The COVID-19 pandemic brought education systems across the world to a halt, with school closures affecting more than 1.6 billion learners at its peak. But even before the pandemic, the world was facing a learning crisis, with 260 million children out of school and those in school not necessarily learning and acquiring the skills they need. School closures caused more than disruption of education: nearly 370 million children missed out on school meals; 10 million more girls than previously estimated are at risk of early marriage by 2030, and 9 million more children are at risk of being pushed into child labour by the end of 2022. Millions of children living in extreme poverty, hunger, and amidst conflicts are faced with new emergencies within existing crises.

Recognizing the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on marginalized children, in 2021, UNICEF scaled up interventions focused on continuity of learning during school closures and getting learning back on track, with a focus on the most marginalized children. UNICEF reached 48.6 million out-of-school children – half of them girls – with education, bringing the total number to 126 million since 2018. Among these children, 6.4 million (48 per cent girls) were children on the move and 31.7 million (50 per cent girls) lived in humanitarian settings. UNICEF reached 42.1 million children (18.1 million in humanitarian settings) with learning materials, bringing the total since 2018 to 109 million children. UNICEF supported 85,586 school management committees or similar bodies with training, a significant increase compared to just under 60,000 in 2020. Moreover, 45 per cent of UNICEF-supported countries reported having a gender-responsive teaching and learning education system. In 2021, 52 per cent of UNICEF-supported countries had national school-related gender-based violence prevention and response mechanisms, 14 percentage points up from 2018. UNICEF’s support to skills development benefited 33 million children (51 per cent girls), including 1.7 million in humanitarian settings. Since 2018, 47 million children participated in skills development programmes through UNICEF support.

UNICEF’s advocacy among partners contributed to significant commitments and action for the most pressing issues in education affecting marginalized children, such as the concrete commitments made by the Group of Seven (the G7) to advance education for girls. UNICEF’s partnerships, such as the Mission: Recovering Education, launched together with UNESCO...
and the World Bank in 2021, contributed to scaling up efforts to ensure safe return to schools for all learners, remedying the learning losses, and supporting teachers. Through the partnership on *Blueprint for Joint Action for Refugees*, UNICEF continued working alongside UNHCR to enrol refugee and host community children in school, including reaching over half a million children in Ethiopia. Under the *Prospects* partnership, UNICEF launched the report, ‘Learning to earning’ for displaced youth: Unlocking the power of digital technologies’, on leveraging digital technologies to support youth transition from school to work in displaced and host communities.

UNICEF’s flagship *Reimagine Education* initiative contributed to scaling up of digital learning solutions and rallying a diverse set of partners to make digital learning a reality for every child. The *Learning Passport*, in partnership with Microsoft, was launched in 13 countries in 2021 and reached nearly 2 million children, youth, educators and caregivers.

Among continued efforts by UNICEF to support data systems, was the launch of the first-ever comprehensive global report on the situation of children with disabilities, *Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities*. UNICEF, in collaboration with UNESCO and the World Bank, continued monitoring national education responses to the pandemic and the status of school reopening, and established the *Learning Data Compact* to support coordinated efforts to close the learning data gaps that still exist worldwide.

UNICEF also launched the *Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Hub*, in collaboration with the World Bank Group and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), to provide a rich repository of resources for use by practitioners and decision makers.

UNICEF developed a new *Strategic Plan (2022–2025)* to strengthen the strategic approach to advocacy, programming and support to countries to bring Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) back on track, and protect a generation of children who have suffered the gravest impacts of the pandemic.

Now is the time for accelerating action to ensure that every child is fully supported in the key transitions of their learning journey. UNICEF will continue to work closely with partners, including with governments, to take urgent action to recover and transform education by: *Reaching* every child, *Assessing* their learning, *Prioritizing* teaching the fundamentals, *Increasing* catch-up learning, and *Developing* psychosocial health and well-being.

---

### Highlight of 2021 results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>48.6 million</strong></td>
<td>(50% girls), including 6.4 million children on the move and 31.7 million children in emergencies, have accessed education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>42.1 million</strong></td>
<td>children, including 18.1 million children in emergencies, received learning materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>85,586</strong></td>
<td>school management committees received training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>33 million</strong></td>
<td>children (51% girls), including 1.7 million children in emergencies, participated in skills development programmes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **45%** of countries have gender-responsive teaching and learning systems
- **43%** of countries have equitable education systems for access
- **52%** of countries had national school-related gender-based violence prevention and response mechanisms
- **48%** of countries have effective education systems for learning outcomes
- **28%** of countries have systems that institutionalize gender-equitable skills
Illustrative 2021 results

In **Haiti**, UNICEF supported 145,000 children (73,950 girls) and adolescents aged 5–19 and 4,190 vulnerable families affected by the disasters (including 200 children with disabilities), through the distribution of learning materials, classroom furniture, cash transfers, psychosocial support and non-formal education.

In **Burkina Faso**, 133,534 adolescent girls received child marriage prevention and care services by learning about sexual and reproductive health, leadership and life skills through 2,146 adolescent clubs.

In **Turkey**, UNICEF and Systems Applications and Products in Data Processing (SAP) supported the Design and Skills Labs model to enhance the digital and 21st-century skills of 611,524 adolescents (55 per cent girls) in 763 upper secondary schools.

In **Uzbekistan**, UNICEF supported the Government in developing and operationalizing child-friendly, inclusive policies, that resulted in increased preschool enrolment rates from 52 per cent in 2020 to 62 per cent in 2021.

In **Philippines**, UNICEF developed a platform that allowed 175,000 youth (43 per cent girls) to access education through online learning.

In **India**, with UNICEF support, 240,000 students (49 per cent girls) participated in training to prepare them for disasters.

In **Peru**, UNICEF and the Government implemented standards for Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE), and contributed to improving guidelines for adapting distance learning to address the educational gaps of vulnerable populations, reaching more than 120,600 students (59,697 of them girls) in five indigenous languages.

In **Ghana**, a digital literacy package was developed benefiting over 7 million pre-tertiary learners (3,442,889 of the total of 7,036,943 were girls), and 338,758 teachers (including 143,617 female teachers).

In **Malawi**, 435,445 children (50 per cent girls) aged 10–17 participated in a Safe School’s Empowerment Transformation and Active Citizenship training.

In conflict-affected areas of **South Sudan**, 1.5 million children were able to continue their learning, and 948,428 children (46 per cent girls) were provided with essential education services and supplies with UNICEF support.

In **Jordan**, the Nahno.org platform supported 77834 (52,290 female) active volunteers with access to civic and volunteering opportunities within their communities.

In **Worldwide**, over 75,000 school children (51 per cent girls) nationwide engaged in the Every Child Can Read initiative through reading corners in pre-primary classrooms and mobile libraries in remote areas.

In **Thailand**, over 75,000 school children (51 per cent girls) nationwide engaged in the Every Child Can Read initiative through reading corners in pre-primary classrooms and mobile libraries in remote areas.
Highlight of 2018–2021 Strategic Plan period results

Number of children receiving learning materials (in millions), cumulatively from 2018 to 2021

Number of children accessing education (in millions), cumulatively from 2018 to 2021

Number of school management committees receiving training, cumulatively from 2018-2021

Funding for Education

In 2021, partners contributed US$621 million ‘other resources – regular’ for Goal Area 2. Public sector partners contributed the largest share of ‘other resources – regular’ to Goal Area 2, at 81 per cent. The top five resource partners to Goal Area 2 in 2021 were the governments of Germany and Norway, the GPE, the European Commission, and the Education Cannot Wait Fund.

Total education expenses in 2021 were US$1.192 billion, accounting for 19 per cent of total UNICEF expenses for the year, the second highest category after health expenses, which accounted for 26 per cent. Compared to 2020, the share for education fell by 1.6 per cent, while in absolute terms, expenses increased by 2.0 per cent.

The share of spending from emergency funds (ORE) significantly decreased to 26 per cent compared to 45 per cent in 2018, 41 per cent in 2019 and 34 per cent in 2020. In absolute terms, spending from emergency funds has also steadily decreased since 2017. In 2021, it dropped by US$91 million. Despite these declines, humanitarian crises are continuing to affect large numbers of children, and UNICEF is continuing to play a very large role in backstopping education services in emergency situations.

In 2021, the amount of education spending from thematic funds was nearly US$121 million, of which a quarter was emergency thematic funds. West and Central Africa was the region with the highest spending of thematic funds, followed by the Middle East and North Africa and East and Southern Africa regions. These three regions cumulated 59 per cent of the total education spending from thematic funds in 2021.

Thematic funding remains a critical source of income for UNICEF programme delivery. It acts as an ideal complement to regular resources, as it can be allocated on a needs-basis, allowing UNICEF to respond more effectively, and facilitating longer-term planning and sustainability. The Government of Norway was the largest thematic resources partner in 2021, providing more than 50 per cent of all thematic education contributions received.

For more information, please contact:

Vina Barahman
Education Specialist, UNICEF Headquarters
vbarahman@unicef.org

Chelsea Lavallee
Education Consultant, UNICEF Headquarters
clavallee@unicef.org

To read the full report, please visit: www.unicef.org/reports/global-annual-results-2021-goal-area-2