



University of
Strathclyde
Glasgow

Inspiring Children's Futures

Supporting Children's Wellbeing During COVID-19:
Providers' and Policymakers' Successes, Challenges,
Lessons Learned and Recommended Actions

Summary of Findings



The International **COVID 4P** Log Project

LEARNING
SERIES | **1**



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, children¹ 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 in new, innovative, and in some cases, unprecedented ways.

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

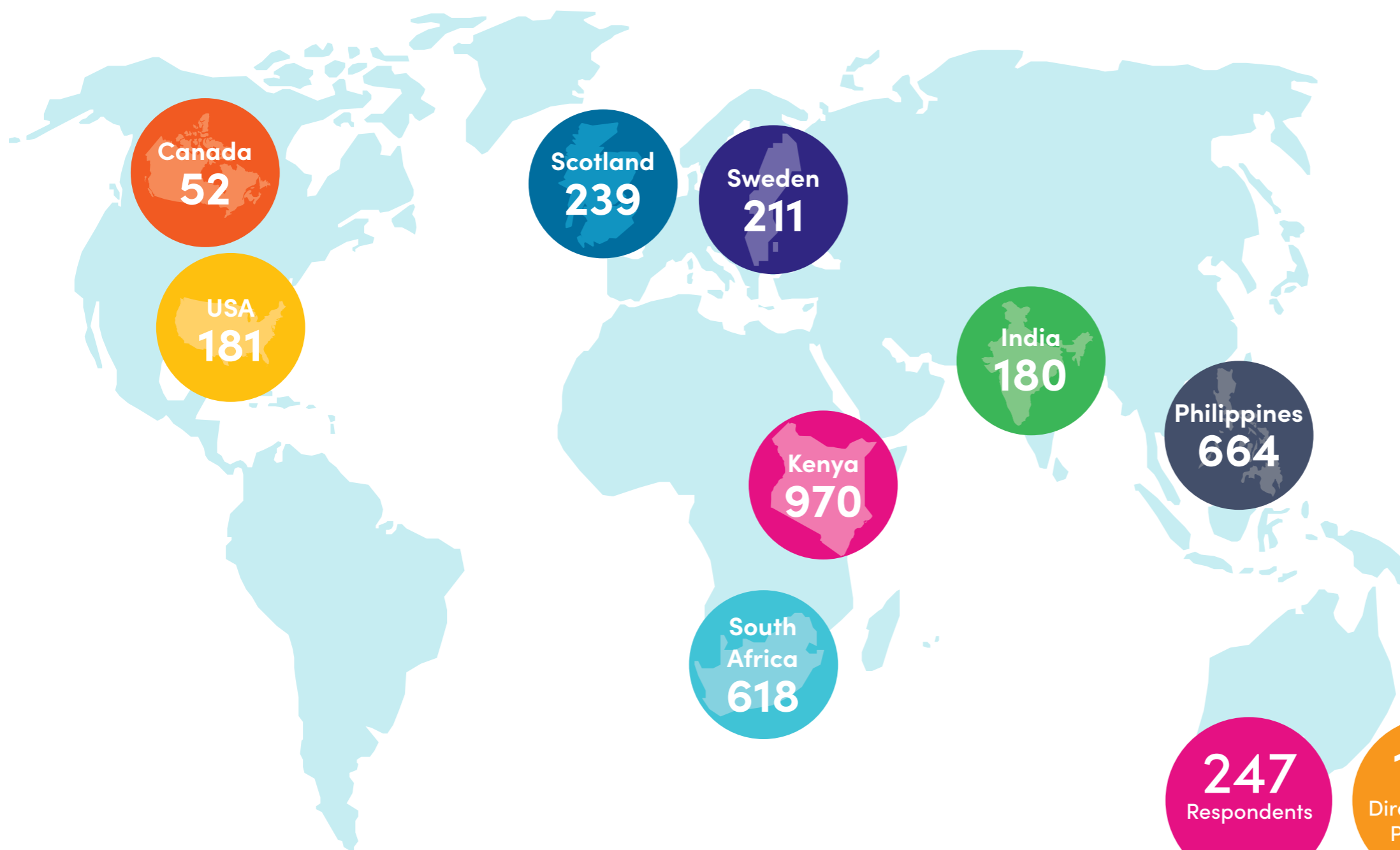
Our 17 international Key Partners range from capacity-building organisations, to international advocacy NGOs and service delivery partnerships, to the UN and other inter-governmental agencies. Their support and close engagement enabled the **Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures** to gather these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



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



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 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.





Report Summary: Supporting Children's Wellbeing During COVID-19

This report provides an overview of the findings generated from an analysis of app responses to a series of Week 1 questions. It is intended to generate new questions and ideas to inform policy, service and practice, with and for children and their families, into the future. The questions in this report concern: respondents' views of their sector, teams' and organisations' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic; good practices and innovations; challenges faced; outcomes and lessons learned. 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/covid>.

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'.

Key Messages

Rights Violations and Injustices Against Children

The challenges faced in this pandemic have led to increases in cases of **child abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation**, thereby threatening and **violating children's essential rights**. 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.

Challenges in Times of 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.

Disparities in the Access to Resources

While useful in engaging some children, alternative strategies such as 'televisits' **could not eliminate long-standing disparities in the distribution of resources** for those in highest need.

Collaboration

Collaborative working was vital. **Holistic support for children** called for **partnerships** among various sectors, such as: non-governmental organisations, caregivers, and communities, as well as engaging with other stakeholders, especially where home visits were not feasible.

Child-Centred Service Delivery

Tailoring services to the child's needs, being a 'constant' in their lives, and 'embracing' the **use of technologies** and other alternative measures were core guiding principles in supporting children during this emergency.

Involving Children

Listening to children, and **involving them in planning, decision-making and service delivery** were seen as **essential for sustained success** at children's **protection, provision, prevention and participation**.

Children's Rights

Service providers and policymakers both believed that children should be enabled to exercise their rights as **a matter of priority**.

Impeded Service Provision

For many service providers, **connecting with children** - and their experiences, families and routines - has been **severely disrupted**. Both pandemic-related challenges (for example, **movement restrictions, loss of income and school closures**), and **pre-existing inequalities** (for example, poverty, rural regions and limited access to internet and mobile devices) have negatively affected the quality, effectiveness and reach of services.

Organisational Support

The **effectiveness** of those approaches was **limited**, however, without sufficient and well-coordinated financial, logistical and moral support from **organisations, governments and donors**.

Innovations

Policymakers and service providers have responded to the pandemic with **a range of innovative practices** to meet children's and families's diverse needs, protect them against COVID-19, and continue to advocate for their rights.

Recovery and Rebuilding

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.

Summary of Main Findings

The report is organised into three main parts - with each part representing an aspect of the policymakers' and service providers' responses to the need to support children's wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those main parts are focused on: successes in supporting children's wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic; challenges to service provision and their impact on children and families; and lessons learned and recommended actions for improving outcomes for children.

Successes in Supporting Children's Wellbeing During the COVID-19 Pandemic:

- Despite facing complex challenges to service delivery during COVID-19, respondents highlighted a range of successes in supporting children's and families' wellbeing. Primary examples included: addressing children's and families' urgent needs, such as food, safety and protection, school support and mental wellbeing; protecting children and communities against COVID-19; adapting service delivery; and engaging in advocacy.
- Distribution of personal protective equipment (henceforth 'PPE') such as face masks, and raising awareness about hygiene and social distancing practices were vital in sectoral responses to the pandemic.
- Keeping children and their families engaged was key to ensuring their wellbeing, protection from rights violations, and timely communication about infection risks.
- Respondents adapted their practice in several key ways - including using virtual platforms to connect with children and families, doing 'televisits', and creating online resources.
- Creativity, flexibility and innovation in service delivery helped improve the support for children and communities despite movement restrictions and lockdowns.
- 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.
- Families' disrupted income generation since the start of the pandemic was highlighted as a major challenge. Strategies for providing financial support to families were less frequently mentioned. Specific examples were emergency funds, cash transfers, income generation programmes and business support.
- Advocacy work, for example, policy and legislative advocacy, was highlighted as instrumental to ensuring children's and families' various needs were met during the pandemic.
- 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.

Facilitators of Effective Practices and Positive Outcomes for Children, Families and Services:

- Critical enablers of effective sectoral responses to the pandemic-induced challenges to service provision included: collaboration and teamwork; communication; organisational and staff commitment; funding; and adequate training and planning.
- A needs-based approach was vital for ensuring service provision was tailored to children's and families' needs and circumstances. Respondents emphasised the importance of prioritising the needs of those affected by poverty, food insecurity, unemployment and digital exclusion.
- Respondents underscored the vital roles of donor support, government support, organisational support and leadership, and staff responsiveness and dedication in enabling effective responses to children's needs.
- Mobilising community leaders and volunteers, and establishing fruitful partnerships within and across sectors, were also highlighted as helpful.

Challenges to Service Provision and their Impact on Children and Families:

- Financial hardship, movement restrictions, school disruptions and insufficient resources to support children's needs were commonly reported challenges.
- Several respondents raised concerns about funding allocation and priority-setting during the pandemic.
- Children's restricted access to key services was another significant concern that had been exacerbated during the pandemic.
- The lack of face-to-face contact with children and families often impeded the frequency and quality of support, as well as the identification of cases of abuse.

Impact on Children:

- Those challenges often resulted in reaching fewer children; children's increased vulnerability to abuse; restricted access to basic needs; increases in teenage pregnancies, and other negative outcomes.
- Often, those challenges represented breaches of children's human rights. Several instances of violence, abuse and exploitation were reported. Children's right to health, right to food and shelter, right to be protected, right to education, right to play and recreation, and right to be heard were commonly threatened or violated.


Lessons Learned and Recommended Actions to Improve Children's Wellbeing and Service Delivery:

Respondents reflected on what they or their organisations would have done differently:

- More effective COVID-19 protection and awareness;
- More basic needs support;
- Greater reach of services;
- Using technology of services sooner;
- Better emergency responses;
- Involving stakeholders, including children; and others.

Respondents put forward several main actions that would have resulted in better outcomes for children:

- Prioritising children's rights, needs and protection;
- Emergency funds for children and better funding allocation;
- Improved coordination and collaboration with the government and the third sector;
- Better COVID-19 protection, awareness and safety management;
- Using technology in services;
- Supporting parents; and others.



“We have continued to support families throughout by communicating verbally over the telephone and offering moral support and guidance and by simply being there to talk to.”

Direct Service Provider, NGO, Scotland

“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

Breaches of Children's Human Rights During COVID-19 Reported by our Respondents

Right to play

Right to safety

Right to health

Right to food and shelter

Right to education

Right to be heard



“Had we improved our skills in humanitarian work, we would have been more effective in working with our partners at the national and local levels for the provision of immediate services and support to children and their families.”

**Service Manager,
Civil Society Organisation,
Philippines**

“Need to have a county or country tailored child policy that guides all sectors towards support of children’s protection, provision, participation and prevention to help the sectors better outcom[e].”

Service Manager, NGO, Kenya



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. 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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