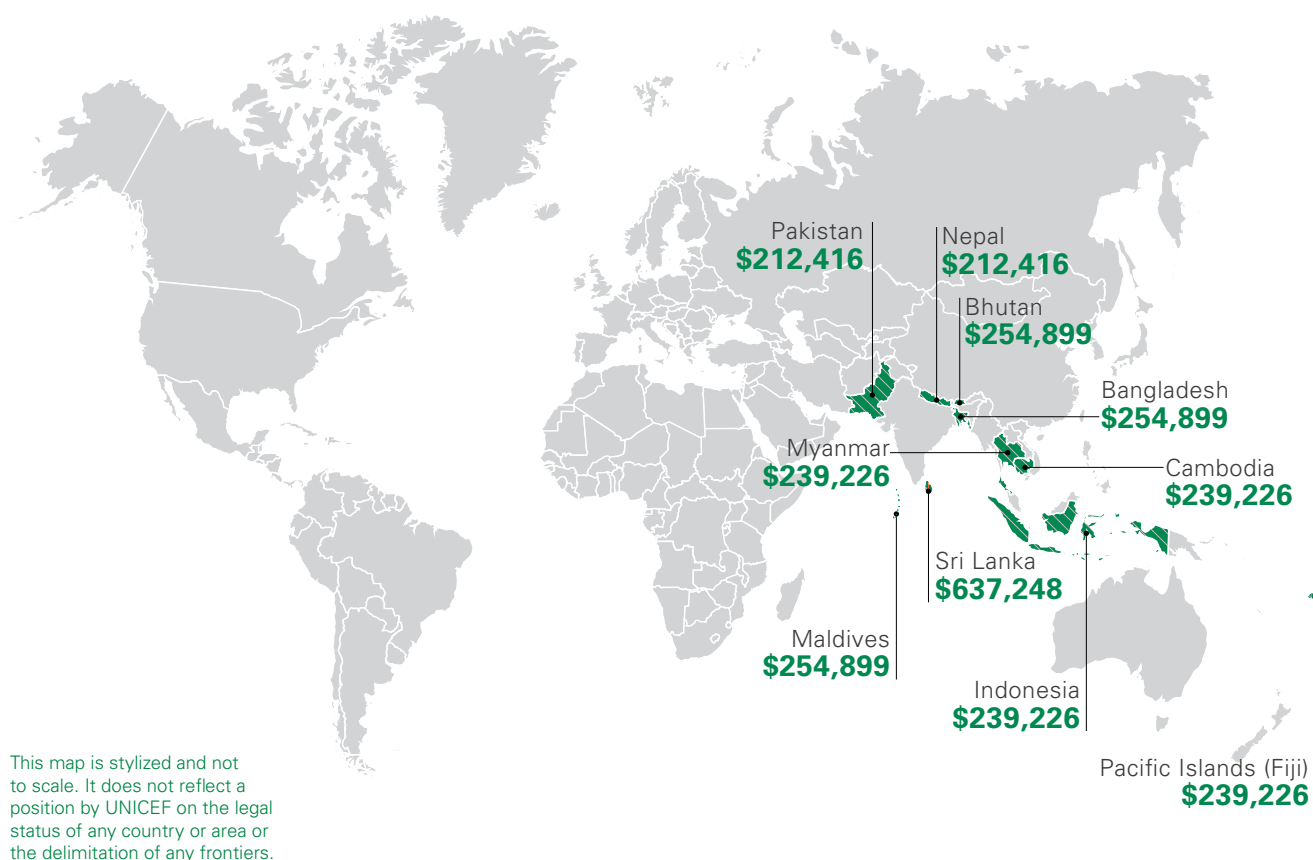
Numbers may not add up due to rounding.
PSFR: Private sector fundraising.

Allocations

In 2023, supporters of the Global Education Thematic Fund enabled UNICEF to allocate resources to education programmes in 112 countries and territories. The map shows the 10 countries that received the highest allocations.

With the lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing learning poverty rate, when allocating global thematic funds, significant consideration was given to address learning recovery by implementation of the [RAPID Framework](#). Introduced to support education systems in response to the pandemic, the framework remains

relevant in addressing foundational learning – the basic literacy, numeracy and socio-emotional skills that provide the fundamental building blocks for all other learning, knowledge and higher-order thinking skills. For example, in Latin America, allocations were made to countries with a high proportion (over 50 per cent) of children who cannot read and understand a simple text. Allocations were based on strategic priorities, complexities and needs, noting that thematic funding is the most flexible source of unearmarked financing. This enabled UNICEF to deliver system-wide programming in the most flexible and agile manner, with longer term impact.



Burundi

An allocation of \$180,000 from the Global Education Thematic Fund in 2023 enabled Burundi to invest in skills development, resulting in 135,000 young people (50 per cent girls) gaining critical life skills and access to entrepreneurship opportunities.

Cambodia

With generous contributions, including \$239,226 from the Global Education Thematic Fund, UNICEF is actively supporting the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in Cambodia to develop learning materials on climate change and enhance student participation in tackling climate action in and around schools. This approach is helping to roll out climate change education in all schools across the country systematically. To date, life-skills education, one of the programme components, has benefited around 200,000 students.

Mali

In Mali, \$140,652 from the Global Education Thematic Fund contributed to driving demand for education and retention in school through strategic programming in social and behaviour change. Enhanced community engagement and awareness-raising campaigns contributed to increasing school enrolment at primary and lower secondary levels.

Tunisia

Using an allocation of \$122,529 from the Global Education Thematic Fund, UNICEF Tunisia supported initiatives targeted at bringing out-of-school children and adolescents back into learning. Back-to-school campaigns and cash transfers reached a million children.

Regional and global programming

While more than three quarters of allocations from the Global Education Thematic Fund went directly to country programmes in 2023, resources were also used to support UNICEF programming across wider regions and globally.

These vital allocations of flexible funding enable UNICEF to have an impact far beyond the countries that receive direct allocations.

Approximately \$2.3 million was allocated across UNICEF's seven regional offices, covering East Asia and the Pacific, Eastern and Southern Africa, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, and West and Central Africa. Regional offices play a critical role, providing technical support and guidance and coordinating education programmes in the countries of their regions. In 2023, the West and Central Africa Regional Office and the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office received the most funds, with both receiving over \$400,000.

Resources from the Global Education Thematic Fund were also allocated at the global level, totalling just over \$1.9 million. These funds enabled UNICEF to drive critical thought leadership and strategic direction and provide technical assistance and quality assurance to countries. Global education staff also maintain UNICEF's presence and advocacy at important influencing events.



Children receive new school kits in the public primary school of Limbe, in the south west region of Cameroon. For every child education.

Achieving results for systems strengthening

Thematic funds are a vital cornerstone of UNICEF's systems-strengthening work, to unlock lasting impact for children. But this takes time. This is why resources from the Global Education Thematic Fund are spent over a four-year period, aligning with UNICEF's Strategic Plan (2022-2025). Below are some headline sector-level results, for which thematic funding was a key contributor, as part of an overall portfolio of funding.

Workforce

All systems require a strong, skilled workforce. In the case of education, this includes teachers, school management professionals, facilitators and volunteers in emergencies. As learning losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have made the job of teaching more challenging and complex, UNICEF is supporting countries to strengthen teacher preparation and professional development.

- In 2023, UNICEF programmes strengthened the capacity of close to 112,000 school management committees (or similar bodies) in 63 countries, contributing to improved quality and learning environments for children.

Laws and policies

UNICEF works directly with governments to support them to make the best policy decisions for education. Specifically, UNICEF engages on inclusive education laws and policies for children with disabilities, early education policies, inclusive laws for children on the move (such as refugees), and policies for inclusion of mental health-care in schools.

- In 2023, 69 per cent of all reporting countries (up from 63 per cent in 2022) indicated that they have effective early-childhood education systems in place, critical for ensuring children have school-readiness skills and support when they enrol in primary education. Similarly, 55 per cent of countries (compared with 47 per cent in 2022) reported progress towards disability-inclusive education systems. This includes policy changes and strategic advocacy for legislative reforms to eliminate systemic barriers to education for children with disabilities.

Social and behaviour change

Social and behaviour change (SBC) in education can help address why children are left behind, out of school, not learning, and/or experiencing violence, racism, stigma, or exclusion in and around schools. SBC programming

can identify social and behavioural barriers that influence children's learning experience and identify solutions to remove them. The education sector has the potential to contribute to overcoming educational and social challenges and barriers that cause distortion of educational outcomes. Adopting a SBC approach to education means tapping into this underused potential.

- In 2023, 70 country offices implemented education-specific SBC programming to enhance education outcomes. For example, in the Central African Republic, UNICEF and the government supported 20 communities to pilot the new 'Kundukua' (community platforms) approach, contributing to increased retention rates and to community-driven initiatives and activities in favour of education.

Data

When the right data is in the right hands at the right time, decisions are better informed, more equitable, and more likely to protect children's rights. For instance, as part of efforts to strengthen Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), UNICEF assists educational authorities to collect data from students, schools and local authorities, to better understand which children are being left behind and increase the effectiveness of education systems to meet their needs.

- In 2023, UNICEF supported 70 governments to implement evidence-based national education sector plans and strategies, to systematically address inequities in learning and translate the SDG 4 targets into concrete results.

Digital learning

UNICEF leads global initiatives to link millions of children and young people with world-class digital learning. Digital education can help vulnerable children – including children affected by conflict, disaster or poverty; girls kept from classrooms; and those cut off from school because they have a disability – to reach a brighter future.

- UNICEF data from 100 reporting countries shows that the proportion of countries with effective systems for digital learning solutions increased from 16 per cent in 2022 to 22 per cent in 2023. Effectiveness is measured by the quality of solutions, as well as the availability of devices, affordability, connectivity, and youth engagement. UNICEF supported 17.8 million children (49 per cent girls) to access education through digital platforms, bringing the cumulative total to 95 million children since 2021.

Targets

To measure the long-term impact of strengthening education systems, UNICEF monitors several key indicators, as seen in the table below.

Indicator	Baseline (2021)	Progress (2023)	Target (2025)
Workforce Percentage of countries with effective teacher development systems	17%	31%	75%
Digital learning Percentage of countries with effective systems for digital learning solutions	9%	22%	26%
Data Percentage of countries with effective learning assessment systems	39%	58%	67%
Laws and policies Percentage of countries implementing evidence-based education sector plans/strategies addressing inequities and mainstreaming the SDG indicators	48%	65%*	63%

* Target has been exceeded.

Impact story

A story of success and struggle for a 14-year-old boy from Yemen

14-year-old Albara'a from Yemen was displaced from his home and has been living in Al-Suwaidi camp in Marib with his family since 2020. He supports his family by selling mineral water to pedestrians and car drivers, as his father and two of his siblings have disabilities.

Nine years into the conflict in Yemen, children's learning struggles persist. Albara'a is one of at least 9.8 million children in need of humanitarian support in Yemen.

Albara'a goes to school every day, walking the half hour each way carrying his 13-year-old sister Ibtikar, who has a disability, on his back.

Albara'a and Ibtikar study at a temporary learning space, one of 181 learning places UNICEF has established for internally displaced children in Marib.

"My favourite subjects are Arabic and mathematics. I found mathematics difficult before, but I understand it much better since I started school in the camp," said Albara'a.

Albara'a has dreams for the future.



14-year-old Albara'a from Marib carries his sister Ibtikar, who has a disability and cannot walk. They both go to a UNICEF-established learning space in the internally displaced camp, Al-Sowaida, where they have been living with their family since 2020.

"I dream of becoming a pilot in the future and I wish all the best for my family."

By 2023, UNICEF had provided access to education opportunities to 23,000 displaced children in Marib, like Albara'a and his sister, Ibtikar.

Children in Yemen need peace to reach their full potential. In 2023, UNICEF supported two million children in Yemen, who benefitted from formal and non-formal education opportunities, learning materials, supplies and professional development of teachers.

Hearing from our donors and partners

Working with the Government of Norway to extend access to quality education

In 2023, the Government of Norway was the largest contributor to the Global Education Thematic Fund, supporting UNICEF to innovate and respond to emerging priorities, in the context of the Strategic Plan and the Global Education Strategy. As one of its most flexible supporters, UNICEF is especially grateful for Norway's commitment to ensuring that thematic and core resources make up most of their total contributions.

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the priority remains ensuring that every child is supported, so they can return to school and catch up on lost learning. The flexibility of thematic funding creates programming opportunities that are not available with tightly earmarked funding, and allows UNICEF to:

- Achieve results at scale, including for the most marginalized children.

- Leverage catalytic funding and domestic financing for education.
- Provide operational and technical education capacity due to decreased on-the-ground presence.

With the support of flexible funding partners like Norway, UNICEF will continue working to increase access to education for millions of out-of-school children, but also ensure that many others remain in school, notably by strengthening the quality of education and removing barriers to the retention and progression of children in school.

UNICEF looks forward to continuing its partnership with the Government of Norway, working together to advance shared developmental priorities around education and access to schools that not only support children's learning journeys, but also their holistic well-being, including for the most marginalized and vulnerable.

Looking ahead

Despite strides in supporting children to catch up with education, the profound and enduring effects of the learning crisis remain palpable.

To tackle the learning crisis, UNICEF's educational strategy will continue to support children and adolescents through their three pivotal learning transitions: ECE to prepare them for formal schooling; fundamental learning to ensure proficiency in literacy, numeracy, and other basics; and skills development to equip every young individual with a comprehensive set of transferable, digital, occupation-specific, and entrepreneurial skills, enabling them to thrive in both life and work.

UNICEF will continue to expand its Five Million Futures initiative, integrating ECE into national strategies for foundational learning. Additionally, UNICEF will endorse quality and holistic interventions in early learning that promote school readiness and break the cycle of intergenerational educational deprivation. Through the Foundational Learning Coalition, UNICEF will collaborate with partners and governments to scale up programmes for learning recovery and remediation.

For adolescents transitioning from learning to employment, UNICEF will continue to provide skills-development opportunities, including digital literacy and employability skills, preparing them for the evolving demands of the job market and life beyond schooling. These transitions are further reinforced by prioritizing four overarching thematic areas: education during emergencies, digital learning, gender equity and inclusion, and education's role in addressing climate change.

UNICEF is dedicated to harnessing the education sector's potential in climate change adaptation and resilience by strengthening local capacities, engaging communities, and advocating climate-smart education systems. UNICEF will also continue working with children and youth advocates to make COP29 a 'Children's COP' by ensuring that climate action plans have children and education at the heart. UNICEF is working in over 50 countries to support governments as they prepare their new revised national climate action plans, ensuring that education is addressed in these plans and that young people are meaningfully included in these processes.

Acknowledging the transformative potential of technology in education, UNICEF advocates and supports countries in leveraging digital learning to fortify educational systems, expand access to quality education, and enhance digital literacy skills. Implementation of the Learning Passport will be focused on enabling more inclusive growth (ensuring accessibility, effectiveness and cultural relevance), harnessing the power of partnership (nurturing existing partnership and forging new alliances), scaling up the offline Learning Passport to achieve equitable access, and strengthening the programme's sustained impact (enhancing the technological infrastructure, content delivery and operational model to support the emergence of robust, resilient, efficient and responsive systems).

For gender equity and inclusion, UNICEF endeavours to address barriers posed by various forms of discrimination, ensuring inclusive and equitable education for all, including through digital platforms.

UNICEF will continue building on the outcomes of the 2022 TES and supporting countries to translate commitments into tangible outcomes for children. This includes enhancing monitoring of countries' commitment and alignment on the various calls to action.

During emergencies, UNICEF prioritizes education as a fundamental element of humanitarian response, aiming to ensure uninterrupted learning and safeguard learners' rights. Furthermore, UNICEF commits to intensifying efforts in education during emergencies, recognizing the escalating humanitarian needs. UNICEF will continue advocating children's right to education in safe environments, leveraging initiatives like Safe to Learn and implementing the Safe Schools Declaration.

The urgency to generate more evidence on learning recovery in humanitarian contexts underscores the need for improved assessments and outcomes, particularly in complex crises. UNICEF remains committed to strengthening education systems to become more resilient, emphasizing climate-resilient infrastructure to safeguard children's learning and investments in education against potential losses. To ensure that every child, everywhere, can realize their right to learn, investing in preparedness and proactive measures is critical.

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