



Mitigating the effects of pandemics on children

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Introduction

Pandemics happen unexpectedly and when they occur, the world is largely unprepared for them. One of the most vulnerable groups in these situations are children. Ranging from high risk of mortality to long-term lower socioeconomic wellbeing, children have the most to lose during major world crises, such as pandemics.

During the most recent pandemic of COVID-19, which is still ongoing, children have been dealing with long lasting effects on their physical and mental health, as well as academic performance. Meanwhile, factors like poverty have been exacerbated, especially for children in the Global South, causing concerns for a “lost generation”.

The United Nations (UN) has taken an active role and holistic approach in attempting to counter the worst effects of pandemics on children, through the United Nations

Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the UN Secretariat, specifically the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.



So far, the UN has focused its efforts on two actions: creating a Pandemic Agreement and bouncing back from COVID-19. The WHO has been leading the process of creating a

Pandemic prevention, preparedness and response accord, but it has encountered difficulties in negotiations, mainly due to lack of political will. UNICEF is mostly focused on gaining the lost ground in the path to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A key difficulty in this pursuit is the multi-crisis environment where children who need the most help are located, where a health crisis is compounded with conflict, increased poverty, collapsing public infrastructure, and a challenging access to education.

In a post-pandemic reality, the world is eager to move on and the emergence of new pressing crises provides urgent distractions to the work that is yet left to be done. If no



action is taken on preparing for the next pandemic or closing the gap left behind by COVID, multilateralism is weakened and the world fails children and young people in need.

Background Examples

This past century, the world has had to deal with three major health crises: the COVID-19 pandemic (2019-present), the HIV/AIDS epidemic (1981-present), and the Spanish flu (1918-1920). During this time frame, there have also been other pandemics and epidemics with less than four million estimated victims worldwide, which are not covered by this issue brief.

Below is a short overview of each of the major pandemics of the past century with a specific focus on their impact on children:

COVID-19 pandemic, 2019-present: On January 30, 2020, the WHO chief declared the novel COVID-19 virus “a public health emergency of international concern”.¹ As of October 2024, over 776 million cases and over 7 million deaths have been reported.²

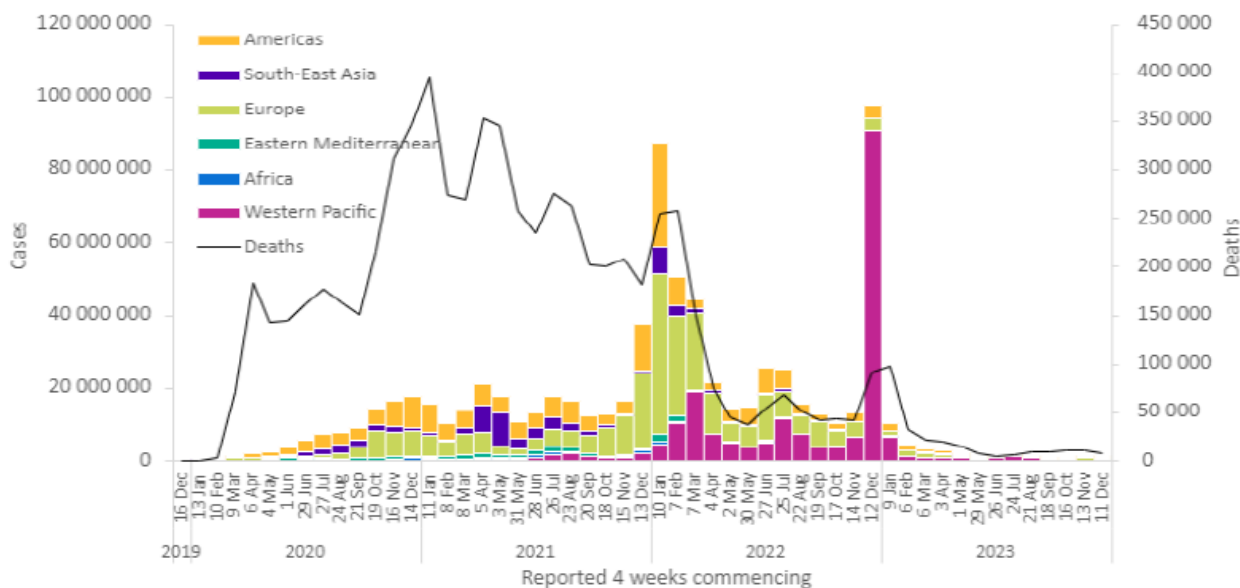
Based on the current analysis, children have been less affected by COVID-19, given low infection rates and deaths among infants and young children. The mean age of infection for children has been 6.7 years old, while the estimated mortality rate ranges from 1-5%, a tiny portion of the Spanish flu pandemic.³ Long term effects of COVID-19 on children can be found in the next section.

¹ [World Health Organization](#). “WHO chief declares end to COVID-19 as a global health emergency.” 5 May 2023.

² [World Health Organization](#). ‘COVID-19 Epidemiological Updates.’ 9 October 2024.

³ Dalekou, Sofia, Spyros N. Michaleas, A.K. Tsitsika, M. Karamanou. “Comparative study of pandemics and their impact on children and adolescents: COVID-19 and Spanish Flu.” [Infez Med](#). 1 June 2023; 31(2): pp. 133.

Fig 1. COVID-19 cases and global deaths by 28-day intervals reported by WHO Region⁴



HIV/AIDS epidemic, 1981-present:

HIV/AIDS was never declared a pandemic, despite having claimed an estimated 42.3 million lives to date.⁵ Although HIV/AIDS was originally thought to only affect specific groups, such as gay men in developed countries and people who inject drugs, it is now widely known that the disease can also spread among heterosexual people and that infected mothers can transmit HIV to their babies.⁶

Almost 40 million people, out of whom an estimated 1.4 million children aged 0-14 years old, currently live with HIV.⁷ At the height of the epidemic in the early 2000s, AIDS claimed the lives of an estimated 360,000 children every year. In 2023, this figure dropped to 76,000 children⁸ and the UN aims to eliminate AIDS by 2030.⁹

⁴ [World Health Organization](#). 'COVID-19 Epidemiological Updates.' 19 January 2024.

⁵ [World Health Organization](#). 'HIV and AIDS: Key Facts.' 22 July 2024.

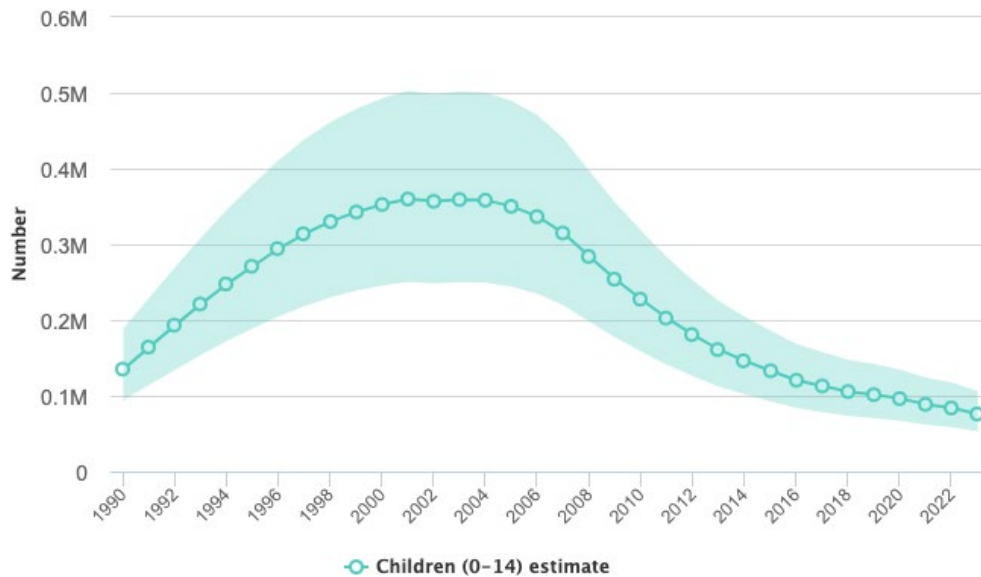
⁶ [World Health Organization](#). 'Why the HIV epidemic is not over.'

⁷ [UNAIDS](#). "AIDSinfo Global Factsheet - 2023."

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ [UNAIDS](#). 'The path that ends AIDS: UNAIDS Global AIDS Update 2023'. Geneva: Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS; 2023.

Fig 2. AIDS-related deaths among children (0-14).¹⁰



*Spanish flu*¹¹ - *Influenza A/H1N1*, 1918-1920: A century before COVID-19, the Spanish flu shocked the world. Given that data collection and analysis was not a priority in the middle of the Great War, the estimated death toll of this pandemic ranges from 17 to 100 million lives.¹² Although the disease affected mostly adults ages 18-50, the mortality rate of children ages 0-4 ranged between 30-35%, much higher than the child mortality rate of COVID-19, mentioned above.¹³ Other effects of the Spanish flu were cardiovascular diseases, increased disability rates and specifically for children, death of parents.¹⁴

Current Situation

The world may be eager to move past the COVID-19 pandemic, granted it is no longer considered a global health emergency.¹⁵ However, humanity is still grappling with the long term educational, socioeconomic and mental health effects of the pandemic and fears of a lost generation are not yet assuaged. While this section draws from sources related to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to note that the select results or consequences presented here can be observed during most pandemics.

¹⁰ [UNAIDS](#). "AIDSinfo Graphs."

¹¹ The Spanish flu did not originate in Spain; Spain was the just first country to publicly attract attention to the flu. Other countries were also affected but did not want to show weakness amidst World War I.

¹² Dalekou, Sofia, Spyros N Michaleas, Tsitsika AK, Karamanou M. "Comparative study of pandemics and their impact on children and adolescents: COVID-19 and Spanish Flu." *Infez Med*. Jun 1, 2023; 31(2):p. 131.

¹³ Ibid, 133.

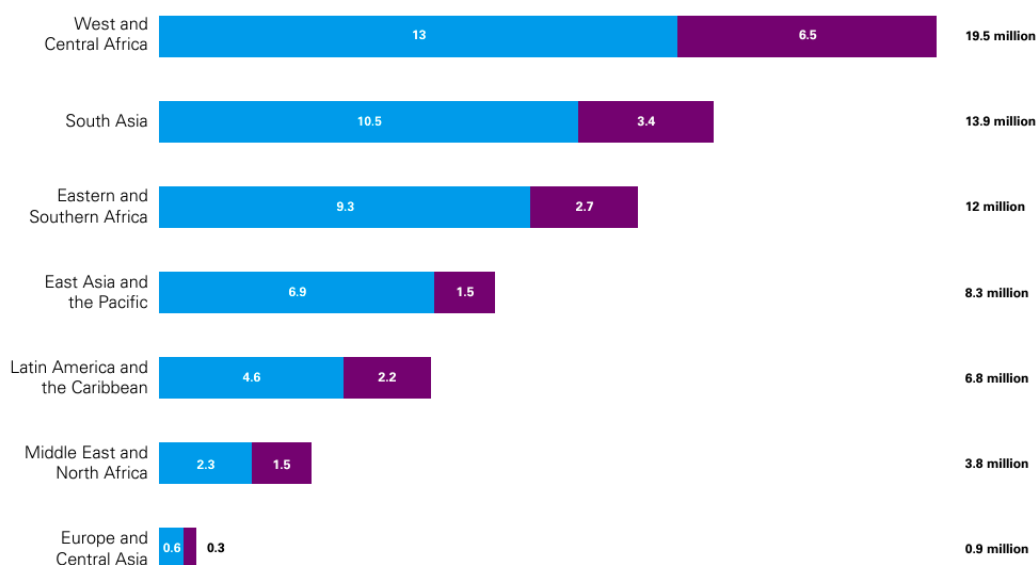
¹⁴ Ibid, 134.

¹⁵ [World Health Organization](#). "WHO chief declares end to COVID-19 as a global health emergency." 5 May 2023.

Vaccination debacle: “In just two years, the world lost more than a decade’s progress in ensuring every child is adequately immunized,” reported UNICEF.¹⁶ In 2021, a total of 18 million children received no vaccines; neither for COVID-19, nor for any other common disease, representing an increase of 5 million children compared to pre-pandemic levels.¹⁷ At the same time, 25

million children worldwide were under-immunized.¹⁸ Unfortunately, children in the Global South are mostly affected by these trends. Between 2019 and 2021, children in West and Central Africa have the highest numbers of both under-vaccinated children (13 million) and zero-dose children (6.5 million) (see below).¹⁹

Fig 3. Under-vaccinated (blue) and zero-dose (purple) children between 2019-2020²⁰



The above figures combined with vaccine hoarding accusations paint a rather unfavorable picture of high-income countries. For example, although Canada was able to secure enough COVID-19 vaccine doses to cover the needs of its population times five, it delayed delivering

on its pledge to share excess doses with low- and middle-income countries through COVAX, a WHO initiative for vaccine cooperation and sharing across the world, which could have proven lifesaving for millions.

¹⁶ UNICEF. ‘The State of the World’s Children 2023: For every child, vaccination’, Florence: UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, April 2023, p. 16.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid, 17.

²⁰ Ibid.

Mental health: Factors like stigmatization prevented the study of mental health in previous pandemics. However, COVID-19 has shone a light on the adverse effect of social distancing and fear on children's and youth's mental health. According to UNICEF, "1 in 5 young people reported often feeling depressed or having little interest in doing things" during the first half of 2021.²¹

In Europe, 30 percent of children between 11-15 years old reported that the pandemic had had a negative impact on their mental health and well-being, with adolescent girls reporting a greater effect on their mental health compared to adolescent boys.²² More specifically, in the UK children claimed that they were isolated during the pandemic and that the experience made them less talkative even after their return to the classroom.²³ One of the few positive mental health outcomes was more quality time with family.²⁴

The exacerbated mental health of children and youth has driven an increase in the demand for mental health support. At the same time, mental health services provision was disrupted or halted during the pandemic in 93 percent of countries worldwide.²⁵

Learning poverty: School closures affected the entire world since schools were either

fully or partially closed worldwide for almost 80% of the in-person instruction time during the first year of the pandemic.²⁶ However, low- and middle-income countries were once again disproportionately affected where nearly 70 percent of 10-year-olds are estimated as being illiterate, meaning not able to read and understand a simple text, a figure that has grown by 13 percent due to the pandemic.²⁷ Regions mostly affected by COVID-related school closures were Latin America and the Caribbean (80 percent of instruction disrupted), South Asia (57 percent of instruction disrupted), and Middle East and North Africa (51 percent of instruction disrupted).²⁸



Even the European Union (EU) has reported that some children, especially those from vulnerable socioeconomic backgrounds, might not have progressed at all during

²¹ [UNICEF](#). 'Preventing a Lost Decade', New York: UNICEF Division of Global Communication and Advocacy. December 2021, 24.

²² Cosma, Alina, Michela Bersia, et al. 'Coping through crisis: COVID-19 pandemic experiences and adolescent mental health and well-being in the WHO European Region.' Copenhagen: [World Health Organization](#), Regional Office for Europe, 2023, 2.

²³ Macaulay, Joanne. "I was quite isolated": Children share their Covid experiences." [BBC](#). 15 October 2024.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ [UNICEF](#). 'Preventing a Lost Decade', 24.

²⁶ Ibid, 19.

²⁷ [UNICEF](#). 'Prospects for Children in the Polycrisis: A 2023 Global Outlook', Florence: UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, January 2023, 12.

²⁸ [UNICEF](#). 'Preventing a Lost Decade', 19.

school closure..²⁹ This trend has continued in the post-pandemic era, as in some cases almost 25% of students were persistently absent the previous academic year citing difficulties in adjusting back to the school routine..³⁰

Economic losses and multidimensional poverty: As the above graph demonstrates, if these educational losses are left unmitigated,

children risk losing USD 21 trillion in lifetime earnings (roughly 16 percent of today's global gross domestic product), which will disproportionately affect the Global South..³¹ An estimated USD 4.7 trillion losses will be observed in the East Asia and Pacific region, while USD 2.7 trillion losses are estimated in Latin America and the Caribbean..³²

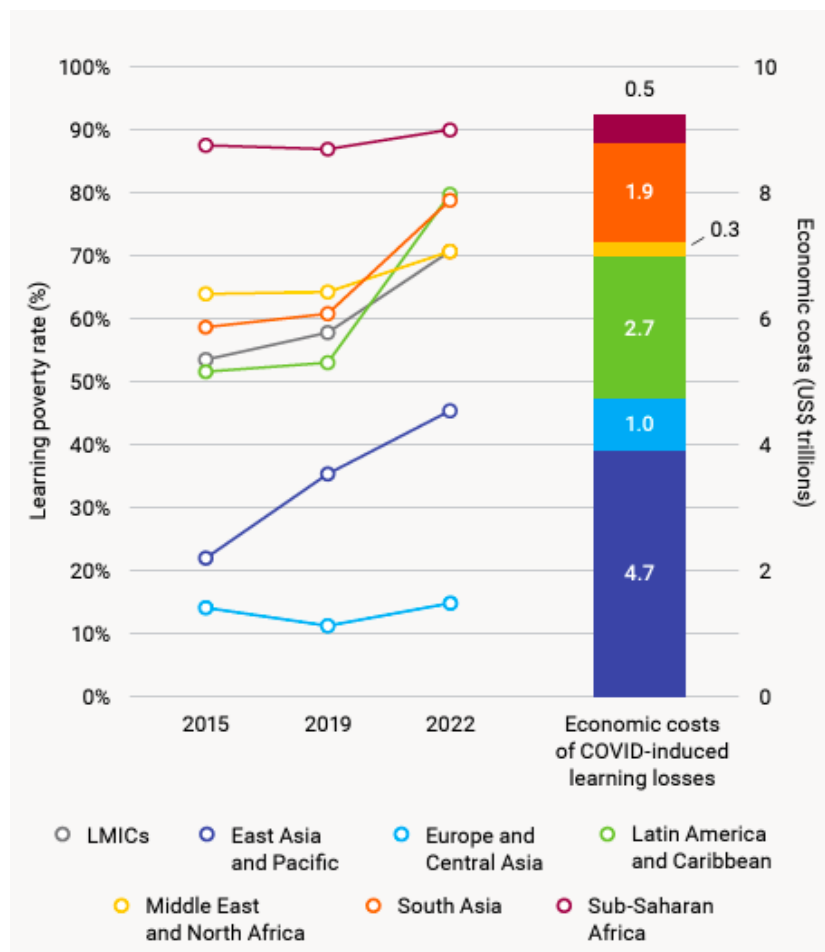


Fig 4. COVID-induced learning (left) and economic (right) losses in low- and middle-income

²⁹ [European Commission](#). "A lost generation? The COVID-19 pandemic triggered dramatic learning losses among schoolchildren", Joint Research Centre, 24 October 2022.

³⁰ Pearson, James. "Pupils blame absence on routine shattered by Covid." [BBC](#). 3 March 2024.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.



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These grim trends have resulted in UNICEF declaring that if no further action is taken, the SDG target of ending extreme child poverty by 2030 will not be met.³³ Despite financial gains in the post-pandemic era, it seems that one in six children or about 333 million children worldwide are estimated to be living below the poverty line, 40 percent of whom are living in Sub-Saharan Africa.³⁴

Exacerbated conflict and multiple crises: All the above factors have had a compound effect on children's vulnerability and exposure to violence and conflict, seen in the graph below. In 2021, grave violations against children continued being recorded despite difficulties with data collection in high numbers: killing and maiming remained the highest verified violation, followed by the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and the denial of humanitarian access.³⁵ At the end of 2022, more than 450 million children lived

in a conflict zone, which also meant a greater risk of forcibly displaced children.³⁶

Meanwhile, the persistent digital divide is not preventing online child sexual exploitation and abuse, as around 300 million children have been affected over the past 12 months.³⁷ As many as 15 percent of children worldwide reported being victims to cyberbullying over the same time period.³⁸

Other forms of violence that children are vulnerable to include intimate partner or sexual violence and violent discipline. Across the world, one in five adolescent girls has reported incidents of intimate partner violence, while almost 400 million children under 5 regularly endure physical punishment and psychosocial aggression at home.³⁹

Role of the United Nations

Within the UN system, the World Health Organization (WHO) is primarily concerned with coordination of pandemic response, and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) is tasked with addressing the repercussions of pandemics, as well as other world crises, specifically related to children. Each of these

³³ [UNICEF](#). 'Global Annual Results Report 2023 - Goal Area 5: Every child, including adolescents, has access to inclusive social protection and lives free from poverty,' New York: UNICEF, Aug 2024, 6.

³⁴ [World Bank Group](#). 'Children Bearing Brunt of Stalled Progress on Extreme Poverty Reduction Worldwide – UNICEF, World Bank.' New York/Washington, Sep 12, 2023.

³⁵ [UNOHC](#). 'Human Rights Council: Violence against Children Has Increased Due to the Pandemic and Multiple Humanitarian Crises, and

2021 Posed Unprecedented Challenges for the Protection of Children Living in Conflict Zones.' Mar 15, 2022.

³⁶ [UN General Assembly](#). 'Annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children.' A/79/242, New York: United Nations, Jul 25, 2024, 10.

³⁷ 'Annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children.' A/79/242, 11.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

agencies has a role to play in the response to pandemics.

In the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the WHO is attempting to create a “Pandemic prevention, preparedness and response accord,” colloquially known as a “Pandemic Treaty” or “Pandemic Agreement”.⁴⁰ WHO’s 194 Member States have created an Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB) and have been meeting since February 2022 in order to create the Pandemic Treaty.

Initially, the outcome document was supposed to be presented in the 2024 World Health Assembly, but negotiations are still ongoing with the next meeting scheduled for 4-15 November 2024.⁴¹ Although the WHO seems eager to take advantage of the recent pandemic to lay the ground for future pandemic response, it seems that, much like the COVAX debacle mentioned above, political will for cooperation and compromise is lacking in a constantly polarizing world.



UNICEF is tasked with protecting the rights of children worldwide. In the context of

pandemic response, UNICEF cooperates with other UN agencies, international organizations and NGOs to cover the needs of children holistically. For example, UNICEF worked with WHO for the procurement and delivery of COVID vaccines to children in need. It cooperated with the World Bank Group to address poverty and access to education. It worked with NGOs like Save the Children to boost protection mechanisms for children in conflict. UNICEF annually publishes the [Global Annual Results Report](#), which tracks progress made in relation to its Strategic Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The agency is especially active in the field of education. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF worked with UNESCO, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the United Kingdom’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and the World Bank to create the RAPID framework for Learning Recovery and Acceleration.⁴² The framework focuses on closing the learning gap and can be broken down on the following objectives:

- Reach every child and keep them in school
- Assess learning levels regularly
- Prioritize teaching the fundamentals
- Increase the efficiency of instruction, including through catch-up learning, and

⁴⁰ [World Health Organization](#). “Pandemic prevention, preparedness and response accord - Q&A”, Jun 10, 2024.

⁴¹ [World Health Organization](#). “Governments progress on negotiations for a pandemic

agreement to boost global preparedness for future emergencies.” Geneva: WHO. Sep 20, 2024.

⁴² [UNICEF](#). ‘Education in a post-COVID world: Towards a RAPID transformation’. New York: UNICEF, Mar 2023, 2.

- Develop psychosocial health and wellbeing.⁴³



Landmark UN Resolutions

Some key UN documents to be taken into consideration during discussions are the following:

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC):

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted on November 20, 1989 by General Assembly resolution 44/25 and entered into force on September 2, 1990.⁴⁴ It was created because of the recognition that children need special care and protection that adults do not.

The CRC calls on authorities to always act based on the child's best interest. It establishes the right to life and survival, to a nationality, to family reunification, to freedom of expression, and to assembly, among others. To date, the CRC has been almost universally ratified, with 196 nations ratifying the Convention and one nation as a signatory, the United States, thus making it one of the most universally accepted international conventions.

The Pact for the Future: Last September, the UN General Assembly convened in New York for the Summit for the Future, an effort at reinvigorating support for the UN system

and offering a slight adjustment to its work by establishing a forward-thinking vision for the future. *The Pact for the Future* outlines this vision and was adopted by consensus without being put to vote. The following three articles are directly related to youth and future generations.⁴⁵:

- Action 34. We will invest in the social and economic development of children and young people so that they can reach their full potential.
- Action 35. We will promote, protect and respect the human rights of all young people and foster social inclusion and integration.
- Action 36. We will strengthen meaningful youth participation at the national level.
- Action 37. We will strengthen meaningful youth participation at the international level.

Political declaration of the General Assembly high-level meeting on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response: In an effort to rally political will for the Pandemic Treaty, the UNGA passed a resolution in late 2023 recognizing the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic and reaffirming the need for multilateralism and global cooperation in future health crises.

⁴³ Ibid. The graph is also part of the same publication.

⁴⁴ [UN General Assembly](#). "Convention on the Rights of the Child." New York: United Nations, A/RES/44/25. Nov 20, 1989.

⁴⁵ [UN General Assembly](#). 'Strengthening of the United Nations system - The Pact for the Future', A/RES/79/1, New York: United Nations, Sep 22, 2024 23-26.

The resolution called for equity and social justice in pandemic response and an effort to address the particular needs of children, youth and other vulnerable populations.⁴⁶

Overall, this resolution is relatively vague and fails to pinpoint specific problems faced during the recent pandemic, such as equitable vaccine sharing, the digital gap between the Global South and Global North, and the shrinking space for civil society.



Country and Bloc Positions

Below are some positions of key countries and blocs in the UN.

African Union: Soon after the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic, the African Union published its “Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 Outbreak”.⁴⁷ The Strategy focused on coordination of efforts

⁴⁶ [UN General Assembly](#). ‘Political declaration of the General Assembly high-level meeting on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response’, A/RES/78/3, New York: United Nations, Oct 16, 2023.

across the African continent and the evidence-based management and control of the disease. At the same time, the AU created two institutions: the Africa Task Force for Coronavirus (AFTCOR) and the African Union COVID-19 Response Fund. The first was created to quickly and efficiently address the rapidly changing realities of the pandemic. The second was established to pool funding for the Africa Center for Disease Control (Africa CDC) and mitigate the socio-economic and humanitarian impact of the pandemic.⁴⁸

Last April, health ministers from all AU countries met and reinforced their united position in negotiations for the Pandemic Agreement, stating “We need African opinion and voice to be heard because this is the only way for us to show that we are together.”⁴⁹



China: Although the recent coronavirus pandemic originated in Wuhan, China, the country was able to control the spread of the virus quickly by adopting a “Zero-COVID” policy, meaning strict measures of social

⁴⁷ [African Union and Africa CDC](#). ‘Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 Outbreak’, Addis Ababa: African Union, Mar 20, 2020.

⁴⁸ [African Union](#). ‘AU COVID-19 Response Fund,’ Accessed on Oct 28, 2024.

⁴⁹ [African Union](#). “Africa speaks with one voice on the Pandemic Agreement,” May 2, 2024.

distancing at a massive scale.⁵⁰ Popular protests against the government's response were met with brute suppression, which in some cases resulted in deaths, and great efforts were made to cover any evidence of state violence.⁵¹ Post-pandemic, China's economy has recovered less quickly than initially predicted, with lower sales and industrial outputs than projected, while youth unemployment rates remained at record high levels.⁵² During the negotiations for the Pandemic Agreement, China, aligned with Russia, has opposed the proposal of increased information sharing in the context of pandemic prevention and response.⁵³

European Union: The EU mobilized quickly to respond to the most recent pandemic. It quickly drafted a response strategy and recovery plan and despite some internal disagreement, it has generally tackled the pandemic in a unified way. Over 80% of the EU population was fully vaccinated against COVID-19.⁵⁴ To support a quick recovery and counter the immediate economic and social consequences of the pandemic, the EU

pumped more than €800 billion into EU Member States.⁵⁵ The EU has also been a key player in drafting the agenda for the Pandemic Agreement.⁵⁶

India: Being one of the top troop contributing countries for UN peacekeeping, India's response to pandemics is crucial. Domestically, India quickly deployed free testing and treatment for the virus⁵⁷ and implemented a "voluntary lockdown" when cases spiked.⁵⁸ Internationally, it provided medical teams for two UN peacekeeping missions in Africa, where Indian peacekeepers are located, and extended medical-related assistance to more than 150 countries.⁵⁹ One of the top priorities of India has been vaccine equity, with the country itself donating 200,000 vaccine doses to UN peacekeepers.⁶⁰

⁵⁰ Cheng S, Zhao Y, Kaminga AC, Zhang X, Xu H. 'China's Fight Against COVID-19: What We Have Done and What We Should Do Next?' [Front Public Health](#). Jun 21, 2022.

⁵¹ Kerry Allen. "How China's Covid protests are being silenced," [BBC](#), Nov 28, 2024.

⁵² Yanzhong Huang. "China's Post-COVID Recovery and Reopening." [Council on Foreign Relations](#). May 23, 2024.

⁵³ Bozzini, Emanuela, Daniela Sicurelli. 'The EU and the Pandemic Treaty: From Agenda-Setter to Troubled Deal-Maker.' Rome: [Istituto Affari Internazionali](#), Jul 2024.

⁵⁴ [European Commission](#). "The European Commission's response to the coronavirus crisis." Accessed Oct 29, 2024.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Bozzini and Sicurelli. 'The EU and the Pandemic Treaty: From Agenda-Setter to Troubled Deal-Maker.'

⁵⁷ Amb. K. Nagaraj Naidu. 'Statement during Virtual Briefing on Covid-19 and Universal Health Coverage.' [Permanent Mission of India to the UN](#). May 15, 2020.

⁵⁸ [Embassy of India, Bucharest](#). "India's Response to Covid-19 Pandemic." Apr 15, 2020.

⁵⁹ Amb. T.S. Tirumurti. 'Statement during Joint Meeting of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) - Fostering global solidarity and conflict sensitive responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic impacts.' [Permanent Mission of India to the UN](#). Nov 19, 2020.

⁶⁰ Amb. T.S. Tirumurti. 'Statement during Joint PBC-ECOSOC Meeting - Promoting Durable Peace & Sustainable Development in the context of recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic.' [Permanent Mission of India to the UN](#). Dec 15, 2021.



Russia: Russia has become increasingly isolated in the UN and hostile towards it. Just before the adoption of the Pact for the Future, Russia moved to defer and amend the Pact, which was overwhelmingly overruled by the UN GA.⁶¹ The Federation has also been very selective when it comes to information sharing with the West. Accounts about the response to the COVID-19 pandemic come mostly from Western analysts, not from the government itself. The pandemic is estimated to have greatly affected Russia, which responded to the crisis in a relatively disconcerted way. Entry bans on foreigners, regional isolation mandates, medical assistance to other countries,⁶² widespread testing, contact tracing and isolation of patients with COVID-19⁶³ were some of the key policies adopted by Russia.

United Kingdom: Much like in other countries, COVID-19 found the UK largely unprepared for a health crisis. There was no clear policy approach at the start of the pandemic and a significant delay before population-wide distancing strategies were introduced.⁶⁴ The rollout of vaccines, however, was considered a resounding success for the public healthcare system.⁶⁵ Currently, the UK government is carrying out a country-wide survey on the evaluation of authorities' response to the pandemic and on the impact the pandemic had in British societies. In fact, Module 8 of the UK Covid Inquiry investigates the impact of the pandemic on children and young people, which is currently at the stage of evidence hearing.⁶⁶ In the UN, the previous UK government expressed intense skepticism for the Pandemic Agreement and even stated that it poses a threat to national sovereignty.⁶⁷

United States: Response to the COVID pandemic was swift, but not perfect. Mandatory isolation measures were not implemented at a mass scale and issues with access to healthcare persisted during the first year of the pandemic.⁶⁸ Another challenge was the battle against misinformation related to the pandemic and vaccines. Congress provided over USD 4.65 trillion in federal funds to produce vaccines, provide unemployment benefits, and support small

⁶¹ Wintour, Patrick. "Russia isolated at UN summit after surprise bid to derail pact." [Guardian](#). Sep 22, 2024.

⁶² Mankoff, Jeffrey, William Heerdt, Timothy Kostelancik. "Russia's Response to Covid-19." [CSIS](#). Apr 10, 2020.

⁶³ Seligmann, Renaud. "COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Policy Response to Combating the Spread of the Epidemic in Russia." [World Bank Group](#). Jun 02, 2020.

⁶⁴ [British Medical Association](#). "The public health response by UK governments to COVID-19." Updated Sep 18, 2024.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ [UK COVID-19 Inquiry](#). "Inquiry update: New investigations announced; Module 8 'Children and Young People.'" May 21, 2024.

⁶⁷ Bozzini and Sicurelli. 'The EU and the Pandemic Treaty: From Agenda-Setter to Troubled Deal-Maker.'

⁶⁸ Alexander M, Unruh L, Koval A, Belanger W. 'United States response to the COVID-19 pandemic, January-November 2020.' [Health Econ Policy Law](#). Jan 2022.

businesses.⁶⁹ On a global scale, the US donated over 687 million vaccine doses to its partners through various initiatives.⁷⁰ Even though it seems that the US has undermined the Pandemic Treaty since in April 2024, it signed a partnership with 50 countries, mostly in Africa and Asia, aimed at identifying and responding to infectious diseases and preventing pandemics.⁷¹

rights and the improvement of their living conditions. Taking into consideration the recently adopted Pact for the Future, delegates could build upon its provisions related to children and youth and focus their discussion on closing the vaccinations and learning gap through the promotion of UNICEF initiatives in both areas.

Some Proposals for Action

Now that the world is on the recovering side of a major pandemic and our memories of social isolation and fear are still fresh, it is vital to take action in order to plan international response for the next outbreak and safeguard the interests of children, especially those from vulnerable backgrounds. Below are three proposals of action:

Pandemic Treaty: Include Children: The Pandemic Treaty seems to be on shaky ground. In an effort to promote multilateralism, delegates could reiterate their support for the creation of the Pandemic Treaty and even take the discussion one step further by drafting an Optional Protocol outlining the specific responses that the international community will take, when it comes to the specific needs of children during pandemics, especially those from vulnerable backgrounds.

Closing the COVID gap: As mentioned above, COVID-19 has undone years of progress towards the realization of children's



Address inequalities: A potential course of action would be a discussion about the rising inequality between the Global North and Global South. Some may argue that inequality is the root cause of most challenges children face in low- and middle-income countries. Developing countries spend 1.4 times more money on servicing their debt to other countries or the World Bank than on services for their local populations. In addition, during the recent

⁶⁹ [US Government Accountability Office](#). "Federal Response to COVID-19." Accessed Oct 29, 2024.

⁷⁰ [US State Department](#). "COVID-19 Response and Recovery." Accessed Oct 29, 2024.

⁷¹ Bozzini and Sicurelli. 'The EU and the Pandemic Treaty: From Agenda-Setter to Troubled Deal-Maker.'



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COVID-19 pandemic, vaccine hoarding by the Global North may have cost thousands of children's lives.

Others claim that low- and middle-income countries should be accountable for inadequate provision of infrastructure and services to their populations, as well as corruption. For instance, the lack of access to technology and the Internet may have contributed to the educational losses sustained by children in the Global South.

Authorize a Secretary-General Report: In case discussions end up yielding little consensus for major action, delegates can always commission a Secretary-General report about the issue at hand. The full effect of the recent pandemic on children is not understood yet, especially at a global scale. Following in the footsteps of the UK COVID-19 Inquiry, delegates could offer an opportunity for governments in the Global South who may otherwise lack the resources necessary for such a widespread study. A report on the consequences of the pandemic for low- or middle-income countries could allow these states to receive more aid, although it would expose their vulnerabilities.

Create an SDG boost fund: Even though the height of the pandemic has passed and financial support is dwindling, the needs of the Global South remain dire. UN Member States belonging to the Non-Aligned Movement are demanding commitment of massive resources to ensure they are not affected unequally. Taking into consideration the fact that only a few years are left to reach the SDGs, the UN GA could create an additional incentive for countries across the world and especially the Global South to focus on improvements that need to be made. *An SDG boost fund*, ideally supported by the rich economies of the Global North, for the

final five years before 2030 would be a bold move and a strong message in support of multilateralism.

Where the money would come from, who pays, the World Summit would have to decide.



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