

UNICEF CHILD PROTECTION UPDATE

NOVEMBER 2020

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for every child



Children play in a protection centre with multi-disciplinary teams, supported by UNICEF on the outskirts of Caracas, Venezuela. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF is sending supplies to protection workers, so they can continue to safely provide psychosocial and other support.

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CONTEXT

Goal Area 3 of UNICEF's 2018–2021 Strategic Plan seeks to ensure that every child, especially the most vulnerable and those affected by humanitarian situations, is protected from all forms of violence, exploitation, abuse and harmful practices by:

- preventing and responding to violence against children;
- accelerating the reduction of harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage;
- enhancing children's access to justice.

As 2020 is drawing to a close, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to put children and women at heightened risk of abuse, exploitation and violence, while economic shutdowns, physical distancing and confinement measures remain serious threats to children's health, well-being and protection. Experience from previous outbreaks shows that epidemics exacerbate existing inequalities, including those based on economic and disability status, ability, age, race/ethnicity and sex. Indeed, UNICEF's [analysis](#) shows that COVID-19 has caused disruptions to critical child protection and gender-based violence (GBV) services in more than 100 countries. Notably, the most widespread drops in service coverage among 140 countries, as compared to this time last year, were: home visits by social services/justice workers (65 countries); civil registration services (42 countries); legal/judicial processes, procedures or services for children in contact with the

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law (40 countries); and, in countries with humanitarian responses, in girls' safe spaces/services. While governments have significantly scaled up their social protection response to COVID-19, further scale up and continuation of social protection support and child protection services is needed.

UNICEF is wholly engaged in United Nations system-wide efforts to mount a rapid, multi-dimensional, human rights-based [response to COVID-19](#). UNICEF is striving to maintain the continuity of its programmes and operations, while responding to COVID-19 and adapting to its impacts. With governments and partners, UNICEF is committed to delivering assistance to children and women across all affected areas – contributing both to disease control and to mitigate the socio-economic ramifications on children and families. Flexible funding has proven key and UNICEF is advocating to boost resources, which will remain indispensable to reach countries and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and beyond. Against the backdrop of the child rights crisis that is the COVID-19 crisis, UNICEF is leading the charge to respond, recover and to reimagine a world fit for every child.

CORNELIUS' CORNER

Since the last Child Protection update (May 2020), in the face of an infectious disease outbreak like no other, the global child protection sector has unstintingly sustained and stepped up its work to protect children.

Two aspects make this pandemic different, namely the **scale**, and the **severity** of prevention measures. The universality of harmful effects on child protection resulting from COVID-19 is global, for instance, more than 1.1 billion children and youth are still **out of school**. This scale, coupled with the severity of prevention measures, which combines so many known risk factors for child protection – home confinement, economic shocks, emotional stress – makes this pandemic much more dangerous than others. The socio-economic impacts of the pandemic are forcing parents into **desperate situations**, increasing the risk of exploitation, GBV, child marriage, **child labour** and trafficking. We see families needing to commodify their kids. With livelihoods lost, children out of school, family income disappeared... uncertainty is high and choices are limited.

Yet despite the forbidding realities faced by children as their countries struggle to fight the pandemic and the unprecedented challenges, the child protection section, together with partners, is nimbly adapting and innovating existing solutions to address COVID-19 –

to reach more children and their communities.

We are seeing **adaptation** through increased recourse to remote case management to overcome **challenges** posed by physical distancing

requirements, with case and family group conferencing, family court hearings, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and follow up with at-risk children taking place more often through phone or other virtual contact. Similarly, to mitigate risks that COVID-19 pressures lead to increased violence in the home, governments are adapting ways of delivering positive parenting resources, for example, in **Montenegro**, where existing face-to-face parenting groups needed to adapt quickly for delivery using online platforms, text messaging and telephone calls.

Not only are we adapting, but we are also **innovating**. For example, at least 40 countries are releasing thousands of children from detention (through a range of actions such as the use of alternative measures to detention, probation, amnesty, conditional release and the prohibition of new entry of children into detention). In eight countries, UN wide approaches are being used with UNAIDS, UNDP, UNODC, UNOPS, UN Women and OHCHR being cited as key partners in various aspects of access to justice programming. Across GBV programmes, we are digitalising our work and making it more accessible.

Are these kids going to pay the price for COVID-19? They will, unless we get these policies right for them. And they will be asking you and me, what did you do? What did you do during COVID-19? In this second special COVID-19 edition of UNICEF's Child Protection Update, we are pleased to see how, despite the overwhelm of child protection systems, UNICEF child protection staff across the world *are* getting the policies right and in preventing roll-back of gains made, are shifting the crisis into an opportunity to enact lasting programmatic changes that better realize children's rights. In the words of **Executive Director Fore**: *'...the challenge of the pandemic is matched with a unique opportunity to take what we have learned, and adapt UNICEF for the future, and to emerge stronger from the time of COVID for millions and millions of children and young people.'*



Cornelius Williams,
Associate Director,
UNICEF Child Protection Section

LEBANON: WHEN HOPE TURNS TO DESPAIR – UNICEF STAYS AND DELIVERS FOR CHILDREN. 2020 – A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER



Lebanese children participate in psychosocial activities at UNICEF's children friendly space at the Karantina public garden in Beirut, Lebanon.

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In 2020, for Lebanon, on top of the COVID-19 pandemic with lockdown and movement restrictions, the country was badly hit by economic crises, political crises, and the devastating 4 August Beirut explosion, which caused massive property damage, loss of life, and thousands of injuries. The crises in 2020 come over and above what was already one of the world's largest humanitarian challenges with Lebanon being host to the highest per capita refugee population in the world: 1.5 million Syrians, 200,000 Palestinians, and close to 20,000 migrant workers living among 6 million Lebanese. The outcome of the popular revolution that started in October 2019 is still unknown and political solutions are being sought. What is certain is that far too many children and families have become victims of the circumstances and face growing despair and difficulties.

With conditions changing so rapidly, it was important for UNICEF to gather real-time data on emerging issues affecting children. Specific child protection issues that became a concern included: i) increased levels of stress and tension in the household resulting in violence against children and intimate partner violence against women and girls, ii) more children working and appearing on the street as a result of families – refugees and Lebanese – falling into poverty and as schools remained closed due to COVID-19, iii) children at higher risk of becoming manipulated to take part in illegal activities and in violent clashes given growing tensions; and iv) families starting to report not having access to basic services and support, basic food and non-food items. Women and child survivors of violence found it difficult to access support due to prolonged confinement. For the first time, as desperation grew following the Beirut blast, Lebanese families started to join refugees on attempts to leave the country across the sea from Lebanon to Cyprus, a perilous journey that ended in death for some – including children – and crushed hopes for most.

UNICEF worked with its partners to reach children and their families with child protection and GBV services. Flexible, multi-year funding from key donors, such as Denmark, the European Union and the United Kingdom enabled the programme to make adjustments to ensure relevance and reach:

- Child protection and GBV services were remodeled to digital and remote support with psychosocial and parenting support sessions provided by phone, small group calls, and online platforms;
- 1,300 Personal Protective Equipment sets were provided to frontline workers visiting households for critical child protection and GBV cases;
- Child protection activities were integral to the response to COVID-19, including provision of recreational kits at hospitals and isolation centres; social workers were deployed to ensure the protection and well-being of children and prevent separation of children from families;
- With concerns for boys, girls, women and young people's mental health and well-being, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) became part of broad multi-sectoral and coordinated programming efforts through services and structures of child protection, education, health and Communication for Development. In response to the Beirut blast, UNICEF reached some 30,000 individuals with different forms of MHPSS programme interventions.
- The programme reached more than 13,000 girls and women and provided them with access to safe spaces and related services, including case management, psychosocial support and information sessions. Girls and women were also referred to legal, mental, health, shelter and livelihood services.

- More than 25,000 girls, boys, women and caregivers were provided with access to a safe and accessible channel to report sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA).
- Integrated and multi-sectoral programming has reached over 10,000 out-of-school children through non-formal education, child protection interventions and monthly

cash assistance. While staying at home due to COVID-19 lockdown, these children were provided with individual stationary, play and recreational kits.

As the situation unfolds, UNICEF will continue to depend on flexible donor funding to stay relevant and continue to deliver for children and women to help restore hope for the future.

SPOTLIGHT: EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

ALBANIA: INFORMATION ON CHILD PROTECTION MADE ACCESSIBLE FOR CHILDREN WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENT

UNICEF Albania has partnered with the Albanian National Association of the Deaf (ANAD) to ensure that children with hearing impairment and their caregivers have access to information on child protection during COVID-19. The COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions left children with hearing impairment at home in complete isolation from the external world; many of their parents and caregivers, who may be unable to communicate using sign language, were left unassisted and unable to communicate with their children. So far, over 300 children with hearing impairment have benefited from more than 12 videos on seeking help, reporting abuse and violence, addressing stigma, parenting, online protection, and more. These videos are made available through social media and are shared through the dedicated platforms for persons with hearing impairment. In addition, ANAD, in partnership with UNICEF, is developing web-based learning

activities to educate parents, as well as teachers and social workers, to communicate in sign language using the Tirana Deaf Institute web-based platform.

PLEASE SEE ONE OF MANY VIDEOS HERE:



SPOTLIGHT: EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

MALAYSIA: AWARD-WINNING #STANDTOGETHER KINDNESS MOVEMENT RE-LAUNCHES ONLINE

After a series of deadly adolescent bullying cases in Malaysia in 2017, UNICEF jumped into action by joining a movement to make National Kindness Week an annual event in all Malaysian schools. The #StandTogether movement, founded by partners R.AGE and SP Setia, included various programmes to empower

students to end violence against children by creating a "Kindness Revolution" in their schools and communities. The movement has proved a resounding success, with 10,000 teachers, students, and other members of the public signing up in 2019 to push for a kinder, more empathetic society; a mission

which the Education Ministry, including its current Director-General Dr Habibah Abdul Rahim, has publicly endorsed and supported. Schools and organizations in other countries – including Indonesia, Philippines, and Singapore – have also expressed interest in participating in the movement. UNICEF regional ambassador Siwon Choi visited a school in Kuala Lumpur to show his support and requested it be brought to South Korea.



Plans to launch the 2020 campaign were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The stay-at-home lockdown resulted in a 57 per cent spike in domestic helpline calls for support, emphasizing that the #StandTogether movement remains as important as ever. UNICEF is working with multi-sectoral partners to deliver the 2020 programme, which contains three main activities and programmes:

1. **The Kindness Challenge:** A five day challenge on WhatsApp, powered by U-Report.
2. **The Kindness Workshops:** A two hour empathy skills workshop delivered via Zoom.
3. **The Kindness Leadership Programme:** A four month fellowship programme and network to develop “Kindness Leaders”.

SPOTLIGHT: EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

RWANDA: COMMUNITY-BASED CHILD PROTECTION IN THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

In 2016, UNICEF supported the Rwanda’s National Commission for Children to deploy a nationwide cadre of 29,674 community-based child protection volunteers known as *Inshuti z’Umuryango* (IZU or ‘Friends of the Family’ in the local language Kinyarwanda). IZU are para-professionals who are part of the community-based child protection system. They are selected by their own communities and are responsible for the identification, support and referral of child protection cases and community sensitization of child protection issues.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 emergency in Rwanda and the resulting lockdown, IZU have played an important role in response efforts, adapting tasks and ways of working to provide uninterrupted essential child protection services. In the six months following the pandemic, IZU had utilized their USSD reporting system to report more than 3,600 cases in need of immediate response and reached more than 125,000 children with protection needs. Additionally, IZU have played an important

role in the COVID-19 risk communication efforts. The gallantry and powerful ability of IZU to bring communities together is apparent in these videos [here](#) and [here](#) and in this [blog](#).

Geretilda Basesake (left) is an *Inshuti z’Umuryango* (IZU or ‘Friends of the Family’), tasked with preventing and responding to child protection concerns in her Rwandan community.



GHANA: LAUNCH OF CHILD PROTECTION DIGITAL FORENSIC LAB IN GHANA

The Ghana Police Service (GPS), with technical and financial support from UNICEF and the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, launched the first ever Child Protection Digital Forensic Lab in Ghana. The Lab, situated within the Criminal Investigations Department, will be responsible for investigating online crimes against children from the 17 regions across the country. The number of internet users in Ghana has grown from nearly eight million in 2017 to just under 15 million in 2020. In 2019, the US National Centre for Missing and Exploitation Children shared over 7,000 CyberTipline Reports related to child sexual abuse material being accessed, distributed, or produced from Ghana with the GPS via Interpol. The Lab will equip the GPS with capacity to prevent and respond to cases of online violence against women and children, including online child sexual exploitation, bullying, sextortion, and cyberstalking. The facility will also enhance ability of the GPS to detect, report and remove child abuse material, and investigate the cases of trafficking and kidnapping in which digital devices

(e.g. mobiles and computers) have been used. The tools and training being provided will help the GPS acquire, investigate, and present evidence from digital devices in a secure and accurate manner, in order to stand the scrutiny of judicial proceedings.

PLEASE SEE THE VIDEO HERE:



MEXICO: PROTECTION, MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN ON THE MOVE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Since early March, more than 400 migrant children have been returned to Mexico from the USA, in addition to the more than 400 migrant children returned from Mexico to Central America, without the necessary protection screenings and health measures. To advocate with authorities for the implementation of protection and medical screenings, UNICEF Mexico developed guidance with suggested actions, roles and accountabilities of the authorities. The guidance is being disseminated as part of a virtual training for authorities on the Comprehensive Protocol for the Protection of Children

on the Move. UNICEF distributed more than 1,800 hygiene kits in shelters in the Northern and the Southern Borders and awareness-raising material to prevent the spread of the disease. Further, UNICEF facilitated a series of webinars on positive parenting and mental health targeting migrant parents and staff from shelters as well as the protection workforce. In total, almost 5,000 participants from Mexico and the region joined the 16 webinars. In addition, innovative remote counselling is being offered to workforce and caregivers in shelters, and UNICEF has ensured the

continuity of remote sport and recreational activities for 156 migrant children, confined to 12 shelters (in Baja California, Chiapas, Sonora and Chihuahua). This programming aims at positively impacting the psychosocial well-being of the children, and strengthening their resilience, lifeskills and knowledge on COVID-19 prevention practices. In addition, UNICEF Mexico participates in the *No Estás Sola* ('You Are Not Alone') campaign, which works with hotels to create safe spaces offering psychosocial support for women and girls. This compensates for reduced space in shelters due to COVID-19 containment measures.



UNICEF Mexico, in Tapachula, delivering hygiene kits and printed materials on how to prevent COVID-19 in shelters for migrant families from Central America.

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SPOTLIGHT: SOUTH ASIA

INDIA: INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE JUDICIARY OF INDIA AND THE RAILWAY PROTECTION FORCE FOR CHILD PROTECTION

UNICEF India has partnered with both the Supreme Court of India and the Railway Protection Force (RPF) leading to the protection and support of vulnerable children throughout the country during the COVID-19 pandemic.

UNICEF India began their partnership with the Judiciary of India in 2014, but the COVID-19 pandemic presented an opportunity to examine the role of courts for children in need of protection. The court, with UNICEF support, issued an order on the care of children within one week of the COVID-19 lockdown, which included guidelines for all actors working with children; and information on the provisional release of children in childcare institutions and return to families. UNICEF continues to work closely with 17 of the 35 states to monitor the data collection efforts. In addition to significant gains for child protection systems in terms of children released and new administrative data collection, nearly 367,500 children and caregivers in institutions and foster care have also received information on prevention and response to COVID-19.

Following sustained advocacy, UNICEF partnered with RPF and initiated the first round of formal training for officials from 5 divisions through an online platform in June 2020.

The RPF plays a critical role in rescuing children who could be vulnerable to trafficking or victims of any form of violence or abuse. National RPF data shows that the number of children rescued from trafficking has been growing every year since 2015, when the railway ministry, the women and child development ministry and National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights issued a standard operating procedure for rescue, and better care and protection of children in contact with the railways. This initiative has helped train around 300 RPF personnel working with railway children and issues of migration, in collaboration with CHILDLINE India Foundation, Action Aid and Railway Children. During the training, senior officers shared their personal experiences of dealing with children, highlighting the need for sensitivity, awareness of laws and using a child rights perspective when dealing with petty offences allegedly committed by children or other instances of abuse and exploitation of children... *"This training has brought about attitudinal change in the mindset of our RPF officials; now we can start looking at children from the perspective of the Juvenile Justice Act, this has helped to establish a connection with children,"* stated Deputy Superintendent of Police, Samastipur Division, Bihar. The RPF rescued over 16,450 children across India in 2019. Read more about the collaboration [here](#).

COPING WITH COVID-19: A PANDEMIC THROUGH A GIRL'S EYES

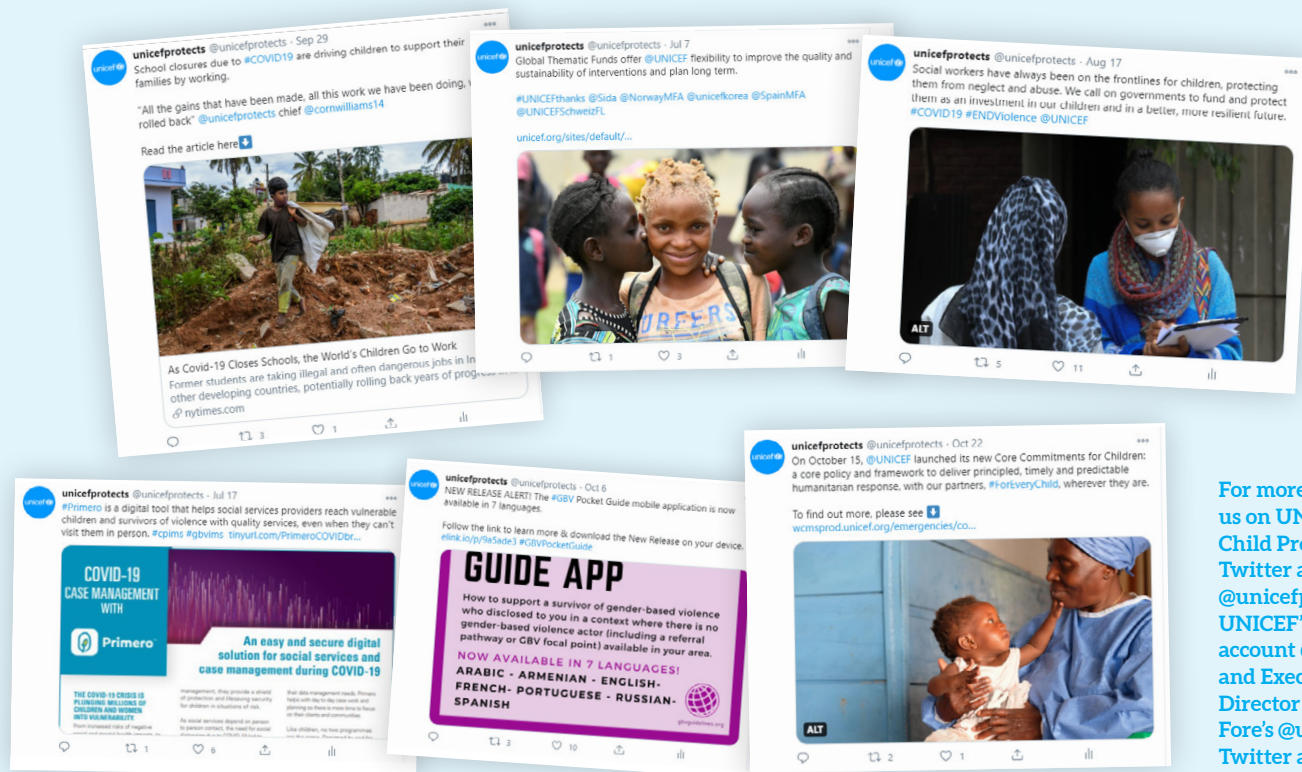
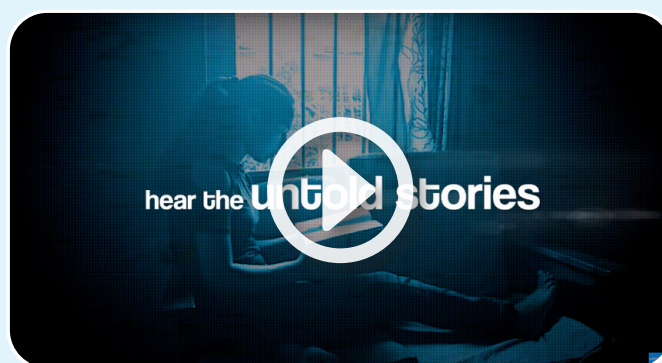
For five weeks between May and June 2020, UNICEF collaborated with 16 adolescent girls from nine countries, asking them to share their lives during the COVID-19 pandemic through the lens of their mobile phones. The videos captured by the girls resulted in a five-part video series aired through UNICEF Facebook, YouTube and Instagram in English and French during the summer.

Fearlessly showing and speaking about their homes, thoughts, worries and hopes – including issues of child marriage, female genital mutilation, education, GBV and inequality – the series gives us an opportunity to ensure that girls' voices are heard and stay on the agenda of governments and development partners during COVID-19 and beyond.

Thanks to the awe-inspiring content shared by the girls, the homepage of the series on [unicef.org](https://www.unicef.org) became the most visited web page of the organization in July 2020, with close to half a million page views and with people spending an average of 20 minutes on the page. At the same time, the trailer for the series became the most watched video of UNICEF in July (watch it below). In total, 6.5 million views of the 5 episodes have been recorded on Facebook, with an additional 44,300 views on YouTube and 212,000 views on Instagram.

In October, the series was announced as a finalist in the 5th Annual [Shorty Social Good Awards](#), in the category user created content. Additionally, the series was featured in the Lancet's Child and Adolescent Health Journal as a [reflection article](#) and in the Spanish newspaper [El Pais](#). To visit the website and access all episodes of the series, please go to <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/coping-with-covid-19>, and to read our blog post on the production of the series, please visit <https://blogs.unicef.org/blog/coping-with-covid-19-a-pandemic-through-girls-eyes/>.

COPING WITH COVID-19 TRAILER:



For more, follow us on UNICEF's Child Protection Twitter account @unicefprotects, UNICEF's Twitter account @UNICEF, and Executive Director Henrietta Fore's @unicefchief Twitter account

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, a growing number of UNICEF offices – at all levels – are documenting UNICEF's child protection response to COVID-19. Across all efforts, the message is clear: COVID-19 has brought with it the need for the child protection sector to increase its investment in data, research, evidence and knowledge generation and management. In response, UNICEF has initiated an evidence agenda and is conducting research on child protection issues and capturing lessons learnt to inform future design of prevention and response programmes, including during pandemics.

To address the limited evidence on child protection outcomes, UNICEF Innocenti undertook a rapid research review: *Impacts of Pandemics and Epidemics on Child Protection: Lessons learned from a rapid review in the context of COVID-19*. The rapid review collates and synthesizes evidence on the child protection impacts of COVID-19 and previous pandemics, epidemics and infectious disease outbreaks; and provides lessons for global and national responses to COVID-19, and recommendations for future research priorities. For further information, see the *Research Brief* summarizing findings from the rapid review *Working Paper*. Related, to identify gaps in the evidence base on the effectiveness of interventions to reduce violence against children in lower middle income countries and to provide an overview of existing evidence, UNICEF Innocenti partnered with the Campbell Collaboration to create an *Evidence and Gap Map*.

UNICEF Data and Analytics (D&A) Section's *Protecting Children from Violence in the Time of COVID-19: Disruptions in prevention and response services*, documents that 1.8 billion children live in the 104 countries where violence prevention and response services have been disrupted due to COVID-19. Around two thirds of countries with disruptions reported that at least one type of service had been severely affected. As countries adopted prevention and control measures to contain COVID-19, more than half reported disruptions (see 'Context' above).^{*} Further, D&A has explored evidence on channels through which the pandemic influences child labour in *COVID-19 and Child Labour: A time of crisis, a time to act*, revealing that with COVID-19, we may see an increase in child labour for the first time in 20 years.

Even as we rapidly build the evidence agenda, UNICEF is equally emphasizing the need for ethical and safe data collection and evidence generation in *Research on violence against children during the COVID-19 pandemic: Guidance to inform ethical data collection and evidence generation*, which

^{*} Note: The survey collected information from UNICEF's network of 157 country offices between 1 May and 14 August 2020 on disruptions in service provision as a result of COVID-19, including all 138 low- and middle-income countries, plus 19 high-income countries. A follow up survey is underway.

addresses key questions on generating violence against children evidence that may arise during the pandemic and includes a [decision tree](#) to guide those considering conducting research and data collection on violence against children during COVID-19. This guidance note builds on two previous Think Pieces by UNICEF Innocenti based on interviews with experts on violence-related research: *Remote data collection on violence against women during COVID-19: A conversation with experts on ethics, measurement & research priorities (Part 1)* and *Remote data collection on violence against children during COVID-19: A conversation with experts on research priorities, measurement and ethics (Part 2)*. Additional, related guidance has been published in *Exploring Critical Issues in the Ethical Involvement of Children with Disabilities in Evidence Generation and Use*; *Digital Contact Tracing and Surveillance During COVID-19: General and child-specific ethical issues* and *Ethical Considerations for Evidence Generation Involving Children on the COVID-19 Pandemic*.

To complement the emerging research, UNICEF is producing a Child Protection Learning Brief Series covering various areas of the COVID-19 child protection response to facilitate real-time emergent learning, documentation and knowledge exchange. The Learning Briefs will extract, synthesize and analyze learning on child protection risks and programme adaptation in the COVID-19 pandemic and contribute to improving policy, evidence-based advocacy, and programme results during infectious disease outbreaks. The first of the Child Protection Learning Brief Series, *Responding to the Shadow Pandemic: Taking stock of gender-based violence risks and responses during COVID-19*, draws on evidence from current country experiences and identifies emerging risks and solutions related to GBV, while the second, *Responding to the mental health and psychosocial impact of COVID-19 on children and families* aims to support UNICEF Country Offices and practitioners as they respond to mental health needs during the pandemic. Upcoming Child Protection Learning Briefs will cover: Birth Registration; Learning from Regional Responses: East Asia/Pacific Regional Office and Child Protection System Adaptation; Social Service Workforce Strengthening and Case Management; Children on the Move; Child Labour and Child Marriage. Additional bundles of related knowledge products are forthcoming in the areas of Justice and Violence against Children.



To further facilitate sharing of information and resources, we are pleased that a revamped Child Protection section of the global UNICEF website is now live at <https://www.unicef.org/protection>. We hope it will be a useful tool for UNICEF staff, partners and the general public when working on and learning about child protection issues.



Samba (*name changed*), 13 (left), helps a friend put on a face mask at a temporary shelter opened in Bamako, Mali, by UNICEF and its partner Samusocial to support children on the street during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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PUBLICATIONS

For links to global resources and events please visit: [UNICEF child protection website](#), [UNICEF Innocenti COVID-19 microsite](#), [Core Commitments platform](#), [COVID-19 page of the Alliance for Child Protection in](#)

Humanitarian Action, [COVID-19 page](#) of the Child Protection Area of Responsibility; and follow UNICEF child protection twitter account [@unicefprotects](#).

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