



FUNDING THE RESPONSE

COVID-19 is sweeping the world, posing grave threats to the lives and wellbeing of millions of people. We know that the COVID-19 crisis will overwhelm national health systems, badly damage economies, and put millions of children at significant risk of harm. This unprecedented global public health crisis requires a well-coordinated response, founded on human rights and principles of international solidarity and cooperation.

Recognising the devastating social and economic impacts for women and girls, United Nations Secretary General António Guterres has issued a policy brief in which he urges States to put them at the centre of their response.

As needs grow, it is critical that resources are not diverted from programmes essential to the health, safety, and wellbeing of children, girls, and young women. Funding for child protection, education, gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) programming should be protected and, if necessary, increased in line with needs.

ADDRESSING VULNERABILITY

Disease outbreaks affect girls, boys, women, and men differently. Individuals and groups of people will also be differently affected depending on their age, as well as their various and intersecting identities and experiences.

This includes, but is not limited to, healthcare workers, homeless people, people with disabilities, people deprived of liberty, people on the move (refugees, internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, migrants), unaccompanied and separated children, children in care settings, and others who lack family and community support.

While the severe direct health effects of COVID-19 appear to disproportionately impact older populations, there will be a wide range of long-term indirect impacts that are likely to negatively affect all children, especially the most vulnerable. Plan International's experience in emergencies has shown that, in these situations, girls are particularly at risk and face increased threats of sexual violence, exploitation, discrimination, and abuse.

Existing vulnerabilities and inequalities in society are likely to increase as a result of this crisis. States must address the specific needs of vulnerable groups and individuals as early as possible in their COVID-19 response, in order to prevent, or limit insofar as possible, the widening of socio-economic gaps.

STATES SHOULD:

- Ensure that national budgets include adequate or increased resources allocated to ensure the protection of children's rights both during and after the COVID-19 crisis;
- Ensure that multilateral funding mechanisms are designed and utilised with due consideration to age, gender, and diversity, and informed by an analysis of how the crisis affects different vulnerable groups;
- Fulfil existing financial commitments to humanitarian, development, and human rights programming and scale up support to existing funding mechanisms such as the UN Women Peace and Humanitarian Fund and the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women; and
- Increase flexibility to enable organisations to adapt to the rapidly shifting context of the COVID-19 pandemic, while also ensuring a duty of care to staff, and upholding the Core Humanitarian Standards.

STATES SHOULD ENSURE THAT POLICIES, LAWS, AND OTHER MEASURES TO TACKLE THE CONSEQUENCES OF COVID-19 ARE:

- Designed and implemented without discrimination and with due consideration to age, gender, and diversity;
- Temporary and only implemented for as long as necessary;
- Addressing both the short- and long-term impacts of the crisis, particularly for the poorest and most vulnerable in society;
- Responsive to the different needs and risks faced by individuals and communities;
- Equitable, holistic, evidence-based, gender-transformative, and protective of dignity, human rights, and the humanitarian principles;
- Developed and implemented in consultation and partnership with civil society and communities, including children and young people; and
- Communicated in a timely and accessible manner, using local languages and child-friendly materials.

ADDRESSING SPECIFIC RISKS FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Today the world is home to 600 million adolescent girls, many of whom suffer deep disadvantages due to both their gender and their age. This double discrimination is compounded by poverty and other factors of discrimination, such as disability or ethnicity.

The safety measures put in place by many States in response to COVID-19, while necessary, place adolescent girls at heightened risk of violence in their home. Reports are already emerging of a rise in domestic incidents of gender-based violence. Many girls around the world may now find themselves confined with their abusers, at a time when they are cut off from social support structures and essential protection and sexual and reproductive health services.

Secondary impacts of the pandemic, such as loss of employment and education, will cause an increase in early pregnancy, sexual violence, exploitation, trafficking, child labour, and harmful practices, including child, early, and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation. The pandemic will also increase burdens of unpaid care and domestic work on adolescent girls.

Gains in gender equality and the protection of girls' rights are at risk of being lost as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. States must make every effort to ensure that the response does not negatively impact human rights, including girls' rights.

STATES SHOULD:

- Ensure that protection risks are assessed, monitored, and mitigated during the planning and implementation of COVID-19 response, with the collection and use of data disaggregated by age, gender, diversity, and other exclusion factors;
- Prioritise the prevention of GBV and the protection and safeguarding of all, particularly girls and women, including by creating or strengthening monitoring and reporting mechanisms and dedicated services to respond to GBV cases;
- Ensure that girls and young women have continued access to comprehensive sexuality education, as well as sexual and reproductive health services and information. In humanitarian settings, implement the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) for Reproductive Health in Emergencies;
- Recognise and address the differential impacts of lack of access to education according to age, gender, diversity, and other exclusion factors, and take steps to ensure education provision by other means, including remote instruction;
- Ensure access for those experiencing violence to free emergency hotlines, shelters with revised public health protocols, and other protection services, including mental health and psychosocial support;
- Ensure that social protection plans and emergency economic packages are gender-responsive and take account of the burdens of unpaid domestic work and care that fall disproportionately on women and girls; and
- Ensure that COVID-19 response teams are embedded with child protection and gender expertise at all levels.