

7 AFFORDABLE AND
CLEAN ENERGY

KEY ASKS

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SDG 7: AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Clean, sustainable energy is critical for children and young people. It improves the quality, accessibility and reliability of essential services they rely on for education, universal healthcare and safe water and sanitation. Affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy can aid in advancing development goals and reducing multidimensional poverty and reduce emissions that contribute to the climate crisis. Where sustainable energy access is lacking or unreliable, children and young people pay the biggest price as they are amongst the most-affected groups. The impacts threaten to undermine decades of progress on every child's ability to survive, grow and thrive.

Almost 600,000 children under age 5 die each year from respiratory infections related to indoor and outdoor air pollution and second-hand smoke resulting from unsustainable energy practices¹. Furthermore, 1 in 4 primary school children attend schools without any form of electricity – barring their access to lighting, information and communications technologies (ICT), cooking, or thermal heating and cooling. Approximately 177 million of these schools are in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America². Global sustainable energy efforts can transform young lives as these are key to enhancing outcomes in education, healthcare and WASH. Improving quality education through access to information and communication technologies (ICTs), digital connectivity, and a comfortable learning environment with adequate heating, cooling, and lighting; and powering healthcare facilities and supplying clean water for essential hygiene and safe water³ are predicated on sustainable energy efforts. For information please see *A Brighter A brighter life for every child with sustainable energy* <https://www.unicef.org/media/127626/file/A%20brighter%20life%20for%20every%20child%20with%20sustainable%20energy.pdf> and <https://www.unicef.org/environment-and-climate-change>



KEY ASKS

1. Energy can define a child's access to education, water, clean air, and safety. As SDG 7 is implemented and monitored, we encourage countries to include children in policies and investments related to sustainable energy. UNICEF encourages governments conducting a Voluntary National Review (VNR) to ensure their reports are: 1) informed by relevant data, disaggregated by age and sex with a particular focus on children; 2) linked to national plans, budgets, and accountability frameworks; and 3) inclusive of children's voices on SDG issues, for instance through conducting consultations with children and youth.
 - Prioritize sustainable electrification in the health and education sectors to accomplish positive social and climate benefits for children.
 - Keep vulnerable consumers connected to electricity/internet.
 - Increase reliable, uninterrupted, and sufficient energy production for more sustainable economic growth



MONITOR -- THE IMPORTANCE OF DISAGGREGATED DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND USE

¹ UNICEF, Healthy Environments for Healthy Children Global Programme Framework, www.unicef.org/media/91216/file/Healthy-Environments-for-Healthy-Children-Global-ProgrammeFramework-2021.pdf.

² UN DESA, Addressing Energy's Interlinkages with other SDGs, https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/2022-UN_SDG7%20Brief-060122.pdf.

³ UN DESA, Addressing Energy's Interlinkages with other SDGs, https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/2022-UN_SDG7%20Brief-060122.pdf.

Energy-related data on the sectors most relevant to children is scarce, specifically the health and education sectors as well as infrastructure such as transport. Disaggregated and specific data on children and their access to and benefits from sustainable energy is even sketchier. The following SDG 7 Targets and Indicators address priority areas for children:

7.1 By 2030, ensure universal access to affordable, reliable, and modern energy services

7.1.1 Proportion of population with access to electricity

7.1.2 Proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology

While national and local governments collect targets and indicators related to SDG 7, we encourage where appropriate the collection of the following relevant SDG indicator areas:

3.9.1 Mortality rate attributed to household and ambient air pollution

4.A.1 Proportion of schools with access to electricity.

Collecting and disaggregating this data is vital to understanding how and where children are being left behind in the context to energy access. For instance, it is through these statistics that we know to:

Reduce air pollution deaths. The health impacts attributable to air pollution, which are closely linked to the use of dirty fossil fuel such as diesel and petrol including in the transport sector, are estimated to have caused 4.2 million premature deaths globally due to outdoor air pollution and 3.8 million due to indoor air pollution in 2012 through the use of conventional fuels for cooking and heating (e.g. charcoal, kerosene). [A majority](#) of these deaths occurring in low- and middle-income countries, which represent 82 per cent of the global population and bear the brunt of the problem. [Around 1.8 billion](#) children under the age of 15 years globally, live in areas where the air is toxic putting their health and development at serious risk.

Improve access to electricity in households. Children living in electrified households spend an average of 274 more days at school than those living in households without electricity. Electricity in the home also helps reduce gender inequalities by providing girls, who are traditionally more engaged in housework than boys, opportunities to study after sunset.

Improve access to electricity for health facilities. An estimated 1 billion people rely on health facilities without electricity, predominantly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In a recent study over 120,000 facilities, almost 60 per cent of healthcare facilities in low- and middle-income countries were estimated to lack reliable electricity, including lighting for child delivery and emergency night-time healthcare, refrigeration of vaccines or electricity for simple medical and diagnostic equipment.

Improve access to electricity for schools. Looking at primary school access to electricity, sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest rate at 31 per cent, followed by South Asia with, and Latin America. Collectively, 186 [million](#) children attend primary schools without electricity, thereby compromising educational and development outcomes. Schools with better access to sustainable energy can also be used to provide other community services, such as clean water, hygienic sanitation, and health and emergency services.

Enhance street lighting. It is unknown how many communities in developing countries are without street lighting; however, it is reasonable to assume that most of those 1.3 billion people who have no access to electricity in their homes are also deprived of street lighting. The lack of street lighting leads to increased risk of harassment and assault.



INVEST -- SOCIAL SPENDING AND PROGRESS ON RESULTS FOR CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

Energy action plans and budgets should cover issues such as children's access to clean, reliable and affordable energy in households, schools, health facilities, communities, and for protection against air pollution. Improved reporting on expenditures and programmes that have direct and indirect impacts on access to affordable, reliable, and sustainable energy should be pursued. To improve public financing for clean energy, UNICEF supports governments to allocate public resources where the need is greatest; and pushes for improved programme design, monitoring and accountability. For example, UNICEF is actively supporting energy access programmes in primary health care facilities in 35 countries. Energy is even more critical in **conflict and emergency context** to ensure continuity of basic services including for life saving medical procedures, water supply, vaccine cold chains, lighting and more. For example, in the Gaza Strip, UNICEF is reaching out to 12 per cent of its population with clean water supply through its *Solar Seawater Desalination Plant Project*. Similarly, in Yemen, Jordan, South Sudan, and Bangladesh (Cox's bazar) UNICEF is investing in solar energy in schools and learning centres for children in humanitarian settings.



ACTIVATE -- AWARENESS BUILDING AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

For more information, visit: <https://www.unicef.org/sdgs>

Sustainable energy transition is an intergenerational issue and young people have a key role to play. UNICEF supports young people as agents of change for climate and energy actions through developing resources and toolkits for children and young people, technical skills building and training, innovation challenges and research and advocacy on green skills and energy literacy.

Shifts in social norms and behaviours begin in communities and households and systemic sustainable energy practices can start with simple actions that children can take part in such as turning off lights and unplugging devices. Therefore, we emphasize the importance of awareness raising and encouraging positive behaviours and more sustainable practices among children, not only as they transition from [childhood](#) to adulthood but as they participate in society now. To this end, UNICEF recently became a partner to the SDG 7 Youth Constituency and it's [Youth Sustainable Energy Hub initiative](#).

Finally, UNICEF stresses **the importance of sustainable energy education and encourages the inclusion of children's perspectives and voices in not only SDG consultations but in implementation efforts such as policy, budgeting, and other decision-making**. Current and future investments in human capital will be integral to growing the sustainable energy industry. Educating generations of students as clean energy technicians, engineers, political activists, and energy practitioners is vital to equip society with the future capability of meeting the demand for access to and affordability of clean energy.