

UNICEF STRATEGIC PLAN 2018–2021

Executive Summary



unicef 
for every child

“For over 70 years, UNICEF has been a champion for children and young people – from reaching starving children after World War II, to igniting the child survival revolution in the 1980s, to renewing the global fight against inequity in recent years. Whatever the challenge, UNICEF’s focus has always been on achieving results – real results that save children’s lives and create new opportunities for young people to fulfil their potential. Our ambitious new Strategic Plan will help us achieve even greater results as we work with our partners to attain the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. To realize the SDGs’ vision of a world in which no one is left behind, we need to go beyond business as usual – investing in innovation and building broader, bolder partnerships that help us reach every child.”

UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta H. Fore

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The planned results cited in this publication are just a sampling of the results to be achieved through UNICEF-supported programmes by 2021, building on baselines drawn from the latest available data.

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Front cover: A young girl stands against a wall in the village of Gondama, Bo District, Sierra Leone. © UNICEF/UN0152818/PHELPS

Facing page: Syrian refugee girls study with Italian friends at a public elementary school in Trentino Province, Italy.

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UNICEF for every child

The driving focus of UNICEF's Strategic Plan is achieving more results for children.

More than 70 years since UNICEF was established in the aftermath of World War II, our mission is as urgent as ever.

Day in and day out, UNICEF works in 190 countries and territories, in some of the toughest places on earth, to reach the children and young people in greatest need and at greatest risk with life-saving assistance and long-term help, and to protect the rights of every child, everywhere.

Anchored in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and building on the lessons we have learned, the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 was developed to advance our mission in a changing world. It sets out the concrete results we aim to achieve for children, together with our partners – in the United Nations, and with governments, civil society and the private sector. It defines the change strategies and enablers we need to achieve them. For the first time, the Strategic Plan includes a Common Chapter that specifies how we will work together with other UN funds and programmes. And it charts a course for the next four years towards the attainment of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – and the realization of a better world for every child.



Children ride in a helicopter chartered to reunite them with their parents in Akobo, South Sudan.

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A pre-term baby is treated in a special care unit at Tangail Medical College Hospital, Bangladesh.

© UNICEF/UNI195710/MAWA

Why does the UNICEF strategic plan matter?

The world has made tremendous progress in advancing the rights and improving the lives of children over the past few decades.

- The number of children dying before their fifth birthday declined by more than half between 1990 and 2015.
- Stunting prevalence among children under age 5 fell from approximately 33 per cent to approximately 23 per cent – representing 43 million fewer stunted children.
- The proportion of children enrolled in primary school in low- and middle-income countries reached 91 per cent in 2015, up from 83 per cent in 1990.

But persistent inequities and lack of opportunity continue to endanger the lives and futures of millions of children around the world. Compared to children growing up in the wealthiest households, the poorest children are:

- Twice as likely to die before reaching the age of five.
- Twice as likely to be stunted.
- Five times as likely to be out of school.


Girls, children with disabilities and children from minority groups are more likely to be marginalized and excluded.

- Adolescent girls are more likely to be illiterate than adolescent boys.
- 1 in 10 girls under the age of 20 has suffered sexual violence.
- Children with disabilities are more likely to be out of school.



And new challenges make vulnerable children even more vulnerable, threatening to roll back hard-won progress for the most disadvantaged children and young people:

- Humanitarian emergencies and extreme poverty are driving waves of displacement, with 28 million children displaced by violence and conflict in recent years.
- By 2030, one third of the world's children will live in countries affected by fragility and conflict.
- Climate change and environmental degradation are increasing the spread of diseases like malaria, as well as the scale of natural disasters.
- Globalization, urbanization and mass movements of people increase the risk of epidemics like Ebola and Zika.



A boy walks home from school in Kiribati – one of the countries most affected by rising sea levels.

© UNICEF/UN055820/SOKHIN

But there are also trends that we can turn into opportunities to break down barriers that endanger children and young people and prevent them from fulfilling their potential:

- *Innovations* in programming are increasing our ability to reach vulnerable children with vital goods, services and medical equipment more cost-effectively.
- *Digital technology and social media* are increasing our ability to reach and motivate supporters around the world – and giving children and young people a platform to demand accountability and drive change.
- The role of the *private sector and civil society* is growing as we work together to improve how we finance and deliver critical services.

The path forward will be challenging. To meet the SDGs by 2030, progress over the next 15 years will have to accelerate – outpacing the rates of progress achieved during the Millennium Development Goals period.

Without faster progress, by 2030:

167 million children will still live in extreme poverty.

60 million children of primary school age will still be out of school.

69 million children under 5 will still die from causes we know how to prevent.

UNICEF's Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 was conceived in the context of these challenges and opportunities. With a set of clear, focused goals tied to specific results, and change strategies to achieve them, the Strategic Plan will help us deepen the impact of our work for every child, starting with the most disadvantaged.

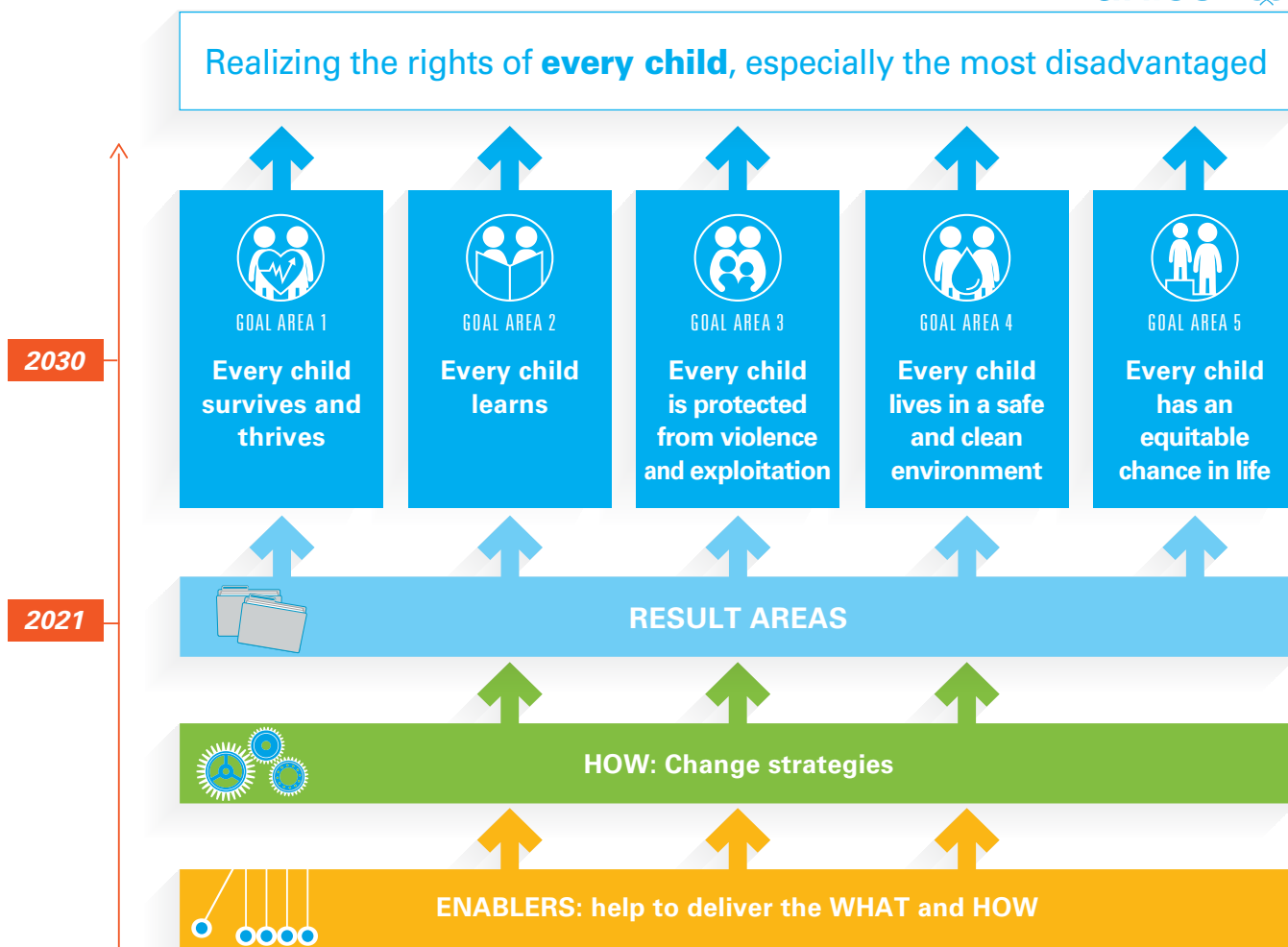
PURPOSE OF THE UNICEF STRATEGIC PLAN, 2018–2021

Building on lessons learned ... emphasizing UNICEF's contribution to achieving the 2030 SDGs ... and recognizing the need to work across sectors with a focus on cross-cutting issues of equity, gender and sustainability, the Strategic Plan will increase UNICEF's ability to deliver results for children in four key ways:

- Aligning our organization's resources around common goals and strategies.
- Supporting our ability to make strategic choices.
- Creating more effective communication about UNICEF's work for every child to win more support for the cause of children.
- Strengthening our organization's accountability framework.

THE STRATEGIC PLAN AND AGENDA 2030

Anchored in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 5 Goal Areas, 8 Change Strategies and 4 Internal Enablers of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 are specifically keyed to drive progress towards the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals – and thus, to help realize the SDGs' vision of a world in which no one is left behind.



Young Rohingya refugees from Myanmar rest on a mat at a settlement in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

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What results will the strategic plan help UNICEF achieve for children?

The overarching goal of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 is to drive results for the most disadvantaged children and young people. Supported by 8 change strategies and tied to 25 results areas, the Strategic Plan establishes **5 goal areas**:



1

Every child survives and thrives



2

Every child learns



3

Every child is protected from violence and exploitation



4

Every child lives in a safe and clean environment



5

Every child has an equitable chance in life

These goal areas span a child's life cycle, encompassing antenatal care, through infancy, childhood and adolescence, giving priority to the most disadvantaged children. Equity for children is both a stand-alone goal and a cross-cutting priority. The results areas target the key barriers that hold children and young people back, deny them the agency to shape their destinies and prevent them from accessing critical services that can save their lives and help them fulfil their potential.



A woman walks with one of the grandchildren she looks after in Southern Province, Zambia.

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GOAL AREA 1

EVERY CHILD SURVIVES AND THRIVES

Every child has the right to grow up healthy and strong.

And yet, poverty, the environment, malnutrition and inaccessible or inadequate care, maternal health and nurturing practices prevent millions of children from surviving and thriving.

In 2016, 15,000 children under 5 still died every day from preventable causes – 7,000 of them in the first days of life. More than 40 per cent of children under 5 may not reach their potential.



Planned results for 2021 include:

120 MILLION

babies born safely at health facilities through UNICEF-supported programmes – up from 25 million.

30 MILLION

children with suspected pneumonia receiving appropriate antibiotics through UNICEF-supported programmes – up from 6 million.

6 MILLION

girls and boys with severe acute malnutrition admitted for treatment – up from 3.4 million.

80 COUNTRIES

having adopted, at scale, early childhood development packages promoting early stimulation and responsive care – up from 9.

1.19 MILLION

pregnant women living with HIV given access to treatment and kept alive – up from 1.02 million.

EVERY CHILD LEARNS

Every child has the right to an education and quality learning opportunities from early childhood to adolescence. And yet, a range of factors – including geographic location, economic circumstances, gender, disability, low-quality teaching and schools, disruption from conflicts and other shocks – prevent millions of children from learning.

In 2016, more than half the world's children of preschool age, 61 million children of primary school age, 60 million adolescents of lower secondary school age and 142 million adolescents of upper secondary school age lacked access to learning opportunities.

Conflict has forced approximately 27 million children out of school – and girls are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than boys in countries affected by conflict.

And an estimated 130 million children have reached Grade 4 without learning basic reading and mathematics skills.



Planned results for 2021 include:

60 MILLION

out-of-school children gaining access to early learning, primary or secondary education – up from 10 million.

93 MILLION

girls and boys provided with individual education or early learning materials – up from 15.7 million.

79 PER CENT

of countries showing improvements in learning outcomes for girls and boys – up from 62 per cent for girls and 60 per cent for boys.



Two girls, one holding a tablet computer, raise their hands to answer a question at a school in Bagai, Cameroon.

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A teacher and student interact at a school for marginalized children in Dhaka District, Bangladesh.

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GOAL AREA 3

EVERY CHILD IS PROTECTED FROM VIOLENCE AND EXPLOITATION

Every child has the right to be protected from violence, exploitation and abuse. And yet, social norms, cultural practices, intra-state conflict and displacement, and other harmful actions undermine children's safety and well-being in every country.

In 2016, up to 1 billion girls and boys experienced some form of violence or harmful practice, including sexual violence. Almost 750 million girls and women were married as children, and at least 200 million women and girls were subjected to female genital mutilation/cutting. Gender-based violence continues to be one of the most pervasive violations of human rights in the world. And humanitarian crises make vulnerable children even more vulnerable to harm.



Planned results for 2021 include:

80 PER CENT

of unaccompanied and separated girls and boys targeted by UNICEF registered with family tracing and reunification services and family-based care or appropriate alternative services – up from 41 per cent.

5.1 MILLION

migrant, refugee and displaced children receiving protective services through UNICEF-supported programmes – up from 1.8 million.

157 COUNTRIES

providing free and universal birth registration services within civil registration systems to give children a legal identity and help protect them from exploitation – up from 131.

GOAL AREA 4

EVERY CHILD LIVES IN A SAFE AND CLEAN ENVIRONMENT

Every child has a right to live in an environment that is conducive to his or her growth and safety, including being protected from pollutants and other hazards. And yet, climate change, weak local and national governance, unplanned urbanization and insufficient awareness of the dangers posed by environmental risks – including inadequate water and sanitation systems – expose millions of children to potential harm.

Around the world today, an estimated 2.4 billion people – women, men, girls and boys – still lack access to improved sanitation. More than 660 million lack access to improved drinking water sources. Nearly 160 million children live in high or extremely high drought severity zones, while around 300 million children live in areas with toxic levels of air pollution.



Planned results for 2021 include:

60 MILLION

additional people gaining access to safe drinking water sources.

250 MILLION

fewer people practising open defecation.

25 COUNTRIES

implementing child-sensitive national plans for climate change adaptation or mitigation – up from 5.



Family members share a laugh at home in the city of El Alto, near La Paz, Bolivia.

© UNICEF/UNI189313/GILBERTSON VII PHOTO



A refugee from Afghanistan holds her six-month-old daughter at an emergency shelter in Vienna, Austria.

© UNICEF/UN05475/GILBERTSON VII PHOTO.

GOAL AREA 5

EVERY CHILD HAS AN EQUITABLE CHANCE IN LIFE

Every child has the right to fulfil his or her potential. And yet, extreme poverty, geography, conflict, discrimination, exclusion and other barriers hold back millions of children around the world, with lifelong consequences for themselves and their societies as inequity and deprivation perpetuate poverty across generations.

Today, nearly 385 million children live in extreme poverty, which is exacerbated by a range of factors such as conflicts, crises and the intensifying effects of climate change.



Planned results for 2021 include:

77 MILLION

fewer children living in extreme poverty in low- and middle-income countries – down from approximately 385 million.

172 MILLION

vulnerable children being reached by UNICEF-supported cash transfer programmes – up from 160 million.

69 COUNTRIES

having national systems in place to measure and report on multidimensional child poverty – up from 38.

Two cross-cutting priorities

Humanitarian action and gender equality are integrated into everything UNICEF does, because we have learned that this is the most effective way of making sustained progress in all areas of our work, and because resilient communities and empowered girls and women are prerequisites for all sustainable development.

1. HUMANITARIAN ACTION

UNICEF's work to reach children trapped in humanitarian emergencies is at the core of our mission and mandate. But in a world where crises and conflicts are increasing in frequency, severity and duration, humanitarian work must also help lay the foundation for the long-term resilience of communities and families – by strengthening health and protection systems, providing families with cash transfers to manage in crises and providing learning and support for children caught up in emergencies. At the same time, our development work must help reduce needs, vulnerabilities and risks over the long term to protect children against future shocks.

Under the Strategic Plan, we will:

- **STRENGTHEN** delivery of faster, more effective and at-scale humanitarian response, with an increased emphasis on adaptations to improve our response to health emergencies, mass displacements and protracted crises.
- **FOCUS** more systematically on community engagement and accountability to affected people and communities, including through communication for development and platforms for adolescent participation.
- **ENHANCE** risk-informed programming, including investments in preparedness, and advocacy for risk reduction in development plans and sector policies.
- **STRENGTHEN** coherence and complementarity between humanitarian action and development programming

2. GENDER EQUALITY

Healthy, educated and empowered girls and women are critical to all sustainable development and strong societies. A sizeable evidence base shows that the well-being of children is most dependent on women's survival, protection and opportunity. Building on UNICEF's Gender Action Plan, 2018–2021, as well as system-wide efforts to promote gender equality, the Strategic Plan integrates gender in each of its five goal areas.

Under the Strategic Plan, we will:

- **EMPHASIZE** gender discriminatory roles and practices.
- **MAINSTREAM** gender analysis in programme design and delivery.
- **ACHIEVE** gender parity in internal staffing and capacity development.
- **OVERCOME** barriers to the empowerment of adolescent girls, in particular.
- **ENGAGE** with men and boys, and change social norms to address the root causes of gender-based discrimination.



In Aden, Yemen, a child's arm is measured to determine whether he suffers from malnutrition.

© UNICEF/UN078075/FUAD

How will UNICEF achieve results for children?

UNICEF delivers change by combining high-quality programmes at scale, harnessing innovation and collecting evidence, in partnership with governments, other United Nations organizations, civil society, the private sector, communities and children. It leverages wider change nationally and globally through advocacy, communications and campaigning. UNICEF also builds public support around the world, encouraging people to volunteer, advocate and mobilize resources for the cause of children, and works with partners to achieve even greater impact.

The UNICEF Strategic Plan identifies eight change strategies and four organizational enablers to drive results:

EIGHT CHANGE STRATEGIES

1. Programming excellence for at-scale results for children
2. Gender-responsive programming
3. Winning support for the cause of children from decision-makers and the wider public
4. Developing and leveraging resources and partnerships for children
5. Leveraging the power of business and markets for children
6. United Nations working together
7. Fostering innovation in programming and advocacy for children
8. Using the power of evidence to drive change for children

FOUR ORGANIZATIONAL ENABLERS

1. Responsive, transparent and accountable internal governance
2. Results-oriented, efficient and effective management
3. Staff capacity to drive change for children
4. Versatile, safe and secure knowledge and information systems

EIGHT CHANGE STRATEGIES

1

CHANGE STRATEGY

PROGRAMMING AT-SCALE RESULTS FOR CHILDREN

UNICEF's programme work in the field is the core of our organization and the foundation of our ability to drive change for children. Under the Strategic Plan, we will increase our ability to:

- Foster cross-sectoral and multi-sectoral programming that responds holistically to children's needs and to the environments in which they grow up.
- Support policy, capacity development and systems strengthening at both national and subnational levels, especially in humanitarian situations, to enable more rapid scale-up and delivery of life-saving and child-protective services, and to improve readiness to scale up cash transfers to families affected by emergencies.
- Enhance coherence and connectedness between humanitarian action and longer-term programming – including analyses of risks related to disaster, conflict, climate change and other shocks – and build responsive programming with partners to support preparedness, increase recovery and build resilience against future shocks.
- Engage with communities to promote behaviour change, increase demand for quality services and support social norms that contribute to the realization of child rights, directly and through policy and systems strengthening, including adaptations for humanitarian response.
- Promote cooperation, share lessons learned and best practices and foster innovation among countries and across regions.

2

CHANGE STRATEGY

GENDER-RESPONSIVE PROGRAMMING

UNICEF will strengthen the mainstreaming of gender equality across the organization, in line with our Gender Action Plan, 2018–2021, working with our United Nations partners. Under the Strategic Plan, we will:

- Strengthen gender-responsive programming in all areas of UNICEF's work, recognizing the special challenges faced by girls and women. This includes preventing child marriage and gender-based violence, as well as providing quality maternal, antenatal and postnatal care, and improving nutrition, education and menstrual hygiene management, .
- Deepen our focus on empowering disadvantaged adolescent girls to improve their well-being, with multiplier effects for their families, communities and societies.
- Improve the capacity of Country Offices by providing tools, technical assistance and other support to advance gender equality.

3

CHANGE STRATEGY

WINNING SUPPORT FOR THE CAUSE OF CHILDREN FROM DECISION-MAKERS AND THE WIDER PUBLIC

UNICEF's ability to deliver results for children depends on our ability to win support for our cause. Under the Strategic Plan, we will:

- Become an even stronger advocacy, campaigning, fundraising and communications force for children, working across our organization on specific campaigns, and working with our partners to build alliances and movements for change.
- More than double our base of supporters to 100 million people willing to volunteer, advocate and donate resources.
- Support children and young people as agents of change, creating platforms and opportunities for them to demand accountability and drive progress for children.

4

CHANGE STRATEGY

DEVELOPING AND LEVERAGING RESOURCES AND PARTNERSHIPS FOR CHILDREN

Everything UNICEF does depends on our partnerships – and our ability to mobilize resources to reach children. To maximize longer-term, flexible and predictable funding in support of our work, under the Strategic Plan, we will:

- Leverage resources and partnerships for children, including by influencing domestic planning, financing and the delivery of services for children.
- Mobilize resources and fundraising for UNICEF from governments and the private sector, including individuals, foundations and corporations.
- Explore new areas for growth, including a deeper focus on pledge donors and on developing corporate and foundation fundraising opportunities.

5

CHANGE STRATEGY

LEVERAGING THE POWER OF BUSINESS AND MARKETS FOR CHILDREN

The private sector has a critical role to play in helping to improve the lives of children around the world. Over the next four years, UNICEF will deepen our engagement and strengthen our ability to leverage the power of business and markets to benefit children. Under the Strategic Plan, we will:

- Deepen our partnerships in the private sector – leveraging their core business and innovation to better serve the needs of hard-to-reach children.
- Influence global and local markets for children – breaking down market barriers that inhibit children’s access to essential supplies and pursuing a research and development pipeline of vaccines, medicines and technologies to drive progress towards the achievement of the SDGs.

6

CHANGE STRATEGY

UNITED NATIONS WORKING TOGETHER

UNICEF is committed to working ever more effectively and efficiently with our partners throughout the United Nations, drawing on our comparative advantage and collective ability to *drive more and better results for children*. Under the Common Chapter of the Strategic Plan, we will:

- Work collaboratively with United Nations partners globally and nationally to achieve more results and save money.
- Increase alignment with national government priorities and plans.
- Work with other United Nations agencies on six priorities: eradicating poverty; addressing climate change; improving adolescent and maternal health; achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; ensuring greater availability and use of disaggregated data to address inequity; and emphasizing the contribution development makes to peacebuilding, sustaining peace and building resilience.

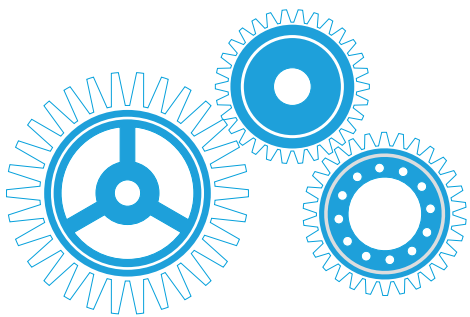
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CHANGE STRATEGY

FOSTERING INNOVATION IN PROGRAMMING AND ADVOCACY FOR CHILDREN

UNICEF has always fostered innovation and pioneered the use of new technologies to help the children at greatest risk and in greatest need. Under the Strategic Plan, we will:

- Enhance the use of new technologies to strengthen systems, improve service delivery and engage communities, citizens and civil society organizations in public decision-making.
- Identify the most promising programme innovations and work with partners to adopt, adapt and scale up the most successful approaches.



8

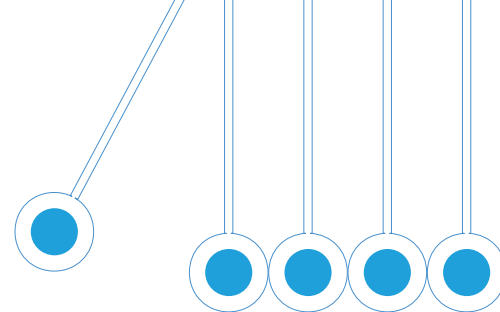
CHANGE STRATEGY

USING THE POWER OF EVIDENCE TO DRIVE CHANGE FOR CHILDREN

Identifying the children at greatest risk and in greatest need is a prerequisite for leaving no child behind – a promise of the SDGs. So is understanding the barriers that hold children back, and the solutions that can overcome those barriers. And quality data, research and evaluation are the foundation for all UNICEF's programmes. Under the Strategic Plan, we will:

- Generate, synthesize and promote the use of evaluations, research and data about child well-being to catalyse change for the most vulnerable children.
- Leverage new and existing partnerships to generate more robust research, disaggregated data and analysis.
- Increase the availability of disaggregated data on the 37 child-focused SDG indicators.

FOUR ORGANIZATIONAL ENABLERS TO DRIVE RESULTS



The UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 lays out four critical organizational enablers that will increase our ability to achieve results for the most disadvantaged children – and to deliver greater value for the funds our donors entrust to us – by building on our internal strengths.

1 **Responsive, transparent and accountable internal governance**

Among numerous improvements in UNICEF's internal governance, the Strategic Plan calls for strengthened financial controls, streamlined business functions and a simplified system for payments to our partners in fast-moving emergencies – a critical shift to improve our ability to respond quickly. We will also build on UNICEF's strong ranking in aid transparency by providing more frequent data on results and resources.

2 **Results-oriented, efficient and effective management**

UNICEF's results-oriented mission will be matched by a *culture* of managing for results. Under the Strategic Plan, this approach will be embedded throughout our programmes, from conception and design to implementation, budget formulation, and monitoring and evaluation. Our guiding management principle is value for money, using new tools to strengthen results-based management and budgeting.

3 **Staff capacity to drive change for children**

The Strategic Plan highlights investments in the skills, knowledge, systems and policies required to increase the capacity, security and well-being of UNICEF's staff – our organization's most indispensable resource. Supported by advances in information and communications technology, a more versatile and mobile staff will help expand UNICEF's global reach and enhance our work with partners – increasing the results we achieve together.

4 **Versatile, safe and secure knowledge and information systems**

As UNICEF strengthens its position as a knowledge leader and advocate for the most vulnerable children, the Strategic Plan requires continued investment in digital platforms that can help us increase public engagement, fundraising and volunteerism. In addition, we will increase connectivity and improve access to UNICEF information and systems for all staff, regardless of location or circumstances.



A girl swims at her local recreation centre in El Salvador as part of a municipal violence-prevention project supported by UNICEF.

© UNICEF/UN0156174/MARTINEZ

The crucial second decade

The UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 identifies a number of emerging issues facing children and young people today. UNICEF will work with its partners to develop programming on these issues, including programmes on suicide, mental health, road safety and online safety.

The plan also highlights other areas where UNICEF is already working and where we see an opportunity to deepen our existing work across all our programmes.

Chief among these areas is adolescence – the crucial second decade of life. It is a time of tremendous vulnerability for children and young people themselves, and an equally great opportunity for UNICEF and our partners to make targeted and timely investments that can pay enormous dividends.

Adolescents – defined by the United Nations as children and young people between the ages of 10 and 19 – number 1.2 billion in the world today, making up 16 per cent of the global population. We have a duty to prepare them for a world that is rapidly evolving. Investing in the first years of children’s lives is critical, but we cannot assume this will be sufficient to fully secure their long-term prosperity. Instead, we must invest across the continuum of the first and second decades of life.

Going forward, UNICEF will build on its cross-cutting advocacy and programme work for adolescents – focusing greater attention on educational opportunity and skills-training, and working with our partners to build a coalition for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable young people.



A 14-year-old former child labourer packs books into her school bag in Khulna, Bangladesh.

© UNICEF/UN016300/GILBERTSON VII PHOTO

Looking ahead

The UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 takes effect as the global community intensifies its work to advance the bold, transformative agenda of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

In these critical early years, we must accelerate the pace of progress, working with our partners to build on what works and to find new ways of reaching the most disadvantaged children and young people more effectively and cost-effectively.

The Strategic Plan is a tool for enhancing the impact of UNICEF's work to deliver greater results. It is specifically keyed to drive progress toward the achievement of the SDGs – and thus, to help realize the 2030 Agenda's vision of a world in which no one is left behind.

For every child

Whoever she is.

Wherever he lives.

Every child deserves a childhood.

A future.

A fair chance.

That's why UNICEF is there.

For each and every child.

Working day in and day out.

In 190 countries and territories.

Reaching the hardest to reach.

The furthest from help.

The most excluded.

It's why we stay to the end.

And never give up.

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