



The voice of 8000 children

The Rights to Protection and to Play and Leisure time post-Covid-19 explained by children from around the world. An exploration from a listening and wellbeing perspective of children and adolescents

Title: The voice of 8000 children The Right to Protection and to Play and Leisure time post-Covid-19 explained by children from around the world. An exploration from a listening and wellbeing perspective of children and adolescents

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Contents

Introduction	5
Methodological note	6
Results	8
Protection during the pandemic	8
Play and leisure time during the pandemic	23
Messages for the most important person during the pandemic	31
Messages for the world	35
Conclusions and Recommendations	40
Bibliography	47



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Introduction

Educo, as a global organisation that works with a focus on children's rights and wellbeing, has activated listening to children during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, we carried out the study [*Schools are shut but learning is on!*](#); at the end of 2021 we presented the research [*The voice of 8000 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*](#), and on this occasion we are presenting the second part of this last study.

The pandemic has been experienced in very different ways in each country. There have also been differences between those who are better placed to deal with it and those who are not. Both socially assigned gender roles and different conceptions of life stages have resulted in different experiences. What has been the experience of children during the pandemic? How do they value the experience? Have they been able to continue their studies? Have they been listened to and taken into account? We have gathered their answers and analysed them. We continue to use this information today to bring the voice of children into the social debate, to influence positive change and to adapt our work as a development organisation.

In this new study we focus on listening to children's perceptions of the protection they have received during the pandemic. We asked whether they have been able to enjoy their right to play and leisure time, and they have been given the possibility to send messages to key figures, and to the world at large, about what they have experienced, how they have experienced it, and how they imagine the future.

Methodological note



Between June and August 2021, the online platform Microsoft Forms was used, due to the context of the pandemic, to distribute a single survey in three different languages (English, Spanish and French) in the countries Educo works in, although this did not prevent us from receiving responses from other locations. Additionally, where possible, Educo staff and partners used alternative channels like interviews via telephone or in person. In these cases, it was necessary to translate the survey into local languages.

Non-probability random sampling based on the convenience sampling technique was applied, and the results are valid for the surveyed population.

Given Educo's programmatic priorities, the topics and the consultation method, the population groups surveyed were children aged 6-11 years old and adolescents and young people aged 12-18 years old, with the possibility of adult accompaniment when necessary, so there could be some bias in this regard.

In this way, we have actively listened to the responses of 7,538 children, adolescents and young people from 12 countries in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas (99.9%).

Table 1. Participation by country

Countries	% of total surveys
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
Others	0.1

More girls have made their voices heard (53.66%) in relation to boys (45.81%).

In relation to the ages, 50.73% were aged between 12 and 18, 44.75% between 6 and 11, and 4.52% were received from ages outside of these ranges.

The results of the online survey were exported to a database, which was then analysed using Power BI. In the first level of analysis, the numerical results are sorted and analysed according to the logic of the survey. Next, the open responses are categorised according to the key words/ideas in order of relevance, and illustrated using textual phrases from the participants.

This is complemented by the use of the “Key influential factors” tool from Power BI, in order to see what had a significant influence on each issue

that was analysed according to the information available (country, age and sex) and compare its relative importance. In the case of the country, the most influential factor is ultimately the social, political and economic contexts in which children live and their governments’ responses to the pandemic.

All the above has been summarised in an [interactive dashboard](#) which enable users to filter more specific information and make other analyses according to their interests and beyond what is summarised in this report.

Results



Protection during the pandemic

- *"We must be careful. We can't stay at home, but we can't forget that the pandemic is not over." (Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Spain).*

Educo defines child protection as "carrying out activities to prevent and respond to violence, exploitation and abuse of children to ensure a

healthy environment free from violence, abuse, exploitation, neglect, discrimination or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment..."¹.

It is a right with a broad presence in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, developed in several General Comments by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which assist with its interpretation and implementation. Beyond this, children's enjoyment of their right to protection still faces major challenges ranging from neglect to overprotection, although

¹ [Child protection: what it involves and what actions are carried out](#), an article from the Educo blog (Cuaderno de valores).

Table 2. Which of the following sentences better expresses how you feel about your right to be protected and live without violence (be looked after, well treated)?

Responses	% of the total	% of responses for each gender			% of responses for each age group		
		Female gender	Male gender	NR	6-11 years old	12-18 years old	Other ages
I feel more protected than before the pandemic	45,53	46,87	43,99	42,50	47,79	44,53	34,31
I feel protected in the same way as before the pandemic	26,88	25,88	27,98	32,50	26,12	27,48	27,57
I feel less protected now than before the pandemic	12,85	12,76	13,00	10,00	9,78	14,83	21,11
I don't understand the question or prefer not to reply.	14,74	14,49	15,03	15,00	16,31	13,15	17,01
Total	100	100	100	100	100	99,99	100

there have been notable advances. What happens to this right when there is a pandemic? Children explain their experiences to us in the report and advise us about how we can continue to improve.

Perception of the level of protection

Child protection is one of the most important themes during an emergency. Crises often abruptly and profoundly change children's daily routines, increasing pre-existing and/or creating new risks, increasing vulnerability and affecting perceptions of protection. The Alliance for the Protection of Children and Adolescents in Humanitarian Action warns that "Infectious diseases such as COVID-19 can disrupt the environments that children and adolescents grow up and develop in. Changes that destabilise families, friendships, daily routines

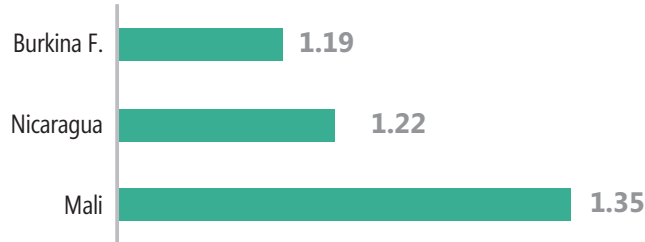
and the community in general, and have negative consequences on wellbeing, development and child protection. In addition, the same measures adopted to prevent and control the transmission of COVID-19 may carry protection risks for children and adolescents. The quarantine and isolation measures in the home, at facilities or in specific areas can negatively affect children and their families"². This has been verified in this research, which shows that the current pandemic has strongly influenced the perception of protection. Let's analyse the responses we have received.

² [Technical note: Child protection during the coronavirus pandemic](#) issued by the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.

I feel more protected than before the pandemic

- *"I feel more protected because I am at home and I am surrounded by people who worry about me". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Bangladesh.*
- *"When coronavirus came along, our parents looked after us better". Boy aged 6-11 years old, Benin.*
- *"Because everything is different because we can't go out whenever we want, we feel locked in, but it's to keep us protected". Girl aged 6-11 years old, Bolivia.*
- *"Because we wear masks and wash our hands all the time". Boy aged 6-11 years old, Burkina Faso.*
- *"I don't feel harassed or threatened by the gang members because they are always watching what we do at school". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, El Salvador.*
- *"Because now we are not with the older children the playground who used to pick on us". Girl aged 6-11 years old, Spain.*
- *"Less bullying at school, I feel protected at home and there is less risk of accidents on the way to school". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Philippines.*
- *"Because we have to stay inside". Boy aged 6-11 years old, Guatemala.*
- *"Because my parents are more worried about protecting me because of the coronavirus, for example, they often say: "Wash your hands", "Don't go out", etc.". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Spain.*
- *"I know about the measures I have to take in order to protect me from illnesses". Girl aged 6-11 years old, Mali.*
- *"Parents and teachers have made an effort to take better care of us and to avoid (the) illness". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Nicaragua.*
- *"Because now we clean our classroom and our hands before class". Boy aged 6-11 years old, Niger.*

Graph 1. Key influencing factors for those who felt more protected than before the pandemic compared to the average



Among those who responded to the survey, 45.53% felt more protected than before the pandemic, but, when analysing their responses, it is clear that this was related to protection from coronavirus infection while, to a much lesser extent, there were mentions of reduced risk of violence due to not going out or going to school. In other words, there is a vision more related to care specific to the pandemic and less to protection in its broadest sense and its implications for the experience of rights and wellbeing, which is evidently influenced by the extraordinary situation.

Therefore, it is not a perception of better protection through reduced violence against children or other profound changes, but a feeling of greater security by being at home during an extraordinary event. In many cases, it even includes children living in an environment where adults are normally concerned about their safety and security and/or the pandemic has been an opportunity for further improvement, especially in contexts with high levels of social violence.

The feeling of more protection is maintained in the data disaggregated by sex and age. The results show that girls and those aged 6-11 years old feel a bit more protected than boys and adolescents and young people. This has probably been influenced by traditional parenting practices, which include taking extra care of



these population groups as they are considered more vulnerable.

Overall, those living in Mali, Nicaragua and Burkina Faso have expressed in greater proportion the feeling of more protection. This is maintained regardless of sex or age and shows only slight variations in the order of the three countries³.

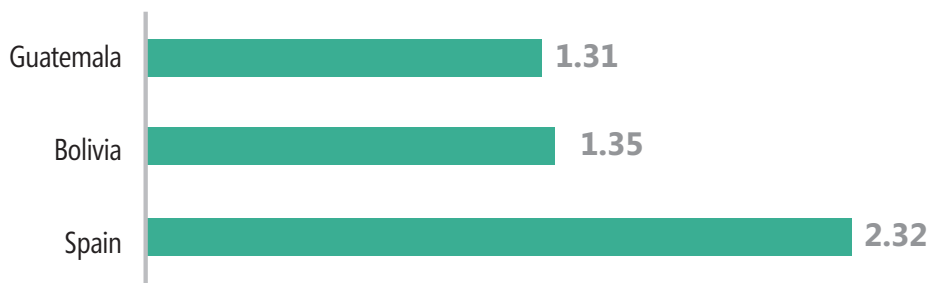
³ These have been calculated on the basis of overall percentage, by sex and by age, but the graphs included in this report only refer to the overall values and where relevant are specified by sex and age in the text. The values shown here indicate how these factors behave in relation to the average. Example: Mali, 1.35; means that living in Mali makes children 1.35 times more likely to report feeling more protected during the pandemic.

I feel protected in the same way as before the pandemic

- *"As we all know, in recent times Bangladesh is facing the worst situation when it comes to female harassment. Now there is an important question for us: 'Are we really safe?'"*. Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Bangladesh.
- *"At school I felt protected and now at home my mother and my sister protect me"*. Boy aged 6-11 years old, Bolivia.
- *"Because violence is still present even during the pandemic"*. Female participant, El Salvador.
- *"Because the pandemic has been a blow to healthcare, but not to national criminality. Violence (both domestic and at school) is the same as before the pandemic. A virus is not going to put a stop to bullying or abuse"*. Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Spain.
- *"My parents protect me as always, with or without the pandemic"*. Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Philippines.
- *"Because at secondary school I felt protected, as I do at home because in both places there are trustworthy people"*. Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Guatemala.
- *"Before the pandemic I spent more time with my friends and during the pandemic I have also spent time with my family and both are places or people that are safe for me"*. Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, India.
- *"With my mask and handwashing, I feel equally safe"*. Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Mali.
- *"Because I have always been guided on the issue of violence and to know my rights"*. Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Nicaragua.



Graph 2. Key influencing factors for those who felt as protected as they did before the pandemic compared to the average



The feeling of being **equally protected (26.88% of the total)** is based on the fact that the pandemic has not led to changes in the care provided by the family or in the levels of violence that existed before. In other words, violence as an underlying condition is the same. The participants acknowledge that they have had to implement measures to protect themselves from COVID-19, but they do not see these changes as an improvement to their protection as such.

Here, in contrast to those who feel more protected, slightly more men and older people have chosen the “equally protected” option. It is also clear from

their responses that this group is more aware of the meaning of the right to protection, beyond care related to the pandemic, and that they come from backgrounds where they have mostly felt protected all their lives. However, in many cases they highlight that they live in places with high levels of social violence. The important role they give to their immediate environment for their protection (family, school) is also evident.

In general, those living in Spain, Bolivia and Guatemala reported feeling more protected than those living in other countries.

I feel less protected now than before the pandemic

- *"Sexual abuse in the home". Male participant, Bangladesh.*
- *"My parents go to the field and leave me with my younger brother at home". Boy aged 6-11 years old, Benin.*
- *"Because I notice that my rights are violated more (in my school only those who have a good income can attend classes)". Adolescent girl, 12-18 years old, Bolivia.*
- *"Because you have to live with new ways of life, behaviour, etc.". Boy aged 6-11 years old, Burkina Faso.*
- *"Because of what we are experiencing due to COVID, it's scary to go out on the streets, but at the same time we have to do it". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, El Salvador.*
- *"I'm scared to go out in the street because the virus is everywhere". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Guatemala.*
- *"My father always drinks. That's why!" Girl aged 6-11 years old, India.*
- *"Because sometimes we don't have enough money to buy masks and disinfectant, and school doesn't provide them". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Nicaragua.*
- *"With the arrival of Covid we are no longer safe, we are afraid and insecurity in our region is strong". Boy aged 6-11 years old, Niger.*
- *"The Philippine government's militarised response to the pandemic gives the police and other law enforcement agencies excuses to harass ordinary people". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Philippines.*
- *"There is fear and restrictions on freedoms". Adolescent girl, Spain.*

12.85% of all children said that they feel less protected now than before the pandemic. Living in Bangladesh, Niger or Benin plays an important role, and this is also true if the data is analysed by gender and age, with only slight variations in the order.

This feeling is mostly justified by fear of COVID - fear of getting sick and fear of the family getting sick - followed by references to mental health (depression,

anxiety, fear in general). To a lesser extent, poverty is cited (lack of resources to buy the necessary products to protect themselves causing greater lack of protection); being alone at home or caring for other children; living away from their parents; violence at home (arguments, shouting, hitting, abuse, alcoholism); violence outside the home (crime, robbery, femicide); police violence; and more time on the Internet.

Graph 3. Key influencing factors for those who felt less protected than before the pandemic compared to the average



There were some references to situations of violence experienced at this stage. In these cases, the opportunity to report was provided using a safe channel that Educo has as part of its Child Safeguarding Policy.

In the responses, it is clear that many children already lived in violent contexts before the pandemic and that it has only made the situation worse. They also show an understanding of the right to protection beyond the care received to protect themselves from the virus, making children more critical of their situation.

Key people for protection

Families and their members have a very important role in the perception of protection by children. The study [Small Voices Big Dreams 2019. Violence against children explained by children](#), carried out by the network ChildFund Alliance which Educo belongs to, included in its most important findings that “children clearly identify their mothers as the people who protect children the most, representing 86.4%, and to a somewhat lesser extent fathers. Other agents of protection, although they are seen as such by a smaller number of children surveyed, include other family members such as uncles and aunts or grandparents and, representing less than 50%, teachers and the police or the military”.

This finding has been ratified by this research and we highlight that the value of the family in



protecting children has been accentuated during the pandemic. Let's look at the results from the voices of the children surveyed.

Table 3. Who has been concerned with keeping you protected and free from violence during the pandemic?

Responses	% of the total	% of responses for each gender			% of responses for each age group		
		Female gender	Male gender	NR	6-11 years old	12-18 years old	Other ages
My mother, father or other people I live with	79,49	81,06	77,58	85,00	83,16	77,30	67,74
My friends	1,17	1,16	1,16	2,50	0,74	1,31	3,81
Government authorities	6,83	5,78	8,14	0,00	5,37	7,77	10,85
Teachers or other staff from my school	2,69	2,74	2,66	0,00	3,05	2,51	1,17
People who work in health services (doctors, nurses, etc.)	1,96	2,00	1,94	0,00	1,13	2,54	3,81
Leaders from my community or the place I live in	0,68	0,77%	0,58	0,00	0,47	0,73	2,05
Other people	1,50	1,46	1,53	2,50	0,77%	2,01	2,93
No one has been concerned with protecting me	0,99	0,72	1,30	2,50	0,42	1,26	3,81
I don't understand the question or prefer not to reply	4,68	4,30	5,10	7,50	4,89	4,58	3,81
Total	99,99	99,99	99,99	100	100	100,01	99,98



Parents or other people they live with are the ones who have been most concerned about protecting children

- *"For my protection, my father and mother buy health-related supplies from the market such as masks, soap, hand sanitiser, etc."*. Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Bangladesh.
- *"They give me advice about respecting the contention measures"*. Boy aged 6-11 years old, Benin.
- *"Through dialogue, asking me if there is anything wrong, if I feel well"*. Adolescent girl, 12-18 years old, Bolivia.
- *"They don't let me go out in the street unless I have to, they always give me hand sanitiser and a mask, they remind me every time I go to school"*. Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, El Salvador.
- *"Teach me to protect myself and to tell them things so that they can help me if necessary"*. Girl aged 6-11 years old, Spain.
- *"They have told me how bad COVID-19 is, explained the protective measures, helped me with homework, played with me and treated us well"*. Girl aged 6-11 years old, Guatemala.
- *"My mother was always there to listen to us and provide us with food and other things we needed. Appa would go out to look for work and earn money"*. Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, India.
- *"Advising me to always respect the containment measures and also to do my homework"*. Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Mali.
- *"In relation to the pandemic that I always wear a mask and in relation to violence that if someone mistreats me I have to speak out and not keep quiet"*. Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Nicaragua.
- *"Giving me advice about protection"*. Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Niger.

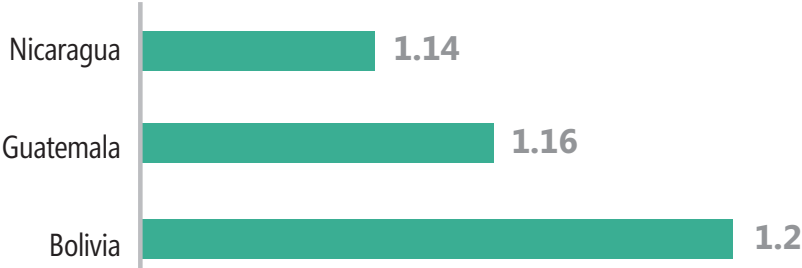
Family members are the main agents of protection by a very wide margin (79.49% of the total number of participants). This is true even if the data are analysed by sex and age. Girls and those aged 6-11 years old stand out from the overall average and, as mentioned above, a gender and age-appropriate conception of care by parents appears to be a factor.

Similarly, the rationale for their responses focuses on motivations driven by the pandemic situation rather than by a conception of protection in its broadest sense. Above all, care to protect against COVID is mentioned and, in general, advice on mask use, hand washing, risk management; explanations about COVID and not letting them

out to protect them from the disease; followed by food provision and ways to take care of health, education, love/caring; and being together/looking out for each other. To a lesser extent, playing and talking.

Beyond the large majority who identified the response option "parent or other person I live with", living in Bolivia, Guatemala and Nicaragua had a higher influence on this response than average, although these are countries that have implemented very different containment measures. This also continues to be the case when the data are analysed by sex and age, although living in the Philippines is also relevant for males and when the data are disaggregated by age.

Graph 4. Key influencing factors that make the key protective figure the mother, father or other people they live with (compared to the average)



Protective role of government authorities	
■	<i>"Provide food and hygiene materials for security during the COVID-19 period". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Bangladesh.</i>
■	<i>"Contention measures: masks, handwashing, maintaining a distance of 1m". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Benin.</i>
■	<i>"Curfew, contention measures, handwashing". Boy aged 6-11 years old, Burkina Faso.</i>
■	<i>"Handling the Protocols". Girl aged 6-11 years old, El Salvador.</i>
■	<i>"Implementing rules to try and stop you from getting it". Girl aged 6-11 years old, Spain.</i>
■	<i>"Providing vaccines". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Philippines.</i>

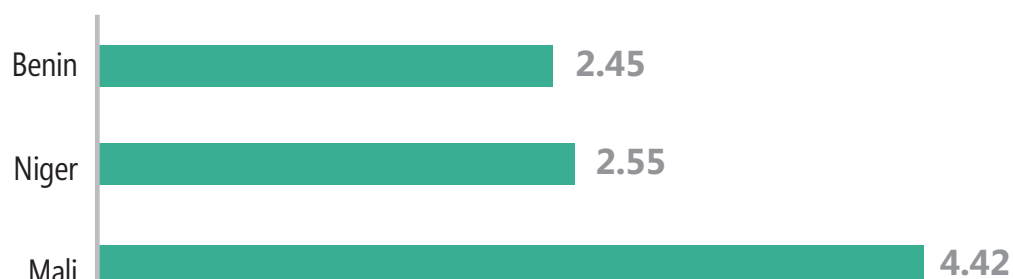
- *“They have put in place rules to prevent contagion, such as masks, social distancing and antibacterial gel”.* Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Guatemala.
- *“The Government has given us a very good way to be safe from COVID-19. Although everyone has helped me, I think the government is the best option”.* Boy aged 6-11 years old, India.
- *“Raised awareness through television and the radio”.* Participant in Mali.
- *“Closed schools and borders, implemented quarantine”.* Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Niger.

Undoubtedly, because of the nature of a pandemic, government authorities have had to be very active in declaring and managing the measures taken. The successes and failures are still part of daily life while this report is being prepared and a more realistic view of them will be possible in the future. However, children have expressed themselves and, although the percentage for this option is far behind that of families, it is the government authorities that are identified in second place as key protection figures for 6.83% of the total number of participants. Children and those aged 12-18 are the population groups that most value the work of government authorities.

The reasons given are, first of all, the implementation of preventive measures against COVID (lockdown, school closures, social distancing, etc.), provision of resources (masks, gel, soap), pandemic awareness campaigns and, to a much lesser extent, the provision of access to vaccines.

Living in Mali, Niger and Benin has had the most influence on identifying the government as a protection figure. When the data is disaggregated by sex and age, this trend remains broadly unchanged.

Graph 5. Key influencing factors that make government authorities the key protection figure (compared to the average)



The role of other key figures

- **Friends:** *“Keeping up with me on a daily basis and always trying to find out how I’m doing”*. Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Spain.
- **Teachers or other staff from my school:** *“They taught us about prevention in this pandemic”*. Girl aged 6-11 years old, Benin.
- **People who work in health services (doctors, nurses, etc.):** *“They came to our houses to see if we had any Covid symptoms, they took our temperature and if we were ill they gave us medicine for free”*. Boy aged 6-11 years old, Bolivia.
- **Leaders from my community or the place I live in:** *“We have a committee in our area which works to protect us”*. Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Bangladesh.
- **Other people:** *“Inhijambia Association, they have guided me to improve my self-esteem and to defend myself in a violent situation”*. Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Nicaragua.

The values assigned to “My friends”, “Teachers or other people from my school”, “People from the health service (doctors, nurses, etc.)” and “Leaders from my community or where I live” are less than 3% in most of the responses in each case. This could be explained by the aforementioned view of protection in a sense limited to COVID -related care, and also

by the very nature of restrictive, imposed or self-imposed measures, which has meant that engaging with these key figures has not been easy.

In addition, until the survey was conducted, very few children had been vaccinated and the implementation of measures against the pandemic had been highly



centralised by the authorities at the highest level and had relied too little on community structures to be rated highly.

There was also the possibility of identifying other key persons, and the respondents mainly referred to NGOs and associations that provide accompaniment

during the pandemic and give talks on violence and how to avoid it. There is also a notable mention of grandparents and extended family and caregivers during the pandemic, despite the fact that there was another response option where these figures could have been included. The number of mentions did not exceed 2.5% of the responses in any case.

No one has been concerned with protecting them

- *"There are no men in our house during the day, because my father and mother work in the tea garden". Boy aged 6-11 years old, Bangladesh.*
- *"Report my stepfather because he uses psychological violence against my mother and I don't like it, but my mother doesn't want to leave him". Adolescent girl, 12-18 years old, Bolivia.*
- *"I haven't experienced violence during the pandemic". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Philippines.*
- *"My father, he drinks a lot". Girl aged 6-11 years old, Guatemala.*
- *"I am safe, I am a mature girl". Female participant, India.*
- *"Nobody looks after me". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, India.*
- *"My family has not worried about me, they haven't taken responsibility, since they went to leave me at Casa Alianza I have been alone. My family should have taken care of my basic needs". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Nicaragua.*
- *"Nobody asks me how I am, how I feel and what I need". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Nicaragua*

This was a response option chosen by only 0.99% of participants, but because of its implications we will take a moment to analyse it.

Those who do not feel comfortable with the binary sexual classification system are the population group that has chosen this answer the most (2.50%). Boys and those aged 12-18 years old mention this lack of concern for their protection. In these cases, gender- and age-appropriate care practices must also be having an influence.

Although data availability did not allow for all calculations on key influencing factors to be made overall, it was identified that living in Niger, being of a different age than those prioritised in the study and being from Bangladesh were also key factors in saying that no one had been concerned about the protection of boys, with boys being the only population

group that chose this response in a proportion that allowed for the full calculation to be made. In addition, responses from those aged 12-18 showed that being from Niger and Bangladesh was key to feeling that no one cared about their protection.

Lastly, there are suggestions that this care should have existed. It is striking that first of all they note that they have not suffered violence and therefore no one needed to be concerned about their protection; a merely reactive conception of the issue and one that does not see protection as a much broader and more complex right. There are also some who say that there is violence in their surroundings/families, and they give examples such as the existence of alcoholism, psychological and physical violence and they highlight that they have not been protected. To a lesser extent they say that there is no one because the other people work and do not take care of them.



Proposals for being protected and without violence

- *"They should bring more vaccines for children". Boy aged 6-11 years old, Bolivia.*
- *"Yes, the Government should bring more protection teams and that people respect the measures". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Mali.*
- *"That mothers and fathers should worry more about their children, that they should always protect them when the pandemic has passed and talk to them". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Nicaragua.*
- *"If we don't have the vaccine we shouldn't leave the house". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Bangladesh.*
- *"Try and get to know all their rights to fight against violence". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Bangladesh.*
- *"We need more schools for parents so that they can learn too". Girl aged 6-11 years old, Bolivia.*
- *"Children should go to school and also get to know their rights". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Mali.*
- *"Implementation of child protection strategies as national policy and budget allocation". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Bangladesh.*
- *"Local councils with their police should carry out surveillance in remote neighbourhoods like mine and give talks to local parents, raising awareness among families". Girl aged 6-11 years old, Benin.*
- *"More security guards should be put in place and families should be taught to live in peace". Boy aged 6-11 years old, Bolivia.*



20% of the answers were of the type “I can’t think of anything”, “I don’t know”, “I don’t know now”, and “I have no suggestions”. We have to take into account that we are talking about an online survey, which is a bit extensive (especially for younger children), and that it includes different topics, so it does not provide much time for reflection. Later in this document we return to this issue, and elaborate on it, because of the similarity of this question to a later one.

There was also a high number of proposals about being protected from COVID. There are suggestions about protection through habits and protective measures to follow: wearing a mask, washing hands, etc. Vaccinations and the availability of more protective products are also mentioned. Although less frequent, they also mention staying at home.

There is a medium frequency of suggestions about other violence prevention perspectives. A first group mentions training and providing information to parents, teachers, children and communities about violence, its consequences and how to prevent it. The emphasis on mothers and fathers is noteworthy. A second group of suggestions at this level concerns awareness-raising and training on

Table 4. Which of the following sentences best expresses how you feel about your right to play and enjoy leisure time during the pandemic?

Responses	% of the total	% of responses for each gender			% of responses for each age group		
		Female gender	Male gender	NR	6-11 years old	12-18 years old	Other ages
I have been able to play and have enough free time	55,98	55,40	56,68	55,00	60,42	51,86	58,36
I haven't been able to play and have enough free time	33,22	33,79	32,55	32,50	28,64	37,68	28,45
I don't understand the question or prefer not to reply	10,80	10,80	10,77	12,50	10,94	10,46	13,20
Total	100	99,99	100	100	100	100	100,01

children's rights in general for the general including children themselves.

Less common references have been made to stiffer punishments for perpetrators of violence and more police on the streets and in public spaces dedicated to children. There is also talk of putting government measures into practice: building spaces for children to be safe and having resources for psychological support. It is highlighted that going to school protects children and that is why the right to education must be guaranteed. Lastly, there are proposals that call for good communication between people: peace education, teaching values at school, and more love and communication within families.

Very infrequently, situations of violence experienced by the participants themselves or by other children and in the family environment have been reported. There is a small group that offers proposals that are very specific and relevant to their context. Lastly, there are those who say that they do not propose anything because they do not see violence in their surroundings.

Play and leisure time during the pandemic

■ ***“Parents should have quality time with children. The adult must ensure the right to play and enjoy leisure time, which is most important for children’s development”.*** Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Bangladesh.

Article 31 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* states that “States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age

of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts”.

This right is extended in the “General Comment No. 17 (2013) on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreation, cultural life and the arts”. In this observation, play is defined as “any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves; it takes place wherever and whenever the opportunity arises”.

The importance of this right throughout life is such that it has been argued that “Playing on their own without adult control is the highest cultural form a child touches. Children who have been able to play well and for lengthy periods will be better adults”.⁴

However, it is among the least understood, claimed and supported of all the rights recognised by the convention. Likewise, today’s society, marked by the concentration of the population in large cities and the consequent loss or dehumanisation of public space, does little to help exercise the right to play. Children playing freely and outside their homes are increasingly rare and, when they do, they are perceived to be engaged in an activity that is a waste of time and/or a situation that puts their protection at risk. Therefore, with all that the pandemic has caused in terms of restrictions on movement, reduced interactions and enjoyment of spaces outside their homes, it was vital to listen to children about this issue and learn from them.

Perception of the enjoyment of play and having leisure time

“A round of applause for all those children who use a space in their homes to turn it into a fun game. A huge round of applause”. This was said by a Bolivian boy, in reference to his heroes during the pandemic,

⁴ [Interview with Francesco Tonucci: Children learn more by playing.](#)

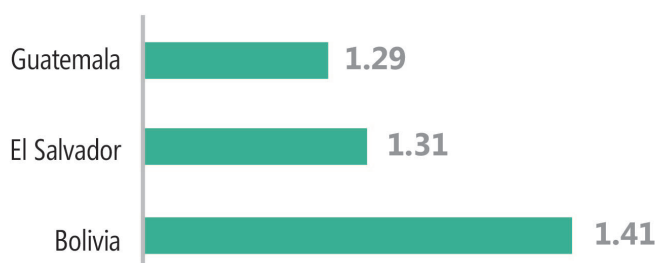
who participated in the Educo study “Schools are shut but learning is on!”, carried out in 2020. In this new study, we have tried to activate our listening in depth regarding how children have experienced

the right to play during the pandemic and whether or not they have had enough leisure time.

I have been able to play and have enough leisure time

- *“Because there is less pressure to study, I have enough time to play and enjoy myself”.* Girl aged 6-11 years old, Bangladesh.
- *“To save myself from boredom”.* Boy from Benin.
- *“There is a lot of free time now that there is no school and I also learned to knit and do handicrafts, I think they are my favourite pastimes”.* Adolescent girl, 12-18 years old, Bolivia.
- *“I was freer at home than at school”.* Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Burkina Faso.
- *“I have been more organised with my studies in order to have free time to play”.* Girl aged 6-11 years old, El Salvador.
- *“I have done lots of things and games with my parents when we were stuck at home, it’s been good”.* Boy aged 6-11 years old, Spain.
- *“It is important to avoid stress and disappointment”.* Girl from the Philippines.
- *“In the mornings after class I help clean and in the afternoon, I have free time”.* Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Guatemala.
- *“I loved playing indoor games... And spending lots of time with my family... Father and mother devoted a lot of time to enjoy with us”.* Adolescent aged 12-18 years old, India.
- *“At home I played, after spending time with my siblings when there was no school”.* Boy aged 6-11 years old, Mali.
- *“Because when I have finished my tasks I have the right to play and also after finishing my chores in the home”.* Girl aged 6-11 years old, Nicaragua.
- *“Because it’s my right to play to be better”.* Girl aged 6-11 years old, Niger.

Graph 6. Key influencing factors for being able to play and having enough leisure time (compared to the average)



55.98% of those who replied to the survey have chosen this option, particularly because schools have been totally or partially closed and/or there have been online classes and this allows for more time at home. There has also been less academic pressure, less exams and less schoolwork, more time with siblings/family, new games because of the obligation to stay at home, and family games have returned; followed by play as a way of avoiding boredom or distracting themselves and de-stressing, enjoying having more opportunities to organise their own time, being able to “use” their time according to their interests and obligations. To a lesser extent, the response has been justified by a change in habits due to having to be indoors or alone at home.

Reading the children’s responses reveals that playing and having leisure time has often been possible because during the pandemic they have stopped doing things that were unavoidable before. Play and leisure time are an alternative to boredom, i.e. not a right that is simply enjoyed without having to give up/stop doing other things/ occupy one’s time. Above all, less studying (less time at school and at home) is highlighted as the main factor contributing to more leisure time and more play during the pandemic.

The above arguments also point to a profile of children who generally feel good and are protected/

cared for, and suggest that this might imply the possibility of sufficient play and leisure time. Using the Power BI *decomposition tree* (or hierarchy) tool, we verified whether or not this presumption was true or not and we have discovered that 63.47% of children who feel more or equally protected have said they have been able to play and have enough leisure time, making it evident that there is a relationship between the fulfilment of both rights.

Boys and those aged 6-11 years old are the most likely to have been able to play and have enough leisure time. The reasons for this must be associated with gender roles assigned to girls in relation to the home/care of the family and the fact that as children grow older, they take on greater responsibilities for themselves and the members of their household, and there is less room for play.

Overall, in Bolivia, El Salvador and Guatemala they have been able to play and have enough leisure time more than the other countries. This stays the same when the data are analysed only for girls and for those aged 6-11 years old. In the case of boys, the Philippines also appears as a good place to enjoy this right; as well as being from the Philippines and Spain for those aged 12-18 years old.



I haven't been able to play and have enough leisure time

- *"My parents were too poor to support the survival of all the family members. I have two different jobs, as a result I have been unable to play and I have not enjoyed enough leisure time". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Bangladesh.*
- *"The ban on meetings limited our games and time for fun". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Benin.*
- *"The teachers give me a lot of homework and I feel very bad about that because it's just copying and I don't understand anything, and I feel annoyed by the way the teachers treat me, even though my mother tries to help me all the time". Girl aged 6-11 years old, Bolivia.*
- *"Because I became a seller with a plate on my head". Girl aged 6-11 years old, Burkina Faso.*
- *"The lockdown during the most difficult part of the pandemic damaged us emotionally. Being at home it is not the same as at school, because there is not much space for recreation". Girl aged 6-11 years old, El Salvador.*
- *"It's clear: they have forbidden me to do so". Girl aged 6-11 years old, Spain.*

■ *"Children used to be happy and play anywhere, now it's just inside the house". Girl aged 6-11 years old, Philippines.*

■ *"I don't have enough time for my chores and I also have to work. But I play once a week". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Guatemala.*

■ *"I miss my school, my classmates and the fun. Playing with my siblings is not enough". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, India.*

■ *"I was too scared of this disease". Girl aged 6-11 years old, Mali.*

■ *"I study in the morning and in the afternoon, I receive extra tutoring. At the weekend, they don't let me out in the streets". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Nicaragua.*

■ *"We don't play because we don't go near each other. Even during break time, we eat and go into the classroom". Boy aged 6-11 years old, Niger.*





33.22% of those who responded to the survey stated that they were unable to play and have enough leisure time during the pandemic. They mainly cite an increase in school work due to online classes, homework/tasks, not being able to go out/not being able to see friends, being at home without being able to do daily activities outside: sports, meetings, going out, visiting parks, etc.

In their responses, there are differences between play and free time. They also contrast playing what each person enjoys or chooses with not being able to do what they want to do, which shows that they have a clearer conception of what this right entails. Family time is valued, but they miss the enjoyment of friendships. Similarly, fear of COVID (for themselves and their family), fear of getting sick and of others getting sick, and restrictions due to lockdown are also mentioned often. All this prevents them from going out to play.

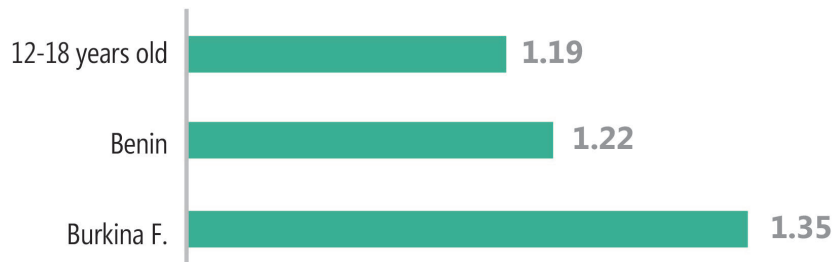
This is followed by a mention of having to work/help out at home. Many children have collaborated with family chores inside and outside the home. There are those who have accompanied their parents with their work or have worked themselves. To a lesser extent, there is talk of stress/agitation/boredom,

emotions that have prevented enjoying play even when there is time to do so.

Therefore, we are dealing with a profile of children who are less content with the situation, who live in more difficult material and relational wellbeing conditions, and who yearn much more to return fully to spaces outside their homes, including school as a place for recreation. As a result, they feel that they have not been able to play or have enough leisure time according to their expectations and what is rightfully theirs. We have found that of the total who feel less protected, 51% have also been unable to play and have enough leisure time, so again the interdependence between rights is evident.

Finally, children in Burkina Faso, regardless of age and sex, are the ones who have reported the highest rate of not having been able to enjoy the right to play and have leisure time, followed by those living in Benin aged 12-18 years old. Being from Mali and aged 12-18 years old has also been an impediment for this right in relation to the others who have participated in the study.

Graph 7. Key influencing factors for not being able to play and having enough leisure time (compared to average)



Imagining what you would like your right to play and leisure time to be like

- *"I would like to have leisure time every day even during the pandemic. Not too long, but at least long enough so that I'm not always thinking about school. And I think that in order for this to be possible, schools should not give so much homework to keep us so busy, even after the many hours of classes we have to have. And that our teachers want us to advance and do it in class time and not as part of the homework". Adolescent girl, 12-18 years old, Bolivia.*
- *"Parents should have quality time with children. The adult must ensure the right to play and enjoy leisure time, which is most important for children's development". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Bangladesh.*



■ *"That my parents agree to let me go out to play while respecting the restriction measures". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Benin.*

■ *"We have to review the timetable, it is too busy, we don't even have time to distract ourselves". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Burkina Faso.*

■ *"Everyone can play board games at home. You can cultivate a hobby". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, India.*

■ *"I want this right to be guaranteed and for us to play at school". Boy aged 6-11 years old, Niger.*

■ *"That parents recognise that playing is a right, it is my right because it helps my development". Girl aged 6-11 years old, Nicaragua.*

■ *"I would like my right to play to be at least 30 minutes. I say I would be free if they didn't give me too much homework and didn't overcrowd me like a hotel overrun by tourists". Boy aged 6-11 years old, Bolivia.*

■ *"More outdoor spaces to play in, more parks, more fountains, more trees". Boy aged 6-11 years old, Spain.*

■ *"More jobs for our parents so that fewer children work and that way their right to play can be fulfilled". Girl aged 6-11 years old, Bolivia.*



As with the question on proposals for improving the right to protection, when asked about their ideas regarding how they could improve their enjoyment of their right to play and leisure time, the highest frequency of responses included “I don’t know”, “I can’t think of anything”, “No idea”.

At this point, and beyond the above considerations, it is definitely very striking that in the questions asking for proposals on a specific topic, there are always more “non-answers”. Do we need to rethink the content and the way we ask children? Are demands for proposals not commonplace in the relationships of a very significant proportion of children? Are they more often asked closed questions or questions with more or less expected answers without full freedom to express their opinions?

Due to the nature of this study, it is impossible to answer these questions with the information we have at this time. However, it is important to remember that in the study [*The voice of 8000 children. The Right to Education and Participation post-COVID-19 explained by children from around the world. An exploration from a listening and wellbeing perspective of children and adolescents*](#), based on the same survey used for this report, it was concluded about the right to participation that “it is evident that there is not as deep an understanding among many children of what this right means, as there is for the right to education”. Therefore, we may be faced with another confirmation of this conclusion, which shows how much progress still needs to be made on this issue.

Likewise, the medium frequency of responses suggesting having fewer responsibilities and, therefore, more choice, highlights the need to reduce tasks (homework/schoolwork, domestic chores, work), to avoid affecting time spent playing.

Another aspect with medium frequency were proposals that consider living with COVID and its rules, playing safely and incorporating measures to reclaim spaces for play with other children. Emphasis

is also placed on incorporating games at home, as the pandemic has been an opportunity for family board games, reading and online games, and this must continue.

There has been a low frequency of demands for play, a need to play. Play, leisure time and time for oneself are valued as a way of releasing stress, for the sake of mental health and wellbeing. The pandemic has also been a new opportunity to suggest training for parents on rights. Parents are called upon to give freedom and to value free time as their children’s right.

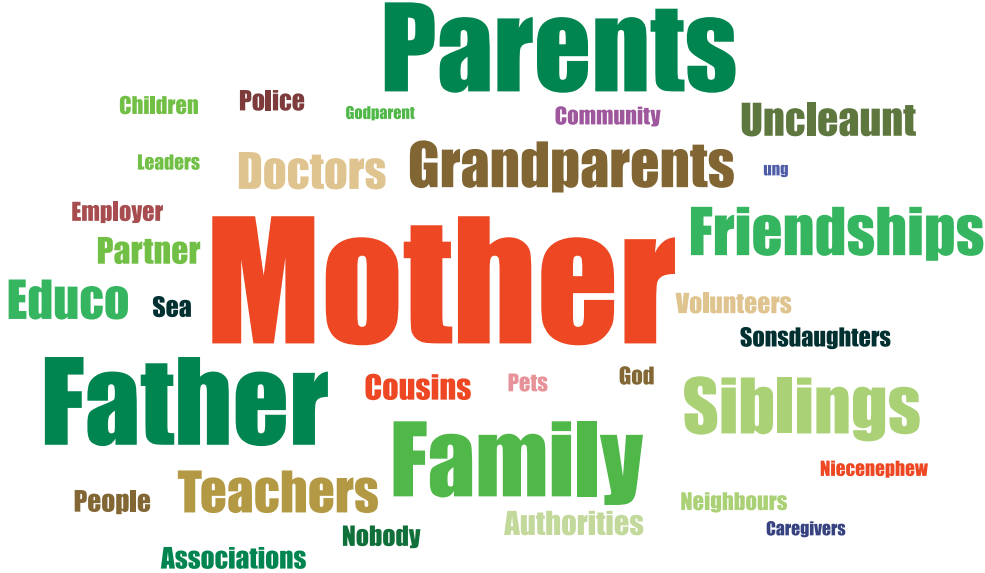
Even less frequently, there are those who feel good about the current situation and, while acknowledging the changes due to the pandemic, believe that their right to play has been preserved. Some have called for better material wellbeing such as spaces for play, better or new facilities and materials, both in community spaces and in the home. Having more free time with the family is also mentioned, as one of the lessons learned from the pandemic is that playing with them, with mothers and fathers, is valued. Of course, this free time should be time in which children can really choose between “doing” or “not doing”.

Finally, and with an even lower frequency, participating children draw attention to situations that affect the right to play and leisure time, such as poverty, lack of work for adults, alcoholism and domestic violence.

Messages for the most important person during the pandemic

They were asked to identify the person they considered most important during the pandemic. It is noteworthy that the family has received the highest number of messages, which is further evidence of the importance they have for their wellbeing. In addition, there is an excellent overview of other key figures and it includes institutions and not just individuals. There are messages of gratitude and advice, but also sad messages from those who have not had a good time.

The following word cloud summarises their responses:



In addition, children had the opportunity to send a message to that person in their own way. The people, or organisations, identified have been ranked in order of highest to lowest frequency and examples are given of the messages sent by those who responded.

- Very high frequency: mother, father.**
- *“Thank you for everything. I have been able to do it because you were by my side”.* Girl aged 6-11 years old, Canada.
- *“That she is my heroine who gives me her love and understanding”.* Boy aged 6-11 years old, Bolivia.
- *“Handwashing, using a mask, social distancing”.* Boy aged 6-11 years old, Bangladesh.
- *“That I love her and that she plays with me. I also miss my father”.* Boy aged 6-11 years old, El Salvador.
- *“That she takes care of herself, just as she takes care of me”.* Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Nicaragua.
- *“Stay safe and protected. Everything will be OK in the end”.* Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, India.
- *“That he is the best father”.* Girl aged 6-11 years old, Mali.

High frequency: family.

- *"To be brave and also to protect yourself you have all the time". Boy, Benin.*
- *"That they love me a lot". Boy aged 6-11 years old, Guatemala.*
- *"Life and learning can run together like train tracks, so anyone can reach his or her goal". Boy aged 6-11 years old, Bangladesh.*

Medium frequency: siblings, doctors, friends, grandparents, teachers, Educo, uncles and aunts.

- *"That she is the best sister in the world and I love her a lot". Boy aged 6-11 years old, Bolivia.*
- *"In this pandemic situation they are like God to the people". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, India.*
- *"Show equality in the treatment of all patients". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Bangladesh.*
- *"Thank you for always helping me and listening to me when I feel bad or stressed. I hope our friendship lasts a long time". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Guatemala.*
- *"To my grandmother Efra: well done". Adolescent girl, 12-18 years old, Bolivia.*
- *"Yaaba protect yourself. I think of you every day". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Burkina Faso.*
- *"Thank you for taking care of me during this difficult year. You know I suffered at the beginning of the school year, but you were there, watching over me to make sure nothing happened. Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Spain.*
- *"To my teacher: I want you to take good care of yourself and I miss you". Participant aged 12-18 years old, Guatemala.*
- *"I am grateful to Educo for the masks they gave us to protect us and also for the awareness-raising that made me aware of my rights and duties." Girl aged 6-11 years old, Mali.*
- *My aunt from Guatemala. I want to see her. We really need her to come and visit". Girl aged 6-11 years old, El Salvador.*

Low frequency: partners, cousins, authorities, me, people, associations, nobody, volunteers, police.

- *"I love them, but we have to keep our distance until this all blows over". Young woman, Bolivia.*
- *"My cousin. She accompanied me and understood me. May she continue to be funny and stay by my side". Girl aged 6-11 years old, Bolivia.*
- *"Government employees take their responsibility seriously and I would like to thank them from the bottom of my heart". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, India.*
- *"That person is myself. I know it sounds very personal, but it's up to you to propose things and whether you succeed or not, and only you can feel what you want to feel. Just keep going and don't demand things from yourself you can't achieve, but give it your all". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Guatemala.*
- *"Nobody. I want to go home". Participant, aged 12-18 years old, El Salvador.*
- *"I wish there had been a person important to me during the pandemic". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Spain.*

In addition, a significant number of children chose to mention specific people in their messages. These names have been listed and are summarised in the following cloud:

Johan Harouna Ian Lola Anita BTS Mar Toño
Isabel Alicia Javier Bruno Antony Serge Herminia
Assan Andrea Simón Cris Kevin Russel Miguel
Pablo Ainoa Carmen Eunice Alison Vera Valeria
Verónica
Alí Fernando Josué Crisn Ousmane Ayman Jaime
Alexander Yassaran Laura Bego Carlos Malena Kim
Megan Maybeline Noemi Yexia Aroa Ángel Phil
Harry Silvia Noelia Nelson May Alexis Moisés Denn
Fátima Diana Benjamin Ramón Guille Camila Efra
Jimena Moncho Zaida Lucia Francisco Vilma



Messages for the world

Lastly, and in an open format, they were asked if they had any other messages they wanted to send to other children, adults or the world in general. Similarly, the messages have been classified in order of frequency and, based on a content analysis, the meaning of these messages is summarised and exemplified by the testimonies of those who have participated.

High frequency.

COVID: look after yourself, protect yourself, take care, get vaccinated, respect the rules and measures. There are also messages about not being afraid, but protecting yourself.

- *"We must be careful. We can't stay at home, but we can't forget that the pandemic is not over". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Spain.*
- *"Take the crown off the coronavirus because you are the king and with care, love and faith we will keep on smiling". Boy aged 6-11 years old, El Salvador.*
- *"A world without coronavirus is a joy for everyone". Girl aged 6-11 years old, Mali.*

Medium frequency.

Ensuring children's rights: the need to defend children's rights, raise awareness about them and promote them.

■ *"Thank you to everyone for thinking about children's rights during and after the pandemic". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Burkina Faso.*

■ *"Don't keep quiet because we all have rights". Girl aged 6-11 years old, Bolivia.*

■ *"Guarantee children's rights in all areas". Adolescent boy aged 12-18 years old, Bangladesh.*

About the future: learn, improve in the future, be better people and communities. Prepare, work hard.

■ *"Be happy always, don't think about the past. Think about the future, spend more time with your family because they are the most important people in your life". Girl from India.*

■ *"Let's work hard in our studies so that in the future we can say that we did it. Let's value the efforts of our parents". Girl aged 6-11 years old, El Salvador.*

■ *"Let's review our every action, everything we do can compromise future generations". Boy aged 6-11 years old, Bolivia.*

Enjoy today: enjoy the present moment, what you have, value it, especially your family.

■ *"Be alert at this time, take care of your health. Stay calm". Girl aged 6-11 years old, India.*



■ *"We are safe because the doctors worked hard. We are safe because many people have worked during the quarantine. They have helped us". Boy aged 6-11 years old, India.*

■ *"Less arguments and more play, less screens and more free time". Girl aged 6-11 years old, Spain.*

Low frequency.

Solidarity and aid: the need to show solidarity, especially with those in vulnerable situations. Understand, help, care for everyone.

■ *"They should be care more about each other, because in this life the most important thing is not the material but the good deeds that you can instil in others. That we take care of nature and that the family is the most important thing". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Spain.*

■ *"Dear citizens, let's be charitable, let's observe the contention measures". Boy, Benin.*

■ *"I ask adults or authorities to please do not leave children on the streets alone. They are children who have nothing to eat or who have lost their parents to this pandemic. Be nicer, don't mistreat them. We must show more solidarity because they are not to blame for anything, they are brave little people who deserve to be treated well without violence". Boy aged 6-11 years old, Bolivia.*

■ *"We need to learn to think as a society and not as isolated individuals". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Spain.*

Love and respect: messages based on love, respect for all. Need to love, respect the diversity of people.

■ *"To all children, adults and the world in general, let's spread peace. Be sympathetic to others. Help whoever needs help. Spread love". Girl aged 6-11 years old, Philippines.*

■ *"Peace in the world, especially peace in Mali". Adolescent girl aged 12-18 years old, Mali.*

■ *"For love for yourself and your people, look after yourself". Girl aged 6-11 years old, Guatemala.*

Environment: total agreement between those who have touched on the need to care for and save the environment, to care for animals and plants and the need to act. And also about the connection of the pandemic with the lack of care for the environment.

Conclusions and Recommendations



The main findings and recommendations of the research are summarised below. These are framed in a perspective beyond the pandemic, but without ignoring it because of the impact it has on children's lives and because it is allowing us to approach issues that might not otherwise be relevant to the present and future of the pandemic. As always, any crisis or undesired situation is an opportunity to improve. Let's embrace it just as the children are doing.

About the pandemic as a context

This research was conducted during a pandemic, a key element of the context. Moreover, analysing the responses highlights how the pandemic is profoundly conditioning how people live and how new routines change or are generated. New possibilities emerge or existing inequalities (poverty, violence, bad living conditions) are accentuated. At the same time, we begin to see that we have to live with the health crisis and children are already showing their resilience and trying to help develop resilience in others.

Child protection in this context has therefore included, primarily, protection from the virus, a feeling of increased security at home and, to a lesser extent, a reduction in the risk of violence. In other words, there is more of a vision of pandemic-specific care and less of protection in its broad sense. There is also a frequent mention of proposals for protecting from COVID, again highlighting the strong influence of the pandemic as a key contextual element or as "the context" as such.

Being able to play and have enough leisure time has been the most voted option in relation to this right. Children say that play and free time have been possible because during the pandemic they have stopped doing things that were previously unavoidable and are mostly related to education. In addition, there is an average frequency of responses that propose reducing responsibilities and living with COVID and its rules in order to play safely. We therefore conclude that acceptance of the illness is also key to the child's perspective on the enjoyment of play and leisure time in the present and the future.

The open messages they have sent, to key figures for their protection and to the world at large, contain a lot of gratitude as well as advice for continued care during the pandemic and to instil encouragement and hope for the future. Equally, there are sad messages from those who have struggled and who show that before the pandemic their lives were already difficult.

Those who have responded recommend looking after yourself, protecting yourself, taking care, getting vaccinated, respecting the rules and measures. Similarly, they recommend not being afraid, but staying protected. Looking to the future, they talk about the need to learn from what we have experienced, improve, become better people and communities, prepare and work hard. There is also an emphasis on enjoying the present day in the pandemic, valuing what you have, especially your family. They stress that this is a time for solidarity, especially with those in vulnerable situations. Understand, help, care for everyone.

Based on the above, we recommend:

Deepening the understanding of the right to protection at all times and with special emphasis on situations that are unusual, emergencies, or situations that otherwise change children's routines. This would help to distinguish between situation-specific care and the full scope of protection, and would mean that an emergency situation is not a limit to other rights such as play and leisure. Children need social interactions that lead to learning how to resolve conflicts, avoid situations, recognise problems, recover from failure or frustration and continue to learn. Nassim Taleb urges us to incorporate the concept of children as anti-fragile beings: "Let's not protect our children from everything that will teach them to live independent lives"⁵, overprotection leads to excessive fragility, anxiety or depression, so pandemic play and necessary protective measures can and must go hand in hand to support a holistic experience of rights and not be seen as irreconcilable opposites.

Deepen the understanding and support necessary for children to enjoy play and leisure time as a right, not as an option when other activities allow or as a reward for "good behaviour". "Leave space, leave time and let children play", as Francesco Tonucci reminds us⁶.

⁵ Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2016). *Antifragile: Things That Gain From Disorder*

⁶ OtrasVocesEnEducacion.org. Interview with Francesco Tonucci: children learn more by playing". Retrieved on 5 February 2022.



Profiles of children in pandemic

The numerical data and the analysis of the open-ended responses have made it possible to describe children in terms of how they are experiencing their rights in a pandemic and the factors that influence this experience. These profiles make it possible to understand that the enjoyment - or lack of enjoyment - of a right is not an isolated issue but the product of the interaction of rights in general.

In relation to protection rights, among those who have felt most protected, being a girl, or aged 6-11 years or living in Mali, Nicaragua or Burkina Faso is most prevalent, and therefore, an influence is detected regarding how the pandemic has been handled in these places and patterns of care in these contexts. The feeling of protection depends most of all the care received during the pandemic.

Those who have felt equally protected are boys, or those aged 12-18 years old and who live in Spain, Bolivia or Guatemala. This group shows a greater awareness of the meaning of the right to protection and, although the pandemic continues to feature highly in their responses, they mention that they already felt protected before the pandemic.

Among those who have felt less protected, the prevailing profile includes, above all, living in Bangladesh, Niger or Benin. They also have a good understanding of protection-related rights and report that they have been living in violent environments since before the pandemic, although violence is still high in their responses.

Those who have stated that no one has bothered to protect them, although they represent a low percentage, emphasise that they are going through very difficult situations that need to be addressed. They are mostly people who are not comfortable with the classification of the binary sexual system, or are male, or are aged 12-18 years old. Living in Niger or Bangladesh have also been key factors in highlighting the fact that no one has been concerned about their protection.

In relation to the right to play and leisure time, those who have most emphatically noted that they have been able to enjoy this right the most are children, or are between 6-11 years old, or live in Bolivia, El Salvador or Guatemala. We have also found that they also feel well and protected/cared for in general.

One in three children report that they have not been able to play and have enough leisure time and highlight the factor of school workloads due to online classes and work/help at home. This group of children differentiates between their chosen and desired play time and their free time, so it is a profile of children with a greater capacity to understand this right, they agree less with the situation and live in more difficult conditions of material and relational wellbeing. Also, living in Burkina Faso or Benin or being aged 12-18 years old implied more responses stating that they were not able to play and have enough leisure time.

According to these elements:

It is very important to help understand that children's human rights, wellbeing and life are the product of interdependence⁷ between multiple factors and we can see how they are experienced through one aspect or right, such as protection and play and leisure in this research. So, both analysis and action must consider this interdependence. It is therefore imperative that society has the tools to understand this concept in depth and put it into practice.

About children and the opportunity to express an opinion freely

A [previous Educo study](#) has already shown that a large part of children do not fully understand the right and principle of participation, while they do understand rights such as education. In this new study, there are findings that connect back to this issue concerning the difficulties encountered by respondents in answering open-ended questions.

It is interesting to note that, when asked for proposals on how to live protected and free from violence, the most frequent response was "no response". Furthermore, and despite the high importance assigned to play and leisure time, when asked how they have experienced this right, one in 10 children chose the option "I don't understand this question or I prefer not to answer". The same is true when looking for proposals to improve the exercise of the right to play and leisure time, where the highest frequency of responses is also "no response".

⁷ Interdependence and interrelatedness, as a principle of human rights, implies that the fulfilment of one right often depends, in whole or in part, on the fulfilment of other rights. For example, the effective exercise of the right to play and leisure may depend on the effective exercise of the right to protection and education.

Based on the above we reiterate that:

Society must be educated from the roots to change all the paradigms that prevent children's participation and ensure that they can take full advantage of opportunities to make their voices heard and taken into account.

We have to question socially how we approach children to give their opinions or to simply answer a question. It is imperative that they have opportunities to give open responses and that they have the certainty that their free opinions are translated into action. We insist that listening is complete when we act and that the fact that children know this will stimulate their participation.

About children and families

Once again, children have highlighted the importance of the family and its role in the enjoyment of their rights and wellbeing. Mothers, first of all, followed by fathers or other family members, are most often mentioned as key figures who protect children. Those living in Bolivia, Guatemala or Nicaragua mention this more.

The value of the family in child protection has been accentuated during the pandemic, so there is little recognition for protection figures outside this setting. After family, government authorities are mentioned as the second key protection figure. This is most evident among those living in Mali, Niger and Benin. The family has also been at the centre of their concerns, and this extends to the rest of the key figures in their circle of relations and to humanity in general.

Finally, in the messages for the most important person during the pandemic and for the world in general, the family was once again the most frequently mentioned, followed by other figures with whom it was possible to connect in person or online, such as friends, teachers and Educo staff.

In accordance with this evidence:

State policies towards the family and, above all, towards all the diverse, complex and different families existing in today's society are necessary. We are talking about real policies (with budget allocations, evaluations, improvements and extensions beyond the pandemic). These policies have to put children, their rights and their wellbeing at the centre because the family has a huge influence on their lives and because children value the family setting above all others.

Similarly, organisations that support child-focused development projects, children's organisations, academic institutions, the private sector, etc., need to reflect on our role and support States, families and, above all, children themselves.

About children and their human rights, gender- and age-related roles

The issue of socially assigned roles based on gender and age does not appear explicitly, but it is noticeable when analysing quantitative and qualitative data.

Perceived care/protection during the pandemic has been influenced by social perceptions linked to age and gender. Therefore, the younger children and girls tend to express a feeling of greater care/protection. On the other hand, being a boy and being younger means enjoying more play and leisure time.

Those who feel the least protected are boys or are older. It is also evident that children recognise the mother as the one who is most concerned with their protection/security, due to her traditional role as caregiver.

Due to the nature of the study, it is not possible to go deeper into whether or not this gender and age role-motivated behaviour has any influence on the experience of rights. For example, are the most cared-for girls really cared for and/or do other dimensions of the right to protection itself become limited (de-protection in the name of protection)?

On the other hand, the participating children claim their rights, both when narrating their experiences and in the proposals for improvement, according to their ages and the social construction of gender. There is a medium frequency of suggestions that speak more from a perspective of preventing violence and looking at protection beyond just the care needed during a pandemic.

There is also a clear demand for play and leisure time as a right, with the possibility of free choice. It is mentioned that existing contradictions have to be solved mainly because of having to fulfil tasks related to education or work at home or outside the home.

The messages to the world they talk about guaranteeing children's rights, the need to defend them, and the need to raise awareness and promote them. There is a connection with an experience of rights, wellbeing and a dignified life. There is a strong demand for love as a value, respect for everyone, the need to love and respect the diversity of people.

Therefore:

The aforementioned family policies and their support from the state, civil society, children's organisations, academic institutions, the private sector, etc. need to be based on the human rights of children from a gender perspective. They must include a special focus on promoting childcare and child protection, and help to eliminate the burden of care for women/mothers/caregivers. At the same time, men/fathers/caregivers must be effectively engaged from a dual perspective: their responsibilities and the greater significance for their own and children's wellbeing of caregiving and protection in a broader sense. It is crucial that as societies we move from a perspective of care/protection as an obligation to one of enjoyment and the generation of wellbeing for all parties involved, including men.

In addition, the promotion of child care/protection requires specific tools that consider life stages and gender. These tools have to help to resolve the common dilemma between care/protection/security and freedom. That is the only way that children will experience all their rights fully. Again, it is worth noting the approach in concepts such as the aforementioned anti-fragility⁸, which would help to incorporate new perspectives.

Similarly, public policy should promote play and leisure time as a right as such and not as a possibility if there is time, a reward for doing other things or simply an alternative to boredom. It is important to raise awareness and provide tools to make play and leisure time a right regardless of age and gender, an important part of family life, community living and education and learning in a broader sense.

About children and the environment

Once again, the importance of the environment for children is highlighted. This survey, where apparently there was nothing connected to this issue, has received a group of responses with very clear messages about the present and future need to think about it. There is complete agreement among those who mention the need to care for and save the environment, to care for animals and plants and, in short, that action is needed. They also draw attention to the connection of the pandemic with the lack of care for the environment.

This coincides with the findings of a previous Educo study in the Americas, which found that, based on aspects noted by the children consulted, "These references associated with the material dimension of children's wellbeing show how important it is for children to have access to a healthy and ecologically balanced environment, as well as the right to health and food".⁹

Therefore, it is important to reiterate what was asked for in the study we have already mentioned:

"It is recommended that States, through their different bodies, promote actions to raise environmental awareness and generate ecological habits and practices, based on a logic of co-responsibility and reciprocity in the care of life and nature. To achieve this, the leading participation of children and adolescents is valued, considering them as active agents in both the design and execution of the actions.

⁸ Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2016). *Antifragile: Things That Gain From Disorder*

⁹ *Children's wellbeing: their views and their voices. Getting to know the perception of children's wellbeing in children and adolescents and their immediate environment.* Research by Educo and the Universidad Católica Boliviana "San Pablo", Instituto de Investigaciones en Ciencias del Comportamiento.

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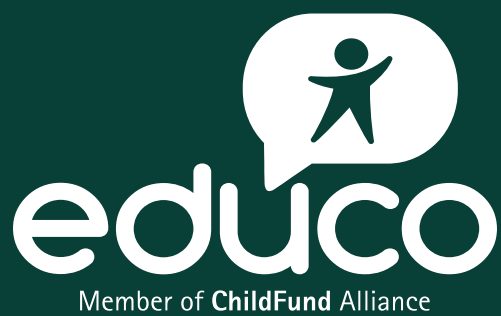
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