

Overview

The *Global Reference Group on Children Affected by COVID-19* was established in July 2021, to produce global estimates for the numbers of children facing pandemic-associated deaths of their parents and caregivers, as well as to develop a unified strategy for evidence-based action. Its main task is to support and advocate for the integration of ‘care for children’ affected by second order impacts of COVID-19 into mainstream COVID-19 Emergency Response planning and action. The focus is on children experiencing pandemic-associated deaths of their parents and caregivers, along with associated poverty, violence and other social vulnerabilities.

The Reference Group consists of 16 standing members and up to 10 ad hoc members, and fosters a unique collaboration between NGOs/CSOs, UN and International Agencies, academics, partnerships, philanthropic organizations, media, and faith sectors, for promoting best practices ‘care for children’ affected by COVID-19. The Reference Group is hosted by and linked to the World Health Organization.

Aims

The Global Reference Group on Children Affected by COVID-19: Joint Estimates and Action aims are:

Raise awareness:

1. To extend investment in children affected by primary effects of the Sars-Co-V2 virus, to include ‘care for children’ affected by the second order impacts of COVID-19, including orphanhood and death of caregivers, extreme poverty, food insecurity, violence, and mental health threats.
2. To facilitate integration of the core principles of “care for children” affected by second order impacts of COVID-19 into all sectors of the COVID-19 Emergency Response.
3. To raise awareness – at global, regional, national, and sub-national levels -- of the magnitude and consequences, and effective response programs and policies, for children affected by the COVID-19 associated orphanhood and death of their co-residing caregivers. These programs and policies include: 1) for children in need of alternative family-based care -- preparing kinship, foster, or adoptive care and ensuring every effort is made to avoid residential care for children; and 2) for both children with a living caregiver and those in alternative care -- supporting ‘cash + care’ programs to build resilience and recovery.

Collective Action:

4. To commit to collaboration amongst agencies and diverse stakeholders (such as governments, communities, donors, the private sector, and faith-based sectors) for immediate, short-term, and long-term “care for children” affected by second order impacts, into COVID-19 Emergency Response.
5. To support interagency and multi-stakeholder coordination and activities at global, regional national, and subnational levels;
6. To adapt existing evidence, effective models, and lessons learned through multilateral, bilateral, philanthropic and civil society organizations in caring for ‘orphans and vulnerable children’ (OVC), with particular attention to children orphaned by HIV/AIDS. (For example, PEPFAR OVC programs, UNICEF, World Bank, UNAIDS, Global Fund, the Coalition of Children Affected by AIDS, DFID (now known as FCDO), US Government programs supported through Orphans and Vulnerable Children’s Legislation (PL 109-95), USAID’s APCCA (Advancing the Protection and Care of Children in Adversity) and DCOF (Displaced Children’s and Orphan’s Fund), International NGOs such as World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, Islamic Relief, Lumos Foundation, SAVE the Children, Child Fund, VIVA, Tearfund, and Faith-community partnerships).
7. To encourage individual agencies to contribute to implementing the Strategy at the national-to-local level, with a focus on identifying, assessing, supporting, and providing effective and equitable services for children and families affected by second-order impacts of COVID-19;
8. To commit to supporting only those programs, policies, and practices that are open-source and non-commercial.
9. To share experiences of Strategy implementation among COVID-19 Response actors, with a focus on the national-to-local levels
10. To interface with the UN Cluster System to include Caring for Children affected by COVID-19-associated second order impacts, including death of parents and caregivers, into policies, tools, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation, and planning processes.

Data: Monitoring and Evaluation

11. To promote, identify, and support effective methods, supported at the national level, for identification, monitoring and evaluation for those children affected by second-order impacts of COVID-19 as an integral part of Emergency Response
12. To generate, collect, and share new evidence on: a) effective, equitable, and inclusive approaches to identifying and caring for children in need of emergency or long-term alternative family care (kinship/fostering/adoption), and b). advancing the equitable protection and care of children at risk of violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, extreme poverty, and other types of social vulnerability
13. For the Expert Reference Group for Estimates, in collaboration with the Expert Reference Group for Evidence-based Action, to support, adapt, modify (in response to new data on excess deaths, vaccine uptake, and impacts of variants of concern), and extend the global ‘ourworldindata’ Imperial Interactive COVID-19 Calculator and Country Calculator for estimates of real-time numbers of children affected by death of parents and caregivers, and to provide these data at global, regional, national levels;

Capacity Building

14. To develop relevant tools linked to implementing evidence-based and best practice policies and programs at national-to-local levels, as outlined in the ‘Strategy for Caring Action,’ in Children: The Hidden Pandemic
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019ncov/downloads/community/orphanhood-report.pdf> ;
15. To facilitate language translations, printing, webinars, and virtual and digital dissemination of the Calculators, the Report, and linked evidence-based programming.
16. To promote and support ongoing capacity development to enable effective use of the Strategy and related tools.

Membership

Global Reference Group on Children Affected by COVID-19 membership includes the following:

- Expert Reference Group for Estimates: representatives who are recognized global experts in COVID-19-associated modeling, complex methods for estimating orphanhood and death of caregivers, analytics, visualizations, and informatics engineering.
- Expert Reference Group for Evidence-based Action: multilateral, bilateral, (governmental) and NGO representatives who are recognized global experts in the epidemiology, research, programming and policies that advance the care and protection of children facing second order impacts of COVID-19, including violence, abuse, poverty, and separation from families.
- Representation on Programs and Policies from Countries and Populations Most Affected: This subgroup is under development, and will foster equity by seeking diverse membership and fostering conditions for inclusion and for identifying and addressing disparities

Nomenclature

- *The Global Reference Group on Children Affected by COVID-19* refers to ‘*children affected by the COVID-19-associated death of parents,*’ as those who have experienced ‘COVID-19-associated orphanhood,’ in order to avoid labeling children as ‘orphans.’ We aim to facilitate linkages to previous effective models, lessons learned, and increase commitment to investments by use of the term ‘*orphanhood*’ defined as the condition of having lost one or both parents.