

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



KEY ASKS

2023 • SDG National Reviews

SDG 6: CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION FOR EVERY CHILD

Every child, no matter where they live or their circumstance, has the right to safe water and sanitation. Without safe water, children simply cannot survive. Without safe toilets, entire communities live with human waste in their environment. Without taps and soap for handwashing, diseases spread rapidly and new-born babies risk death from infection. Young children are particularly vulnerable, and water and sanitation related diseases remain among the leading causes of death in children under five as well as contribute to malnutrition and stunting. Every year, 300,000 children under five die due to diarrhoea linked to inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). Children exposed to bodies of polluted water (e.g., with human waste, trash, chemical and industrial waste, or other environmental pollutants) are also at increased risk of disease and death.

Despite significant progress, there are still 2 billion people around the world who do not have safely managed drinking water services. Nearly half of the global population, or 3.6 billion people, lack safely managed sanitation services. 2.3 billion people lack basic handwashing facilities with soap and water available at home. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic presents an additional barrier to progress threatening long term sustainability of basic services. Progress on sanitation and hygiene has been particularly slow, with 494 million people around the world still practicing open defecation and nearly 539 million children worldwide lacking a basic sanitation service at their school. 22 per cent of health-care facilities globally do not have basic water services and without these basic needs being met, new mothers and babies are at a significantly increased risk of disease, infection, or death.

Adding to this, climate change is driving more frequent and severe weather events, which can disrupt and destroy water, sanitation and hygiene services, increasing unsafe discharges of human waste, contaminating drinking water, and increase the risk of diseases like cholera and diarrhoea. Changes in water recharge patterns are making it more difficult to access sufficient quantities of safe drinking water, especially for the most vulnerable children. Similarly, rising temperatures and rising sea levels can exacerbate the spread of deadly pathogens and lead to the salination of freshwater sources, compromising the water resources that millions of people rely on.

While UNICEF focuses particularly on targets 6.1 and 6.2 concerning drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene, we acknowledge that these cannot be achieved without attention to the whole of SDG 6, which also takes into account issues of wastewater, water scarcity, water quality and water resources management. Beyond keeping children alive and healthy, access to water, sanitation and hygiene supports progress on nutrition, education, health, urban services, gender equality, resilience, climate change, reducing poverty and increasing economic growth. Improving equitable access to water, sanitation and hygiene, therefore, underpins the success of all the SDGs. UNICEF encourages countries participating in a Voluntary National Review (VNR) during the 2023 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) to include the following aspects in their respective reports. Additional information on UNICEF actions in WASH: <https://www.unicef.org/wash>



KEY ASKS

To achieve SDG 6, Governments must invest in their communities and bridge the economic and geographic divides to deliver the human rights to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene. UNICEF encourages Governments to:

1. **Reaffirm and take action on their commitment to improve access to basic water, sanitation and hygiene services**, as a key building block for a more sustainable and prosperous future for everyone, paying special attention to the needs the most vulnerable.
2. **Establish and enforce regulation of water, sanitation, and hygiene services**, through policies and independent regulatory bodies that prioritize and protect drinking water and sanitation services for their populations, especially the most vulnerable.

3. **Strengthen partnerships with the national statistics offices towards the collection, analysis and use of disaggregated data and routinely measuring progress** towards equitable access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene, in homes, schools and healthcare centres.
4. **Understand full costs, develop budgets, allocate funds and secure additional financing** for a water, sanitation and hygiene sector that provides affordable, safely managed services for everyone.
5. **Build a professional, motivated workforce through a range of capacity development approaches**, including training programmes, long-term and revenue generation.
6. **Encourage innovation and experimentation** through supportive government policy and a flexible regulatory environment.



MONITOR -- DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND USE

UNICEF urges all Governments to **prioritize the collection, analysis, dissemination and use of disaggregated data** for key [SDG 6 indicators](#) and the implementation and monitoring of related indicators [SDG 1.4](#) and [4.a](#).

Where appropriate, the **collection of data for the following additional indicator areas is encouraged**: (i) use of basic water, sanitation and hygiene services at home; proportion of the population practicing of open defecation; and (ii) basic water, sanitation and hygiene in schools, health centres and other settings beyond the home.

To help identify inequalities, **disaggregate data** by area (urban, informal urban and rural areas; subnational regions), poverty, and nationally identified disadvantaged groups, as well as gender and disabilities data at the household level.

Governments are further encouraged to **strengthen systems** to collect administrative data on water, sanitation, and hygiene, in homes, schools and healthcare centres.



INVEST -- SOCIAL SPENDING AND PROGRESS ON RESULTS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The current pace of progress is insufficient to achieve SDG 6 by 2030. Current spending on WASH needs to increase threefold to meet SDG targets 6.1 and 6.2, the cost of which is estimated at USD \$114 billion per year in developing countries from 2016-2030. Notably, poorer regions must invest a higher proportion of GDP than the rest in expanding service coverage, for example 2 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa and 0.5 per cent in Southern Asia. New financing mechanisms and innovative approaches towards achieving universal access to affordable WASH services will be crucial. UNICEF encourages Governments to:

- **Step up investments** to ensure affordable access to services and **provide smart subsidies to poorer households** to partially finance the costs of WASH services. Discussions on financing for development suggest that while some low-income and fragile states remain dependent on external support, most of the additional financing is expected to come from domestic resources, including private-sector investments.
- **Invest in climate-resilient WASH** as a critical tool for climate change adaptation. The effects of climate change, including drought, heat waves, cyclones, tropical storms, and flooding, continue to exacerbate water scarcity and cause serious damage to WASH infrastructure. Investing in climate-resilient WASH services will help communities facing the impacts of climate change adapt to changing water needs and make WASH services more sustainable over time.
- **Budget for water, sanitation, and hygiene at subnational levels** to address economic and geographic divides. Children and their families in poor and rural communities are most at risk of being left behind.
- **Closing inequality gaps in the accessibility, quality and availability** of water, sanitation and hygiene should be at the heart of government funding and planning strategies.
- **Extend basic services to populations that remain unserved and increase the quality of existing services**. This will also require developing new approaches that will work in urban areas and new **partnerships with the private sector** to leverage all available resources for children (this can include: linking the public sector and larger companies in efforts to strengthen the domestic and small-scale private sector; collaborating to meet the WASH needs of people at work, as well as in their homes and communities; and facilitating forms of engagement at global level that can support country governments to engage their own private sectors).