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# PROTECT A GENERATION

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



## The impact of COVID-19 on children's lives



Photo: Save the Children

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Salam\*, 10, and her brother Rami\*, 13, learning at home in a camp in North West Syria

An estimated 99% of children worldwide – or more than 2.3 billion children – live in one of the 186 countries that have implemented some form of restrictions due to COVID-19<sup>1</sup>. Although children are not at a high risk of direct harm from the virus, they are disproportionately affected by its hidden impacts.

“

**We are not living our childhood.”**

– 12-year-old girl, Syria

The most marginalised and deprived children have been hit the hardest, and existing inequalities have been exacerbated. Progress that had been made against the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for children is at risk of being disrupted, or even lost. For many children, the impacts of the pandemic will be catastrophic.

Save the Children carried out a global survey of children and their parents or caregivers during the COVID-19 pandemic, to find out the impact that the pandemic is having on their access to healthcare, their education, their family finances

and their safety, and to hear from children themselves on these topics.

The survey is the largest and most comprehensive survey of children and families during the COVID-19 crisis to date. The research was implemented in 46 countries and results in the largest and most comprehensive survey of children and families during the COVID-19 crisis to date, with 31,683 parents and caregivers and 13,477 children aged between 11-17 years old participating. The research sampled three distinct population groups:

1. Save the Children program participants with telephone numbers

or email addresses, 2. specific population groups of interest to Save the Children, and 3. the general public.

This report is one in a series presenting findings from the Global COVID-19 Research. The results presented in this report focus on quantitative data from our representative sample of 17,565 parents/caregivers and 8,069 children from 37 countries in our program participants group. Quotes from children across the three samples are also shared.

Survey participants

COUNTRIES

37

PARENTS

17,565

CHILDREN

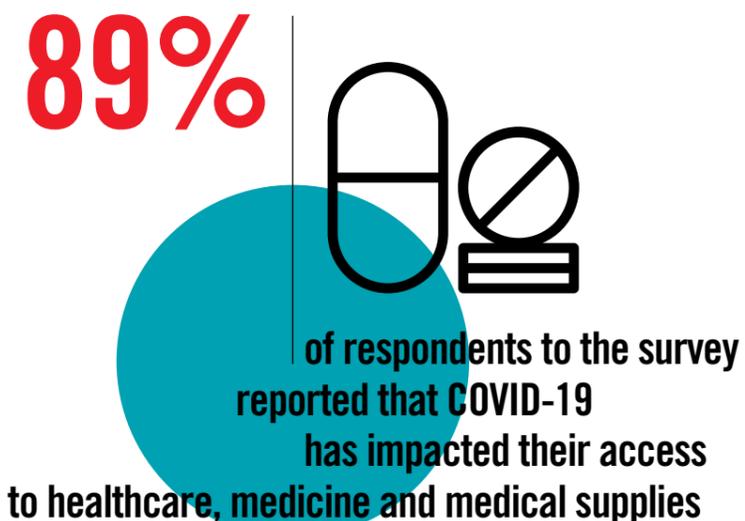
8,069

## Children's Agenda for Action

Children's rights, as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), need to be respected, protected and fulfilled during times of crisis. The children who responded to the global survey made articulate and clear demands of their leaders to deliver on their rights.

Children demand action on education, including the re-opening of schools and improved distance learning, an acceleration in the response to the pandemic and increased access to healthcare, as well as a call for duty-bearers to prioritise poorer families with the provision of social protection.

Children are calling on duty-bearers to protect them from increasing violence as a result of COVID-19 and crucially, to honour their right to be heard and to participate systematically in public decision-making on issues that affect them.



## Health and nutrition during the pandemic

As a result of the deprioritisation of non-COVID related healthcare, lockdowns, and fear of contracting the virus, it is predicted that many children will die from preventable causes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Food and economic insecurity also threaten children's access to good nutrition, and malnutrition rates are expected to rise. **89% of respondents to the survey reported that COVID-19 has impacted their access to healthcare, medicine and medical supplies.** This increased for children with chronic health conditions or disabilities, and for poor households.

Further, **almost two thirds (62%) of respondents said that they are finding it difficult to provide their families with meat, dairy products, grains, fruits and vegetables.** The primary reason noted was cost, with **over half (52%) of respondents reporting that food is too expensive.**

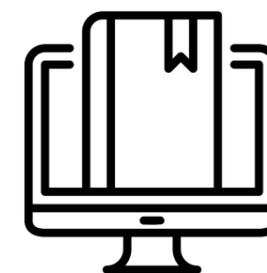
## Save Our Education

More than 1.6 billion learners globally have faced school closures due to the pandemic. Save the Children predicts that the unprecedented disruption to children's education will result in at least 10 million children not returning to school, with girls and the most marginalised and deprived children most affected.<sup>2</sup> For children that do return to school, it is likely that they will miss out on months of learning and experience significant setbacks in their learning. This will particularly affect the poorest children who don't have access to online technology to support distance learning, and are less likely to have access to help at home.

**More than 8 in 10 children surveyed felt that they were learning little or nothing at all.** This figure was even higher for children living in poor households, displaced children, and girls. **Fewer than 1% of children from poor households said they have access to the internet for distance learning,** despite more than 60% of national distance learning initiatives relying on online platforms.<sup>3</sup>

**40% of children from poor households said that they need help with their schoolwork, but they have no one to help them.** This is even more concerning as **two thirds of parents and caregivers reported that their child had received no contact from teachers since their school closed.** Children without access to help with their learning will be left further behind when they return to school.

Fewer than **1%**



**of children from poor households said they have access to the internet for distance learning**

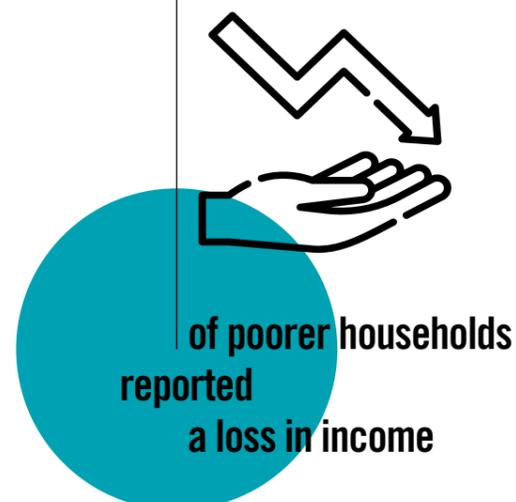
## Child poverty and social protection

The COVID-19 health crisis quickly developed into an economic crisis, and Save the Children predicts that the number of children living in poor households could increase by as many as 117 million in 2020 alone.<sup>4</sup> As well as being a key factor in undermining the economic growth and social capital of a country, child poverty stops children from having access to vital services including health and education, and can result in them being at a higher risk of violence, including child labour and child marriage.

In response to the survey, **more than 3 in 4 households reported an income loss** since the beginning of the pandemic. **Poorer households were more likely to suffer income losses (82%) than those not classified as poor (70%).** Urban households were also disproportionately affected by income loss, with **respondents from urban areas almost twice as likely to say they have lost their job (61%) compared with those in rural areas (33%).**

Although many countries and territories have implemented social protection measures since the outbreak of the virus, coverage does not yet go far enough. In response to the survey, **70% of respondents who suffered economic losses reported that they had not received government support.**

# 82%



## Protecting children from violence

Violence against children was already at pandemic proportions before the outbreak of COVID-19; globally, 1 billion children aged between 2-17 years old experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence or neglect each year.<sup>5</sup> COVID-19 threatens to exacerbate the risk of violence against children, particularly for those who are already at greater risk of violence – including girls, poor children, children with disabilities, and those in fragile contexts.

**Nearly one third (32%) of households had a child, parent or caregiver who said that there had been physical or emotional violence in their home since the start of the pandemic.**

Income loss and school closures heightened such violence; **19% of households in which violence was reported to have taken place by children had lost all or most of their household income due to COVID-19 compared to 5% when there had been no loss of income.** Violence in the household reported by children was double the rate when schools were closed (17%) compared with when schools were open and the child was attending in person (8%).

Responses to the survey also suggested that girls were being negatively affected by gender roles in the home. **Almost two thirds of girls (63%) reported an increase in household chores and more than half (52%) reported an increase in time spent caring for siblings and others** since the pandemic began. Girls reported that this **stopped them from being able to study, at twice the rate of boys.**

# 32%



## Recommendations

Save the Children call on all stakeholders to come together to protect a generation of children. Action must be taken at the global and national level to ensure that all countries are able to respond to the pandemic effectively and build back better for children.

Governments, donors, multilateral organisations and all other stakeholders must take action to ensure that all children:

- Have access to strong, resilient and equitable health and nutrition systems that continue to deliver routine services
- Have access to learning whilst out of school, and are able to return to school when it is safe to do so
- Have access to inclusive and resilient social protection schemes
- Are protected from violence and have access to child protection services, including gender-based violence and mental health services
- Are listened to and involved in decision-making processes, as enshrined under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

For the full list of recommendations, please [see the full report](#).

## Endnotes

- 1 UNICEF, (2020). Don't Let Children be the Hidden Victims of COVID-19 pandemic <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/dont-let-children-be-hidden-victims-covid-19-pandemic>
- 2 Save the Children, (2020). Save our Education: Protect every child's right to learn in the COVID-19 response and recovery [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/17871/pdf/save\\_our\\_education\\_0.pdf](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/17871/pdf/save_our_education_0.pdf)
- 3 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report, (2020). World Education Blog, Distance Learning Denied <https://gemreportunesco.wordpress.com/2020/05/15/distance-learning-denied/#more-12982>
- 4 Save the Children UK, (2020). Coronavirus' Invisible Victims: Children in Monetary Poor Households <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/blogs/2020/coronavirus-invisible-victims-children-in-monetary-poor-househol>
- 5 World Health Organization, (2020). Violence Against Children Factsheet <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-children>

Eloge\*, 15, helps her brother put his facemask on in the DRC