

# CHILDREN IN LOCKDOWN

## THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS ON UK CHILDREN



This briefing outlines the findings of Unicef UK's rapid assessment of the impact of the coronavirus crisis on children and young people in the UK. It reveals the short-term and potential long-term impact on children, and we make urgent recommendations for UK Government action.

The world is facing an unprecedented crisis and global as well as national efforts are rightly focused on dealing with the immediate public health emergency and providing the care and support needed by those most affected by the pandemic. While children have, for the most part, been spared the medical impact of the virus, lockdown restrictions are having a hugely negative effect on their rights, lives, well-being and in some cases, their safety. For the majority of children, the school gates are locked, the playgrounds empty, they are hidden behind closed doors. Although out of sight, they should not be out of mind.

**It is imperative that the impact of this crisis on children is urgently addressed in the Government's immediate and long-term response.**

Following the announcement of strict restrictions and the closure of schools for the majority of children, Unicef UK undertook a rapid assessment *Children in lockdown: What coronavirus means for UK children* to understand the impact of the coronavirus crisis on children and their rights. We identified a **complex and multi-faceted context of issues and risks facing children across the UK in every area of their lives** from education to health and nutrition, to protection and play. For those with the right support and access to resources the effects may be brief, but for many others, the effects of the pandemic will cast a long shadow over their futures. There is also significant risk that the lockdown measures will further entrench existing inequalities and the challenges vulnerable children were already facing.

Thousands of children who rely on education, health and social systems are seeing these support mechanisms weakened through a combination of factors including redeployment of key frontline workers, a reduction in staff capacity and the move to online learning and support. Thousands more will see their circumstances change as a result of the crisis, who will likely find themselves in need of support but are as yet unknown and invisible to authorities.

Every year, Unicef UK reaches over 2 million children across the UK through our work with schools, hospitals and local authorities.

We are mandated by the UN General Assembly to ensure children's rights are protected and upheld in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which the UK Government is a signatory.

### RAPID ASSESSMENT: KEY FINDINGS

- **700 million school days could be lost<sup>i</sup>** between now and the summer holidays, with children experiencing significant disparities in access to space and resources, workload, and support at home. This could lead to long-term challenges in learning, including intensifying existing disparities in education.
- **Children will have reduced access to healthcare and other essential services** as services are stretched and avoided. This means that health problems faced by children could extend well into the future.
- **More children in the UK will face food insecurity** as job losses take their toll on family finances, access to sources of emergency food is under pressure from reductions in donations and volunteers and families turn to readily available, processed foods.
- **Anxiety and stress** from lockdown, alongside limited access to services and usual coping mechanisms will exacerbate problems for children already living with mental health issues. Those subjected to new and persistent abuse at home are also at increased risk of experiencing mental health issues in the long term.
- **Increases in domestic violence have been reported<sup>ii</sup> and thousands of children are at greater risk of abuse in their homes and online** as pressure and tensions increase, online supervision decreases and predators seek to take advantage of the situation.

# PROTECTING CHILDREN & THEIR RIGHTS NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

While the UK Government has taken unprecedented steps in response to the crisis, **the impact on children must be more central**. So far, the voices of children and young people have been absent from the significant decisions affecting them, their lives and their futures. What their world looks like tomorrow is our responsibility today.

Without dedicated resource invested in greater coordination across Government managing the response and looking to the future, a generation of young people could be left behind in the wake of this pandemic.

In setting out these challenges, we draw on UNICEF's global emergency experience to call for greater coordination at the top of Government to protect children. This will ensure the voices of children are being heard, issues affecting them are being identified and addressed efficiently across the range of services and organisations involved including civil society, and children's rights remain a priority for all now and into the future.

## UNICEF UK RECOMMENDS THAT THE UK GOVERNMENT

1. **Make a dedicated direct address to the nation's children and young people** to acknowledge the enormous impact this crisis is having and listen to them about how it is affecting their lives. This dialogue should directly inform government action in support of children.
2. **Appoint a Special Envoy for Children reporting directly to the Prime Minister who leads an emergency Children's Taskforce** to effectively coordinate across all government departments, service providers, local authorities and civil society to ensure all children are reached and supported now and in the future.
3. **Create a Comprehensive Children's Recovery Plan** that sets out the necessary actions and provides ringfenced resource for schools, local authorities, civil society, and children's service providers to help build a better tomorrow for all children.

For further information on this briefing and Unicef UK's work in response to the coronavirus crisis, please contact Senior Government Relations Adviser, Natalie Dilworth: [NatalieD@unicef.org.uk](mailto:NatalieD@unicef.org.uk)

<sup>i</sup> Based on number of days left in spring term and total summer terms for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, multiplied by numbers of students enrolled.

<sup>ii</sup> ChildLine have [reported](#) an unprecedented increase in demand for its services in relation to coronavirus and National Domestic Abuse Hotline has [reported](#) a 25% increase in calls since lockdown began.

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