

# Education in Timor-Leste

An investment opportunity for private and public donors

unicef   
for every child

## The opportunity

All children have the right to go to school and learn, regardless of who they are, where they live or how much money their family has. On any given school day, over 1 billion children around the world head to class.

Timor-Leste has made impressive progress in education over the past 20 years, with increasing numbers of children going to school each year. Gross enrolment rates in preschool education have increased from 12 per cent in 2013 to 25 per cent in 2019. Net enrolment rate in primary education has increased from 83 per cent in 2008 to 91 per cent in 2017. The country has achieved gender parity in primary and preschool education in nearly all regions across the country, with boys and girls attending primary education at an almost equal rate. Literacy levels have risen rapidly among all ages, which is central for promoting sustainable development. Education expenditure has also increased, showing a positive trend over the period 2011–2016, rising from US\$87.2 million in 2011 to about US\$124.8 million in 2016.

Education is a right and a crucial opportunity. It holds the key to a better life for children and adolescents worldwide: a life with less poverty, better health and an increased ability to take their future into their own hands. Education, particularly girls' education, is one of the most powerful tools for creating economic growth, decreasing the likelihood of conflict, increasing resilience and providing future generations with wide-reaching economic and social benefits.

Investing in education in Timor-Leste will bring about unprecedented returns for generations to come, enabling and preparing children and youth to become agile, adaptive learners and citizens, prepared to navigate personal, social, academic, economic and environmental challenges. Education will ensure a bright future for them and the society they live in.

## Return on investment

- Every US\$1 invested in quality preschool education can have a return of up to US\$15.<sup>1</sup>
- Investments in children's early development can lead to better individual adult incomes of up to 25 per cent.<sup>2</sup>
- On average, each additional year of education boosts a person's income by 10 per cent and increases a country's GDP by 18 per cent.<sup>3</sup>

## Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: quality education

UNICEF's learning programme contributes to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 – quality learning – ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. Education enables upward socio-economic mobility and is a key to escaping poverty. Education helps to reduce inequalities and reach gender equality and is crucial to fostering tolerance and more peaceful societies.



<sup>1</sup> <<https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/10781/file/UNICEF-Burundi-Cost-Benefit-Analysis-Investments-Early-Childhood-2021-EN.pdf>>

<sup>2</sup> <<https://blogs.unicef.org/blog/why-early-childhood-development-is-the-foundation-for-sustainable-development/>>

<sup>3</sup> <<https://blogs.unicef.org/blog/education-the-most-powerful-investment-in-our-future/#:~:text=Evidence%20shows%20that%2C%20on%20average,people%20would%20live%20in%20poverty>>

## The challenges

Despite the commendable progress made in improving education in Timor-Leste, some crucial challenges remain. Girls and boys in Timor-Leste are not reaching age-appropriate learning standards, particularly those living in rural and urban poor areas. Three main causes underpin this deprivation: 1) children are not being adequately prepared for school, leading to grade repetition; 2) they experience poor quality learning; and 3) they irregularly attend school and many eventually drop out of school.

Preschool is integral to ensuring that children arrive in primary school ready to learn and can expect to achieve genuine learning while at school. According to Education Management and Information System data, which do not include community-run preschools, access to preschool education is low, covering only around 25 per cent of three- to five-year-old children in 2019. High repetition rates (almost 24 per cent) and dropout rates (over 5 per cent) already in Grade 1 suggest poor school readiness. The Ministry of Education estimates that around 39 per cent of

all children 5 and 6 years old are not in either preschool or primary school.

According to the World Bank, in 2010 more than 70 per cent of students at the end of Grade 1, 40 per cent of students at the end of Grade 2 and 20 per cent of students at the end of Grade 3 could not read a single word of the simple text passages provided. Another study reveals that when considering what children learn, children who complete 10 years of education attain a result that is equivalent to 5.9 years of education when learning is adjusted for what they actually retain.

Around 32 per cent of children who are out of school say that they have 'no interest' in education, while 'parents didn't see the value of education' for 31 per cent of out-of-school children. Almost half of children with disabilities between 3 and 18 years are not in school. For adolescent mothers, there is a sharp decline in attendance from age 15 to age 19.



A student washes his hands with soap at a UNICEF-supplied hand-washing station before entering his classroom at the EBC Esperanca da Patria school in Dili.



## The solutions

UNICEF will drive change in four key areas that currently limit quality education for Timorese children.

### ① Quality early childhood development

UNICEF will continue to prioritize early childhood development and promote school readiness to help children transition smoothly to primary education. To accelerate access to quality pre-primary education, especially for those in disadvantaged, rural and remote communities, UNICEF will advocate for at least one year of universal preschool; promote a play-based approach to early learning; strengthen community and parental involvement in early childhood education; and promote alternative approaches such as community-based preschools that complement the traditional centre-based preschool programmes.

### ② Quality basic education

UNICEF will continue to provide technical support to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports at all levels to strengthen the capacity to plan, execute and monitor results-based and gender- and disability-sensitive plans and budgets. It will focus on further strengthening the government's central role in quality assurance and standard setting. UNICEF will also focus on further capacity development of teachers and education policymakers to deliver quality basic and secondary education and better support children and adolescent learning. This will include building the capacity of teacher education institutions to address the teaching of basic literacy and numeracy skills in addition to developing soft skills of critical thinking, negotiation and creativity in line with 21st century learning.

### ③ Innovative and alternative pathways to promote life-long learning

UNICEF will support greater access to inclusive, equitable, relevant and quality formal and non-formal education and innovative learning pathways to ensure that out-of-school children and adolescents, specifically young mothers and working children in rural and urban poor areas, continue to learn – through either formal or non-formal education. UNICEF will build on the work done as a response to COVID-19 in the education sector and promote the use of information and communication technologies to enhance learning. The Timor-Leste Learning Passport Platform provides more information: <<https://timorleste.learningpassport.org>>

### ④ Positive social norms and child-friendly learning environments

UNICEF will increase the capacity of families and communities to create nurturing and stimulating homes and communal spaces that are child-friendly and inclusive, promoting social cohesion. This will include increasing the number of schools that have at least one teacher trained in the child-friendly school approach; leadership training and advocating for student councils; and increasing the number of schools with safe drinking water, hand-washing facilities with soap, gender-segregated toilets, disability-accessible water and sanitation facilities, and menstrual hygiene management facilities.

UNICEF will focus on addressing beliefs, practices and social norms that may adversely affect children's and adolescents' access to quality learning and education.



Sixth-grade students, Lidia (left) and Canizia (right), participate in young facilitator training at their school.

## Impact

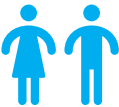
By 2025, working with partners in the public and private sectors, UNICEF in Timor-Leste will contribute to the achievement of these key results:



60 per cent of **children under 5 years of age** (153,109) are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being



50 per cent of **children** (127,591) participate in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age



1,500 **parents** annually attend at least one parent education session



All **preschool** (757), **primary** (7,511) and **secondary school teachers** (364) have received at least the minimum organized teacher training (e.g. pedagogical training) pre-service or in-service required for teaching



The net **primary enrolment rate** reaches 98 per cent



70 per cent of **schools** (1,323) have safe drinking water, hand-washing facilities with soap, gender-segregated toilets, and menstrual hygiene management facilities (currently 27.6 per cent)



Abrão draws during an art session at the community preschool.



## How to help

UNICEF's work in education requires a budget of US\$13 million for 2022–2025. Of this amount, UNICEF has committed US\$3 million from its resources. Now, UNICEF is seeking partners from both the private and the public sector to financially support its life-changing education programme with a total amount of US\$10 million. Donors can contribute in two ways:

- 1. Contribute to thematic funds and other flexible funds** – This type of funding targets a specific goal area of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, such as education, while enabling the Country Office to direct the investments to activities that are most needed within this thematic area. This gives UNICEF's experts the flexibility to focus on interventions that will have the most impact in accelerating results for children.
- 2. Contribute to specific activities** – If you are interested in contributing to specific solutions, UNICEF is ready to partner with you. UNICEF has developed the following budget for its education work for 2022–2025 and can provide more details on the interventions listed below.

SOLUTIONS	FUNDING GAP (US\$) 2022–2025*
1. Quality early childhood development	3.5 million
2. Quality basic education	3 million
3. Innovative and alternative pathways to promote life-long learning	2.5 million
4. Positive social norms and child-friendly learning environments	1 million

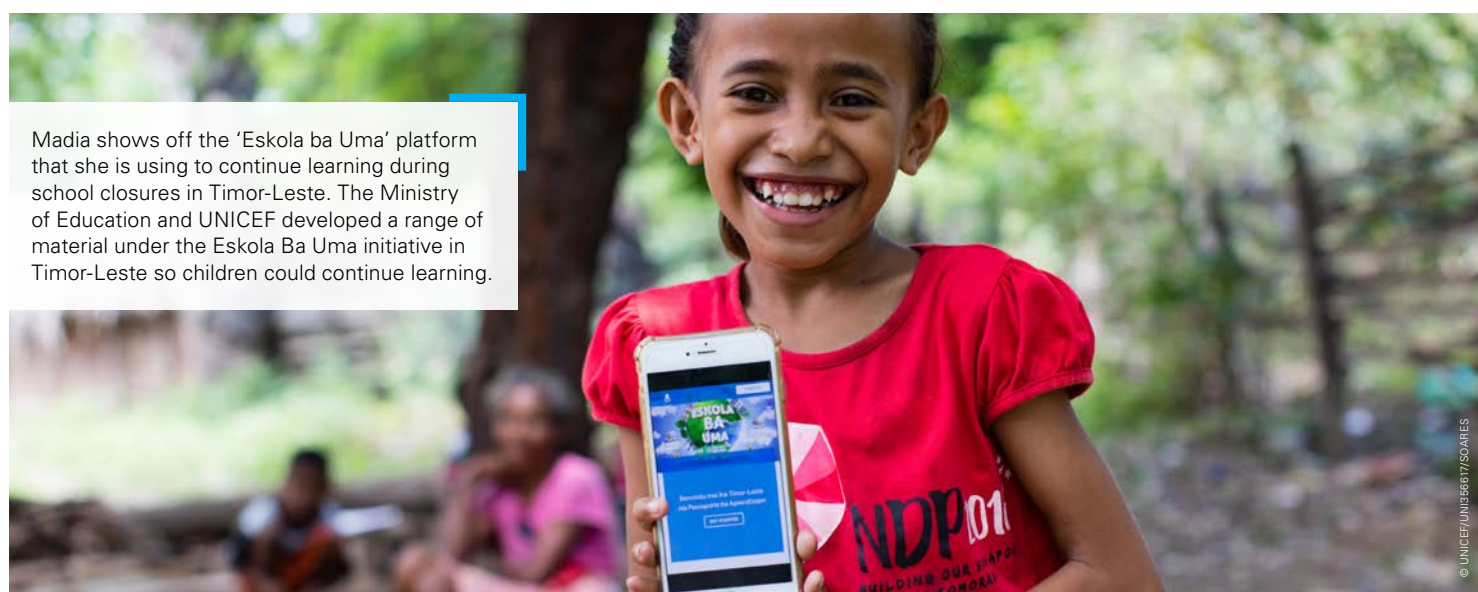
\*Detailed budgets for each solution are available.

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Strategies deployed under each solution include:

- **Service delivery:** Procurement, distribution of supplies and equipment, logistics, transportation, warehousing, infrastructure, direct assistance, cash grants, monitoring and innovations
- **Capacity development:** Development of materials, training aids, information, education and communication materials, workshops, social mobilization and community empowerment
- **Institution building:** Development of plans/micro-plans, institutional mechanisms and tools, guidelines, protocols and standards, coordination, oversight strengthening, management information systems, resourcing and budgeting
- **Evidence generation:** Situation analysis, research, studies, surveys, evaluation, assessments, generation of profiles, knowledge management and innovative approaches
- **Policy dialogue and advocacy:** Strategy and policy formulation, convening meetings, organizing workshops, study tours, South-South cooperation, partnership building and media outreach

Madia shows off the 'Eskola ba Uma' platform that she is using to continue learning during school closures in Timor-Leste. The Ministry of Education and UNICEF developed a range of material under the Eskola Ba Uma initiative in Timor-Leste so children could continue learning.





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## Children in Grade 1 inspired to learn by peer mentors in Timor-Leste

Around 40 children between the ages of 5 and 7 sit in small groups on a large veranda and in classrooms at the Eskola Basic Filial (EBF) Matata School in Ermera Municipality. The UNICEF supported 'Ready to LEAP' (Learn, Engage, Achieve, Progress) programme, introduced in 2019 with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, helps children enrolled in Grade 1 or those repeating Grade 1 to get additional support from the school, their parents and families and other students as peer mentors. The trained peer mentors play a key role in inspiring younger children to learn.

In a country where only 25 per cent of children are enrolled in preschool and the Grade 1 repetition rate is 24 per cent, initiatives such as this one make a big difference in inspiring younger children to transition smoothly into school-based learning. To date, the school readiness programme has benefitted 1,314 students in Grade 1 classes and enabled 439 students between 10 and 11 years old from 11 basic education schools to take part as peer mentors. To not interrupt the peer mentors' learning, the sessions take place on Saturdays.

"I feel so happy and proud when the teacher asked me to be a young facilitator," says 10-year-old Davio. Since joining this programme, I have become much closer to Grade 1 students and have become friends with them."

Nine-year-old Merelia expresses her excitement at being part of the programme: "I feel so proud because I am like a teacher for them. I make them feel happy to be diligent, and they come to the school every day. So it is a great feeling."

"This is not only benefiting the Grade 1 students," says Lurdes Rangel Goncalves, a teacher at EBF Matata School. "After taking a role as peer mentors, the literacy and numeracy skills of the mentors also improved, and so did their social skills, for example understanding ways to solve problems, or how to communicate with friends and manage time."

We hope you are inspired to join us and take a leading role in improving education for all Timorese children. If you have any questions or would like more details, please contact:

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