



Erika supported a survey conducted by the Commission on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the resulting report on Adolescent and Youth Voices on COVID-19 in Timor-Leste.

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## Addressing the socio-economic challenges of COVID-19 in Timor-Leste

UN Volunteer Erika Tsuruyama (Japan) served as a Socio-Economic Recovery Specialist for eight months in Dili, Timor-Leste. From August 2020 to April 2021, she supported the response of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) to the COVID-19 pandemic. Her research, analysis and creative skills contributed to improved outcomes for Timor-Leste's children during an incredibly challenging time. Erika's UNV assignment was supported through the COVID-19 Impact Reduction Programme, funded by the Government of Japan.

The children of Timor-Leste face many barriers to living a full and prosperous life. Poverty, malnutrition and poor access to healthcare mean that many children are unable to thrive. Only one in four children aged 3-5 years have access to pre-school and the others start schooling directly in grade 1, leaving them at a disadvantage that may impact subsequent years of their education.

To further compound these problems, the COVID-19 pandemic is "the worst crisis for children UNICEF has seen in its 75-year history" and threatens to reverse much of the progress towards better human rights for children around the world.

“ According to UNICEF, COVID-19 is challenging decades of progress on key childhood challenges such as poverty, health, access to education, nutrition, child protection and mental well-being.

As part of her role, Erika supported the implementation, analysis and results sharing of UNICEF Timor-Leste’s first online survey for adolescents and youth, focused on the impact of COVID-19. The survey was conducted by the Commission on the Rights of the Child and UNICEF. Erika gathered data and conducted analyses, provided technical support and developed visual materials to represent the results.

The findings were captured in a report on [Adolescent and Youth Voices on COVID-19 in Timor-Leste](#). The results reached high-level decision-makers from the Government and development partners, assisting the Ministry of Health to develop appropriate COVID-19 response and vaccination strategies.

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She also organized a launch event where UNICEF invited more than 200 young people and government officials, such as the Ministry of Education, the Secretary of State for youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion, to facilitate a dialogue between youth and the government based on the results of the survey. This was an opportunity for government officials to explain how they support adolescents and youth in the context of COVID-19, and for young people to speak up about their opinions and struggles.

Additionally, Erika analysed the proposed 2021 state budget and developed a brief that examined the budget from a child rights perspective, to inform

parliamentary debate and support UNICEF’s advocacy work. She also developed a highly visual representation to advocate for greater investment in pre-primary education as a critical action needed in the post-COVID-19 context.

“ Erica is a valuable team member whose research, analysis and data visualisation skills made significant contributions for children in Timor-Leste. She demonstrated a good understanding of never hesitated to put in extra efforts to meet a tight deadline, and she handled pressure very well, remaining calm and pleasant even when facing unexpected hurdles. –Emmanuelle Collet, Chief of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation & Social Policy, UNICEF Timor-Leste

Devastatingly, heavy rains across the country in March 2021 resulted in widespread flash floods and landslides, further degrading the situation of Timor-Leste’s most vulnerable. During this emergency, Erika supported the drafting of situation reports for UNICEF Timor-Leste and UN Resident Coordinator’s Office in Timor-Leste, aiding in communications.

Erika’s work in Timor Leste was varied and often required her to adapt her skills to different situations. Her contributions supported SDG 1: No Poverty, in the context of improving the lives of Timor-Leste’s children.



<https://www.unicef.org/timorleste/reports/adolescent-and-youth-voices-covid-19-timor-leste>



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