

UNICEF CHILD PROTECTION UPDATE

MAY 2021

unicef 
for every child



At the end of 2020, this 11 year-old girl who lives in a refugee camp in Jordan, attends a UNICEF supported centre for learning and child protection services.

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CONTEXT

Goal Area 3 of UNICEF's 2018–2021 Strategic Plan seeks to ensure that every child, especially the most vulnerable and those affected by humanitarian situations, is protected from all forms of violence, exploitation, abuse and harmful practices by:

- preventing and responding to violence against children
- accelerating the reduction of harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage
- enhancing children's access to justice

As we progress into 2021, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is apparent in every corner of the world, though it is uneven in terms of severity and timing. In this context, the Sustainable Development Goals related to child protection are under threat. The pandemic has strained weak and fragile social service, protection and justice systems; multiplied underlying protection and gender-related risks; and deepened existing inequalities. For example, ten million additional child marriages may occur before the end of the decade, as a result of COVID-19, threatening years of progress in reducing the practice. At the same time, the crisis provided opportunities to elevate child protection issues, including such "hidden" issues as mental health, violence in the home and children without family care, and to recognize the social service workforce as "essential".

Throughout 2020, UNICEF sought to maintain the continuity of its programmes and operations while pivoting to proactively address the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and support

national mitigation planning. The organization played a leading role in expanding and establishing partnerships and networks to maintain a continuum of prevention and response services and to ensure national coordination. With its partners, it reached an unprecedented number of children, young people and families with protection initiatives, using innovative and digital approaches.

As a result of the investment in strengthening child protection systems across the world over many years, UNICEF and partners were well-positioned to pivot into COVID-19 programming, achieving even greater results for children than in years past as exemplified by: the 126 countries where UNICEF reached over 4 million children who had experienced violence with health, social work and justice services (of whom 24,227 were children with disabilities across 55 countries, 51 per cent more than in 2019); the parenting programmes which reached over 2.6 million parents and caregivers across 87 countries; the over 711,000 children without parental or family care who were provided with appropriate alternative care arrangements in 87 countries; the 16.4 million reached through education, communication and social mobilization platforms promoting FGM elimination; the 6 million girls who received child-marriage related prevention and care interventions; and the more than 11,600 children who were released from detention using alternative measures and the prohibition of new entries into detention across 37 countries. Our forthcoming Global Annual Results Reports for 2020 will provide more details on the challenges and milestones of our work last year.

CORNELIUS' CORNER

More than a year after the COVID-19 pandemic changed the global landscape, we can highlight important ways in which the Child Protection sector everywhere rose to meet this unprecedented crisis. We were able to make visible the aggravated realities of violence that this context wrought and to position the importance of those who offer a lifeline of support to the often invisible and most vulnerable children and families: those in the juvenile justice system; in care institutions; in the context of human mobility; facing violence in their homes; among others. Nevertheless, in 2021, as UNICEF celebrates its 75th birthday, though we have much to celebrate in the advancement of children's rights over this period, we now face a highly complex context of significant challenges for children and families around the world.

As the COVID-19 pandemic context evolves, in its wake, and persistence in many places, we are certain to continue to find intensified vulnerabilities for many children and compromised institutional capacities for response for quite a while to come. Consequently, we must persevere in pulling all of our efforts forward and ensure that the innovations adapted during the pandemic become long-term solutions and that the care, protection and well-being of children is solidified as a sustained priority. As the pandemic continues, and we continue to adapt and learn in an ever-evolving situation, the need to ensure a connection between development efforts and humanitarian preparedness and response has never been more apparent. All of our efforts as a sector must continue to encompass this ample vision.



2021 presents us also with several exciting opportunities to continue to stake the place of children front and centre on the global agenda. It is the [International Year](#)

Cornelius Williams,
Associate Director,
UNICEF Child Protection Section

for the [Elimination of Child Labour](#), which compels us to take action to address faltering progress in this regard. The socio-economic fallout of COVID-19 may place as many as 66 million more children in extreme poverty and further exposed to falling into child labour, including its worst forms such as debt bondage and trafficking. Recent estimates suggest the world may see an increase in child labour for the first time in 20 years as a result of the impact of COVID-19. Along with the ILO, UNICEF will be launching an updated Global Estimates on Child Labour report in June at a high-level event within the International Labour Conference. UNICEF is also involved in events being organized with Member States in Brussels and New York to bring greater attention to mounting concerns around child labour, and the UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti will be holding a Leading Minds forum on the topic later this year, as well.

This year also marks 25 years since the ground-breaking Graca Machel study on "The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children". On this occasion, UNICEF is preparing an analysis on how efforts by the United Nations around monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children in armed conflict have helped to address these and support country level response plans in this regard. We cannot disregard the continued growth in the identification of these grave violations.

In the coming months we look forward, as well, to the launch of the new UNICEF Child Protection Strategy (2021–2030), which will bring with it a new vision to drive forward a strategy to accelerate action in line with the Decade of Action for the SDGs. Our ambition is to capitalize on the tremendous knowledge already accumulated by the sector worldwide to scale up evidence-based prevention approaches to the population level – not only in the core Child Protection sectors of Social Welfare and Justice, but also in Education, Health, Social Protection and other sectors. This includes universal access to justice, to family and parenting support, to safe schools and to safety online, as well as universal adoption of social norms.

We know that violence is preventable, and we know a great deal on how to prevent it, but we must do much more collectively to achieve this at scale. As we will build on the momentum of the partnerships and networks that allowed us to face the tremendous challenges that COVID has brought - and continues to bring - we are certain that our sector, in collaboration with many other allies, can accomplish what is needed to protect children worldwide.

GUATEMALA: INFORMATION MANAGEMENT FOR THE PROTECTION OF MIGRANT CHILDREN

The Child Protection Information Management System / Primero™ (CPIMS+ / Primero™) is an open source global child protection information management system that facilitates case management, including family tracing and reunification. With the support of UNICEF Guatemala, the Ministry of Social Affairs (*Secretaría de Bienestar Social* in Spanish) is using CPIMS+ Primero™ to take a proactive approach in the case management and care of children in the context of migration.

Due to its geographical position, Guatemala is a country of origin, transit, destination and return of migrants and asylum seekers. It is a country with extremely high levels of poverty and violence and where a great portion of children have limited access to social services. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 containment measures which increased border restrictions, 4,511 unaccompanied girls and boys were returned to Guatemala from Mexico (2,559) and the United States (1,952). Returns from the United States increased 225 per cent compared to 2019. In addition, at least 2,191 children were returned accompanied by an adult family member.

Due to return policies instituted in the context of COVID-19 in the United States and Mexico, many of the returned children had not been able to access asylum, despite having been victims of family and community violence and persecution in Guatemala. This implied that upon return to Guatemala, it was critical to identify these children and ensure immediate protective services and necessary social service referrals. At a time when the child protection system of Guatemala was already compromised and over-stretched due to the pandemic, CPIMS+ Primero™ helped to make this process more organized, effective and efficient.

It allowed social service workers to register the children, coordinate social services referrals and support family tracing and reunification.

The system has also proved extremely useful in the context of migrant “caravans”; a modality in which large groups of persons travel together. In January 2021, in the wake of the devastating impacts of COVID-10, plus two large hurricanes which battered the region, a migrant caravan left Honduras with more than 7,000 people, including approximately 1,500 children. This group was stopped by Guatemalan authorities upon entering the country and most migrants were rapidly returned to Honduras. Amongst those remaining, Guatemalan authorities provided care to more than 90 unaccompanied children identified in this caravan and managed the assessment (best interest determination) of their individual cases. CPIMS+ Primero™ supported Guatemalan authorities to ensure careful follow-up and coordination of these cases to determine and implement a sustainable solution for each child, which in these circumstances also entailed an element of cross border case management.



Guatemalan immigration official using information management system Primero to register unaccompanied and separated migrant children.

CAMBODIA: STRENGTHENING THE SOCIAL SERVICE WORKFORCE AS A LIFELINE

The economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing containment measures resulted in increased risks for vulnerable children and women on a global scale. During emergencies, social service workers such as social workers, case workers, and community-based paraprofessionals take on a more critical role, acting as a lifeline for children and families by defending their well-being. In several developing countries, however, there are too few social service workers – the majority of whom have no formal training and qualification – to meet the needs of children and families during the pandemic. In Cambodia, we adapted our child protection strategy to ensure that social workers and others have access to tools to conduct effective case management and ensure the continuation of child protection service delivery during the pandemic.

UNICEF implemented various measures to support the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSVY) in the promotion of case management and the continuation of child protection service delivery during the emergency. In partnership with Save the Children, technical support was provided to MoSVY to develop instructions and guidance on case management and referrals for alternative care placement of children without parental care. UNICEF and MoSVY worked with Family Care First to develop a series of online trainings based on the case management guidelines adapted to the COVID-19 context. UNICEF also supported MoSVY in the recruitment of 20 social workers to cover, for the first time, all provinces of Cambodia, in providing children with continuous access to child protection services. To promote the safety, well-being and psychosocial support of frontline workers, children, their parents and caregivers, UNICEF partnered with the non-government organization (NGO) Transcultural Psychosocial Organization to provide counselling services through phone hotlines and social media platforms. UNICEF strengthened its partnership with the NGO



Beng Chhail, a social worker uses Primero to do an initial case assessment of a child living in a residential care institution in Kampong Thom.

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Improving Cambodia's Society through Skillful Parenting to conduct community awareness- raising campaigns to provide parents and caregivers with supportive messages on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), positive parenting and COVID-19 prevention.

As a result of the various measures implemented by MoSVY, with the support of UNICEF, Save the Children and other NGOs, the social service workforce is better positioned to respond to child protection needs during the pandemic and beyond. Children in all provinces now have access to child protection services; frontline child protection workers have received guidance on case management; and 480 social service workers from the Provincial Department of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation and from NGOs received online training on new case management guidelines. In 2020, UNICEF Cambodia reached 361,818 children and 302,055 parents and caregivers with MHPSS support, including 12,215 parents and caregivers with parenting programmes as part of prevention and response services for violence against children. The promotion of safety, self-care and psychosocial support for frontline workers continues to ensure the continuous and effective provision of child protection services during the pandemic.

In the process of adapting its child protection strategy to meet the new context arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF Cambodia learned several key lessons:

- new ways of working must be sought when the programmatic context changes;
- the use of appropriate tools must be considered when delivering training to the social service workforce;
- a clear dedicated response is needed to meet increased child protection risks arising during an emergency;
- and opportunities must be seized to advocate for increased numbers and capacity of social workers for supporting children in times of emergencies and beyond.

ROMANIA: INTEGRATED MODEL OF SERVICES BOOSTS PROTECTION

Thanks to years of modelling, technical support and advocacy to scale-up, the law on social assistance was amended to now include the full extension of the Minimum Package of Services (MPS) nationally. This major result was achieved in a close collaboration with Parliament and the National Authority for Child Rights, to mention but two stakeholders. An updated costing of MPS scale-up scenarios was undertaken, providing clear evidence that MPS is an effective and efficient solution for children and families.

The *Minimum Package of Services* is an integrated model of basic services in health, education, social/ child protection provided at the community level with a special focus on the most vulnerable children and their families. MPS was designed to prevent and address at an early stage, issues such as: violence, poverty, early pregnancy, preventable diseases, lack of access to cash benefits, institutionalization, and school dropout, etc. In most cases, vulnerable children face not just one, but several of these deprivations, underlining the importance of a cross sectoral approach.

MPS requires the presence in each community of at least one social worker, a community nurse and a school counsellor. In the poorest communities, including those with Roma populations, the Minimum Service Package may also include the school

mediator and the health mediator. Working in close collaboration, these professionals help vulnerable children and their families, assessing their needs and providing individualized support. They also work with local stakeholders, such as the mayorality, NGOs and other community partners.

The amendment in the law is based upon the pilot project tested by UNICEF together with local, regional and national authorities and line ministries since 2015 in 45 rural and urban communities in Bacau county. According to an independent evaluation, MPS contributed to the social inclusion of vulnerable children and their families: all children identified without documents at the beginning of the program now have identity papers and are registered with a family doctor; the number of unvaccinated children decreased by 40%; the number of teenage mothers decreased by 50%; school dropout was reduced by 60%; the number of children living in poverty-stricken households has decreased from 29% to less than 1%. The program also aims to decrease family separation, which is high in Romania, with approximately 10,000 children being separated yearly from their parents.

This national initiative demonstrates that harm in children can be prevented – the key is to have a minimal local system in place to detect, prevent and respond to vulnerabilities.

BANGLADESH: VIRTUAL CHILDREN'S COURTS

The first-ever virtual children's court opened in Bangladesh, with support from UNICEF. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted an already overstretched court system in Bangladesh and threatened the lives of children held in overcrowded juvenile detention centres. This, alongside strong advocacy from UNICEF and its partners, prompted the Bangladeshi President to issue an ordinance introducing virtual courts in May 2020, with the virtual children's court launching just a few days later.

The Supreme Court established these virtual children's courts to expedite the trials of children in conflict with the law. The majority of the children held in such detention centres are there for alleged minor offences with many in pre-trial detention, and these cases can take months – even years – to resolve. With the introduction of virtual courts there is a means to expedite process children's cases without resorting to deprivation of liberty.

A total of 1,976 children were released from detention centres with 1,964 reunified with their families, during 2020. As of February, it was reported that there had only be two cases of reoffending. A total of 587 children have been supervised by probation officers and provided cash grants to help prevent recidivism and build the resilience of their families.

UNICEF supports the process of release from detention centres as well as works with the Department of Social Services to reunite children with their families and ensure they are accompanied on their journey home. UNICEF also assists the post-release by facilitating access to health care and other vital services such as legal support, psychosocial support, violence prevention and response and education, thereby ensuring the child's reintegration back into their family and communities.



A 15-year-old boy bursts into tears after being reunited with his father upon release from a child detention centre in Tongi, Bangladesh. The photo was taken on 20 May 2020.

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In addition, UNICEF is actively collaborating with the Supreme Court's Special Committee on Child Rights and the Ministry of Law Justice and Parliamentary Affairs to support their efforts to build on these results to achieve wider justice system reforms for children, including through child-friendly courts. Sixteen out of 102 courts currently have staff that are trained on specifically on child rights.

SPOTLIGHT: NORTHERN AFRICA

EGYPT: ADDITIONAL STEP TOWARD ENDING FGM AND ITS MEDICALIZATION

In March of 2021, the Parliament of Egypt approved a bill that amends the Penal Code and increases the penalty for female genital mutilation (FGM). In a country where 9 in 10 women aged 15 to 49 have undergone female genital mutilation, these amendments represent a historic shift. Informed by the evidence that 6 in 10 girls aged 15 to 19 years underwent FGM performed by doctors, the new law also establishes imprisonment for no less than five years as a penalty for doctors and other medical officers involved in such procedures, as well as the closing of medical facilities where FGM is performed.

This progress is a result of significant advocacy, coordination, and a wide range of community-based campaigns driven by the National Committee for the Eradication of FGM — headed by the National Council for Women and the National Council of Childhood and Motherhood, and supported by the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint

Programme to Eliminate FGM. UNICEF and UNFPA Egypt have been working with the Government, civil society organizations, and development partners to accelerate progress towards eliminating FGM by 2030 through supporting the legal frameworks that affect children, building the use of evidence, promoting FGM prevention in health services, strengthening the child protection national system to end violence against children and implementing good practices for prevention, protection, and response.

To oversee the response, the National Committee for the Eradication of FGM was established in Egypt in 2019 and has reached more than 3.3 million people through a national door-to-door campaign, community mobilization, services and outreach interventions in more than 15 governorates. The Committee developed a national radio campaign entitled 'Protect her from FGM' aired during the peak season for combatting FGM (summer holiday months).

The radio spots were recorded by a renowned media figure and were broadcast 1,230 times on 18 radio stations for a month, covering Upper and Lower Egypt. During the campaign, the national helpline received 1,527 calls, primarily from fathers and girls seeking FGM-related counselling and services.

In addition to these campaigns and community mobilization efforts, UNICEF has supported strengthening of the national protection system through investment in the National Child Helpline and the child protection committees, law enforcement systems, and ensuring referral and counselling for girls at risk of or affected by FGM. Finally, in partnership with the



A 17-year-old peer educator, and her peers actively participate in discussion groups about the harmful effects of female genital mutilation and aim to educate other girls in their school.

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Prosecution Office and the Ministry of Justice, UNICEF has also supported the mainstreaming of FGM in child protection institutional capacity-building programmes for law enforcement officials including judges and prosecutors.

SPOTLIGHT: SOUTHERN AFRICA

ZIMBABWE: INTEGRATING INFORMATION ON GBV THROUGH HEALTH MOBILE OUTREACH

The COVID-19 lockdown left Zimbabwe's health services in both urban and rural areas under severe strain. Infants, children, pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers could not access health services as many clinics were not able to function properly. In this context, GOAL Zimbabwe, in partnership with Promobile Africa and UNICEF, took a public health and hygiene awareness campaign to the most vulnerable people in urban and rural areas using specialized mobile trucks.

Originally, the awareness campaign emphasized preventative messages around handwashing, social distancing and other important health and wellbeing issues related to COVID-19. The trucks moved through communities spreading messages using loudspeakers and also engaged people (practicing all COVID-19 prevention measures), particular at food distribution points.



Mobile units supported by UNICEF which reached rural communities during COVID-19 incorporated GBV awareness-raising and prevention messaging into their health and hygiene campaign.

Information on Gender Based Violence (GBV) was also incorporated into this campaign, as it became apparent that cases of GBV were rising in Zimbabwe during the COVID-19 lockdown. Campaign educators shared information with communities on where to report cases of abuse and violence in a protected manner.

The specialized mobile trucks proved to be an effective way of reaching communities safely, particularly during the lockdown, when other community engagement activities were not always possible. The integrated visits allowed communities to get information on a variety of issues of concern at the same time, including on child protection and violence prevention and response.

CENTRAL AFRICA REPUBLIC: ADAPTING PROTECTIVE MEASURES FOR INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN AS NEEDS INCREASE

An estimated 738,000 people, half of whom are children, are now internally displaced across the Central African Republic (CAR) as a result of ongoing violence and insecurity. This is the highest level of child displacement in the country since 2014, and UNICEF is warning of the mounting risks for children, including exposure to sexual and physical violence, recruitment and use by armed forces and groups, increasing rates of malnutrition and limited access to essential services. UNICEF is also concerned about the impact of recent displacements on host communities, who were already extremely fragile due to years of conflict and instability. Despite significant challenges, including attacks against humanitarian workers, UNICEF continues to strengthen its child protection activities across the country. These efforts include the deployment of mobile child protection teams who can

reach vulnerable children, including those located in remote areas. UNICEF and its partners are also working to provide children with mental health and psychosocial activities through child friendly spaces and other community-based interventions.

The child friendly spaces are places established to provide affected children with a secure environment for play as a means to help overcome the psychosocial distress linked to conflict and displacement. Activities organized in these spaces also include classes on basic literacy and numeracy and life-skills (problem solving, hygiene, reproductive health, etc). Outreach activities organized at the community level include counselling for children and their parents (in particular for those who have experienced violence) and awareness raising on child protection issues.



Internally displaced children at a UNICEF child friendly space at Sangaris camp in Bambari, Central African Republic.

In response to government containment measures that would have resulted in the closure of child friendly spaces in the context of COVID-19, servicing tens of thousands of highly vulnerable children, UNICEF worked with the Ministry for the Promotion of Women to develop national minimum standards for the implementation of child friendly spaces which incorporated precautions against the spread of the virus. Community volunteers, teachers, NGO workers and government social workers were trained on these guidelines and on how to provide psychosocial support to children in the context of COVID-19.

REIMAGINING MIGRATION RESPONSES: LEARNING FROM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO MOVE IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

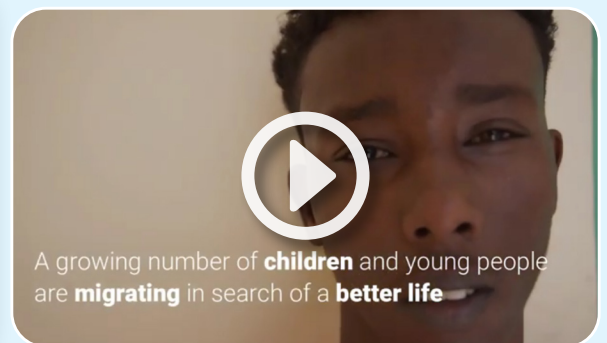
PLEASE SEE THE VIDEO HERE:



As the result of close collaboration between the UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti, UNICEF Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, ESARO, MENARO, and Child Protection at HQ, a new UNICEF Innocenti [report](#) captures the experiences of almost 1,300 migrant children and youth in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan. Migration has long been a coping strategy in the Horn of Africa, with children and youth leaving home

for various reasons – from job prospects, to joining loved ones, to seeking safety. The study documents the the real experiences, and helps address the evidence gap, of children and young people migrating in the Horn of Africa by:

- providing a better understanding of their perceptions and feelings of safety and well-being;
- capturing a snapshot of their access to services, support and resources, and the level of trust they have in authorities and other providers; and
- offering policy and programme recommendations to rethink child protection approaches for child and young migrants in the region for a wide spectrum of actors – from governments to intergovernmental bodies to donor partners and civil society organizations.



SAFE RETURN TO SCHOOLS:

UNICEF Associate Director for Child Protection, Cornelius Williams, explains the key measures that must be included in school reopening plans to protect children from violence, exploitation and abuse, and ensure that they have access to mental and psychosocial support:

For more, follow us on UNICEF's Child Protection Twitter account [@unicefprotects](#) and Executive Director Henrietta Fore's [@unicefchief](#) Twitter account



UNICEF, with our partners, produced at least 320 knowledge products across the spectrum of child protection issues at global, regional and country levels in 2020. This represents more than a 50 per cent increase compared with 2019. In 2021, UNICEF continues to pursue an ambitious learning agenda throughout our priority result areas.

At the end of 2020, UNICEF in partnership with IOM published the [Reintegration Handbook: Module 6 - A Child Rights Approach to The Sustainable Reintegration of Migrant Children and Families](#). The module has five parts covering critical principles for child-sensitive reintegration at the individual, community, and institutional level, as well as indicators for monitoring and evaluating reintegration assistance. The overall target audience are programme managers and developers, case managers, service providers, local and national government staff, implementing partners, donors, and monitoring and evaluation officers.

In January, 2021, UNICEF launched [Action to End Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation](#). This review documents what is known about the extent, nature and consequences of child sexual abuse and exploitation for children in different contexts and the evidence on effective interventions to prevent and respond to it. The zoom launch was co-hosted by UNICEF, the Global Partnership to End Violence and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children as an affiliate event to the Together to @ENDviolence Solutions Summit Series.

In February of this year, UNICEF launched **Access to Justice for Children in the era of COVID-19: Notes from the Field** and [Learnings from the Field](#). These two publications document how UNICEF and its partners rapidly adapted programming on access to justice for children to meet the challenges of the pandemic and its unique impacts on children in the justice system, focused on the release of children from detention and the continuation of child justice services. They are supplemented by four in-depth case studies from [Europe & Central Asia](#), [Iraq](#), [Morocco](#), and the [State of Palestine](#) and a brief on the [Impact of COVID-19 on children's access to justice](#) through an analysis of the data from UNICEF's Socioeconomic Impact Survey of COVID-19 Response.

[COVID-19: A Threat to Progress Against Child Marriage](#), published in March 2021, explains how the pandemic has exacerbated key factors that put children at risk of marrying before their 18th birthday. New data from UNICEF shows that an additional 10 million girls are at risk of child marriage in the next decade due to the pandemic. The risk of child marriage increases through various pathways, including economic shocks, school closures and interruptions in services. It is well known, for example, that economic insecurity can lead to child marriage as a way to relieve financial pressure on a family. The evidence is also clear that

education is a protective factor against child marriage. Thus, school closures such as those triggered by COVID-19 may, in effect, push girls towards marriage since school is no longer an option. Additionally, the disruption of 'non-essential' services including reproductive health services have a direct impact on teenage pregnancy and subsequently on marriage.

Also in March, **VOICE and UNICEF** created a space for **local women's groups to have their voices heard** to help set priorities and influence decision-making within the humanitarian system. The listening session [webinar](#) event was designed for donor partners to hear directly from women leaders about foreign aid funding of women and girl-led organizations. The conversation centered on findings from the VOICE "We Must Do Better" research, along with insights and shared experiences from the local women leaders participating in the panel.

In the meantime, **UNICEF's Gender Based Violence in Emergencies Podcast Series** continues: As part of the 16 days of activism against GBV, two episodes showcased what UNICEF country offices have been doing in responding to the surge in GBV risks during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the [first episode](#), we hear from colleagues from Ecuador, Afghanistan and India. They tell us about exciting initiatives, including a hackathon to identify innovative solutions to disseminate GBV messages in Ecuador and working through women's local organizations to reach invisible women and girls in Afghanistan. In the [second episode](#) we hear from UNICEF Zimbabwe, Greece, Philippines and Yemen.

Looking ahead, researchers and practitioners have identified the need for further evidence to improve our understanding of the **linkages between violence against women and children** to guide the development of cohesive and complementary evidence-based, effective programs that can ensure the best outcomes across both forms of violence. Setting research priorities on these intersections will help guide the implementation of the [INSPIRE](#) and [RESPECT](#) frameworks and promote coherence in the achievement of related 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. A shared research agenda will ultimately advance the field more systematically, ensure that research efforts make the best use of limited resources, and serve as a monitoring tool for the field over time.

To drive this process forward, The Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI), the UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, and the Special Programme on Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction (HRP) hosted by the World Health Organization (WHO) are partnering to lead a participatory, collaborative process that will result in the [development of research priorities on the intersections between VAW and VAC](#), including the identification of gaps in intersectional intervention development and research.