



GOAL 4

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

TARGET 4.1

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

Target overview

SDG monitoring

SDG Target 4.1 is tracked by a single indicator, comprised of six subsets of the data:

- 4.1.1 Proportion of children and young people (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex

Broader monitoring context

Goal 4 is comprised of seven targets and three means of implementation, all of which are closely linked. So in order to ensure that the learning target is achieved, gender and other disparities must be eliminated (Target 4.5) and education facilities must provide an inclusive and effective learning environment for all (Target 4.a). Furthermore, learning rests on a foundation of quality early childhood development (Target 4.2). And within the larger context of the SDGs it is essential that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development (Target 4.7). Thus, the single indicator under Target 4.1 needs to be considered within a broader context of SDG indicators. Beyond the SDGs, there are a range of indicators that may be produced by countries to help support advocacy and programming. These include UNICEF SP, SDG Thematic and MICS indicators.¹

¹ Examples of overlapping SP, SDG4 and MICS indicators: Completion rate (SDG4.1.4 and MICS indicators), Gross-Intake Rate to the Last grade in primary and lower secondary education (SDG4.1.3, SP impact, and MICS indicators), and Out-of-School Children rates for primary, lower secondary and upper secondary (SDG4.1.5, SP outcome, and MICS indicators).

Many countries currently lack consistent comprehensive data to support advocacy and programming, and efforts to monitoring progress are essential. Data that capture the educational situation of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable populations are particularly difficult to come by in most countries. In some cases, lack of robust data is at least partially due to the lack of an established measurement methodology. Efforts are underway to fill these gaps, for example through new data collection in MICS 6 (see below), which for many years has been a key source of comparable, disaggregatable data on numerous aspects of educational attainment

UNICEF role in monitoring

While UNESCO Institute for Statistics is the custodian agency of most of the SDG4 indicators, UNICEF plays an active role in SDG4 monitoring. At country level, UNICEF works together UIS/UNESCO to support ministries of education in their reporting. UNICEF support for MICS surveys also helps countries to collect essential data. UNICEF is also an active member of the Global Alliance to Monitor Learning (GAML) to discuss technical issues in measuring learning outcomes among others. Notably, UNICEF Strategic Plan Goal Area 2 (Every child learns) is fully aligned to SDG4 and other education-related targets.

General information and resources

- UNICEF data: <https://data.unicef.org/>
- UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS): <http://mics.unicef.org>
- SDG indicators: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/>
- Education Sector Analysis Methodological Guidelines Volume 1 and Volume 2: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/methodological-guidelines-education-sector-analysis-volume-1>
- The Sustainable Development Goals Explained: Quality Education, by Jo Bourne, Associate Director of Education, UNICEF (Video, 3:01)
- SDG4 Brief for UNICEF Education Staff, May 2017

For further information, please contact the education focal point at the Data & Analytics Section at UNICEF HQ via: data@unicef.org

INDICATOR 4.1.1



Proportion of children and young people (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex

Description

Definition and key terms

The indicator is calculated as the percentage of children and/ or young people at the relevant stage of education achieving or exceeding a pre-defined proficiency level in a given subject. Thus, estimates should be presented for each of the six subcomponents of the indicator, as follows:

- Achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in reading in Grade 2 or 3
- Achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in mathematics in Grade 2 or 3
- Achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in reading at the end of primary education
- Achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in mathematics at the end of primary education
- Achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in reading at the end of lower secondary education
- Achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in mathematics at the end of lower secondary education

Key terms:

- Minimum proficiency level is the benchmark of basic knowledge in a domain (mathematics or reading) measured through learning assessments. Currently, there are no common standards validated by the international community or countries.

National data sources

There is no standardized measurement tool at present, and to date available data have been derived from various cross-national learning assessments including:

- Programme d'analyse des systèmes éducatifs de la CONFEMEN (PASEC): <http://www.pasec.confemen.org/>

- Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS): <https://timssandpirls.bc.edu/>
- Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA): <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/aboutpisa/>
- Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ): <http://www.sacmeq.org/?q=sacmeq-projects/sacmeq-iv>
- Tercer Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo (TERCE): <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/santiago/education/education-assessment-llece/terce/>
- Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS): <http://www.iea.nl/timss-2015>

Notably, performance levels on the various assessments may not be directly comparable.

The MICS programme has developed a new module (the Foundational Learning Module) now part of MICS 6, to capture the basic literacy and numeracy skills of children in order to provide data that are comparable across countries. The new learning module will be administered to children aged 7–14 years, including out-of-school children, and will assess reading and math skills of grade 2 in primary education.

Data collection innovation

In addition to the new MICS Foundational Learning Module, there is a new MICS 6 module on child functioning (disability), which allows for the identification of out of school children with disabilities. This will permit the calculation of certain elements of the parity indices in indicator 4.5.1.

Using the indicator



Interpretation

This indicator is a direct measure of the learning outcomes achieved in reading and mathematics at the end of the relevant stages of education. Each stage of education must have its own established minimum standard; from a measurement perspective, these minimum standards are currently set by the particular data collection instrument being used and thus are not necessarily comparable across data sources. With the FL module in MICS6; countries can report percentages of children between age 7 and 14 who correctly answered five math and five literacy questions, respectively.

When using these data, it is important to note that assessments have typically been administered within school systems. This means the current indicators cover only those in school and the proportion of in-school target populations might vary from country to country due to varied out-of-school children populations.

Disaggregation

Key disaggregators include age (or age-group of students), sex, location (urban-rural), and sub-national geographical unit (provinces, states, etc). When household survey datasets are used, data may also be disaggregated by socio-economic status, language, ethnicity, and disability status among others. SDG4 emphasis on disaggregation based on the principle of “Leave no one behind”, and indicator 4.5 is essentially disaggregation of SDG and other important education indicators.

Common pitfalls

Available data are sparse and inconsistent across countries. The majority of SDG 4 indicators are not available in UNICEF programme countries, making identification of data gaps and development of data generation strategy a high priority for UNICEF COs.

Monitoring and reporting

National

Ministries of Education, National Statistical Offices

Global

UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UNESCO-UIS) is the custodian agency for indicator 4.1.1

The co-convening agencies for overall monitoring of SDG4 include UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, UNFPA, UNDP, UN Women and UNHCR. UNICEF also participates on the Technical Cooperation Group to provide technical guidance for monitoring SDG4 indicators, together with 26 Member states and UNESCO, UIS, GPE, World Bank, OECD, CONFEMEN and various NGOs. UNICEF is also an active member of the Global Alliance to Monitor Learning (GAML) to discuss technical issues in measuring learning outcomes among others.

Process: Discussions are ongoing among co-convening agencies and member states on global monitoring and reporting processes for SDG4. For the latest information, please contact the education focal point in the Data & Analytics section via: data@unicef.org.

Timing: See above.

Discrepancies with national estimates: See above.

Key resources

Indicator information and cross-country comparable estimates:

- UNICEF Data: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/overview/>
- SDG4 Portal Site: <http://uis.unesco.org/>
- SDG metadata: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/>

Tools and measurement guidance:

- MICS Methodological Work in Assessment of Learning Outcomes: http://mics.unicef.org/methodological_work/2/ASSESSMENT-OF-LEARNING-OUTCOMES
- MICS questionnaire for Children Age 5-17 – includes module on foundational learning skills: <http://mics.unicef.org/tools>