

RESEARCH BRIEFING

Children’s voices in times of COVID-19

Continued child activism in the face of personal challenges

**“ 91 per cent of the children and young people reported feeling emotional distress or facing troubling experiences. ”**

This research was conducted in March and April 2020 to explore children and young people’s reflections and perceptions on the COVID-19 outbreak. Children and young people have already started mobilising themselves, using online platforms to share their experiences and support others with information and emotional support. This research on young voices was organised in response to the young people’s continued child activism in the face of personal challenges. We hope that the results will prove useful to other child rights focused organisations as we seek to better understand what children and young people want to do in this time of crisis and how they can be supported, equipped, and encouraged.

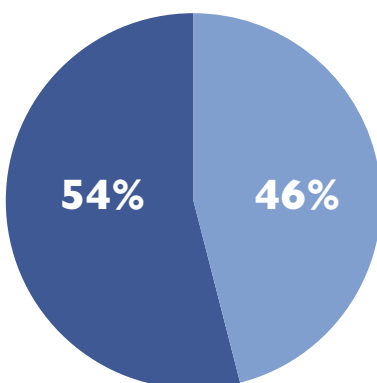
Listening to children in the context of COVID-19 is part of how World Vision is meeting our commitment to place children and young people at the centre of our work, focus on their empowerment, and amplify their voices from local to global levels. World Vision will continually seek children and young people’s perspectives to understand their realities and inform decision-making processes based on their input.

The consultation project included 101 children and young people (58 girls and 43 boys) between the ages of 8 and 17 from 13 countries: Albania, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Peru, Philippines, Romania, Sierra Leone and Syrian refugee children living in refugee camps near the Turkish-Syrian border. The project embraced an intergenerational collaboration between two adult researchers and 12 young leaders, ages 13 to 18, who engaged as peer researchers.

**“ 71 per cent of the child respondents said that they feel isolated and lonely since their schools closed. ”**

**GRAPH 1.**

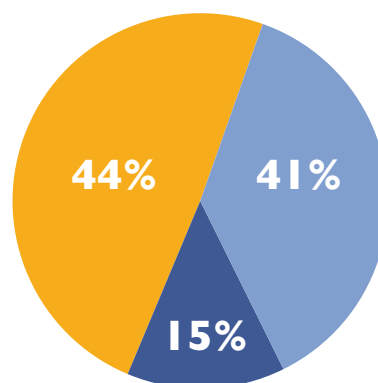
Research participants’ self-reported gender



■ BOYS  
■ GIRLS

**GRAPH 2.**

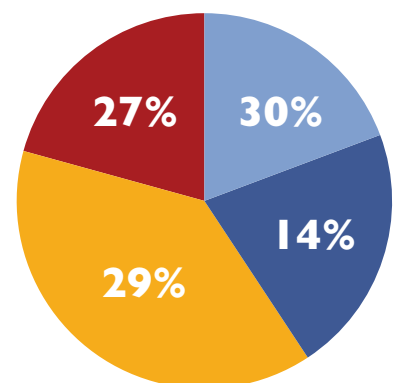
Research participants’ age



■ AGE 8-13  
■ AGE 14-15  
■ AGE 16-18

**GRAPH 3.**

Participants’ geographical location



■ AFRICA  
■ MIDDLE EAST & EASTERN EUROPE  
■ ASIA  
■ LATIN AMERICA

Three essential themes that emerged from the data included, (1) changing lives on a massive scale, (2) keeping safe but mobilising against the expansion of the COVID-19, and (3) exploring what to do next. Across all 13 countries, the respondents highlighted three important factors that directly changed their lives on a massive scale: (a) school disruption, (b) emotional distress due to social distancing, and (c) increasing poverty. During interviews, 71 per cent of the children and young people said that they felt isolated and lonely due to school closures. Moreover, they pointed out that this had a negative impact on their learning and daily routines and increased their sense of isolation and despair. Similarly, 91 per cent of respondents acknowledged that they were facing emotional distress and troubling feelings, including anxiety, anger, and worry due to the uncertainty of how long this crisis will last and dealing with isolation.



Despite these challenging feelings, children and young people expressed that they wanted to contribute to the fight against the spread of COVID-19 in their respective communities. They stated that it was very important for them to get involved in raising awareness about protecting people from the spread of the virus, informing their peers about the risks associated with COVID-19, and helping the most vulnerable, including the homeless, elderly, and children and young people, amongst others. Due to the nature of this crisis, the children were not able to plan activities in-person, and their awareness-raising activities have shifted online and to other remote collaboration systems instead. Research suggest that virtual platforms can provide a safe and conducive environment for children and young people to engage with their peers and other community members, model positive behaviours and increasing the use of social media for social change.

The children and young people spoke about a great sense of social justice, serving others, and a desire to use their voices to support the vulnerable and marginalised. Children and young people asserted that they could play a pivotal role in raising awareness on COVID-19 and providing information to people because, in many cases, they had a better education and more access to technology and information than their parents and other community members.

The findings of this study show that there is major scope for collaboration with and engagement of children and young people in raising awareness and educating their peers and community members. This research proves that children and young people are keen to engage in social change and to get involved in direct actions to support their peers and communities in coping with the COVID-19 outbreak. Respondents provided a number of recommendations for child-focussed agencies, decision makers, adult professionals, and children and young people to integrate into their engagements and strategies so that children and young people are supported to take actions on issues that matter to them.

It is our hope that this study will provide child-focussed agencies, decision makers, adult professionals, staff members, and children and young people with ideas to consider embracing in order to support children and young people's virtual participation opportunities throughout the crisis. This will ensure that COVID-19 response strategies are child-centred, empowering, and inclusive.