UNICEF works for children and adolescents in 22 countries and territories in Europe and Central Asia Region (ECAR). UNICEF is also present in Italy supporting Refugee and Migrant populations.

- All but two countries (Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) have reported cases of COVID-19.
- UNICEF is supporting Governments in the procurement of life-saving personal protective equipment (PPE), hygiene kits and medical devices. Despite global market constraints, UNICEF has made preliminary deliveries in 11 countries, with more orders pending.
- Eight countries have declared states of emergencies and at least 16 have temporarily closed schools, preschools, and childcare centres.
- UNICEF is working with Governments and coordinating with UN agencies and NGO partners to mount a child-focused response.
- Stay-at-home orders heighten risks to violence in the home and can result in the potential neglect of children in residential institutions and other closed facilities.
- In refugee-hosting countries like Greece, Italy, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, children and families are living in overcrowded reception centres, and sometimes informal, unsanitary conditions that make practising basic hygiene and physical distancing virtually impossible. Refugee and migrant children in Turkey are also at higher risk.
- Messages on COVID-19 safety, protection, positive parenting, and being of service to others have reached hundreds of thousands of children, parents and other targeted audiences through multilingual print materials, video, and social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp) and innovative, interactive platforms such as U-Report information polls and an AI chatbot [https://healthbuddy.info/](https://healthbuddy.info/).
- Through new or expanded digital platforms and TV broadcasts, UNICEF is working with Ministries of Education to support distance learning to enable remote learning opportunities tailored for all languages and ages. Print and digital resources created for parents and caregivers to support children continue to be delivered through #LearningAtHome and similar campaigns.
- UNICEF is paying special attention in reaching disadvantaged Roma, refugee and other high-risk communities who cannot equally benefit from technology-based solutions for communication, learning, and psychosocial support.

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1 Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Greece, Kazakhstan, Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), Kyrgyzstan, , Montenegro, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

* Does not include figures from Italy.
Funding Overview and Partnerships

Under UNICEF’s Global Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) for COVID-19 response, Europe and Central Asia is appealing for $38 million. Against this target, the Region has already confirmed $4,324,293 million (11%) in funding received from key donors, including: Asia Development Bank, UK Department of International Development, Global Partnership for Education, Nordeaus, Switzerland, UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), and USAID². The amount indicated includes funding received via UNICEF Emergency Programme Fund.

UNICEF is following up with key donors (Russia Federation, the European Union, World Bank, Islamic Development Bank, Gavi, Global Fund, among others) to mobilise resources for the response or to re-programme portions of existing grants and loans from donors who have indicated such flexibility. Within programme countries, UNICEF is engaging with the private sector to leverage funding from private donors and private sector partnership. UNICEF in Serbia mobilised almost $700,000 for procurement of medical equipment. In Ukraine, advertising providers have donated 1,600 billboard and other pro-bono space to support UNICEF’s public information campaign on prevention.

Situation Overview & Humanitarian Needs

The burden COVID-19 has already placed on local health systems will compromise the delivery of basic primary care, including routine immunization programmes, HIV treatment, home-visiting, antenatal care, and baby check-ups. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and epidemiological measures, child protection services and interventions have been downsized, increasing the risk of violence against children and limiting the support to and supervision of families and children at risk. Early childhood care and education centres and school closures may have unintended child protection consequences, and deepen inequalities in access to learning, especially for the most vulnerable children such as refugee and migrant children, ethnic and linguistic minority children, and those from socio-economically deprived families. Socio-economic gaps are likely to further widen during this outbreak, exacerbating the inequalities and vulnerability of children in the home. COVID-19 has a greater impact on women in their role in caring for children who are out of school, and in indirect ways such as a possible surge in Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and child marriage.

In Greece, Italy and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the situation of refugee and migrant children, especially those unaccompanied, and without parental care, is of grave concern, especially as a first case is now reported and confirmed among the refugee and migrant population in Greece. In these populations and in Turkey, where almost all four million refugees and asylum-seekers are living in host communities and have been struggling to meet their basic needs, health precautions which require soap, sanitation and physical distancing will be very difficult to implement. In Ukraine, the closure of the checkpoints to non-government-controlled areas (NGAs) also puts conflict-affected children and families at greater risk.

Partnerships and Coordination

UNICEF is working closely with Governments, WHO and other UN agencies, the donor community, and NGO partners including Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies to stop the transmission of COVID-19. UNICEF is also very much focused on measures to mitigate collateral impacts, and ensure the continuity of health and social services, especially for the most vulnerable populations. In collaboration with WHO, UNDP, and UN Crisis Management Teams, UNICEF is working with the Ministry of Health (MOH) to consolidate procurement plans for PPE, ventilators and other critical health supplies. As a trusted partner of Ministries responsible for education, social services, and young people, UNICEF is providing technical expertise in the design and delivery of public information strategies especially for children, youth, parents, and teachers. In Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Montenegro and Tajikistan, UNICEF leads the Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) working group. In Armenia, UNICEF is co-hosting donor coordination on social protection together with the Ministry of Labour and

² Details on funding and amount available on request.
Social Affairs (MoLSA) to identify needs and gaps, as well as activate the UN coordination group on social protection/psychosocial support for more aligned and comprehensive response. In Greece, UNICEF, in coordination with Site Management Support actors, have launched a tool to monitor the COVID-19 preparedness and response activities in open accommodation sites on a weekly basis.

Summary of UNICEF’s Preparedness and Response Actions

Supplies

Continuous assessment of the challenges in sourcing and delivery of critical supplies has enabled UNICEF to deliver preliminary shipments of PPEs (e.g., masks, glove, gowns) and/or hygiene kits, disinfectant, chlorine, hand sanitizer, and/or diagnostic tests, oximeters, oxygen concentrators to health staff and front-line social workers in Croatia, Georgia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Tajikistan and Turkey. In Greece, UNICEF is supporting Government procurement through UNICEF Procurement Services. Procurement efforts are aligned with technical support to Ministries of Health (MOH) and other health authorities on surveillance, advocacy and capacity building.

Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE)

At Regional level, UNICEF has developed a rich digital assets database, including print, video and audio communication materials and guidance that Country Offices can readily translate and adapt to effectively reach parents, schools, health and other professionals to protect children and families and support the continuity of quality health care, learning and development, and social services. A toolkit is available to support families and caregivers in managing the care and learning crisis at home is assembled regionally and provide content to support a regional social media campaign (#LearningAtHome) aimed at providing parents with daily activities and tips.

At a sub-regional level, UNICEF offices have intensified coordination and cooperation in translating, preparing and exchanging communication materials based on similar languages and shared media space (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia) and sharing translated information (Kosovo, Albania and Montenegro). Communication materials are being disseminated in Azerbaijan (in Azerbaijani and Farsi), Belarus, Bulgaria, Greece, Kazakhstan (in Kazakh and Russian), Montenegro (in Montenegrin and Albanian). Communication materials are also being developed in Romani (in partnership with the Red Cross), Serbia (for Roma settlements), in Tajikistan and Turkey (in Turkish and Arabic, for refugee and migrant population).

Innovative and interactive outreach has recently been launched at Regional level, for example, an AI-powered Q&A ChatBot for COVID-19 response (https://healthbuddy.info/) built on a RapidPro platform was been launched in English and Russian. UNICEF has developed similar multilingual ChatBots in In Italy (Italian, French, English, Arabic, Tigrinya, Bengali and Albanian) and in Montenegro. ChatBots built on U-Report and RapidPro platforms are interfacing with a growing number of young people who are actively participating in U-Report information polls (Albania, Italy, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Ukraine) and RapidPro text messages (Turkey).

Digital campaigns such as #StayHome deploy Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to spread messages on risk communication, hand washing, learning at home and psychosocial support have large followings in nearly all countries. For example, regularly, 620,000 people in Montenegro; 215,207 in Armenia; 50,000 in Moldova. In Uzbekistan, a social network channel on Telegram has been set up for communication, and in two weeks has over 1.2 million followers. An ECD social media campaign #WhileAtHome has attracted 50,000 parents and children in Montenegro and 100,000 in Kosovo. Campaigns were tailored to specific language groups, for example to the Albanian speakers in Montenegro. Turkey already has an ECD campaign underway. UNICEF in Ukraine is working with the Ministry of Education and Science to activate a something similar.

Traditional media is also helping to reach audiences that have limited digital access. Risk communication assets are also being used in the production of hundreds of thousands of traditional print material (posters, leaflets etc.) that often complement web-based, multi-language campaigns. UNICEF Kosovo is partnering with Radio Television of Kosovo to broadcast COVID-19 messages in Albanian, Serbian and Romani. In Tajikistan, video and audio clips aimed at promoting hygiene practices and preventive measures were developed in Tajik and Russian and broadcasted on the national TV and radio. In Albania, a child friendly video with information on COVID-19 is being broadcasted by two TV channels and the video is amplified via social media channels. UNICEF’s National Ambassador appears in video messages in Turkey.

Access to Continuous Learning

UNICEF is taking a leadership role in supporting Government commitments to ensure that learning continues, despite temporary school closures in at least 16 countries in ECAR. In Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Ukraine are among countries where UNICEF is supporting the MOE to develop a sector response strategy/plan to ensure continuity of learning for children. In Moldova, UNICEF is leading the UN Coordinated Education Task Force for COVID-19 that facilitates and ensures coordinated communication for UN Agencies (including UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women, UN OHCHR and UNICEF), and the World Bank with the
UNICEF is supporting MOEs and other actors in producing education lessons to be broadcasted via television or online distance learning platforms (including Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey). UNICEF offices (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia) have initiated partnerships with MOE and other authorities to develop education content for pre-school children, while others (UNICEF Armenia) are targeting children from the most vulnerable groups, mobilizing resources to enhance teacher capacities in using the distance learning platform, improving e-learning and teaching resources and developing mechanisms for children hardest to reach. UNICEF is working in Bulgaria and Montenegro to reach Roma minority children and children with disabilities. In Greece, UNICEF is providing non-formal education activities and psychosocial support to refugee and migrant children and families through distance learning and remote psychosocial support sessions. UNICEF Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are supporting the availability and tools for children with disabilities and ethnic and linguistic minorities, including the addition of sign language and multiple language subtitles to remote lessons.

UNICEF efforts also focused on supporting parents and caregivers in guiding children in home-learning and in some cases, providing psychosocial support (e.g., Albania, In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Ukraine Bulgaria). Serbia’s public radio and television broadcaster has allotted time for learning through play and parents support programmes. In Turkey, daily activity packages in Arabic and Turkish are being prepared/adjusted for children (to be implemented by parents/caregivers) including reference videos if relevant. Turkish children are also supported by available online material such as downloadable story books. If the parents/caregivers do not have access to the internet, teachers are supported to provide guidance on the phone on daily basis.

Monitoring of quality – including both the quality of distance learning platforms and learning outcomes—is a key priority. At least three country offices report that M&E mechanisms are in place, while 5 report development of M&E is underway. One example is in Kazakhstan, where UNICEF is ensuring that M&E tools are built into teacher resources and that quality assurance is built into online learning interventions. Country Offices are also engaging with partners to provide devices, software, and mobile and internet connections for children who may otherwise not access remote learning.

Engaging adolescents and young people

In Europe and Central Asia Region, UNICEF’s focus on programmes for adolescents and youth has created a remarkable resource in the concerted effort to keep communities safe. For example:

- In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Italy, Romania, Kosovo, Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, Uzbekistan and Ukraine the U-Report platform gives young people an opportunity to amplify their concerns to decision makers. It has already provided 220,157 U-Reports providing feedback on COVID-19 polls. Bulgaria will join those efforts shortly. In Italy U-Report “On the Move” website and social media channels are constantly updated, and youth-friendly infographics and videos have been produced by U-Ambassadors. In Romania, the U-Report Global Bot with Q&A on the new coronavirus was activated after the first positive case was confirmed and reached over 9,600 U-Reporters.
- In Bulgaria, youth influencers (vloggers, YouTubers, etc.) and youth activists from NGOs are acting as role models for their fan-base and peers, recording video testimonies for educational, safe behaviour and creative ideas to spend social distancing meaningfully. Adolescents are engaged in online hackathon on innovative solutions for media literacy.
- In Croatia, young people are at the heart of UNICEF efforts to organize online activities related to media literacy (educational materials, webinars, virtual classrooms, articles, social banners) focused on understanding the media, importance of critical thinking, recognizing fake news, online safety and online violence prevention. Junior Ambassadors to the EU and for the Rights of the Children and Young People (UNICEF-MoFA Croatia Joint Programme) are producing blogs and videos which are being shared on UNICEF digital platforms, including Voices of Youth and programme “ZABUM – for the future of young people.”
- In Greece, UNICEF is supporting unaccompanied adolescent children through WhatsApp messaging in sites who are outside the Safe Zones and particularly vulnerable.
- In Turkey, UNICEF released a video with youth on their point of view regarding COVID19, which has been disseminated through social media. UNICEF is also working closely with the Ministry of Youth and Sports to use its YouTube channel and nation-wide network of youth centres to further disseminate messages related to COVID-19 as well as provide opportunities for virtual learning and engage young people in national efforts to fight the pandemic.
- UNICEF offices are implementing skills building programmes, i.e. Italy is continuing UPSHIFT classes online and Croatia is activating online 21st century skills workshops, Hackathon and U-Report. In Armenia, adolescents from the UPSHIFT community to contribute to global youth voices by blogs posts on the current situation, producing social media assets to be disseminated locally and development of a photo story on how they are coping with the COVID-19 isolation. The ongoing GenU Youth Challenge organized by UNICEF, UNDP and local partners will shift from in-person to an online platform.
- In Kazakhstan, an information and educational session on COVID-19 for the volunteers of the Youth-Friendly Services in Almaty and the National Volunteers Network’s volunteers was conducted to educate them on COVID-19 and social
distancing aiming to further reach adolescents and youth online.

- UNICEF Innovation Lab in Kosovo is being creative and active in engaging adolescents and youth through its different digital platforms and social networks with a purpose to promote online education activities, inspirational speeches, and direct engagement of youth which are delivered by our partners and beneficiaries. The activities such as UPSHIFT & Podium online solutions are already being disseminated via social networks using the #WhileAtHome, #StayConnected, including Virtual Activate Talk speech (for one week). Up to date UNICEF Innovations Lab #StayConnected Campaign managed to reach 81, 450 young people.

- In Romania, the members of UNICEF’s Children’s Board were engaged in developing communication materials and sharing of prevention messages – a series of 8 blogs were written by children for children, on online education, their recommendations for activities, preferred books and movies and their voices against stigma and discrimination. The children also developed videos for the newly-created TikTok account – all were amplified in social media channels.

- Building on an existing volunteer initiative, North Macedonia is also working with 22 youth to redesign the programme in the COVID-19 context and attract more volunteers. In Montenegro, through the Association of Scouts of Montenegro and their “Scouts League” UNICEF has engaged 420 children and young people to inform their peers on good practices and ways to protect from COVID-19, but also positive ways on how to spend one’s time in isolation.

Access to Child Protection and Social Protection Services

The pandemic confronts children with increasing threats to safety and wellbeing, including mistreatment, GBV, exploitation, social exclusion and separation from caregivers. COVID-19 has disrupted the normal environment in which children live and grow leaving them in home-based quarantine, which can have a negative impact on children and their families.

- In Albania, UNICEF is currently supporting the Agency on the Rights and Protection of the Child with the finalization of guidelines on child protection measures during the emergency. The establishment of a humanitarian cash transfer for poor households with children is being explored by UNICEF in Albania in partnership with the national and municipal authorities.

- In Armenia, UNICEF is supporting Yerevan Municipality on a tool for rapid needs assessment of social needs of families/individuals who are out of social protection programmes, including development of a database, support packages (cash and vouchers), regulations and psycho-social support schemes. Also, in cooperation with Yerevan Municipality and an NGO, terms of reference are being developed on providing psycho-social support to vulnerable children and families.

- In Greece, UNICEF has adjusted team compositions in Open Accommodation Sites to be in line with social distancing guidelines set by the government while continuing to provide essential support to the population in sites. Case management, psychosocial support, GBV prevention, and legal aid continues on site when possible or through alternative remote communication (phone, messaging apps, etc.). A WhatsApp group for parents is being set up for all sites in order to share messages and facilitate communication.

- In Italy, UNICEF is partnering with the humanitarian NGO, INTERSOS to carry out case management of very vulnerable young men and women, and families with small children who remain outside the formal reception system, so that they can access emergency shelter and cash assistance within private and commercial structures. A partnership with Médecins du Monde (MdM) was activated to deliver phone counselling and psychological first aid for refugees and migrants. Coordinamento Nazionale delle Comunità di Accoglienza (CNCA) is supporting foster families and children remotely, including psychosocial support and stress management during quarantine. A guidance on how to mainstream gender considerations into COVID-19 outbreak response for migrants and refugees is been prepared in Italian.

- In the Western Balkans, plans of action focus on enabling reporting abuse and violence, with psychosocial support and the construction of shelters for the most high-risk children and strengthen capacity of staff delivering mental health and psychosocial services, ensuring continuity of child protection and social protection services, Mitigating risks of all forms of violence and abuse of children, addressing, mental health and psychosocial support and stigma prevention.

- In Montenegro, the “Parenting for Lifelong Health Programme” is now delivered online (via Zoom and Viber) or by phone in 5 municipalities to 12 parent groups providing much needed support to 119 parents currently enrolled in the programme to promote positive parenting and prevention of violence.

- In North Macedonia, psychosocial services are made available to children and parents through help lines, specifically targeting adolescents and parents of children with disabilities.

- In Kazakhstan, in partnership with the National Centre for Mental Health, the planning session for psychologists was facilitated on online access to services and resources on mental health. Also, UNICEF is advocating with the Human Rights and Children’s Rights Ombudspersons to focus on the needs of children with disabilities during COVID-19 pandemic.

- In Turkey, child protection partners continue to deliver critical outreach, case management and psycho-social support to vulnerable children and families, through a network of over 70 child and family centres and outreach teams. Considering the constrains related to social distancing measures to sustain outreach and case management remotely are being put in place. Important social assistance programs for vulnerable children, including the Conditional Cash Transfer for Education, are continued. UNICEF translated materials related to addressing mental health and psychosocial aspects of COVID-19 outbreak, protection of children, and tips for parenting have disseminated these
materials amongst and through its partners.

- In Ukraine, UNICEF disseminated new guidance focusing on child protection and mainstreaming disability into the COVID-19 response. These included communicating with children and adults with disabilities. In Eastern Ukraine, mobile GBV prevention teams adapted to providing consultations online, complemented by emergency visits when required. In Ukraine, UNICEF also conducted a rapid analysis on the economic consequences of the COVID-19 on vulnerable families. A policy note to support advocacy focusing on the immediate to longer terms needs for social protection was presented to the newly appointed Minister of Social Policy and deputy head of the presidential administration for further consideration. UNICEF also deployed an expert to support the government in calculating the macro-economic forecast and budget implications. A 4.5% GDP decline and 6.9% of budget deficit was reported.

**Data Collection, Analysis and Research**

At regional level, UNICEF is tapping into existing datasets to better understand and analyse the impact of COVID-19 on children, particularly those most vulnerable, due to reduced access to healthcare, school closures and limited child protection/social protection services.

- In Armenia, as part of the broader UN Multi-Sector Response framework, UNICEF in coordination with UNDP and with involvement of the World Bank (WB) ADB, EU, is contributing to the joint COVID-19 Socio-Economic Impact Assessment via developing a methodology based on comparison of different disaster and humanitarian rapid assessment tools, like the Human Security Approach, Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment and Disaster Recovery Framework. In parallel, UNICEF is also contributing to the food-security assessment led by WFP.
- In Bulgaria, UNICEF is initiating a rapid assessment on positive and negative online behaviours of adolescents under social distancing (e.g. trends in cyberbullying, activism and volunteering).
- In Montenegro, UNICEF has engaged a research agency to conduct public perception surveys on COVID-19 impact, on a weekly basis.
- In Romania, UNICEF is undertaking a Rapid Assessment to understand the situation of (particularly) the most vulnerable children/families amid the pandemic. The first round of interviewing key informants in being undertaken in three counties. Key partners like WHO/World Bank provided useful input to the concept note and several local organizations are assisting pro bono on the actual collection of evidence.
- In Greece, as chair of the Education Sector Working Group, UNICEF in coordination with education actors undertook an assessment nationally across different accommodation (sites, urban apartments, RICs, shelters, etc.) to determine the level of preparedness for continued education, distant learning, and information provision. UNICEF Field Monitors taking into consideration authorities guidelines for protection continue to assess the situation in open accommodation sites including access of children to services and information, situation development and coordination mechanisms in sites. Information exchange channels among authorities and UN agencies have been established to ensure common planning data and situation analysis.

**Internal and External Media**

- The ECA Regional Director spoke to Reuters on the situation for refugee children on the Greek Islands: [https://nationalpost.com/pmn/health-pmn/u-n-refugee-agency-to-suspend-resettlements-because-of-coronavirus](https://nationalpost.com/pmn/health-pmn/u-n-refugee-agency-to-suspend-resettlements-because-of-coronavirus)
- The Regional Office published a new photos essay on the situation for refugee and migrant children and families: [Refugee and migrant communities brace for COVID-19 in already dire conditions on the Greek islands](https://nationalpost.com/pmn/health-pmn/u-n-refugee-agency-to-suspend-resettlements-because-of-coronavirus)
- The Regional Office also published the following stories from Serbia: [Calm in the coronavirus 'infodemic'](https://nationalpost.com/pmn/health-pmn/u-n-refugee-agency-to-suspend-resettlements-because-of-coronavirus)
- The Regional Office published a new youth blog from Kosovo: “[We are united by the challenges imposed by this global pandemic”](https://nationalpost.com/pmn/health-pmn/u-n-refugee-agency-to-suspend-resettlements-because-of-coronavirus)
- A UNICEF global Voices of Youth article on Montenegro by young reporters - [https://www.voicesofyouth.org/blog/young-reporters-have-message-you-stay-home-and-fight-fake-news-around-coronavirus](https://www.voicesofyouth.org/blog/young-reporters-have-message-you-stay-home-and-fight-fake-news-around-coronavirus) was also published
- The Regional Office is systematically translating global COVID-19 content into Russian language, including specific [COVID-19 landing page](https://nationalpost.com/pmn/health-pmn/u-n-refugee-agency-to-suspend-resettlements-because-of-coronavirus) linking to many of the Russian language resources.

**Who to contact for further information**

Afshan Khan  
Regional Director  
UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia  
Email: akhan@unicef.org

Basil Rodrigues  
Regional Adviser, Health  
UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia  
Email: brodriques@unicef.org

Annmarie Swai  
Regional Adviser, Emergency  
UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia  
Email: aswai@unicef.org