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Annual report for 2025 of the Executive Director of UNICEF

Summary

This is the fourth and final annual report of the UNICEF Executive Director to the UNICEF Executive Board on the implementation of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025.

The report is accompanied by reports on the implementation of the Integrated Results and Resources Framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 and on the implementation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system;^a an annex on independent oversight functions/bodies in UNICEF; and a data companion and scorecard.

Elements of a draft decision for consideration by the Executive Board are presented in section V.

^a General Assembly resolution [A/RES/75/233](#).

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** [E/ICEF/2026/9](#).



I. Overview

1. The year 2025 was catastrophic for children. Armed conflict, climate shocks and deepening inequality converged and began to erode decades of progress. Today, 1 in 5 children lives in or has fled a conflict zone, while grave violations of children's rights in armed conflict have reached record levels, rising by 25 per cent in 2024 compared to the previous year. At the same time, economic instability and a retreat from multilateralism have weakened the systems designed to protect children. Abrupt and significant cuts to official development assistance – estimated at 23.1 per cent in real terms compared to 2024¹ – are constraining life-saving programmes just as needs surge.

2. These pressures come at a moment when progress for children is already under threat. Since 2000, major gains have been achieved, including halving under-5 mortality and reducing stunting by 57 million cases.² Those gains are now being reversed. Funding cuts could lead to up to 5.4 million additional preventable deaths among children under 5 years old by 2030,³ while 6 million more children could be pushed out of school by 2026.⁴ Globally, nearly two thirds of children now live in poverty, with 412 million in extreme poverty. Four out of 5 children face at least one extreme climate hazard each year, while fiscal pressures and rising debt are limiting the ability of Governments to respond.

3. Meanwhile, humanitarian needs have reached an unprecedented scale. In 2025, an estimated 213 million children required humanitarian assistance, driven by protracted and intensifying crises across regions, including in Gaza, the Sudan, Yemen, Ukraine and Haiti. Two famines were declared during the year, while attacks on schools, hospitals and humanitarian workers were alarmingly frequent. Across contexts, children are paying the highest price, as essential services collapse and funding cuts force humanitarian workers to make impossible choices, given limited supplies and capacity.

4. Despite these challenges, UNICEF continued to save lives at scale. In 2025, the organization responded to 414 humanitarian emergencies in 101 countries and territories while strengthening national systems to sustain essential services. Delivery remained strong across sectors: over 1.6 billion polio vaccine doses were delivered in 2025, contributing to a 68 per cent reduction in cases since 2022; \$559 million in cash assistance reached vulnerable households and front-line workers in humanitarian settings; and millions of people gained access to climate-resilient water and sanitation services. UNICEF expanded its reach to the most vulnerable, supporting 27.8 million out-of-school children with education, assisting nearly 10.4 million adolescent girls at risk of child marriage, and scaling up disability-inclusive programming across 139 countries.

5. To meet the scale and complexity of today's challenges, UNICEF continues to accelerate significant internal reforms. The organization is reducing costs, streamlining operations, strengthening local partnerships and modernizing supply chains – ensuring that more resources reach children directly. These efforts are aligned with the UN80 Initiative and the Humanitarian Reset. The UNICEF Strategic

¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Preliminary official development assistance levels in 2025"; see [https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD\(2026\)8/en/pdf](https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD(2026)8/en/pdf).

² Most data points on the situation of children cited in the present document come from UNICEF global databases; see <https://data.unicef.org/>.

³ Ferreira da Silva, Andrea, et al., 'Impact of Two Decades of Humanitarian and Development Assistance and the Projected Mortality Consequences of Current Defunding to 2030 Retrospective Evaluation and Forecasting Analysis', *The Lancet Global Health*, 2 February 2026.

⁴ UNICEF, 'Education aid cuts: a broken promise to children', New York, 2025.

Plan, 2026–2029 sharpens the organization’s focus on five Impact Results where it can drive population-level progress on children’s survival and development, learning and skills, freedom from poverty, protection from violence and resilience to climate and environmental risks. The new Plan has a strong emphasis on partnerships and core resource mobilization. In a constrained global environment, UNICEF is adapting to become more agile, efficient and accountable – while maintaining an unwavering commitment to deliver for every child, everywhere.

6. The stakes for children could not be clearer. At a time of rising needs and shrinking resources, the world is at risk of turning away from its youngest and most vulnerable. The consequences of inaction will be measured in lost lives, lost learning and lost futures. UNICEF calls on Governments and partners to act now – to protect investments in children, uphold their rights and ensure that no child is left behind.

II. Performance under the Goal Areas

7. After four years of implementation of the Strategic Plan, and despite significant challenges resulting from a confluence of crises, UNICEF attained an achievement rate over 80 per cent for 15 out of 18 result areas. Only ‘fast track the end of HIV/AIDS’ scored less than 60 per cent. Despite renewed global strategies, including the 95-95-95 targets and the Global Alliance to End AIDS in Children, structural and operational gaps slowed progress. Seventy per cent of Strategic Plan output targets were met or nearly met, with 10 per cent somewhat off track and an additional 20 per cent significantly off track.

A. Goal Area 1: Every child, including adolescents, survives and thrives, with access to nutritious diets, quality primary healthcare, nurturing practices and essential supplies

8. Alongside remarkable reductions in under-5 mortality and stunting, global maternal mortality has dropped by about one third since 2000, while immunization now saves nearly 4.2 million lives every year.

9. Yet progress is fragile and uneven, and numerous countries remain off track to meet the Sustainable Development Goals related to health and nutrition. The rate of decline in under-5 mortality has slowed. Immunization coverage has partially rebounded after disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, but remains below global targets, while the number of zero-dose children, who have received no vaccines, reached 14.3 million in 2024, up from 12.9 million in 2019. An estimated 150 million children are affected by stunting, and 43 million suffer from wasting. For the first time, more school-age children and adolescents are affected by obesity than underweight. Severe food poverty affects one in four children under 5 years of age and is a leading cause of malnutrition, constraining progress.

10. In 2025, UNICEF worked on Goal Area 1 in 148 countries, with a total expense of \$3.33 billion, including \$1.94 billion for humanitarian action. At the output level, the organization met 29 of its output targets in this Goal Area, with progress rates above 90 per cent for six out of eight result areas. Progress was slowest for the output indicator related to countries implementing multisectoral approaches to caregiver mental health, despite the number increasing from 41 in 2022 to 59 in 2025. Greater investment and workforce capacity are needed to scale up support for caregiver mental health, a key enabler of caregivers’ capacity to provide the nurturing care children need to develop optimally.

11. In over 130 countries, UNICEF worked with Governments to strengthen resilient primary healthcare systems, prioritizing community-based delivery, partnerships for smarter financing and digital transformation. The organization supported life-saving care at scale: 39 million births in health facilities and 51.9 million children reached with services for integrated management of neonatal and childhood illnesses. UNICEF helped to build capacity at the country level, supporting Governments to train 4.8 million health workers. Reaching zero-dose children was a key focus of efforts to expand access to primary healthcare, including through the Big Catch-up immunization campaign, led by UNICEF and partners in 36 countries.

12. UNICEF supported 63 countries to enhance health emergency preparedness and worked with partners to strengthen global public health emergency preparedness and response capacities. During a year of overlapping health emergencies, including cholera, Ebola, mpox and measles, the organization supported outbreak responses in 119 countries. In Angola, UNICEF trained sign language interpreters to deliver accurate information on cholera prevention to deaf communities. More than 38.6 million children were vaccinated against measles in 29 countries in humanitarian settings, exceeding the target of 27 million, for a total of 512.4 million children across humanitarian and development settings since 2022.

13. As the world's largest purchaser of vaccines, UNICEF delivered 3.2 billion doses to 103 countries in 2025, with procurement totalling \$2.4 billion, for a total of 12.2 billion doses during the period 2022–2025. UNICEF advocacy helped to secure \$9 billion in pledges for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance in 2025, while the Vaccine Independence Initiative, extended to 2030 with expanded capitalization, enabled pre-financing of \$226.4 million across 35 countries. UNICEF delivered 54 million doses of the human papillomavirus vaccine to Gavi-supported campaigns, and supported 27 new vaccine introductions across country immunization programmes.

14. By the end of 2025, 33 of 37 priority HIV countries had expanded paediatric services, all adopted innovative diagnostics, all had policies for dual elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis, and 33 advanced combination prevention, including pre-exposure prophylaxis.

15. To advance adolescent girls' health, UNICEF supported countries to expand HIV prevention for girls and integrate sexual and reproductive health and rights, mental health and psychosocial support, noncommunicable disease prevention and injury prevention into primary healthcare and school platforms. Community engagement and youth participation, including through peer-led models, accelerated service uptake.

16. UNICEF strengthened mental health and psychosocial support within primary healthcare across 46 countries, up from 39 in 2023, strengthening front-line workforce capacity and referral pathways between primary healthcare, schools, child protection systems and community platforms. Coverage more than doubled, with 7 million children, adolescents and caregivers reached in 2025 alone, and 23.2 million since 2022.

17. Ninety-one countries integrated early childhood development into primary healthcare in 2025, up from 65 in 2022. During this period, the percentage of children aged 24–59 months developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being remained stable, at around two thirds in the 72 countries with data. In 2025, more than half (in the 78 countries with data) received early stimulation and responsive care from their caregivers.

18. In 2025, 70 countries strengthened the resilience of 11,624 healthcare facilities through solarization, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) improvements and waste management, up by 25 per cent from 2024. Forty-five countries addressed the dangers

of air pollution and/or lead exposure to child health and well-being, up almost 40 per cent, including through risk communication, environmental regulations, compliance enforcement and capacity-building.

19. UNICEF supported maternal and child nutrition programming in 122 countries, scaling its efforts to improve children's access to nutritious and affordable foods, essential nutrition services and positive care practices, with a focus on preventing malnutrition and strengthening food systems. Policies, programmes and services to prevent stunting reached 423 million children under 5 years old in 81 countries, up from 356 million in 89 countries in 2022.

20. First Foods Africa, a public-private sector initiative, facilitated capital investment among local manufacturers to expand the production and marketing of nutritious first foods, building on UNICEF experience in the local production of ready-to-use therapeutic food. To shift incentives towards nutritious foods, the organization advocated with and supported Governments to improve food-based regulatory and fiscal policies, including through food labelling, marketing, reformulation, taxes and subsidies, and food in schools.

21. Services to prevent, detect and treat wasting reached 255 million children in 54 countries in 2025 (up from 182 million in 57 countries in 2022), 9 million of whom received life-saving treatment for severe wasting (up from 7 million). Community-based approaches enabled millions more children to be treated at lower cost and closer to home. Community workers and families were trained to detect malnutrition using simple tools, such as color-coded arm bands to measure middle-upper-arm circumference.

22. UNICEF delivered over 76,000 metric tons of life-saving ready-to-use therapeutic food to support national nutrition programmes in 68 countries. The organization worked with partners to reduce market barriers for nutrition supplies and expand access to treatment for wasting, with support from the UNICEF-led Child Nutrition Fund. The Fund spent \$94.7 million for the delivery of high-impact nutrition interventions, including \$18.9 million for the matching domestic funding for nutrition supplies. It also set up a \$50 million matching mechanism for multiple micronutrient supplements for pregnant women.

23. As co-chair of the Action Review Panel on Child Wasting, UNICEF leveraged its leadership, communications and advocacy, partnering with Governments, the private sector, donors and nongovernmental organizations to improve the impact and sustainability of services via the United Nations Global Action Plan on Child Wasting. The organization released the UNICEF Framework for Child Nutrition and Climate Action to guide policymakers and practitioners in addressing malnutrition caused by climate shocks and introduced the Early Childhood Food Insecurity Experience Scale to monitor in real time children's access to food in fragile and humanitarian contexts.

24. Policies, programmes and services to prevent anaemia, overweight and other forms of malnutrition reached 158 million school-age children and adolescents in 92 countries in 2025, up from 116 million in 63 countries in 2022. UNICEF worked to reach out-of-school adolescent girls in their communities with weekly iron and folic acid supplements, helping to regain coverage after the COVID-19 pandemic.

25. Looking ahead, efforts to strengthen primary healthcare systems will focus on supporting the community health workforce; nationally owned digital health systems; expanded access to essential commodities via the Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Accelerator; peer-led, community- and adolescent-focused multisectoral approaches; and sustainable financing. UNICEF will promote approaches such as First Foods Africa, which create local livelihoods and markets that support the production of affordable, nutritious and sustainable foods for children, and solutions

that tackle both undernutrition and overweight and obesity. Innovative and blended financing mechanisms, such as the Child Nutrition Fund, and coordination with key United Nations partners, including with the World Food Programme on child wasting, will support scale.

B. Goal Area 2: Every child, including adolescents, learns and acquires skills for the future

26. Progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 remains slow and significantly off track, as education systems navigate overlapping crises that erode children’s right to quality education. The latest estimates show 273 million children and young people out of school in 2024, down by less than 1 per cent since 2015.⁵ Climate shocks disrupted education for 242 million students across 85 countries in 2024,⁶ while 234 million crisis-affected children require urgent learning support.⁷ These pressures, alongside chronic underinvestment and teacher shortages, exacerbate the learning crisis. Across 48 low- and middle-income countries, over 90 per cent of children are unable to identify letter names or sounds, or read simple words, at expected levels after three years of schooling.⁸

27. In 2025, UNICEF worked on Goal Area 2 in 143 countries, with a total expense of \$1.56 billion, including \$0.85 billion for humanitarian action. At the output level, the organization met seven of its output targets in this Goal Area, with progress rates above 80 per cent for both result areas. Progress was slowest for the output indicator related to UNICEF-supported programmes on civic engagement, owing to insufficient resources. Countries that invested in youth participation, including Brazil and Ukraine, achieved significant results.

28. In 2025, the organization focused on expanding access to quality learning, strengthening education systems and protecting learning continuity in the face of intensifying shocks. Across 90 countries, 27.8 million out-of-school children, including adolescents (nearly half in sub-Saharan Africa and 51 per cent girls) were supported with access to education, for a total of 178 million children across 132 countries during the period 2022–2025. The percentage of supported children living in humanitarian settings rose from 29 per cent in 2022 to 33 per cent in 2025, and the percentage of migrant, refugee and displaced children from 8 per cent to 11 per cent during the same time frame.

29. Fifty-seven per cent of countries had inclusive and gender-responsive education systems as of 2025, up from 47 per cent in 2022. Progress built on strong foundations in early childhood education and disability inclusion, although legal and policy constraints hampered refugee and migrant inclusion.

30. Through the Foundational Learning Action Tracker, Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) Foundational Learning Module 2.0, UNICEF helped Governments to strengthen assessment systems, data use and instructional quality. Sixty-three per cent of supported countries (45 total) had effective national assessment systems, up from 56 per cent in 2022.

⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, “Out-of-school rate”, available at <https://education-estimates.org/out-of-school/>.

⁶ UNICEF, “Learning Interrupted: Global snapshot of climate-related school disruptions in 2024”, New York, 2025.

⁷ Education Cannot Wait, “State of education for crisis-affected children and adolescents: Access and learning outcomes – Global estimates 2025 update”, New York, 2025.

⁸ Crawford, Michael, et al., “Inadequate foundational decoding skills constrain global literacy goals for pupils in low-and middle-income countries”, *Nature Human Behaviour*, vol. 9, no. 1, January 2025.

These efforts translated into tangible learning gains. In Jordan, 73 per cent of Syrian learners participating in the Reading Recovery Programme showed improved reading skills.

31. Despite challenging contexts, 34 per cent of UNICEF-supported countries met all targets related to improving teacher development systems in 2025, with improvements driven by teacher professional development, school leadership and accountability mechanisms. Ninety-seven countries integrated mental health and psychosocial support into teacher professional development. Investment in targeted teacher training, curriculum updates and child-centred pedagogy led to improved pre-primary teaching and learning environments in 40 per cent of countries. The joint *Global Report on Early Childhood Care and Education*, with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, brought greater policy attention to early childhood education, highlighting the global shortage of 6 million pre-primary teachers.

32. UNICEF expanded its support for embedding transferable, digital, green, entrepreneurial and job-ready skills for adolescents into national curricula, and for strengthening alternative learning pathways for school re-entry or transition to work. In 2025, 48 per cent of countries had institutionalized holistic skills approaches, surpassing the 42 per cent target. Through Generation Unlimited partnerships, school-to-work programmes were scaled across regions.

33. Twenty-nine per cent of countries had effective digital learning solutions, up from 9 per cent in 2021. In 2025, more than 13.6 million children (54 per cent girls) across 71 countries accessed education through digital platforms such as the Learning Passport. Evidence showed that safe, high-quality digital solutions improved children's skills and learning outcomes. The EdTech for Good Framework and Learning Cabinet was recognized as setting global standards for inclusive, scalable digital learning tools. Fourteen Governments produced accessible digital textbooks using UNICEF open-source, artificial intelligence-powered tools, reaching nearly 2 million children, including 442,826 children with disabilities, and over 90,000 teachers by the end of 2025.

34. In 2025, 61 per cent of countries had effective student and community participation mechanisms, up from 49 per cent in 2022. UNICEF engaged 20 million adolescents, up from 16 million in 2023, including over 1 million in humanitarian situations, up from 345,000 in 2022.

35. With support to strengthen local leadership and integrate risk-informed planning, preparedness, response and recovery strategies, 44 countries had resilient education systems able to absorb climate shocks, conflict and other disruptions, up from 23 per cent in 2022. UNICEF supported Governments in 98 countries to integrate climate, energy, environment, green skills and disaster risk reduction into education systems, with 42 strengthening teacher development on climate literacy and sustainability.

36. Looking ahead, UNICEF will focus on national assessment systems and support for educators to strengthen foundational learning, alongside safe, scalable EdTech solutions, responsible artificial intelligence use and meaningful participation of children, including adolescents, and communities. The organization will advocate for increased and equitable education financing through official development assistance and domestic sources. Work to support national capacities for risk-informed planning, climate-resilient infrastructure and flexible financing will be vital to protect learning continuity.

C. Goal Area 3: Every child, including adolescents, is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices

37. Despite notable progress since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, most child protection–related Sustainable Development Goals remain off track. Overlapping crises, normative pushback on child rights, digital harms and organized crime exacerbate intersecting risks that compromise children’s right to protection.

38. Violence against children remains pervasive and systemic. Globally, 1 in 5 girls and women and around 1 in 7 boys and men experienced sexual violence as children. With 19 per cent of women aged 20–24 years worldwide in union or married before the age of 18 years, progress would need to be 20 times faster to end child marriage by 2030.⁹ While an estimated 75 per cent of children under 5 years old were registered at birth, the world remains off track towards universal birth registration by 2030.

39. In 2025, UNICEF worked on Goal Area 3 in 157 countries, with a total expense of \$0.93 billion, including \$0.59 billion for humanitarian action. At the output level, the organization met 13 of its output targets in this Goal Area, with progress rates of nearly or above 90 per cent for two out of three result areas. Progress was slowest for the output indicator related to eliminating discriminatory social and gender norms and harmful practices through community platforms, as funding reductions led some countries that had driven results in previous years to prioritize more targeted interventions.

40. UNICEF continued to champion child protection systems strengthening as the most effective strategy to prevent and respond to violations at scale. Child protection systems, the social service workforce and justice systems were strengthened across 147 countries. Since 2022, the number of countries with mature child protection systems increased from one to seven, specialized justice systems from 31 to 41, and quality assurance systems for the social service workforce from 41 to 48. As of 2025, 63 countries had interoperable civil registration and health systems to support universal birth registration, while UNICEF supported birth registration for over 217 million children during the period 2022–2025.

41. UNICEF-supported parenting programmes reached 17.9 million parents and caregivers in 2025, exceeding the targeted 5.1 million, with 3.8 million reached in the Philippines alone. Mental health and psychosocial support services through the child protection and education sectors reached 46.7 million children, adolescents, parents and caregivers, as strengthened workforce development, systems-level integration, monitoring and evidence-based interventions supported scale-up.

42. In partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Global Programme to End Child Marriage and the Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation supported a multisectoral approach to address harmful practices at scale. In 2025, over 894,000 girls and women in 19 countries accessed prevention and protection services related to female genital mutilation, more than doubling reach since 2022. Nearly 10.4 million adolescent girls in 50 countries benefited from child marriage prevention and care interventions, while 19.2 million people across 67 countries engaged in community dialogues to challenge discriminatory social and gender norms. Since 2022, prevention, care and protection services related to child marriage and female genital mutilation reached over 50 million girls and women.

⁹ UNICEF, “Is an End to Child Marriage within Reach?”, UNICEF, New York, 2023, pp. 10 and 15.

43. In 2025, UNICEF supported 4.5 million children affected by violence in accessing health, social work, justice and law enforcement services across 112 countries. The organization partnered with UNFPA and Save the Children to link efforts to tackle technology-facilitated gender-based violence and violence against children. UNICEF co-convened the World Congress on Justice with Children, attended by about 7,000 justice actors.

44. Child protection programming reached nearly 10 million migrant children. Investment in digital transformation strengthened child protection case management, with 78 per cent of UNICEF-targeted children (688,317) receiving individual case management support across 71 countries. More than 121,000 children who were unaccompanied or separated from their families received alternative care and/or reunification support. Programmes addressing gender-based violence response, prevention and risk mitigation in emergencies reached nearly 10.9 million people (including 296,711 with disabilities) across 70 countries.

45. UNICEF continued to play a central role in United Nations monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children in armed conflict in more than 20 countries. Sixty-four per cent of targeted children formerly associated with armed forces or groups received protection or reintegration support. Prevention or victim assistance interventions reached over 4.8 million children affected by landmines and other explosive weapons. The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, co-led by UNICEF, advocated to highlight the impact of funding reductions and changes in the humanitarian system, calling on all actors to prioritize children and their protection during crises.

46. In 2025, 74.2 million people accessed safe channels for reporting sexual exploitation and abuse, as UNICEF enhanced institutional and community-level safeguards to prevent and respond to the issue. As global lead for the United Nations Victims' Assistance Protocol, the organization strengthened inter-agency mechanisms for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse through technical guidance, training and direct support to countries.

47. Looking ahead, UNICEF will prioritize high-impact solutions that address immediate protection needs while disrupting intergenerational cycles of violence – including parenting support, safe and enabling school environments, and response and support services. The organization will work to strengthen inclusive child protection systems with a dedicated front-line social service and justice workforce, promote care reform to prevent family separation and end institutionalization, and prioritize immediate birth registration as the foundation of a child's legal identity, leveraging links across social sectors and safe, cost-effective digitalization to help systems meet the needs of all children.

D. Goal Area 4: Every child, including adolescents, has access to safe and equitable WASH services, and lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment

48. Despite significant progress over the past decade in expanding access to safely managed drinking water and sanitation as well as basic hygiene services, the number of people in low-income countries without these services has increased. Stagnating government WASH budgets and declining official development assistance triggered a 46 per cent funding gap between needs and available resources.¹⁰ As a result, 2.1

¹⁰ UNICEF, World Health Organization and UN-Water, *Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-water State of Systems for Drinking Water, Sanitation and hygiene: Global update 2025*, 2025.

billion people still lack safely managed drinking water, 3.4 billion lack safely managed sanitation, and 1.7 billion lack basic hand-washing facilities with soap and water available.

49. The increasing impacts of climate change and environmental degradation disrupt access to WASH and other essential services and pose grave threats to children, whose developing bodies are less able to cope than adults'. Almost 2,000 children under 5 years old die daily because of health impacts linked to air pollution, while 1 in 3 children have high blood lead levels. Childhood exposure to such hazards can have long-term consequences. Climate hazards become disasters when child-critical systems fail, and children living in poverty, fragile contexts and disaster-prone geographies face the greatest harms.

50. In 2025, UNICEF worked on Goal Area 4 in 154 countries, with a total expense of \$1.24 billion, including \$0.88 billion for humanitarian action. At the output level, the organization met 14 of its output targets in this Goal Area, with all three result areas achieving progress rates above 80 per cent. Progress was slowest for the output indicator related to increased annual WASH sector expenditures from different sources, despite 40 countries advancing in this area.

51. In 2025, UNICEF made strong progress in direct support for safe WASH services. Over 17 million people (including 1.1 million with disabilities) gained access to at least basic sanitation services, over 34 million (2.4 million with disabilities) to safe water, and over 15 million (893,000 with disabilities) to basic hygiene. Over 5,500 schools and 2,800 healthcare facilities were supported to achieve a basic level of WASH service provision.

52. Direct support in humanitarian emergencies reached over 36 million people with drinking water services and 7 million with sanitation services in 2025. Since 2022, 35 countries integrated humanitarian-development nexus approaches into WASH programming, a critical step forward in using water as a tool to build peace and resilience in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Fifty countries were supported to incorporate WASH into national climate policies, so that systems are designed and adapted to withstand climate and environmental stresses.

53. During the period 2022–2025, UNICEF worked to strengthen WASH sector systems by leveraging additional financing in 27 countries and supporting national costed and inclusive WASH finance strategies in 21 countries. The organization explored innovative financing, including through the Sanitation Programme Facility, which aims to bring together guarantee donors and international financial institutions to provide sanitation access for 50 million people in sub-Saharan Africa.

54. UNICEF-supported programmes addressed the menstrual health and hygiene of almost 9 million women and adolescent girls in 2025 (including 273,211 with disabilities) for a total of 46.3 million women and girls (1.17 million with disabilities) during the period 2022–2025, providing supplies, privacy and safety in facilities, school-based programming, and social and behaviour change interventions. With the World Health Organization, UNICEF led gender-focused reporting for the 2025 Joint Monitoring Programme, emphasizing the need to advance gender-specific indicators and monitoring frameworks.

55. The organization expanded climate and environment programming to 129 countries, up from 37 in 2021. Eighty-nine countries, up from 33 in 2021, implemented multisectoral programmes or policies to strengthen children's resilience to climate, environmental and disaster risks. Enhanced advocacy, policy engagement and technical assistance helped 99 countries, up from 69 in 2024, to make their national climate, environmental or disaster risk management frameworks, including Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans, child-sensitive.

UNICEF collaborated with 109 Governments to enhance children’s disaster resilience, up from 60 in 2021 and exceeding the target of 72.

56. Renewable energy solutions expanded to 121 countries in 2025, with 1,767 solar-powered water systems installed in 70 countries, for a total of 8,529 since 2022. In Pakistan, UNICEF supported the Government to install 675 solar photovoltaic systems in 2025, providing reliable energy to support safe water supply, health facilities and education services for 1.8 million children.

57. Strengthened data, evidence and risk analysis underpinned progress. Eighty-nine countries completed multisector climate and environmental impact studies, and 78 strengthened child-centred risk analysis tools, up from 25 in 2021. UNICEF promoted the development of an AI tool for drought early warning, and a universal data integrator bringing together data from various WASH sources to enable near real-time assessment and response.

58. With UNICEF support, 108 countries enabled youth participation in policy development, entrepreneurship and advocacy on sustainability, up from 102 in 2024. The Green Rising initiative mobilized over 14.5 million young people globally for environmental volunteer initiatives.

59. Looking ahead, UNICEF recognizes that elevating climate, environment and disaster risk reduction within evolving development and humanitarian agendas requires adaptability and strategic engagement. Institutional coherence and scalable support models are vital as demand for technical assistance increases, particularly in vulnerable contexts. The organization will strengthen data and risk analysis; document impacts, costs and benefits to mobilize resources and support scale; advance national ownership and policy alignment; and target ambitious reach for WASH, a pivotal component of addressing climate impacts.

E. Goal Area 5: Every child, including adolescents, has access to inclusive social protection and lives free from poverty

60. Since 2000, the global child poverty rate fell by about one third, and 20 countries halved their multidimensional child poverty rates.¹¹ These gains demonstrate that child poverty is not inevitable, but global progress remains fragile and uneven. Children are twice as likely as adults to live in both extreme and multidimensional poverty,¹² and millions lack access to essentials such as health, nutrition, education, social protection, adequate housing, water and sanitation. While social protection systems expanded over the past decade, over 3 in 4 children globally remain without access. In conflict-affected settings, extreme child poverty has increased, affecting more than half of children – five times as many as in other States.¹³

61. In 2025, UNICEF worked on Goal Area 5 in 157 countries, with a total expense of \$0.61 billion, including \$0.30 billion for humanitarian action. At the output level, the organization met six of its output targets in this Goal Area, with progress rates above 80 per cent for both result areas. Progress was slowest for the output target indicator related to UNICEF-supported cash transfers, owing to fiscal tightening and reductions in national child benefit programmes.

¹¹ UNICEF, “Cross-Sectoral Partnerships and Solutions to End Child Poverty: Lessons and Actions”, Side event at the Second World Summit for Social Development, 5 November 2025.

¹² UNICEF, *The State of the World’s Children 2025: Ending child poverty – Our shared imperative*, UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, Florence, Italy, November 2025, p. 6.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

62. Together with Governments, public and private sector partners and international financial institutions, UNICEF delivered focused and differentiated support to improve national child poverty measurement, align public budgets with children's rights, strengthen local governance, and expand inclusive and shock-responsive social protection programmes. The launch of *The State of the World's Children 2025: Ending child poverty – Our shared imperative* at the Group of 20 (G20) Social Summit in South Africa elevated child poverty reduction on the international agenda.

63. Nationally owned systems to routinely measure monetary and multidimensional child poverty were in place in 94 and 87 countries, respectively, up from 68 and 72 in 2024. In 44 countries, child poverty measures informed national development plans and programmes addressing child poverty.

64. Progress in financing for children underscored growing demand for child-focused public financial management reforms, fiscal space expansion, and stronger prioritization of social spending for children. In 2025, 93 countries strengthened social sector budgets, including for social protection, up from 91 in 2024. UNICEF accelerated its efforts to support Governments to leverage international and private resources for social service delivery in 98 countries, up from 85 in 2024, leading to concrete results for social service delivery.

65. Ninety countries had moderately strong to strong child-sensitive social protection systems, reflecting continued improvements in legislation, financing, coverage, intersectoral linkages, data systems and delivery capacity. Through integrated social protection systems and multisectoral coordination, 89 countries, up from 56 in 2021, expanded access to care and family-friendly policies, including subsidized childcare and paid parental leave.

66. Sixty-nine countries strengthened gender-responsive social protection, up from 22 in 2021, and 80 strengthened disability-inclusive social protection, up from 77 in 2024. With UNICEF support, Benin implemented the Cash Plus Care/Faaba programme, reaching 148,132 girls with cash transfers that helped them remain in school and avoid child marriage.

67. Crisis readiness improved, with 34 countries able to rapidly deliver social protection support to children during humanitarian crises, up from 26 in 2024. UNICEF-supported cash programmes reached almost 70 million households. The organization delivered a total of \$559 million, including \$322 million in humanitarian cash assistance reaching 0.9 million households, and \$237 million in cash incentive payments to front-line workers.

68. Looking ahead, a focused set of high-impact policy levers – child-sensitive social protection and public finance, and inclusive economic pathways for young people – will be used to scale interventions where evidence shows the greatest potential to reduce child poverty at population level. Priority will be given to expanding coverage and adequacy of child benefits, strengthening shock-responsive systems, and aligning public budgets and fiscal policies more systematically with children's rights.

III. Strengthening organizational performance through strategies supporting programme results and organizational capacity

69. UNICEF efforts to operationalize its change strategies and invest in its organizational performance enablers made invaluable contributions to the achievements outlined above. The subsections that follow exemplify some of the

more critical results cutting across Goal Areas, with further details available in the annexes to the present report.

Upholding children's rights

70. To counter the intensifying normative pushback against child rights, UNICEF continued in 2025 to elevate and amplify recognition of children as independent rights holders within United Nations human rights mechanisms. The organization advocated for child rights at the global, regional and national levels, including through the Third Committee of the General Assembly and other United Nations forums.

71. UNICEF delivered 45 thematic or country-specific statements to the Human Rights Council, and 95 per cent of country offices supported follow-up to the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, up from 84 per cent in 2021. Over 60 per cent engaged with independent institutions with a child rights mandate, up from 45 per cent in 2021.

72. Advocacy contributed to child-sensitive laws, regulations, policies, budgets or practices on vaccine affordability, availability and equity in 93 countries, education in 112 countries, mental health in 101 countries, and water, climate and the environment in 121 countries. As of 2025, the organization supported over 41.8 million U-Reporters worldwide to share information and engage in advocacy.

Engaging communities and addressing norms and practices

73. In 2025, UNICEF worked to strengthen national systems for adolescent and youth participation in 69 countries. Sixty-seven per cent of country offices reached the organizational benchmarks for community engagement and social and behaviour change. UNICEF implemented sector-specific community engagement and social and behaviour change strategies in 119 countries, including to foster demand for immunization, increase access to life-saving services in public health emergencies, prevent violence against children, support parenting, promote positive discipline and encourage protective behaviours.

74. Capacity development for front-line workers, delivered at scale with a focus on gender equality in 70 countries and disability inclusion in 91 countries, helped to streamline the inclusion of adolescent girls and children with disabilities in national systems. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, UNICEF partnered with organizations of persons with disabilities to adapt its global Disability Inclusion Training Package for Frontline Workers. Social and behaviour change interventions in 117 countries addressed barriers faced by children with disabilities and their families.

75. In 92 countries, at-scale programmes addressed gender-discriminatory roles and practices among children. Adolescent girls helped to shape solutions and mobilize peers through the Global Girl Leaders Advisory Group and POWER4Girls, a new initiative that contributed to the scale-up of evidence-based, girl-focused programmes benefiting 5.4 million girls and over 11 million people in 15 countries. UNICEF issued its Gender Equality Action Plan, 2026–2029, a new global road map to drive systems-level change for girls and women, committing a minimum of 15 per cent of expenses to girls' and women's priorities.

Strengthening data on children

76. UNICEF continued to support national statistical offices to conduct household surveys covering most of the child-related Sustainable Development Goal indicators. In 2025, 71 countries implemented surveys under the UNICEF-supported MICS programme, the largest remaining global survey programme providing internationally

comparable data on health, demographic, education and protection outcomes for children and their families. The organization leveraged over \$112 million in national and international resources for child-related household surveys. Efforts to place data for children at the centre of UN80 reform efforts continued, in partnership with key United Nations entities and the World Bank.

Harnessing innovation and digital transformation

77. UNICEF worked to discover and scale innovations addressing critical challenges for children. The Venture Fund expanded its reach from 31.7 million people in 2022 to over 115 million by 2025, and catalysed investment averaging 12 times the initial funding. UNICEF leveraged the technical expertise, credibility and influence of partners including Arm, Google, OpenAI, the Lego Foundation and the Global Video Game Coalition to expand its delivery capacity.

78. As a co-founder of the Digital Public Goods Alliance, UNICEF advanced open, interoperable systems aligned with national priorities, enabling safer, more resilient digital services for children at lower cost. The organization strengthened digital governance and cybersecurity, researched the impacts of artificial intelligence on children and capitalized on the potential of this new technology to accelerate results through policy drafts, governance frameworks, use-case inventories, knowledge assets and collaboration models.

Partnering with business

79. UNICEF strengthened its strategic engagement with businesses. The organization engaged in discussions with multinationals on innovative financing, climate and humanitarian crises at the World Economic Forum annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, and delivered policy and advocacy messaging through the Forum's Global Alliance for Women's Health, of which the Executive Director is a board member.

80. Advocacy by country offices and National Committees for UNICEF contributed to improved policies and regulations on business practices in 36 countries. Over 12,000 companies strengthened their commitment to addressing the impact of their policies and practices on children's rights. UNICEF released guidance to help businesses assess and report on the impacts of the digital environment on child rights.

Facilitating access to essential supplies

81. Throughout the period 2022–2025, UNICEF leveraged an end-to-end supply chain approach to manage \$23.9 billion in global procurement. In 2025, procurement totalled \$5.7 billion, comprising \$3.8 billion in goods and \$1.9 billion in services, including \$1.44 billion in supplies delivered to support humanitarian action in 67 countries.

82. The organization mobilized over \$20 million to expand access to assistive technologies. Across 92 countries, 933,594 children with disabilities received assistive devices and inclusive products. The UNICEF Children with Disabilities Fund, launched in 2025, secured \$1 million in private sector contributions to advance disability inclusion, including through access to assistive technologies.

83. UNICEF worked with the United Nations Secretariat and the World Food Programme to propose an integrated approach to United Nations supply chains in complex environments, to improve efficiency and scale. Building on existing inter-agency collaboration and the Humanitarian Reset, the model will leverage existing strengths to offer coordinated procurement and harmonize global and in-country logistics.

Deepening collaboration with United Nations partners

84. Under the UN80 Initiative, UNICEF worked alongside the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the United Nations Development Coordination Office and other entities to translate reform options into practical, country-facing solutions that reduce duplication and strengthen shared accountability. UNICEF actively contributed to six work packages under the Secretary-General's UN80 Action Plan, co-leading one, and helped to shape tangible offers on integrated supply chains, shared services and data commons.

85. UNICEF advocated for the centrality of country programme documents as core accountability instruments, aligned with nationally defined priorities for children and the overall strategic direction provided by United Nations Cooperation Frameworks. The organization anchored the reporting and results architecture of its Strategic Plan, 2026–2029 in the mandates of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system.

86. As part of its support to the Humanitarian Reset, UNICEF engaged with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to ensure that reform efforts place children, and the systems that protect them, at the centre of humanitarian action. This included concerted efforts to prioritize the organization's Humanitarian Action for Children appeals, simplify cluster coordination, and engage national authorities and development partners to address longer-term development alongside immediate assistance.

Mobilizing resources

87. Against the backdrop of a structural contraction in development funding, UNICEF income reached \$8.1 billion in 2025, 2 per cent below 2024 actuals, with a marked divergence between public and private sector results. On the private sector side, UNICEF delivered one of the strongest performances in its history, with sustained growth across fundraising channels, notably digital fundraising and legacy giving. The private sector ecosystem, anchored by National Committees and country and regional offices, proved resilient. Innovative finance played a growing role, including through the World Bank pilot instrument and the Dynamo Revolving Fund.

88. Public sector results were sustained by multi-year agreements and one-off mitigation measures, while official development assistance declined. Core resources (regular resources) reached \$1.5 billion in 2025 (19 per cent of total income), with public sector regular resources (6 per cent of total public sector income) falling to their lowest level in nearly two decades, well below the 30 per cent funding compact benchmark. Flexible thematic funding declined to \$331 million (5 per cent of all other resources), significantly short of the 15 per cent funding compact commitment.

89. While diversification of the funding base strengthens resilience, predictable and flexible public sector funding remains indispensable. UNICEF continues to underscore the importance of a balanced, sustainable funding architecture to support the United Nations system, spanning core resources, single-agency thematic funding, inter-agency pooled funds and earmarked contributions, in line with the funding compact.

Enhancing oversight, risk management and efficiency

90. UNICEF reinforced its policy and operational frameworks for resource partners. Clearer roles and decision-making processes, alongside more consistent approaches to notifying donors on integrity-related matters, strengthened the organization's ability to manage partnership risks and reinforce trust and confidence among resource partners. UNICEF worked to strengthen its personal data protection framework,

providing training and guidance for staff, documenting activities that involve processing of personal data, and conducting data protection impact assessments of programmes, digital initiatives and partnerships.

91. Centralized delivery of finance, human resources, payroll, global learning and customer care services freed up time and resources, enabling country offices to focus on programmatic work. UNICEF strengthened use of data and analytics in its global shared services, improving volume forecasting and workforce optimization, developing country programme efficiency analysis, and supporting second line of defence and risk oversight. Process standardization, lean methodologies and automation enabled centralized services to reach a level of productivity that ranks UNICEF in the top quartile of private sector performance. The organization shared lessons from its experience in delivering shared services with the United Nations system, towards a unified shared services road map.

Maintaining a supportive, inclusive organizational culture

92. In a year marked by overlapping crises and fiscal pressure, UNICEF embraced significant restructuring in March 2025 while maintaining a capable and values-driven workforce, key to preserving operational continuity. The number of fixed-term personnel decreased from 17,260 in April 2025 to 14,892 by January 2026. Resource constraints and post reductions affected morale, while demand for staff support increased more rapidly than available capacity.

93. During a time of uncertainty, UNICEF worked to reinforce psychological safety and well-being among staff and strengthen the capacities of its leadership. Better workforce data and clearer insights strengthened decision-making. Targeted internal communication and engagement efforts supported staff navigating transitions.

94. Gender parity continued to strengthen, demonstrating sustained commitment to equity and inclusion. Women represented 50.1 per cent of staff and 49.6 per cent of senior staff, reaching the highest level in three years among the latter. UNICEF met or exceeded 89 per cent (16 out of 18) of the benchmarks of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

95. Within the authority given to the Executive Director to establish senior-level positions on an as-needed basis and funded from within the approved institutional budget envelope, four net additional senior-level positions were approved in 2025. All four positions were located at headquarters. Three were temporary in nature, established to meet short-term needs. The positions include a net increase of two Director (D)-2 positions and two D-1 positions. This brings the total of senior-level positions to 144 (1 Under-Secretary-General, 4 Assistant Secretary-General, 43 D-2s and 96 D-1s).

IV. Looking ahead

96. Today's children are growing up in an increasingly volatile world – shaped by fragmented geopolitics, escalating conflicts, worsening climate and environmental crises, and rapid technological change. These overlapping shocks are destabilizing societies, deepening poverty, and driving displacement and violence. In too many places, children's rights are being eroded, while grave violations in armed conflict continue to rise year after year.

97. At the same time, the systems meant to protect children are under strain. Weakening multilateralism, underfunded public services, and a collapse in development financing are limiting the world's ability to respond. Opportunities presented by technological advances – from AI to neurotechnology – remain unevenly

governed, while the debt crisis continues to trap children in the poorest countries in cycles of deprivation, although solutions exist that could satisfy some creditors while increasing investments in children. Children are paying the highest price for these failures of collective action. And when investment in children falters, so, too, does global stability.

98. International cooperation and the rule of law remain essential to reversing these trends. The United Nations system continues to offer the most comprehensive platform for collective action, and UNICEF is working to strengthen its agility, efficiency and accountability, while expanding partnerships and diversifying its funding base. Yet innovation alone is not enough. New financing solutions cannot replace official development assistance. The leadership and sustained commitment of Member States remain indispensable.

99. There is, however, a clear path forward. Today's children – the largest generation in history – are living proof that progress is possible when political will is matched with investment. The returns are both immediate and long-term: universal secondary school completion, achievable at just \$1.53 per day per adolescent girl, could boost developing economies by 10 per cent by 2030.¹⁴ Decisive climate action could lift 175 million people out of extreme poverty by 2050.¹⁵

100. But the risks of inaction are just as clear. Without urgent efforts to de-escalate conflict, uphold international law and address the root causes of poverty and instability, the harms to children will deepen and multiply. No level of efficiency can compensate for a lack of resources or political will.

101. With decisive action, countries can invest in the systems children depend on, learn from one another, and work together to confront shared crises. The tools exist. The solutions are within reach. What is needed now is the will to act.

102. Children cannot wait. The decisions that are made today will define not only their future – but the future that we all share.

V. Draft decision

The Executive Board

1. *Takes note* of the Annual report for 2025 of the Executive Director of UNICEF, as well as the Report on the implementation of the Integrated Results and Resources Framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025; the Report on the implementation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system; the Description of independent oversight functions/bodies in UNICEF; and the data companion and scorecard;

2. *Decides* to transmit the above-mentioned reports to the Economic and Social Council along with a summary of the comments and guidance of the Executive Board;

3. *Takes note* of the UNICEF report on the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit, including the management responses to the five recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit intended for consideration by the Executive Board.

¹⁴ UNICEF, “Adolescent Girls: The investment case”, 2023, p. 1.

¹⁵ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2025*, p. 42.