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**SOWD REPORT**  
STATE OF WORLD HEALTH SECURITY & DIPLOMACY

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**UNICEF's  
COVID-19 Response:  
Moving Forward**

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**Contributors: Jannath Kaur Chhokar and Prof. Andrew DeFor**

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## Executive Summary

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has revealed our lack of investment and maintenance in a comprehensive and sufficient public healthcare system. As a result, countless lives have been lost, and many more remain in danger, even though the WHO declared COVID-19 is not a global emergency as of May 2023.<sup>1</sup> The pandemic has resulted in widespread closures, job losses, and economic downturns. From 2020 to 2023, UNICEF allocated \$882.2 million and initiated various projects to assist countries in their COVID-19 response efforts.<sup>2</sup> This document presents an independent evaluation conducted by the Center for Global Health Security and Diplomacy experts, focusing on UNICEF's response to COVID-19. It examines UNICEF's strategic health policies, their strategies for addressing COVID-19 and identifies any gaps or deficiencies in their implementation. Additionally, it offers recommendations on how UNICEF can restructure its implementation system to support countries in preventing, detecting, and effectively responding to future pandemics.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, "WHO Chief Declares End to COVID-19 as a Global Health Emergency," United Nations, May 5, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/05/1136367>.

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, "Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Response: Donors and Partners," UNICEF, 2022, <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/donors-and-partners>.

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## Background of UNICEF

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is a leading global organization dedicated to promoting the rights and well-being of children. Established in 1946, UNICEF works in over 190 countries and territories, partnering with governments, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure that every child has the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.<sup>3</sup> UNICEF’s establishment responded to the urgent needs of children affected by World War II.<sup>4</sup> Initially tasked with providing emergency relief to children in war-torn regions, UNICEF’s mandate quickly expanded to encompass a broader range of issues affecting children’s lives. In 1953, the organization became a permanent part of the United Nations system, with a mission to advocate for children’s rights and support their development across various sectors.<sup>5</sup>

The foundation of UNICEF’s work is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a landmark international treaty adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989.<sup>6</sup> The CRC outlines the fundamental rights of children, including the right to survival, health, education, protection and participation.<sup>7</sup> UNICEF plays a crucial role in promoting, protecting, and fulfilling these rights, working following the principles of the CRC. The organization’s focus areas include health, education, child protection, social inclusion and emergency response.<sup>8</sup> The organization emphasizes social inclusion, striving to reach the most marginalized and vulnerable children and addressing poverty, gender inequality, disabilities and humanitarian crises.

UNICEF’s work is made possible through partnerships with governments, non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector. It relies on voluntary contributions from governments, individuals, and corporations to fund its programs and initiatives. Over the years, UNICEF has made significant progress in advancing children’s rights and well-being. However, challenges persist, including poverty, inequality, conflicts and emerging global issues such as pandemics. UNICEF continues to evolve and adapt its strategies to address these challenges, working towards a world where every child has a fair chance in life and a bright future.

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<sup>3</sup> UNICEF, “*About UNICEF*,” UNICEF, 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/about-unicef>.

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF, “*UNICEF History*,” UNICEF, 2022, <https://www.unicef.org/history>.

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF, “*Frequently Asked Questions*,” UNICEF, June 6, 2023,

<https://www.unicef.org/about-unicef/frequently-asked-questions#:~:text=UNICEF%20became%20a%20permanent%20part.>

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF, “*Convention on the Rights of the Child*,” UNICEF, n.d., <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

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## UNICEF's Strategy for Health

UNICEF's Strategy for Health 2016-2030 was a comprehensive and ambitious plan to improve the health and well-being of children and mothers worldwide. This strategy was designed to align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and recognize the importance of addressing the immediate and underlying causes of poor health outcomes for children.<sup>9</sup> It focused on three key pillars addressing inequities in access to quality health services, strengthening health systems to deliver effective and sustainable interventions, and promoting child and adolescent health and well-being.<sup>10</sup>

Under the 2016-2030 strategy, UNICEF partnered with governments, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to scale up evidence-based interventions. The strategy outlined several priority areas for action. One of the main goals was to ensure every child survives and thrives by addressing preventable causes of child mortality and morbidity.<sup>11</sup> This involved providing access to essential health services, such as immunizations, nutrition interventions, and maternal and newborn care.<sup>12</sup> Another key focus area was promoting early childhood development and education.<sup>13</sup> UNICEF recognized the critical importance of the early years in a child's life and emphasized the need for nurturing care, quality education, and early intervention services to support children's cognitive, social, and emotional development.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the strategy aimed to prevent and respond to major infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis. UNICEF sought to strengthen health systems, improve access to diagnostics and treatment, and effectively promote behaviour change and community engagement to combat these diseases.<sup>15</sup> The strategy emphasized a rights-based approach, ensuring every child can access quality health services regardless of background or geographic location.

In response to the evolving global health landscape and the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF revised its Strategy for Health from 2022 to 2025. The revised strategy builds on the achievements and lessons learned from the previous one while adapting to emerging priorities and opportunities. It recognizes the urgent need to build back better and strengthen health systems to improve resilience and responsiveness.<sup>16</sup> The revised

<sup>9</sup> UNICEF, "Strategy for Health 2016 -2030," August 2016,

<https://www.unicef.org/media/119736/file/UNICEF-Strategy-for-Health-2016-2030.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> UNICEF, "UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022-2025," January 2022,

<https://www.unicef.org/media/115646/file/Strategic%20Plan%202022-2025%20publication%20English.pdf>.

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strategy places a strong emphasis on equity, with a focus on reaching the most marginalized and vulnerable children and communities. It seeks to address the widening disparities caused by the pandemic and ensure that no child is left behind.<sup>17</sup> The strategy also acknowledges the importance of integrating health interventions with other sectors, such as education, social protection, and child protection, to maximize impact and deliver holistic support to children.<sup>18</sup>

To achieve its goals, UNICEF's revised strategy for health prioritizes four strategic areas: improving maternal, newborn, and child health and nutrition; preventing and treating infectious diseases, including COVID-19; addressing the mental and psychosocial well-being of children and adolescents; and promoting adolescent health and well-being.<sup>19</sup> It also underscores the importance of data-driven decision-making, innovation, and partnerships to accelerate progress toward universal health coverage and the SDGs.<sup>20</sup> Given this, UNICEF recognized the need to strengthen health systems' resilience and ensure adequate emergency response mechanisms to safeguard children's health during crises such as pandemics, natural disasters, and conflicts. The revised strategy also highlighted the importance of digital health and innovation. UNICEF aimed to harness the power of technology and digital solutions to improve access to health services, data collection and analysis, and health information dissemination in hard-to-reach areas.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the revised strategy underscored the importance of addressing climate change and environmental health. UNICEF recognized the profound impact of environmental degradation on children's health and called for sustainable and resilient health systems, pollution reduction and climate change adaptation strategies.<sup>22</sup>

In summary, both UNICEF's Strategy for Health 2016-2030 and its revised Strategy for Health 2022-2025 reflect the organization's commitment to advancing the health and well-being of children worldwide. These strategies provide a roadmap for addressing children's health challenges, focusing on equity, integration, and evidence-based interventions to drive sustainable change.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

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# COVID-19 Pandemic

## About SARS-CoV-2

The COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), has profoundly impacted individuals worldwide. SARS-CoV-2 is a novel coronavirus first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China.<sup>23</sup> The virus quickly spread across borders, leading the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare it a public health emergency of international concern and later termed it a pandemic.<sup>24</sup>

SARS-CoV-2 is primarily transmitted through respiratory droplets when an infected individual coughs, sneezes, talks or breathes. It can also spread by touching contaminated surfaces and the face.<sup>25</sup> The virus has a high transmission rate, making it highly contagious and capable of causing widespread outbreaks. COVID-19 symptoms can range from mild to severe, with common signs including fever, cough, fatigue, and difficulty breathing. In extreme cases, the infection can lead to pneumonia, acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), multiple organ failure, and death.<sup>26</sup> Certain groups, such as older adults and individuals with underlying health conditions, are at higher risk of developing severe illness. Since then, the virus has rapidly spread across the globe, resulting in a significant public health crisis with over 768 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 worldwide, with more than 6 million deaths attributed to the virus.<sup>27</sup> The alarming speed of transmission, coupled with the severity of the disease, has highlighted significant weaknesses in global health systems and raised critical concerns regarding worldwide security and diplomatic coordination.

Countries have implemented various measures to control the spread of COVID-19, including social distancing, wearing face masks, hand hygiene, travel restrictions, and lockdowns. Testing, contact tracing, and quarantine measures have also been crucial in identifying and isolating infected individuals to prevent further transmission. The COVID-19 pandemic has posed significant challenges to healthcare systems worldwide, leading to hospitalizations and straining medical resources. The development and deployment of vaccines have been pivotal in controlling the spread of the virus and reducing the severity of illness. Vaccination campaigns, along with adherence to preventive measures, are crucial for achieving population-level immunity and bringing the pandemic under control.

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<sup>23</sup> World Health Organization, “*Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)*,” World Health Organization, May 13, 2021, <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/coronavirus-disease-covid-19>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> World Health Organization, “*WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard*,” World Health Organization, 2023, <https://covid19.who.int/?mapFilter=deaths>.

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International collaboration and coordination have been essential in response to the pandemic. Global organizations, including the WHO, have guided and supported countries in managing the pandemic. Research efforts have accelerated to understand the virus better, develop treatments, and improve diagnostics. Challenges include vaccine equity, new variants of the virus, and vaccine hesitancy.

As the world continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, efforts to control the spread of the virus, ensure equitable access to vaccines, strengthen health systems, and mitigate the socio-economic impacts remain critical. International cooperation, scientific advancements, and sustained public health measures are essential in overcoming this global challenge and building a more resilient future.

### **Impact of COVID-19**

The rapid transmission of SARS-CoV-2 has overwhelmed healthcare systems globally. Hospitals have faced shortages of medical supplies, beds, and personnel, leading to a strain on providing adequate care. As a result, there have been millions of hospitalizations due to COVID-19, with some patients requiring intensive care and mechanical ventilation. The development and distribution of vaccines have been crucial in combating the virus, with over 13.48 billion vaccine doses administered worldwide and 80,907 administered each day, leading to 70.3% of the world's population receiving at least one dose.<sup>28</sup> Despite these efforts, new virus variants continue to emerge, posing challenges to public health responses and necessitating ongoing surveillance and research.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching consequences on individuals, communities, and societies worldwide, impacting health, economics, social dynamics, and mental well-being. The direct health implications have been substantial, with many confirmed cases and notable mortality rates. Healthcare systems have faced immense strain, leading to overwhelmed hospitals, shortages of medical supplies, and increased pressure on healthcare workers. Moreover, routine healthcare services have been disrupted, resulting in delays or reduced access to essential treatments for other health conditions.

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<sup>28</sup> Our World in Data, "Coronavirus (COVID-19) Vaccinations," Our World in Data, 2023, <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations>.

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Governments implemented various measures to contain the spread of the virus, including lockdowns, travel restrictions, and social distancing guidelines. These measures, while necessary, have had significant economic consequences. Economically, the pandemic has caused severe disruptions, triggering widespread job losses, business closures, and economic recessions. Industries such as tourism, hospitality, and retail have been particularly hard-hit, resulting in financial hardships for individuals and businesses. The global economy experienced a severe contraction, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimating a decline of 3.5% in global GDP in 2020.<sup>29</sup> Vulnerable workers in the informal and low-income sectors have faced disproportionate impacts due to limited social safety nets and reduced earning opportunities. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), an estimated 8.8% of global working hours were lost in 2020, equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs.<sup>30</sup> The socio-economic impact has been particularly severe for vulnerable populations, exacerbating inequalities in access to healthcare, employment, and social support.

The education sector has also experienced severe disruptions, with school closures and interruptions affecting millions of students worldwide. School closures disrupted education for 1.5 billion children globally, potentially widening educational disparities.<sup>31</sup> The shift to remote learning has exposed existing inequalities in access to technology and internet connectivity, exacerbating learning gaps and hindering educational outcomes. Additionally, in the East Asia and Pacific region, around 325 million children experienced the impact of COVID-19 closures, and a staggering 80 million among them faced difficulties in accessing remote learning opportunities throughout the year 2020.<sup>32</sup>

The social and psychological impact of the pandemic cannot be underestimated. Measures such as physical distancing, lockdowns, and restrictions on social gatherings have increased feelings of isolation, loneliness, and mental health challenges. Furthermore, global solidarity and cooperation have played essential roles in responding to the pandemic. International collaboration has proven vital. Challenges persist in achieving vaccine equity as disparities persist. Addressing these inequities is paramount for an effective and fair global recovery.

As the world continues to navigate the COVID-19 crisis, comprehensive and coordinated efforts are necessary to address the multifaceted impacts. This includes ensuring access to

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<sup>29</sup> International Monetary Fund, “*World Economic Outlook Update*,” International Monetary Fund, January 2021, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2021/01/26/2021-world-economic-outlook-update>.

<sup>30</sup> International Labour Organization, “*COVID-19 Recovery Must Be Human-Centred*,” International Labour Organization, April 9, 2021, [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/statements-and-speeches/WCMS\\_779257/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/statements-and-speeches/WCMS_779257/lang--en/index.htm).

<sup>31</sup> Valerie Strauss, “*1.5 Billion Children around Globe Affected by School Closure. What Countries Are Doing to Keep Kids Learning during Pandemic*,” Washington Post, March 27, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/03/26/nearly-14-billion-children-around-globe-are-out-school-heres-what-countries-are-doing-keep-kids-learning-during-pandemic/>.

<sup>32</sup> UNICEF, “*Education and COVID-19 Response*,” UNICEF, n.d., <https://www.unicef.org/eap/education-and-covid-19-response>.

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healthcare, strengthening social protection systems, supporting educational continuity, prioritizing mental health and psychosocial support, promoting gender equality, and addressing inequalities at all levels. By working together and prioritizing the needs of the most vulnerable, we can mitigate the long-term consequences of the pandemic and build more resilient societies.

## UNICEF's COVID-19 Response

As a global organization focused on children's rights and well-being, UNICEF has also responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by aligning its efforts with its mission and core values. Their response is guided by their comparative advantages and critical importance, which help prioritize their actions and maximize their impact within the limitations of available resources. UNICEF's comparative advantages lie in its extensive multisectoral knowledge and local and global levels. This expertise enables them to understand the intricate dynamics across various sectors and effectively address the diverse needs of children and their families during the pandemic.

The organization's core values include care, respect, integrity, trust, sustainability and accountability.<sup>33</sup> Specifically, UNICEF's core values revolve around inclusivity and non-discrimination, ensuring that every child's rights are upheld regardless of their background.<sup>34</sup> They prioritize children's best interests, considering their needs and perspectives in all decisions and actions. UNICEF also promotes active participation of children, valuing their voices and involving them in matters that affect their lives. These will form the framework by which this policy brief analyzes their pandemic response.

UNICEF has been critical in the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the virus outbreak, UNICEF has been actively working to protect and support children and families worldwide. Its response has focused on critical areas, including providing personal protective equipment (PPE), ensuring continued education and saving lives. By intending to ensure every child's survival, development, protection, and participation, UNICEF's mission in the pandemic has been to mitigate the devastating effects on children's lives and safeguard their rights.

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<sup>33</sup> UNICEF, "*UNICEF's Culture*," UNICEF, 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/about/unicef-culture>.

<sup>34</sup> UNICEF, "*UNICEF Core Values*," UNICEF, n.d, <https://www.unicef.org/careers/unicef-core-values>.

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## Health Interventions

UNICEF aims to protect and safeguard the health and well-being of children and their families worldwide during the pandemic. Their goal was to prevent the spread of the virus, mitigate its impact on vulnerable populations, and ensure equitable access to essential healthcare services, including vaccination.

The organization's provision of PPE to frontline workers has been critical in safeguarding the well-being of healthcare professionals and communities, particularly in low-to-middle-income countries. This involved implementing measures to prevent virus transmission through testing, isolation, treatment, contact tracing, and quarantining. They aimed to strengthen health service delivery by providing training and essential equipment to healthcare workers while expanding and reorganizing care facilities to handle the increased demand. UNICEF has been shipping PPE since January 2020.<sup>35</sup> The delivery of over 489.8 million masks, 411.9 million gloves, 33.2 N95 respirators, 14.1 million medical gowns, 9.1 million testing kits and 58,378 oxygen concentrators since July 2022 to countries in need demonstrates the magnitude of UNICEF's efforts in protecting those at the forefront of the response.<sup>36</sup>

UNICEF focused on pandemic preparedness and response, as they worked with governments and partners to develop and implement emergency response plans to address the specific needs of children during the pandemic. These plans included setting up temporary isolation and treatment centers for infected children and their families, ensuring continuity of essential health services, and providing mental health and psychosocial support to children facing stress and anxiety due to the pandemic's disruptions. For example, in conflict-affected areas like Yemen and Syria, UNICEF supported the establishment of safe spaces and temporary isolation centers to care for infected children and their families.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, UNICEF is the largest single vaccine buyer in the world; during the pandemic, the organization focused heavily on vaccine distribution.<sup>38</sup> In collaboration with WHO, UNICEF procured and delivered millions of COVID-19 vaccines to developing countries. In February 2021, UNICEF took charge of the most extensive vaccine supply operation, spearheading the initiative on behalf of COVAX.<sup>39</sup> The primary objective is to ensure fair and

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<sup>35</sup> UNICEF, "Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic with Life-Saving Supplies," UNICEF, July 25, 2022, <https://www.unicef.org/supply/coronavirus-disease-covid-19>.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> UNICEF, "Supporting Children Adolescents and Women Affected by COVID-19," UNICEF, April 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/supporting-children-adolescents-and-women-affected-covid-19>.

<sup>38</sup> UNICEF, "COVAX: Ensuring Global Equitable Access to COVID-19 Vaccines," UNICEF, n.d., <https://www.unicef.org/supply/covax-ensuring-global-equitable-access-covid-19vaccines#:~:text=As%20the%20largest%20single%20vaccine>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

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equal access to COVID-19 vaccines for all participating countries and territories within the COVAX framework. As of July 2023, UNICEF had delivered over 1.9 million COVID-19 vaccine doses to more than 146 countries and territories, contributing to global vaccination efforts.<sup>40</sup>

UNICEF has been actively involved in the ACT-Accelerator partnership since April 2020, a global collaborative effort led by the WHO to develop tools to combat COVID-19.<sup>41</sup> Through the COVAX Facility, UNICEF's mission was to ensure that all 190 countries had equitable access to 2 billion doses of the COVID-19 vaccine by the end of 2021.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, UNICEF has contributed to developing testing and treatment strategies by collaborating with partners to enhance diagnostic capabilities and improve patient care, particularly in resource-constrained settings.<sup>43</sup> Through partnerships with organizations like WHO, COVAX and Gavi, UNICEF sought to pool resources and expertise, ensuring a more effective and unified approach to vaccine access and distribution.

## Social Interventions for Human Capital

UNICEF's COVID-19 response included social interventions aimed at safeguarding human capital, especially the well-being and rights of children. Understanding that the pandemic posed significant risks to children's development, education, and protection, UNICEF focused on implementing various social interventions to mitigate these impacts and promote their overall development.

One of their primary objectives was to ensure continued education access during lockdowns and school closures.<sup>44</sup> UNICEF worked with governments and partners to support remote learning initiatives and provide access to online educational resources. For instance, in countries across West and Central Africa, UNICEF helped develop and disseminate educational radio and TV programs to reach children with limited internet access.<sup>45</sup> They also distributed learning materials and conducted teacher training to enhance remote teaching capabilities. Another critical social intervention addressed the surge in child protection risks during the pandemic. UNICEF set up helplines and safe spaces for children to report violence, exploitation, and abuse, providing psychosocial support and counselling services across various countries.

<sup>40</sup> UNICEF, "COVID-19 Market Dashboard," UNICEF, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/supply/covid-19-market-dashboard>.

<sup>41</sup> World Health Organization, "The Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator," World Health Organization, n.d., <https://www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator>.

<sup>42</sup> UNICEF, "COVAX: Ensuring Global Equitable Access to COVID-19 Vaccines," UNICEF, n.d., <https://www.unicef.org/vietnam/covax-ensuring-global-equitable-access-covid-19-vaccines>.

<sup>43</sup> World Health Organization, "The Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator," World Health Organization, n.d., <https://www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator>.

<sup>44</sup> UNICEF, "Education and COVID-19 Response," UNICEF, n.d., <https://www.unicef.org/eap/education-and-covid-19-response>.

<sup>45</sup> UNICEF, "Unequal Access to Remote Schooling amid COVID-19 Threatens to Deepen Global Learning Crisis," UNICEF, June 4, 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unequal-access-remote-schooling-amid-covid-19-threatens-deepen-global-learning>.



Furthermore, UNICEF’s social interventions focused on protecting children’s health and nutrition. They supported community-based initiatives to promote breastfeeding, maternal and child health and provided nutrition assistance to vulnerable families. Additionally, UNICEF worked with governments to expand cash transfer programs, social safety nets, and access to health services for those most affected by the economic impact of the pandemic.<sup>46</sup>

UNICEF’s focus on preventive measures was reflected in its public awareness campaigns. They disseminated accurate information on COVID-19 prevention, hygiene practices, and vaccine education, reaching millions globally. For example, in Nepal, UNICEF supported the production of radio programs in multiple languages to inform communities about preventive measures and debunk myths surrounding the virus.<sup>47</sup>

## Economic Restructuring and Debt Resolution

UNICEF’s COVID-19 response included economic restructuring and debt resolution efforts to address the pandemic’s economic impact on vulnerable countries and communities. In low-to-middle-income countries, where the pandemic exacerbated existing economic challenges, UNICEF worked with the government and international partners to advocate for debt relief and restructuring. As a result, Ethiopia benefited from the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), which provided temporary debt relief, freeing up resources to be redirected toward essential health and social services.<sup>48</sup>

In Nigeria, another country heavily impacted by the pandemic, UNICEF’s advocacy efforts led to the approval of \$3.4 billion from the IMF to support the government’s response to the economic challenges posed by COVID-19.<sup>49,50</sup> This financial assistance contributed to protecting social investments and maintaining essential services for children and their families during the crisis. UNICEF’s impact on economic restructuring and debt resolution was also evident globally. Through collaborative efforts with other organizations, they successfully advocated for the G20’s extension of the DSSI until mid-2021, providing continued debt relief to eligible countries. This extension allowed many low- and middle-income countries to access additional fiscal space to address urgent health and social needs. As of December 2021, the DSSI had provided temporary debt service relief to 48 countries, amounting to approximately \$12.9 billion.<sup>51</sup> This relief enabled these countries to reallocate funds towards their COVID-19 response, including healthcare, education, and social protection programs.

<sup>46</sup> UNICEF, “*UNICEF’s Social Protection Response to COVID-19*,” UNICEF, October 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/reports/unicef-social-protection-response-to-covid-19-2020#:~:text=Social%20protection%20is%20playing%20a>.

<sup>47</sup> UNICEF, “*Bite-Sized Doses of Fact*,” UNICEF Nepal, n.d., <https://www.unicef.org/nepal/stories/bite-sized-doses-fact>.

<sup>48</sup> Paris Club, “*Ethiopia Benefits from the Debt Service Suspension Initiative*,” Paris Club, June 9, 2020, <https://clubdeparis.org/en/communications/press-release/ethiopia-benefits-from-the-debt-service-suspension-initiative-09-06>.

<sup>49</sup> UNICEF, “*Update on UNICEF Engagement with International Financial Institutions*,” UNICEF, January 9, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/executiveboard/documents/update-unicef-engagement-international-financial-institutions-frs-2023>.

<sup>50</sup> International Monetary Fund, “*IMF Executive Board Approves US\$ 3.4 Billion in Emergency Support to Nigeria to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic*,” International Monetary Fund, April 28, 2020, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/04/28/pr20191-nigeria-imf-executive-board-approves-emergency-support-to-address-covid-19>.

<sup>51</sup> World Bank, “*COVID 19: Debt Service Suspension Initiative*,” World Bank, March 10, 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/debt/brief/covid-19-debt-service-suspension-initiative>.

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## Policy and Institutional Reforms for Rebuilding Better

UNICEF's COVID-19 response included efforts in policy and institutional reforms for rebuilding better, focusing on social and economic inclusion and protecting the rights of children and vulnerable populations. They aimed to advocate for evidence-based policies, strengthen institutional capacities, and promote equitable recovery strategies.

In Cambodia, UNICEF collaborated with the government to address the socio-economic impact of the pandemic. As a result of their advocacy and technical support, Cambodia adopted a National Social Protection Policy Framework, providing a more comprehensive and targeted approach to social assistance.<sup>52</sup> This policy reform aimed to protect vulnerable families from falling into poverty and ensured a safety net during the crisis.

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of resilient systems that can effectively meet demands and provide efficient safety nets. Countries will need to play a crucial role in addressing three key priorities. Firstly, there is a need to revitalize firms and supply chain networks to promote sustainable job growth and creation. This goal can be achieved through investments in public-private partnerships focusing on education and skill training to enhance employment opportunities. Secondly, countries should strive to eliminate obstacles hindering productivity growth while enhancing resilience against future shocks. Lastly, promoting equity and inclusion should be a top priority for governments. UNICEF can support these reforms through policy-based lending, which would assist in implementing a targeted yet achievable set of policy measures to bolster the impact of their health, social, and economic responses.

## Policy Analysis

### Limitations in Analyzing UNICEF's Role in Health

In the 2016-2030 Strategy for Health, UNICEF focuses on traditional health interventions was evident in their efforts to provide vaccinations, nutrition support, and treatment for common childhood illnesses. While these interventions were essential, the strategy could have done more to address broader social determinants of health. For instance, some low-income countries have limited clean water and sanitation access. According to UNICEF's estimates, approximately 2.2 billion people globally lack access to safely managed drinking water

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<sup>52</sup> Chan Narith et al., "Developing the Family Package in Cambodia: The Realization of Integrated Social Protection," [https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/13711/file/Chapter%207\\_Developing%20the%20Family%20Package%20in%20Cambodia.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/13711/file/Chapter%207_Developing%20the%20Family%20Package%20in%20Cambodia.pdf).

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services, and 4.2 billion people lack access to safely managed sanitation.<sup>53</sup> Incorporating initiatives to improve water and sanitation infrastructure would profoundly impact children's health, reducing the prevalence of waterborne diseases and malnutrition.

Moreover, the 2016-2023 strategy could have addressed health disparities among vulnerable populations more explicitly, such as in conflict-affected regions like Syria. A UNICEF report in 2020 revealed that in Syria, the under-five mortality rate in conflict areas was more than double that in non-conflict areas.<sup>54</sup> A more targeted approach in the strategy, specifically addressing the unique challenges children face in conflict zones, could have contributed to bridging such disparities and saving more lives.

The revised 2022-2025 Strategy for Health shows that resource allocation remains limited despite its ambitious goals. For example, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF launched the "Reimagine" campaign to deliver vaccines, treatments, and diagnostics to low-income countries.<sup>55</sup> However, UNICEF reported a funding gap for this initiative. The revised strategy must prioritize resource mobilization and strategic partnerships to ensure the necessary funding to execute critical health programs effectively.

Furthermore, the revised strategy could benefit from a stronger focus on health system strengthening. In Africa, where many countries struggle with fragile health systems, immunization rates for diseases like measles have remained low. According to UNICEF data from 2023, only 12.7 million children received missed one or more measles vaccinations over the past three years.<sup>56</sup> A more explicit emphasis on building health system capacities and training healthcare workers would be crucial to improving vaccination coverage and overall health outcomes.

The release of the 2022-2025 Strategy for Health by UNICEF during the mid-pandemic period raises valid concerns about its timing and implications for preparedness. While the revised strategy shows a proactive approach to addressing the ongoing health challenges, its delayed release highlights potential missed opportunities for better preparedness and response. Had the 2022-2025 strategy been developed and released before the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF could have been better equipped to anticipate and respond to the crisis.

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<sup>53</sup> World Health Organization, "1 in 3 People Globally Do Not Have Access to Safe Drinking Water," World Health Organization, June 18, 2019, <https://www.who.int/news/item/18-06-2019-1-in-3-people-globally-do-not-have-access-to-safe-drinking-water-unicef-who>.

<sup>54</sup> UNICEF, "No End in Sight to Seven Years of War in Syria: Children with Disabilities at Risk of Exclusion," UNICEF, May 24, 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/syria/press-releases/no-end-sight-seven-years-war-syria-children-disabilities-risk-exclusion>.

<sup>55</sup> UNICEF, "As the COVID-19 Pandemic Begins to Enter a New Phase, UNICEF Reminds the World That 'the Light at the End of the Tunnel Needs to Shine for All,'" UNICEF, December 4, 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/covid-19-pandemic-begins-enter-new-phase-unicef-reminds-world-light-end-tunnel-needs>.

<sup>56</sup> UNICEF, "New UNICEF Report Shows 12.7 Million Children in Africa Missed out on One or More Vaccinations over Three Years," UNICEF, April 20, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/esa/press-releases/new-unicef-report-shows-127-million-children-africa-missed-out-one-or-more>.

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The strategy's mid-pandemic release indicates a certain level of reactive rather than proactive planning. An earlier release would have allowed UNICEF to incorporate lessons learned from past pandemics and health emergencies, strengthening its ability to address emerging health threats effectively.

Furthermore, the revised strategy could have included more comprehensive measures to enhance pandemic preparedness. The pandemic exposed critical gaps in health systems worldwide, and UNICEF's timely response would have been instrumental in building resilient healthcare infrastructures. For instance, investments in strengthening disease surveillance, health data systems, and supply chain logistics would have ensured a more efficient and coordinated response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The mid-pandemic release may indicate a reactive approach, as the organization might have been compelled to adjust its priorities based on the ongoing crisis. This could have led to the reallocation of resources and attention away from other critical health programs and priorities that were in progress before the pandemic. Moreover, an earlier strategy release would have facilitated resource mobilization and strategic partnerships. The pandemic brought a global call for solidarity and financial commitments to support health interventions. With an earlier strategy, UNICEF could have advocated for additional funding from donors and governments to bolster its response efforts. A more proactive approach to resource mobilization could have potentially reduced funding gaps and accelerated critical health initiatives. Additionally, an early release of the strategy would have given UNICEF ample time to fine-tune its coordination and collaboration efforts. The pandemic highlighted the importance of effective partnerships among global health organizations and governments. By having the strategy in place beforehand, UNICEF could have established more robust collaborative frameworks and strengthened its role as a key player in global health governance.

## **Evaluating UNICEF's COVID-19 Response**

UNICEF's COVID-19 response has been a critical global effort to protect children and vulnerable populations during the pandemic. As the largest single vaccine buyer in the world, UNICEF played a significant role in procuring and distributing COVID-19 vaccines to low-income countries. As of January 2022, UNICEF and other organizations assisted COVAX in delivering 1 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines to over 144 countries and territories, contributing to global vaccination efforts.<sup>57</sup> This achievement demonstrated the organization's

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<sup>57</sup> UNICEF, "COVAX: 1 Billion Vaccines Delivered," UNICEF, January 19, 2022, <https://www.unicef.org/supply/stories/covax-1-billion-vaccines-delivered>

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capacity to mobilize resources and work with partners to ensure equitable vaccine access. Despite being the largest vaccine buyer in the world, the organization's efforts to ensure vaccine equity fell short. By mid-2021, low-income countries had received only about 16% of the global supply of COVID-19 vaccines, while high-income countries had secured a much larger share (80%).<sup>58</sup> As of July 2023, in low-income countries, 32.2% have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.<sup>59</sup> This disparity underscored the need for greater advocacy and diplomatic efforts by UNICEF to urge high-income countries to share vaccine doses with low-income nations and support initiatives such as COVAX to ensure vaccine equity for vulnerable populations.

UNICEF's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been crucial in tackling the challenges faced by childhood vaccination and healthcare systems globally. However, UNICEF's recent data from 2023 highlights concerning trends, with up to 44 percentage points decline in confidence in childhood vaccines in certain countries during the pandemic.<sup>60</sup> This decline occurred amidst the largest sustained backslide in childhood immunization in three decades, primarily driven by the disruptions caused by COVID-19. The pandemic's far-reaching effects resulted in approximately 67 million children missing vital vaccinations over three years.<sup>61</sup> Factors such as strained health systems, diversion of resources to combat COVID-19, conflicts, fragility, and decreased vaccine confidence contributed to this disruption. Shockingly, 48 million of these children did not receive a single routine vaccine, leaving them vulnerable to preventable diseases.<sup>62</sup> Countries like India and Nigeria had the highest numbers of zero-dose children, while Myanmar and the Philippines experienced notable increases.<sup>63</sup> Still, urgent and targeted efforts are needed to restore vaccine confidence, strengthen health systems, and improve vaccination coverage to safeguard the health and well-being of children worldwide.

As per UNICEF's analysis, approximately 77% of children worldwide, totalling 1.8 billion individuals under 18, reside in one of the 132 countries that have implemented various movement restrictions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>64</sup> In addition to its vaccine distribution efforts, UNICEF actively called on high-income countries to contribute more funding for the COVID-19 response; the organization needed help to bridge the funding gap for its humanitarian appeal. For instance, in 2020, UNICEF launched its COVID-19

<sup>58</sup> World Health Organization, "COVAX Calls for Urgent Action to Close Vaccine Equity Gap," World Health Organization, May 20, 2022, <https://www.who.int/news/item/20-05-2022-covax-calls-for-urgent-action-to-close-vaccine-equity-gap#:~:text=Only%2016%25%20of%20people%20in>

<sup>59</sup> Our World in Data, "Coronavirus (COVID-19) Vaccinations," Our World in Data, 2023, <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations>.

<sup>60</sup> UNICEF, "New Data Indicates Declining Confidence in Childhood Vaccines of up to 44 Percentage Points in Some Countries during the COVID-19 Pandemic," UNICEF, April 20, 2023, <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/press-releases/new-data-indicates-declining-confidence-childhood-vaccines-44-percentage-points-some>.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> UNICEF, "UNICEF Appeals for \$1.6 Billion to Meet Growing Needs of Children Impacted by COVID-19 Pandemic," UNICEF, May 12, 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/eap/press-releases/unicef-appeals-16-billion-meet-growing-needs-children-impacted-covid-19-pandemic-0>.



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Humanitarian Response Appeal, seeking \$1.6 billion to support its efforts to reach and protect vulnerable children and families during the pandemic.<sup>65</sup> However, UNICEF's appeal was 64% underfunded by the end of 2022.<sup>66</sup> The need for more funding hampered the organization's ability to scale up its response efforts and support critical health and education initiatives in low-income countries.

While UNICEF's focus on vaccines was crucial for mitigating the spread of COVID-19, there were concerns about UNICEF's relative emphasis on other areas, such as education. The pandemic disruption to education was severe, affecting more than 1.5 billion students worldwide at its peak.<sup>67</sup> Despite UNICEF's initiatives to support remote learning and education continuity, more attention should have been given to addressing the digital divide and ensuring all children have access to remote learning tools and quality education during lockdowns and school closures. For example, in Afghanistan and Yemen, where conflict and limited infrastructure posed obstacles, many children struggled to access quality education during school closures. Addressing the digital divide was a significant challenge for UNICEF during the pandemic. By the end of 2020, approximately 63% of the global population still lacked internet access, with 760 million youths unable to access online learning resources.<sup>68</sup> Bridging this divide requires substantial investment in digital infrastructure and policies to ensure inclusive education, regardless of socio-economic status or geographical location.

Conversely, the mid-pandemic release of UNICEF's 2022-2025 Strategy for Health has raised concerns about its timing and implications for preparedness. The strategy's development during an ongoing global health crisis suggests a missed opportunity for better pandemic preparedness. For instance, incorporating lessons learned from previous pandemics, such as the H1N1 influenza outbreak 2009, could have informed UNICEF's strategy to ensure a more timely and efficient response to COVID-19. Moreover, the 2019 Global Health Security Index revealed that many countries needed to prepare for a pandemic, with an average overall score of only 40.2 out of 100.<sup>69</sup> An earlier strategy release could have focused on strengthening countries' pandemic preparedness, including improving laboratory capacity, stockpiling medical supplies, and enhancing surveillance systems.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> UNICEF, "UNICEF's Response and Funding Status" UNICEF, 2022, <https://www.unicef.org/media/139936/file/LACRO-Humanitarian-SitRep-COVID19-Children-on-the-move-EoY-2022.pdf>.

<sup>67</sup> Valerie Strauss, "1.5 Billion Children around Globe Affected by School Closure. What Countries Are Doing to Keep Kids Learning during Pandemic," Washington Post, March 27, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/03/26/nearly-14-billion-children-around-globe-are-out-school-heres-what-countries-are-doing-keep-kids-learning-during-pandemic/>.

<sup>68</sup> UNICEF, "How Many Children and Young People Have Internet Access at Home?," UNICEF, 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/media/88381/file/How-many-children-and-young-people-have-internet-access-at-h>.

<sup>69</sup> Global Health Security Index, "Inaugural Global Health Security Index Finds No Country Is Prepared for Epidemics or Pandemics," GHS Index, October 24, 2019, <https://www.ghsindex.org/news/inaugural-global-health-security-index-finds-no-country-is-prepared-for-epidemics-or-pandemics/>.

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The mid-pandemic timing of the strategy also presented challenges in resource mobilization. The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a global health and economic crisis, affecting funding availability for UNICEF's health initiatives. While wealthier nations continue to implement booster shot campaigns, a staggering 98% of individuals in low-income countries have yet to receive their first dose of the vaccine.<sup>70</sup> COVAX, once seen as having overly optimistic goals, has been criticized by an expert for its underwhelming performance, as it has only contributed to less than 5% of the total global vaccine administrations. Furthermore, the initiative has recently admitted to failing to achieve its ambitious target of distributing 2 billion vaccines by the end of 2021.<sup>71</sup> With an earlier strategy, UNICEF could have proactively engaged with donors and governments to secure additional funding for pandemic response efforts, potentially mitigating some of the resource mobilization challenges.

Coordination and partnership concerns also arose due to the mid-pandemic release of the strategy. The pandemic underscored the importance of effective collaboration between global health organizations and governments. However, the rapid and dynamic response required during the pandemic may have made optimizing coordination efforts difficult. For instance, WHO's COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund faced challenges in attracting donations, receiving only a fraction of its initial target of \$675 million in 2021.<sup>72</sup> An earlier strategy release would have provided more time for UNICEF to strengthen its coordination mechanisms and strategic partnerships, ensuring a more streamlined and collaborative pandemic response. Another critical aspect affected by the mid-pandemic strategy release is its potential impact on ongoing health programs. Before the pandemic, UNICEF had various ongoing initiatives to combat malnutrition, improve maternal and child health, and address other pressing health issues. However, the rapid response required for COVID-19 may have led to the reallocation of resources and attention, potentially impacting the progress of these programs. This diversion of resources could have hampered UNICEF's ability to achieve its long-term health goals and may have posed challenges for the most vulnerable populations who rely on these ongoing health programs.

UNICEF's COVID-19 response demonstrated significant achievements in vaccine distribution and global health coordination. However, challenges persisted, particularly in achieving vaccine equity and securing adequate funding to support response efforts. Moving

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<sup>70</sup> Olivia Goldhill, "Naively Ambitious: How COVAX Failed on Its Promise to Vaccinate the World," STAT, October 8, 2021, <https://www.statnews.com/2021/10/08/how-covax-failed-on-its-promise-to-vaccinate-the-world/>.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> World Health Organization, "COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund Marks First Anniversary and Appeals for Continued Support," World Health Organization, March 15, 2021, <https://www.who.int/news/item/15-03-2021-covid-19-solidarity-response-fund-marks-first-anniversary-and-appeals-for-continued-support>.

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forward, UNICEF should continue advocating for more equitable vaccine distribution, addressing the digital divide to support inclusive education, and strengthening its capacity to respond effectively to future health crises.

## Recommendations

To proactively address future pandemics, it is imperative to prioritize pandemic preparedness within long-term strategies. This entails establishing a comprehensive framework that encompasses crucial elements of pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response. By making pandemic preparedness a central pillar, UNICEF can enhance its ability to anticipate and effectively respond to forthcoming health crises.

UNICEF can actively support the European Union's and WHO's proposal for a pandemic treaty by participating in treaty negotiations and advocating for measures prioritizing vulnerable populations' needs. This treaty aims to enhance international cooperation in pandemic preparedness and response, ensuring equitable access to vaccines and medical resources. For instance, UNICEF can advocate for provisions that ensure timely and equitable access to vaccines, diagnostics, and treatments in all regions, irrespective of income levels. By participating in treaty negotiations and advocating for child-centric provisions, UNICEF can ensure that the treaty prioritizes the rights and well-being of children during health crises. The treaty should address equitable vaccine distribution, access to healthcare, and medical resources for vulnerable populations.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF faced formidable financial challenges while responding to the urgent needs of vulnerable populations. As the largest vaccine buyer in the world, UNICEF played a crucial role in vaccine procurement and distribution. However, financial constraints significantly impacted its ability to meet the unprecedented vaccine demand. Despite the global administration of over 700 million vaccine doses, a glaring disparity remains between richer and low-income countries. Richer nations have received an overwhelming 87 percent of these doses, while low-income countries have only received a mere 0.2 percent. This has led to a significant gap in vaccination rates. In high-income countries, approximately one in four individuals have been vaccinated, whereas in low-income countries, the number is staggeringly low, with only one in over 500 people having received a vaccine.<sup>73</sup> This financial shortfall resulted in delayed vaccine delivery and limited

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<sup>73</sup> United Nations, "Low-Income Countries Have Received Just 0.2 per Cent of All COVID-19 Shots Given," United Nations, April 9, 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/04/1089392>

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access for vulnerable populations in many countries. UNICEF could have actively engaged with international financial institutions, such as the IMF and the World Bank, and high-income countries to advocate for debt relief measures for low- and middle-income countries affected by the pandemic. These efforts could include calling for debt cancellation or temporarily suspending debt payments to free up funds for pandemic response and recovery efforts. By presenting compelling arguments and evidence-backed research on the impact of debt burdens on health and social services in affected countries, UNICEF could have bolstered its case for debt relief.

Redesigning early warning systems, such as surveillance and alert systems, at regional, national, and global levels is crucial for UNICEF's pandemic response and preparedness efforts. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed significant gaps in early response measures, resulting in delayed and ineffective actions by many countries. UNICEF should critically assess its role in advocating for and supporting the establishment of robust early warning systems to ensure timely and effective responses to future health crises. During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, several countries struggled to detect and respond to the virus promptly. This lack of speed and urgency in national early responses contributed to the rapid spread of the virus and the subsequent overwhelming of healthcare systems. For instance, the delayed detection and response in some regions resulted in missed opportunities to contain the virus's initial spread, leading to devastating consequences for vulnerable populations, including children.

UNICEF should advocate for and support redesigning early warning systems that are inclusive, transparent, and data-driven. These systems should prioritize collecting and analyzing real-time data, including socio-economic indicators, to identify vulnerable populations and hotspots that require urgent attention and assistance. For example, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, early warning systems that could accurately identify regions with high child poverty rates or limited access to healthcare facilities would have enabled targeted and effective responses to protect children's well-being. Furthermore, UNICEF should critically evaluate the cooperation and coordination mechanisms among countries and global health organizations in sharing critical information. Early warning systems at the international level should facilitate timely and transparent data sharing to ensure a collective response to emerging health threats. UNICEF should advocate for increased collaboration between national governments, the WHO, United Nations Security Council, and other relevant stakeholders to build a cohesive and robust global early warning system.

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In pandemic preparedness within their strategy, UNICEF could have implemented several recommendations and strategies to strengthen education systems and ensure continuity of learning during health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, UNICEF could have proactively invested in digital infrastructure and connectivity in schools and communities to bridge the digital divide in education. In some low-income countries, as of 2021, only 12% of households had access to the Internet, limiting students' ability to engage in online learning during school closures. By providing schools with the necessary technology and ensuring internet access in underserved areas, UNICEF could have better-equipped students and teachers to transition to online learning during lockdowns and school closures.

To further support education continuity, UNICEF should have focused on teacher training and capacity building. By offering extensive training programs on online and remote teaching methodologies, teachers would have been better prepared to deliver quality education through digital platforms and engage with students effectively during crises. In addition, UNICEF could have advocated for integrating education technology into regular teaching practices before a pandemic strikes. This means encouraging the adoption of digital tools, educational apps, and online learning platforms in schools to ensure that the education system is prepared for remote learning when needed. A crucial aspect of UNICEF's pandemic preparedness strategy should have been contingency planning. Working closely with governments, UNICEF could have developed comprehensive plans for emergencies, outlining alternative learning modalities and support mechanisms to ensure continuous education during crises. For instance, in the event of school closures, UNICEF could have supported initiatives such as remote learning through radio broadcasts, providing take-home educational materials, or setting up community learning centers.

UNICEF may advocate for drills and simulation exercises to boost their member countries' preparedness. This approach enables prompt and regular rectification of identified weaknesses while also focusing on understanding how the system functions under real conditions of pandemic stress. By studying and analyzing the lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF can learn valuable insights to enhance its preparedness for future pandemics.

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## Key Recommendations

**Prioritize pandemic preparedness:** Pandemic preparedness should be a central pillar within its long-term strategies, encompassing prevention, preparedness, and response to future health crises.

**Support the pandemic treaty proposal:** UNICEF should actively participate in treaty negotiations and advocate for measures prioritizing vulnerable populations' needs, ensuring equitable access to vaccines and medical resources.

**Address financial challenges:** There should be engagement with international financial institutions and high-income countries to advocate for debt relief measures for low- and middle-income countries affected by the pandemic to free up funds for pandemic response efforts.

**Redesign early warning systems:** There should be advocacy for and support for establishing robust early warning systems at regional, national, and global levels, focusing on inclusivity, transparency, and real-time data analysis to identify vulnerable populations and hotspots that require urgent attention.

**Strengthen education systems:** UNICEF should invest in digital infrastructure and connectivity to bridge the digital divide in education, provide teacher training on online teaching methodologies, and advocate for integrating education technology into regular teaching practices.

**Advocate for drills and simulation exercises:** There should be advocacy for conducting training and simulation activities to enhance preparedness, learn from past experiences, and identify weaknesses for improvement.

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