

# ALL CHILDREN, EVERYWHERE

A strategy for basic education and gender equality



THE CONVENTION ON  
THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD



unite for children

For the full text of the 'UNICEF Education Strategy', see United Nations document E/ICEF/2007/10 (4 May 2007). The PDF is available online at: [www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/07-10\\_education\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/07-10_education_strategy.pdf)

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## Foreword

Children sitting in a well-ventilated classroom in Indonesia, in a school that is earthquake-resistant and provides separate toilets for boys and girls, a teachers' office, a library and ramps for disabled students to enter the building. School enrolment doubling or even tripling in areas of Southern Sudan. The national gender policy in Uganda revised after many years, with the expected impact of opening school doors for many more girls.

What is now a reality in some places – more children than ever before receiving a higher quality education than they have yet known – is only a down payment on the more encompassing vision of what can be: all children, everywhere receiving the quality education that is their right.

UNICEF's education strategy through 2015 reflects how the organization is using the synergy of partnership to turn good practice, successful innovation and efficient use of resources into a quality education for children. This overview of our work in basic education and gender equality outlines the goals we are trying to achieve, the principles that guide us, the main partners we are working with and the key actions we are undertaking.

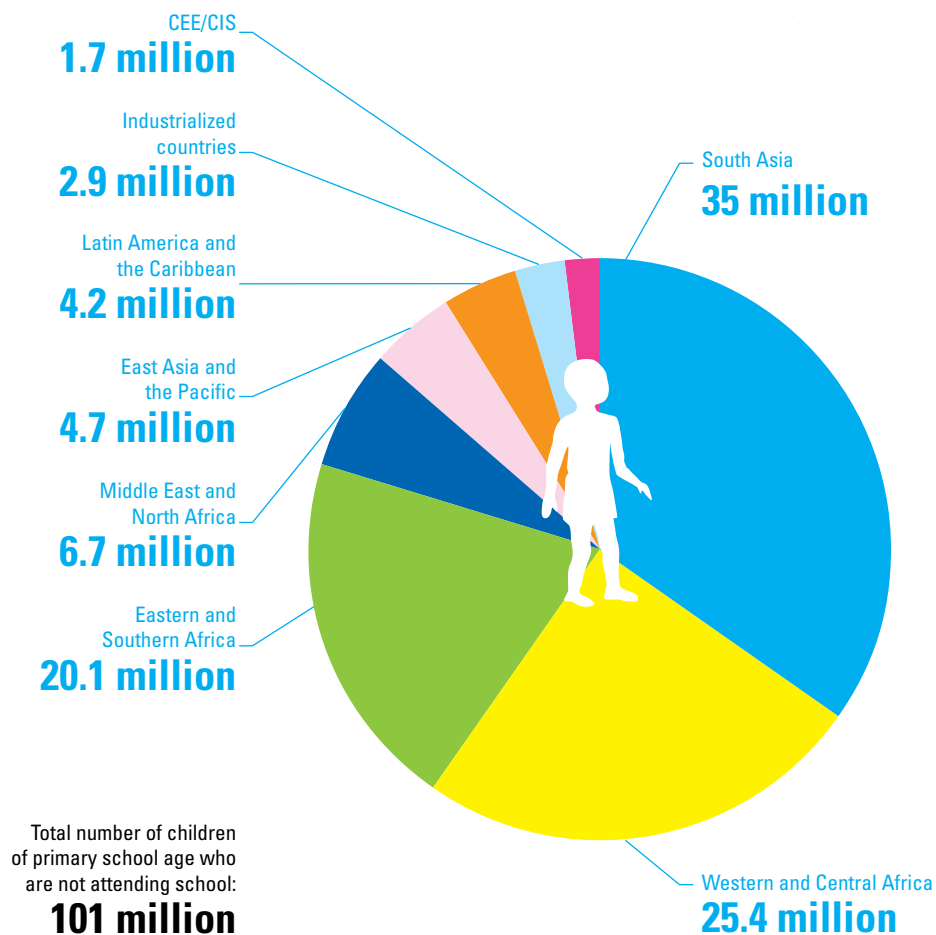
## Who has the right to education: The CHILDREN

The right to receive free primary education regardless of gender, background or mental and physical abilities; the right to develop one's personality, talents and abilities to their fullest potential; the right to receive quality education in a safe, healthy and protective environment, even during emergency situations – these are recognized children's rights incorporated in a range of international conventions and regional treaties. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) functions as an ideological framework for UNICEF's principles and goals.

Although children's right to education is internationally recognized, it is not completely fulfilled in many parts of the world. Out-of-school children represent a broken promise affecting the shared fortunes of the children, their education system, their health and that of their families, and the overall development potential of the countries where they live. Without an education, children are less likely to be healthy, grow strong or be safe. Without an education, they

### Children of primary school age who are not attending school, per region (2007)

Source: UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2009*.





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are less likely to fully participate in their communities or raise healthy children themselves one day. Without universal education, countries are less likely to achieve other development goals.

In 2006, 75 million children of primary school age were not enrolled in school; in 2007, 101 million were not attending. Most out-of-school primary-school-age children – 88 per cent – live in Africa and Asia. In addition, in many countries, a significant percentage of older children are still in primary school because they started late or repeated grades; an even higher percentage of these older children are not in school at all, having dropped out or failed to qualify. The education status of these older children affects their own prospects as well as those of their younger peers.

In many countries, gender and other disparities mar progress towards providing a quality education for all children. Many of the children who do not have access to school are those who are excluded, marginalized or otherwise vulnerable. Children from poor and rural areas as well as girls and children with disabilities face particular challenges in gaining access to quality basic education and performing well to complete the cycle.

In all of the ongoing work on education and gender equality, UNICEF and its partners help countries fulfil the right to education for all children, everywhere.

## What we want to achieve for children: The GOALS

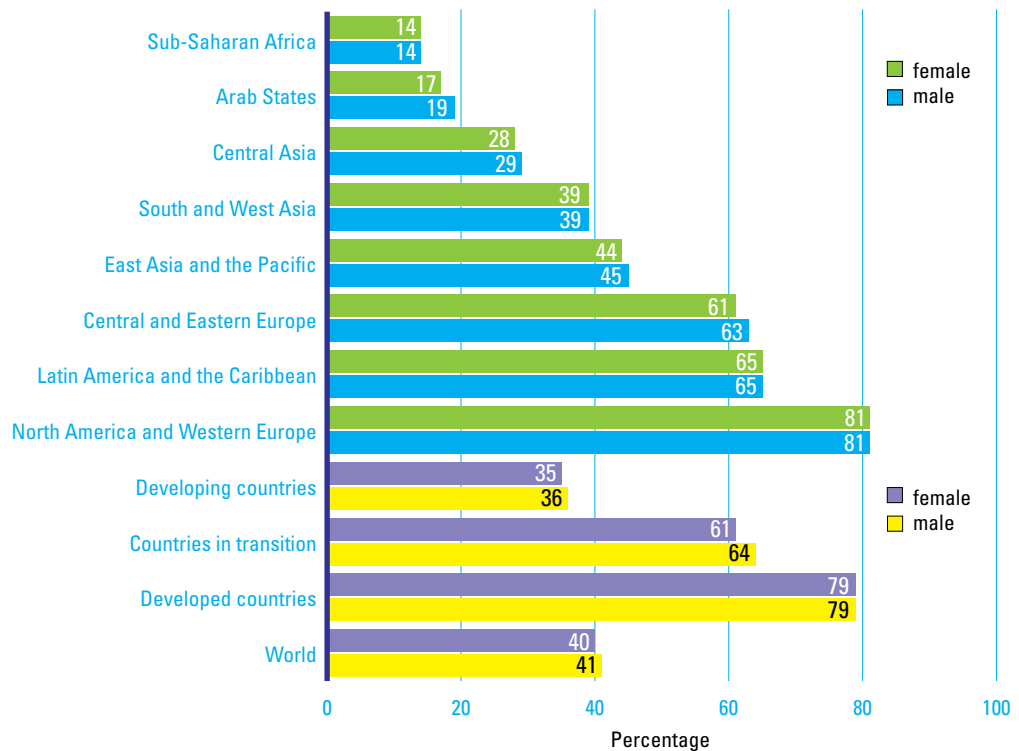
Various international goals regarding education have been adopted since 1990 with the ultimate aim of getting all children into school and providing them with a quality education (*see Table, at right*). UNICEF accompanies individual countries as they strive to meet these goals. Its current work – focusing on areas where the organization has a clear mandate, a strong track record and a comparative advantage – is aimed at supporting countries in their efforts. Achieving results in the following specific areas will move countries closer to attaining the overall international education-related goals:

- Improve children’s readiness to start primary school on time, particularly children who are marginalized and face social exclusion.
- Reduce gender and other disparities that hamper increased access to, participation in and completion of a quality basic education.
- Improve education quality and increase school retention, completion and achievement rates.
- Restore education in emergency, post-conflict and transition environments, and safeguard education systems against fallout from the AIDS epidemic.

### Pre-primary school enrolment, gross percentage, per region (2006)\*

\*The UNESCO regions differ from the UNICEF regions.

Source: UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2009*.





**Table: The key international education and gender goals**

**THE  
MILLENNIUM  
DEVELOPMENT  
GOALS**

**MDG 2:**

Achieve universal primary education

Target 3 of this goal: Ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

**MDG 3:**

Promote gender equality and empower women

Target 4 of this goal: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015

**THE  
EDUCATION FOR ALL  
(DAKAR) GOALS**

Expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children

Ensure that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality

Ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes

Achieve a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults

Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieve gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality

Improve all aspects of the quality of education and ensure excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills





How we want to achieve our goals:  
**Our PRINCIPLES**

As it accompanies countries to achieve the international education goals, UNICEF seeks to:

- Work within national education frameworks
- Reinforce existing mechanisms and tools
- Support and be part of interlinked and seamless partnerships
- Focus on inter-sectoral work, recognizing the importance of the 'whole' child
- Add value
- Base work on evidence
- Respond to urgent needs of countries and populations
- Learn by doing
- Build knowledge for action.

These principles guide UNICEF's vision that the right to education can – and will – be fulfilled for all children, everywhere.





## How we are working to achieve the goals: The PARTNERSHIPS

No single government, agency or organization can be the full and sole support for countries in working towards their education aims. But many partners working in unity towards common goals, advocating and supporting policies that address the many factors that affect enrolment and quality, can make a difference.

UNICEF's education strategy from 2006 through 2015 is to use its expertise and extensive country presence to contribute to and in some cases lead the key partnerships that influence and support national policy and practice.

UNICEF works primarily through four key international partnerships: the **Education for All Global Action Plan**, which gives technical support for developing national education plans to achieve the Dakar goals and for monitoring progress towards Education for All; the **Education for All Fast-Track Initiative**, which supports design of credible education sector plans and finances funding gaps in national plans for universal primary completion; the **United Nations Girls' Education Initiative**, which advocates for and supports gender parity and equality through work on national education plans; and the **Inter-Agency Standing Committee Cluster for Education in Emergencies**, which coordinates efforts by partners to restore schooling to children affected by natural or human-made emergencies. UNICEF also engages selectively in other partnerships but devotes less time and fewer resources to them. The four main global partnerships (*see Panel 1, page 12, for more details*) share the membership of three agencies – UNICEF, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Bank – and benefit from a wide array of other participants.


Together, these important partnerships help UNICEF influence education planning, education financing, action on reducing gender disparities and provision of education in emergencies. By working primarily through partnerships, UNICEF seeks to make efficient use of its resources to achieve the greatest possible gains for children.

# UNICEF works primarily through four main international partnerships




The **Education for All (EFA) Global Action Plan**, coordinated by UNESCO, provides technical support to develop national education plans for achieving the six EFA goals (the Dakar goals) and monitors EFA progress. By linking its contributions to the planning expertise provided to countries by other partners, UNICEF can bring its successful initiatives more systematically into national plans and priorities. UNICEF also links its own monitoring and evaluation efforts to the wider overview of progress provided by the *EFA Global Monitoring Report*, which is usually published yearly.

The **EFA Fast-Track Initiative**, spearheaded by the World Bank, supports design of credible education sector plans and finances funding gaps in national plans for universal primary completion. UNICEF can most effectively influence national plans and priorities as part of the Fast-Track Initiative, particularly in the areas of gender parity and equality in education. Many countries are more able to attract the financing they need for scaling up programmes once these initiatives become part of their national plans and are financed by the Fast-Track Initiative.



The **United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI)**, anchored by UNICEF, provides advocacy and technical support for gender parity and equality in the design, financing and implementation of national education plans. Through this initiative, UNICEF is better able to marshal the influence and resources of a wide range of partners to support gender parity and equality in national education priorities and plans.



The **Inter-Agency Standing Committee Cluster for Education in Emergencies** is intended to enhance coordination efforts by many partners to restore schooling to children affected by emergencies stemming from conflict or natural disaster. It also helps coordinate the efforts of partners to rebuild education systems in order to help countries affected by emergencies return to normal development.









## What we are doing through partnerships: The ACTIONS

There are several critical interventions – including teacher training, textbook provision, school meals, provision of adequate water and sanitation – that can help a country get all of its primary-school-age children into school and provide them with a quality education. What's more, there are important gains to be made by addressing the 'whole child', the many aspects of a child's life that influence whether, how and how successfully that child is educated. UNICEF's recognition of the importance of the whole child and how education affects other areas of a child's life, and vice versa, makes its current education strategy significantly different from the organization's previous strategies and from strategies advanced by other agencies.

UNICEF's support to countries, channelled through the key partnerships, revolves around the following three broad areas:

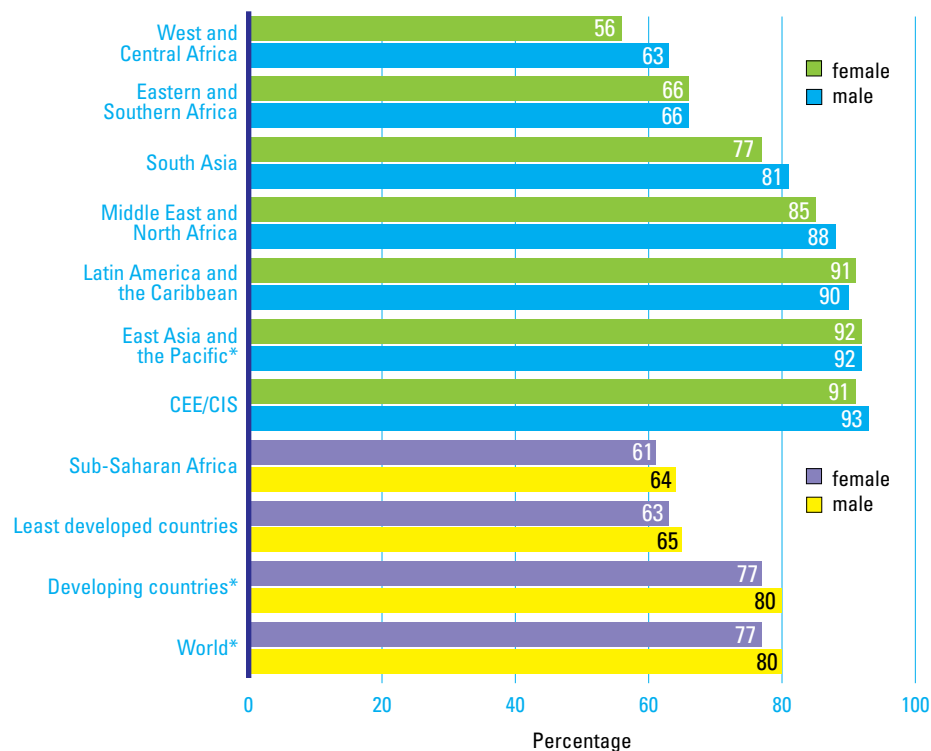
### Equal access and universal primary school completion

Examples of support measures include helping countries to: abolish and reduce school fees and other charges to create an enrolment surge; distribute on a mass scale a customized 'essential learning package' to generate high enrolment, regular attendance and quality learning; provide multiple services for children in schools (meals, health and nutrition interventions, and other care and support); establish standards of effectiveness, efficiency, support and safety to boost enrolment and improve attendance.

#### Primary school attendance, net percentage, by region (2000–2007)

\* Excludes China.

Source: UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2009*.



### Empowerment through girls' education and gender mainstreaming

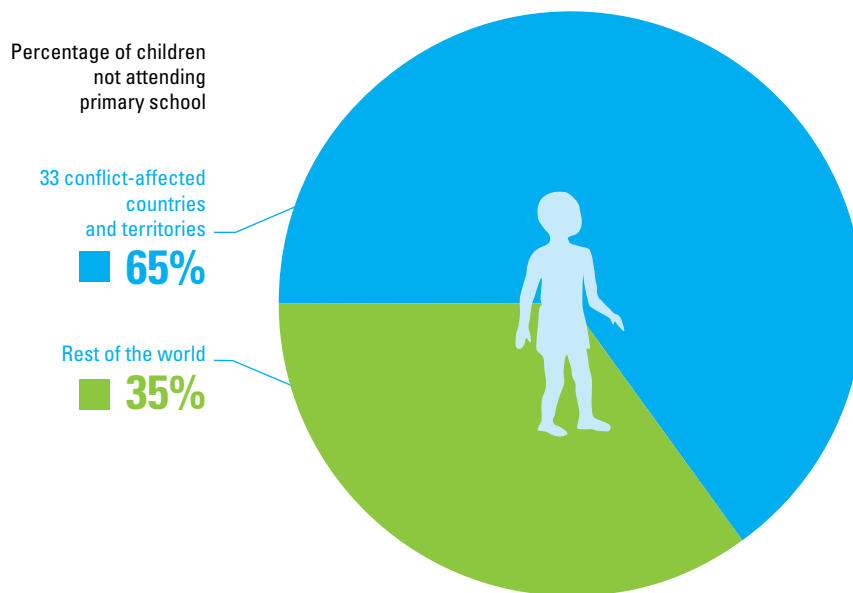
Specific activities include supporting countries to: use gender-disaggregated data to highlight education disparities at sub-national levels and for disadvantaged groups; use gender budget analysis to direct resources towards supporting countries' commitments to gender plans and priorities in education; promote life skills-based education with a gender focus in child-friendly schools, especially in the post-primary level, and including sexual and reproductive health; support female role models in education, or women in key positions in politics and development.

### Interventions related to emergencies and post-crisis situations

Specific activities include support to countries to: create safe learning spaces for children and provide basic facilities and supplies for quality learning and other basic needs; improve prediction and prevention of emergencies, and intensify emergency preparedness in countries prone to natural disasters and conflicts; build national capacity by providing training to help with emergency prediction, prevention and preparedness; mount back-to-school campaigns as part of the peace dividend in post-conflict states and as the first stage of helping countries 'build back better'; strengthen the cluster approach to education in emergencies and develop among partners the surge capacity to respond.

**Almost two thirds of children not attending primary school are living in conflict-affected countries and territories (2006)**

Source: UNICEF, *Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review*, 2009.





Underpinning each of UNICEF's three broad areas of work – equal access to primary education and universal completion, empowerment through girls' education and gender mainstreaming, and support for education interventions in emergencies and post-crisis situations – is the strategic priority to increase children's readiness to start school on time and improve the quality of education they receive. Work on school readiness and education is fundamental to the success of all UNICEF education efforts.

### School readiness

One of the major causes of inadequacy in primary education stems from far too many children in the developing world starting school later than the prescribed age and being poorly prepared for school. This leads to high repetition, large numbers of overage learners and high drop-out rates – situations that stretch scarce resources and perpetuate the cycle of under-education of a country's children. It also locks in disadvantages, forcing disadvantaged children to struggle to keep up with their better-off peers right from the start. Investing in the early years can mitigate disparities that would otherwise only deepen over time; it helps children start primary school at the right age and complete school at the standard time.

UNICEF supports many actions to improve school readiness, including working within partnerships to help countries: promote parenting education for adolescents in and out of school and for adults in literacy and development programmes; support community-based early childhood care and development programmes that are linked to other development programmes for women and children; provide formal preschool programmes that are linked with primary schools and use national standards for school readiness; implement the 'child-to-child' school readiness initiative in which children who are already in school



receive lessons and resources they can take home to help get younger siblings ready for school at the right age (see Panel 2, at right).

### Quality education

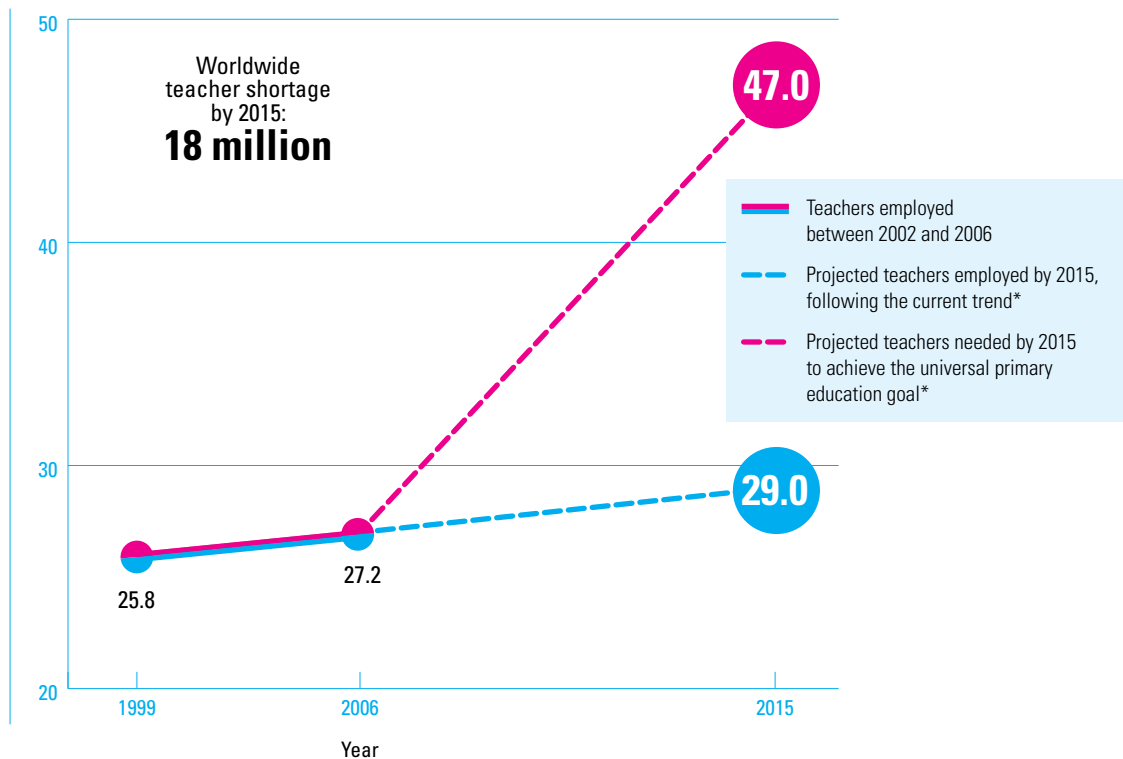
Providing a quality education is a challenge for many countries, even those close to achieving universal primary completion. Approaches to improving the quality of education have often been fragmented, with investments directed towards training teachers *or* supplying materials *or* revising the curriculum. UNICEF is at the forefront of a progressive shift from such single-factor interventions to a more holistic, packaged approach that seeks to achieve lasting results that are more than the sum of their parts.

UNICEF promotes many actions to improve education quality, including supporting countries and external partners to: introduce the child-friendly school model to partners and practitioners in countries and to key staff at UNICEF and other partner agencies; train and build national capacity to use child-friendly school models and standards to enhance the quality of education nationally; support the implementation of child-friendly schools (see Panel 3, page 23).

### Teachers needed worldwide for achieving the universal primary education goal by 2015

\* Calculation based on average annual increase.

Source: UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2009*.



# Child-to-child for school readiness: What does it mean?

Getting Ready for School: A Child-to-Child Approach is at the heart of UNICEF's work to address on-time entry into school and school readiness. Children who are already in school assist younger siblings at home or younger children in the neighbourhood who are about to attend school. These 'young facilitators' provide learning and developmental activities to younger siblings and neighbours. The initiative has been piloted in six countries – Bangladesh, China, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Tajikistan and Yemen – chosen to represent a variety of school systems, geographical locations and country sizes.

Several partners are driving this initiative. Among them, the Child-to-Child Trust, based at the University of London's Institute of Education, has been key to developing the approach, which was first used in the area of health; the American Institutes for Research is evaluating the intervention's effectiveness to provide evidence on which to shape further expansion.





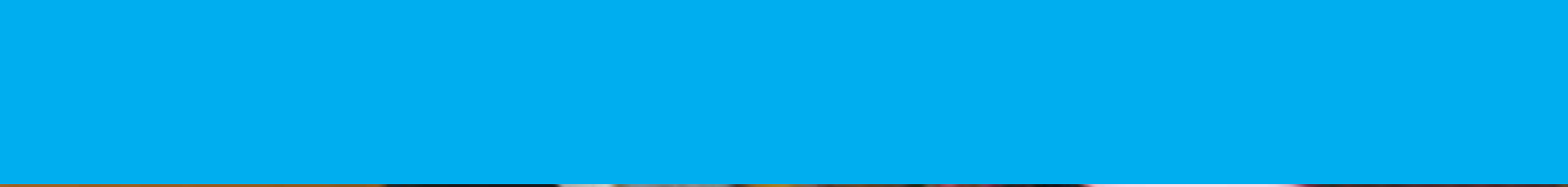


# Child-friendly schools: The centrepiece of UNICEF's work towards a quality education for all

Promoting child-friendly schools is at the core of UNICEF's efforts to improve education quality. Child-friendly school models help countries deal systematically with an expanding array of quality issues and establish national standards for quality improvement of the following elements:



- Safe school buildings (location, design, construction, maintenance)
- Infrastructure and main facilities (water, sanitation, energy, playgrounds)
- Links between schools and their communities (school boards, parent-teacher associations)
- Training for teachers (child-centred pedagogy, reflective practitioner)
- Caring for children's basic needs (school meals, health checks, deworming)
- Emphasis on learning through play for younger children (joyful learning)
- Focus on self-identity, negotiating skills and coping behaviours (life skills)
- Availability of learning resources and teaching aids (stimulating classrooms)
- Care and protection of learners (the school as a protective environment)
- Support for child participation (the school as a democratic institution)
- Appropriate knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour (curriculum relevance)
- Achievement of prescribed learning outcomes (school effectiveness).





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