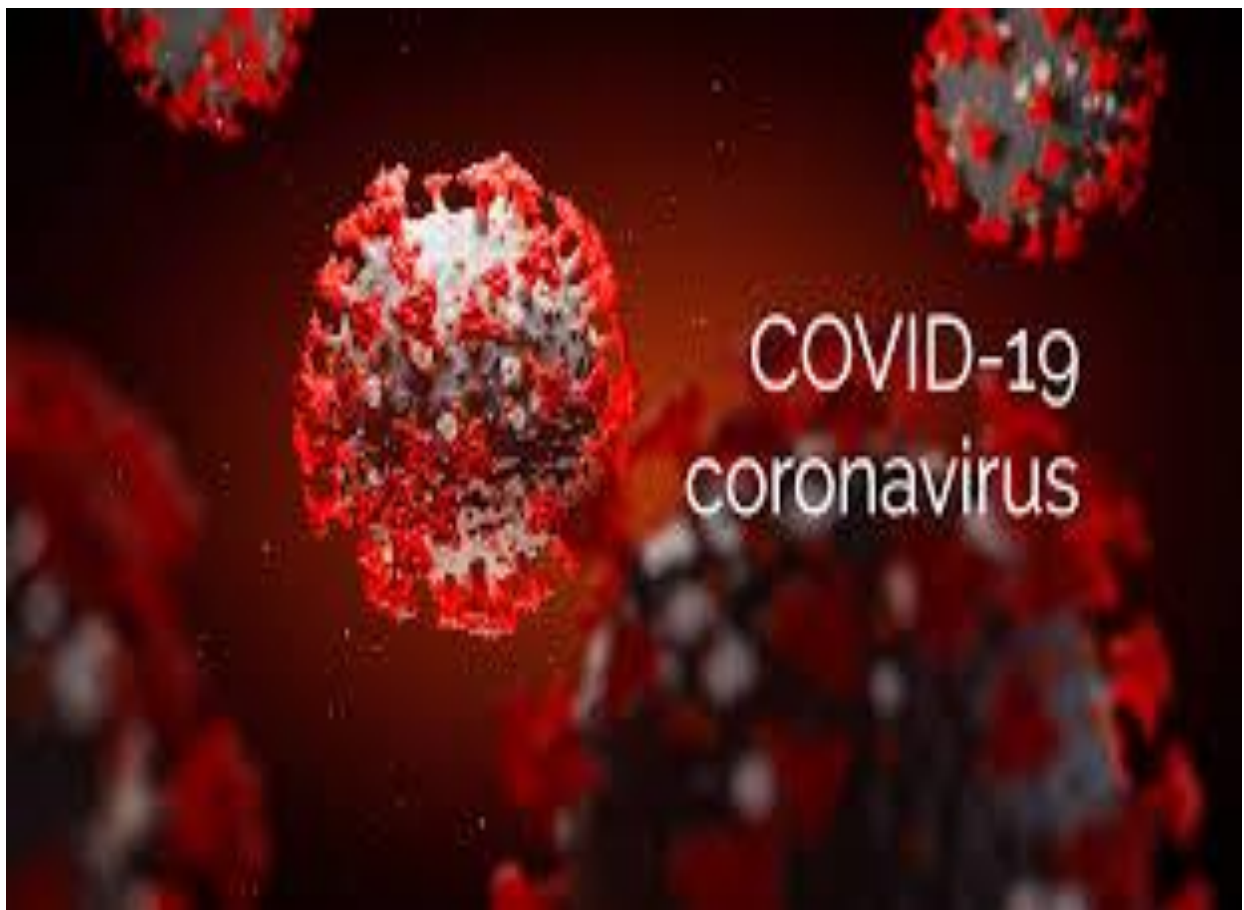


# **COVID 19**

**A review of the impact on the younger population and response actions  
taken by HOCI**

**Research Report by Hope for Children International (HOCI)**

**MAY 2020**



As the global health community and the world come together to face the COVID-19 pandemic, every decision we make is being guided by our long-standing commitment to putting the health of children and youths, and their communities, at the centre of our work. We are committed to our mission – educating, inspiring, and mobilizing at-risk youth to overcome their greatest health challenges– which is even more urgent given the imminent spread of coronavirus in around the world.

HOCI has made several programmatic adjustments to support the response to COVID-19 while continuing to address other youth issues.

- All HOCI programs will include social/physical distancing and incorporate hand washing and use of sanitizers
- HOCI has developed specialized COVID-19 activities to teach children and youths about hand washing, making of hand sanitizers, mindfulness on face touching and close interactions.
- We have also turned to the use of the social media to send out messages on the prevention of COVID 19.

Much has changed in the past weeks and months, and our focus on investing in children and youths in helping them overcome their greatest health challenges have never been more urgent. While the content and delivery of our programs will adapt to address our new reality, our core goals and objectives will not change.

### **YOUNG PEOPLE SERIOUSLY AFFECTED BY THE COVID-19 ARE PART OF THE GLOBAL RESPONSE**

From the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the defining messages has been that older persons are more affected. Yet health and non-health impacts on young people are proving to be significant. A common understanding of these impacts and the role young people are playing in driving solutions is essential to the pandemic response. The repercussions of COVID-19 will extend beyond health and well beyond the pandemic time frame. This global crisis is exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and inequalities. All of these impacts are further amplified in humanitarian contexts where fragility, conflict, and emergencies have undermined institutional capacity and limited access to services. Some of the impacts include:

## **1. SPECIFIC VULNERABILITIES**

The impacts of COVID-19 are, and will continue to be, felt most harshly by young people already living in difficult and/or disadvantaged circumstances. These include but are not limited to:

- Refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons, both in and out of camp settings, and others caught in pre-existing humanitarian emergencies.
- Young people living in poor, high density urban areas and informal settlements without access to running water and other services and with limited ability to physically distance.
- Young people experiencing homelessness, little access to services and limited ability to physically distance.
- Young migrants, who will suffer disproportionately, both from the pandemic and from its aftermath – whether because of restrictions on their movement, close living conditions, fewer employment opportunities, and the inability to return home.
- Young people separated from, unaccompanied by or left behind by migrant working parents, who face higher risks of exploitation, violence and mental health issues and have limited access to health services and protection.
- Young people with disabilities or who are differently abled, including those with physical, visual, hearing, intellectual, and other impairments.
- Adolescent girls and young women who already suffer from gender-based inequalities and deprivations, and are at heightened risk of experiencing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and increased care burdens.
- Young people living with chronic health conditions such as asthma.
- Youth living with HIV may be at heightened risk due to weakened immune systems and disruptions of their treatment regimens, while deprivations caused by the COVID-19 virus may increase the risk of HIV transmission, especially for girls.

## **SAFETY AND PROTECTION ISSUES**

- Protection needs of young people will have to be addressed in the context of this pandemic, in particular when caregivers are infected, are quarantined, or pass away.
- During lockdown, and in a context of overall economic and social distress, children and adolescents are at high risk of domestic violence. Young women and girls are at

higher risk of experiencing GBV, intimate partner violence, or sexual exploitation. Many young women and girls are forced to “lock down” with their abusers while their access to support services is severely disrupted.

- Sustained disruption of education may lead to a rise in rates of child labour and child marriage. Support structures for at-risk young people (such as safe spaces, women’s centres, or life-skills programmes) are likely to be closed because of physical distancing.
- With education, activism, and other engagement opportunities shifting to online platforms, children and young people may also face increased risks of cyber bullying, cybercrime, and various forms of online harassment and abuse.

## **EDUCATIONAL IMPACTS**

- Over 90 per cent of the world’s students, 1.5 billion young people in 188 countries are being kept away from school and universities due to physical distancing measures.
- Young people are additionally affected by closures of non-formal education opportunities. Youth in humanitarian contexts especially rely on informal learning, online courses (where feasible), and social interaction as means of personal development.
- This large-scale interruption of learning, including non-formal and informal learning, may have severe consequences – from compromising nutrition to limiting access to health care, raising dropout rates, and depriving young people of social support and resources. These negative consequences will be exacerbated in cases of students living with disabilities, by lack of access to assistive devices, accessible materials, and platforms as well as lack of trained teaching personnel.
- For adolescents and youth, connecting with one another is essential to their sense of belonging and overall well-being. Long-term confinement and isolation from educational spaces will erode the social support networks young people build with each other.
- While young people are generally very connected digitally, large numbers do not have regular and affordable Internet access and may fall behind as learning and participation shift to online platforms. Online learning limits the pedagogical tools available to educators, placing an extra burden on students and caretakers. This may lead to anxiety, frustration, and elevated dropout rates.

- Distance learning is also a driver of existing inequities. Fewer than 40% of low-income countries have announced distance-learning education programmes, compared with 90% of high-income countries. Girls and young women have comparatively less access to digital technology than boys and young men, so they can expect to miss out on additional learning.

## **ECONOMIC IMPACTS**

- Young people tend to be economically fragile, live closer to the poverty line than other age groups, have few savings, and work in the informal sector.
- Dependence on daily wages is forcing some to remain economically active, both exposing them to COVID-19 and risking spreading the virus to others.
- A global recession is a likely consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, and young people's livelihoods will be disproportionately affected. After the 2008 global economic and financial crisis, rates of global youth unemployment rose faster than those of adults and took significantly longer to recover. The effects of the current economic crisis are likely to be similar.
- Young people, who disproportionately work in the informal sector, are also more likely to be excluded from public policies and stimulus packages addressing the economic impacts of the pandemic. Young migrants and non-residents may also face higher rates of labour exploitation and abuse, as they are often excluded from national social protection measures.
- Before the pandemic began, the World Bank estimated that 1 billion young people would enter the labour market in the next decade, out of which only 400 million would find a job. The coming recession will only increase the uncertainty around the prospects of the remaining 600 million.

## **IMPACT ON CIVIC SPACE AND PARTICIPATION**

- Governments around the world are invoking executive powers and calling for extraordinary measures, such as lockdowns, quarantines, and increased surveillance in response to COVID-19. In the absence of sunset provisions, civic space may contract and freedoms of assembly, privacy, and expression may be negatively affected, silencing young people's calls for change. Moreover, these unprecedented restrictions by governments can leave young peace builders and human rights and environmental defenders less protected against attacks and threats.

- All young people, including adolescents below the age of 18, should enjoy their rights to participation, rights that should be upheld in humanitarian crises, fragile contexts, and the current COVID-19 crisis. As is being increasingly recognized, it is precisely in these settings that investing in and tapping into the power of adolescent participation, and acknowledging their role as rights-holders, can make a difference to improve the quality and impact of humanitarian responses.
- Restrictions on movement will hamper the ability of young leaders and organizations to mobilize and support their communities. Youth civil society organization (CSOs) are often uniquely placed to understand the specific challenges faced by their communities as well as existing coping mechanisms that may help communities mitigate the effects of the pandemic.
- The current crisis is likely to have long-term effects on the critical work that youth organizations undertake. Such organizations tend to rely on volunteer work and already face major challenges in accessing reliable, sustained, and flexible funding. Youth leaders and organizations generally have little access to power and decision makers. The scale and complexity of humanitarian decision-making structures, funding mechanisms, and reporting structures further marginalize and threaten the survival of youth CSOs.

## **YOUNG PEOPLE MOBILISE**

In spite of the multiple impacts of COVID-19 on young people's lives, many adolescents and youth have mobilized immediately to respond to the crisis.

- Young people are at the forefront of risk communication initiatives, running advocacy and hand washing campaigns, and countering disinformation, misinformation, and stigma in their communities. Many are volunteering to support the elderly and other vulnerable populations and contributing as scientists, social entrepreneurs, and innovators.
- Young people play an important role in mobilizing their communities, changing behaviours, and distributing food and non-food items to quarantined people at home who are in need. By partnering with development actors and the government.
- Despite the digital divide, young people today are more connected than any previous generation. With many critical activities and institutions moving online, young people are well positioned to respond and adapt to COVID-19.

- Young people can also be critical in bridging the digital divide by providing information and knowledge to communities that do not have access to digital technologies, and tailoring messaging and channels to reach diverse audiences and reflect multiple voices. Yet, in a context of acute reliance on online technologies and remote platforms, the digital divide becomes even more critical to address.
- Young people continue to play a critical role in disseminating accurate information on COVID-19, tackling myths and stigma, policing fake news, and supporting information-sharing programmes on risk reduction, national preparedness, and response efforts.
- Young people can be at the forefront of finding new and innovative ways to communicate with their governments, mass media, medical services, and their communities through channels such as the radio, WhatsApp, text message, social media, and video-conferencing platforms.
- Young people can also help mitigate the impact and consequences of the crisis in the longer term, including by engaging around issues such as promoting social cohesion and countering hate speech, xenophobia, human rights violations, and violence, and by building strong and inclusive initiatives. Through social media, they are finding ways to remotely check on, and support, others' mental health.