

7 AFFORDABLE AND
CLEAN ENERGY



KEY ASKS

2022 • SDG National Reviews

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SDG 7: AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Sustainable energy is a critical to dramatically improving the quality, accessibility, and reliability of services that children rely on (e.g. health, WASH, education, nutrition) for their survival and well-being. For example:

- In homes, children need reliable access to modern lighting for their daily chores and to do homework after dark and need heating and cooling to stay comfortable.
- Low levels of electricity access are correlated with poor educational performance, lower attendance, and a decreased ability to attract and maintain teachers.
- Health facilities and schools require energy for lighting, operating medical devices and life-saving procedures, cooking, heating, water delivery and purification, cooling, and digital connectivity. School attendance is reported to have increased with better electrification and lighting, especially in regions with poor sunlight penetration.
- Children, including those with disabilities, need safe, clean and affordable transportation to school.
- Street lighting is important for children's safety, especially girls, after dark.
- Amongst children, girls are primarily responsible for collecting fuel and water, and are often at serious risk of sexual violence particularly in emergency contexts.
- Sustainable energy measures considerably reduce indoor air pollution and related health risks, particularly for children. In 2019 indoor air pollution, largely caused by the burning of solid fuels, contributes to over half a million deaths of children under five years old (Ref State of Global Air Report, 2019 in UNICEF Technical Brief).
- Reliable and affordable energy is a prerequisite to accessing clean and safe water and sanitation.

The onset and ongoing crisis of the global COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the situation, especially for the most vulnerable children. Lack of access to energy may hamper efforts to contain COVID-19 across many parts of the world. In addition, children who lack electricity cannot access digital learning which has negative educational impacts. Over 200 million children go to primary schools without electricity.¹ In sub-Saharan Africa alone only 31 per cent of primary schools have electricity access. This is also a region with some of the lowest levels of literacy rates and low in human capital index.² These impacts threaten to undermine decades of progress on every child's ability to survive, grow, and thrive. Energy services are key to preventing disease and fighting pandemics – from powering healthcare facilities and supplying clean water for essential hygiene to enabling communication and IT services that connect people while maintaining social distancing. (UNICEF [Climate & COVID-19 Advocacy Brief](#)).



KEY ASKS

1. Energy can define a child's access to education, water, clean air and safety. As SDG 7 is implemented and monitored, we encourage countries to include children in policies and investments related to sustainable energy. UNICEF encourages governments conducting a Voluntary National Review (VNR) to ensure their reports are: 1) informed by relevant, disaggregated data, including on children; 2) linked to national plans, budgets and accountability frameworks; and 3) inclusive of children's voices on SDG issues, for instance through conducting consultations with children and youth. During the COVID- 19 pandemic it is key to:
 - Prioritize sustainable electrification in the health and education sectors to accomplish positive social and climate benefits for children.

¹ UNESCO, 2019

² https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/2021-UN_POLICY_BRIEFS-063021.pdf

- Keep vulnerable consumers connected to electricity/internet.
- Increase reliable, uninterrupted, and sufficient energy production in preparation for a more sustainable economic recovery.



MONITOR -- THE IMPORTANCE OF DISAGGREGATED DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND USE

Energy-related data on the sectors most relevant to children is scarce, specifically the health and education sectors as well as infrastructure such as transport. Disaggregated and specific data on children and their access to and benefits from sustainable energy is even sketchier. The following SDG 7 Targets and Indicators address priority areas for children:

7.1 By 2030, ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services

7.1.1 Proportion of population with access to electricity

7.1.2 Proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology

While national and local governments collect targets and indicators related to SDG 7, we encourage where appropriate the collection of the following relevant SDG indicator areas:

3.9.1 Mortality rate attributed to household and ambient air pollution

4.A.1 Proportion of schools with access to electricity.

Collecting and disaggregating this data is vital to understanding how and where children are being left behind in the context to energy access. For instance, it is through these statistics that we know to:

Reduce air pollution deaths. The health impacts attributable to air pollution, which are closely linked to the use of dirty fossil fuel such as diesel and petrol including in the transport sector, are estimated to have caused 4.2 million premature deaths globally due to outdoor air pollution and 3.8 million due to indoor air pollution in 2012 through the use of conventional fuels for cooking and heating (e.g. charcoal, kerosene). [Up to 94 per cent](#) of these deaths occurring in low- and middle -income countries, which represent 82 per cent of the global population and bear the brunt of the problem. [Around 300 million children globally, including 17 million babies](#) live in areas where the air is toxic – exceeding international limits by at least six times.

Improve access to electricity in households. Children living in electrified households spend an average of 274 more days at school than those living in households without electricity. Electricity in the home also helps reduce gender inequalities by providing girls, who are traditionally more engaged in housework than boys, opportunities to study after sunset.

Improve access to electricity for health facilities. An estimated 1 billion people rely on health facilities without electricity, predominantly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In a recent study over 120,000 facilities, almost 60 per cent of healthcare facilities in low- and middle-income countries were estimated to lack reliable electricity, including lighting for child delivery and emergency night-time healthcare, refrigeration of vaccines or electricity for simple medical and diagnostic equipment.

Improve access to electricity for schools. Looking at primary school access to electricity, sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest rate at 31 per cent, followed by South Asia with, and Latin America. Collectively, [230 million](#) children attend primary schools without electricity, thereby compromising educational and development outcomes. Schools with better access to sustainable energy can also be used to provide other community services, such as clean water, hygienic sanitation, and health and emergency services.

Enhance street lighting. It is unknown how many communities in developing countries are without street lighting; however, it is reasonable to assume that most of those 1.3 billion people who have no access to electricity in their homes are also deprived of street lighting. The lack of street lighting leads to increased risk of harassment and assault.



INVEST -- SOCIAL SPENDING AND PROGRESS ON RESULTS FOR CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

Energy action plans and budgets should cover issues such as children's access to clean, reliable and affordable energy in households, schools, health facilities, communities, and for protection against air pollution. Improved reporting on expenditures and programmes that have direct and indirect impacts on access to affordable, reliable, and sustainable energy should be pursued. To improve public financing for clean energy, UNICEF supports governments to allocate public resources where the need is greatest; and pushes for improved programme design, monitoring and accountability. For example, UNICEF is actively supporting energy access programmes in primary health care facilities in 35 countries. Energy is even more critical in **conflict and emergency context** to ensure continuity of basic services including for life saving medical procedures, water supply, vaccine

cold chains, lighting and more. For example in the Gaza Strip, UNICEF is reaching out to 12 per cent of its population with clean water supply through its *Solar Seawater Desalination Plant Project*. Similarly, in Yemen, Jordan, South Sudan, and Bangladesh (Cox's bazar) UNICEF is investing in solar energy in schools and learning centres for children in humanitarian settings.



ACTIVATE -- AWARENESS BUILDING AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

Sustainable energy transition is an intergenerational issue and young people have a key role to play. UNICEF supports young people as agents of change for climate and energy actions, including through strategic partnerships like the one with the [Youth Sustainable Energy Hub](#), innovation challenges and toolkits for children and young people.

Shifts in social norms and behaviours begin in communities and households and systemic sustainable energy practices can start with simple actions that children can take part in such as turning off lights and unplugging devices. Therefore, we emphasize the importance of awareness raising and encouraging positive behaviours and more sustainable practices among children, not only as they transition from childhood to adulthood but as they participate in society now. To this end, UNICEF recently became a partner to the [Youth Sustainable Energy Hub initiative](#).

The process for preparing the 2022 national review should directly involve children and adolescent girls and boys, especially the most marginalized or excluded. For example, through consultations (on and/or offline), surveys or polls, focus group discussions, etc. UNICEF together with civil society, child-focused organizations and other partners could support the government in that process. The results of these efforts as well as the methods employed should be described in the VNR report, including the number of young people involved in the process.

Provide spaces and/or platforms for children, adolescents, and youth to learn about, discuss and take action on the SDGs, including Affordable and Clean Energy. UNICEF can support this effort through our existing work in this space and by creating child- friendly education and entertainment materials via our foundational partnerships on the [World's Largest Lesson](#) and [Comics Uniting Nations. Voices of Youth](#) and [UNICEF's Youth Activate Talk Methodology](#) are also a platform from children to express their ideas on the SDGs through a variety of mediums.

Awareness-raising and participation should be seen as part of **a continuum to regularly, meaningfully and consistently engage children, adolescents and young people as agents of change to influence behaviours and social norms amongst themselves, their households and their communities.** This goes beyond engagement just for the purposes of reporting periods, but rather creating standing mechanisms and spaces for young people to engage and have their perspectives heard in decision and policy-making processes. This inclusion also enforces young people's role across media and communications channels for the purpose of solidifying long-term positive changes in behaviours and social norms. It is important for UNICEF and UN agencies to listen and learn from young people so that we can continue to be led and inspired by them.

Finally, UNICEF stresses **the importance of sustainable energy education and encourages the inclusion of children's perspectives and voices in not only SDG consultations but in implementation efforts such as policy, budgeting, and other decision-making.** Current and future investments in human capital will be integral to growing the sustainable energy industry. Educating generations of students as clean energy technicians, engineers, political activists and energy practitioners is vital to equip society with the future capability of meeting the demand for access to and affordability of clean energy.



For more information, visit: <https://www.unicef.org/sdgs>