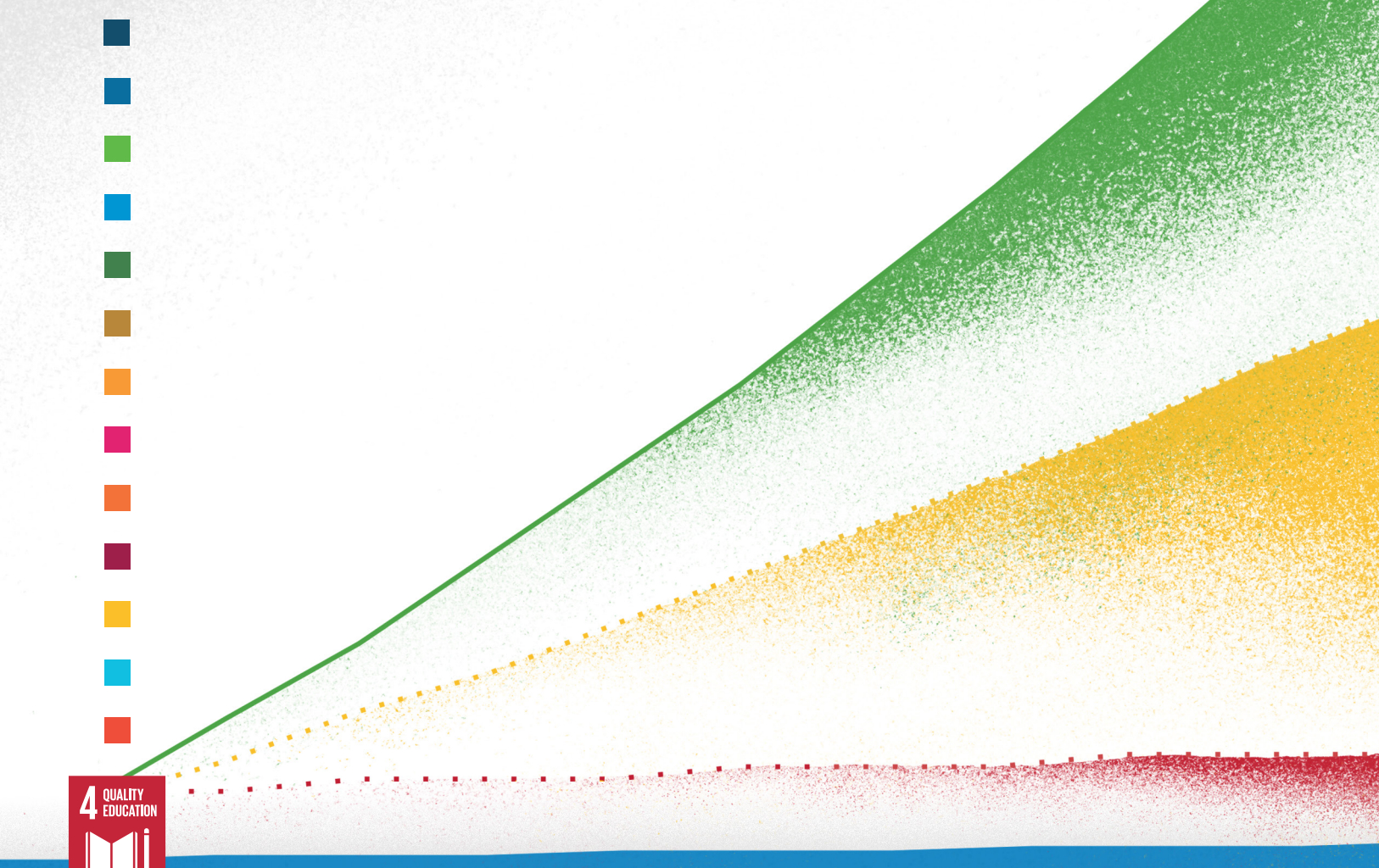


4 QUALITY EDUCATION

MEETING COMMITMENTS

ARE COUNTRIES ON TRACK TO ACHIEVE SDG 4?

United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

UNESCO INSTITUTE FOR STATISTICS

Global Education Monitoring Report

SDG 4, our global education goal

TABLE 1:
SDG 4 — the education goal and targets

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Target 4.1: By 2030, ensure that all girl and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

Target 4.2: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education

Target 4.3: By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

Target 4.4: By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

Target 4.5: By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

Target 4.6: By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

Target 4.7: By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

Target 4.a: Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all

Target 4.b: By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programs, in developed countries and other developing countries

Target 4.c: By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States

At the 70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015, Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. At the heart of the Agenda are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 4, which covers education.

Developed through an inclusive intergovernmental process, the 2030 Agenda integrates the social, environmental and economic pillars of sustainability with peace and security objectives. The Agenda in general, and SDG 4 in particular, bring together two earlier and parallel development strands:

- The environment agenda, known as Agenda 21, which was adopted at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, also known as the Rio or Earth Summit. Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 focused on the need for education for sustainable development.

- The poverty reduction agenda, known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), adopted in 2000. MDG 2 focused on universal primary completion, while MDG 3 aimed at achieving gender parity in primary, secondary and tertiary education. In addition, the Education for All agenda also focused attention on goals related to early childhood, skills, adult literacy and education quality.

Representatives of the global education community embraced SDG 4 by signing the Incheon Declaration at the World Education Forum in May 2015. The Declaration's 10 targets aim to support learning, in all its shapes and forms, which can influence people's choices to create more just, inclusive and sustainable societies. To advance progress towards SDG 4 and its targets, the global education community adopted the Education 2030 Framework for Action in Paris in November 2015.

The Framework for Action recognizes the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) as the 'official source of cross-nationally comparable data on education' and the *Global Education Monitoring* (GEM) *Report* as the 'mechanism for monitoring and reporting on SDG 4 ... as part of the overall SDG follow-up and review'.

Following the Synthesis Report of the UN Secretary-General, a set of global indicators were proposed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators and adopted by the UN General Assembly in July 2017. Data are published in the annual SDG Report. There are 11 global indicators for SDG 4, and the UIS is responsible for compiling data for 9 of them.

As the 11 global indicators do not capture the full scope of the education agenda, a total set of 43 thematic indicators, including the 11 global indicators, constitute the SDG 4 monitoring framework. These are endorsed in the Education 2030 Framework for Action. Marking the occasion of the SDG 4 review at the 2019 High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, the main UN apex platform for the follow-up and review of Agenda 2030, this publication builds on the SDG Report to present the progress so far towards the SDG 4 targets, with data from selected global and thematic indicators.

TARGET
4.1

UNIVERSAL PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

More than 220 million children, adolescents and youth will still be out of school in 2030

Globally, 262 million or 18% of all children, adolescents and youth aged 6 to 17 years were out of school in 2017. Based on current trends, these numbers will drop only slightly to 225 million or 14% by 2030. Among **children** of primary school age (typically 6–11 years), 64 million or **9%** are out of school. The primary out-of-school rate fell from 15% to 9% between 2000 and 2008, but has not changed in subsequent years.

Since only the hardest-to-reach children remain out of school, progress has slowed down in middle-income countries. However, it seems surprising that progress in reducing the out-of-school rate in low-income countries stopped when the rate reached 20%. This interruption coincides with the sudden halt in the growth of aid to education to low-income countries after the onset of the financial crisis. Aid accounts for almost one-fifth of public spending in these countries. During the 2000s, aid to education doubled, but it has plateaued at about US$2.5 billion since 2010.

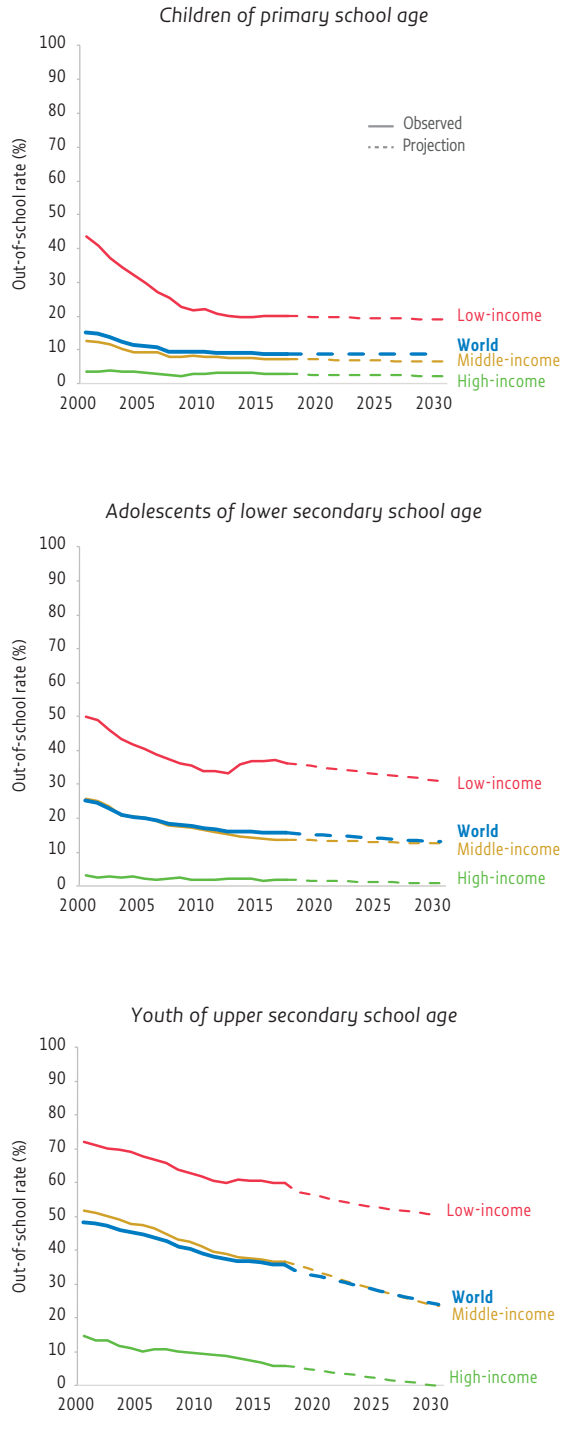
In addition, 61 million or **16%** of **adolescents** of lower secondary school age (12–14 years) are out of school. The out-of-school rate for this age group fell from 25% to 17% between 2000 and 2010, but has since remained stagnant. The out-of-school rate is 14% in middle-income countries. In low-income countries, the rate is 36%; between 2012 and 2015, the rate increased in this group, driven mainly by reverses in countries such as Ethiopia and the Syrian Arab Republic.

Finally, 138 million or **36%** of **youth** of upper secondary school age (15–17 years) are out of school. After falling from 48% to 37% between 2000 and 2013, the decline in the out-of-school rate in this group has slowed down considerably. The upper secondary out-of-school rate is 60% in low-income countries, 37% in middle-income and 6% in high-income countries. Although countries have made a commitment in SDG 4 to achieve universal secondary completion, upper secondary education is not compulsory in 47% of countries.

Only upper secondary out-of-school rates are projected to continue their downward trend until 2030, when one-quarter of all adolescents are still expected to be out of school. Primary and lower secondary out-of-school rates are projected to remain at nearly the same levels as today.

The challenge of meeting this target is particularly great for countries in sub-Saharan Africa, where the school-age population is growing faster than elsewhere in the world. The share of the region in the global out-of-school population of primary school age grew from 41% in 2000 to 54% in 2017.

FIGURE 1:
Out-of-school rate, 2000–2017 and projections to 2030



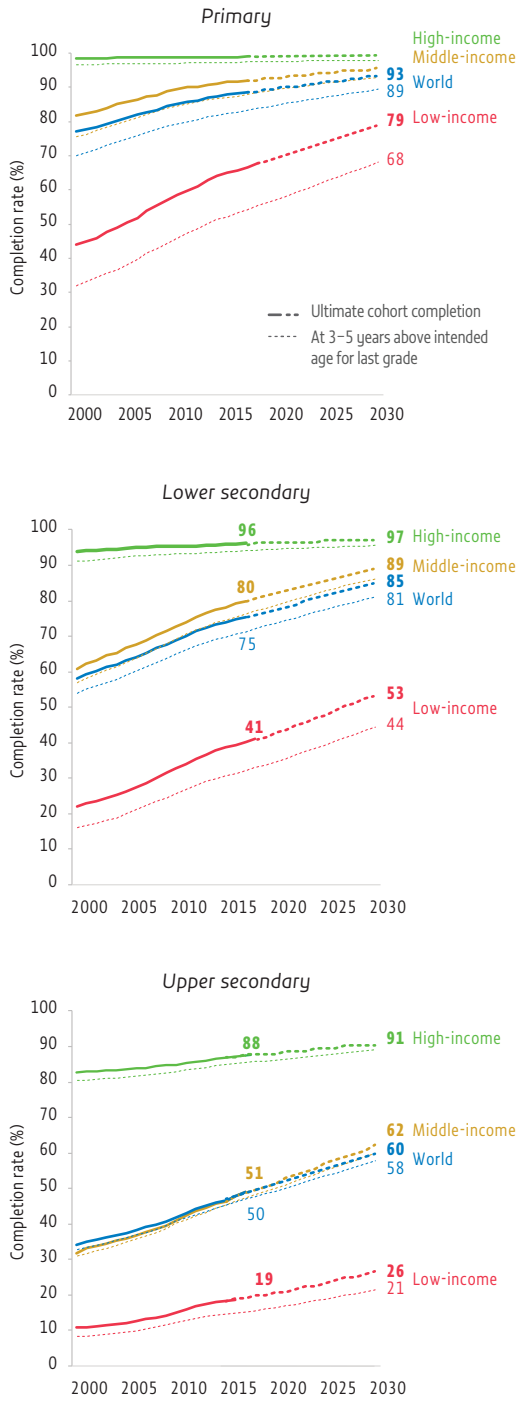
Source: UIS database and projections.

TARGET 4.1

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION – COMPLETION

Only six in ten young people will be finishing secondary school in 2030

FIGURE 2:
Completion rate, 2000–2018 and projections to 2030



Source: GEM Report team estimates and projections.

Bringing children into school is not enough; SDG 4 also calls for all children to complete their schooling. Globally, across 148 countries with estimates, the primary school completion rate has reached 84% in 2018, up from 70% in 2000. Primary completion is already universal in high-income and most upper-middle-income countries. Under current trends, it is expected to reach 89% globally by 2030. If the present expansion is accelerated, achieving universal primary completion by 2030 is still possible as a stretch goal.

Lower and upper secondary completion stand at 72% and 48%, respectively, in 2018. Large disparities exist among countries in the rate with which they expand upper secondary education relative to lower secondary education. Under current trends, lower secondary completion is expected to reach 81% and upper secondary school completion 58% by 2030.

The current pace, therefore, is insufficient to achieve Target 4.1 without a transformational departure from past trajectories. While universal completion remains an aspirational target, countries' performance should be assessed against ambitious but achievable benchmarks at the regional level, with potential reference to the record of high-achieving countries.

The standard indicator for the completion rate measures school completion among students three to five years above the nominal age for the final grade. It is, accordingly, a measure of reasonably timely completion. In some countries, a considerable number of students complete school with even greater delay. In many low- and middle-income countries, late school entry, high repetition rates, dropout and later re-entry are common.

In these settings, the standard completion rate underestimates the proportion of children, adolescents and youth who eventually complete primary, lower or upper secondary school. In low-income countries, the gap between primary completion at 3 to 5 years above the intended age for the last grade (typically ages 14 to 16) (55%) and ultimate primary completion 8 years above (68%) is estimated at 13 percentage points in 2018. This gap is expected to drop to 11 percentage points by 2030.

Applying this ultimate cohort completion rate, it is projected that, globally by 2030, the completion rate will be 93% in primary, 85% in lower secondary and 60% in upper secondary education.

TARGET
4.1

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION – LEARNING

The world will approach the learning target only if progress equals the rate of the best-performing countries

Apart from school entry and completion, Target 4.1 also seeks to ensure that students achieve a basic standard of learning while they are in school. Progress has been made since 2015 on defining ways in which different national and cross-national assessments map onto each other, as well as in establishing a minimum level of proficiency at each of the three points of measurement (grade 2 or 3, end of primary, end of lower secondary) and for each of the two subjects measured in this target (reading and mathematics). Different routes are being followed to increase comparability, including students taking two different assessments and experts debating and assigning a level of difficulty to different assessment items. Ultimately, a bank of items from different assessments that could be used by all countries could help improve comparability without creating a new assessment, ensuring national ownership and probably lowering the cost.

In the meantime, the results of individual cross-national learning assessments demonstrate that a large proportion of students do not achieve minimum proficiency in reading. In addition, past rates of progress even suggest that learning outcomes may deteriorate in some cases.

The results of the Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education (LLECE) suggest that nearly 60% of grade 3 students reach minimum proficiency on average. If the average trend continues, the proportion of proficient students will stay the same, but at the rate of the best-performing country, the proportion could reach 80%.

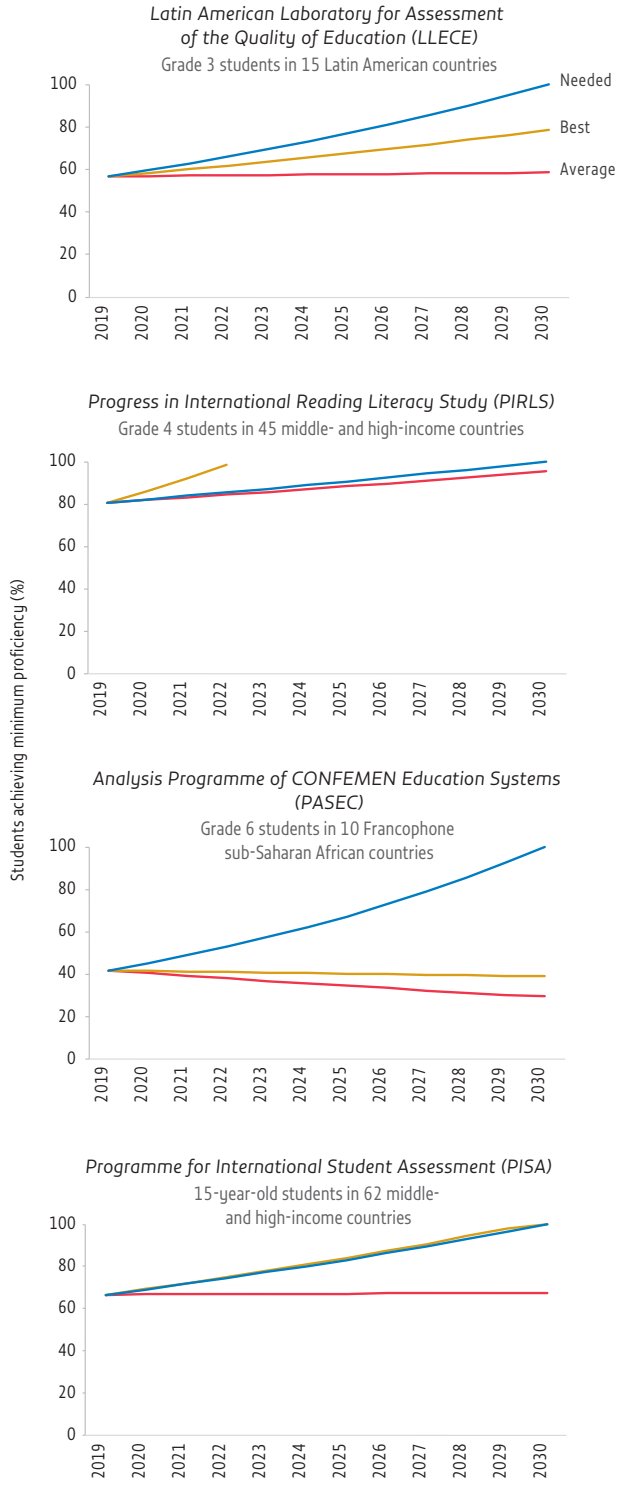
The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) assesses the reading skills of grade 4 students, mostly in high-income countries. In this assessment, 81% of students achieve at least minimum proficiency and the average rate of progress in participating countries needs to be only slightly higher to reach 100% by 2030.

The results of the Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Educatifs de la CONFEMEN (Analysis Programme of CONFEMEN Education Systems, PASEC) show that 42% of grade 6 students in assessed Francophone African countries achieve minimum proficiency, but the trend is negative, and if it continues, the proportion could drop by nearly one-third.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) targets 15-year-old students in middle- and high-income countries. On average, two-thirds of these students perform at the minimum level, indicating proficiency in reading and mathematics. At the current rate of progress, this proportion will be the same in 2030. However, if all countries emulated the growth rate of the best-performing country, the 2030 target would be well within reach.

FIGURE 3:

Percentage of students who reach minimum proficiency level in reading, current level and projections to 2030 by scenarios



Source: UIS estimates and projections.

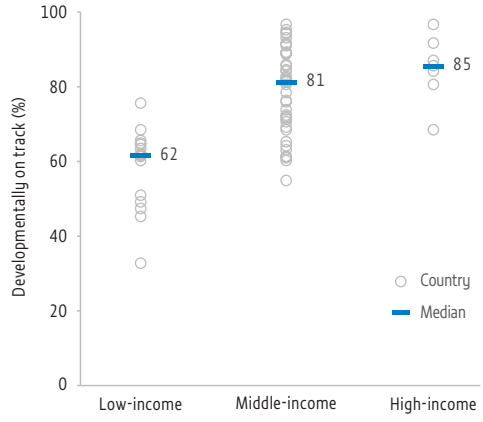
TARGET 4.2

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Access to early childhood education is expanding but low- and middle-income countries have to catch up

FIGURE 4:

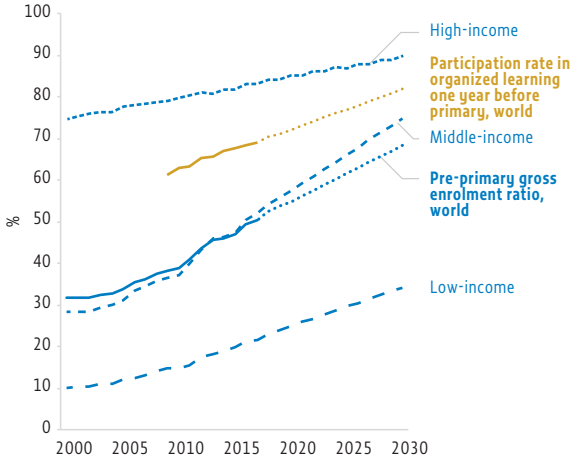
Percentage of children aged 36 to 59 months who are developmentally on track, 2009–2017



Source: UIS database based on the UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey.

FIGURE 5:

Participation rate in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age and pre-primary gross enrolment ratio, 2000–2017 and projections to 2030



Source: UIS database and projections.

The global indicator on early childhood aims to capture the proportion of children under 5 who are 'developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being'. This is a complex outcome, for which a methodology was only approved by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators in March 2019. Until the new methodology is widely adopted, the UNICEF Early Childhood Development Index (ECDI) is used to track the indicator. The ECDI is based on 10 questions covering 4 domains: physical, social-emotional, learning and literacy-numeracy.

The average share of 3- and 4-year-olds considered 'on track' (and, implicitly, 'ready for primary school') in the 66 countries with data since 2009 is 76%, but the share falls to 62% in low-income countries.

In most countries, the value for the ECDI physical domain is high. However, this measure underestimates the scale of the challenge, given that malnutrition, which may have serious effects on children's cognitive development, remains high at 35% in low-income countries and 32% in lower-middle-income countries.

By contrast, the value of the ECDI literacy-numeracy domain is low. This domain includes early skills, such as letter/sound identification and counting, which are fundamental to developing future literacy and numeracy skills. The average share of 3- to 4-year-olds with such skills was only 11% in low-income countries.

For such skills to develop, two factors are key, in addition to good health: stimulating home environments and access to early childhood care and education. Across 44 low- and middle-income countries only about 7.5% of children under 5 – and only 0.3% of those in the poorest 20% of households – live in homes with at least 10 books.

Access to quality early childhood care and education is crucial for cognitive and emotional development. The pre-primary gross enrolment ratio has increased from 32% in 2000 to 50% in 2017 and is projected to reach 68% in 2030. Since 2000, the slowest growth has been in Central and Southern Asia and the fastest in Eastern and South-eastern Asia.

The share of children a year younger than the official primary school entry age who are attending pre-primary education or any other form of organized learning is 69%. The share varies from 42% in low-income countries to 93% in high-income countries. Among geographic regions, the lowest participation rates are observed in sub-Saharan Africa (42%) and Western Asia (48%). It is projected that, globally, the rate will reach 82% in 2030.

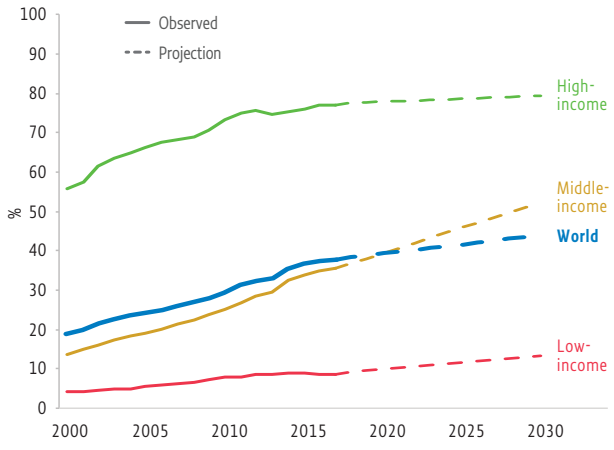
TARGET 4.3

TECHNICAL, VOCATIONAL, TERTIARY AND ADULT EDUCATION

Tertiary education systems will keep expanding over the next 10 years

FIGURE 6:

Tertiary gross enrolment ratio, 2000–2017 and projections to 2030



Source: UIS database and projections.

Globally, the gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education increased from 19% in 2000 to 38% in 2017, with the female enrolment ratio exceeding the male ratio by 4 percentage points. The tertiary gross enrolment ratio ranges from 9% in low-income countries to 77% in high-income countries, where, after rapid growth in the 2000s, it reached a plateau in the 2010s. Between now and 2030, the biggest increase in tertiary enrolment ratios is expected in middle-income countries, where it will reach 52%.

SDG 4 commits countries to providing lifelong learning opportunities for all. This commitment is monitored through the global indicator for Target 4.3, which measures the participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, whether for work or non-work purposes. Published data are available mainly for Europe and North America, where the average participation rate was 46%, ranging from a low of 7% to a high of 69% in individual countries. Trend analysis was not possible due to limited coverage for this indicator but estimates for more countries are expected to be released by the UIS later in 2019 through the processing of labour force surveys.

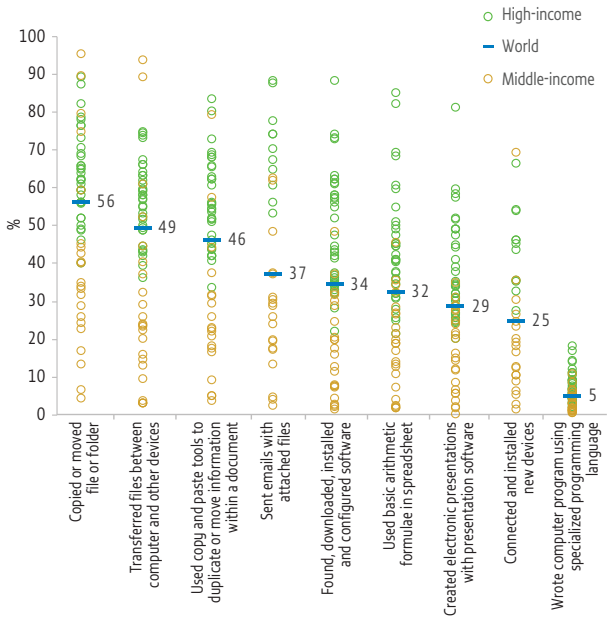
TARGET 4.4

SKILLS FOR WORK

Many more are learning ICT skills in high-income than in middle-income countries

FIGURE 7:

Youth and adults with ICT skills, 2017



Source: UIS database based on Eurostat and International Telecommunication Union data.

The global indicator for Target 4.4, an indirect measure of use of information and communications technology (ICT) skills, may seem very limited for monitoring the target's broad scope about the skills that youth and adults need for the world of work. However, the indicator is innovative for an education monitoring framework for several reasons. First, it aims to capture skills beyond literacy and numeracy. Second, it tries to assess skills that are becoming almost universally important for the world of work – not many skills categories can claim to have such worldwide relevance. Third, it challenges governments to think about ways in which such skills can be acquired in and outside school.

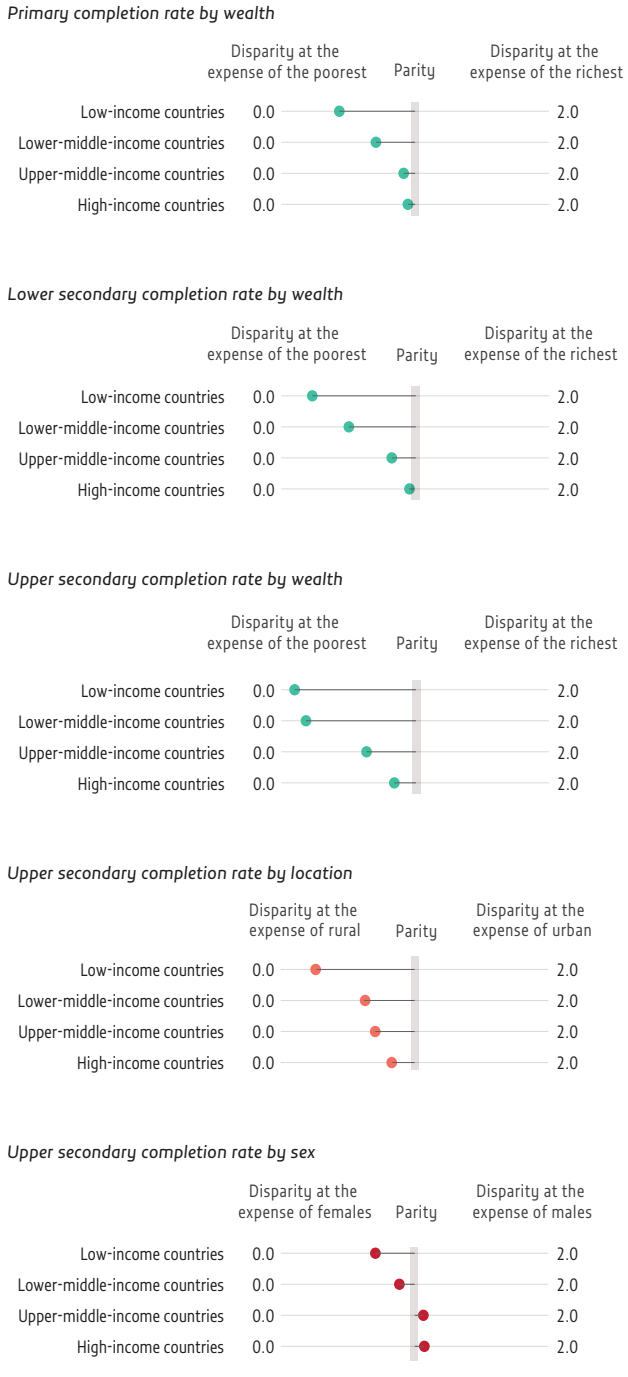
The global indicator draws on individuals reporting in household surveys whether they have carried out nine selected computer-related activities in the previous three months. The latest data from the International Telecommunication Union show that copying or moving a file or folder is the only skill that more than one in three respondents had in typical middle-income countries, while two in three respondents in high-income countries had this skill. The average share of the adult population with programming skills is 7% in high-income countries and 3% in middle-income countries. Ultimately, the aspiration is to move towards a direct measure of these skills. The UIS Digital Literacy Global Framework based on the European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens, should provide a solid basis for future direct measurement.

TARGET 4.5

EQUITY

In low-income countries, the richest are nine times as likely as the poorest to complete upper secondary

FIGURE 8:
Adjusted parity index, 2013–2017



Source: World Inequality Database on Education.

'Leaving no one behind' is one of the principles of Agenda 2030, and one of the main contributions of the SDG 4 monitoring framework to this aim is that the disaggregation of education indicators by individual characteristics has been mainstreamed. The richness of the evidence on the parity index, the global indicator for Target 4.5, is presented concisely in the World Inequality Database on Education, which is managed jointly by the GEM Report and the UIS.

In low-income countries, for every 100 in the richest quintile, 44 children in the poorest quintile complete primary school, 23 adolescents complete lower secondary school, and just 11 youth complete upper secondary school. Absolute disparities are very high: while only 4% of the poorest youth complete upper secondary school in low-income countries, 36% of the richest do. In lower-middle-income countries, the gap is even wider: while only 14% of the poorest youth complete upper secondary school, 72% of the richest do. Relative disparities tend to decline as countries become richer and completion rates increase. For instance, for every 100 of the richest young people who complete upper secondary school, 11 complete upper secondary school in low-income, 19 in lower middle-income, 64 in upper-middle-income and 85 in high-income countries.

Disparities by wealth appear to be the largest form of disparity, although it is important to note that the comparison concerns the bottom 20% and top 20% and does not consider the middle 60%. Other comparisons – by sex and location – split the population in two groups. In terms of location, 26 young people living in rural areas complete upper secondary school for every 100 young people living in urban areas who do so. In terms of sex, 70 young women in low-income and 88 in lower-middle-income countries complete upper secondary school for every 100 young men who do so. Gender disparities reverse in richer countries: 106 young women in upper-middle- and 107 in high-income countries complete upper secondary school for every 100 young men.

Disparities by sex, location and wealth, and their intersections, are among the few characteristics that can be aggregated across countries in the sense that the respective categories carry a similar meaning and data are relatively easy to obtain. In the coming years, as a result of mobilization and inter-agency coordination, it is expected that more information will be available on education indicators by disability.

Other individual characteristics are important, but analyses are more relevant at national than cross-national level. Large disparities can be observed in different countries by geographic region, ethnicity, language, and migrant background.

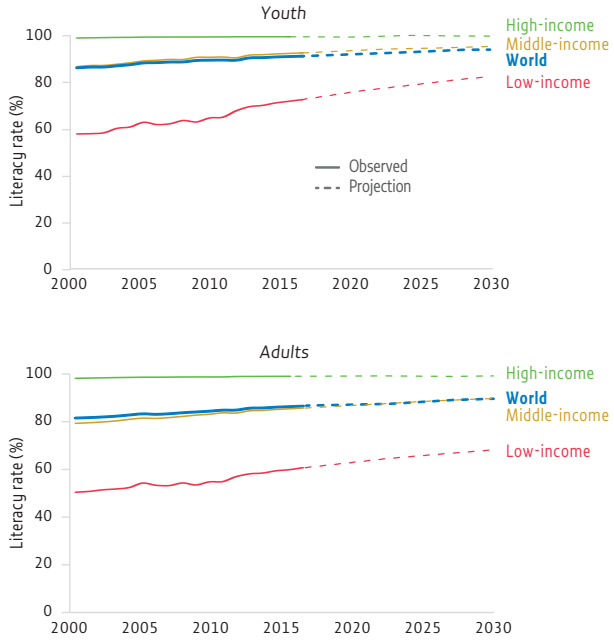
TARGET 4.6

ADULT LITERACY AND NUMERACY

Literacy rates are growing steadily across the globe but 750 million adults still cannot read

FIGURE 9:

Youth and adult literacy rate, 2000–2016 and projections to 2030



Source: UIS database and projections.

The global indicator for Target 4.6, which refers to a 'level of proficiency' in functional literacy and numeracy skills, aims to shift attention away from the conventional dichotomy of literacy/illiteracy. A rigid distinction between adults who do and do not possess basic reading and writing skills is less informative than the range of adult proficiency levels in various contexts. For the time being, however, the needed measurement tools are not available beyond high-income countries, so reporting for most countries is limited to youth and adult literacy based on traditional literacy rates.

According to the most recent estimates, the global youth literacy rate is 91%, meaning 102 million youth lack basic literacy skills. In low-income countries, one in three young people still cannot read. The adult literacy rate is 86%, which means 750 million adults lack basic literacy skills. There are 92 literate women for every 100 literate men globally, and in low-income countries, as few as 77 literate women for every 100 literate men. The literacy rate is expected to continue to grow steadily in countries in all income groups. At the global level, the youth literacy rate is expected to reach 94% by 2030 and the adult literacy rate 90%. In low-income countries, less than 70% of adults and slightly more than 80% of youth aged 15 to 24 years are projected to have basic literacy skills by 2030.

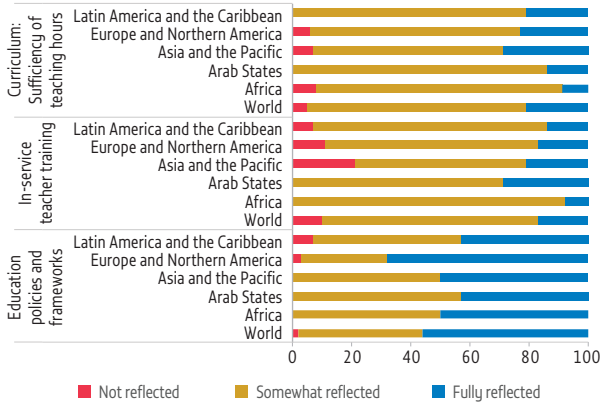
TARGET 4.7

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Limited data indicate large gaps in mainstreaming education for sustainable development

FIGURE 10:

Countries reflecting principles of the 1974 UNESCO Recommendation in their education policy, teacher education and curricula, 2013–2016



Source: UNESCO.

Monitoring progress on Target 4.7, with its unique focus on the content of education, remains challenging. A methodology has not yet been adopted for the global indicator, which aims to capture country efforts to mainstream global citizenship education and education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights, at all levels in their education policies, curricula, teacher education and student assessment. However, reporting on the implementation of the 1974 UNESCO Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms indicates the state of national education systems.

In the sixth consultation carried out in 2016, 83 countries reported on the extent to which their education systems reflect the Recommendation's guiding principles and associated topics. In nearly 60% of reporting countries, the Recommendation has been 'fully reflected' in national education policies. Implementation is weakest for in-service teacher education, which 'fully reflects' the Recommendation in only 17% of responding countries. The most rapid progress was observed for student assessment, with more than four in five countries reporting inclusion, up from just under half in the fifth consultation.

TARGET 4.a

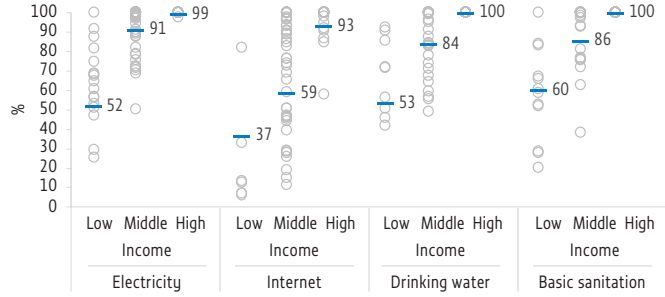
EDUCATION FACILITIES AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Four in ten upper secondary schools in low-income countries have no sanitation

The global indicator for Target 4.a reports information on infrastructure in schools. In low-income countries, only 32% of primary, 43% of lower secondary and 52% of upper secondary schools have access to electricity. This affects access to the internet, which is just 37% in upper secondary schools in low-income countries, as compared to 59% in those in middle-income countries and 93% in those in high-income countries.

Access to basic water, sanitation and hygiene is also far from universal. Among upper secondary schools, only 53% in low-income countries and 84% in middle-income countries have access to basic drinking water. Access to water and sanitation is universal in high-income countries.

FIGURE 11:
Resources in upper secondary school facilities by country income group, 2017



Source: UIS database.

TARGET 4.b

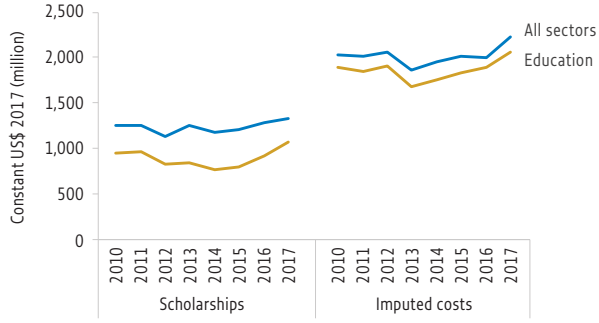
SCHOLARSHIPS

The volume of aid for scholarships has not increased

According to UIS data, about 2.3% of tertiary education students are internationally mobile, which corresponds to 5.1 million students, although levels of mobility vary from 7.2% in developed countries to 0.8% in developing countries. There is no systematic evidence on the number of scholarships, although the Institute of International Education and the GEM Report have estimated that only 1% of students in developing countries received public scholarships from developed countries in 2015.

In the absence of data on the number of scholarships, the global indicator focuses on the volume of aid to education allocated for scholarships. This volume has remained constant at about US$1.3 billion. In addition, another US$2 billion is estimated to cover developing country students' costs in developed countries. However, the indicator can be misleading since many developed countries do not include scholarships in their aid programmes.

FIGURE 12:
Official development assistance disbursements on scholarships and imputed student costs, education sector and all sectors, 2010–2017



Source: GEM Report team estimates based on the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS).

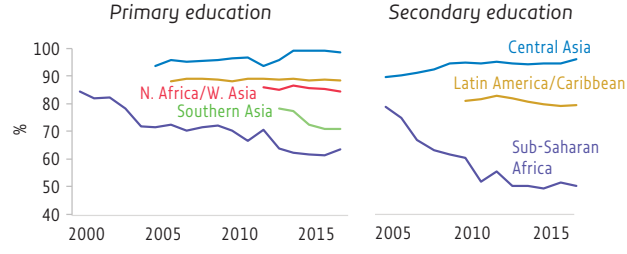
TARGET 4.c

TEACHERS

The proportion of trained teachers is falling in sub-Saharan Africa

Target 4.c seeks to increase the supply of qualified teachers by 2030, and the global indicator is the proportion of teachers with the minimum organized teacher training required for teaching at the relevant level in a given country. Regionally representative figures for this indicator are available for few regions, but those that exist show wide variation in the composition of the teacher workforce. Among regions with data, Central Asia has the highest proportion of trained teachers. In sub-Saharan Africa, only 64% of primary and 50% of secondary school teachers have the minimum required training, and this proportion has been declining since 2000, as a result of schools hiring contract teachers without qualifications to cover gaps at lower cost.

FIGURE 13:
Percentage of trained teachers by region, 2000–2017



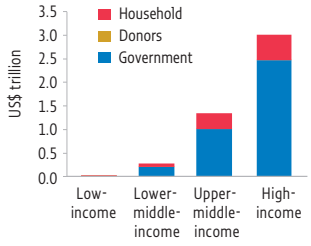
Source: UIS database.

FINANCE

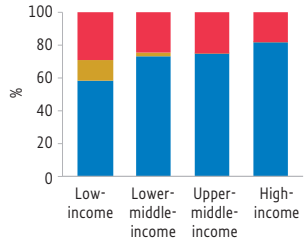
One-quarter of all countries spend less than 4% of GDP and less than 15% of their budget on education

FIGURE 14:

Total spending on education, by country income group and financing source, 2014



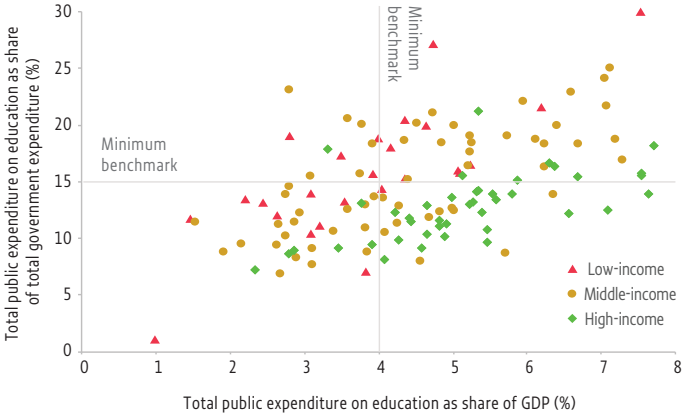
Distribution of total spending on education, by country income group and financing source, 2014



Source: GEM Report team analysis based on UIS (government and household) and OECD CRS (donor) databases.

FIGURE 15:

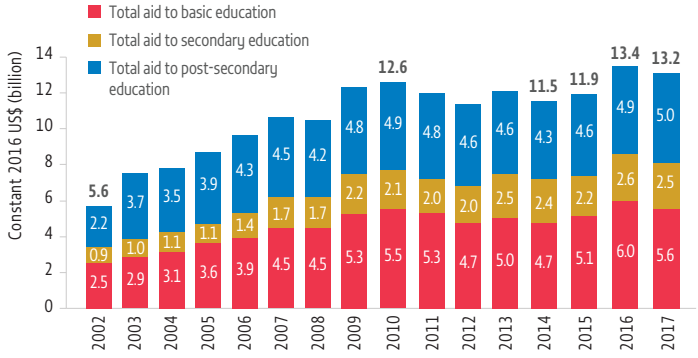
Public education expenditure as a share of GDP and of total public expenditure, countries below both benchmarks, 2017 or most recent year



Source: UIS database.

FIGURE 16:

Total aid to education disbursements, by education level, 2002–2017



Source: GEM Report team analysis based on OECD CRS.

Annual spending on education is estimated at US$4.7 trillion worldwide. Of that, US$3 trillion (65% of the total) is spent in high-income countries and US$22 billion (0.5% of the total) in low-income countries, even though the two groups have roughly equal school-age populations. Governments account for 79% of total spending and households for 20%. Donors account for 12% of total education expenditure in low-income countries and 2% in lower-middle-income countries.

The Education 2030 Framework for Action endorses two key benchmarks for **public** financing of education:

- Allocating at least 4% to 6% of GDP, and/or
- Allocating at least 15% to 20% of public expenditure.

The average public education expenditure was 4.4% of GDP in 2017, with regional averages ranging from 3.4% in Eastern and South-eastern Asia to 5.1% in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The global average share of total public expenditure dedicated to education was 14.1%, ranging from 11.6% in Europe and Northern America to 18% in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Overall, poorer countries, which have relatively larger school-age populations and education challenges, spend a larger share of their budget on education but struggle to mobilize sufficient domestic resources. In total, 43 out of 148 countries from different income groups or regions did not meet either benchmark.

The GEM Report has estimated that there is an annual funding gap of at least US$39 billion per year between 2015 and 2030 in low- and lower-middle-income countries. To make up the shortfall, **aid** to education would need to increase sixfold from its 2010 levels. Instead, it has remained stagnant since 2010, reaching US$13.2 billion in 2017. Of that, only US$5.4 billion is allocated to primary and secondary education in low- and lower-middle-income countries. The share of education in total official development assistance, excluding debt relief, has largely declined in the 2010s, from 10% in 2010 to 7% in 2017, indicating that education has declined as a priority among donors.

Households constitute a significant yet underappreciated source of education spending. Even where primary and secondary education is free of charge, families still incur education-related costs. The average share of households in total education expenditure in 28 high-income countries is 14%, but this share exceeds 50% in a few middle-income countries where data are available.

Monitoring progress in SDG 4 remains challenging

This overview of progress towards the SDG 4 targets suggests some overarching conclusions. First, the world is far **off track** on achieving international commitments to education. For several years now, no progress has been made on access to primary and secondary education. Only one in two young people complete secondary school. Of those who are in school, fewer than one in two reach a minimum level of proficiency in reading and mathematics by the end of primary; in sub-Saharan Africa, only one in ten do so, while the percentage of trained teachers is trending downwards. Disparities abound, with the richest five times as likely to complete secondary school as the poorest. Low-income countries, which have some of the most acute deficiencies in infrastructure and which need external assistance, have seen aid stagnate for a decade.

Second, many targets are universal; for instance, countries are called upon to ensure that 'all girls and boys complete' secondary education. But it is not realistic to expect all countries to achieve the same targets, given their very different starting positions. Country-specific target levels need to be set, because otherwise it is difficult to determine whether countries are on track. While it is not easy to set targets for individual countries at a global level, there are more opportunities for countries to agree **benchmarks** at the sub-regional or regional level. Europe, through the European Union institutions, has followed a consensus process to agree such benchmarks for 2020 and now for 2030. Other regions should follow suit.

Third, SDG 4 has presented a unique opportunity to expand the scope of education monitoring, since SDG 4 places a distinct emphasis on outcomes, disaggregation by individual demographic and socio-economic characteristics, and the content of education. However, the **methodologies and measurement tools** for several of these indicators are still under development. The UIS has established new coordination mechanisms – notably, the Technical Cooperation Group on the Indicators for SDG 4 - Education 2030 and its working group on learning outcome indicators, the Global Alliance to Monitor Learning – in order to develop consensus and joint action between countries and agencies on these issues. Country participation in these mechanisms needs to be strengthened.

Fourth, data **availability** – in terms of both country coverage and time series – is a major constraint. The lack of effective international cooperation is a key factor that has held back progress. Fewer than half of countries report data on flagship indicators, such as learning outcomes in primary and secondary education. For other indicators, such as public expenditure, the information is available only with a considerable time lag. For yet other indicators, such as trained teachers, comparability is weak.

TABLE 2:

Country coverage of SDG 4 global indicators in the UIS database

	Indicator	%
4.1.1	Minimum proficiency level in reading in early grades	41
	Minimum proficiency level in reading at the end of primary	30
	Minimum proficiency level in reading at the end of lower secondary	41
4.2.1	Proportion of children under 5 years of age who are developmentally on track	31
4.2.2	Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age)	74
4.3.1	Participation rate of youth/adults in formal and non-formal education and training in previous 12 months	21
4.4.1	Percentage of youth/adults with information and communications technology skills	26
4.5.1	Parity index, e.g. secondary education completion by wealth	35
4.6.1	Percentage of population achieving a fixed level of proficiency in functional literacy and numeracy skills	18
4.7.1	Mainstreaming global citizenship/sustainable development in policies, curricula, teacher education, assessment	-
4.a.1	Primary schools with access to electricity	61
	Secondary schools with adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities	20
4.b.1	Volume of official development assistance flows for scholarships	100
4.c.1	Proportion of trained teachers in primary education	60
	Proportion of trained teachers in upper secondary education	37

Note: Indicator 4.2.1 was classified as a Tier III indicator by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators until March 2019, which means it had no established methodology and reporting was based on proxies. Coverage for Indicator 4.2.1 indicates availability of data for the Early Childhood Development Index (ECDI), used to track progress for Target 4.2 until data from the improved methodology become available. Indicator 4.7.1 remains classified as a Tier III indicator and no country-level data are presently available in the UIS database.
Source: UIS.

The international community must finance SDG 4 data collection and capacity development mechanisms

The SDG 4 monitoring framework has a primarily formative role, aimed at steering countries to focus on key education issues. SDG 4 targets include several concepts that have never before been measured at the global level. In addition, some SDG 4 indicators are measured in only a few countries.

There are still considerable gaps in available data, varying by region, among countries and by source. Learning assessments and household surveys will continue to be the focus of a significant part of the additional funding for monitoring SDG 4 indicators. Over the last two decades, international, regional and national assessments have proliferated, and data collection with household surveys has increased, which means that countries have several options for monitoring progress towards SDG 4 and for developing their monitoring capacity. However, in many low- and middle-income countries, inadequate financing remains a significant hurdle. If additional domestic and external resources are not mobilized quickly, opportunities for advancing the monitoring of SDG 4 indicators will be lost.

Countries should have two priorities in monitoring the 11 global SDG 4 indicators: (1) learning assessments at the three levels identified under Indicator 4.1.1; and (2) development of household and/or school surveys that provide data for **all** the indicators associated with Targets 4.3, 4.4, 4.6, 4.a and 4.c, which are not currently collected by learning assessments or administrative systems. To act on these two priorities, countries and partners must:

1. **Finance.** In order to monitor SDG 4 adequately and effectively, US$280 million per year is needed. Currently, the amount spent on SDG 4 monitoring is an estimated US$148 million per year, with the majority spent by upper-middle- and high-income countries. To meet the shortfall of US$132 million per year, external funding in low-income and lower-middle-income countries must be increased by up to US$60 million per year over current levels through 2030, and all countries must increase domestic expenditures by one-third. Most of this financing would cover multipurpose school and household surveys (25%) and learning assessments (75%) that would generate data on multiple indicators.

2. **Coordinate.** All development partners need to align behind the SDG 4 monitoring agenda, ensuring that all other initiatives they support are consistent with it. Moreover, countries and donors should ensure that the SDG 4 monitoring indicators, especially learning outcome indicators, are supported and funded in every national education plan and budget, in every education loan and in every education grant.

3. **Broker.** In spite of notable successes in the past years, coordination and support for countries still need to be improved. A strong institutional broker is needed to promote information sharing between data providers, data users and donors. This broker would evaluate a country's technical and institutional capacity for the production and dissemination of SDG 4 data and indicators; assess the capacity needs of a country; determine a country's cost of producing and disseminating SDG 4 data; examine the institutional barriers between donors, agencies and countries that impede efficient allocation and use of funds and human resources; and give advice on the domestic and external funding and resources needed to fill data gaps at the country level. This institutional broker would also establish a clearinghouse for technical guidelines for education data and strengthen engagement at regional and national levels in support of SDG 4.

In March 2019, the UN Statistical Commission endorsed the UIS to serve this important role. The expanded mandate to act as a broker between countries and development partners will enable the UIS to improve the production and use of high-quality data at the national, regional and global levels and support the entire international education community in its efforts to achieve the 2030 targets.

A call to action to monitor and deliver on SDG 4

The 2019 High-level Political Forum's focus on education could not have been better timed. Almost one-third of the period planned for the achievement of the SDGs has already elapsed, and the generation that should finish secondary school by 2030 is now entering school. Given the urgency of the SDGs and the stagnation in many indicators of educational development, the complacency of political leaders must immediately end.

In order to make progress in monitoring SDG 4 and develop the evidence base to prompt action, education actors need to move. The following are six areas for joint action that echo the messages from the companion publication 'Beyond commitments: How countries implement SDG 4', prepared by the GEM Report under the auspices of the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee to mark the HLPF 2019:

	Governments should:	International partners should:
BEYOND AVERAGES: equity	**Finance** household surveys and ensure education ministries collaborate with statistical offices to target policies at those left behind.	**Coordinate** the financing of household surveys and pool resources to use the information already available more effectively.
BEYOND ACCESS: learning	**Finance** national assessments to inform policy, curricula and teacher education development and fund participation in regional or international assessments for global monitoring commitments.	**Coordinate** the financing of learning assessments at three points in students' education trajectories to lower costs and ensure that countries develop sufficient capacity.
BEYOND BASICS: content	**Finance** efforts to analyse national curricula and textbooks to identify areas for improvement and alignment with the SDGs, from gender equality and human rights to skills for decent jobs.	**Coordinate** research and policy dialogue mechanisms to explore how learners can better use their knowledge to be agents for change and sustainable development.
BEYOND SCHOOLING: adults	**Finance** labour force surveys and direct assessments to understand the distribution of skills in the population and inform the design of education and training programmes.	**Coordinate** improvements in labour force survey questions related to youth and adult education and training, whether formal or non-formal, whether for work or other purposes.
BEYOND EDUCATION: cross-sector cooperation	**Coordinate** to help develop key indicators, such as those related to early childhood development.	
BEYOND COUNTRIES: regional and global cooperation	**Coordinate** in regional and global fora, such as the Technical Cooperation Group, which discuss SDG 4 benchmarks, methodologies and financing of data collection activities. **Broker** between donors and countries to promote information sharing.	

A Global Action Plan for education, like the equivalent plan developed in the health sector, is long overdue. These commitments could help frame the data component of such an action plan, to reverse the slide and put the world back on track towards achieving the targets of SDG 4.

TABLE 3:

SDG 4 monitoring framework indicators

	Indicator
	Target 4.1
4.1.1	Proportion of children and young people (a) in Grade 2 or 3; (b) at the end of primary education; and (c) at the end of lower secondary education achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex
4.1.2	Administration of a nationally-representative learning assessment (a) in Grade 2 or 3; (b) at the end of primary education; and (c) at the end of lower secondary education
4.1.3	Gross intake ratio to the last grade (primary education, lower secondary education)
4.1.4	Completion rate (primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education)
4.1.5	Out-of-school rate (primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education)
4.1.6	Percentage of children over-age for grade (primary education, lower secondary education)
4.1.7	Number of years of (a) free and (b) compulsory primary and secondary education guaranteed in legal frameworks
	Target 4.2
4.2.1	Proportion of children under 5 years of age who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, by sex
4.2.2	Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex
4.2.3	Percentage of children under 5 years experiencing positive and stimulating home learning environments
4.2.4	Gross early childhood education enrolment ratio in (a) pre-primary education and (b) and early childhood educational development
4.2.5	Number of years of (a) free and (b) compulsory pre-primary education guaranteed in legal frameworks
	Target 4.3
4.3.1	Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex
4.3.2	Gross enrolment ratio for tertiary education by sex
4.3.3	Participation rate in technical-vocational programmes (15- to 24-year-olds) by sex
	Target 4.4
4.4.1	Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill
4.4.2	Percentage of youth/adults who have achieved at least a minimum level of proficiency in digital literacy skills
4.4.3	Youth/adult educational attainment rates by age group, economic activity status, levels of education and programme orientation
	Target 4.5
4.5.1	Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated
4.5.2	Percentage of students in primary education whose first or home language is the language of instruction
4.5.3	Extent to which explicit formula-based policies reallocate education resources to disadvantaged populations
4.5.4	Education expenditure per student by level of education and source of funding
4.5.5	Percentage of total aid to education allocated to least developed countries
	Target 4.6
4.6.1	Percentage of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex
4.6.2	Youth/adult literacy rate
4.6.3	Participation rate of illiterate youth/adults in literacy programmes
	Target 4.7
4.7.1	Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights, are mainstreamed at all levels in: (a) national education policies, (b) curricula, (c) teacher education and (d) student assessment
4.7.2	Percentage of schools that provide life skills-based HIV and sexuality education
4.7.3	Extent to which the framework on the World Programme on Human Rights Education is implemented nationally (as per the UNGA Resolution 59/113)
4.7.4	Percentage of students by age group (or education level) showing adequate understanding of issues relating to global citizenship and sustainability
4.7.5	Percentage of 15-year-old students showing proficiency in knowledge of environmental science and geoscience
	Target 4.a
4.a.1	Proportion of schools with access to: (a) electricity; (b) Internet for pedagogical purposes; (c) computers for pedagogical purposes; (d) adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities; (e) basic drinking water; (f) single-sex basic sanitation facilities; and (g) basic handwashing facilities (as per the WASH indicator definitions)
4.a.2	Percentage of students experiencing bullying, corporal punishment, harassment, violence, sexual discrimination and abuse
4.a.3	Number of attacks on students, personnel and institutions
	Target 4.b
4.b.1	Volume of official development assistance flows for scholarships by sector and type of study
4.b.2	Number of higher education scholarships awarded by beneficiary country
	Target 4.c
4.c.1	Proportion of teachers in: (a) pre-primary education; (b) primary education; (c) lower secondary education; and (d) upper secondary education who have received at least the minimum organized teacher training (e.g., pedagogical training) pre-service or in-service required for teaching at the relevant level in a given country, by sex
4.c.2	Pupil-trained teacher ratio by education level
4.c.3	Proportion of teachers qualified according to national standards by education level and type of institution
4.c.4	Pupil-qualified teacher ratio by education level
4.c.5	Average teacher salary relative to other professions requiring a comparable level of qualification
4.c.6	Teacher attrition rate by education level
4.c.7	Percentage of teachers who received in-service training in the last 12 months by type of training

Notes: Global indicators are highlighted in grey. UNGA = UN General Assembly; WASH = water, sanitation and hygiene.
Source: UIS.

MEETING COMMITMENTS

ARE COUNTRIES ON TRACK TO ACHIEVE SDG 4?

The world is a third of the way towards the deadline of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes the fourth Sustainable Development Goal on education, SDG 4. But it is behind on its commitments. This joint publication by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the Global Education Monitoring Report for the 2019 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development captures concisely how far the world is from achieving its education targets.

This is the year that the generation of students that should finish secondary school by 2030 should be entering school for the first time. Yet, in low-income countries, only 60% of children complete primary school, while in some regions the percentage of students who achieve minimum proficiency in reading is even falling. There is no denying that the world is off track. It is time to put an end to complacency.

The international community relies on data to report on the SDG 4 monitoring framework to assess progress. While clear improvements have been made in data collection, data gaps remain a major concern. This publication makes a call for countries and their international development partners to coordinate and finance the collection of data to monitor and deliver on SDG 4.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNESCO INSTITUTE FOR STATISTICS

Global Education Monitoring Report

UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS)
C.P. 6128 Succursale Centre-ville
Montreal, Quebec H3C 3J7 Canada

Email: uis.information@unesco.org
Tel: +1 514 343 6880
Fax: +1 514 343 5740
uis.unesco.org

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics is the official source of cross-nationally comparable data used to monitor progress towards the Sustainable Development Goal on education and key targets related to science, culture, communication and gender equality.

Global Education Monitoring Report
UNESCO
7, place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP, France
Email: gemreport@unesco.org
Tel: +33 (1) 45 68 10 36
Fax: +33 (1) 45 68 56 41
www.unesco.org/gemreport

Developed by an independent team and published by UNESCO, the *Global Education Monitoring Report* is an authoritative reference that aims to inform, influence and sustain genuine commitment towards the global education targets in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework.

© UNESCO
ED/GEMR/MRT/2019/HLPF/2

bit.ly/meetingcommitments2019 · uis.unesco.org · www.unesco.org/gemreport

@UNESCOstat · @GEMReport