

# HOW UNICEF INNOCENTI IS RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Living Document: Version 14 April 2020



Learners wear masks to prevent against COVID-19 at a pre-school in Johannesburg, South Africa. © UNICEF/UNI316642/Mohamedh

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF Innocenti is planning research projects to provide the evidence needed to inform UNICEF's work, including: rapid assessment, immediate mitigating strategies in programming and policy advocacy; & preparation for longer term consequences of the crisis.

The projects cover a rapid review of evidence, education analysis, & social & economic policies. Short-term studies are distinguished from longer-term ones that will be undertaken as more information & evidence come to light.

## SHORTER TERM PROJECTS

### **Pandemics & child protection, a rapid review**

A review of existing literature & evidence, undertaken in 3-4 weeks, to support UNICEF's programmatic evidence needs for COVID-19 child protection. The project will define a methodology to undertake such reviews in other areas outside the scope of UNICEF Innocenti's work streams.

### **Identifying "good practices" for equitable continuation of learning during COVID-19 school closures**

Rapid analysis of promising remote learning practices during school closures & how it affects all children, including those most vulnerable without electricity. Build on data currently collected from country offices & other sources & will be done in collaboration with UNICEF HQ.

## RESEARCH PROJECTS

Pandemics & child protection, a rapid review

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Identifying "good practices" for the equitable continuation of learning during COVID-19 school closures

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

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Learning from the COVID-19 crisis on providing continued education for all in times of school closures

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Children's experiences & views of COVID-19 & responses to it

## **Social protection for families & 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, based on national preconditions (social, economic, public policy practice) & exposure to COVID-19, when seeking to protect children from the effects of a health crisis accompanied by a financial crisis. By isolating key macro-determinants of short- & long-term risks to children, social & economic conditions will contribute directly to country-level rapid assessments & planning.



## **LONGER TERM PROJECTS**

### **Learning from the COVID-19 crisis on providing continued education for all in times of school closures**

Investigating the impacts of the COVID-19 school closures on education & other outcomes related to nutrition, social policy, child protection; & what works to provide continued learning during crises. The research will draw on available data & ongoing Innocenti research for innovation in education programmes, such as digital learning platforms.

### **Children's experiences & views of COVID-19**

Children's voices on this global issue must be heard & considered when formulating responses. Focusing on the most vulnerable children, this work will conduct primary research in selected contexts to ask: How do children experience the COVID-19 situation? How has it affected them? What are the key issues from their perspective?

## **PRINCIPLES OF COVID-19 RESEARCH**

UNICEF Innocenti is developing a document outlining ethical considerations for evidence generation involving children during COVID-19. The office will undertake research that will:

- Understand & interpret limitations of existing evidence collected under differing circumstances
- Focus on vulnerable groups & children
- Use a gender & intergenerational lens
- Be child-focused
- Be action & policy oriented

## **PRIORITISING COVID-19 IN EXISTING WORK PLANS**

Ongoing Innocenti projects will be reviewed to assess the potential for including analysis salient to the COVID-19 response.

- Donors & partners will be included in discussions on proposed adaptations to work plans
- Existing research partners have been informed of potential delays to deliverables
- Risks & risk mitigation strategies will be updated to refer to COVID-19 circumstances
- Adaptations to work plans involving new data collection or fieldwork will be reviewed under guidelines for ethical research during the COVID-19 crisis

## **RESEARCH PROMOTION**

Blogs, webinars, & other communications products will promote the research generated. The communications team will scan for & highlight key publications & data sources from partner organisations.

**Visit [unicef-irc.org/covid19](https://www.unicef-irc.org/covid19)**

**Contact [drichardson@unicef.org](mailto:drichardson@unicef.org)**

# PANDEMICS & CHILD PROTECTION: A RAPID REVIEW

A rapid synthesis of literature to answer three research questions:

- **What are the effects of epidemics & pandemics on child protection outcomes?**
- **What are the effects of containment measures on child protection outcomes?**
- **What does the evidence say about the effects on vulnerable children & adolescents?**

## RATIONALE

Policy guidance & media commentary suggest that the COVID-19 virus & control measures could have both short- & long-term impacts on families & children due to multiple stresses. These disruptions can have negative consequences for children's well-being, development & protection, particularly for those already vulnerable to socio-economic exclusion & those who live in overcrowded settings. Competition for scarce resources, limited access to social supports or safe spaces could increase risks of child abuse, neglect, exploitation, & violence. These impacts have gendered & generational consequences, including domestic violence faced by women & girls in particular, & the potential impacts of illness or death of caregivers, a parent, or grandparent. As such, this review seeks to provide rapid evidence on the potential child protection risks, which can then be fed into decision-making processes.

## HOW WILL THE STUDY ADDRESS THE QUESTION?

We will follow the guidance & principles on evidence synthesis to produce a rapid review. The final product will be a report synthesizing the findings of studies on the agreed research question. The synthesis will draw on studies and systematic reviews of previous pandemics & epidemics, including:

- Child protection effects of COVID-19, Ebola, SARS, MERS, H1N1, Zika, HIV/AIDS & their infection control methods
- Focus on children & adolescents (0-19 years of age)
- Effects on individual child-level outcomes, including unpaid work, child labour, child marriage, & violence exposure

Recommendations & implications will be presented in a manner that can easily inform decision-making & policy. Where evidence is available, we will highlight the risks & effects on particular vulnerable sub-groups of children by:

- Conducting systematic searches in a limited number of databases
- Screening studies according pre-defined inclusion criteria
- Extracting key data, including: year, country of study, crisis event, design & method, participants, key results
- A narrative synthesis (thematic analysis) of the key findings in the literature
- Limitations: not comprehensive, no quality appraisal

## RESOURCES

1 team leader, 2 expert advisors, 3 researchers. The team leader will provide the methodological lead & will ensure quality control.

## TIMELINE

Estimated 24 days

## PARTNERSHIPS

Sandy Oliver & Claire Stansfield from EPPI-Centre, a leading evidence synthesis centre based at University College London, will provide expert advice on overall methodology & search strategy.

## RESEARCH LEAD

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# IDENTIFYING “GOOD PRACTICES” FOR THE EQUITABLE CONTINUATION OF LEARNING DURING COVID-19 SCHOOL CLOSURES

Rapid analysis of remote learning promising practices (online learning, digital tools, TV/radio based teaching, “take-home” package for parental education) for continued education during school closures & how it affects all children, including the most vulnerable children without electricity/connectivity. The research will build on the data currently collected from country offices & other sources & will be done in collaboration with UNICEF HQ (PD/EDU, DAPM/D&A).

**What are the promising practices for government & UNICEF responses for continued education for all during the closures of school by COVID 19, including for the most vulnerable?**

## RATIONALE

UNICEF has the largest global education presence of any international agency with over 790 staff in 144 countries. Around the world, governments are closing schools, putting 87% of the world’s children out-of-school (as of March 26 2020). Varied measures & tools (see education toolkit COVID-19) exist for the continuation of 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 & progress towards SDGs. The analysis will inform tangible recommendations to governments & country offices in their education response to the crisis for children in different situations. Innocenti is well placed to provide these answers based on its research capacity & ongoing support to data collection questionnaires to COs & the review of costing/modeling tool (‘RELEARN’) developed by ESARO.

## HOW WILL THE STUDY ADDRESS THE QUESTION?

Mapping of Government & UNICEF responses to the remote learning decision tree developed by PD-Education. Analysis will rely on data collected by UNICEF offices from the education response questionnaire & secondary data analysis on the use of TV, radio, & technology (from household surveys), & school closures (UNESCO & UNICEF corporate questionnaire on socio-economic impacts).

## METHODOLOGY & DATA SOURCES

- Mapping countries, by socio-economic status, region, electricity & technology penetration
- Mapping UNICEF responses & statistical analysis correlating responses to COVID-19 exposure over time, school closures, technological penetration
- Statistical analysis to estimate the potential for negative equity effects for responses based on variations in electricity, technology, & internet across & within countries

Data Sources: UNICEF COVID-19 education response questionnaire, school closures from COVID (UIS), secondary impacts of COVID-19 questionnaire, electricity/technology penetration (ITU, household survey data).

## RESOURCES

Shifting time of 3 researchers

## TIMELINE

3 weeks from the receipt of data from the education questionnaire

## PARTNERSHIPS

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

## RESEARCH LEADS

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# SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR FAMILIES & 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, based on national preconditions (social, economic, public policy practice) & exposure to COVID-19, when seeking to protect children from the effects of a health crisis accompanied by a financial crisis in the short and long term. The report will draw on lessons from previous social protection responses to the 2008-13 global financial crises, previous health & economic crises, & early responses to COVID-19 in a selection of countries (see Gentilini, others).

- **What are the national & household level economic & social vulnerabilities related to the COVID-19 pandemic?**
- **What is the role of social protection in preventing or treating social & economic risks at household & national levels following the COVID-19 pandemic?**
  - *Is fiscal stimulus the answer? If so, how should it be delivered & to whom?*
- **What is the case for business supports, grants, or main government responses being implemented?**
  - *To what extent does mortgage, rent, & tax relief protect from default, poverty, or undermine the contributions to social protection? What is the roll for catch-up on tax or SI contributions?*
- **What is the role of social services?**
  - *What are the effects on service administration (e.g. capacity)?*

## RATIONALE

The global health pandemic has led to countries adopting population health mitigation strategies, such as health advice, travel restrictions, social distancing decrees, & initial public policy responses to mitigate & protect against the predicted economic fallout that could follow. The study examines the economic & social vulnerabilities of countries based on demographic, health, & economic preconditions & makes recommendations for responses & reforms to address these vulnerabilities. The study will provide timely guidance on how countries can assess their economic & social risks & determine optimal social protection responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## RESOURCES

All members of the Social & Economic Policy team will contribute to this work. Staff time will be redirected towards this effort & funding is required to enable this work.

## TIMELINE

3-4 weeks in April 2020  
Weeks 1 & 2: review of literature & data collation  
Weeks 3 & 4: Writing report & policy recommendations

## PARTNERSHIPS

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

## RESEARCH LEADS

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# SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR FAMILIES & CHILDREN: CONSIDERATIONS FOR A POST COVID-19 RESPONSE

## HOW WILL THE STUDY ADDRESS THE QUESTION?

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

- Literature review of direct & indirect effects of legislative & policy responses to previous financial & health crises
- Collation & analysis of quantitative & secondary data on demographic, health & economic preconditions & COVID-19 burden in each country
- Qualitative/normative assessments of social protection typologies & recommendations for optimal response

It will be tailored to provide evidence that can feed into rapid assessment tools for informing immediate & long-term social protection responses.

## METHODOLOGY & DATA SOURCES

The research will use quantitative methods for secondary data collection & analysis. The team will collect statistics related to the national preconditions that increase or lessen the susceptibility to the health, economic, & social shocks of COVID-19, e.g. numbers of intergenerational households,

Average Rate Indexes, growth rates & other economic conditions (such as government debts, current account deficits, poverty), & other social statistics related to mental health & intimate partner violence. Data analyses will include descriptive statistics & graphs.

Data sources include the World Bank, IMF, WHO, Eurostat, European health surveys, demographic & health surveys, & national household surveys. Data on policy responses will be obtained from global policy trackers run by the World Bank, IMF, University of Oxford, Teneo & others.



# LEARNING FROM THE COVID-19 CRISIS ON PROVIDING CONTINUED EDUCATION FOR ALL IN TIMES OF SCHOOL CLOSURES

This research will investigate the impacts of the COVID-19 school closures on education & other outcomes & what works to provide continued learning during crises. To complement the global understanding of the impact & response to COVID-19 in education, the research will draw on available data & on ongoing Innocenti research for UNICEF innovation in education programmes, such as digital learning platforms, to understand their use during times when schools have to close.

**What is the impact of the COVID-19 school closures on education and cross sectoral outcomes & what works to make education systems function for all when schools have to close, including for the most vulnerable?**

## RATIONALE

Around the world, governments are closing schools, putting 87% of the world's children out-of-school (as of March 26 2020). Varied measures & tools (see education toolkit COVID-19) exist for the continuation of 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 & progress towards SDGs. The research will provide evidence-based solutions to governments & education actors to improve equitable education & other outcomes when schools have to close. The project will draw on existing research conducted by the office on innovation in education (e.g. Akelius).

## HOW WILL THE STUDY ADDRESS THE QUESTION?

Three areas of inquiry will be investigated:

- The impact of different types of responses on education (learning, retention, drop-outs etc.) & cross-sectoral outcomes (e.g. nutrition, health, social policy)
- How did school closures change education systems? How persistent are those changes? What are key strategies to bring children back into education?
- What remote learning programmes work for the most disadvantaged & least able to access electricity, technology & internet? Includes ongoing & upcoming research on innovation in education

## METHODOLOGY & DATA SOURCES

Mixed methods research including quasi-experimental analysis where applicable & feasible. Research will be linked to existing UNICEF partnerships (such as Akelius and Learning Passport) with case studies on their use during COVID-19. Potential data sources include UNICEF COVID-19 education response, secondary impacts datasets, DHS, MICS, LSMS, UIS.

## RESOURCES

Shifting focus of staff currently supporting innovations in education research

## TIMELINE

6 months

## PARTNERSHIPS

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

## RESEARCH LEADS

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# CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES & VIEWS OF COVID-19 & RESPONSES TO IT

- **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 & proposals for responses to the current situation & how situations like this could be handled better in the future?**

UNICEF is in an ideal position to generate answers to these questions, given its role & reach. However, there are substantial risks inherent in this kind of work. It requires careful preparation & necessary skills & safeguards. Evidence-gathering from children on this issue must be conducted: ethically (including considering appropriate timing, contexts & methods); to a high standard so that evidence is robust & reliable; & in a systematic, coherent way to avoid duplication of effort & to maximize value.

## RATIONALE

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

## HOW WILL THE STUDY ADDRESS THE QUESTION?

- Devise an approach to evidence-gathering from children about this issue that meets requirements regarding ethics, quality & coherence.
- Conduct primary research in selected countries & contexts, working with research partners (within & outside UNICEF) to pilot approaches & gather an initial set of evidence
- Share materials & 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 & collation of evidence gathered

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

## METHODOLOGY & DATA SOURCES

The work will be primarily qualitative. We will develop & pilot a range of methods (traditional & digital) to involve children. These will take into consideration different age groups & 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 are in discussions with the Senior Ethics Adviser.

## 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

Minimum of 3 months

## PARTNERSHIPS

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

## RESEARCH LEAD

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# LEADING MINDS ONLINE | COVID-19 & CHILDREN | WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

The unprecedented global COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world within a few short weeks. For convening, face-to-face meetings are no longer possible & may not be for some time. Leading Minds Online will host rapid expert consultations to garner expertise & experience on pandemics, responses & effects on children, & support efforts by our research teams & other UNICEF divisions.

Leading Minds Online draws on the Leading Minds brand, which is synonymous with high quality convening & which we intend to improve in our online interactions. Given the momentous changes that the world is experiencing, including a potentially historic depression, it is highly uncertain that large & relatively expensive face-to-face convening will be a viable modality for UNICEF Innocenti any time soon.

- **Collate evidence & knowledge on pandemics, responses, & effects on children & adolescents**
- **Gather experience & expertise on policy & programmes from practitioners & policy makers**
- **Consolidate & disseminate evidence & knowledge for wider uptake**

## METHODS

Leading Minds Online will use the same blend of convening as at its inaugural conference, bringing together knowledge brokers, practitioners, policy makers, civil society, foundations, & young people to connect, listen, share, & explore recommendations.

Each online convening will generally follow a common format. After a brief introduction, the first 30 minutes will be devoted to a moderated CNN-style panel discussion with 4-5 leading minds on a COVID-19 related topic. This will be followed by a moderated open discussion in which UNICEF staff, partners, donors, & others can pose questions to the experts. The total time for each session of online convening will be 50 minutes max. If appropriate, consideration will be given to including a 7-minute keynote address.

Panelists will be sent detailed briefing packs on the format & questions. They will be given 2-3 minutes for their responses & will be held strictly to time.

All partners will be invited to participate in these discussions through ZOOM or other media, & to ask questions via a chat room moderated by the Convening team. The facilitators of the discussion will relay a selection of these comments & questions as appropriate in the discussion.

A summary of the sessions will be shared within 48 hours of the convening, with next steps outlined. Sessions will be recorded & available within 24 hours.

## POSSIBLE CONVENINGS

Epidemiology of COVID-19 & Children & Adolescents  
COVID-19 & Children Online  
COVID-19 & Child Mental Health  
COVID-19 & Societal Impact  
COVID-19 & Violence  
COVID-19, Economic Crisis & Social Protection  
COVID-19 & Continued Learning  
COVID-19 & Children in Fragile Settings  
COVID-19 & WASH

## TIMELINE

2 weeks from conception to first consultation, starting May 2020

## PARTNERSHIPS

UNICEF HQ & other offices, National Committees, academic partners, Governments, civil society, partners, foundations, philanthropists, young people

## LEADS

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# ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR EVIDENCE GENERATION INVOLVING CHILDREN ON COVID-19

**What are the ethical considerations when undertaking evidence generation involving children on COVID-19?**

## RATIONALE

While COVID-19 can & should be considered an emergency, it is a specific case of the emergency context. Hence while the ethical issues pertaining to evidence generation involving children in emergencies are relevant, there are a number of factors that define this special case that need to be considered from the outset & that will inform the ethical considerations.

## HOW WILL THE STUDY ADDRESS THE QUESTION?

The guidance will be drawn from pre-existing guidelines relating to ethically engaging children in evidence generation in humanitarian contexts tailored to the COVID-19 context.

## METHODOLOGY & DATA SOURCES

This is not going to be a comprehensive literature review but rather an accessible / nonacademic summary & overview.

## RESOURCES

Completed by the Ethics Advisor at UNICEF Innocenti

## TIMELINE

Available April 2020

## RESEARCH LEAD

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