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In the spotlight

Follow-up Exploratory Research on the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Lives of Working Children and their Families

Written by Ornella Barros and Claire O'Kane, June 2021

Kindernothilfe. Acting together.

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→ **CEIPA** (Centro Ecuménico de Integración Pastoral) from Guatemala

→ **PKPA** (Pusat Kajian dan Perlindungan Anak, engl. Centre for Child Study and Protection) from Indonesia

→ **WCY** (Welfare of Children and Youth Kenya) from Kenya

→ **Kaugmaon for children's rights and social development** from the Philippines

→ **JCM** (Jesus Cares Ministries) from Zambia

We would like to especially thank the 16 girls and 20 boys and the 12 female caregivers who participated in the consultations and shared their views on the multifaceted impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their lives. We hope this research contributes to strengthening the local to global efforts to ensure the protection of working children and motivates stakeholders to continuously engage children and their families in decisions that concern them.

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Executive Summary

In 2020 Kindernothilfe led an exploratory research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the lives of working children and their families in six countries. One year later a follow up study has been undertaken in collaboration with the same six child-focused NGO partners from Bolivia (PASOCAP), Guatemala (CEIPA), Indonesia (PKPA), Kenya (WCY), the Philippines (KAUGMAON), and Zambia (JCM). This follow-up research aims to make visible the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on working children and their families a year after the previous study. The study focuses on changes they have experienced since the beginning of the pandemic, as well as their recommendations moving forward.

The small-scale exploratory research used qualitative methods. Consultations (mostly individual) using participatory tools with 20 boys, 16 girls and 12 female caregivers, and semi-structured interviews with eight staff from the six local NGO partners were organised across the six study countries. The children aged 11 to 17 years were primarily working in informal sectors, such as small-scale vendors, waste collectors, restaurant assistants, clothes sellers, domestic workers, tomb cleaners, construction workers, and agricultural workers.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, working children and their caregivers reported having lost their income, faced job insecurity, with many changing jobs in order to generate an income. At the time of this follow up study (April – May 2021), businesses had started to resume activities in each of the study countries. Children and caregivers described their relief when family members could return to work, increasing opportunities to meet their basic needs. However, many individuals are struggling to find decent work as the economy is negatively impacted by the temporary or permanent shut down of stores, hotels, and markets. With reduced options, children face increased risks of exploitation.

The digital divide and its adverse effect on children's education are evident. As schools used remote learning approaches, accessibility and affordability to obtain digital devices and internet costs are two key challenges that negatively impact on the education and aspirations of children. In Kenya and Zambia schools have started to re-open, while remote learning continues for government schools in Bolivia, Guatemala, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Children engaged in online learning have become more familiar with the digital platforms, and some children appreciate opportunities to apply new technologies. However, the **limited interaction** with teachers and the **lack of child-friendly modules** make it difficult for many children to understand the topics or to ask questions about the subjects. Challenges in accessing quality education during the lockdowns has **increased school-drop out rates**, and some children and caregivers expressed fears that children may **not be able to return to school**. In Kenya, where schools are partially open under strict protocols, some working children have **lost motivation** to remain in schools, and expressed a preference to work to help meet their family's basic needs.

Children and caregivers in each of the study countries expressed **fears that they or a family member would get infected**, especially with increased infection rates in Bolivia and Guatemala (at the time of the study). Children and caregivers described how family members avoided going to health centres due to **fears of getting infected in medical centres**. While in Kenya and Zambia some participants described reduced fears due to increased application of health protocols, and awareness that a vaccine had been developed. Although the COVID-19 vaccination programme has started in all the study countries, progress was rather slow, and none of the families involved in the study had been vaccinated at the time of this study.

The economic reactivation has allowed many working children and their families to resume some economic activities, enabling them to buy more food. However, for many families the **quantity and quality of food consumption have not significantly changed** over the last year since the start of the pandemic, due to ongoing financial worries.

Individual and collective family worries about finances, food, health, education and future aspirations **impact on the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing** of children and their caregivers. **Children's sadness** regarding the death of loved ones, the loss of opportunities and barriers to their aspirations were evident in their creative expressions, and caregivers revealed the multiple worries that they carried.

The 2020 study identified the importance of effective communication among family members as **a protective factor for children's positive mental health and well-being**. The benefits of good communication and family unity were emphasised by children and caregivers in this follow up study. Some children described how their views are listened to more now, in comparison to the beginning of the pandemic. Increased opportunities for children to communicate with their peers also enhances children's well-being. Many caregivers and children commented on the benefits of widening opportunities to safely meet and discuss with neighbours, friends and extended family members, and to engage in outdoor sports, spiritual practices, and other activities.

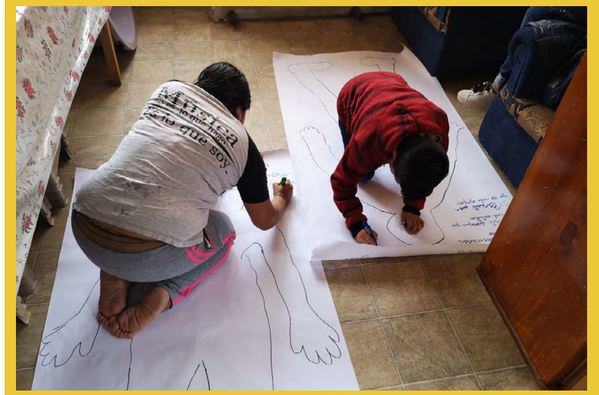
Compared to findings from the 2020 study, the NGO partners expressed **greater concerns about the increased violence** that children face in and outside their homes, including risks of corporal punishment, neglect, sexual abuse and exploitation.

Similar to the 2020 study, the complexities of the impact of COVID-19 on working children and their families reveal the importance of developing an inclusive response to the crisis that takes into consideration diverse perspectives on children's work and children's indivisible rights to survival, protection, development and participation. It is important to support families, to understand roles and relationships, ensuring protection of girls and boys from exploitation and hazardous work, while also acknowledging the structural causes that prevent children and their families from accessing dignified work, food security, access to quality education and other basic services. Increased platforms are needed for working children and their caregivers to share their views, to dialogue with policy makers to influence decision-making processes, practices and policies to increase their opportunities to survive and thrive.





› Junge aus Guatemala beschreibt seine Erfahrungen mit COVID-19.



‹ Teilnehmer:innen der Befragung mit ihrer Body Map.

Introduction



The COVID-19 pandemic has left millions of families without jobs and income. The World Bank estimates that the number of people in extreme poverty (those living on less than US$1.90 per day) grew by 88 to 93 million in 2020, and projects further increases during 2021.[1] According to ILO and UNICEF studies, a one percent rise in poverty results in a 0.7 percent rise in child labour.[2] However, pre-COVID evidence suggests that poverty is not the only reason why children work.[3] Between May and July 2020 Kindernothilfe led an exploratory research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the lives of working children and their families. The research showed how the challenges facing working children and their families have been exacerbated since the outbreak and it presents their recommendations for effective and relevant responses to the pandemic. The findings of the original study described the impact of the pandemic at the level of livelihood and income, education, nutrition and physical health, mental health and well-being. The complexities on the impact of COVID-19 on working children and their families revealed the importance of developing a multi-sectoral response to the crisis to ensure children's indivisible rights to survival, protection, development and participation.

In collaboration with the six child-focused NGO partners from Bolivia (PASOCAP), Guatemala (CEIPA), Indonesia (PKPA), Kenya (WCY), the Philippines (KAUGMAON), and Zambia (JCM)[4] that participated in the first study, this follow-up research aims to make visible the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on working children and their families a year after the previous study. The study focuses on changes they have experienced since the beginning of the pandemic, as well as their recommendations moving forward.

This study documents the initiatives that have helped the families cope with the economic, social, physical, and social-emotional effects of the pandemic; and actions needed to overcome the ongoing challenges and concerns. The findings aim to inform and influence practice and policy-making processes affecting working children and their families at local, national, and international levels.

1 Human Rights Watch (2021). I Must Work to Eat: Covid-19, Poverty, and Child Labor in Ghana, Nepal, and Uganda.
2 ILO and UNICEF (2020). COVID-19 and Child Labour: A time of crisis, a time to act.
3 O'Kane, C., Barros, O., and Meslaoui, N. (2018). It's Time to Talk: Children's views on children's work. It's Time to Talk: Kindernothilfe and Terre des Hommes
4 CEIPA = Centro Ecuménico de Integración Pastoral, Guatemala; JCM = Jesus Cares Ministries, Zambia; Kaugmaon for children's rights and social development, the Philippines; PASOCAP = Pastoral Social Caritas Potosi, Bolivia; PKPA = Pusat Kajian dan Perlindungan Anak (Centre for Child Study and Protection), Indonesia; WCY Kenya = Welfare of Children and Youth Kenya.

Methodology



The research used qualitative methods and engaged different stakeholders including:

→ Participatory self-guided and face-to-face individual consultations[5] with 20 boys and 16 girls. Originally it was considered to do online consultations, but children were not keen to do anything online given the time that they already spend on Zoom for online learning. Thus, in-person consultations were organised in community centres or at the offices of NGO partners following COVID-19 preventive measures.

→ Participatory self-guided and face-to-face individual consultations with twelve female caregivers.

→ Semi-structured interviews with eight focal points from the six local NGO partners supporting the consultation process.

5 In the Philippines group consultations with children were undertaken while applying health prevention measures.

→ Consultation tools

Three consultation tools – originally used for the Time to Talk project[6] – were adapted for the exploratory research as optional activities for children and their caregivers to participate in the research. Participants were encouraged to use one or more of the following consultation activities depending on their interest and time availability and informed consent:



→ **Body mapping** to explore the effects of COVID-19 on the lives of working children and their households, identifying beginning and after changes in how they think, feel, communicate, what they do, and how they are treated.

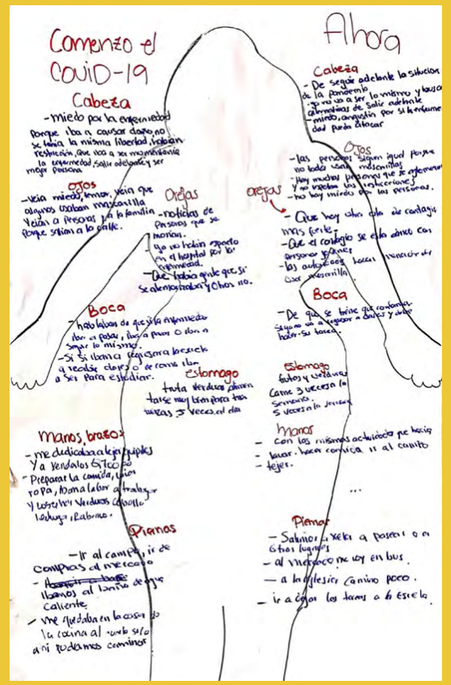
→ **Draw and write** to learn about the actions that children and their parents / caregivers were taking a year after the outbreak to adapt to the pandemic restrictions and effects.

→ **Flower of support** to identify recommendations to increase the protection and support to working children and their families in overcoming the negative effects of the pandemic a year after.

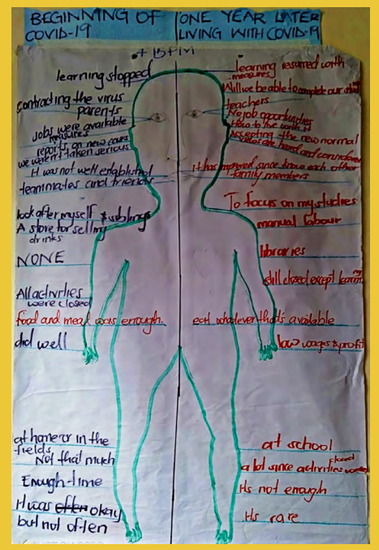
6 O'Kane, C., Meslaoui, N. and Barros, O. (2016). Research Toolkit: Facilitators Guide for organising consultations with children in support of the International Campaign "It's Time to Talk – Children's Views on Children's Work. Kindernothilfe, Save the Children and terre des home.

The selection criteria prioritized by local NGO partners included participation of:

- → Children and parents / caregivers who participated in the first consultation back in 2020.
- → Children and caregivers that were interested and available, ensuring informed consent.
- → Households most affected by the pandemic.
- → Families that were geographically accessible.
- → Participation of children and caregivers living in urban and rural settings –whenever possible, and gender balance.



Body Map: Beginning of Covid and One year later, 27 year old mother, Guatemala, CEIPA



Body Map: Beginning of Covid and One year later, 15 year old girl, Kenya, WCY

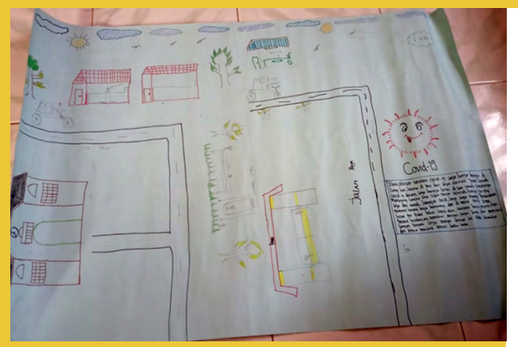
Some of the limitations included challenges to involve all the children and families who participated in 2020 study given the high rate of working children and families that **relocated because of the economic hardship and unemployment**. It was particularly challenging to reach rural areas because of COVID-19 related restrictions and transportation costs. For in-person consultations, the NGO partners were committed to ensure the application of preventive measures during face-to-face consultations, although it took extra efforts and reminders during the session because children wanted to have more time and interaction with their peers.

Key Findings

Livelihood, income, and labour exploitation

According to the International Labour Organization there was an unprecedented global employment loss in 2020 of 114 million jobs relative to 2019, as well as a decline in earnings for informal workers of up 82 per cent in low and lower-middle-income countries since the COVID-19 outbreak.[7] Findings from this follow-up exploratory research reflect these statistics. Since the beginning of the pandemic, working children and their caregivers reported having **lost their income, faced job insecurity, with many changing jobs in order to generate an income.** Due to job losses, some families who had been working in urban settings, re-located back to their rural communities to make more efficient use of their limited resources. Some individuals who were able to keep their jobs have a higher workload because of the restricted number of employees allowed at workplaces or are working fewer hours, which translated into less family income. NGOs from the Philippines and Kenya reported not only about an increase in the number of child labourers, but also an increase in working children engaged in heavy, hazardous, and exploitative work.

7 ILO (2021). ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Seventh edition. Updated estimates and analysis.



Draw & Write: 17 year old girl, waste collector, Indonesia, PKPA.

Before the spread of COVID-19 I just worked every afternoon because I went to school in the morning.

The situation is different after the pandemic as I work all day as a waste collector. I do my class through an online process at home.

It feels confusing because my income decreased significantly. The number of bottles I find outside have reduced. Moreover, I feel unusual in this situation in which I should follow the health protocol, wear a mask, keep physical distancing, and wash hands all the time. I wish this situation would soon end so that we can go back to normal.

> ***"We, my workmates and neighbours share what we experienced and most of us answered that it is hard to look for a job so we must spend our money wisely."***
>
> (48 year old mother, waste separator, the Philippines, KAUGMAON)

At the time of this follow up study (April–May 2021), businesses had started to resume activities with little or no restrictions in each of the study countries. Children and caregivers described their relief when family members were able to work again, increasing opportunities for them to earn to meet their basic needs.

However, some caregivers are struggling to find jobs as some businesses became bankrupt after months of restrictions and lockdown. Some individuals are working fewer hours, and those working in the informal sector like small-scale vendors, have also been negatively affected by temporary or permanent shut down of stores, hotels, and markets. Caregivers and children who worked as small-scale vendors described how they earned less income for the hours worked, due to fewer customers.

> ***"Now there are no jobs because a lot of stores and factories closed due to the pandemic."***
>
> (13 year old boy, small scale vendor, Bolivia, PASOCAP)

Zambia case study: Livelihood challenges working in the informal sector

John*[8] is a 12 year old boy who lives with his parents and siblings in Zambia. At the beginning of the pandemic John and his family members were unable to visit extended family and friends. They could not go to church and the government introduced 'e-learning.' A year later, after six months of remote learning, schools re-opened for face-to-face learning with safety protocols. The COVID-19 restrictions are flexible, and business and churches resumed activities.

John's mother is a small-scale vendor. She sells tomatoes, pre-packed meals, and charcoal. She was also a domestic worker at some point before the outbreak. Her son has continued to help with the family business during the pandemic, although the time dedicated to work was reduced during the confinement.

Despite John's parents being able to re-establish their informal trading, the pandemic and its consequences have aggravated existing economic challenges faced by his family. The government launched a COVID-19 emergency fund that benefited the reactivation of the economic sector, but that did not reach the most vulnerable families working in the informal sector, like John's family.

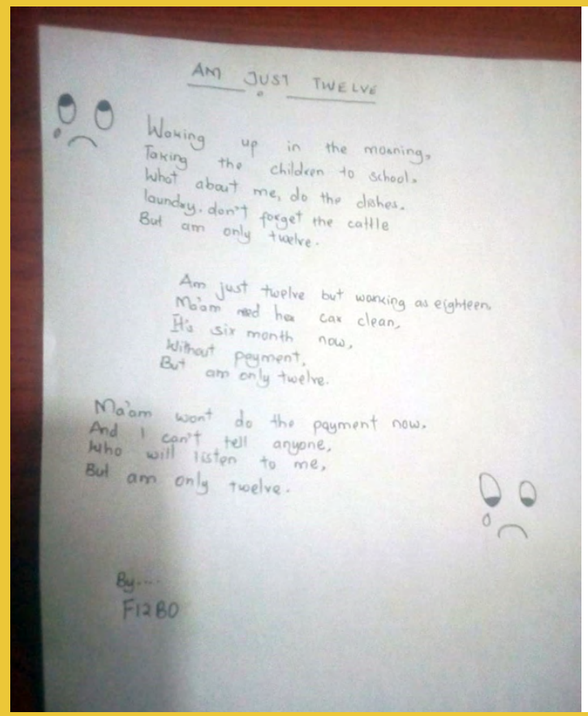
Livelihood programs that were established by civil society organisations prior to the pandemic –like the saving groups of the NGO JCM in Zambia– also manifest sustainability challenges as the country resumed economic activities. It was the saving group that allowed John's mother to revamp their business and continue selling their products. However, the reactivation of their businesses did not mean that women accessing the loans from the saving groups had the capacity to pay back their loans due to the economic crises.

8 All names in the case studies in this report are changed to protect children and caregiver's anonymity

As the economic sectors reactivated, children also resumed their economic activities. In Bolivia, Kenya, and Indonesia it came with more challenges for children, as they described their difficulties to find a job in comparison to before the pandemic.

Government assistance is needed to support the higher number of families living in extreme poverty. Whilst the humanitarian response plans that were established by governments at the beginning of the pandemic reached several vulnerable groups, today these plans are no longer implemented in the countries that are part of this study.

> ***"There are no jobs for everyone anymore. Our vegetables are not sold as before, and my mother does not go to the market every day as she used to."***
>
> (12 year old girl, small scale vendor, Guatemala, CEIPA)



Draw & Write: 12 year old girl, domestic and farm worker, Kenya, WCY.

I am just twelve

Waking up in the morning,
taking the children to school,
what about me, do the clothes,
laundry, don't forget the cattle,
but I am only twelve.

I am just twelve but working as eighteen,
ma'am needs her car clean,
it's six months now,
without payment,
but I am only twelve.

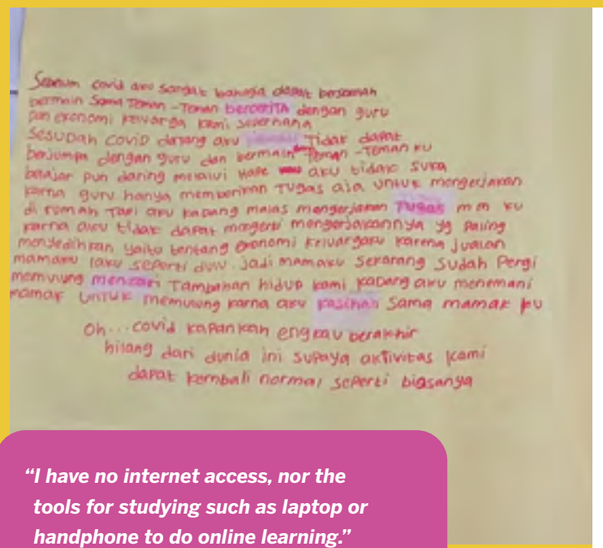
Ma'am won't do the payment now,
And I can't tell anyone,
Who will listen to me,
But I am only twelve.

Education

At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, UNESCO reported that over 1.6 billion children in more than 190 countries were out of school. Today (June), half of the world's student population (more than 800 million learners) is still affected by full or partial school closures. In 29 countries, schools remain fully closed.[9] In Kenya and Zambia schools are partially open by limiting the number of hours or days a week in which children go for in-person learning. In Bolivia, Guatemala, Indonesia, and the Philippines schools are partially open while government schools remain on remote learning.

The majority of working children involved in the study attend government schools, which means that their learning modality remains either through online lessons or weekly modules that children need to pick up, complete, and return a week later.

9 UNESCO (2021). One year into COVID-19 education disruption: Where do we stand?



"I have no internet access, nor the tools for studying such as laptop or handphone to do online learning."

(17 year old girl, waste collector, Indonesia, PKPA)

Draw & Write: 14 year old girl, waste collector, Indonesia, PKPA.

Before COVID-19, I was so happy to go to school, play with friends, and tell many stories to the teacher. My family income is low. Now, everything has changed after COVID-19. I can't meet with my teacher nor play with my friends.

I study by phone only. I don't like the online lessons, because the teacher just gives homework and sometimes I feel lazy to do maths at home because I can't understand the topic.

The saddest thing for me personally is about my family's financial situation because my mother can't sell as much as before so now my mother scavenges to get more income for us. Sometimes I accompany her to work. Sometimes I accompany her because I feel sorry for how tired she is. Oh covid-19, when will you end? Disappear from this world so that our activities can be normal again.

Indonesia case study: Challenges in accessing quality education

Since the covid-19 outbreak, family members lost jobs and had to deal with the economic hardships of the lockdown. This had adverse consequences on children's access to education. This was the case of Dara, a 17 year old girl living in Medan, Indonesia. After nine months of home-schooling, private schools started to reopen in December 2020 while government schools, such as the one attended by Dara, remain on remote learning. Dara is expected to either join online lessons or go to a school to pick up modules each week and return them back a week later.

For Dara and her family, the situation was particularly difficult at the beginning of the pandemic as they did not have internet access, nor devices to access the online learning platforms. A year later, the situation improved for Dara as she managed to have her own cell phone and free internet access thanks to the support of a telecommunication company. Nonetheless, access to education did not grant her the opportunity to access quality education due to challenges associated with online learning: 'Right now, we lack knowledge because of the online learning system and many difficulties that happened. As a result, we were not able to answer the school examination questions.'

At the beginning of the lockdown Dara's father, the main breadwinner lost his job, and the pandemic made it difficult for her mother to find a job as a domestic worker. As a result, the three meals that they used to have a year ago –including dishes with fish and vegetables, turned into irregular meals depending on what one of the children was able to bring home. Dara currently works nine hours a day selling soft drinks; earning Rr. 30.000/day (EUR 1.72), with little time to rest as she tries to earn enough to afford her higher education. Dara's main concern is her education, but much of her earning that used to cover her school fees are currently used to cover her family's basic needs and rent.

The digital divide became evident early on when schools closed due to lockdowns. Recent data show that over 90 per cent of education ministries worldwide implemented some form of remote learning approaches that involve radio, television, or the internet in 2020.[10] However, accessibility and affordability remain as two of the main challenges that children face during remote learning. Lack of digital devices, limited internet coverage and costly internet access have negatively affected access to online learning and have contributed to higher rates of school drop-out. In Guatemala, for example, the ministry of education reported an estimated increase from 40% to 60% of school drop-out in 2020. Children and their caregivers, especially from Guatemala, Indonesia and Zambia expressed fears that children may not be able to return to school.

10 UNICEF (2021). COVID-19 and school closures: One year of education disruption

"Online lessons were a problem because many of us did not have a phone. Thus, only 30% of my class approved the year as the rest of us did not have access to internet."

(17 year old girl, waitress, Bolivia, PASCAP)

> ***"We will not go back to school. Instead, we continue studying virtually, and those who have not been able to connect drop-out school."***
>
> (11 year old boy, domestic work, Guatemala, CEIPA)

In many situations, despite remote learning policies and the presence of the necessary technology at home, children still find it difficult to learn due to skills gaps among their teachers or a lack of parental support.[11] This was the case for participants in each of the countries included in this study, where months of remote learning accentuated the already existing challenges to access quality education. According to PKPA in Indonesia and KAUGMAON in the Philippines, the modules-based system, where children have to pick up and drop off modules each week, is also not convenient for families. For children living outside capital cities, it became especially hard to keep up with the transportation costs, time and logistic to pick up or return modules every week. In addition, reduced feedback from teachers to children hampers the quality of education.

> ***"We are still attending school until today, because it is difficult for us to follow the modules. Sometimes it is hard, sometimes it is easy, but we do not know if our answer is correct or not"***
>
> (13 year old girl, waste collector, the Philippines, KAUGMAON)

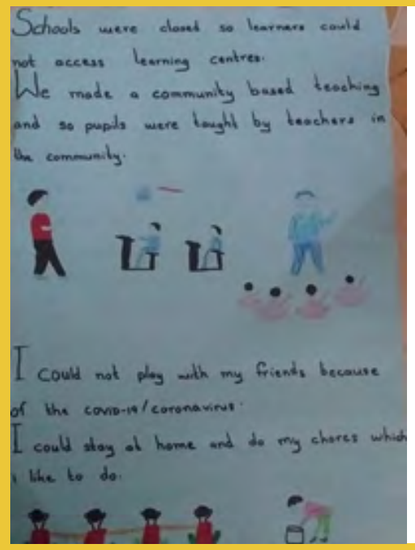
Children doing online learning have become more familiar with the digital platforms, and some children appreciate opportunities to learn and apply new technologies, and to see and interact with their friends online. Children also provide peer support to one another to increase their understanding of their classes.

> ***"Now the lessons are virtual, and we do not learn properly. I am afraid of not being able to make it to university because we are not learning well through online lessons"***
>
> (17 year old boy, small scale vendor, Bolivia, PASOCAP)

However, the limited interaction with teachers and the lack of child-friendly modules makes it difficult for many children to understand the topics or to ask questions about the subjects. Furthermore, parents' support for children's remote learning is often limited because they lack knowledge and skills, are not at home anymore, or struggle to keep up with the amount of homework given to their children.

For working children in Bolivia, Guatemala and Zambia the tutoring support provided by PASOCAP, CEIPA, and JCM respectively has helped them overcome the challenges of remote learning. Children's agency also made a difference in the way individuals tackled the learning crisis. For example, some children have prioritised their education and made dedicated efforts to study. Some caregivers also emphasised the support they gave to their children's study. More collective community efforts to support children's education were also observed. For example, in Kenya, children and community leaders organised themselves to do a community-based learning that lasted the nine months of school closure.

11 UNICEF (2020). COVID-19: Are children able to continue learning during school closures?



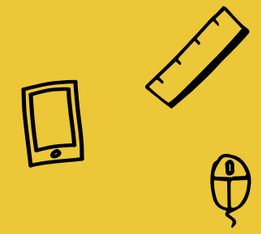
Draw & Write: 11 year old boy, agriculture and cattle herder, Kenya, WCY.

Schools were closed so learners could not access learning centres.

We made a community-based teaching so pupils could be taught by teachers in the community.

I could not play with my friends because of the COVID-19/coronavirus.

I could stay at home and do my chores which I like to do.



> ***"School activities that I enjoy doing: Learning to use technology to receive my classes"***
>
> (12 year old boy, clothes seller, Guatemala, CEIPA)

> ***"Schools are open, face to face interactions but with strict COVID-19 guidelines. Sports not allowed in school, because most of the sport is contact games."***
>
> (12 year old boy, small scale vendor, Zambia, JCM)

> ***"Children are now familiar to working, so they don't have passion anymore to continue their studies."***
>
> (48 year old mother, Indonesia, PKPA)

As difficult as working children find remote learning, they seemed to enjoy it much more at the beginning of the pandemic. For example, children from Bolivia, Guatemala and Indonesia shared about how boring online education have become for them. In Kenya, where schools are partially open under strict protocols –including mask-wearing, physical distancing, and limited interactions–, some working children have lost motivation to remain in schools. Many children had to choose between pursuing their education or support their families as they see their parents and caregivers struggling to provide for the family.

Evidence shows that prolonged closures disrupt essential school-based

services such as immunization, school feeding, and mental health and psychosocial support, and can cause stress and anxiety due to the loss of peer interaction and disrupted routines.[12] For some working children, the learning disruption also came from additional stress caused by having to study, work, and live in the same physical space.

12 UNESCO, UNICEF, The World Bank, WFP, UNHCR (2020). Framework for reopening schools

"At the beginning of the pandemic I had access to education. However, the virtual learning affected me because I could not receive the 100 percent of my lessons, and if I had questions, the teacher did not answer the phone. Tutoring from CEIPA was what helped me."

(12 year old girl, vegetable vendor, Guatemala, CEIPA)



Draw & Write: 13 year old girl, small scale vendor, Zambia, JCM.

At the beginning of COVID-19 the business was not running well; people stopped moving because of COVID-19. We started wearing face masks; we started washing hands with soap and sanitizer and we continued to sell following health guidelines. We did not visit relatives nor attend community parties. Schools closed and since I was in an exam class I became worried. Rumours of me repeating my grade 7 made me even more scared. My mother moved her business from the market to home. This helped to reduce her movements. But the move of the business from the market to our home disturbed my studying because half the time I had to attend to customers.

Now I am back in school. I passed my grade 7 and I am now in grade 8. We are now able to visit family and friends and at least attend community parties. My parents are in business but the cost of doing business is high. My mother's business is still at home.

Physical health and nutrition

As breadwinners lose jobs, fall ill and die, the food security and nutrition of millions of people are under threat, with those in low-income countries, particularly the most marginalized populations being hardest hit.[13]

All Children and caregivers expressed fears that they or a family member would get infected and sick, and some participants shared concerns about increasing numbers of infections in their communities, with increasing risks of younger age groups being badly affected. While in Kenya and Zambia some children and caregivers described reduced fears due to increased application of health protocols, and awareness that a vaccine had been developed.

Over the last year, working children and their families have learnt to protect themselves and reduce the risk of infection by incorporating COVID-19 preventive measures into their daily routines. In the Philippines, according to KAUGMAON, for working children it is like the pandemic does not exist anymore because the hunger and financial crisis hit their households so hard that children are in the situation of choosing between going to work or starving at home.

13 ILO, FAO, IFAD, WHO (2020). Impact of COVID-19 on people's livelihoods, their health and our food systems.

"We aren't afraid anymore because we apply the health protocol."

(40 year old mother, Indonesia, PKPA)

"Our job situation is hard, but we need money. We need to bear all the difficulties so that we can provide for food and also give some to my parents."

(16 year old boy, informal work, the Philippines, KAUGMAON)

"I have no longer fear because COVID-19 cases have reduced. My hopes are for COVID-19 to end completely."

(12 year old boy, small scale vendor, Zambia, JCM)



"I think I'm going to get infected because the number of infected is increasing"

(40 year old mother, security guard at a mine, Bolivia, PASCOP)

"At least am able to get some food for my family through the sale of drinks at the hotel. I eat what is available."

(15 year old girl, small scale vendor, Kenya, WCY)



Bolivia case study: Food insecurity

Alejandra is a 17 year old girl living with her parents and her sisters in Potosí, Bolivia. The pandemic brought several challenges for Alejandra and her family members; including food insecurity and limited opportunities to access education.

By the time of the COVID-19 outbreak Alejandra was working as a waitress at a small hotel; something that she considered as a good job. As the lockdown got extended in Bolivia, Alejandra and her family members lost their jobs. It did not take too long until the economic situation started affecting their lifestyle and food habits: 'The most difficult part was when me and my family were suffering from the lack of food. My mom did not earn much from selling quinoa juice; neither did my father; and my income was very little. We are a numerous family.' There was no money to buy food and the amount of people living in the household made it harder to ration the food available.

Today, Alejandra's family members have reinvented their ways of generating an income. Her mother knits clothes and sells them. Her father went back to work, and Alejandra works only on Saturdays. She does not think her salary is good, but it at least allows her and her family to eat much better and recover some of their earlier food habits. Furthermore, her education situation is better as there is more peer support to keep up with remote learning. Nonetheless, it is not as good as before because it is virtual and difficult to understand.

> ***"We only eat 2 meals per day, lunch sweet potatoes, and supper is nshima with vegetables."***
>
> (12 year old boy, small scale vendor, Zambia, JCM)

According to the World Bank, the primary risks to food security are at the country level: higher retail prices, combined with reduced incomes, mean more and more households having to cut down on the quantity and quality of their food consumption.[14] The economic reactivation allowed working children and their families to have a better access to food either because they started generating income as they resumed their economic activities, or because transportation was available to go to the markets to sell or buy food. However, for many families the quantity and quality of food consumption have not significantly changed over the last year since the start of the pandemic.

> ***"Now we eat meat once or twice a week. They increased the price of fruits."***
>
> (11 year old boy, waiter, Guatemala, CEIPA)

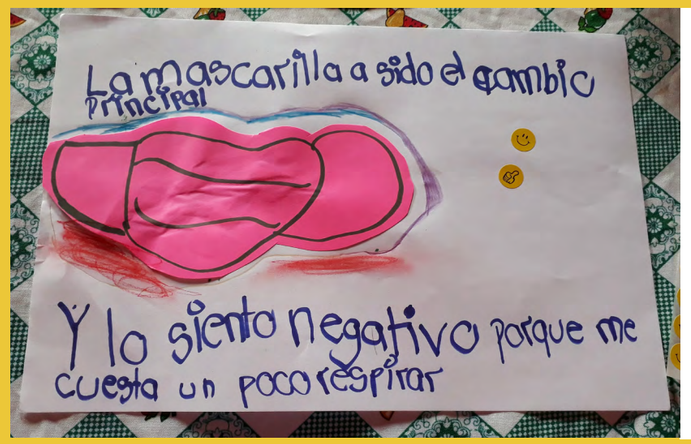
> ***"It is quite good, even a little bit we can eat. The situation starts to be stable because there is income to buy some food."***
>
> (48 year old mother, Indonesia, PKPA)

14 World Bank (2021). Food Security and COVID-19

Children and their families consulted do have access to health care services. In Kenya, for example, the government took action to increase access to health care by providing subsidies for health care costs for the entire population. However, many children and caregivers described how family members avoided going to health centres over the last year, because of their ongoing fear of getting infected in medical centres or risks that they are given false diagnosis.

In rural areas of Bolivia, people prefer to use natural medicine over health care provided by the state. Sanitation measures of mask-wearing, hand-washing, and physical distancing remain in each of the study countries. However, children and caregivers described how the measures are not respected as much as at the beginning of the pandemic, and children themselves find some of these measures uncomfortable to follow.

> ***"Now we no longer go to the Health Center for fear of getting infected"***
>
> (40 year old mother, fruit seller, Guatemala, CEIPA)



Draw & Write: 12 year old boy, clothes vendor, Guatemala, CEIPA.

'Mask-wearing has been the main change. I feel it like a negative change because it makes it difficult to breath'



Although the COVID-19 vaccination programme has started in all the study countries, by the time of the interviews with the NGO partners (May 2021) the progress was very slow. In the best scenario, the countries were still at the stage of vaccinating front-line health workers and teachers. None of the families involved in the study reported having had a family member vaccinated by the time of the consultation. According to KAUGMAON (the Philippines), PASOCAP (Bolivia), and WCY (Kenya) children and their families do not have expectations to get vaccinated any time soon. One of the reasons is that many parents are relatively young, and their age group has not yet been prioritized for vaccination.

Mental health and psychosocial well-being

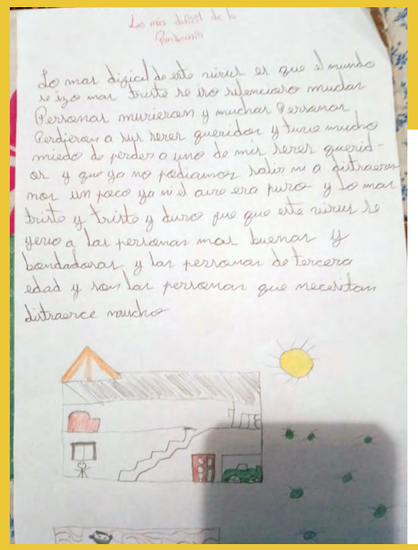
Children thrive when their basic needs are met, when they feel valued, safe and protected, and when family and community connections are stable. The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly disrupted many of these foundations that assure children's mental health and wellbeing and created various challenges:[15]

- → the impact of isolation and confinement on their physical and mental health;
- → challenges to deal with the loss of family members and friends and its effects on their relationships;
- → children's transition to a new way of interacting with their peers in the communities and at school upon their return;
- → the impact of economic hardships on their families and their communities; and
- → the uncertainty and fears about the future of themselves, their families and communities.[16]

"I am scared because we do not know if this pandemic will continue or not... there are more and more people dying."

(11 year old boy, domestic work, Bolivia, PASOCAP)

15 UNICEF (2020). Child Protection Learning Brief #2: Responding to the Mental Health and Psychosocial Impact of Covid-19 on children and families.
16 OECD (2021). Supporting young people's mental health through the COVID-19 crisis



Children's sadness regarding the death of loved ones, the loss of opportunities or barriers to their aspirations were evident in their creative expressions.

Draw & Write: 13 year old boy, agriculture, Guatemala, CEIPA.

The most difficult thing about this virus is that the world made me sadder; it became silent; many people died, and many people lost their loved ones.

I was very afraid of losing one of my loved ones, and that we could not even go out anymore; not even to distract us a bit.

The air was not pure anymore and the saddest and hardest thing is that this virus took away the kindest people and the elderly whom are the people who need to be distracted the most.

Draw & Write: 17 year old girl, waste collector, Indonesia, PKPA.

My sadness during Covid-19
Day after day I passed
Now it's been almost one year
The impact of covid-19 ruined my dreams...

My dream is having a harmonious family
Dream of having a high education
Dreams to do activities perfectly...

My dream is to have a harmonious family
Dream of having a high education
Dreams to do activities perfectly...

But...
It's all imperfect I can get
All my dreams are just one
Delusion

Economic groaning, has always been a
cause of quarrels in my family
I want to have a peaceful family and a decent life
And I want to continue my education to a higher level

But all of that was hindered because of the impact of Covid-19

I am very sad about my current fate
Now, I must become a child worker because my father is
Currently being laid off...
I cried...
I can't get my rights as a child...
Now I must work, from morning until late evening
To earn money for my education and needs
And an addition to my family

And now I believe that every test has a wisdom
Every challenge has a way out...
And I'm sure if we want to change the destiny
Just get up with enthusiasm

Right now, I truly believe is the key to success
Rise up for me ... cheer up!!
And I believe I can reach my goals
With sincerity and sincerely
Spirit for me and all of us...

Caregivers also revealed the burden of concerns and fears they carried, including fear that a family member will get infected, sadness about people dying, uncertainty about children's return to school, worries about their economic situation and their struggles to pay bills and meet the basic needs of their family members.

"We hear bad news, continuous deaths, and restrictions... All this pandemic or Covid-19 has been something uncomfortable that has had to be overcome. It has been very stressful especially with children."

(29 year old mother, Guatemala, CEIPA)

"I fear that my children will get sick because the hospitals are already full and there is no space."

(35 year old mother, clothes seller, Guatemala, CEIPA)

Guatemala case study: Dealing with Stress

Ana is a 12 year old girl living in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. Ana and her mother work at the market selling vegetables. Before the covid-19 outbreak they used to work every day. At the beginning of the pandemic due to their fear of getting infected they reduced their work, to only sell their vegetables in the market once or twice a week. The subsequent confinement changed many aspects of their lives, including their fears and hopes. According to Ana's mother, 'the pandemic was all people talked about; we were traumatized by all this!' They were afraid of getting infected or not being able to return to school. There was uncertainty about what would happen to their jobs, as well as fear of not being able to meet with friends and extended family members.

Many of these concerns remain to date. Although most restrictions have been lifted, the infection rate continues to increase, as do Ana's worries about when she will be able to go out without feeling afraid of getting infected and sick.

Despite the challenges that Ana and her family have gone through, at the beginning of the pandemic Ana appreciated opportunities to rest between one to two hours a day and to play two or three hours every day. Today, Ana is back at work. She has only 10 to 15 minutes a day to rest or play, and the time she spends at home 'is very boring. Looking into four walls and feeling that the time goes by slower and slower is difficult.'

While Ana and her family try to overcome the negative impact of the pandemic on their family income and on Ana's education, Ana found some positive ways to deal with the stress including reading, listening to music, songwriting, and spending quality time with her family.

"I am afraid about the possibility that a member of my family could get infected. I am hopeful that we will be fine after this pandemic. My dreams are to remain united as a family and that nothing bad happens to us."

(13 year old boy, small scale vendor, Bolivia, PASOCAP)

"I help my daughters with their homework, I go to my daughter's room to visit her or sometimes she come to visit me and we share many things."

(40 year old mother, Guatemala, CEIPA)

The 2020 study identified the importance of effective communication among family members as a protective factor for children's positive mental health and psychosocial well-being.[17] The 2020 confinements allowed working children and their families to spend more quality time together, and in many cases, it improved communication between family members.

Today, the time spent together is reducing for some children, as family members resume work and study commitments outside of their homes. However, the benefits of good communication and family unity among children, parents and other family members remains important, and was emphasised by children and caregivers in this follow up study.

17 Barros, O. & O'Kane, C. (2020). Exploratory research on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic in the lives of working children and their families. Kindernothilfe: Duisburg.

"Now I am able to reach my classmates, teammates and teachers and tell stories since schools opened."

(15 year old girl, small scale vendor, Kenya, WCY)

Increased opportunities for children to communicate with their peers also enhances children's well-being. Reconnect with their friends in schools and to engage in outdoor sports and other activities was reported as a positive development. Children and caregivers from Guatemala and Zambia appreciated the re-opening of churches, as they gain strength from their spiritual practices.

"My friends give advices and guidance whenever I do, if it is right or wrong."

(17 year old boy, waste collector and construction worker, the Philippines, KAUGMAON)



"Now I can go out to play outside my house and I can go shopping with my mother. Now I can go for a run, exercise and distract myself."

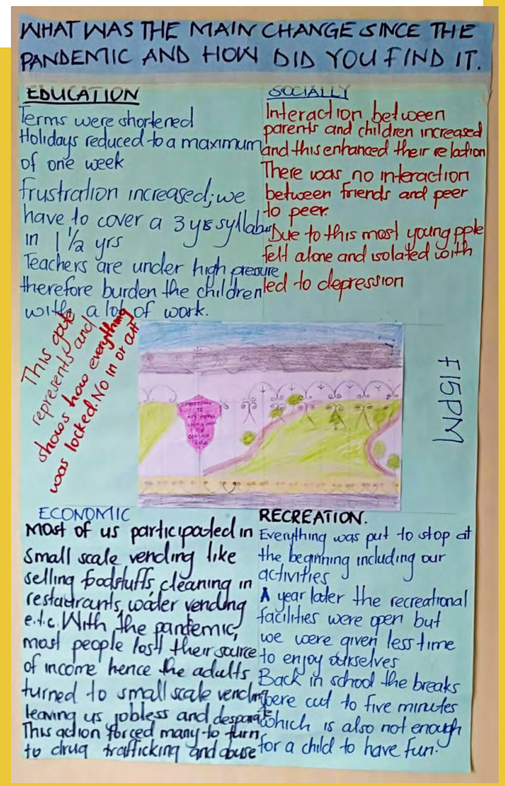
(13 year old boy, poultry keeper, Guatemala, CEIPA)

"Now my feet do not rest because I am busy with my projects and dedicate little time to play. Now I dedicate more time to work"

(17 year old girl, small scale vendor, Bolivia, PASOCAP)





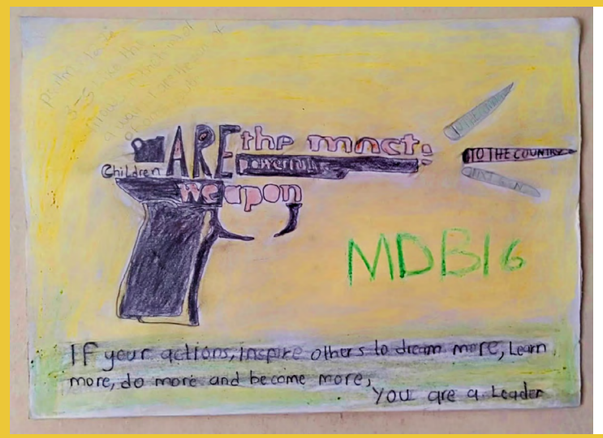


The link between children's psychosocial well-being and learning outcomes[18] keeps NGO partners concerned about actions to ensure that schools and educators are prepared to create learning environments that are sensitive to the social and emotional needs of children. It includes the need to respond to the changing realities and uncertainty that working children face, and to provide them with opportunities to continue learning, while addressing their MHPSS (Mental Health and Psychosocial Support) needs.

Children's well-being is enhanced when they have a sense of self-efficacy, when they are listened to and heard in decisions that affect them.[19] Some children described how their views are more listened to now, in comparison to the beginning of the pandemic. For some this is due both to increased opportunities to communicate with family members during the period of confinement, as well as the benefits of children's engagement in child groups and community-based initiatives, through which their leadership roles are recognised and valued. Opportunities to actively engage in NGO activities and groups were a source of strength for children. For example, in Indonesia, children became peer educators about COVID-19 because of their involvement in child-friendly opportunities that PKPA organised for children to learn about the issue and find alternatives to deal with the stress caused by the confinement.

> ***"Now take my opinion is taken into account because I am a leader."***
>
> (17 year old girl, waitress, Bolivia, PASOCAP)

18 UNESCO (2021). One year into COVID: Prioritizing education recovery to avoid a generational catastrophe.
19 UNICEF (2020). Mental Health and Psychosocial support for children in humanitarian settings: An updated review of evidence and practice.



Draw & Write:
16 year old boy, Kenya, WCY

Children are the most powerful weapon. If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.

Protection from violence

Risk factors for children's experience of violence, abuse and neglect have increased during the pandemic, especially during periods of confinement.[20] Different agencies and helplines have highlighted increased reports of domestic violence during the lockdown, including different forms of gender-based violence.[21]

Compared to findings from the 2020 study, the NGO partners expressed greater concerns of the increased violence that children face in and outside their homes. While only two girls in the small sample of children consulted in this study directly raised concerns of domestic violence, NGO staff from each country reported increased rates of corporal punishment, neglect, and domestic violence experienced by children, as well as increased risks of sexual abuse and exploitation. There are also gender dimensions to the risks faced, with girls facing increased risks of sexual abuse and exploitation; while boys may face increased risks of harsher physical punishments.

NGO staff from Guatemala, Indonesia, Kenya, and Zambia also reported significant increases in child pregnancy, especially following the months of confinement.

In Kenya, within a period of one month, WCY rescued four children who were victims of abuse and neglect in their households. These four cases are being processed in court to determine follow up actions guided by consideration of the best interests of the child. In Indonesia, PKPA staff described how the increased on-screen time that working children spend since the outbreak has resulted in higher risks of online sexual abuse and exploitation. Within the last year, PKPA has submitted three complaints to the Ombudsmen office about child protection cases that had not been resolved. Since the pandemic, law enforcement in Indonesia is constrained as public servants remain working from home and prosecution processes have become extremely slow.

20 The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action et al (2020). Protecting Children from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in the home.
21 World Vision (2020). Covid-19 Aftershocks: A Perfect Storm: Millions more children at risk of violence under lockdown and into the 'new normal'.



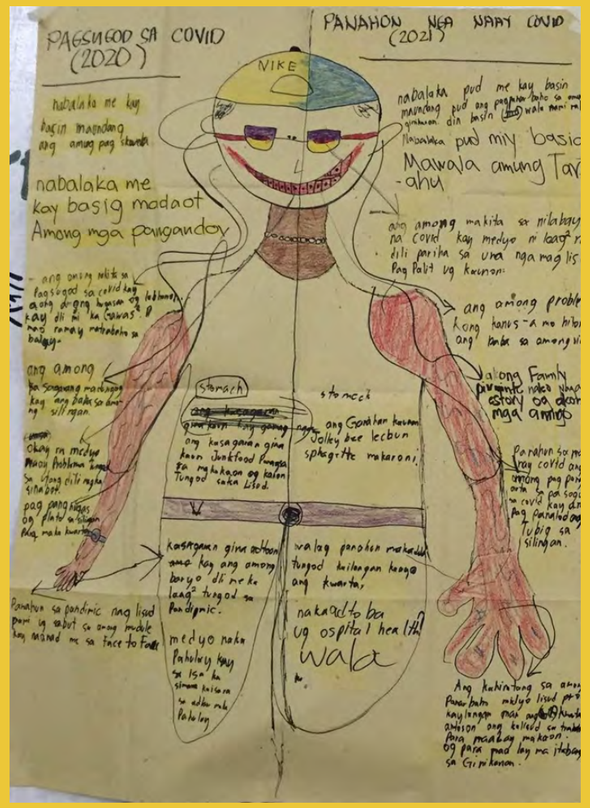
› Boy from Peru formulates his messages.

Kenya case study: Increased violence against children

The social and emotional impact of the pandemic on families is one of the main concerns for staff from WCY in Kenya. The effects of stress caused by a long period of uncertainty, higher rates of unemployment, limited interactions with friends at school, the loss of family members, among others have also increased the risks that children are exposed to inside and outside their homes.

Since schools closed, the increased responsibilities of parents to guide and support children's education has brought an additional challenge to their ongoing concerns. Staff from WCY described how they have received increased reports about violence experienced by children both at home and in the community including reports of corporal punishment, neglect and sexual abuse.

Increased risks of violence against children also result from changes in the job market. Mary is a 15 year old girl that sells food and soft drinks together with her mother. Most of the children that Mary knows, including herself work as small-scale vendors or as cleaners in restaurants. The unemployment rate that increased since the COVID-19 outbreak has left many people without a source of income and at risk of more exploitative and harmful forms of work. For example, Mary described how some individuals who could not find work turned to drug trafficking and other forms of harmful and exploitative work.



Body map by a boy informal worker, the Philippines, KAUGMAON

Recommendations

Working children and caregivers identified key stakeholders that could contribute to improve their situation and protect children's rights and well-being during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Key messages focus on diverse impact areas including: livelihoods and income-generation opportunities; food security and social protection schemes; education; health; child protection and psycho-social support.

The key messages indicate the importance of multi-sectoral and inclusive efforts to enhance the indivisible rights of children and their families to survival, protection, development and participation. Non-discriminatory efforts to ensure quality services reach the most vulnerable groups are crucial. Furthermore, community and child participation, transparent information- sharing and communication, responsible media and advocacy are crucial to making governments more responsive and accountable to the needs and perspectives of children and families.

To governments

- → Provide basic food and / or cash to families to meet the basic needs of the most vulnerable groups.
- → Ensure fair distribution of aid.
- → Ensure access to quality education by providing free education, free internet access, devices, and necessary materials for children to continue their education.
- → Ensure child-friendly school syllabus and necessary school infrastructure for inclusive quality education.
- → Ensure that food programmes at schools continue upon children's return to in-person learning.
- → Create sources of employment, decent work and livelihood support to enable families to meet basic needs and school-related costs.
- → Increase child protection programmes and ensure law enforcement to prevent and respond to violence against children and to child labour exploitation.
- → Ensure free and inclusive access to health care services with decent health equipment, medicines, and vaccination for all.
- → Give children a voice in decision-making

To civil society organisations

- Provide humanitarian assistance including access to food and essential hygiene items.
- Support children's education through tutoring, school materials, internet access, and life-skills education.
- Provide psychosocial support and capacity building of children and parents to enhance their knowledge and skills to promote and protect children's rights.
- Advocate for children's rights and the improved situation of working children by enabling their voices to be heard.
- Help children who are abused by their parents or other people.

To schools and teachers

- Be understanding, teach better and give children more time to deliver assignments.
- Understand that not all of the families can afford the school materials, internet and devices that children need to access remote learning.
- Support working children to continue their education by encouraging them to remain enrolled, explain homework, and stay available for questions that children may have about the subjects.

To parents and extended family

- Support children's education by helping them understand the subjects, their homework and provide them with the devices and school materials to access remote learning.
- Give children quality time, care, attention and advice. Listen to children and support children especially during these difficult times.
- Create a safe and favourable home environment where everybody communicates well, and everyone in the family feels a sense of belonging.
- Provide financial help to ensure that children's basic needs to food, clothes, health care and education are met.
- Give children time to rest and play.

To faith communities

- Provide humanitarian assistance including access to basic food, medicines, and clothes.
- Appreciate, support, and encourage children and youth.
- Protect children.
- Ensure fair distribution of support.



To children

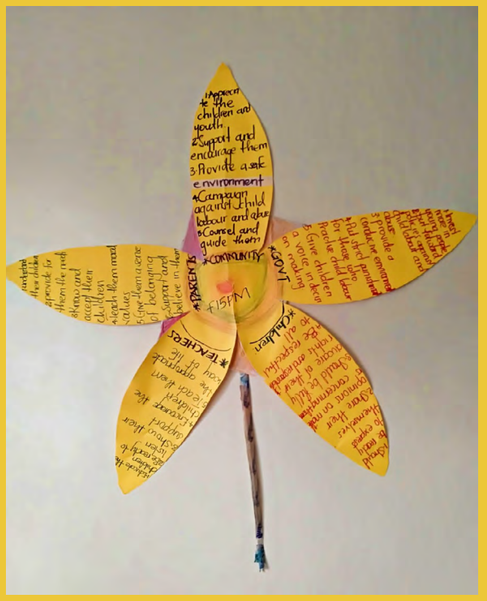


- Express yourselves and share your views on matters that affect you.
- Give advice and support to each other.
- Learn about your rights and defend your rights.

To media



- Report accurate information about COVID-19 and ways to access vaccination.
- Air children's views.



Flower of Support, 15 year old girl, Kenya, WCY

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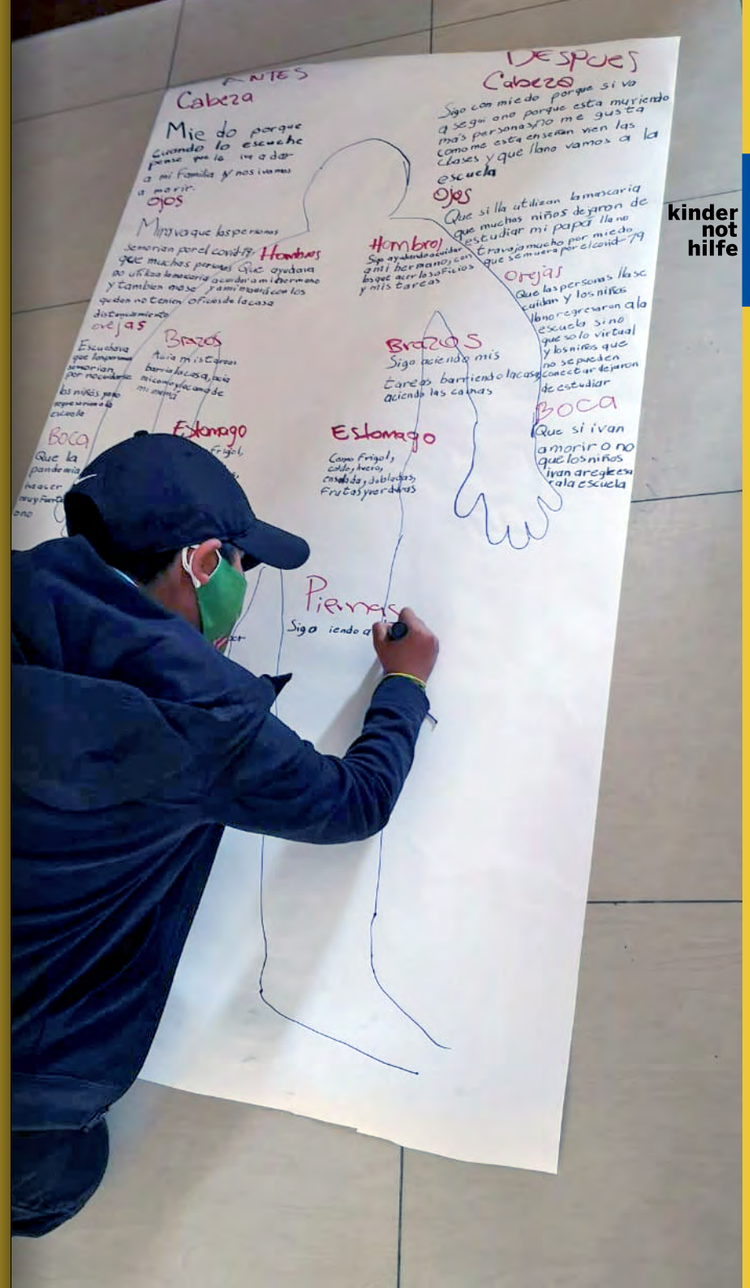
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