AN INVESTMENT CASE FOR PARTNERS

UNICEF STRATEGIC PLAN 2026–2029

INVESTING IN CHILDREN. STRENGTHENING SYSTEMS. POWERING PROGRESS.SYSTEM-LEVEL IMPACT POWERED BY QUALITY, FLEXIBLE FUNDING

unicef for every child

The choices made in the next four years will shape outcomes for decades

Progress toward 2030 could accelerate, or hard-won gains in child survival, learning and protection could stall. The SDG window is narrowing: two in three 10-year-olds cannot read with comprehension despite being developmentally on track at age five. Thirty million children under five remain at preventable risk of death. These are investment and systems failures. They are also reversible.

The fiscal environment makes wise choices both harder and more consequential. Development assistance is tightening even as humanitarian needs reach record levels. Declining resources are one risk. Equally serious is the prospect that remaining resources become fragmented and reactive, funding isolated projects rather than the systems that deliver results at scale and over time.

> ***UNICEF's Strategic Plan 2026–2029 is a direct response to this moment. It sets a clear investment ambition, $28 billion mobilized over four years, to deliver results through systems built to last: government-led, nationally owned and resilient enough to protect children when shocks arrive.***

Investment ambition and strategic shifts

The investment ambition

$28B
total mobilized 2026–2029

$5.3B
must be raised as a minimum as unrestricted funding, the strategic backbone that protects coherence and resilience across the portfolio

$0.91
of every $1 goes directly to programmes for children

Five impact results by 2029

RESULT	TARGET BY 2029
Impact Result 1 **Children Survive and Thrive**	**10 million** child lives saved; 500 million children healthy, well-nourished and on-track
Impact Result 2 **Children Learn and Acquire Skills**	**350 million** more children and young people learning and skilled
Impact Result 3 **Children have Equitable Opportunities**	**100 million** fewer children in multidimensional poverty
Impact Result 4 **Children are Protected from Violence**	**350 million** children protected from violence, abuse and exploitation
Impact Result 5 **Children Live in a Safe Environment**	**500 million** children better protected from disasters and climate and environmental risks

Three deliberate shifts

The 2026–2029 plan is shaped by three deliberate shifts, each grounded in the fiscal and geopolitical realities of this moment:

1 Protecting and prioritizing social spending for children even under fiscal pressure

2 Leveraging domestic, blended and innovative finance beyond traditional ODA

3 Designing for interconnected, system-level impact, because these challenges do not arrive in isolation

These results reinforce each other: investment in any one amplifies progress across all others. UNICEF's role is catalytic, contributing through systems strengthening, innovation and advocacy to accelerate government-led, nationally owned outcomes.

Differentiated strategies across country contexts

UNICEF operates across the full humanitarian-development continuum, from acute crisis response to upstream policy reform, with a consistent focus on equity, rights and nationally owned systems.

Low-income and fragile

Protect essential services, stabilize systems, deliver lifesaving assistance while building national capacity. UNICEF as provider of last resort.

Lower-middle income

Strengthen national systems, support governments to address persistent equity gaps and build capacity to sustain progress, with a focus on leveraging domestic financing for children.

Upper-middle income

Support policy and programme reform, public finance engagement and the scaling up of evidence-based solutions to address the inequities that persist within otherwise stronger national systems.

Humanitarian contexts

Undertake principled humanitarian action with a consistent bridge to development and peacebuilding, protecting today's gains while building tomorrow's resilience.

Wherever partners' priorities sit, whether a specific region, income context, thematic area or emergency setting, UNICEF has a relevant, evidence-based offer. And because UNICEF operates across all contexts simultaneously, investments made in stable settings build the very systems that protect children when crises arrive.

Three accelerators that convert investment into scale

The Strategic Plan identifies three accelerators, each with a demonstrable multiplier effect across all five Impact Results.

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Adolescent girls

$28.60 return per $1 invested in girls' education

Investment in girls' health, education and protection generates powerful intergenerational returns. Educated girls earn more, marry later and have healthier children, investing in turn in the generation that follows.

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Community and frontline systems

Last-mile delivery turns national policy into real results

When community health workers, teachers and social workers are properly trained and supported, entire systems function better, reaching displaced, marginalized and hard-to-reach children.

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Innovation and digital transformation

Technologies available now, deployable at scale

Digital public infrastructure and AI are accelerating progress that once took decades. Data systems make excluded children visible; digital platforms extend learning; AI optimizes supply chains.

A funding portfolio designed for coherence

Every contribution at every level functions as part of a coherent portfolio greater than the sum of its parts. Flexible, unrestricted funding enables UNICEF to respond within hours to crises, reallocate resources equitably across countries and sustain systems-strengthening work that cannot be tied to a single sector or timeline.

Unrestricted funding
The strategic backbone

Enables rapid crisis response, equity-focused allocation across countries and the flexibility to sustain long-term systems work wherever it is needed most.

Thematic funding
(lightly restricted)

Bridges partner priorities with portfolio outcomes. Multi-year, outcome-focused and minimally restricted, preserving flexibility while targeting thematic results.

Targeted investment
(fully restricted)

Drives innovation, proof-of-concept and systemic reform. Coordinated to complement rather than fragment the portfolio.

Guatemala – Pilar Escudero, UNICEF Communication carries Yamilet, 2, at the Comprehensive Child Development Community Center, which provides comprehensive care to children from conception to age 4, along with their families.

The investment proposition

By investing through UNICEF's portfolio, partners contribute to:

Protecting social spending for children in an era of fiscal constraint

Building the resilience that protects development gains when crises arrive

Strengthening nationally owned systems that deliver results for every child

Accelerating holistic results across survival, learning, protection, equity and climate resilience

Leveraging domestic, blended and innovative finance to multiply impact

The window to shape the 2026–2029 partnership portfolio is open now

Partners who engage early help shape programming priorities and position their investments for maximum leverage as the Plan scales. Waiting until 2027 or 2028 does not reduce the cost; it reduces the impact.

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UNICEF is a trusted partner in 190+ countries and territories, directing $0.91 of every $1 directly to programmes. Real-time results are publicly available through UNICEF's Transparency Portal.

The years until 2030 represent a narrowing window

Two-thirds of child-related SDG targets are currently off-track. The question is no longer whether to act, but how: through systems capable of delivering results at scale, or through isolated interventions that cannot. UNICEF's Strategic Plan 2026–2029 is an invitation to join a global coalition for children, one that invests in systems, protects flexibility and accelerates impact at scale.

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