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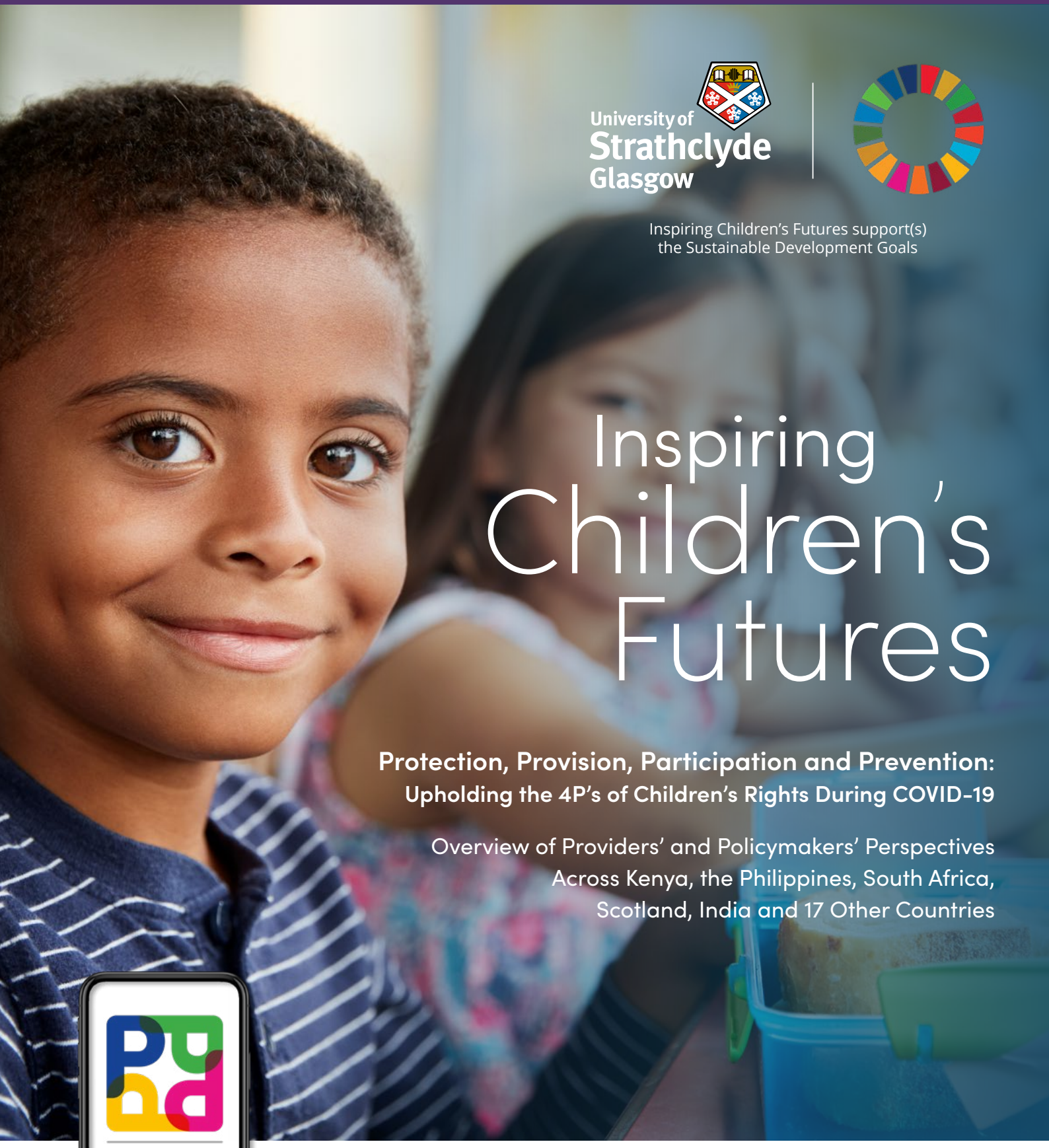

University of Strathclyde Glasgow

Inspiring Children's Futures support(s) the Sustainable Development Goals

Inspiring Children's Futures

Protection, Provision, Participation and Prevention: Upholding the 4P's of Children's Rights During COVID-19

Overview of Providers' and Policymakers' Perspectives Across Kenya, the Philippines, South Africa, Scotland, India and 17 Other Countries

The International **COVID 4P Log Project**

Inspiring children's Futures

LEARNING SERIES 5 OVERVIEW

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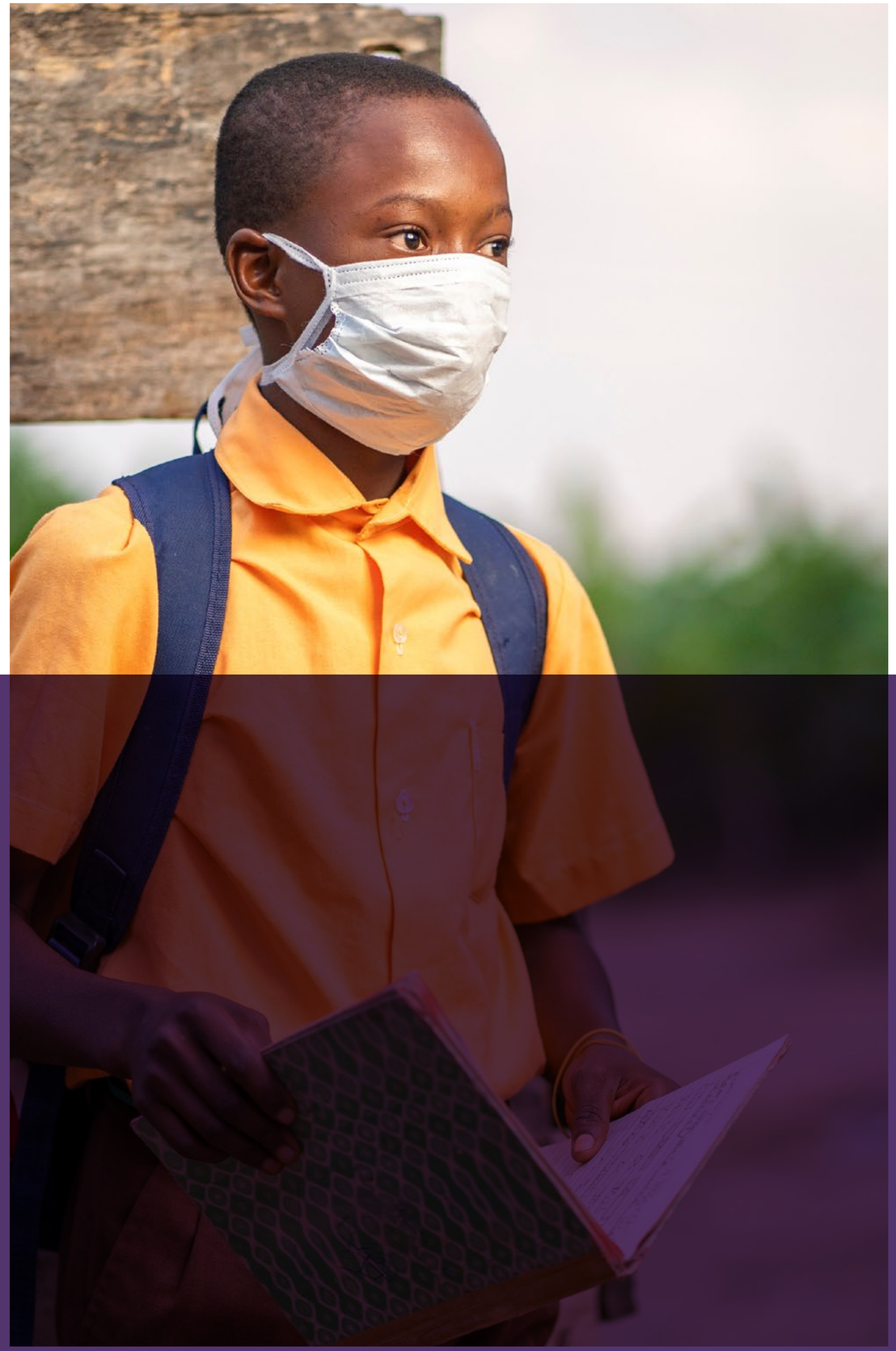


About the COVID 4P Log Project

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.

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-building 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

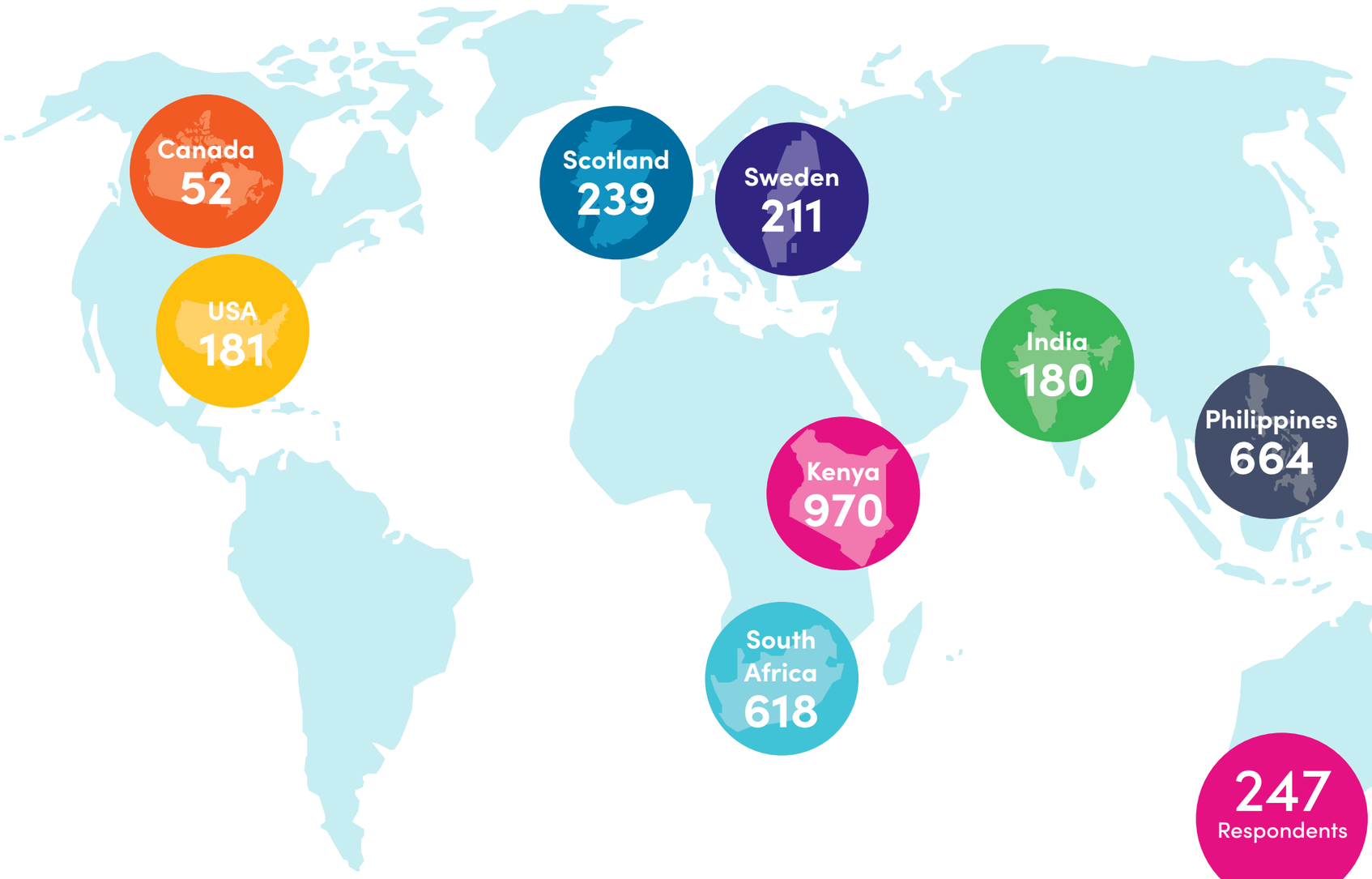
Respondents and Countries Represented in the Eight-Week COVID 4P Log Project

3339 Responses

22 Countries

5 Continents

TOP 8 COUNTRIES BY NUMBER OF RESPONSES



Overall, 247 respondents from 22 countries - including 139 direct service providers, 66 service managers and 42 policymakers - contributed to at least one main app question between the last quarter of 2020 and the first quarter of 2021. 173 respondents were women; 68 - men; 5 - prefer not to say; 1 - other.

The represented countries were (in alphabetical order) Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, Ethiopia, Greece, India, Israel, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Malawi, Mexico, the Netherlands, Palestine, the Philippines, the Republic of Montenegro, South Africa, Sweden, United Kingdom (England), United Kingdom (Scotland) and the United States of America (USA).

The top eight countries by highest number of respondents were Kenya (60), the Philippines (48), South Africa (41), Scotland (32), India (14), the USA (12), Canada (11), and Sweden (8).

A total of 3339 responses were generated across the eight weeks of questions - with eight countries, Kenya (970), the Philippines (664), South Africa (618), Scotland (239), Sweden (211), the USA (181), India (180), and Canada (52) - accounting for 93% of all responses.

The remaining countries had the following numbers of respondents and responses, respectively: **Malawi** (2/52), **England, UK** (1/52), **Israel** (1/40), **the Republic of Montenegro** (1/27), **Greece** (5/13), **Belgium** (1/10), **the Netherlands** (2/10), **Ethiopia** (2/4), **Lebanon** (1/4), **Palestine** (1/4), **Australia** (1/2), **Bangladesh** (1/2), **Italy** (1/2), and **Mexico** (1/2).

169 (68%) respondents worked for NGOs; 31 (13%) - for the government; 22 (9%) - for civil society organisations; 11 (4%) - in the private sector; 10 (4%) - other; and 4 (2%) - unknown.

Respondents represented a range of sectors such as child and youth care, advocacy, community-based services, sexual and reproductive health, mental health, child rights, children and family services, education, social services, working with refugees, juvenile justice, maternal and child health, housing, and others.

247 Respondents

139 Direct Service Providers

66 Service Managers

42 Policymakers

PROTECTION
PROVISION
PARTICIPATION
PREVENTION

For the wellbeing of our *children*

Children's human rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are sometimes summarised as the four P's: Protection, Provision, Participation and Prevention. The COVID 4P Log uses this 4P conceptual framework to frame the questions we asked practitioners and policymakers. While the 4Ps are not all-encompassing, they offer an accessible lens through which to explore how practitioners and policymakers from different countries, sectors and organisations see children's human rights being realised.

We asked about good practices, and innovations despite the challenges, that ensured children's human rights were upheld across key aspects of children's lives, in particular those of children whose rights are most vulnerable to being violated. In this project, we explore how practitioners and policymakers are upholding the 4Ps, with a focus on the following areas:

PROTECTION

We explore children's rights to protection from exploitation, violence and other abuses, and to effective and child-friendly interventions if these occur. Our questions seek to understand what concrete and effective measures have been enacted to protect children from violence during the pandemic.

PROVISION

We explore children's rights to growth and development, including the right to food, health care and education, play and leisure, and provision of targeted assistance—including economic assistance—to families. We also ask about the special considerations for children living in exceptionally difficult conditions, in particular for children involved in justice systems, in alternative care, and with disabilities.

PARTICIPATION

We explore a child's right to express their views freely, and to have their views given due weight when decisions are made that affect them. Children's participation and intergenerational partnerships are essential ingredients for understanding the impact of COVID-19 on children's wellbeing.

PREVENTION

We explore children's rights to social and emotional wellbeing support. Isolation under COVID-19 has been a common reality for many, and social exclusion of children can undermine their wellbeing. Supporting children's social and emotional wellbeing, and that of their families, can prevent further harms.

Report Summary:

Overview of the Findings from the Eight-Week COVID 4P Log Project

This report offers a concise overview of the most significant findings from an analysis of more than 3000 smartphone app survey responses from 247 respondents representing 22 countries. The responses were gathered in the last quarter of 2020. Our guiding framework for upholding children's rights – Protection, Provision, Participation and Prevention (the 4P-s) – has been used to present the key findings concerning best practices and innovations; challenges; and lessons learned and recommended actions for supporting children's wellbeing during and post-COVID-19:

- **PROTECTION** – responses to the increased risk of violence against children; the impact of actions to protect children at the organisational, governmental and community levels on their rights and wellbeing;
- **PROVISION** – restrictions and inequities in children's access to essential goods and services during the pandemic, particularly food, health care and education, as well as the effects thereof on child safety and development;
- **PARTICIPATION** – efforts to amplify children's voices during the pandemic; initiatives to actively involve children in decision-making, awareness-raising and service delivery; threats to the visibility, representation and perceived urgency of children's issues;
- **PREVENTION** – considerations about the short-, medium- and long-term impact of the pandemic on children's socio-emotional development and prosperity; interventions to promote children's and families' coping with stress and wellness; perceived level of priority given to children's socio-emotional needs.

This is an overview report. The complete series of thematic Learning Reports is available on **www.InspiringChildrensFutures.org**. 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:

Protection

1. The pandemic has led to increases in child abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation in the home, in the community and online. The overwhelming majority of respondents reported their sectors had experienced challenges in protecting children from violence.

2. Respondents reflected on effective practices and challenges associated with protecting children amidst the health crisis (against COVID-19 itself) and from its related social impacts, including:

   a. Protecting children from abuse and neglect – including exposure to violence in the home and online

   b. Mitigating the heath risks stemming from child neglect and the poor access to health information and care, including unwanted pregnancies

3. Respondents found it particularly challenging to detect occurrences of child abuse and neglect, and raise those with authorities for an effective response, during the pandemic. This resulted in serious concerns about the capacity of systems and services to protect those considered most socially vulnerable.

4. To mitigate child protection challenges during COVID-19, respondents engaged in a range of activities such as: the provision of basic supplies; adherence to safety regulations; face-to-face and online advocacy and awareness-raising about children's rights; virtual check-ins and helplines; training programmes for child and youth care workers, as well as for children and families; and others.

5. Despite the widespread practice adaptations and innovations, respondents indicated there were persistent organisational, policy and other structural barriers to upholding children's rights in these circumstances. Poverty, unemployment, digital exclusion and other systemic inequalities limited the effectiveness of innovations such as televisits. Further structural barriers to child protection were corruption, the lack of funding, inefficient services, cultural practices, the poor implementation of programmes, the inadequate focus on prevention, and others.

6. Many respondents believed funding allocation and priority-setting did not optimally meet children's and families' needs.

7. Those barriers often resulted in children's needs not being met; exacerbated inequalities; hindered access to justice; inefficient use of resources; the lack of coordination and trust within and across sectors; and poorer caregiver and staff wellbeing.

8. Respondents stressed the importance of swift, unified and needs-led responses to the risk of child abuse and neglect, COVID-19 risks and the wider spectrum of children's threatened rights. Service providers, policymakers, caregivers and communities must coordinate efforts and leverage existing resources to ensure and sustain children's access to safe homes, safe spaces in case of emergencies, safe outdoor spaces and a safe virtual environment.

Key Messages:

Provision

Challenges to Access and Equity

1. Respondents expressed concerns about children's restricted access to essential services – particularly health care, mental health care, schooling, Internet and digital technologies, and justice. Those restrictions endangered children's safety, wellbeing, dignity and connectedness to others. In many cases, the need exceeded available resources. Financial resources and organisational capacity were often insufficient to reach all children.

2. The restricted access to health care was associated with a range of negative outcomes for children – including receiving inadequate or no medical treatment; delays in routine health checks; missed vaccinations; disrupted help-seeking; malnourished children not being identified; rural regions remaining underserved; and conditions such as mental health problems being unattended.

3. Children's restricted access to schooling led to a range of negative consequences beyond poorer educational outcomes – including increased exposure to violence in the home and online; engagement in risky and anti-social behaviours; distress, anxiety, loneliness and poorer socioemotional development; and the entrenchment of socio-economic inequities.

4. Country-level factors were cited by several respondents as hindering children's access to basic needs during the pandemic. Among those barriers were poverty, loss of income and jobs, movement restrictions and school closures, delayed government responses and the inadequate capacity and resources to provide for all children in need.

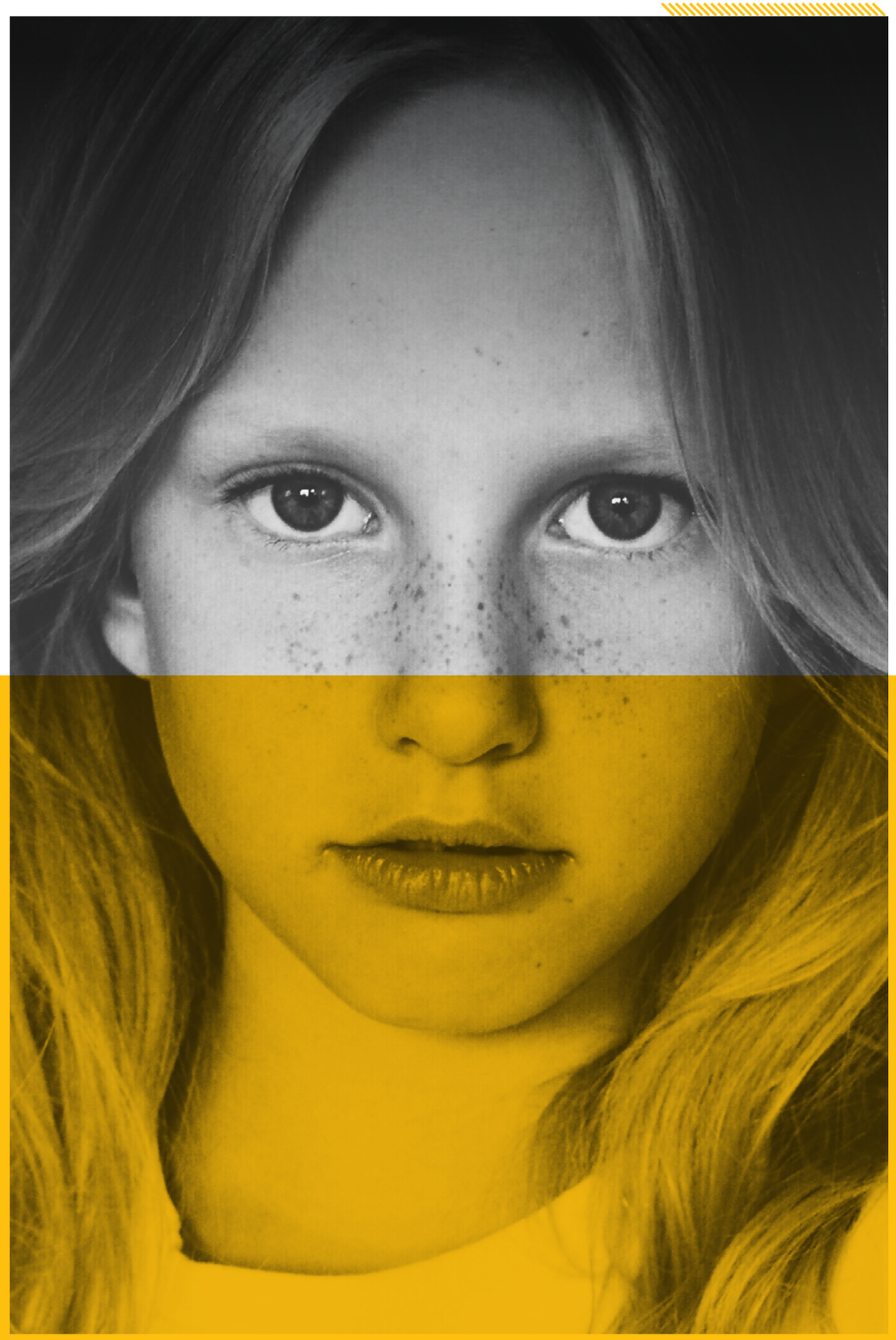
Responses

5. Respondents highlighted numerous groups of children whose essential rights had been most severely affected during the pandemic. Some of those groups include children in street situations, children with disabilities, economically disadvantaged families, children in need of medical interventions, and children without parental care.

6. Many respondents' sectors and organisations were involved in the supply and distribution of basic necessities – food, personal protective equipment, medicines, dignity packs, shade nets, emergency cash, books, tablets and data, among other essential items and services. Those aimed to help children and families stay safe at home, protect themselves from the virus, have food security, report accidents, manage the stress and uncertainty of unemployment, and uphold their dignity and rights.

7. To increase children's access to food, respondents reported a range of effective initiatives – primarily relief distribution, economic assistance, urban gardening and livelihood projects, meal programmes in schools, and awareness-raising and empowerment. The majority (14 out of 21, or 67%) of respondents stated targeted economic assistance had been made available during COVID-19.

8. The provision quality and responsive services would be facilitated by more effective government and system responses – including more funding, less corruption, better coordination between statutory and non-statutory organisations, better planning, better communication with households and community leaders, and others. Respondents also stressed the vital role of collaboration among national governments, local government units, non-governmental organisations and education partners, as well as nurturing positive relationships with parents, carers and young people.



Key Messages:

Participation

1. Collectively, respondents recognised that the meaningful and sustained participation of children in decision-making, including policies, campaigns and services, was vital to protecting the full spectrum of their rights, providing holistic support to meet their needs, and fostering their resilience.

2. Respondents stressed the importance of affirming children's rights by inviting them to make full and meaningful contribution to decisions affecting them, although several respondents shared there were difficulties with upholding child participation during COVID-19.

3. Several examples of children's participation were mentioned: community coordination forums; a youth forum involved in changes to legislation; organising youth-friendly camps; inviting children to speak out and listening to them; press-conferences with children; involvement in research; peer-led tutoring, counselling and advocacy; consulting children about the services they received; and others.

4. However, several respondents indicated children's views had not been sought during the pandemic regarding decisions affecting them.

5. Barriers to child participation included movement restrictions, digital and information exclusion, and the lack of stakeholder consultations.

Key Messages:

Prevention

1. Respondents expressed a wide range of concerns about the medium- and long-term consequences of lockdowns, movement restrictions and social isolation on children's social and emotional wellbeing. 13 (93%) out of 14 respondents stated they had become 'more concerned' about children's social and emotional wellbeing during COVID-19.

2. Concerns were also raised about the wellbeing of children with pre-existing mental health conditions, as well as about parents' and providers' mental wellbeing, which, in turn, affected all children's care and protection.

3. 11 (92%) out of 12 respondents believed children's social and emotional wellbeing had been prioritised less during the pandemic compared to children's basic needs.

4. A range of interventions were shared that aimed to address children's isolation, improve their socio-emotional wellbeing and prevent serious mental health conditions. Among those were online meetings and webinars on mental health; community awareness efforts; community hubs in rural and isolated areas and door-to-door volunteer support; virtual check-ins; parental skills training; helplines, including gender-based violence services; psychological services; and others.

5. Several respondents shared concerns about the inadequacy of such responses. Those concerns included the lack of an integrated and collaborative approach; the inability to reach all children in need; and the insufficient services to address children's social and emotional wellbeing.

Quick Insights

Protecting Children from Violence

76%
(34)

Of respondents reported their sectors had faced challenges to protecting children from violence during COVID-19.

73%
(24)

Of respondents had seen challenges in delivering home or clinic visits, or other practices to protect children.

78%
(29)

Of respondents had observed good practices that have protected children from violence during COVID-19.

Children's Restricted Access to Food, Schooling and Health Care During COVID-19

70%
(28)

Of respondents shared children had had less access to food as a result of COVID-19.

91%
(31)

Of respondents stated children had experienced restricted access to schooling as a result of COVID-19.

71%
(24)

Of respondents reported children had had restricted access to health care.

Collaborations and Advocacy During COVID-19

75%
(18)

Of respondents had seen positive collaborations providing support to children and families during this pandemic.

57%
(8)

Of respondents stated their capacity to engage with government decision-making or national institutions had been hindered through this pandemic.

Children's Social and Emotional Wellbeing During COVID-19

93%
(13)

Of respondents shared they had become more concerned for the social and emotional wellbeing of the children in their care.

Staff Wellbeing and Recognition

45%
(14)

Of respondents stated the stress and anxiety experienced during the pandemic had had an impact on their work.

60%
(12)

Of respondents believed their role should have been designated as essential work.

Summary of Main Findings

We now present a more detailed summary of the main findings from the COVID 4P Log Project, together with select quotes from our respondents representing a diversity of child wellbeing practitioners and policymakers. Those are focused around three overarching thematic areas:

- The complex and often-compounding challenges to supporting children's wellbeing, as well as their impact on child protection, development, participation and justice;
- The numerous adaptions to, and innovations in, service provision that ensured the support available to children and their families was accessible, needs-led, of high quality, equitable and sustainable; and, finally
- Respondents' views on what key factors enabled those positive practices and agile responses, how organisational and governmental actions could have been more efficient and appropriate, and which crucial areas should be prioritised to maximise and sustain positive outcomes for all children.

This is an overview report. The complete series of detailed thematic Learning Reports is available on: www.InspiringChildrensFutures.org

Unique and Complex Challenges to Supporting Children's Wellbeing During COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unique and complex challenges to promoting children's wellbeing, protecting their rights and empowering their voices across the globe. The quality, effectiveness and reach of services for children have been adversely affected as a result of both pandemic-related impediments and systemic socio-economic inequalities. 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.

Severity and Impact

- The pandemic has led to increases in the cases of child **abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation** – in the home, in the community and online.
- Many children have had **restricted access to health, education, shelter, information, and play and recreation**. Those injustices have endangered children's safety, wellbeing, dignity and connectedness to others.
- Children in street situations, children with disabilities, economically disadvantaged children, children needing medical interventions, children without parental care, and several other groups were reported to be among **the most severely impacted** groups of children.

Protecting Children from Violence

- **Delays** in the reporting of abuse and pursuing justice, constrained service capacity, inadequate 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.
- Communities' COVID-19 fears and some caregivers' lack of cooperation with service providers were also cited as barriers to child protection and effective service delivery.

Health Care and Schooling

- Children's restricted access to health care during the pandemic had resulted in receiving **inadequate or no medical care; delays in routine appointments; the continued underserving of rural regions**; and issues such as **malnourishment** and mental health problems remaining **unattended**.
- The reported consequences of the limited access to schooling during COVID-19 were numerous, severe and far-reaching. According to respondents, school closures had violated children's rights to education, food and play and recreation; endangered their safety; widened inequities; and resulted in learning gaps.
- The restricted access to schooling was also reported to have **poorly affected children's social, cognitive and emotional development and mental wellbeing**.

Structural Barriers Hindered the Reach and Effectiveness of Service Innovations, and Widened Within-Country Inequities

- **Poverty, unemployment, digital exclusion** and other systemic inequalities limited the effectiveness of innovations such as televisits.
- Further structural barriers to child protection were corruption, the **lack of funding, inefficient services**, the poor cooperation between NGOs and the government, cultural practices, the poor implementation of programmes, the inadequate focus on prevention, and others.
- The **ineffectiveness of child protection laws, policies and organisational leadership** often hindered the implementation of effective practices in promoting child safety and wellbeing.

Inadequate Priority-Setting. Ineffective Rule of Law. Barriers to Collaborations

- Many respondents believed funding allocation and priority-setting did not optimally meet children's and families' needs.
- Several barriers to collaboration were highlighted: corruption, the lack of a unified response at different levels of systems, fear of the virus and the lack of trust between NGOs and the government.

Negative Impacts on Children's Development, Right to Play and Socio-Emotional Wellbeing

- Respondents shared that the COVID-19 pandemic had **negatively impacted** children's ability to socialise; their loneliness and isolation; coping skills and psychosocial wellbeing; nutrition; and parent-child relationships. Despite some positive responses such as awareness-raising and mental health and psychosocial support programmes, resources were often **insufficient to meet the demand** for socio-emotional wellbeing support.

Challenges to Promoting Child Participation

- Several instances were reported in which children's views had not been sought:

'I think their views were never sought'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, Kenya

'The children were not consulted in any of the actions in schools, including closure and exams'

Direct Service Provider, Private Sector, Scotland

'Maybe consult all stakeholders, especially the children, before doing a plan...'

Policymaker, Government, Philippines

Staff Wellbeing and Productivity

- Respondents discussed their experience of **stress and anxiety** during the pandemic, with almost half of them reporting these had had an impact on their work. The **increased workload and work demands** were sometimes cited as the main sources of stress. **Feeling unmotivated, unproductive, overwhelmed and isolated** - were often reported as consequences of not receiving adequate support during the pandemic. **Burnout, fatigue** and thoughts about leaving one's job were also reported.

Barriers to Upholding Children's Rights During COVID-19

'Reports that more children contact phone service for them about violence to them or between their parents but difficult to follow up in child heath care.'

Direct Service Provider, Civil Society Organisation, Sweden

'Poverty, cultural practices and corruption are among the barriers'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, Kenya

'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

'The NGO sector has been outstanding in support children and families, though they had minimal support from the government.'

Service Manager, NGO, South Africa

'The biggest challenge was supporting children mostly on online means. At the start you will need to check their connectivity access and teach them how to use online platforms for more formal meetings, consultations and learning activities.'

Service Manager, Civil Society Organisation, Philippines

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Innovations, Adaptations and Best Practices to Support Children During COVID-19

Policymakers and service providers have responded to the increasing threats to child rights, safety and wellbeing with a range of innovative practices. Those have helped meet children's and families' diverse needs, protect them against COVID-19, and continue to advocate for their rights.

Continuing Being There 'For' and 'With' Children

- Tailoring services to the child's needs, being a 'constant' in their lives, and embracing the use of technology and other alternative measures were key to a **child-centred service delivery** during this emergency.

Agility and Innovation

- Respondents adapted their practice to deliver several key outcomes: address children's and families' urgent needs, such as food, safety and protection, school support and mental wellbeing; protect children and communities against COVID-19; and engage in advocacy.

- Most respondents had **adapted their practice** to mitigate those challenges. Common examples of such responses were the distribution of basic necessities and provision of sustenance support; awareness-raising and signposting; financial assistance; technology-enhanced communication with families; organised school support and recreational activities for children; and advocacy.

- Many respondents and their organisations **distributed food parcels**, medication supplies, hygiene supplies and 'dignity packs' to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all children and families served, particularly those deemed **most vulnerable**.

- To increase children's **access to food**, respondents reported a range of effective initiatives – primarily relief distribution, economic assistance, urban gardening and livelihood projects, meal programmes in schools and awareness-raising and empowerment.

- **Use of technology** enhanced responses to the pandemic by enabling virtual check-ups with children and families, as well as online training and awareness-raising. 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.

Protecting Children from Violence

- The most commonly reported examples of practices to protect children from violence during the pandemic 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. Those practices were addressing a range of issues – such as physical, sexual and emotional violence, neglect and deprivation.

- Examples were also shared of 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; and multi-drug dispensing.

- 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. 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.

Positive Outcomes for Children

- 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.

Vital Role of Partnerships and Community Mobilisation

- A range of examples of **effective collaborations** was shared – for example, between health and social services, NGOs and local governments and between individuals and local and international organisations. Most commonly, those partnerships served to help deliver food, medical assistance and other essential supplies; identify and support the most vulnerable families; exchange knowledge; and engage in advocacy and awareness-raising for children's rights.

- **Mobilising community leaders and volunteers** and establishing fruitful **partnerships within and across sectors** were highlighted as critical to increasing the reach and effectiveness of the support.

Responsive Financial Assistance

- Strategies for providing financial support to families were also mentioned. Specific examples were **emergency funds, cash transfers, income generation programmes and business support**. A range of positive impacts of financial assistance initiatives were reported – including reductions in poverty, inequalities and gender-based violence, and increased access to essential rights such as education.

Information Dissemination

- Information about COVID-19 that suited children's individual needs was communicated via posters, cartoons, radio and TV, videos, different languages and flyers given to caregivers. Community meetings and child-led press-conferences were also held. Information about COVID-19 was also included in relief distribution packs. Messaging that was factual, consistent, inclusive and easily understandable by children was preferred.

Directed Mental Health Support

- Respondents provided direct mental health support to young people, signposted them to appropriate services and resources, and organised individual and group wellbeing, educational and recreational activities, mostly virtually.

Role of Professional Supervision in Promoting Respondents' Coping and Work Capacity

- Receiving effective professional supervision was **immensely valuable** in helping respondents physically, mentally and emotionally cope with the challenges faced during the pandemic. Supervision that offered **frequent, immediate, personalised and confidential support** was preferred as it fostered **collaboration, problem-solving and reflection** — resulting in more effective responses to the COVID-19 emergency. 'Useful' supervision helped respondents feel cared for, connected, guided and reassured.

Adapting and Innovating Practice. Upholding Children's Rights

'We have managed to show flexibility, creativity and adaptability in reaching children and their families to provide support while protecting our staff'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, Greece

'My organization did virtual work with youth children and families since we couldnt go out... We made sure all youth children families felt and are supported through calls messages and whatsapp group work... We made sure all are aware of how they should keep safe and we advocated for families that were in need of food for food parcels.'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

'During lockdown, we had staff going around to the houses to drop off socially distanced packages with activities for kids to do around the house'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, Canada

'We could not really do more during this time, we had to be creative to be able to do more because of all the movement restrictions.'

Direct Service Provider, Civil Society Organisation, Philippines

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Spotlight: Promoting Children's Visibility and Participation During COVID-19

'Children and parents will be participating and involved in community meetings, Sinovuyo Parenting and Teens sessions, Family meetings, and other media platform e.g. whatsApp groups for inputs.'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, South Africa

'Normally we work with young people in schools or they drop into our centre. During lockdown we went round all families we support to handout food tokens and offer general support. This led to many conversations with parents/ carers. Deepening relationships with the families of the young people we know. Many feeling able to ask for help and support [...]'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, Scotland

'The children, even from poor and distant communities, have been constinuously involved at varying levels - as key informants, participants and resource persons about their situations and issues.'

Service Manager, Civil Society Organisation, Philippines

'The presence of children's collectives with a strong element of participation and the building of community volunteers by the organisation'

Direct Service Provider, NGO, India

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Lessons Learned from this Pandemic and Recommended Actions for Improving Outcomes for Children

Despite the numerous examples of innovative and effective responses in service provision, limited resources, capacity and coordination often decreased their effectiveness, reach and impact. Respondents shared there was an urgent need to ensure greater COVID-19 protection and awareness; provide more basic needs support and allocate more emergency funding; expand the reach of services; and involve all stakeholders, particularly children, in decision-making and service design and delivery. 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.

- Improved coordination and collaboration with the government and the third sector were identified as a priority. Collaborative working was vital. The holistic support for children called for partnerships among various sectors — including non-governmental organisations, caregivers, and communities, as well as engaging with other stakeholders.
- Creativity, flexibility and innovation in service delivery helped improve the support for children and communities despite movement restrictions and lockdowns. Continuous learning from children, partners and supervisors was also emphasised.
- Listening to children, and involving them in planning, decision-making and service delivery were seen as essential for sustained success of initiatives aimed at protection, provision, prevention and participation.

- The importance of supportive policies was also underscored.
- To better address children's needs during COVID-19, respondents urged that more effective government responses be put in place – including more basic needs support; that additional cadres and services be mobilised; that more collaboration between stakeholders take place; and that connectivity and access to technologies be secured for all.
- Respondents' advice to their colleagues about coping with the personal and professional challenges during the pandemic carried messages about self-care and self-compassion, resilience and finding support in others.

Lessons Learned from this Pandemic and Recommended Actions for Improving Outcomes for Children

'Set up community hubs in rural and isolated areas and also utilize any volunteers to go to door to door to determine any chronic basic needs. Much like what occurs after a natural disaster with emergency management systems'

Service Manager, Government, USA

'Strengthen community mechanisms on educational and health support. During times like this, I am humbled and challenged by how unprepared development and policy advocacy groups are in humanitarian work. While we are limited, it would help to have a humanitarian track for our work to help us contribute well during emergency situations.'

Service Manager, Civil Society Organisation, Philippines

'Tangible needs often take precedence over socio-emotional needs. In Rajasthan, where it is difficult to meet the tangible needs of children, it is often difficult to prioritize advocacy for the emotional well-being. Because interventions of emotional well-being alone can't do justice to socio-economic distress.'

Policymaker, Government, India

'Be innovative. Let's work with children with disabilities and guardians to discuss creative and customized approaches.'

Policymaker, NGO, Philippines

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Conclusion

This Learning Report distilled the key findings from the eight-week COVID 4P Log Project, which collected responses from 247 respondents from 22 countries in the last quarter of 2020. The Key Messages reported here are organised around the four pillars of this project: 'protection, provision, participation and prevention for the wellbeing of our children'. Collectively, these findings reveal a nuanced yet rich picture of the numerous challenges providers and policymakers were facing in upholding children's rights and supporting their wellbeing; the swift and agile responses to those challenges underpinned by respondents' commitment, dedication and resilience, and enacted with the help of digital technologies, among other service innovations; and, lastly, respondents' reflections about, and recommendations for, the urgent actions required to support children during and post-COVID-19.

The analysis of the rich findings from the COVID 4P Log projects features some powerful messages about the extent and impact of the challenges faced, and about the effective responses implemented during this critical time. The successes in supporting children's wellbeing during COVID-19, reported by our respondents, offer hope. Commitment, dedication and openness to innovation, strengthened relationships within and across sectors, and responsive leadership, are the foundation for improving children's outcomes amidst and after the pandemic.

We hope these key messages will provoke and inspire reflections about best practices and challenges within your own organisations, sectors and countries, as well as discussions about the implications for policy and practice.

A Note of Caution

While the survey generated useful insights into the respondents' work in relation to children, young people 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 survey engaged practitioners and policymakers only. The findings may not reflect children's or their caregivers' views.
- The findings reported here have been produced by the COVID 4P Log research team and, due to the anonymised 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.

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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