

Quality education empowers children and adolescents, contributes to reducing poverty, inequality and injustice, and promotes sustainable economic growth, better health, environmental sustainability, peace and resilience.
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The Pacific countries include many of the last countries in the world to identify COVID-19 cases, but the impact on education was immediate and long-lasting.

Out of the 14 countries, 12 had unplanned school closures and many closed borders for at least two years, with resulting impact on education budgets. As COVID-19 spread, school closures were reinitiated in 2021 and 2022. Many Pacific countries responded by developing and strengthening remote learning systems, safe school protocols, and mechanisms to promote safety and wellbeing of children.



Many students had to shift to remote learning when schools closed to COVID-19, but quality and equity of access to digital and other remote learning systems remain a challenge.
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UNICEF PACIFIC ISLANDS Education

Overview

More and more young children in the Pacific region are taking part in early education programmes, and enrolment is growing in primary schools. However, many children fail to meet minimum learning standards for their grade level, and many older children still miss out on secondary education.

Education comes under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, but it contributes significantly to other SDG targets, including reducing poverty, supporting economic growth, preventing inequality and injustice, improving health and reducing climate change impacts.



SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Early Childhood Education



35% Samoa

66% Solomon Islands

>90% 5 countries

Lower Secondary Completion Rate



46% Vanuatu

49% Nauru & RMI

>90% 6 countries

Where we are now

Enrolment in basic education is relatively high in the Pacific, and most countries are on track to achieve universal primary education, however, significant challenges remain.



Many children with disabilities miss out on opportunities to learn and develop skills for employment, independent living and full participation in their communities.
© UNICEF/2020/Shing



More countries in the Pacific are advancing education sector strategic planning processes with an aim to define clear roadmaps towards national education priorities.

Early Childhood Education (ECE)

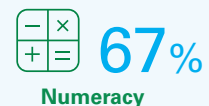
Access to ECE has increased in most Pacific countries, particularly for children in the year before entering primary school, though net enrolment for all ECE-aged children is significantly lower in most countries. Even where access to ECE is high, there are pockets of children without access, and quality of ECE remains a concern in most countries.

Primary and Secondary Education

Universal or near-universal primary enrolment has been achieved in many countries, although recent decreases in enrolment rates have been noted in some. Even in countries with high primary enrolment rates, completion rates are a concern. Significant numbers of children also fail to meet the minimum learning standards.

In secondary school, enrolment rates in most countries drop significantly, particularly for boys. In some countries, high enrolment rates mask the fact that children drop out partway through secondary school. Relevant alternative learning pathways, as well as data and analysis on out-of-school children and children at risk of dropping out, are also not always available.

At or above expected proficiency level Year 4 (2021)



At or above expected proficiency level Year 6 (2021)



Source: PILNA

Disability

Available evidence suggests very low participation rates in education for children with disabilities across the Pacific. These children are less likely to ever attend school, to complete primary or secondary education or to have basic literacy skills. All countries have legislation or policies that support inclusive education, but truly inclusive education systems remain elusive, especially with limited availability of inclusive learning environments, teachers trained in inclusive education, or access to teacher aides, assistive technologies and specialist services.

Gender

A gender disparity in favour of girls is evident at secondary level in most Pacific countries, and girls also tend overall to outperform boys on learning assessments. Yet girls face a number of gender-based challenges, both in schools, and as they leave school. Gender is a core cross-cutting concern across all education review, planning and programming.



Early childhood education builds a foundation for lifelong learning and development.
© UNICEF/2014/Alcock



Education is a crucial component of climate change mitigation and adaptation, yet education systems in the Pacific acknowledge they need to strengthen skills, tools and adequate financing to prevent and manage associated risks.

What is UNICEF doing?

Data Challenges

Availability and reliability of data is a persistent barrier to monitoring education access and learning across the Pacific, while even available data are not always used to inform policy, planning and programming in education.

Planning & Financing

More countries in the Pacific are advancing education sector strategic planning processes with an aim to define clear roadmaps towards national education priorities in the countries. Across the Pacific, the percentage of national budgets allocated to the education sector varies significantly, and there is still a need to strengthen adequacy, equity and efficiency in education finance in most countries.

Risks to Education

The acute vulnerability of Pacific Island countries to climate change-induced extreme weather events and natural hazards impacts upon children's access to education. Education is a crucial component of climate change mitigation and adaptation, yet education systems in the Pacific acknowledge they need to strengthen skills, tools and adequate financing to prevent and manage associated risks. Lessons learnt from recurring disasters, as well as from the COVID-19 pandemic, reinforce the importance of a resilient education system, able to sustain teaching, learning and student well-being for all students and under all circumstances.

Multi-Sectoral ECD

In general in the Pacific, children do not benefit from a seamless continuum of care throughout the early years, despite the critical nature of the Early Childhood Development (ECD) period in life-long success and broader socio-economic development. Services for young children and families are typically spread across ministries, without clear mechanisms for whole-of-government planning and service delivery. However, nine Pacific Island countries are developing national ECD policies and coordination mechanisms.

The new 2023-2027 Education programme aims to ensure that by 2027, more children in the Pacific, including adolescents and those in emergency situations, are developing holistically, learning and building skills and resilience that prepare them for life and their future. The programme is aligned with the objectives of the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) developed and approved by the Pacific Education Ministers.

UNICEF partners directly with Ministries of Education using a system strengthening approach.

New programmes are designed to be delivered through existing systems, then tested and refined before going to scale as part of the national education system; these efforts are underpinned by evidence-generation and evidence-based and risk-informed planning, with system capacity building. The programme also works multi-sectorally to strengthen systems and services for ECD, as well as for student safety, protection, hygiene and well-being. UNICEF has Education staff in 6 Pacific Island countries and existing partnerships with all 14 countries and territories.



Children take a break outside their temporary learning space after a cyclone badly damaged their school. © UNICEF/2021/Stephen

Frequent cyclones and weather events destroy or impact on homes, communities and schools. This impacted learning as well as the many supports for safety, protection, hygiene, mental health and overall well-being that students normally access at schools. The Pacific region is highly vulnerable to climate induced extreme weather events and natural hazards. Frequent cyclones and weather events affect homes, communities and schools, impacting learning as well as the many supports for safety, protection, hygiene, mental health and overall well-being that students normally access at schools.

UNICEF rapidly and agilely mobilizes to help children in emergencies, supporting coordination around a government-led response. As climate change further exacerbates the frequency, intensity and impact of natural hazards, climate adaptation and resilience will continue to be a priority, not only within the education sector but for ensuring adequate attention to education within climate adaptation discussions and strategies. UNICEF Pacific is doubling down its efforts to focus on improvement of learning facilities so that they can withstand the impacts of climate change, mainstreaming climate education and continuity, green skills in education systems and integrating disaster risk reduction strategies into education policies down to the school level.

Key Elements

Early Childhood Education

- High-quality, locally relevant ECE curricula and learning materials.
- ECE teacher workforce development, training and support.
- Quality ECE standards and ECE centre improvement strategies.
- Disaster risk reduction and resilience in ECE.

Teaching & Learning

- Transformed and inclusive teaching and learning, including remote and digital learning.
- Foundational skills, with a focus on fundamentals (literacy, numeracy, transferable skills).
- Transitions and gender-sensitive flexible learning pathways.
- School quality standards and school improvement strategies.
- Disaster risk reduction and resilience in schools.

System Strengthening & Resilience

- Generation and use of data, knowledge and evidence on key education challenges, gaps and priorities.
- Budget advocacy.
- Evidence-based and risk-informed education sector planning and capacity strengthening.
- Building resilience of education facilities and systems
- Supporting technology-enhanced learning.

Multi-Sectoral Early Childhood Development

- Multi-sectoral coordination of policies and services for ECD.
- Responsive caregiving and nurturing care.
- Pacific regional action and coordination of ECD



Estimated budget for the Education programme 2023-2027:

US\$32 million

UNICEF Pacific Multi Country Office

Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu.

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