

Fast Facts

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for every child



Context: COVID-19 in Belize

COVID-19 hit Belize in March 2020. [With a total number of 72 cases as of 4 August 2020](#), most of newly identified cases correspond to unauthorized border crossings and repatriated Belizeans. In March 2020, the Government of Belize declared a State of Emergency, implementing safety restrictions including a national lockdown until 30 June 2020.

[So far, the biggest impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Belize have been socio-economic](#), with profound consequences for the most vulnerable – including children. 42% of Belizeans are under 18 years of age.

[Even before the pandemic, the country faced high levels of poverty](#), weak public sector services – including health systems – and [disparities in access and quality of basic services](#).

Like many other Small Island and Developing States, [Belize is also highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change](#), incurring an estimated average loss of 4% of GDP per year due to natural hazards like hurricanes.

Belize has a very high tourist traffic all year round. With border closures and subsequent restrictions due to COVID-19, [the economic impact of decreased tourism is particularly concerning](#).

In addition to emergency measures to contain the spread of the virus, the country has established an [Unemployment Relief Programme and Emergency Food Programme](#), while preparing to expand its BOOST National Cash Transfer Programme.

Impact of COVID-19 on children

Globally, [COVID-19 is claiming lives and livelihoods](#). As families struggle to stay afloat, the crisis is battering essential services that secure the education and protection of the country's children. [The most vulnerable children – such as those affected by poverty, exclusion or family violence – are facing even greater risks](#), cut off from existing support.

In Belize:

- Preliminary [MICS Plus](#) data show that [up to half of surveyed households have lost their job or livelihood](#), and 60% have suffered a reduction of income.
- [More than 100,000 children and adolescents have been affected by school closures](#), with a consequent dramatic drop in the time dedicated to learning.
- [About 25% of surveyed households indicated skipping meals](#) or reducing their food intake (Caribbean COVID-19 Food Security & Livelihoods Impact Survey). This represents an additional threat, especially to 15% of children under 5 who suffer from stunting, and pregnant women who do not have access to nutritious food.
- [Violence against children is on the rise](#), with an increased number of reported cases since the beginning of the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to reverse decades of hard-won development gains for children, and jeopardize the accelerated progress now needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). If unaddressed, [the costs of the pandemic for children may persist throughout their lives](#).

UNICEF's action

UNICEF's preparedness and response strategy in Belize has two priorities: 1) to [reduce COVID-19 transmission and mortality](#) through the public health response, and 2) to [mitigate the socio-economic impacts](#) on children and families, especially the most vulnerable.

In collaboration with national and local authorities, civil society organizations, other UN agencies and partners, below are some of the highlights of our action so far.

Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE)

- [Reached more than 260,000 people](#) through messaging on COVID-19 prevention.
- Co-led interagency efforts on risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) to counter misinformation and promote healthy behaviours, such as handwashing.

Health

- [Procured and delivered 200,000 gloves, 840 masks, and other protective equipment](#) (PPE) such as biohazard bags, goggles, and face shields to protect hundreds of healthcare workers across the country, helping them to save lives.
- [Procured and distributed 5 oxygen concentrators](#) to provide oxygen therapy to hospitalized children and newborns with severe acute respiratory infection (SARI) and suspected COVID-19 infection.
- [Secured critical hygiene and prevention items](#) for use in schools, health facilities, and public spaces – including upcoming testing kits and additional PPE Supplies.
- [Supplied 2 laptops to the Ministry of Health](#) to enable lab technologists to carry out COVID-19 testing, as well as manage investigations, track and collect data.

Data collection

- Collected data to inform the national COVID-19 response by surveying 268 households in 5 waves of [MICS Plus surveys](#).

Nutrition and WASH (Water, Sanitation & Hygiene)

- [Supported the Ministry of Education's School Feeding Programme](#) with 1,000 nutrition hampers, including hygiene kits, which have been distributed to the families of children who have been beneficiaries of the Ministry of Education's School Feeding Programme and affected by school closures.
- Provided technical support to the Ministry of Health for the development of [nutrition counselling material for infant and young child feeding](#).
- [Advocated for the continuation of breastfeeding](#) to key healthcare personnel from Belize District to reduce the negative impact of COVID-19 on the nutrition status of children.

Education

- Partnered with the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture to produce and air the TV and radio programme "[In It Together](#)" to ensure educational continuity through flexible, fun and interactive home-based learning during COVID-19.
- Produced and broadcast [messages for parents and caregivers](#) to assist children at home with psychosocial support and distance learning.
- Reached [over 30,000 students, from pre-school to secondary school](#), with free printed lessons to support children during school closures.

Child protection

- Supported the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation to respond to violence against children during COVID-19 by providing guidance on remote reporting, as well as [supplies for remote working and case management and response](#).
- [Printed and distributed 200 hard copies of protocols for the police](#) on how to interact with children during COVID-19 across 6 districts in Belize.
- [Procured video recording equipment and supplies for child-friendly spaces](#) at 3 police stations across Belize to ensure that children who are already in a vulnerable situation do not feel further victimized and fearful when coming in contact with the police.

Social protection

- Supported the implementation of the national COVID-19 Food Assistance Programme, which provided 32,000 households with a two-week basic food basket valued at US\$75.

ABOUT US

In shaping a Belize fit for children and women, UNICEF focuses mainly on social protection, child protection, early childhood development and education, health and nutrition.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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See [UNICEF's work in Belize](#) and [its COVID-19 response in Latin America and the Caribbean](#).

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