The COVID-19 pandemic affects everyone, everywhere.

But it affects different groups of people differently, deepening existing inequalities.

Early data indicates that the mortality rates from COVID-19 may be higher for men. But the pandemic is having devastating social and economic consequences for women and girls.

Today we are launching a report that shows how COVID-19 could reverse the limited progress that has been made on gender equality and women’s rights – and recommends ways to put women’s leadership and contributions at the heart of resilience and recovery.

Nearly 60 per cent of women around the world work in the informal economy, earning less, saving less, and at greater risk of falling into poverty.

As markets fall and businesses close, millions of women’s jobs have disappeared.

At the same time as they are losing paid employment, women’s unpaid care work has increased exponentially as a result of school closures and the increased needs of older people.
These currents are combining as never before to defeat women’s rights and deny women’s opportunities.

Progress lost takes years to regain. Teenage girls out of school may never return.

I urge governments to put women and girls at the centre of their efforts to recover from COVID-19.

That starts with women as leaders, with equal representation and decision-making power.

Measures to protect and stimulate the economy, from cash transfers to credits and loans, must be targeted at women.

Social safety nets must be expanded.

Unpaid care work must be recognized and valued as a vital contribution to the economy.

The pandemic has also led to a horrifying increase in violence against women.

Nearly one in five women worldwide has experienced violence in the past year. Many of these women are now trapped at home with their abusers, struggling to access services that are suffering from cuts and restrictions.

This was the basis for my appeal to governments earlier this week to take urgent steps to protect women and expand support services.

COVID-19 is not only challenging global health systems, but testing our common humanity.

Gender equality and women’s rights are essential to getting through this pandemic together, to recovering faster, and to building a better future for everyone.

**Link:**
UNICEF STATEMENT

Don’t let children be the hidden victims of COVID-19 pandemic—UNICEF

Ninety-nine per cent of the world’s children live with some form of pandemic-related movement restrictions; Sixty per cent live in countries with full or partial lockdowns

Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore

NEW YORK, 10 April 2020 – “The world is currently united in a shared struggle against an invisible enemy. But while our eyes are firmly focused on how to avoid or treat COVID-19, the serious consequences that will challenge us far beyond the current pandemic – the hidden impacts – are not yet front of mind. This must change.

“Not only are children and young people contracting COVID-19, they are also among its most severely impacted victims. Unless we act now to address the pandemic’s impacts on children, the echoes of COVID-19 will permanently damage our shared future.

“According to our analysis, 99 per cent of children and young people under 18 worldwide (2.34 billion) live in one of the 186 countries with some form of movement restrictions in place due to COVID-19. Sixty per cent of all children live in one of the 82 countries with a full (7%) or partial (53%) lockdown – accounting for 1.4 billion young lives.

“We know that, in any crisis, the young and the most vulnerable suffer disproportionately. This pandemic is no different. It is our responsibility to prevent suffering, save lives and protect the health of every child. We must also ensure that risk-informed decisions on COVID-19 control measures are made based on the best available evidence in order to minimize and prevent any collateral damage, and to provide mitigation measures so the damage is not lasting.
“This starts with resisting the temptation, in times of potential global recession, to deprioritize investment in our future. Increased investments now in education, child protection, health and nutrition, and water and sanitation will help the world reduce the damage caused by this crisis and avoid future crises. The world will open up again, and when that happens, the resilience of the weakest health systems will be the gauge of how well we will do against future threats.

“Countries and communities around the world must work together to address this crisis. As we have learned painfully in the past two months, until there is a vaccine, coronavirus anywhere is a threat to people everywhere. We need to act now to strengthen health systems, as well as other child-focused social services, to keep track with global development priorities, in every country around the world.

“This week, UNICEF is launching our global agenda for action to protect the most vulnerable children from harm. The agenda has six pillars: 1) Keep children healthy; 2) Reach vulnerable children with water, sanitation and hygiene; 3) Keep children learning; 4) Support families to cover their needs and care for their children; 5) Protect children from violence, exploitation and abuse; and 6) Protect refugee and migrant children, and those affected by conflict.

Without urgent action, this health crisis risks becoming a child rights crisis. Only by working together, can we keep millions of girls and boys healthy, safe and learning.

“In health, COVID-19 has the potential to overwhelm fragile health systems in low- and middle-income countries and undermine many of the gains made in child survival, health, nutrition and development over the last several decades. But too many national healthcare systems were already struggling. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, 32 per cent of children worldwide with pneumonia symptoms were not being taken to a health provider. What will happen when COVID-19 hits in full force? We’re already seeing disruptions in immunization services, threatening outbreaks of diseases for which there already exists a vaccine, such as polio, measles and cholera. Many more newborns, children, young people and pregnant mothers could be lost to non-coronavirus related causes if national healthcare systems, already under great strain, become completely overwhelmed. Likewise, many nutrition programmes are disrupted or suspended, as are community programmes for the early detection and treatment of undernourished children. We need to act now to preserve and strengthen health and food systems in every country around the world.
“Likewise, protecting ourselves and others through proper handwashing and **hygiene practices** has never been more important. But for many children, basic water, sanitation and hygiene facilities remain out of reach. Globally, 40 per cent of the population, 3 billion people, still lack a basic handwashing facility with soap and water available at home – and this is as high as nearly three quarters of the population of the least developed countries. Let us ensure that every household, school, and health care facility has the means to a hygienic and healthy environment.

“In **education**, an entire generation of children have seen their education interrupted. Nationwide school closures have disrupted the education of more than 1.57 billion students – 91 per cent – worldwide. We know from previous shutdowns that schoolchildren, and especially girls, who are out of school for extended periods of time are much less likely to return when classrooms reopen. The closure of schools also eliminates access to school-based nutrition programmes, driving malnutrition rates upwards. An entire generation of students could suffer damage to their learning and potential. Redoubling our commitments to education, and our investments in it, has never been more urgent.

“The **socio-economic impact** of COVID-19 will be felt hardest by the world’s most vulnerable children. Many already live in poverty, and the consequences of COVID-19 response measures risk plunging them further into hardship. As millions of parents struggle to maintain their livelihoods and income, governments must scale up social protection measures – providing social safety nets and cash transfers, protecting jobs, working with employers to support working parents, and prioritizing policies that connect families to life-saving health care, nutrition and education.

“We know from previous health emergencies that children are at heightened risk of **exploitation, violence** and **abuse** when schools are closed, social services are interrupted, and movement is restricted. For example, school closures during the Ebola outbreak in West Africa from 2014 to 2016 resulted in spikes in child labor, neglect, sexual abuse and teenage pregnancies. And the most common form of violence children face takes place in the home. In a majority of countries, more than 2 in 3 children are subjected to violent discipline by caregivers. What happens when those children can’t leave home, cut off from teachers, friends, or protection services? And as millions of children turn to digital technology for a path to the outside world, how do we keep them safe from the risks and potential harmful consequences online? A social
movement to stamp out violence and abuse of children, mirroring the movement to stamp out the violence experienced by women, is essential. The sooner it gets underway, the better our world will be.

“Children already living through humanitarian crises must also not be forgotten during the COVID-19 response. 2020 was already set to be a year with more people than ever before in need of humanitarian assistance, and the vulnerabilities of children in crisis-affected countries will persist and likely be further compounded by the consequences of this pandemic, exposing them to a double jeopardy. The Secretary-General has launched a Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19. It is up to the global community to come together in support of the most vulnerable children – those torn from their families and homes – to uphold their rights and protect them from the spread of the virus.

“Finally, defending children in the midst of this crisis means ensuring the availability and accessibility of life-saving supplies such as medicines, vaccines, sanitation and education supplies. The current COVID-19 outbreak is applying pressure on global manufacturer production and on logistics, and we are working with businesses on the production and procurement of essential commodities with fair distribution in mind. We want to support countries – particularly those with health systems under strain – to have equal access to supplies to fight COVID-19. We also need to make sure that travel restrictions, export bans and the current pressure on production capacity does not prevent us from sourcing and shipping essential supplies to support our interventions in health, education, and water and sanitation programmes, and in support of our humanitarian response.

“While we are currently focused during this lockdown period on the immediate concern of keeping ourselves and our loved ones healthy, we must also remember the millions of children who risk becoming the forgotten victims of this pandemic. What their world looks like tomorrow, and what their futures ultimately look like, is also our responsibility today.

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For more information about COVID-19 and guidance on how to protect children and families, visit: www.unicef.org/coronavirus

About UNICEF
UNICEF works in some of the world’s toughest places, to reach the world’s most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone. Follow UNICEF on Twitter and Facebook.

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