



Reimagine the future
for every child

PREVENTING A LOST DECADE

Urgent action to reverse
the devastating impact
of COVID-19 on children
and young people



unicef 

for every child

FOREWORD

For 75 years, UNICEF has delivered for children. From armed conflict, natural disasters and humanitarian crises to long-term survival and development programmes, our staff and partners have been on the ground working to provide essential services for those in need. Through the decades, UNICEF has helped to develop healthier and safer environments for children and their families.

Take one example – vaccines. In the 1980s, UNICEF and partners embarked on a bold mission – to immunize every child against preventable diseases. Together with governments, we facilitated one of the greatest logistical mobilizations in peacetime history. By the early 1990s, global childhood immunization levels reached 80 per cent.

Before the pandemic, we had made great strides toward helping all children realize their right to health, education and protection. At the start of 2020, more children were living to see their first birthday than at any time in history. Child mortality had fallen by 50 per cent since 2000. Maternal mortality and child marriages were on the decline and more girls were going to and staying in school than ever before.

Yet multiple crises are now threatening those hard-fought gains for children. The COVID-19 pandemic has been the biggest threat to children in our 75-year history. While the number of children who are hungry, out of school, abused, living in poverty or forced into marriage is going up, the number of children with access to health care, vaccines, sufficient food and essential services is going down.

The COVID-19 pandemic, a worsening climate crisis, armed conflict, displacement and other humanitarian emergencies are depriving children of their health and well-being. These developments portend an even more challenging future – a future in which the world could fall short of meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty, reduce inequality and build more peaceful, prosperous societies by 2030. In September, UN-Secretary General Guterres laid out the stakes to an audience of world leaders: “I am here to sound the alarm. The world must wake up. We are on the edge of an abyss – and moving in the wrong direction.”

The world stands at a crossroads. We have a decision to make. Do we rally and unite to protect years of progress on child rights? Or do we allow the unequal recovery from COVID-19 to further marginalize the disadvantaged and increase inequality even more?

UNICEF was created at another moment of crisis. Much of the world lay in ruins following years of war. Then, as now, marginalized and vulnerable children were most affected. In this context, UNICEF was created with the mandate to uphold and defend the rights of every child.

So as we commemorate UNICEF’s 75th year, we must also take stock of the work yet to be done for children. Now and in the years to come, we will continue to strive to create a world where children’s rights are fully realized, and where we open opportunities for every child. This is an ambitious undertaking that depends on new and strengthened partnerships with governments, civil society, our UN sister agencies and business. But together, we can build on the foundation of 75 years of results for children.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the private sector was instrumental in helping to rebuild economies, services and systems for children. In the years to come, the private sector will be a pivotal partner in driving innovation and technology to help us provide better services to more children and families.

And of course, children and young people are the most important partners of all. They are more than voices and beneficiaries – they are integral participants in creating and implementing solutions. Their strength, creativity and courage give me hope. By working with them, we can respond to and recover from the pandemic equitably and reimagine a better future for every child.

Henrietta Fore
UNICEF Executive Director

CONTENTS

	Foreword	2
	Key messages	4
<hr/>		
1	Introduction	6
	A protracted pandemic with unequal impact	9
	A reimagined future	11
	75 years of delivering for children	12
<hr/>		
2	COVID-19's ongoing impact on children	15
	Poverty	16
	Health and immunization	19
	Education	20
	Child protection	21
	Nutrition	22
	Mental health	24
	Humanitarian emergencies	25
<hr/>		
3	First in line for investment, last in line for cuts: An urgent agenda for action for children	27
	1. Invest in social protection, human capital, and spending for an inclusive and resilient recovery.	28
	2. End the pandemic and reverse the alarming rollback in child health and nutrition	32
	3. Build back stronger by ensuring quality education, protection, and good mental health for every child	36
	4. Build resilience to better prevent, respond to, and protect children from crises	40

KEY MESSAGES

The problem

- COVID-19 is the worst crisis for children in UNICEF's 75-year history. Without action, the world faces a lost decade for children, leaving the Sustainable Development Goals an impossible dream.
- In less than two years, 100 million more children have fallen into poverty, a 10 per cent increase since 2019.
- In a best-case scenario, it will take seven to eight years to recover and return to pre-COVID-19 child poverty levels.
- The deep disparity in recovery from the pandemic is widening the gap between richer and poorer countries. While richer countries are recovering, poorer countries are saddled with debt and development gains are falling behind. The poverty rate continues to rise in low-income countries and least developed countries.

The danger

- For the best-case scenario to become a reality, we must take action now.
- Even before the pandemic, around 1 billion children worldwide, and half of all children in developing countries, suffered at least one severe deprivation, without minimum levels of access to education, health, housing, nutrition, sanitation or water.
- The world stands at a crossroads. We must decide to either protect and expand the gains made for child rights over years, or suffer the consequences of reversed progress and a lost decade for today's children and young people, which will be felt by all of us, everywhere.

A child drinks water from the only source in Hesbi Camp, South Lebanon, October 2021.

© UNICEF/UN0553717/Choufany



But there's hope

- Far from feeling powerless in the face of challenge, today's children and young people welcome change and challenges, forging ahead with resilience and courage. Rather than consigning themselves to an already determined future, they are taking action. Today's young generation are more hopeful and confident that the world is becoming a better place.
- Today's crises also present a unique window of opportunity for the world to reimagine itself – as a fair, safe, interdependent whole in which every child's potential stands an equal chance of fulfillment.
- For 75 years, UNICEF has been the world's leading architect and advocate for child rights, whose work in delivering for every child, especially in times of crisis, is as critical today as ever.
- This is not a moment to be cautious. This is the time to work together and build a better future.

What must happen

- Make our collective future – our children – **first** in line for investment and **last** in line for cuts.
- This agenda for action is based on UNICEF's 75 years of experience, research and practice and 75 years of listening to children and young people.
- To respond and recover and to reimagine the future for every child, UNICEF continues to call for:
 - Investing in social protection, human capital and spending for an inclusive and resilient recovery
 - Ending the pandemic and reversing the alarming rollback in child health and nutrition – including through leveraging UNICEF's vital role in COVID-19 vaccine distribution
 - Building back stronger by ensuring quality education, protection and good mental health for every child
 - Building resilience to better prevent, respond to and protect children from crises – including new approaches to end famines, protect children from climate change and reimagine disaster spending.



Rukaiya Abbas, a UNICEF Nigeria Education Officer, talks with children at Kulmsulum School in Maiduguri, Nigeria.

© UNICEF/UN0322355/Kokic

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is the worst crisis for children in UNICEF's 75-year history. Almost two years into the pandemic, its widespread impact continues to deepen, increasing poverty and entrenching inequality. While some countries are recovering and rebuilding in a 'new normal', for too many, COVID-19 remains a catastrophe.

The global response so far has been deeply unequal and inadequate. The world now stands at a crossroads. The actions we take now will determine the well-being and rights of children for years to come.

The unequal rollout of COVID-19 vaccines is putting entire communities at risk. And as new variants continue to emerge, children and their communities continue to face health risks.

Increases in poverty have set back progress toward realizing children's rights and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Children's diets have deteriorated, and families struggle to find ways to find enough food and safe water for their children.

By September 2021, schoolchildren around the world have lost an estimated 1.8 trillion hours of in-person learning due to COVID-related school closures, which will have profound long-term, unequal social and economic effects.

Essential nutrition and health services such as routine immunization programmes and maternal and childcare continue to be disrupted.

School closures, job losses among families and increased stress and anxiety have affected the mental health of children and young people.

COVID-19 remains an urgent crisis for children that requires sustained, focused action.

As we commemorate UNICEF's 75th year, this report lays out the work in front of us by taking stock of the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on children and the road to respond and recover to reimagine the future for every child.



“According to my experience studying during the pandemic, whether it was distance learning or a mix of distance and in person, it provokes a great loss of interest. There is frustration, anxiety, panic, wanting to drop out of school and well, all of this has a great impact on our mental health. I think our generation questions many things. We talk about what is taboo, but above all, we stand up and raise our voice without letting anyone silence us. We come together regardless of our differences and this is a really good thing to be able to achieve the same goal. We want to use empathy to leave behind a good planet, a good world, a good place for future generations.”

Sofia, Uruguay. From UNICEF's Coping with COVID, Season 2.



Girls play together after school in Montevideo, Uruguay.

© UNICEF/UN0343182/Pazos

AN URGENT MOMENT: THE VAST IMPACT OF MULTIPLE CRISES



Health workers carry vaccines for COVID-19 vaccination session in Ramgarh, Banswada, India.

© UNICEF/UN0499236/ Bhardwaj

Children today are growing up in a world facing multiple crises.

The costs are not affecting all children equally. The most marginalized and vulnerable are hurt the most and vast disparities in health, education, mental health, poverty and migrants remain:

In 2020, over 23 million children missed out on essential **vaccines** – an increase of nearly 4 million from 2019, and the highest number since 2009.

At its peak, more than 1.5 billion students were **out of school** due to nationwide shutdowns. Millions of children are either not in school or not learning the basic skills they need to build a better future.

Mental health conditions affect more than 13 per cent of adolescents aged 10–19 worldwide.

Globally, 426 million children – nearly 1 in 5 – live in **conflict zones** that are becoming more intense

and taking heavier toll on civilians, disproportionately affecting children. Women and girls are at the highest risk of conflict-related sexual violence. Eighty per cent of all humanitarian needs are driven by conflict.

50 million children suffer from wasting, the most life-threatening form of **malnutrition**, and this figure could increase by 9 million by 2022 due to the pandemic's impact on children's diets, nutrition services and feeding practices.

Approximately 1 billion children – nearly half of the world's children – live in countries that are at an 'extremely high risk' from the impacts of **climate change**.

More children are displaced than ever before. Last year, more than 82 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced.

A PROTRACTED PANDEMIC WITH UNEQUAL IMPACT

Around the world, the pandemic continues to wreak havoc on young lives. COVID-19 has affected essentially every child in the world. But it has not affected all children equally. Governments are scrambling to accelerate vaccination programmes while prolonging or even reintroducing public health measures.

A survey of UNICEF Country Offices from March and April 2021 report that all countries – not only those with ongoing humanitarian response or that are off-track towards reducing child mortality rates – continue to face some severe service disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic and response. Countries with Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) appeals are more affected. Lockdown measures that restrict mobility, access and transportation are a leading reason for service disruptions.

The economic recovery has been deeply unequal. While richer countries are expected to regain all pandemic losses before the end of 2022, low-income countries face a fiscal and economic crisis that could last for years. And while richer countries are spending trillions on stimulus programmes and rolling out COVID-19 vaccines, low-income countries face slower economic growth, vaccine shortages, food insecurity and deepening poverty. With many lower-income countries in debt distress, the pandemic is widening the gap between rich and poor countries.

Nowhere is this clearer than the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines. The triumph of science and human inventiveness led to the creation of life-saving vaccines in record time. Yet as those in richer countries have access, many in poorer countries still wait for their first dose. As of 1 November 2021, over 80 per cent of administered COVID-19 vaccine doses have been in high- and upper-middle-income countries. Just 1.5 per cent have been given in low-income countries.

At the Global COVID-19 Summit in September, world leaders set a target that every country should vaccinate 70 per cent of its population by mid-2022. Yet according to one estimate, the more than 85 low-income countries will not reach a vaccination rate of 60 per cent until 2023, or even later.

This unjust rollout not only affects those who lack access to vaccines but it also affects the entire world. As the virus continues to spread, the more it continues to mutate, potentially into more dangerous variants.

The pandemic will not be over for anyone until it is over for everyone.



“COVID-19 changed how I look at the world. We have had to learn to adapt quickly to unpredictable conditions. COVID-19 changed me personally to take better care of my health and cleanliness and to take care of each other... I still want to be an agent of change and give more contributions to the children in Indonesia, in particular, the children in Kabupaten Bone... My hope for Indonesian girls is that they can pursue as high an education as possible without obstacles, such as child marriage, arranged marriage and other things. I wish that people realized that education is the most significant thing.”

Zulfa, Indonesia. From UNICEF's Coping with COVID, Season 2.



Endah puts a mask on her daughter Fatima, 3, before leaving their home in Bekasi, West Java province, Indonesia.

© UNICEF/UNI346202/Wilander

A REIMAGINED FUTURE

A year ago, we urged the world to take action to avert a lost COVID generation. One year later, it is clear that far from being powerless in the face of challenge, today's children and young people are the 'welcome' generation – welcoming change and challenges, forging ahead with resilience and courage. Rather than consigning themselves to an already determined future, they are taking action and opening new opportunities.

Today's young generation is more hopeful and confident that the world is becoming a better place. UNICEF's Changing Childhood project surveyed over 20,000 people across 21 countries and found that instead of despairing in the face of inequality and the climate crisis, the young are instead more confident that the world is becoming a better place compared to those aged 40 and older. The survey also found that today's young people are more likely than the older generation to recognize the progress made as living standards have risen and access to services has expanded.

The expectations of children and young people are changing. They want to be more than voices speaking out and beneficiaries of services. They are rights-holders and act as agents of change and participants in creating and implementing solutions. From addressing the climate crisis, mental health, education, xenophobia, racism and discrimination – they are calling for adults to reimagine a better future.

As adults, we need to listen to and learn from their perspective. We cannot afford to fail them.

As UNICEF commemorates its 75th anniversary, we are recommitting ourselves with a new spirit of urgency to work with partners, supporters and children and young people all over the world to ensure children survive and thrive into healthy, productive adulthood and protect the most marginalized and vulnerable.

Children should be first in line for investment and last in line for cuts. We are starting our 76th year by calling for urgent action to respond to and recover from COVID-19. An equitable recovery will not only reverse the effects of the pandemic, but also build a foundation for responding to future crises and reverse the deep inequalities that affect children:

- 1. Invest in social protection human capital and spending for an inclusive and resilient recovery:**
 - Ensure an inclusive recovery for every child
 - Invest in the untapped potential of young migrants, refugees, and internally displaced people.
- 2. End the pandemic and reverse the alarming rollback in child health and nutrition, including through leveraging UNICEF's vital role in COVID-19 vaccine distribution:**
 - Ensure fair and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines
 - Protect children from deadly but treatable diseases
 - Reverse the child nutrition crisis.
- 3. Build back stronger by ensuring quality education, protection and good mental health for every child:**
 - Resume in-person learning and improve quality education for every child.
 - Invest in the mental health and well-being of children and young people.
- 4. Build resilience to better prevent, respond to and protect children from crises, including new approaches to end famines, protect children from climate change, and reimagine disaster spending:**
 - Consign famine and food insecurity to history
 - Take urgent action to protect children from climate change and slow the devastating rise in global temperatures
 - Reimagine disaster spending.
 - Redouble efforts to protect children in war

75 YEARS OF DELIVERING FOR CHILDREN

When UNICEF was founded in 1946 during the aftermath of World War II, the world faced unprecedented devastation. The world's children needed the support, services and advocacy that UNICEF could provide.



In the early 1980s, UNICEF launched the Child Survival and Development Revolution, a drive to save the lives of millions of children each year, focusing on four low-cost measures: growth monitoring, oral rehydration therapy, promotion of breastfeeding and immunization.



1946

1980s

1970s

1990s

On a global scale, children's health and well-being have improved significantly since 1946. Together with partners, UNICEF has developed life-changing innovations for children: the India Mark II family of water handpumps developed in the 1970s is still the world's most widely used human-powered pump.



Following the 1989 adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child – the most comprehensive international legal framework on children's rights – UNICEF brought nations together under the banner of children's rights and adopted a human rights-based approach to programming, placing human rights principles at the centre of its work. In the 1990s, UNICEF also developed School-in-a-Box, which continues to keep children learning in emergency settings.





In the 2000s, UNICEF brought to scale a ready-to-use therapeutic food, which has become the global standard to treat children suffering from malnutrition. From 2000 to 2019, scaling up of coverage of malaria prevention and treatment, such as insecticide-treated nets, malaria rapid testing and drugs, reduced global malaria mortality by 60 per cent.



And in 2020, as the world grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF played a key role in the UN-wide response and led efforts to procure and supply COVID-19 vaccines so that all countries have fair and equitable access to the vaccine as part of the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility (COVAX).

2000s

2020s

2010s



A decade later, UNICEF took a leading role in challenging systemic inequity around the world. In 2015, the world began working toward a new global development agenda, seeking to achieve, by 2030, new targets set out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

But there is still much to do. Deeply ingrained discrimination, poverty and inequality are leaving too many children and young people behind. UNICEF is dedicated to continuing to reach children from the poorest, most disadvantaged households, communities and countries.





Hamsatou, 13, washes her hands at the Socoura displacement camp in Mopti, Mali.

© UNICEF/ UN0488966/ Keïta

COVID-19'S ONGOING IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Schools were closed worldwide for **almost 80 per cent of the in-person instruction time** during the first year of the pandemic.



At its peak in March 2020, 1.6 billion learners (90 per cent of total learners worldwide) were facing school closure.

At the peak of the pandemic, 1.8 billion children lived in the 104 countries where **violence prevention and response services were seriously disrupted**.



The percentage of children living in multidimensional poverty is projected to have increased from 46–48 per cent pre-COVID-19 to around 52 per cent in 2021, an **increase of 100 million additional children**.

The percentage of children in monetary poor households is projected to have increased from 32 per cent in 2019 to 35 per cent in 2021, **more than 60 million more children compared to before the pandemic**.



50 million children suffer from wasting, the most life-threatening form of malnutrition. This figure could increase by 9 million by 2022 because of the impact of the pandemic.



By October 2020, the pandemic had disrupted or halted critical mental health services in 93 per cent of countries worldwide



Conflicts are increasingly affecting civilians, disproportionately affecting children, with **women and girls at increased risk of conflict-related sexual violence**.



In 2020, **over 23 million children missed out on essential vaccines**, the highest number since 2009.

POVERTY

The COVID-19 pandemic is reversing progress in the fight against child poverty. Although in much of the world, child poverty levels in late 2021 are not as high as in the early months of the pandemic in 2020, it will take at least seven to eight years to recover and return to pre-COVID-19 child poverty levels. Simply put, the recovery is not fast enough.

UNICEF calculates child poverty by two distinct but complementary measures: children living in monetary poor households and multidimensional poverty (deprivations in at least one of the following: education, health, housing, nutrition, sanitation and water).

The percentage of children living in monetary poor households is projected to have increased dramatically in 2020 compared to 2019. While globally, 2021 is expected to see a modest decrease from 2020, there

is a stark inequality. While richer countries seem to be improving, the poverty rate is expected to increase in low-income countries and least developed countries compared to 2020.

In developing countries, the percentage of children living in multidimensional poverty is projected to have increased from 46–48 per cent pre-COVID-19 (around 1 billion children) to around 52 per cent in 2021. This is equivalent to a projected increase of 100 million additional children living in poverty compared to 2019. In the least developed countries, the increase in poverty is projected to be even more dramatic, rising from 48 per cent in 2019 to around 56 per cent in 2021 (an increase of over 40 million children).

In addition, lower-income countries are recovering at a slower pace and continue to have higher levels of



Sebatso Nchephe, 18, stands on the roof of the home she shares with her mother and two sisters in Ivory Park, an informal settlement on the outskirts of Johannesburg, South Africa.

© UNICEF/UNI363394/Schermbrucker

FIGURE 1

The share of children living in monetary poor households is projected to continue rising in low-income countries

Children living in monetary poor households (%)

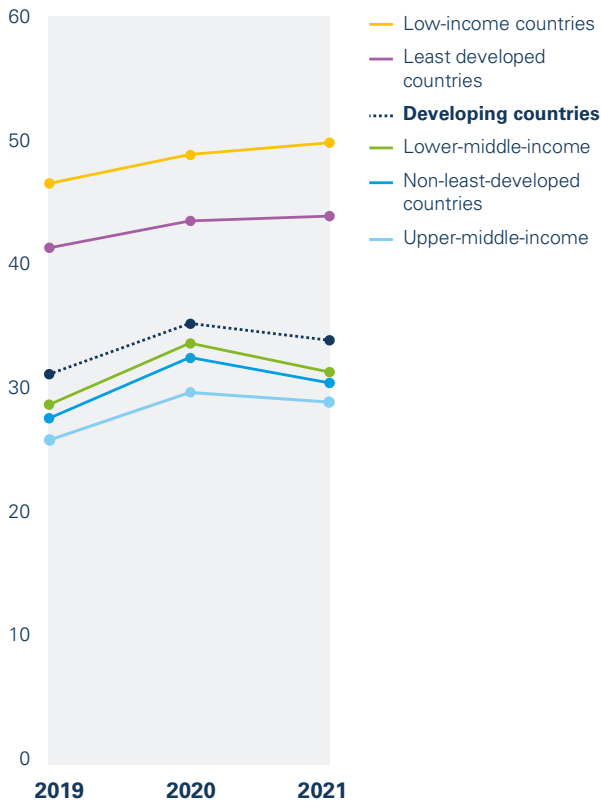
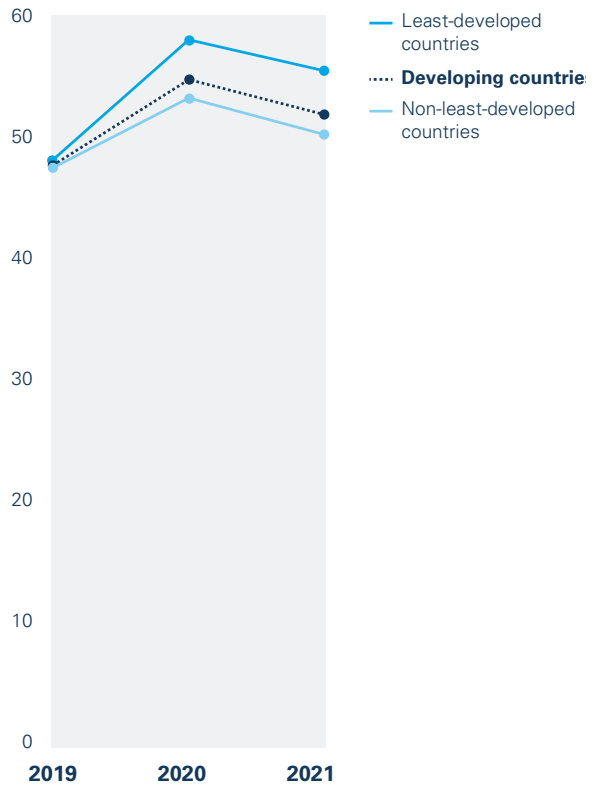


FIGURE 2

The rise in multidimensional poverty since before the pandemic is expected to be more dramatic for the least-developed countries

Children living in multidimensional poverty (%)



unemployment, prolonging the suffering of families and children. The unequal distribution of the COVID-19 shock will likely deepen inequality between countries and particularly impact children living in low-income regions. Children already living in monetary poverty are more likely to suffer a greater depth of poverty, while a new pool of children is more likely to increase the prevalence of poverty due to the unemployment rate increase.

Even before the pandemic, almost half of all children in developing countries suffered at least one severe deprivation such as education, health, housing, nutrition, or water and sanitation. In 2020, multidimensional poverty increased 15–18 per cent due to immediate impacts of COVID-19 such as school closures and health services disruption.

Some of this increase is projected to be reversed in 2021 as schools reopen and health services recover. However, as the pandemic continues, lagging and cumulative effects of the economic disruption on nutrition are becoming evident, leading to a change in the composition of child poverty. These changes include both a different set of children and different problems. Underlying many of these challenges are significant gaps in social protection. For example, only 1 in 4 children have access to any form of child or family benefit.¹

¹ Note: For more on the assumptions, analysis, and methods used to expand and update the projections of the impact of COVID-19 on child poverty and children living in monetary poor households carried out last year by Save the Children and UNICEF, please see *Impact of COVID-19 on children living in poverty: A Technical Note* <www.unicef.org/reports/unicef-75-preventing-a-lost-decade>.

HEALTH AND IMMUNIZATION

According to data from the first quarter of 2021, more than half of respondent countries reported some level of reduction in routine vaccination services compared to the same time in 2020 and more than one third of respondent countries reported disruptions to both routine facility-based and outreach immunization services.

Years of progress in childhood immunization were eroded in less than two years of the pandemic:

- In 2020, over 23 million children missed out on essential vaccines – an increase of nearly 4 million from 2019, and the highest number since 2009.
- Of those 23 million more than 60 per cent live in just ten countries (Angola, Brazil, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan and the Philippines) and 17 million of them did not receive any vaccines (zero-dose children).
- Most of these children live in communities affected by conflict, under-served remote areas, or informal urban settings where they experience multiple deprivations, including poor access to basic health and social services.



Rocham Dear holds her disabled child at a UNICEF-supported vaccination and screening centre in Ratanakiri province, Cambodia.

© UNICEF/UNI316681/Frank Dejo

EDUCATION

The impact of school closures during the first year of the pandemic was truly a worldwide phenomenon, affecting all countries and regions.

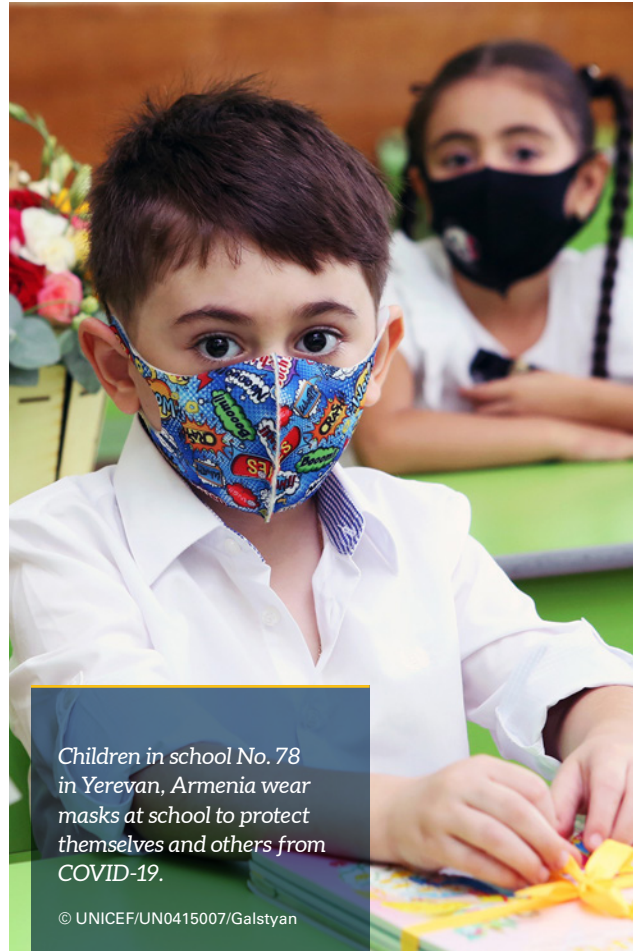
In all, schools were either fully or partially closed worldwide for almost 80 per cent of the in-person instruction time during the first year of the pandemic. Globally during the first year of the pandemic, schools were fully closed 43 per cent of the time intended for in-person classroom instruction. Schools were partially closed 35 per cent of the time.

Latin America and the Caribbean has been the most affected region with 80 per cent of instruction time disrupted due to full school closures. South Asia, the most populous region where the loss of instruction time due to full school closures accounted for 57 per cent, and Middle East and North Africa accounted for 51 per cent.

In some countries, schools have been closed throughout the entire pandemic from early 2020. According to data from UNESCO, as of 31 October, 2021, an estimated more than 55 million students are affected by school closures in 14 countries, without any in-person learning. Low-income and lower-middle income countries have been more affected by full school closures than upper-middle income and high-income countries.

Richer schoolchildren have access to digital technology that allows them to learn remotely, whereas children from poorer households are at risk of falling further behind in their education. The combination of prolonged school closures and inadequate remote learning could translate into substantial learning loss, further exacerbating the learning crisis.

Stark inequalities in internet access remain across and within countries. Globally, 2.2 billion children and young people aged 25 years or less – two thirds of children and young people worldwide – do not have an internet connection at home.

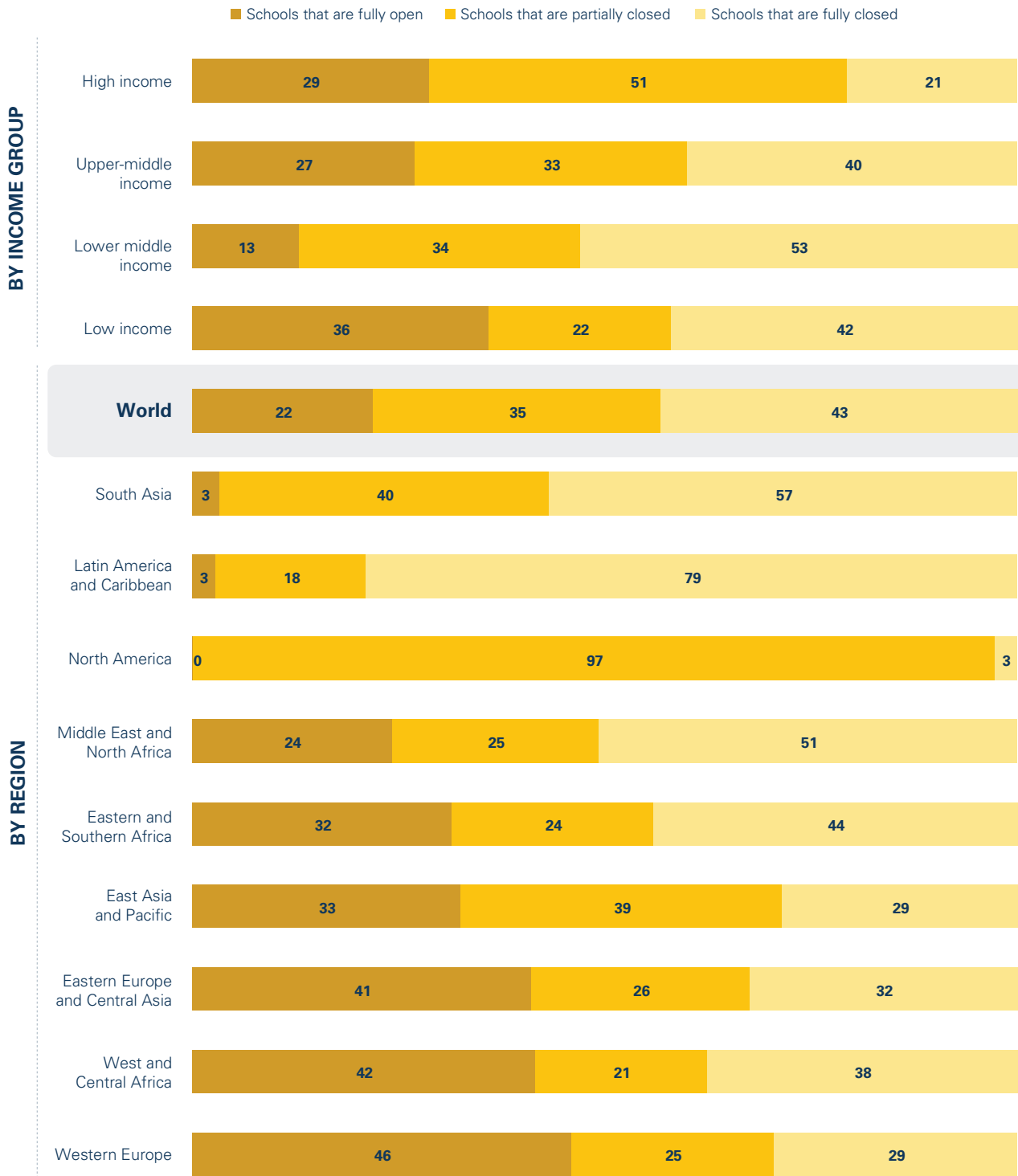


Children in school No. 78 in Yerevan, Armenia wear masks at school to protect themselves and others from COVID-19.

© UNICEF/UN0415007/Galstyan

Disparities in access to the internet are even starker between rich and poor countries. Only 6 per cent of children and young people aged 25 years or younger in low-income countries have internet access at home, compared to 87 per cent in high-income countries. Globally, among the richest 20 per cent of families, 58 per cent of children and young people aged 25 years or younger have internet access at home compared to only 16 per cent of children and young people from the poorest 20 per cent of households.

FIGURE 3 A higher percentage of in-person instruction time was disrupted by full school closures in low- and lower-middle-income countries



Percentage of in-person instruction time disrupted by school closures over the first year of the pandemic (11 March 2020 – 11 March 2021)
Note: Schools are considered 'fully closed' if the closures institutionalized by the governments affect at least 70 per cent of the students (in pre-primary through upper secondary education) in a country; subnational school closures affecting a smaller share of students are considered as partial.

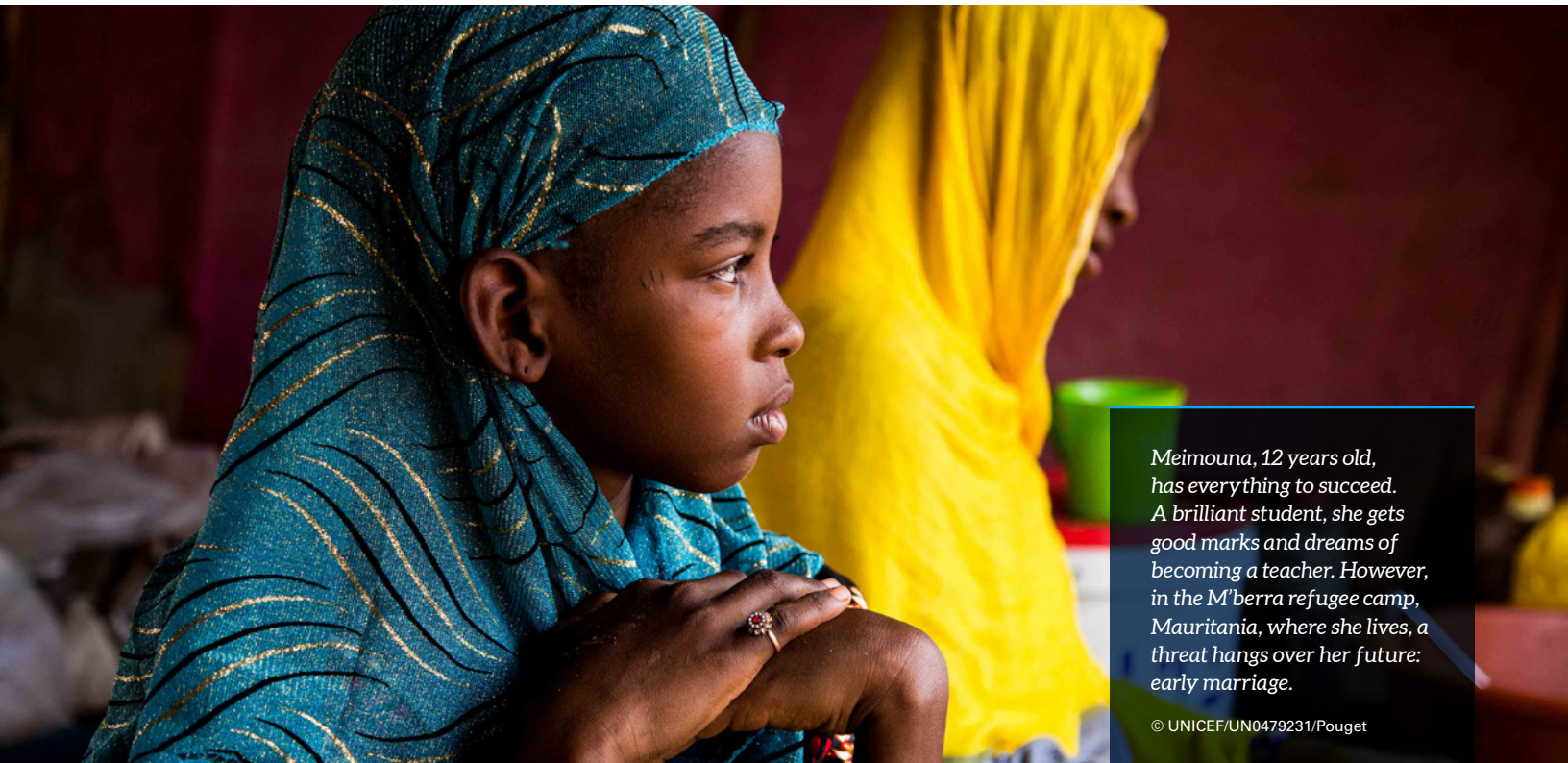
CHILD PROTECTION

Even before COVID-19, violence was all-too common in the lives of children, affecting at least 1 billion children every year. All indications suggest that the disruptions and public health measures associated with the pandemic may have increased the frequency and intensity of this violence. At the same time, children have been cut off from many of the positive and supportive relationships they rely on when in distress, including at school, in the extended family or the community. At the peak of the pandemic, 1.8 billion children lived in the 104 countries where violence prevention and response services were seriously disrupted. While the immediate health crisis will eventually wane, the impact of violence and trauma in childhood can last a lifetime including serious social and economic costs.

Child marriage is closely associated with lower educational attainment, early pregnancies, intimate partner violence, maternal and child mortality,

increased rates of sexually transmitted infections, intergenerational poverty, and the disempowerment of married girls. The pandemic is undoing years of progress in the fight against this practice. Up to 10 million additional child marriages can occur before the end of the decade as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Poverty reduction along with access to education and jobs are key to ending child marriage.

Global progress to end child labour has stalled for the first time in 20 years. The latest global estimates indicate that the number of children in child labour has risen to 160 million worldwide – an increase of 8.4 million children in the last four years. At the beginning of 2020, 63 million girls and 97 million boys were in child labour globally, accounting for almost 1 in 10 of all children worldwide. An additional 9 million children are at risk of being pushed into child labour by the end of 2022 as a result of the increase in poverty triggered by the pandemic.



Meimouna, 12 years old, has everything to succeed. A brilliant student, she gets good marks and dreams of becoming a teacher. However, in the M'berra refugee camp, Mauritania, where she lives, a threat hangs over her future: early marriage.

© UNICEF/UN0479231/Pouget

NUTRITION

The pandemic has harmed the nutrition, diets and food security of children and adolescents, especially for those living in poverty with multiple vulnerabilities. Children's diets have long been inadequate – only 29 per cent of children aged 6–23 months receive a minimally diverse diet and only 52 per cent receive a minimum meal frequency, with no notable change in the last 10 years. The pandemic has made children's diets even worse.

Quarantine measures, deteriorating economic conditions of families, and school closures have led to dramatically increased **food insecurity**. In the Philippines, households classified as moderately or severely food insecure jumped to 65 per cent, compared to 40 per cent before the pandemic. Fifty-six per cent of Filipino households report problems accessing food because of job loss, lack of money or limited public transportation.

Economic situations have forced families to resort to difficult **food-based coping strategies** to manage limited food resources. These included limiting portion sizes during meals and relying on less preferred or less expensive food. In Cambodia, households that adopted these strategies increased from 62 per cent in August 2020 to 71 per cent in July 2021.

Lower dietary diversity. The pandemic has also affected the quality of children's diets, dramatically increasing their risk for micronutrient deficiencies. In Sri Lanka, there was a reduction in the consumption of flesh foods, dairy, pulses, and vitamin A rich foods among children 6–23 months old compared to data from November 2019.

Children have consumed more **processed foods**. With more time spent at home due to social distancing and mobility restrictions, children and their families have shifted their food consumption patterns, often eating more unhealthy foods. For example, consumption of fruits declined by 30 per cent in Kenya and Uganda compared to pre-COVID-19. In Zimbabwe,




Maria Méndez, 26, is feeding crushed bananas to her two-year-old daughter Mariela in Colotenango, Guatemala.

© UNICEF/UN0515109/Volpe

36 per cent reported an increase of sugary and junk food consumption since the beginning of lockdown in May 2020.

Children have witnessed more **ads for unhealthy products** in the media during the pandemic. A review of social media posts from Uruguay corroborates the digital marketing practices of food companies. More than a third (35 per cent) of their Facebook posts on ultra-processed products made reference to the COVID-19 pandemic as an 'excuse' to 'stay home' and consume more of their products.



In Lusikisiki Ngobozana, Eastern Cape, South Africa, a caregiver monitors Marlon's recovery from acute malnutrition, while his mother, Nomakhosazana, holds him.

COVID-19-related lockdowns made those living in marginalized communities even more vulnerable. In South Africa, moderate and severe acute malnutrition remain a significant underlying causes of child mortality. Many families say the frequency of caregivers' home visits have decreased and clinics haven't been consistently open. Pandemic-necessitated travel restrictions further exposed a sharp divide between those who can afford adequate diets and services and those who cannot.

From UNICEF and Magnum Photos' Generation COVID photo project.



Children in Chattisgarh, India participate in games and activities to build emotional awareness as part of a Manas Foundation mental health and psycho-socio-support programme facilitated by UNICEF.

© UNICEF/UN0517425/Panjwani

MENTAL HEALTH

Even before the pandemic, in almost every country, mental health remains stigmatized and underfunded – and poor mental health is limiting the life chances of children and adolescents around the world.

- More than 13 per cent of adolescents aged 10–19 live with a diagnosed mental disorder.
- Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death for young people aged 15-19.
- Half of all mental health conditions start by 14 years of age.

COVID-19 has exposed the extent and severity of the mental health crisis. The disruption to routines, education, recreation, as well as concern for family income, health and increase in stress and anxiety, is leaving many children and young people feeling afraid, angry and concerned for their future.

By October 2020, the pandemic had disrupted or halted critical mental health services in 93 per cent of countries worldwide, while the demand for mental health support increased. National lockdowns have piled pressure on vulnerable children, as well as parents and caregivers' ability to protect and nurture them.

According to UNICEF's Changing Childhood project across 21 countries in the first half of 2021, 1 in 5 young people reported often feeling depressed or having little interest in doing things.

In fact, we won't know the true impact of COVID-19 on children's mental health for years.



A humanitarian shipment which arrived at Beirut international airport through a UNICEF charter flight. The shipment included essential drugs, oral rehydration salts and antibiotics, medical and surgical supplies, and nutritional commodities.

© UNICEF/UN0551291/Choufany

HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES

Current humanitarian trends are deeply concerning. A steep rise in the number of countries and people affected humanitarian crises, including natural disasters, armed conflict and infectious disease outbreak continues. United Nations inter-agency appeals reflects the growing scale of humanitarian assistance and protection needs. In 2011, 14 consolidated appeals aimed to reach 112 million people. By 2021, this number has grown to nearly 160 million people across 27 consolidated appeals.

Conflicts are increasingly affecting civilian populations, disproportionately affecting children. Women and girls are at increased risk of conflict-related sexual violence. As the intensity of conflict has increased, the number of people internally displaced by conflict reached its highest level. Entering 2021, there were an estimated 48 million internally displaced persons globally, and the number of refugees had reached 20 million.

On top of this, the worsening climate crisis is also a deepening child rights crisis. Increasingly severe and frequent weather events and natural disasters are exacerbating chronic vulnerabilities. Globally, approximately 1 billion children – nearly half of the world's children – live in countries that are at an 'extremely high-risk' from the impacts of climate change.



A boy smiles at a learning centre in Barranquilla, Colombia, which provides education to children aged 6–15 who have been displaced by violence and are not enrolled in school.

First in line for investment, last in line for cuts:

AN URGENT AGENDA FOR ACTION FOR CHILDREN

As when UNICEF was founded 75 years ago, the world needed solutions to heal divisions, harness global progress, and protect and uphold universal human rights. We believe just as firmly now as we did 75 years ago that this starts with guaranteeing the next generation a better life than the last.

We know what this world looks like. It is a world where we realize the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals in their entirety. Where we work together to end the pandemic and reverse the potentially devastating backslide in progress on child health and nutrition. Where we build back stronger by ensuring quality education and mental health for every child. Where we end poverty and invest in human capital for an inclusive recovery. Where we reverse climate change. And where we secure a new deal for children living through conflict, disaster, and displacement.

The solutions below provide a clear roadmap towards this world.

But this is only the beginning. We will only emerge stronger by working together – governments, businesses, civil society, the public and – most of all – children and young people, to build a better future for every child.

- 1. Invest in social protection, human capital and spending for an inclusive and resilient recovery.**



- 2. End the pandemic and reverse the alarming rollback in child health and nutrition – including through leveraging UNICEF's vital role in COVID-19 vaccine distribution.**



- 3. Build back stronger by ensuring quality education, protection, and good mental health for every child.**



- 4. Build resilience to better prevent, respond to, and protect children from crises – including new approaches to end famines, protect children from climate change, and reimagine disaster spending.**



1

INVEST IN SOCIAL PROTECTION, HUMAN CAPITAL, AND SPENDING FOR AN INCLUSIVE AND RESILIENT RECOVERY



Ranvir laughs heartily as he plays with his friends at an Anganwadi centre in Nayakheda, Rajasthan, India. Similar to day care centres, Anganwadi Centres provide meals, basic health services, immunization and a happy and safe place to play and learn for children in villages and rural areas throughout India.

© UNICEF/ UNI333247

ENSURE AN INCLUSIVE RECOVERY FOR EVERY CHILD

The COVID-19 pandemic risks devastating long-term economic consequences for children, communities and countries around the world. Children who were already marginalized are the most affected, as they suffer the impact of living in poverty, lost education, poorer nutrition and disrupted mental health.

Economic crises are often followed by cuts to government spending, including on programmes for children. If the world repeats this pattern in the wake of COVID-19, poverty and deprivation among children will persist long after the immediate crisis has waned.

To prevent a lost decade, it is essential that countries invest in children to achieve sustained, inclusive economic growth and ensure they are prepared for the global economy of the future.

We urgently need an inclusive recovery plan to reinstate the hard-won development gains of the past and avert the consequences of poverty for millions more children and their families.

A Rohingya refugee girl jumps across a bridge in a large puddle caused by recent rains in Balukhali camp for Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazaar District, Bangladesh.

© UNICEF/UN0205640/Sokol



An inclusive recovery requires:

- 1. Governments safeguarding critical social spending to ensure that social systems and interventions are protected from spending cuts and expanded where inadequate.**

 - All governments should identify and ring-fence spending on programmes for children, adopting the principle of children being first in line for investment and last in line for cuts.
 - Expand resilient social protection programmes for the most vulnerable children, no matter their migration status, as well as families with children, including working towards universal child benefits and child-friendly services like affordable, quality childcare.
- 2. Governments ensuring the best, most equitable, effective, and efficient use of financial resources across social sectors for human capital development.**

 - This includes ensuring that the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic is green, low-carbon and inclusive, so that the capacity of future generations to address and respond to the climate crisis is not compromised.
- 3. International donors directing finance towards an inclusive recovery that protects children, especially the poorest and most marginalized.**

 - Maintain or increase overseas aid commitments, identifying context-specific new financing options, and direct funding to those countries most affected and least able to take on new lending.
 - Act on debt relief, including extending current debt service suspension beyond December 2021 and to middle-income countries. Ensure coordinated action covering all creditors to restructure and, where necessary, reduce debt.

INVEST IN THE UNTAPPED POTENTIAL OF YOUNG MIGRANTS, REFUGEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

One way to grow human capital following COVID-19 is to invest in talent on the move, a unique, yet largely untapped pool of talent, ideas, and entrepreneurship.

Often resilient, highly motivated and with experience overcoming adversity, migrant and displaced youth have the potential to help solve some of our greatest challenges.

- McKinsey calculated that migrants made up just 3.4 per cent of the world's population in 2015 but contributed nearly 10 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP).
- Our own lives are touched every day by inventions and products developed by migrants or refugees. In 2017, nearly half of all Fortune 500 companies were founded by American immigrants or children of immigrants.

While talent is universal, for many, opportunities are hard to come by. Governments and donors around the world must do more to break down the barriers standing in the way of this enormous potential to build back stronger.

Unlocking the untapped potential of talent on the move requires:

- Governments removing barriers that prevent children and young people on the move accessing education, health and social protection. This includes opening national schools to all children independent of migration status, abolishing school fees, establishing scholarship programmes and paid traineeships, and providing financial assistance for school supplies.
- Governments recognizing prior learning and qualifications of migrant and displaced children and young people. Innovative digital solutions can be leveraged to achieve this.
- Governments stepping up their efforts to close the digital divide and create more opportunities for refugee and migrant children and youth to transition from learning to earning.
- Governments, caregivers and social services providing young people with more relevant and targeted information on available education and employment opportunities. This should be in a language that youth on the move will understand and communicated through channels they trust and that are most accessible – for example, working with diaspora communities, youth groups or social messaging apps.



A mother holds her child at a temporary health camp in Nepal.

© UNICEF/
UNI187351/
Shrestha



“

Manija (standing), 13, teaches an English lesson in Lesvos, Greece, at the “School of Stars”, which she runs with her friend, Atefe in the Moria Reception and Identification Centre, the largest camp for refugees and migrants in Europe.

Both girls are of Afghan descent but were born in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where they lived until immigrating with their families to Greece, with hopes of obtaining refugee status in the European Union. Manija says,

“Teaching is my passion. In the class we provide masks to every student, we suggest they wash their hands, and we sanitize the air... I want to grow up so I can be useful for the community.”

From UNICEF and Magnum Photos’ Generation COVID photo project.

2

END THE PANDEMIC AND REVERSE THE ALARMING ROLLBACK IN CHILD HEALTH AND NUTRITION - INCLUDING THROUGH LEVERAGING UNICEF'S VITAL ROLE IN COVID-19 VACCINE DISTRIBUTION



Mg Thu Wai Htut (3 years old) is being measured with a MUAC tape as part of the Out-patient Therapeutic Feeding Program at Dagon Seikkan ward community hall, Myanmar.

ENSURE FAIR AND EQUITABLE ACCESS TO COVID-19 VACCINES

All people must have an equal opportunity to receive the COVID-19 vaccine regardless of who they are, where they live, or their migration status, nationality, gender, social status or ethnicity.

While the virus remains unchecked, it will continue to mutate, cross borders, spread the disease, damage the global economy, and disrupt essential services for children and young people. The longer we take to vaccinate everyone, the bigger the risk to the entire world and the harder it will be to prevent a lost decade.

To slow the spread of COVID-19 and reduce its devastating impact, all governments must take concerted global action to ensure fair and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. Despite progress over the past year, the rate of vaccination in low-income countries is shockingly low. Wealthier countries must step up to ensure the same inequities do not characterize 2022.

This is not only the right thing to do, but it is also essential for global recovery efforts. Estimates suggest that inequitable access to COVID-19 vaccines could cost the global economy \$9.2 trillion.

Reaching all people with the COVID-19 vaccine requires:

- Aid donors fully funding ACT-A and COVAX – a global coalition of organizations developing and deploying the new diagnostics, treatments, and vaccines needed to end the worst impacts of the pandemic, including providing support to country vaccine delivery.
- Countries receiving more doses than needed to vaccinate their entire adult populations to immediately loan, release, or donate most or all excess doses to COVAX.
- All governments ensuring their vaccine strategies are inclusive – prioritizing the most vulnerable regardless of their status and making an extra effort to reach these individuals and communities, including refugees, migrants and internally displaced people.
- Countries prioritizing vaccinations that will save lives, protect public health services – starting with the most vulnerable and frontline health workers, while the number of available vaccines remain limited.

In addition to vaccination, measures such as informing people about the disease, practicing social distancing, and handwashing with soap must continue as critical routes to control the spread of COVID-19.

PROTECT CHILDREN FROM DEADLY BUT TREATABLE DISEASES

The world faces a historic opportunity to both end the COVID-19 pandemic and set out a pathway for the eradication of preventable diseases. But this requires a collective effort to reach every child and community with vaccines and realize the right to primary health care for every person everywhere. This is the only way to accelerate progress towards the Global Goal target of ending preventable child mortality.

Along with handwashing with soap, immunization is unequivocally one of the most cost-effective public health interventions: vaccines prevented 37 million deaths over the last 20 years in middle- and low-income countries. Yet in 2019, 7.4 million children, adolescents and young people died from preventable or treatable causes.

Reaching every child and community with vaccines and health services requires:

- Strengthening health systems in the poorest countries by increasing targeted investment, protecting aid budgets, and fulfilling existing commitments to support lifesaving child health services including routine immunization.
- Investing in Primary Health Care, including Community Health Care as a wrap-around package covering health, nutrition and water and sanitation.
- All governments developing and implementing ambitious national plans to reach every child with essential vaccines.
- Prioritizing communities with 'zero-dose' children who still go without basic, routine vaccines every year.
- Ensuring current political commitments on COVID-19 vaccines lead to investment in primary health services that can reach every person in every community.
- Building confidence in vaccines – both COVID-19 and the routine immunization that saves children's lives – with development actors, communities, governments, and health care workers working together.



Karla Flores, 7, is vaccinated during a mass vaccination day in San Vicente community, Miranda state, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

REVERSE THE CHILD NUTRITION CRISIS

Ensuring every child has access to nutritious and safe diets is vital to ensure we genuinely build back stronger from the pandemic and safeguard the health and well-being of future generations.

Poor nutritional intake in children's earliest years can irreversibly harm their rapidly growing bodies and brains, impacting their schooling, job prospects, and futures.

While we have known this for years, there has been little progress on providing the right kind of nutritious and safe foods young children need for healthy growth and development – and the ongoing impact of COVID-19 disruptions risk making the situation much worse just when we urgently need things to improve.

WHAT IS DRIVING THE NUTRITION CRISIS?

- **Growing up in poverty.** Families living in low-income countries and low-income households often struggle to afford nutritious and safe foods for their children, including fruits, vegetables, milk, fish, eggs and meat.
- **Conflict, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic** are also playing a major role in making nutritious and safe foods less available and affordable to millions of young children.
- **The abundance of nutrient-poor and cheap processed foods rich in sugar, salt and unhealthy fats.** Junk food is ubiquitous both in large cities and in rural areas and is often accompanied by misleading marketing strategies targeting children and families.

Just as the drivers of poor diets are multiple, so are the solutions. To deliver nutritious, safe, and affordable diets to every child, governments, donors, civil society organizations and development actors must work together to transform food, health, and social protection systems and to improve the prevention and treatment of the most severe forms of malnutrition.

Delivering nutritious, safe and affordable diets to every child requires:

- All with power and influence taking action to increase the availability and affordability of nutritious foods – including fruits, vegetables, eggs, dairy, fish meat and fortified foods – by incentivizing their production, making them more affordable and accessible.
- Governments implementing national standards and legislation to protect young children from unhealthy processed and ultra-processed foods and to end harmful marketing of unhealthy food and drink targeting children and families.
- Governments and development actors renewing action to end child wasting – including training community workers and caregivers to detect the early signs of wasting; concerted and localized action to prevent wasting in hotspot areas; and mobilizing new funding for life-saving treatment, including ready to use therapeutic foods.
- Development and humanitarian donors – at a minimum – doubling their financial commitments to fighting child malnutrition and committing to the solutions we know work.

3

BUILD BACK STRONGER BY ENSURING QUALITY EDUCATION, PROTECTION AND GOOD MENTAL HEALTH FOR EVERY CHILD



Caio, 12, completes a lesson in a workbook at his home in Itacaré, Brazil.

Caio's teachers organized support sessions with virtual classrooms, but with no internet at home and no smartphone or computer at his disposal, he has been unable to join online activities. Left alone with all this work and without the support structure of school, he finds it almost impossible to keep up with his studies. The pandemic has exacerbated gaps in education equity, setting Caio further back in what was already a critical year for his studies.

From UNICEF and Magnum Photos' Generation COVID photo project.



RESUME IN-PERSON LEARNING AND IMPROVE QUALITY EDUCATION FOR EVERY CHILD

The pandemic upended education for millions of children. Even before COVID-19, the world was grappling with a learning crisis. We now have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to fix this crisis – starting with getting children back to school.

Access to quality education is both a right and a crucial opportunity for every child. Basic literacy and numeracy are a prerequisite for quality learning. These skills ensure children can thrive in primary and secondary education and transition to the workplace.

Investment in pre-primary education, particularly for marginalized children and those affected by learning poverty, can transform the lives of children, their families, and their communities. Access to digital learning in low- and middle-income countries can also act as a great equalizer.

To address the learning crisis, we must therefore ensure every student gains the skills to reach their full potential, including through quality digital learning.



Students use laptop computers provided by UNICEF during learning skills activities at the Al-Nasr secondary school in Sana'a Governorate, Yemen.

© UNICEF/ UNI346679/Alansi

Ensuring access to quality education for every child requires:

- Protecting education budgets in the face of the economic impact of COVID-19, and prioritizing the most vulnerable children, not only for the sake of the current generation of children, but also for the future workforce, economic growth and social cohesion.
- Aiding teachers and facilitators to deliver solid foundational literacy and numeracy.
- Prioritizing school reopening and providing enough support to teachers and schools to make this viable.
- Governments and private sector donors allocating at least 10 per cent of their education budget, or aid, to pre-primary education. This will ensure children arrive at school ready to learn.
- Developing lasting solutions at scale with partnerships between the private sector, governments and other partners to connect every child and young person – some 3.5 billion – to the internet by 2030. This means every corporate provider of digital learning increasing access to their content and platforms; the international community – particularly the private sector – lowering the cost of digital devices; all Mobile Network Operators developing solutions to allow digital learning content to be accessed anywhere; and every government creating opportunities for young people to play a part in reimagining education.
- Ceasing all attacks on schools, and respecting and protecting education personnel. Member States must endorse and advocate for other states to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, and put in place the necessary measures to ensure its full and effective implementation.

INVEST IN THE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

With children and young people facing so many challenges to their mental well-being, the pandemic is a vital moment to drive transformative action on mental health.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored just how critical mental health and well-being are for all children, adolescents, caregivers and families, in all countries. The pandemic has also highlighted the fragility of support systems for mental health in many countries, and once again underlined how these hardships fall disproportionately on the most disadvantaged communities.

The most marginalized and discriminated against children and adolescents, including those exposed to poverty, violence, neglect, or living through humanitarian crises and displacement, are at the highest risk of mental health concerns. But they are also the least likely to have access to support.

While the long-term impact of the pandemic on children's mental health remains unclear, the global recovery offers a rare opportunity to overturn the mental health crisis.

Early prevention is key. It has the potential to break the inter-generational cycle of poor mental health and transform mental health outcomes for current and future generations.

To emerge stronger from the pandemic and guarantee every child a better future, governments must invest in quality support to protect children from neglect and abuse and promote the mental health of all children and young people, with a particular focus on ending the childhood adversities that drive poor mental health outcomes.

Protecting and supporting the mental health of every child and young person requires:

- Governments investing in more and better protection, mental health and psychosocial support services across all sectors and community services.
- Governments and relevant national and local services supporting families by scaling up parenting programmes that promote responsive, nurturing caregiving and support parent and caregiver well-being and mental health.
- Governments reinforcing education and community care providers to ensure that all schools support mental health through quality services and positive relationships, and that children and adolescents learn and interact in safe and secure environments, both on and offline.
- All relevant actors responding to abuse and neglect, ensuring children and their families have access to response services, care and justice and prevent reoccurrence.
- Governments and relevant national and local services playing an active role in addressing stigma and promoting better understanding of mental health. This will partly be achieved through meaningfully involving children and young people in the design and implementation of policies and programmes.



“Some girls did not go back to school after COVID-19 because they are afraid... The pandemic changed my way of seeing the world because, now I find that the world is not as calm and stable as it used to be.... My wish for all girls in Chad is that I ask the girls to fight for their future.”

Laetitia, Chad. From UNICEF’s Coping with COVID, season 2.

Girls in the village of Alibeit,
in southern Chad.

© UNICEF/UN0291831/Frank Dejongh



4

BUILD RESILIENCE TO BETTER PREVENT, RESPOND TO, AND PROTECT CHILDREN FROM CRISES – INCLUDING NEW APPROACHES TO END FAMINES, PROTECT CHILDREN FROM CLIMATE CHANGE AND REIMAGINE DISASTER SPENDING



A toxic combination of conflict, climate change and COVID-19 are deepening humanitarian crises, entrenching inequality, and pushing us further from the realization of child rights and the ambition of the Sustainable Development Goals.



Telma, 36, here with her three children, benefitted from assistance during the COVID-19 confinement via the Bono Familia emergency cash transfer programme, developed by the Government of Guatemala with the support of UNICEF and the World Bank.

© UNICEF/UNI388999/Mussapp

WHY DO WE NEED A NEW APPROACH TO TACKLING CRISES?



A plane carrying nine tons of UNICEF medical supplies arrives in Tocumen International Airport, Panama, to continue supporting the response against COVID-19 in the region. The supplies will be prepositioning at the regional humanitarian warehouse and distributed to Latin America and the Caribbean countries.

© UNICEF/UNI346302/Amador

- **Hunger is on the rise.** Nearly one tenth of the world population – up to 811 million people – went hungry in 2020. And famine, which should be consigned to history, looms again.
- **The last 10 years were the hottest on record and the number of climate-related disasters has tripled in the last 30 years.** These disasters have a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable children and families – threatening food security, increasing water scarcity, forcing people from their homes, and increasing the risk of conflict and public health emergencies.
- **Today, over 400 million children live in areas of high or extremely high-water vulnerability.** This is likely to worsen as climate change increases frequency and severity of droughts, water stress, seasonal and interannual variability, contamination – and demand and competition for water increases.
- **More children displaced than ever before.** Last year, more than 82 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced. A shocking 42 per cent were children. Disasters, many driven by climate change, water scarcity and conflict were amongst the biggest drivers.
- **War continues to take a devastating toll on civilians including children.** As well as forcing families from their home, attacks on children, including civilian infrastructure critical for their survival, are continuing at an alarming rate. In 2020, the United Nations verified a total of 23, 946 violations against children in conflict situations. This corresponds to 72 violations occurring every single day or three violations every hour.

The world was not ready for COVID-19 – and too slow to respond to many other climate- and conflict-related disasters of the past few years. Millions of children are at imminent risk if we fail to respond to these needs urgently and unswervingly.



CONSIGN FAMINE AND FOOD INSECURITY TO HISTORY

We need a global plan of action and accountability to consign famine to history once and for all.

This means:

- Investing in longer-term, preventative, multipronged approaches that go beyond food aid and prioritize children as the most severely affected by these crises.
- But ultimately, we must recognize famines for what they are: political crises that require political solutions. We need the collective will and accountability to ensure that governance failures are addressed long before famine takes hold, humanitarian access is sustained, and the laws and norms of conflict are upheld.



URGENT ACTION TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM CLIMATE CHANGE AND SLOW THE DEVASTATING RISE IN GLOBAL TEMPERATURES

Global climate change is real and happening now. It is a threat to all children, everywhere. Current targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the only way to avert the worse impacts of the climate crisis, fall short.

Protecting children from the already changing climate and averting the worst impacts of the climate crisis requires:

- Governments laying out a roadmap that will cut emissions to 'Net Zero' by 2050.
- Urgently increasing investment in climate adaptation and resilience in key social services for children including critical services in WASH, health, and food systems, so they are more sustainable and low carbon and resilient to the impacts of climate disasters. This also includes providing children with climate education and greens skills, critical for their adaptation to and preparation for the effects of climate change.
- Ensuring that children's rights and needs are at the center of climate and environmental policy, and that they are consulted and heard in decision-making that directly affects them.
- Governments formally including young people in all national, regional, and international climate negotiations and decisions, including in emerging scientific and policy discussions on climate-related mobility; children and young people on the move must have a seat at the table in climate change processes at all levels.



REIMAGINE DISASTER SPENDING

A broad re-thinking of how we approach humanitarian financing is needed to sustain these changes.

Being properly prepared for the next crises and spending money in a way that protects the most at risk children requires:

- First and foremost, donors must keep their promises on humanitarian funding so we can save lives and avert a lost generation. This means flexible, long-term humanitarian funding now and avoiding donor conditionalities that may impede access to life-saving support.
- Donors should commit to pre-arranged finance so humanitarian and development organizations like UNICEF can mobilize resources much more quickly, well before devastating and irreversible damage to children occur.
- And we cannot wait to better protect and support children and their communities. All humanitarian actors must ensure the meaningful participation of vulnerable countries and vulnerable groups and communities within these countries in future humanitarian planning.



REDOUBLE EFFORTS TO PROTECT CHILDREN IN WAR

Conflicts are the leading cause of humanitarian crises globally and progress in most countries affected by conflict has stagnated or reversed.

Ensuring peace and protection for every child requires:

- Humanitarian donors and actors investing in child-inclusive peacebuilding locally, nationally, and internationally and at a minimum reaffirming the need for a temporary ceasefire to support safe, effective, and inclusive COVID-19 vaccine delivery and pandemic response and recovery efforts. Peace is the best protection.
- All actors with influence increasing pressure on parties to conflict to end grave violations against children in war, including those that prolong war and exacerbate food insecurity and famine. This should include a robust political declaration to avoid the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and renewed efforts to reintegrated children into their communities after displacement or conflict.
- All parties to conflict redoubling efforts to both respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law and all with influence must condemn any action or inaction in conflict that prevents children and their communities from accessing food, safe water and sanitation, and other urgent relief in conflict.

FOR EVERY CHILD

Whoever she is.
Wherever he lives.
Every child deserves a childhood.
A future.
A fair chance.
That's why UNICEF is there.
For each and every child.
Working day in and day out.
In more than 190 countries and territories.
Reaching the hardest to reach.
The furthest from help.
The most excluded.
It's why we stay to the end.
And never give up.



© UNICEF/ UN0488988

Photograph on front cover: © UNICEF/ UN0488988

unicef 
for every child

Published by UNICEF
Division of Global Communication
and Advocacy
3 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017, USA
pubdoc@unicef.org
www.unicef.org

© United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
December 2021

Photograph on front cover:
© UNICEF/UNI355816/Panjwani

ISBN: 978-92-806-5310-6