University of Strathclyde Glasgow

Inspiring Children's Futures

Protecting Children from Violence During the Pandemic: Providers' and Policymakers' Best Practices, Challenges and Innovations

Summary of Findings

The International **COVID 4P Log Project**

LEARNING SERIES | 3 PROTECTION

About the COVID 4P Log Project

COVID-19 has abruptly thrust the rights and wellbeing of children and families into greater risk around the world. The impact of COVID-19 on children continues to be vast. Risks posed to children's survival and development, to their special protections, education, health and access to food, for example, are being greatly compounded not only by COVID-19, but also by government responses.

With roughly a third of the global population estimated to be under age 18, children[1] account for a huge proportion of our population. Successful delivery of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (henceforth 'SDGs'), which relate to all ages, heavily relies on our ability to effectively and robustly respond to the distinct needs and rights of children. Even prior to COVID-19, our global task to achieve these global goals by 2030 seemed daunting. In the light of COVID-19, achieving the SDGs is even more challenging.

To effectively mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in the light of protecting children's wellbeing, and ultimately for our collective societal future, policy and practice responses must be distinctively designed to address children's wellbeing needs.

Policymakers, and those working with children, are at the heart of pandemic responses as they continue to support children's wellbeing, rise to many new challenges, and respond in new, innovative and, in some cases, unprecedented ways. To address the impact of COVID-19 on children in the long term, the **COVID 4P Log Project** sought to better understand the changing demands on these policies and practices across different cultures and contexts, in 22 countries and five continents.

Inspiring Children's Futures

The **Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures** is a joint initiative at the University of Strathclyde, Scotland, with a collective vision of ensuring that children and young people have what they need to reach their full potential, particularly those who face adversity.

We work in partnership with a wide range of partners nationally and internationally. Children's human rights and the UN Sustainable Development Goals are the heart of our work.

1. The term 'children' is used throughout to describe all those under the age of 18 years, in line with the CRC's definition of a child. Where 'young person' is used in the Report, this is reflecting that specific age group only.

THE SMARTPHONE APP

The COVID 4P Log is an Android and iOS smartphone app, free-of-cost to app users, that collected the real-time, anonymous views and experiences of practitioners and policymakers who were working across the globe to support children's wellbeing in the light of COVID-19. In answering a series of questions, these volunteer respondents helped us to better understand the ways practitioners and policymakers were responding to those challenges.

During the last quarter of 2020, practitioners and policymakers were invited to download the app to log a 2-minute response to one main question every day, for eight weeks. The questions were both practice and policy-focused, and based on the '4P' children's human rights framework of Protection, Provision, Prevention, and Participation, in order to better understand the ways practitioners and policymakers around the world were protecting children, providing for their unique needs, enabling their participation in decisions that affect them, and preventing harm, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESEARCH THEMES

The smartphone app explored respondents' views of several core areas:

1. Learning from the pandemic so far
2. Protection: Ending violence against children
3. Provision: Access to food, health, education
4. Collaborations, flexibility, transparency and trust: Applying evidence from past emergencies to COVID-19
5. Prevention: Children's social and emotional wellbeing
6. Special considerations: Justice, alternative care and disabilities
7. Participation: Responding to #COVIDUnder19-children and young people's findings
8. Preparing to rebuild post-COVID

OUR KEY PARTNERS

Our 17 international Key Partners range from capacity-buidling organisations, to international advocacy NGOs and service delivery partnerships, to the UN and other inter-governmental agencies. Their support and close engagement enabled the **Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures** to gather these important insights through the COVID 4P Log smartpone app. Their mention here does not imply endorsement of these findings.

African Child Policy Forum ACPF
AFRICAN PARTNERSHIP to End Violence against Children
BARNAFRID - Swedish National Center on Violence Against Children LINKÖPING UNIVERSITY
CYCNET
DEFENCE FOR CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL
European Social Network
Child Rights Coalition Asia
FICE
child rights connect
Observatory of CHILDREN'S HUMAN RIGHTS Scotland
National Child Welfare Workforce Institute LEARNING, LEADING, CHANGING
OECD INCLUSIVE GROWTH
REPSSI Psychosocial Wellbeing For All Children
University of Strathclyde Glasgow
Terre des hommes Helping children worldwide.
OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN
PATHFINDERS FOR PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES Justice for Children Justice for All
GLOBAL SOCIAL SERVICE WORKFORCE ALLIANCE

Report Summary:

Protecting Children from Violence

The in-depth findings from the analysis of the COVID 4P Log Week 2 responses are reported in three main parts. Part One provides an overview of respondents' accounts of **good practices** in protecting children from violence during the pandemic. Examples from good practices in day-to-day service provision, health care, justice, advocacy, education and others are offered. The impact of gender-based violence services on children's wellbeing is also discussed.

Part Two addresses the reported **challenges** to protecting children during COVID-19, as well as respondents' views of the **impact** of those challenges on children. The most frequently discussed challenges relate to protecting children's safety at home, disrupted service delivery and the ineffective child protection laws, policies and service responses.

Part Three is dedicated to **how practices have changed** in response to child protection challenges, including accounts of policy and service innovations, as well as barriers to their success.

The data presented here were collected in the last quarter of 2020.

This is a summary report. The full report on the in-depth findings can be found at https://inspiringchildrensfutures.org/publications.

This report aims to generate new insights, and spark new questions and ideas, to inform, equip and strengthen policy, service and practices for and with children and their families. This report is part of a series of Learning Reports documenting the COVID 4P Log App findings from responses across the eight weeks of questions. This COVID 4P Log Learning Report Series aims to inform and equip those who seek to 'respond to children's distinct needs, and realise their full range of rights and opportunities, to achieve peaceful, just and inclusive societies for all'. [2]

2. Davidson, J.; Elsley, S.; Giraldi, M.; Goudie, A.; Hope, K.; Lyth, A.; Van Keirsbilck, B. (June 2019): Justice for Children, Justice for All: The Challenge to Achieve SDG16+ Call to Action. Glasgow: CELCIS - Inspiring Children's Futures, University of Strathclyde. https://www.justice.sdg16.plus/justiceforchildren

Key Messages

Increased Risks for Children's Safety and Rights During COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has put children at an increased risk of neglect, violence and other rights violations. The overwhelming majority of respondents reported their sectors had experienced challenges in protecting children from violence.

Delays in Reporting Abuse and Pursuing Justice

Delays in the reporting of abuse and pursuing justice, constrained service capacity, ineffective child protection policies and insufficient coordination among stakeholders often perpetuated those risks for children. Detection of cases of child abuse and other violations had been hindered during the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of movement restrictions, limited home visits, infection risks, connectivity issues and service disruptions. This necessitated urgent and flexible responses to ensure cases of abuse were promptly assessed, reported and addressed.

Challenges to Reaching All Children

Reaching all children and families, particularly those living in poor and/or rural areas, was often challenging due to the lack of connectivity and resources.

Good Practices

Despite the challenges, the majority of respondents identified good practices that had been implemented to protect children from violence during the pandemic. Good practices in child protection during the pandemic were reported in several crucial domains: advocacy and signposting; justice; health care; education and awareness-raising; children and community involvement; and virtual service delivery.

Service Innovations

Innovations in service delivery included leveraging virtual communication platforms; helplines for children in distress; community networks; optimised and integrated health services; safe spaces for children; and others.

Gender-Based Violence Services

Gender-based violence support was delivered through helplines, shelter and alternative care, life skills training, early intervention, supportive policing and paralegal support, and benefitted both women's and children's wellbeing.

Policy and Organisational Challenges to Protecting Children

The ineffectiveness of child protection laws, policies and service responses often hindered the implementation of effective practices in promoting child safety and wellbeing. Respondents felt a stronger focus on assessment, prevention and early intervention was needed.

Engaging with Children and Upholding the Full Spectrum of their Human Rights

Listening to children's concerns and creating awareness of child protection issues were recognised as important. Ensuring children's wellbeing and continued access to essential rights such as health, safety and justice was dependent upon responsive and well-coordinated systems and structures.

Involving the Community

Community partners were involved to ensure a holistic and efficient approach to child protection.

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Summary of Main Findings:

Responses to Protect Children from Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- The vast majority of respondents had observed good practices to protect children from violence during the pandemic. Those practices were addressing a range of issues – such as physical, sexual and emotional violence, neglect and deprivation.
- The most commonly reported examples of such best practices were: advocating against gender-based violence, as well as providing helplines for children in distress; educating children and caregivers about children's rights; and following up on, and referring, child protection cases promptly to ensure justice was served.
- Examples of facilitating access to health care by, for example, organising multidisciplinary child protection units in hospitals, were also given.
- Respondents also shared good practices in the provision of basic needs to families, and the protection of their rights, and online support and services. Examples included: child protection checks via WhatsApp; online consultation with children; using social media to report cases of abuse and other violations; and facilitating child-friendly activities online.
- Respondents stressed the importance of connecting with, and listening to, children in order to understand their concerns and escalate any issues swiftly.
- A range of positive outcomes of gender-based violence services for children were also recognised – from the provision of shelter and the reduction of violence to life skills training and psychosocial support.
- While respondents noted these good examples of practice despite the challenges in the pandemic, there were still serious barriers to effectively protecting children from violence, and deep concerns raised about the impact on children.

> *Yes there is a programme that was designed to assist child and youth care workers while working under lock down situations. It was called Child and Youth Care Workers Response to Covid19 [...] It provided tools that the child and youth care workers could use while connecting with families via social media platforms and also had built in methods for counselling children in private. Some of the tools included budgeting, parenting skills and how to keep the young people busy. Children were assisted with school work and also provided with means to request time for counselling. This programme prevented a child from suicide.*
>
> Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

> *All those who work with children eg CHVs and case workers have sole responsibility to monitor any form of Violence to children by linking them to law enforcement based at the community level. Cases reported are followed up to ensure justice is done*
>
> Direct Service Provider, NGO, Kenya

Summary of Main Findings:

Challenges and Impact on Children

- Numerous child protection challenges during the pandemic were reported. The majority of those responses can be categorised as:
  - Ineffective child protection laws, policies and service responses;
  - Violence against children in the home;
  - Barriers specific to carrying out home visits and monitoring children;
  - Service delays and disruptions;
  - Health system pressures;
  - And poverty and unemployment.
- In addition, ineffective law enforcement; delayed and uncoordinated responses; limited resources; civic space restrictions – were all reported as persistent barriers to effective child protection practices. In some cases, those challenges had resulted in difficulties pursuing justice, unsuitable placements for children, the lack of access to services, among other negative outcomes.
- Barriers to home visits and child and family monitoring were most often related to movement restrictions, the lack of cooperation by caregivers and COVID-19 fears.
- Collectively, those challenges were associated with a range of negative outcomes for children, specifically relating to: accessing essential services; reporting cases of abuse; and accessing safe spaces.

> *During covid19 we were unable to do home visits so we couldn't engage and work in the life space of our beneficiaries, yes we did virtual connections to check up on them but that was not enough to assess the situation they're in during this global pandemic. In our work line we only experience challenges to protect them when they relocate to another place without informing you because you can't tell if they are safe and not experiencing violence*
>
> Service Manager, NGO, South Africa

> *We repeat concerns to child welfare agencies and sometimes feel surprised to hear that children will still be returned to living with the family members or caregivers we had reported about. We struggle to accept that child welfare has deemed certain placements as suitable when we often have concerns around emotional, physical and verbal abuse and neglect*
>
> Direct Service Provider, Government, Canada

Summary of Main Findings:

Innovative Practices in Response to Child Protection Challenges

- Most respondents had seen new practice innovations to child protection challenges in response to COVID-19. Those innovations were addressing different types of violence against children such as emotional, physical and sexual violence, and deprivation and neglect, across a range of age groups.
- Respondents shared several innovative solutions that had been implemented to address some of the service delivery challenges during COVID-19, such as:
  - Hotlines for reporting cases of abuse;
  - Alternative ways to communicate with children and families (for example, televisits);
  - Child-friendly justice practices;
  - Child protection policies;
  - Positive parenting training and improving community awareness of children's rights;
  - Multi-drug dispensing; and mobilising neighbours and community networks.
- Overall, several types of positive outcomes of those changed practices were reported, including: more effective service delivery leading to better engagement of children and families; ensuring frequent contact between children and families; and reaching the harder-to-reach such as families in rural areas.
- A number of persistent challenges to sustaining and scaling up innovations and good practices were reported: systemic and structural issues (such as poverty, corruption and the lack of funding); movement restrictions and limited home visits; communication with caregivers and children; community awareness and acceptance; staff sickness; and the premature release of perpetrators of violence.
- Systemic and structural barriers included poverty, corruption, the lack of funding, insufficient services, cultural practices, poor implementation of programmes, the inadequate focus on prevention, and others.

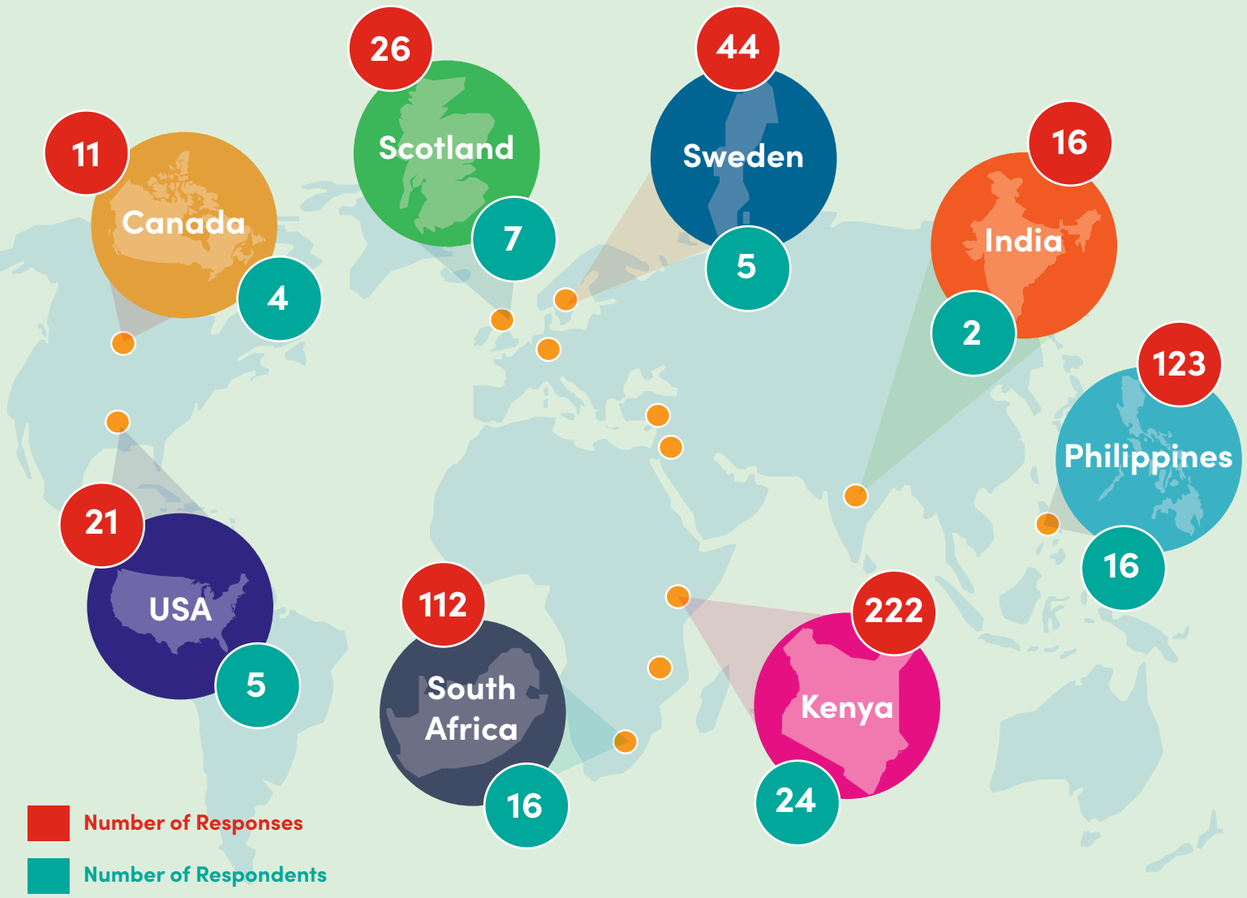
> *The youth are now involved in disseminating information on child abuse and where/who to report cases that they know of. They advocate messages online with their peers*
>
> Service Manager, NGO, Philippines

> *Learning modules for parents, specifically positive discipline in everyday parenting, was revised to adapt key messages and tips for parents on how to support their children given the pandemic*
>
> Service Manager, Civil Society Organisation, Philippines

> *Poverty, cultural practices and corruption are among the barriers*
>
> Direct Service Provider, NGO, Kenya

Respondents and Countries Represented in this Report

590 responses from 84 respondents across 12 countries and 4 continents



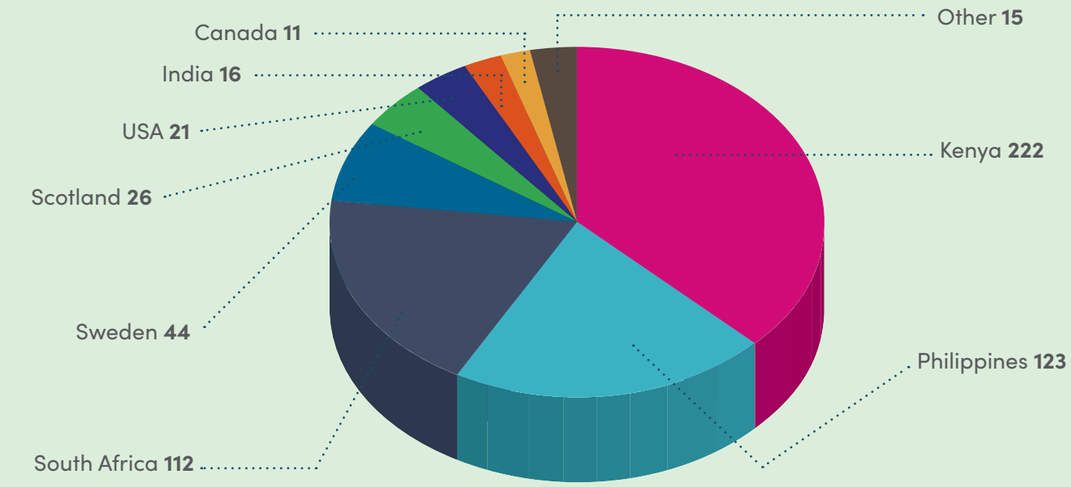
The findings in this Learning Report are based on 590 responses from 84 respondents - including 47 direct service providers, 26 service managers and 11 policymakers (58 - women; 24 - men; 2 - prefer not to say).

58 (69%) represented NGOs; 10 (12%) - civil society organisations; 8 (10%) - the government; 2 (2%) - the private sector; 3 (4%) - other; 3 (4%) - unknown. 52 (62%) of all respondents in this report supervised staff.

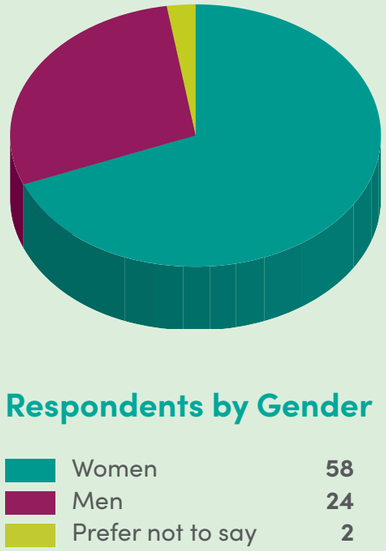
The respondents represented 12 countries:

Belgium, Canada, India, Israel, Kenya, Malawi, Palestine, the Philippines, South Africa, Sweden, the United Kingdom (Scotland) and the USA.

Number of Responses

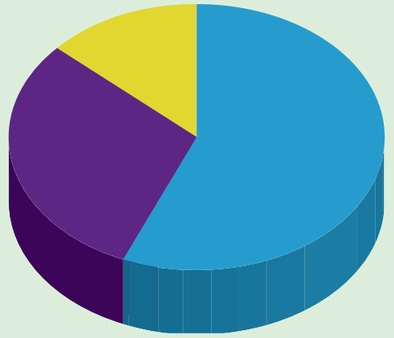


Respondents by Gender



Women	58
Men	24
Prefer not to say	2

Respondents by Role



Direct Service Providers	47
Service Managers	26
Policymakers	11

The top eight countries by highest numbers of respondents and responses, respectively, were:

Kenya (24 and 222); the Philippines (16 and 123); South Africa (16 and 112); Sweden (5 and 44); Scotland (7 and 26); the USA (5 and 21); India (2 and 16); and Canada (4 and 11).

Together, the responses from those top eight countries amount to 575 or 97% of all responses reported here. All other countries contributed to a total of 15 (or 3%) of all responses.

"'In paper practices are written but implementation will be done after you have fought."

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

"The provision of hotlines might not be enough as many times children tend to report late or not at all, what the children need are services within their reach.'"

Service Manager, Civil Society Organisation, Philippines

"There is a helpline for children 1098 and if the child is in ditress [distress] they call the number and the social workers talk to the children and thileir [their] parents. In rare cases the child is put into a childrens [children's] home to keep them safe.

The organisation reaches out through its community network of children and adults."

Service Manager, NGO, India

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Common responses about child protection challenges related to laws, policies and services

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"1. Inefficiency in law enforcement. The police take a lot of time to apprehend perpetrators of violence.

2. Judgement to these cases in court also take long.

3. compromise, most of the time, perpetrators of these acts do compromise the victims, parents and even law enforcing officers by offering money or other goodies to drop orderail these cases.

4. culture, some times the actof violence could have been committed amongst people of the same family. The family would settledown the case as a family and release the culprit."

Direct Service Provider, NGO, Kenya

"Let me cite a specific case. So there was a case of extreme violence against children in our country. You can google Fabel Pineda's case. It was really challenging not only could we not stage a protest as expression of our indignation, but it was also particularly difficult during this time because of the preeminence of politics in the country. The case died just like that. It is sad because even when we promote child helplines and tell children to 'report, report, report' the existing laws and mechanisms could not protect them."

Direct Service Provider, Civil Society Organisation, Philippines

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Impact on Children

The challenges to protecting children during COVID-19 shared by our respondents had a range of direct and indirect negative effects on children's wellbeing.

'Since we are notbalso [not also] allowed to do home visitations due to tge [the] pandemic, it is really hard to check on the children's welfare especially those who have no means to communicate. It is hard for them to report cases of abuse especially those happening in their homes and if perpetrators are their own family members. What we did is to ask some neighbors to check on some children who we are suspecting to be suffering in their homes.'

Service Manager, NGO, Philippines

'The survivor does not always get the justice deserved coz most perpetrators are very close relative to the survivor making it had to push the case'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, Kenya

'People are sick and do not come to visits. No control over the situation in vulnerable families. Difficult to keep on working in a consistent and stringent manner. Some families lost in the system due to sick leaves and more urgent matters. Everything depends on the parents capacity and will.'

Policymaker, Government, Sweden

'The main challenge that we face as a sector is that most children are facing threats after being violated hence making it difficult for them to report.'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, Kenya

A Note of Caution

While the survey generated useful insights into the respondents' work in relation to children and families, the findings should be interpreted with caution due to a number of factors.

- The numbers of respondents are modest, so the findings may not be representative of the experiences and challenges faced in those countries or sectors.
- The findings reported here have been produced by the COVID 4P Log research team and, due to the format of the smartphone app survey, the findings cannot be shared with the respondents for commentary or review.
- The findings are derived from a short-form survey and lack context. Respondents' engagement with the survey varied, which may have affected the completeness of the data.
- We are aware some respondents had difficulties with engaging with the app due to workload pressures and technical issues, which might have affected their response rates.

Summary

This report offered an overview of COVID 4P Log respondents' views and experiences of challenges to protecting children from violence during the pandemic; the effects of those challenges on children's rights and wellbeing; good practices implemented to protect children during the pandemic; and barriers to the effectiveness and reach of those practice innovations and other organisational and policy responses.

The overwhelming majority of respondents in this report represented eight countries: Kenya, the Philippines; South Africa; Sweden; Scotland; the USA; India; and Canada.

Part One presented examples of good practices in child protection during the pandemic. The most commonly reported examples of such practices were: advocating against gender-based violence, as well as providing helplines for children in distress; educating children and caregivers about children's rights; and following up on, and referring, child protection cases promptly to ensure justice was served. Examples of facilitating access to health care and basic supplies were also shared. Respondents stressed the importance of connecting with, and listening to, children in order to understand their concerns and escalate any issues swiftly. This was often facilitated by online consultations with children and using social media and other child-friendly activities online.

Part Two was focused on common challenges to protecting children from violence during COVID-19, particularly the inadequate child protection laws, policies and service responses; violence against children in the home; barriers specific to carrying out home visits and monitoring children; service delays and disruptions; health system pressures; and poverty and unemployment. Barriers to home visits and child and family monitoring were most often related to movement restrictions, the lack of cooperation by caregivers and COVID-19 fears. Collectively, those challenges were associated with a range of negative outcomes for children – specifically – in relation to accessing needed services; reporting cases of abuse; and accessing safe spaces.

Finally, Part Three was dedicated to innovative practices in child protection implemented during the pandemic such as setting up hotlines for reporting child abuse cases; using technology to connect with children remotely; mobilising neighbours and community networks; advocating for child-friendly justice practices such as safe spaces; and others. Despite enhancing service delivery and the engagement and protection of children and families, several barriers hindered the effectiveness and reach of those measures. Such commonly reported hinderers were poverty, corruption and the lack of funding; movement restrictions and limited home visits; communication with caregivers and children; community awareness and acceptance; staff sickness; and the premature release of perpetrators of violence.

Respondents highlighted that ensuring children's wellbeing and continued access to essential rights such as health, safety and justice was dependent upon responsive and well-coordinated systems and structures.

Our hope is that this COVID 4P Log Learning Report series will generate new insights, and spark new questions and ideas to strengthen policy, service and practice with, and for, children and their families.

About this Report

This Learning Report has been produced by the Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures at the University of Strathclyde, Scotland, UK. **Inspiring Children's Futures**, with its many partners, has a strong track record of multi-level, multi-sector global engagement, policy development and practice improvement.

This Learning Report is part of a series of reports on the findings of the COVID 4P Log smartphone app survey. Together, the reports from this series form the second of a three-part 'Inspiring Children's Futures in light of COVID-19' programme.

This programme is gathering evidence on protecting children's wellbeing in past epidemics; informing better policies and practices throughout the COVID-19 pandemic; and influencing change in the long shadow that COVID-19 will cast over the recovery phases ahead.

With our partners, we are strengthening global, national and local approaches to ensure that we are collectively delivering on the Justice for Children, Justice for All SDG 16+ Call to Action to "respond to children's distinct needs, and realise their full range of rights and opportunities, to achieve peaceful, just and inclusive societies for all".

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