

HOW COVID-19 IS CHANGING CHILDHOOD IN SOUTH AFRICA

unicef 
for every child



COVID-19 is a child rights crisis

Responding and reimagining for every child

NOVEMBER 2020

UNICEF South Africa acknowledges the generous support received from its donors and partners in response to the increasingly dire needs of children during the COVID-19 pandemic. Without this collective effort, our work for children in South Africa would not be possible.

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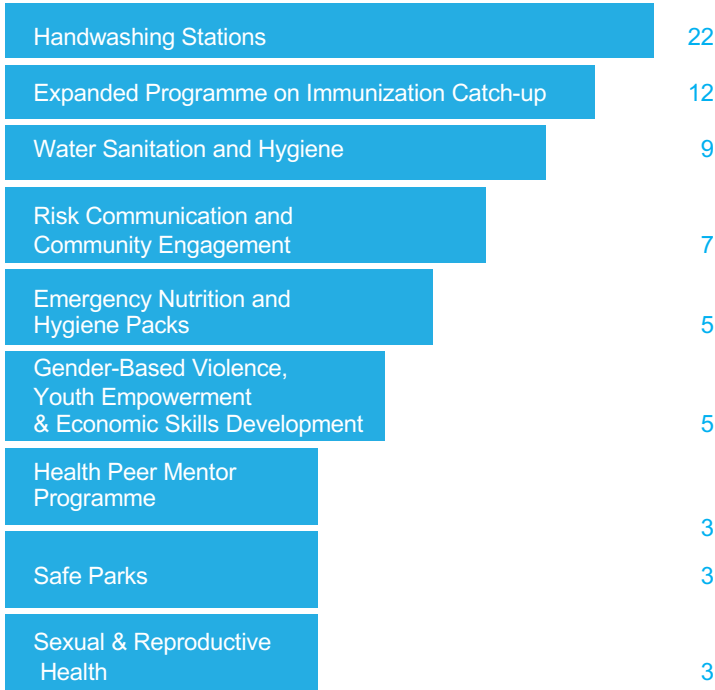
Finally, UNICEF's work in South Africa would also not be possible without the multiple partners that we work with across the country – their role on the ground is vital to improving the lives of every child.



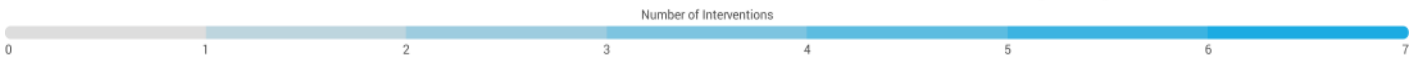
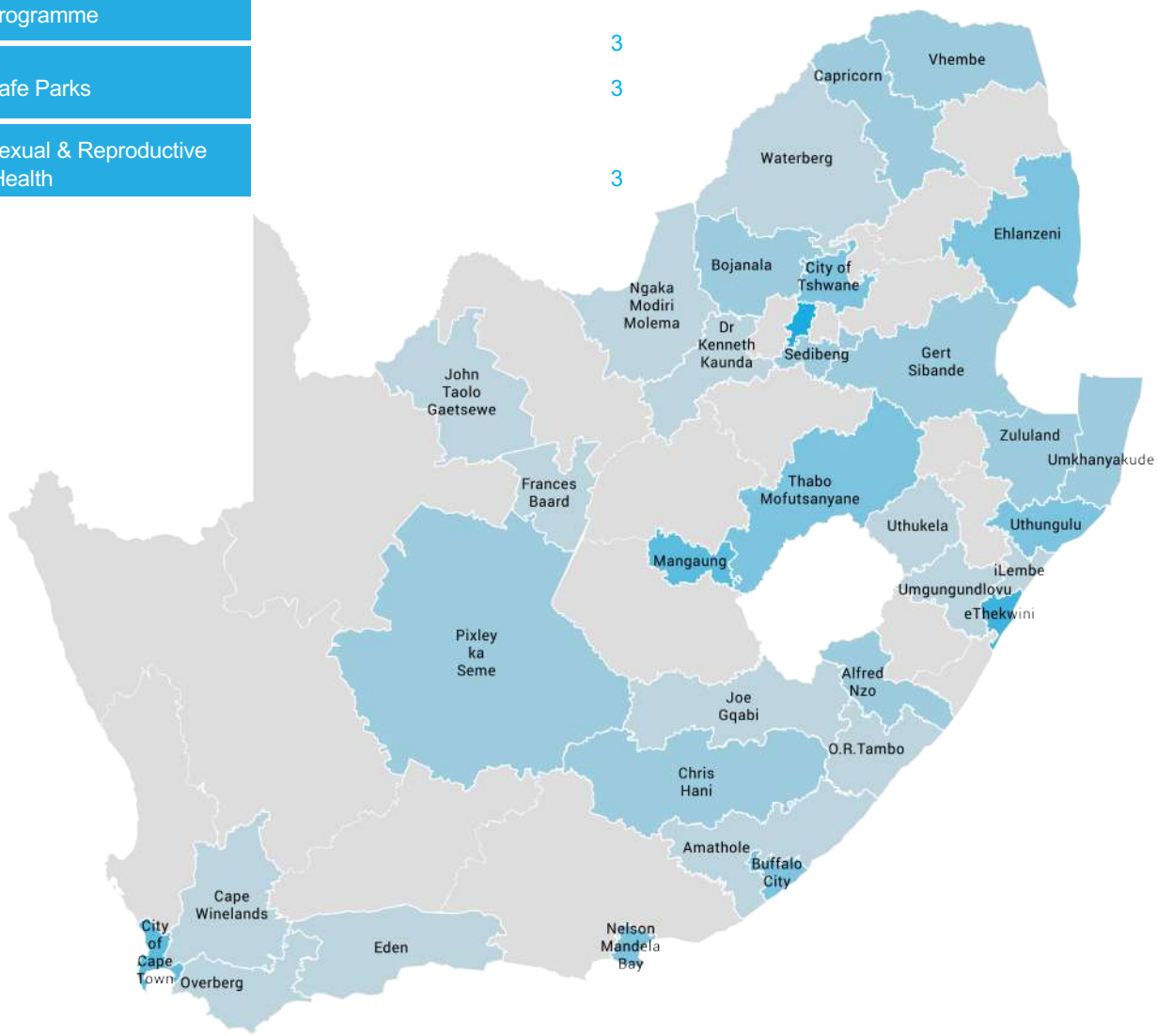
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Responding and reimagining for every child

Total Number of Districts by Intervention Type



Through risk communication and community engagement work, UNICEF has a national presence spreading COVID-19 prevention measures, supporting the safe return to school and promoting safe access to critical child health services. This mass media, community outreach and digital engagement work reaches some **21 million people** across the country.



The information in this map does not imply official recognition or endorsement of any physical, political boundaries or feature names by UNICEF.

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COVID-19 hits South Africa

On the evening of 26 March 2020, South Africa locked down in response to the COVID-19 outbreak in the country.

Having witnessed the speed at which the virus was spreading and devastating countries across the globe, South Africa's strict lockdown formed a pre-emptive measure to slow the spread of the virus and prepare the country's health facilities ahead of an anticipated surge in infections.

The public health impact of the virus has been severe, with more than 757,000 reported infections and 20,500 COVID-19 related deaths recorded by 19 November 2020,¹ with children making up 8% of COVID-19 confirmed cases.² Of this number, adolescents are affected at higher rates and available evidence³ indicates that adolescent girls are impacted worse than boys.

While children can get sick and spread the disease, this is just the tip of the iceberg. The relaxing of lockdown restrictions from 01 June and gradual reopening of economic activity further revealed the pandemic's broad ranging impact on childhood and youth.

Children's safety, nutrition and health have been compromised, while their education has been disrupted. A reported 2.2 million jobs were lost between April and June in South Africa⁴ – lost livelihoods that have a direct impact on children.

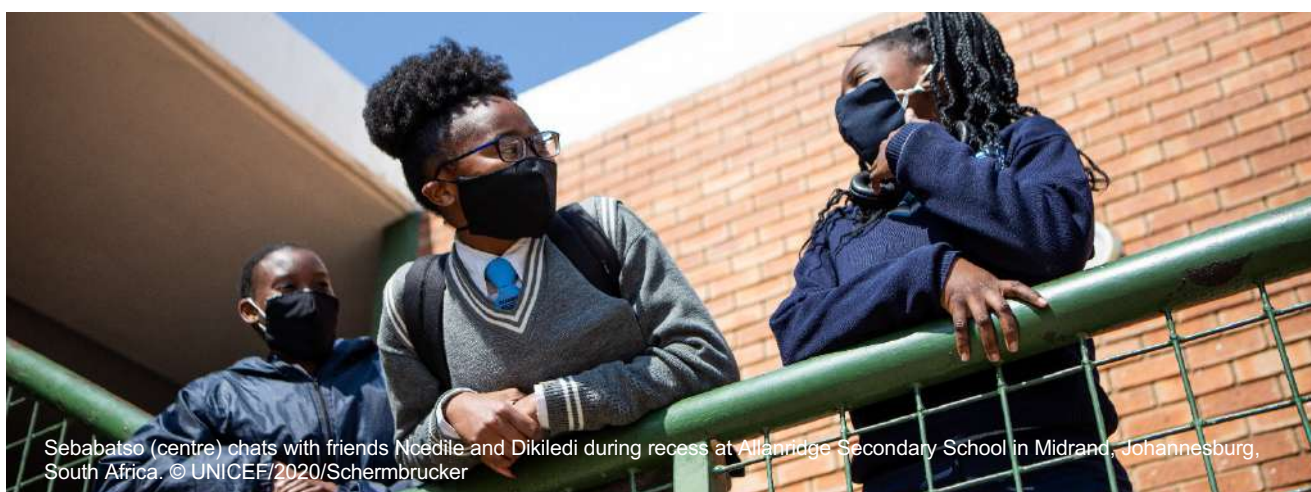
In South Africa – a country already defined by the triple challenge of inequality, poverty and unemployment and facing a crisis of gender-based violence (GBV) and violence against children (VAC) – COVID-19 and its fallout has only amplified the severity of these issues.

Achieving South Africa's National Development Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 has been made that much harder and requires a concerted effort to get back on track.

"The lives and futures of children across South Africa are being threatened by the COVID-19 crisis," said UNICEF South Africa Representative, Christine Muhigana. "Working alongside the South African Government and partners, our collective response must also tackle some of the deep-rooted issues in the country, only then can we reimagine and realise a better future, for every child."

UNICEF South Africa's agenda for action is aligned to the UN in South Africa's emergency COVID-19 appeal and works with the Government and multiple partners to:

- Keep children healthy and well nourished
- Improve access to safe water and hand hygiene for all
- Support families to cover their needs and care for their children
- Keep children learning
- Protect children from violence, exploitation and abuse
- Protect refugee and migrant children



Sebatso (centre) chats with friends Noédile and Dikiledi during recess at Allanridge Secondary School in Midrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. © UNICEF/2020/Schermbrucker

¹ 'COVID-19 South African Coronavirus News and Information Portal', SA Corona Virus Online Portal, 19 November 2020, <https://sacoronavirus.co.za/>.

² As at 17 October 2020; NCID, 'Monthly COVID-19 in Children Surveillance Report' (The National Institute for Communicable Diseases, 2020), <https://www.nicd.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Monthly-Covid-19-In-Children-Surveillance-Report-week-45.pdf>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Stats SA, 'Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2nd Quarter 2020', 29 September 2020, http://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=1854.

**Guarantee access to
nutrition & health
services & make
vaccines affordable
& available to
every child**



Slowing the spread of COVID-19 and keeping children healthy

The spread of COVID-19 and the related lockdown in South Africa led to extreme anxiety and fear among children, parents and caregivers. Accessing accurate and verified information about the virus and how to stay safe has been a challenge for people around the world in what the World Health Organisation (WHO) has described as an “infodemic”.⁵

“In the beginning, misinformation made our job really difficult,” says Mariame Sylla, UNICEF South Africa’s Chief of Health and Nutrition. “We had to put a lot of energy into our communication and messaging to ensure that the correct information was getting to where it was needed most.”

The immediate national priority was to curb the spread of infection and protect children and their families, particularly in hotspot areas, such as informal settlements where access to water and social distancing measures are more challenging.

Strengthening ‘risk communication and community engagement’ (RCCE) work on COVID-19 prevention messages continues to be critical. Through the national, provincial and district levels, UNICEF has been promoting and engaging with communities on handwashing, social distancing and mask wearing promotion, including through traditional media, television, online platforms, community radio and signage at handwashing stations.



A health worker administers a vaccine to a child
© UNICEF/2020/Tadesse

Some 7 million people have been reached with this lifesaving messaging and work goes on to further scale up this communication to help prevent a potential COVID-19 resurgence.

Although the evidence indicates that children generally present with milder symptoms due to COVID-19 infections⁶ the associated impact of the virus on existing services has been severe.

The disruptions to school feeding schemes, child nutrition services, routine immunisation and vaccination services, breastfeeding support and the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV programmes, risks undoing years of progress in securing children’s health and nutrition.

“Because of the fear and uncertainty, we saw a huge drop in visits to clinics,” says Sylla. “We’ve had to say, ‘don’t stop breastfeeding your child, don’t miss your child’s routine vaccination, don’t stop collecting your medication’ in encouraging people to return to clinics safely to preserve the progress we’ve made over the last years.”

Before March, HIV testing in children was increasing but after the start of the lockdown these numbers struggled to reach pre-lockdown levels, with 110,946 children tested in March 2020, down to 44,772 tested in April and rising again to 73,739 in September.⁷

UNICEF integrated its COVID-19 prevention messaging with crucial health communication promoting the continued safe use of health services on-the-ground, services which have continued to function and provide critical lifesaving support.

More than 10,000 primary caregivers of children under 24 months have received young child feeding counselling through the adolescent girls and young women peer mentor project. A further 164,000 are receiving healthcare services, including immunisation, prenatal, postnatal, HIV & GBV care in facilities supported by UNICEF.

“The immunisation catch-up drive is key to get routine vaccination coverage back on track and to protect children from preventable but deadly diseases, such as measles,” says Sylla. The campaign is targeting 12 priority districts, including 7 metropolitan areas that have been badly affected by COVID-19. During lockdown, routine immunisation coverage dropped to a worrying low of 61%.

The catch-up drive is also an opportunity to include deworming, nutrition screening, micronutrient supplementation, and screening and referrals for HIV testing and treatments among children under five years.

⁵ WHO, ‘Managing the COVID-19 Infodemic: Promoting Healthy Behaviours and Mitigating the Harm from Misinformation and Disinformation’, 23 September 2020, <https://www.who.int/news/item/23-09-2020-managing-the-covid-19-infodemic-promoting-healthy-behaviours-and-mitigating-the-harm-from-misinformation-and-disinformation>.

⁶ NCID, ‘Monthly COVID-19 in Children Surveillance Report: November’ (The National Institute for Communicable Diseases, 2020), <https://www.nicd.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Monthly-Covid-19-In-Children-Surveillance-Report-2.pdf>.

⁷ District Health Information Systems. November 2020. *Technical Working Group Meeting*.

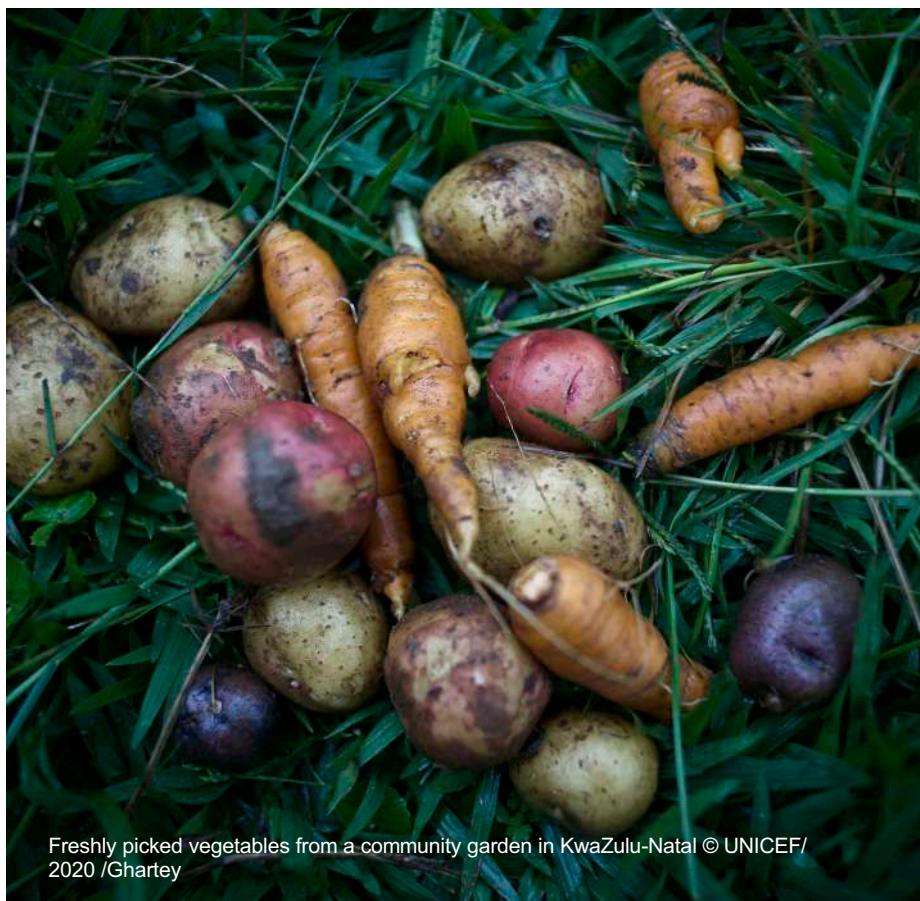
Since April, with the massive loss of jobs and income, it has become harder than ever for poorer families to provide for their children. Forty-seven percent of households ran out of money for food in April during lockdown and while this number fell to 37% in June, the need remains dire.⁸

In response to a UNICEF U-report SMS platform survey assessing youth's immediate intervention needs in July, food was the most pressing need with 44% of respondents requesting "family food packages" from government.⁹

To mitigate the immediate and potential long-term impact on child nutrition, UNICEF and partners responded in five priority provinces to promote the continuation of child nutrition services and is implementing recovery plans to improve nutritional status. The construction of community gardens in Cape Town, Soweto and Durban through child protection partners is another element of the response that not only provides nutritious food on the table but also a safe space for vulnerable children to learn, play and grow. Outside one of the community gardens in Salt River, Cape Town, 22-year-old Fay-Yaadh explains, "Gardening and maintenance makes me feel free and safe [and] this helps me to clear my mind. This garden keeps me pro-active and brings the community together."

Promoting nutrition more broadly, a media campaign focusing on 'National Nutrition and Obesity' is also reaching youth with important messages on healthy eating in the context of COVID-19. Greater nutritional awareness amongst adolescents and youth, will in turn also reduce longer-term risk factors linked to non-communicable diseases, as young people become agents of change in their communities. At the same time, with only 31% of infants being exclusively breastfed in the country,¹⁰ critical messages on the benefits of breastfeeding are reaching young mothers to change behaviours and in-turn to help give their children the best start in life.

"We're taking it day by day", says Sylla. "But the real challenge lies six to eighteen months away as the effects of this virus will be with us for a long time," she adds.



Freshly picked vegetables from a community garden in KwaZulu-Natal © UNICEF/2020 /Ghartey

Key Facts

- 27% of children in South Africa were stunted, pre-pandemic.¹¹
- One in seven respondents of the National Income Dynamic Survey (NIDS) reported that a child had gone hungry in the last 7 days, with 8% reporting frequent child hunger of 3-days in one week.¹²
- During lockdown, national immunisation coverage dropped to 61%, down from 82% in the same month of 2019.¹³

⁸ Gabrielle Wills et al., 'Household Resource Flows and Food Poverty during South Africa's Lockdown: Short-Term Policy Implications for Three Channels of Social Protection', Wave 1: National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (CRAM), 2020, 46.

⁹ De Lannoy, A., Mudiriza, G. & Smith, C. (2020) The state of youth well-being in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic. Cape Town: Southern Africa Labour and Research Development Unit, University of Cape Town & Centre for Social Development in South Africa, University of Johannesburg.

¹⁰ UNICEF South Africa, 'South African Nutrition Brief' (Pretoria: UNICEF, 2020), <https://www.unicef.org/southafrica/media/4036/file/ZAF-Nutrition-brief-2020.pdf>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Spaul et al., 'NIDS-CRAM Synthesis Report Wave', Working Paper Series, 2020, 17.

¹³ Adele Baleta, 'Dramatic Drop in SA's Immunisation Rates', Spotlight, 24 June 2020, <https://www.spotlightnsp.co.za/2020/06/24/dramatic-drop-in-sas-immunisation-rates/>.



**Increase access to
safe water and hand
hygiene for all**

Improving hand hygiene for all

Handwashing with soap was quickly recognised as being one of the best ways to slow the spread of COVID-19. But in a recent UNICEF South Africa poll, young people said water shortages in communities are one of the main barriers to handwashing, with only 36% saying they had washed their hands more than five times the day before.¹⁴

UNICEF South Africa immediately set-up an emergency COVID-19 water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) response, targeting the most at risk locations, from informal settlements to transport hubs, and schools to healthcare facilities.

Through this work, more than 130 handwashing stations with soap have been erected across 9 provinces, alongside the ongoing distribution of 10,000 WASH kits, containing soap, sanitiser, masks and cleaning products for vulnerable households.

UNICEF and partners are improving both access to handwashing facilities, as well as engaging with communities to promote their proper and regular use. This work not only helps to slow the spread of COVID-19 but also reduce the prevalence of other preventable diseases, such as diarrhoea that is attributable to 8% of deaths of under-fives in South Africa.¹⁵

In supporting the Department of Basic Education (DBE), a total of 120 schools across 7 provinces will receive improved access to handwashing facilities, a critical response to help keep schools safe and open.

Hygiene promotion programmes are also a part of this work, including the “H for Handwashing” initiative in partnership with the DBE and Unilever/Lifebuoy to engrain handwashing into the minds and practices of young children through learning the alphabet.

Powered by more than 20,000 young people, the #TippyTapChallenge – a drive to construct inexpensive and easy-to-build ‘Tippy Taps’ for improved handwashing at home and in schools – is leading a youth handwashing revolution through an innovative digital approach.

UNICEF’s Tippy Tap guidelines have also been included in operating protocols to help keep South Africa’s 1,374 drop-in centres open, facilities that provide essential services aimed at meeting the emotional, physical and social development of vulnerable children across the country.



A resident of Alexandra in Johannesburg washes their hands at a newly installed handwashing station. © UNICEF/Spatari/AFP-Service

Key Facts

A recent UNICEF survey¹⁶ shows that:

- 3% rural and 28% of urban key informants reported that there is enough water for handwashing – 45% experienced water cuts in the last week
- 3% rural and 18% urban key informants reported that most people have access to functioning handwashing facilities
- 36% of youth said they had washed their hands more than five times the day before

¹⁴ UNICEF South Africa, Children’s Radio Foundation. (June, 2020) Youth Reporter Handwashing Survey.

¹⁵ ‘Diarrhoea’, UNICEF Data, October 2020, <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-health/diarrhoeal-disease/>.

¹⁶ Smulders, J.R. & Simon Meyer, J. 2020. WASH/RCCE Key Informant Rapid Needs Assessment. UNICEF South Africa.



Thobeka: A Handwashing Hero

© UNICEF/2020/Hearfield

Thobeka's final year at Limekhaya Secondary School didn't go as planned. After shutting down in response to the COVID-19 lockdown, her school's gradual reopening has brought new challenges that hadn't previously been as much of a concern.

"Most of the time, here in our school, [the] water runs out and we don't have water to wash our hands," says the 20-year-old student as she steps out of her schools' exam venue after writing her Business Studies paper.

Thobeka is one of a number of students at Limekhaya Secondary School who joined the #TippyTapChallenge – a people-powered campaign initiated by UNICEF South Africa to curb the spread of COVID-19 and to stop a resurgence by building vital handwashing stations – 'tippy taps' – in the areas that need them most.

"Because we don't have money to buy sanitisers, having a tippy tap is good because you [can] wash your hands", continues Thobeka. With an estimated 2 million households in South Africa not having access to handwashing facilities, the tippy tap is one measure being promoted to provide urgent relief as an inexpensive, easy to assemble and water saving handwashing solution.

Requiring no more than some string, wooden poles, a nail, a plastic bottle or water container and a bar of soap, a tippy tap can be quickly assembled, providing a simple and hygienic handwashing station.

Through UNICEF's partnership with the Zlto platform, users are able to earn digital rewards for every tippy tap built via the Zlto app. The Zlto rewards can then be redeemed for food and airtime vouchers and are also reflected as a 'work asset', which young people can use as experience when applying for jobs.

The partnership is spurring a youth-led handwashing revolution with more than 3,000 young people having built a tippy tap via the platform, while more than 20,000 have enrolled in a course on how to build the handwashing stations.

Critically children and young people are playing a key role in helping to keep their schools and communities safe. Sustainable access to safe water in schools is also improving through the government's strategy to provide every school with decent water and sanitation facilities.



**Reverse the rise in child poverty
and ensure an inclusive
recovery for all**

Key Facts

- The impact of the virus has exacerbated urban and rural divisions, with 52% of adults in rural areas unemployed in June, compared with 35% in the metros.¹⁷
- The gender wage gap widened during lockdown, from women earning 29% less hourly wages than men before the lockdown, to 43% less in June.¹⁸
- The South African economy is projected to decline by 7.2 per cent in 2020.¹⁹
- The Child Support Grant reaches some 12.5 million children.²⁰



Sebatatso Nchephe (left), 18, outside her home near Johannesburg
© UNICEF/2020/Schermbrucker

Ensuring an inclusive recovery for all

Figures from Statistics South Africa²¹ and the National Income Dynamics Study – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (Nids-Cram)²² tell a devastating story of South Africa's new economic reality.

Despite the easing of lockdown regulations on economic activity since June, most of the 2.2 million jobs lost over the second quarter have not been recovered with figures from South Africa's third quarter indicating that the unemployment rate has increased by 7.5% to 30.8%.²³

The impact of massive job losses is not equally felt. The wage gap between women and men increased from 30% to 50% and it is women who are more likely to have lost their jobs while bearing increased childcare responsibilities.

In the poorest female headed homes, women and children are carrying the heaviest burden. Without money to buy food, and faced with the stress of unemployment, children have become more vulnerable as parents and caregivers struggle to provide for their children and to cope themselves.

While the evidence reveals the scale of the economic crisis as a result of COVID-19, it also offers a sign of what can work to help mitigate the broad ranging socio-economic impact.

Social relief efforts like the Child Support Grant (CSG) – which was increased by R300 for each of the 12.5 million children receiving it in May and R500 for 7 million caregivers thereafter – have made a significant impact in reaching and alleviating some of the economic stress for the most vulnerable.

The top-ups to existing social grants, alongside the government's COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant and the Temporary Employee/Employer Relief Scheme (TERS) have together seen a reduction in child hunger, from 15% over May and June to 11% by the end of August.²⁴ This is in step with a decline in the number of households that ran out of money for food, from 47% in April to 37% in June.²⁵

Together with a coalition of 35 civil society organisations, UNICEF successfully advocated for the top-up of the CSG in response to the impact of COVID-19.

For Sibongile Matume, an unemployed mother from Freedom Park in Johannesburg, the CSG has meant that she can provide food for her daughter, Malume. "I feel very relieved," says Sibongile, "I know that I won't be stressed, even when I want to cook, everything is there, they can eat [and] I am very happy."

Evidence of the effectiveness of social relief grants will be important in guiding budget prioritisation over the coming months.

Even before COVID-19, the CSG was a crucial instrument of social protection in South Africa. Now, with the economic impact of the virus having far-reaching implications for vulnerable children, the life-saving ability of this grant must continue to be prioritised.

¹⁷ Ivan Turok and Justin Visagie, 'Confronting Spatial Inequalities in the COVID-19 Crisis', 2020, 8.

¹⁸ Robert Hill and Tim Köhler, 'Analysing the Effects of South Africa's National Lockdown on Gender Wage Inequality', 2020, 10.

¹⁹ UNICEF South Africa, 'National Budget Brief South Africa', 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/southafrica/media/4606/file/ZAF-national-budget-brief-2020.pdf>.

²⁰ UNICEF, 'The South African Child Support Grant Impact Assessment: Evidence from a Survey of Children, Adolescents and Their Households', 2012, https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/The_South_African_Child_Support_Grant_Impact_Assessment.pdf.

²¹ Stats SA, 'Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2nd Quarter 2020'. 29 September 2020, http://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=1854.

²² Nic Spaull et al., 'Synthesis Report NIDS-CRAM Wave 2' (Cape Town, 20 September 2020), <https://cramsury.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/1.-Spaull-et-al.-NIDS-CRAM-Wave-2-Synthesis-Findings..pdf>.

²³ This according to the narrow definition of employment; Stats SA, 'Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 3rd Quarter 2020'. 12 November 2020, <http://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=13758>.

²⁴ Bridgman, G., Van der Berg, S. & Patel, L. (2020) Hunger in South Africa during 2020: Results from Wave 2 of NIDS-CRAM.

²⁵ Ibid

A photograph of two young Black women sitting on wooden desks in a classroom, facing each other and talking. They are both wearing black face masks. The woman on the left is wearing a grey sweater over a white collared shirt and a blue tie, and dark pants. The woman on the right is wearing a dark blue tracksuit. The background shows a chalkboard with some drawings and text, and several rows of empty desks and orange chairs. The text "Ensure all children learn," is overlaid in white at the top, and "by closing the digital divide" is overlaid in white in the center.

Ensure all children learn,

by closing
the digital
divide

Bolstering Early Learning

Some 1.8 million children²⁶ have been affected by the closure of ECD services and 100,000 jobs may already be lost in the sector, adding to South Africa's immense unemployment burden.

UNICEF is supporting the safe return to ECD centres and is bolstering the early learning response through remote learning resources for children aged 0 to 5-years. This is critical to ensuring that children have the best start in life.

To support early learning in the national curriculum framework, UNICEF rapidly translated popular digital materials into all 11 local languages. Through the *Tshwaragano ka Bana: Let's play, learn and grow together series*, ECD learning materials have reached more than 683,000 parents and an estimated 940,000 children under five.

Support from the LEGO Foundation has also enabled the design, finalisation and hosting of *ECD Mobi*, a virtual resource room for parents, caregivers and educators with ideas to support their children's learning through play according to their age.



Keeping children learning in and out of school

For South Africa's estimated 13 million school children, the pandemic resulted in the total closure of schools for a cumulative 3-and-a-half months with periods of gradual and staggered reopening.

This not only disrupted learning but meant that 9.1 million children who received school meals suddenly missed out. Children also lost the safe and protective environment that schools provide and for some children getting back into class will be an ongoing challenge.

Responding to the available evidence, the South African government has been recognised globally for leading a proactive response in getting children back to school safely.

UNICEF played a lead role in supporting the safe back-to-school initiative. Through child friendly standard operating procedures developed with partners such as WHO and the Red Cross, children, teachers, caregivers and communities were provided with clear guidance on how to stay as safe as possible.

This is in addition to videos and mass media work on staying safe at school that has reached 21 million people, through public service broadcast announcements and via the Children's Radio Foundation.

In keeping children safe, it has been as important to keep children learning during the lockdown and school re-opening process.

Improvised, innovative and often creative remote learning has helped fill the gap left by the school closures. Lessons have been delivered on television, online, through social media, over the radio or mobile phone, or via printed home learning packages with at least 6,8 million children receiving learning resources through these different mediums.

UNICEF is also supporting the *WOZA Matrics 2020* catch up broadcast learning programme that provides final year learners with materials and psychosocial support as they prepare for their final school exams.

Efforts to expand digital learning have been pivotal not only to South Africa's COVID-19 response, but also well beyond it. UNICEF is supporting the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to scale up mass e-learning, online and app-based access with private sector input, including partnering with *2Enable* to develop digital learning content for preschool and primary students.

Remote learning has also exposed the digital divide that reflects broader societal inequality. Many households – especially in rural areas – have no electricity, let alone internet access. According to the recent national survey conducted through UNICEF's U-Report SMS platform, only 11% of young people reported access to a laptop and internet, and 41% highlighted the need for information on skills and training opportunities.²⁷

As South Africa and countries around the world look to reimagine education in the wake of the pandemic, bridging the digital divide and prioritising online connectivity is imperative. More than this – with 8 out of 10 grade four students in South Africa unable to read for meaning, even before the arrival of COVID-19²⁸ – it is crucial that our build-back-better response transforms the way children learn and how they are being taught to ensure a quality and inclusive education system for all.

This effort will require the collective engagement of the private sector and all partners to support the Government's ongoing work to provide every child with the same chance.

²⁶ BRIDGE, Ilifa Labantwana, National ECD Alliance, SmartStart, SA Congress for ECD. 2020. "Second Survey Assessing the Impact of COVID on ECD." August 2020.

²⁷ De Lannoy, A., Mudiriza, G. & Smith, C. (2020) The state of youth well-being in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic. Cape Town: Southern Africa Labour and Research Development Unit, University of Cape Town & Centre for Social Development in South Africa, University of Johannesburg.

²⁸ Ina V.S. Mullis et al., 'PIRLS 2016: International Results in Reading' (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2016), <http://pirls2016.org/download-center/>.



Sebatatso, 18, poses for a photo in Ivory Park, Johannesburg. © UNICEF/2020/Schermbrucker

Young people innovating for a brighter post-COVID future

When 19-year-old Sebatatso suspected she had COVID-19, she walked to the local clinic, where she found a pregnant woman waiting alone in the punishing heat.

The woman had come for a prenatal visit. But, as Sebatatso explains, “the nurse told her it happened in the morning and she had to come back tomorrow. Imagine the time she wasted. What if she lives far and has no money for taxi fare?”

That’s when Sebatatso got the idea for an app – Afya Yangu, or ‘My Health’.

Especially for those living with HIV and AIDS, Sebatatso says, the app will help patients maintain privacy and dignity.

“There has been too much stigmatization in hospitals for people with HIV. Now, when you’re trying to keep your status confidential, you won’t have to stand in line with everyone who knows you.”

The app allows hospitals to directly communicate with patients, giving them critical information about their health care without forcing them to wait hours or even days in line.

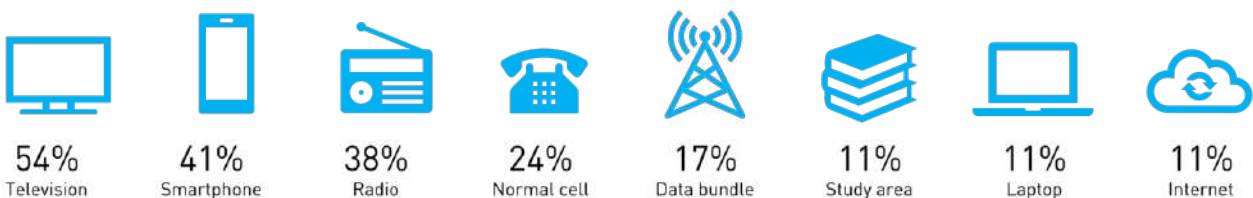
A participant in the UNICEF-supported Techno Girl programme, Sebatatso’s confidence and skills have grown through the programme’s job shadowing experience in technical fields such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Sebatatso’s story is a prominent example of how youth in South Africa have joined in the COVID-19 response through digital technologies. Through UNICEF’s U-Report SMS platform, young people have participated in rapid response surveys that have guided authorities with crucial information needed in implementing a targeted response to address the shocks to young people’s lives.

Generation Unlimited – a broad ranging partnership to grow education, training and employment opportunities will play a critical role in supporting young people to access mentorship opportunities, digital knowledge and jobs, to foster their entrepreneurship ideas and to move into meaningful work.

“If more girls could be exposed to what I was exposed to, they would dream big,” Sebatatso says, reflecting on her opportunities to learn to create digital technologies. “I want to tell them that your story must be told, your dreams are valid.”

U-Report youth respondents’ access to different items during lockdown²⁹



²⁹ De Lannoy, A., Mudiriza, G. & Smith, C. (2020) The state of youth well-being in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic. Cape Town: Southern Africa Labour and Research Development Unit, University of Cape Town & Centre for Social Development in South Africa, University of Johannesburg.

Support and protect the mental health of children and young people and bring an end to abuse, gender-based violence and neglect



The COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa, has had a devastating impact on children's safety and wellbeing across the country.

For some children, trapped at home with their abusers and out of the public eye, reports of child abuse increased, while reaching child victims has been made more difficult as disruptions affected crucial child protection services. Children on the move and younger children, often without access to and knowledge of the services available, have borne the brunt.

The intensified levels of violence against women and children has been described as South Africa's "second pandemic" and as the pandemic evolves, children's emotional and psychological wellbeing is deteriorating as they look ahead towards a more uncertain future.

Livhuwani is one of the many UNICEF-supported social workers who has been supporting children through the lockdown. Working with Childline South Africa – a non-profit organisation that provides free counselling services to children – Livhuwani knows first-hand the value of social work in supporting children and young people in South Africa. "In terms of violence, it was there where I grew up," she says. "I didn't know it as 'gender-based violence', I knew it as 'a man must rule his family.' – only now I'm realising that was abuse, that was domestic violence."

A UNICEF global survey, conducted between May and August 2020, found that violence prevention and response services have been severely disrupted in more than 104 countries during COVID-19 lockdowns.

"This period of COVID-19, we have registered so many cases of domestic violence, gender-based violence [and] sexual abuse – so many cases that were contributed by this lockdown and staying at home," says Livhuwani who works in the Orange Farm area, south of Johannesburg.



Key Facts

- 1 in 3 children experience some form of violence in South Africa.
- Between 28% and 37% of adult men report having raped a women.³⁰
- A U-report survey shows how 72% of young people reported depressive symptoms during the hard lockdown – a figure that is drastically higher than pre-pandemic surveys.³¹
- Childline South Africa reported a more than 36% increase in the overall call volumes for August 2020, compared with the same month in 2019.

³⁰ Rachel Jewkes et al., 'Gender Inequitable Masculinity and Sexual Entitlement in Rape Perpetration South Africa: Findings of a Cross-Sectional Study', ed. Beverley J. Shea, PLoS ONE 6, no. 12 (28 December 2011): e29590, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0029590>.

³¹ De Lannoy, A., Mudiriza, G. & Smith, C. (2020) The state of youth well-being in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic. Cape Town: Southern Africa Labour and Research Development Unit, University of Cape Town & Centre for Social Development in South Africa, University of Johannesburg.



Livhuwani meets with one of her clients in Johannesburg, South Africa. © UNICEF/2020

Over the end of March and early April, Childline received 21,827 calls – up 67% from the same period last year. The high call volumes continued throughout and after the lockdown and are a concerning indication that children’s safety will remain under increased threat in the wake of the pandemic.

Working with the National Association of Child Care Workers (NACCW), UNICEF and child protection partners transformed child and youth care work in response to the pandemic. Over 1,000 children have been counselled through an innovative virtual platform known as the “virtual livespace” – a facilitated online learning and support programme, providing psychosocial services and educational support to children and youth.

Providing direct support to partners for child protection organisations like Childline, Red Cross, Progress and the NACCW forms part of UNICEF’s prevention and early intervention approach to VAC. Some 20,000 children have been assisted with online counselling, referrals and information for their physical, emotional and psychological health.

In addition, UNICEF is providing capacity development training in child protection services, including mental health as well as protection against sexual exploitation and abuse with partners in the South Africa Council for Social Service Professionals (SACSSP), Jelly Beanz and the NACCW.

With the SACSSP, 1,000 social service professionals have been provided with information on COVID-19 through online platforms and, following the trainings, 250 social service professionals have been placed in community-based NGOs, local government and the gender-based violence (GBV) command centres. This work plays a critical role in localising the GBV and broader child protection response.

As UNICEF South Africa’s Chief of Social Policy and Child Protection, Mayke Huijbregts, explains, direct relief on-the-ground and capacity development are two of three layers in UNICEF’s COVID-19 response in protecting children in the wake of the pandemic. “Providing technical leadership at a national level through numerous strategic virtual engagements has also been a vital part of our work in guiding the South African response,” says Huijbregts.

UNICEF’s thought leadership in driving policy has been complemented by an extensive public advocacy campaign. “Since the onset of the pandemic, it has also been critical to spread awareness and equip caregivers, faith and community leaders to tackle child abuse and mental health issues in the home and online,” says Huijbregts.

In a particularly successful example of this virtual advocacy, the ‘Africa Day Benefit Concert At Home’ was hosted with partners ViacomCBS and the World Food Programme to celebrate Africa Day on the 25th of May. Featuring a range of celebrities, the concert saw more than 100 million viewers tuning in and being exposed to vital child protection messaging and guidance.



Redouble efforts to protect children on the move and their families

A young boy wears a face mask as he walks with his mother © UNICEF/2020 /Everett

For children on the move – a group comprising refugees, asylum seekers, victims of trafficking, smuggled migrants and unaccompanied and separated minors – the impact of the coronavirus has been especially severe.

Living in precarious conditions, and without the documentation to qualify for state support, the immediate needs of these children are dire. Refugee children and women are also often victims of the shocking scale of GBV and VAC before, during and post South Africa's lockdown.

Through a network of partnerships, UNICEF is providing immediate food relief, hygiene kits, psycho-social services and support in acquiring appropriate documentation to migrant children and families in distress. This support has been complimented by targeted business training programmes for migrant women.

UNICEF's water, sanitation and health communication has also been tailored to reach children on the move through hygiene promotion messaging in French and Swahili – the languages most spoken by migrant children.

To gain a more accurate picture of the COVID-19 impact on this vulnerable group, UNICEF has partnered with the Red Cross to support the Department of Social Development in mapping children on the move, as well as the existing activities and potential opportunities to strengthen the coronavirus response.

Key Facts

- More than 642,000 migrant or displaced children currently live in South Africa, making it the country with the largest child migrant population on the continent.³²
- It is estimated that more than 266,000 refugees and asylum seekers currently need assistance in South Africa.³³

This more accurate picture of the movement of migrant children has been strengthened through the signing of an agreement to monitor the situation of children and their rights with the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC). The agreement ensures that all children – regardless of migratory status – are considered and included in policies and actions responding to COVID-19 and have access to basic services.

There are concerns that the socio-economic impact of the virus could lead to increased xenophobia against already vulnerable children on the move and their families, who have previously taken the blame during challenging economic times in South Africa.

UNICEF is working with sister UN agencies and the South African media to take a proactive stance to counter xenophobic messages and to tackle negative narratives across social media platforms in the wake of COVID-19.

The safety of refugee and migrant children requires a clear and unequivocal condemnation of xenophobia whenever and wherever it emerges.

³² UNICEF, 'Data Snapshot of Migrant and Displaced Children in Africa' (UNICEF, 2019), <https://data.unicef.org/resources/data-snapshot-of-migrant-and-displaced-children-in-africa/>

³³ UNDP, 'COVID-19: Rapid Emergency Needs Assessment for the Most Vulnerable Groups' (United Nations Development Programme, 2020), https://www.za.undp.org/content/south_africa/en/home/library/rapid-emergency-needs-assessment.html.



Before the onset of COVID-19, young people gather outside a community centre in Taung, North West © UNICEF/2012/Maduna

Reimagining the future: A call to action for a safer, fairer and better South Africa

The impact of COVID-19 on children's health, education, safety and opportunities – on children's rights – has been devastating. UNICEF South Africa and partners are committed to mitigating the broad ranging impact of COVID-19 on childhood and to work towards achieving the National Development Plan and Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

To ensure children are healthy and well-nourished, UNICEF calls for:

- the continuation of key child health and nutrition services – especially routine immunisation, prioritising the hardest to reach;
- a united fight against the spread of misinformation;
- equal and affordable access to COVID-19 diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines as part of a comprehensive package of essential care.

To reach vulnerable children with safe water and improve hand hygiene, UNICEF calls for:

- universal access to sustainable safe water and handwashing facilities for children and families;
- investment in climate-resilient water, sanitation and hygiene services in homes, schools, hospitals and public spaces;
- greater awareness to teach children and young people about climate change, the environment and responsible and sustainable consumption and production.

To support families to cover their needs, UNICEF calls for:

- the continued expansion of the social protection floor through the Child Support Grant and relevant COVID-relief grants;
- investment and donor support for key services for children and young people and to ring-fence spending on the most vulnerable children;
- commit to an inclusive recovery plan to prevent more children and their families falling into poverty.

To keep children learning, UNICEF calls for:

- collaboration between partners in the private sector, government and civil society to reduce the digital divide, so that every school and every child has access to online learning opportunities;
- state and private sector support to aid in the safe reopening of Early Childhood Development centres;
- access to in-school psychosocial support services WASH facilities and training in hygiene for parents, teachers and students in all schools

To protect children and end violence, exploitation and abuse, UNICEF calls for:

- social compacts to intensify investments in childcare and prevention and early intervention services;
- accelerated youth empowerment through social compacts between the state, the private sector and community partners;
- investment in gender-sensitive mental health and psychosocial support services for children, adolescents and their caregivers, including through schools, social services and communities.

To redouble efforts to protect children on the move and their families, UNICEF calls for:

- national systems, policies and plans for the inclusion of children on the move – starting with COVID-19 recovery and response efforts, as well as specific donor support for this vulnerable group;
- expediting the process of attaining documentation for children on the move and their families so that they can receive access to comprehensive social relief, health and other services;
- all partners to condemn and counter xenophobia in all its forms.

Summary of Programme Results, UNICEF South Africa, November 2020

Indicators	Target to 31 Dec 2020	Results as of 31 October 2020
Education		
Number of children – and parents – supported with distance/home-based learning [ECD, Primary, Secondary Ed]	7,200,000	6,824,791
Child Protection & Social Policy		
Number of children without parental or family provided with appropriate alternative care arrangements	15,000	18,467
Number of children, parents and primary caregivers provided with community- based mental health and psychosocial support	100,000	131,800
Number of children and adults that have access to a safe and accessible channel to report sexual exploitation and abuse	2,500,000	175,940
Number of UNICEF personnel & partners that have completed training on GBV risk mitigation & referrals for survivors, including for PSEA	20	70
UNICEF technical support to COVID-19 top-up of government social protection cash transfer system	5,700,000 (households)	5,700,000
WASH		
Number of people reached with critical WASH supplies, including hygiene items, and services	500,000	66,104
Health and Nutrition		
Number of children & women receiving essential healthcare services, including immunization, prenatal, postnatal, HIV & GBV care in UNICEF supported facilities (national and monthly)	171,858	166,855
Number of primary caregivers of children aged 0-23 months who received infant and young child feeding counselling through facilities and community platforms through UNICEF supported adolescent girls and young women peer mentors project	5,774	13,086
Risk Communication & Community Engagement		
Number of people reached on COVID-19 through messaging on prevention and access to services	7,000,000	7,365,154
Number of people engaged on COVID-19 through RCCE actions	40,000	73,555
Number of people sharing their concerns and asking questions/clarifications for available support services to address their needs through established feedback mechanisms	100,000	37,000



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for every child