Indonesia is among the countries in southeast Asia most-affected by COVID-19. While the case load has been high since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the spread of the highly infectious delta variant led to a dramatic surge in cases and deaths during the months of July and August 2021.

In addition to the direct impact of COVID-19 on children, the indirect impact of the pandemic on Indonesia’s 80 million children and their daily lives has been severe and widespread. Access to health, nutrition, water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH) and protection services has been severely impacted; the education of millions of children and adolescents has been disrupted resulting in unprecedented learning loss; and families struggle to stay afloat financially. Existing inequalities have been exacerbated, particularly those related to gender, poverty and disability.

Throughout 2021, UNICEF Indonesia continued to work closely with the Government of Indonesia and partners to address the immediate and longer-term effects of COVID-19 on children. Here are nine ways we protected the lives and rights of children and their families (January-November 2021):

- 3,694,560 million women and children remained connected to critical basic health services including pre- and postnatal care, medical care for childhood illnesses and life-saving vaccination.
- 15 million people were reached with critical nutrition messages on the importance of breastfeeding, healthy diets, food safety, hygiene and essential nutrition services during COVID-19.
- 279,290 people were provided with access to appropriately designed hygiene and sanitation facilities to help stop the spread of the infection.
- 37,862 schools were supported to implement health safety protocols to ensure safe return to learning for around 5.7 million students in disadvantaged areas.
- 48,543 children, adolescents and caregivers were provided with mental health and psychosocial support to address and mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3 million households were supported with new or additional social transfers to help them stay afloat through an expansion of government social protection programmes.
- 200 million people were reached with key messages through media outreach, digital platforms and community engagement to help them understand how to protect themselves and their children from the virus and to increase demand for COVID-19 vaccination.
- 7,108 adolescent girls and boys participated in or led civic engagement to ensure their voices were heard and that they could help shape preparedness and response measures.
- 8 digital innovations were developed to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on children and their families and to target and monitor populations eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccine.
UNICEF is responding to urgent and critical needs across a multitude of sectors – while addressing that the specific nature of this emergency requires a long-term response and investment in strengthened resilience. Key priorities for the coming period include:

Providing needed support for the COVID-19 health sector response while ensuring safe resumption of health services, strengthening primary health care and support for COVID-19 vaccine deployment.

With embedded staff in the government and across provinces, UNICEF, in partnership with the Government of Indonesia, continues to enhance subnational capacity through its seven subnational offices by supporting the COVID-19 Taskforce with the response strategy; improving data and information flows; and developing and disseminating COVID-19 technical and communication materials. Furthermore, the impact of COVID-19 on the health of children, pregnant women and mothers is of serious concern, with decreases in antenatal care visits, hospital-based deliveries and routine childhood immunization. In response to these challenges, UNICEF is focusing on ensuring safe resumption of essential health services through strengthened primary health care. In addition, specific areas of engagement around COVID-19 vaccine deployment include procurement support through the COVAX Facility; technical assistance to national and subnational planning, budgeting, systems strengthening and implementation.

Addressing all forms of maternal and child malnutrition triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

One in three and one in ten Indonesian children are stunted and wasted, respectively, while nearly one in two pregnant mothers are anaemic. These vulnerabilities have been exacerbated by the economic crisis and food and health system disruptions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. UNICEF is working with partners to address this by revitalizing essential nutrition services, especially focusing on prevention and treatment of child severe wasting and maternal underweight and anaemia, and scale up of innovations to strengthen delivery of nutrition services. UNICEF, in partnership with the Government of Indonesia, is undertaking efforts to improve infant and young child feeding practices and nutrition for school-age children and adolescent girls and boys, and to transform food systems to make healthy, safe, nutritious foods accessible, affordable, and available to vulnerable populations.

Assessing risks, accelerating water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions.

Handwashing rates remain low in Indonesia with limited access to safely managed hand hygiene services, including in health facilities, schools and other public areas. UNICEF is co-leading WASH Cluster coordination for response activities, supporting national assessments to improve coordination systems and implementing recommendations to strengthen capacities during emergencies. For implementation, UNICEF developed behaviour change trainings, assessed WASH conditions in schools and health facilities aimed at increasing sustainable and safely managed WASH infrastructure; and continues to scale up real-time independent monitoring of COVID-19 safe behaviours. UNICEF is supporting the development of a costed national roadmap to improve access to hand hygiene and promote behaviour change; and is coordinating a coalition of public-private partners for multi-sectoral engagements to accelerate supply and demand generation activities while promoting innovations for increased access to inclusive hand hygiene facilities and services.
Ensuring continuous and catch up learning for vulnerable children, assisting out-of-school children to continue their education; and enhancing adolescent participation.

School closure due to COVID-19 has affected nearly 530,000 schools and 60 million learners across Indonesia. Over 4.3 million children are out of school, and this number is increasing. With schools gradually re-opening, UNICEF is focusing on recovering lost learning. This work includes supporting safe school re-opening; resumption of early childhood education and development services; adoption of blended learning approaches; and capacity building of teachers to provide catch-up learning on foundational literacy and numeracy skills, particularly for students in rural and remote areas. UNICEF continues to assist with the identification of out-of-school children and those at risk of dropping out of school; and to enhance access to essential services to promote ongoing education. UNICEF is also working with adolescents to promote their participation in creating relevant learning opportunities for twenty-first century skills development.

Addressing child protection concerns and reducing vulnerabilities.

COVID-19 has deepened existing child vulnerabilities and created new ones – particularly among the poor; those who lack parental care; are victims of violence, abuse and exploitation. The pandemic and associated containment measures have also worsened the already limited capacity of the child protection system and services to prevent and respond to these vulnerabilities and risks. UNICEF continues focusing on improving mental health and psychosocial support services for children, adolescents and caregivers as well as health workers and other front-line responders, such as social workers and community volunteers. Support includes the need to expand alternative care options and promote diversion programmes for children in conflict with the law, as well as reducing risks to violence against children and gender-based violence.

Securing public finance for children and strengthening social protection systems.

More children and adolescents have fallen into poverty than any other age group because of the COVID-19 pandemic. They have been hit especially hard by reduced household incomes and the inability of their families to improve their economic status. These economic conditions were exacerbated by low coverage and limited benefits received from social protection programmes. UNICEF is working with national and subnational authorities to strengthen child-focused social protection systems, support the establishment of a single social-economic registration system and increase the adaptiveness of social protection systems to emergencies. An additional area of focus is evidence generation to assess the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on households.

Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE).

UNICEF’s RCCE strategy revolves around five main areas: i) national support and coordination; ii) public awareness; iii) community engagement, including with young people; iv) advocacy; v) monitoring & evaluation, including documentation. Through its RCCE work, UNICEF aims to promote trust in public health efforts related to COVID-19 and support national authorities in rolling out authoritative public information campaigns on all aspects of the COVID-19 response. Regarding vaccine rollout, while the first phase of the RCCE work in 2021 focused on supporting COVID-19 vaccination for priority groups such as front-line workers and teachers, the work now focuses on broader coverage, including vulnerable populations and remote areas.
UNICEF Indonesia is grateful for the support received from key partners, including Accenture in Indonesia, Binance Charity, COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund, French National Committee for UNICEF, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, Global Partnership for Education, the Governments of Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, United Kingdom and United States of America, Johnson & Johnson Foundation, KOICA (Korea International Cooperation Agency), Prudential Indonesia, Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group, Wings Group Indonesia and individual and corporate donations received via UNICEF’s Private Sector Fundraising team.

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UNICEF globally is also the key agency responsible for COVID-19 vaccine procurement through the COVAX mechanism. UNICEF Indonesia is supporting government efforts to ensure effective procurement and equitable distribution so that vaccines get where they are needed most. By late November 2021, Indonesia had received over 44 million vaccines and 17 ultracold chain equipment through COVAX. By 23 November 2021, more than 225 million vaccines were administered.

Ensuring meaningful adolescent participation. Ensuring meaningful participation and engagement of adolescents/young people in the various response stages is essential.

Key areas of engagement include supporting meaningful advocacy and awareness raising efforts including co-designing information, education, and communication materials and campaigns; reviewing and contributing to government-led decision-making processes and guidance on issues affecting them; and conducting monitoring, evaluation and documentation of existing COVID-19 response programmes. UNICEF Indonesia also partners with youth networks and youth volunteers to reach children and adolescents with messages, programmes and services.

Strengthening real-time monitoring, information sharing and reporting through data & analytics.

The majority of UNICEF’s interventions are strengthened by the deployment of digital platforms to support real-time reporting and monitoring efforts; institutional status assessments in health facilities, schools and alternative care sites for vulnerable children; the design of chatbots and interactive voice technologies for information sharing and survey administration; and big-data partnerships with Google and Facebook to assess the effects of physical distancing on population mobility and COVID-19 transmission dynamics, electrification and connectivity level at public services, and child poverty mapping.

More information can be found in our Comprehensive Response Plan.