

TEST TO TEACH

Findings from the Foundational Learning Action Tracker 2026

HEMPEL FOUNDATION

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Foreword



Foundational learning gives children the essential building blocks for future learning and skills development. Yet, too many children remain in school without acquiring the basic literacy, numeracy and socio-emotional skills they need to learn and thrive.

The Foundational Learning Action Tracker (FLAT) was established to make government action on foundational learning more visible – tracking policy and systems strengthening efforts needed to turn commitments into sustained action. Guided by a Steering Committee that includes education ministers and sector leaders, informed by a Technical Reference Group and shaped through consultation with Ministries of Education, FLAT is a shared resource for governments and partners. Now in its fourth year, FLAT draws on data from 123 low- and middle-income countries, highlighting where progress is taking hold and where important gaps remain.

This year, we chose to spotlight assessment. Assessment is not an end in itself. When education systems can generate, interpret and use assessment data, they can identify children's learning needs, target interventions, and strengthen classroom teaching.

FLAT 2026 findings point to an important lesson. Countries are making progress in establishing policies to support foundational learning, but policy action tends to outpace the systems needed to effectively implement them. Assessment illustrates this gap particularly clearly: About 7 in 10 countries report using assessment data nationwide for education policy and planning, but only about 4 in 10 report using it to inform classroom practices across all schools – a step that depends on systems for teacher capacity, practical tools and ongoing support.

Closing this gap will require more than strong policies. It means building the institutional capacity, financing, data systems, teacher support and implementation mechanisms needed to sustain those policies at scale. It also means making better use of assessment data, so that evidence on what children are learning reach the people who can act on them – from ministries to teachers – and shape what happens in the classroom.

There are encouraging examples of countries building these connections. FLAT 2026 highlights efforts to strengthen assessment systems, using evidence to target support, improve middle-tier management and support, build teacher capacity and develop approaches that respond more effectively and holistically to children's needs. These experiences demonstrate that progress from policy ambition to sustained implementation is possible.

FLAT 2026 gives us a clearer picture of where we stand. What matters now is what we do with that knowledge. The challenge before us is to translate evidence into political commitment, investment into effective classroom practice, and national ambition into measurable gains in children's learning. Every child deserves these foundations, and the time to act is now.

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Executive Summary



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Since 2023, the Foundational Learning Action Tracker (FLAT) has monitored government efforts targeted at supporting foundational learning, anchored in the RAPID Framework. Across 123 low- and middle-income countries with data, FLAT 2026 shows that countries are building strong foundations for learning, with government efforts averaging at the Established level – the third level on the 4-point FLAT rating scale. Progress varies across the RAPID dimensions: While countries are continuing strong efforts to reach every child, greater action is needed to increase the efficiency of instruction and develop children's overall well-being.

A central finding of FLAT 2026 is that progress in establishing policies continues to move faster than the systems needed to put them into practice. As observed in previous FLAT cycles, policy action ratings outpace systems strengthening ratings across all RAPID dimensions. While developing policies is an important first step, gaps remain in establishing the systems needed to implement, monitor and sustain them. Policies and systems also need to be backed by adequate financing: Among 56 countries with data, 42 per cent show a mismatch between government efforts and education spending for foundational learning.

Progress is clearest where governments can act through standards and materials for foundational learning. More than 8 in 10 countries report clearly defined benchmarks for foundational literacy and numeracy in the early-grade curriculum nationwide. Among countries reporting in each survey round, the share of countries providing reading textbooks to every student has continued to increase.

But across levels of the education system, progress is uneven when it comes to assessment – the spotlight of this year's FLAT report. Most countries use assessment data to shape decisions at the system level: About 7 in 10 countries report using assessment data for education policy and planning nationwide, and 6 in 10 report using it to inform intervention programmes for foundational learning nationwide. Both areas have shown consistent gains over each FLAT cycle. By contrast, translating evidence at the classroom level remains a challenge: Only about 4 in 10 countries report using assessment data to inform classroom practices across all schools, with no change over the past year.

This classroom-level gap points to weaknesses in the systems that enable assessments to support teaching and learning. Only about half of countries report providing nationwide support to teachers on assessments of foundational learning, and fewer than a third report an annual large-scale assessment of reading and/or math in the early grades. Stronger learning assessment systems are needed to safeguard regular data collection, improve middle-tier management and support, build teacher capacity and provide practical tools and guidance to effectively act on evidence in the classroom.

Beyond assessment, important gaps remain in strengthening comprehensive approaches to meeting children where they are. Only about a third of countries report nationwide programmes that target instruction to children's learning levels and provide catch-up for those who have fallen behind. Challenges persist in addressing overall well-being, with only about a third of countries reporting nationwide school-based mental health and psychosocial support services for students.

The priority is to close the gap between policy adoption and effective implementation. This means equipping teachers with the capacity and tools to use assessment data in the classroom, investing in the systems that put policies to work, and expanding targeted, holistic support from middle-tier management, including district offices and school leaders. Most countries are holding steady rather than advancing in their efforts, but the scale of the global learning crisis demands more than steady progress. The task now is to turn stable policy commitments into stronger results – so that every teacher, every classroom and every child can be reached.

Introduction

In many education systems, it remains difficult to know whether children who are in school are actually learning. While enrolment data are widely available, information on whether children are acquiring foundational skills – the basic literacy, numeracy and socio-emotional competencies they need to learn and thrive – is often limited, delayed or incomplete. As a result, teachers and decision-makers may not always have a clear and timely understanding of learning needs, and in some cases, perceived learning levels are substantially higher than those found when children are assessed.[1] This can limit their ability to identify gaps, target support and respond effectively, especially for children who are falling behind.

Turning data into better learning outcomes requires systems that can generate and use evidence effectively. Without timely, reliable and actionable information, efforts to improve instruction, curriculum delivery and learning support risk being insufficiently targeted and slow to respond to children's needs. Syntheses of research show that assessment improves learning by helping teachers understand students' current learning levels and adapt their instruction accordingly.[2] Assessment systems that enable the effective use of evidence therefore play a critical role in moving from policy intent into measurable improvements in learning outcomes.

The Foundational Learning Action Tracker supports countries in translating commitments on foundational learning into action. Launched by UNICEF and the Hempel Foundation in 2023, the Foundational Learning Action Tracker (FLAT) monitors government actions aimed at improving foundational learning in low- and middle-income countries. FLAT is guided by a Steering Committee that includes education ministers and sector leaders, with technical review provided by a Technical Reference Group comprised of foundational learning experts from government, regional bodies, academia, civil society and international organizations. The tool is structured around the RAPID Framework developed by the Global Coalition for Foundational Learning. The Framework identifies five key dimensions for accelerating learning: Reach every child and keep them in school; Assess learning levels regularly; Prioritize teaching the fundamentals; Increase the efficiency of instruction; and Develop psychosocial health and well-being.

This report presents findings from FLAT 2026 across 123 low- and middle-income countries. Data were collected through two main data streams. First, a global survey was conducted from May to July 2026 to gather data on ongoing policy actions. Responses were collected from 86 UNICEF country offices, of which 92 per cent were completed in consultation with Ministry of Education counterparts. Second, data on systems strengthening efforts were gathered through UNICEF's annual internal monitoring and reporting exercise with its programme countries, with 119 countries reporting on at least one indicator from this exercise. Combining these two data sources, FLAT 2026 covers 123 countries with information on policy actions and/or systems strengthening efforts. FLAT data are presented on a 4-point scale, describing countries' progress on policy action and systems strengthening: (1) Not yet initiating, (2) Initiating, (3) Established, and (4) Championing. As data are self-reported and participation varies across years, findings should be interpreted with appropriate caution (*see Box 1*).

This year's FLAT report places a spotlight on assessments – not as a standalone pillar but as a system-wide enabler of learning improvement. Guided by the strategic direction of the FLAT Steering Committee, this report examines how assessment can support action across all five RAPID dimensions. The ability of systems to identify learning needs, target interventions and track progress depends on whether learning is measured regularly and results are used effectively. This report examines both the availability of learning assessment systems and their role in supporting action across education systems. The report begins with the RAPID 5 – a set of key indicators from the broader FLAT that represent the essential ingredients for accelerating foundational learning. The subsequent chapters examine progress on each of the five RAPID dimensions, including insights on how countries are using assessment and data to improve foundational learning.

Box 1. Methodological note

The FLAT uses two main data sources: (i) a RAPID survey conducted with Ministries of Education and UNICEF country offices, and (ii) UNICEF's annual monitoring and reporting exercise with its programme countries. Each data source is described below, along with the method of calculation for their respective ratings presented in this report.

RAPID SURVEY

The survey builds on previous iterations by UNICEF and partner organizations from the Global Coalition for Foundational Learning, dating back to March 2022.[3, 4, 5] Significant revisions were made in 2024, including item analysis to reduce the number of survey items, as well as a series of consultations to introduce new indicators constituting the RAPID 5. New survey items on child protection and inclusive education were introduced in 2025, followed by an indicator on core components of effective instruction in 2026, drawing on research from the What Works Hub for Global Education.[6, 7] The 2026 round also included further disaggregation of items by domain – literacy, numeracy and socio-emotional skills – where possible.

The RAPID survey was conducted from May to July 2026, with a total of 99 country responses collected from Ministries of Education and UNICEF country offices. As the FLAT focuses on low- and middle-income countries, this report presents data from the 86 low- and middle-income countries that responded to the survey.[8] Of these countries, 92 per cent reported that the Ministry of Education was consulted on some or all survey items. Specifically, 59 per cent of all countries reported that the survey was completed jointly with the Ministry of Education through a workshop, meeting or other form of direct engagement, while a further 21 per cent reported that the survey was completed by the UNICEF country office and shared with Ministry of Education for review. The remaining respondents reported that the Ministry of Education was consulted on only some survey items.

The RAPID survey asks countries to report on the scope at which policy actions are currently being implemented at the primary level. Table 1 presents how each scope of implementation was defined by the response options in the survey.

Due to the self-reported nature of the survey, several limitations remain, including potential for bias, varying interpretations of survey items and differing perceptions among respondents. Several measures were taken to mitigate these limitations. Country offices were encouraged to hold consultation workshops with their Ministry of Education counterparts and partners to promote a shared understanding of survey items and draw on relevant country-level evidence. Where possible, data were triangulated with published sources, including international databases (e.g., UNESCO Institute for Statistics database) and national reports (e.g., statistical yearbooks). The FLAT Technical Reference Group reviewed and validated the data, drawing on members' technical expertise. Sensitivity checks found that the methods used for imputation and year-on-year comparisons have no material impact on aggregate findings. While these measures cannot eliminate all sources of uncertainty, they strengthen confidence in the consistency and robustness of the data.

UNICEF INTERNAL MONITORING AND REPORTING EXERCISE

UNICEF conducts an annual comprehensive monitoring and reporting exercise with its country offices for performance management and reporting. The annual exercise includes indicators (with multiple sub-dimensions) related to equitable and inclusive access to learning opportunities and improved learning, effectiveness of assessment systems, digital learning, skills, and adolescent participation and engagement.

Relevant indicators from this exercise were mapped against each dimension of the RAPID Framework, with a total of 119 countries having data for at least one indicator. Each indicator includes defined criteria to guide countries in reporting the level of effectiveness of key education system aspects, such as learning assessment systems (mapped to the RAPID dimension of 'Assess learning levels regularly') and teacher development systems (mapped to the RAPID dimension of 'Increase the efficiency of instruction').



METHOD OF CALCULATION

For each RAPID dimension, three types of ratings were computed for each country: policy action, systems strengthening and overall rating.

1. To compute a **policy action rating** for a RAPID dimension, responses to relevant survey items were converted to a 4-point scale based on the scope of implementation reported for each policy measure, from 1 ('No implementation') to 4 ('Nationwide implementation'). For items not based on implementation scope (e.g., average textbook-student ratio), responses were converted using defined cut-points (e.g., a score of 4 for 1:1 ratio). The average of these scores across indicators was calculated to produce the country's policy action rating.

2. To compute a **systems strengthening rating** for a RAPID dimension, data are derived from the respective RAPID indicator mapped in UNICEF's internal monitoring exercise. Each indicator is assessed using a standardized matrix that is already aligned to a 4-point scale, based on established criteria and methodology.

3. To compute an **overall rating** for a RAPID dimension, the average of the policy action rating and the systems strengthening rating was calculated. If only one of the two ratings was available, that score was used as the overall rating.

This process results in three ratings for each of the five RAPID dimensions. The 4-point scale corresponds to the following increasing levels of progress: (1) Not yet initiating, (2) Initiating, (3) Established, and (4) Championing. The average of the five overall ratings is computed to produce a single overall FLAT rating.

For countries missing data in 2026, 2025 policy action and systems strengthening ratings were used, based on the assumption that efforts had not significantly changed over the past year. Imputation was applied to at least one RAPID dimension in 33 countries. Combining actual and imputed data, FLAT 2026 ratings were produced for a total of 123 low- and middle-income countries. A sensitivity check comparing ratings for the full sample against a restricted sample of countries with only actual 2026 data found no material differences in dimension-level or overall ratings, confirming that the imputed data does not meaningfully alter the overall findings.

COMPARISONS ACROSS YEARS

Within each RAPID dimension and the RAPID 5, indicators showing 'strong progress' and 'limited progress' are identified by considering both the rate of change since indicator tracking began and the current level of implementation. Year-on-year comparisons of RAPID survey indicators are based on the 39 countries that have responded to every round since 2023.[9] This ensures that reported changes reflect the same set of countries over time, rather than shifts in which countries responded each year. To assess whether this matched panel introduces selection bias, comparisons were also made using the full set of respondents in each year. This comparison showed broadly consistent patterns: Both approaches identified similar indicators as showing the greatest and least progress, as well as similar indicators consistently ranking highest and lowest in reported implementation.

Comparisons between 2026 and 2025 ratings are restricted to a set of 59 low- and middle-income countries with the same underlying data composition across both years, based on actual, non-imputed data wherever ratings are available. These are countries for which every component contributing to its RAPID dimension scores – policy action, systems strengthening, or both, depending on which were available – is available for both 2025 and 2026. A change greater than or equal to 0.5 is considered an increase, and a change less than or equal to -0.5 is considered a decrease.





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TABLE 1. RAPID survey response options on scope of implementation

RAPID DIMENSION	RESPONSE OPTIONS FOR SCOPE OF IMPLEMENTATION AND CORRESPONDING RATING			
	NOT YET INITIATING (1)	**INITIATING (2)**	**ESTABLISHED (3)**	**CHAMPIONING (4)**
Reach every child and keep them in school Assess learning levels regularly Prioritize teaching the fundamentals	No implementation	Small-scale implementation – at school level only, including in selected schools only, even if across multiple regions (i.e., limited or pilot efforts not yet at sub-national scale)	Partial implementation – at sub-national level, including regions/sub-regions and schools in those selected regions/sub-regions (i.e., not yet uniformly applied across all regions)	Nationwide implementation – at central, sub-national and school levels (i.e., policy or mechanism exists and is applied across the entire system)
Increase the efficiency of instruction	No implementation	Small-scale implementation (in few schools)	Partial implementation (in more than half of, but not all, schools)	Nationwide implementation (in all schools)
Develop psychosocial health and well-being	No implementation	Small-scale implementation – at school level only, including in selected schools only, even if across multiple regions (i.e., limited or pilot efforts not yet at sub-national scale)	Partial implementation – at sub-national level, including regions/sub-regions and schools in those selected regions/sub-regions (i.e., not yet uniformly applied across all regions)	Nationwide implementation – at central, sub-national and school levels (i.e., policy or mechanism exists and is applied across the entire system)



PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

RAPID 5

The RAPID 5, a subset of indicators from the broader FLAT, tracks the five most fundamental ingredients needed to drive progress on foundational learning:

- Average textbook-student ratio in the early grades (Grades 1–3);
- Clearly defined learning outcomes and/or benchmarks for foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) in the Grade 1–3 curriculum/policy;
- Regular nationally representative large-scale assessment of reading and/or math in the early grades (Grades 2/3);
- Utilization of assessment data to inform classroom practices and education policy and planning; and
- Evidence-based programmes to improve FLN at scale.

Strong progress: 1:1 textbook-student ratio in the early grades – showing the largest gain among 39 countries reporting in every round (46 per cent in 2024 to 72 per cent in 2026).

Limited progress: Annual nationally representative large-scale assessment of reading and/or math in the early grades (Grades 2/3) – remaining the lowest-reported RAPID 5 indicator and declining from 41 per cent in 2025 to 33 per cent in 2026, among 39 countries responding in every round.



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The RAPID 5 comprises five essential, actionable levers for accelerating foundational learning. These indicators are drawn from the broader FLAT, representing critical factors for progress as identified through consultations with experts and stakeholders. While the comprehensive FLAT captures the breadth of government efforts, the RAPID 5 narrows the focus to priority actions that matter most for policymaking and advocacy. Data on the RAPID 5 indicators are transformed into a 4-point scale based on criteria as presented in Table 2.

The RAPID 5 data should be interpreted with some caveats in mind. Countries were asked to identify the data source for selected indicators, such as textbook-student ratio. While most countries drew on national or sub-national administrative data, public reports or databases, 22 per cent relied on estimates from Ministry of Education or UNICEF country office staff due to limited data availability. Three countries were unable to provide responses on textbook-student ratio, citing that such data are not systematically collected.

In 2026, RAPID 5 indicators showed markedly different levels of implementation across the five actions tracked. Over 8 in 10 countries reported nationwide measures to define FLN benchmarks or learning outcomes in the early-grade curriculum or policy, while about two thirds reported providing each early-grade student with a reading textbook (*see Figure 1*). However, far fewer reported a high level of implementation for the remaining RAPID 5 areas; for instance, fewer than a third of countries reported annual large-scale assessments of reading and/or math in the early grades.


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TABLE 2. RAPID 5 criteria

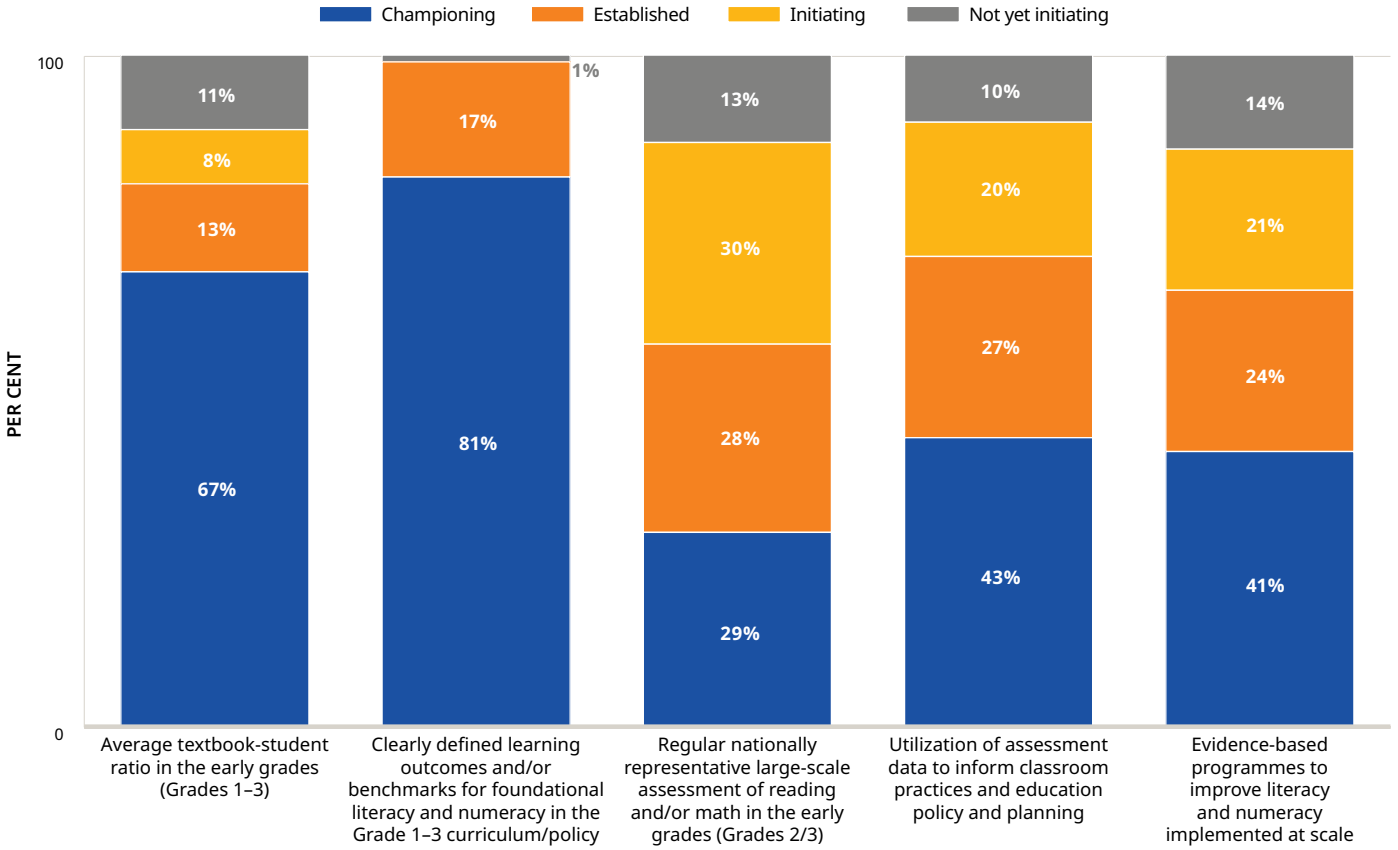
RAPID 5	NOT YET INITIATING (1)	INITIATING (2)	ESTABLISHED (3)	CHAMPIONING (4)
Average textbook-student ratio in the early grades (Grades 1–3)	There are more than 5 students per reading textbook.	There are 3–5 students per reading textbook.	There are 2 students per reading textbook.	Reading textbooks are provided on a 1:1 basis.
Clearly defined learning outcomes and/or benchmarks for FLN in the Grade 1–3 curriculum/policy	Learning outcomes and/or benchmarks for FLN have not been defined in the Grade 1–3 curriculum/policy.	Learning outcomes and/or benchmarks for FLN are clearly defined in the Grade 1–3 curriculum/policy for some schools.	Learning outcomes and/or benchmarks for FLN are clearly defined in the Grade 1–3 curriculum/policy at sub-national level.	Learning outcomes and/or benchmarks for FLN are clearly defined in the Grade 1–3 curriculum/policy at national level.
Regular nationally representative large-scale assessment of reading and/or math in the early grades (Grades 2/3)	There is no nationally representative large-scale learning assessment of reading and/or math in the early grades.	There is a nationally representative large-scale learning assessment of reading and/or math in the early grades administered every 4 or more years.	There is a nationally representative large-scale learning assessment of reading and/or math in the early grades administered every 2 or 3 years.	There is a nationally representative large-scale learning assessment of reading and/or math in the early grades administered every year.
Utilization of assessment data to inform classroom practices and education policy and planning	Assessment data are used to inform classroom practices and/or education policy and planning for primary education on only a small scale (e.g., selected schools) or not at all.	Assessment data are used to inform classroom practices and/or education policy and planning for primary education on a regional/sub-national scale.	Assessment data are used to inform either classroom practices or education policy and planning for primary education on a nationwide scale.	Assessment data are used to inform both classroom practices and education policy and planning for primary education on a nationwide scale.
Evidence-based programmes to improve FLN at scale	At least one evidence-based programme for FLN at the primary education level is implemented for only few schools or not at all.	At least one evidence-based programme for FLN at the primary education level is implemented in more than half of, but not all, schools.	At least one evidence-based programme for FLN at the primary education level is implemented nationwide in all schools.	At least one evaluated and evidence-based programme for FLN at the primary education level is implemented nationwide in all schools.

Since RAPID 5 tracking began in 2024, progress has been strongest for tangible inputs and standards. Gains have been largest in providing textbooks to every student: Among 39 countries responding in every survey round, the share reporting a 1:1 reading textbook-student ratio has increased from 46 per cent in 2024 to 72 per cent in 2026 (*see Figure 2*). Additionally, the share of countries reporting that FLN benchmarks are clearly defined in the early-grade curriculum nationwide has remained high at over 80 per cent.



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FIGURE 1. Share of countries by RAPID 5 rating

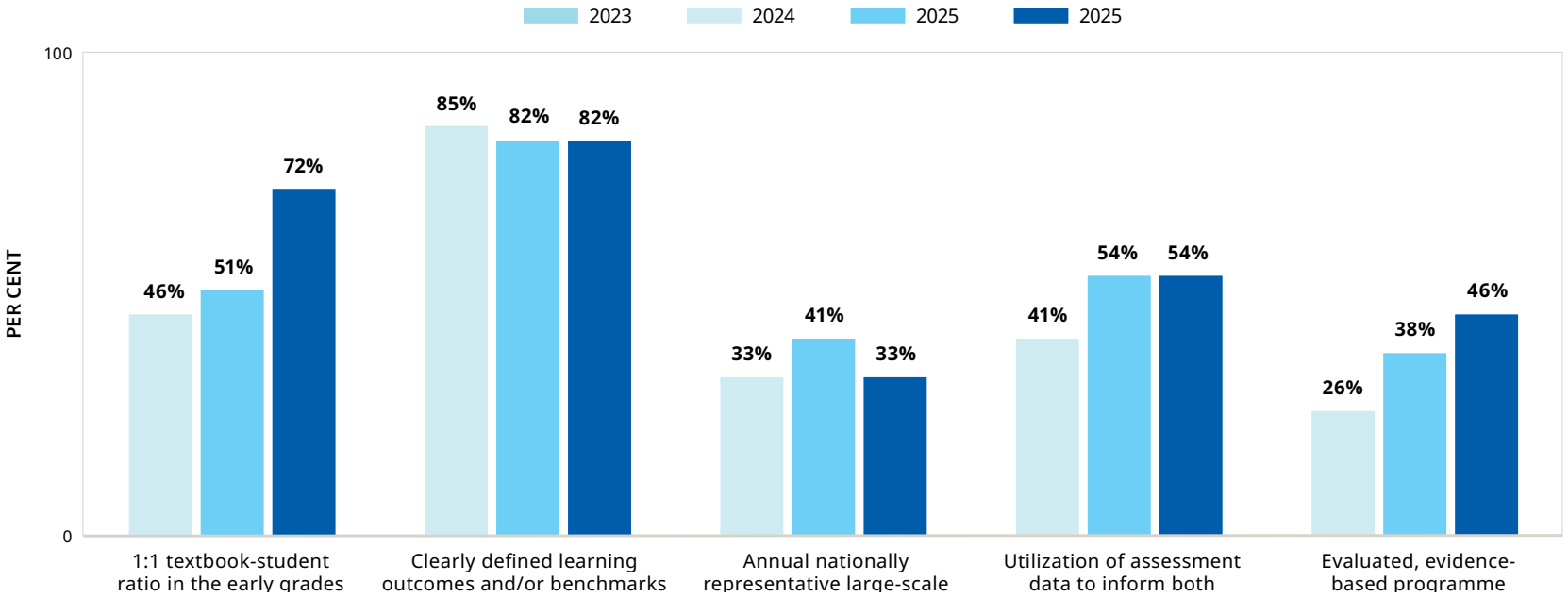


Source: UNICEF's RAPID 2026 survey. Data for average textbook-student ratio represent responses from 83 low- and middle-income countries, while data for the remaining indicators represent responses from 86 countries.

However, progress has been considerably weaker for the assessment and evidence-use systems needed to translate these into stronger learning outcomes. Annual large-scale assessment remains the lowest-reported indicator and is the only one to have declined over the past year, while the use of assessment data to inform both classroom practices and education policy has stagnated, underscoring the gap between data availability and its effective use. Limitations in institutional capacity and sustainable financing are among the recurring constraints to establishing assessment administration and data utilization as a regular, institutionalized function, rather than a periodic, project-dependent exercise.


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FIGURE 2. Share of countries at 'Championing' level for RAPID 5 indicators, by year



Source: Restricted to a matched panel of 39 countries with UNICEF RAPID survey responses in 2023–2026.

Gaps become even starker for social-emotional learning, despite being a key component of foundational learning. Reading and mathematics track closely together in terms of countries' responses on assessment frequency, with 29 per cent of countries reporting annual assessment of these specific domains. However, in 2026, only 14 per cent of countries reported the same for social-emotional learning. The gap is similarly wide for textbook provision: While about two thirds of countries report a 1:1 textbook-student ratio for reading and mathematics, over 7 in 10 countries report having no dedicated textbook for social-emotional learning – though some countries report that these skills are integrated into materials for other subjects. This divide suggests that socio-emotional skills often remain under-resourced and unmeasured, highlighting an area needing further action to support foundational learning.

PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

Reach every child and keep them in school

Reaching every child means identifying who is missing from school and acting before they fall further behind. The FLAT tracks progress in this dimension through the following indicators:

- Mechanisms to collect, report and act on information on student attendance;
- Mechanisms to collect, report and act on information on student dropout;
- Cash transfers or other types of support to increase enrolment among students from disadvantaged families; and
- Evidence-based education sector plan/strategy addressing inequities.

Strong progress: Nationwide mechanisms to collect, report and act on information on student attendance – showing the largest gain among 39 countries responding in every survey round (62 per cent in 2023 to 77 per cent in 2026).

Limited progress: Nationwide cash transfers or other types of support to increase enrolment among students from disadvantaged families – remaining the lowest-reported indicator in this dimension among 39 countries responding in every survey round, though coverage has grown from 46 per cent in 2025 to 56 per cent in 2026.


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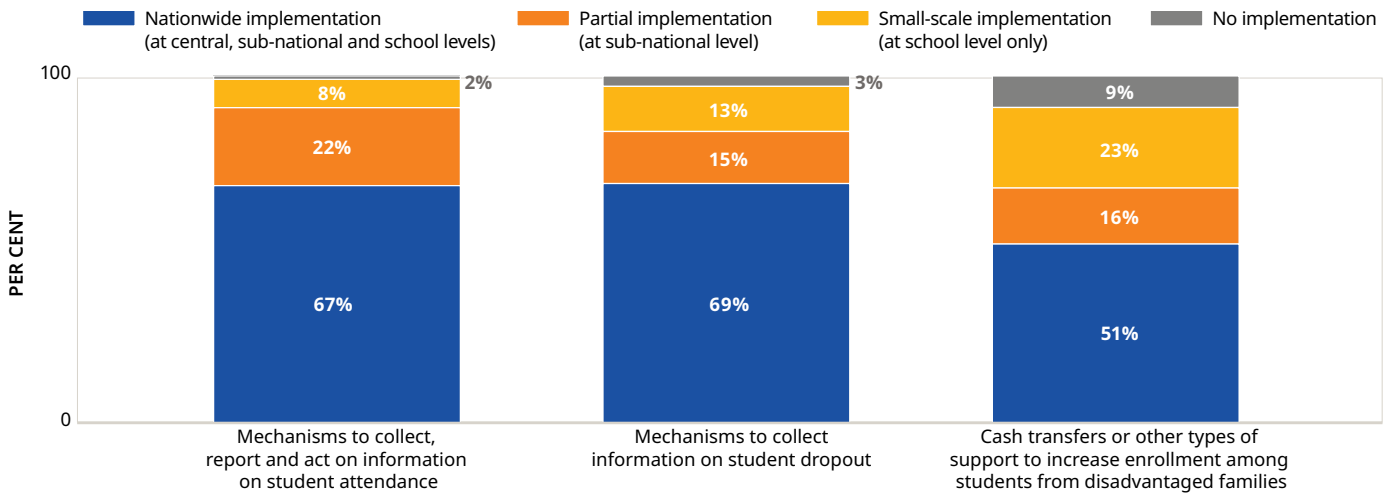
In 2026, most countries reported taking action at scale to track student attendance and dropout. Among all low- and middle-income countries responding in 2026, almost 7 in 10 reported nationwide mechanisms to collect, report and act on information on student attendance and dropout (*see Figure 3*). A smaller share of countries reported large-scale action on cash transfers and other types of support to increase enrolment among disadvantaged students, with just over half of countries reporting doing so on a nationwide scale.

Targeted support for disadvantaged students remains the slowest-moving indicator in the 'Reach' dimension. Not only does this indicator have the lowest-reported nationwide implementation in 2026, but it also has seen minimal growth since 2023. Among 39 countries reporting in every survey round since 2023, nationwide action on cash transfers and other types of support has seen the smallest gains in the 'Reach' dimension year on year, alongside a decline in 2025 (*see Figure 4*). Providing targeted support – such as cash transfers, school transport and the elimination of school fees – helps address barriers to education for the most disadvantaged children.

To accelerate progress in this dimension, policy actions must be supported by systems that mitigate inequities in access, participation and retention. In 2026, only about half of low- and middle-income countries reported that their national education sector strategies or plans are evidence-based, updated, measurable and implemented to address inequities. More data-driven, timely and comprehensive systems help ensure children are not only brought to school but are also identified and supported before they fall out of the system (*see Box 2*).

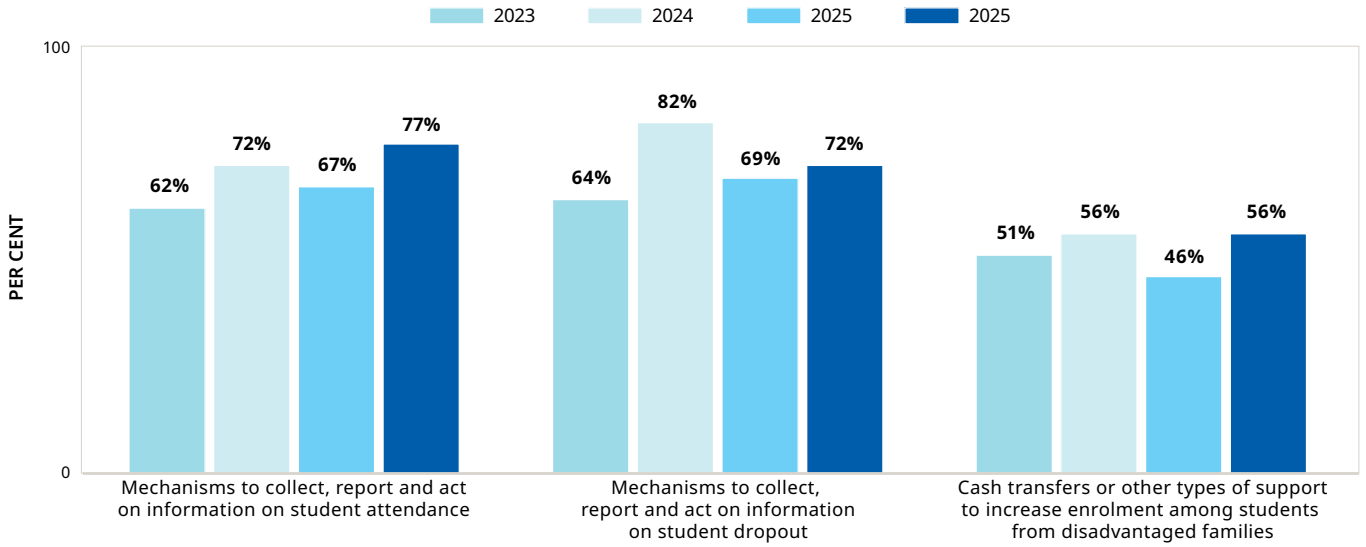


FIGURE 3. Share of surveyed countries reporting implementation of 'Reach' policy actions



Source: UNICEF's RAPID 2026 survey, with responses from 86 low- and middle-income countries.

FIGURE 4. Share of surveyed countries reporting nationwide implementation of 'Reach' policy actions, by year



Source: Restricted to a matched panel of 39 countries with UNICEF RAPID survey responses in 2023–2026.

Box 2. Making the invisible visible: Using data to reach every child

Keeping children in school starts with knowing who has stopped attending, and why. Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) can do more than track enrolment – they can be used to flag irregular attendance, identify children at risk of dropping out, and surface those who are in school but not learning. However, data suggest that many education systems have yet to establish robust EMIS, with only about 1 in 10 low- and middle-income countries reporting their EMIS to have strong data quality, timeliness and disaggregation. Without granular, timely data, children who have stopped attending, or who are at risk of doing so, remain invisible to the systems meant to serve them.

Countries have already begun closing this gap. In **Armenia**, the EMIS includes a dedicated early-warning module that tracks school dropout using a clear, consistent definition. Schools record student-level absenteeism against defined categories of excused and unexcused absence, and this data is used systematically at the school level to identify and support children at risk before they leave the system, while also being aggregated nationally to inform policy. Additionally, data on school dropouts is transferred to the Ministry of Social Labour and Affairs, which uses it for case management and to refer dropouts to relevant services to address the root causes of leaving education. In **Rwanda**, the EMIS collects and disaggregates attendance and dropout data not only by gender, age and location but also by vulnerability status – including refugee, migrant and disability status – allowing policymakers to see where enrolled children are falling behind and to target interventions at the groups most likely to be missed.



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PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

Assess learning levels regularly

Assessing learning levels regularly ensures children's learning needs are met. The FLAT tracks progress in this dimension through the following indicators:

- Use of assessment data for intervention programmes on foundational learning;
- Use of assessment data to inform classroom practices;
- Use of assessment data to inform education policy and planning (e.g., curriculum review and/or reform);
- Use of assessment data to improve design of assessment instruments (e.g., choice of mother tongue as language of assessment);
- Support to teachers on assessments of foundational learning (e.g., developing and conducting assessments, utilizing assessment data);
- Regular nationally representative large-scale assessments in the early grades (Grades 2/3) (see RAPID 5 chapter for findings); and
- Effectiveness of learning assessment systems.

Strong progress: Nationwide use of assessment data for intervention programmes on foundational learning – showing the largest gain among 39 countries responding in every survey round (21 per cent in 2023 to 72 per cent in 2026).

Limited progress: Use of assessment data to inform classroom practices nationwide – remaining the lowest-reported indicator in this dimension among 39 countries responding in every survey round.

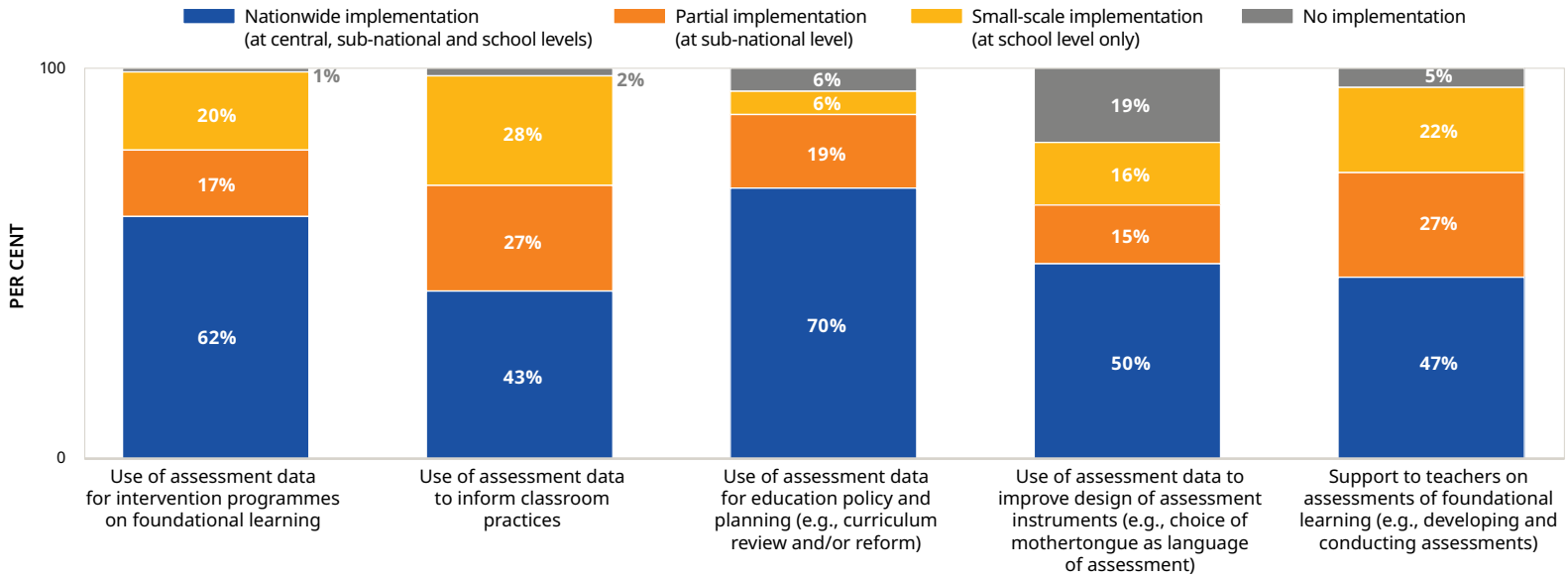
Most countries report using assessment data at scale to shape decisions at the system level. Among 86 low- and middle-income countries that responded to the survey in 2026, about 7 in 10 reported nationwide use of assessment data to inform education policy and planning. About 6 in 10 countries also reported nationwide use of assessment data for intervention programmes to support foundational learning (*see Figure 5*). These figures suggest that assessment findings are increasingly informing decisions made at policy level.

However, progress has been relatively slower in translating this data into support for teachers and classroom practice. Among 39 countries responding to the survey in every round, the use of assessment data to inform classroom practices across all schools continues to have the lowest coverage. This indicator, along with teacher support on assessments of foundational learning, has stagnated over the past year (*see Figure 6*). While countries report using assessment data for policy and planning, a gap remains in ensuring that data are effectively turned into improved teaching and learning at the classroom level. Middle-tier management, including district offices and school leaders, can play a critical role in bridging this gap by helping teachers interpret findings, identify learning needs and translate evidence into instructional support

Enabling systems must be in place to support effective learning assessments, including ensuring and building capacity. In 2026, about 63 per cent of low- and middle-income countries reported sufficient system-wide institutional capacity to ensure the quality of school-based, standardized and national large-scale assessments. Comprehensive assessment systems require adequate resourcing – including qualified personnel and sustainable financing – as well as strong technical foundations, such as formal guidelines, curriculum alignment, and mechanisms for monitoring and analysis, to ensure data are collected and used effectively. These systems also need clear roles and support structures within middle-tier management so that findings are understood and acted on in schools (*see Box 3*). In recent years, regional initiatives are emerging to strengthen learning assessment and data use, such as AFLAI in Africa, SIKAI in South Asia and SEA-PLM 2.0 in Southeast Asia.

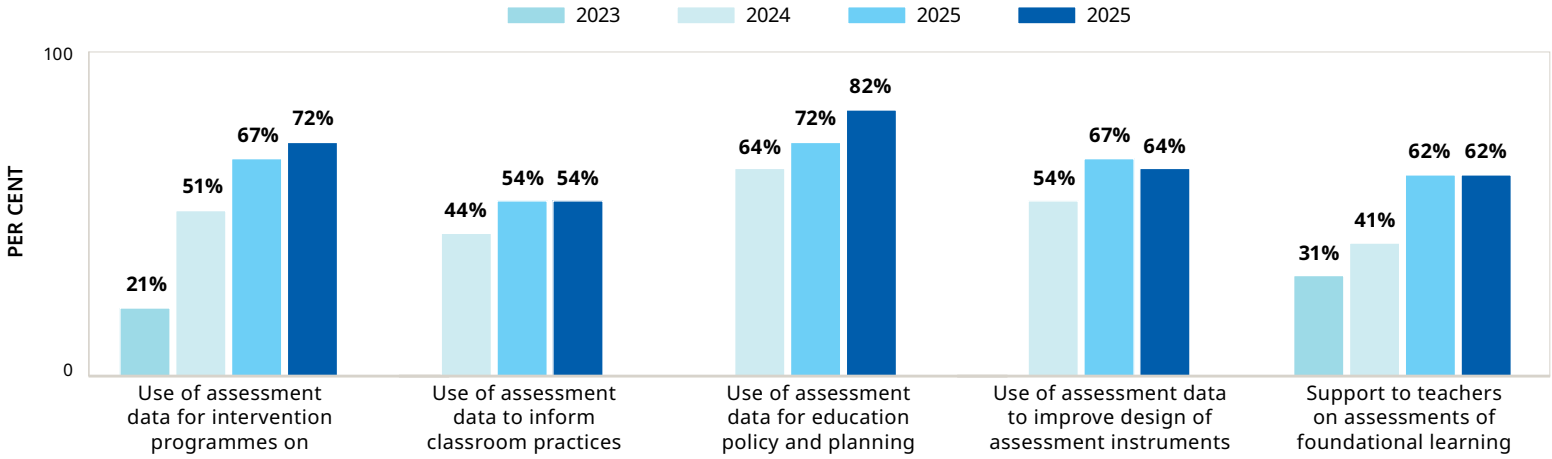

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FIGURE 5. Share of surveyed countries reporting implementation of 'Assess' policy actions



Source: UNICEF's RAPID 2026 survey, with responses from 86 low- and middle-income countries.

FIGURE 6. Share of surveyed countries reporting nationwide implementation of 'Assess' policy actions, by year



Source: Restricted to a matched panel of 39 countries with UNICEF RAPID survey responses in 2023–2026.

Box 3. Seeing the full picture: Why assessing learning takes more than one tool

Understanding children's learning levels requires a comprehensive assessment system. This means capturing what is happening in the classroom, at key transition points and across the education system as a whole. Each type of assessment serves a different purpose and generates valuable data to support the education process: Classroom assessments give teachers and students real-time feedback to enhance teaching and learning; high-stakes examinations provide information used to determine the formal progression of students through the education system; and large-scale assessments produce system-level insights to aid policy and planning.[10] A well-functioning system does not rely on any one of these in isolation – findings from each type of assessment can inform and reinforce the others, and triangulating evidence across all three builds a fuller, more reliable picture of children's learning. Middle-tier management, including district offices and school leaders, can help turn these different sources of evidence to action by reviewing findings, identifying gaps and helping schools respond to them.

To strengthen assessments at the classroom level, countries are investing in teacher capacity and supervision and support, including at the middle tier. In **Kenya**, the National Examinations Council has strengthened institutional capacity for school-based assessments and equipped teachers accordingly, with e-assessment training now planned to extend this work at scale. In **Zimbabwe**, every teacher is required to conduct a classroom assessment once every two weeks and record it in an assessment register, with compliance checked directly by supervisors – keeping assessment a routine, monitored part of teaching.

Comprehensive coverage, reliable funding and institutional capacity are key to well-functioning examination systems. In **Brazil**, a stable, country-wide standardized examination is administered to all students at key grade transitions – the 2nd and 5th years of primary education, the final year of lower secondary education and the final year of upper secondary education – testing Portuguese language and mathematics alongside socio-economic questionnaires. In the **United Republic of Tanzania**, the National Examinations Council offers standardized examinations at the end of every education level, is well-funded, and is technically equipped to coordinate the examination system and provide oversight throughout the process.

National large-scale assessments give governments a system-wide view of how learning is progressing across grades and subjects. In **Bhutan**, the Council for School Examinations and Assessment conducts the National Education Assessment (NEA), a triennial large-scale assessment conducted at key stages of learning (Grades 3, 6 and 9), with capacity-building underway to strengthen how NEA data are analyzed and used to inform policy and improve learning outcomes. In **South Africa**, the Department of Basic Education conducts the South African Systemic Evaluation to monitor language and mathematics achievement in Grades 3, 6 and 9, while Funda Uphumelele – the national early-grade reading initiative – generates evidence to monitor literacy outcomes, identify learning gaps and inform targeted interventions to ensure all learners can read for meaning by Grade 4.

Bringing different types of assessments together can help build a more coherent picture of learning and strengthen the overall assessment system. In **Argentina**, a multi-year assessment plan agreed by the Federal Education Council brings formative, national, regional and international assessments into a single framework and roadmap through 2030. In **Uzbekistan**, a learning assessment framework is being developed – covering classroom assessment, examinations and national large-scale assessments – to define shared priorities and a coordinated path for reforming the learning assessment system as a whole.


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PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

Prioritize teaching the fundamentals

Prioritizing the fundamentals means ensuring that foundational skills are embedded across curricula, instruction and assessment.
The FLAT tracks progress in this dimension through the following indicators:

- Clearly defined learning outcomes and/or benchmarks for FLN in the early grades (Grades 1–3);
- Integration of social-emotional learning in the curriculum;
- Average textbook-student ratio in the early grades (Grades 1–3) (*see RAPID 5 chapter for findings*); and
- Mainstreaming of transferable skills development within the national education system, including national curricula, assessment and pre- and in-service teacher training.

Strong progress: Clearly defined learning outcomes and/or benchmarks for FLN in the Grade 1–3 curriculum/policy nationwide – remaining the highest-reported indicator in this dimension among 39 countries responding in every survey round (consistently over 80 per cent since 2024).

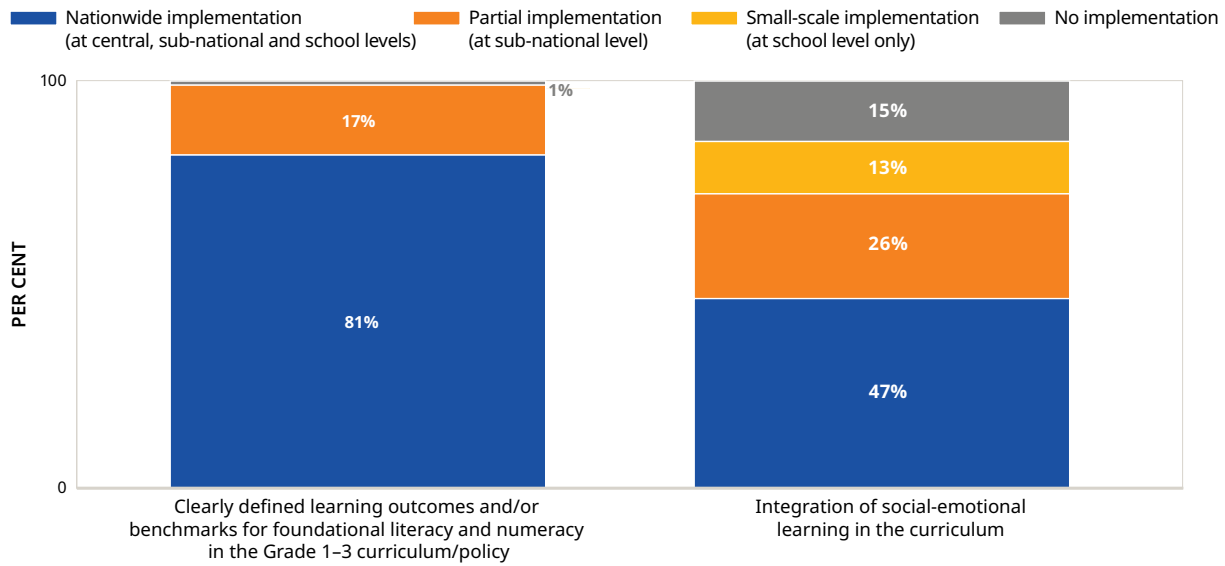
Limited progress: Integration of social-emotional learning in the curriculum nationwide – remaining the lowest-reported indicator in this dimension among 39 countries responding in every survey round, though coverage has grown over each round.

The large majority of low- and middle-income countries report having clearly defined benchmarks and/or learning outcomes for FLN in the early-grade curriculum. In 2026, over 8 in 10 countries reported nationwide actions to do so (*see Figure 7*). Establishing clear standards for what students should be learning ensures that assessment, curriculum and instruction are aligned to meet their needs, so that all children can acquire foundational skills.

However, progress on prioritizing socio-emotional skills remains relatively slow compared to literacy and numeracy. Among 39 low- and middle-income countries responding to the survey in every round, the share of countries reporting nationwide integration of social-emotional learning in the curriculum has remained lower than the share reporting clearly defined FLN benchmarks (*see Figure 8*). Encouragingly, curricular integration of social-emotional learning has seen growth over each survey round. Greater efforts to mainstream these skills in education systems can help ensure a holistic development of foundational learning for children.

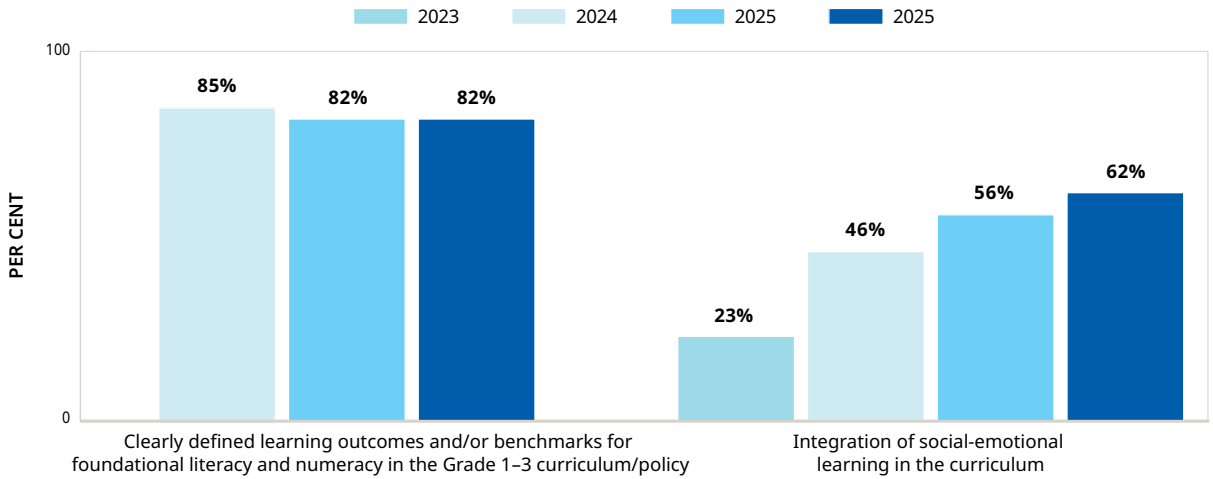
Countries must scale up actions and systems to support not just literacy and numeracy but also socio-emotional skills. In 2026, only about 13 per cent of low- and middle-income countries reported that transferable skills – also called life skills or socio-emotional skills – are integrated in formal and non-formal education systems, accompanied by sufficient budgeting and human resources. Because what is measured tends to shape what is prioritized, these skills need to be embedded into national curricula, teacher training and – critically – assessment (*see Box 4*).

FIGURE 7. Share of surveyed countries reporting implementation of 'Prioritize' policy actions



Source: UNICEF's RAPID 2026 survey, with responses from 86 low- and middle-income countries.

FIGURE 8. Share of surveyed countries reporting nationwide implementation of 'Prioritize' policy actions, by year



Source: Restricted to a matched panel of 39 countries with UNICEF RAPID survey responses in 2023–2026.

Box 4. Making skills count: What gets assessed gets prioritized

What education systems measure shapes what they prioritize – including transferable skills. Transferable skills – also known as socio-emotional or life skills – are an integral part of foundational learning. These skills support critical thinking, active citizenship, empowerment and social cohesion and are key to ensuring children thrive in school and beyond. Yet, over 40 per cent of low- and middle-income countries report only partial or limited integration of these skills into national curricula, teacher training and – critically – assessment. Without measuring these skills, many systems may have no reliable way of understanding whether children are developing them.

Assessing transferable or socio-emotional skills requires approaches that capture children's development over time. In **Jamaica**, rather than using a single test, the national Jamaica School Readiness Assessment (JSRA), administered at age 4, combines classroom observations with tools to evaluate key areas such as behaviour, social interaction and emotional readiness along with literacy, numeracy, language and motor skills. These tools include a Child Behavior Rating Scale and sections on approaches to learning and socio-emotional growth. At Grade 1, the Grade One Individual Learning Profile (GOILP) continues this focus, assessing social and emotional development alongside cognitive and interpersonal skills.

PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

Increase the efficiency of instruction

Increasing the efficiency of instruction means using evidence-based strategies for improving teaching and learning. The FLAT tracks progress in this dimension through the following indicators:

- Structured pedagogy (specifically designed, coherent package of activities implemented together, such as structured lesson plans, student materials, with or without technology tools, etc.);
- Targeted instruction (providing instruction appropriate to the learning level of each student);
- Catch-up programmes for children who dropped out of school and/or who are behind expected learning competencies;
- Core components of effective instruction; and
- Effectiveness of teacher development systems.

Strong progress: Structured pedagogy in schools nationwide – showing the largest gain among 39 countries responding in every survey round (28 per cent in 2023 to 64 per cent in 2026).

Limited progress: Catch-up programmes in schools nationwide – showing the slowest growth among indicators in this dimension among 39 countries responding in every survey round, with coverage rising only slightly since 2024 (33 per cent in 2024 to 36 per cent in 2026).



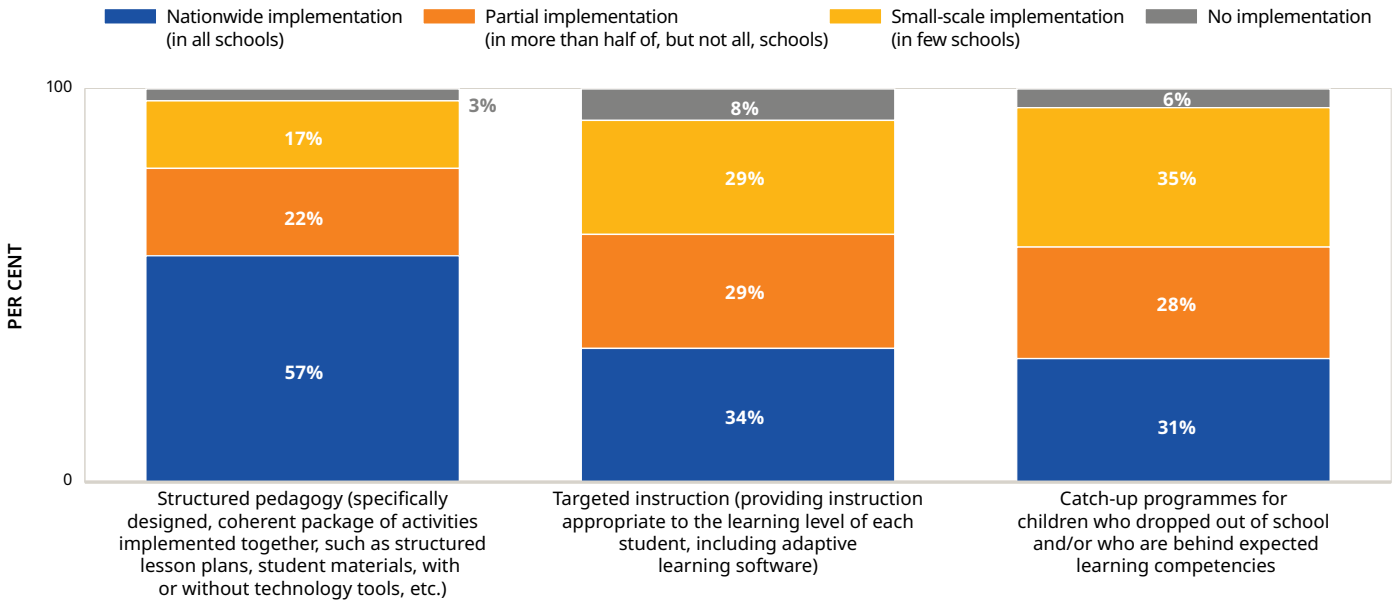
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Over half of countries reported implementing structured pedagogy programmes at scale. In 2026, about 57 per cent of countries reported nationwide structured pedagogy programmes – a coherent package of activities implemented together, such as structured lesson plans, student materials, with or without technology tools (*see Figure 9*). Uptake of structured pedagogy has increased every year since 2023 and continues to be the indicator with the highest coverage in this dimension.

By contrast, catch-up programmes remain the slowest-moving indicator in the 'Increase' dimension. Among 39 low- and middle-income countries responding in every survey round, the share of countries reporting nationwide catch-up programmes increased between 2023 and 2024 but has since seen little change (*see Figure 10*). Targeted instruction has shown relatively more movement, growing year on year from 2023 to 2025 before seeing a slight decline in 2026. This points to a broader pattern also seen elsewhere in this report: While most countries report nationwide mechanisms to track student attendance and dropout (see 'Reach' chapter), the systems and resources needed to respond to children once identified – such as assessing learning levels to target instruction and provide catch-up support – have not kept pace, further illustrating the gap between policy commitment and systems capable of delivering on it.


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FIGURE 9. Share of surveyed countries reporting implementation of 'Increase' policy actions

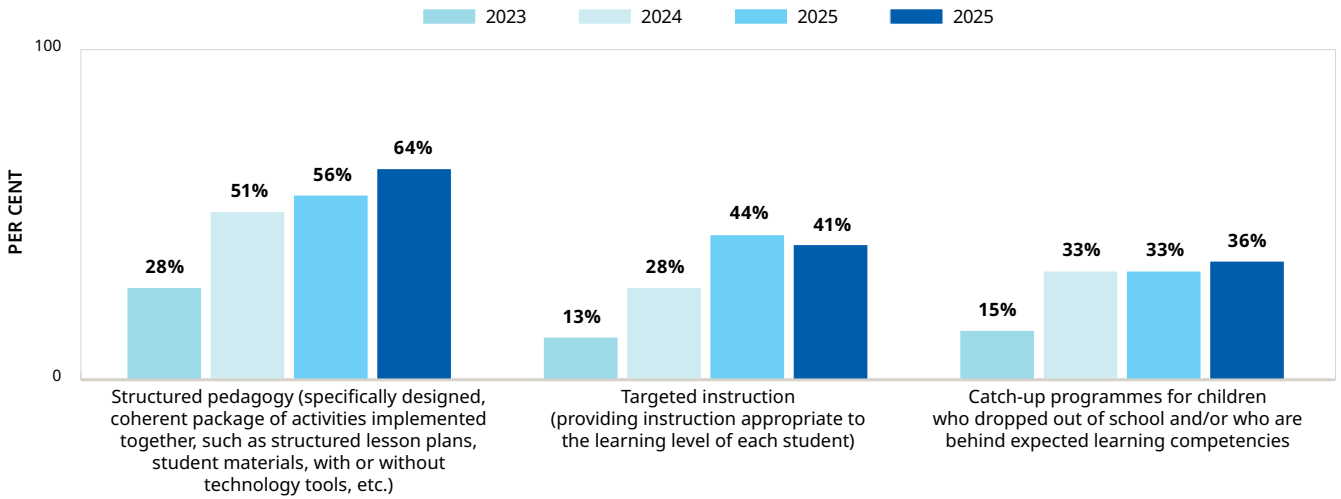


Source: UNICEF's RAPID 2026 survey, with responses from 86 low- and middle-income countries.

To facilitate effective instruction, most countries report taking consistent action on teaching and learning materials and a coherent, sequenced progression of foundational skills. In 2026, the RAPID survey piloted a question on the core components of effective instruction, drawing on research on structured pedagogy and Teaching at the Right Level programmes from the What Works Hub for Global Education.[11, 12] To capture good practice regardless of how programmes are formally labelled, the survey question focused broadly on 'effective instruction'. Over 7 in 10 countries reported consistent actions on quality-assured, localized and well-aligned teaching and learning materials, as well as a streamlined, sequenced progression of foundational skills (*see Figure 11*). By contrast, fewer than a third reported prioritization in resourcing and government officials' time – highlighting an important gap: Without dedicated budget and staff time, initiatives risk remaining project-dependent rather than embedded in the system.

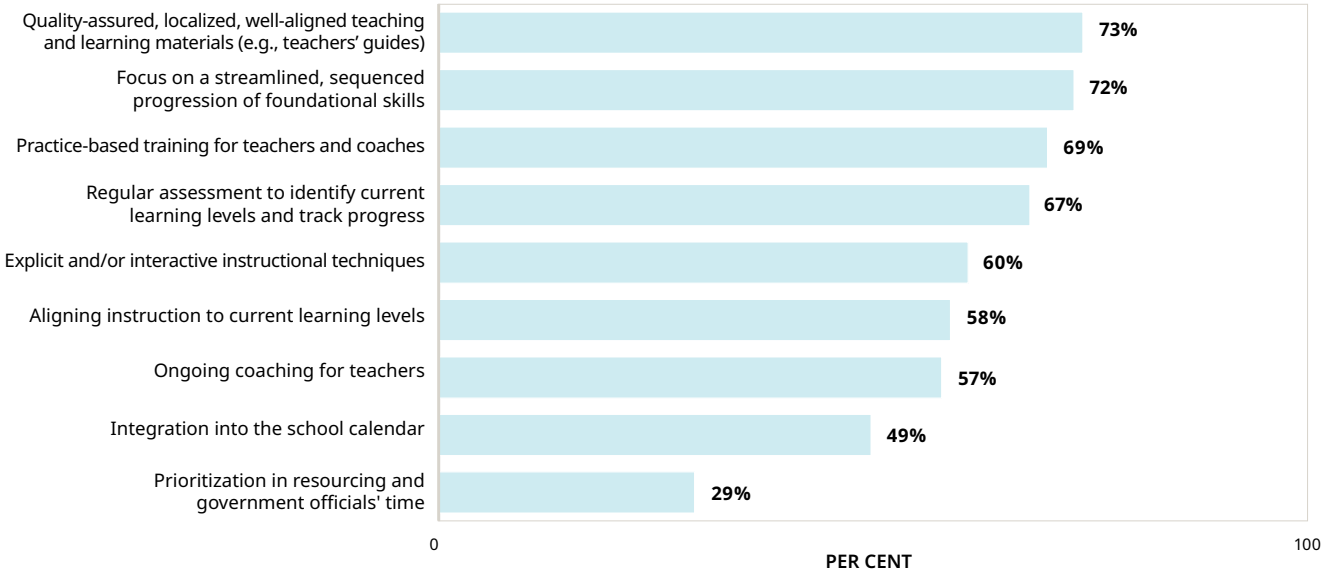
To increase the efficiency of instruction, teacher development systems should enable the effective use of assessment data in the classroom. In 2026, about 58 per cent of low- and middle-income countries reported limited or no systems to promote teacher accountability or to inform instructional practices through evidence. Closing this gap depends on teachers having reliable, regularly generated assessment data – and the structures to act on it, including guidance and supervision from middle-tier management (*see Box 5*).

FIGURE 10. Share of surveyed countries reporting nationwide implementation of 'Increase' policy actions, by year



Source: Restricted to a matched panel of 39 countries with UNICEF RAPID survey responses in 2023–2026.

FIGURE 11. Share of surveyed countries reporting consistent implementation, by core component of effective instruction



Source: UNICEF's RAPID 2026 survey, with responses from 86 low- and middle-income countries.



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Box 5. Closing the loop: Turning assessment data into better teaching

Assessment data can only improve learning when they inform what happens in the classroom. Assessment can reveal gaps that would otherwise go unnoticed: In a Teaching at the Right Level programme in Bihar, India, in schools where cluster coordinators had believed that 90 per cent of children could read basic Hindi, assessments revealed that only 30 per cent could.[13] Acting on such information, however, depends on conditions in daily classroom practice. A systematic review found that prerequisites for implementing assessments for learning include teachers who can interpret information on the spot, constructive and focused feedback, and school-wide culture that facilitates collaboration and teacher autonomy.[14] In practice, fewer than half of countries report established systems with clear guidance on using assessment data to shape instructional practices and regularly evaluating teachers' in-class performance. For many systems, the data generated through assessments and the decisions teachers make in classrooms remain weakly connected. Middle-tier management and support, including district offices and school leaders, can help strengthen this link by guiding teachers in using findings and following up on classroom practice.

Many governments are working to close the loop between assessment data and classroom teaching. In **Bangladesh**, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board has developed Formative Assessment Guidelines to support assessment practices in the classroom, and the Directorate of Primary Education introduced dedicated tools to help teachers record and act on assessment findings to adapt teaching – though consistent implementation at the classroom level remains a challenge. Additionally, evidence from the National Student Assessment (NSA) helps shape instructional support, including informing the design of a remedial education pilot programme. In **Malawi**, the Ministry of Education is harmonizing foundational learning assessments to strengthen the collection and use of data for decision-making and classroom instruction, while systematic teacher-level use of assessment data remains at an early stage.

PROGRESS AT A GLANCE

Develop psychosocial health and well-being

Developing psychosocial health and well-being is foundational to children's readiness to learn. The FLAT tracks progress in this dimension through the following indicators:

- School-based psychosocial and mental health support (MHPSS) for students (e.g., counseling);
- Recruitment of specific school personnel to support students' mental health and well-being (e.g., psychologists, counselors);
- Child protection/safeguarding policy for schools;
- School nutrition services (e.g., school feeding programmes, free or discount on school meals); and
- Education strategies, policies and plans to address MHPSS needs of children, adolescents and teachers.

Strong progress: School-based MHPSS for students nationwide – showing the largest gain among 39 countries responding in every survey round (13 per cent in 2023 to 37 per cent in 2026).

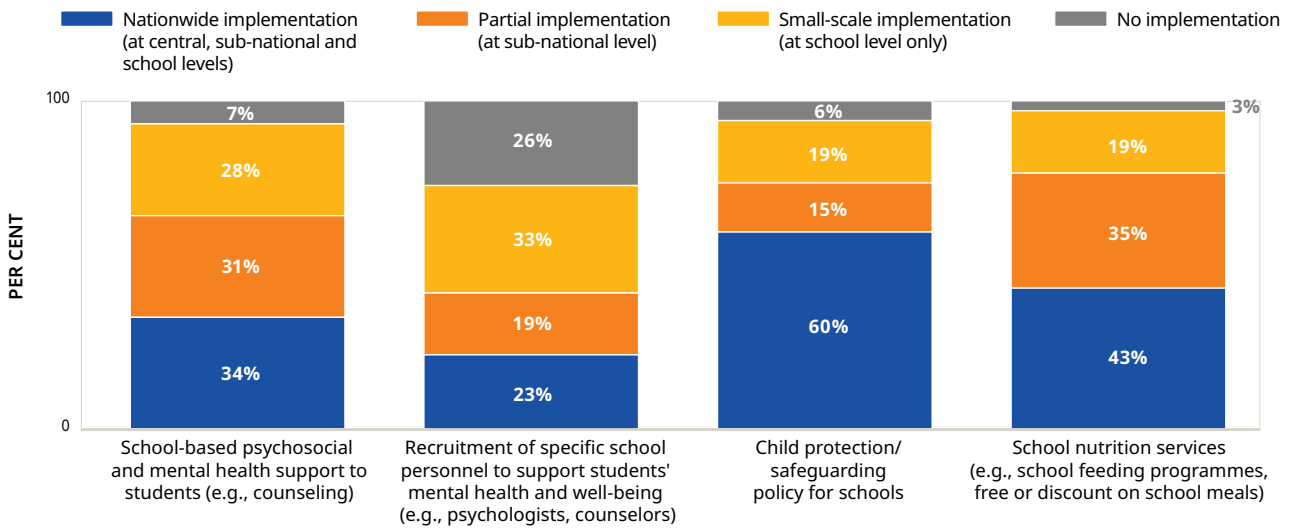
Limited progress: Recruitment of specific school personnel to support students' mental health and well-being nationwide – showing more limited progress than other indicators in this dimension and declining from 34 per cent in 2025 to 26 per cent in 2026, among 39 countries responding in every survey round.

Most countries report implementing measures on child protection or safeguarding in schools. In 2026, about 6 in 10 countries reported nationwide child protection or safeguarding policies for schools, building on efforts observed when the indicator was introduced in 2025. By contrast, fewer countries reported taking action at scale in areas like MHPSS or school nutrition services (*see Figure 12*).

Progress lags in the recruitment of specific school personnel to support students' well-being. Based on responses from 39 low- and middle-income countries participating in every survey round, this indicator has had the lowest coverage in the dimension since 2024 (*see Figure 13*). Without dedicated support in schools, students' MHPSS concerns may not be properly addressed – and may end up as added responsibility for teachers.

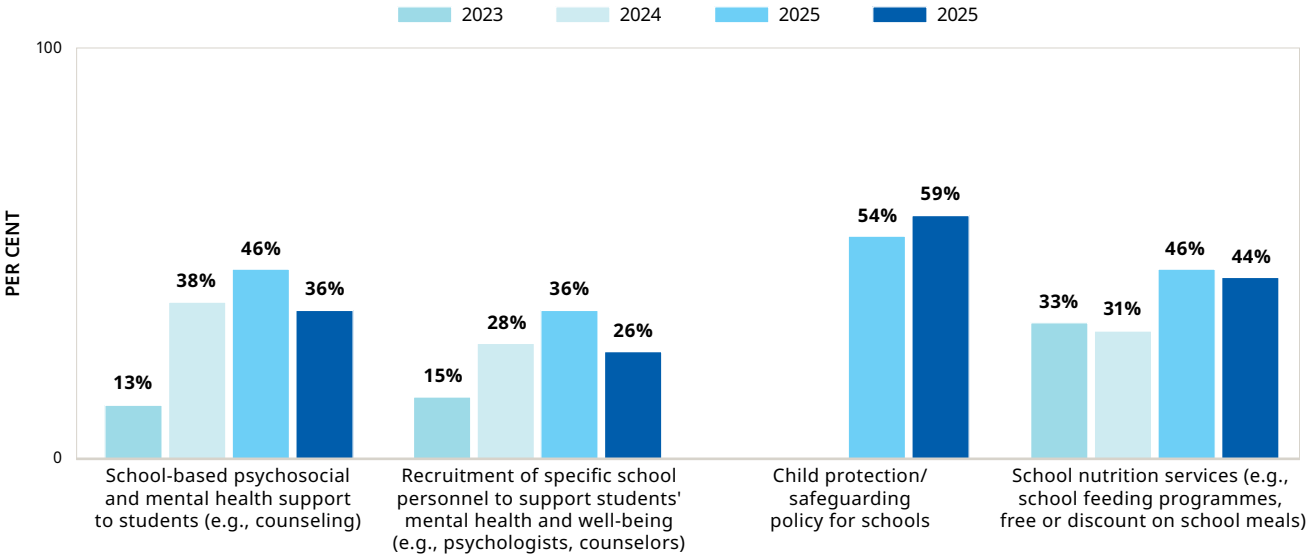
Enabling systems must be in place to strengthen the overall well-being of children and teachers. In 2026, over half of low- and middle-income countries reported having limited or no systems in place to support MHPSS in schools through policies, strategies, training curricula and community engagement. Support from middle-tier management can help translate these into coordinated school-level support, including by identifying children's needs and connecting them with appropriate services. To know whether these systems are working, countries also need to assess children's well-being alongside their learning (*see Box 6*).

FIGURE 12. Share of surveyed countries reporting implementation of 'Develop' policy actions



Source: UNICEF's RAPID 2026 survey, with responses from 86 low- and middle-income countries.

FIGURE 13. Share of surveyed countries reporting nationwide implementation of 'Develop' policy actions, by year



Source: Restricted to a matched panel of 39 countries with UNICEF RAPID survey responses in 2023–2026.

Box 6. Beyond academics: Measuring well-being to support the whole child

Assessment can capture more than just literacy and numeracy. Integrating measures of student engagement, mental well-being and psychosocial development into monitoring systems helps reflect a broader understanding of learning. Such information is often captured through international assessments like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and regional assessments like the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM), which provide contextual data on various student, home and school factors that affect learning, including students' exposure to bullying, sense of belonging at school and overall life satisfaction.

At the country level, efforts are underway to systematically assess children's well-being. In **Ecuador**, the National Institute for Educational Evaluation's annual *Ser Estudiante* assessment – conducted annually and based on curriculum content – includes a component to gather information on school safety and student well-being, alongside academic results. In **Serbia**, the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the Council of Europe, conducted a National Survey on Peer Violence and Student Well-being to generate evidence and recommendations on the prevention of peer violence in schools.

Conclusion

A persistent gap between policy and systems shows that progress on paper does not always translate into implementation. Across 123 low- and middle-income countries with data, the average FLAT rating in 2026 is at the Established level, the third of four levels in the FLAT rating scale. As observed in previous years, policy action ratings outpace systems strengthening ratings across all RAPID dimensions (*see Figure 14*). Even the most well-designed policies will not improve learning unless they are backed by enabling systems to implement, monitor and sustain them. Closing this gap means not only adopting policies but also investing in the systems themselves, such as teacher development, assessment, monitoring and middle-tier management and support.

Assessment illustrates the policy-systems gap clearly. Progress is strongest in using assessment data to inform education policy and planning but weakest in using it to shape classroom practices. To close this gap, learning assessment systems must enable regular assessment and equip teachers with the skills, tools and guidance they need to effectively use data to improve instruction with support from middle-tier management.

Most countries have sustained or built on their efforts over the past year. Among 59 low- and middle-income countries with comparable data across both years, the share reaching at least the Established level rose from 73 per cent in 2025 to 78 per cent in 2026. Outside this comparison set, countries such as Mali and Turkmenistan show progress across multiple RAPID dimensions, transiting from the Initiating to the Established level. Overall, 88 per cent of countries maintained a stable FLAT rating since 2025, 3 per cent showed a decrease and 9 per cent recorded an increase (*see Box 7*).[15]

Stability should not necessarily be read as a positive signal on its own. While it may reflect the consolidation of recent gains in some contexts, it can equally indicate stalled progress in others. A stable rating can also reflect offsetting movement among underlying indicators – for example, gains in some areas may be counterbalanced by declines in others. Although most countries are holding steady in their efforts, a business-as-usual approach is not enough – the scale of the learning crisis demands accelerating current efforts. Newly released PASEC 2024 results from 16 African countries illustrate this need: At the end of primary education, 61.5 per cent of students are below the expected baseline level of proficiency in reading and 75.2 per cent in mathematics.[16]


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Box 7. What progress looks Like: Countries with the largest gains in FLAT ratings

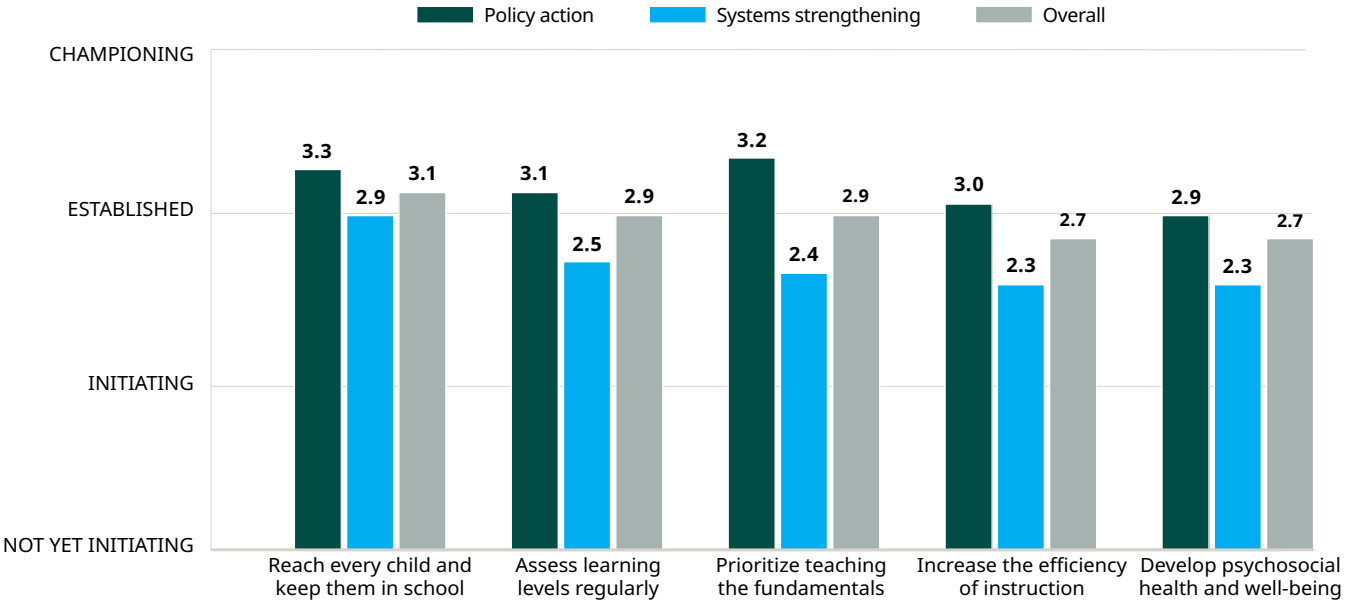
Among 59 countries with comparable data, five recorded a substantial increase in their overall FLAT rating between 2025 and 2026. Initiatives in two of them – the Gambia and Malawi – illustrate concrete government efforts underway as these countries advanced. The Philippines, whose ratings have held steady at a high level, shows what a reform delivered at scale and independently evaluated can look like.

In the **Gambia**, ratings rose substantially across all RAPID dimensions – particularly in 'Prioritize teaching the fundamentals' – lifting the country to the Established level in 2026. A key government programme underway is the Mainstreaming Effective Intervention Strategies in Schools (MEISS). Building on lessons learned from the Support Classes Offered in Rural Education (SCORE) trial, MEISS translates evidence on effective early-grade literacy and numeracy approaches into classroom practice across government schools, while strengthening teacher support, structured pedagogy, assessment and the use of data to improve instruction.

In **Malawi**, ratings increased substantially overall and across most RAPID dimensions, with the country leading the way among African countries in the dimension of 'Increase the efficiency of instruction'. Among the country's key efforts is the Malawi Education Reform Programme (MERP), particularly the nationwide expansion of Common Zonal Testing (CZT). Standardized assessment and feedback enable schools, zones and districts to identify learning gaps and target instructional support. The systematic use of learning data has strengthened the feedback loop between assessment, remediation and instructional improvement.

In the **Philippines**, ratings have held steady since 2025, with the country at the 'Championing' level for three out of the five RAPID dimensions. A key effort underway is the Department of Education's Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program which provides systematized tutorial sessions, intervention plans and learning resources for kindergarten to Grade 10 learners who are below expected reading competencies. An independent impact evaluation found that the ARAL Program led to a 9-percentage-point reduction in the share of struggling readers and a 4.8-percentage-point increase in grade-level reading proficiency.

FIGURE 14. FLAT ratings, by RAPID dimension



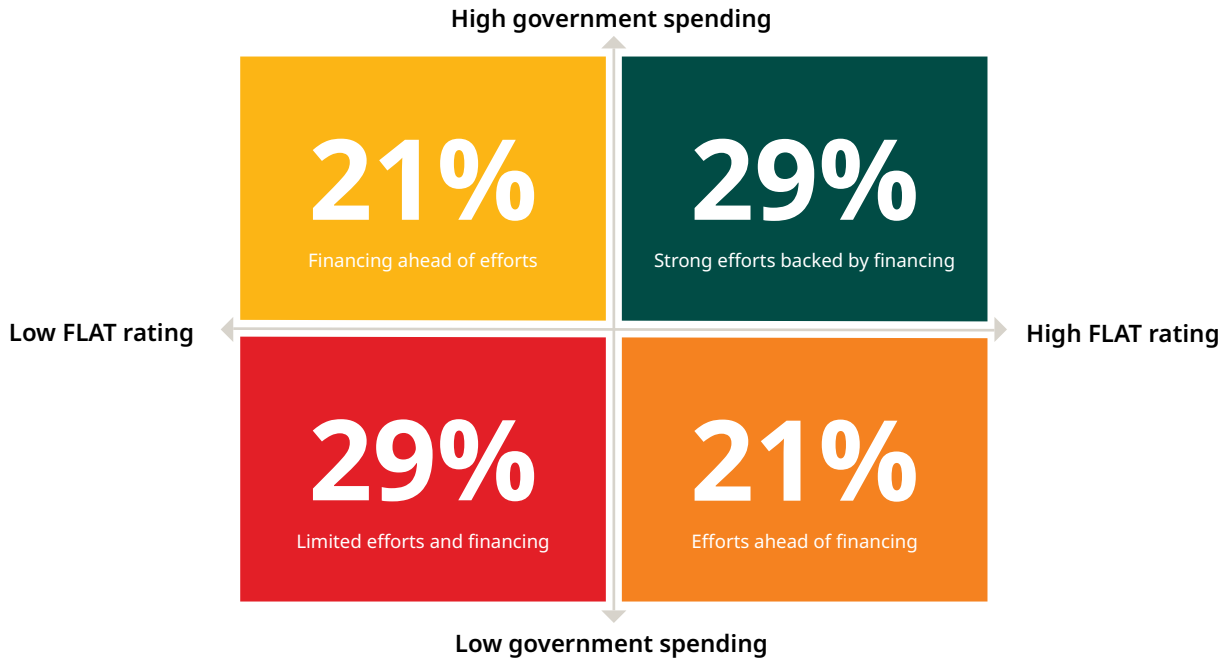
Source: UNICEF's RAPID 2026 survey (data on policy action) and internal monitoring and reporting exercise (data on systems strengthening). FLAT 2025 ratings were used for countries without data in 2026.

Policy ambition must be matched by sufficient investment to deliver results. To examine whether policy efforts are backed by financial commitment, overall FLAT 2026 ratings were compared against government spending on pre-primary and primary education – reflecting investment across the continuum of early learning upon which foundational learning skills are built. Among 56 low- and middle-income countries with comparable data, about 29 per cent show both above-median policy effort and above-median spending. Over 40 per cent of countries show some form of mismatch: About 21 per cent have above-median spending without correspondingly strong efforts, while a similar share shows strong policy efforts without matching investment. The remaining 29 per cent of countries lag on both fronts (*see Figure 15*).



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FIGURE 15. Share of countries by overall FLAT 2026 rating and government spending on pre-primary and primary education as a percentage of GDP



Source: UNICEF and the Hempel Foundation's FLAT 2026 ratings. Latest government education expenditure data since 2021 from UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Graph represents 56 low- and middle-income countries with both FLAT and expenditure data.

These mismatches can reflect different underlying realities across countries. In some cases, policies may be strong on paper, but implementation suffers from underfunding. In others, strong policy outcomes may be achieved efficiently with comparatively modest investment. Further country-level analysis is needed to tell the two apart. For countries facing a genuine gap, sustaining policy ambition may require greater or more effectively targeted investment to support implementation. For countries facing the reverse pattern, where spending outpaces policy efforts, strengthening policy and systems – alongside examining whether resources are well-targeted – may be critical.

Pre-primary education needs to be part of the financing picture. When pre-primary spending is excluded, the share of countries showing a mismatch between government efforts and spending rises from 42 per cent to 54 per cent – suggesting that spending patterns align more closely with policy effort when pre-primary investment is included. However, pre-primary spending is often inconsistently reported, limiting the ability to measure whether governments are investing in line with their foundational learning ambitions. Additionally, pre-primary learning outcomes are often not consistently assessed, further posing challenges in gauging how effectively investment translates into early learning.

Strong policies set the direction, but systems, financing and evidence are needed to turn them into learning gains. Strong policies set the direction, but systems, financing and evidence are needed to turn them into learning gains. FLAT 2026 shows that most countries are continuing their efforts to support foundational learning, but sustaining momentum is not enough. Accelerating progress means closing the gaps between policy, systems and financing commitments. FLAT offers governments and partners a shared platform to track progress, identify solutions and learn from one another, including how to use assessment data to strengthen teaching and learning. The priority now is to act together on this evidence, so that commitments translate into learning gains for every child.



Annex



Rating scale	No data	Not yet initiating	Initiating	Established	Championing

Increase since 2025	▲	Decrease since 2025	▼	No change since 2025	—	No 2025 data	—

COUNTRY/ TERRITORY	OVERALL		REACH		ASSESS		PRIORITIZE		INCREASE		DEVELOP	
Afghanistan	2.3	▲	3.0	▲	1.8	—	2.7	—	2.1	—	2.0	▲
Algeria	2.5	—*		—	3.0	—	2.5	—	2.8	—	1.8	—*
Antigua and Barbuda	3.7	—*	3.0	—*	4.0	—*	4.0	—*	3.7	—*	3.7	—*
Argentina	3.0	—	3.3	▼	3.5	—	2.7	—	2.8	—	3.0	—
Armenia	3.5	—	3.8	▲	2.8	—	4.0	—	3.6	—	3.4	—
Azerbaijan	2.9	—	2.3	—		—	3.0	—	3.3	—		—
Bangladesh	2.5	—	3.2	▲	2.1	—	3.2	—	2.0	—	1.9	—
Barbados	3.7	—	4.0	▲	3.5	▼	4.0	—	3.7	—	3.3	—
Belarus	2.3	—	3.0	—		—	2.0	—	2.0	—	2.0	—
Belize	3.4	—*	4.0	—	2.3	—	3.5	—	4.0	—	3.0	—*
Benin	2.8	—*	3.6	▲	3.3	—	2.6	—	2.7	—	1.7	—*
Bhutan	3.5	—	3.0	—	3.7	—	3.8	—	3.3	—	4.0	—
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	2.7	—	4.0	—	3.2	▲	2.8	—	1.3	—	2.1	▲
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1.8	—	2.0	—		—	1.5	—		—		—

COUNTRY/ TERRITORY	OVERALL		REACH		ASSESS		PRIORITIZE		INCREASE		DEVELOP	
Botswana	3.8	—*	4.0	—*	3.6	—*	3.3	—*	4.0	—*	4.0	—*
Brazil	3.4	—	3.5	—	3.3	—	3.5	—	3.3	▼	3.5	—
Bulgaria	3.4	—	3.6	—	3.3	—	3.5	—	3.7	—	3.1	—
Burkina Faso	3.4	—	3.3	—	3.5	—	3.3	—	3.5	—	3.3	—
Burundi	2.8	—*	3.4	—	2.7	—	2.9	—*	2.3	—	2.9	—
Cabo Verde	3.1	—	4.0	—	3.3	—	3.2	—	2.0	▼	3.0	▼
Cambodia	3.2	—	3.3	—	3.2	▲	3.0	—	3.3	—	3.1	—
Cameroon	2.7	—*	3.3	—*	2.5	—*	3.3	—*	2.2	—*	2.3	—*
Central African Republic	1.8	▼	2.1	—	1.6	▼	1.0	▼	1.9	—	2.2	▼
Chad	2.8	▲	2.7	—	3.5	—	3.3	—	2.7	—	2.0	—
Chile	3.6	—	3.4	—	3.5	—	3.3	—	4.0	—	4.0	—
Colombia	2.4	—	2.7	▲	1.9	—	2.3	—	2.0	—	3.0	—
Comoros	1.7	—*	1.3	—*	2.4	—*	2.0	—*	1.7	▲*	1.0	—*
Congo	2.2	—*	3.0	—	2.7	—	2.0	—	2.0	—	1.5	—*
Costa Rica	3.7	—*	4.0	—*	3.6	—*	4.0	—*	3.3	—*	3.5	—*
Côte d'Ivoire	2.3	▲	2.7	—	2.6	—	2.3	▲	2.3	—	1.6	—
Croatia	3.3	▲	4.0	—	3.2	—	3.0	▲	3.3	—	3.0	▲
Cuba	3.7	—	3.0	▼	4.0	—	3.3	—	4.0	—	4.0	—
Democratic Republic of the Congo	1.7	—*	2.2	—*	1.6	—*	1.3	—*	1.5	—*	1.9	—*
Djibouti	3.1	—*	3.2	—*	3.6	—*	2.8	—*	3.0	—*	3.0	—*

COUNTRY/ TERRITORY	OVERALL		REACH		ASSESS		PRIORITIZE		INCREASE		DEVELOP	
Dominican Republic	3.3	—	3.2	—	2.8	—	3.7	—	3.7	—	3.0	—
Ecuador	3.1	▲	3.7	▲	3.2	▲	2.9	—	2.5	—	3.3	▲
Egypt	3.0	▼	3.0	▼	3.2	▼	3.3	—	2.5	▼	3.3	—
El Salvador	3.2	—*	3.4	—*	4.0	—*	3.3	—*	2.7	—*	2.9	—*
Equatorial Guinea	3.0	▲*	3.7	—	2.7	—	2.2	▲*	3.7	—	3.0	—
Eritrea	3.2	—*	3.5	—	3.2	—		—	2.8	—*		—
Eswatini	2.2	—		—	2.5	—	2.0	—	2.0	—	2.2	—
Ethiopia	2.9	—	3.0	▲	3.5	▲	2.8	▼	2.8	▲	2.5	▼
Fiji	2.5	—*	2.6	—*	1.7	—	3.7	—	1.0	—	3.5	—
Gabon	2.4	—	3.0	—		—	2.0	—	2.3	—		—
Gambia	3.0	▲	3.4	▲	3.2	▲	2.8	▲	2.7	▲	3.2	▲
Georgia	2.8	—	3.0	—	2.7	—	3.5	—	2.0	—	2.7	—
Ghana	3.1	—*	3.6	—*	3.1	—*	2.5	▼*	3.4	—*	3.0	—*
Grenada	3.0	—*	4.0	—*	2.7	—*	4.0	—*	1.3	—*	3.0	▼*
Guatemala	2.9	—	2.5	—	3.2	▼	2.0	▼	3.7	—	3.0	—
Guinea	2.0	▼	2.4	▼	2.1	—	2.0	▼	1.8	—	1.5	▼
Guinea-Bissau	2.2	—	2.9	▲	2.1	—	2.1	—	1.9	—	2.0	—
Haiti	2.4	—*	2.6	▼*	2.1	▼	2.9	—	2.4	—	2.0	—
Honduras	2.6	—	2.7	▼	2.5	—	2.3	—	3.0	▲	2.5	—
India	3.2	—*	3.2	—*	3.4	—*	3.3	—*	3.3	—*	2.8	—*

COUNTRY/ TERRITORY	OVERALL		REACH		ASSESS		PRIORITIZE		INCREASE		DEVELOP	
Indonesia	3.5	—*	3.7	—*	3.1	—*	3.7	—*	3.3	—*	3.8	—*
Iraq – Federal	3.0	—	3.3	—	2.6	—	3.6	▲	2.7	—	3.0	▲
Iraq – Kurdistan Region	3.1	—	3.4	—	2.6	—	3.5	—	3.1	—	2.8	—
Jamaica	3.7	—	3.8	—	4.0	—	3.5	—	3.5	—	3.4	—
Kazakhstan	3.4	—	3.4	—	4.0	—	2.8	—	3.5	▲	3.4	—
Kenya	3.4	—	3.5	—	3.6	—	3.5	—	3.3	▲	2.9	—
Kiribati	2.8	—	2.8	—		—		—		—		—
Kosovo	3.1	—	3.3	—	3.0	▼	3.0	—	2.9	—	3.3	—
Kuwait	2.2	—		—	2.3	—	2.5	—	2.0	—	2.0	—
Kyrgyzstan	2.4	—	2.8	—	2.3	—	2.0	—	2.5	—		—
Lao People's Democratic Republic	3.0	—	3.3	—	3.5	—	3.3	—	2.3	—	2.3	—
Lebanon	2.3	—*	2.3	—*	1.7	—*	2.7	—*	1.8	—*	2.7	—*
Lesotho	3.0	—	4.0	—	3.0	—	3.0	—	2.0	—	3.0	—
Liberia	2.5	—	3.1	▲	2.3	▼	2.2	—	2.3	—	2.3	—
Libya	3.4	▲	4.0	—	3.8	—	3.3	▲	3.0	—	2.9	▲
Madagascar	2.4	—	3.3	—	2.2	▼	2.3	▼	2.5	—	1.8	—
Malawi	3.2	▲	3.6	—	2.5	—	3.7	▲	3.6	▲	2.9	▲
Malaysia	3.8	—	3.8	—	4.0	—	3.8	—	3.8	—	4.0	—
Maldives	2.9	—*	3.4	▲	2.8	▼	3.3	—	2.3	—*	2.7	—

COUNTRY/ TERRITORY	OVERALL		REACH		ASSESS		PRIORITIZE		INCREASE		DEVELOP	
Mali	2.9	▲	3.2	—	3.1	▲	2.9	▲	3.0	▲	2.2	▲
Marshall Islands	2.5	▲	2.5	▲		—		—		—		—
Mauritania	2.5	—	2.8	—	2.8	—	2.1	▼	2.3	▼	2.5	▲
Mexico	3.3	—	3.7	—	4.0	—	3.3	—	3.7	▲	2.0	▼
Micronesia (Federated States of)	2.0	—	2.3	—	2.0	—	2.7	—	1.7	—	1.5	—
Mongolia	3.3	▲*	3.5	▲	3.7	—	3.0	▲	3.3	▲	3.1	▲*
Montenegro	3.1	—	3.8	—	3.1	—	3.3	▲	2.7	—	2.9	▲
Montserrat	2.8	—	3.7	—	2.3	—	2.3	—	2.0	—	3.8	—
Morocco	3.0	—	3.6	—	2.8	▼	3.0	▲	3.3	—	2.3	—
Mozambique	2.9	—	3.4	▲	3.0	—	3.0	▲	2.3	▼	2.6	—
Namibia	3.3	—*	3.3	—	3.7	—*	3.3	—	3.0	—	3.1	—
Nepal	2.9	▲	3.7	▲	2.8	—	2.8	▲	2.5	▲	2.9	—
Niger	2.1	—*	2.7	—	2.7	—	1.5	—*		—	1.5	—
Nigeria	2.7	—	2.6	—	2.9	—	2.8	—	2.5	—	2.8	—
North Macedonia	3.5	—	3.6	—	3.8	—	3.3	—	3.4	—	3.3	—
Oman	3.2	—	3.2	—		—		—		—		—
Pakistan	2.4	—	2.8	▲	1.5	▼	4.0	▲	1.9	—	1.8	—
Panama	2.5	—	3.1	—	2.2	—	2.0	▲	1.8	—	3.3	—
Papua New Guinea	2.5	—*	2.3	—*	2.5	—*	2.5	—*	2.7	—*	2.3	—*

COUNTRY/ TERRITORY	OVERALL		REACH		ASSESS		PRIORITIZE		INCREASE		DEVELOP	
Paraguay	3.4	—	3.4	—	3.8	—	4.0	—	3.3	—	2.3	—
Philippines	3.4	—	3.8	—	3.6	—	3.0	—	3.5	—	3.2	—
Qatar	1.9	—*	2.2	—		—		—		—	1.5	—*
Republic of Moldova	3.1	—	3.5	—	3.1	—	3.0	—	2.9	—	2.8	—
Romania	3.6	—	4.0	—	3.6	—	4.0	—	3.3	—	3.3	—
Rwanda	3.3	—	3.7	—	3.7	—	3.5	▲	3.0	—	2.8	▼
Saint Kitts and Nevis	4.0	—	4.0	—	4.0	—	4.0	—	4.0	—	4.0	—
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	2.3	—		—		—		—		—	2.3	—
Sao Tome and Principe	2.9	—	3.3	—	2.9	—	3.3	—	2.2	—	2.8	—
Senegal	3.0	—	3.2	—	2.7	—	3.0	—	3.3	—		—
Serbia	3.3	—	3.4	—	3.7	—	3.1	—	3.3	—	3.3	—
Sierra Leone	2.8	—*	2.8	—	3.2	—	2.8	—	3.0	—	2.3	—*
Solomon Islands	2.1	—	2.6	—	2.5	—	2.7	—	1.3	—	1.5	—
Somalia	2.4	—	2.8	▼	1.9	—	2.5	▼	2.3	—	2.3	—
South Africa	3.2	—	4.0	—	3.2	▲	3.2	—	2.3	—	3.5	—
South Sudan	2.4	—	3.0	—	2.8	—	2.5	—	2.0	—	1.8	—
Sri Lanka	2.7	—*	2.1	—*	3.0	—*	3.3	—*	2.7	—*	2.7	—*
State of Palestine	2.5	—*	2.3	—	3.2	—*	2.3	—	2.2	—	2.8	—

COUNTRY/ TERRITORY	OVERALL		REACH		ASSESS		PRIORITIZE		INCREASE		DEVELOP	
Sudan	2.3	▲	2.5	▲	2.0	—	2.3	—	2.4	▲	2.3	▲
Suriname	3.1	—*	2.8	—*	3.9	—*	4.0	—*	2.3	—*	2.7	—*
Syrian Arab Republic	2.2	—*	2.8	—		—	1.5	—		—	2.3	—*
Thailand	2.8	—	3.0	—	3.3	▼	2.8	—	2.3	▼	2.3	—
Timor-Leste	3.6	—*	4.0	—*	3.1	—*	4.0	—*	4.0	—*	2.8	—*
Togo	3.2	▲	3.6	▲	3.2	▲	4.0	—	3.2	▲	2.2	▲
Trinidad and Tobago	3.7	—	4.0	—	4.0	—	4.0	—	2.3	—	4.0	—
Tunisia	3.3	▲	3.4	▲	2.9	▲	3.5	▲	2.7	—	4.0	—
Türkiye	3.8	▲	4.0	—	3.8	▲	3.8	—	3.5	▲	3.8	—
Turkmenistan	2.7	▲	2.8	▲	2.7	▲	3.0	▲	3.3	▲	2.0	▲
Turks and Caicos Islands	3.0	—	3.3	—	3.0	—	3.0	—	2.0	—	3.8	—
Tuvalu	2.7	—	2.7	—		—		—		—		—
Uganda	2.9	—	3.1	—	3.3	—	2.7	—	3.2	—	2.2	—
Ukraine	3.0	▲	3.0	—	2.5	—	3.1	▲	3.0	—	3.5	—
United Arab Emirates	1.5	—	1.3	—		—		—		—	1.8	—
United Republic of Tanzania	2.9	—*	3.6	—*	3.4	—*	3.4	—*	1.8	—*	2.5	—*
Uruguay	2.9	—	3.3	—	3.3	▲	3.0	—	2.7	—	2.3	—

COUNTRY/ TERRITORY	OVERALL		REACH		ASSESS		PRIORITIZE		INCREASE		DEVELOP	
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	1.9	—	1.8	—	1.8	—	2.0	▲	1.8	▲	2.2	—
Viet Nam	3.4	—	3.7	—	3.7	—	3.8	—	3.0	—	3.1	—
Yemen	2.5	▲	2.1	—	2.5	—	4.0	—	1.7	—	2.3	—
Zambia	3.2	—	3.7	—	3.5	—	2.8	—	2.9	—	3.3	—
Zimbabwe	3.4	—	3.8	—	3.7	—	3.0	—	3.7	—	3.1	—

Source: UNICEF and Hempel Foundation's FLAT 2026 and FLAT 2025 data. *Indicates a rating that includes values imputed from 2025 data, due to missing data in 2026. A rating change of >=0.5 (<=-0.5) is counted as an increase (decrease). Ratings for 11 countries with available data are not shown, in line with country preferences; these countries are included in the regional and global averages in this report.

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Endnotes

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8 In 2026, two survey responses were submitted for Iraq – one from the Federal Ministry of Education, and one from the Ministry of Education in the Kurdistan Region. The response from the Federal Ministry is used in global aggregate statistics; ratings for both are presented separately in the Annex of this report.

9 Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Belize, Bhutan, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Liberia, Malawi, Maldives, Mexico, Mozambique, Namibia, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Paraguay, the Philippines, Rwanda, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Tajikistan, Thailand, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Zambia and Zimbabwe. All references to Kosovo in this report should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

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