

Quick Guide

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Part 1. Guest editorial

The crisis of care: the missing 'C' underpinning global crises

More than three years after the beginning of [lockdowns](#) that closed borders and restricted movements between countries, the World Health Organization (WHO) on Friday 5 May 2023 declared COVID-19 over as a global health emergency. However, the effects on public health, economies and societies will continue to affect the lives of millions of people. As is often the case, children are those bearing the harshest consequences, especially in the Global

South: [multidimensional child poverty](#) is projected to have increased, [learning losses](#) have not yet been recuperated, millions of girls and boys are at risk of being pushed into [child labour](#) and [child marriage](#), and young people's [mental health](#) has worsened.

But COVID-19 is not the only crisis striking the world: several crises are interlinking with and compounding each other – something many are calling a '[polycrisis](#)'



– creating pockets of multidimensional vulnerabilities. Conflicts in dozens of countries are [disrupting the lives of children, their families and their communities](#). [Costs of living](#) have soared for millions of families, driven by higher food and energy prices. The [climate crisis](#) exacerbates all these, with extreme weather events impacting children's lives, especially in the Global South. However, an additional and too-often overlooked crisis intersects with these: the [crisis of care](#).

Understanding the crisis of care

From shopping, cooking and cleaning, raising children and caring for the elderly or other family or household members, to maintaining households and communities more broadly, care and domestic work activities are essential to ensure the daily lives and well-being of families and societies around the world. However, the capacities to meet these care and domestic needs are under pressure from several directions, with services being the first to be cut when public finances are squeezed, and with households put under tremendous financial, emotional and physical strain to meet the needs of its youngest members. While investment in care is needed to ensure the functioning of families and societies, these investments are [devalued by markets, and inadequately supported by governments](#).



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Whether care and domestic work is performed without pay in one's own home, or for (little) pay in childcare and elderly care centres and nursing homes (by paid care workers) and private households (by paid domestic workers), the lack of adequate public and private investments in care services raises the cost of meeting care and domestic needs for families. These work activities are overwhelmingly performed by [women and girls](#) globally – interfering with their education and [employment prospects](#) and creating gendered inequalities in leisure. They are normally undertaken without monetary compensation, or with low pay due to being perceived as a 'natural' extension of motherhood. They are also likely to increase in the face of shocks and stresses such as COVID-19.

Emerging data and research carried out in the past three years from the COVID-19 pandemic have confirmed the evidence from [past epidemics and pandemics](#) that showed increased care needs, which children also help meet through contributions of their work and time. With the closure of childcare facilities and schools, working parents (especially [mothers](#)) had to juggle their paid work with childcare and homeschooling. [Daughters](#) contributed work to meet these care needs, putting them at risk of never rejoining schools. With the increased burden on health-care facilities, [paid health-care workers](#) – 67 per cent of whom are women – experienced increased workloads and heightened risk of exposure to infections, while [paid domestic workers](#) faced increasing vulnerability due to the risk of layoffs and loss of livelihoods.

Shocks and stresses

These dynamics related to care and domestic work may also materialize following other types of shocks and stresses. Climate change and extreme weather events exacerbate [water scarcity](#) and environmental degradation, which may increase time spent on fetching water and collecting firewood. Conflicts cause deaths, physical and mental disabilities, migration and displacement. This changes the demographic profiles of families and countries and shifts the responsibility of meeting care and domestic needs onto the rest of the family, often women and children. This happens in [contexts](#) where childcare facilities are unavailable or inaccessible, also resulting in millions of children missing the opportunity to socialize with peers and develop their potential. Increases in the cost of living in past [financial crises](#) were shown to lead to retrenched public and private investment in generally highly feminized sectors such as childcare, resulting in care and domestic needs being met by families, with primarily women being the shock-absorbers.

Exploring the crisis of care

This COVID-19 digest explores this crisis of care. It examines the evidence that has emerged in the past years on how COVID-19 has impacted the care that women and children provide and receive. Twelve studies are spotlighted to provide insights into several dimensions of the crisis that have close relevance for children's well-being and that can generate insights about how to respond to other types of crises that the world is or will be facing in the future.

First, the increased care and domestic needs caused by the pandemic have been met primarily by women, though fathers have taken up some of this work, as have children. The question remains if this will lead in the long term to a more positive balance of care and domestic responsibilities and, in turn, more gender equality in the home. However, analysis of media accounts of childcare shows that it is still widely perceived as a job for women. Second, more attention needs to be paid to policy solutions to the crisis of care. For example, governments around the world have reacted quickly to design and implement new

[social protection and care programmes](#), or scale up existing ones, including cash benefits to meet care and domestic needs. Yet more needs to be done, including public and private investments in care infrastructure, and gender-transformative programming for equality in care.

We hope this evidence can provide grounds for reflection, spark debates and support calls for action and critical investments to address the crisis of care and underlying gender inequalities.

About the authors

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Part 2. Research highlights

Introduction

This digest highlights newly curated research papers, selected based on criteria assessing relevance to the theme. This selection is not exhaustive, and we welcome suggestions from our readers on further criteria and papers for inclusion.

Publication 1

[A Gender-Responsive Recovery: Ensuring women's decent work and transforming care provision](#)

Gender & Development, vol. 30, no. 1-2, August 2022.

It is widely recognized that the pandemic, associated lockdowns and other containment measures have disproportionately impacted women, especially those experiencing other intersecting inequalities on the basis of race, class, gender identity and location among other factors.

This special issue of *Gender & Development* highlights that the work and bodily labour, both formal and informal, performed by marginalized women is rooted into powered local, regional, national and global economies – a reality which was brought into sharper relief during the global pandemic. Despite this, the general lack of gender- and care-sensitive policies and recovery measures show how little priority and recognition is afforded to care as work.

The contributors to this issue advocate for stronger policy and legal attention to care work, including investments in care as a salient way to ensure a gender-responsive recovery, generate decent work and support resiliency. In parallel, it is also critical to represent the voices of marginalized women, who bear the disproportionate burden of providing care, and to engage meaningfully with groups and collectives who represent the interests of the most vulnerable groups.

Publication 2

[Women and Girls Left Behind: Glaring gaps in pandemic responses](#)

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), December 2021.

Based on the results of [Rapid Gender Assessment](#) surveys (RGAs) on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 in 45 countries, this report examines the impacts of the pandemic for women on five areas: 1) participation in the workforce; 2) unpaid care and domestic work; 3) emotional and physical well-being; 4) access to goods and services; 5) relief and social protection measures.

The report also includes the findings from the United Nations Development Programme and UN Women's COVID-19 [Gender Response Tracker](#), which provides information on how countries are integrating gender equality into their policy responses. Data reveal that national responses have insufficiently addressed the needs of women and girls, with care work falling disproportionately on their shoulders, and young girls are especially likely to be left out of social protection schemes.

Findings from this study are being used to inform gender-responsive response programmes and policies, to call for placing women and girls at the centre of global recovery efforts and for collecting timely gender-sensitive data to inform recovery response.

Publication 3

[From "Nobody's Clapping for Us" to "Bad Moms": COVID-19 and the circle of childcare in Canada](#)

Smith, Julia, *Gender, Work & Organization*, vol. 29, no. 1, October 2021, pp. 353-367.

Drawing on the International Labour Organization's (ILO) '[unpaid care work–paid work–paid care work circle](#)', this paper analyses how COVID-19 affected paid childcare, unpaid childcare and other paid work, and the relationship between these sectors in Canada. Findings show that childcare policy response in Canada delegated care responsibilities to women without corresponding recognition or support, causing women to absorb the costs of care work.

This study indicates that pandemic response, recovery and preparedness efforts must address all sectors of the circle of care and the relationships between them. For example, further reducing childcare fees would not only improve the accessibility of childcare, but also enable women to rejoin the workforce and ease the financial burden parents struggle with due to pandemic-related economic crises. In addition, the well-being of educators should be prioritized to avoid the risk of burnout and decreased quality of formal childcare.

Publication 4

[The Covid-19 Pandemic and Gendered Division of Paid Work, Domestic Chores and Leisure: Evidence from India's first wave](#)

Deshpande, Ashwini, *Economia Politica*, vol. 39, July 2021.

This study examines the effects of the first wave of the pandemic on gender imbalances in paid and unpaid work in India. Estimates reveal a large contraction in employment for both men and women and a worsening of the domestic chores burden for women, with sharp increases in unemployment projected for the future.

The authors advocate for stronger policies to support employment generation and boost demand, in the absence of which job losses might mount, worsening the employment crisis. In addition to overall unemployment, pre-existing inequalities along gender lines are likely to get reinforced, unless the specific patterns of gender disadvantage are recognized and addressed.

Publication 5

[Fathers Matter: Intrahousehold responsibilities and children's wellbeing during the COVID-19 lockdown in Italy](#)

Mangiavacchi, Lucia, Piccoli, Luca and Pieroni, Luca, *Economics & Human Biology*, vol. 42, August 2021.

Using real-time survey data, this study examines how the intrahousehold division of housework and childcare has changed in Italy during lockdown, and how this, in turn, has influenced children's emotional well-being and learning processes.

Shifts in the parental division of household tasks and childcare, mostly enforced by the labour market restrictions during lockdown, led to a greater involvement of fathers in childcare and homeschooling activities. This positive variation in fathers' involvement was accompanied by an increase in children's emotional well-being and by a reduction in TV and passive screen time. On the other hand, the quality of children's home learning did not appear to depend on which parent was overseeing their work, but rather on the type of distance learning activities proposed by their teachers.

These results support the argument that policies aimed at increasing fathers' involvement in childcare activities, such as increased mandatory paternity leave time and more flexible work arrangements, can have positive effects on children's well-being, with the additional advantage of contributing to rebalancing women's workload at home and in the market.



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Publication 6

[Gender Differences in Housework and Childcare among Japanese Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

Sakuragi, Toshihide, et al., *Journal of Occupational Health*, vol. 64, no. 1, July 2022.

This study investigates how working men and women's responsibilities for housework and childcare changed during the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan, drawing on a cross-sectional analysis (N = 14,454) conducted using data from an internet monitoring study (CORoNa Work Project).

Regardless of work hours, job type, number of employees in the workplace, and frequency of telecommuting the time spent by women on housework and childcare substantially increased compared to men. Larger companies were found to be more prone to adopt telecommuting arrangements, which resulted in workers being more likely to report an increase in time spent in care and domestic tasks.

With formal policies on paternal leave lacking in Japan, the study recommends strengthening local incentives such as the most recent Papa Quotas and Iku-boss initiatives to bridge the care gap and improve work-life balance for both working men and women.

Publication 7**[Balancing Work and Childcare: Evidence from COVID-19 school closures and reopening in Kenya](#)**

Biscaye, Pierre E., Egger, Dennis Timo and Pape, Utz Johann, *World Bank Policy Research Working Papers*, 7 March 2022.

This paper analyses the impact of childcare responsibilities on adult labour supply in the context of COVID-19-related school closures in Kenya. Using nationally representative data from World Bank phone surveys in 2020–2021, it shows that school closures accounted for over 30 per cent of the fall in average work hours in the first few months of the pandemic. Although both women and men increased hours spent on childcare, women took on more of this burden, particularly when they could not rely on older siblings to support with care and domestic duties.

The findings emphasize the importance of siblings in raising children in the home and suggest introducing policies that increase childcare availability and affordability to help boost adult labour supply in Kenya.

Publication 8**[‘It’s Making His Bad Days into My Bad Days’: The impact of coronavirus social distancing measures on young carers and young adult carers in the United Kingdom](#)**

Blake-Holmes, Kate, and McGowan, Andy, *Child & Family Social Work*, vol. 27, no. 1, January 2022.

The lives and well-being of young carers (children under the age of 18 providing care to a family member or friend with a physical or mental illness, disability or a substance misuse problem) and young adult carers (those aged 18 or above with similar care roles) in the UK were significantly impacted by the lockdown measures put in place in March 2020. This rapid review finds that, as external agency support had been withdrawn during the pandemic, young carers were required to perform higher degrees of care, while experiencing challenges with school closures. Lockdown restrictions had a significant impact on several aspects of their lives, from their ability to meet their own mental health needs, to managing the requirements of homeschooling.

The study recommends to further acknowledge the needs of young carers within the political agenda, especially at times of crisis. Health and social care services should increase their capacity to identify and support this group, and work should be done within educational settings to provide a flexible response to individual needs. This study suggests a number of initiatives to formalize identification and provision for young carers, such as through the inclusion of these data within the School Census and through strengthening young carers’ networks, such as Caring Together, aimed at supporting the health and well-being of carers.

Publication 9**[News Coverage of Childcare during COVID-19: Where are women and gender?](#)**

Wallace, Rebecca, and Goodyear-Grant, Elizabeth, *Politics & Gender*, vol. 16, no. 4, August 2020, pp. 1123–1130.

This study analysed news coverage of childcare in major Canadian daily newspapers to explore whether and how news narratives regarding childcare shifted in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results suggest that the pandemic has not shifted the conversation on childcare and that current coverage principally reflects long-standing trends in childcare framing. Gender remains systematically written out of coverage of childcare, occluded by a larger focus on health-, economy- and accessibility-related concerns around childcare services.

Accessible, affordable childcare is a necessary ingredient for women’s equality, especially in the context of economic and social recovery from COVID-19. This analysis suggests that the media discourse has not engaged sufficiently with these realities and may be contributing to the normalization of gender-related care imbalances, and the removal of these challenges from the public eye and public accountability.

Publication 10**[Caring in Times of COVID-19: A global study on the impact of the pandemic on care work and gender equality](#)**

A. Ferigra Stefanovic (coord.), *Project Documents (LC/TS.2022/82/Corr.1)*, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, August 2022.

Led by five United Nations Regional Commissions, along with other United Nations partner agencies, this global review brings together evidence from across the globe on how the pandemic has impacted women’s unpaid care work, as well as exploring measures implemented by governments and the degree to which these mainstream a gender perspective.

The report is designed to help Member States identify the key challenges for designing and implementing policies that consider the unequal distribution of care, incorporate unpaid work and gender into recovery efforts, and highlight the care sector as an important driving force for a more equitable recovery. Based on regional and national case studies, the report recommends a series of principles for strengthening care systems and suggests that public investments in the care sector can serve as main catalysts for driving a more equitable recovery.

Publication 11**[Childcare Services in Cities: Challenges and emerging solutions for women informal workers and their children](#)**

Moussié, Rachel, *Environment and Urbanization*, vol. 33, no. 1, January 2021.

Cities present important challenges for the extension of quality childcare services to informal workers, who make up most of the urban poor across the Global South. Access to quality childcare services allows women more time to earn an income and seek new employment. This is particularly important, as informal workers who are women struggle to recover their earnings following the economic recession brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Drawing on focus group discussions carried out by Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), the study identifies the major obstacles that informal workers face when caring for young children in cities in terms of affordability, accessibility, trust and quality. It further explores possible solutions for strengthening childcare provision in cities, drawn on earlier case studies presented by ILO and WIEGO in the policy brief series '[Childcare for workers in the informal economy](#)'.

Publication 12**[Evidence Review of the Global Childcare Crisis and the Road for Post-COVID-19 Recovery and Resilience](#)**

Grantham, Kate, et al., International Development Research Centre, February 2021.

Currently, only 8 per cent of global economic responses have addressed unpaid care, including childcare, and two thirds of countries have enacted no relevant measures. This study proposes to tackle the childcare crisis from multiple angles, as laid out in the ILO's [5R framework for decent care work](#).

In particular, the authors call for action in three key areas:

1. ***Unpaid care work must be recognized, reduced and redistributed.*** To do so, governments must ramp up investment in gender-responsive public services and direct income support to cover childcare workers' wages, especially during lockdown. They also need to support women who are managing increased care loads, especially in low- and middle-income countries, including single-parent households, essential workers and informal workers.
2. ***Paid care work must be rewarded by promoting more work for childcare workers.*** To do so, governments must increase public and private financing for the sector and enhance income support for both centre-based and domestic childcare workers.
3. ***Care workers' representation with employers and the state must be guaranteed.*** This can be achieved through promoting dialogue with childcare workers and strengthening their rights to collective action to ensure the policy measures taken are contextually relevant.



Part 3. Resources

Introduction

While not contained in the Research Library, a number of published guidelines, checklists, toolkits, dashboards, case briefs and other resources on paid and unpaid care and domestic work are worthy of reference here. These practical materials are intended for use by field practitioners and education staff, as well as national and local governments and the wider development and humanitarian community. This includes service- and advocacy-based organizations that are involved in the decision making and implementation of multisectoral COVID-19 outbreak readiness and response activities in various settings.

[Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2022](#) (UN Women, September 2022)

This brief examines progress on gender equality across the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG Target 5.4 on unpaid care and domestic work. Low- and middle-income countries are far from being on track on this target, with Europe, Northern America, Australia and New Zealand being 'moderately' on track to achieve it.

[Whose Time to Care: Unpaid care and domestic work during COVID-19](#) (UN Women, 25 November 2020)

Teaming up with national and international partners, UN Women has rolled out RGAs on unpaid care and domestic work during COVID-19 in nearly 50 countries, using a variety of online methods. Reports from the Asia-Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, and Arab States regions are now available as well as [survey data](#) and additional resources.

[A Toolkit on Paid and Unpaid Care Work: From 3Rs to 5Rs](#) (UN Women, June 2022)

This toolkit provides resources for practitioners working on paid care, unpaid care and domestic work, across the '5Rs' framework developed by ILO – Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute, Reward, Represent – with the latter two specifically referring to rewarding and representing paid care and domestic workers.

[It's Time for Care: Prioritizing quality care for children - Challenges, opportunities and an agenda for action](#) (UNICEF and the Better Care Network, December 2020)

This discussion paper provides a five-point road map to ensure quality care for children and adequate long-term investments to make children, families and communities more resilient: 1) Ensure a child- and family-centred response; 2) Create an economy that values care; 3) Build care systems and an effective care workforce; 4) Enhance resources for family-based care in the community; 5) Collect data on children's care.

[The Global Childcare Workload from School and Preschool Closures During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) (Kenny, Charles, and Yang, George, Center for Global Development, 25 June 2021)

This working paper estimates the additional childcare workload created by school and preschool closures. The authors found that, globally, school closures generated the need for 672 billion hours of additional unpaid childcare from March to October 2020.

[Girls' Lived Experiences of School Closures: Insights from interviews with girls and mothers in Punjab, Pakistan](#) (Malik, Rabea et al., *World Bank Policy Brief*, January 2022)

This note explores findings on changing household dynamics in response to the COVID-19 school closures in Punjab, Pakistan. Phone interviews with mothers and daughters confirmed an increase in gendered division of household tasks. Fathers and sons rarely supported with housework, while young men took on an increased share of chores outside the house.

[Childcare in Humanitarian Crises: Programming models for acute onset emergencies](#) (UNICEF, May 2022)

This brief highlights essential childcare programming elements in humanitarian contexts, including in acute emergencies: 1) Training and mentoring for childcare providers; 2) Trauma-informed care; 3) Spaces and curricula for play, early learning and social-emotional development; 4) Integrated nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene services, health and social protection services; 5) Primary caregiver support and empowerment initiatives.

[The COVID-19 Outbreak and Gender: Regional analysis and recommendations from Asia and the Pacific](#) (CARE, 19 May 2020)

This evaluation by CARE documents good practices in gender programming across the Asia Pacific during the earlier wave of COVID-19. Recommendations include: 1) Ensure that humanitarian programming is informed by the emerging evidence, including sex- and age-disaggregated data; 2) Ensure that funding is allocated to gender-responsive projects; 3) Ensure economic support/safety nets, especially to people in the informal sectors; 4) Promote equal caregiving responsibilities for parents and flexible, family-friendly work practices.

[Report on Decent Work for Care Workers and Investment in Care](#) (Gausi, Tamara, ITU-CSI, April 2022)

This report provides a summary of the discussions held during a virtual meeting in April 2021 among trade union leaders, activists and members from 34 countries, representing health care, social care, early childhood education and domestic work, to assess the progress made on their common care agenda for decent work and quality care services.

[Family-Friendly Policies for Workers in the Informal Economy: Social protection and care systems for children and families during COVID-19 and beyond](#) (WIEGO, ILO and UNICEF, July 2021)

This brief advocates for family-friendly policies for workers in the informal economy that are good for children, good for women and good for the economy. It calls for investments in the care economy and in social protection services that provide families with the time, resources and services they need to nurture their children.

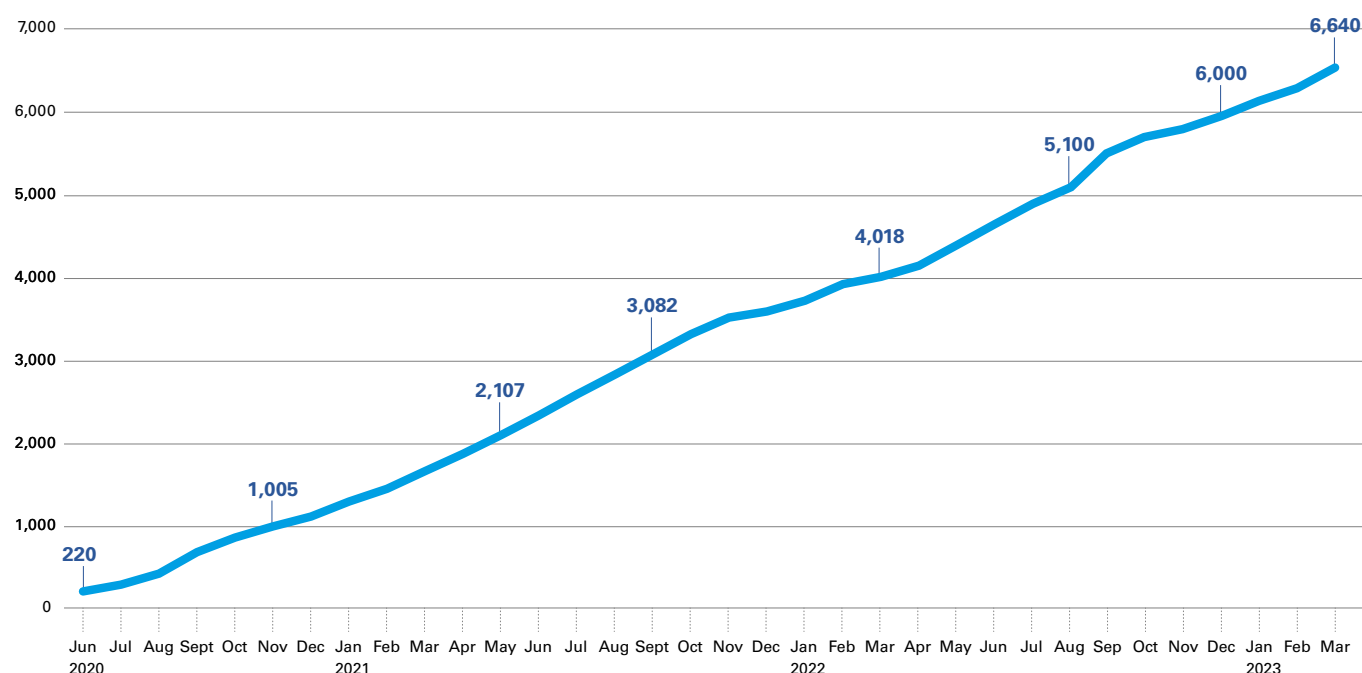


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Part 4. Library update: Facts and figures

Since its launch in the early stages of the pandemic as a timely knowledge-sharing response to the demand from multiple stakeholders for the up-to-date, reliable and comprehensive evidence, [UNICEF Innocenti’s Children and COVID-19 Research Library](#) has collected more than 6,600 records of high- quality publications, based on rigorous search and screening methods.

Figure 1: Number of records to date by month



As the world gradually moves into the post-pandemic era, the library ceased to be updated from March 2023. Instead, to continue to capture high quality evidence on the long-term impact of the pandemic on children and adolescents, the library will be transformed during a transition period the library will be turned into a living 'evidence and gap map' and published when ready.

In particular, this library has collected over 900 research publications exploring the impact of COVID-19 on [childcare](#), [care service](#) and paid and unpaid [care](#) and [domestic work](#).

Figure 2: Number of records to date by content type

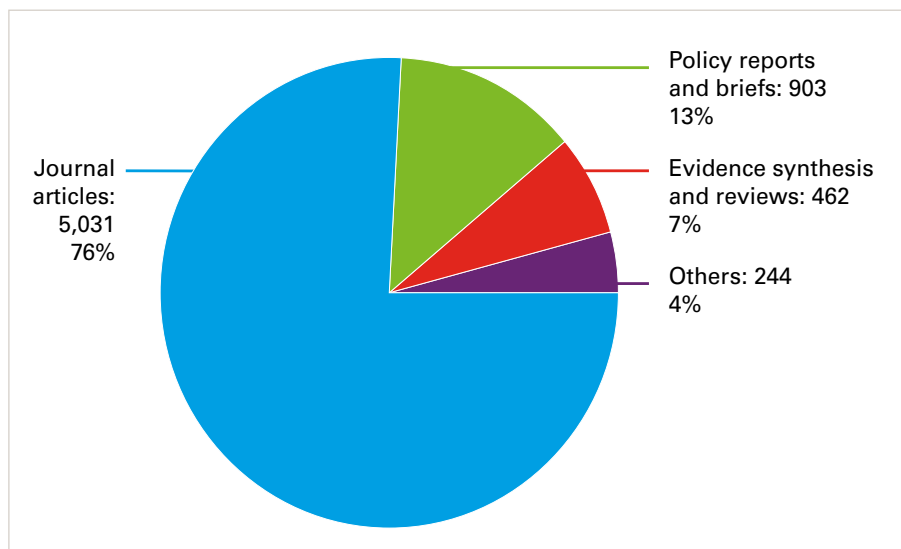
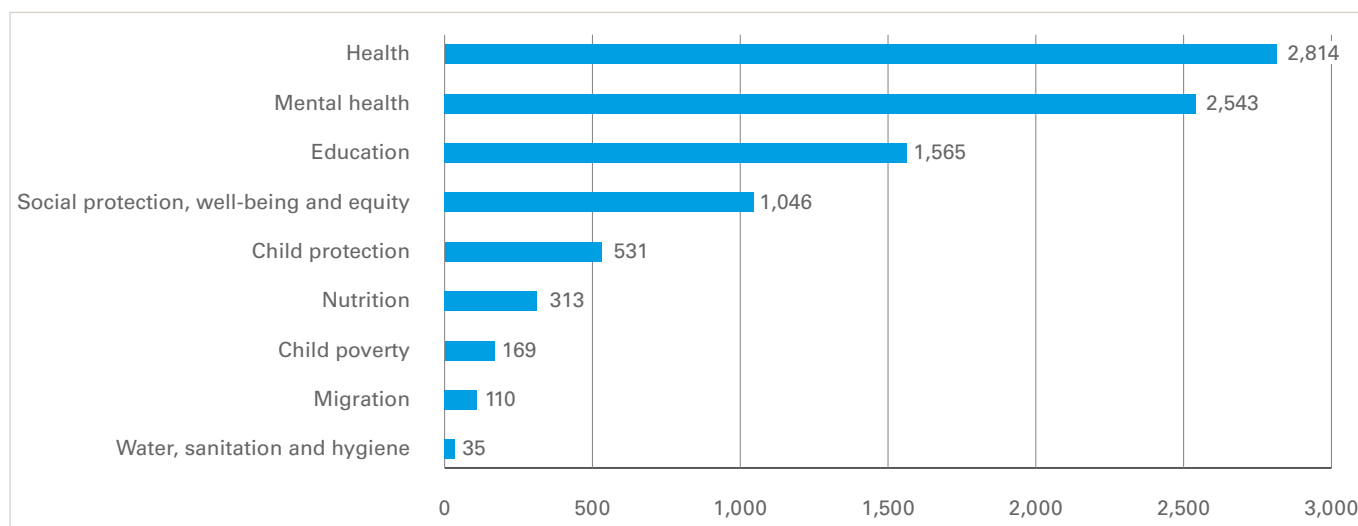


Figure 3: Number of records to date by topic



Trending topics in the library include the impact of COVID-19 on [health](#) (including over 2,500 records on [mental health](#)), [education](#), [social protection, well-being and equity](#), with less (but increasing) research on [nutrition](#), [poverty](#), [refugee and migrant youth](#) and [water, sanitation and hygiene](#).

(All figures are updated as of 9 March 2023.)

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About this digest

[Each quarterly thematic digest](#) features the latest evidence drawn from [UNICEF Innocenti's Children and COVID-19 Research Library](#) on a particular topic of interest. Updated daily (until March 2023), the library is a database collecting research from around the world on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, with the potential to inform programmatic and policy work for children and adolescents.

