

**SAVE THE CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL**

St Vincent House  
30 Orange Street  
London WC2H 7HH  
UK

T +44 (0)20 3272 0300  
F +44 (0)20 8237 8000  
E [info@savethechildren.org](mailto:info@savethechildren.org)

[www.savethechildren.net](http://www.savethechildren.net)

Company registration number 3732267 (England and Wales)  
Charity registration number 1076822

# CHILDREN'S AGENDA FOR ACTION



Save the Children



#### ON THE COVER

Ayda\*, from Harar, Eastern Ethiopia, who wants to be a taekwondo master.

\*Name changed to protect identity

Photo: Hannah Adcock / Save the Children

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was written by Jess Edwards.

Thank you to Beckie Shuker for her contributions to the report, in writing the Children's Agenda for Action.

Thank you to the Global Research Team: Dr Melissa Burgess, Muhammad Hassan Qaiser, Shanmugapriyah Thiyagarajah, Dr Silvia Mila Arlini, Munshi Sulaiman, Dr Hadley Solomon, Michael O'Donnell, Madhu Kalra, Suyeon Lee and a large number of people involved in making the research possible.

Thank you to the Global Research Report series authors: Nicole Dulieu, Lavinia Loperfido, Chiara Orlassino, Daniela Ritz, Georgina O'Hare, Mya Gordon, Dr Adetayo Omoni, Paul Rees-Thomas, Dr Shahab Ali Siddiqui, Dr Yasir Arafat, Martina Orsander, Henk Van Beers and Bharti Mepani.

We also appreciate the feedback of colleagues from across Save the Children member, regional and country offices whose contributions have undoubtedly improved the report.

Most importantly, we would like to thank the children and their families who shared their experiences and demands with us through the global survey and through the case studies found in this report. The name of children portrayed in case studies have been changed to protect identities.

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has put an entire generation of children at risk. Measures that have been taken to stop the spread of the virus, including nationwide lockdowns and school closures, have caused many disruptions to children's lives. These disruptions will have long-term negative effects on children's right to survive, learn and be protected.

Ayan, 25, holds her son Mohamed\*, 13 months, in Ethiopia

Photo: Eduardo Soteras Jalil / Save the Children

“

Take care of us, because our situation is **only getting worse**”

– 16-year-old girl, Lebanon

The impacts of COVID-19 have been felt by children and families all around the world, but it has not affected everyone in the same way. With even developed countries struggling to cope with the virus, there is a risk that the pandemic could have catastrophic effects on low-income countries.

Within countries, poorer and more marginalised children and families are often suffering the most. Some people called the pandemic a 'great leveller'; they expected it to have the same effect on everybody. However, the pandemic has actually made the inequality that already exists between different groups of children much worse. For many millions of already vulnerable groups of children such as poor children, girls, children with disabilities, refugee children and children living in fragile and humanitarian areas, the impacts of the pandemic look to be long lasting and life changing.

Children are not at a high risk of suffering from the immediate health problems of COVID-19. However, the pandemic has put pressure on hospitals and health services that could prevent children from getting medical help, meaning that children may die from preventable causes such as pneumonia and malaria during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has caused shortages in food and caused many families from losing some or all of their income, making them poorer. Having less money means that many children may not have enough to eat, which might lead to an increase in hunger and malnutrition.

COVID-19 has disrupted many children's education because governments have had to close schools, meaning that children have had to learn at home. Save the Children predict that at least 10 million children will not return to school when they reopen, and that girls and poorer children will be more likely to not go back.<sup>1</sup> For children that do go back to school, many will have missed out on months of learning, and will be behind in their education. This will affect the poorest children that do not have online technology like computers and mobile phones at home, and are less likely to have help from their families to learn at home. With governments putting lockdowns in place, COVID-19 quickly caused economic problems in many countries. Save the Children predicts that the number of children living in poor households could increase by 117 million in 2020.<sup>2</sup> Child poverty stops children having access to vital services like health and education. It can mean that they are more likely to suffer violence, like child labour and child marriage.

Many children were already experiencing violence before the COVID-19 outbreak. But, the COVID-19 pandemic will make the risk of violence against children even higher, particularly for girls, poor children, children with disabilities and children living in conflict. Concerns over health and money can cause an increase in violence against children, as over-stressed parents and caregivers can become abusive. Schools can be a safe space for children at risk of violence in the home. Without school, children might face greater harm.

In order to find out about how the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting children's health, nutrition, learning, wellbeing, poverty and protection, Save the Children carried out a global survey to find out the views of children and their parents and caregivers, including children's messages for leaders.

The survey helped us to hear about children's experience of COVID-19 and the effects it is having on children and families across the world and to understand how different children, including the most marginalised, have been impacted by the pandemic.

<sup>1</sup> - Save the Children, (2020). Save our Education: Protect every child's right to learn in the COVID-19 response and recovery [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/17871/pdf/save\\_our\\_education\\_0.pdf](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/17871/pdf/save_our_education_0.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> - Save the Children UK, (2020). Coronavirus' Invisible Victims: Children in Monetary Poor Households <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/blogs/2020/coronavirus-invisible-victims-children-in-monetary-poor-househol>

Amelia rides a bike in the Reach Academy allotment, Feltham



Photo: Simon Edmunds/Save the Children



Photos: Malama Mwila / Save the Children

Mutinta\* from Zambia raises her hand during a lesson

## CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO BE HEARD

All children have rights that are specific to them as children, guaranteed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which need to be respected, protected and fulfilled even during times of crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that many child rights have been violated, including the right to be heard.

“

My message for leaders is that...  
**I'm speechless** since they don't  
take us into account”

– 17-year-old boy, El Salvador

### Children's Right to be Heard

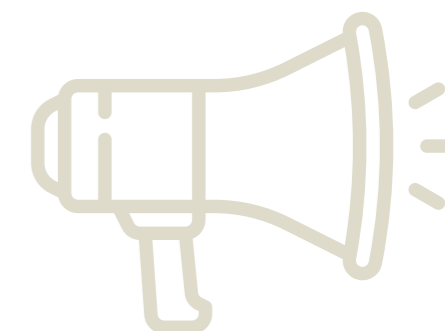
The UNCRC protects children's right to be heard and for their views to be taken in to consideration in public decision-making processes that affect them. The convention ensures that every child has:

- The right to reliable information in a form that can be understood by them
- The right to express themselves in society
- The right to campaign and participate in peaceful assembly to influence change.

Over half (58%) of child respondents to the survey said that they can express their concerns about the pandemic to family members, and 65% said that they can ask family members questions about it.

With schools closed and social interaction with friends limited due to lockdowns, children's access to sources of information that they might usually rely on are limited.

8 out of 10 parents and caregivers who responded to our survey said that they discuss the COVID-19 pandemic with their children. This was the case in most countries. In Latin America and the Caribbean, 9 out of 10 parents and caregivers said that they discussed the pandemic with their children.



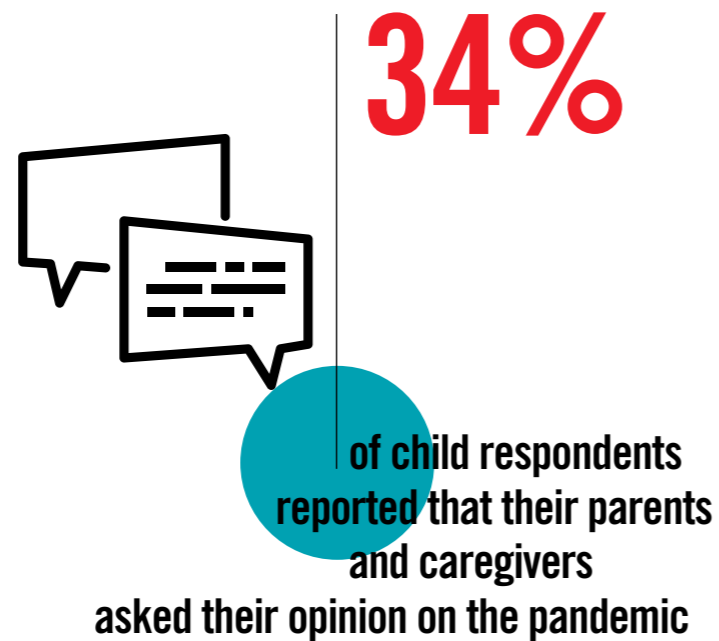
Children, especially adolescents, may rely on social media and the internet more often to get information, which can be unreliable. Children who cannot access the internet may not receive any information about the pandemic. In a Save the Children study in Rwanda, the majority of children said that they were not aware of the pandemic, as they do not have access to the internet.

“

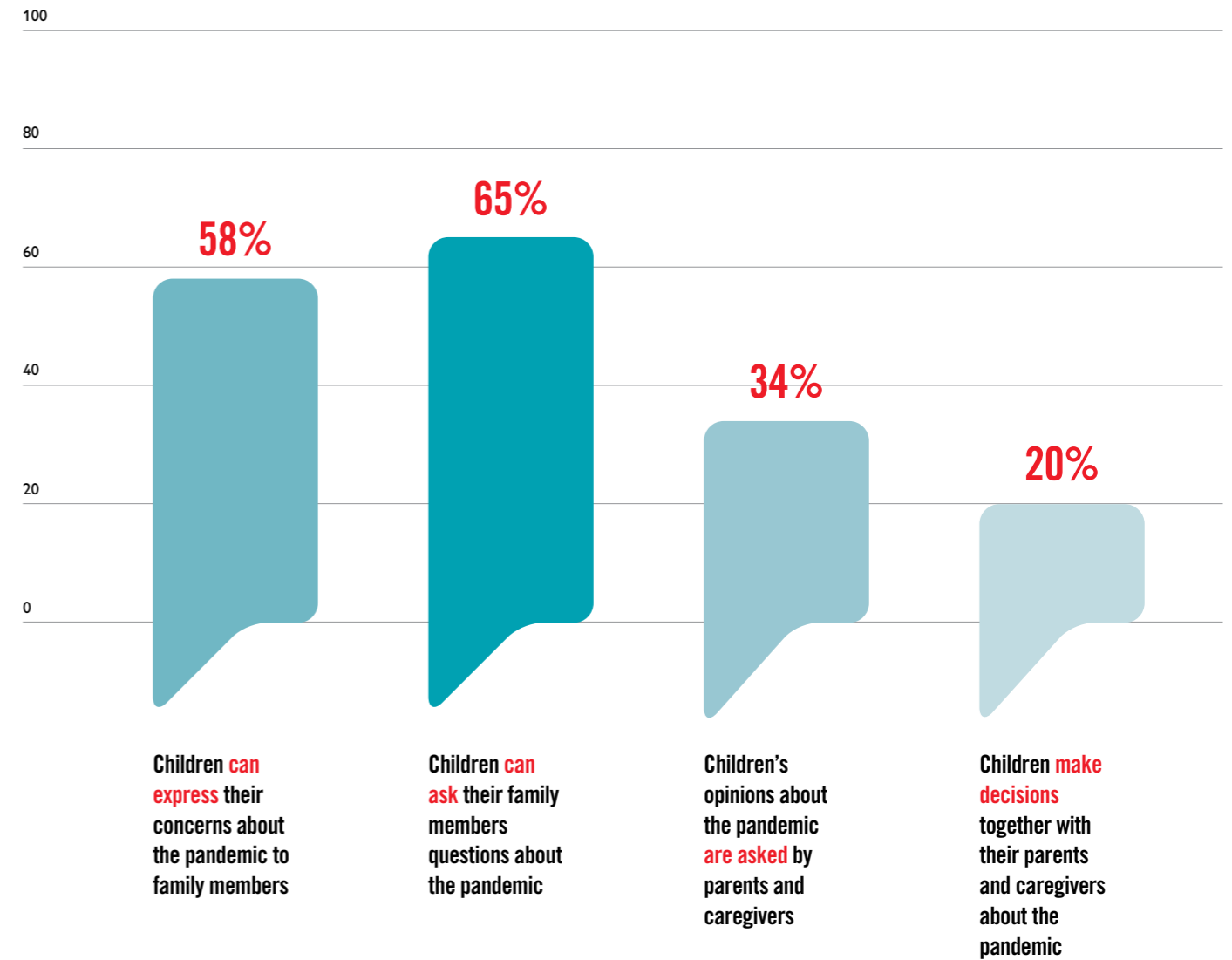
**Broadcast truthful and reliable news.”**

– 15-year-old girl, Bangladesh

Although the majority of child respondents to the survey feel that they are informed about COVID-19, the majority do not feel listened to. Just over one third (34%) of child respondents told us that their parents and caregivers asked their opinion on the pandemic. 20% of children asked said they had made decisions about the pandemic together with their parents and caregivers.



Percentage of child reporting



# CHILDREN'S AGENDA FOR ACTION



Photo: Hanna Adcock / Save the Children

Harriet\*, 14, at her home in Bidi Bidi Refugee settlement in Northern Uganda.

Photo: Louis Leeson / Save the Children

“

**Work with children more. We are the future, and how you treat us now, is how the future will look too.”**

– 12-year-old girl, Kosovo

Many children have been affected by COVID-19 in many different ways. Since the beginning of the pandemic, children have been coming up with recommendations for their governments and other decision-makers about COVID-19.

However, even in more normal times, children tend not to feel confident that adults are listening and taking them seriously. To stop the spread of the virus, governments have had to put measures in place that make it more difficult for children to access the places and conversations that they need to get involved in decision-making about issues that affect them. It is now even more difficult for children to be heard.

It is more important than ever that adults listen to, respect, amplify and act on children's solutions to the challenges that they are facing. Save the Children has found that children's demands for decision-makers are mainly about these five topics: education, child poverty, health, governance and protection from violence.

These findings are based partly on responses from children to the question: 'if you were asked to write a letter to leaders in your country, what would you say?', asked as part of the global survey. The findings are backed up by Save the Children's other work to support children to influence change during the pandemic, including other reports, live online events, and child-led projects like letter-writing.

From the demands that children around the world have made, an Agenda for Action is becoming clear.

## EDUCATION



In Save the Children's global survey, children frequently mentioned three important topics. Most demands that children made were about education. Most often, children asked leaders to either increase access to online learning or re-open their schools. A smaller number of children asked that schools stay closed due to safety worries, or for more investment in education more generally. Many children said that schools should stay open with proper safety measures in place, and that they needed more opportunities to play during COVID-19.

**"Dear country leaders, we need to go to school, we need additional support and catch-up classes to make it."** – 13-year-old girl, Burkina Faso

**"We ask for governments to spend more money to make sure that we can continue learning while at home by providing radios, TVs and internet learning. They must make sure that children in rural areas and from poor families also get to learn. We want to see mobile libraries passing in our communities delivering books for us to learn."** – 17-year-old girl, Zambia<sup>3</sup>

**"If schools are to be opened, the government should prioritise safety of pupils. Provide adequate masks for the children and hand-washing stations for schools."** – 13-year-old girl, Kenya

**"We want free dedicated play areas."** – 11-year-old boy, occupied Palestinian territory (oPt)

## CHILD POVERTY AND THE NEED FOR SOCIAL PROTECTION



The second highest number of demands that children made were about children living in poverty, and the government protection policies and laws that exist to help the poor and vulnerable. Children want decision-makers to combat poverty and provide food and shelter. Many children are asking leaders to make sure marginalised and deprived children in particular are taken into account during the COVID-19 crisis and during the recovery from the pandemic. They demand that internally displaced children, children living on the street, children separated from their parent or caregiver, and children living in remote areas are cared for, particularly children with disabilities and refugee children.

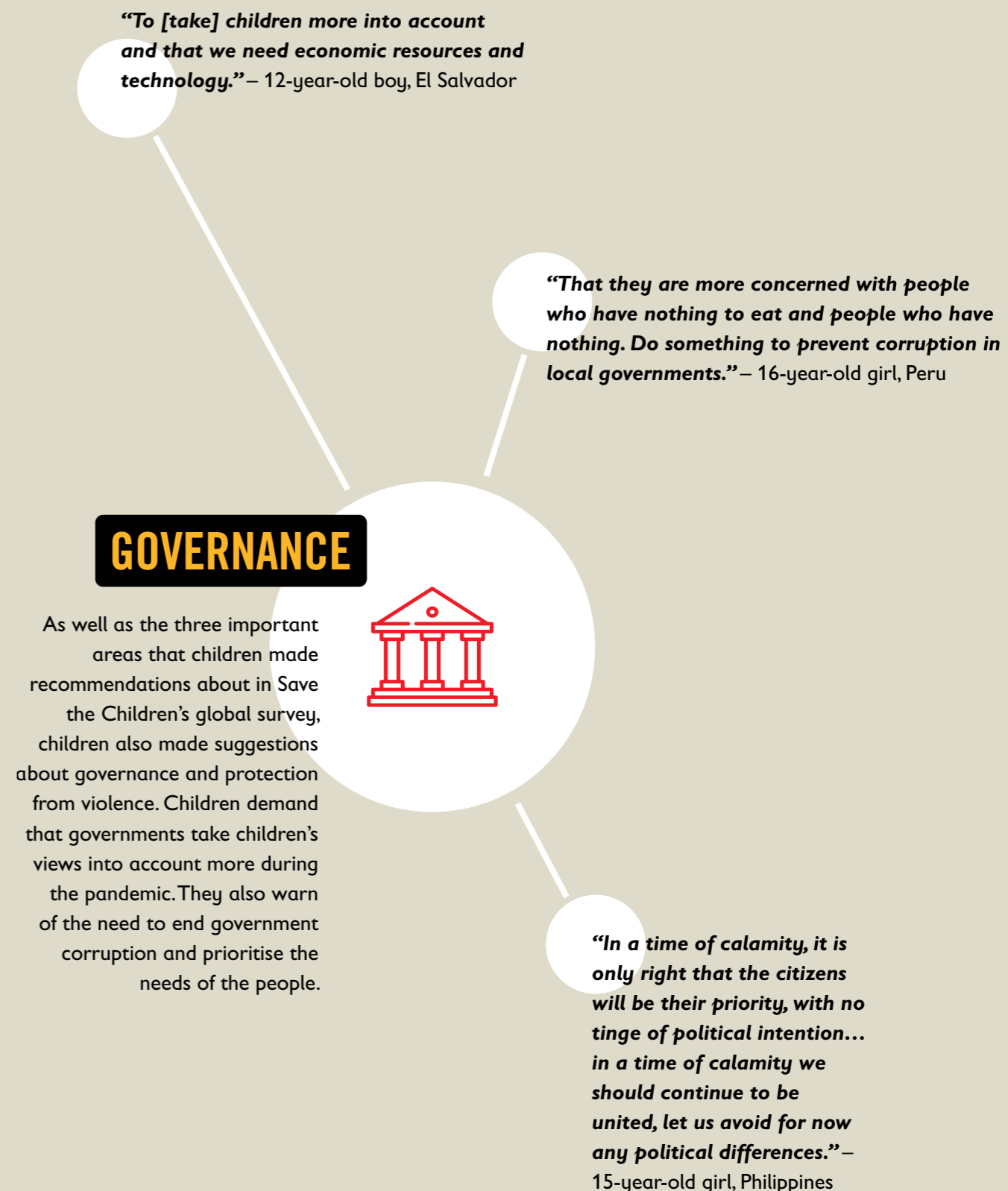
**"I ask that coronavirus patients' costs are free or can be fully provided by the government because not everyone can afford its costs. Coronavirus can be transmitted to all people, either rich or poor."** – 13-year-old boy, Indonesia

**"The only thing I would say is to... provide social food assistance to the families who really need it."** – 16-year-old girl, Albania

**"There should be more programs for people of the country, the people have the right to a happy life. There is unfair pricing, this should be controlled. There is also increasing inequality, which has resulted in poverty. Governments should ensure food for those who are in quarantine."** – 16-year-old boy, Nepal

**"I'd ask for more opportunities for persons with disabilities. Our life is always in quarantine."** – 17-year-old girl, Kosovo

**"I am not in my country, what I would ask is that you please help us because even if we are not from here, we are human beings. I study in this country and someday I will work here, so I think I also have the right to ask the government for support for refugee children like me."** – 12-year-old girl, Peru



**“That they think about the health of girls and boys who do not have conditions for protection, and the rights to live without violence and with freedom of expression are fulfilled.”** – 11-year-old girl, Nicaragua

**“War should be ended, children should be enrolled in school, helping poor people, we are tired of war and enemies. Peace should come and there should be cohesion among our people.”** – 13-year-old girl, rural Afghanistan

## PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE



Children have three main recommendations for decision-makers on the topic of protection from violence during COVID-19. The first is around protection from gender-based violence, where children call for an end to violence against girls and the prevention of child marriage. The second demand is for an end to war and conflict. Third, children ask for an end to all violence against children, that they are cared for and protected.

**“Open schools and madrasas. I fear early marriage.”** – 12-year-old girl, Kenya<sup>5</sup>

Photo: Hanna Adcock - UK Stories Team



Sofia\*, 15, stands outside her home in Huanuco, Peru. She talked about girls' rights at a Save the Children event in Sweden.

These quotations provide a picture of what children want from their leaders in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Children want decision-makers to listen to their demands; to take action to improve their access to education during and after the crisis; to support children and their families living in poverty; to ensure equal access to healthcare including mental health support; to accelerate their reaction to the response; and to protect children from violence.

When children speak and tell adults what needs to change, they are often ignored. It is up to global leaders at all levels to make children's right to be heard and to influence public decisions on

COVID-19 a reality for all children, no matter who they are or where they live.

Global leaders must invest in children's participation and create inclusive spaces for them to be heard; strengthen children's confidence to participate in decision-making; respect children's rights to express themselves and to campaign, engage in peaceful assembly and access age-appropriate information; and demonstrate accountability and provide feedback to children following their participation.<sup>6</sup>

Children are very aware of their own needs and have concrete suggestions for solutions to the

problems that they face. It is their right to have a stronger role in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

### Further Reading

You can find a child-friendly summary of the full Protect a Generation report, that this Children's Agenda for Action is part of, [here](#)

The full Protect a Generation report is available [here](#)

For more information about the impact of COVID-19 on children's rights: Save the Children 'Child Rights Thematic Report', [here](#)

5 - 'Madrasa' is a term for a religious school in Kenya.

6 - Save the Children, (2020). The Right of Children to Participate in Public Decision-Making Processes [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/17711/pdf/the\\_right\\_of\\_children\\_to\\_participate\\_in\\_public\\_decision-making\\_processes-save\\_the\\_children\\_0.pdf](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/17711/pdf/the_right_of_children_to_participate_in_public_decision-making_processes-save_the_children_0.pdf)

## SAVE THE CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL

St Vincent House  
30 Orange Street  
London WC2H 7HH  
UK

**T** +44 (0)20 3272 0300

**F** +44 (0)20 8237 8000

**E** [info@savethechildren.org](mailto:info@savethechildren.org)

[www.savethechildren.net](http://www.savethechildren.net)

Company registration number 3732267 (England and Wales)  
Charity registration number 1076822