



International Network for School Social Work

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The Right to Education and School Social Work

UNICEF is the United Nations Children’s Fund. It exists to defend the rights of every child, and works in 190 countries. UNICEF considers education to be “the key to opportunities”, vital to the well-being of all children. In 2016 UNICEF spent US\$1.1 billion on carrying out numerous programs geared towards reaching the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goal for education (SDG 4). This calls for the international community to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities”.

UNICEF Annual Results Report for 2016

The report is available online with 100 pages of details about programs, results and work plans at https://www.unicef.org/publicpartnerships/files/2016arr_education.pdf.

UNICEF breaks down this goal into several components.

- **Quality education for all** involves quality curricula, standards and accountability and includes the concept of child-friendly schools
- **Improved learning outcomes** means increased access to education, plus mother tongue and innovative teaching
- **Education in emergencies** provides for children who are displaced or refugee children and promotes preventive activities such as peace-building
- **Education in the early years** especially for the most vulnerable and marginalized
- **Inclusive equitable systems** provides for including children with disabilities and minorities
- **Girls’ education** focusing in 12 countries on secondary education and violence against girls, since this makes it more difficult for girls’ access to education.

Each of these components has several measurable objectives. The Annual Results Report gives details on many positive outcomes, describes the continuing constraints and challenges, and outlines the strategic work plan for 2018 through 2012.

Gapminder (an interactive program for using data to track social indicators) provides a graphic way to follow progress in educational markers, such as literacy or enrollment. For example to find out how literacy is improving around the world go to http://www.gapminder.org/tools/_locale_id=en;&chart-type=bubbles. Click *Life Expectancy* at the top left (to select a new indicator)

and then select Education, Literacy, Literacy of Youth. Literacy is shown on the y axis. At the right hand side of the screen select a few countries you are interested in. You can also select a region such as the OECD. To view change over time, click the arrow at the extreme bottom left. Moving bubbles will reveal the progress over several years for the countries you selected. The progress shows that UNICEF is getting dramatic results in the Sustainable Development Goal for Education.

Building the Future: Children and the Sustainable Development Goals in Rich Countries

https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/RC14_eng.pdf

UNICEF protects the rights of every child including children in rich countries who are marginalized by poverty, disability, ethnicity or gender. The 2016 Report Card provides an assessment of child well-being in 41 countries of the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), termed “rich countries”. The report highlights the SDG targets for children including education goals. Page 10 shows a league table with country performance across nine goals such as poverty, hunger, health, education and equality. Pages 26 through 30 cover education goals and performance.

UNICEF uses the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) to determine once every three years the proportion of children with at least minimum proficiency in reading, math and science. In 2015, countries where over 80% of pupils in the high-income countries achieved universal competency at the end of secondary school were Canada, Estonia, Finland and Japan. In addition, countries with more than 75 per cent of 15-year-olds attaining the basic level across three subjects are Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Poland, Republic of Korea and Slovenia. In the United States 66.4% of pupils reached the basic level. Most children in these high-income countries have some kind of pre-school education.

Combining the 2 indicators (of minimum proficiency and preschool participation) shows Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, United States, Greece, Cyprus, Slovakia, Croatia, Chile, Bulgaria, Australia, Romania and Turkey needing improvement to catch up with other high-income countries.

UNICEF reports and school social work

UNICEF’s focus on equity, achievement, inclusion and quality in education mirrors social work values and goals. With 700 staff employed on education goals in 155 countries, it seems there should be a role within UNICEF for social workers, for example in helping to strengthen the connection between home and school, and contributing to developing social policies in education. Many countries that need the most help to improve their educational outcomes have no school social work service. A social work presence in UNICEF could help to promote school social work in those countries.

In high-income countries some of the pupils who most need the services of the school social worker are the ones who do not reach the basic level of competency. Many of these countries do have school social work services. These school social workers are fortunate to have plenty of data to use to justify their work and to demonstrate successful interventions. School systems usually provide statistics about attendance, achievement, mobility, achievement gaps between various populations etc. These data are valuable aids for school social workers, who can use them to select the pupils who need help and track their progress using data that schools routinely gather. UNICEF gives a powerful example of how to use data effectively to plan interventions.