



# The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Early Childhood

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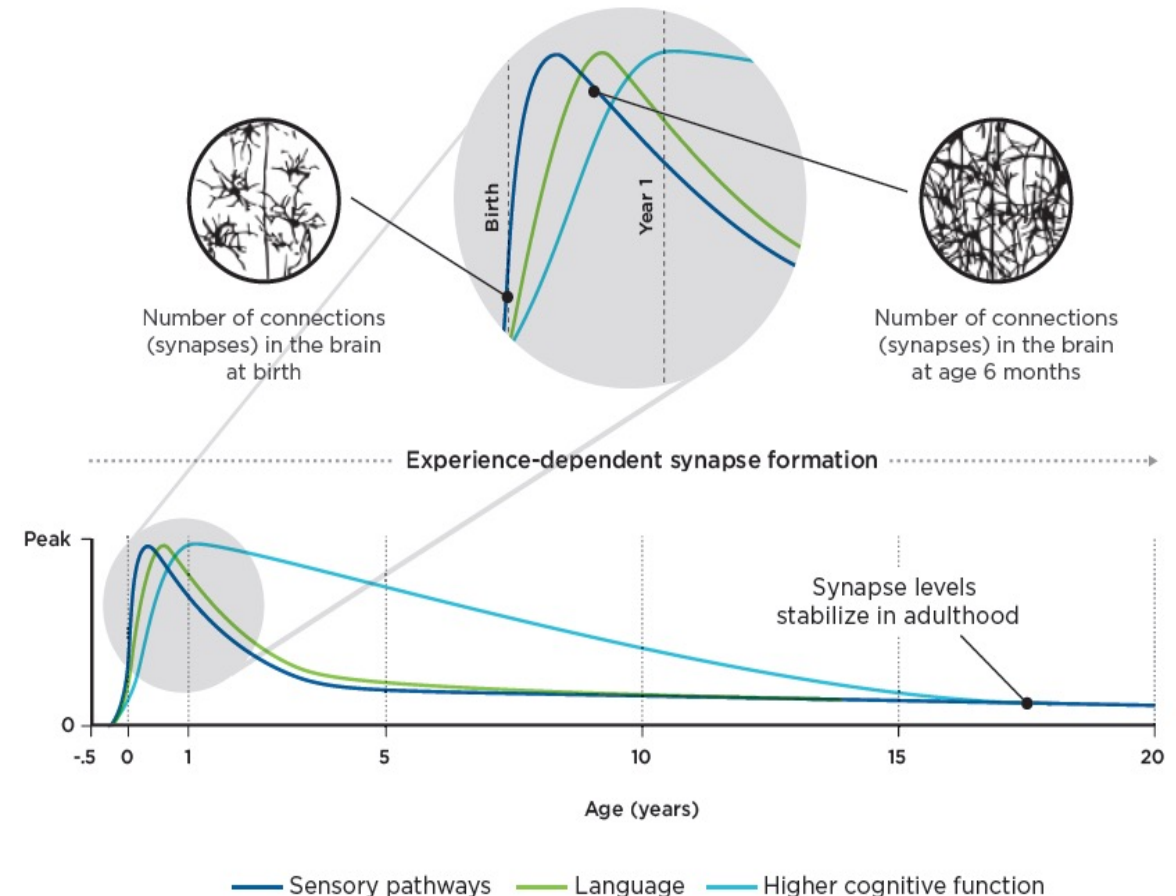
World Bank Group

# Four key messages about early childhood during COVID-19

1. The early years are a critical period to build human capital and young children are disproportionately at risk and must be prioritized in COVID-19 responses.
2. We will reach young children by supporting parents and caregivers.
3. We need to focus on the most vulnerable children and families.
4. We can find solutions, working across sectors and innovating

# Message #1: The early years are a critical period to build human capital and young children are disproportionately at risk

- The brain matures faster and is the most malleable it will ever be in a child's first five years.
- Severe, lifelong impacts can result from deprivations in care, nutrition, health and stimulation and learning during the early years.
- Strategic investments in ECD are a proven way to minimize preventable child deaths and drive economic recovery and productivity in the longer term.





# Young children are disproportionately at risk

- Young children are disproportionately represented in vulnerable families
- Young children are often outside of formal systems and end up overlooked.
- Multiple challenges: Food insecurity, increased stress and domestic violence, limited access to early learning
- Recovery will be protracted and families will face extended economic challenges.



# Country level data on the impact of COVID on young children and their families

## Recent evidence from a survey in one country in Latin America suggests young children are suffering:

- Almost **30%** of households reported nutrition worsened and children were affected by food insecurity
- **14%** of children were left unsupervised and almost **60%** had more screen time than before the Pandemic
- Only **37%** of children have continued attending their regular medical appointments
- **One-third of** children show internalizing behaviors (crying a lot, speaking less than they used to, etc) and **half of all children** show externalizing behaviors (irritability, defiance of rules, and destroying or damaging things)
- **11%** of caregivers show more difficulties being affectionate to children; **46%** have felt more irritable

# Increased neglect, violence in the home and unplanned pregnancies

- **Increase in child abuse and neglect:**

- The number of babies in England that have suffered serious injury through abuse or neglect during the Covid pandemic is **up by a fifth on the same period last year**

- **Increased rates of gender-based violence and unplanned pregnancies:**

- An analysis from UNFPA and Johns Hopkins suggest that for every 3 months of lockdown, an **additional 15 million additional cases of gender-based violence** are expected
- An **additional 7 million unintended pregnancies** as a result of lack of access to contraception just in the first six months of the pandemic.

## Message #2: Support and encourage parents

- Parents are first-line responders for children's survival, care and learning.
- Efforts to reach young children need to begin by reaching parents with income and mental health support, encouragement and practical ideas.
- Even in low-resource settings, there are actions parents can take to protect and promote their children's development.





# A silver lining?

- Parents are home
- Parents may engage more with their children's learning
- Improved socio-emotional and cognitive outcomes?





# Message #3: We need to focus on the most vulnerable

**Who will be excluded and who is most vulnerable?**

- Socio-economic status
- Access to technology
- Language
- Disability
- Frontline workers

# Ideas to reach families most in need

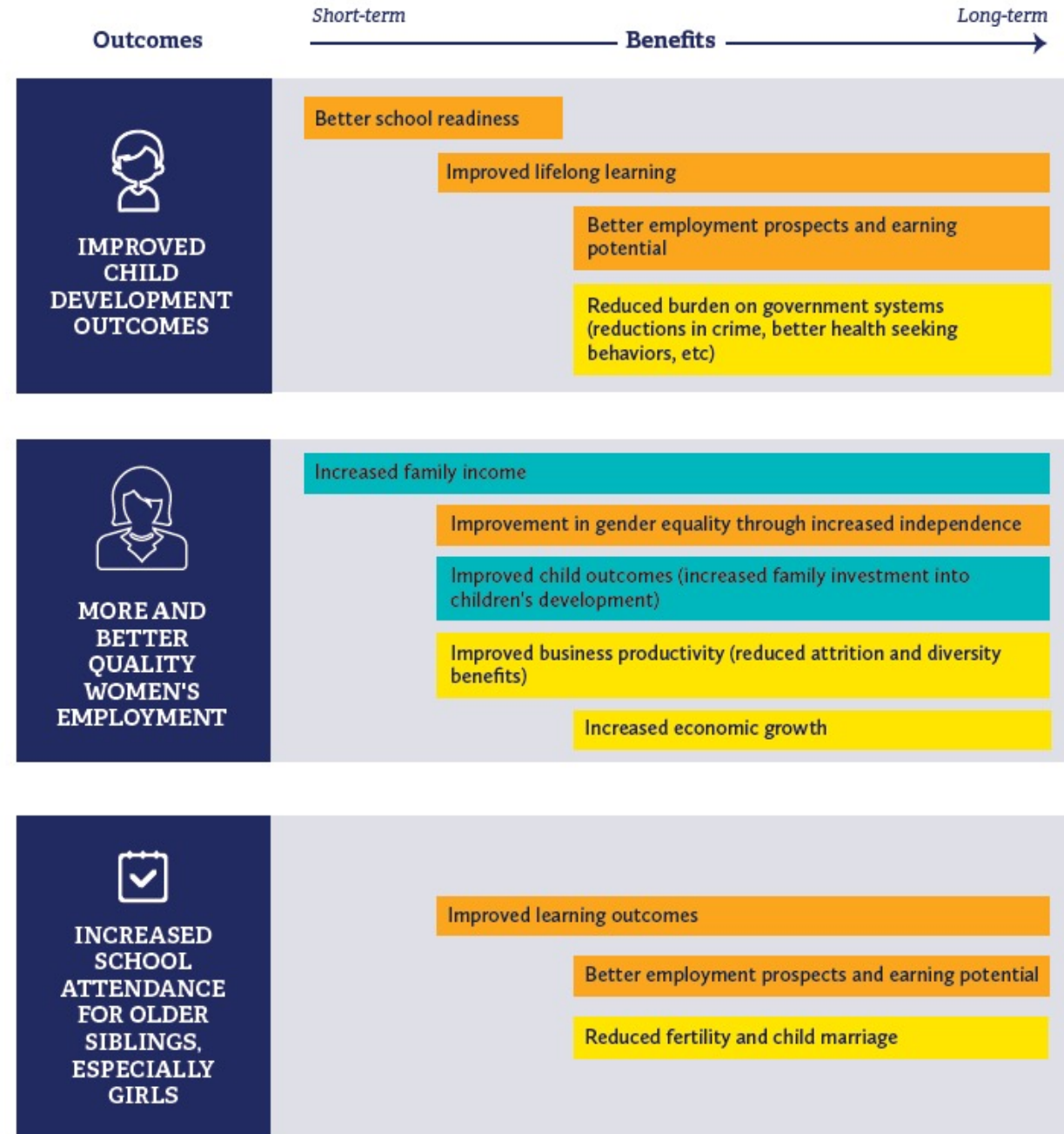
- Target resources
- Multi-modal learning
- Distribute hardware (devices) but also go low-tech with materials
- No-cost access (zero-rated, toll-free services, Telcom partnerships)
- Meals and support to replace school meals
- Use schools as distribution points
- Leverage services that are still operating and reach the most vulnerable
  - Health
  - Cash transfers
  - Community outreach
  - Adapted home visiting programs

# Strategies and Innovations



# Childcare and COVID-19

- Childcare sector struggled even before COVID-19:
  - Uneven access, poor quality, limited public finance, poor terms of employment for the workforce and overall vulnerability of the sector.
- Some countries forecasting that HALF of all private childcare facilities may never re-open
- Smart investments to support families and the childcare industry are essential to to enable parents to return to work.
- Investing in childcare is a source of potential job creation and childcare providers should be considered for small business relief





# Promote reading at home





- Reading in the home is highly correlated with better learning outcomes for students
- It is not just a crisis response. It is a smart investment at any time and will protect against future shocks
- A study of 35 countries found that having at least one children's book at home almost doubled the likelihood of a child being on track for literacy and numeracy (controlling for maternal education, wealth, area of residence, etc)



# Get reading and learning materials into homes

- Mobile libraries (Mongolia)
- Books distributed through doctor's offices (UK- Booksmart)
- Use the postal system (USA- Dolly Parton's Imagination Library)
- Assemble and distribute learning packages (Argentina, Germany)
- Distribute materials through social safety nets or other partnerships (N. Macedonia - Read@Home)
- Print in newspapers
- What services are still reaching families?

# Read@Home Country Examples

	Approach	TA, piloting and country implementation update
 Senegal	15M books to 2M children 0-6 years (50% of all children age 0-6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Book distribution through preschools, community ECD centers, community nutrition platforms, Koranic schools and a cash transfer program</li><li>• Track and Trace system being developed</li></ul>
 RMI	1,000 families in main and outer islands, targeting single or first-time mothers of children aged 0-5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Books to be distributed by a local NGO through home visiting programs and accompanied by messages on local radio.</li><li>• Procurement TA lowers costs of books from \$9-\$19 to less than \$2.</li></ul>
 Ethiopia	Reaching families in conflict-affected areas with 45,000 titles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Book selection started with titles pre-approved by the Ministry of Education.</li><li>• Early-grade reader titles to be distributed in 3 local languages (Amharic, Oromo and Tigrinya)</li><li>• Book distribution planning underway.</li></ul>
 North Macedonia	Reaching all children ages 3-12 in the country's poorest 10% of households (40,000 children)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Distribution of storybooks, reading comprehension activities and guidance to parents in the language they speak at home.</li><li>• Collaboration between Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry Labor and Social Protection, UNICEF, World Bank and several local and international NGOs</li></ul>

# Educational television programs and radio

Longitudinal studies confirm high-quality edutainment on TV can improve children's cognitive and socio-emotional skills.

## **Tips to roll-out**

- Invest in quality productions to ensure material is engaging
- Programs should not need to be experienced in sequence
- Recognize that multiple ages may be listening
- Make it engaging and informative for parents
- High investment costs, but low per-student cost over time
- Dubbing/translating existing culturally appropriate materials often a good solution (think: Sesame Street)



# Distance education platforms

- This crisis presents an opportunity to scale access to ECE at low-cost if integrated into efforts to scale-up remote learning platforms in basic education.
- Preschool programming can be included in remote learning platforms that are being developed for basic education.
- Support and learning materials for parents and children can be delivered via video, radio, social media, apps, USB sticks and SD platforms in areas with low connectivity.
- Examples from Spain, Costa Rica, USA, Zanzibar

# Social media and phones

- Social media (Facebook, Whatsapp, etc) can be used to amplify messaging and create support networks.
- Key messages for parents on parenting, coping, health, nutrition, sanitation and early learning as part of national and local communications campaigns.
- Support networks – social media platforms, particularly Whatsapp, can be used to create parent support communities around coping and parenting.
- Examples from Colombia, Chile



# Engaging teachers

- Some countries used time out of classroom to:
  - Roll-out virtual training for teachers or
  - Engage teachers to call families and check-in and share ideas
  - Call-in centers for parents

# Re-opening

- Importance of childcare to allow parents to work
- Flexibility required for working parents
- Mixed modal likely to continue to be needed
- Rapid response surveys to get feedback from parents
- Ensure parents are partners and communicate clearly
- Remember that many families will be facing extended hardships
- More than ever, children will need secure, enjoyable, and stimulating environment

## Global Guidance on Reopening Early Childhood Education Settings



### Global Guidance on Reopening Early Childhood Education Settings

September, 2020

As countries make decisions to reopen schools, there are unique considerations related to opening early childhood education (ECE) settings with holistic approaches to nurturing care and learning for young children. Reopening ECE settings can provide children with much-needed emotional support, learning opportunities and offers reliable childcare options for parents returning to work. Though there will be challenges, young children are highly resilient and adaptive. With clear and consistent instructions and a nurturing environment, they will be able to adjust and thrive in their new learning environment.

In the [Framework for Reopening Schools](#), UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, the World Food Programme and UNHCR highlight six key dimensions to consider when planning for reopening: policy, financing, safe operations, learning, reaching the most marginalized and well-being/protection.<sup>2</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) offers guidance for reopening schools based on careful risk assessment of community engagement and the government's ability to sustain social and economic support to the most vulnerable populations, as well as epidemiological factors and health-system and public health capacities.<sup>3</sup> This Global Guidance on Reopening ECE Settings is aligned with the [Framework for Reopening Schools](#) and the WHO guidance, but provides additional content specifically for ECE settings.<sup>4</sup>

This guidance note outlines key principles and practical measures for decision-makers to consider before, during and after the transition from closure to reopening. It focuses on safe operations in ECE settings, staff training and support, child well-being and development, and parental communication and support. [Additional resources developed by UNICEF](#) to understand staff capacity priorities, children and family needs and to clearly communicate with teachers, parents and children are available.

#### Definition of ECE Settings

This document focuses on early childhood education (ECE) settings, including preschools, kindergartens and other early childhood development centres, which are designed to include educational content for children aged 3 years up to the start of primary education, often around age 6.

With some adaptations, the principles and suggested measures described can also be applied to reopening childcare centres and crèches serving children aged 0–3 years.

[Download here](#)



# What might the preschool classrooms look like?

- Training for teachers
- Establish healthy hygiene behavior and practices
- Ideas for developmentally appropriate and feasible social distancing:
  - Use shifts to reduce class size and create space in classrooms
  - New games and classroom routines
  - Minimize mixing of classes and materials
  - Imaginative play that allows for space between children
  - Individual supplies for children to use to minimize sharing
- Kids are resilient

# Colombia: Mis Manos te Enseñan

## 3 Components:

1. Phone-based continuous support for families
  - 6 check-ins per month on health, nutrition and child development
  - Referrals as needed
2. Distribution of learning materials
  - Materials and guidance for parents, includes context specific recommendations (eg for children with disabilities)
3. Distribution of food baskets

*Emergency Health Plan System and Bienstar app developed to monitor system performance and wellbeing of individual families*

More than 1.5 million families reached (88% of those targeted, who had attended ECE centers in person)



# Peru: Adapting Cuna Más to Remote Context

## Background

- Cuna Más, the Peruvian national ECD program, aims to improve children's cognitive, social, physical and emotional development
- Targets children from 6 to 36 months in poor areas of the country through two modalities: daycare centers in marginalized urban areas and home visits in rural communities
- Community volunteers are trained and monitored by program field staff
- Reaches 55,000 children in daycare centers, and 105,000 families through home visits, including 10,000 pregnant women



## Adaptation

### 1. Remote Counseling Services for Parents and Caregivers

- Guidelines developed and staff oriented on how to engage with parents virtually
- Community volunteers reach parents through 30-minute scripted phone calls every week and monthly 2 hour small group exchanges

### 2. Monitoring App for Staff

- Field staff were able to monitor service provision and follow up with volunteers to troubleshoot challenges

### 3. Design of a virtual ECD education program

- 30 sessions broadcasted nationally through radio and social media with government support to reach families enrolled in the program and hundreds of thousands of new families

Thank you