

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

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- **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

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Content

2	Acknowledgements
3	Executive summary
5	Introduction
6	Methodology
9	Key findings
9	Impact on livelihood and income
12	Impact on education
15	Impact on nutrition and physical health
18	Impact on mental health and well-being
22	Recommendations
25	References
26	Annexes



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D sseldorfer Landstra e 180 • 47249 Duisburg

Authors: Claire O'Kane, Ornella Barros
Editor/Co-ordination: Lea Kulakow

Contact: Lea Kulakow • Advocacy Officer
Lea.Kulakow@knh.de • 0203.7789-2803

In cooperation with:
Kindernothilfe Austria • info@kindernothilfe.at
Dorotheergasse 18 • 1010 Wien, Austria

Kindernothilfe Luxembourg a.s.b.l. • info@kindernothilfe.lu
15, rue Eecherschmelz • L-1481 Luxembourg

Kindernothilfe Switzerland • info@kindernothilfe.ch
Laurenzenvorstadt 89 • 5000 Aarau, Switzerland

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Executive summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected children's lives worldwide negatively affecting the enjoyment of fundamental rights such as education, health and nutrition. This exploratory research led by Kindernothilfe between May – July 2020 shows 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.

In collaboration with six child-focused NGO partners from Bolivia (PASOCAP), Guatemala (CEIPA), Indonesia (PKPA), Kenya (WCY), the Philippines (Kaugmaon), and Zambia (JCM) and Children's Advisory Committees in each country the exploratory research gathered the views, experiences and messages of 25 boys, 21 girls, and 9 caregivers. The children and young people aged 7 to 17 years were primarily working in informal sectors, such as small-scale vendors, waste collectors, street singers, fruit loaders, tailors, and assistants (for masonry, bakery and shoemaker). Some worked in the agricultural sector.

At the time of the study there were partial lockdowns in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Zambia; and full lockdowns, including curfew measures in Bolivia, Guatemala and Kenya. Confinement measures have particularly affected working children's and families' income and livelihoods. Lockdowns, health risks, and the closure of public markets and several economic sectors left many child workers and their caregivers either unemployed or with less income. They have tried to adapt their work but, in most cases, it has not enabled sufficient family income. During the lockdown, some families relied exclusively on humanitarian assistance provided by international and local NGOs and/or faith based organisations. The limited access to government subsidies and services was compounded by insufficient information, internet access and difficulties to meet the requirements for government assistance.

Many working children were already struggling to pay tuition fees and school materials before the pandemic. Since the outbreak their access to education has been adversely

affected. The school closures made digital exclusion more evident, particularly for children living in poverty. For many working children, the lack of internet access, computers or smart phones and internet costs made it difficult for girls and boys to pursue their education during the pandemic. Some of them tried to continue home-school either via WhatsApp and Zoom, while some others tried to follow lessons on TV, radio, or through printed lessons. Challenges at this level included low literacy level of caregivers to support children's education. Children miss going to school and seeing their friends, but remain hopeful to be able to continue their education and go back to their school routine.

Physical health and nutrition deteriorated for working children since the outbreak. Most of the families reported either having less access to food, eating smaller portions, having a reduced number of meals per day, or having a less balanced diet. Some children faced malnutrition. However, a minority of children are eating better than before as they spend their days at home and have even gained weight. Many girls and boys are resting more during the pandemic due to loss of work and home base restrictions, although some experience more physical exhaustion since the pandemic because they work longer shifts or are engaged in heavy work such as agricultural work or masonry.

As a result of the pandemic, caregivers and children face ongoing, changing and increased worries and uncertainties that affect their mental health and wellbeing. Some children mentioned their sense of frustration, and sadness for not being able to go out and work to support their families. All they hear on the media is information about the pandemic, which has increased their fear and uncertainty about their future. A few children and caregivers reported increased risks of violence in families, particularly quarrels between family members. Yet despite the multiple stresses brought about by the pandemic, strengthened communication and improved relationships between children and their caregivers became a protective factor. Many of the working children consulted emphasised improved communication between children and parents, as they got to spend more quality time together that

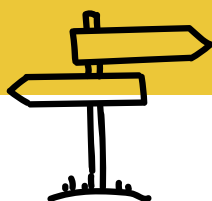
under normal circumstances was not possible due to work and other responsibilities.

These complexities on 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 within families, 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.





Introduction



The COVID-19 pandemic suddenly and drastically changed the way we live and interact with others. By late August 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) has reported more than twenty-three million confirmed cases and more than eight hundred thousand deaths.¹ There have been many efforts to understand and document the impact of COVID-19 at multiple levels. Some of them focus on the long-term effects of the crisis on children's wellbeing and safety including increased levels of poverty, an increasing number of children deprived from their right to education and health, and significant protection risks.² Working children are not spared from the impact of COVID-19 and associated risks, rather they may be amongst the most affected by the global socio-economic crisis and related impacts triggered by the pandemic.

Pre-COVID-19 "Time to Talk" research with working children revealed that the main reasons for children's work are to help their families, to overcome poverty and family struggles, to meet their basic needs, and to continue their education.³ To date, there have been efforts to document the impact of COVID-19 on child labour,⁴ but with limited or in-existent engagement of children in the process. Recognising that children have lived experiences and insights on the short and long-term potential impact of the pandemic on children, it is important to listen to them.⁵ To address this need, during May – July 2020 Kindernothilfe led a small-scale exploratory research study with child workers and their parents/caregivers across six countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America to explore the impact of COVID-19 on working children and their families.

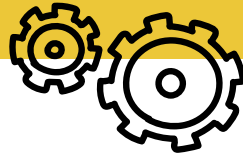
In collaboration with six child-focused NGO partners from Bolivia (PASOCAP), Guatemala (CEIPA), Indonesia (PKPA), Kenya (WCY), the Philippines (Kaugmaon), and Zambia



^ Guatemala: 11-year-old boy with his mother. He works in a masonry.

(JCM)⁶, and Children's Advisory Committees (CACs) in each country the exploratory research gathered the views, experiences and messages of working children and their families. This report presents working children's and their caregivers' views about the impact of COVID-19 on working children and their families, to support efforts to influence practice and policy-making processes affecting working children at local, national, regional and international levels.

1 As of 25 August, 2020. See: <https://covid19.who.int/>
 2 United Nations (2020). Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on children. Available at: <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/policy-brief-impact-covid-19-children>
 3 O'Kane, C., Barros, O. & Meslaoui, N. (2018). Children's views on children's work. Duisburg: 'Time to Talk' [Kindernothilfe and Terre des Hommes Germany].
 4 International Labour Organization and United Nations Children's Fund (2020). 'COVID-19 and Child Labour: A time of crisis, a time to act'. ILO and UNICEF, New York.
 5 The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2020). Technical Note: Protection of Children during the Coronavirus Pandemic.
 6 CEIPA = Centro Ecueménico 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 exploratory research aimed to identify, analyse and document the:

- effects of COVID-19 on the lives of working children and their families, particularly in relation to livelihood opportunities and income; education; nutrition and physical health; and mental health and well-being;
- mechanisms that working children and their caregivers are using to cope with the effects of COVID-19; and
- recommendations to mitigate the negative effects of COVID-19 on working children and their families.

The research used qualitative methods and engaged different stakeholders including:

- Participatory self-guided and face-to-face consultations with 25 boys and 21 girls participants of Time to Talk's Children's Advisory Committees (CACs) in Bolivia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kenya, the Philippines, and Zambia. The children aged 7 to 17 years⁷ were primarily working in informal sectors, such as small-scale vendors, waste collectors, street singers, fruit loaders, tailors, and assistants (for masonry, bakery and shoemaker). Some worked in the agricultural sector.
- Participatory self-guided and face-to-face consultations with nine caregivers including eight women and one man.
- Semi-structured interviews with nine focal points from the six local NGO partners supporting the consultation process.

7 One of the participants from Indonesia was 18 years old at the time of the consultation.

The study at a glance



9 caregivers
(Parents, guardians, etc.)



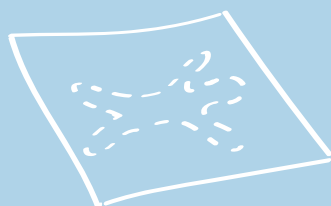
21 girls and 25 boys
Aged 7 to 17 years



6 NGO partners

→ Consultation tools

Three consultation tools – originally used for the Time to Talk project⁸ – 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 informed consent, interest and time availability:



→ **Body mapping** to explore the effects of COVID-19 on the lives of working children and their households, identifying before 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 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.

⁸ 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. Kindernoithilfe, Save the Children and terre des home.

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

- CAC members;
- Children and caregivers that were interested and available;
- Households most affected by the pandemic;
- Participation of children and caregivers living in urban and rural settings – whenever possible, they also prioritized gender balance;
- Caregivers with enough literacy level to support and/or participate in consultation.



^ Boy from Kenia with a body map.



Consultation types

A self-guided consultation toolkit was designed to support children's and caregivers' participation. Additionally, information leaflets were available for caregivers and local NGO partners to introduce the research objectives, methodology, documentation forms, informed consent forms and related child safeguarding standards.

Self-guided consultations: Children and caregivers participating in Bolivia (PASOCAP), Kenya (WCY), and Zambia (JCM) used the consultation toolkit with remote support from the local NGO partners. In Kenya and Bolivia, for example, WCY and PASOCAP used phone calls, WhatsApp, or Zoom to share information and to support children and caregivers understanding of the tools and documentation process. For families living in urban settings, WCY printed some of the materials and delivered them to the households. Similarly, in Zambia JCM conducted short home visits to deliver materials, share consultation instructions, and pick up the results. The local NGO partners concurred that children were very happy to be reached and asked about how they were doing during

the pandemic, and they were very interested to share their views about how the crisis has affected their lives. According to the local NGO partners, the main challenge of this type of consultation was related to difficulties to provide remote support and follow-up to children and caregivers given the internet connection issues and movement restrictions.

Face-to-face consultations: Children and caregivers participating in Indonesia and the Philippines were able to join the consultations through face-to-face workshops organised by PKPA and KAUGMAON respectively. The local NGO partners followed safety protocols including spacious venues and open spaces, social distancing, mask-wearing, regular hand-washing, and short consultation workshops. In Guatemala, the facilitators from CEIPA conducted home visits to consult children and their caregivers. The main challenges of these face-to-face consultations were related to difficulties for children to keep social distancing, and the low literacy level of some caregivers that required additional support from local NGO partners.

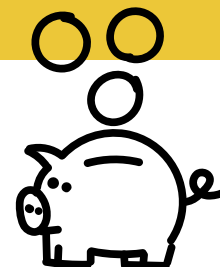
Some of the limitations included challenges to support remote consultations and documentation due to movement restrictions and poor internet connection – especially in rural areas; low literacy level of some caregivers to support and/or participate in consultations; limited resources to support the participation of a higher number of children and caregivers; and limited time for data collection.





Key findings

Impact on **livelihood and income**



Evidence about the impact of previous pandemics and epidemics on child protection indicates that reductions in household income resulted in increased risk of child labour to support family survival. While quarantine and lockdown restrictions made younger children and girls less likely to be engaged in child labour outside the home, but more likely to be engaged in work within the home, including domestic work and chores.⁹

Findings from this exploratory research revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic is having a significant impact on working

children's and caregiver's livelihoods. Working children and caregivers reported a drastic reduction in available livelihood opportunities resulting in substantial income loss. Some parents used to have more than one income source, but the pandemic has left them either unemployed or with an income loss of up to 50%. Before the pandemic, children and their caregivers had more stable work and income. It was easier for children to find jobs; they earned more, and their earnings were often used to meet their basic needs, including their school expenses.

⁹ Bakrania, S., Chavez, C., Ipince, A., Rocca, M., Oliver, S., Stansfield, C., and Subrahmanian, R. (2020) Impacts of Pandemics and Epidemics on Child Protection: Lessons learned from a rapid review in the context of COVID-19, Innocenti Working Paper 2020-05, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence.



Draw & Write: 15-year-old girl, small-scale vendor, the Philippines, KAUGMAON.

"I want to have a small store where I could sell iced candy, iced popsicle, munchkins, or french fries. I wish I could gain an income from selling these things to be able to help my family, especially during this COVID-19 pandemic. Now, I have a small store but because I do not have enough capital I only gain a small amount. From these earnings, I gave half of it to my mother, and I kept the other half. These savings are still for food for the family when my parents run out of money, which happens most of the time."



At the time of the study partial lockdowns in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Zambia meant that only a few essential businesses were open. In Indonesia, for example, the confinement measures were applied differently depending on the contagion levels in the regions. In contrast, Bolivia, Guatemala and Kenya faced full lockdowns including curfew measures during weekends. By the time of the interviews with local NGO partners, Guatemala and Bolivia had completed four months of full lockdown. According to children and caregivers, lockdowns, health risks, and the closure of public markets and several economic sectors left many child workers and their caregivers either unemployed or with less income. For children with disabilities the pandemic resulted in higher levels of discrimination, and created additional challenges to access basic services and decent job opportunities.

Containment measures themselves have a disproportionate impact on the poorest populations who cannot work from home and live at subsistence levels.¹⁰ This was

the case of some children and caregivers who had to break the lockdown in order to generate income, as most of them rely on informal jobs. Some caregivers and children persevered with their jobs or changed jobs in order to bring in an income. Yet, many reported earning significantly less due to a lower number of customers.

Although several governments implemented humanitarian response plans to contain the pandemic

and its effects, there are indications that the virus and its impact are disproportionately affecting certain communities, accentuating underlying structural inequalities¹¹ including access to governmental services and subsidies. In Bolivia and Guatemala, for example, governments developed between two to eight types of subsidies in response to COVID-19 that primarily targeted marginalized communities. However, according to the local NGO partners, several families did not benefit from government assistance because they could not access information about the subsidies; lacked internet access to complete online application forms; or were required to present supporting documents such as utility bills in their name, that families could not submit because they live in rented places. Thus, most of the children and caregivers reported that they had not received any governmental assistance by the time of consultations, except for Indonesia, where some households received five kilos of rice once a month since the COVID-19 outbreak, and the Philippines where families received some assistance, but not enough for the number of people in the household. Some households reported having no income at all and relying exclusively on humanitarian assistance provided by local and international NGOs, which in many cases is not reaching the most vulnerable.

Working children's responsibilities have changed since the COVID-19 outbreak. Before, girls and boys used to juggle

"I used to see more job opportunities. Now there is no work as we are not selling the products. We rely on the subsidy we received from the government, and my only responsibility is to help with the housework."

(15-year-old girl, small-scale vendor, Bolivia, PASOCAP)

"After COVID-19 things have not been easier for me. My work has suffered loss, the little money we had has been spent on food. Now we rely on my uncle in Lusaka who is also struggling to meet his basic needs."

(11-year-old girl, plaits hair, Zambia, JCM)

10 United Nations (2020). Policy brief COVID-19 and Human Rights: We are all in this together. Available at: https://www.un.org/victimsofterrorism/sites/www.un.org.victimsofterrorism/files/un_-_human_rights_and_covid_april_2020.pdf

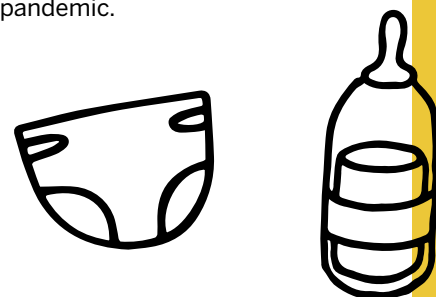
11 Ibid.



education, paid work and household work. Since lockdown measures were put in place across most countries, many girls and boys were unable to earn an income and children's responsibilities mainly focused on helping with household chores and trying to continue their studies.¹² For some children, one of the most difficult aspects of the crisis has been the family struggle and the frustration of feeling powerless and unable to provide economic support.

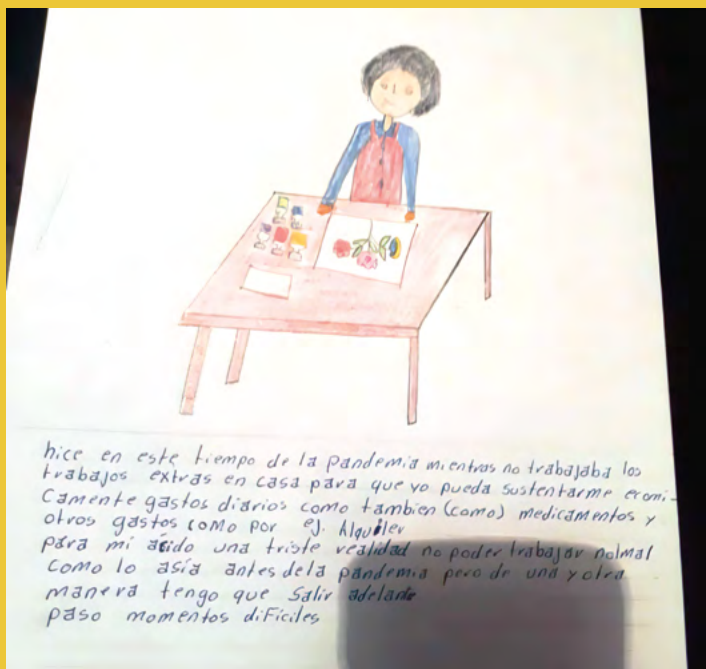
Some boys explained that they are spending less time taking care of their younger siblings because their parents spend more time at home. In contrast, other boys and girls continued taking care of their younger siblings and other family members while their parents were working.

Compared to adults, children are more likely to accept working for less pay and in vulnerable conditions.¹³ In efforts to find alternative work during the pandemic some girls and boys who used to do light work now spend more hours doing heavy work. In Kenya, for example, WCY reported an increased risk of exploitation and sexual abuse, especially for children working more hours in farms since the outbreak. For parents, the responsibilities have not significantly changed, as they tend to remain the main income source of the households, but the economic burden and uncertainty have increased due to the pandemic.



¹² See: Ritz, D., O'Hare, G. and Burgess, M. (2020), The Hidden Impact of COVID-19 on Child Protection and Wellbeing. London, Save the Children International.

¹³ International Labour Organization and United Nations Children's Fund (2020). 'COVID-19 and Child Labour: A time of crisis, a time to act'. ILO and UNICEF, New York.



Draw & Write: 33-year-old mother, cook, Bolivia, PASOCAP.

"During the pandemic, I had to find an alternative income, as I was not able to continue working. I had to do it in order to cover my daily expenses including medication and other expenses such as the rent.

It has been a sad reality not being able to work as I used to do before the pandemic, but either way, I have to thrive. I am going through difficult times."

Impact on **education**

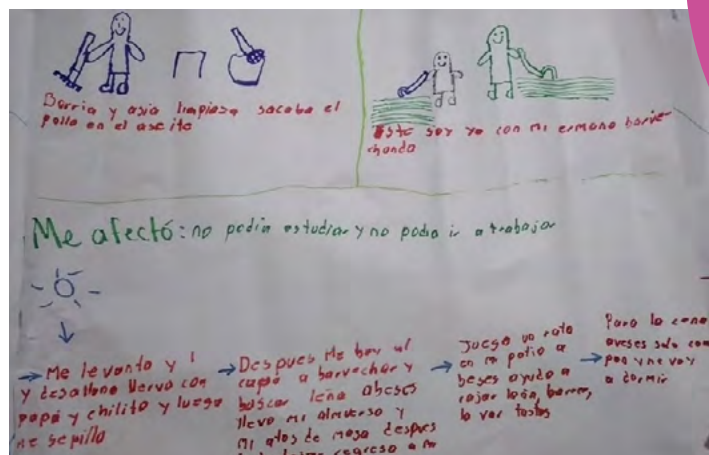


Existing evidence indicates that quarantine and lockdown restrictions, combined with lengthy school closures, increase the economic impact on vulnerable families and creates a disincentive to send children back to school.¹⁴ School closures due to COVID-19 affected more than 1.5 billion children and youth around the world.¹⁵ As of July 2020, schools remained closed in all of the countries participating in the exploratory research, drastically affecting children's right to education and development.

“The most difficult part during COVID-19 was that many things came to a standstill. I stopped going to school. You just spend your time at home.”

(11-year-old boy, small-scale vendor, Zambia, JCM)

Access to early child care and educational experiences outside the home can have an equalizing effect on children's development and life chances. These opportunities are determined by three key factors including accessibility, affordability, and quality.¹⁶ The COVID-19 pandemic gave a whole new dimension to the definition of inclusive access to education. In some contexts, children simply had to drop-out because schools (formal and/or informal schools) were closed. Some schools continued with online education. Some children were given printed homework every two weeks; some received assignments via WhatsApp; and a few received lessons through radio and TV programs. By the time of interviews with local NGO partners from Bolivia and Guatemala in July 2020, the restriction measures increased as compared to the time children and caregivers were consulted in May 2020. Therefore, children who used to receive printed homework by the beginning of the outbreak could not continue accessing this type of learning material, adversely affecting their learning opportunities. Similarly, the local NGO partner from Zambia reported difficulties for working children to continue home-school as many of them did not have access to internet, TV, or radio.



△ Timeline: A day in lockdown: 11-year-old boy, agriculture, Guatemala, CEIPA.

Before this crisis, almost one third of the world's young people were already digitally excluded.¹⁷ The lack of internet access, computers or smart phones and internet costs made it difficult for girls and boys to pursue their education during the pandemic. Furthermore, for those who were able to access online lessons, girls and boys reported that it became harder to understand the lessons online as teachers were less able to explain things clearly and they were less able to listen to and respond to children's questions. According to UNICEF country's choice of remote learning technology appears to be influenced by their income group. However, students in rural areas consistently represent the vast majority of those who could

“We do our homework, but we do not receive school lessons because we do not have any computer at the community. We learn through the printed homework that the teacher gives us. We do not learn much because they give us these copies without an explanation on the topics.”

(12-year-old boy, clothes packing, Guatemala, CEIPA)

14 Bakrania, S., Chavez, C., Ipince, A., Rocca, M., Oliver, S., Stansfield, C., and Subrahmanian, R. (2020) Impacts of Pandemics and Epidemics on Child Protection: Lessons learned from a rapid review in the context of COVID-19. Innocenti Working Paper 2020-05, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence.
15 United Nations (2020). Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on children. Available at: <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/policy-brief-impact-covid-19-children>
16 Gromada, Anna; Richardson, Dominic; Rees, Gwyther (2020). Childcare in a Global Crisis: The Impact of COVID-19 on work and family life. Innocenti Research Briefs no. 2020-18, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence.
17 United Nations (2020). Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on children. Available at: <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/policy-brief-impact-covid-19-children>

“Now learning is not as easy as before. I am not learning much.”

(14-year-old girl, small-scale vendor, Bolivia, PASOCAP)

“During the home-schooling program, our teachers give our homework through an internet-based application. Sadly, my parents and I do not have money to purchase internet data. Therefore, I have to go to a bakery shop near my house in the morning to access free Wi-Fi from its parking lot. I always wear a mask when I go out.”

(16-year-old girl, Quran tuition, Indonesia, PKPA)

not be reached, irrespective of the country’s level of economic development. Overall, three out of four students who could not be reached by remote learning technology live in rural areas, but in low-income countries the percentage is even higher.¹⁸

In several contexts, children work in order to afford their education.¹⁹ Before COVID-19, many girls and boys described how they enjoyed going to school. They appreciated learning about different subjects, playing with other children, interacting with and learning from teachers, and doing sports and school projects. Their dreams and aspirations were very much related to finishing their studies and pursuing a career, owning a house, or starting a business. Some girls and boys used to worry about passing the school year due to their limited time to study or attend school but appreciated having a job that helped them paying the tuition fees and school materials. Prior to the pandemic, many children and their caregivers were already struggling to pay school fees. This struggle continued and intensified during the crisis. In Indonesia, children advocated for the school fees to be cancelled, especially for months during the lockdown when children couldn’t attend school.

“My work at least helped me to pay for the school fees.”

(12-year-old boy, baker assistant, Guatemala, CEIPA)

Challenges related to accessibility and affordability make it even more difficult for children to enjoy quality education. Local NGO partners reported that many children participating in the exploratory research were excited to use the participatory tools of the research as a way to distract themselves and do

creative activities that took them out of their quarantine routine. Some of the main quality issues that working children are struggling with during home-schooling include learning methods that involve a lot of handwriting to copy lessons and do their homework; a lot of homework without proper explanation; and the lack of support from families not because caregivers are not interested to support them, but because many of them do not have the literacy level to help their children. In some cases, the alternative was for children to help their younger siblings with their schoolwork.

School closures also affected children’s right to play and prevented them from socializing with friends. Children missed seeing and playing with their friends at school. Many were bored spending hours at home, and missed regular communication with their friends.

Despite the challenges faced many of the working children continue to give importance to their education, they prioritise efforts to study, and remain hopeful that they can return to school when it is safe. A few children appreciated the increased flexibility for schoolwork after the pandemic.

“I only copy the lessons and continue doing the same work, but the situation is difficult because my hands are tired.”

(12-year-old boy, small-scale vendor, Guatemala, CEIPA)

“I am forced to keep myself busy by doing assignments which are becoming a boring routine, reading story books and watching news which is all about COVID.”

(15-year-old boy, community worker, Kenya, WCY)



18 UNICEF (2020). Covid-19: Are children able to continue learning during school closures? A global analysis of the potential reach of remote learning policies using data from 100 countries. United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

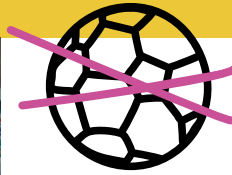
19 O’Kane, C., Barros, O. & Meslaoui, N. (2018). Children’s views on children’s work. Duisburg: ‘Time to Talk’ [Kindernothilfe and Terre des Hommes Germany].

"We feel bored. We do not have class. So, we cannot see our classmates."

(15 to 16-year-old- boys, agricultural work, waste collector & tombstone cleaner, the Philippines, KAUGMAON)

"We realized that we really need to take schooling seriously so that in the future we will have good and stable jobs that will help us get out of poverty."

(15-16-year-old- boys, agricultural work, waste collector & tombstone cleaner, the Philippines, KAUGMAON)



Draw & Write: 11-year-old boy, small-scale-vendor, Zambia, JMC.

"The most difficult part during COVID-19 was that many things came to a standstill. I stopped going to school. You just spend your time at home. I used to enjoy playing soccer with friends before the outbreak. I also used to help my family selling charcoal. After COVID-19 I could not go out to play and I no longer sell charcoal. I keep my mind busy with house chores. My plan is that after COVID-19 ends, I want to join my parents and work to earn money, as since the day we were asked to stay home my days are just spent like this."

"I am not able to play or go to school. This has limited our interactions and we are not able to share the advice we were getting when we met together. This has also brought a negative impact on my life of loneliness away from my friends and relatives."

(15-year-old boy, community worker, Kenya, WCY)

"We need to be active as we do not know when COVID-19 will end. During my remote school, I can study freely. Before COVID-19, I could only work on my school assignments at night. Now, I have more time and I spend it wisely because time is money."

(14-year-old girl, waste collector, Indonesia, PKPA).





Impact on **nutrition and physical health**

The World Food Programme reported that at least 346 million children who used to rely on school meals for a reliable source of daily nutrition are now at high risk of malnutrition and other diseases due to COVID-19.²⁰ Findings from this exploratory research indicate that nutrition of working children and their families is significantly and negatively affected by the pandemic. Most of the families reported either having less access to food, eating smaller portions, having a reduced number of meals per day, or having a less balanced diet. Before the pandemic, many of them

were able to choose what to eat, had access to their favourite food, used to eat snacks between meals, and they more regularly ate meat or fish. Evidence from past crises shows that when faced with unemployment and lower wages, poor families eat cheaper and less nutritious food, leading to weight loss and malnutrition, especially for young children and pregnant women.²¹

“Before we did not have much to eat, we were always short of food. In my family we no longer have money and we lack food. There are days when we have nothing to eat; our situation worsens.”

(30-year-old woman, small-scale vendor, Bolivia, PASOCAP)

Since the pandemic, a minority of children are eating better than before as they spend their days at home and have even gained weight. However, most children switched to a plant-based diet with some limitations to access fruits. Some children and their parents skipped their meals to give it to younger family members. Some families relied on vegetables and fruits that grow near their households. Humanitarian assistance has been key for family survival, but the food assistance has not reached all families, and it is not sufficient to feed all their family members.

Some children are experiencing malnutrition by eating only once a day or going through the day drinking only water. In Bolivia, PASOCAP estimates that at least 50% of the children they support are facing food insecurity, while one of the consulted caregivers reported having sent her daughter to relatives after weeks of eating only rice and showing symptoms



^ Body Mapping: 12-year-old boy, small-scale vendor, Guatemala, CEIPA.

20 World Food Programme (2020). Global Monitoring of School Meals During COVID-19 School Closures. Available at: https://cdn.wfp.org/2020/school-feeding-map/?_ga=2.201921873.1733416669.1586285970-1859366263.1586285970

21 UNICEF (2009). A Matter of Magnitude: The impact of the economic crisis on women and children in South Asia. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).



of malnutrition. Efforts of local NGO partners include resource mobilization for humanitarian assistance, advocacy to increase food security programs, and support to keep the saving groups active – such as the case of Zambia. The extreme situation in some contexts has pushed children to commit minor crimes for survival. In the Philippines, for example, the high need situation forced some children to steal food from neighboring plantations in order to access food.

“If we have work then we have good food; if not, then we just eat anything that is available, or worst cases, we skipped meals.”

(16-year-old boy, waste collector, The Philippines, KAUGMAON)



Draw & Write: 10-year-old girl, masonry assistant, Guatemala, CEIPA.

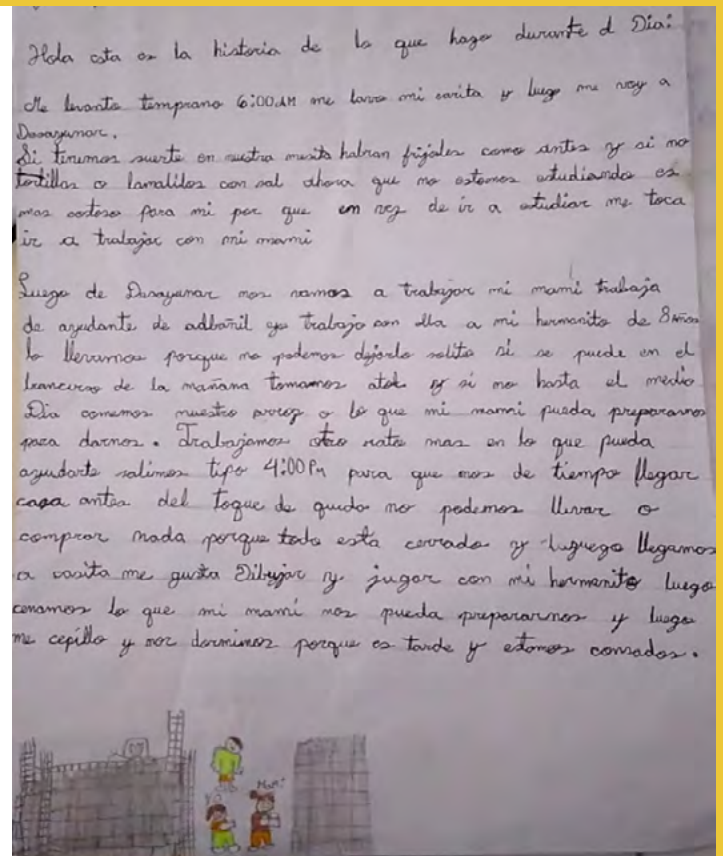
“Hello, this is the story of what I do during the day:

I get up early at 6:00 AM, wash my face, then I have breakfast.

If we are lucky, we eat beans for breakfast like before COVID-19. Otherwise, we will have tortillas or tamales with salt for breakfast. Now that we are not studying, the situation is more difficult for me because as I can no longer study, I must go to work with my mother instead.

After breakfast we go to work with my mother, she works as a masonry assistant and I work with her, we take my 8-year-old brother with us because we cannot leave him alone at home since there is no one to take care of him. Sometimes, in the course of the morning at work we have refreshments and if not, we eat by noon. At lunch we eat our rice or whatever my mother can prepare; after lunch we work a bit more and I help her as much as I can.

We finish work at 4 p.m. to give us time to get home before the curfew begins. Since COVID-19 we cannot buy anything on our way home because all the stores are closed at that time.



Once we are back home, I like to draw and play with my little brother. For dinner, we eat what my mother can prepare for us. Then I brush my teeth and we go to sleep because it is late, and we are tired. ”

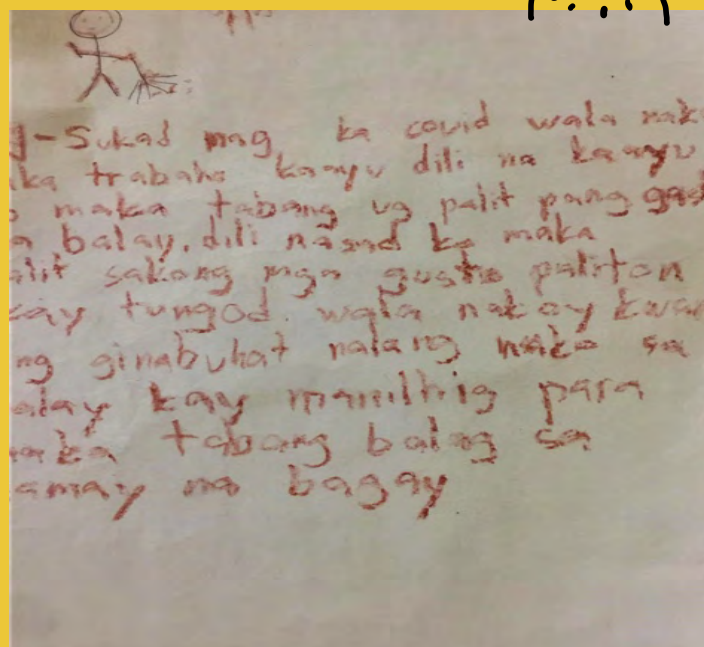




“I rest a little more in the afternoon after returning from the field or after helping my grandmother with the housework because in the fried chicken shop they no longer gave me work. Sometimes I play with my brother in the afternoon or go to bed later.”

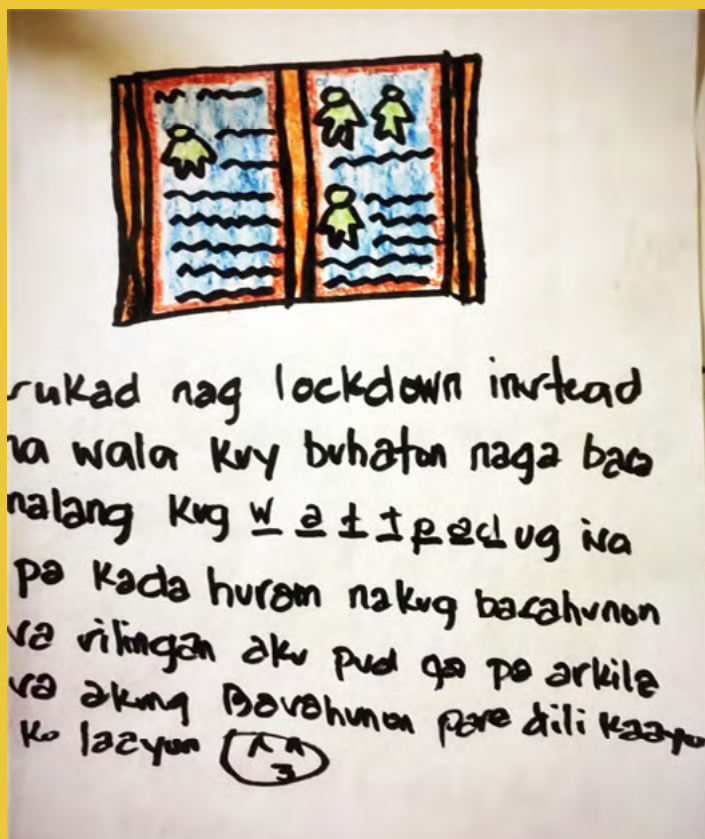
(11-year-old boy, agricultural work, Guatemala, CEIPA)

Many girls and boys are resting more during the pandemic due to loss of work and home base restrictions. Furthermore, some girls and boys explained that the confinement has helped them become more aware of hygiene practices, creating family routines to eat together, and encouraging them to stay physically active. However, some girls and boys experience more physical exhaustion since the pandemic either because they work longer shifts, they are engaged in heavy work such as agricultural work or masonry, or because they spend more time walking and standing to help with household chores or looking after family members. The physical health condition of children with disabilities was particularly deteriorated due to lack of access to medicines and health services, including therapy and Activities of Daily Living (ADL), often provided by non-governmental organisations.



Draw & Write: 15-year-old boy, tombstone cleaner, the Philippines, KAUGMAON.

“Since the COVID-19 pandemic, I stopped working. I cannot help in providing and buying the needs at home for the family. I cannot buy the things I want to buy since I do not have money. What I do instead, is helping with the chores at home like sweeping so that I can be of help at home even if it’s a very minimal contribution.”



Draw & Write: 16-year-old boy, agriculture, Philippines, Kaugmaon.

Impact on **mental health and well-being**



Health risks, and the lack of income and unemployment triggered by the pandemic significantly changed the worries, fears and aspirations of working children and their caregivers. Before, their main concern was to earn enough to be able to support their families and for children to continue their education. Some of the children were also worried about their safety, and combining work and school. Children used to dream of pursuing a professional career, buying things, or starting a business. Parents wished for financial stability, owning a house, and hoped for a brighter future for their children.

As a result of the pandemic, caregivers and children face ongoing, changing and increased worries and uncertainties. Children and their parents fear that they or their family members risk getting sick, and they worry about job losses, reduced income which affects their ability to feed their family members, to cover school costs, and to pay rent and utility bills. Some families worried about debt. Many girls, boys and caregivers shared a primary hope for the pandemic to end. Children wish to go back to school and get back their freedom of movement. Some children mentioned their sense of frustration and sadness for not being able to go out and work to support their families. All they hear on the media is information about the pandemic, which has increased their fear and uncertainty about their future.

“I am worried of contracting corona and starving due to the lack of food.”

(15-year-old girl, unpaid domestic work, Kenya, WCY)

Research on COVID-19 is still new and based on small samples, but initial results indicate that 1 in 4 quarantined parents showed some symptoms of mental ill-health compared with 1 in 20 non-quarantined parents.²² Even if family care is predominantly a positive experience for children, the



^ Flower of support: 15-year-old boy, Kenya, WCY.

implications for those caring for children may include high levels of stress, and exhaustion.²³ Local NGO partners concurred about the confusion and stress caused by the pandemic, but especially by the misinformation and overflow of information that children and their caregivers are accessing through the media. In Kenya, WCY reported an increased rate of child suicide among working children from rural areas since the outbreak. In Guatemala, for example, the media has focused only on numbers and little on mechanisms to access government subsidies and programs, leaving several families without crucial information to improve their situation. In the Philippines, the issue of not taking information beyond numbers has been balanced by volunteers who are part of village structures and who have put efforts into sharing accurate and relevant information to the communities.

The movement restrictions had a significant impact on the type of activities and coping mechanisms used by children and their families to release stress and cope during the pandemic. Most of the children have more time to rest, but many

22 Brooks, S.K., Webster, R.K., Smith, L.E., Woodland, L., Wessely, S., Greenberg, N. & Rubin, and G.J. (2020). The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence. *The Lancet* 395, 912–920.

23 Clark, S., De Almada, M., Kabiru, C. W., Muthuri, S., & Wanjohi, M. (2018). Balancing paid work and child care in a slum of Nairobi, Kenya: The case for centre-based child care. *Journal of Family Studies*, 1–19.



"I am forced to keep myself busy by doing assignments which are becoming a boring routine, reading story books and watching news which is all about COVID-19."

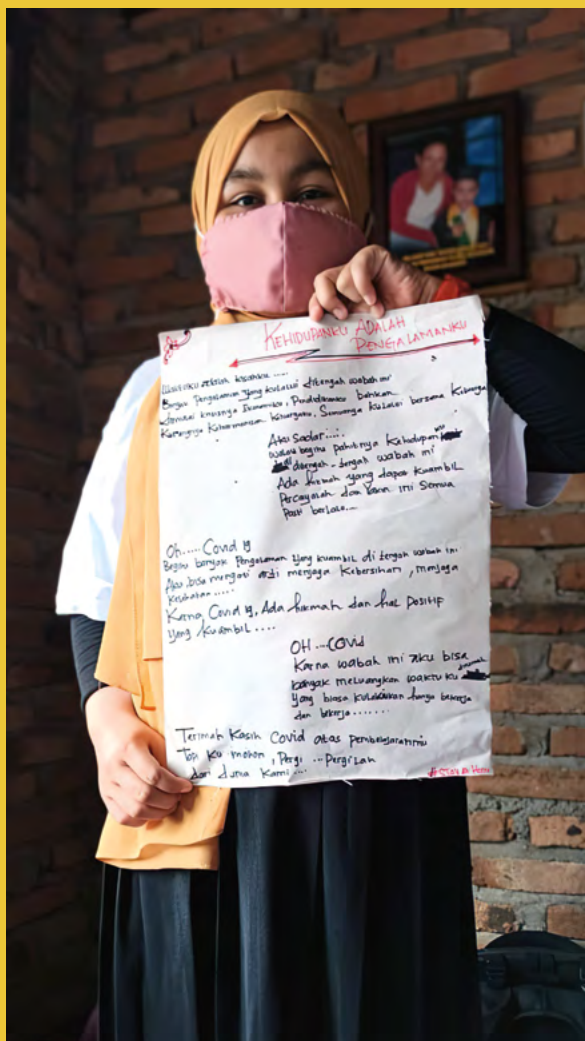
(15-year-old boy, community worker, Kenya, WCY)

felt bored and reported life disruption as one of the main challenges of the crisis. Many girls and boys missed playing outdoors and hanging out with friends. Caregivers and children also missed seeing relatives who did not live in their neighbourhood. However, children and caregivers have also balanced these feelings with thoughts that help them focusing on the present, routines that give structure to their days, and leisure activities including reading, listening to music, and workouts. Some children and caregivers sought hope and comfort through their religious beliefs and practices.

Before COVID-19 children interacted with a wider group of school friends, work peers, extended family members, and community members. The majority used to communicate more with their peers than with their parents and other family

members. Prior to COVID-19 some girls and boys also had good communication with their teachers. For many, the confinement reduced children's communication with their friends and teachers, while increasing their communication with their families.

Despite the challenges that this crisis poses, the time that children and their families spend together can be a precious opportunity to strengthen family bonds, nurture children's spirituality, and provide learning opportunities for them to reflect on ethical challenges, develop their imagination, critical thinking, while still practicing safe social distancing. A significant positive impact of COVID-19 and the lockdown has been that many working children have increased quality time with their parents/caregivers and siblings. Before each



Story of a 16-year-old girl, Quran Tuition from Indonesia:



My time is My Story

*Many experiences I have been through in this pandemic
Started with my financial crisis, my education, even
the lack of harmony in my family
I went it through with my family*

Then I realised...

*Despite the bitter life of mine in this pandemic
There is a wisdom I can gain, a trust and believe that everything shall pass*

Oh COVID-19...

*I can take so many experiences from this pandemic
I can understand what it means by taking care of my hygiene and health
Because of COVID-19, I learned a lesson and
there are positive things I can get*

Oh COVID-19...

*Because of this pandemic, I can spend more time at home
All I can do was working and working*

Thank you COVID-19 for your lessons

But I beg you, go... go away...

From our world...



family member was busy with work, school or other responsibilities outside of the home, and some families did not even have time to eat a meal together. For many children the communication with their parents and siblings significantly improved during the confinement, giving them opportunities to share their views and experiences, and to explore solutions together. Some caregivers described how they had more time to take care of and play with younger children, and older children also played more with their younger siblings. Despite the multiple stresses brought about by the pandemic, strengthened communication and improved relationships between children and their caregivers is an immense protective factor contributing to increased resilience of children, caregivers and families.

“Now we communicate more because my parents spend more time at home.”

(13-year-old girl, tailor, Guatemala, CEIPA)

While the majority of children and caregivers commented on improved communication among family members, a few children said they had not experienced any positive change in their communication with their families, and for a few children they were negative changes. A few children felt

like their opinions were heard less since the pandemic, as adults only had time to talk about the impact of COVID-19. Moreover, a few children and caregivers reported increased risks of violence in families, with increased quarrels between family members due to the stress of reduced earnings and increased domestic violence, especially if a family member drank alcohol.

According to PASOCAP, domestic violence seems to be increasing in Bolivia, just that victims – including children – are afraid to report. Children’s reliance on online platforms for distance learning has also increased their risk of exposure to inappropriate content and online predators. This is the case in the Philippines, where KAUGMAON reported that some of the children they support have become victims of online sexual exploitation since the COVID-19 outbreak.

“We have time to communicate with our parents and siblings. If we have problems or stories that worth sharing, we share it with our family. We felt that we have more time to bond with our family and less time with our friends.”

(15-16 year-old boys, informal workers, the Philippines, KAUGMAON)





“I can hear my drunk mother and how my grandparents scold her for not stopping to drink alcohol. I can hear my older brother come home from work exhausted.”

(11 year-old boy, working in agriculture, Guatemala, CEIPA)

These complexities on 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 the 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 within families, 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.



^ 13-year-old boy, motobike taxi driver, Guatemala (CEIPA)

Recommendations

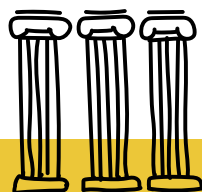


Working children and caregivers identified key stakeholders that could contribute to improve their situation and protect children's rights and well-being during and after COVID-19. Their key messages address governments; civil society organizations; parents and extended family members; neighbours and community; faith communities; employers; private sector; ombudsman; children; and the media.

The **key messages** focus on diverse impact areas including meeting basic needs; education; livelihoods and food security; child protection and psycho-social support; health; advocacy; and communication and community engagement.

To governments

- Ensure fair humanitarian assistance for the most vulnerable including access to basic food, and essential hygiene items.
- Set up cash transfer programmes to support vulnerable families in their income generation to mitigate the economic shock.
- Ensure children's right to education by providing free education, free internet access, devices, and necessary materials to continue home school.
- Provide an inclusive education that reaches children with no internet access for online learning, including education through radio and TV programmes.
- Ensure children's protection and implementation of safety protocols for children's return to face-to-face learning.
- Ensure inclusive education for girls and boys once face-to-face learning is resumed.
- Listen to the views and suggestions of working children and their families to provide inclusive and relevant quality education.
- Provide free and quality (alternative) education to vulnerable children and support their re-enrolment directly after lockdowns, taking into consideration the knowledge gaps of children unable to continue their education remotely during COVID-19.
- Increase COVID-19 free testing and ensure access to free health care and medication to vulnerable children including children with disabilities.
- Promote decent safe work and livelihood support for parents and family members.
- Provide utilities at no cost.
- Promote decent safe work and livelihood support for parents and family members to enable families to meet basic needs and school-related costs.
- Provide agricultural seeds and promote food security.
- Recognise and build upon the resilience and strengths of working children and their family members and actively engage them in policy and practice developments affecting them.





To civil society organisations

- Provide humanitarian assistance including access to basic food, and essential hygiene items.
- Provide psychosocial support and capacity building of girls and boys to enhance skills and confidence.
- Support children to continue their education by providing school materials, scholarships, and financial support.
- Raise awareness on the COVID-19 pandemic by sharing accurate information about what is happening in society and how to prevent infection.
- Advocate for children's rights and the improved situation of working children by enabling their voices to be heard.
- Provide Activity of Daily Living (ADL) and therapy support to children with disabilities.

To parents and extended family members

- Protect children.
- Provide advice and guidance.
- Give children quality time, care, attention and good communication by creating a safe and favourable home environment where everybody in the family will feel a sense of belonging.
- Support children's education.
- Take care of cleanliness and hygiene.
- Provide financial help to support children's education and basic needs.

To neighbours and communities

- Show solidarity by supporting each other and sharing food.
- Share advice and emotional support.
- Protect each other to prevent infection spread.
- Advocate with local government to access humanitarian assistance and subsidies.

To faith communities

- Provide humanitarian assistance including access to basic food, and essential hygiene items.
- Advocate with local and national government for access to humanitarian aid and financial support for the most vulnerable.
- Provide counselling and spiritual support through prayer and open forums.

To employers

- Avoid firing employees and provide safe and decent work so that children and their families have a source of income.
- Ensure health and safety measures for workers
- Provide flexible working hours

To the private sector

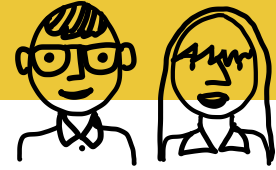
- Provide humanitarian including access to basic food, and essential hygiene items.
- Support livelihood and food security programmes.
- Provide scholarships.
- Telecommunication companies could provide online free internet access for home school.

To Ombudsman

- Prevent domestic violence and provide family counselling.
- Advocate for and support families who cannot afford their house rent.



To children



- Restrict from usual movement to prevent infection spread.
- Respect parents/caregivers and follow the prevention measures to stay healthy.
- Speak up about the negative things in the community.

To the media

- Broadcast working children and their families' experiences of COVID-19 and its impact on their lives.
- Share accurate information about COVID-19 and ways to prevent it.



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Annexes



Adapted Advocacy Messages shared with policy makers and practitioners in June 2020

Based on the emerging findings and key messages from working children, in June 2020, Kindernothilfe shared working children's recommendations, and adapted some of the advocacy messages for policy makers in Germany and for other relevant international briefing papers for policy makers and practitioners working on education and child protection.

Key messages for governments and agencies supporting working children and caregivers:

- Ensure fair humanitarian assistance for the most vulnerable including access to basic food, and essential hygiene items.
- Set up cash transfer programmes to support vulnerable families in their income generation to mitigate the economic shock
- Provide free and quality (alternative) education to vulnerable children and support their re-enrolment directly after lockdowns, taking into consideration the knowledge gaps of children unable to continue their education remotely during COVID-19
- Recognise and build upon the resilience and strengths of working children and their family members and actively engage them in policy and practice developments affecting them

Key education messages for governments on education from working children and caregivers

- Ensure children's right to education by providing free education, free internet access, devices, and necessary materials to continue home school.
- Provide an inclusive education that reaches children with no internet access for online learning, including education through radio and TV programmes.
- Listen to the views and suggestions of working children and their families to provide inclusive and relevant quality education.
- Promote decent safe work and livelihood support for parents and family members to enable families to meet basic needs and school-related costs.



Adapted advocacy messages shared in a Briefing Paper delivered to German policy makers on the occasion of June 12th, World Day Against Child Labour²⁴:

To safeguard children's rights to adequate living conditions and social security

Provide equitable humanitarian support in the Corona emergency aid program through financial means to secure access to basic food, water, sanitation and hygiene options (WASH), especially for the particularly vulnerable population groups such as working children.

Ensure social security systems: Families facing struggles to meet their own needs should be supported through social protection systems and direct financial aid (cash transfers).

Support bilateral education and training programs to fight poverty in order to create decent, safe jobs and conditions for young people of working age and adults.

To safeguard children's rights to health and protection from hunger

Expand bilateral support for seed and food security programs for particularly vulnerable groups, such as working children and their families.

Ensure free preventive, treatment and vaccination opportunities worldwide. For example, by supporting global health initiatives such as the Global Fund to Fight Tuberculosis, Malaria and AIDS, vaccine development (CEPI) and Vaccination access (GAVI).

To secure children's right to education

Short-term support of the Emergency COVID-19 Response from Education Cannot Wait and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) to ensure free, high quality education for the most vulnerable populations.

Ensure inclusive and integrative, gender-sensitive and free (home) teaching through educational programs that reach child workers without access to online-based learning, for example by providing school materials or radio and television programs.

To safeguard children's rights to protection from violence and neglect

Demand child protection system and institutions to protect child workers from exploitation, violence and neglect and to support them in cases of violence and abuse through free and accessible reporting points.

Ensure access to free telephone hotlines and web applications for children, as well as psychosocial support.

Demand for studies and high-profile media programs to provide information about safe behaviors for COVID-19 prevention and for the exchange of psychological stress, e.g. through the lockdown in society.

Ensure commitment to children's right to political and social participation in order to better include affected children in crisis response planning.

24 Kindernothilfe (June 2020) Policy Briefing: Die Auswirkungen der COVID-19 Pandemie auf das Leben arbeitender Kinder





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