



Investing in Hand Hygiene for All as We Build a Next and Better Normal

An investment opportunity for the private and public sectors



\$0.90 to \$2.50
per capita per year is the cost of
implementing hand hygiene strategies
in health care facilities

The opportunity

The global community currently has the extraordinary opportunity to enable another 3 billion people – 40 per cent of the world’s population – to wash their hands at home.

When reimagining how we can provide a better post-COVID world for every child, UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore included hand hygiene in her recent open letter, “[Five opportunities for children we must seize now.](#)”

Proper handwashing not only protects us from contracting COVID-19 but it also stops the transmission to other people. To beat the virus today – and to be better prepared for possible future pandemics – universal access to hand hygiene must become a reality for everyone, in all settings, and most especially in health care facilities, schools, crowded public spaces, camps, and prisons.

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Hand hygiene is also one of the most cost-effective ways to prevent the spread of infectious diseases in general. The [cost of implementing hand hygiene strategies](#) in health care facilities is low, estimated at just \$0.90 to \$2.50 per capita per year, depending on the country. Looking at the economics, improving hand hygiene policies can generate savings in national health expenditures up to 15 times the cost. In addition to being one of the most cost-effective ways to protect global health, hand hygiene is a human right and is fundamental to human dignity.

40
per cent of the world’s population, some
3 billion people, do not have a handwashing
facility at home with soap and water

The challenge

In many parts of the world children, parents, teachers, health care workers, and other members of the community do not have access to basic handwashing at home, in health care facilities, in schools, or elsewhere; and even where facilities are available, handwashing is often not practiced consistently.

According to the latest estimates:

- **At home:** 40 per cent of the world’s population, some 3 billion people, do not have a home handwashing facility with soap and water, including approximately three quarters of those living in least developed countries.
- **At school:** 43 per cent of schools lack a handwashing facility with soap and water, affecting 817 million school-aged children. Further, over a third of schools worldwide and half of schools in the least developed countries have no place for children to wash their hands at all.
- **In health care facilities:** 26 per cent of health care facilities do not have hand hygiene services at points of care.

The outbreak of COVID-19 brought into sharp relief the insufficient global coverage of hand hygiene in low- and middle-income countries, the persistent lack of political prioritization, and the chronic under-investment.

Globally, the proportion of households with access to soap and water in the home would need to improve by **three percentage points per year** to achieve universal access by 2030. As modest as this may sound, such rates of change pose a significant challenge in some countries. In schools and health care facilities much more rapid improvement is possible, as in these areas governments have much more control. Thus, countries should prioritize universal access to hand hygiene materials in health care settings immediately and should also ensure that children return to a safe school environment.

21 per cent of surveyed countries did not have a national policy for hygiene

Behind this lack of handwashing facilities are five distinct and underlying root causes:

Weak institutional leadership

Hygiene requires both infrastructure and behaviour change across a multitude of settings – from schools to markets to health care facilities. Effective leadership by hygiene champions across all levels unlocks the potential for real progress, but all too often the mandate for hygiene is not clearly defined among various government ministries. As a result, institutional accountability is often vague or non-existent. To address this dangerous gap, governments must establish strong policy objectives and national standards, and they must precisely define the institutional accountabilities and strategies for achieving them. However, in 2018–2019, **23 out of 109 surveyed countries (21 per cent) did not have a national policy for hygiene**, while 41 per cent did not even have national coverage targets.

Inadequate planning for financing

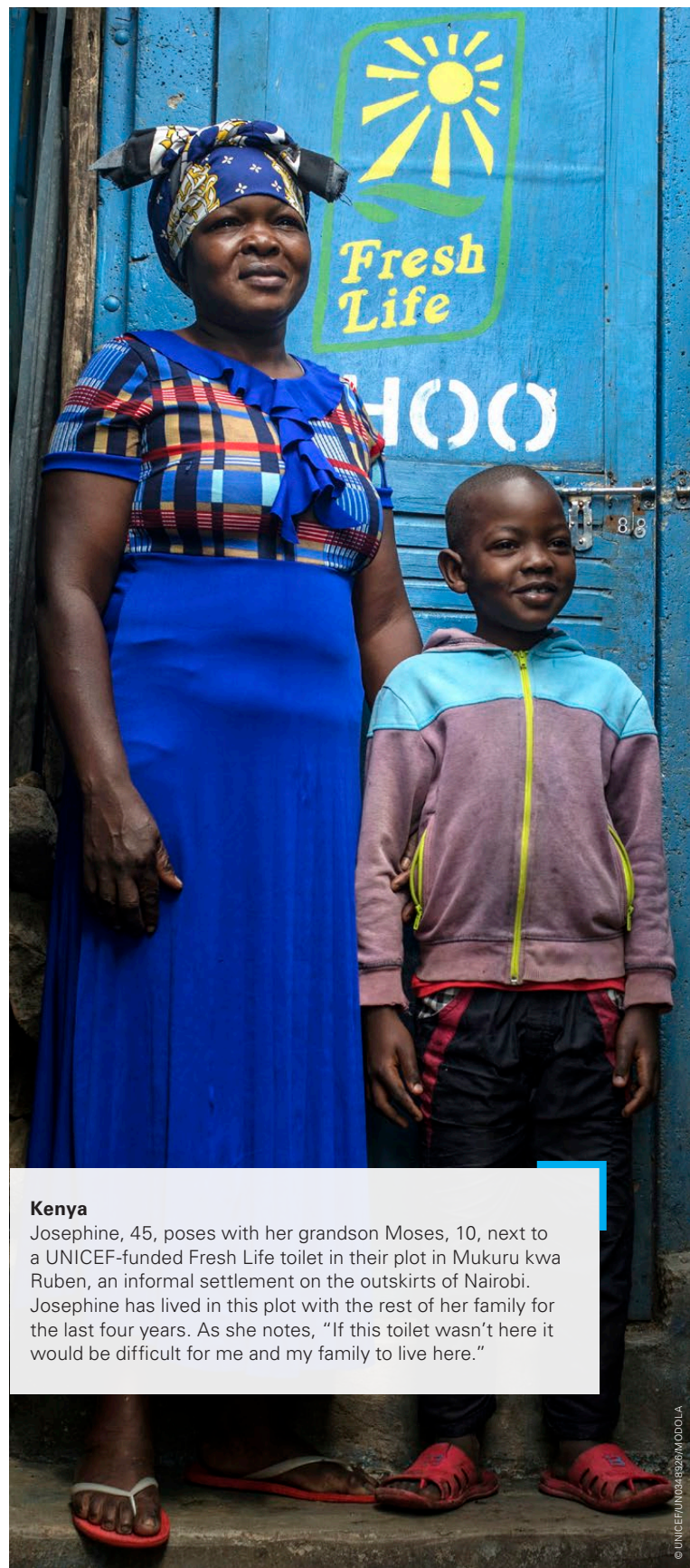
Many countries do not know how much it would cost to achieve their policy objectives or how to tap into existing and new sources to finance their plans. The 2018–2019 country survey report found that **32 of the 80 countries that had national hygiene targets did not include costings in their plans**.

Insufficient data and information

The availability of data and information, as well as clear baselines, is another key concern. In 2019, 33 of the 109 surveyed countries lacked data on access to handwashing facilities with soap and water in the home, while 29 countries lacked data on basic hygiene in schools. Most worrying of all, 54 countries had no data on the availability of hand hygiene materials in health care facilities, and 93 lacked data on the availability of soap and water in toilets at health care facilities. **There is also a general lack of data on hand hygiene in public spaces and workplaces.**

Where baselines do exist, countries should set ambitious but achievable targets to improve access. **Currently, however, 59 per cent of countries surveyed (55 of 93) lacked national hygiene coverage targets** for basic

59 per cent of countries surveyed lacked national hygiene coverage targets



Kenya

Josephine, 45, poses with her grandson Moses, 10, next to a UNICEF-funded Fresh Life toilet in their plot in Mukuru kwa Ruben, an informal settlement on the outskirts of Nairobi. Josephine has lived in this plot with the rest of her family for the last four years. As she notes, “If this toilet wasn’t here it would be difficult for me and my family to live here.”

90 per cent of countries lacked the human capacity to implement their national plans for hygiene

hygiene in households (handwashing facilities on premises with soap and water), while the same number had no national coverage target for hygiene more generally.

Apart from the lack of national targets and monitoring, high-quality data on behavioural drivers, market information, and household needs and preferences are also missing and/or are underutilized to shape programmes. Admittedly, hand hygiene behaviours are notoriously difficult to monitor, as reflected in the paucity of data.

Limited capacity development

Capacity gaps impede progress on hand hygiene. This includes capacities to strengthen the enabling environment for hand hygiene, evidence-based hand hygiene promotion, and shaping markets for hygiene products and services. In some cases, institutions may not have the necessary structures, knowledge, tools, training, and incentives. The 2018–2019 survey found that **90 per cent of countries lacked the human capacity to implement their national plans for hygiene.**

This gap cuts across policy makers, local leaders, researchers, innovators, implementers, entrepreneurs, retailers, distributors, and consumers, and it prevents a quick response to a public health emergency.

Challenges in taking innovations to scale

Notably, there is a significant shortfall in the availability and affordability of attractive, easy to install, and convenient to use hand washing facilities for households and various public settings. Handwashing stations that simultaneously respond to consumers' aesthetic, aspirational, and functional preferences are rare in the current market in low- and middle-income countries.

While several promising innovations exist, bringing them to scale and making solutions available in communities remains a challenge.

In addition, the continuous practice of hand hygiene requires a reliable supply of water and affordable soap or hand sanitizer. During the COVID-19 pandemic, weaknesses were exposed in the traditional supply chains, and dependency on imported hand hygiene goods often led to shortfalls in domestic supply.

Improving market resilience through local market development and improved business engagement – both in the workplace and via local business chambers – are foundational strategies for ensuring a robust private sector engagement in pandemic preparedness.



Syrian Arab Republic

Children displaced from Afrin fill buckets and jerry cans from a UNICEF-supported water tank in Fafin village, northern rural Aleppo, thanks to a generous contribution from ECHO.

110 countries have been supported by UNICEF through handwashing campaigns

2.7 billion people have been reached by UNICEF through messaging on prevention and access to services

UNICEF's sustainable response

UNICEF has decades of experience in supporting national handwashing campaigns and helping to integrate handwashing into other existing programmes – such as health, education, and nutrition – in 110 countries across a wide range of contexts. Since initiating the response to the coronavirus disease pandemic in early 2020, UNICEF and partners have assisted 153 countries and territories with their response. This includes reaching 2.7 billion people through messaging on prevention and access to services; providing 92 million people with critical water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) supplies and services; training 3.4 million health care facility staff and community health workers in infection prevention and control; and supporting 355,000 schools to implement safe protocols for COVID-19 prevention and control.

Over the years UNICEF has supported hand hygiene initiatives to combat some of the worst epidemics, including Ebola and cholera. Backed by such vast experience, the organization immediately began to scale-up hand hygiene efforts in various countries and regions at the start of this latest pandemic, making services available by supporting local and global product innovation, and helping to find new ways of bringing affordable products and services to the most vulnerable.

UNICEF helps governments reach people through a variety of channels, including community health and outreach workers, teachers, local celebrities, and social and mass media. Our experts build on research and evidence to ensure that our work is based on the latest behavioural science. Together with governments, UNICEF develops policies, strategies, and action plans to promote proper handwashing and to make the necessary services and supplies available – including in schools and health care facilities.

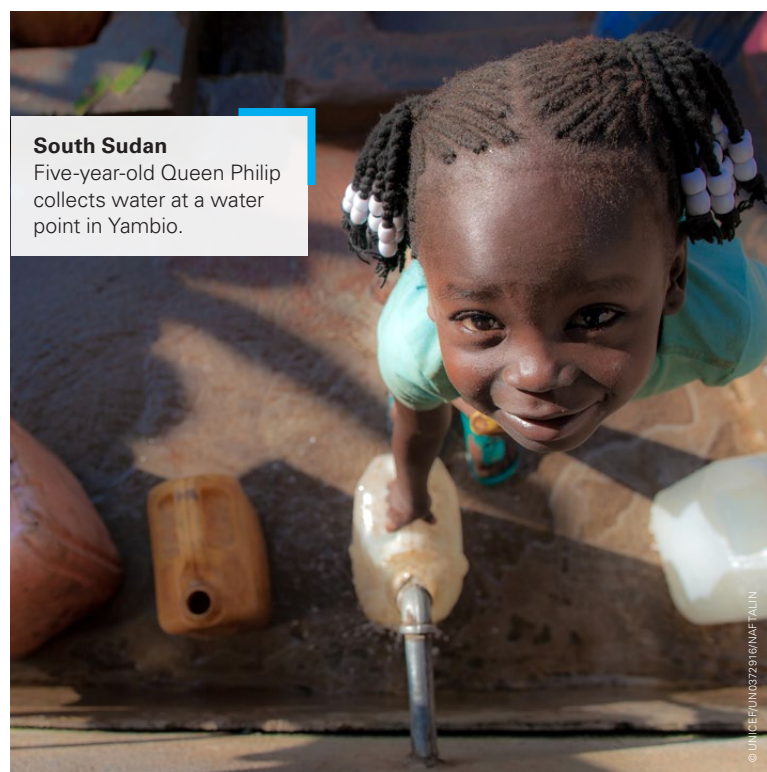
To achieve these urgent goals, UNICEF and partners are responding to the pandemic in a sustainable way through:

1 Promoting institutional leadership

UNICEF is calling for countries to lay out [comprehensive national roadmaps](#) that bridge between the COVID-19 response and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6.2 (by 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations) and to articulate government-led plans for achieving hand hygiene for all.

At the global level, UNICEF is coordinating activities among international and regional partners and aligning these activities behind country-led efforts and investments. Global coordination efforts create synergies to accelerate progress, and these accelerators mirror those of the [SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework](#).

UNICEF is leveraging and expanding an existing network of organizations to create global and regional multi-stakeholder platforms that support country-led efforts to improve hand hygiene. In addition, the organization is honing high-level political leadership for hand hygiene through global and regional advocacy while also supporting regional policy dialogues.



South Sudan
Five-year-old Queen Philip collects water at a water point in Yambio.

② Developing a financing business case and tools

UNICEF is developing a robust business case for financing hand hygiene, including collaborating with WHO on a costing tool for hand hygiene, which allows countries to estimate the cost of reaching hand hygiene for all. UNICEF is also convening high-level events to promote increased funding by domestic and external support agencies, including innovative financing opportunities such as blended financing models.

③ Improving data and information

Through the UNICEF/WHO-led Joint Monitoring Programme and drawing on activity from across core partners and beyond, UNICEF is triaging existing monitoring tools across countries to develop standardized monitoring tools and methodologies across multiple settings, including in public places. This includes the strengthening of national monitoring systems.



Afghanistan

Somaya, 9, is washing her hands in the Balkh province of Afghanistan. UNICEF Afghanistan provides basic handwashing facilities for internally displaced children at Ferdousi camp in Nahri Shahi.

④ Building capacity

UNICEF is leveraging the expertise across our partnerships and beyond, and in particular from the COVID-19 Hygiene Hub, to establish a responsive mechanism for tailored, evidence-based support to countries on all facets of national hand hygiene. Areas of support include:

- hygiene capacity assessment;
- social and behaviour change communication;
- capacity-building for market-based interventions; and
- modelling hand hygiene programming in multiple settings.

⑤ Pioneering with new innovations, evidence, and learning

UNICEF is synthesizing evidence on effective hand hygiene programming and its impacts, key insights from countries on how to sustain hand hygiene post-outbreak, innovative approaches, and a research agenda towards evidence-based decision-making for hand hygiene programmes.

The organization is engaging the private sector directly through shared value partnerships and multi-stakeholder platforms that bring together businesses, humanitarian and development actors, academia, and governments – all with the aim of closing product and supply chain gaps while also supporting workplace enhancements to ‘normalize’ proper handwashing during work hours.



Niger

A boy fetches water for his family and the Nigerian refugee family they are hosting at their home in Maradi. It is early morning and a sand storm makes the task very challenging for the children of the village.

How the private and public sectors can invest

Along with inviting our partners to contribute with innovations, technical assistance, capacity-building, and research, there are several sustainable ways for philanthropists, corporations, foundations, governments, and bilateral and multilateral organizations to invest in universal hand hygiene through UNICEF:

Invest in pooled, flexible funds for water, sanitation, and hygiene

Flexible funding enables UNICEF to direct investments where they are needed most within the field of WASH, including hand hygiene. Such funding allows experts to focus on interventions that will have the best results, and therefore enable a strong return on investment. This is particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic and as we build a next and better tomorrow – providing the flexibility to adapt quickly in a volatile and changing environment.

Invest in specific results

UNICEF recognizes that some partners need to designate their resources to a particular hand hygiene result or country, or would like to complement their financial investment with advocacy and technical expertise. UNICEF has a long history of developing strategic partnerships to meet our partners' priorities and their philanthropic, corporate, or institutional goals. Partnerships can support any of the five specific response areas: good governance, innovative finance, pioneering innovations, generating data and evidence, and building capacity.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Children wash hands at school before entering class. UNICEF supports schools by distributing hygiene kits to prevent Ebola epidemics from spreading.



Why partner with UNICEF?

UNICEF's core accountability is to act wherever children lack a basic level of service. But the work does not stop there. All people need unfettered, long-term access to potable water, household sanitation facilities that dispose of waste safely, and sustainable hygiene practices. To these ends, the organization works with governments and the private sector to ensure that policies, standards, and systems are in place, but the most critical work happens locally. UNICEF knows that the power to maintain safe, reliable, and sustainable practices must rest in the hands of communities themselves. And while behaviour change is the essential starting point, improvements must also be sustained by robust local markets with adequate supply chains so goods and services are available and affordable.

UNICEF achieves the greatest impact for children:

Our priority is to ensure that hand hygiene solutions are sustainable in the long term. UNICEF works with its partners on sustainability plans that ensure an urgent response, but that are also imbedded in the community system.

UNICEF works at scale: Building on our knowledge, technical expertise, and lessons learned from existing programmes, UNICEF is uniquely placed to identify and design solutions at scale to provide hand hygiene services to schools, health care facilities, and communities in full alignment with national government commitments to the SDGs.


UNICEF leads and pioneers: By working with field partners and programmatic experts, and in close collaboration with private and public sector partners, UNICEF can identify, develop, and scale fit-for-purpose and value-for-money solutions for hand hygiene that respond to the unmet needs of communities around the globe.

UNICEF meets needs across the entire childhood and adolescence spectrum: UNICEF knows that the short-term answer is not the right answer. Only by addressing the WASH needs of young people throughout their entire childhood and adolescence can you ensure that hand hygiene goes hand-in-hand with such other essential needs as health, nutrition, and education.

UNICEF is there before, during, and after emergencies:

UNICEF has a history of working with communities before disaster strikes, of being there during a disaster, and continuing to provide aid and support right through to recovery. In this same way, UNICEF's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its work towards universal hand hygiene once again demonstrates the organization's ongoing commitment.

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Somalia

Pupils utilize a UNICEF-supported water point at Muuse Xuseen Hodoon School in Borama, Somaliland.



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