

PRESS RELEASE:

Educo: Global survey with 8,000 children reveals that 1 in 10 children unable to continue schooling amid COVID-19 crisis

Child rights NGO Educo urges governments to ensure that children are being listened to and provided with opportunities to participate and access quality learning during the pandemic

November 17, 2021 – Educo’s new global survey with nearly 8,000 participants reveals that one in 10 children failed to continue their education during the pandemic, with children citing school closures and lack of access to digital tools and internet access among the major reasons for not studying. Educo’s global report, **The Voices of 8,000 Children: The Right to Education and Participation as Explained by Children**, analyses responses of girls and boys aged 6-18 years old in 12 countries across Asia, Latin America, Africa and Spain.

The study found that while the majority (81%) of children miss school and prefer to study in school, only less than half (45%) of them were able to attend school physically at some point, while about a quarter have no other option but to study remotely.

“An overwhelming number of children are telling us that they miss school and want to continue studying, but they are also struggling as they have limited learning and recreational opportunities and at times do not have the adequate support that they need to carry on”, says Pilar Orenes, Executive Director of Educo.

She adds: “While some children have been able to attend school, the transition to the new normal has been largely unequal. We fear that some of the most disadvantaged children who have had little to no support are forced to drop out of school and others more are becoming disinterested in schooling as they were unable to cope with the new normal.”

Main findings

Overall, about 1 in 10 (11%) had not been able to study by any means within six months prior to the survey. Children surveyed in India and Bangladesh were three times more likely than average not to be able to continue studying and those aged between 12 and 18, especially those living in Burkina Faso (1.5 times the average, when analyzed by age).

Among those who were unable to study, about 67% of those who have not been able to study in any form identified school closures and absence of other alternatives that can accommodate their realities as major reasons for not studying, including a lack of technological resources, poverty, and a lack of family support, while about 11% of the same did not want to continue studying due to various reasons such as disinterest in school, feeling discouraged to study, and lack of resources, among others.

The majority of the children surveyed said that they miss school. In Bolivia, they are just over twice as likely to miss school on average, followed by those living in India and Guatemala.

Given the school closures, studying from home has been a very relevant option in Bolivia (four times the average), as well as Guatemala, and the Philippines, one of the very few countries which have not opened the schools physically for over 18 months.

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.

While nearly half of children feel that they have participated, 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. Children who answered the survey in Benin reported being almost twice as likely not to be listened to than the average, followed by India and Mali. "They are the ones who decide and we do it," a girl from Benin told us about adults; "Because you are a child, you don't know anything," commented an adolescent girl from India.

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.

Children's role during a pandemic

"We know from experience that children are able to contribute even during a pandemic. We have seen children teaching their peers or fundraising for those in need. At the very basic level, we need to listen to them first", Orenes said, adding that while children have been worst affected by the pandemic, they had very little say or participation in the decisions related to their wellbeing.

The report also found that about half (49.19%) of children surveyed said that they want a better school than what they had before: better infrastructure, more spaces for learning and playing, and emphasis on having proper hygiene and sanitation.

"To minimize the loss [due to lost years during the pandemic], the government has to emphasize more on education than before", says a child respondent from Bangladesh. Children added that schools should be better equipped, that new technologies should be present, that there should be more books, materials and games, and that these would help them acquire the skills for a digital world. Children also ask for hygiene materials, and to have access to clean water and vaccinations, and means to overcome the loneliness and isolation they have experienced, and that work be done to improve mental health.

Orenes added: "The most crucial insight from the global report is that COVID-19 has accentuated and deepened the inequalities which already existed, exacerbating the poverty pandemic and increasing the number of children who are dropping out of school, and worse, preventing those out of the school system from returning to school.

Educo is calling on governments and donors to act on the following recommendations:

- Address the digital divide by ensuring that children have access to reliable internet and technological devices, and more importantly that schools have the proper infrastructure and teachers are trained with the demands of the current education context. Mental health services must be available to both students and teachers.
- Intensify efforts to reduce child poverty and expand social safety net programs for the poorest and most disadvantaged children and families in order to prevent dropouts, students' disinterest in studies, and increase enrollment during post COVID-19 recovery. Specific measures need to be taken to reintegrate into the education system those children who have been out of school for a long period of time and the promotion of educational alternatives.
- Ensure that schools are fully prepared as they reopen especially in some of the poorest areas, by strictly implementing health protocols and ensuring access to vaccinations, clean water, and hygiene materials –many of which are already overlooked even before the pandemic.

- When possible, face-to-face education must be prioritized, making the necessary adjustments to maintain sanitary safety measures.
- Provide children avenues so that they can meaningfully participate in the decision-making processes.

Orenes added: “We must give children the attention they deserve, make them visible and listen to them because children as they are the ones most severely affected by the crisis.”

“At this point in the pandemic, we need to use every opportunity to come up with inclusive solutions that reach people excluded from education even before the pandemic. It is an opportunity to progress towards more resilient education models and ones which are better adapted to the learning needs in each country and community.”

— ENDS —

NOTES TO THE EDITOR:

Educo is a global development NGO focused on education and child protection which works in 14 countries carrying out projects which include participation from more than 800,000 children and young people.

*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 in which around 8,000 children from 12 countries across Asia, Latin America, Africa and Spain participated in, 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, was participated in by both girls (53.66%) and boys (45.81%); with 50.73% aged 12-18, 44.75% aged 6-11, and 4.52% of responses were received from other ages.*

In 2020, Educo conducted its first global survey for children, 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 the potential impact of the virus on their family’s health and on their livelihood, and the uncertainty and optimism for their future.