

UNICEF Innocenti's COVID-19 Rapid Research Response

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Two girls wearing face masks, sit in a boat in the Amazon river in Leticia, Colombia. © UNICEF/UNI333645/Alvarez/AFP

UNICEF Innocenti is undertaking a wide range of research to provide the evidence needed to inform UNICEF and its partner's work to respond to the consequences of the pandemic.

UPCOMING RESEARCH

Social protection for families and children: considerations for a post COVID-19 response

Comparative research will determine what social protection changes we may see in different countries when seeking to protect children from the health and financial crisis.

Estimating the impact of COVID-19 measures on prevalence of physical punishment of children

This research will model existing data sets to estimate the impact of COVID-19 measures on prevalence of physical punishment of children in the home.

COVID-19 & school closures: impact on child well-being

The impacts of school closures on multiple dimensions of child well-being on vulnerable groups will be measured, including learning outcomes, nutrition (with WFP), health, violence, and child labour.

COVID-19 & school reopenings: strategies and measures for mitigating its impact

Strategies that countries are using to mitigate the negative impacts of school closures on children's learning outcomes are described.

OUT
NOW

COVID-19: How prepared are global education systems for future crises?

This work, based on a review of literature, will explore the resiliency of education systems to respond to school closures and mitigate their effects.

OUT
NOW

COVID-19: A reason to double down on investments in pre-primary education

This research brief will provide a cost-benefit analysis of pre-primary education in low- and middle-income countries and provide policy recommendations for investments.

OUT
NOW

COVID-19 Remote learning in pre-primary education: Trends, emerging good practices, and gaps

This research will examine remote learning options made available for pre-primary students and their families while schools are closed during COVID-19.

COVID-19 Analysis of child vulnerability to school closures: reachability indicator



This work will quantify the maximum number of children who can be reached by remote learning modalities (internet, TV, and radio) during school closures by level of education.

COVID-19 Analysis of child vulnerability to school closures: development of a learning continuity index

A composite index will classify countries' risk of learning loss during school closures using three dimensions: supply side (access to technologies and electricity), parental capacity to support, and government's preparedness.

COVID-19 and education: Analysis of Ministries of Education questionnaire

Using data from the joint UNESCO/UNICEF/World Bank questionnaire, this research will compare learning loss, remote learning, policies to boost access to online learning, policies to support teachers and parents, learning assessment, financing, and plans for school re-openings.

Digital skills and related disparities across countries, gender and socio-economic status

ICT literacy skills are critical to online learning. This work will analyse disparities in digital skills across countries, gender, and socio-economic status of children.

Akelius Digital Learning Course for Refugees in Greece before and during COVID-19

This research will examine the impact of COVID-19 on learning and implementation of the Akelius digital language course for refugees and migrants in Greece.

Children's experiences and views of COVID-19

Children's voices on this issue must be considered when formulating responses. Focusing on the most vulnerable children: how do children experience the COVID-19 situation?

COVID-19 lessons on providing assistive technology to persons with disability in humanitarian response

This study will help us better understand how assistive technology is provisioned in humanitarian response and will study coordination and national governance challenges.

LATEST RESEARCH

OUT NOW

Promising Practices for Equitable Remote Learning. Emerging lessons from 127 countries

Parental engagement in children's learning

A rapid review of economic policy and social protection responses to health and economic crises and their effects on children

Digital Connectivity During COVID-19: Access to vital information for every child

Pandemics, epidemics and child protection, a rapid review

Epidemiology of COVID-19 among children and adolescents

Ethical considerations for evidence generation involving children on COVID-19

Ethical issues in the use of digital technology for contact tracing and surveillance

COVID-19 & school reopenings: strategies and measures for mitigating its impact

COVID-19: How prepared are global education systems for future crises?

COVID-19: A reason to double down on investments in pre-primary education

COVID-19 Analysis of child vulnerability to school closures: reachability indicator

Children and COVID-19 Research Library

Children's use of digital technology during COVID-19

Online surveys across eleven European countries will help understand: what digital engagement looks like during COVID-19; how it has changed; and what support children need to take advantage of the internet during lockdowns.

Mapping and gender analysis of COVID-19 public policy responses

As part of the gender-responsive age-sensitive social protection research programme, new secondary data analysis will assess the extent to which gender has been integrated (or not) into policy responses to COVID-19.



EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS AND SUPPORT

Review of emerging evidence on mental health among children and adolescents

A review of evidence from previous health crises on children and adolescents' mental health, including from humanitarian settings and emerging evidence on the impact of COVID-19.

Review of emerging evidence on social impacts of COVID-19

A review of evidence from previous health crises on the social impacts on children, families, and communities, including from humanitarian settings and emerging evidence from COVID-19.

Methodological Brief on Conducting Rapid Reviews

A Rapid Review methodological brief will discuss how to rapidly compress traditional evidence synthesis time frames without sacrificing quality and rigour.

Child Well-being in LMICs: MegaMap and research briefs

The [MegaMap on Child Well-being in LMICs](#) maps evidence against the five goals of UNICEF's Strategic Plan (2018-2021). The 2020 update will feature emerging evidence on the impacts of and responses to COVID-19, as well as previous evidence on other health outbreaks and financial crises.

Mapping of Research and Evidence Entities in UNICEF's Regions

An internal directory of potential research (and broader evidence generation, communication, and use) partners based in programme countries with expertise relevant to UNICEF's Strategic Plan goals, including experience of working on issues related to COVID-19.



LEADING MINDS ONLINE

The new Coronavirus & Children Series: What the experts say will host expert consultations to garner expertise and experience on pandemics, responses and effects on children, and support efforts by our research teams, research teams, other UNICEF divisions, and external partners.

[WATCH OUR LEADING MINDS ONLINE SERIES](#)

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Social Protection for Families and Children: Considerations for a post-COVID-19 Response

Rapid comparative research will determine what social protection changes we might expect to see in different countries when seeking to protect children from the effects of a health crisis accompanied by a financial crisis. This study will be based on national preconditions (social, economic, public policy practice) and exposure to COVID-19, drawing on lessons from previous social protection responses to the 2008-13 financial crisis, previous health crises, and early responses to COVID-19.

- **What are the national and household level economic and social vulnerabilities related to the COVID-19 pandemic?**
- **What is the role of social protection in preventing or treating social and economic risks at household & national levels following the COVID-19 pandemic?**

RATIONALE

The global health pandemic has led to countries adopting public health strategies as well as public policy responses to mitigate and protect against the predicted economic fallout. The study examines the economic and social vulnerabilities of countries based on demographic, health, and economic preconditions and makes recommendations for responses and reforms to address these vulnerabilities.

HOW WILL THE STUDY ADDRESS THE QUESTION?

Cross-country comparisons of vulnerabilities and policy responses will be done within each world region. The study will primarily be desk-based with three main components:

- [Literature review of direct and indirect effects of legislative and policy responses to previous financial and health crises](#)
- Collation and analysis of quantitative data on demographic, health, and economic preconditions, and COVID-19 burden
- Qualitative assessments of vulnerability typologies and recommendations for optimal social protection response

Evidence can feed into rapid assessment tools for informing immediate and long-term social protection responses.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

The research will use quantitative methods for secondary data collection and analysis. The team will collect statistics related to national preconditions that increase or lessen susceptibility to the health, economic, and social shocks of COVID-19, e.g. numbers of intergenerational households, growth rates, rates of intimate partner violence, etc. Data sources include the World Bank, IMF, WHO, Eurostat, demographic and health surveys, and national household surveys. Data on policy responses will be obtained from global policy trackers.

RESOURCES

All members of the Social & Economic Policy team will contribute to this work.

TIMELINE

One regional report per month:
ECAR, HICs, WCAR, LACR
Weeks 1-3: review of literature & data collation
Weeks 4-7: Analysis, writing report & policy recommendations
(Weeks 8-10: review & editing)

PARTNERSHIPS

UNICEF HQ, Regional Offices, Country Offices, National Committees, academic partners

RESEARCH LEADS

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Estimating the Impact of COVID-19 Measures on the Prevalence of Physical Punishment of Children

Global stakeholders have raised concerns about the [implications](#) of COVID-19 for violence against children (VAC). An increased risk of violence could result from a variety of compounding structural, interpersonal, and individual-level [risk factors](#), including the increased economic strain placed on families, stay-at-home orders, school closures, and other COVID-19 response measures. Nonetheless, measuring the impact of COVID-19 on the levels of violence raises a number of ethical, safety, and methodological concerns, particularly when research subjects are children. Therefore, it is important to assess the potential of different methodologies, including modelling via existing data bases, in producing estimates of such impact.

- **What are the predictors of child discipline?**
- **How will COVID-19 response measures affect the predictors of child discipline?**
- **How will COVID-19 response measures affect the likelihood and severity of child discipline?**
- **What are the short term and long-term effects of COVID-19 on violence against children?**

HOW WILL THE STUDY ADDRESS THE QUESTION?

This research will develop a methodology to model the impact of COVID-19 measures on the levels of harsh discipline of children in the home. It is part of a three-pronged strategy comparing different methodologies to assess the impact of COVID-19 measures on the levels of various forms of violence against children and against women. Two other research streams will look into big data (primarily from social media) and administrative data (primarily from helplines).

METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

Using MICS surveys from Mongolia, Nigeria, and Suriname:

- Set up conceptual framework that combines exposures, outcomes, and the potential effects of COVID-19 related measures.
- Conduct descriptive analyses of outcome and exposures.
- Develop adjusted and unadjusted models to estimate the relationship between exposures and outcome.
- Develop assumptions based on the literature on how COVID-19 measures could change the exposures.
- Decide sources and type of data to inform hypothesis formulation:
 - measures to limit infection (school closures, interruption of production activities, limitation to movement, events cancellation)
 - measures to prevent economic crisis (social assistance, social insurance)
- Develop models incorporating these assumptions.
- Data sources: nationally representative data

PARTNERSHIPS

UNICEF Division of Data, Analytics, Planning & Monitoring (DAPM), London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

RESEARCH LEADS

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COVID-19 and School Closures: Impact on Children's Learning, Nutrition, Health, and Protection Outcomes

To comprehensively analyse the impact and response to COVID-19 in education, the research will draw on Innocenti research, country and regional initiatives, as well as data from household surveys, UNICEF/UNESCO/World Bank COVID response questionnaire to Ministries of Education, Global School-Based Health Survey, and UNICEF's COVID Education Tracker.

- **What is the impact of the COVID-19 school closures on schooling, learning outcomes, health, nutrition, mental wellbeing, violence, early marriage, child labour, and other outcomes?**
- **How have countries with school closures during previous times of school closures and during COVID-19 been responding to protect children from harm?**
- **What works to make education systems resilient and able to continue children's learning during times of crisis and school closures?**

RATIONALE

To help contain the spread of COVID-19, schools around the world have closed, affecting 1.6 billion learners (UNESCO). Varied delivery channels (see [education toolkit COVID-19](#)) exist for remote learning. Responses include technologies with the promise to facilitate remote learning but which are often not accessible to marginalized children, leading to the increase of inequity of learning and progress towards SDGs. The research will provide evidence-based solutions to governments to improve equitable learning and mitigate risks on nutrition, health, violence, and other outcomes when schools have to close.

HOW WILL THE STUDY ADDRESS THE QUESTION?

- Analysis of existing data from varied sources (including from previous pandemics) to analyse the impact of school closures on education (learning, retention, drop-outs etc.) and cross-sectoral outcomes (e.g. nutrition, health, violence, child labour).
- Estimation of the learning loss associated with school closure and the mitigation effects of different response strategies (remote education).
- In-depth review of the responses taken to provide continued learning and mitigate risks on children's nutrition, health, violence and other outcomes.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

Mixed methods research including literature review, data analysis of household surveys (DHS, MICS, LSMS) of the UNICEF/UNESCO/World Bank joint COVID response questionnaire to Ministries of Education, of the UNICEF COVID-19 education tracker and of regional and country initiatives.

RESOURCES

Shifting focus of staff currently supporting innovations in education research

TIMELINE

Available now

PARTNERSHIPS

UNICEF Education, UNICEF Division of Data, Analytics, Planning & Monitoring (DAPM), Regional Offices

RESEARCH LEADS

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COVID-19 and School Reopenings: Strategies and Measures to Mitigate the Impact of COVID-19

As countries start to re-open schools and others are developing plans to do, this research asks:

What strategies are countries putting in place to mitigate the negative impacts of school closures on children's learning outcomes, particularly on the most vulnerable groups?

RATIONALE

Past experiences (e.g. pandemics, conflicts, natural disasters) indicate that school closures can have long-term negative impacts on children's educational outcomes. Children who were already more vulnerable prior to the crisis, including girls and those with less-educated parents, are particularly affected. Lessons from past school closures also point to policies and initiatives with positive results in mitigating the negative impact of disruptions caused by school closures. These strategies include fee relief, condensed curriculum, extended school year, drop-out prevention, remediation, and targeted support for vulnerable groups. As countries are experiencing the COVID pandemic to varying degrees and at different rates, sharing strategies that are being considered and already implemented will be useful to improve reopening plans.

HOW WILL THE STUDY ADDRESS THE QUESTION?

- Literature review: lessons from re-openings following past experiences.
- Re-opening schools after COVID-19 closures: description of countries with set dates/plans to re-open schools, resulting duration of closures, regional trends.
- Strategies to mitigate the educational impact of COVID-19 school closures, including:
 - Monitoring of re-enrolment/attendance
 - Outreach to children not attending
 - Initiatives to recover lost teaching time
 - Other strategies, e.g. assessment of learning gaps and needs. Include 1-2 case studies of countries/initiatives
- Scalability/replicability: analysis of resources and enabling environment needed to implement at scale successful school-re-openings strategies – including suggestions for continued monitoring of progress, along with sharing and reporting between countries.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

- Analyse Education Tracker data, including considerations for school re-opening in national education responses.
- Review of policy documents, monitoring/progress reports (and if feasible interviews with Country Offices and education stakeholders), and summary of re-opening strategies implemented to address the educational impacts of COVID-19, including the joint UNICEF/UNESCO/World Bank questionnaire to Ministries of Education.
- Cross-country analysis of household surveys.

RESOURCES

Shifting focus of staff currently supporting innovations in education research

TIMELINE

6 months.

First draft available 15 July.

PARTNERSHIPS

UNICEF Education, UNICEF Division of Data, Analytics, Planning & Monitoring (DAPM), Regional Offices

RESEARCH LEADS

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Children's Experiences and Views of COVID-19 and Responses

This study will gain an in-depth insight, across different contexts, of children's experiences and views of the COVID-19 crisis:

- **How do children experience the COVID-19 situation? How has it affected them? What are the key issues from their perspective?**
- **What are children's ideas and proposals for responses to the current situation and how situations like this could be handled better in the future?**

RATIONALE

Children's voices on this global issue must be heard and considered when formulating responses. This includes giving children the opportunity to be involved in designing responses. In particular, we need to understand the experiences and views of children in groups who may be hardest hit by these events, including (but not limited to): migrant children; children in institutions and reception facilities; children with disabilities or chronic health conditions; children in poverty; orphaned children; homeless children. UNICEF is in an ideal position to undertake and lead research on this topic.

HOW WILL THE STUDY ADDRESS THE QUESTION?

- Devise an approach to evidence-gathering from children about this issue that meets requirements regarding ethics, quality and coherence.
- Conduct primary research in selected contexts, working with research partners (within and outside UNICEF) to pilot approaches and gather an initial set of evidence.
- Share materials and guidance that can be used by others in the organisation who wish to replicate the approach.
- Act as a central point for coordination of this initiative and collation of evidence gathered.

Through this approach we will create a unique, high-quality and valuable database that can help to inform responses.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

The work will be primarily qualitative and will cover a range of countries and contexts. We will develop and pilot a range of methods (traditional and digital) to involve children. These will take into consideration different age groups and contexts. The aim is to ensure that evidence gathered can be presented in a coherent way to create a bigger picture. Ethical considerations will be central to the methodology. We will involve children throughout the research process from designing the methods to interpreting and communicating the results. The initial study will be built in a way that can enable longitudinal data-gathering.

RESOURCES

Short-term (1-2 months):
developed within Innocenti,
external consultants

Medium-term (3-6 months):
Funding needed for pilot fieldwork

Longer-term: New funding needed
to act as a central advice, collation
& analysis point

TIMELINE

9 months.

Preparatory work by end June.
Pilot data collection by end
December.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partners have been identified in
Italy and Canada. Seeking a
Country Office partner in Africa.

RESEARCH LEAD

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COVID-19 Lessons on Providing Assistive Technology to Persons with Disability in Humanitarian Response

This research will investigate how assistive technology (AT), such as wheelchairs, prosthetics, eyeglasses, and hearing aids, is provisioned in humanitarian response planning and action, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. The work will help better account for any levels of unmet need, as well as review barriers and enablers to optimize access to AT in humanitarian settings. Case studies will document the extent to which disability inclusion is present in humanitarian response planning. The work will include a review of the role of Organisation of Persons with Disabilities (DPOs), government, and international agencies in negotiating provision during pandemics.

- **What are the coordination and governance challenges around COVID-19 for AT provision?**
- **What are the likely and realised impacts of COVID-19 on AT provision for different groups?**

RATIONALE

More than one billion people today live with some form of disability. This figure is estimated to double by 2050. Many need AT to lead productive, inclusive, and dignified lives. Over 900 million people today do not have access to the AT they require. We know little about the provisions of AT in humanitarian settings. However, we do know that the majority of people with disabilities (80 per cent) live in low and middle-income countries where service systems, including for AT, are often under pressure and have limited capacity to meet the needs of the population. Persons with disabilities:

- are disproportionately represented among older populations, who are also at increased risk of COVID-19. ~46% of the world's over 60 population have disabilities.
- may have underlying health conditions that increase their risk of complications from COVID-19.
- are disproportionately represented among people living in poverty. The impacts of COVID-19 are likely to be worse for people in lower socio-economic groups.

HOW WILL THE STUDY ADDRESS THE QUESTION?

A literature and evidence review will study the extent to which health pandemics disrupt the AT 'ecosystem' provision as well as factors that enable it. Informed by data, the results will assist humanitarian actors in strategic planning of AT and fill a knowledge gap in current humanitarian guidance on inclusion of persons with disabilities.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

The work is a mix of ongoing literature review and in-country research in three target countries. The case studies will involve interviews with key stakeholders and a review of relevant national and organisational policy, planning, project, and monitoring documentation. This will begin to close evidence gaps and supplement the findings of the literature review. The research will also use available data, e.g. MICS-6.

RESOURCES

1 full-time consultant

TIMELINE

12 months. Interim review outputs available June/July 2020

PARTNERSHIPS

UNICEF Disability section, WHO – Assistive Technology & Medical Devices Unit, University College London – Global Disability Innovation Hub

RESEARCH LEADS

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Children's use of digital technology during COVID-19

Primary research using nationally representative online panel surveys with 500 children and parents across (at least) 11 European countries will determine if and how children's and parent's engagement with digital technology has changed during lockdown. It will consider how children are using digital technology to meet their current needs (for education, information, social interaction, and play) and if this is having positive or negative outcomes. The study is coordinated by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission and conducted with EU Kids Online, with support and partial financing from UNICEF Innocenti. Comparisons of data collected by Global Kids Online/EU Kids Online from 2018/2019 will be used for trend analysis, comparing the current results to the situation pre-COVID.

- **How do children use digital technologies during lockdown?**
- **Have children's and parents' attitudes towards digital technology and certain online activities changed compared to pre-lockdown?**
- **Are digital technologies helping to meet the needs of children during the pandemic?**

RATIONALE

Most children in Europe (and beyond) are locked down at home. Schooling, leisure time, and social connection take place at home via digital media for most. Children are now more than ever consumers of digital media and content. Based on prior research, we expect that the more activities children engage in online, the more online risks they encounter (inappropriate content, commercial pressure, unwanted contact, cyberbullying). At the same time, they also have new opportunities to benefit. It is essential to generate comparable cross-national data to inform stakeholders of the current trends and possible impacts of COVID-19 on children's digital experiences, as well as insights into how digital technologies can be used to support children during stressful life events.

HOW WILL THE STUDY ADDRESS THE QUESTION?

Cross-country comparisons of survey data will be done between the participating countries. Where data exists from 2018/2019, trend analyses will also be conducted. The study will be quantitative, generating descriptive statistics and complex modelling that help respond to the main research questions. The analysis is complemented by qualitative interviews with families in select countries. Follow-up studies are planned for early 2021 to enable trend analysis in post-COVID settings.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

The research will use online panel surveys for primary data collection, through engaging children and parents directly. The survey will draw on UNICEF's Global Kids Online survey and incorporate COVID-specific elements. Qualitative methods will be used in a sub-set of countries.

RESOURCES

Funded by European Commission's Joint Research Centre & EU Kids Online. Italian study funded by Innocenti & German by German NatComm.

TIMELINE

Data collection June/July 2020
Analysis & writing July-Oct 2020

PARTNERSHIPS

UNICEF National Committees, EU Kids Online network, European Commission's Joint Research Centre

RESEARCH LEADS

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Mapping and Gender Analysis of COVID-19 Public Policy Responses

As part of the gender-responsive age-sensitive social protection (GRASSP) research programme, new secondary data analysis will be conducted to assess the extent to which gender has been integrated (or not) into policy responses to COVID-19.

RATIONALE

Governments have quickly designed or reformed social protection measures to mitigate the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and related containment measures. Non-contributory programmes are most widely used, followed by reforms of social insurance and supply-side labour market interventions. Fiscal stimulus-type responses have also been implemented.

It is unclear if and how these policy responses have incorporated gender considerations into their design, for example by addressing specific gendered risks and vulnerabilities. While at the beginning of the pandemic sex-disaggregated data was showing that men were more likely than women to develop severe symptoms due to COVID-19, it has become clear that women and children will likely bear the brunt of the socio-economic impacts that will be brought on by COVID-19, containment measures, and the global recession that will likely follow. For example, it is well known that globally women and girls already spend on average [three times more time than men and boys](#) on unpaid care and domestic work, including cleaning and looking after sick household members. These activities have likely increased due to COVID-19, the promotion of hygiene practices, closing of schools and daycare centres, and following the infection of household members with COVID-19.

HOW WILL THE STUDY ADDRESS THE QUESTION?

Research Objective 1: Assess the extent to which policy responses have integrated gender considerations in their design (objectives, targeting, conditionalities, etc).

Research Objective 2: Estimate the effects on gender equality outcomes, drawing on data and lessons from past crises.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

For Research Objective 1, the research will use an adapted version of the GRASSP analytical framework that has been applied in the mapping and gender analysis of social protection programmes in low- and middle-income countries (UNICEF Innocenti and UN women 2020 forthcoming).

The research will draw on these data sources (secondary): World Bank living paper by Ugo Gentilini et al; ILO Social Protection Monitor; IMF Fiscal Stimulus database; Oxford School of Blavatnik stringency measure database; time series data on gender equality outcomes

RESOURCES

GRASSP team

TIMELINE

6 months (Sept 2020 - March 2021)

RESEARCH LEADS

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