

SPECIAL REPORT

Community responses to keep children safe during COVID-19

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As the global coronavirus pandemic exacerbates vulnerabilities for children and youth worldwide, Global Fund for Children's local partners are at the heart of community responses. Through its Emergency Response Fund, GFC is issuing grants to grassroots organizations to help keep young people safe.

In March 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic struck worldwide, Global Fund for Children and its local partners rapidly mobilized to respond to young people's needs. It was clear that the pandemic would have immediate and lasting consequences for children and communities, from loss of family income and food insecurity to lack of access to healthcare, closed schools, and increasing violence at home.

As countries shut down to combat the virus, GFC's local partners sprang into action to help families without running water receive hygiene kits, girls at risk of abuse find safe shelter, and students without reliable internet connections attend virtual classes. GFC established an [Emergency Response Fund](#) to issue cash grants to its partners serving children affected by the pandemic, approving \$404,000 in emergency grants for 124 partners worldwide as of the end of September 2020.

Through all of this, GFC is also continuing to support local organizations by providing unrestricted funding, capacity support, and safeguarding practices as partners shift from emergency relief to longer-term adaptation and resilience. Together, GFC and community organizations are planning responses that will help protect and empower young people both during and after COVID-19.

Over the next six months, GFC is committed to distributing more than \$1.8 million in grants to community-based organizations responding to COVID-19. This includes at least \$570,000 in grants for organizations serving children and youth around the world, as well as £1 million in emergency grants to Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME¹) communities in England through the [Phoenix Fund](#).

In this report, learn more about the far-reaching impacts of COVID-19 on children and communities, how local organizations are positioned to respond during a crisis, and GFC's commitment to flexibility and responsiveness throughout and beyond the pandemic.

Click on the links below to jump to different topics within the report:

- **[Context](#)**: learn more about the ways COVID-19 is affecting children and communities worldwide
- **[Community-based responses](#)**: see how child- and youth-serving organizations are responding to the pandemic
- **[Our role](#)**: find out how GFC is supporting these local organizations in their pandemic responses
- **[Looking ahead](#)**: see what's next in GFC's plans to support grassroots resiliency during COVID-19 and beyond

¹ We recognize the diversity of individual identities and lived experiences, and we recognize that BAME is an imperfect term that does not fully capture the racial, cultural, and ethnic identities that experience structural and systematic inequality. Whenever possible, we attempt to name individuals as they themselves prefer to be named.



Youth from Prayasam, a GFC alumni partner in India, painted informative murals about COVID-19 prevention before the country went into lockdown. © Prayasam

Context

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly changed the world as we know it. Young people – and the grassroots organizations that support them – are facing [a myriad of immediate and long-term effects](#).

Impact on children and families

School closures caused by COVID-19 continue to affect more than half of the world's student population, with [579 million students](#) out of school.

An impact survey by GFC partner Magic Bus in India demonstrates the lockdown's ripple effects on education and livelihood: [83% of adolescents](#) reported they were unable to access any online learning resources, cutting off a sizable group of learners from educational opportunities – and affecting their future prospects for employment.

In addition to impacts on education, GFC partners are seeing increases in child marriage, [child trafficking](#), and [violence against children](#). Partners are concerned about losing ground during this crisis, as social distancing measures and loss of family income exacerbate the very issues they work so hard to address.

A [37-country survey](#) of children and caregivers, released in September, found that 77% of households have lost income due to COVID-19, and 96% are struggling to pay for their children's essential needs, including food and medical supplies.

Findings from GFC partner Centro Integral de Atención a las Mujeres (CIAM) in Mexico echo these global results: [80% of CIAM's program participants](#) reported that their economic situation had worsened during the pandemic, while 66% reported difficulty acquiring basic food items and cleaning supplies.

Impact on local organizations

Grassroots organizations around the world serve as a critical source of support for children and families every day. Now, when their support is even more needed, these organizations are also facing new challenges caused by the pandemic.

Local organizations have had to make significant changes to their programming – closing group activities, shutting down revenue-generating social enterprises, and canceling in-person fundraising. These necessary actions threaten organizations' very existence. In the United Kingdom, for example, COVID-19 has put [nine out of ten](#) micro and small BAME organizations at risk of closing within three months.

In a global survey of GFC partners on the impacts of COVID-19, 60% reported a “significant disruption” in services, and 65% reported that they had shifted partially or entirely to virtual services or programming.

As of late August, governments and development organizations had committed to funding approximately [\\$20.3 trillion](#) in COVID-19 response. However, less than 1% of this funding is destined for nongovernmental organizations and civil society organizations across the world.

GFC partners are faced with finding a balance between providing emergency relief and continuing to push forward with their regular programming as much as possible. They are doing their best to address increasing challenges, displaying incredible adaptation and resilience even as funding sources become scarcer.



Peter Ouko from Youth Safety Awareness Initiative and Iryn Were from SHOFCO model social distancing for children in Nairobi's Mathare informal settlement, next to a mobile hand-washing station. © Youth Safety Awareness Initiative

Community-based responses

GFC's community-based partners are uniquely positioned to protect children and youth during a crisis. Often the [only trusted source of support](#) in their communities, grassroots leaders have taken on the role of emergency responders and coordinators, filling gaps where government response has fallen short. Grassroots organizations are doing the on-the-ground work to keep children safe and secure in the most difficult circumstances, shifting gears to address new challenges and future needs.

GFC's partners around the world have rapidly responded to COVID-19 by:

- Assembling emergency kits – including food, medicine, and hand sanitizer – for hundreds of children, youth, and families
- Mobilizing community education campaigns, including mobile hand-washing stations, street theater, and murals
- Serving as trusted sources of information about the prevention and treatment of COVID-19, dispelling myths and rumors through community outreach and social media campaigns
- Staffing child abuse hotlines, monitoring child trafficking, and providing alternative housing for children living in shelters
- Transitioning programming online, including counseling services
- Raising awareness and advocating for communities that are being left behind in the crisis

As the pandemic grinds on, our local partners are continuing this work and are adapting to new realities – deploying technology to reach children and youth, adjusting social enterprise activities, and finding new ways to keep their teams productive and motivated. Around the world, partners have shared stories of their responses, their challenges, and their determination in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. Zy Movement Foundation in Thailand and Coincidir in Guatemala are two examples.

Zy Movement Foundation



A group of Zy Movement Foundation participants pose with food they have prepared through the organization's new skills-building program in Thailand. © Zy Movement Foundation

In Thailand, [Zy Movement Foundation](#) (ZMF) works with schools, universities, hospitals, parents, and government stakeholders to ensure that children with disabilities have access to inclusive education, to provide cutting-edge technology solutions to children with physical disabilities, and to change the social mindset about the abilities of these children. The organization was founded by Walter Lee and named after his son, Zy, who was born with half a right arm, no right leg, a malformed left leg, and dislocated hip joints. Zy, now 14, is an active co-leader in ZMF's programs and activities, embodying the organization's philosophy of positioning children with disabilities as leaders and decision-makers on issues that affect them.

When Thailand initiated lockdown measures to ensure social distancing, ZMF's staff began working remotely and suspended all in-person activities. The

organization shifted its focus to providing relief packages to families of children with disabilities. As the pandemic began negatively impacting the livelihoods of ZMF's community members, the team adapted its programming to include [a skill-building program](#) called Train the ZMF Entrepreneur. For this program, Walter is using his existing restaurant to teach cooking skills and is mentoring the fledgling businesses that result. ZMF used its emergency grant from GFC to procure masks and hygiene kits for staff and community members, as well as food supplies for the community members most affected by the shutdown and loss of livelihood.

As ZMF looks at the “new normal,” it plans to continue the recently founded entrepreneurship program to provide livelihood training to youth with disabilities and their families. The organization will also provide more online support to parents of children with disabilities and offer online medical seminars to engage the broader healthcare community.

Coincidir



A volunteer from Coincidir distributes hygiene supplies and food kits to members of her community in Guatemala. © Coincidir

In Guatemala, Coincidir defends young people's rights by bringing together girls in rural communities affected by social violence to engage in youth-led advocacy. With Coincidir's support, teen girls have [convinced mayoral candidates](#) to adopt girl-centered policies and have [used hip-hop music](#) to change social norms. In the region of Jalapa, a group of 20 girls advocates for their rights and the needs of their communities through a network they call La Coordinadora.

When the coronavirus struck Guatemala, communities in Jalapa were some of the hardest hit. Most people are day laborers and lost their jobs during lockdown, and the region had experienced severe malnutrition even before the pandemic. Realizing that they could help, the girls of La Coordinadora began distributing masks, hand

sanitizer, soap, and food products to kids and families. Coincidir is one of the few organizations going door to door, providing aid and counseling to more than 250 families.

But Coincidir's girl leaders do more than provide necessary supplies: [they also offer families the opportunity to get involved](#). When they distribute the supplies, the girls of La Coordinadora ask the families, no matter how humble their status, “Will you contribute something to the community?” This simple question reinforces the dignity of each family, and typically families donate something from their home gardens to be shared with others. Their goal? To provide humanitarian assistance that empowers communities and respects their dignity.



Children living in slum communities in New Delhi, India receive hand sanitizer from GFC partner Sahyog Care for You. © Sahyog Care for You

Our role

Global Fund for Children champions voices, solutions, and collective action for children at the community level. More than ever in the current crisis, local organizations have a critical role to play, with unique relationships and access to young people in some of the most vulnerable circumstances.

GFC's community-based partners address gaps and societal inequities, which the COVID-19 pandemic has magnified. Ensuring that these organizations can continue to operate, adapting as needed, and can stay the course to effect long-term systemic change is critical to the lives of children and youth and to their communities.

GFC's expertise with global grantmaking has made it possible to quickly distribute funds – and nonfinancial support – to help these local organizations keep up their lifesaving work. For many partners, GFC was the first funder to offer support in this time of great uncertainty. GFC continues to back these organizations as they rebuild and work to provide essential programming for young people in new ways.

Flexible funding

In March 2020, GFC sent its [first COVID-19 emergency grant](#) to Ashanti Peru, providing funds to purchase hand sanitizer and soap for 300 families in Lima who only have access to running water for a few hours each day.

“We thought of who would understand us and respond quickly: Global Fund for Children immediately came to mind. I think we had the additional funds within two to three days,” said Marco Antonio Ramirez, President of Ashanti Peru.

As of the end of September 2020, GFC had approved 153 emergency grants totaling \$404,000 through its [Emergency Response Fund](#), supporting 124 local partners in 35 countries.

In Moldova, [Institute for Rural Initiatives](#) used its emergency grant to give emergency food assistance to children in rural villages facing pandemic-induced shortages. In India, [Avani](#) provided food and safe shelter for migrant women and children unable to return to their home villages when the country went into lockdown. And in South Africa, [Jelly Beanz](#) provided virtual services for children at risk of violence and abuse.

In a survey of emergency grant recipients, 96% of these community-based organizations reported that it was either easy or very easy to receive a COVID-19 emergency grant from GFC.

Anonymous respondents highlighted the urgency and impact of these grants for children and youth in their communities:

“Our young people’s situation was dire. Your help made a huge difference, and the ease and speed of the application and transfer allowed us to alleviate many difficulties promptly.”

“Your grant was urgent and deeply appreciated. With others, you have allowed us to feed more than 2,000 children a day in their daaras where they live, as their normal source of food – begging – was completely cut off.”

GFC has [joined more than 700 funders](#) in calling for philanthropy more broadly to embrace the principles of flexible funding, support, and trust during and beyond the coronavirus crisis. The pledge embodies the essential principles of trust-based philanthropy to which GFC is committed.

GFC has also partnered with The National Lottery Community Fund and BAME-led organizations across England to put racial justice at the center of the COVID-19 pandemic response. Through the [Phoenix Fund](#), GFC is supporting a network of BAME charities in England that are working in the heart of their communities.

Support beyond the check

Beyond grantmaking, GFC is sharing best practices that help organizations adapt; facilitating introductions to other funders from which partners can request emergency funds; and convening partners virtually to enable them to express their concerns, learn from others’ responses to COVID-19, and build solidarity. GFC is committed to listening to its local partners in order to best meet their capacity development needs and is creating feedback loops to continue providing responsive and relevant support. Examples of GFC’s support beyond the check include:

Contextualized trainings: Responding to partner requests, GFC has invested in quality training for partners on utilizing online resources to hold effective workshops and meetings. In August, the Americas regional partners participated in three Spanish-language trainings led by Training for Change about dynamic online facilitation.

Funding referrals: GFC continues to offer contextualized support and share resources with partners, including links to emergency financial support, by identifying eligible funding sources and serving as a recommended referrer. GFC recently became a referral partner of the Global Resilience Fund to support community organizations led by girls, young women, and/or trans and intersex youth, which enables eligible GFC partners to access this new fund.

Leadership dialogues: In March 2020, GFC launched a virtual CEO Circle, headed by President and CEO John Hecklinger, with 12 organizational leaders and founders from partner organizations across the world. These calls serve as a platform for sharing experiences and lessons learned about leading during a crisis and have fostered a sense of regional and global solidarity.

Online conferences: The many in-person conferences that have moved to a virtual format have provided an opportunity for GFC to facilitate visibility for its partners and their causes. At the Central America Donors Forum in September, GFC moderated a panel with four of its partners on [addressing inequalities in philanthropy to shift power](#).

Regional partner calls: GFC has facilitated regional partner calls, roughly monthly, to continue to expand connections and to provide a space to reflect and share experiences with peers. These calls are highly attended, with more than 50 people each month, and have contributed to [increasing happiness](#) and solidarity.



In Honduras, GFC partner Un Mundo distributes masks and hand sanitizer during information sessions on the risks of COVID-19. © Un Mundo

Looking ahead

While the future remains uncertain, GFC will continue its response and recovery efforts to alleviate COVID-19's impact on children and youth. GFC is committed to adapting and mobilizing behind its local

partners. GFC's response will remain [rooted in](#) flexible funding that allows its partners to determine the best use of resources; solidarity with grassroots approaches; and a commitment to [safeguarding young people](#) who are now at greater risk of exploitation and harm.

Through a \$250,000 grant from the [Center for Disaster Philanthropy](#), GFC will issue unrestricted emergency funds to 15 to 20 community-based organizations over the next six months. This will give our local partners immediate, flexible resources to meet both urgent and ongoing needs of young people and community members. GFC will also continue to support the Phoenix Fund, using a participatory, community-led approach to provide £1 million in emergency grants to BAME organizations across England.

In April 2020, at the onset of the pandemic, GFC set out to raise at least \$500,000 for COVID-19 emergency response and recovery during this crisis. Thanks to the Center for Disaster Philanthropy, the Dorothea Haus Ross Foundation, [Lingumi](#), and more than 80 individual donors, we exceeded this goal in August – but the work is not over.

Grassroots organizations need ongoing support not only to meet immediate needs but also to plan for the long term. In the face of ongoing challenges, GFC's local partners are working to bring back reliable services for children in their communities, embrace innovation and online solutions to fit new contexts, and rebuild more resilient systems during and beyond the pandemic.

This is an opportunity for GFC to work with its partners to co-create and reimagine a new, more equitable, human-centered, and collaborative future. We can use this moment to better support local organizations in the long term as they promote children's rights and build more just societies.

[Learn more about how GFC is supporting children affected by the coronavirus – and how you can help.](#)

[Read this report online.](#)
