

COVID-19 IN EGYPT

Protecting Children and Young People in a Time of Crisis

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- While children and young people are not most at risk of developing health complications due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), its broader socioeconomic impacts risk are catastrophic and with consequences for society as a whole.
- Children and youth (0-24) make up 52% of the Egyptian population and are considered to be among the most vulnerable groups to COVID-19's social and economic impact.
- The measures taken to contain the pandemic have already started to affect children and youth, limiting their access to education, making them vulnerable to various types of violence, poverty, and mental health issues.
- Employment prospects for youth who are transitioning to the labor market are expected to be even more precarious as a result of the pandemic.

WHAT ARE CORONAVIRUSES AND COVID-19?

Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that can infect humans and animals, causing various respiratory infections in humans like the common cold and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). Towards the end of 2019, a newly discovered coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) is thought to have been transmitted from animals to humans, causing the infectious coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The most common symptoms of the disease are fever, exhaustion, and a dry cough, however, around 1 in 6 people have been found to develop more serious symptoms, which include difficulty in breathing and persistent chest pain¹. Globally, the disease is continuing to infect millions of people and is resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths.

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a public health emergency in January 2020 and then a pandemic in March 2020 after witnessing its alarming spread in various countries around the world.

Although to date relatively fewer cases have been reported in many African countries, this situation has the potential to

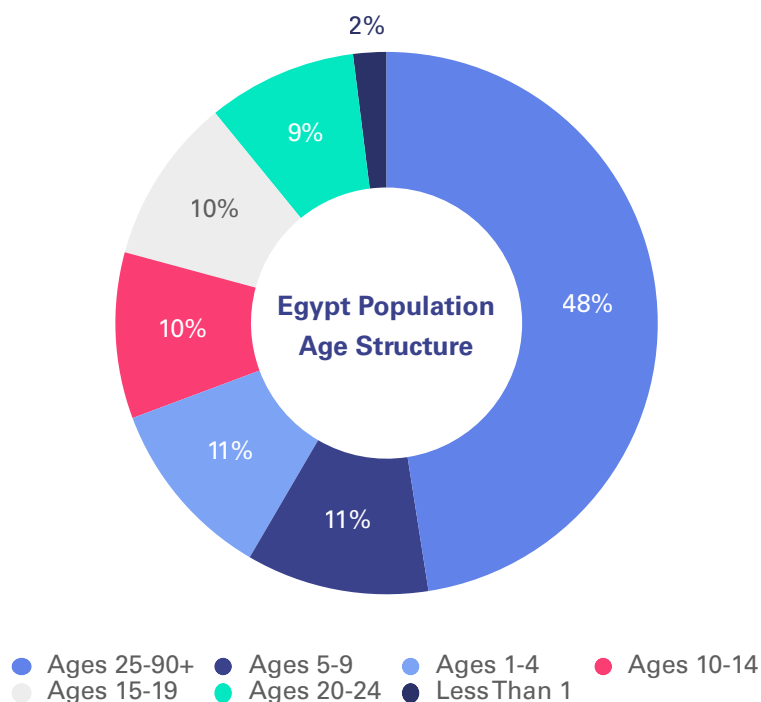
change very quickly. Data from WHO shows that as of the 1st of June, close to 6 million individuals have reported being affected by the virus and more than 367,000 who have succumbed to this attack globally. Egypt is showing considerable resistance in limiting the total number of positive cases to about 23,000 cases and 913 reported cases of death on account of COVID-19³. Egypt has taken a number of important steps in restricting the spread of the virus, notable among them are the lockdown of schools and educational institutions and the stoppage of economic and social activities, especially related to entertainment and hospitality sectors. The Government of Egypt has also increased its efforts and taken extensive steps in proper identification and treatment of those who have been infected by the virus. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to impact the Egyptian economy primarily due to declining travel and tourist activity, reduced worker remittances, capital outflows, and slowdown in domestic activities as people are asked to stay at home.

¹ World Health Organization (WHO), 2020. Virus Origin / Reducing Animal-Human Transmission Of Emerging Pathogens. [online] Who.int. Available at: <<https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus/who-recommendations-to-reduce-risk-of-transmission-of-emerging-pathogens-from-animals-to-humans-in-live-animal-markets>> [Accessed 18 May 2020].

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2020. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) – Symptoms. [online] cdc.gov. Available at: <<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>> [Accessed 18 May 2020].

³ World Health Organization (WHO), 2020. WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard. [online] Covid19.who.int. Available at: <<https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/eg>> [Accessed 6 June 2020].

WHY DO WE NEED TO PRIORITIZE CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN OUR RESPONSE TO COVID-19?



Children and youth (0-24) make up 52% of Egypt's population⁴. Although the symptoms of COVID-19 have generally been milder in children, both children and youth are just as susceptible as adults to contracting the virus. Furthermore, beyond the health crisis, the pandemic and the measures adopted to deal with it have started to take a toll on our social lives and on the economy.

Children and youth are considered to be among the most vulnerable groups to COVID-19's social and economic impact, owing mostly to the developmental needs of these particular age groups and the threat that the pandemic poses on the availability of growth and livelihood opportunities and not forgetting that their life choices are, to a large extent, dependent on the decisions taken by their parents and heads of their households.

The impact of COVID-19 on children are far-reaching but its effects will not be distributed equally. Some children are destined to bear the greatest costs in the absence of mitigating actions.

In an era characterized by extreme inequality, the COVID-19 pandemic is a fundamentally disequalizing event and its effects are expected to be most damaging for children in the poorest families and poorest regions.

For children caught at the apex of this crisis, there is a genuine possibility that its effects will permanently alter their lives. Children facing acute deprivation in nutrition, protection or stimulation, or periods of prolonged exposure to toxic stress, during the critical window of early childhood development are likely to develop lifelong challenges as their neurological development is impaired.

Children who drop out of school will face not only a higher risk of child marriage, child labour, and teenage pregnancies, but will see their lifetime earning potential precipitously fall. Children who experience family breakdowns during this period of heightened stress risk losing the sense of support and security on which children's wellbeing depends⁵.

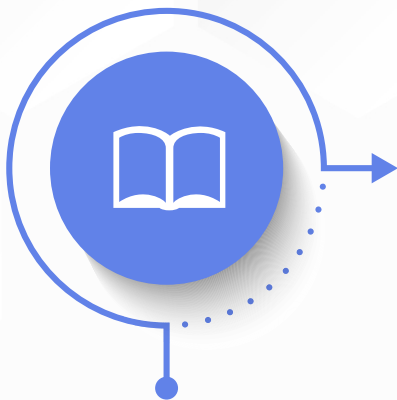
Young people (15-24), representing 18.2% of the total Egyptian population, are likely to be affected greatly by the long-lasting consequences of the pandemic. The economic slowdown that has already started will create new barriers to enter the labour market and to fulfil their aspirations which may contribute to unrest and instability.

⁴ CAPMAS, Egypt Census 2017

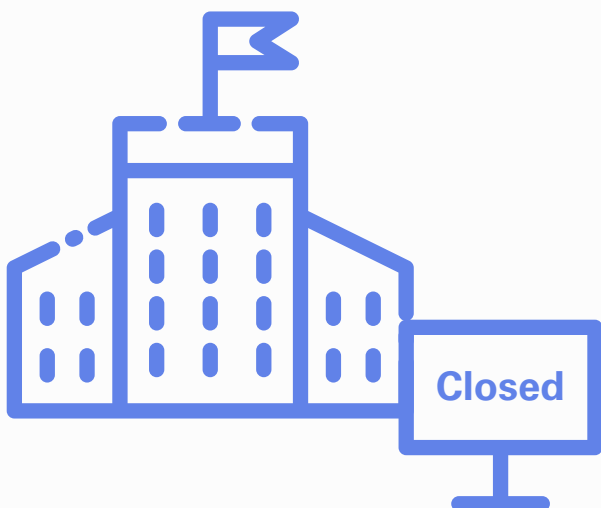
⁵ United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), 2020. Policy Brief: The Impact Of COVID-19 On Children. [online] UNSDG. Available at: <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/160420_Covid_Children_Policy_Brief.pdf> [Accessed 18 May 2020].

The following are some of the ways in which the pandemic is currently affecting youth and children and how it is expected to affect them in the near future:

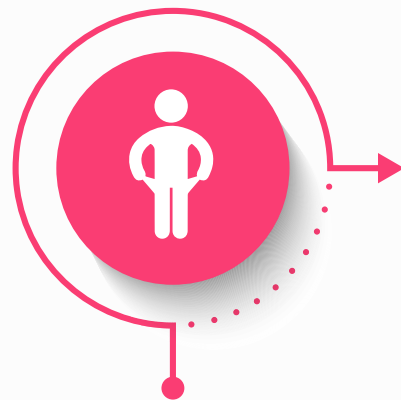
Education



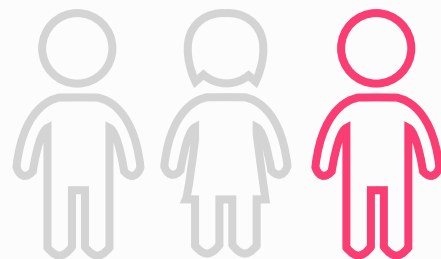
School closures have affected an estimated 25.3 million students in Egypt. Disruptions in learning and lack of peer interaction may affect social and behavioral development and the suspension of school feeding programmes may affect children's nutritional status. Furthermore, a risk of income loss due to pandemic-induced measures, such as workplace closures and restrictions in mobility, might force children and youth to seek out income-generating activities, jeopardizing their education and threatening their safety and security.



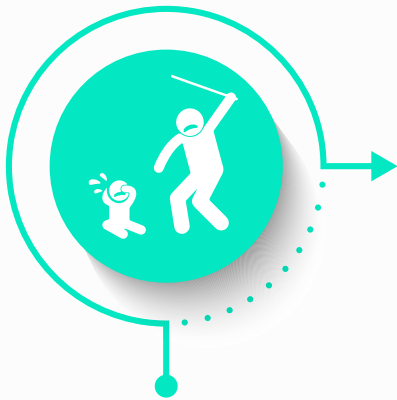
Poverty



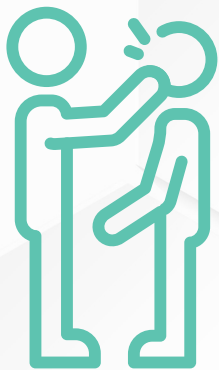
1 in 3 children were already considered to be multidimensionally poor in Egypt in 2014. Poverty affects young people's access to quality education, healthcare, nutrition, and decent jobs. The global economic slow-down due to the COVID-19 crisis is expected to hinder Egypt's economic growth, leading to job losses and a decrease in household income. People working in the informal sector (especially daily-wage earners) and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), the majority of Egypt's labor force, are at a higher risk of losing income and/or their jobs. Employment prospects for youth who are transitioning from education to the labor market are expected to be even more precarious as a result of the pandemic.



Exposure to violence



93% of young people (aged 1-14) in Egypt are exposed to violent disciplinary practices and 25% of ever-married girls/women aged 15-19 reported being exposed to some type of physical, sexual, or emotional violence⁶. Quarantining, and lack of access to protection services may increase the prevalence of violence against children, youth, and women.



Refugees and migrants



Egypt is host to around 5 million migrants and more than 256,000 refugees and asylum seekers (February 2020). **Around 600,000 migrants and 98,000 refugees are children and more than 4,500 are unaccompanied and separated children.** Refugees and migrants in Egypt and in many parts of the world are vulnerable to poverty and violence, have limited access to quality services and have no access to decent livelihood opportunities. An economic recession can further increase deprivation of refugees and migrants by limiting livelihood opportunities and the public resources available to support them.



Mental health



The disruption of young people's daily routines, their exposure to violence, and the fear for their own safety/security as well as the safety of those around them can **lead to anxiety, stress, and other long-term mental health issues.**



⁶ Ministry of Health and Population [Egypt], El-Zanaty and Associates [Egypt], and ICF International. 2015. Egypt Demographic and Health Survey 2014. Cairo, Egypt and Rockville, Maryland, USA: Ministry of Health and Population and ICF International.

WHAT IS UNICEF DOING ABOUT IT?

Fears around the ongoing/expected impact of COVID-19 is driving governments around the world to adopt protective measures to control the health crisis and fatalities, as well as to mitigate the economic damage that has already started to befall the most vulnerable groups in our society.

Making sure that children and youth are at the forefront of our response is essential for the present and for our shared future. UNICEF is working with the Government of Egypt and other development partners to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic on the well-being of people in general and on children in specific. The following are some of the initiatives supported by UNICEF:

SOCIAL PROTECTION

Social protection is linked with improved education, health, and nutrition outcomes. Expanding access to social protection programs can help limit the 'use of negative coping mechanisms', such as consumption rationing (i.e. eating less or spending less on education and health) or child labour, to deal with poverty. To help with the targeted expansion of social protection programs, UNICEF is working on:

01

- **Monitoring, tracking and understanding the impacts:**
 - » Developing real-time impact monitoring to help with assessing and disseminating information on the status of children during this crisis and understanding the challenges faced by social service providers.
 - » Producing poverty impact estimates based on multiple scenarios
- **Providing technical assistance to government partners to mitigate the impact of COVID-19.** Assistance will be based on an assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on high risk groups, poverty analysis, and real-time monitoring of the immediate consequences of the crisis.

FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

Considering the disruption of essential food/nutrition services, the suspension of school feeding programs, and the expected price inflation and income loss due to the pandemic, it is important to closely monitor and respond to the lack of access to services and expected negative coping mechanisms (e.g. consumption rationing). To this end, UNICEF is working on:

02

- Ensuring access to essential nutrition commodities by procuring and distributing these products to mother and child health services.
- Using multiple channels to develop and disseminate information on the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative⁷, best practices for infant and young child feeding, maternal and child health, and the importance of physical activities and play for healthy growth and development.
- Coaching and supporting supervision of health professionals (capacity building) in primary health care facilities to deliver and monitor nutrition interventions.

⁷ Maternity facilities that promote breastfeeding and provide breastfeeding support.

EDUCATION

The protective measures implemented to deal with COVID-19 and the pandemic's socioeconomic impact have limited access to schools and have strongly impacted both the quality as well as the quantity of education received. Furthermore, youth and children living in economically disadvantaged households have lower chances of continuing their education after the crisis ends. To support the continuity of learning, UNICEF is currently working on:

- **Supporting access to education and skills development for children and youth** through:
 - » Developing school guidelines for COVID-19 infection prevention and control.
 - » Distributing hygiene kits (including infrared thermometers), textbooks, coloring books and stationery, especially for the vulnerable populations including refugees.
 - » Developing multimedia edutainment content that can be used for skills development and home schooling.
 - » Training nursery facilitators on how to work remotely and providing the needed learning materials.
 - » Strengthening the institutional capacity of the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS) by training staff on using online platforms to deliver skills development programmes to youth and adolescents, especially those from vulnerable backgrounds.
- **Promoting girls' participation and positive parenting** to help counteract the expected negative impact of the pandemic on girls' and women's participation. This is proposed to be achieved through:
 - » Using the Dawwie national initiative (National Girls' Empowerment Initiative⁸) to foster engagement among youth and to promote digital literacy.
 - » Using digital messages, public service announcements, and the Ministry of Education and Technical Education's educational channels to combat negative coping behaviors, promote positive parenting, and provide psychological support to youth and parents.
- **Promoting youth inclusion/participation in the response to the pandemic** through:
 - » Working with MoYS to cultivate ideas and solutions from vulnerable youth/communities related to the COVID-19 response plan and supporting selected proposals.

03

HEALTH

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a heavy toll on the healthcare system and health professionals who have to work in risky conditions to minimize the spread of the disease and deal with other ailments. UNICEF is supporting the health sector through:

- **Ensuring continued access to essential maternal and child healthcare services** by
 - » Training health professionals on planning and tracking the continuity of services provided at primary healthcare facilities.
 - » Launching the updated guidelines for Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses, which include COVID-19 case management.
 - » Procuring and distributing equipment and medicine needed for maternal and child health.
- **Continuing the promotion of maternal and child health and nutrition** by training health professionals to use online platforms to disseminate information and raise awareness.
- **Helping protect people and prevent the spread of the pandemic** by rehabilitating the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene in healthcare facilities.

04

⁸ The Dawwie initiative focuses on providing adolescent girls and boys with digital literacy skills and promotes self-expression, intergenerational dialogue, and gender equality through activities such as storytelling circles, interactive theatre, and sports events. For more information on Dawwie, please visit www.dawwie.net; <https://www.facebook.com/DawwieInitiative/>

RISK COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (RCCE)

UNICEF is engaging with children, parents, service providers, communities and larger population in the response to COVID-19 to develop inclusive RCCE plans and strategies working closely with affected communities to promote behaviors favoring pandemic prevention and response to its secondary impacts. UNICEF in Egypt is:

05

- Co-leading the National Response's Risk Communication and Community Engagement pillar in coordination with the Ministry of Health and Population and WHO.
- Developing multimedia productions on COVID-19 to counter the abundant misinformation about the disease and to engage and address the needs of children, parents, and women, including pregnant and lactating women.
- Working with the government on using the RapidPro application to communicate with, and collect policy-relevant real-time data from the most vulnerable households in a time of crisis.
- Engaging youth networks and influencers, including media networks and private sector, in peer-to-peer and community engagement activities to support children's and families' resilience during COVID 19.

CHILD PROTECTION

Child protection services are especially important during a time of crisis as they can help prevent and mitigate some of the risks that children and youth deal with. To ensure access to adequate child protection services, UNICEF is working on:

06

- **Supporting the adaptation child protection services to COVID-19 conditions** through:
 - » Supporting the provision of psychosocial support to children and families in vulnerable settings.
 - » Ensuring the adaptation of services provided through Child Helpline (16000) and the Child Protection Committees to the needs of children during the current crisis.
- **Ensuring that the most vulnerable children have access to quality essential services** through:
 - » Supporting the development of referral pathways to other organizations and agencies for specialized child protection, gender-based violence, and mental health services and other basic needs.
 - » Strengthening mechanisms for alternative care arrangements for children who were left without care providers due to hospitalization or death.
 - » Providing care homes with personal protective equipment and information about infection prevention and control.



© UNICEF/Egypt2020/Rehab Eldali

REFUGEES, MIGRANTS AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Refugees and asylum seekers are particularly vulnerable to the impact of the pandemic due to lack of access to sustainable livelihoods, lack of social capital, and the dwindling resources available to support them. To support refugees and asylum seekers, UNICEF is working on:

- **Ensuring access to essential services and information through:**

- » Supporting the access to education by facilitating the distribution of hygiene kits, textbooks, coloring books and basic stationeries through in-kind donation facilitated by UNICEF.
- » Working with the Ministry of Health and Population to provide key COVID-19 health and prevention awareness and enrich promotion of protective hygiene practices and creating community-based COVID-19 surveillance.
- » Develop multimedia productions and arranging refugee-led communication activities on how to manage wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic, with targeted messaging to children and parents (including pregnant and lactating women).

07

Supported by:


www.unicef.org/egypt/

UNICEFEgypt

UNICEF_Egypt

unicef.egypt

unicef 
for every child