

Adolescent Girls Accelerator Strategy

2026–2029

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Foreword by Global Girl Leaders Advisory Group members

These statements were written by members of the UNICEF Global Girl Leaders Advisory Group (GGLAG) who have been instrumental in shaping UNICEF's strategic direction on adolescent girls' rights:



"From early childhood, girls face unique challenges that deserve to be addressed. Adolescence is a critical time when girls grow up, their bodies change, and they learn to discover who they are. Special attention should be given to adolescent girls because they face social pressures like child marriage, gender norms, risks of gender-based violence, difficulties in accessing education or health care, particularly menstrual health care, and sometimes a lack of understanding or support. Ignoring such challenges during adolescence can have an impact on girls' entire lives. However, thanks to this type of support, girls are becoming strong women, leaders and agents of change. Ultimately, a society that protects and empowers its adolescent girls is building a much stronger future."



I am motivated by impact. Every time a young girl gains confidence, dares to express herself, returns to school or understands that she has rights, I tell myself that our efforts have meaning.

Ines, Chad



"As members of the Global Girl Leaders Advisory Group, established in 2023, we bring together adolescent girls and young women between the ages of 15 and 24 to collaborate with UNICEF in advancing girls' rights, including education, health and climate justice. We are the second generation of girls to participate in this group, and we wish to recognize and thank the previous generations of leaders, activists, students, and human rights advocates who have contributed to building a strong global network among girls. These statements speak to the importance of having an Adolescent Girl Accelerator Strategy at this time – for girls and for the world. We want to stop witnessing the redirection of budgets away from human rights, quietly undermining progress on past gains made. We do not

want to see these barriers lead to a rollback of rights achieved through decades of collective grassroots, national and international efforts and movements. As conflicts intensify, adolescent girls face increasing risks and are often directly targeted by attacks. The violence we witness in our communities affects us deeply and creates fear that will also affect the next generation of girls. Ensuring the safety of adolescent girls in all their diversity - and ensuring their ability to participate in developing solutions that advance justice and peace - is essential to advancing women's rights worldwide and those of Indigenous Peoples. Securing an adolescent girl's present today means securing her future."



I am convinced that climate justice, the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the rights of children and youth cannot be fully realized unless we first uphold the rights, dignity and leadership of girls.

Kantuta, Bolivia



“Adolescent girls are not merely an age group, but an active force capable of driving real change. Yet many of them still face structural challenges that limit their access to their fundamental rights, particularly in the areas of education, protection, and community participation – including girls with disabilities. Empowering girls begins with ensuring that they are aware of their rights and strengthening their ability to claim them, enabling them to participate effectively in their communities and in decision-making. We therefore call on decision-makers to adopt inclusive policies that invest in girls’ capacities and ensure their engagement as key partners, grounded in the firm belief that their presence is not marginal but essential to building more just and sustainable societies.”



I constantly strive to make a positive impact and empower girls, including girls with disabilities, to claim their rights and realize their ambitions

Sondos, Jordan



“Adolescent girls require focused attention because they face structural barriers at a formative stage of their lives – a period when access to education, safety, mentorship, health care and opportunities directly shape their future participation in society. Decisions made during adolescence often determine whether girls are able to continue their education, enter leadership positions, access stable employment, or participate in civic and political life later on. Despite this, adolescent girls are still disproportionately affected by inequality, insecurity and underinvestment. The reality is that systems often ignore girls, restrict them, silence them, and make them believe that they should reduce their ambitions to fit within what society considers acceptable. That is why

the focus should not only be on representation but also on developing the tools that allow girls to participate confidently and independently. Real empowerment means giving girls the tools to enter the rooms where decisions are made, understand how systems operate, challenge those systems when necessary and build new ones when existing systems fail them.”



As someone who has experienced displacement firsthand and now works on strengthening the security and resilience of Ukrainian communities, I believe that every girl deserves the freedom, opportunity and confidence to grow into her own strength.

Anna, Ukraine

Executive summary

The evidence is clear: many manifestations of gender inequality either begin or get significantly worse during adolescence, with adolescent girls bearing the brunt of these issues. From HIV, child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM) and maternal mortality, to sexual violence, unpaid care work and transition to livelihoods, **adolescent girls deserve targeted investment**. In addition, adolescence offers a powerful window of opportunity for investment and change – **when entire lifetime trajectories can be knocked off course or set on a positive track for opportunity and empowerment**.

This Adolescent Girls Accelerator Strategy also recognizes adolescent girls as powerful catalysts for progress: for girls themselves, for gender equality, for broader development outcomes and for societies as a whole.

Over the past three decades, significant progress for adolescent girls has demonstrated that **transformative change is possible** when political commitment, sustained investment and evidence-based approaches converge. Significant reductions in adolescent pregnancy, maternal mortality, new HIV infections, child marriage and FGM, increased secondary school participation, and the rapid expansion of HPV vaccination coverage all highlight the impact of combining strong, well-financed, government-led systems with targeted interventions for and with girls and their communities.

At the same time, emerging challenges, particularly climate change, digital divides, protracted crises and a rapidly shifting global financing architecture, underscore the need for adolescent girl programming that is resilient and at-scale – and the need for all partners invested in seeing progress to **adapt what we do and how to meet this moment**. Alongside broader lessons from global practice, UNICEF's experience reaching hundreds of millions of adolescent girls between 2022 and 2025¹ has generated valuable lessons that have informed and shaped this Strategy.

This Strategy commits UNICEF to focused, evidence-driven action where the potential for impact is highest, while responding to emerging threats facing adolescent girls and applying lessons from evidence and programmatic experience to achieve meaningful results.

Success will mean more adolescent girls growing up healthy, safe, educated, economically empowered and able to exercise greater individual and collective agency. It will mean national systems and partners increasingly delivering integrated, coordinated and girl-responsive services at scale, alongside greater investment, visibility and accountability for and with adolescent girls and the organizations that serve or are led by them. Between 2026 and 2029, success will mean moving from generalized commitments to measurable, scalable change. **The table below summarizes indicators for change.**

Strategic shifts	What success looks like
From pilot to population-level action	• At-scale programmes that reach at least 10% of the adolescent girl population in a given country, with progress tracked through institutional indicators, including the number of countries with at-scale programmes that have a specific focus on adolescent girls' outcomes. • Programmes achieving quantifiable results beyond reach, alongside intentional measures to reach adolescent girls in all their diversity, particularly those experiencing multiple and overlapping vulnerabilities such as those out of school or living in rural areas. • Evidence-based interventions are institutionalized within national systems, with stronger measurement, learning and adaptation to scale approaches proven to improve outcomes for girls.

Strategic shifts	What success looks like
Streamlined, coordinated, effective multisectoral models around priority actions for adolescent girls	• Countries implement practical, lean multisectoral approaches that connect ‘one plus one’ priority services that can deliver high impact, priority outcomes for adolescent girls that are fiscally sustainable and impactful – tailored to regional and country contexts and prioritizing 2–3 ‘north star’ issues.
From official development assistance (ODA)-centric financing to sustainable domestic investment and coalition-based financing	• Increase in financing commitments from governments, international financial institutions and development partners for priority adolescent girls’ interventions, mobilized through coalition-based advocacy and sustainable partnerships, and supported by investment cases and economic modelling demonstrating returns and impact. • Using UNICEF funds and global initiatives as catalytic engines for change, including: • A commitment of 10% UNICEF country office expenditure directed to adolescent girls’ priorities, with stronger accountability for results and sustained institutional commitment. • At least 10% of UNICEF financing to support civil society organizations led by, or focused on, girls’ and women’s rights, including girl-led and youth-led networks, movements and organizations. • A target of US\$50 million mobilized across targeted global initiatives for adolescent girls rights by 2029 to support catalytic change and leverage larger financing streams for greater commitments to adolescent girls.
Targeted action in the context of conflict, climate crises, public health emergencies and emerging risks, informed by adolescent girls	• Prioritize girl-intentional and gender-responsive preparedness, anticipatory action, disaster risk reduction, pandemic readiness and climate resilience, recognizing the distinct and overlapping risks adolescent girls face during crises. • Strengthen adolescent girls’ resilience and leadership by supporting women- and girl-led organizations, gender-responsive social protection, environmental education and green skills, meaningful participation in climate and disaster planning, and access to essential health, economic and social resources.
From scattergun approaches to measurement of results and evidence towards a sharper more consistent focus on impact	• Demonstrable improvements are achieved across priority outcomes for adolescent girls, as crystallized in UNICEF’s Strategic Plan and Gender Equality Action Plan (UGEAP) 2026-2029 indicators and targets, across health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), education, protection, economic empowerment and climate. • Measurable shifts are captured in girls’ voice, decision-making and freedom of movement, as well as gender equitable attitudes among girls, boys and adults, supported by strengthened methodological tools. • Sharpen our investments in evidence-generation by focusing on the areas where investment and answers are needed most urgently.

Delivering this Strategy will require sustained partnership and collective action across governments, civil society, development partners, other UN agencies, international financial institutions (IFIs), philanthropy and the private sector. At a time of growing pressure on gender equality and public financing, UNICEF remains committed to placing adolescent girls at the centre of efforts to advance child rights and sustainable development and will

leverage its mandate in supporting governments and partners to scale proven solutions, strengthen national systems and expand support for girl- and women-led organizations, building coalitions in support of this goal. Investing in adolescent girls is both a matter of rights and one of the most strategic investments societies can make for a more equitable and resilient future – it is therefore an essential priority for this time.



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1 | The situation for adolescent girls: Trends, challenges and opportunities

Why a focus on adolescent girls, adolescence and gender equality?

The world is home to the largest generation of adolescent girls in history. In 2026, the global number of adolescent girls aged 10–19 is projected to be 656 million, around 20 per cent more than three decades ago.^{1,2} The issues that children face are exacerbated by gender, age and sex-based discrimination and inequality. While harmful to all adolescents, these inequalities disproportionately impact adolescent girls. Adolescent girls aged 15–19 are nearly twice as likely as boys to not be in education, employment or training (NEET), are disproportionately affected by HIV infection and child marriage,^{3,4} and too often carry the responsibility for the care and well-being of other children whilst still being children themselves.

Despite important progress over recent decades, advances for adolescent girls remain uneven and too slow. With only four years remaining to achieve the 2030 Agenda, no country has met even half of 16 Sustainable Development Goal targets most critical to adolescent girls' well-being. Adolescent girls face a double burden because of both their age and their gender, a stark situation for girls and their current or possible future children. **We will not achieve our goals for current or future cohorts of children without targeted investments in adolescent girls. Nor will we achieve our goals for gender equality without a targeted set of investments during adolescence.** Progress depends on addressing the harmful gender norms and inequalities that crystallize during adolescence and shape the lives of both girls and boys.

Many macro-trends threaten to stall or reverse progress, requiring more intentional, strategic action than ever before.

Backlash against gender equality is being felt on a generational level amongst adolescents, underscoring the urgency of investing early to reverse this trend. Recent research across 29 countries indicates that adolescent boys and young men are twice as likely as today's grandfathers to believe wives should obey husbands.⁵ Yet **these trends are neither universal nor inevitable.** Investing early in adolescence remains a unique window of opportunity, when social norms and life trajectories are still taking shape.

Digital transformation is reshaping children's lives with specific impacts on adolescent girls. Where access exists, digital platforms create new opportunities for learning, participation and

economic inclusion, while also exposing girls to online harassment, violence, harmful content, misinformation, exploitative commercial practices, and growing online misogynistic content that reinforce harmful gender norms and backlash against gender equality, alongside other gendered risks. As generative artificial intelligence reshapes labour markets and threatens traditional entry-level jobs, strengthening girls' digital literacy and proficiency is increasingly essential to enable them to access emerging employment opportunities.⁶

Economic and energy crises, public health emergencies, conflict, climate-related disasters and the growth of movements opposing human rights and gender equality also have particular impacts on adolescent girls. Since 2010, the number of children displaced by conflict and violence has nearly tripled, while drought exposure has been linked to increased risks of sexual, emotional and physical violence among adolescents.^{7,8} For many adolescent girls, humanitarian crises are no longer exceptional events but a persistent reality that shapes their lives and opportunities – increasing the risk of child marriage, FGM, sexual violence and maternal mortality, while disrupting access to education, health care and other essential services. In fragile contexts, adolescent girls are nearly 90 per cent more likely to be out of school than girls in stable settings, and child marriage rates are almost double the global average.^{9,10} These realities underscore the need to make gender- and age-responsive preparedness, anticipatory action and gender- and shock-responsive programming core to the work to advance adolescent girls' rights.

Youth unemployment, marked by persistent gender inequalities, is one of the defining challenges facing this generation. For adolescent girls, access to pathways to safe, dignified and future-oriented livelihoods is central to their well-being, agency and resilience – and a growing focus of UNICEF's work. Yet, across many contexts, the transition from school to work is failing adolescent girls. Millions remain excluded from skills pathways, digital access, productive assets, financial services and decent work opportunities, leaving them at risk of being left behind – particularly in the emerging green and digital workforce.¹¹

In contexts of economic stress, this exclusion increases risks of child marriage, transactional sex, exploitative labour and school dropout as well as long-term disempowerment. Yet when adolescent girls gain access to skills, livelihoods, entrepreneurship, digital opportunities and economic assets, the benefits extend far beyond employment. Evidence shows multiplier

effects through delayed marriage and pregnancy, agency, mobility, education retention, nutrition and household well-being.¹² **Expanding girls' livelihoods pathways as they transition to adulthood is thus not only an economic issue, but a core protection, gender equality and human capital investment imperative.**

This Strategy therefore proposes **targeted action for adolescent girls where data clearly supports this, as well as an intentional focus on implementing gender equality programming approaches targeting all adolescents**, alongside their caregivers, teachers, health workers and wider community. Gender inequality harms every child, and a more equal future benefits us all.

This generation of adolescent girls represents a huge cohort of under-invested in, untapped potential. Yet despite clear evidence of the returns that investments

for and with adolescent girls can generate, the outlook is precarious. Investment in adolescent girls remains insufficient at national levels, compounded by a depleting global funding landscape. After years of steady growth, international official development assistance (ODA) began to decline in 2024,¹³ with an unprecedented fall in 2025. In addition, as a proportion of ODA, less than 5 per cent supported adolescent girls' well-being,¹⁴ and less than 2 per cent of that reached girl-led movements and groups.¹⁵ **Global policymakers, donors and alliances must build on these lessons and use ODA even more strategically in this next phase.** ODA should be understood as one important financing tool, positioned alongside far larger levers for advancing adolescent girls' rights, including national economic and social policy, public sector resource allocation, private capital flows and philanthropic efforts.



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Why an Accelerator?

The imperative to act from a rights-based perspective is undeniable. At the same time, while the host of new, emerging and intensifying challenges can create a sense of limited bandwidth to engage in these issues, **there is a strong rationale for prioritizing adolescent girls as a cohort where, if we get the investments right, societies reap dividends far beyond one population group.** Adolescence represents a critical window of opportunity – a period of profound biological and social transition when risks

intensify, but so does the potential to shape lifelong trajectories well beyond individuals.¹⁶

Evidence shows that targeted investments in adolescent girls generate outsized returns across health, education, protection and economic outcomes. They improve schooling attainment, delay pregnancy and marriage, increase household earnings, reduce poverty, strengthen labour market productivity, and contribute to demographic dividends and intergenerational gains.^{17, 18, 19}

Likely because they are further behind and reinvest in their families at higher rates, evidence shows that every dollar, dinar, euro, yuan or shilling invested in adolescent girls can go further in delivering impacts for girls, families and economies. For example, a systematic review of social protection programmes found greater impacts on economic security and empowerment for girls and women than for any other group.²⁰

Investments in adolescent girls' rights and well-being also have significant demographic impacts for countries and generate associated economic gains. Inter-generational impacts are also clear. For example, analysis from Bangladesh demonstrates that investing in adolescent girls' nutrition delivers immediate benefits for girls, contributes to a healthier future workforce, strengthens outcomes for the next generation and supports the country's human capital and economic growth.²¹ Recent World Bank analysis indicates that key investments in adolescent girls between now and 2040 in Africa could unlock an additional US\$2.4 trillion in income.²²

Evidence also shows that investing in adolescent girls' education, skills and economic inclusion strengthens household and community resilience to climate shocks, reducing vulnerability to displacement, food insecurity and the harmful coping strategies that crises accelerate. The climate and the adolescent girls' agendas are therefore not parallel tracks; with the right investments, they are mutually reinforcing. For these reasons, investments for and with adolescent girls can yield a triple dividend: **benefitting adolescent**

girls today, their future families, and societies and economies at large.

The challenges and opportunities set out above reinforce the urgency of UNICEF's commitment to gender equality and the rights of girls and women. UNICEF's Gender Equality Action Plan (UGEAP) and the designation of adolescent girls as one of the three priority Accelerators at the heart of UNICEF's Strategic Plan (2026-2029) – alongside digital transformation and frontline workers and systems – reflect that commitment. This Adolescent Girls Accelerator Strategy is a complementary framework **that sets out what will change in how UNICEF delivers with and for adolescent girls as an Accelerator in the Strategic Plan.** It also provides strategic guidance for implementing the adolescent girl priorities of the UGEAP, learning lessons from progress as well as failure.

Over the past three decades, ODA has been a crucial driver of progress for adolescent girls alongside other macro-trends, supporting national efforts to expand girls' access to education, skilled birth attendance, and interventions to reduce adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. **Change is possible but not guaranteed.**

A girl who is 10 years old today should come of age in 2035 in a world where our collective efforts have made their mark – where the barriers to gender equality that she faces today have been dismantled, and where her family and community also benefit from that progress. Our sights must be on how to make that happen.

Adolescent Girls Accelerator Strategy consultation approaches

This strategy was shaped through extensive consultations conducted between 2025 and 2026, including ongoing engagement with UNICEF's Global Girl Leaders Advisory Group; insights gathered through UNICEF's U-Report polls with adolescents and youth; consultations convened through the NGO/UN Working Group on Girls; and consultations spearheaded by Plan International and the Girls Deliver international community. It also draws on lessons from the UGEAP consultation process, internal reviews and guidance from an external reference group.

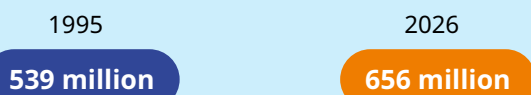


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Data profile

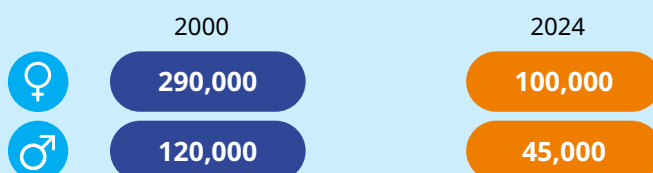
This data profile provides a short snapshot of some of the trends and progress for adolescent girls over the last thirty years where robust data is available. More detailed data is available in the [Companion Brief to the Adolescent Girls Accelerator Strategy 2026-2029: Trends for adolescent girls across key outcomes](#).

Adolescent girl (aged 10–19) population trends and projections



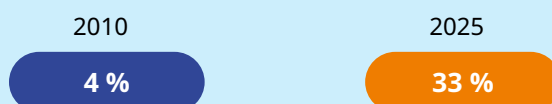
The global population of adolescent girls is projected to be nearly 22 per cent larger in 2026 than in 1995.

Number of annual new HIV infections among adolescent girls and boys



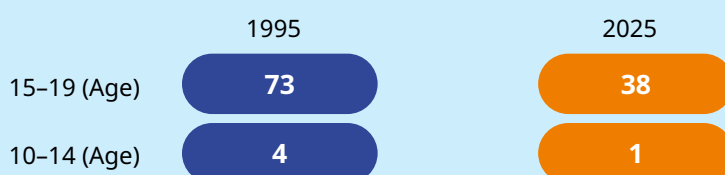
New HIV infections among adolescent girls have decreased by approximately two-thirds.

Percentage of girls that received at least one dose of HPV vaccine



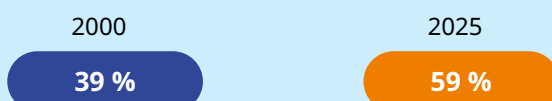
Global coverage of the first dose of the HPV vaccine among girls increased from 4 per cent in 2010 to 33 per cent in 2025. Despite this, only one in three girls in the target population received a first dose in 2025.

Adolescent birth rate



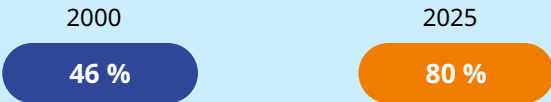
Globally, adolescent birth rates have declined by nearly half among girls aged 15–19 and by three-quarters among girls aged 10–14. Progress notwithstanding, rates remain particularly high in sub-Saharan Africa.

Percentage of adolescent girls aged 15–19 attended at least four times during pregnancy



Notwithstanding progress, nearly 4 in 10 pregnant girls do not receive at least four antenatal care visits today. Coverage of at least four antenatal care visits is also substantially lower among pregnant adolescent girls aged 15–19 (59 per cent) than among the overall 15–49 age group (72 per cent).

Percentage of births by adolescent girls aged 15–19, attended by skilled health personnel



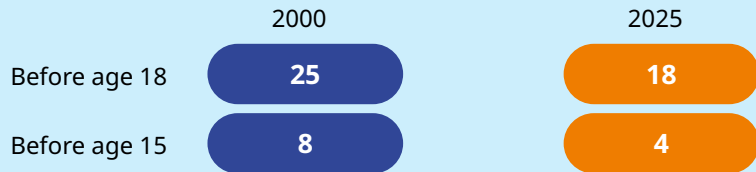
While the percentage increase in skilled birth attendance for adolescent girls represents substantial progress, it remains below the 87 per cent skilled birth attendance rate among adolescent girls and women aged 15–49 in 2025.

Adolescent girls without access to at least basic sanitation services



The number of adolescent girls lacking access to basic sanitation nearly halved.

Percentage of women aged 20–24 who were first married or in union before age 18 and before age 15



Child marriage is declining worldwide, but nearly one in five young women were still married before age 18 in 2025.

Adolescent girls and boys out of school in lower and upper secondary levels



Globally, the most progress in out-of-school rates was achieved during the first decade of the 2000s, after which the pace of advancement slowed between 2010 and 2015 and has remained largely stagnant since then. The global figures mask significant regional diversity: in sub-Saharan Africa girls remain out of school at a higher rate than boys.

Global share of youth aged 15–24 not in employment, education or training (NEET)



Despite reductions, adolescent girls and young women remain more than twice as likely as adolescent boys and young men to be NEET.



2 | What have we learned to inform this new phase of work with and for adolescent girls, adolescence and gender equality? A snapshot

Taken together, data trends suggest that progress for adolescent girls has reached a critical juncture, with gains increasingly at risk of stalling or reversal. Without urgent and coordinated action, global pressures will continue to intersect with entrenched gender inequalities, amplifying adolescent girls' vulnerability, undermining their rights, and significantly curtailing the potential of countries to grow and make progress.

This section presents a snapshot of lessons on what works – and where challenges remain – in advancing adolescent girls' rights. It draws particularly on a robust review of evidence of adolescent girls' rights over the past 30 years since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; findings from recent UNICEF adolescent girl programming and evaluations of UNICEF's Gender Action Plans (2018–2025); a review of all relevant UNICEF evaluations of adolescent girl programming conducted between 2022 and 2025;²³ and programmatic and operational insights generated through implementation across UNICEF-supported programmes in consultation with girls, staff and partners. **It distills critical lessons on what has worked to advance adolescent girls' rights, well-being and agency, and what needs to change.**

Positive progress for girls: Areas for scale and acceleration

- **Reductions in adolescent pregnancy and maternal mortality, particularly through increased access to skilled birth attendants:** The greatest progress for adolescent girls at the country level over the past 30 years has been in reproductive health outcomes, including reductions in adolescent pregnancy and maternal mortality, with particularly significant gains in access to skilled birth attendance. The majority of countries with available data (134 of 188) have met, are close to meeting, or require only minimal additional effort to achieve the SDG target on skilled birth attendance.²⁴ However, this indicator reflects only one dimension of the broader picture.²⁵

Progress has been driven by investments in health systems and infrastructure, emergency obstetric care, improved antenatal care, access to contraception and HIV treatment, alongside expanded education, poverty reduction and

social protection measures supporting girls' access to health services. However, an unfinished agenda remains. Adolescent mothers continue to require priority health care and support, reflected in lower access to antenatal care compared to older women.²⁶ Some regions require particular dedicated focus, such as in sub-Saharan Africa where persistently high adolescent fertility and rapid population growth demand accelerated progress.

- **Important global progress has been achieved in reducing new HIV infections among adolescent girls and young women:** New HIV infections among adolescent girls declined by 66 per cent between 2000 and 2024, including a 47 per cent reduction since 2010.²⁷ This progress demonstrates that change is possible when governments, communities and partners invest in evidence-based, girl-centred approaches, including HIV prevention, treatment access, sexual and reproductive health services, education, social protection and gender-responsive programming.

However, adolescent girls continue to bear a disproportionate HIV burden, accounting for over 70 per cent of new infections occurring in adolescents globally, and more than 80 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa.²⁸ In 2024 alone, an estimated 208,000 new HIV infections occurred among adolescent girls and young women aged 15–24 – equivalent to around 4,000 new infections every week, including approximately 3,300 in sub-Saharan Africa. Sustaining and accelerating the progress made for adolescent girls and young women will therefore require continued political commitment and investment.

- **Ensuring that adolescent girls complete secondary school:** In 2000, 87 million adolescent girls and young women were out of school at the upper secondary level; by 2025, this had fallen to 63 million. These data represent significant progress, while highlighting the scale of the remaining challenge. National and global prioritization, clear targets backed by dedicated funding, targeted programmes for girls' education, removal of school fees, and social protection and cash transfer programmes supporting school enrolment and retention have all contributed to this progress, alongside

expanded school infrastructure and efforts to address gender inequality, child marriage and adolescent pregnancy.

However, as with many of these trends, substantial regional disparities persist, underscoring the need for urgent and accelerated action. Rates of adolescent girls out of upper secondary school in East and Southern Africa, West and Central Africa and South Asia continue to be significantly higher than the global averages.²⁹

- **Expanded coverage of the HPV vaccine:**

Although cervical cancer is largely preventable through HPV vaccination, it remains a major cause of death in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where access remains uneven, particularly for out-of-school girls and those in hard-to-reach settings. HPV vaccination represents one of UNICEF and its partners' most significant advances in adolescent girls' health and well-being in recent years – making it an important case study for learning lessons.

Together with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, governments, girls' and women's organizations and national and international partners, UNICEF leveraged its supply capacity for cost-effective vaccine distribution, maximized its in-country technical presence and supported the training of health workers and volunteers to provide accurate information and trusted services. A key focus was tackling gender barriers to vaccine uptake by strengthening demand and trust in the vaccine and health authorities, addressing myths and stigma, improving provider communication and service experience, reducing caregiver consent barriers and barriers affecting girls not in school. Partnerships with girls' and women's organizations, school-based campaigns and targeted outreach to out-of-school girls have contributed to historic levels of coverage.

Global HPV vaccine coverage (at least one dose) among girls turning 15 increased from 3 per cent in 2010 to 21 per cent in 2024.³⁰ Since 2022, over 100 million girls have been vaccinated worldwide, far surpassing the global target of 80 million.

UNICEF and partners are now investing in the 'plus' aspects of HPV programming, using vaccine delivery as an opportunity to provide additional cost-effective services.

However, there is now a need to shift from campaign-based approaches to the systemic introduction of the vaccine in national health plans with reliable delivery schedules. Evidence about what works to accelerate vaccine coverage and 'plus' services, including on cost-effective measures, is still emerging and will be important for the sustainability of future rollouts.

- **Reductions in the prevalence of child marriage, but risks of plateauing:**

In the past 25 years, the prevalence of child marriage has fallen from 25 per cent in 2000 to 18 per cent in 2025, averting an estimated 68 million child marriages.³¹ Progress has been driven by political leadership; partnerships across UN-wide, civil society, including women- and youth-led organizations, academic and development actors; sustained investment in proven interventions (e.g. social protection and economic empowerment, education and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) interventions); and momentum generated by girl-led advocacy and community engagement. Evidence underscores that impact depends on design, delivery mechanisms and context, and that pathways to sustained change are not yet fully understood.^{32, 33}

Gains have been especially strong in South Asia, where the prevalence of child marriage has halved over the past 25 years, from 52 per cent in 2000 to 25 per cent in 2025. Progress remains uneven and stagnant in some regions, particularly Latin America and the Caribbean, where there has been no measurable progress over the last 25 years. Additionally, most global progress has been made in the wealthiest households with almost no progress among the poorest households. Current rates of decline remain far too slow to meet SDG target 5.3 by 2030. Without significantly accelerated action, more than nine million girls are projected to marry before age 18 that year.

UNICEF adolescent girl programmatic learnings from implementation experience and evaluations:

Key insights from UNICEF programming 2022–2025

UNICEF significantly scaled up its multisectoral work with and for adolescent girls in this period, reaching over 47 million adolescent girls and 89 million people (including boys, caregivers, teachers, health workers and other community members) through girl-targeted, 'girl-intentional' or gender equality and adolescent targeted programming.

Multisectoral work was identified as critical in many consultations, reflecting the fact that adolescent girls' outcomes are shaped by interconnected factors that need to be tackled together. Yet ambition and vision can become weighed down by coordination challenges, spread financing too thinly, and weaken ownership and accountability. In addition, globally, much work for adolescent girls and gender equality remains in pilot stage, underfunded, fragmented and disconnected from the platforms and systems that can deliver at scale.

At the same time, in some contexts, significant scale of results was achieved for adolescent girls through multisectoral approaches, and not only in high-income or stable contexts. **Success has most often come from leveraging existing larger or at-scale programmes (such as layering on gender-based violence service referrals to humanitarian nutrition programming in Somalia) or government systems and national ownership (such as gender-responsive curricula reform in the secondary education system in Bangladesh)** to improve the content and quality of what is being delivered for adolescent girls. Effective approaches typically have a clear sector lead but integrate complementary services where the need is clear, and the complementary services are available and of reasonable quality (e.g. a cash transfer programme paired with referrals to other services such as skills training; offering iron and folic acid (IFA) supplementation or adding STEM/IT focused girls' clubs at school; embedding referrals to services that adolescent girls are already accessing (e.g. HPV vaccine or gender-based violence (GBV) referrals at a mobile health clinic). Depending on the platforms chosen, greater efforts are needed to reach hard-to-reach adolescents, including those out of school or not accessing health facilities, through alternative delivery mechanisms.

The weak transition pathway between education systems and economic opportunity for adolescent girls remains a persistent gap across many contexts. While gains have been achieved in enrolment and retention, many girls continue to face constrained transitions into livelihoods, skills systems, entrepreneurship and decent work, with significant impacts across many aspects of their lives. Future programming will require stronger links between education, social protection, digital inclusion and labour market systems, particularly for out-of-school girls, adolescent mothers, girls with disabilities, Indigenous girls and girls affected by displacement.

While meaningful progress was made in capturing shifts in adolescent girls' voice, agency and leadership in some contexts, and results have often shown some gains or strong gains – including, where measured, in confidence, skills, employment and delayed marriage – challenges persist in securing the resources, opportunity, buy-in and expertise needed to embed robust measurement consistently within programmes, particularly when integrated into large-scale government systems with multiple stakeholders.

Securing financing beyond ODA was most successful where multiple partners – from girls and national government to civil society and development partners – were engaged in a model from the outset, and where a model of programmes for adolescent girls was costed for feasibility from the beginning, with clear measurement to demonstrate results. Persistent champions are key to taking pilots from testing to scale.

Amid increasing pressures, increasing crises (ranging from public health emergencies and conflict to climate change, alongside backlash against gender equality and rights) are accelerating the reversal of hard-won gains for adolescent girls. For example, droughts, floods and heat stress are increasing school dropout, worsening adolescent nutrition and anaemia, disrupting water, WASH and menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) services and intensifying GBV and child marriage risks. Programming that does not account for crisis and climate-related shocks and stressors is increasingly at risk of delivering short-term gains that are not sustained. Programming must be designed from the outset to be shock-responsive, climate-aware and build resilience if gains are to be

protected and sustained. This includes designing programmes with appropriate risk analysis to understand how diverse shocks affect specific cohorts of girls (including out-of-school girls, adolescent mothers, girls in pastoral or flood-prone communities) and embedding anticipatory actions and referral pathways into programme models that meet the needs of adolescent girls.

6

Girls' voices were essential to shaping policies and programmes that worked for them, and to understanding whether programme models were effective and delivered impact. During this phase of UNICEF's work, a range of models were tested, from national girls' advisory committees and intensive programme-specific consultations, to youth advisory groups with girl-specific working groups on sensitive issues, depending on the context – alongside direct funding to girls' networks, movements and organizations.³⁴ Approaches like girls' scorecards to measure changes in the quality of health services, light touch surveys in safe spaces for girl-specific services and representative committees in schools demonstrate how girls' voices can be embedded into programming to ensure that programme vision and design are maintained throughout implementation and delivery.

The establishment of the [Global Girl Leaders Advisory Group](#) (GGLAG) was another important mechanism. Comprising a diverse group of girls and young women from around the world with meaningful connections to UNICEF's work in their home countries, the GGLAG engaged directly in a spectrum of work, from global strategy, advocacy and policy, to inputting into funding decisions for global initiatives.

7

Guidelines for adolescent girls' meaningful participation in decision-making processes

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines participation as a fundamental human right. UNICEF recognizes the power of adolescents and young people and values their meaningful participation in decision-making processes, particularly in matters directly affecting their lives. The following standards were developed by members of UNICEF's Global Girl Leaders Advisory Group to ensure meaningful and inclusive participation with adolescent girls.

- **Treat girls as experts on their own lives** by maximizing opportunities for their engagement and voice to be incorporated in programmes.
- **Ensure child safeguarding and compliance to ethics norms.**
- **Be intentional about which girls you communicate with and how**, promoting diversity of experiences and profiles.
- **When consulting with girls, share information** in timely, age-appropriate and accessible ways whilst being **mindful of girls' time**.
- **Whenever possible, act on girls' feedback, incorporate their ideas and communicate back how things have shifted** to build a relationship of trust and motivation to participate.
- **Encourage and build networks with participating girls** to enable peer-to-peer learning and support.
- **Amplify girls' voices** by leveraging UNICEF's convening capacity to elevate girls' voices into local and national policy and government conversations and lobby for their active participation and meaningful engagement in spaces of power.



3

**What does it mean to be an Accelerator
for the Adolescent Girls Agenda?
Key shifts we will pursue**

Informed by the ‘lighthouse’ areas of progress spotlighted above; lessons from both successes and common challenges across programming for adolescent girls, adolescence and gender equality; and a review of evaluations of programming relevant to adolescent girls across different sectoral practices, UNICEF’s Adolescent Girls Accelerator Strategy sets out the following key commitments:

SHIFT 1. From pilot to population-level action.

A commitment to focusing on **scalable and at-scale programming with and for adolescent girls**, while **incorporating measures that specifically target the most marginalized girls** in a given context – whether girls living in rural areas, girls with disabilities, pregnant and parenting girls or others. For UNICEF this means in every country where we work, wherever feasible, partnering with governments, national and international partners, and adolescent girls to build from, adapt and add onto existing systems and programmes. Through these at-scale programmes, at national level we will seek to achieve targets for adolescent girls in at least one key domain across our Strategic Plan, avoiding generic scaling commitments to specifically **reach a minimum of 10 per cent of the**

adolescent girl population. Progress will be tracked with an institutional target: **number of countries with at-scale programmes that have a specific focus on adolescent girls’ outcomes**.

We will particularly seek to build from existing systems, platforms and workforces in health and nutrition (such as community health workers), education (such as schools), child protection (social workforce cadres), and social protection (such as national cash transfer programmes) to address adolescent girls’ needs at scale. Whilst many of our preferred programme platforms will target more marginalized or at-risk populations by default – such as those facing malnutrition, out-of-school or living in poverty, etc. – for universal and other programme platforms we will seek to implement **‘scale plus equity’ approaches**. These **combine less intensive at-scale models with more intensive programme components that target support to the most marginalized**. For example, gender-responsive pedagogical training and curricula reform can improve the quality of education for millions of girls in school, while targeted alternative learning pathways provide more intensive support for out-of-school girls, tailored to the multiple and intersecting deprivations they face.



SHIFT 2. From ‘too complex or nothing at all’ approaches to real prioritization for multisectoral programming, led by the priorities of adolescent girls, their needs and opportunities.

A commitment to supporting, testing and scaling ‘one plus one’ multisectoral programme models with and for adolescent girls that are designed from the outset with feasibility for delivery and affordability at-scale in mind.^I By ‘one plus one’ (or at most, ‘one plus two’) models we mean layering and linking one to two evidence-based services or interventions onto systems or programmes with proven potential or existing scale. Applying practical lessons from policymaking and programming, we will intentionally prioritize interventions for combination where there is strong evidence of cost-effectiveness or enhanced impact.^{II} The goal is to avoid programme models that are either single-sector and siloed, or so complex and multi-component that they become challenging to deliver or finance sustainably in many contexts.

This shift also means moving from gender analysis on the sidelines, and long shopping lists of recommendations, to **real prioritization at country level, informed by girls’ voices and tailored to context and country typology.** Too often gender analysis is not translated into key programmatic or policy actions that are implemented at scale. We will undertake, or support partners to undertake, gender- and age-sensitive analysis to identify where adolescent girls are especially at risk, vulnerable or left behind. We will place adolescent girls’ voices and priorities at the centre of this process, **identifying one to three ‘north star’ issues to prioritize for advocacy, technical support and at-scale programming, driven by regional and country context.**

SHIFT 3. From ODA-centric action to stepping up support for domestic financing and coalition-based partnerships – using UNICEF funds and global initiatives as catalytic engines towards sustainable, long-term change.

UNICEF will maximize its unique position in partnerships, resource mobilization and convening to support the ecosystem to come together to advance adolescent girls’ rights. We will bring our full set of institutional levers to bear with maximum impact through our extensive operational footprint across 190 countries and territories, often with multiple field offices operating in fragile, humanitarian and development contexts; our ability to work across the socio-ecological model, from girls to governments and with stakeholders at every level in-between; and our trusted voice, robust data and analytical capacity, and platforms to support children and young people’s voices.

From our sectoral expertise to our thought leadership on public finance for children, we will provide more intentional support to finance programme models that can work to improve the lives of adolescent girls at scale, tailoring that support to country typology and context. **In countries with more fiscal space, we will work with finance ministries and line ministries to provide substantive support where required,** supporting processes to identify investments, cost evidence-based interventions for scale, and mobilize additional financing aligned with national budget cycles and opportunities such as IFI financing. **We will increasingly support economic modelling and investment cases that help to demonstrate the kind of investments needed to close specific gaps for adolescent girls and the results they can deliver for girls, governments and societies,** including macroeconomic returns – extending engagement well beyond traditional ‘gender-focused’ ministries to ministries of finance, planning and labour. Together with other partners we will seek to strengthen country-level tracking of actual budget allocations to adolescent girls’ priority issues. In humanitarian contexts, our operating model will continue to place greater emphasis on

^I The need for prioritising this ‘middle ground’ or ‘Goldilocks’ option of multisectoral programming is borne out of operational learning at UNICEF in the past three years, where in many cases more complex programmes that attempted to deliver upwards of four components simultaneously tended not to retain quality of delivery at scale and/or secure long-term financing.

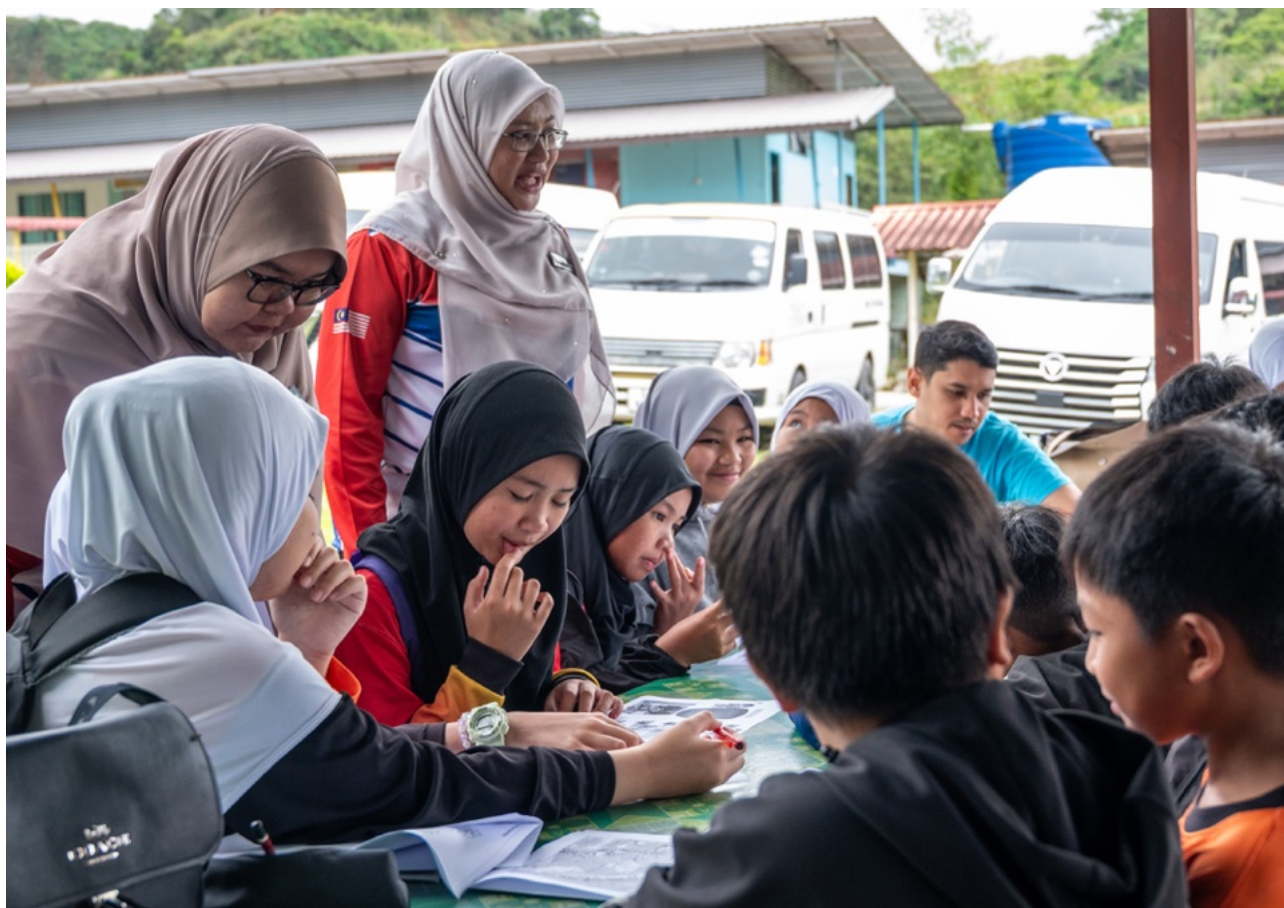
^{II} Examples may include layering livelihoods, financial literacy or digital skills onto social protection platforms; integrating employability and entrepreneurship pathways into secondary education systems; linking HPV or adolescent health platforms to information, mentoring and skills opportunities; embedding referral pathways between safe spaces, economic inclusion services and protection systems; building on school health programs that are jointly managed by education and health ministries, using schools as platforms but bringing in health systems and services in the school environment, and should include programmatic components from nutrition and WASH in order to be successful.

direct delivery and civil society partnerships. This work will span national financing opportunities and global. For example, we will also work to direct climate finance toward girl- and women-led organizations and adolescent girl-focused programmes by leveraging mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund, the Adaptation Fund and the Loss and Damage Fund.

Institutional indicators will also support implementation of the Adolescent Girls Accelerator, **including using UNICEF funds and global initiatives as catalytic engines towards sustainable, long-term change.** This includes our commitment set out in the UGEAP to allocate at least 15 per cent of UNICEF expenditure to gender equality marker 3 results – programmes that explicitly aim to

address gender inequalities, remove structural barriers and empower disadvantaged populations – and **10 per cent of UNICEF country office expenditure on adolescent girls' priorities. Under this Accelerator Strategy, we commit to targeting at least 10 per cent of financing to civil society organizations led by and/or focused on girls' and/or women's rights,** including increased support to girl-led and youth-led networks, movements and organizations. **We will leverage our role and forge strategic partnerships to mobilize US\$50 million across targeted initiatives that advance the rights of adolescent girls by 2029,** using these initiatives intentionally as levers to influence larger funding streams.

SHIFT 4. From reactive emergency response to inclusive preparedness, anticipatory action, disaster risk reduction, pandemic preparedness and climate resilience with and for adolescent girls.



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UNICEF will strengthen girls' resilience in partnership with girls, their families, and local and national actors, recognizing that crises – including those driven by climate change, conflict and public health crises – create distinct and compounding risks that require targeted action. We will increase our focus on preparedness that centres the leadership and

rights of women and girls, **including through funding for women- and girl-led civil society organizations; promoting gender-responsive, shock-responsive social protection that responds to the specific vulnerabilities and needs of adolescent girls; supporting environmental education, green skills and climate leadership pathways for adolescent girls; meaningfully**

engaging adolescent girls in local and national climate decision-making, including nationally determined contributions (NDCs), national adaptation plans (NAPs) and disaster risk reduction planning; and working to scale-up our support through the humanitarian system to pre-position critical supplies, mitigate risks and equip adolescent girls with the range of health, economic and social assets they need.

Lessons from our humanitarian and resilience practice must be applied in responding to existential threats facing this generation and exacerbating gender inequality and the erosion of many hard-won gains, including the gender digital divide, debt burden, lack of access to livelihoods, and backlash against rights. UNICEF's added value will be to focus on the needs of children, including adolescents, and on the evidence of what works to address these challenges as they experience them in the face of transformative shifts in society. This includes adapting our programmes, policies and technical support in response to these shifts; strengthening innovation and close thought partnership with partners in the digital transformation and livelihoods sectors; and using data, evidence and UNICEF's platforms to support the voices of children and young people – particularly adolescent girls – and draw attention to their needs and demands.

SHIFT 5. From scattergun approaches to measurement of results and evidence towards a sharper more consistent focus on impact and where we need investment and answers most urgently, with girls' voice, agency and empowerment more deeply embedded in programming and policymaking.

At the heart of our policy support, programming and technical assistance for at-scale programming will be a focus on impact, including quantitative and qualitative measures of change. This requires us to take both a long- and short-term view, keeping in sight the population-scale results that we aim to achieve over several years and beyond, while also tracking indicators where tangible change is feasible and measurable on a six-monthly or quarterly basis. Our commitments by results area and sector are mapped out below, while aggregate progress will be measured through a **country-level composite indicator: the extent to which at-scale programmes have a specific focus on adolescent girls' outcomes.**

Alongside this, we will continue to step up and build from what we have learnt in supporting adolescent girls' voice, agency and leadership at both country and programmatic level. We will strengthen measurement of the areas that are both cross-cutting and central to girls' empowerment, including **shifts in voice, decision-making, freedom of movement, and gender attitudes and gender norms held by adolescent girls, boys and adults.** This strategy will not only aim to improve and track outcomes for girls, but also to transform and measure unequal gender norms, power relations and systems that constrain their agency by working with boys, men, families, institutions and communities. This includes addressing unequal and harmful gender norms, practices and structures from the outset of programme design and measurement in each sector, recognizing that they are significant impediments to achieving SDGs well beyond gender equality.

We will also **sharpen our investments in evidence-generation by focusing on the areas where investment and answers are needed most urgently.** In this new era of work for adolescent girls, this will include advancing relevant global indicators, strengthening national data and evidence ecosystems, and supporting quantitative and qualitative data collection, including through representative surveys, participatory research and citizen-generated data. This includes through national evidence infrastructures, including representative surveys, complementary qualitative and participatory research and citizen-generated data. We will also ensure that research and data generation are guided by the **questions that matter most for accelerating progress in a time of increasingly scarce resources:**

- Are girls co-creating research priorities, methodologies, questions and choices?
- Will this evidence help to unlock additional financing from government or the private sector? If so, what evidence indicates this?
- For economic modelling, costing and investment cases, what is more relevant and impactful in a given context? Where economic modelling or an investment case is proposed, will it provide decision-makers with credible evidence on the costs of inaction, the expected benefits of investment, or both?
- Does this evidence answer a question that will make a difference to what is prioritized for a programme intervention or model, either in this context or similar settings?

Global programmes and initiatives targeting results for girls as catalytic engines for change

We spotlight here five significant initiatives that prioritize targeting outcomes for girls and that span partnerships with civil society, the private sector, government, multiple forms of coalition, sister UN agencies and girls themselves to advance these goals. While also ensuring that broader global strategies, programmes and initiatives for children contribute to goals for adolescent girls,^{III} **UNICEF will use its role in global programmes and vehicles that specifically target outcomes for adolescent girls as levers to advance the Adolescent Girls Accelerator Agenda**, and as **dedicated spaces for mobilizing resources, galvanizing action and generating learning** for this segment of the population and for development and humanitarian practice at-large.



The POWER4Girls Initiative, UNICEF and We Are Purposeful's flagship initiative, champions adolescent girls' rights and leadership by expanding economic empowerment, skills and essential services, alongside work across the community on discriminatory gender norms and practices, while supporting girls' leadership through funding girl-led work and building movements that sustain change long after initial investment. Since its 2025 launch, POWER4Girls has benefited 5.4 million girls and 11 million people across 15 countries alone, alongside channeling flexible funding to girl-led movements through We Are Purposeful and supporting economic modelling and investment cases to support government and other forms of financing. It is poised to significantly expand reach in the coming years thanks to a coalition of partners spanning governments, philanthropists and the private sector. 35.5 million adolescent girls and 77 million caregivers/parents were also reached through POWER4Girls advocacy, with 189 million reached through the #GirlGoals campaign.



The Skills4Girls Initiative contributes to a future-focused agenda for skills, learning and empowerment, helping to ensure that adolescent girls, including the most marginalized, have equitable access to quality education and skills, are supported to remain in or return to school and training, and can access pathways to meaningful economic inclusion and participation in rapidly evolving economies. It has an increasing focus on digital innovation, green skills and STEM, building from lessons in its first phase. The initiative has benefited 17.4 million girls across more than 20 countries with skills and learning opportunities to date, at global level primarily in partnership with private sector organizations.



The HPV Plus Initiative uses HPV vaccination as a high-reach entry point for delivering integrated health and well-being services to adolescent girls who are, in many contexts, often unlikely to be reached otherwise. By using HPV vaccination as a critical life-saving objective, and a catalytic entry-point for additional services, it addresses adolescent girls' overlapping needs across health, nutrition, protection and agency through cost-effective programming that makes use of existing workforces and infrastructure. To date, the HPV Plus Initiative has supported over 25 million girls to receive the HPV vaccine, alongside complementary services and demand-generation activities in 21 countries.

^{III} For example, we will work synergistically through UNICEF sectoral strategies, including the Adolescent Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2026–2029 (guiding UNICEF's adolescent health programming through strengthened primary health care, health systems, equitable access to quality services and adolescent well-being), Youth Livelihoods Strategy 2026–2029 (providing pathways into skilling and systems for employment, entrepreneurship and income generation for young people, including adolescent girls aged 15–19 in particular) and Vision & Strategy for Learning & Skills 2026–2029 (addressing barriers to access to learning, disruptions to schooling and poor learning outcomes); and partnerships including with Generation Unlimited to further UNICEF's youth offer through its work on partnerships, innovation, financing and scale. Detailed alignment of cohorts, country differentiation, results frameworks and implementation approaches will be addressed through the relevant sectoral strategies and country-level planning and guidance.



Through the **UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage**, UNICEF and its partners will continue to reach every segment of society with interventions that boost adolescent girls' agency and decision-making power while accelerating action to end child marriage and advance gender equality. Since 2016, the Global Programme has reached over 35 million girls with life skills and comprehensive sexuality education, engaged more than 100 million community members on child marriage and gender equality, strengthened tens of thousands of service delivery points for adolescent girl-friendly care, advanced social protection partnerships and supported national strategies, subnational action plans and legal frameworks that strengthen the enabling environment.



Through the **UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination FGM** UNICEF and partners are expanding opportunities for girls' agency, promoting gender equitable family and community environments and growing a global youth movement grounded in adolescent girls' leadership to eliminate FGM. Recent results demonstrate significant scale and impact: millions of people have been reached through mass media and community dialogues, with over 4.3 million publicly committing to abandon FGM; participation in life-skills and social behaviour change programmes has expanded to nearly 1.8 million girls; and more than 2.2 million women and girls have accessed essential prevention, protection, and health services alongside major increases in specialized care and trained service points, reflecting accelerated progress toward the global elimination of FGM.





4

Targets: What are we committing to delivering through and beyond sectors for and with adolescent girls?

The UNICEF Strategic Plan 2026–2029 and Gender Equality Action Plan (UGEAP) 2026–2029 will guide the organization’s final push toward the SDGs and set out a cross-sectoral offer with commitments and targets for adolescent girls embedded across all sectoral results areas. The Adolescent Girls Accelerator provides an approach to advancing these outcomes through UNICEF’s core sectoral work, with shared responsibility for adolescent girls’ results across Impact Results and alignment with other Strategic Plan accelerators and enablers. **This section provides a distilled snapshot of these priority targets, complementing the Adolescent Girl Accelerator approaches outlined above.**

While tailored to country context, the Strategic Plan and UGEAP 2026–2029 indicators below showcase how institutional progress with and for adolescent girls will be tracked. At the core of this approach is the institutional indicator measuring **the extent to which at-scale programmes incorporate a specific focus on adolescent girls’ outcomes**, where a programme or set of programmes are considered ‘at scale’ when they

reach at least 10 per cent of a country’s adolescent girl population annually. Baseline data from 2025 indicate that 38 countries have met this target, with the target set for 82 countries supporting these at-scale programmes by 2029.

As the drivers of exclusion and participation, policy environments and UNICEF’s comparative advantage vary widely across contexts, programmes must reflect local realities and the most strategic pathways to scale. In upper- and middle-income countries, the focus will often be on upstream policy reform, financing and regulatory levers, alongside testing innovative models with national partners where pathways to scale are clear. In low-income settings, programming may involve stronger support for service delivery alongside systems strengthening and sustainability pathways. In humanitarian contexts, adolescent girl programming will prioritize access to critical services and safe spaces for girls, alongside a longer-term resilience agenda that includes supporting girls’ and women’s organizations and networks at the forefront of crisis response.



Cross-cutting Adolescent Girl Accelerator indicators

SP 2026–2029 Accelerator focus	SP 2026–2029 outcome indicators	SP 2026–2029 output indicators with relevance for adolescent girls
A1: Adolescent girls	A 1.1.a. Percentage of adolescent girl-relevant indicators for which progress toward target is observed	A 1.1.1 Extent to which at-scale programmes have a specific focus on adolescent girls' outcomes
	A1.1.b Percentage of adolescent girls who report having freedom of movement	A 1.1.1.1 Extent to which national programme(s) led by government, private sector and/or civil society specifically focus on improving outcomes for adolescent girls
	A1.1.c Percentage of adolescent girls who report being able to express their opinions and be heard ('voice')	A 1.1.1.2 Proportion of adolescent girl population covered annually by sub/national programme(s)
	A1.1.d Percentage of adolescent girls who report participating in and influencing decisions on matters directly affecting their lives	A 1.1.1.3 Level of evidence available on positive shifts in outcomes for adolescent girls reached by national programme(s)
	A1.1.e Percentage of adolescents who hold more gender-equitable attitudes	A 1.1.1.4 Extent of UNICEF support for at-scale programmes with a specific focus on adolescent girls' outcomes
	A1.1.f Percentage of adolescent girls who report high self-esteem	A 1.1.2 Extent to which country office meets organizational standards for UNICEF Gender Equality Action Plan implementation
	A1.1.g Percentage of adolescent girls who have both savings in their own name and can decide independently how those savings are used	A 1.1.3 Number of adolescents and young people engaged in taking action to address local or global issues or influencing decision makers

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

UNICEF commits to prioritizing the health and nutrition of adolescent girls as a central component of survival and development outcomes. UNICEF also recognizes safe WASH and MHH as foundational determinants of adolescent girls' health, nutrition, dignity, safety and empowerment. These are essential to supporting school participation and attendance and enabling adolescent girls to participate more fully in social and economic life.



SP 2026–2029 Impact Results	SP Sublevel results with relevance for adolescent girls	SP and UGEAP 2026–2029 Outcome indicators for adolescent girls
Impact Result 1: 10 million child lives saved and at least 500 million children healthy, well-nourished and developmentally on track	1.1. 500 million pregnant women and 1 billion children reached with life-saving interventions	1.1.a. Number of live births attended by skilled health personnel (home and facilities)
	1.2. 500 million children and adolescents immunized and wild polio eradicated	1.2.b. Number of adolescent girls who received human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine
	1.3. 2 million children living with HIV receiving antiretroviral therapy	1.3.a. Number of people living with HIV receiving antiretroviral therapy
	1.4. 20 million children and adolescents with access to mental health and psychosocial support	1.4.a. Number of children and adolescents reporting access to mental health and psychosocial support services.
	1.7. 400 million school-age children, adolescents and women benefit from a comprehensive package of nutrition interventions (diets, services and practices) for the prevention of anaemia, low birthweight, overweight and other forms of malnutrition	1.7.a. Number of school-age children, adolescents and women who benefit from a comprehensive package of nutrition interventions (diets, services and practices) for the prevention of anaemia, low birthweight, overweight and other forms of malnutrition
	1.8. 400 million children under 5 years of age benefit from early stimulation, nurturing care, childcare services and parenting support, including children with disabilities	1.8.a. Number of children under 5 years of age who benefit from early stimulation, nurturing care, responsive parenting and inclusive childcare services to support early childhood development (inclusive of adolescent parents)

The Strategic Plan commits to delivering integrated, adolescent-responsive services – including nutrition interventions, immunization, HIV prevention and treatment, and mental health and psychosocial support – through accessible, gender- and age-appropriate primary health care and community platforms. It underscores the importance of advancing comprehensive health, nutrition and dignity for adolescent girls, including access to safe WASH services and MHH.

Under Impact Result 1, the Strategic Plan also prioritizes preventing and reducing anaemia and malnutrition, expanding access to nutritious diets, strengthening national systems to deliver essential nutrition services, and ensuring early detection and treatment alongside prevention. A core priority is reducing barriers that undermine continuity of care in situations of fragility, insecurity and displacement, where compounded vulnerabilities heighten risks to girls' health and nutritional status.

Building on this foundation, the UGEAP sets out how UNICEF will focus on expanded maternal, newborn and postnatal services for pregnant and parenting adolescent girls, alongside support for their mental health, parenting and longer-term wellbeing; scale HIV prevention designed with and for girls; integrate

gender-responsive adolescent mental health care into primary health care, expand early intervention programmes for vulnerable adolescents, and strengthen self-harm prevention; expand cervical cancer prevention through HPV vaccination, screening and treatment; scale school- and community-based anaemia prevention (including iron-folate supplementation); and advance climate-resilient and girl-friendly WASH services in communities, schools and health care facilities, whilst addressing MHH needs. Throughout, UNICEF will leverage its multisectoral work and work in partnership with other UN agencies, governments and partners to support comprehensive responses that prevent and respond to adolescent pregnancy. This includes focused efforts on the needs of pregnant and parenting adolescent girls.

The UGEAP also emphasizes the importance of sustained national financing and delivery through trained frontline health workers and community systems, while empowering adolescent girls and young women as leaders and change-makers. Importantly, the UGEAP reinforces UNICEF's commitment to advocating for and creating safe, enabling spaces where adolescent girls can exercise bodily autonomy, participate meaningfully in decisions affecting their lives, and strengthen their agency over their health, well-being and futures.

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

Despite notable progress in childhood development, education systems too often fail to sustain learning and skills acquisition as children transition into adolescence and young adulthood.

For many adolescent girls, weak transitions between education, skills systems and economic opportunity further reinforce cycles of poverty, unpaid care burdens, exclusion from decent work and heightened vulnerability to harmful coping strategies including child marriage and child labour. These challenges are exacerbated by conflict, displacement, poverty and systemic exclusion, which disproportionately disrupt adolescent girls' education and limit opportunities to complete secondary education and transition to work.

SP 2026–2029 Impact Results	SP and UGEAP Impact Indicators	SP Sublevel results with relevance for adolescent girls	SP and UGEAP 2026–2029 Outcome indicators for adolescent girls
Impact Result 2: 350 million more children and young people learning and skilled	2.b. Percentage of young people who lack minimum skills for work and life	2.1. 200 million more children and adolescents in school (pre-primary to secondary), of whom 100 million are girls and 15 million are children with disabilities	2.1.a. Out-of-school rate (one year before the official primary entry age, primary school age and secondary school age)
		2.2. 120 million more children, of whom 60 million are girls, achieving minimum learning proficiency levels	2.2.a. 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
		2.3. 160 million more young people, of whom 80 million are adolescent girls and young women, acquiring skills for work and life	2.3.a. Participation rate of young people in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex
			2.3.b. Out-of-school rate (lower secondary school age)

Between 2026 and 2029, UNICEF will prioritize addressing underlying and persistent access issues where they remain, while strengthening learning outcomes and skills acquisition for adolescent girls. Recognizing education, foundational and transferable skills and transition pathways to livelihoods as foundational to adolescent girls' agency, economic empowerment, resilience and civic participation, UNICEF will focus on ensuring that girls are equipped to thrive throughout adolescence and into adulthood.

The Strategic Plan emphasizes reducing exclusion and unequal access to education, particularly for girls affected by disability, marginalization, humanitarian crisis and conflict. Alongside interventions to address barriers to access, scaling approaches such as

structured pedagogy, remedial learning programmes and innovative teacher training to improve gender equitable learning outcomes is an essential part of the strategy. Digital learning platforms will expand access to digital, green and transferable skills, training and micro-credentials.

UNICEF will also support stronger school-to-work transition pathways for adolescent girls through career guidance, entrepreneurship, employability support, work-based learning, mentorship and linkages to national skills and labour market systems. National systems will be strengthened to remove barriers to adolescent girls' enrolment, retention and academic performance, including through investment in school health and well-being, such as school health

programmes, access to WASH and MHH services and removing practical and social barriers to keep adolescent girls in school – including ensuring that school environments, and the journey to school, is safer for girls.

Building on this foundation, the UGEAP further underlines a focus on removing structural and gender-specific barriers that prevent adolescent girls and young women from accessing and completing quality education and skills training, including tackling the gender digital divide by addressing access to devices and connectivity, online safety, and girls' equal access to STEM skills development. It places strong emphasis on reaching girls who live in humanitarian crisis, are out of school, displaced, living with disabilities, or pregnant and parenting, through school retention and re-entry as well as alternative learning pathways and supportive environments.

The UGEAP further commits to equipping adolescent girls – including those out of school – with green skills, enabling them to engage with climate challenges in their communities and access emerging green economy opportunities. It elevates girls' leadership, voice and agency, highlighting their meaningful inclusion in the design and implementation of solutions and related advocacy. Upstream policy work will focus on education sector planning, monitoring and national capacity strengthening in data, implementation and accountability, as well as financing work through areas like reform of school fees, capitation grants and the expansion of social protection to address poverty-related barriers to reach adolescent girls most vulnerable to school dropout.



Impact Result 3: 100 million fewer children in multidimensional poverty

Adolescent girls face entrenched, intersecting barriers that trap them in cycles of poverty, restricting access to skills, decent work and upward economic mobility. Disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work, limited social protection coverage, and exclusion from financial and economic services, assets and decision-making leave girls more vulnerable and economically marginalized than boys their age.

SP 2026–2029 Impact Results	SP Sublevel results with relevance for adolescent girls	SP and UGEAP 2026–2029 Outcome indicators for adolescent girls
Impact Result 3: 100 million fewer children in multidimensional poverty	3.1. 1 billion children receive child or family benefits	3.1.a. Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems
	3.2. 33 million young people, of whom 18 million are women, securing livelihoods	3.2.a. Youth not in education or training who are employed
	3.3. 90 million children screened and accessing disability support services and assistive technology, when needed, for their development and participation	3.3.a. Prevalence of met need of assistive products

From 2026 to 2029, UNICEF will support adolescent girls' economic inclusion through integrated social protection, livelihoods and care systems that reduce vulnerability while expanding pathways to skills, productive assets, entrepreneurship and decent work. This includes scaling up cash transfers – such as child, family and maternity benefits – alongside strengthening care and support systems and skills-building opportunities to support dignified work, boost household incomes and build long-term resilience to shocks. UNICEF will increasingly support 'productive inclusion' approaches that combine income support with coaching, skills, savings, mentoring, financial inclusion and market linkages to help adolescent girls sustainably transition towards economic participation. Tailored measures will also address the compounded disadvantages faced by adolescent girls with disabilities, for better identification, compensation and accessibility of services.

To drive results, UNICEF will leverage social protection and livelihoods interventions to enable adolescent girls to stay in school, delay child marriage and pregnancy, and navigate safe and dignified transitions from learning to livelihoods and meaningful economic participation – including in humanitarian and climate impacted settings. This includes promoting equitable care and support systems through investments in family-friendly policies like parental leave, flexible work, breastfeeding and affordable, accessible childcare, particularly for adolescent parents, alongside flexible education and livelihood pathways. Through integrated support – training, mentoring, apprenticeships, financial literacy and more – UNICEF will equip girls with the tools, resources and agency they need to achieve lasting economic empowerment. Particular emphasis will be placed on digital and green economy opportunities, including safe digital participation, eco-entrepreneurship and access to emerging labour market pathways.

Impact Result 4: 350 million children protected from violence

Adolescent girls face multiple and often intersecting forms of violence and harmful practices, including child marriage, FGM, sexual violence and other forms of GBV, all of which violate their bodily integrity. These experiences can have significant impacts on their health, development and participation in society, while reinforcing cycles of gender inequality and risk. Protecting adolescent girls is essential for upholding their rights, promoting well-being and enabling equitable social and economic development.

SP 2026–2029 Impact Results	SP and UGEAP Impact Indicators	SP Sublevel results with relevance for adolescent girls	SP and UGEAP 2026–2029 Outcome indicators for adolescent girls
Impact Result 4: 350 million children protected from violence	4.a. Percentage of children aged 1–14 years who experienced any violent discipline by caregivers in the past one month	4.1. 250 million children at risk of or experiencing violence, including children on the move, accessing specialized social welfare or justice services, parenting programmes and online protection	4.1.d. Percentage of mothers or primary caregivers who think that physical punishment is necessary to raise/educate children
	4.b. Percentage of children aged 0–17 years living in a household with a mother who experienced intimate partner violence in the last 12 months		
	4.c. Percentage of children aged 13–15 years who reported being bullied in the past 30 days		
	4.d. Percentage of adolescent girls aged 15–17 years who experienced intimate partner violence (physical only) in the past 12 months		
	4.e. Percentage of children aged 0–17 years who have ever been subjected to sexual violence	4.3. 63 million more adolescents opposing gender-based violence and harmful practices	4.3.a. Percentage of adolescent girls and boys aged 15–19 years who believe that FGM should be eliminated
	4.f. Percentage of girls who have undergone FGM		
	4.g. Number of deaths of children aged 0–19 years due to violent causes (interpersonal violence, collective violence and legal intervention)		4.3.b. Percentage of adolescent girls and boys aged 15–19 years who consider a husband to be justified in beating his wife under specified conditions
	4.h. Proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in union before age 18		

Between 2026 and 2029, UNICEF will scale up efforts to protect adolescent girls from violence and harmful practices, including child marriage, FGM and all forms of GBV – building from significant work on evidence-based approaches to prevent and address violence against women and children and the gendered drivers of violence. The Strategic Plan emphasizes increasing access to specialized social justice and survivor support services, with particular attention to adolescent girls in conflict and fragile contexts. Multisectoral interventions will target discriminatory norms, promote parenting programmes that foster gender equality and inclusive family and community environments to reduce girls’ exposure to violence and harmful practices.

Building on this, the UGEAP outlines in further detail ways in which UNICEF will operationalize these

commitments, by accelerating violence prevention at home, in schools and in the community; forging partnership with girl-led organizations; leveraging technology-based approaches to empower adolescent girls and strengthen their access to protection services; and scaling up multisectoral interventions from the individual to systems level, with particular attention to married, pregnant and parenting girls, and adolescents with disabilities who are at heightened risk. This includes social and behaviour change initiatives to address harmful gender norms and social expectations, negative attitudes, caregiving practices, peer dynamics, community commitments and provider behaviours in order to promote healthy, non-violent, gender-equitable relationships and safe environments across families, peers, communities, services and systems.

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

Adolescent girls are among the most climate-vulnerable populations, yet they remain largely invisible within climate risk frameworks, finance mechanisms and policy spaces. Climate change disrupts their access to education, WASH and health services, increases unpaid care burdens, heightens exposure to GBV, child marriage and displacement and compounds existing intersecting inequalities. At the same time, adolescent girls are critical agents of climate resilience whose knowledge, leadership and agency deliver multiplier effects at household and community levels.

SP 2026–2029 Impact Results	SP Impact Indicators	SP Sublevel results with relevance for adolescent girls	SP Outcome indicators for adolescent girls
Impact Result 5: 500 million children better protected from disasters and climate and environmental risks	5.a. Number of children highly exposed to climate hazards in countries implementing child-sensitive climate policies and programmes	5.1. 300 million children benefit from climate-resilient water and/or sanitation, health and education infrastructure and services	5.1.c. Number of children reached with education services adapted to climate, environmental or disaster risks ³⁵
	5.b. Number of children highly exposed to climate hazards in countries implementing national disaster risk reduction strategies		

Between 2026 and 2029, UNICEF will address these differentiated climate impacts on adolescent girls across three strategic directions: (1) scaling gender-responsive, climate-resilient services, including WASH, health, education and social protection infrastructure designed to withstand climate shocks and address girls' specific needs, including MHH, safe shelter and SRHR during emergencies; (2) recognizing and supporting adolescent girls as active participants and leaders in climate decision-making, including NDCs, NAPs, disaster risk reduction planning, and local and nature-based solutions, with meaningful engagement of the most marginalized; and (3) closing critical evidence and data gaps on climate impacts on girls by strengthening sex- and age-disaggregated data

systems and generating rigorous evidence on what works in climate action for girls.

The UGEAP further operationalizes these commitments through environmental education and green skills programming for out-of-school girls; directing climate finance to girl- and women-led organizations; developing gender-equitable climate and environment-related strategies with specific targets for girls and women; and integrating gender-responsive budget allocations and sex-disaggregated indicators into UNICEF climate programming proposals as a minimum institutional standard.



5

Conclusion

Delivering UNICEF's bold and transformative Adolescent Girl Accelerator Strategy 2026–2029 with and for adolescent girls will require deep partnerships, sustained investment and collective action across governments, civil society, academia, development partners, international financial institutions, philanthropy and the private sector.

At a time of generational backlash on gender equality and increasing pressure on public financing, partnerships are foundational. UNICEF is committed to holding the line on gender equality and placing adolescent girls at the centre because evidence is clear: the SDGs and the fulfilment of child rights cannot be achieved without targeted action with and for girls.

Collectively, we need coordinated, well-financed, evidence-informed and girl-centred action in areas proven to generate multiplier impacts. Through this Accelerator Strategy, UNICEF will support governments and partners to scale proven programme models that improve outcomes for adolescent girls across sectors, supporting efforts of duty-bearers to reach at least 10 per cent of the adolescent girl population by 2029, and supporting the strengthening of national systems to deliver at scale and equitably. Girl-led, locally owned solutions are a foundation, a requirement and a fundamental part of the sustainability of this vision. UNICEF will therefore support locally-driven solutions by expanding partnerships and resourcing with girl- and women-led organizations.

This is also a moment to invest in adolescent girls as experts on their own lives and as changemakers. Girls are disproportionately affected by conflict, climate change, violence and exclusion, yet they are already driving solutions in their communities. Together, we can strengthen policies, accountability mechanisms and norms that respond to adolescent girls' realities while creating more space for their expression, agency and decision-making. We seek partnerships through which girls can influence priorities, contribute to programme design and participate in decision-making processes in ways that are safe, inclusive and sustained. This is an essential investment for thriving democracies and economies.

Investing early and consistently in adolescent girls is both a matter of rights and one of the most strategic investments countries can make for stronger economies and more resilient communities. While UNICEF and partners have already reached millions of adolescent girls through evidence-based programming, the urgency of need and the magnitude of potential demands ambitious collaboration, financing and coordination. Success will depend on effective integration of this agenda into UNICEF country programmes, government ownership and context-sensitive scale-up with consistent technical and financial investments from a broad range of partners.

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Wherever he lives.

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