



# KEY ASKS

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## SDG 4: QUALITY EDUCATION FOR EVERY CHILD

Education is an investment not only in children’s futures, but in our future economic productivity, poverty reduction, social cohesion, sustainability and more. Achieving the targets under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 will also help to accelerate progress under many other SDGs. The adoption of SDG 4 was both a recognition of the importance of education and a commitment to achieve more ambitious results in learning outcomes, skills development, and access to access to education. UNICEF’s global priority of working to ensure **every child learns** is fully aligned with SDG 4 and other education-related targets and includes the most vulnerable children in humanitarian crises and development contexts, regardless of wealth, location, gender, disability, migration status, language, or minority status. To learn and develop the skills they need to reach their full potential, find meaningful work, and participate in society, every child should have an equal chance to participate in quality education. Please click [here](#) for more information on UNICEF’s Global Education Strategy.



### KEY ASKS

1. **Tackle the learning crisis by supporting foundational learning for every child.** The world is in the depths of a learning crisis. According to estimates, nearly two-thirds of 10-year-olds globally are unable to read and understand a simple story. These children’s futures – and those of their families and communities – hang in the balance as education systems fail to ensure they learn the basic skills they need. **Without urgent action on the learning crisis, this generation risks losing \$21 trillion in potential lifetime earnings.** To address this crisis, UNICEF and partners have developed the ‘RAPID’ framework, setting out key actions to support learning: reach every child and keep them in school; assess learning levels regularly; prioritise teaching the fundamentals; increase the efficiency of instruction (including catch-up programmes), and develop psychosocial health and well-being, so every child is ready to learn. We ask every Member State to urgently endorse the [Commitment to Action on Foundational Learning](#) which includes an agreement to implement the RAPID agenda and regularly assess countries’ progress against it.
2. **Demonstrate how SDG 4’s global ambitions are being nationalized into plans, policies, budgets, data collection efforts, and reports, with a focus on learning.** For too many children, entering the classroom does not equate to learning. Business as usual at the national level will not move the world towards achieving SDG 4. Member States are encouraged to review and update existing sector plans, ensuring they are context-based and draw on innovations from other countries or regions. A focus on skills development is encouraged, ensuring:
  - Every 5-year-old is developmentally on track and is ready to start school, so children are ready to learn.
  - Every 10-year-old can read, do basic maths and acquires socioemotional skills, as the foundation for all higher skills.
  - Every 18-year-old has the foundational, transferable, entrepreneurial, and job-specific skills they need to succeed in work and life. This includes support for the transition to work, such as through apprenticeships and internships, as well as skills for the future of work and technology, skills for a green economy and sustainability, and skills that promote leadership, resilience, and tolerance among young people.

As children and young people’s learning is predicated on their health and well-being (as set out in the RAPID framework referenced above), these needs must also be met to progress on the goals of SDG4.

3. **Scale-up digital learning solutions to help accelerate learning for every child.** The innovations and partnerships mobilized in response to the COVID-19 pandemic offer an opportunity for accelerating the transformation of education, so all children and young people develop the skills they need to succeed. A key element of this transformation is harnessing the power of technology and scaling up world-class digital learning solutions to reach all children. Digital learning solutions can be deployed at speed and scale to reach children, young people, educators, and teachers with affordable and accessible content tailored to their interests, needs and context and in languages they speak. These solutions can be an innovative, efficient, and effective method of supporting children’s skills development. However, more than half of the world’s children and

young people are on the wrong side of the digital divide, with girls, children from poorer backgrounds, and children in remote areas most likely to be affected. As such, Member States are encouraged to work to close the digital divide and harness the power of technology for learning.

4. **Provide quality education and learning opportunities for the most vulnerable.** Too often, children's access to education present inequities according to their geographic location, sex, gender, disability status, economic status, or other criteria. In response, Member States are encouraged to ensure national and local governments accelerate action plans to address inequities and ensure all children learn. This should include using technology, inclusive and gender responsive pedagogies and flexible learning pathways while also removing social, legal, and economic barriers to learning for all children.
5. **Protect education in emergencies and improve the resilience of education systems.** In emergencies, learning protects children and families, providing essential lifesaving support and inspiring hope for a better future. Yet, children affected by crises are among the most marginalised, often facing significant barriers to learning. These children must be supported to continue their education, with Member States encouraged to protect schools in crises, prioritise learning in emergency responses, and support refugee and displaced children to continue their learning. Member States are also encouraged to build the resilience of education systems to ensure they are built to withstand the shocks we know are coming, including the effects of climate change.
6. **Implement SDG-focused learning throughout schools to raise awareness and inspire positive action.** Member States are encouraged to ensure local and national governments and other school systems formally embed SDG education in national curricula (in line with Target 4.7), so students can learn about the importance of the issues articulated in the SDGs and how to think critically about barriers and solutions for achieving them. Through schools, students should also be consulted on SDG plans, progress, and reports.



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

Achieving the globally agreed upon [SDG 4 Targets and Indicators](#) will require expanded data collection and disaggregation. SDG 4 comprises seven targets and three means of implementation. These are monitored through a set of **12** global indicators recommended for global monitoring of progress on key targets. In addition, [31 other thematic indicators](#) have been identified by a UNESCO-led, UNICEF-supported body of member states, multilateral agencies and civil society called the Technical Cooperation Group (TCG). The non-global indicators are optional and complementary to the global ones, allowing for a more comprehensive picture of SDG 4 achievement. Countries may customize the targets, as well as choose their own indicators to monitor SDG 4, including country-specific indicators not part of the 12 global or 31 non-global indicators, but it is recommended wherever possible to align national indicators to the internationally agreed SDG 4 indicators. Not all 12 global indicators (as well as many non-global indicators) have established methodology and/or widespread availability, either at national level or when disaggregated by priority groups such as children with disabilities and ethnic and linguistic minorities. To fill these gaps, Member States are encouraged to:

- **Carry out a data mapping exercise to identify SDG 4 data gaps**, including identifying existing data sources and indicators based on national priorities, setting national targets, and developing data strategy to monitor progress towards SDG 4 goals.
- **Collect and analyse data from different sources** to generate baseline estimates for SDG 4 indicators.
- **Mainstream SDG 4 monitoring within national education sector plans and strategies.**
- **Collaborate with partners to implement new [MICS household survey modules](#)** including early child development, early learning, and child functioning (disabilities).
- **Improve capacity to collect and disaggregate data for disadvantaged children** to ensure no child is left behind, including by improving data on children with disabilities, children in conflict- and disaster-affected areas, migrant and displaced children, and attacks on education.
- **Improve measurement on the acquisition of life skills**, such as transferable and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.
- **Monitor countries progress against the RAPID framework**



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

Research shows that proper resource allocation and financial investments in education yield some of the strongest economic and social returns. Every year of schooling raises an individual's earnings by [10 per cent](#). This rate of return is, in fact, higher than alternative [investments](#), including bonds, stocks, deposits, and housing. UNICEF recommends that Member States:

- **Tackle the learning crisis by investing in foundational learning, prioritising the most vulnerable children, and increasing the proportion of Official Development Assistance going towards pre-primary and primary education.** Foundational learning, including basic reading, maths, and socioemotional skills, is essential for all learning throughout childhood and beyond and is crucial for the realisation of nearly all targets under SDG 4. It should be seen not as a cost, but as an investment. Member States are encouraged to close the gap in financing for foundational learning to tackle the learning crisis and thus enable further progress under SDG4. These efforts should be complemented by increased investment in pre-primary education, to ensure children are ready to learn when they reach primary school.
- **Protect education budgets and target public spending at those left furthest behind.** Even before the pandemic, government education expenditures in many lower income countries barely reached the international benchmark of **four per cent** of their GDP going to education. The economic impacts of the pandemic and possible global recession are likely to cause governments to face further financial pressures, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Yet the annual funding gap to achieve SDG 4 for lower income countries has increased from \$148 billion pre-COVID to nearly \$200 billion post-pandemic. Reductions in public spending on education will be further exacerbated by declines in household spending, often an important component of education spending in low-income countries. In response, Member States are encouraged to: target public resources towards lower levels of education, supporting the most marginalized across the system; prioritize equity and efficiency in public spending and investment; and improve financial data and public financial management systems to ensure their education strategies are fully funded.
- **Protect education budgets through humanitarian official development assistance (ODA).** This is important particularly in protracted crisis. Member States are encouraged to scale up bilateral ODA to meet the existing commitments, help reverse cuts in humanitarian aid and overall direct more resources towards children.
- **Apply the Education Commission's recommendation of "progressive universalism."** Recognizing the scarcity of public funding compared to the needs, the [Education Commission](#) recommends that when balancing spending across different levels of education, decision-makers should prioritize the poorest and youngest where social returns are highest, so that poorer households' spending on basic education is minimized. Member States are encouraged to adopt financing plans to fully finance education following principles of progressive universalism, including adopting equity financing formulas that reflect the needs of the most marginalized children.
- **Adopt principles of results-based management, with a focus on equity and effectiveness.** Member States are encouraged to adopt policies that allow for the equitable targeting of resources and improve the efficiency of overall education spending. With limited resources and a long way to go before every child is learning, it is essential to identify and support country-specific, cost-effective equitable policies and interventions. Member States are encouraged to strengthen learning assessment systems, particularly for the early grades, and ensure strong accountability structures to improve the way in which investments are transformed into learning.