

# Children and young people's voices in times of COVID-19

Voices of children and young people in the United Kingdom (Milton Keynes) and World Vision International's young leaders programme

*It Takes a World to End Violence Against Children* is a global campaign run by World Vision International since 2016. The campaign aims to have a significant impact on the lives of millions of girls and boys under 18 globally by contributing to the end of all forms of violence against them, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Active in more than 80 countries to date, the It Takes a World campaign aims to ignite global movements for, with, and by children; strengthen prevention and response measures; increase funding; and strengthen accountability for implementation of commitments related to ending violence against children. In the United Kingdom (UK), the It Takes a World campaign was launched in November 2018 to make ending violence against children a priority for the UK's humanitarian policies, programmes, and international aid. All children deserve to be safe. **The UK can make a difference.** Join our campaign at <https://www.worldvision.org.uk>.

This publication was prepared by Dr. Carine le Borgne (Senior Policy Adviser and It Takes a World Lead, World Vision UK) with the assistance of Anna Jarrett-Rawlence (Policy, Advocacy, and Campaigns Team Coordinator, World Vision UK)

## Acknowledgments

This publication is based on the following research project: Cuevas-Parra, P. and Stephano, M. (2020) Children's voices in the time of COVID-19: Continued child activism in the face of personal challenges. World Vision International. Available from: <https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/child-participation/childrens-voices-times-covid-19-continued-child-activism>.

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## Child and adult safeguarding considerations

World Vision ensured safe and ethical participation of children and young people when they shared their stories, adhering to World Vision's safeguarding protocols. Some of the names of the children and young people have been anonymised and changed to ensure confidentiality. All photos were taken and used with informed consent.

At World Vision, our focus is on helping the most vulnerable children in the most dangerous places overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian faith, we work together with communities, partners, local leaders, and governments to help children of all backgrounds experience fullness of life.

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COVER PHOTO © World Vision. Children and young people participating from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mongolia, Peru, Romania and the United Kingdom taking part in online consultations on COVID-19. Interior photos © World Vision / Jon Warren, Kate Shaw and R. Bormom

# Foreword

**Dr. Carine Le Borgne, Senior Policy Advisor & ITAW Lead, World Vision UK**



Active in more than 80 countries to date, the **It Takes A World To End Violence Against Children** campaign aims to ignite global movements for, with, and by children and young people; strengthen prevention and response measures; increase funding; and strengthen

accountability for implementation of commitments related to ending violence against children and young people.

The COVID-19 context has increased the relevance of the It Takes a World campaign, as children and young people face increased threats of violence due to the secondary impact of the pandemic. World Vision is relentlessly advocating for an end to violence against children and young people, but we need governments to act too. World Vision International launched a global petition on 1 June 2020<sup>1</sup> to urge governments worldwide to increase funding for health, education, and other social services that protect children and young people from all forms of violence and abuse. By signing the petition, we have the opportunity to join the fight together – supporters, non-governmental organisations, and governments.

World Vision believes it takes all of us to end violence against children and young people, including governments and donors, as well as children and young people themselves. It is vital to include children and young people in issues which affect them, such as COVID-19. When we empower and engage with children and young people, they become powerful agents of their own change.

Children and young people from across the world inspired their peers in the UK to speak out on the increased risks they are facing during this time of COVID-19. Like them,

World Vision draws its strength from its truly international network – this mobilisation is a central part of the It Takes a World campaign. Our mandate is to support the children and young people as their advocate and share their findings with leaders in the UK.

*“I am concerned that children and young people that come from fragile contexts may not have been recognised as being in that situation. I’ve read something in the news that more children are expected to be forced into child marriage because of coronavirus specifically. I think a lot of children will be exposed to domestic violence and things like that, that maybe wouldn’t have otherwise, and the government won’t be able to identify those children during lockdown.”* (Disha, 16, UK)

*“This coronavirus is like another war for them [countries experiencing conflict], they are trying to survive with what resources they already have, and for them, this might just make their situation much harder.”* (Alessandro, 16, UK)

World Vision International conducted research in March and April 2020 which explored children and young people’s reflections and perceptions on the COVID-19 outbreak. In the UK, World Vision partnered with Milton Keynes Youth Cabinet for this research.

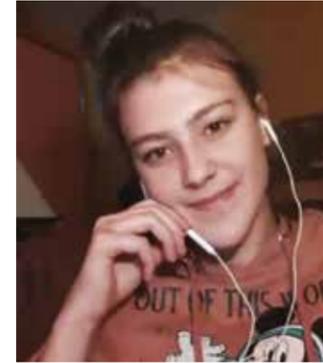
The findings of this study underline the importance of recognising children and young people’s understanding of the current crisis and the need to support meaningful spaces and partnerships with children and young people to help them take action to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Through digital platforms, children and young people will call UK leaders to action, including asking them to recognise and embrace children and young people as rights-holders and social actors with capabilities to contribute to stopping the spread of COVID-19.

<sup>1</sup> Find the global petition at: <https://www.wvi.org/ittakesaworld>

# Foreword

**Ajlin, Young leader, age 14, Bosnia and Herzegovina April 2020**



Everything about the coronavirus made me confused when it first started. As you know, stories, panic, opinions, and the virus itself, all spread quickly. I feel like it was just yesterday that I was reading about this virus appearing in China. I never thought it would

come to my country and my town, but suddenly my life has been totally changed. School has stopped, cafes are closed, and socialising is forbidden. I really miss my friends, nature, school, workshops, and everything else that I cannot do right now, but I think – and am hopeful – that this will end soon.

Sometimes I feel like some kind of prisoner. I believe that children and young people are struggling the most with this virus crisis. Children are mentally suffering, but not only this is affecting us. We are badly in need of physical activities too. Children are used to moving, running, and socialising every day, and now we are confined to our rooms and houses. Like everyone else, we want this to end as soon as possible.

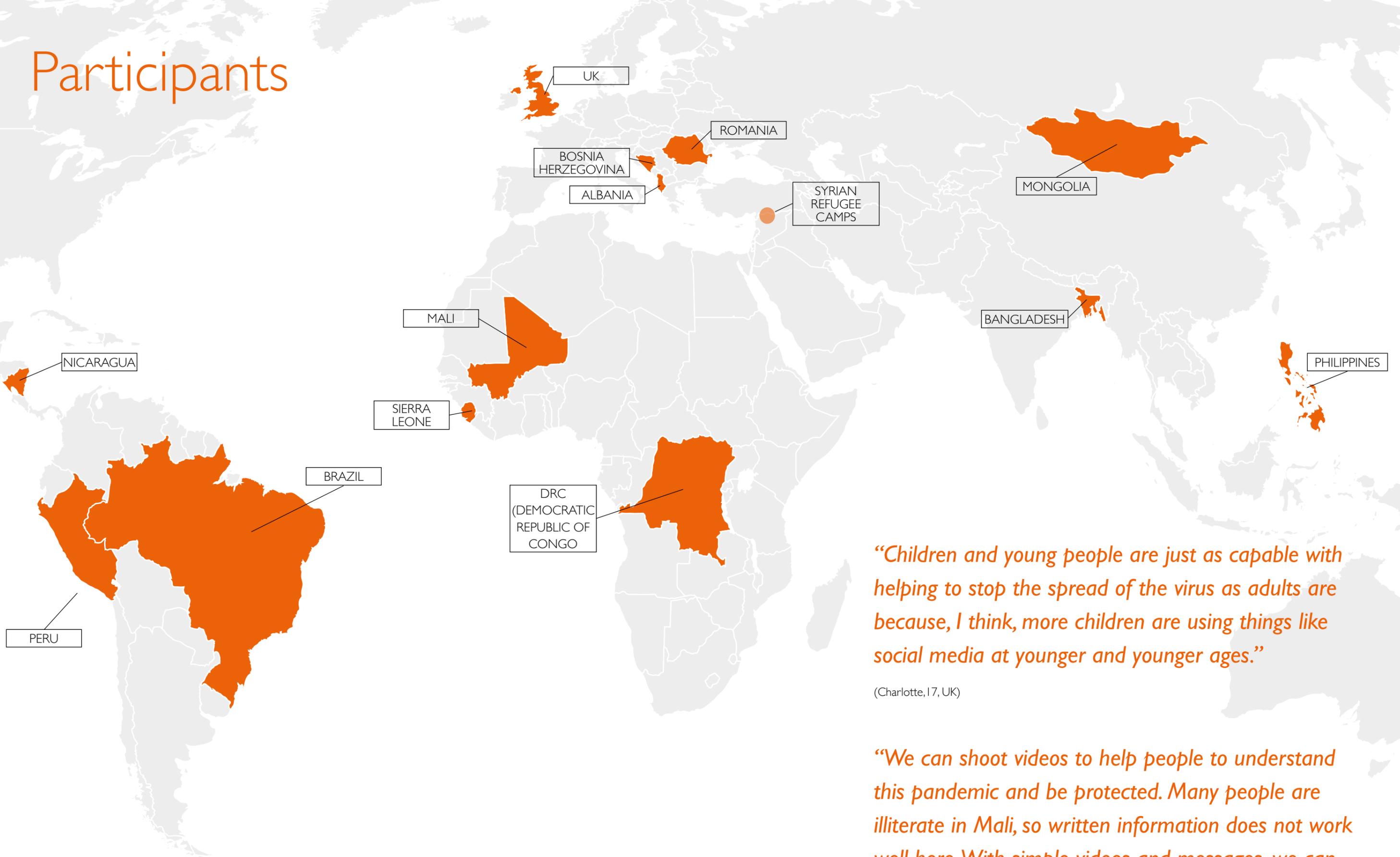
Thankfully, we are aware of the situation and are taking it seriously. It’s important for children to follow the main rule of stopping the virus’ spread – to stay home. My

mum explained how to stop the coronavirus to me in a really interesting way. She said that the virus is like a match flame and people are the matches; if we light six matches next to each other but we take the sixth one out, five will burn and the sixth one will stop the fire (the virus) from spreading. That means if we isolate ourselves, we will definitely stop extending the virus’ reach. Staying home is our responsibility right now. We should also be patient and think positively, because this is the only way to beat this disease. We need to stick together and isolate ourselves.

We can contribute to fighting against the expansion of COVID-19 by talking with our friends about the coronavirus, sharing our opinions, and understanding the consequences. As children, we can support our friends and families in these difficult times of crisis thanks to our access to information and technology. We can stay in contact with each other and disseminate positive and educational messages.

We need to avoid people who are making up stories that are not true as this is creating unnecessary mass panic. We should convince our peers, parents, and elders that this panic is not needed, but, at the same time, encourage them to stay home, be patient, and follow the rules. We are all in this together, and if we really want to stop this virus, we have to work together as a community. We, as children and young people, will continue doing public awareness raising using photos and videos to let everyone know that we can do this together; we can beat this virus together, and we are stronger when we are unified by a common goal.

# Participants



*“Children and young people are just as capable with helping to stop the spread of the virus as adults are because, I think, more children are using things like social media at younger and younger ages.”*

(Charlotte, 17, UK)

*“We can shoot videos to help people to understand this pandemic and be protected. Many people are illiterate in Mali, so written information does not work well here. With simple videos and messages, we can support them”.*

(Salimata, 15, Mali)

# 1. Methodology

This report is drawn on research undertaken in March and April 2020 by World Vision International.<sup>2</sup> The voices of children and young people in the UK were added in May and June 2020 to give children and young people the opportunity to express their perspectives within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Because this consultation focusses on ways in which to support children and young people's empowerment and opportunities to partake in child-led actions in response to the health crisis, questions did not include specific queries regarding child protection issues as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.<sup>3</sup>

World Vision International conducted research on children and young people's voices in the time of COVID-19 to explore their reflections and perceptions on the outbreak. This study was carried out through World Vision's Young Leaders advocacy programme. World Vision spoke to 101 children and young people (58 girls and 43 boys) between the ages of 8 and 18 from 13 countries (Albania, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Peru, Philippines, Romania, Sierra Leone, and Syrian children and young people living in refugee camps near the Turkish-Syrian border). They participated in a series of interviews and focus group discussions conducted remotely via social media platforms, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber, and Skype.

The methodology developed by World Vision International included a collaboration between adults on the consultation team and young leaders engaged as peer researchers. Using an intergenerational collaboration approach, the research team included two adult professionals and 12 young researchers (aged 12 to 18) who interviewed children and young people over social media and messaging platforms. Four of these young researchers also served as research advisers to support the consultation team of adult professionals. It is worth acknowledging that accessing respondents via digital means could be a limitation of the research as children and young people in the most fragile environments or living in extreme poverty may not have access to technology, and thus may not be completely represented. However, the young researchers were able to reach their peers in a way that would have been almost impossible for the adult team members due to restrictions imposed in each country to control the spread of COVID-19. The data collection

and advisory tasks were made possible as the young researchers had prior training on research skills and had previously conducted data collection and analyses.

At the end of May 2020, World Vision UK conducted two online focus group discussions via Microsoft Teams with nine children and young people between the ages of 15 and 17 through World Vision's partnership with the Milton Keynes Youth Cabinet, following the same methodology used by the *children's voices* report.

The aim of this research was to explore children and young people's views and experiences related to the outbreak of COVID-19, their ideas on how to engage in online community-based activities to support their peers and communities, and their thoughts on how to raise awareness on protective measures against COVID-19.

## Research questions included:

- How is COVID-19 affecting your life or the lives of children and young people in your country?
- How are children and young people contributing, or can they contribute, to the fight against the spread of COVID-19?
- Do you have any ideas for actions or a message to other children and young people about how they can raise awareness about COVID-19 using social media or other means?

This project used a qualitative interview approach. The research team analysed interview data by identifying and categorising emerging themes or patterns within the responses to gain a deeper understanding of the information.

This consultation project followed the minimum standards for consulting with children and young people developed by the Inter-agency Working Group on Children's Participation. These principles include, transparency, honesty, accountability, provision of a child-friendly environment, equality of opportunity, and the safety and protection of young participants.<sup>4</sup> The project took into account the special considerations required to gain informed consent, ensure confidentiality and anonymity, acknowledge the diverse cultures of the research sites, and refrain from presenting any information that may potentially harm participants.<sup>5</sup> In the UK, the project applied World Vision UK's Safeguarding Policy.<sup>6</sup>

# 2. Findings

Although the children and young people came from a wide range of backgrounds, contexts, and countries, their experiences and actions in the face of COVID-19 all fell within common themes. Participants talked about the sudden and vast changes to their lives, described ongoing activism to spread knowledge in new ways while staying safe, and the overwhelming need many of them felt to do more to respond to the crisis.

## 1. Changing lives on a massive scale

Participants were asked to share their views on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected their lives, personally and in their respective countries. Across all 14 countries, the interviewees pointed out four vital dimensions that directly changed children and young people's lives on a massive scale: school disruption, emotional distress due to social distancing, increasing violence, and increasing poverty. In every country, the child respondents particularly highlighted the need to focus on the most vulnerable populations. They said that governments, civil society, and non-governmental organisations need to consider their voices in their responses to this crisis.

### a. School disruption

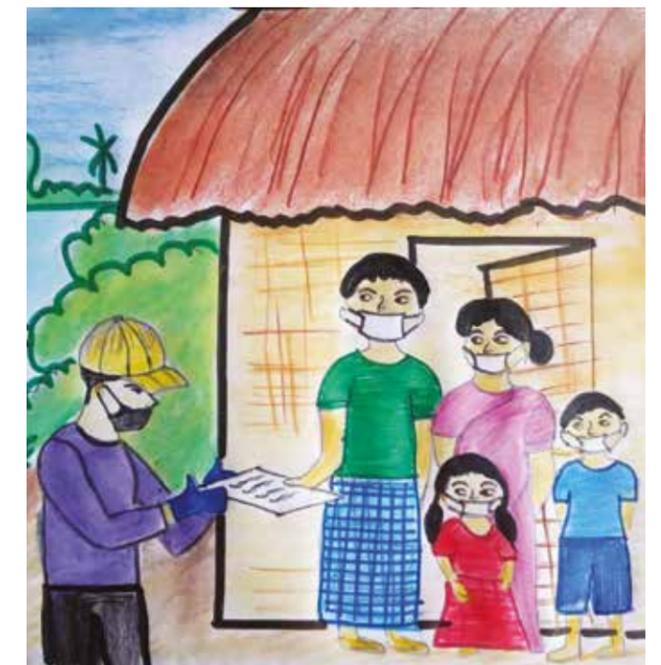
*"Before, we were better as the schools were open and we were learning. Then suddenly, this virus came, and everything stopped"*. (Joudy, 13, Syrian refugee in Turkey)

*"Many children did not previously have access to education, and now, as families do not benefit from essential things, such as electricity or the Internet, the children are limited in the possibility of attending online courses."* (Miruna, 15, Romania)

*"My life and that of everyone in my country has been greatly affected since we have lost classes, and the teachers were not prepared for the online school modality. At this point they have not explained the subjects, they do not give examples, and we do not know much about the subjects we are taking online."* (Angie, 16, Nicaragua)

*"One thing I have been finding difficult, and I know a lot of other children have [as well], is the transition from face-to-face learning, [i.e.] learning in a classroom, to learning online. Some of the schools don't enforce online learning. Some teachers don't set any work because they have a family to look after or they are finding the transition hard."* (Alexia, 17, UK)

A common response from the participants has been a reflection on the impact on children and young people's lives due to the sudden change in education with the closure of schools. This transitional phase from face-to-face classroom learning to learning from home posed different challenges of isolation across different contexts. This was where some teachers were not prepared for the transition for the move to online learning. This was recognised by Jason, age 15, from the DRC, who pointed out that 'the right to education is suspended' and that schools and parents were not assisting students to cope with the school closures. Online home schooling is not possible in many parts of the DRC due to the extreme poverty and families' lack of access to technology and connectivity. Across the different contexts, the school disruption showed participants' anxiety in dealing with online learning and emphasised that the most vulnerable girls and boys struggled the most in this transition to online learning due to issues with access to the Internet.



ABOVE Children from Bangladesh use drawings to express their views on COVID-19 outbreak.

<sup>2</sup> Cuevas-Parra, P. and Stephano, M. (2020) Children's voices in the time of COVID-19: Continued child activism in the face of personal challenges. World Vision International. Available from: <https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/child-participation/childrens-voices-times-covid-19-continued-child-activism>.

<sup>3</sup> In this document, the term 'children and young people' is used to refer to the age group under 18 years old, as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This term respects the reality that many older children prefer the category 'young people' to 'children'.

<sup>4</sup> Inter-Agency Working Group on Children's Participation. (2007) *Operations manual on children's participation in consultations*. Available from: [https://www.unicef.org/lac/Operations\\_manual\(1\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/lac/Operations_manual(1).pdf) [Accessed: 29 March 2015].

<sup>5</sup> Morrow, V. (2012) The ethics of social research with children and families in young lives: Practical experiences. In: Boyden, J. and Bourdillon, M. (Eds.) *Childhood poverty*, London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp24–42. Available from: DOI 10.1057/9780230362796\_3 [Accessed: 12 March 2020].

<sup>6</sup> World Vision. (2019) *World Vision UK safeguarding policy* [online]. Available from: <https://www.worldvision.org.uk/who-we-are/policies-ethics/child-safeguarding/>.

## b. Emotional distress due to social distancing

*“Children feel trapped in [their] homes. We are used to playing outside and communicating with as many people as possible.”* (Teodora, 16, Romania)

*“Everyone feels scared. We all stay home all day. We communicate with friends or other family members only by our phones. This is something we haven’t done before.”* (Redi, 17, Albania)

*“Children under 18 can’t go outside at all, so the only way for us to communicate is over social media... It is kind of a disappointing rule because we cannot see each other.”* (Arijan, 15, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

*“I’ve been locked in the house for over two months now. It’s just my mum going in and out every day. And I am not always chatting to my friends. I think it has affected a lot of young people’s mental health in this time because we can’t really go out and socialise, give each other hugs, and give people support.”* (Amelia, 15, UK)

Common across participants’ experiences was how staying at home had an impact on their mental health. A loss in connection with friends and family caused feelings of anxiety and fear and a loss in peer networks contributed to mental health pressures. Participants noted that they missed the support between their friends through physical contact. In Bangladesh, children and young people reported high levels of stress due to their fear of COVID-19 as well as a struggle to find alternate coping mechanisms while maintaining social distancing. Rejuan, age 16, said, *“Children cannot play together. It’s very harmful for every child’s mental and physical health.”* Building on this, Sharmim, a 16-year-old from Bangladesh, reflected that *“this is such a heart-breaking situation for children”*. Disha, a 16-year-old in the UK, also reflected on her experience of loss during this time:

*“I have lost someone over this period and not being able to go to their funeral has really affected me. I know that I am not alone in that and a lot of young people will be feeling the same way.”*

From the participants’ responses, it is evident that children and young people faced different levels of emotional distress due to the COVID-19 outbreak. However, for some of the young respondents, the sense of crisis and confinement was all too familiar. In the

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), children and young people have previously faced many challenges as a result of ongoing armed conflict, social upheaval, and the Ebola outbreak.<sup>7</sup> Anita, age 16 from the DRC, reflected on these deeply troubling issues and how they increased children and young people’s sense of vulnerability during the current crisis:

*“I do not like this situation. We wanted to announce the end of Ebola, but now coronavirus is already coming. We stay at home, we no longer study, we no longer go to church, and we are unable to participate in meetings. And, despite the fact that isolation will help protect us from the virus, this will bring starvation that can still kill us too.”*

## c. Increasing violence

*“This coronavirus is like another war for them [countries experiencing conflict], they are trying to survive with what resources they already have and for them this might just make their situation much harder.”* (Alessandro, 16, UK)

*“I am concerned that children and young people that come from fragile contexts may not have been recognised as being in that situation. I’ve read something in the news that more children are expected to be forced into child marriage because of coronavirus specifically. I think a lot of children will be exposed to domestic violence and things like that, that maybe wouldn’t have otherwise, and the government won’t be able to identify those children during lockdown.”* (Disha, 16, UK)

For some of the participants in the UK, COVID-19 poses a dangerous threat for children and young people living in conflict contexts. According to the World Vision International report, *COVID-19 Aftershocks: A Perfect Storm*,<sup>8</sup> these are real concerns as they found that the COVID-19 quarantine has put 85 million more children and young people at risk of violence. Children and young people are isolated in unsafe homes, sent to work, or pushed into early marriage. As a result of the pandemic, at least 4 million more girls will be married within the next two years. World Vision predicts a major spike in the cases of children and young people experiencing physical, emotional, and sexual violence, both now and in the months and years to come.

## d. Increasing poverty

*“We are very worried for the people who are informal workers, those who make their income on a daily basis. These people are suffering the consequences of the quarantine, and their families will start to starve very soon. So, solidarity will be very important to support each other.”* (Jose, 15, Peru)

*“One of my parents was laid off as well, [which] is really difficult on [our] financial situation.”* (Georgia, 16, UK)

Most of the children and young people interviewed were specifically concerned about the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis. They were especially worried about their parents’ ability to earn a living in the face of the harsh conditions their countries imposed. They were also troubled about the economic impact the crisis would have on the most vulnerable and concerned for the people in their communities who did not have any savings and were dependent on the money they earned daily. Children and young people were fully aware that the growing health crisis would disproportionately hit the most vulnerable populations, to which many of them belong. Ahona, age 16, a girl from Bangladesh, said that the economic crisis would affect mainly children and young people, saying, *“Overall, it is a very pessimistic time for everyone in the nation.”*

Some of the participants highlighted that the economic crisis associated with COVID-19 had an impact on basic government services, such as water. Lara, 17, from Brazil said:

*“A big problem is the lack of water. For example, one of the most important recommendations is handwashing, but where we live, we don’t have water. Many houses get water only once a week; so, how are these people going to have good hygiene opportunities? They can’t! This will cause many infections.”*

Another Brazilian girl, Bethania, age 16, explained, *“The major problem is that our health system is not ready to face this crisis. Another major problem is the economic tragedy for many families, especially those who work every day to receive a daily income.”*

## 2. Keeping safe but mobilising against the expansion of COVID-19

Research participants were fully aware of current events surrounding the pandemic and were abiding by the regulations and quarantines imposed by their

governments. However, they expressed a desire to find ways to help and support others, such as raising awareness and supporting their peers, even though they knew they needed to find new ways to do so online from their homes in order to comply with movement restrictions.

### a. Staying at home

*“The only way we can protect ourselves and others is to stay at home and safe.”* (Laura, 15, Albania)

*“I feel like the biggest thing you can do is stay at home or just stay alert... Lots of teenagers are still meeting up with friends and not following social distancing rules. So I think that is really contributing to the spread”.* (Temi, 16, UK)

*“At the beginning of the quarantine, people were behaving well, but as time passes, many people are not respecting the lockdown, and these people are putting others at risk”.* (Natalia, 16, Peru)

The children and young people who participated in this research study had a clear understanding of the importance of complying with their governments’ lockdown measures and regulations encouraging people to stay at home to keep COVID-19 from spreading. Rares, a 12-year-old Romanian boy, also noted that children and young people could help by staying at home and respecting the rules.



ABOVE Children and young people in rural Nepal listen and learn from a radio programme © Ashish Thapar Magar/World Vision

<sup>7</sup> Ridout, A. (2014) *No one to turn to: Life for children in eastern DRC*. World Vision International. Available from: [https://www.worldvision.org/wp-content/uploads/No-One-To-Turn-To-FINAL\\_0.pdf](https://www.worldvision.org/wp-content/uploads/No-One-To-Turn-To-FINAL_0.pdf) [Accessed: 20 March 2020].

<sup>8</sup> World Vision International. (2020) *COVID-19 Aftershocks: A Perfect Storm*. Available from: <https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/coronavirus-health-crisis/covid-19-aftershocks-perfect-storm>.

## b. Supporting their communities

*“Children and young people are just as capable with helping to stop the spread of the virus as adults are because, I think, more children are using things like social media at younger and younger ages.”*

(Charlotte, 17, UK)

*“We can shoot videos to help people to understand this pandemic and be protected. Many people are illiterate in Mali, so written information does not work well here. With simple videos and messages, we can support them.”*

(Salimata, 15, Mali)

*“We are doing videos and creating flipcharts with information on what we cannot do. We are conducting storytelling for children to keep them entertained and occupied. This helps children to stay at home and not go out to the streets.”*

(Lara, 17, Brazil)

*“Radio is one of the most powerful media channels, like social media. Kids can talk to live programmes on the radio by connecting to the programme via mobile calls. We can also invite a specialist physician who can talk about solutions and guidance.”*

(Sanjidul, 15, Bangladesh)

For most of the participants, they were clear that it was very important for them to get involved in raising awareness about the need to flatten the curve of COVID-19, informing their peers about the risks associated with the disease, and helping the most vulnerable people, including the elderly and children and young people. Most participants also expressed the value of technology and the role they could play, as children and young people, to encourage people to stay at home and provide accurate information through social media channels.

They all expressed a strong desire to use their voices to help keep people safe and combat the outbreak. Foyosal, from Bangladesh, believed that the role that children and young people could play in fighting the spread of COVID-19 was vital and urgent as the children and young people in his community had a proven track record of mobilising and influencing changes around issues that were relevant to them. This was endorsed by another Bangladeshi boy, Sakib, who said, “Children are mature and well-prepared to carry out social activities;

we can be effective in raising awareness about coronavirus through the child forums.” Similarly, Jomarie, age 17 from the Philippines, emphasised:

*“I am volunteering in my community to battle the coronavirus pandemic and raise awareness about the risks the virus brings to the population. We want to ensure that the people are following the instructions and*

*are using masks and gloves when needed. I feel this is an opportunity to help others.”*

In addition, a common frustration for some of the participants was the dominance of false information.

*“I know when everything started there was a lot of false information being spread, and there still is. I feel like when people are told to spread awareness, they find the first thing they can about the topic and they just post it on Instagram or a social media platform. They don't actually check the facts properly; so, I think checking the facts properly and using lots of different sources before you post information is really important.”*

(Temi, 16, UK)

*“Many people are confused by the misinformation or are listening to rumours. [We can] make them aware of information from the World Health Organization (WHO) ... If necessary, we can explain how to call the hotline. All this can be done by building a network of other teenagers.”*

(Sanjidul, 15, Bangladesh)

Anika, age 15 from Bangladesh, suggested the following solution, “In order to reduce fake news and misinformation, we can upload posts and messages from reliable sources, such as WHO, and share them with our friends.”



ABOVE Young people in Nepal recording a community radio programme ©Ashish Thapar Magar/World Vision

## c. Supporting their peers

*“We [our youth group] have come up with some safety tips including, for example, online safety, gaming, keeping the vulnerable safe ... fraud as well ... We are coming up with some gifs and putting all the tips on a poster so young people can be aware of the messages.”*

(Alexia, 17, UK)

*“We [our youth group] are gathering evidence from different people from different schools so they can tell us if they are struggling with Wi-Fi, and if they are, how it is affecting them. When we have the evidence, what we are going to try and do is send a letter to an MP [Member of Parliament] and different Wi-Fi branches and ask for free Wi-Fi during COVID 19.”*

(Madi, 15, UK)

*“An initiative I have set up, called the ‘Mentoring Scheme’, offers support in two ways. We have a 1-2-1 programme which allows older students ... to provide free support and guidance to [younger students]. [This could be] help with their schoolwork and subjects or helping them to get support with what their next steps are. There isn't much that schools are offering them with their next steps ... so mentors are best placed to provide that support.”*

(Disha, 16, UK)

In the UK, children and young people involved in the Milton Keynes Youth Cabinet were campaigning online for safer living. The children and young people were aware of the significance of online safety as an increasing need amongst children and young people using technology, especially during this pandemic. They developed safety tips to raise their peers' awareness of how to stay safe on issues such as fraud and protecting the vulnerable. Some children and young people in the UK experienced Internet accessibility issues, so research participants worked on getting free Wi-Fi access during COVID 19 so that all children and young people could access their schoolwork. Aware of the increased mental health pressures, one participant implemented an online national scheme, as part of another volunteer role, to involve children and young people in a mentoring system to support those struggling with the transition of COVID 19.

The children and young people who participated in this research project articulated a great sense of social justice, a desire to continue serving others, and a wish to find ways to use their voices to support the vulnerable and



ABOVE Child leader is helping students with reading in the Philippines ©Dexter Gamboa/World Vision

marginalised. Even though all of the young respondents thought of themselves as living in poverty, they were aware that there were other people in their communities who were even more disadvantaged than them, and they wanted to help support them through the crisis. The young participants asserted that they could play a pivotal role in raising awareness and providing information to people because, in many cases, they were more educated and had greater access to technology and information than their parents and other community members.

### 3. World Vision's call to action

Children and young people are active, competent social actors who can make decisions and influence their environments. As was clear from the participants' ongoing activities to raise awareness and find a role in the fight to stop the spread of COVID-19, children and young people are not helpless victims or passive beneficiaries. Rather, they develop strategies to overcome hardships and circumstances and have much to contribute towards societal change.

Although this consultation was conducted in 14 different countries, children and young people's experiences were similar across a diversity of contexts and backgrounds, as this pandemic has had a global impact. Based on the children and young people's perspectives on the COVID-19 outbreak, World Vision is calling on governments, the United Nations, international communities, and civil society organisations to act.

#### CALL TO ACTION

- 1 Recognise and embrace children and young people as rights-holders and social actors with the capabilities to contribute to stopping the spread of COVID-19, and consider appropriate strategies to ensure that their participation is safe, sensitive, and meaningful.**
- 2 Urgently scale up global COVID-19 prevention and response measures for children and their families to strengthen health systems, maintain essential health service delivery; equip frontline health workers; engage and communicate effectively with communities as a whole, including children and young people; and provide critical child protection interventions and mental health and psychosocial support.**
- 3 Adopt policies and fund COVID-19 response plans that holistically address the secondary impacts of the pandemic on children and young people and their families, especially for the 'most vulnerable' living in ongoing crises and fragile contexts, particularly with respect to child protection, gender-based violence, education, water and sanitation, food security, and livelihoods. These interventions should seek to strengthen existing protection systems within communities so that key areas of work are not left behind.**

*As COVID-19 spreads, the well-being of children and young people will be more at risk. World Vision offices and programmes are working to highlight and respond to child protection needs and ensure that children and young people's voices are heard. This includes promoting online safety; strengthening life skills and developmental assets; adapting life skills approaches for virtual/isolation/smaller group settings, amongst other interventions; emphasising self-efficacy; and amplifying voices, gender equality, and community services.<sup>9</sup>*

RIGHT Pricilla, age 12, is raising awareness in a refugee camp in the DRC about COVID-19  
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<sup>9</sup> For further information, contact Julia Smith-Brake, Senior Adolescent Programming Specialist, Child Protection & Participation, Impact and Engagement Team, World Vision International





# #ItTakesAWorld #COVID19

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At World Vision, our focus is on helping the most vulnerable children in the most dangerous places overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian faith, we work together with communities, partners, local leaders and governments, to help children of all backgrounds experience fullness of life.

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