

2021 Global Survey

# The voices of 8,000 children

The Right to Education and Participation post-COVID-19 explained  
by children from around the world. An exploration from the  
listening and wellbeing perspective of children and adolescents.

MEDIA SUMMARY

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- *I think there is always (something) better. In everything. We can be better than we are, that's how it would be with school.*

Adolescent boy aged 12-18, Guatemala

- *You have to listen to children like you would like to be listened to.*

Adolescent girl aged 12-18, Burkina Faso

- *Lots of people ignore what we say, they act like they are listening but they are not*

Adolescent boy aged 12-18, Nicaragua

- *I miss the feeling of waking up early to get ready for school, I miss the relationships with my classmates.*

Adolescent girl aged 12-18, India

- *If I go to school, the teacher helps me to prepare the lesson and even my classmates help to explain it. This opportunity is not available at home.*

Boy aged 6-11 years old, Bolivia

- *Because at school I can play with my friends and be with my teacher.*

12-18 years old, Bolivia

- *Because internet access is scarce and printed materials are limited.*

Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old,  
Philippines





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# Why a global survey for children matters

Nearly two years into the pandemic, many children, particularly those who were already living in precarious conditions, have suffered significantly due to school closures and limited opportunities for quality learning alternatives.

Participation by country	
Total surveys: 7,538	
Countries	% of total survey number
Mali	17.3%
Bolivia	12.5%
India	12.4%
Nicaragua	9.0%
Burkina Faso	8.4%
Bangladesh	7.6%
Spain	7.0%
Niger	6.8%
Guatemala	6.9%
El Salvador	5.2%
Philippines	3.7%
Benin	2.9%
Other	0.1%

This year's new global report by Educo, **Global Survey 2021: The Voices of 8,000 Children (The Right to Education and Participation post COVID-19 explained by girls and boys of the world)**, is a survey participated by about 8,000 children from 12 countries across Asia, Latin America, Africa and Spain gathered by staff and partners through a combination of online surveys and telephone and face-to-face interviews. The

global survey, conducted between 17 June and 23 August 2021, were participated by girls (53.66%) and boys (45.81%); with 50.73% aged 12-18, 44.75% were aged 6-11, and 4.52% of responses were received from other ages.

In 2020, Educo conducted its first global survey for children, documented in the first report *Schools are shut but learning is on!*, which showed that children greatly missed activities central to their general wellbeing, such as going to school, seeing their friends, etc. Their greatest concerns were linked to potential impact of the virus on their family's health and on their livelihood, and the uncertainty and optimism for their future.

One year after that study, we are still in a pandemic. It is key to understand the context which this report emerges from, as well as the opinions and feelings of children and adolescents: On September 23, 2021, UNESCO reported 127,959,411 students affected by total or partial school closures. For Educo, it is critical to find out how children and adolescents are experiencing the current COVID-19 pandemic and their recommendations moving forward, so that the current crisis can be an opportunity to improve key issues that directly affect them.

Education has been one of the issues that has generated, and will continue to generate, the most public debate, during the COVID-19 pandemic. A report by the Inter-American Development Bank, covering the period up to April 2021, has ranked



Education as the number one trend in the digital conversation<sup>1</sup>, with Health coming in second place. Unsurprisingly, the participation of children, adolescents and young people during emergencies is overlooked. In general, emergencies tend to deepen the existing gaps regarding this issue and the social perception we have of this life stage.

At Educo we believe that Education and Participation are children's human rights, and are also an opportunity to change societies. We believe that we have to go to the root of problems in order to find solutions that help cure them. This involves educating ourselves in a consistent and continuous way from a deep understanding of how children

and adolescents experience, think and feel; of what affects and moves them; of their assessments and aspirations; of their ideas and opinions for searching for and setting up, alongside them, the most robust and durable solutions.

This document will provide key findings on children's views on how they have experienced their rights to education and participation. It also includes an analysis according to gender, age groups, countries and key influencing factors for the responses. **For the full technical report version of this summary, you may visit [www.educo.org](http://www.educo.org).**

<sup>1</sup> BID (2020). *Trends that shape society during the coronavirus*.





# Key findings

## Education during the pandemic



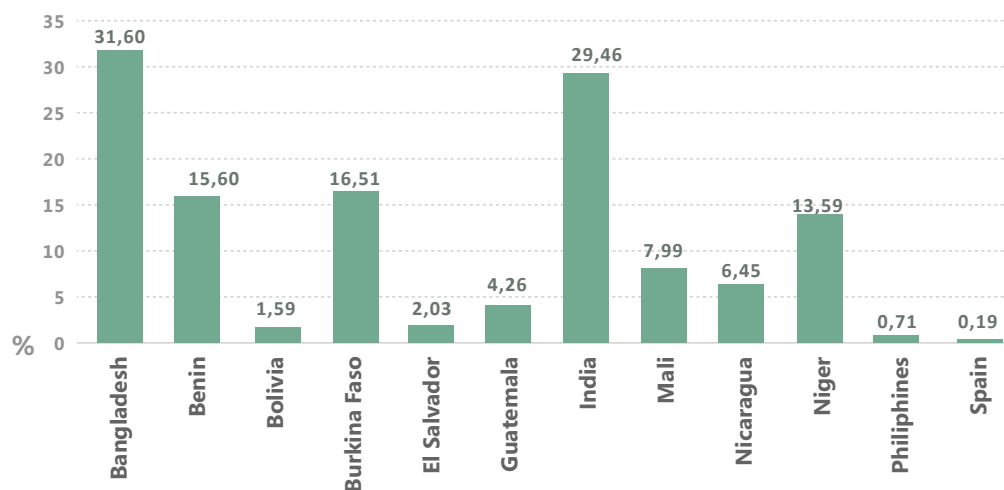
While there has been a gradual return to school, the transition to the new normal has been unequal. On 23 September 2021, UNESCO reported that 127,959,411 students were affected by total or partial school closures, which represents 7.3% of the total number of enrolled children, and 17 closures at a national level.

### Status of children's schooling in the past 6 months

**Although the majority of the children in the study were able to continue studying through various modes, only 45% of them said that they were able to attend school, while nearly 25% reported that studying from home was their only option.**

**Worse, the study revealed that 1 In 10 child participants could not continue school due to a number of reasons.**

**Graph 1. Children who were not able to continue their studies by country (%)**



- The data from this study (see Table 3) shows that in the six months prior to the survey carried out by Educo, 45.49% of children had been to school, followed by those who had only studied from home and those who had mixed methods. Overall, and including the three methods, 85.36% have continued studying in some way, but studying only from home was still the only option for 24.67% of the students.
- Those living in Nicaragua, Mali and Spain have been more likely to attend school, either because there have been no school closures or because the duration of school closures has not been as long. In general, those living in Nicaragua, a country that has never officially closed its schools, have had a greater chance (more than twice the average) of continuing with face-to-face classes in the six months prior to the survey
- Given the school closure situation, studying from home has been a very relevant option in Bolivia, Guatemala and the Philippines.
- Combining the school with other alternative methods has been particularly relevant in El Salvador, Guatemala and India.

#### Percentage of children who were unable to attend school, by country:

- Overall, about 1 in 10 children (11%) had not been able to study during the pandemic, specifically during six months prior to the survey. Girls, and those aged 6-11, have a slightly higher percentage. Refer to Graph 1 for specific country information. It has particularly affected those **living in India and Bangladesh** (three times the average) and those **aged between 12 and 18**.
- When analysed by age, Burkina Faso also appears as a place with significant restrictions to continuing studies.

#### Reasons for not wanting to continue studying:

**School closures and lack of access to proper digital tools and internet access were cited by children as key barriers to continuing their education.**



### School closures and lack of access to adequate digital tools:

- About 67% of those who were unable to study cited school closures and the fact that the alternatives that were available did not fit their possibilities or there were no options. School closures have been a particular cause for not studying in Bangladesh, India and Burkina Faso. **(See table 2 below for quick reference. See Table 7 to view the same in the full technical report.)**
- **In Bangladesh, school closure, with no other options to take advantage of, has been identified as the main reason for not continuing their studies, four times more than the average. Living in India and Burkina Faso also greatly influences the likelihood of not studying for this reason (see Table 8 in the full technical report).**
- Not having equipment, or not having enough at home, the equipment available not being adequate enough, difficulties accessing the Internet, and not having sufficient financial resources, were mentioned among the reasons for not being able to study online or to take advantage of other alternatives.

### Did not want to continue studying

- There were those who have not wished to continue studying by choice (11.23%), with higher numbers than average in Benin, India and Nicaragua; it is also more relevant for boys and those aged 12-18.
- The analysis of the reasons why they did not want to continue studying includes disinterest in school and in studies in general, they did not feel encouraged to study. It also includes school failure, believing that one does not have sufficient capacity or memory, failing in exams, not understanding the subjects.



### Parents decided not to send them to school

- Some of the reasons cited include: safety/fear of COVID-19, getting sick and making the family sick; helping the family at home, in the field or being able to work; because of economic problems; lack of support for education, disinterest of the family.

### Already stopped schooling before the pandemic

A few children (6%) said that they have not studied even before the pandemic.

Why have you not been able to study at all?							
Answers	% of total	% of responses for each sex			% of responses for each age group		
		Girls	Children	NR	6-11	12-18	Other ages
Schools closed and there was no other way to continue studying.	67,25	68,79	65,85	-	71,18	66,85	36,67
Comments on this situation							
Closed schools with no other options; lack of technological resources, basically mobile; poverty, lack of economic resources; lack of support from family or school; disinterest.							
I didn't want to continue studying	11,23	8,79	13,76	50,00	5,56	13,00	33,33
Why didn't you want to continue studying?							
Disinterest in school and in studies in general, discouragement, rebelliousness; school failure: believing that one does not have sufficient ability or memory, failing exams, not understanding the subjects; poverty or lack of economic resources; lack of Internet or device to receive online classes; by choice; drug-related situation; fear of going to school; closed schools; lack of family support; marriage; need to go out to work.							
Before the pandemic I was no longer studying	7,06	6,37	7,62	50,00	5,90	7,33	13,33
Why didn't you study?							
Poverty or lack of economic resources; lack of interest in school or studies in general; lack of support or interest from the family to study and even opposition to it; children who work; lack of internet connection; not understanding online classes; terrorist attacks or wars.							
Dad, mom, or another adult decided not to send me to school.	6,02	7,25	4,67	-	6,60	5,86	3,33
Why did they decide not to send you to school?							
For safety/fear of COVID-19, getting sick and making the family sick; helping the family at home, in the field or being able to work; because of economic problems; lack of support for education, disinterest of the family.							
Another answer	5,44	6,59	4,18	-	7,64	4,21	6,67
Summary of Other Responses							
Not enrolled before; lack of technological resources in rural areas; lack of financial resources and need to work to support family; not yet of age; health problems; pregnancy/marriage; lack of family support due to work.							
I don't understand or prefer not to answer	3,01	2,20	3,93	-	3,13	2,75	6,67
Total	100,01	99,99	100,01	100	100,01	100	100



**I am in the rural area. Due to lockdown, no vehicles and no network, too, to attend online class properly.**

**Girl child from India**

Educo's 2020 study *School is closed, but learning is not!* found that, above all, children missed being able to "go to school" and "see my friends". These responses were the same when the data were analysed by age or gender and showed the great concern that children had for their relational wellbeing during the pandemic.

This is in line with a short list of repercussions drawn up by UNESCO, which includes effects on learning, nutrition, protection, etc., but also warns that "school closures increase social isolation, since schools are centres of social activity and human interaction. When schools close, many children and young people lose social contact, which is essential for learning and development".

Non-attendance and dropping out of school are multi-causal problems that are very difficult to reverse and a health emergency, such as the one we are facing due to COVID-19, often has a high impact in aggravating them further. In August 2020, UNESCO estimated that "some 24 million students at all levels, from preschool to university, were at risk of not returning to school. Of these, 10.9 million were in primary and secondary education and, of these, 5.2 million were girls. The largest proportion of potential dropouts (almost half) were in South and West Asia (5.9 million) and sub-Saharan Africa (5.3 million)".







#### Preference for studying in school vs. other modalities:

**There is a clear preference for studying in school, with over 80% saying that they miss being in school.**

- The study reveals that children prefer to study at school and this is true for girls and boys, and all different ages.
- School is preferred because it allows them to learn more and better, they value the relationships (between peers and with teachers), the opportunity to play, to have more support for their learning and they were not prepared to substitute it for other alternatives.

- In Bolivia, Guatemala and the Philippines, the desire to study in school is much stronger than the perceptions of children in the other countries consulted
- While most children prefer studying in school, a few children said they prefer to study from home, citing advantages for quality and protecting themselves from COVID-19 as key reasons
- It allows them to have more time for themselves and for their families and is an opportunity to use and enjoy technology. From the type of answers, it is likely that they were those who had the best possibilities to study online (equipment, connection, financial resources) and who also had family support.
- Studying from home is particularly valued in India, Bolivia and El Salvador.
- More than 80% of those who have been partially or completely unable to go to school said they miss it. Girls missed school a bit more and also those in Bolivia, India and Guatemala.

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■ *Parents work, they are both tired when they get home. It is better to study at school.*

**Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Philippines**

### Children's hopes on how their school would look like in the future:

#### Children said they wanted a better school.

Having continued to study in person during the pandemic has influenced their desire for an improved school. According to the responses, the ideal of the school that is constructed (based on the one they have had or the one they wish for) coincides in key aspects such as enjoyment, relationships, play, learning, etc., so that in the end these differences are not so great and this makes action easier.

- Overall, the majority of the children in the study said that they want a better school. When analysed by age, the desire is strongest for children aged between 12 and 18.
- Where there have not been such severe restrictions on attendance, such as in Nicaragua, Benin, Burkina Faso and Mali, there is a greater desire for an improved school and therefore less longing for what was there before the pandemic.
- They have described an improved school in great detail, which includes the following: Better infrastructure, more spaces for learning and playing, emphasis on the quality of the lavatories and they also mention plants, gardens and nature.
- An improved school is a place for learning and enjoyment.
- They wish to regain the learning and pace of study they used to have.
- They would like there to be less students in each class.
- To have the possibility to combine in person learning with online education.

- To have fewer tasks.
- Better quality teachers, who are motivated, who are more cooperative, who treat them better, who are better prepared.
- More and improved technological equipment and more school supplies.
- Better health and sanitary conditions at school, including mental health.
- Better school coexistence (among peers and with teachers).



*To minimize the loss [due to lost years during the pandemic], the government has to emphasize more on education than before.*

**Boy child from Bangladesh**

## Participation during the pandemic

Children's participation, as a right and a principle, should not be affected in emergency situations. The General Observation N°12 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (The right of a child to be listened to) includes that "the participation of children affected by emergencies in the analysis of their situation and future prospects should be encouraged and facilitated. Children's participation helps them to regain control of their lives, contributes to rehabilitation, fosters organisational skills and strengthens a sense of identity".

When we talk about the Right to Participation we do not just put an emphasis on them being able to express themselves, we also emphasise active listening, because without it, it would be impossible

to get to the root of what needs to be changed or improved, or those things we can learn from.

### Views on how they have been able to participate:

**Only 48% of children feel that they have been listened to and taken into account during the pandemic, while 18% said that they have not been listened to, and have not been involved in decision-making.**

- Just over 48% feel they have been listened to and taken into account during the pandemic period. This feeling is strongest in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Bolivia.

**Table 13, How do you feel about your Right to Participation during the pandemic?**

Answers	% of total	% of responses for each sex			% of responses for each age group		
		Girls	Boy	NR	6-11	12-18	Other ages
<b>I have felt listened to and counted on in making decisions.</b>	48,14	49,30	46,77	50,00	48,38	46,81	60,70
<b>Can you give at least one example?</b>							
Participation in the campaign for protection against COVID-19 (they understood the question about what they were able to do during the pandemic); participation in family life; participation in non-school institutions (this survey, NGOs, churches, community, city council, municipality); school participation.							
<b>I have not felt listened to and I have not been involved in decision-making.</b>	18,32	17,95	18,77	17,50	16,25	20,69	12,32
<b>Can you give at least one example?</b>							
Reference to pandemic and health measures and restrictions; there has been distinction of levels of participation; reasons given for non-participation; own decision not to participate; but there is recognition of areas for participation; consequences of non-participation are also identified.							
<b>Another answer</b>	2,89	2,74	3,07	2,50	2,58	3,06	4,11
<b>Summary of Other Responses</b>							
They highlight that participation is unequal in the different areas and by the type of issue to be dealt with; more listening, but less being part of the decisions; lack of spaces/places to participate because of the pandemic; not knowing the right or lack of understanding of it; by choice or believing that they have no ideas; same as always, same as before the pandemic; feeling happy, feeling listened to, sharing in the family; feeling fearful, stressed, worried.							
<b>I don't understand or prefer not to answer</b>	30,64	30,01	31,39	30,00	32,79	29,45	22,87
<b>Total</b>	99,99	100	100	100	100	100,01	100



- However, based on other open responses and opinions, it is clear that there is not as deep an understanding among many children about what this right means in the same way as there is for the right to education.
- They feel they have been involved mainly because of what they have done in relation to the pandemic, and much less so in other areas of their lives. They participated by protecting themselves and their families, by following the measures and encouraging others to do so.
- There are also mentions of decisions in everyday life, but due to the scope of the study it is not possible to assess whether this amounted to real participation.
- The survey for this study is used as an example of participation. Reference is also made to spaces with other NGOs, churches, communities, local governments and in school life, but without specific examples.
- About one-third of children did not understand the question or preferred not to reply, referring to the option “I don’t understand or prefer not to answer” in relation to how they feel about their Right to Participation during the pandemic. This finding may be very revealing of the state of this right among those who have responded to the survey, as a good part of the respondents to the survey are unaware of what participation implies both as a right and as a principle.
- In Bangladesh, Niger and Burkina Faso, they have been more likely to not understand or not want to answer this question than the average
- About 18% of child participants believe that they have not felt listened to and that they have not been counted on to make decisions during the pandemic. Males, and those aged 12-18, have a slightly higher percentage than others.

- Among the examples cited on their views of lack of participation include: not being able to leave their homes; that families, schools and governments have taken measures without asking children and adolescents, that they have not allowed them to give their opinion or have not given them explanations about the reasons behind the measures. This is the only time that children participating in the survey refer to accountability as part of participation.

#### **There are those who think that they have not participated:**

- Generally speaking, boys and those between 12 and 18 years of age are more likely to express this opinion.
- The feeling of non-participation is higher in Benin, India and Mali. The open-ended responses show that these are countries with very strong cultural patterns that make it difficult for children to participate.
- Although they resent not having participated, in their responses they show that they know more about this right, therefore they are able to be more critical.
- They are more critical of having had to follow measures during the pandemic without prior information and without being given the possibility to contribute to sharing and implementing them.
- They complain a lot that they are not listened to and they question cultural patterns.
- Their responses mention key areas for their participation: family, school, community, local government.



- They see the pandemic as a setback for participation, especially in schools.
- They identify negative feelings caused by not participating, they don't like it, it affects their self-esteem.

#### **Improving participation:**

- There was a high frequency of responses saying that they did not know what to answer or that did not say anything at all. A reading has been made from this situation in order to recognise all that needs to be done for the understanding of the right to participation, starting from activating listening even when there are no answers.
- Beyond this finding, there is a whole series of responses that include very valuable proposals referring to participation and agency during the pandemic, participation in the family with simple solutions to activate listening, education involving participation, what they need to do to improve on their behalf to improve their capacities, take advantage of and generate spaces and attitudes of listening among children without discrimination, that participation is also an issue in the public space and that it will influence a better future.
- There has been little mention of the issue of accountability, and this is a very important part of children's right to participation.





# Recommendations

## About the right to education based on the experiences during the pandemic

**As societies, it is imperative that we take advantage of the current spotlight on improving education and integrating the views of children. They are guiding us in a masterful way, they also include what experts in the field recommend, and they have their own valuable interpretations and emphases. To improve would therefore be to educate from the root bearing in mind that:**

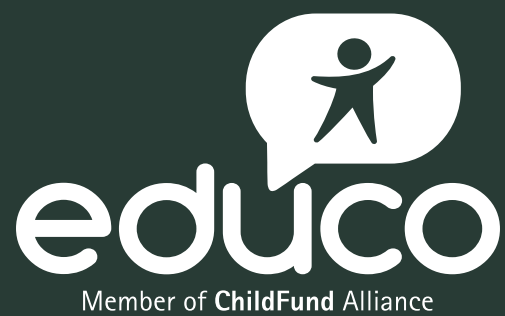
- It's about going back to school, but to an improved school. There is a very strong demand for this, but the 12–18-year-olds are more vocal about it.
- The description of the desired school is very much the same for those who aspire to the same school as before and those who clearly want an improved school.
- This improved school is for improving learning, but also a place for becoming and being, a space of freedom to develop and one where there is leisure and play.
- A school integrated in the digital world, where the use of technology has not substituted the school experience, but adds value to the experience of in-person learning. They should no longer be seen as options that replace each other according to the context, they should coexist and enrich each other.
- That school requires teachers who are more competent, stimulating, empathetic and capable of fostering positive relationships.
- A school where health/hygiene has to continue to be present, not only because of COVID-19, but because they are always necessary issues and there is more awareness about this, including mental health. Children want to educate themselves and others on these issues.



**In a world with so many challenges, where we need everyone to contribute, the failure to encourage the participation of a large part of the population is not only a violation of their rights, but also an invaluable loss of opportunities. It is also necessary to educate from the roots in order to change what prevents children's participation, this cannot be postponed and must take into account that:**

- Children must be supported to exercise their agency, to show society that their participation generates benefits for all, just as during this pandemic, some children have been successful in educating their families and supporting them in understanding and applying prevention measures.
- Child participation must be made visible at all levels. A lot of resources tend to be devoted to creating and promoting what is being done at national and international levels, but the same is not done in the closest and most priority areas (family, school, community). This will then transcend from these spaces to the other spaces.
- If we want to educate from the roots to change the status of children's right to participation, we must go to where they are, and understand and accompany them in order to change what prevents them from participating in what they have reason to value.





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