



KEY ASKS

2023 • SDG National Reviews

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

Prioritizing the education, protection, health, and well-being of children constitutes the best and most robust investment we can make to fulfil the promise of Agenda 2030 and for peace, human security, and sustainable development for all of us and the planet we inhabit. It is also a fundamental human right for all children, adolescents, and young people.

The [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#) recognizes that children have fundamental rights - including access to equitable and well financed social services. In addition, the [Addis Ababa Action Agenda \(AAAA\)](#) recognizes the link between child- and youth-focused investments and growth by treating children and youth not just as passive recipients of social services and assistance but as active agents of inclusive development. Specifically, the Agenda:

- Recognizes that investing in children and youth is critical to achieving inclusive, equitable and sustainable development for present and future generations (AAAA para 7);
- Recognizes the need to support countries that face particular challenges to make the requisite investments in children and youth (AAAA para 7);
- Reaffirms the vital importance of promoting and protecting the rights of all children, and ensuring that no child is left behind (AAAA para 7);
- Commits to promote national youth strategies as a key instrument for meeting the needs and aspirations of young people (AAAA para 16);

Countries have also made several commitments as part of the SDG Means of Implementation (MOI) indicators (see [IAEG report on SDG indicators to the UN Statistical Commission](#)). These include to regularly monitor: the proportion of resources allocated by the government directly to poverty reduction programmes (MOI indicator 1.a.1); the proportion of total government spending on essential services (education, health, and social protection, (MOI indicator 1. a.2); pro-poor public social spending (MOI indicator 1.b.1); programme coverage and results achieved in major SDG priority areas, such as education, health and WASH; as well as primary government expenditures as a proportion of original approved budget, by sector, or by budget codes, or similar (MOI 16.6.1).

Countries are also encouraged to introduce “nationally appropriate spending targets for quality investments in essential public services for all, including health, education, energy, water and sanitation, consistent with national sustainable development strategies” and to “provide fiscally sustainable and nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, with a focus on those furthest below the poverty line and vulnerable groups, including children ([Addis Ababa Action Agenda](#), para 12).

INVESTING IN CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

The onset and ongoing crisis of the global COVID-19 pandemic threatens to roll back years of progress on the SDGs. There is also a risk that investments in child rights and well-being as articulated in the 2030 Agenda Outcome Document and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda will be deprioritized in the face of economic shocks and recessions globally. To that end, UNICEF and our partners encourage governments to call for **urgent action to Protect Our Children and to make specific commitments, including financial commitments, to realize this pledge**. Recognising the need to continue to invest in children to safeguard progress, in 2021, UNICEF issued [Financing an Inclusive Recovery for Children: A Call to Action](#) This calls on governments and the international community and the private sector to:

- Safeguard critical social spending and minimize the negative impacts of the economic crisis on people, children in particular, ensuring children are last in line for budget cuts.
- Ensure the effective and efficient use of financial resources across social sectors for human capital development, maximizing coverage and impact for all children.

- Identify and deploy additional international and domestic financing options, using innovative approaches as necessary to direct adequate finance towards an inclusive recovery that protects children (especially the poorest and most marginalized), tackles inequalities (including those of gender that have been revealed and deepened by the pandemic), and sets a course for more resilient economies to respond to future shocks.

Governments around the world have mobilized billions of dollars to save their economies. But there is another impending and devastating loss if we do not act: a lost generation of children. Progress towards the SDGs is slipping backwards, and children are the hardest hit. Not only does this have grave consequences for children now, but it is also a threat to their future and our shared humanity.

Building on the Member State pledge to [Protect Our Children](#), initiated by the EU, GRULAC and Members of the Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs, a proposed Six Point Plan to Protect our Children includes urgent action to prevent, mitigate and respond to the worst effects of the pandemic as it continues to spread around the globe. It also proposes a set of practical and concrete actions to safeguard child rights now and to reimagine a better future. It aims to bring the world back together around a common cause: the health and wellbeing of current and future generations and the full realization of the SDGs and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

[A proposed Six-Point Plan to Protect Our Children](#)

In all the below six points, decision makers must prioritize one critical step: **listening to children and young people and including them in decision-making**. They will be living with the impact of this pandemic for years to come and must be included in decisions that affect their future. To fulfil our shared SDG pledge to Leave No One Behind, any action taken must prioritize **the rights of the most marginalized children and young people – including girls; those facing poverty, exclusion, or violence; children with disabilities; children affected or displaced by humanitarian crisis; or children without parental care**:

- Ensure all children learn, including by closing the digital divide.
- Guarantee access to primary health care and make vaccines affordable and available to every child.
- Support and protect the mental health of children and young people and bring an end to abuse, gender-based violence, and neglect in childhood.
- Increase access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene and address environmental degradation and climate change.
- Reverse the rise in child poverty and ensure an inclusive recovery for all.
- Redouble efforts to protect and support children and their families living through conflict, disaster, and displacement.

For the realization of the 2030 agenda, it will be key to continue work together to ensure all children have **access to social services that are equitable and adequately financed** to mitigate the worst effects of the pandemic and **strengthen social protection responses** to reach all families and children – in particular, the most vulnerable and marginalized.



KEY ASKS

UNICEF encourages the following actions to improve understanding of social spending on children, adolescents, and young people in all settings, including within the context of fragile and humanitarian context; and endeavours to support governments on these actions:

1. **Ensure that social services have adequate public budget allocations, while improving the equity, transparency, and reporting of public budgets. Safeguarding social spending to guarantee the rights of all children and young people, including the most disadvantaged groups.** A country's budget, in particular, reflects how well political commitments under the 2030 Agenda and Financing for Development (FFD) agreements are being translated into direct actions to benefit the most excluded children, adolescents, youth and most disadvantaged groups. Yet, under current reporting practices most government budgets are organized by sector and functional area, but do not provide timely and detailed measurement on public spending on health, education and social protection that addresses the human capital potential of young people.
2. **Monitor and increase investments on underfinanced social services, specifically those cross-cutting in nature, and are not always prioritized in traditional sectoral budgets.** For example, in the area of child protection, investments in family or foster care; response to and prevention of violence against children; and justice for children are distinct from social protection and not always classified under such budgets. Interventions in areas like gender equality, adolescent development, nutrition, and early childhood development similarly cut across sectors, ranging from health to education to agriculture to water and sanitation. Investments that support the school-to-work transition are also commonly captured by education, labour, business development and social protection budgets.
3. **Adopt principles of results-based reporting to spending on children and young people, with a particular focus adequacy, equity, transparency and effectiveness.** Examples include tracking of spending that explicitly addresses geographic disparities of services for children, adolescents, and youth (both quality and access), as well as inequities among different population groups and gender in service provision or other matters. Possible criteria for spending effectiveness include the degree to which budget programs intended for children, adolescents, and youth (directly or indirectly) succeed in achieving their objectives.

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

4. **Carry out public advocacy around the budgeting process.** Public participation in the budgeting process can lead to the improvement of the frameworks capable to demonstrate transparent processes and also track sectoral spending on specific SDGs. Such practices include routine budget briefs, fiscal space analysis and related advocacy with Members of Parliament, civil society, media (for relevant examples and country case studies see here and here).
5. **Carry out systematic equity gap analysis to understand better which children, adolescents and youth are being left behind and where progress for these young people is lagging and determine the underlying causes and bottlenecks.** The policy and programmatic response to this analysis should focus on integration of service delivery platforms, systematically support the participation of community and strategies to reduce vulnerability and linking budgets and spending to results.
6. **Support the introduction and dissemination of blended finance solutions, to bridge the gap of existing public financing.** Innovative mechanisms and approaches such as blended finance have a critical role in catalysing contributions from different sources for financing the SDGs. The mobilization of combined efforts and good practices from the public and the private sectors can enable the provision of partnerships and financing instruments such as venture capital, impact bonds, brain trusts and other public-private financing models to deliver investments in children, adolescents, and youth and in support of achieving the SDGs.
7. **Scale-up the adoption, integration, and deployment of new technologies to support progress across the SDGs.** New digital technologies are emerging as opportunities to address long-standing development challenges across the SDGs that directly impact young people—from child protection to nutrition to access to education to healthcare. Technological innovations in programme implementation, service delivery, etc. can assist in reducing inefficiencies and costs in the public sector and in removing some important barriers that constrain the development of sustainable finance practices.