INVENTORY OF BENCHMARKS IN NATIONAL PLANS

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

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Contents

Acronyms and abbreviations

GDP   Gross Domestic Product

GEMR Global Education Monitoring Report

GPE   Global Partnership for Education

MOE   Ministry of Education

NSO   National Statistics Office

SDG   Sustainable Development Goals

TES   Transforming Education Summit

UIS   UNESCO Institute for Statistics

UN   United Nations

UNESCO   United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

VNR   Voluntary National Review

WB   World Bank

1. Introduction

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), as the agency responsible for monitoring SDG 4 globally, aims to monitor the progress of countries towards the global education goals. To do this, it must have up-to-date information on the benchmarks set by countries for the SDG 4 indicators.

The establishment of these benchmarks has been guided by the UIS and the GEMR, which are mandated by the Education 2030 Framework for Action to support countries in setting their national benchmarks indicators. The selected SDG 4 benchmarks are:

Table 1: SDG 4 benchmarks

Basic education	4.1.1 Minimum proficiency in reading and mathematics
	4.1.2 Completion rate
	4.1.4 Out-of-school rate
Early childhood	4.2.2 Participation in organized learning a year before primary education
Equity	Gender gap in upper secondary completion rate
Digital transformation	4.a.1 Proportion of schools with access to internet for pedagogical purposes
Quality	4.c.1 Teachers with minimum required qualifications
Finance	1.a.2 Public education expenditure as share of GDP
	FFA Public education expenditure as share of total government expenditure (1.a.GDP)

Following these guidelines, countries and territories have formulated education plans where they have established quantitative and/or qualitative targets to be achieved in the next years. Some of these targets exactly match the benchmarks set by the UIS, while others pursue specific targets of the countries.

As part of this process, and to facilitate access to the available information on education benchmarks, a compilation of the different types of plans has been carried out, distinguishing the type of benchmark in each of them. This document outlines the most relevant aspects associated with the development and processing of the **Inventory of Benchmarks in National Plans**.

2. The inventory

The inventory is a compilation of education plans developed by each country. These plans fall into three categories: a National Plan, a Voluntary National Review (VNR), or a commitment submitted to the Transforming Education Summit (TES). Each plan may include qualitative and/or quantitative targets related to the SDG 4 benchmarks; however, some plans may not contain any identifiable benchmarks. These categories are identified in the Inventory as follows:

1. No plan: it means that no plan has been collected for the country (identified as a dark gray square).
2. No benchmark: at least one type of national document has been identified for the country, but the plan does not contain SDG 4 targets (identified as a light gray square).
3. Qualitative: at least one type of national document has been identified for the country, and that plan contains only qualitative targets (identified as a light blue square).
4. Quantitative: at least one type of national document has been identified for the country, and that plan contains only quantitative targets (identified as a blue square).
5. Qualitative & Quantitative: at least one type of national document has been identified for the country, and that plan contains both qualitative and quantitative targets (identified as a dark blue square).

3. Data

The data covers plans from 2004 to 2025. The information presented in the inventory refers to official plans developed by Ministries of Education (MOE), National Statistical Offices (NSO), and other national and international organizations.

3.1 Types of national documents

The different plans collected were classified into the following types:

- **National plans:** These are strictly national initiatives, typically carried out by MOE or NSO. Their targets may or may not be aligned with the SDGs.

- **VNR:** These are voluntary plans presented by countries to the United Nations to assess and report on their progress in implementing the SDGs within the framework of the 2030 Agenda.

- **TES:** These are plans or statements from countries resulting from the Transforming Education Summit (TES) driven by the UN Secretary-General and UNESCO.

3.2 Regions

The regional groupings available in the inventory are:

- Global Partnership for Education (GPE)

- SDG regional group (SDG region)

- World Bank income classification (Income group)

In particular, the regional groupings consist of the following classification:

Table 2: Regional groupings

Region Definition	Full name
GPE	**Global Partnership for Education**
A list of 85 countries belonging to the GPE1	
SDG Region	**Sustainable Development Goals**
Africa (Sub-Saharan)	
Asia (Central and Southern)	
Asia (Eastern and South-eastern)	
Latin America and the Caribbean	
Northern America and Europe	
Oceania	
Western Asia and Northern Africa	
Income group	**World Bank country income groups**
Low income	
Lower middle income	
Upper middle income	
High income	

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[1] Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Dominica, El Salvador, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Fiji, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Indonesia, Kenya, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Micronesia (Federated States of), Mongolia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Moldova, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tonga, Tunisia, Tuvalu, Uganda, Ukraine, United Republic of Tanzania, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, and Zimbabwe..

4. Coverage

4.1 Plans

At least one plan was found for 208 countries. From the list of the 240 SDG countries, the resulting coverage achieved is 86.7%. Below is the distribution of countries according to the different regional groupings considered.

Table 3: Coverage of countries by GPE

GPE	No. of countries	% of countries with plans
GPE members	85	100.0

Table 4: Coverage of countries by SDG region

SDG Region	No. of countries	% of countries with plans
Africa (Sub-Saharan)	51	94.1
Asia (Central and Southern)	14	100.0
Asia (Eastern and South-eastern)	18	100.0
Latin America and the Caribbean	49	83.7
Northern America and Europe	57	82.5
Oceania	25	64.0
Western Asia and Northern Africa	26	92.3

Table 5: Coverage of countries by Income group

Income group	No. of countries	% of countries with plans
Low income	29	100.0
Lower middle income	50	100.0
Upper middle income	55	98.2
High income	82	85.4
Without classification	24	20.8

In total, 762 education plans were identified, comprising 330 national plans (43.3%), 286 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) (37.5%) and 146 Transforming Education Summit (TES) commitments (19.2%).

Table 6: Type of national document

| Type	No. of plans
National plan	330
VNR	286
TES	146
Total	**762**

4.2 Benchmarks

A total of 1,334 benchmark data points were collected. Of these, 938 (70.3%) are quantitative and 396 (29.7%) are qualitative. Among the qualitative data points, 209 (52.8%) correspond to indicators and 187 (47.2%) to targets.

Table 7: Type of SDG 4 benchmarks data points

Type of benchmark	No. of data points		Total
	Indicator	Target	
Quantitative	938	0	938
Qualitative	209	187	396
Total	**1,147**	**187**	**1,334**

Among the quantitative benchmarks, indicator *1.a.2 Public education expenditure as a share of GDP* has the highest number of data points identified, with a total of 89, followed by indicators *4.1.2 Completion rate for primary* (65 data points) and *4.1.4.i Out-of-school rate, primary* (59). The indicator with the lowest coverage is 4.1.1 at Grade 2, for both mathematics and reading outcomes.

Figure 1: Number of quantitative data points by SDG 4 indicator benchmark
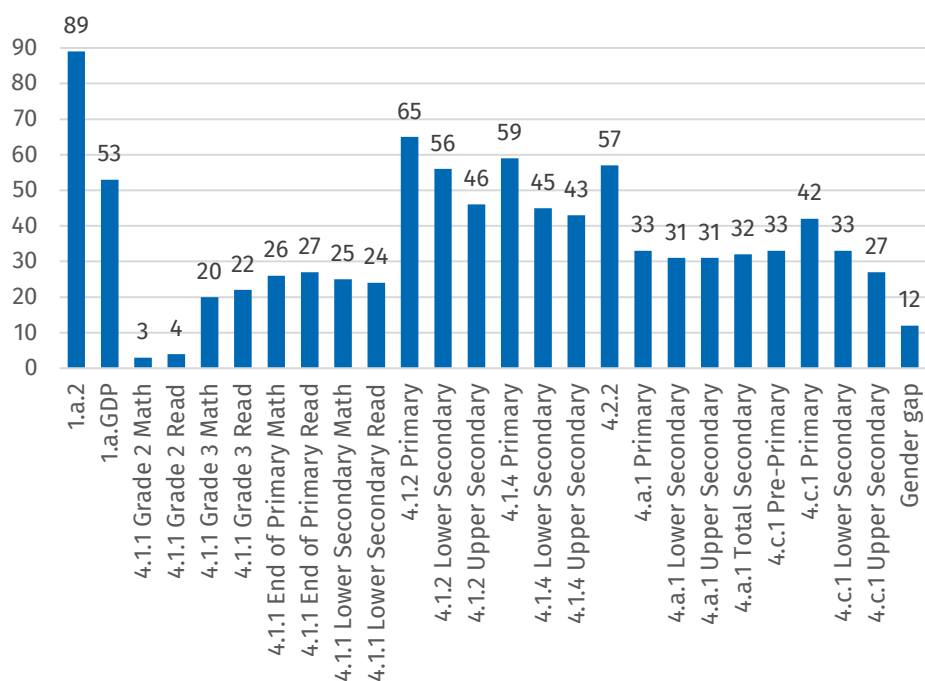
In general, the number of data points decreases as the education level increases. For example, this happens in the completion rate indicators (4.1.2) and the out-of-school indicators (4.1.4).

4.3 Definitions

Countries may either align their targets with the SDG 4 framework adopted by the UIS or define their own national targets that diverge from it. This section aims to present the quantitative targets set by countries, focusing on how they are defined at the national level in order to compare them with the UIS-aligned SDG 4 framework.

As mentioned earlier, a total of 938 quantitative benchmark data points were collected. However, this section analyzes only the 897 data points for which a clear definition could be identified. The remaining data points lacked a specific definition and were therefore excluded from the analysis.

Out of a total of 897 quantitative data points, 641 (71.5%) follow the SDG 4 framework adopted by the UIS, while 256 (28.5%) are defined differently (Table 8). When analyzed by indicator, the finance indicators (1.a.2 and 1.a.GDP) show the highest similarity with the UIS definitions: together, they account for 139 data points, with only one differing in its definition.

Among the remaining SDG 4 benchmarks indicators, 4.a.1 exhibits the biggest alignment with the UIS framework definitions (90% of the mined data points), whereas indicator 4.1.1 shows the least similarity, with only 21% of the data points matching the UIS definitions.

Table 8: SDG 4 benchmark indicators by alignment with the UIS framework definition

SDG 4 indicator	Same definition as UIS framework?		Total (%)
	No No. (%)	Yes No. (%)	
1.a.2	0 (0)	87 (100)	87 (100)
1.a.GDP	1 (2)	51 (98)	52 (100)
4.1.1	120 (79)	31 (21)	151 (100)
4.1.2	45 (27)	119 (73)	164 (100)

4.1.4	32 (24)	100 (76)	132 (100)
4.2.2	19 (36)	34 (64)	53 (100)
4.a.1	12 (10)	111 (90)	123 (100)
4.c.1	19 (15)	104 (85)	123 (100)
Gender gap	8 (67)	4 (33)	12 (100)
Total	**256 (28.5)**	**641 (71.5)**	**897 (100.0)**

The tables below detail the various definitions that countries use when reporting SDG 4 benchmark indicators[2]. It is important to clarify that multiple definitions for a single indicator do not necessarily mean that all differ from the UIS framework. For example, indicator 4.1.4 has four definitions, two of which align with the UIS framework (Net enrolment rate and Out-of-school rate).

For indicator 4.1.1, three groups of definitions were identified: Percentage of students above the minimum (national assessment), Percentage of students above the minimum (international assessment), and Other. The first group, based on national assessments, is the most common (58.9%). The international assessment definition, which follows the UIS framework, accounts for 20.5%, as do other definitions involving different education levels or measurement units (Table 9).

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2 Indicators 1.a.2 and 1.a.GDP were excluded from the analysis, as together they exhibited over 99% similarity with the UIS framework..

Table 9: Number of quantitative data points for indicator 4.1.1, by definition type

4.1.1	Definition	%
% of students above the minimum (National assessment)	89	58.9
% of students above the minimum (International assessment)	31	20.5
Other	31	20.5
Total	**151**	**100**

For indicator 4.1.2, five types of definitions were identified. The most frequent (75.0%) is the *Completion rate*, which aligns with the UIS framework. This is followed by *Promotion and/or Transition rates* (11.0%), *Completion rates for education levels grouped differently* from the UIS framework (6.1%), *Gross completion rate* (4.9%), and *Other* definitions (3.0%).

Table 10: Number of quantitative data points for indicator 4.1.2, by definition type

4.1.2	Definition	%
Completion rate	123	75.0
Promotion/Transition rate	18	11.0
Completion rate (different level)	10	6.1
Gross completion rate	8	4.9
Other	5	3.0
Total	**164**	**100**

For indicator 4.1.4, the definitions of *Net enrollment rate* and *Out-of-school rate* follow the UIS framework, and together account for 86.3% of the mined data points. This is followed by *Gross enrollment rate* (9.8%) and *Other* (3.8%).

Table 11: Number of quantitative data points for indicator 4.1.4, by definition type

4.1.4	Definition	%
Net enrolment rate (NER)	96	72.7
Out-of-school rate (OOS)	18	13.6
Gross enrolment rate (GER)	13	9.8
Other	5	3.8
Total	**132**	**100**

For indicator 4.2.2, four definitions were identified: *Participation rate (1 year before primary)*, which aligns with the UIS definition and is the most frequent (60.4%); *Participation rate (more than 1 year before primary)*, encompassing all definitions where children's ages differ from the UIS framework (24.5%); followed by *GER* and *Other*, each representing 7.5%.

Table 12: Number of quantitative data points for indicator 4.2.2, by definition type

4.2.2	Definition	%
Participation rate (1 year before primary)	32	60.4
Participation rate (more than 1 year before primary)	13	24.5
Gross enrolment rate (GER)	4	7.5
Other	4	7.5
Total	**53**	**100**

For indicator 4.a.1, three types of definitions were mined. The most frequent (82.9%) aligns with the UIS framework as the *Percentage of schools with internet access*. This is followed by a broader definition—*Percentage of schools with internet access and other resources* (11.4%)—which includes computers, ICT resources, electricity, etc. Lastly, the *Other* category accounts for 5.7% of the total.

Table 13: Number of quantitative data points for indicator 4.a.1, by definition type

4.a.1	Definition	%
% of schools with Internet access	102	82.9
% of schools with Internet access and other	14	11.4
Other	7	5.7
Total	**123**	**100**

Indicator 4.c.1 has one of the broadest definitions among the SDG 4 benchmark indicators, as the meaning of "trained" or "qualified" teacher varies significantly across countries. Based on this, two groups of definitions were identified: *Percentage of trained teachers* (65.0% of the total) and *Percentage of qualified teachers* (35.0%).

Table 14: Number of quantitative data points for indicator 4.c.1, by definition type

4.c.1	Definition	%
% of Trained teachers	80	65.0
% of Qualified teachers	43	35.0
Total	**123**	**100**

Finally, for the Gender Gap indicator, two main approaches were identified: one that reports targets disaggregated by sex, and another that constructs a parity index. In the first approach the parity is achieved at zero, while in the second, gender parity is achieved at one. Based on this, the definitions found include *Completion rate (by sex)* (33.3%), *Parity index* (16.7%), and *Other* (by sex) (50.0%).

Table 15: Number of quantitative data points for 'Gender gap', by definition type

Gender gap	Definition	%
Completion rate (by sex)	4	33.3
Parity Index	2	16.7
Other (by sex)	6	50.0
Total	**12**	**100**

Annex I: About the collection

The inventory is not intended to be an exhaustive compilation of plans. If a plan or benchmark is not listed for a particular country, it may be due to the information not being publicly available, the country's website being inaccessible at the time of data collection, or an unintentional omission.