



KEY ASKS

2021 • SDG National Reviews

SDG 6: CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION FOR EVERY CHILD

Every child, no matter where they live or their circumstance, has the right to safe water and sanitation. Without safe water, children simply cannot survive. Without safe toilets, entire communities live with human waste in their environment. Without taps and soap for handwashing, diseases spread rapidly and newborn babies risk death from infection. Young children are particularly vulnerable, and water and sanitation related diseases remain among the leading causes of death in children under five as well as contribute malnutrition and stunting. Every year, [297,000 children under 5 years die due to diarrhoea linked to inadequate WASH](#). Children exposed to bodies of polluted water (e.g. with human waste, trash, chemical and industrial waste or other environmental pollutants) are also at increased risk of disease and death.

Despite significant progress, there are still 2.2 billion people around the world today who do not have safely managed drinking water services. Over half of the global population, [or 4.2 billion people, lack safely managed sanitation services](#). Three billion people lack basic handwashing facilities with soap and water available at home. Overall, there are vast inequalities in the accessibility, availability and quality of these services. Progress on sanitation and hygiene has been particularly slow, with [673 million people around the world still practicing open defecation](#) and over [620 million children worldwide lacking a basic sanitation service at their school](#). [26% of health-care facilities globally do not have basic water services](#) and without these basic needs being met, new mothers and babies are at a significantly increased risk of disease, infection or death.

While UNICEF focuses particularly on targets 6.1 and 6.2, concerning drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, it acknowledges that these cannot be achieved without attention to the whole of SDG6, which also takes into account issues of water scarcity, water quality and climate resilience. Beyond keeping children alive and healthy, access to water, sanitation and hygiene supports progress on nutrition, education, health, urban services, gender equality, resilience, climate change, reducing poverty and increasing economic growth. Improving equitable access to water, therefore, underpins the success of all SDGs. UNICEF encourages countries participating in a Voluntary National Review (VNR) during the 2020 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) to include the following aspects in their respective reports:

The onset and ongoing crisis of the global COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the situation, especially for the most vulnerable children. Good handwashing and hygiene practices are essential to reducing transmission and exposure to the coronavirus. However, across the world, [2.1 billion people](#) still lack access to safe water at home, while [3 billion people](#) (40 per cent of the world's population) do not have a place in their homes to wash their hands with water and soap. This puts a significant portion of the world's population at immediate risk of COVID-19 simply because they lack basic handwashing facilities.

“Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services are also at risk of disruption by lockdown measures, posing further threats to children’s health through water-borne diseases. Over 700 children under five die every day from diarrheal diseases related to inadequate WASH services 19, and this number could rise sharply if existing services collapse. This is especially alarming given the critical role of hygiene in preventing infection and controlling the spread of COVID-19.”

--Policy Brief by the UN Secretary-General : [The Impact of COVID-19 on Children](#)



KEY ASKS

To achieve SDG 6, Governments must invest in their communities and bridge the economic and geographic divides to deliver the human rights to safe water, sanitation and hygiene. UNICEF encourages Governments to:

1. **Reaffirm their commitment to improve access to basic water, sanitation and hygiene services**, as a key building block for a more sustainable and prosperous future for everyone, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls;
2. **Strengthen partnerships with the national statistics offices towards the collection, analysis and use of disaggregated data and routinely measuring progress** towards equitable access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene, in homes, schools and healthcare centres;
3. **Report progress on national action** to address low levels of access to and quality of basic services through targeting the poorest and most vulnerable children and their families.
4. **Ensure the continuity and quality of quality of WASH services during the COVID-19 crisis and sustain affordable access to WASH products and services for the poorest and most vulnerable populations** (e.g., in refugee/displacement camps and urban slums) with special attention for children with disabilities and those living in humanitarian settings.



MONITOR – THE IMPORTANCE OF DISAGGREGATED DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND USE

UNICEF urges all Governments to **prioritize the collection, analysis, dissemination and use of disaggregated data for key SDG 6 indicators**:

6.1 By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all
6.1.1 Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services
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
6.2.1 Proportion of population using (i) safely managed sanitation services and (ii) a hand-washing facility with soap and water
6.3 By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally
6.3.1 Proportion of wastewater safely treated
6.3.2 Proportion of bodies of water with good ambient water quality

UNICEF also encourages the implementation and monitoring of the following related indicators under SDG targets 1.4 and 4.a:

1.4.1 Proportion of population living in households with access to basic services (including access to basic drinking water, basic sanitation and basic handwashing facilities)
4.A.1. Proportion of schools with access to: (a) electricity; (b) the Internet for pedagogical purposes; (c) computers for pedagogical purposes; (d) adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities; (e) basic drinking water; (f) single-sex basic sanitation facilities; and (g) basic handwashing facilities (as per the WASH indicator definitions)

While national and local governments collect targets and indicators related to SDG 6, we encourage, where appropriate, the collection of data for the following **additional indicator areas**: use of basic water, sanitation and hygiene services at home; proportion of the population practicing of open defecation; basic water, sanitation and hygiene in schools, health centers and other settings beyond the home.

To help identify inequalities, **disaggregate data** by area (urban, informal urban and rural areas; subnational regions), poverty, and nationally identified disadvantaged groups, as well as gender and disabilities data at the household level.

Strengthen systems to collect administrative data on water, sanitation and hygiene, in homes, schools and healthcare centers.



INVEST -- SOCIAL SPENDING AND PROGRESS ON RESULTS FOR CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

The current pace of progress is insufficient to achieve SDG 6 by 2030. Current [spending on WASH needs to increase threefold](#) in order to meet SDG targets 6.1 and 6.2, the cost of which is estimated at USD \$114 billion per year in developing countries from 2016-2030. Notably, poorer regions have to invest a higher proportion of GDP than the rest in expanding service coverage, for example 2% in Sub-Saharan Africa and 0.5% in Southern Asia. New financing mechanisms and innovative approaches towards achieving universal access to affordable WASH services will be crucial. UNICEF encourages Governments to:

Step up investments to ensure affordable access to services and **provide smart subsidies to poorer households** to partially finance the costs of WASH services. Discussions on financing for development suggest that while some low-income and fragile states remain dependent on external support, most of the additional financing is expected to come from domestic resources, including private-sector investments.

Budget for water and sanitation at subnational levels in order to address economic and geographic divides. Children and their families in poor and rural communities are most at risk of being left behind. **Closing inequality gaps in the accessibility, quality and availability** of water, sanitation and hygiene should be at the heart of government funding and planning strategies.

Extend basic services to populations that remain unserved and increase the quality of existing services. This will also require developing new approaches that will work in urban areas and new **partnerships with the private sector** to leverage all available resources for children (this can include: linking the public sector and larger companies in efforts to strengthen the domestic and small-scale private sector; collaborating to meet the WASH needs of people at work, as well as in their homes and communities; and facilitating forms of engagement at global level that can support country governments to engage their own private sectors).



ACTIVATE -- AWARENESS BUILDING & MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

Evidence from UNICEF's programmes in water, sanitation and hygiene illustrates the powerful ways in how reaching children and youth with education in schools positively impacts household and community practices. Because norms in sanitation particularly can be associated with social stigma, people's participation in solutions promotes a sense of ownership, which is a necessary prerequisite for long-term and sustainable practices. UNICEF encourages Governments to involve children and adolescents in learning about their rights and the SDGs through participatory means:

The process for preparing the 2020 national review should directly involve children and adolescent girls and boys, especially the most marginalized or excluded. For example, through consultations (on and/or offline), surveys or polls, focus group discussions, etc. UNICEF together with civil society, child-focused organizations and other partners could support the government in that process. The results of these efforts as well as the methods employed should be described in the VNR report, including the number of young people involved in the process.

Implement SDG-focused learning throughout schools in their countries. Existing materials specifically developed for this purpose such as the [World's Largest Lesson](#) and [Comics Uniting Nations](#) are intended to bring the SDGs to the classroom through freely available, multilingual creative and educational content, including specific [content related to SDG 6](#). [UNICEF's Youth Activate Talk Methodology](#) is also a platform from children to express their ideas on the SDGs through a variety of medium.

Awareness-raising and participation should be seen as part of **a continuum to regularly, meaningfully and consistently engage children, adolescents and young people as agents of change to influence behaviours and social norms amongst themselves, their households and their communities.** This goes beyond engagement just for the purposes of reporting periods, but rather creating standing mechanisms and spaces for young people to engage and have their perspectives heard in decision and policy-making processes as well as across media and communications channels for the purpose of solidifying long-term positive changes in behaviours and social norms.



For more information, visit: <https://www.unicef.org/sdgs>