

ACT NOW FOR CHILDREN

How a Global Pandemic is Changing the
Lives of Children in the Middle East and
Eastern Europe Region

Summary Brief

Photo: Elias Hatimi, World Vision Afghanistan
Arifa, 12, is putting on a mask and learning about COVID 19

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I feel the world is over, I think about the future,
what will happen? Can I be happy again?
Now I am very saddened.

Dil Aqa, 13, Afghanistan

New research explores the stress children in World Vision programmes in the Middle East and Eastern Europe region are under due to COVID-19.

In addition to their fear that they themselves or their loved ones will catch the disease, children worry about economic hardships, the loss of their education, increased violence and social isolation.

But in the midst of it all, a clear message comes through – young people are hopeful about the future, they want to make a contribution and they want their voices to be heard.

Photo: Anamaria Motateanu, World Vision Romania
Lorena, 7, is receiving support during the COVID 19 interventions in rural areas





RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

World Vision is committed to listening to girls and boys, including them in decision-making processes and empowering them to contribute to change in their families and communities. As part of this mandate, a sequential, mixed-method research with girls and boys was conducted in the Middle East and Eastern Europe region including: Afghanistan, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Iraq, Jerusalem-West Bank-Gaza, Kosovo, Lebanon, Romania, and the Syria response countries (Jordan, Syria and Turkey).

This research explores how the pandemic is impacting the lives of boys and girls. A cross-sectional observation design was developed with the application of convenience sampling at the country level and aggregation of all samples at the regional level (762 girls and boys ages 11–17 from World Vision private or grant funded programmes). The survey took place in June 2020. Quantitative results were complemented with findings from key informant interviews with 130 children ages 13–15.

762 

CHILDREN

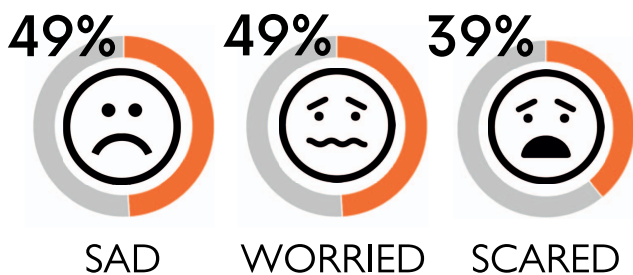
 367
BOYS
395 
GIRLS

11 - 17 YEARS OLD

12  **COUNTRIES**

PANDEMIC STRESSORS

Across the region, millions live with little or no healthcare, food or water, as well as with volatile prices and destroyed infrastructure. Early indications show the severe impact of COVID-19 on some of the region's most vulnerable people, many of whom already struggle against vast odds. The lives of children have been turned upside down by the pandemic, and as a result, almost half of the survey participants, especially girls, feel sad (49%) and worried (49%) – and more than one-third feel scared (39%) and lonely (38%).



INCREASED VIOLENCE

Research results showed us that during COVID-19, 50% of surveyed children experienced emotional violence at least once. Syria reported the highest percentage (84%) followed by Iraq (60%) and Afghanistan (58%). 20% of children said that they knew of intimate violence being experienced by other children in their surroundings. The highest percentages were reported by children from Iraq (46%) followed by children from Syria (34%). In Afghanistan and Iraq over a third of children reported incidents of physical violence. In Syria nearly half of children reported this (47%). About two thirds of physical (72%) and emotional (75%) violent incidents in Syria occurred in the family.

SOCIAL ISOLATION

84% of respondents, especially girls (49% vs. 35%) were stressed because they are isolated from their friends during the COVID-19 outbreak. 80% are also stressed because they can't hug or kiss grandparents and older relatives due to social distancing measures.



ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS

For many children, the COVID-19 crisis is a food crisis. 60% of adolescents who participated in the survey worry about falling into poverty, with Afghanistan (99%), Iraq (93%), Syria (89%) and Lebanon (73%) having the highest numbers. 58% of respondents are concerned that their parents might lose jobs. Half of the boys and girls fear that they and their families won't have enough to eat, with Afghanistan (99%), Iraq (75%), Syria (74%) and Lebanon (65%) demonstrating the highest percentages.



EDUCATION

With school closures part of necessary lockdown measures, the education of children in the region was totally disrupted. 24% were completely deprived of continuing any learning for this school year. 87% of respondents worry that due to changed education approaches they might not be learning enough to be ready for school in the future, and 75% fear that they might fall behind others in their class. 56% of them are stressed by their financial situation and their parent's ability to pay school fees next year.



GENDER INEQUALITY



The research confirmed that COVID-19 exacerbates gender inequalities. 57% of surveyed girls versus 37% of surveyed boys confirmed that their household chores had increased since the beginning of the pandemic with the highest percentages for girls in Iraq (80%), JWG (68%) and Albania (62%). Girls are also more exposed to emotional violence than boys (52% versus 46%). However, family environments seems to be more violent for girls (66% versus 55%), while boys experience more violence outside of the family in comparison to girls (5% versus 18% from other adults, 13% versus 30% from friends, 6% versus 17% from teachers, 3% versus 13% from someone unknown).

SIGNS OF RESILIENCE



Photo: Maria Bou Chaaya, World Vision Lebanon
Mohamad, 12, Syrian refugee boy living in Lebanon

CHILDREN'S ASKS

One-third of surveyed children consider that their government's response to COVID-19 insufficient and 76% of them are in favour of increasing measures taken for protection from COVID-19.

We heard clearly and urgently that young people in the pandemic want to have their voices heard, their rights respected, and want to be included in decision-making processes. They ask their governments:

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To improve access to electronic devices and the internet, especially in poor, rural and vulnerable communities

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To safely open schools again and where that isn't possible, to provide lessons on radio and TV

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For more supplies to fight the spread of the disease

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To impose and enforce safety measures

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For safe recreational spaces to fight social isolation

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To provide free and comprehensive health care for families who contract the virus

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For access to up-to-date and reliable information about how to protect themselves

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To enforce laws that protect children from violence at home and in the streets

“

To provide food, regulate the price of food and to provide financial assistance and livelihood opportunities to families

In the research, we see encouraging signs that young people in the region are responding to the challenges created by the pandemic.

More than two-thirds (71%) of surveyed children are most often optimistic about the future despite their current fears.

78% of girls and 85% of boys feel useful to others.

Dealing with the pandemic difficulties and uncertainty have been possible through close, constant contact with families that helped to create strong bonds, love and affection between children and their parents and instilled a feeling of security for them. In fact, when surveyed children are exposed to stress factors or feel insecure, 82% of them, especially boys, reach out to their parents for support. Furthermore, 52%, especially girls, turn to prayer to face their fear of the unknown.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

World Vision aims to nurture optimism through need-driven, context-relevant interventions, and calls for government leaders, including high-level decision-makers and donors to step up immediate efforts to protect children from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by:



Photo: Maria Bou Chaaya, World Vision Lebanon
Hassan, 5, at his first educational experience

1.

Acting on the prioritised list of requests above from the children themselves

2.

Considering COVID-19 a child protection and gender-based violence crisis, placing girls and boys at the centre of response and recovery plans, and recognising them as rights holders and social actors

3.

Prioritising child and adult protection as a lifesaving intervention in all national COVID-19 responses, investing in humanitarian and development multi-sectoral programming to prevent, mitigate, respond to and end all forms of violence against girls and boys, as well as vulnerable adults

4.

Networking and acting together with faith leaders and faith-based organisations to fight poverty and alleviate the suffering of children and their families through their spiritual empowerment

5.

Working with states and governments, all international actors and local NGOs to recognise children's voices and support their needs with both targeted and mainstreamed post-COVID funding

6.

Funding education programmes which might require distributing learning equipment to children or developing other remote learning methodologies

7.

For many children, the COVID crisis is a food crisis. The international community should invest in cash programming, food assistance and livelihood support to reduce child hunger and strengthen the livelihoods of families. Good child nutrition is essential to healthy development. Addressing the COVID food crisis will also help to reduce family stress and also have a direct impact on reducing violence against children within families.

8.

Conducting programmes in ways that strengthen families, particularly the bond between parents and children. We should also invest in positive parenting skills. This will help to reduce incidents of violence against children. More research is needed to better understand the impact of various approaches, such as cash assistance, on family relationships and the role this can play in strengthening child protection.



Photo: Maria Bou Chaaya, World Vision Lebanon
The WASH team providing trucking and dislodging services to the informal tented settlements

World Vision Middle East and Eastern Europe
Regional Office

280 Strovolos Avenue
2048 Strovolos, Nicosia, Cyprus
+357 22.870.277

For further information please contact:

Leah Donoghue
Director of Communications and Advocacy
World Vision MEERO

leah_donoghue@wvi.org