

P R E S S E M I T T E I L U N G

Official end to the COVID-19 public health emergency does not cure the crisis for children

London/Geneva, 5 May 2023 – Children’s health, education and protection must be given greater priority by governments globally with the official end to the COVID-19 global emergency not altering the fact that an estimated 100 million additional children were driven into poverty, and 1.5 billion had their education disrupted, Save the Children said.

Dr Zaeem Haq, Global Medical Director at Save the Children, said the World Health Organisation’s announcement that it will no longer consider COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern was a “crucial milestone”, but it did not eradicate the greater challenges now facing millions of children worldwide.

“Over the past three years, COVID-19 turned children’s lives upside down – denying them access to education, health and protection – widening global inequality and driving an estimated 100 million additional children into poverty, but while COVID-19 is no longer officially considered a ‘public health emergency of international concern’, the virus is here to stay. Many vulnerable communities around the world remain unvaccinated, raising the risk of death and ill health, and hundreds of millions of children are still facing the effects of the pandemic every day and will likely continue to do so for years to come.

“COVID-19 and the resulting lockdowns, global economic shutdown and disruption to services brought on an unprecedented crisis for children, putting their physical and mental health, education, protection and economic wellbeing in jeopardy. This, combined with the effects of conflicts and the climate crisis, exacerbated existing inequalities and hit the most marginalised children the hardest. An estimated 100 million additional children were driven into poverty (i) and the risk of hunger increased worldwide. Over 1.5 billion children had their education disrupted, and children suffered an increase in violence when schools were closed (ii). An estimated 10.5 million children lost a parent or caregiver to COVID-19 (iii), and the pandemic unleashed a global mental health crisis, with 83% of children reporting an increase in negative feelings as a result (iv).

“Without urgent global action, years of progress for children will be permanently reversed, putting the United Nations’ 2030 Sustainable Development Goals beyond reach. It is vital that all governments prioritise and invest in children’s physical and mental health, nutrition, wellbeing, protection and learning and commit to invest in early outbreak detection systems and robust pandemic preparedness, strengthen health systems and ensure universal access to healthcare.

“The announcement by the WHO serve as a stark reminder that we live in a highly unequal world, one that is failing to protect children and their rights. Global leaders must work together to prioritise and finance the work that must be done.”

Notes to Editor:

- (i.) Two years into the pandemic, an estimated 100 million additional children had been driven into poverty – a 10% increase compared to pre-COVID-19, [according to data from 2021 analysed by UNICEF](#) and Save the Children. This spike means that as of 2021, a projected 1.1 billion children were living in multi-dimensional poverty, which includes severe deprivation of their education, health, housing, nutrition, or water and sanitation.

- (ii.) In a 2020 [Save the Children survey](#) of 25,000 people across 37 countries, children reported higher rates of violence when schools were closed compared to when attending class in person.
- (iii.) About [10.5 million children worldwide](#) experienced COVID-19–associated loss of parents and caregivers through May 1, 2022, according to estimates based on World Health Organization (WHO) data.
- (iv.) A [survey of over 13,000 children](#) in 46 countries carried out by Save the Children in September 2020 found that 83% of children reported an increase in negative feelings due to the pandemic. Reports of negative feelings were far higher for the vast majority of children (96%) when schools had been closed for 17 to 19 weeks.

Save the Children's response to COVID-19

At the height of the pandemic in 2020, Save the Children supported 11.8 million children through our response. Around the world, our teams distributed hygiene materials to help children and their families protect themselves from COVID-19, and we helped 1 million families access safe water.

Our [Protect a Generation Report](#) raised the voices of children and their families – and reveals the pandemic widened existing inequalities, with girls and poorer children being hardest hit. Globally, we provided 626,000 children and adults with mental health and psychological support during the pandemic.

We launched our Save our Education campaign which called on governments to keep learning alive for children during lockdowns with accessible distance learning, ensure every child returns to school when it's safe, and to build better education systems for the future. We helped 3.5 million children access distance learning and supported 54 countries in adapting their curriculums to COVID-19.

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Über Save the Children

Im Nachkriegsjahr 1919 gründete die britische Sozialreformerin und Kinderrechtlerin Eglantyne Jebb Save the Children, um Kinder in Deutschland und Österreich vor dem Hungertod zu retten. Heute ist die inzwischen größte unabhängige Kinderrechtsorganisation der Welt in rund 120 Ländern tätig. Save the Children setzt sich ein für Kinder in Kriegen, Konflikten und Katastrophen. Für eine Welt, die die Rechte der Kinder achtet, in der alle Kinder gesund und sicher leben sowie frei und selbstbestimmt aufwachsen und lernen können – seit über 100 Jahren.