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UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029

Summary

The UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029 will guide the organization's final drive to achieve the child-related Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, in partnership with Governments and other stakeholders at the global, regional and national levels. The Plan aims to accelerate progress for children and advance the full realization of their rights. It reflects the commitment of UNICEF to sharpen its focus, differentiate its strategies across diverse country contexts, respond agilely to evolving challenges, leverage resources and expand partnerships to achieve impact at scale, leaving no child behind.

Elements of a draft decision for consideration by the Executive Board are provided in section VIII.

* Reissued for technical reasons on 24 October 2025.

** [E/ICEF/2025/27](#).



I. Overview

1. The UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029 is anchored in the organization’s mission to advance the realization of children’s rights, as articulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other human rights instruments. It commits UNICEF to partner with Governments, the private sector, civil society and other global, regional and national-level actors to create meaningful change for children, including adolescents, and build a peaceful, prosperous and equitable future, leaving no child behind.
2. As 2030 approaches, interconnected crises driven by conflicts, geopolitical and economic instability, climate shocks and systemic discrimination threaten progress achieved to date and deepen deprivations for those already left behind. Children’s status as rights holders is increasingly disregarded or disputed, particularly where international humanitarian and human rights law is not upheld. Even as the need for international cooperation grows, seismic shifts rock the development financing landscape, and funding continues to shrink.
3. Amid growing uncertainty, it remains clear that upholding children’s rights requires concerted, evidence-based action to address the root causes of violations, strengthen national systems and build the resilience of communities. For UNICEF, meeting this challenge in a rapidly evolving, resource-constrained global context means sharpening the focus of its action, applying differentiated strategies and leveraging the power of partnerships to expand scale and impact.
4. The Strategic Plan aims towards the achievement of five Impact Results by 2029, building on the organization’s comparative advantage to accelerate government-led progress on children’s survival and development, learning and skills, freedom from poverty, protection from violence, and resilience in the face of climate and environmental risks.
5. To drive achievement of these results, UNICEF will build coalitions of public and private sector partners committed to advancing children’s rights. Work to influence policies and leverage financial investments will be vital to scaling up tailored interventions that further develop government capacities and improve the lives of children, particularly those most left behind, across development and humanitarian contexts.
6. The organization will keep children, including adolescents, at the centre of all of its actions, as rights holders, leaders and agents of change. Children are calling for more opportunities to engage on the issues that affect them – and UNICEF will work to create safe, inclusive and accessible spaces where they can contribute to policies and express their ideas.
7. A more future-focused UNICEF is poised to capitalize on the immense opportunities that exist today, building on successes in delivering development and humanitarian solutions for children. Interventions that have fuelled progress in diverse countries facing complex challenges can be adapted to new contexts and applied at scale. The responsible and ethical use of technology and artificial intelligence, guided by a child rights approach and informed by strategic foresight, can help to expand reach, improve quality and enhance impact. Innovative financing and new forms of public-private collaboration can support Governments and communities to deliver for children.
8. Many possible futures could emerge from this moment, depending on the choices made today. Guided by the Strategic Plan, 2026–2029, UNICEF will mobilize collective action around a shared commitment to align those choices with the obligations set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. With increased

investments in national systems that deliver resilient, child-focused social services – underpinned by solidarity in the face of global and local challenges – more children than ever before can realize their rights and live with dignity and hope.

II. Introduction

A. Context

9. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989, commits States parties to recognize children as human beings with a distinct set of rights. As history’s most widely ratified human rights treaty, it set in motion a paradigm shift that generated widespread changes in laws, policies and practices, improving the lives of generations of children.

10. Still, for many children worldwide, the rights enshrined in the Convention remain out of reach. Nearly 5 million children under 5 years old die each year, mostly from preventable causes. Every four minutes somewhere in the world, a child is killed by an act of violence. Two thirds of the child-related Sustainable Development Goals are off-track.

11. Children living in low-income and conflict-affected contexts and areas exposed to climate and environmental hazards struggle to access essential services, support and opportunities, as do children affected by intersecting inequalities, children with disabilities, children on the move, children without parental care and children deprived of liberty. Systemic discrimination, exacerbated by the erosion of children’s and women’s rights, compounds disadvantages. Girls are especially affected, facing widespread discrimination and heightened barriers to the realization of their rights.

12. Complex, protracted and violent conflicts are escalating around the world, affecting more than one in six children.¹ About 1 billion children live in multidimensional poverty, deprived of necessities such as shelter, food, clean water, sanitation and hygiene, healthcare, protection and education.

13. By 2050, most children will live in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, regions containing most of the world’s poorest countries. Realizing the rights of these countries’ rapidly growing child populations will require an unprecedented expansion of social services and protection.

14. But even today, many Governments face major fiscal challenges – including mounting debt service payments – that prevent them from investing adequately in social services for children. Meanwhile, the development and humanitarian financing landscape is changing. With sharp cuts in aid from many donors, marshalling the additional financing needed to accelerate sustainable progress for children requires new approaches and partnerships, particularly with the private sector.

15. Despite the challenges, tremendous opportunities exist to advance child rights. Across all regions and income levels, some countries have shown remarkable progress towards the child-related Sustainable Development Goals, by deploying evidence-based interventions at scale, alongside innovative approaches that harness technology and empower communities. Through child-centred partnerships and investments, UNICEF can build on these successes to drive catalytic progress for every child.

¹ Østby, Gudrun and Siri Aas Rustad, ‘Children Affected by Armed Conflict, 1990–2023’, *Conflict Trends*, 1, January 2024.

B. Guiding principles

16. The mandate of UNICEF is to advocate for the protection of children's rights, help to meet their basic needs, and expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. Guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the organization strives to affirm children's rights as enduring ethical principles and international standards of behaviour towards children.

17. In line with article 45 of the Convention, UNICEF supports States and other duty bearers to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities, while supporting children to claim their rights. In the context of the increasing erosion of child rights, upholding the organization's child rights mandate is more critical than ever.

18. Alongside the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Strategic Plan is guided by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international humanitarian law, and other United Nations human rights instruments.

19. Non-discrimination is a guiding principle of all UNICEF work, in line with the imperative of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind. The organization is committed to advancing equity, maintaining a proactive focus on marginalized groups of children, and striving to ensure that efforts to achieve scale do not reinforce inequalities.

20. Gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women remain at the heart of everything that UNICEF does in its programming and workplaces, as outlined in the UNICEF Gender Equality Action Plan, 2026–2029. The organization counters discrimination against girls and women and its impacts on the realization of child rights across the life course, and supports policy changes to address the underlying causes of inequalities and to empower girls and women. UNICEF will continue to address sexual and reproductive health and rights, promote inclusive and equitable service access and engage men and boys as allies and partners, while renewing the focus on gender-based violence and deep-rooted social and economic inequalities.

21. UNICEF works to mainstream the rights of children and adults with disabilities in all facets of its programming and operations, addressing attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers to the inclusion of children with disabilities in a systematic manner, across all contexts.

22. In line with its Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, UNICEF adheres to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.² The organization prioritizes the rights of the people it serves and ensures that all of its work, and that of its partners, is ethical, effective and responsive, underpinned by a commitment to enhance accountability to affected populations, uphold the centrality of protection and support localization. UNICEF takes active measures to do no harm, ensuring that interventions do not exacerbate vulnerabilities or inequalities.

III. Strategic approach

23. The UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029 is informed by a robust evidence base, including findings from the Report on the midterm review of the UNICEF Strategic

² The centrality of the humanitarian principles to the work of UNICEF and other humanitarian organizations is formally enshrined in General Assembly resolutions [46/182 \(1991\)](#) and [58/114 \(2004\)](#).

Plan, 2022–2025 (part of document [E/ICEF/2024/11](#)) and the Evaluation of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 ([E/ICEF/2025/3](#)), as well as cumulative insights from past programming cycles. Based on lessons learned, the organization will continue its shift from direct service delivery to strengthening national systems, focusing on fewer, high-impact priorities to enhance organizational coherence and better support Governments in scaling up results for children – while ensuring that programmes are rooted in child rights and tailored to local contexts.

24. In the Strategic Plan, 2026–2029, UNICEF is undertaking three intentional shifts. First, the organization is sharpening its focus, moving from a broad menu of results to a whole-of-organization prioritization of five Impact Results, with a commitment to their achievement through six strategies and four enablers.

25. Second, a new orientation towards scale and impact marks a transition from an emphasis on delivering programme outputs to reaching whole populations of children, particularly vulnerable and marginalized groups, within countries and across borders. UNICEF will work with partners to scale up interventions in areas where robust, evidence-based solutions already exist. Where evidence is still emerging, evidence generation will be a priority, to inform the design and implementation of new, scalable solutions that do not reinforce inequalities.

26. Third, UNICEF will differentiate its programmatic offer and strategies for acceleration across contexts. Evidence and risk analysis will guide the selection of strategies and the level to which they are implemented, considering national and subnational factors affecting children’s rights and local capacities, such as country income status, demographic profiles, financing potential, and capacity to respond to shocks and stresses including climate and environmental hazards, conflicts and fragility.

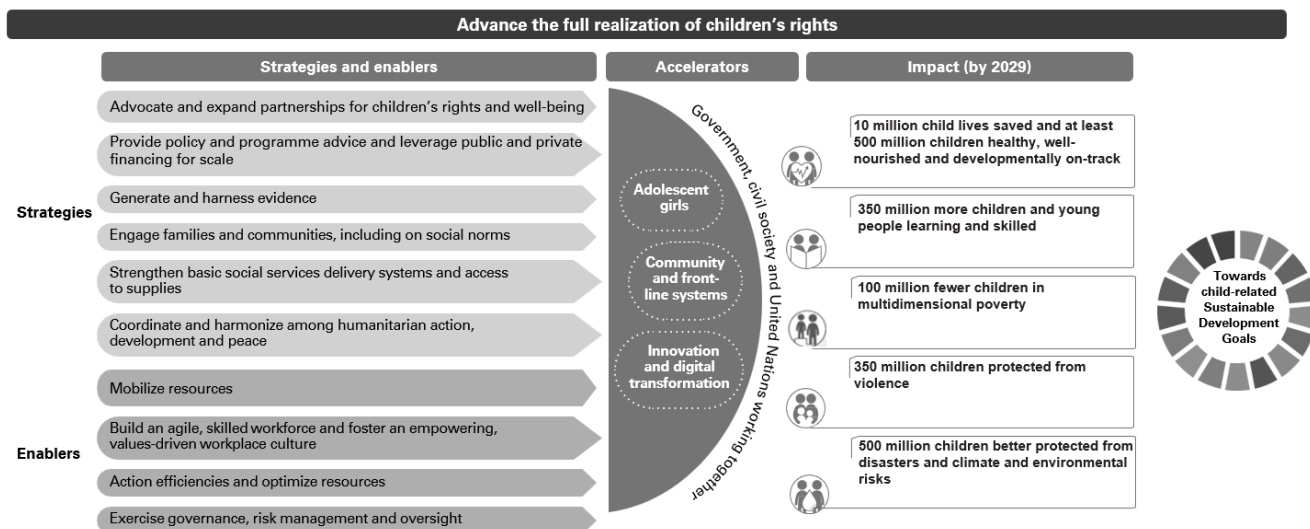
27. Catalysing sustainable change in the context of interconnected crises and increasing resource constraints requires UNICEF to convene public and private sector partners around a commitment to advancing children’s rights, and to leverage financing to strengthen systems, policies and investments that create meaningful improvements in children’s lives. Domestic financing remains a foundation for sustainable progress at scale, and the organization will work alongside Governments to strengthen those investments.

28. Engagement with the private sector through fundraising, partnerships, advocacy and innovation will be expanded, in recognition of the sector’s growing role in the development of solutions for children, ensuring that contributions reinforce national efforts. Cooperation through diverse partnership modalities, including South-South and triangular cooperation, will be leveraged.

29. With principled humanitarian action remaining central to its mandate, UNICEF will strengthen coordination across its humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work, focusing on systems strengthening, resilience and social cohesion. Careful analysis of political, social and conflict dynamics will inform the organization’s approaches. Across all contexts, UNICEF will make its partnerships with local actors more strategic, based on a recognition of their unique knowledge of their contexts, their proximity to affected populations, and the critical importance of local ownership of progress.

30. The Strategic Plan keeps children, families and communities at the centre of UNICEF actions. Meaningful engagement with children, including adolescents, will be key to support their empowerment as agents of change. Responding to their concerns, UNICEF will prioritize accessibility, representation of marginalized children, and the mental and physical well-being of all participants in engagement efforts.

Figure I
UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029: Structure



A. Impact Results

31. By 2029, the Strategic Plan aims to contribute to the global achievement of five Impact Results that reflect quantifiable progress towards the realization of children's rights. These targets are ambitious yet achievable – they are established based on evidence, benchmarking and scenario-based simulation, using past performance and anticipated demographic shifts to understand what improvements can be expected over four years. They will be reviewed and revised as needed during the midterm review of the Plan.

32. The Impact Results are owned by Governments, with UNICEF holding itself accountable for providing catalytic support to achieve them. They are objectively verifiable through national and international data sources, and align with the Sustainable Development Goals and other global and United Nations targets, as well as national targets, where these exist.

33. To drive the achievement of the Impact Results, UNICEF has identified sublevel results linked to evidence-based, scalable solutions. UNICEF will engage with partners to support national Governments in implementing these solutions, leveraging its policy, evidence and technical leadership. Differentiated approaches towards the achievement of each result are detailed in the theory of change paper (UNICEF/2025/EB/10).

Impact Result 1: 10 million child lives saved and at least 500 million children healthy, well-nourished and developmentally on-track

34. All children have the right to survive and realize their full potential. While recent decades have seen significant progress in improving child survival and nutrition, 30 million children under 5 years old are still at risk of dying by 2030. Stunting affects 148 million children due to food poverty, which impacts at least one in four children under 5 years of age. Meanwhile, overweight and obesity are fast becoming dominant forms of malnutrition among children in lower-income countries. Approximately 250 million children under 5 years old are at risk of not achieving their full developmental potential. Over a billion children still lack access to safely managed sanitation.

35. Nearly half of child deaths and malnutrition occur among the rising numbers of children living in or displaced by humanitarian crises. Some groups of children – including those with disabilities and adolescent girls – disproportionately struggle to access the healthcare and nutrition they need, compromising their chances to survive, grow and develop.

36. To drive progress towards Impact Result 1, UNICEF will focus on expanding access to life-saving interventions for children and pregnant women; immunization; HIV treatment; mental health and psychosocial support; nutrition interventions to address malnutrition among children, including adolescents, and women; early childhood development services and parenting support; safely managed water and sanitation; and improved hygiene.

Figure II

UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029: Impact Result 1



37. UNICEF champions a comprehensive, multisectoral approach to improve child survival and development throughout the life course. Delivered through resilient primary healthcare and food systems, this approach is key to attaining universal health coverage, making nutritious and diverse foods accessible and affordable for all children, and promoting holistic child development through early childhood programmes. It prioritizes prevention-focused, community-driven services to reach vulnerable and marginalized populations, and links children and families to support and care through education, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), child protection and social protection systems. UNICEF focuses on equipping systems to keep delivering life-saving care, even during emergencies, and delivers directly, together with local organizations, only when these systems are unable to do so.

38. With most preventable under-5 deaths concentrated in 20 countries, UNICEF will provide targeted support to Governments to strengthen primary healthcare systems, leveraging community-based platforms and high-impact entry points such as immunization to deliver proven health, nutrition and WASH interventions. Technical assistance and direct support to improve the quality of antenatal, postnatal and newborn care will be prioritized to address the leading causes of neonatal and maternal deaths. Coverage of proven interventions to address malaria, pneumonia, diarrhoea and malnutrition will be scaled up, and immunization programmes, including the roll-out of new vaccines, will be a priority.

39. To address child malnutrition in all its forms, UNICEF will build the capacity of national systems to deliver nutritious diets, essential nutrition services and positive

care practices for all children, including adolescents, and women. While the first 1,000 days – from conception to age 2 – remain core to UNICEF programmes, the organization will also address the nutrition of school-age children and adolescents as a second window of opportunity to break intergenerational cycles of malnutrition. When prevention efforts fail, evidence-based protocols and programmes will be deployed to deliver timely, quality services and supplies for the early detection and treatment of wasting in development and humanitarian contexts.

40. Given the significance of early experiences in shaping children’s physical, cognitive, emotional and social development, UNICEF will work with partners to strengthen inclusive early childhood development policies and programmes that promote nurturing care and support parents and caregivers, ensuring that all children – especially those with disabilities and those in fragile and humanitarian contexts – can reach their developmental potential.

41. The health, nutrition and well-being of adolescent girls and women is key to progress in child survival and development. UNICEF will support interventions to prevent maternal mortality, human papillomavirus, anaemia and malnutrition; provide comprehensive HIV prevention and care to adolescent girls; and enhance access to WASH and menstrual health and hygiene services, which are critical to improving health and dignity.

42. Water and sanitation are foundational to improving the health and resilience of communities and reducing child and maternal deaths, stunting, disease transmission and antimicrobial resistance. UNICEF will support Governments to increase access to safely managed water and sanitation, and will work with the World Health Organization (WHO) to equip health facilities with water and sanitation and strengthen infection prevention and control measures.

43. Deeper engagement with partners across the public and private sectors, new financing mechanisms – including innovative financing platforms such as the Child Nutrition Fund – and technological advancements will enhance programme delivery and impact. The role of UNICEF in the Community Health Delivery Partnership and community-based prevention and management of child malnutrition will provide opportunities to unify partners and resources at country level, while the organization’s leadership on early childhood development, in partnership with the World Bank, international financial institutions, the private sector and philanthropists, will drive a focus on ensuring that all children have opportunities to thrive.

Impact Result 2: 350 million more children and young people learning and skilled

44. Quality education is a right of every child. But millions of children worldwide remain at risk of being left without the knowledge and skills needed to escape poverty, secure livelihoods and participate in their communities. While three quarters of 5-year-olds are developmentally on-track, two thirds of 10-year-olds cannot read with comprehension, and only a quarter of 18-year-olds have the required skills for life and work.³

45. Globally, 272 million children and young people are out of school,⁴ and progress to reduce those numbers has stagnated for two decades. Children with disabilities, children from marginalized groups, and girls – and, in some contexts, boys – face unequal access to learning opportunities, while conflicts, displacement and economic, climate and other shocks – including the lingering effects of the coronavirus disease

³ World Bank et. al., *The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 update*, 2022.

⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Global Education Monitoring Report 2024/5*, 2025 update, UNESCO, Paris, 2025, available at <https://education-estimates.org/out-of-school/>.

(COVID-19) pandemic – disrupt education, deepen exclusion and exacerbate the learning crisis.

46. To drive progress towards Impact Result 2, UNICEF will focus on supporting school enrolment and retention, from pre-primary to secondary; improving learning proficiency; and strengthening skills for life and work.

Figure III

UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029: Impact Result 2



47. The organization’s comprehensive approach to education encompasses personal development, vocational training and engagement, addressing the continuum of a child’s learning journey – from early childhood and school readiness to the acquisition of foundational skills and preparation for work and life. This includes support in building resilient and inclusive national systems to enable continuity of education, even during crises and emergencies, and creating learning environments that keep children safe, engaged, empowered and mentally well.

48. UNICEF will support Governments in translating domestic financing commitments into high-quality education and skills development opportunities for all children. Strategic partnerships with the public and private sectors, as well as multisectoral partnership platforms such as Generation Unlimited, will be key for securing the necessary resources to bolster national systems.

49. Evidence-based solutions such as structured pedagogy approaches, remedial learning programmes and innovative teacher training models will be scaled to improve learning outcomes. Digital learning platforms will be used to expand opportunities for digital, green and transferable skills, training and microcredentials, especially for girls.

50. To close gaps in education for girls, tailored support to national education systems will promote girls’ enrolment, retention and academic performance in school, including by securing access to menstrual health and hygiene services. UNICEF will work with Governments and other partners to address barriers preventing children – including children with disabilities and refugee, displaced, stateless and migrant children – from accessing education. To address education disruptions during crises, Governments will be supported to build resilient and inclusive education systems.

Impact Result 3: 100 million fewer children in multidimensional poverty

51. All children have the right to live free from poverty. But progress to reduce child poverty has stagnated, set back about three years by the COVID-19 pandemic. Limited livelihood opportunities for young people feed intergenerational cycles of poverty and strain social cohesion, while an increasing burden of unpaid care work further limits access to education and livelihoods, especially for adolescent girls and

women. Although investment in social protection is proven to reduce child poverty, only one in four children has access to any child or family benefit.

52. To drive progress towards Impact Result 3, UNICEF will focus on expanding children's access to social benefits, supporting young people to secure livelihoods, and increasing access to disability support services and assistive technology for children.

Figure IV

UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029: Impact Result 3



53. Expanded advocacy together with a broad alliance of stakeholders will demonstrate that overcoming child poverty is a policy choice. With national and local governments and strategic partners, UNICEF will work to make children living in poverty visible to policymakers, and to design, prioritize and accelerate scale-up of evidence-based policy solutions to end child poverty. To provide continuity of support in fragile contexts and humanitarian crises, UNICEF will support government systems to scale up cash transfers, delivering directly when systems are unable to do so.

54. Through its social policy expertise, UNICEF aims to support Governments to increase their investments in child rights, as per article 4 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Data analytics will be used to monitor international and national economic trends, national policies, sectoral budgets and innovative finance, informing efforts to improve and sustain national spending on services for children.

55. Partnerships with international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, alongside regional financial institutions, will be leveraged to strengthen public finance systems and child-focused social spending. UNICEF will advocate for more responsive and flexible funding mechanisms to support children in fragile contexts and humanitarian crises.

56. Applying a life-course lens, work on care and support policies will help Governments to provide children, including adolescents, with the care they need. Through Generation Unlimited and other partnerships, UNICEF will scale up its comprehensive support to equip young people to secure dignified livelihoods, boosting household incomes and reducing the risks of poverty and exclusion.

57. A growing evidence base will inform efforts to bolster the economic empowerment of adolescent girls as a priority intervention to help break intergenerational cycles of poverty. To reduce disability-related costs and the disproportionate levels of poverty that children with disabilities and their families face, UNICEF will support Governments to scale up disability screening and access to support services and assistive technology. Successful country-level programmes will be expanded and adapted to integrate children on the move into national social protection systems, including cash programmes.

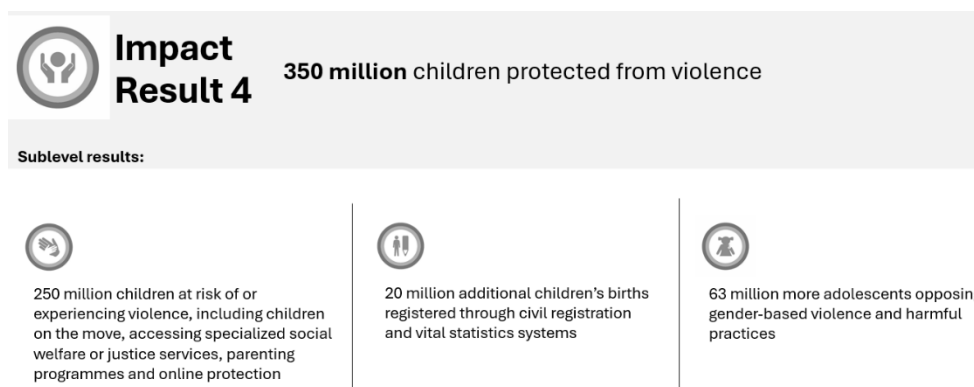
Impact Result 4: 350 million children protected from violence

58. Protecting children from violence is central to the realization of their rights. But despite progress since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, violence against children is widespread. Two in three children regularly face violent punishment at home. One in five girls and one in seven boys experience sexual violence in childhood.⁵ One in five women aged 20–24 years was married before age 18, and over 230 million girls and women have undergone female genital mutilation. While birth registration has increased, nearly one quarter of children still lack legal recognition of their identity, with girls, children with disabilities and children in conflict zones more likely to be unregistered.

59. To drive progress towards Impact Result 4, UNICEF will focus on increasing access to specialized social welfare and justice services for children, parenting programmes and online protection; accelerating birth registration; and scaling up efforts to end child marriage, female genital mutilation and all forms of gender-based violence.

Figure V

UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029: Impact Result 4



60. UNICEF champions child protection systems strengthening, social norms change and humanitarian action as the most effective approaches to prevent and respond to child protection violations at scale, in an inclusive and resilient manner. The organization will focus on ensuring the continuity, adaptability and portability of services delivered through national systems. Governments will be supported to expand the social service workforce, with standard-setting and coordination for child protection, including services related to gender-based violence and mental health and psychosocial support, prioritized in development contexts and humanitarian crises.

61. UNICEF will work to prevent violence against children and harmful practices in all contexts through research and programming, supporting Governments to ensure that all children who experience violations, including survivors of sexual violence, receive access to justice and timely, effective services, including the continued implementation of a survivor-centred approach across both prevention and response efforts. At-risk children, including those in conflict settings, will be prioritized, with prevention and early intervention efforts addressing discrimination, inequality among girls and boys, social exclusion, statelessness, and regressions of children's rights. In accordance with Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), UNICEF, as co-chair of the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting, will continue to play a central role

⁵ Together for Girls, 'Break the Record: Facts, figures, and solutions to break the world's record of inaction against childhood sexual violence', 2024.

in monitoring, reporting and responding to grave violations against children in armed conflicts.⁶

62. UNICEF will work through all sectors to protect displaced and migrant children from harm, to include them in national systems and to empower them to thrive. As global migration grows and the numbers of displaced children increase, strategies will be adapted to country contexts for maximum impact, from strengthening inclusive government social service systems to technical assistance on child-sensitive migration and asylum policies, including to protect unaccompanied children.

63. To tackle the root causes of violence and harmful practices, UNICEF will support Governments to integrate child protection with other sectors, such as health, education and social protection, while scaling up interventions to address norms that drive discrimination against girls and women and create enabling family and community environments. This will include programming to promote positive parenting and the reporting of violations.

64. Digital technologies will be leveraged to enhance child protection case management, birth registration, systems interoperability, and access to information, services and support. Strong evidence on children's experiences of online violence will inform advocacy and programmes. Strategic partnerships, including with the WeProtect Global Alliance, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), other United Nations agencies and the private sector, will be instrumental in tackling online violence and promoting rights-respecting digital governance and child data protection.

Impact Result 5: 500 million children better protected from disasters and climate and environmental risks

65. Protection from disasters and environmental hazards is a precondition for the realization of children's rights. Today's children live in a more hazardous and unpredictable environment than previous generations. Stronger and more frequent heatwaves, floods, droughts and tropical cyclones disrupt critical social services and infrastructure, exacerbate risks of economic downturns, and set back hard-won development gains.⁷ Mounting environmental threats such as polluted air, water and soil as well as exposure to toxic chemicals threaten the survival, health and future of a growing number of children.⁸ Children in particularly climate-vulnerable and conflict-affected countries, such as small island developing States, are at heightened risk.

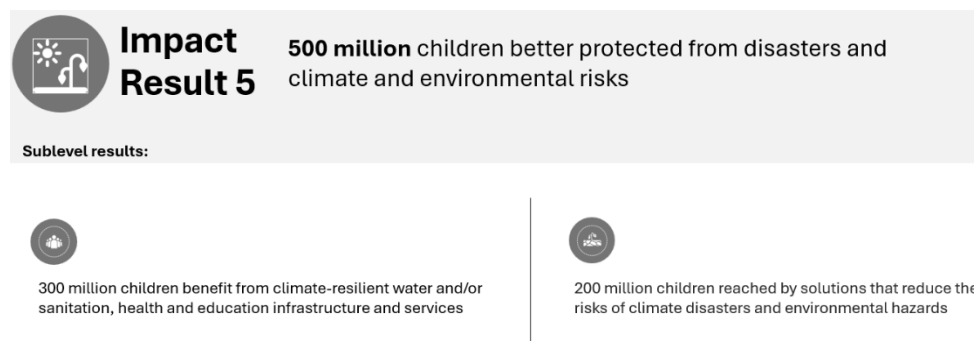
66. To drive progress towards Impact Result 5, UNICEF will support Governments and other relevant stakeholders to strengthen the resilience of social infrastructure and services to extreme weather events and expand access to systems that reduce the impacts of environmental hazards and disasters for children and their families.

⁶ In line United Nations Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 1612 (2005).

⁷ United Nations, Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development, *Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2024*.

⁸ UNICEF, 'The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index', UNICEF, New York, 2021.

Figure VI
UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029: Impact Result 5



67. Guided by national policies, strategies and plans, UNICEF will focus on water, sanitation, health and education as priorities for strengthening local systems and capacities to reduce children’s exposure to climate risks and environmental hazards and enhance the resilience of their communities. The organization will build on its leadership in climate-resilient WASH, through which the required sectoral shifts have been identified. Governments will be supported to use sectoral planning to address key drivers of risk, and to tackle the underlying policy, regulatory and institutional issues that govern the impacts of climatic and environmental threats on children and their families. Across social sectors, UNICEF will increase and diversify access to reliable, affordable and secure sources of energy and empower children, including adolescents, with the education and skills to be champions for the environment.

68. To reduce short-term disaster risk and avoid dependence on humanitarian aid, UNICEF will work with national and local governments, communities, and humanitarian and development partners to strengthen protocols for climate risk analysis, early warning, disaster preparedness and anticipatory action. The organization’s pioneering Children’s Climate Risk Index, which links children’s exposure to climatic and environmental threats with indicators of vulnerability and well-being, will be a key tool to prioritize programmes and investments. Children in high-vulnerability settings such as slums, informal settlements, highly degraded environments and protracted crisis contexts will be supported by integrated disaster risk reduction programmes.

69. UNICEF will drive a holistic focus on the types of pollution that undermine the health and well-being of children, including air pollution, pollution of drinking water and lead poisoning. In this context, safely managed water and sanitation will be essential for community resilience, by promoting sustainable resource management and reducing the threat from untreated human waste discharge, especially in urban areas.

70. To build political will, amplify advocacy and integrate diverse sources of financing for child-centric climate and disaster risk reduction, UNICEF will forge and strengthen partnerships and coordination across public and private sector institutions, international financial institutions and other United Nations agencies and programmes. Innovative climate and disaster risk financing solutions, such as climate risk insurance, are increasingly relevant to augment shock-responsive social protection systems.

B. Accelerators

71. To rapidly deliver results at scale, UNICEF will invest in three accelerators, selected for their proven potential to generate a multiplier effect across sectors and contexts.

72. Investment in securing the rights of adolescent girls is one of the most effective ways to transform societies, boost economies, lift communities out of poverty, and build a more equitable world. Convening an expanded coalition of partners, including girl- and women-led organizations, UNICEF will leverage financial resources and scale up cost-effective, multisectoral interventions promoting adolescent girls' leadership and agency, health and nutrition, education and skills training for life and work, and protection from violence, abuse and exploitation.

73. Community and front-line systems – organizations and structures that interact directly with households and families – ensure that national systems reach all children. Investment in these systems, and in participatory local governance, yields profound multiplier effects through effective, tailored, culturally relevant and accessible service delivery and social support, enhancing sustainability, social cohesion and resilience.

74. UNICEF will build on opportunities created by innovation and digital transformation, harnessing viable innovations in programming, facilitating adoption of emerging digital and artificial intelligence technologies, and strengthening the use of digital systems to support decision-making, unlock innovative financing and target financial solutions. The organization will support Governments to reach marginalized populations through national digital and online services, and will model responsible technology development and use, consistent with human rights principles.

C. Strategies

75. The strategies reflect the most effective approaches and roles of UNICEF in supporting national partners to achieve the Impact Results across development and humanitarian contexts. Their application will be tailored to each country's context, prioritizing those most conducive to achieving results given specific socioeconomic challenges, national capacities and opportunities to achieve impact at scale.

(1) Advocate and expand partnerships for children's rights and well-being

76. In an increasingly complex operating environment, advocacy, communication and partnerships have become fundamental to the ability of UNICEF to effectively support national Governments and fulfil its mandate. The organization will make strategic investments in the process of building, nurturing and managing public and private partnerships, including with multilateral banks, international financial institutions, United Nations agencies, foundations, civil society, social movements, private sector partners, media, opinion leaders and the public, including children.

77. Evidence-based, context-sensitive advocacy and strategic communications will mobilize support for child rights, build political will in complex situations, combat misinformation, enable technical programmes to gain traction, and mobilize financial investments. UNICEF will engage with the public and through humanitarian diplomacy to protect children during conflicts, in accordance with international humanitarian law, and facilitate their access to essential services and assistance.

(2) Provide policy and programme advice and leverage public and private financing for scale

78. UNICEF will provide high-quality technical advice and leverage public and private financing to strengthen national systems, as a critical strategy to achieve scale and impact for children. The organization will aim to influence laws, policies and financing strategies, while supporting Governments to strengthen social sector budgets and leverage diverse financing options to increase child-focused investments, including through domestic financing, innovative and sustainable financing, and climate financing. Public participation, including that of children, will be promoted as an important supportive element. Engagement across the public and private sectors and collaboration with international financial institutions will be vital to channelling capital towards child-centric priorities, including through alignment of aid, trade and investment.

(3) Generate and harness evidence

79. This strategy focuses on generating high-quality research, foresight, data, analytics, evaluations and other evidence products, and promoting their use to inform decision-making, create global goods and strengthen programming, advocacy, partnerships, resource mobilization and financing. UNICEF will partner with Governments, the United Nations system and other stakeholders to strengthen national data and evidence ecosystems, enhance national data and evaluation capacities, and support Sustainable Development Goal data collection and monitoring. The organization will leverage its knowledge leadership to advance children's rights, including through its role as global lead for the nutrition cluster and co-lead for the education and WASH clusters.

(4) Engage families and communities, including on social norms

80. UNICEF will engage with children, including adolescents; young people; parents and caregivers; communities and civil society, to increase demand for services, promote protective behaviours, eliminate support from harmful practices, and reinforce social norms that support the realization of child rights and gender equality. The organization will prioritize child-centred, locally owned approaches and will work with community-based organizations and leaders to design programmes and support community-led initiatives. By ensuring that development and humanitarian initiatives reflect diverse community voices, this engagement helps to build trust in institutions and service providers, increase social cohesion and foster accountability to affected populations.

(5) Strengthen basic social service delivery systems and access to supplies

81. As part of broader national systems strengthening, this strategy focuses on enhancing basic social service delivery systems and ensuring inclusive, equitable and uninterrupted access to essential supplies, particularly for marginalized and crisis-affected populations. With its network of partners, UNICEF will support Governments to deliver promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative services, supplies and cash transfers – delivering services directly only when national systems are unable to do so, so that its interventions complement and reinforce existing structures rather than replace them. Effective humanitarian coordination, through the cluster leadership of UNICEF, will enhance reach, impact and efficiency.

(6) Coordinate and harmonize among humanitarian action, development and peace

82. UNICEF will leverage its humanitarian and development mandate to support national systems and communities to prepare for, withstand and recover from shocks, collaborating with national and local institutions and communities to build resilience, tackle the underlying drivers of vulnerability, and contribute to sustainable recovery, social cohesion and peace. This strategy emphasizes risk analysis, forecasting and preparedness to mitigate crises before they escalate, while addressing urgent humanitarian needs and maintaining essential services during emergencies. It leverages the role of UNICEF as the provider of last resort to ensure predictability and accountability in humanitarian responses.

D. Enablers

83. The enablers aim to equip UNICEF with the tools, processes, technical capacity and technologies to implement the strategies across diverse country contexts, respond to evolving challenges, and enhance efficiency and accountability to drive meaningful change for children.

(E1) Mobilize resources

84. UNICEF will enhance financial resource mobilization across the public and private sectors, diversifying funding sources with a focus on protecting and scaling flexible, outcome-focused, multi-year funding with minimal restrictions to maximize impact and advance children's rights. To safeguard public sector income, the organization will engage with traditional and emerging partners, as well as international financial institutions, and broaden collaboration through United Nations joint programmes and inter-agency pooled funds. UNICEF will deepen and expand partnerships with the private sector, via National Committees for UNICEF and country offices, and explore innovative financing models.

(E2) Build an agile, skilled workforce and foster an empowering, values-driven workplace culture

85. UNICEF will cultivate a dynamic, inclusive workforce that is agile, forward-looking, skilled and technically equipped to drive sustainable results for children worldwide. Workplace culture will emphasize individual and team accountability and uphold the values of care, respect, integrity, trust, accountability and sustainability, with zero tolerance for misconduct. UNICEF will enhance staff development, prioritize mental, physical and emotional well-being support, and ensure representation and inclusion across all functions.

(E3) Action efficiencies and optimize resources

86. To better adapt to external factors and evolving financial constraints, UNICEF aims to transform its business model to facilitate differentiated programming, promote cost-efficiency and streamline support to countries. A more agile and resilient model will enable the organization to achieve and sustain meaningful results through office modernization, technology and evidence-driven insights for strategic decision-making. Offices will strategically manage allocated resources, implementing robust monitoring mechanisms and transparent reporting to ensure compliance and accountability.

(E4) Exercise governance, risk management and oversight

87. UNICEF will strengthen the integration of governance, proactive risk management, safeguarding and strategic oversight into daily operations, through its core management structures, specialized risk management functions and independent oversight offices. This will enable the organization to better anticipate, prevent and manage risks, prepare for crises, maintain business continuity, improve programme and operational quality, maintain trust, promote ethical values and reinforce its human rights-based approach. The organization will continue to uphold the highest standards of accountability and require the same commitment from its partners. Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse remains a core component of the integrated approach to risk management and safeguarding, ensuring that UNICEF operates in ways that prevent and manage the risk of harm to all individuals who come into contact with the organization or its work.

IV. The UNICEF comparative advantage and complementarity within the United Nations system

88. With a mandate to promote the rights and well-being of every child, UNICEF has a distinct role within the United Nations system. Its presence in over 190 countries, strong partnerships with Governments, civil society and communities, and work across development and humanitarian contexts position the organization to provide effective support to Governments, in concert with other United Nations entities.

89. The work of UNICEF across critical sectors – health, education, nutrition, child protection and social protection – allows for integrated responses that address local needs and priorities. It complements the specialized mandates of other United Nations entities – for example, by addressing child health within broader WHO-led health responses, supporting child-sensitive social protection alongside the International Labour Organization, and advancing inclusive education in coordination with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. UNICEF enhances sectoral coordination and complementarity through its role as cluster lead agency.

90. As the largest procurement entity of the United Nations, UNICEF leverages its global reach, market influence, expertise and partnerships to complement broader United Nations efforts and ensure the cost-effective and timely delivery of essential supplies for children. The leadership of UNICEF in data and evidence generation supports national decision-making, including through tools such as Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and active engagement in the United Nations Statistical Commission and United Nations regional commissions. The advocacy role, convening power and innovation capacity of UNICEF help to integrate children’s needs across the United Nations system, reinforcing collective progress towards sustainable development.

91. UNICEF remains fully engaged in making the United Nations system more effective and coherent. By aligning its Strategic Plan and Results Framework with the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR), the organization ensures that its work contributes to system-wide goals and accountability, strengthens coordination with other agencies and reinforces shared efforts to leave no one behind.

92. As a strong supporter of United Nations development system reform, UNICEF works closely with other agencies to strengthen integrated planning and evaluation, and to promote the use of joint programming to deliver results for children. It contributes to a more integrated United Nations presence through its support for the resident coordinator system and improvements in regional and multi-country office operations. By leveraging, aligning, complementing and connecting the work of its

United Nations partners, including through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks at the country level, UNICEF helps to build a more coordinated, efficient and impact-driven system that is better equipped to respond to today's interconnected challenges and deliver lasting results for children.

93. UNICEF is part of the coordination group for the development (United Nations system) and humanitarian clusters under the UN80 Task Force established by the United Nations Secretary-General to enhance efficiency, reduce costs and improve outcomes by clearly delineating tasks and responsibilities, leveraging comparative advantages and strengthening coordination among entities. The organization supports the humanitarian reform initiatives outlined in the Emergency Relief Coordinator's Humanitarian Reset, and is fully engaged with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in the development and implementation of the agreed proposals. This includes reprioritizing its humanitarian action, making coordination and response modalities, including the cluster approach, simpler and more efficient; establishing diverse partnerships; and fostering innovation to shape the future of the humanitarian system.

94. UNICEF draws on the commitments made in the Pact for the Future to guide the organization's strategic direction beyond 2030, working with partners to ensure that children's rights are embedded in the future global agenda.

V. Risks and mitigation measures

95. Over the past decade, the scale and complexity of UNICEF programmes and operations have increased significantly, as have the risks that the organization is facing. These risks will be monitored and managed in accordance with the UNICEF enterprise risk management policy and related regulatory frameworks, including on safeguarding, environmental and social standards, and complaints and feedback management.

96. The Strategic Plan is designed to anticipate and manage risks to the organization's ability to accelerate and preserve progress for children in a rapidly evolving, geopolitically fragmented, resource-constrained and uncertain world. Its key shifts, strategies and enablers are at the core of the approach to mitigating risks, underpinned by an enhanced focus on programme effectiveness, community engagement, partnerships, advocacy and leveraging resources for children.

97. As declining development funding and growing debt threaten countries' abilities to invest in social services for children, policy advice to help Governments manage domestic resources is increasingly critical. UNICEF is also prioritizing partnerships and advocacy with international financial institutions, regional development banks and the private sector to leverage additional financing for children and address children's needs through debt relief and financing strategies.

98. To address the risks posed by humanitarian crises and a deteriorating security environment, UNICEF is strengthening coordination across development, humanitarian, disaster risk reduction and peacebuilding efforts, with a focus on localization to enhance resilience, social cohesion and sustainable outcomes. The organization is investing in efforts to obtain humanitarian access, and in better data, evaluation and more systematic consultation to make programmatic approaches more responsive to the needs of affected populations – while enhancing evidence-based advocacy to address the erosion of child rights.

99. The focus on systems strengthening rather than direct service delivery, and on outcome-level results rather than output-focused programming, may present challenges with measuring results, as data may not be as readily available and change may take longer to become apparent. To manage associated risks, UNICEF has developed a new set of output indicators focused on change in national systems and

will enhance its investments in foresight, monitoring, reporting and assurance mechanisms.

VI. Monitoring, reporting and evaluation

100. The Strategic Plan, 2026–2029 and its monitoring framework reshape UNICEF monitoring of global and country-level progress and the organization’s own performance. A leaner Results Framework focuses on indicators related to the five Impact Results.

101. Aligning Strategic Plan monitoring with Sustainable Development Goal reporting mechanisms and national statistical systems ensures that UNICEF contributions are integrated into broader development planning frameworks, reinforcing credibility and accountability. The Results Framework includes indicators shared across the United Nations system, reflecting the commitment of UNICEF to the QCPR, UN 2.0, Pact for the Future, United Nations System-wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan, and United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality, among other frameworks.

102. The internal Global Effectiveness Review, conducted annually, and a midterm review of the Strategic Plan will be important moments to gauge the effectiveness of UNICEF programming, assess the financial landscape, make course corrections and inform the post-2030 development agenda. Regular performance reviews encompassing both humanitarian and development contexts will be conducted at country, regional and global levels to strengthen adaptive programming and risk responsiveness. UNICEF will report on progress towards achieving the Strategic Plan results through the annual report of the Executive Director.

103. UNICEF will continue to strengthen the independent evaluation function as a vital source of learning and accountability, while fostering an enabling environment conducive to evaluation. Evaluations will be strategically focused on the organization’s key learning and accountability needs, particularly with respect to the acceleration of progress towards Impact Results and sublevel results. Key decisions will systematically integrate learning from evaluations.

VII. Beyond 2030

104. A number of possible futures could emerge from this moment of rapid change and overlapping crises. If current trends towards global fragmentation, regressions of child rights and diversion of resources away from social investments continue or accelerate, by 2050, more children will live in poverty, deprived of skills and prospects, and exposed to conflicts and climate shocks.

105. But with increased investments in social services and support for children – and collective action to address the root causes of conflicts and mitigate and adapt to climate change – broad-based economic growth could drive prosperity and reduce child poverty in today’s low- and middle-income countries. All children could have the opportunity to complete school, and more children could live in societies characterized by equal opportunities for girls and boys.⁹

106. The trajectory the world takes depends on the policy choices made today. As the international community looks beyond 2030, UNICEF is committed to ensuring that children, including adolescents, remain at the heart of development and humanitarian agendas.

⁹ UNICEF, *The State of the World Children 2024: The future of childhood in a changing world*, UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, Florence, Italy, November 2024.

107. For every barrier to the realization of children’s rights, solutions exist. Root causes can be identified. Proven interventions can be adapted, and new and innovative ones can be fostered and brought to scale. Resources can be found, along with the ingenuity to use them creatively and efficiently. But making these things happen is a question of political will.

108. Guided by this Strategic Plan – and a vision of a world truly fit for children – UNICEF aims to mobilize a coalition of partners to align the choices ahead with the standards set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Together, all of us can make this world into one in which every child can enjoy the full scope of their rights, with prospects for a life of dignity and hope.

VIII. Draft decision

The Executive Board

Endorses the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029 ([E/ICEF/2025/29](#) and [E/ICEF/2025/29/Add.1](#)).
