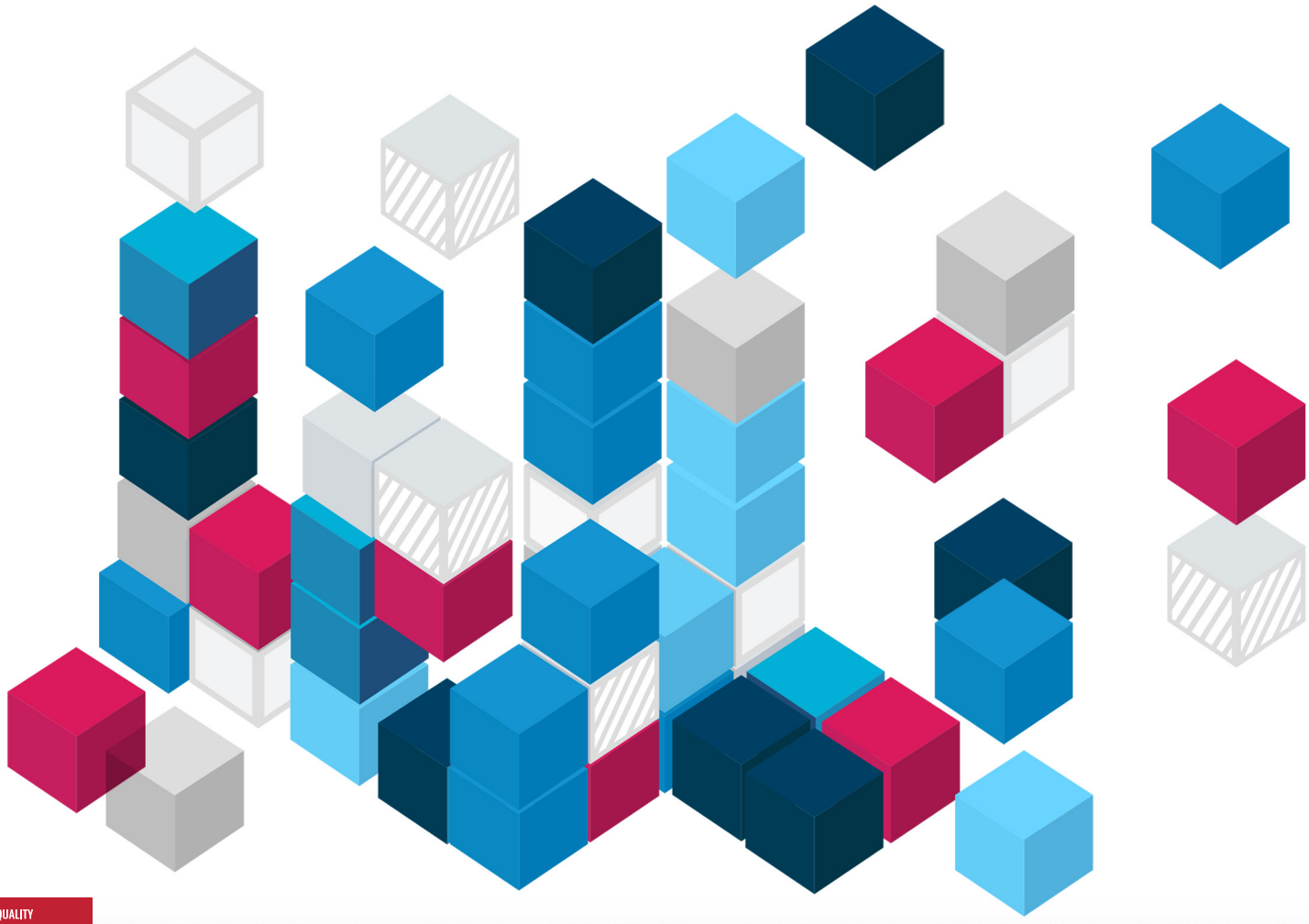

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

SDG 4 SCORECARD

PROGRESS REPORT ON NATIONAL BENCHMARKS

FOCUS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD

2023

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SDG 4 SCORECARD

PROGRESS REPORT ON NATIONAL BENCHMARKS

FOCUS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD

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Published in 2023 by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics C.P 250 Succursale H, Montréal, Québec H3G 2K8 Canada. Tel: +1 514-343-6880. Email: uis.publications@unesco.org (http://www.uis.unesco.org) and by the Global Education Monitoring Report, 7, place de Fontenoy 75352 Paris 07 SP, France. Tel:+33 (1) 45 68 07 41. Email: gemreport@unesco.org (https://www.unesco.org/gem-report)

ISBN: 978-92-9189-319-5
Ref. Number: UIS/2023/ED/SD/1
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Design and layout by Big Yellow Taxi, Inc.

https://doi.org/10.54676/ZSLV3583

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Acronyms and abbreviations

CARICOM	Caribbean Community
EU	European Union
GDP	gross domestic product
GEM Report	Global Education Monitoring Report
HLSC	High-Level Steering Committee
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TES	Transforming Education Summit
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Foreword

The Sustainable Development Goals express the global commitment for achieving a better and more sustainable future for all. They capture urgent priorities and highlight the interconnectedness of our challenges, for both people and planet. Will we accelerate progress towards – and ultimately achieve – our common goals by 2030? In order to do so, it is necessary to translate the collective responsibility for implementing such a complex agenda into national responsibilities.

The international education community tackled these issues head-on in the Education 2030 Framework for Action when it included a call for 'appropriate intermediate benchmarks' to be established, which it saw as 'indispensable for addressing the accountability deficit associated with longer-term targets' (§28). This is even more important now as nations make renewed commitments to transforming education in a world facing multiple global crises.

The benchmarking process allows each country to define its own targets, taking their specific context, starting point and pace of progress into account. This is an important departure from assuming each country can achieve the same target, which was unrealistic and unfair for many countries.

In 2021/2, three in four countries set such benchmarks, or national targets, for seven SDG 4 indicators. These have been complemented with targets extracted from national education sector plans and voluntary national reviews. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report have prepared this first report that evaluates the progress that countries have made towards these benchmarks, beyond 'business as usual'. The assessment of progress stops at 2020 just before the onset of the pandemic, which placed education and data collection systems around the world under stress.

Even outside of a global shock such as the pandemic, countries needed to accelerate progress in the run-up to 2030. The crisis that hit education systems during 2020 and 2021 means that the next report, which will show how countries managed to offset the challenges caused by the COVID-19 school closures, will be even more useful for guiding us towards the problem points and the necessary support.

This process aims to strengthen accountability for fulfilling government commitments but also to help governments develop policies that will take them closer towards ambitious but feasible targets.

This publication will make an important contribution to the celebration of the International Day of Education by promoting dialogue among peers. We encourage countries to continue strengthening the national SDG 4 benchmarking process through setting national targets, where they are still missing, and improving the data being used. The value of the approach lies in the opportunity it provides for countries to learn from one another and adapt their policies. This value has been recognized in the recent decision of the SDG 4 High-Level Steering Committee to build upon it in order to monitor the commitments made at the Transforming Education Summit.

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Acknowledgements

The UIS and the GEM Report would like to thank officials in every country for their contribution to the national SDG 4 benchmark setting and for their feedback that continues to improve the process.

We would like to thank UN Secretary-General António Guterres for his Vision Statement at the Transforming Education Summit (September 2022) which called for 'taking current arrangements for monitoring SDG 4 implementation including the Global Education Meetings and the national SDG 4 benchmarking process to the next level' and the SDG 4 High-Level Steering Committee, which decided to build on the SDG 4 benchmarking process as part of the follow-up strategy to the Summit's commitments (December 2022). We are grateful to the UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education, Stefania Giannini, for her leadership.

We would further like to thank the consultants who supported the analysis of benchmarks (Kevin Macdonald) and the mapping of targets in national education sector plans, ensuring that they are represented in the global database (Patricio Canalis, Temurbek Raxmatov, Ioulia Sementchouk, Patricio Temperley, Tiago Vier and Ana Vigano).

Our thanks also to Andy Quan for editing, Eliza Bennett for copy-editing, Erin Crum for proofreading and Big Yellow Taxi (Nicolette Cantillo, Peter Leonardo and Tony Vecchione) for producing the report with the support of Madeleine Barry.

Last but not least, thanks go to our dedicated teams at the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (Roshan Bajracharya, Adolfo Imhof, Lina Ktaili, Yacine Fall and Shailendra Sigdel) and the *Global Education Monitoring Report* (Benjamin Alcott, Yasmine Bekkouche, Camila Lima De Moraes, Patrick Montjourides and Kate Redman). In addition, we would like to thank the team that worked on the mapping of national laws and policies on the regulation of private education providers as part of the PEER website, which is used in Section 5 of this report (Anna D'Addio, Daniel April, Maria Rafaela Kaldi and Manuela Pombo). Adolfo Imhof prepared the global database that is part of this publication and the Global Education Observatory at https://geo.uis.unesco.org/sdg-benchmarks.

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Executive summary

Three in four countries have submitted benchmarks, or national targets, to be achieved by 2025 and 2030 for at least some of seven SDG 4 indicators: early childhood education attendance, out-of-school rates, completion rates, gender gaps in completion rates, minimum proficiency rates in reading and mathematics, trained teachers and public education expenditure. This process, supported by the UIS and the GEM Report, responds to the Education 2030 Framework for Action which had called on countries to establish 'appropriate intermediate benchmarks … for addressing the accountability deficit associated with longer-term targets'. This report provides the first annual snapshot of country progress towards these national targets.

An analysis of historical progress rates between 2000 and 2015 from each country's starting point provides the context against which recent progress is being assessed. The analysis maps the past average progress of fast- and slow-moving countries against different starting points, indicating what ambitious but feasible trajectories might look like.

The process of compiling benchmark values has combined two processes:

- Benchmarks submitted directly by countries; of those, most are based on the source recommended in the SDG 4 indicator metadata, but some use other sources preferred by countries, which has led to discrepancies in terms of baseline and latest values.

- Benchmarks extracted from mapping national sector plans, voluntary national reviews and related documents, which also may or may not be based on standard data sources.

Even when the standard information sources have been used for the baseline, benchmarks set by countries sometimes depart considerably from ambitious but feasible progress rates.

Progress between 2015 and 2020 informs the analysis of country prospects in achieving their 2025 national benchmarks. Progress is assessed up to the onset of COVID-19, which disrupted not only education development but also data collection systems. Summary progress towards actual and feasible benchmarks is provided for each indicator, while progress towards actual benchmarks is provided for each country for two indicators: the upper secondary completion rate and the participation rate in organized learning one year before primary. Among countries with benchmarks and data, 29% in the upper secondary completion rate and 43% in the participation rate in organized learning one year before primary were on course to achieve their 2025 benchmark with high probability; these were mostly richer countries, especially in the case of the early childhood indicator. Also, one in three countries – and two in three low-income countries – allocate public education expenditure at a level below 4% of gross domestic product (GDP) and below 15% of total public expenditure.

The report also contributes to one of the main objectives of the national SDG 4 benchmarking process, which is connecting progress to specific policies. This report focuses on one benchmark indicator, the participation rate in organized learning one year before primary. Countries' progress is discussed with reference to policies related to free and compulsory pre-primary education legislation, private provider regulation and public education expenditure.

Introduction

In 2015, the Education 2030 Framework for Action, which is the roadmap for achieving SDG 4, called on countries to establish benchmarks, i.e. national targets. It provided a clear rationale and a set of principles for doing so:

> The targets of SDG4-Education 2030 are specific and measurable, and contribute directly to achieving the overarching goal. They spell out a global level of ambition that should encourage countries to **strive for accelerated progress**. They are applicable to all countries, **taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development** and respecting national policies and priorities. **Country-led action will drive change**, supported by effective multi-stakeholder partnerships and financing. Governments are expected to **translate global targets into achievable national targets based on** their education priorities, **national** development strategies and **plans**, the ways their education systems are organized, their institutional capacity and the availability of resources. This requires **establishing appropriate intermediate benchmarks** (e.g. for 2020 and 2025) through an inclusive process, with full transparency and accountability, engaging all partners so there is country ownership and common understanding. Intermediate benchmarks can be set for each target to serve as quantitative goalposts for review of global progress vis-à-vis the longer-term goals. Such benchmarks should build on existing reporting mechanisms, as appropriate. Intermediate benchmarks are **indispensable for addressing the accountability deficit associated with longer-term targets** (UNESCO, 2015).

Key elements of the national SDG 4 benchmarking process in education include:

- **Ambition:** Benchmarks should be set at a level that entails progress faster than what would have been achieved without extra effort ('strive for accelerated progress').
- **Fairness:** Benchmarks should be set relative to countries' starting points ('taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development').
- **Ownership:** Benchmarks should build on national and not external processes ('translate global targets into achievable national targets based on … national … plans').
- **Learning:** Benchmarks should have a formative purpose, to be achieved through peer learning ('Country-led action will drive change').
- **Accountability:** Benchmarks should lead countries to take responsibility for delivering improved education outcomes ('indispensable for addressing the accountability deficit associated with longer-term targets').

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the *Global Education Monitoring Report*, which are mandated by the Education 2030 Framework for Action to jointly monitor progress towards SDG 4, have helped countries fulfil their commitment to establish national SDG 4 benchmarks (UIS and GEM Report, 2022a, 2022b).

The benchmarking process, which began shortly after the adoption of the SDG 4 monitoring framework by the UN General Assembly in 2017, has involved three key steps (**Figure 1**):

- In August 2019, the Technical Cooperation Group on SDG 4 Indicators endorsed 7 SDG 4 indicators (20 when disaggregated) (**Table 1**). They were deemed suitable for benchmarking under three conditions: Data were available for most countries; the indicator followed a clear historical trend (from 0 to 100%) or a clear target (e.g. gender parity, minimum public expenditure) was associated with it; and the indicator was policy-relevant.

- In August 2021, building on the October 2020 Global Education Meeting declaration, which requested UNESCO to 'propose relevant and realistic benchmarks of key SDG indicators' (UNESCO, 2020), an invitation was sent to countries, along with supporting documentation, to submit national benchmark values by 1 October 2021 for 2025 and 2030.

In February 2022, following the release of the initial results, countries that had not taken part in the process in 2021 were invited to submit national benchmark values by 31 May 2022, while countries that had already submitted benchmarks in 2021 were offered the opportunity to revise them if they wished.

The advantages of the benchmarking process were recognized during the Transforming Education Summit (TES) in September 2022, leading to calls for adding more benchmark indicators to the list to capture some of the summit's commitments for education transformation (**Box 1**).

FIGURE 1:
Timeline of SDG 4 benchmarking process

2019	2020	2021			2022			2023
August	October	January–June	July–September	October–December	January–June	July–September	October–December	January
Agreement on seven indicators	Adoption of technical process	Consultations	Global Education Meeting	Global Education Meeting	International Day of Education	Transforming Education Summit and High-Level Political Forum	SDG 4 High-Level Steering Committee	International Day of Education
TCG6	TCG7	Regional minimum benchmark values Additional regional benchmark indicators	Regional benchmarks endorsed as first step to national benchmarks First letter sent by UNESCO ADG/ED* to all ministers on 4 August 2021 asking benchmarks to be submitted by 1 October 2021	National benchmarks compiled Global Education Observatory	Second letter sent by UNESCO ADG/ED to all ministers on 23 February 2022 asking benchmarks to be submitted by 31 May 2022		Decision to request benchmark indicators on greening and digital education	First progress report on SDG 4 benchmarks

* Assistant Director-General of Education

TABLE 1.
SDG 4 benchmark indicators

Thematic area	Indicator			Disaggregation
Early childhood	Global Indicator 4.2.2	Participation rate one year before primary	1	
Basic education	Thematic Indicator 4.1.4	Out-of-school rate	3	(i) primary, (ii) lower secondary and (iii) upper secondary school age
	Global Indicator 4.1.2	Completion rate	3	(i) primary, (ii) lower secondary and (iii) upper secondary education
Equity	Target 4.5	Gender gap, completion rate in upper secondary	1	
	Global Indicator 4.1.1	Minimum learning proficiency	6	(i) early grades, (ii) end of primary and (iii) end of lower secondary, in (a) reading and (b) mathematics
Quality	Global Indicator 4.c.1	Trained teachers	4	(i) pre-primary, (ii) primary, (iii) lower secondary and (iv) upper secondary education
Financing	Global Indicator 1.a.2 and Education 2030 benchmarks	Education expenditure	2	(i) as share of total public expenditure and (ii) as share of gross domestic product
			20	

BOX 1:
Benchmarking the Transforming Education Summit commitments

In September 2022, in his Vision Statement at the TES, the UN Secretary-General called for 'ways to strengthen political accountability for transforming and financing education, taking current arrangements for monitoring SDG 4 implementation including the Global Education Meetings and the national SDG 4 benchmarking process to the next level'.

In its Call to Action, the SDG 4 High-Level Steering Committee (HLSC) recognized that selected SDG 4 benchmark indicators can help monitor four of the seven global initiatives proposed during the TES. It further urged countries to build on the national SDG 4 benchmarking process, by:

- 'Agreeing to set a small number of indicators, linked to the Global Initiatives, which will be added to the list of SDG 4 benchmark indicators.'
- 'Setting national targets for these indicators for 2025 and 2030. These will represent the transformation countries want to see out of this Summit.'

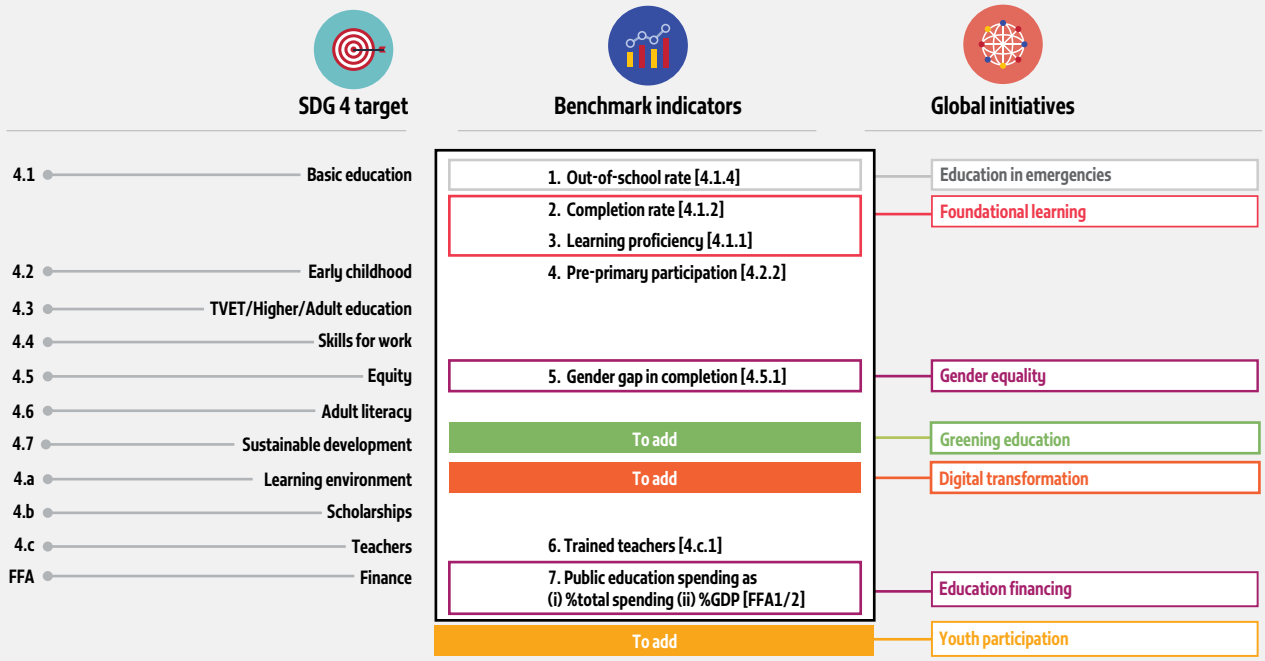
The focus is on three global initiatives. At its meeting in December 2022, the HLSC decided to add indicators for (i) greening education, (ii) digital transformation and (iii) youth and student engagement to the existing SDG 4 benchmark indicator framework (**Figure 2**).

Preliminary ideas on benchmark indicators for these three global initiatives have been proposed to the Technical Cooperation Group on SDG 4 Indicators. In the case of **greening education**, which consists of four dimensions (schools, learning, teachers and communities), two indicator proposals have been made. The first proposal is the percentage of schools with green accreditation in compliance with a forthcoming UNESCO Quality Standard on Green Schools. The second proposal is a measure of national intentions to cover climate change based on analysis of relevant policy documents; this indicator has already been estimated based on keyword searches of more than 170 national curriculum frameworks for 133 countries.

In the case of **digital transformation**, the global initiative consists of three dimensions: content, capacity and connectivity. While no indicator can cover all aspects comprehensively, school internet connectivity has the advantage that it is an existing global SDG 4 indicator (4.a.1) and is therefore being monitored by countries and reported at the international level. In coming years, improvements can be made in how the indicator is sourced (e.g. adding information from internet service providers).

A potential indicator on the **youth engagement** global initiative will involve, first, governments reporting whether they have an education policy development council or related body that includes youth representatives; and, second, youth organizations reporting whether they are active members of such a council or body and have been consulted in education policy development.

FIGURE 2:
Alignment of Transforming Education Summit global initiatives with SDG 4 targets and benchmark indicators



Note: FFA is the Education 2030 Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2015).
Source: UIS and GEM Reoport (2022).

Overall, three in four countries have set national SDG 4 benchmarks (**Figure 3**):

- National benchmark values were submitted by 64% of countries.
- Another 10% of countries are Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and European Union (EU) member states that have committed to being bound by the benchmarks agreed through their respective regional processes.[1]

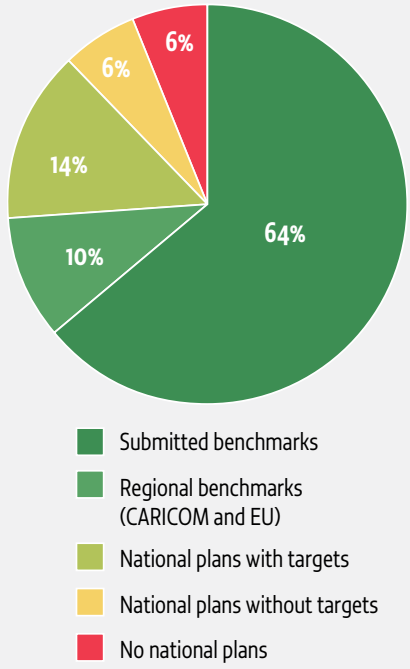
For the remaining countries, information collected from national education sector plans and voluntary national reviews was used to identify whether national targets had already been set:

- These documents yielded at least some benchmark indicator targets for 14% of countries.
- 6% of countries had plans without targets.
- 6% of countries had no plans.

The baseline and benchmark values can be accessed at the Global Education Observatory website.

This report provides a first snapshot of country progress towards their national targets. **Section 2** discusses, for each benchmark indicator, historical progress rates between 2000 and 2015 with respect to each country's starting point. This overview provides the context against which recent progress will be assessed.

FIGURE 3:
Participation in national SDG 4 benchmarking process



Source: Annex A.

Section 3 introduces data issues that have arisen during the benchmark-setting process. One issue is that national sources other than those used to report on global and thematic SDG 4 indicators have been used in some cases, which leads to discrepancies in both the initial and target values. A related issue is the gap observed between the benchmarks set and progress that could be considered feasible based on past progress.

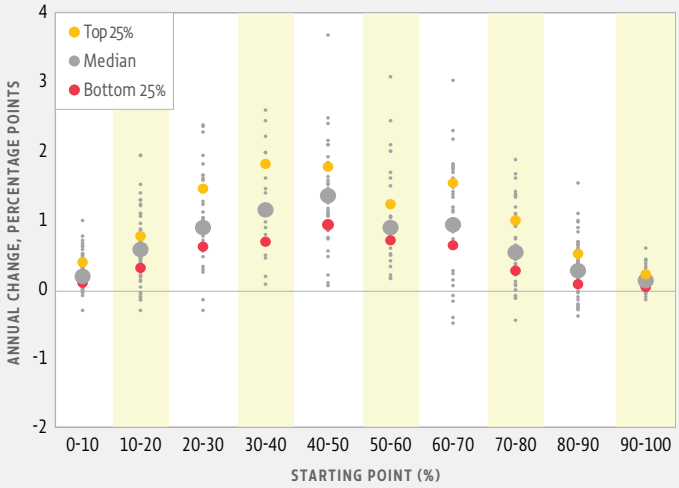
Section 4 discusses progress between 2015 and 2020. Summary progress is provided for each indicator with respect to both progress towards the national benchmark and the feasible benchmark values (UIS and GEM Report, 2022b). Each country's progress is also assessed for two benchmark indicators: upper secondary completion rate and early childhood education participation rate. Progress is assessed up to the onset of COVID-19, which disrupted not only education development but also data collection systems. Finally, progress towards the pair of minimum public education expenditure benchmarks is assessed.

As described above, the purpose of the national SDG 4 benchmarking exercise is not limited to monitoring and identifying countries that have made slow or rapid progress. The exercise will serve its purpose only if it also engages countries in discussions about policies that help them achieve their national targets. **Section 5** therefore further analyses countries' progress towards one of these benchmark indicators – the early childhood education participation rate – with reference to policies related to compulsory pre-primary education legislation, private provider regulation and public education expenditure. **Section 6** concludes, highlighting the three key messages of the report.

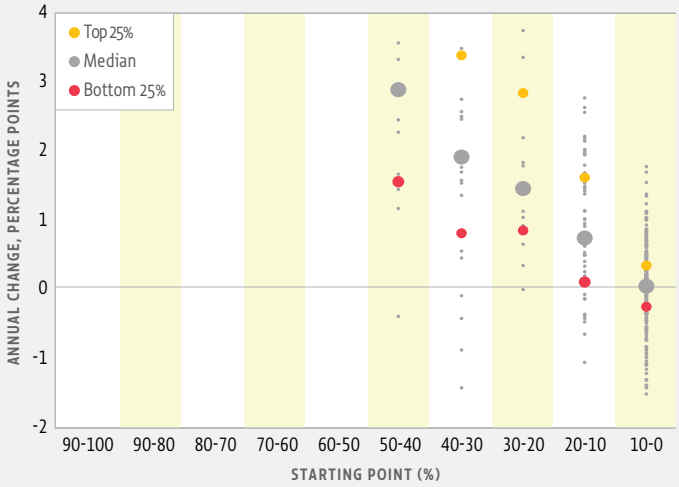
1 For CARICOM countries: at least 75% of students achieving the minimum level of proficiency in reading and mathematics in (a) grade 2 or 3, (b) at the end of primary, and (c) at the end of lower secondary; no more than 5% of children and 15% of young people out of school in primary and upper secondary respectively; and at least 85% of teachers with the minimum required qualifications. For EU countries: at least 85% of students achieving the minimum level of competencies in reading and mathematics at the end of lower secondary; at least a 91% upper secondary completion rate; and at least a 96% participation rate in organized learning one year before primary.

FIGURE 4:
Annual percentage point change 2000–15, by indicator and starting point

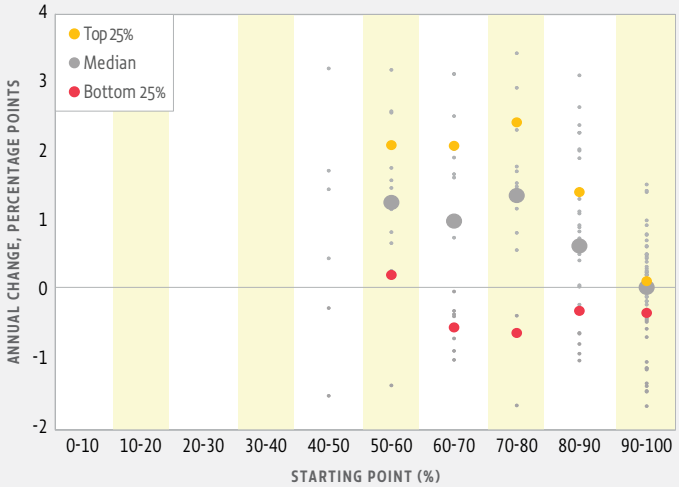
a. Completion rate, upper secondary



b. Out-of-school rate, lower secondary



c. Trained teachers, primary



Source: Analysis based on the UIS database.

Past progress

Global development agendas express the aspirations of the international community to accelerate progress towards fulfilling economic and social rights. However, they implicitly assume all countries can achieve the same objectives, despite starting from very different points. The national SDG 4 benchmarking process takes both countries' starting points and their historical progress rates into account in evaluating whether their education development trajectory meets expectations.

Selected examples highlight this perspective. They show the annual change in percentage points for some benchmark indicators, calculated over five-year periods between 2000 and 2015. A typical education development trajectory is captured by the upper secondary completion rate (global indicator 4.1.2c) (**Figure 4a**). Countries' progress rates, observed across different starting points arranged in intervals of 10 percentage points, increase as they move closer to 50% and gradually decrease from that point onwards. Among countries whose initial upper secondary completion rate was between 40% and 50%, the median country improved by 1.4 percentage points per year; in other words, a country that started from 45% could reach 52% within five years. The country at the bottom 25% of improvement from that starting range still increased its completion rate by 1 percentage point; by contrast, the country at the top 25% of improvement increased its completion rate by 1.8 percentage points.

For many indicators, either there are not enough data for countries in some stages of education development or there are simply not enough countries with indicator values in certain ranges. The out-of-school rate among adolescents of lower secondary school age (thematic indicator 4.1.4b) is restricted to the range 0–50% (**Figure 4b**). Its progress rate also slows down, but at a faster pace. For instance, among countries with an out-of-school rate between 20% and 30%, the median country historically improved by 1.5 percentage points per year, while among countries with an upper secondary completion rate between 70% and 80%, the median country improved by just 0.5 percentage points per year.

Another case is highlighted by the percentage of primary school trained teachers (global indicator 4.c.1b) (**Figure 4c**). This indicator is also observed only over the range 50–100% and follows a declining rate of improvement. A particular aspect of this indicator is that throughout the range of observed values, the bottom 25% of countries in each starting point range has negative change, which means that their percentage of trained teachers has been declining.

Finally, another benchmark indicator, the gender gap – i.e. the difference between females and males – (which is a slight variation of global indicator 4.5.1, the gender parity index) in the upper secondary completion rate presents other challenges. First, countries with a gender gap at the expense of females almost exclusively have a very low upper secondary completion rate: Almost all countries where females are at a disadvantage have a completion rate below 30% (**Figure 5a**). By contrast, countries with a gender gap at the expense of males are observed across the full spectrum of upper secondary completion rates (**Figure 5b**).

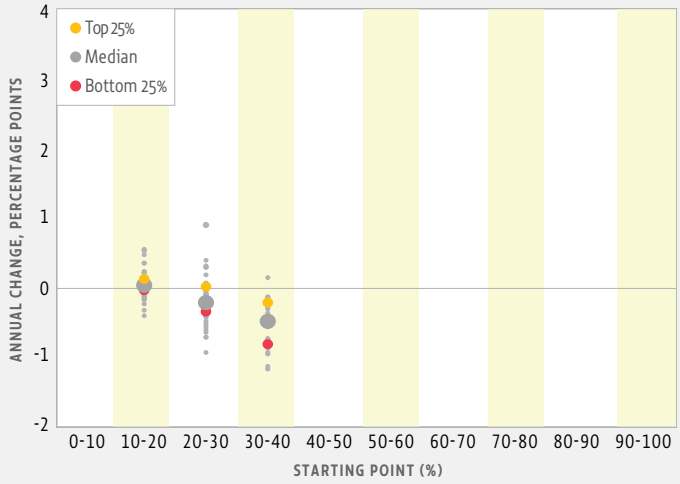
In most countries with gaps at the expense of females, this gap is closing. Among countries with gaps at the expense of males, this gap is widening by as much as 0.5 percentage points each year among countries with a completion rate between 40% and 50%. The average country has not managed to reduce its gender gap at the expense of males in upper secondary completion over a five-year period. The only countries that are consistently reducing the gap (by no more than 0.1 percentage points per year) are the best-performing 25% of countries with a gender gap at the expense of males whose initial upper secondary completion rate was at least 70%.

This lack of success to reduce gender gaps at the expense of males in upper secondary completion may be one of the obstacles that prevent these countries from setting a national target to eliminate disparity, as Section 3 shows.

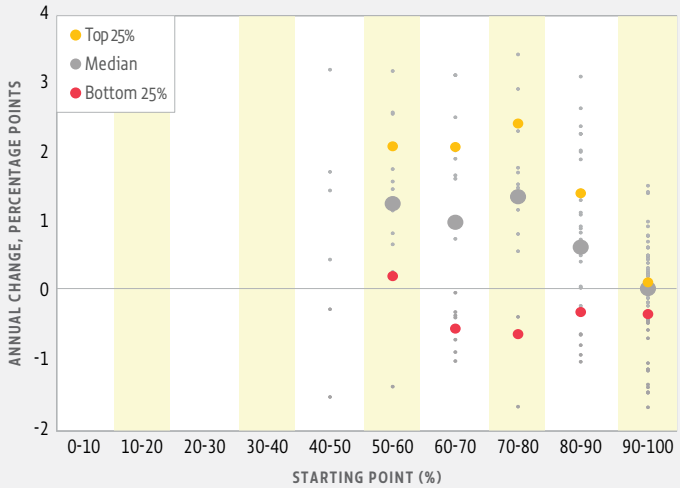
This section has shown how indicator values have changed on an annual basis from 2000 to 2015, distinguishing countries whose progress has been slow, average or fast. The analysis provides the background to understand how countries may be expected to have progressed after 2015. It also provides insights into how countries may have decided to set their national targets.

FIGURE 5:
Annual percentage point change 2000–15, upper secondary completion gender gap, by starting point

a. Countries with a gap at expense of females



b. Countries with a gap at expense of males



Notes: The figures show the change in the gender gap: (CR male–CR female)$_{final}$ – (CR male–CR female)$_{initial}$ for different levels of the completion rate for both sexes. A negative observation means this difference has decreased. For countries with an initial gap at the expense of females, a negative value means the gap is narrowing; for countries with an initial gap at the expense of males, a negative value means the gap is widening.

Source: Analysis based on the UIS database.

Benchmark setting and database compilation

Differences in understanding between the UIS and countries have arisen during the benchmark-setting process with respect to indicator definitions and information sources, some of them, such as data on school-age populations, long-standing. In some cases, these differences have generated discrepancies between official baseline values and those recognized by countries and, consequently, between baseline and benchmark values. Moreover, even when the standard information sources have been used for the baseline, the benchmarks set by countries sometimes depart considerably from what might be considered as ambitious but feasible progress rates based on past performance, as analysed in Section 2. Such feasible values had previously been shared with all countries for information to support their benchmark-setting process if they had no prior national target.

The full set of benchmark values is a combination of two parallel processes:

- Benchmarks submitted directly by countries. Of those:
  - Most are based on the source recommended in the SDG 4 indicator metadata.
  - However, some submissions use other sources preferred by countries.
- Benchmarks that have been extracted from mapping national sector plans, voluntary national reviews and related documents, which also – and perhaps more often – use different indicator definition and data sources in some cases.

For every submission, values were checked in terms of:

- Baseline and latest value consistency (including consistency between different indicators, e.g. between completion and out-of-school rates but also within indicators across levels).
- Data source (e.g. notably whether learning benchmarks were set based on values derived from comparable cross-national assessments).
- Methodology used (which affected mostly the early childhood participation rate, the out-of-school rate and the completion rate).

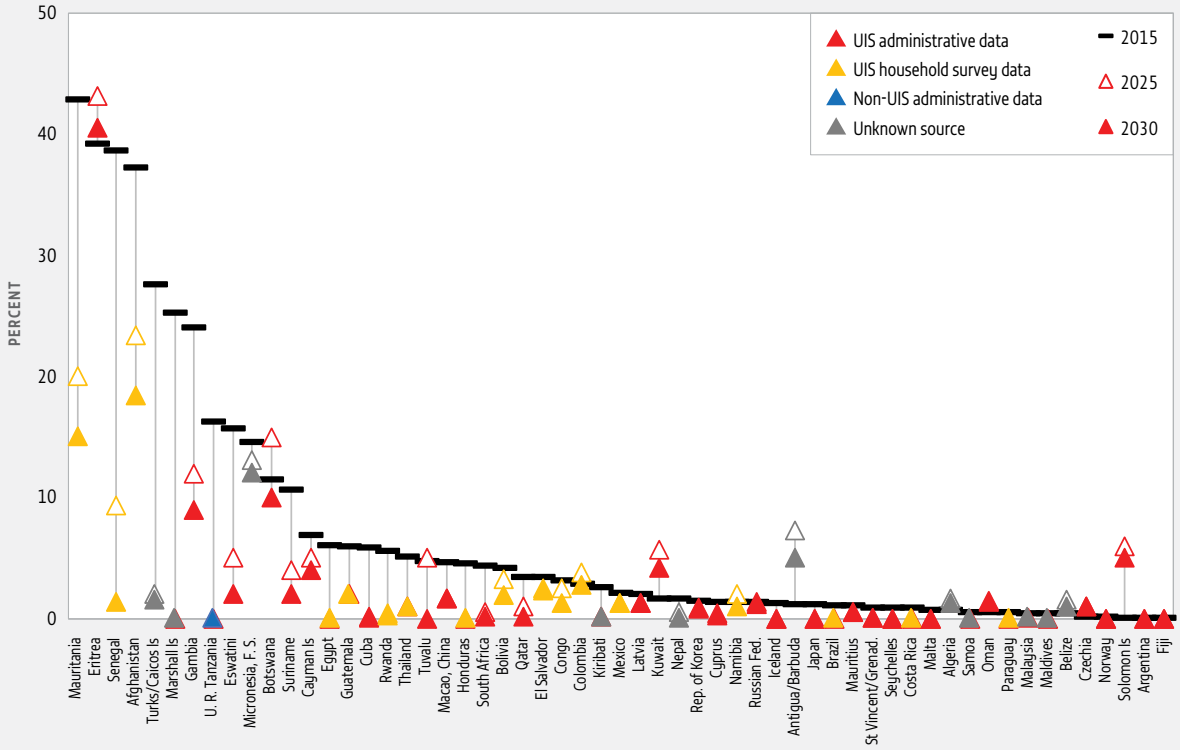
For instance, in the case of the out-of-school rate of primary school age children, the standard sources are the administrative data collected by the UIS. However, among 57 countries, 17 countries used household survey data, 1 country used administrative data different to the ones reported to the UIS, and 11 countries used unknown data, instead of UIS administrative data (**Figure 6a**). By contrast, there was less variation among 54 countries on trained pre-primary teachers, where all but 6 used UIS administrative data (**Figure 6b**).

In the case of benchmarks that were directly sourced from documents, target values set by countries for benchmark (or proxy) indicators were reviewed. The main source was *education sector plans*. The metadata reviewed included:

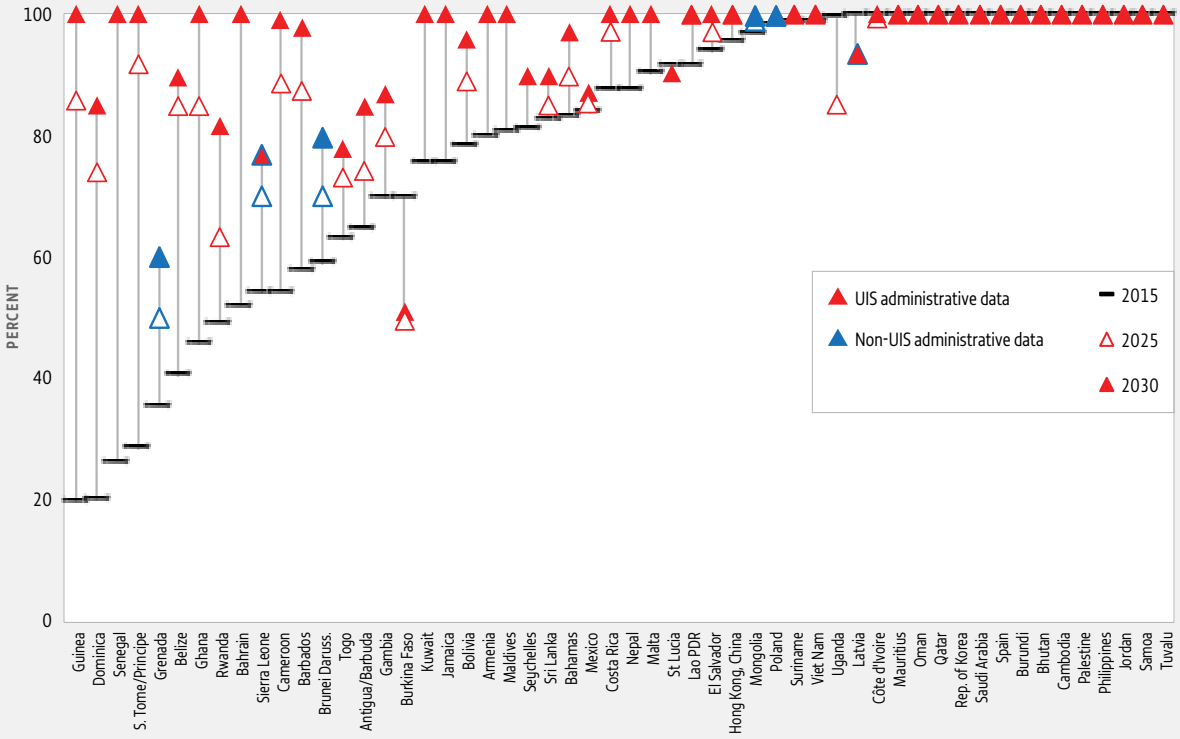
- The calculation methodology and differences from UIS methodology (e.g. some countries used national population and GDP data, which differed from those of the United Nations Population Division and the

FIGURE 6:
Starting point and 2025/2030 benchmarks, by source of data

a. Out-of-school rate, primary school age children



b. Trained teachers, pre-primary education



Source: SDG 4 benchmarks database.

World Bank; or national school age definitions which differ from the International Standard Classification of Education; or only public institutions data).

- The use of proxy indicators (e.g. net enrolment rates as a proxy for out-of-school rates).
- The availability of targets at the required level of disaggregation (e.g. lower and upper secondary were often reported together: In such cases, target values reported for total secondary were used as a proxy for both lower and upper secondary).
- The setting of targets for years other than 2025 and 2030: If a country had a target from a different baseline for a different year, the implicit progress rates were applied to the 2015 baseline values to estimate target values for 2025 and 2030.

A total of 467 documents were reviewed, of which 183 contained quantitative targets. The rest of the documents either had no targets related to SDG 4 or were limited to general statements of commitment. Information on targets was extracted through this process for 103 out of 208 countries and territories, for a total of 488 target values extracted directly, while a further 239 target values were estimated through the implicit progress rates – out of a maximum total of 4,160 values (i.e. 20 indicator values for 208 countries). The most common benchmark indicators for which target values were extracted through this process were the early childhood education participation rate (50 values) followed by government expenditure on education as a share of total government expenditure (42 values) and the primary completion rate (36 values).

Voluntary national reviews provided a secondary source. Out of 122 countries that submitted a review in 2020, 2021 or 2022, only 12 countries set a national target for any of the SDG 4 benchmark indicators; most countries presented only baseline and latest values. For the minimum proficiency level, completion rate (including the gender gap), out-of-school rate and early childhood education participation rate, the source of information tended to be different from the source recommended by the UIS methodology.

The overall database contains 208 countries and territories, 7 indicators (or 20 sub-indicators when all levels of disaggregation are considered) and 23 years (2000 to 2022). The baseline uses data for 2015 plus or minus two years. Preferred data sources used for each indicator depend on the availability and official source (**Table 2**). The use of benchmark sources was prioritized. National benchmarks submitted during the second phase take precedence over other benchmark value sources (**Table 3**). For countries where regional benchmarks are used, the national benchmarks are defined as the highest value (or lowest, for the out-of-school rate) between the latest national value and the minimum regional benchmark.

TABLE 2.
Data source used for each benchmark indicator, in order of priority

Indicator	Learning assessment	Administrative data	Household survey data, observed	Household survey data, modelled	Expenditure data
Participation rate one year before primary		1	2		
Out-of-school rate		1	2		
Completion rate			1	2	
Completion rate, gender gap in upper secondary			1	2	
Minimum learning proficiency	1				
Trained teachers		1			
Education expenditure					1

TABLE 3.
Benchmark source used, in order of priority

	Submission phase 2, Feb.–May 2022	Submission phase 1, Aug.–Oct. 2021	Regional benchmarks (CARICOM, EU)	Values extracted from national plans and reviews
Benchmark values, 2025 and 2030	1	2	3	4

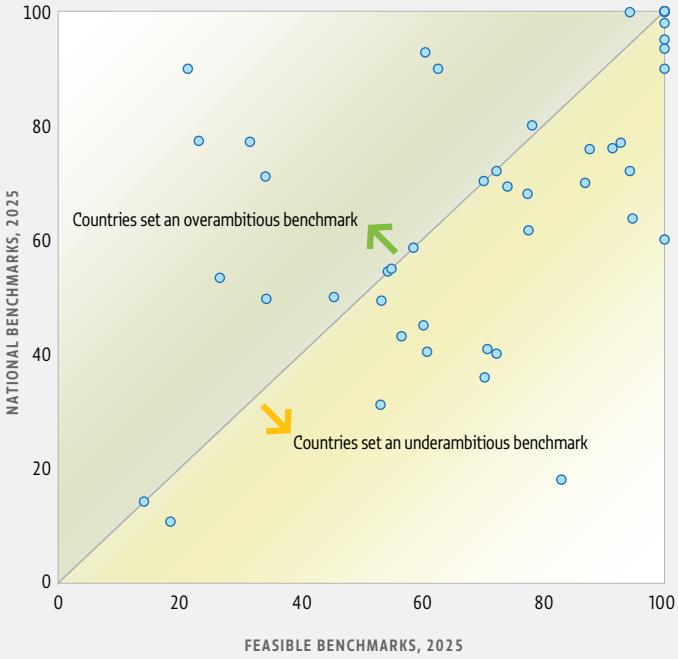
Benchmark coverage varies by indicator (**Table 4**). The benchmark indicator with the lowest coverage is the gender gap of the upper secondary school completion rate: only 48 countries, or 23%. The main reason is that this indicator was not part of the original call for benchmark setting in 2021 but was added only in 2022. Countries may have also found it difficult to set a target knowing that the disparity is growing – this despite the fact that 136 countries, or 65%, have set a benchmark for the upper secondary school completion rate, the second highest among all indicators. The indicator for which most countries have set a benchmark is the early childhood education participation rate, for which there is a national target for 149, or 72%, of countries. All countries are supposed to have agreed minimum targets for the public expenditure indicators in the Education 2030 Framework for Action (15% of total public expenditure and 4% of GDP).

TABLE 4.
Countries with benchmark values for 2025 and/or 2030

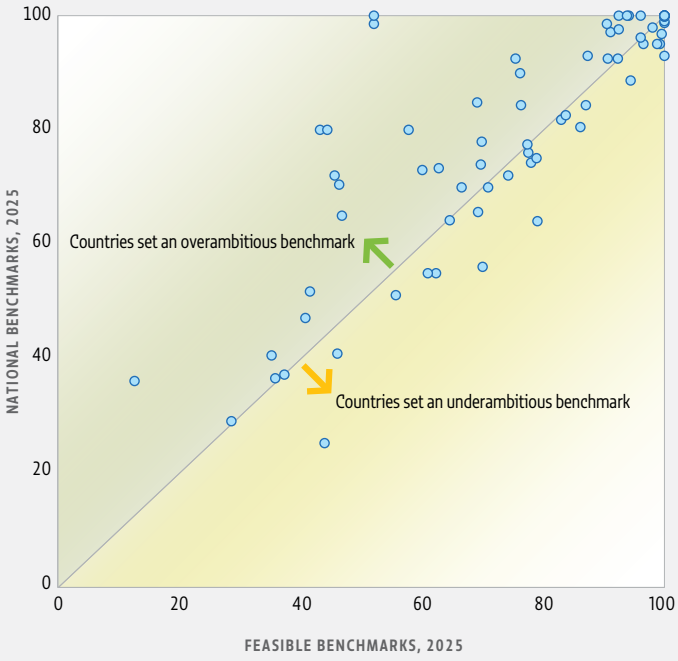
Indicator	Disaggregation	Countries
Participation rate one year before primary		149
Out-of-school rate	Primary	118
	Lower secondary	113
	Upper secondary	115
Completion rate	Primary	123
	Lower secondary	123
	Upper secondary	136
Gender gap, completion rate	Upper secondary	48
Minimum learning proficiency, reading	Early grades	77
	End of primary	96
	End of lower secondary	99
Minimum learning proficiency, mathematics	Early grades	78
	End of primary	99
	End of lower secondary	105
Trained teachers	Pre-primary	113
	Primary	118
	Lower secondary	112
	Upper secondary	115
Education expenditure	Share of total expenditure	208
	Share of GDP	208

FIGURE 7:
Actual and feasible benchmarks

a. Minimum proficiency level in reading, end of primary



b. Completion rate, lower secondary



Source: SDG 4 benchmarks database.

As mentioned earlier, every country was provided by the UIS and the GEM Report with indicative feasible benchmark values. These estimated where countries could be by 2025 and 2030 if they grew at the historic rate of the top 25% of countries. A review of how benchmark values set by countries compare with indicative feasible benchmark values is instructive of the challenges that countries have faced in setting benchmarks.

Wide discrepancy between benchmarks and feasible benchmarks is found in minimum proficiency levels, for instance in reading at the end of primary education (**Figure 7a**). On average, countries with low starting values are far more ambitious than indicated by feasible benchmark values, while countries with high starting values are less ambitious. This may be because this indicator was added to the education monitoring framework only in 2015: Poorer countries lack data and are less familiar with its progress. By contrast, richer countries have been taking part in cross-national assessments for the past 20 years and are more familiar with the indicator and its progress. In fact, indicator levels in richer countries with high initial learning levels (more than 70% of students achieving minimum proficiency) have fallen on average between 2000 and 2015, which may explain why these countries have been more cautious in setting their national targets.

By contrast, the discrepancy in completion rate – an indicator with a trajectory far more familiar to countries – is considerably smaller (**Figure 7b**). Again, a few countries with low starting values have been too ambitious. This may be explained by their lack of experience or precedent in national target setting. However, fewer countries have been as ambitious in this indicator as in learning.

In brief, this section's analysis has highlighted the steps taken to prepare the benchmark database, as harmonization of multiple data sources is key to monitor progress, given the considerable discrepancies that exist among them. As countries have more data available than the data they routinely submit to the UIS, the benchmark-setting process has revealed issues that will require more dialogue and coordination to resolve further inconsistencies between indicator baseline and benchmark values.

Progress towards benchmarks

With the benchmark values set by countries, the next step is to monitor their achievement. This section explains the proposed two methodological approaches, which group countries with respect to the rate of progress relative to their starting point, and presents results from its application to three indicators.

The **first approach** monitors countries with respect to progress towards achieving their national benchmarks. The achievement of the 2025 benchmarks will not be verified before 2027 at the earliest, once 2025 data are available for all countries. In the meantime, the focus is on the probability that countries will reach their benchmarks. This prospect is evaluated on the basis of the progress made by countries in 2000–15. Seven categories are envisaged (**Table 5**). Four capture the speed of progress during the last five years – and its implication for the probability of achieving the benchmark – and three recognize the non-availability of data or benchmarks.

TABLE 5.
Country classification of progress relative to national SDG 4 benchmarks

Category		Description
Fast progress		>75% probability that 2025 national benchmark will be achieved given the latest value (including countries which have already achieved the benchmark or are close to 100%)
Average progress		25–75% probability that 2025 national benchmark will be achieved given the latest value
Slow progress		<25% probability that 2025 national benchmarks will be achieved given the latest value
No progress		Negative progress
No benchmark		
No data for trend		
No data		

The review of benchmarks has suggested that countries' degrees of ambition vary, with some being more and others less ambitious. As the benchmarks are mixed in their degree of ambition, there is always a chance that some countries may be held to a higher standard than others. The **second approach**, therefore, monitors countries with respect to a common standard: progress towards achieving indicative feasible benchmarks. As mentioned earlier, using data between 2000 and 2015, these feasible benchmarks were estimated for each indicator based on the rate of progress of the fastest-improving top 25% of countries. Six categories are envisaged (**Table 6**). Four capture the speed of progress and two recognize the non-availability of data.

TABLE 6.
Country classification of progress relative to feasible benchmarks

Category		Description
Fast progress		>75% probability that 2025 feasible benchmark will be achieved given the latest value (including countries which have already achieved the benchmark or are close to 100%)
Average progress		25–75% probability that 2025 feasible benchmark will be achieved given the latest value
Slow progress		<25% probability that 2025 feasible benchmarks will be achieved given the latest value
No progress		Negative progress
No data for trend		
No data		

For both approaches, the estimation of a country's probability of achieving the benchmark depends on two factors. First, the speed of its own progress since 2015. Second, the historical progress rates of all countries between 2000 and 2015. A country's projected value for 2025 is calculated by applying its average rate of progress since 2015 for every year, from its latest value to 2025. Two values are projected to 2025: The first represents a value for which there is an up to 25% chance of exceeding; the second represents a value for which there is an up to 75% chance of exceeding. A country is categorized as having:

- Less than a 25% chance of achieving its benchmark if it exceeds the higher projection
- A 25% to 75% probability of achieving its benchmark if it lies between the lower and upper projections
- A 75% chance of achieving its benchmark if it falls below the lower projection.

The two projections for 2025 are calculated as follows:

- For the higher projection, the distance between:
  - The projection if the country experiences fast (75th percentile) progress in historical terms
  - The projection if it experiences average (50th percentile) progress in historical terms is added to the projected value for 2025.
- For the lower projection, the distance between:
  - The projection if the country experiences average (50th percentile) progress in historical terms
  - The projection if it experiences slow (25th percentile) progress in historical terms is subtracted from the projected value for 2025.

For some indicators, including early childhood education participation, out-of-school, completion, teacher qualification rates and some minimum learning proficiency rates, a clear pattern emerges between indicator value and progress rate. For these indicators, historical progress rates were calculated based on the country's starting point; for example the 75th percentile progress rate depends on the indicator starting value and is estimated using a quantile regression. For indicators without a clear association between indicator value and progress rate, such as the gender gap and some minimum proficiency indicators, progress rates are treated as unconditional; for example, the 75th percentile of progress rates would simply be the 75th percentile of all progress rates.

GENERAL CLASSIFICATION OF PROGRESS IN ALL BENCHMARK INDICATORS

Countries' progress towards each of the SDG 4 benchmarks has been categorized (**Table 7a**). This categorization has been possible in very few countries for the learning outcome indicators (4.1.1). For instance, in the case of minimum proficiency in mathematics at the end of primary education, there are no data for almost half the countries (47%) and insufficient data for another fifth of countries (19%) to establish a trend. Beyond those, 18% of countries have not set a benchmark. This leaves only about 16% of countries whose progress can be assessed. Of those, almost one in three regressed between 2015 and 2020. Overall, this suggests that a major effort is needed to collect data on learning outcomes in coming years.

In the case of the completion rate (4.1.2), data availability is higher, although still 30% of countries have no data

or insufficient data to establish a trend. While in primary completion, more countries have made fast progress and/or have achieved universal completion, in upper secondary completion, more countries have made slow rather than fast progress. As suggested earlier, even among countries with data, one in two has not set a national benchmark on the gender gap in upper secondary completion.

TABLE 7.
Country distribution of progress

a. Relative to 2025 national benchmarks (%)

	4.1.1 grades 2/3 reading	4.1.1 grades 2/3 mathematics	4.1.1 end of primary reading	4.1.1 end of primary mathematics	4.1.1 end of lower secondary reading	4.1.1 end of lower secondary mathematics	4.1.2 primary	4.1.2 lower secondary	4.1.2 upper secondary	4.1.2 upper secondary, gender gap	4.1.4 primary	4.1.4 lower secondary	4.1.4 upper secondary	4.2.2	4.c.1 pre-primary	4.c.1 primary	4.c.1 lower secondary	4.c.1 upper secondary
Fast progress	1	2	5	3	2	6	29	21	16	10	27	21	15	28	14	24	16	15
Average progress	1	0	2	4	1	2	2	4	5	1	0	0	1	7	1	2	1	2
Slow progress	1	1	3	4	2	6	15	22	31	2	3	2	7	15	6	5	3	4
No progress	2	1	2	5	15	8	1	0	3	6	5	8	10	15	13	11	5	5
No benchmark	8	8	16	18	11	12	25	25	17	51	27	27	28	20	11	12	7	7
No data for trend	19	19	21	19	10	12	8	8	8	8	33	37	34	6	22	19	24	24
No data	67	68	51	47	58	53	21	21	21	21	5	6	5	9	33	26	42	43
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

b. Relative to 2025 feasible benchmarks (%)

	4.1.1 grades 2/3 reading	4.1.1 grades 2/3 mathematics	4.1.1 end of primary reading	4.1.1 end of primary mathematics	4.1.1 end of lower secondary reading	4.1.1 end of lower secondary mathematics	4.1.2 primary	4.1.2 lower secondary	4.1.2 upper secondary	4.1.2 upper secondary, gender gap	4.1.4 primary	4.1.4 lower secondary	4.1.4 upper secondary	4.2.2	4.c.1 pre-primary	4.c.1 primary	4.c.1 lower secondary	4.c.1 upper secondary
Fast progress	5	4	15	4	1	5	48	36	25	39	50	41	26	38	24	34	21	19
Average progress	1	2	4	8	2	8	9	10	10	4	1	2	4	4	3	4	2	2
Slow progress	2	4	4	11	5	9	13	24	32	9	3	3	13	22	4	4	4	5
No progress	6	3	5	11	23	13	1	0	4	19	9	11	18	21	14	13	6	7
No data for trend	19	19	21	19	10	12	8	8	8	8	33	37	34	6	22	19	24	24
No data	67	68	51	47	58	53	21	21	21	21	5	6	5	9	33	26	42	43
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Data to establish trends for the out-of-school rate (4.1.4) are a particular challenge and affect more than one in three countries, although this issue could be addressed if modelled estimates of out-of-school rates were used for the analysis. Most countries with benchmarks and data appear to be making fast progress towards the national targets, although 3 in 10 of these countries appear to have regressed in the out-of-school rate of youth of upper secondary school age between 2015 and 2020.

The indicator on trained teachers (4.c.1) also suffers from low data availability, ranging from 55% in primary education to 33% in upper secondary education. Among countries with data and a benchmark at the primary education level, 56% of countries have a high probability of reaching their 2025 benchmark, although the share of primary trained teachers regressed between 2015 and 2020 in 27% of countries.

The distribution of countries by each category of progress towards the feasible benchmarks has also been analysed. As mentioned in Section 3, this analysis controls for the possibility that some countries have set too ambitious and some too unambitious benchmarks. It also allows an assessment of progress regardless of whether a country has or has not set a national target, since the feasible benchmark is calculated based on the historic speed with which countries have progress relative their starting points (**Table 7b**).

One finding from comparing progress towards national and feasible benchmarks, among countries with benchmarks and data, is that feasible benchmarks are less ambitious than national benchmarks: It is more likely for countries to appear to be moving fast towards their feasible benchmarks than towards their national benchmarks in the case of most indicators except learning outcome indicators. This finding reflects observations made in Section 3: It is mainly richer countries that have data and have set national benchmarks on learning, and these opted to be more conservative.

CLASSIFICATION OF COUNTRY PROGRESS IN TWO BENCHMARK INDICATORS

For the first time, this report looks at individual country progress, using the two benchmark indicators with the highest incidence of national target setting.

In the case of the upper secondary completion rate (**Table 8a**), more countries made slow than fast progress between 2015 and 2020. Among low-income countries, only one, Rwanda, achieved fast progress; most either have insufficient data or no national target. Slow progress also characterizes the performance of most lower-middle-income countries, although seven countries stand out for fast progress: Bangladesh, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Egypt, Ghana, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal and the Republic of Moldova. By contrast, the trajectories of upper-middle- and high-income countries are more balanced between fast and slow progress. Data were unavailable for a large number of high-income countries, including Gulf States, Small Island Developing States and countries with low populations.

In the case of the participation rate in organized learning one year before primary, high-income countries are more likely to have achieved fast progress and/or to have achieved a rate of at least 95%. By contrast, lower-middle-income countries have achieved slower progress and are less likely to achieve their national target by 2025. Nevertheless, there are 15 low- and lower-middle-income countries that are on track to achieve their benchmarks: Burkina Faso, Burundi, Bhutan, Cambodia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, India, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Republic of Moldova, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Vanuatu and Viet Nam (**Table 8b**).

TABLE 8.
Classification of country progress relative to national 2025 benchmark

a. Upper secondary completion rate

	Low income	Lower middle income	Upper middle income	High income
Fast progress	Rwanda	Bangladesh; Bolivia, P. S.; Egypt; Ghana; Kyrgyzstan; Nepal; Republic of Moldova	Albania; Armenia; Brazil; China; Costa Rica; Indonesia; Jamaica; Kazakhstan; Mexico; Russian Federation; Samoa; Serbia; Tonga	Belgium; Croatia; Greece; Japan; Mauritius; Norway; Qatar; Republic of Korea; Slovakia; Slovenia; Sweden; Trinidad and Tobago
Average progress		Honduras; Lesotho; Mauritania	Botswana; Fiji; Maldives	Estonia; Ireland; Italy; Switzerland
Slow progress	Gambia; Guinea; Madagascar; Malawi; Mozambique; Niger; Sudan; Tajikistan; Togo; Uganda	Algeria; Angola; Benin; Cambodia; Cameroon; Comoros; Congo; Côte d'Ivoire; Eswatini; India; Kenya; Kiribati; Myanmar; Nigeria; Pakistan; Palestine; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Senegal; Timor-Leste; Viet Nam; Zambia	Argentina; Belize; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Bulgaria; Georgia; Guatemala; Guyana; Iraq; Namibia; South Africa; Suriname; Thailand; Tuvalu	Australia; Austria; Barbados; Cyprus; Czechia; Denmark; Finland; Germany; Hungary; Iceland; Latvia; Luxembourg; Malta ; Netherlands; Poland; Portugal; Spain; United States; Uruguay
No progress	Sierra Leone	El Salvador	Colombia; Cuba; Jordan	Lithuania
No benchmark	Afghanistan; Burundi; Central African Republic; Chad; D.R. Congo; Ethiopia; Guinea-Bissau; Haiti; Liberia; Mali; South Sudan	Mongolia; Sao Tome and Principe; Tunisia; Ukraine; United Republic of Tanzania; Zimbabwe	Belarus; Dominican Republic; Ecuador; Gabon; Iran, Islamic Republic of; Montenegro; North Macedonia; Paraguay; Peru; Saint Lucia; Türkiye; Turkmenistan	Canada; Chile; France; Israel; Panama; Romania; United Kingdom
No data for trend	Burkina Faso; Somalia; Syrian Arab Republic; Yemen	Bhutan; Djibouti; Lao PDR; Morocco; Nicaragua; Sri Lanka; Uzbekistan; Vanuatu	Azerbaijan; Equatorial Guinea; Malaysia; Venezuela, B. R.	Turks and Caicos Islands
No data	Eritrea	Cabo Verde; Micronesia, F. S.; Solomon Islands	Dominica; Grenada; Lebanon; Libya; Marshall Islands; Montserrat; Niue; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Tokelau	Andorra; Anguilla; Antigua and Barbuda; Aruba; Bahamas; Bahrain; Bermuda; British Virgin Islands; Brunei Darussalam; Cayman Islands, Cook Islands; Curaçao; Hong Kong, China; Kuwait; Liechtenstein; Macao, China; Monaco; Nauru; New Zealand; Oman; Palau; Saint Kitts and Nevis; San Marino; Saudi Arabia; Seychelles; Singapore; Sint Maarten; United Arab Emirates

b. Participation rate in organized learning one year before primary

	Low income	Lower middle income	Upper middle income	High income
Fast progress	Burkina Faso; Burundi; Guinea; Rwanda; Sierra Leone	Bhutan; Cambodia; Côte d'Ivoire; Ghana; India; Kyrgyzstan; Mongolia; Republic of Moldova; Vanuatu; Viet Nam	Argentina; Colombia; Costa Rica; Cuba; Dominica; Guyana; Indonesia; Mexico; Saint Lucia; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Thailand; Türkiye	Anguilla; Austria; Bermuda; British Virgin Islands; Cayman Islands; Cyprus; Czechia; Denmark; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Hong Kong, China; Iceland; Japan; Latvia; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Macao, China; Malta; Nauru; Netherlands; Norway; Poland; Portugal; Saint Kitts and Nevis; San Marino; Saudi Arabia; Seychelles; Spain; Sweden; Turks and Caicos Islands
Average progress		Angola; Bolivia, P. S.; Congo; Lao PDR	Bosnia and Herzegovina; Brazil; Fiji; Jordan; Maldives; Niue; Russian Federation; Venezuela, B. R.	Estonia; United States
Slow progress	Ethiopia; Gambia	Bangladesh; Cabo Verde; Cameroon; Djibouti; Egypt; El Salvador; Honduras; Morocco; Pakistan; Palestine; Papua New Guinea; Sao Tome and Principe; Senegal; Timor-Leste; United Republic of Tanzania; Uzbekistan	Albania; Malaysia; Montenegro; Namibia; Samoa; Serbia; South Africa; Suriname	Bahamas; Croatia; Oman; Qatar; Slovakia; Slovenia
No progress	Eritrea; Liberia; Madagascar; Syrian Arab Republic	Algeria; Comoros; Micronesia, F. S.; Nepal; Philippines; Solomon Islands	Armenia; Belize; Botswana; Bulgaria; Grenada; Guatemala; Kazakhstan; Marshall Islands; Montserrat; Tuvalu	Antigua and Barbuda; Bahrain; Barbados; Cook Islands; Italy; Kuwait; Mauritius; Palau; Panama; Republic of Korea; Trinidad and Tobago
No benchmark	Central African Republic; Chad; Mali; Niger; South Sudan; Tajikistan; Togo; Yemen	Benin; Lesotho; Myanmar; Ukraine; Zimbabwe	Azerbaijan; Belarus; Dominican Republic; Ecuador; Equatorial Guinea; Iran, Islamic Republic of; North Macedonia; Paraguay; Peru; Tokelau	Aruba; Australia; Belgium; Brunei Darussalam; Canada; Chile; Hungary; Ireland; Israel; Liechtenstein; New Zealand; Romania; Singapore; Sint Maarten; Switzerland; United Arab Emirates; United Kingdom; Uruguay
No data for trend	Democratic Republic of the Congo; Guinea-Bissau; Sudan; Uganda	Kenya; Kiribati; Nicaragua; Tunisia	Georgia; Iraq; Jamaica; Tonga	Curaçao
No data	Afghanistan; Haiti; Malawi; Mozambique; Somalia	Eswatini; Mauritania; Nigeria; Sri Lanka; Zambia	China; Gabon; Lebanon; Libya; Turkmenistan	Andorra; Monaco

CLASSIFICATION OF COUNTRY LEVELS OF PUBLIC EXPENDITURE

For the two public expenditure indicators, evaluation shows progress differs for a number of reasons. First, all countries are bound by the benchmark values to which they committed in 2015 at the Education 2030 Framework for Action. Second, unlike the trajectories of other benchmark indicators, progress towards meeting the benchmarks does not follow a clear increasing trajectory, not least given that the benchmarks are minimum values.

The original framing of these benchmarks in the Education 2030 Framework for Action is:

- Allocating at least 4% to 6% of gross domestic product (GDP) to education; and/or
- Allocating at least 15% to 20% of public expenditure to education.

This framework has two points of contention. First, it sets two thresholds per indicator (e.g. 'at least 4% to 6%'), which is a contradiction in terms. Second, it ambiguously uses 'and/or' when one of the two would have been clearer. To eliminate ambiguity, the lowest threshold is being taken for each indicator (i.e. 4% of GDP and 15% of total public expenditure), and 'or' is being preferred over 'and' in recognition of the fact that richer countries tend to meet the GDP benchmark and poor countries tend to meet the total public expenditure benchmark. This is because of their respective differences in domestic revenue mobilization (rich countries raise much more taxes) and in demographic structures (children are a larger percentage of the population in poor countries, making education a bigger budget priority).

Countries have therefore been classified into four categories according to whether they meet both benchmarks, one of the two benchmarks or neither benchmark (**Table 9**).

TABLE 9.
Classification of country levels relative to public expenditure benchmarks

Category		Description
Both benchmarks		Achieved the two expenditure indicator benchmarks
One benchmark		Achieved one of the two expenditure indicator benchmarks
No benchmark		Achieved neither of the two expenditure indicator benchmarks
No data		

In summary, 61 countries failed to meet both benchmarks in 2020. Among 339 observations in 2015–20, these countries were below both benchmarks in 82% of cases. Further, 34 of these 61 countries were below both benchmarks in every year between 2015 and 2020. Overall, 29% of all countries, or 33% of countries with data, failed to meet both benchmarks. Among countries with data, 64% of low-income countries relative to 29% of middle- and high-income countries fell below both benchmarks. Among countries that met one of the two benchmarks, no low-income country fell below 15% of total public expenditure and no high-income country fell below 4% of GDP. In total, 38% of middle-income countries met both benchmarks, compared with 27% of low-income and 13% of high-income countries. Finally, 24% of low-income countries had no data, compared with 15% of middle-income and 6% of high-income countries (**Table 10 and Table 11**).

TABLE 10.
Country distribution of level relative to public expenditure benchmarks, 2020

a. Number of countries by category and country income group

As share of GDP	Below 4%	Below 4%	Above 4%	Above 4%		
Total public expenditure	Below 15%	Above 15%	Below 15%	Above 15%	No data	Total
Low income	14	2	0	6	7	29
Lower middle income	14	6	8	19	3	50
Upper middle income	12	7	11	16	11	57
High income	21	0	38	9	4	72
All	**61**	**15**	**57**	**50**	**25**	**208**

b. As a share of countries (%)

GDP	Below 4%	Below 4%	Above 4%	Above 4%		
Total public expenditure	Below 15%	Above 15%	Below 15%	Above 15%	No data	Total
Low income	48	7	0	21	24	100
Lower middle income	28	12	16	38	6	100
Upper middle income	21	12	19	28	19	100
High income	29	0	53	13	6	100
All	**29**	**7**	**27**	**24**	**12**	**100**

c. As a share of countries with data (%)

GDP	Below 4%	Below 4%	Above 4%	Above 4%	
Total public expenditure	Below 15%	Above 15%	Below 15%	Above 15%	Total
Low income	64	9	0	27	100
Lower middle income	30	13	17	40	100
Upper middle income	26	15	24	35	100
High income	31	0	56	13	100
All	**33**	**8**	**31**	**27**	**100**

TABLE 11.
Country classification of progress relative to public expenditure benchmarks, 2020

Public education expenditure		Below 4% of GDP	Above 4% of GDP
Above 15% of total public expenditure	Low income	Madagascar; Togo	Burkina Faso; Burundi; Ethiopia; Mozambique; Sierra Leone; Tajikistan
	Lower middle income	Benin; Cambodia; Côte d'Ivoire; Ghana; Philippines; Zimbabwe	Algeria; Bhutan; Cabo Verde; Congo; Eswatini; Honduras; India; Kenya; Kiribati; Kyrgyzstan; Micronesia, F. S.; Nepal; Nicaragua; Palestine; Republic of Moldova; Sao Tome and Principe; Senegal; Solomon Islands; Uzbekistan
	Upper middle income	Gabon; Guatemala; Indonesia; Iran, Islamic Republic of; Malaysia; Thailand; Turkmenistan	Belize; Botswana; Brazil; Costa Rica; Dominican Republic; Fiji; Guyana; Jamaica; Kazakhstan; Marshall Islands; Mexico; Namibia; Peru; Samoa; South Africa; Tonga
	High income		Chile; Curaçao; Hong Kong, China; Iceland; Israel; Mauritius; Palau; Saudi Arabia; Uruguay
Below 15% of total public expenditure	Low income	Afghanistan; Central African Republic; Chad; Gambia; Guinea; Guinea-Bissau; Haiti; Liberia; Malawi; Mali; Niger; Rwanda; Somalia; Uganda	
	Lower middle income	Angola; Bangladesh; Cameroon; Djibouti; Egypt; Lao PDR; Mauritania; Myanmar; Pakistan; Papua New Guinea; Sri Lanka; United Republic of Tanzania; Vanuatu; Zambia	Bolivia, P. S.; El Salvador; Lesotho; Mongolia; Morocco; Timor-Leste; Ukraine; Viet Nam
	Upper middle income	Albania; Armenia; China; Georgia; Grenada; Jordan; Lebanon; Paraguay; Russian Federation; Serbia; Saint Lucia; Türkiye	Argentina; Azerbaijan; Belarus; Bulgaria; Colombia; Dominica; Ecuador; Maldives; Montserrat; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Suriname
	High income	Andorra; Antigua and Barbuda; Bahamas; Bahrain; Barbados; Bermuda; British Virgin Islands; Cayman Islands; Cook Islands; Ireland; Japan; Lithuania; Monaco; Panama; Qatar; Romania; San Marino; Singapore; Saint Kitts and Nevis; Turks and Caicos Islands; United Arab Emirates	Anguilla; Australia; Austria; Belgium; Canada; Croatia; Cyprus; Czechia; Denmark; Estonia; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Hungary; Italy; Kuwait; Latvia; Luxembourg; Macao, China; Malta; Nauru; Netherlands; New Zealand; Norway; Oman; Poland; Portugal; Republic of Korea; Seychelles; Slovakia; Slovenia; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; Trinidad and Tobago; United Kingdom; United States
No data	Low income	DPR Korea; D. R. Congo; Eritrea; South Sudan; Sudan; Syrian Arab Republic; Yemen	
	Lower middle income	Comoros; Nigeria; Tunisia	
	Upper middle income	Bosnia and Herzegovina; Cuba; Equatorial Guinea; Iraq; Libya; Montenegro; Niue; North Macedonia; Tokelau; Tuvalu; Venezuela, B. R.	
	High income	Aruba; Brunei Darussalam; Liechtenstein; Sint Maarten	

Early childhood education participation rate: Policies and progress

The purpose of the national SDG 4 benchmarking process is not just to identify whether countries progress towards the targets they have set but also to identify lessons from countries' distinct trajectories and how these relate to policies. This annual report aims to review one benchmark indicator each edition to highlight how observed progress relates to policies. For this first edition, the focus indicator is the early childhood education participation rate (global indicator 4.2.2) and the review focuses on three sets of policies: the extent to which countries have, first, adopted free and compulsory pre-primary education legislation; second, adopted policies that regulate pre-primary education provision; and third, invested in pre-primary education.

FREE AND COMPULSORY PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION LEGISLATION

The number of years of (a) free and (b) compulsory pre-primary education guaranteed in legal frameworks (thematic indicator 4.2.5) should be related to the progress countries make towards increasing early childhood education participation. This indicator has changed only slowly over the years. The share of countries which offer no years of free pre-primary education declined from 58% in 2010 to 49% in 2021 (**Figure 8a**), while the corresponding share of countries with no compulsory years of pre-primary education declined from 84% to 75% in the same period (**Figure 8b**). In 2020, 91 out of 188 countries guaranteed zero years of free and compulsory pre-primary education in their legislation (**Table 12**).

FIGURE 8:
Countries by years of pre-primary education guaranteed in legislation, 2010–21

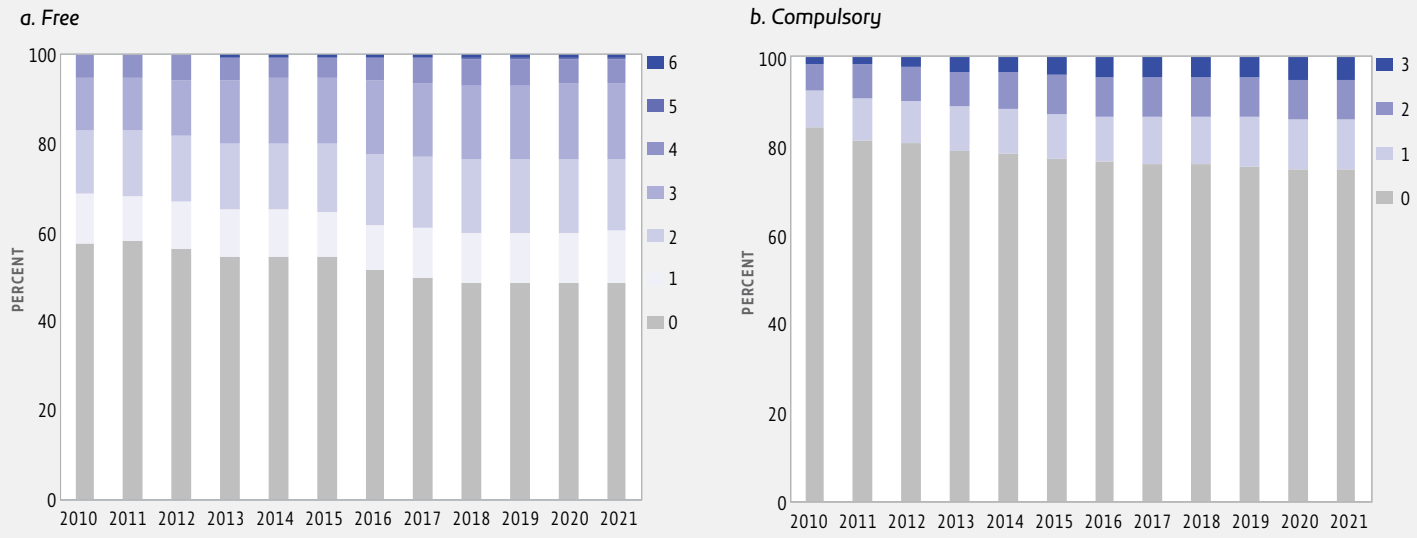


TABLE 12.
Distribution of countries by number of years of free and compulsory pre-primary education guaranteed in legislation, 2020

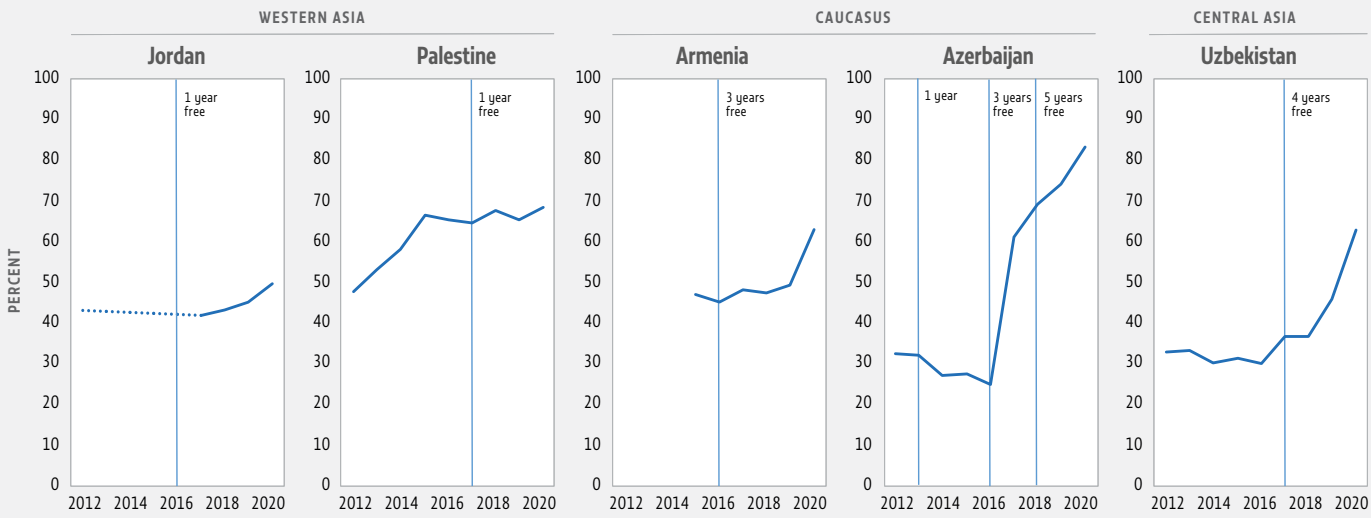
Free (years)	Compulsory (years) 0	1	2	3
0	91	2	1	
1	11	9		
2	16	3	11	
3	17	4	2	9
4	7	2	1	
5		1		
6			1	

TABLE 13.
Countries which increased the number of years of free and compulsory pre-primary education guaranteed in legislation, 2015–20

		Free	Compulsory
Central and Southern Asia	Tajikistan	+4	0
	Uzbekistan	+4	0
Eastern and South-eastern Asia	Mongolia	+4	0
	Thailand	+3	0
Europe and Northern America	Finland	0	+1
	France	0	+3
	Lithuania	+1	+1
	Portugal	+1	0
	Sweden	0	+1
Northern Africa and Western Asia	Armenia	+3	0
	Azerbaijan	+5	0
	Israel	+2	+2
	Jordan	+1	0
	Lebanon	+3	0
	Libya	+2	0
	Palestine	+1	0

Since 2015, only 16 countries have seen changes in the number of years of free and/or compulsory pre-primary education provided (**Table 13**). Of those, there are no data for Libya and Lebanon. Among countries where data are available, six countries had a participation rate below 90%: two in Western Asia (Jordan and Palestine); two in the Caucasus (Armenia and Azerbaijan); and two in Central Asia (Tajikistan and Uzbekistan). There are no data after 2017 for Tajikistan, a country with one of the lowest participation rates in the world (13% in 2017). Among the other five countries, the introduction of one year of free education in Jordan and Palestine has had a weak effect. However, the introduction of three years of free education in Armenia, four years in Uzbekistan and three – and later five – years in Azerbaijan is associated with a large increase in participation rates (**Figure 9**).

FIGURE 9:
Participation in organized learning one year before primary, countries which have recently guaranteed free early childhood education in legislation, 2012–20



Source: UIS database.

Countries with at least one year of compulsory pre-primary education have higher average baseline and benchmark values (**Table 14**).

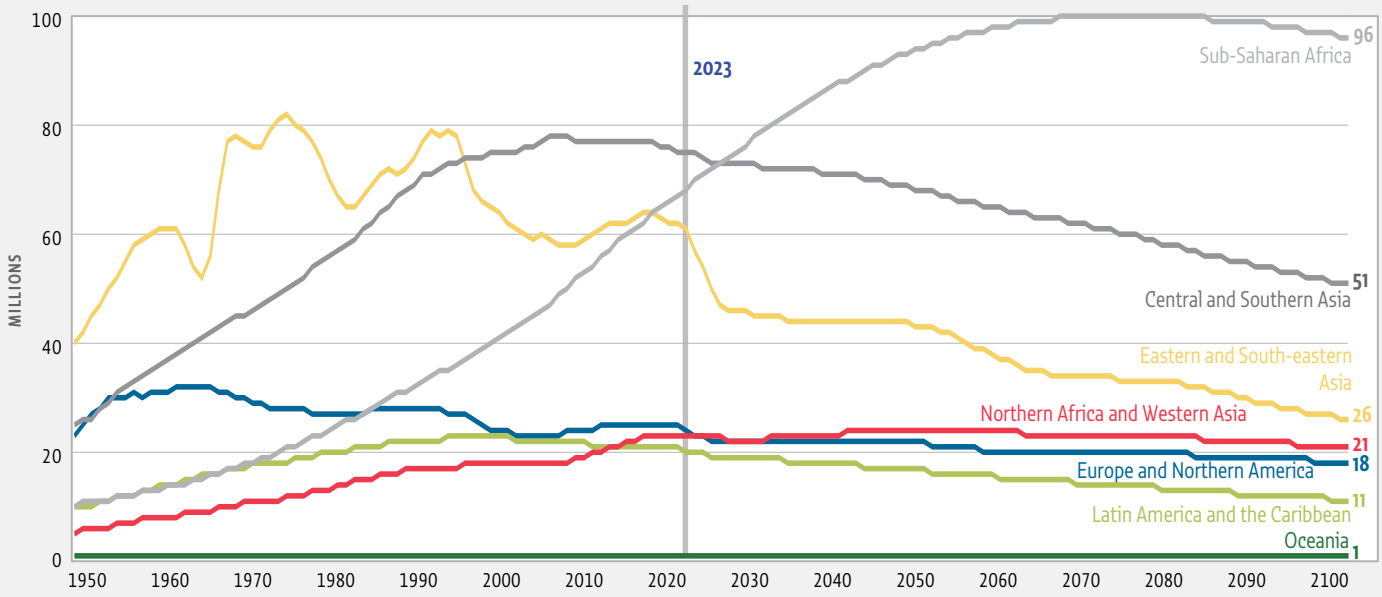
TABLE 14.
Average baseline and 2030 benchmark, by compulsory pre-primary education status and country income group

	No compulsory pre-primary education		At least one year of compulsory pre-primary education	
	2015	2030 benchmark	2015	2030 benchmark
Low income	44	64	–	–
Lower middle income	61	84	82	97
Upper middle income	82	91	88	93
High income	89	95	96	98

The continuing absence of free and compulsory pre-primary education legislation sits at odds with the commitments several countries have made by setting national benchmarks for 2025 and 2030. In total, there are 117 countries, mostly in Africa and Asia, which have a benchmark and yet have no compulsory pre-primary education legislation. For example, Kenya, Namibia and the United Republic of Tanzania have set a target of over 80% by 2025, and India and Pakistan a target of 95%, even though none of these countries make pre-primary education compulsory.

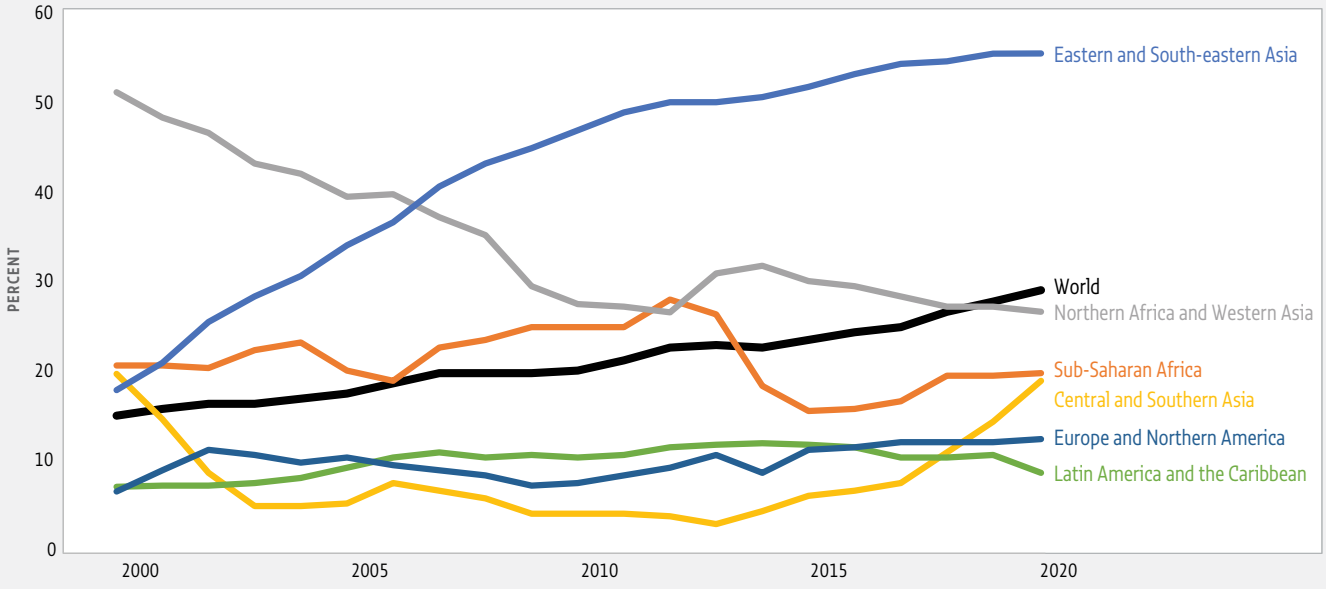
Low-income and, more generally, sub-Saharan African countries are not only those more likely than other countries to lack compulsory education legislation and national benchmarks related to early childhood education participation. Sub-Saharan Africa is also the region that is facing the biggest challenge with respect to both its starting point (48% in 2020, relative to a global average of 75%) and its population prospects. In the beginning of 2023, there were 70 million 4- to 5-year-olds in sub-Saharan Africa; by 2026, it is projected that sub-Saharan Africa will surpass Central and Southern Asia as the region with the largest cohort. This cohort will grow by 1 million each year on average in the next 20 years. Population growth will slow down but the cohort will still reach 100 million in 2069 and will slightly decline afterwards, although sub-Saharan Africa's share of the global cohort will continue to grow, reaching 43% by the end of the century (**Figure 10**).

FIGURE 10:
Population of 4- to 5-year-olds by region, 1950–2100, millions



Source: United Nations Population Division.

FIGURE 11:
Share of private institutions in pre-primary education enrolment, 2000–20



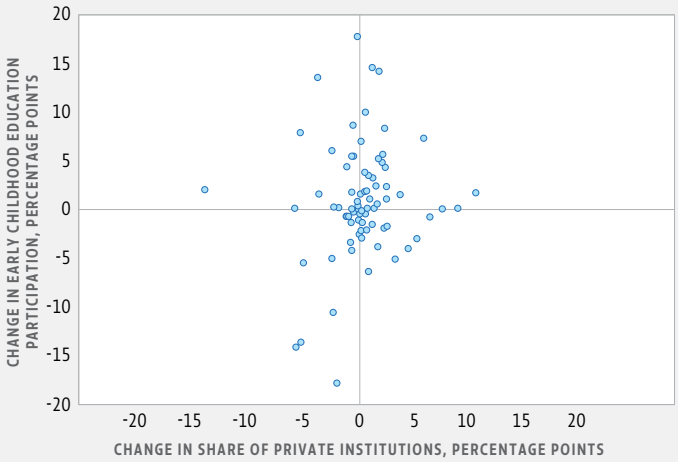
Source: UIS database.

REGULATION OF PRIVATE PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION PROVISION

Pre-primary education is the level with the highest share of private institutions in total enrolment. It increased by 10 percentage points (from 28% to 38%) in 2000–20, but the annual growth rate has more than doubled, from 0.35 percentage points in 2000–05 to 0.74 percentage points in 2015–20 (**Figure 11**). Global growth has been driven by two regions: Eastern and South-eastern Asia, and Central and Southern Asia. In Eastern and South-eastern Asia, the share of private institutions expanded rapidly from 30% in 2000 to 52% in 2012 and has continued rising since, albeit far more slowly, reaching 56% in 2020. In Central and Southern Asia, the share has remained constant between 2000 and 2020 at 31%, but this hides a rapid decline in 2000–04 to 21%, matched by a rapid increase from 23% to 31% in 2017–20. In contrast, Northern Africa and Western Asia witnessed a decline in the share of private institutions from 53% in 2000 to 37% in 2010, where it remained through to the end of the decade. In 2020, there were more children enrolled in private than in public institutions in one-third of countries.

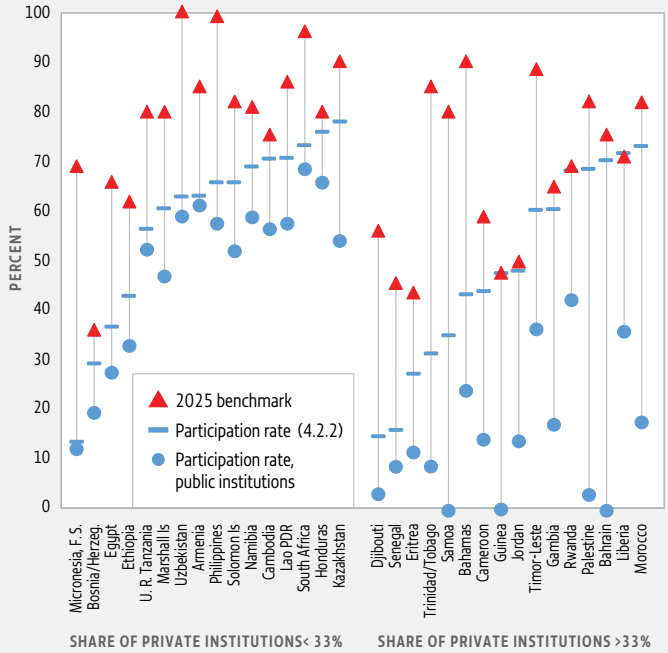
Overall, while different trajectories are observed, the early childhood education participation rate increased on average relatively more where the share of private institutions in pre-primary education enrolment increased more in 2016–20 (**Figure 12**). Important policy questions arise for countries whose governments have set ambitious benchmarks, but where participation rates in organized learning one year before primary in public institutions remains low. For instance, in Samoa, the participation rate is 35% but all enrolment is in private institutions and the 2025 benchmark is 80%. In Trinidad and Tobago, the participation rate is 31% with almost three-quarters of enrolments in private institution, but the 2025 benchmark is 85%. Policy tools are very different if the target is expected to be achieved through private institutions rather than through public institutions (**Figure 13**).

FIGURE 12:
Change in participation rate in organized learning one year before primary and in share of private institutions in pre-primary education enrolment, 2016–20



Source: Analysis using the UIS database.

FIGURE 13:
Participation rate in organized learning one year before primary (total and in public institutions only), selected countries, 2020 level and 2025 benchmark



Note: Selected countries had participation rates up to 80% in 2020.

Source: Analysis using the UIS database.

National profiles of laws and policies on regulation of private provision in pre-primary education for 211 education systems were developed as part of the 2021/2 GEM Report on non-state actors. The vast majority of governments have regulations related to entry and exit. For instance, 97% of countries regulate approval, licensing and establishment, while 90% include closure as a potential sanction. Fewer countries have regulations and policies that relate to the impact of private providers on quality and equity in pre-primary education. For example, 26% of countries support specific vulnerable populations' tuition fee payments and 15% have a regulation which prohibits non-state providers from operating for profit (**Figure 14**).

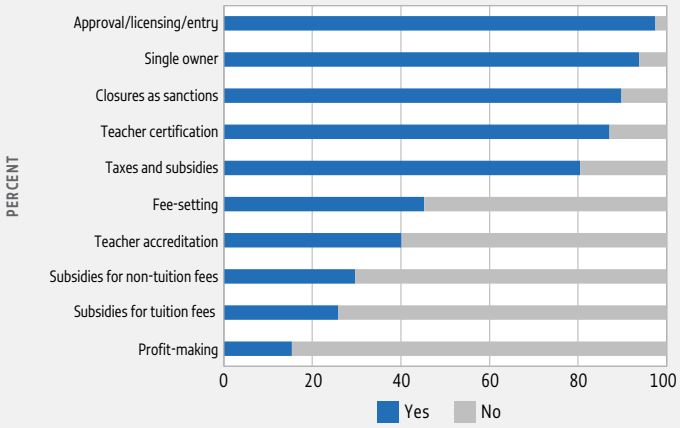
Countries with specific regulations have slightly higher early childhood education participation rates on average. For instance, in countries where tuition fees for specific population groups are subsidized, the percentage of children who participate in organized learning one year before entry to primary school is higher by 13 percentage points, whereas countries with fee-setting regulations have a higher participation rate by 7 percentage points (**Figure 15**).

PUBLIC EXPENDITURE IN PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

Evidence on public expenditure in pre-primary education is relatively limited. About 80 countries reported data in 2018–20. On average, these governments spend 0.43% of GDP on pre-primary education. Four countries spend above 1% of GDP: Belarus, Ecuador, the Republic of Moldova and Sweden. But such data are not straightforward to interpret, given the high share of enrolment in private institutions in many countries: The amount of spending bears no relation to overall enrolment (**Figure 16a**) but there is a clear positive association with enrolment levels in public institutions (**Figure 16b**). Doubling spending from 0.25 to 0.50 of GDP is associated with a tripling of the participation rate in public institutions from 20% to 60% on average.

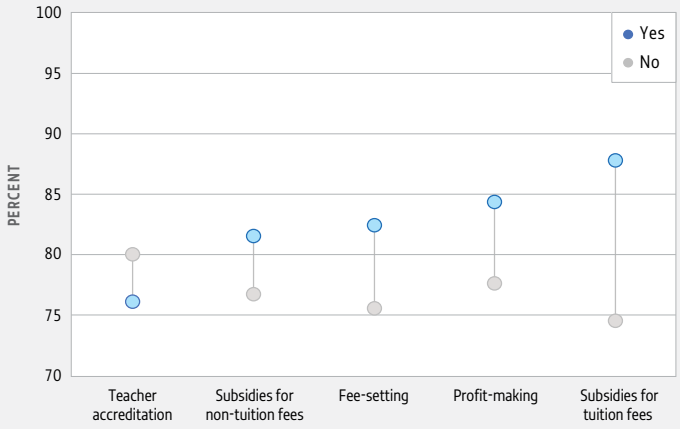
There are even fewer observations of expenditure trends. An analysis of changes over 2015–20 does not suggest that an increase in public expenditure is linked to an increase in enrolment. However, there is more of a positive association in countries with a lower share of private institutions in total enrolment (**Figure 17a**) than in countries with a higher share of private institutions in total enrolment (**Figure 17b**).

FIGURE 14:
Share of countries with specific regulations for private pre-primary education providers, 2020



Source: GEM Report analysis using the PEER database.

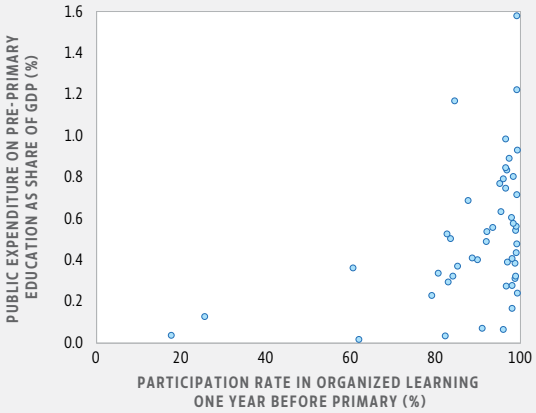
FIGURE 15:
Participation rate in organized learning one year before primary, existence of private provider regulations, 2020



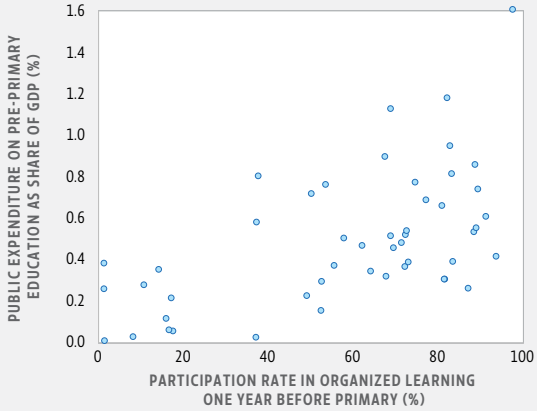
Source: Analysis using the UIS database.

FIGURE 16:
Public expenditure in pre-primary education as a share of GDP and participation rate in organized learning one year before primary, 2020 or latest year

a. Total enrolment



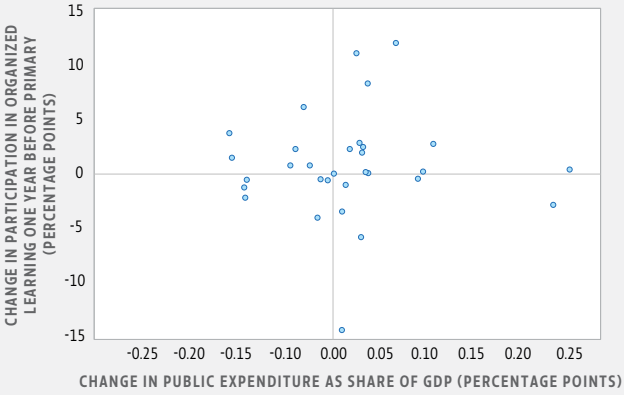
b. Enrolment in public institutions



Source: Analysis using the UIS database.

FIGURE 17:
Change in public expenditure in pre-primary education as a share of GDP and change in participation rate in organized learning one year before primary, 2015–20

a. Countries where the share of private institutions is less than 50%



b. Countries where the share of private institutions is more than 50%

Conclusion

This report has provided the first set of results on progress towards the national SDG 4 benchmarks. It has been exploratory, applying a methodology first presented in 2022 to selected benchmark indicators to invite countries and the international education community to reflect on the approach. The assessment of progress covers the period 2015–20, just before the onset of COVID-19, which disrupted not only education development but also data collection systems.

Three key messages emerge from this report. First, the compilation of the database of benchmarks has highlighted discrepancies between internationally and nationally recognized baselines, which are the result of different data sources used or even different understandings of indicator definitions. While the best efforts have been made to minimize discrepancies, more communication is needed to resolve them.

Second, while three in four countries have submitted benchmarks for at least some of the indicators and national targets have been extracted from additional countries based on their national sector plans and other documents, there are still many countries that do not have national targets for 2025 and 2030. Some of these gaps are explained by the lower relevance of some benchmarks to some countries (for instance, many high-income countries are very close to the maximum values) but in many cases, countries need to continue their effort to develop their national targets, notably on gender gap and learning outcome indicators.

Third, analysis shows that only a minority of countries were making enough progress prior to the onset of COVID-19 to achieve their set targets. For instance, 29% of countries in the upper secondary completion rate and 43% in the participation rate in organized learning one year before primary were on course to achieve their 2025 benchmark with high probability, and these were mostly richer countries, especially in the case of the early childhood indicator. One in three countries did not reach either of their two public expenditure benchmarks.

Policies on spending as well as in other areas, such as compulsory education legislation and equity-oriented regulation of private provision, have been shown to be associated with higher levels of the benchmark indicator on participation in organized learning one year before primary. Inevitably, the pandemic will not have improved countries' prospects in achieving their benchmarks. This report is meant to encourage countries not only to set more targets but also to reflect on better targets and their links to policy. It points at countries at different income levels that have made fast enough progress to bring their 2025 national targets within reach. These countries have important experiences to share with their peers about the steps they have taken to be in that position.

ANNEX A: BENCHMARK SUBMISSION STATUS

Country	Status	Early childhood participation rate	Out-of-school rate, primary	Out-of-school rate, lower secondary	Out-of-school rate, upper secondary	Completion rate, primary	Completion rate, lower secondary	Completion rate, upper secondary	Gender gap in upper secondary completion	Learning: reading, grades 2/3	Learning: reading, end of primary	Learning: reading, end of lower secondary	Learning: mathematics, grades 2/3	Learning: mathematics, end of primary	Learning: mathematics, end of lower secondary	Trained teachers, pre-primary	Trained teachers, primary	Trained teachers, lower secondary	Trained teachers, upper secondary	Public expenditure, % GDP	Public expenditure, % total expenditure	Benchmarks
Sub-Saharan Africa		**65**	**65**	**67**	**63**	**75**	**77**	**67**	**31**	**50**	**50**	**17**	**50**	**48**	**19**	**58**	**67**	**58**	**60**	**100**	**100**	**59**
Angola	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	14
Benin	National plans with targets	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5
Botswana	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Burkina Faso	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	14
Burundi	Submitted	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
Cabo Verde	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	13
Cameroon	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	17
Central African Republic	National plans with targets	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Chad	National plans with targets	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	4
Comoros	Submitted	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	8
Congo	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	18
Côte d'Ivoire	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	15
D. R. Congo	National plans with targets	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
Djibouti	National plans with targets	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
Equat. Guinea	No national plans	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Eritrea	National plans with targets	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
Eswatini	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	17
Ethiopia	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	18
Gabon	No national plans	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Gambia	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	18
Ghana	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	18
Guinea	Submitted	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	14
Guinea-Bissau	National plans with targets	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3
Kenya	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	17
Lesotho	National plans with targets	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5
Liberia	National plans with targets	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	7
Madagascar	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	17
Malawi	Submitted	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	12
Mali	National plans with targets	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	4
Mauritania	Submitted	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	12
Mauritius	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	16

Country	Status	Early childhood participation rate	Out-of-school rate, primary	Out-of-school rate, lower secondary	Out-of-school rate, upper secondary	Completion rate, primary	Completion rate, lower secondary	Completion rate, upper secondary	Gender gap in upper secondary completion	Learning: reading, grades 2/3	Learning: reading, end of primary	Learning: reading, end of lower secondary	Learning: mathematics, grades 2/3	Learning: mathematics, end of primary	Learning: mathematics, end of lower secondary	Trained teachers, pre-primary	Trained teachers, primary	Trained teachers, lower secondary	Trained teachers, upper secondary	Public expenditure, % GDP	Public expenditure, % total expenditure	Benchmarks
Mozambique	Submitted	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	12
Namibia	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	14
Niger	Submitted	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	13
Nigeria	Submitted	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	13
Rwanda	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Sao Tome and Principe	National plans with targets	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
Senegal	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Seychelles	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Sierra Leone	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	18
Somalia	Submitted	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	8
South Africa	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	16
South Sudan	National plans with targets	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	6
Togo	Submitted	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	15
Uganda	Submitted	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	16
United Republic of Tanzania	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	11
Zambia	National plans with targets	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	12
Zimbabwe	National plans with targets	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	7
Northern Africa and Western Asia		**75**	**63**	**63**	**63**	**63**	**63**	**63**	**33**	**42**	**58**	**54**	**33**	**58**	**63**	**71**	**71**	**67**	**71**	**100**	**100**	**64**
Algeria	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Armenia	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Azerbaijan	No national plans	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Bahrain	Submitted	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
Cyprus	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Egypt	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Georgia	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Iraq	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	13
Israel	No national plans	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Jordan	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	18
Kuwait	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	18
Lebanon	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	16
Libya	No national plans	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Morocco	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	18
Oman	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	17

Country	Status	Early childhood participation rate	Out-of-school rate, primary	Out-of-school rate, lower secondary	Out-of-school rate, upper secondary	Completion rate, primary	Completion rate, lower secondary	Completion rate, upper secondary	Gender gap in upper secondary completion	Learning: reading, grades 2/3	Learning: reading, end of primary	Learning: reading, end of lower secondary	Learning: mathematics, grades 2/3	Learning: mathematics, end of primary	Learning: mathematics, end of lower secondary	Trained teachers, pre-primary	Trained teachers, primary	Trained teachers, lower secondary	Trained teachers, upper secondary	Public expenditure, % GDP	Public expenditure, % total expenditure	Benchmarks
Palestine	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	18
Qatar	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Saudi Arabia	Submitted	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
Sudan	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	15
Syrian Arab Republic.	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Tunisia	National plans without targets	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Türkiye	National plans with targets	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3
United Arab Emirates	No national plans	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Yemen	National plans with targets	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Central and Southern Asia		**64**	**64**	**64**	**57**	**79**	**71**	**79**	**21**	**50**	**57**	**50**	**50**	**57**	**57**	**71**	**71**	**71**	**71**	**100**	**100**	**65**
Afghanistan	National plans with targets	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5
Bangladesh	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Bhutan	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	17
India	Submitted	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	17
Iran, Islamic Republic of	No national plans	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Kazakhstan	Submitted	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	16
Kyrgyzstan	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Maldives	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	17
Nepal	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Pakistan	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	17
Sri Lanka	Submitted	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	15
Tajikistan	National plans with targets	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3
Turkmenistan	No national plans	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Uzbekistan	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	13
Eastern and South-eastern Asia		**78**	**78**	**78**	**67**	**72**	**72**	**67**	**33**	**39**	**39**	**61**	**44**	**50**	**67**	**72**	**72**	**72**	**72**	**100**	**100**	**67**
Brunei Darussalam	Submitted	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Cambodia	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
China	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	18
China, Hong Kong	Submitted	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
China, Macao	Submitted	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	12
DPR Korea	National plans without targets	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Indonesia	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	16
Japan	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	11

Country	Status	Early childhood participation rate	Out-of-school rate, primary	Out-of-school rate, lower secondary	Out-of-school rate, upper secondary	Completion rate, primary	Completion rate, lower secondary	Completion rate, upper secondary	Gender gap in upper secondary completion	Learning: reading, grades 2/3	Learning: reading, end of primary	Learning: reading, end of lower secondary	Learning: mathematics, grades 2/3	Learning: mathematics, end of primary	Learning: mathematics, end of lower secondary	Trained teachers, pre-primary	Trained teachers, primary	Trained teachers, lower secondary	Trained teachers, upper secondary	Public expenditure, % GDP	Public expenditure, % total expenditure	Benchmarks
Lao PDR	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Malaysia	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	18
Mongolia	Submitted	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	17
Myanmar	National plans with targets	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	8
Philippines	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	13
Republic of Korea	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	17
Singapore	National plans without targets	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Thailand	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	18
Timor-Leste	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Viet Nam	Submitted	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	16
Oceania		**82**	**65**	**65**	**65**	**65**	**65**	**71**	**6**	**59**	**76**	**65**	**65**	**76**	**65**	**76**	**76**	**76**	**76**	**100**	**100**	**70**
Australia	Submitted	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3
Cook Islands	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Fiji	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Kiribati	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Marshall Islands	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Micronesia, F. S.	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	18
Nauru	Submitted	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
New Zealand	National plans without targets	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Niue	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Palau	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Papua New Guinea	National plans with targets	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	12
Samoa	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Solomon Is	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	16
Tokelau	National plans without targets	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Tonga	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Tuvalu	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Vanuatu	National plans with targets	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5
Latin America and the Caribbean		**76**	**80**	**61**	**80**	**54**	**51**	**54**	**20**	**39**	**44**	**44**	**41**	**49**	**46**	**56**	**59**	**56**	**56**	**100**	**100**	**58**
Anguilla	Regional benchmarks (CARICOM)	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	8
Antigua/Barbuda	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Argentina	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	11
Aruba	National plans without targets	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2

Country	Status	Early childhood participation rate	Out-of-school rate, primary	Out-of-school rate, lower secondary	Out-of-school rate, upper secondary	Completion rate, primary	Completion rate, lower secondary	Completion rate, upper secondary	Gender gap in upper secondary completion	Learning: reading, grades 2/3	Learning: reading, end of primary	Learning: reading, end of lower secondary	Learning: mathematics, grades 2/3	Learning: mathematics, end of primary	Learning: mathematics, end of lower secondary	Trained teachers, pre-primary	Trained teachers, primary	Trained teachers, lower secondary	Trained teachers, upper secondary	Public expenditure, % GDP	Public expenditure, % total expenditure	Benchmarks
Bahamas	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Barbados	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Belize	Submitted	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	18
Bolivia, P. S.	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	12
Brazil	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	15
British Virgin Islands	Submitted	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	14
Cayman Islands	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Chile	National plans without targets	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Colombia	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	14
Costa Rica	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Cuba	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Curaçao	Submitted	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
Dominica	Regional benchmarks (CARICOM)	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Dominican Republic	National plans with targets	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
Ecuador	National plans without targets	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
El Salvador	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Grenada	Submitted	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	17
Guatemala	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	14
Guyana	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Haiti	Regional benchmarks (CARICOM)	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	4
Honduras	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	9
Jamaica	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Mexico	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	16
Montserrat	Regional benchmarks (CARICOM)	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Nicaragua	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	13
Panama	National plans with targets	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	9
Paraguay	National plans with targets	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5
Peru	National plans without targets	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Saint Kitts and Nevis	Regional benchmarks (CARICOM)	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	8
Saint Lucia	Regional benchmarks (CARICOM)	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	9

Country	Status	Early childhood participation rate	Out-of-school rate, primary	Out-of-school rate, lower secondary	Out-of-school rate, upper secondary	Completion rate, primary	Completion rate, lower secondary	Completion rate, upper secondary	Gender gap in upper secondary completion	Learning: reading, grades 2/3	Learning: reading, end of primary	Learning: reading, end of lower secondary	Learning: mathematics, grades 2/3	Learning: mathematics, end of primary	Learning: mathematics, end of lower secondary	Trained teachers, pre-primary	Trained teachers, primary	Trained teachers, lower secondary	Trained teachers, upper secondary	Public expenditure, % GDP	Public expenditure, % total expenditure	Benchmarks
Saint Vincent/ Grenadines	Regional benchmarks (CARICOM)	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Sint Maarten	No national plans	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Suriname	Submitted	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Trinidad and Tobago	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	13
Turks and Caicos Islands	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	17
Uruguay	Submitted	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	4
Venezuela, B. R.	National plans with targets	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
Europe and Northern America		**80**	**22**	**22**	**24**	**37**	**39**	**74**	**15**	**11**	**33**	**72**	**11**	**35**	**72**	**30**	**28**	**28**	**28**	**100**	**100**	**43**
Albania	Submitted	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	16
Andorra	No national plans	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Austria	Submitted	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	10
Belarus	National plans without targets	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Belgium	Submitted	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	7
Bermuda	Regional benchmarks (CARICOM)	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Submitted	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	10
Bulgaria	Regional benchmarks (EU)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
Canada	Pending submission	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Croatia	Regional benchmarks (EU)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
Czechia	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Denmark	Regional benchmarks (EU)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
Estonia	Regional benchmarks (EU)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
Finland	Submitted	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	8
France	Submitted	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	7
Germany	Regional benchmarks (EU)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
Greece	Regional benchmarks (EU)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
Hungary	Submitted	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
Iceland	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Ireland	Submitted	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	11
Italy	Regional benchmarks (EU)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
Latvia	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	18
Liechtenstein	No national plans	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Lithuania	Submitted	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	7

Country	Status	Early childhood participation rate	Out-of-school rate, primary	Out-of-school rate, lower secondary	Out-of-school rate, upper secondary	Completion rate, primary	Completion rate, lower secondary	Completion rate, upper secondary	Gender gap in upper secondary completion	Learning: reading, grades 2/3	Learning: reading, end of primary	Learning: reading, end of lower secondary	Learning: mathematics, grades 2/3	Learning: mathematics, end of primary	Learning: mathematics, end of lower secondary	Trained teachers, pre-primary	Trained teachers, primary	Trained teachers, lower secondary	Trained teachers, upper secondary	Public expenditure, % GDP	Public expenditure, % total expenditure	Benchmarks
Luxembourg	Regional benchmarks (EU)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
Malta	Submitted	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	16
Monaco	No national plans	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Montenegro	National plans with targets	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3
Netherlands	Regional benchmarks (EU)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
North Macedonia	National plans without targets	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Norway	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	17
Poland	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
Portugal	Regional benchmarks (EU)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
Republic of Moldova	Submitted	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	14
Romania	Submitted	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
Russian Federation	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	19
San Marino	Submitted	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	14
Serbia	National plans with targets	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	9
Slovakia	Submitted	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	15
Slovenia	Regional benchmarks (EU)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
Spain	Submitted	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	13
Sweden	Regional benchmarks (EU)	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
Switzerland	National plans with targets	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3
Ukraine	National plans without targets	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
United Kingdom	Submitted	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	7
United States	National plans with targets	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	6
World		**74**	**59**	**56**	**58**	**60**	**60**	**66**	**23**	**38**	**48**	**49**	**38**	**50**	**51**	**57**	**59**	**56**	**57**	**100**	**100**	**58**

Notes:

1. The benchmarks column shows:

   (a) For each country: the number of benchmark values reported by each country for all indicators except for the two public expenditure benchmarks (to which all countries have committed).

   (b) For each region/world: the percentage of benchmark values reported by all countries out of the maximum possible for the region/world for all indicators except for the two public expenditure benchmarks (to which all countries have committed).

2. The region/world rows show the percentage of countries in the region that provided a benchmark value for each indicator.

SDG 4 SCORECARD

PROGRESS REPORT ON NATIONAL BENCHMARKS

FOCUS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD

This is the first attempt to assess progress towards the 2025 and 2030 benchmarks, or national targets, that countries set over the past 18 months on seven SDG 4 indicators, in fulfilment of a commitment they made in 2015. The assessment covers the period 2015–20, just before the onset of COVID-19, which disrupted not only education development but also data collection systems.

It highlights the importance of the benchmarking process, also recognized by the UN Secretary-General in the Transforming Education Summit in September 2022. Compiling the benchmark database has revealed differences in data sources and indicator definitions used, which will require better coordination between the national and global levels to be resolved.

The process further highlights the need for more data, as they are currently insufficient to understand past trends and evaluate future prospects for a number of indicators. In many cases, countries also need to set more and better-informed national targets, notably on the gender gap in completion rates and in learning outcome indicators.

This publication surveys overall progress on all benchmark indicators and looks more closely at individual country progress in three of them. One indicator – the participation rate in organized learning one year before primary – is further analysed to understand how progress may be associated with free and compulsory pre-primary education legislation, equity-oriented regulation of private provision, and public spending. Ultimately, the purpose of benchmarking is to encourage countries to link progress with policy change and learn from other countries' experience.

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