

# EDUCATION IN CRISIS: COVID-19 AND ADOLESCENTS' EDUCATION IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS



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**Cover photo:** Girls wear face masks at their school to prevent the spread of COVID-19, Nepal. Credit: Plan International

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>COVID-19</b>	2019 novel coronavirus
<b>ERT</b>	Ethics Review Team
<b>FGM/C</b>	Female genital mutilation/cutting
<b>FTS</b>	Financial Tracking Service
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based violence
<b>GDPR</b>	General Data Protection Regulation
<b>GPE</b>	Global Partnership for Education
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communication technology
<b>IDPs</b>	Internally displaced people
<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>MERL</b>	Monitoring, evaluation, research and learning
<b>NEET</b>	Not in education, employment or training
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>ODA</b>	Overseas development assistance
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SRA</b>	Social Research Association
<b>SRHR</b>	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>VAWG</b>	Violence against women and girls
<b>WASH</b>	Water, sanitation and hygiene
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

# FOREWORD

**COVID-19 has caused an education emergency at a scale not experienced in living memory. More than 1.5 billion learners – 90% of those worldwide – have seen their education interrupted.**

Schools have been shut for a full year for more than 168 million children globally. Girls, children with disabilities, refugee children, and children living in humanitarian settings are experiencing the most catastrophic impacts.

The pandemic threatens to cause irreversible harm to children's education – a whole generation's prospects are at risk of being devastated. The young people, parents and teachers interviewed in this report have been clear: as we begin to move on from the crisis, we must learn from the past year and ensure schools are inclusive, accessible and resilient to future shocks and crises.

Girls' education, in particular, has been hit hard by the pandemic. COVID-19 has exacerbated existing barriers to education for girls, such as an increase in gender-based violence, greater risk of unplanned or unintended pregnancy, and having to take on the gendered burden of care work. In many cases, boys have been prioritised when it comes to accessing the laptops, computers or smartphones needed for education. And the longer girls are out of school, the less likely they'll ever return.

But it would be simplistic to blame poor school attendance or the poor quality of education on the pandemic alone. The reality is there has been a global funding shortfall for education over the past decade, which has resulted in slow progress towards reducing the number of children out-of-school and improving the quality of education.

With the risk of the pandemic increasing the current \$148 billion financing gap to education by a third, the chance of achieving any of the SDG global education goals is going to be slim. This means the world will have failed to provide all children with quality and inclusive education by 2030.

By preparing this report, we aim to offer a roadmap to getting education on track, and to strengthen resilient, gender-transformative education systems for children, young people and their teachers. We have responded to the clarion call of girls and boys around the world who have demanded their right to an education. That is why it's crucial governments take urgent action and implement this report's recommendations.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rose Caldwell".

**Rose Caldwell**  
CEO, Plan International UK

Girl wears face mask at her school to prevent the spread of COVID-19, Nepal.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research is intended to inform and help shape efforts to turn the tide on the global education crisis that has intensified because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It shines a light on the impact of the pandemic on adolescents' education in low and middle-income countries by bringing together quantitative and qualitative data to help understand how adolescents, and particularly adolescent girls, have or have not been able to continue their education over the last year.

“ It was a devastating feeling, not being able to go to school. ”

*Adolescent boy, age unknown, Guli, Sudan*

Through primary research that engaged more than 1,900 adolescents, parents and teachers in Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Nepal and Sudan, supplemented by secondary data analysis, this report explores the:

- ability of adolescents to access education during the pandemic.
- quality of education received by those who were able to continue their learning.
- availability and use of home-learning materials, teaching capacity, and teacher interaction with students during periods of school closure.
- home-learning environment and the level of support adolescents received for their learning.
- impact remote learning has had on adolescents' mental health and well-being.

- extent to which adolescents have been involved in decision making, as part of the COVID-19 response.
- challenges and successes of returning to education after lockdowns.

Many adolescents in this research – especially those in poor communities in rural areas – were unable to access education from their homes. This was primarily due to a lack of devices, electricity or digital infrastructure and the limited provision of alternative no-tech approaches. For the same reason, many teachers were also unable to provide lessons.

- On average, just under half (46%) of adolescents had no contact with their school during lockdowns. In Sudan, this figure rose to 84%.



- Three-quarters (77%) of teachers were unable to teach remotely during lockdowns due to their own or their students' lack of connectivity or access to devices.
- 85% of teachers reported fewer students attending online lessons compared with pre-pandemic school-based lessons.

**“Education is not only for those who have a mobile phone, but [should be] available for everyone.”**

*Adolescent girl, 14 years old, location unknown, Honduras*

**“I did not have the opportunity to teach online because there are no resources and the community where I work is poor and there is no internet access.”**

*Female teacher, location unknown, Honduras*

The home environment was generally not conducive to learning, with adolescents feeling easily distracted and limited in study time due to competing demands such as increased chore burdens or the need to support their family through income-generating activities. Most parents and adolescents were ill-prepared and under-supported. Too few were consulted on how to improve the situation.

- More than half (53%) of parents did not feel able to support their child's learning due to believing they lacked the necessary ability or knowledge, or because of time constraints and work commitments.

- Less than half (48%) of adolescents felt able to concentrate when studying at home and four in 10 (41%) did not have enough time to study, often due to increased unpaid care burdens or needing to support their family through income-generating activities.

**“I always support her emotionally, but I found using the materials [provided], the computer, the internet difficult.”**

*Mother, location unknown, Guatemala*

**“There would be frequent interruption. I would get disturbed when someone entered the room during class time. I had no separate room [to study in].”**

*Adolescent girl, age unknown, Makwanpur, Nepal*

The social and economic impacts of the pandemic placed additional burdens on students, parents and caregivers. The psychosocial impacts of the pandemic, isolation and worry about exams, academic performance and future career prospects also affected the mental health and well-being of adolescents.

- Academic performance, falling behind and the impact this might have on their future was the most reported concern (47% of responses), followed by isolation (17%) and loss of motivation for education (10%).
- Only 46% of adolescents reported enjoying learning from home, and 53% were motivated to learn remotely. Nearly two-thirds (63%) felt they had not learned as much at home as they would have in school.

**“Initially, my siblings were so excited that they were going to stay home and not go to school. But with weeks passing they started to forget the poems they were taught... to forget their friends... and became withdrawn.”**

*Adolescent girl, age unknown, Khartoum, Sudan*

**“I used to see them hold books even when doing their household chores – an indication that proves to me they really missed going to school.”**

*Mother, Bondo, Kenya*

Despite the global commitment to guaranteeing a quality education for every child, millions now face a future outside of the classroom. Reduced numbers of adolescents have returned to school, with a third (33%) of those in our sample still absent. Of the 371 individuals who responded to an open question about why adolescents had not returned to education:

- 24% stated a fear of catching COVID-19.
- 19% stated that schools remained shut or that teachers had not returned to teaching.
- 10% cited early pregnancies.
- 10% referred to child marriage or having to leave school to work.

**“Some were not able to access [sanitary] pads and they were lured by men to help them get the sanitary towels and they ended up being pregnant. Some got married. Some are engaged with some work which they earn money [from] so they don’t see the need to be back to school.”**

*Adolescent girl, 15 years old, Kisumu, Kenya*

Millions of children have learned very little while out of school, with girls, children living with disabilities, displaced children, and those living in low-income households most likely to report learning nothing at all. The risk of adolescents never returning to school is drastically heightened as they take on additional unpaid care, are forced into marriage or work, and shoulder increased economic burdens.

Without addressing the economic, gender, social, geographic and technological inequalities – already barriers to education – that have been heightened during the pandemic, the long, uneven and uncertain recovery from this education crisis will stall. The stakes have never been higher. Swift and targeted action is needed, in partnership with adolescents, to reverse the damage done to girls’ and boys’ education over the last year, and to build back better and more equal.

We call upon donors, national governments, humanitarian actors and education providers to work together and in partnership with adolescents to:

1. Urgently increase and sustain financial support to meet the education needs of adolescent girls and boys, including those living through conflict and humanitarian crises, so every girl can lead, learn, decide and thrive.
2. Work in partnership with women and girls, men and boys, in all their diversity, to eliminate the systemic and gendered barriers preventing adolescent girls from accessing and completing a quality education.
3. Support quality inclusive learning environments, through a focus on the well-being of teachers and learners and a whole-school approach.
4. Strengthen the resilience of education systems to protect learning during the ongoing pandemic and be prepared to respond to future pandemics, climate-related shocks, insecurity, and other crises, incorporating the capacity to shift safely and effectively between face-to-face and distance learning as required.
5. Promote health and COVID-19-prevention measures, including equitable access to water, sanitation and hygiene, and safe and effective vaccines, particularly in low and middle-income countries.

## BOX 1 METHODS AT A GLANCE

This mixed-methods study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to investigate the effect of COVID-19 on adolescents' education in low and middle-income countries, particularly for girls. Primary data was collected from adolescents, parents and teachers in five countries: Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Nepal and Sudan.

The literature review explored both grey and peer-reviewed literature. A total of 273 documents were reviewed. Additional evidence has also been included from other relevant Plan International research.

Quantitative data was collected in two phases. Surveys were conducted in Guatemala, Honduras, Nepal and Sudan between March and April 2021. Data collection in Kenya took place in June 2021. Analysis is based on 1,750 surveys (655 adolescents, 585 parents and 510 teachers).

Qualitative research was carried out through 134 key informant interviews and focus group discussions with adolescent girls and boys, parents, teachers and local leaders, in Nepal and Sudan. An additional 51 adolescents in Nepal and Sudan participated in a 'photovoice diary' methodology that allowed participants to express their views, perspectives and feelings on how COVID-19 has affected their education through taking photographs that were then discussed collectively.

Plan International staff member uses child-friendly COVID-19 book to teach children about the disease, Honduras.





# INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental human right that has the power to transform the lives of adolescent girls as they transition into adulthood. Quality, equitable and inclusive education saves lives, improves nutrition, reduces child, early and forced marriage, and leads to more equal, respectful and open societies.<sup>1</sup> It is critical to achieving gender justice, peace, stability and climate resilience. Yet now, more than ever, education is out of reach for millions of adolescent girls around the world.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has uprooted lives in countries across the world. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that, at the point of publishing, more than 3.8 million people have lost their lives due to the virus.<sup>2</sup> To stem the spread of the virus, governments introduced stringent lockdown measures, interrupting essential services; closing shops, businesses and schools; and asking people to stay at home. The global economy faces a severe recession, increasing poverty and inequality within and between countries. The effects on people's lives are profound.

The pandemic has created the worst education crisis in a century, affecting 94% of students worldwide.<sup>3</sup> At the pandemic's peak in 2020, 1.6 billion students were taken out of the classroom.<sup>4</sup> One in seven children globally have missed more than three quarters of their in-person learning since the start of the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> This unprecedented interruption to education has the potential to roll back gains made on girls' education since the advent of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000. Children are facing generation-defining disruption to their learning that will severely exacerbate and compound the pre-pandemic challenges faced internationally in meeting Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.

School closures enforced by COVID-19 have worsened the learning crisis for all children, and existing inequalities in the education system have been exposed. Millions of children have learned very little while out of school, with girls, displaced children, and those living in low-income households most likely to report learning nothing at all.<sup>6</sup>

While swift and wide-ranging attempts were made to reach girls and boys through remote learning, nearly a third (463 million) were not able to access it – often lacking the necessary technological assets at home.<sup>7</sup> It is estimated that at least 100 million more girls and boys will fall below the minimum proficiency level in reading.<sup>8</sup> This year of lost learning will have a damaging effect on the futures of millions of people.<sup>9</sup>

## BOX 2 THE STATE OF GLOBAL EDUCATION BEFORE AND AFTER THE PANDEMIC

COVID-19 has created the worst crisis in education and learning for a century.<sup>10</sup> It has added fuel to the fire of a pre-existing education emergency. Even before COVID-19:

- 258.4 million children were reported to be out of school, 129.2 million of whom were girls.<sup>11</sup>
- Girls in crisis-affected countries were far less likely to attend school than girls in non-crisis-affected low and middle-income countries. In 2019, 69 million girls were already out of school in crisis-affected countries.<sup>12</sup>
- 36% of refugee boys were in secondary school, compared with 27% of girls.<sup>13</sup>
- 53% of 10-year-old children in low and middle-income countries either had failed to learn to read with comprehension or were out of school entirely.<sup>14</sup>
- Upper secondary-school-age children were more than four times as likely to be out of school as children of primary school age, and more than twice as likely to be out of school as adolescents of lower secondary school age.<sup>15</sup>
- Youth unemployment was growing. More than 267 million young people out of 1.2 billion globally were not in employment, education or training (NEET).<sup>16</sup>

As a result of COVID-19:

- Education has been interrupted for 94% of learners<sup>17</sup> with 214 million children having missed more than three-quarters of their in-person learning.<sup>18</sup>
- In a post-COVID-19 scenario of no remediation and low mitigation for the effects of school closures, simulations show learning poverty increases from 53% of primary-school-age children to 63%.<sup>19</sup>
- Approximately 150 million children are now living in multidimensional poverty, a 15% increase compared with before the pandemic.<sup>20</sup> This is likely to significantly affect the number of children who do not return to education.
- If trends of the last 15 years were to continue, it would take 50 years to halve the learning poverty.<sup>21</sup>
- The public health cost of COVID-19 may mean that with fewer domestic resources allocated to education and shrinking international aid budgets, struggling education systems will become further underfunded, leaving the poorest and most marginalised children behind.<sup>22</sup>
- Students currently in school stand to lose US\$10 trillion in labour earnings over their working life.<sup>23</sup>

The pandemic has worsened many pre-existing crises, including an education emergency that has resulted in high out-of-school rates, particularly among adolescents<sup>a</sup> and young people,<sup>24</sup> and a global learning crisis.<sup>25</sup> The climate emergency, humanitarian crises and conflicts are growing in complexity and length, further halting progress.<sup>26</sup> COVID-19 has amplified these crises and further hindered progress towards achieving SDGs 4 and 5 on education and gender equality, which was already lagging.<sup>27</sup>

The ripple effects extend well beyond the ability of girls and boys to learn. The closure of schools has prevented them from accessing protective spaces. Critical services such as school meals, menstrual hygiene kits, child protection mechanisms, health services, and mental health and psychosocial support were suddenly out of reach.<sup>28</sup> Current evidence and experience show the impacts of this are heavily gendered, with girls and young women most affected, through increased exposure to child, early and forced marriage, trafficking and sexual exploitation, and unintended or unwanted adolescent pregnancy.<sup>29,30,31,32,33</sup>

Millions of girls and boys risk missing out on an education unless ambitious action is taken. Governments, local education authorities, donors, and local, national and international organisations must work in partnership with children and adolescents to rapidly turn the tide on the global education crisis.

This research is intended to help inform and shape these efforts. It shines a light on the impact of COVID-19 on adolescents' education by bringing together quantitative and qualitative data to help us understand how adolescents, and particularly adolescent girls, have or have not been able to continue their education during the pandemic. Through primary research that engaged more than 1,900 adolescents, parents and teachers in Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Nepal and Sudan, triangulated with a literature review and supplemented by secondary data analysis drawn from other Plan International research, this report explores the:

- ability of adolescents to access education during the pandemic.
- quality of education received by those who were able to continue their learning.
- availability and use of home-learning materials, teaching capacity, and teacher interaction with students during periods of school closure.
- home-learning environment and support adolescents received for their learning.
- impact remote learning has had on adolescents' mental health and well-being.
- extent to which children and adolescents have been involved in decision making, as part of the COVID-19 response.
- challenges and successes of returning to education.

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<sup>a</sup> Plan International defines adolescents as being between 10 and 19 years old.

## PHOTOVOICE DIARY: EMPTY STREETS DURING LOCKDOWN IN SHABASHA, SUDAN



**“ This photo is of myself walking in the streets and the streets are empty because of the lockdown. ”**

*Adolescent boy, age unknown, Shabasha, Sudan*



Prevailing social norms and cultural attitudes reduce girls' and young women's mobility, access to resources and information, and broad social networks, and can restrict access to spaces of power and decision making.

This research reveals adolescents' perspectives, experiences and recommendations for action, so often unheard. The findings offer an insight into the challenges that adolescents, parents and teachers faced in the studied countries over the past year:

**77%**

of participating teachers were unable to teach remotely during lockdowns due to their own or their students' lack of connectivity or access to devices.

**33%**

of adolescents have not yet fully returned to education, or their school has closed again, more than a year since the pandemic began.

**85%**

of teachers reported fewer students attending online lessons compared with pre-pandemic school-based lessons.

**63%**

of adolescents felt they had not learned as much at home as they would have in school.

Recovery from this crisis will be long, uneven and uncertain. Swift and targeted action is needed, in partnership with adolescents, to reverse the damage done to girls' and boys' education over the last year, and to build back better and more equal.

## BOX 3 ADOLESCENCE AND THE GENDERED IMPACT OF COVID-19

Adolescence is a pivotal time that can shape life trajectories. The term ‘adolescence’ refers to a specific phase of life within the process of a child’s development – typically between the ages of 10 and 19 years old.<sup>34</sup> It is the period between entering puberty and the beginning of adulthood. While the definition of adolescence can change based on cultural and geographic context, it is generally understood to represent a transitional time, characterised by drastic physical, mental and social changes.<sup>35</sup>

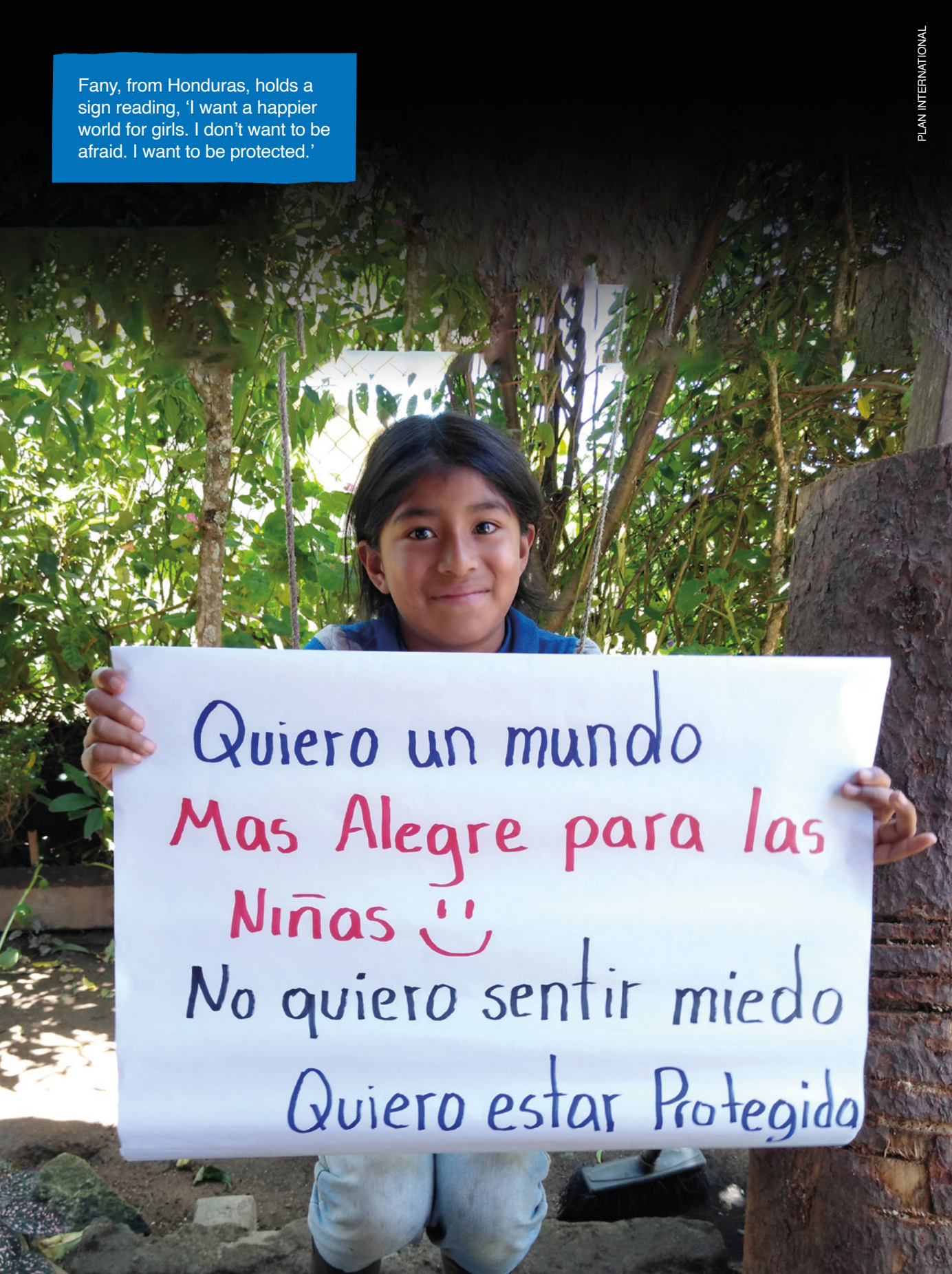
Adolescence is a time of rapid brain development, where people develop new skills and gain more advanced thoughts and emotions. Adolescents start to form stronger connections with their peers, while seeking more independence from their parents and families. They are often curious, creative and great innovators. This stage of brain development, however, can leave adolescents particularly vulnerable to difficult experiences and emotional circumstances, which can disrupt their positive development.<sup>36</sup>

In many contexts, adolescent girls are valued less than boys and have fewer opportunities. They are held back further because of the double discrimination they face due to their age and gender. The onset of puberty can mark a time of restriction and curtailed opportunities due to gender norms and expectations. Age and gender-based discrimination is replicated through social, political, cultural and economic spheres. It is compounded by other factors, such as race, disability and sexual orientation, that intersect to further restrict women and girls in all their diversity.

COVID-19-related quarantines have intensified the marginalisation and discrimination that many women and girls face around the world. Evidence from past crises shows the impacts are often gendered, with girls particularly vulnerable to violations of their rights in the face of prolonged school closures.<sup>37,38</sup> The pandemic has led to a surge in gender-based violence (GBV),<sup>39</sup> including sexual exploitation,<sup>40</sup> has intensified the drivers of child, early and forced marriage, and put many more girls at risk of unwanted or unintended pregnancies.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, access to vital services for girls’ protection, nutrition, health and well-being have been cut off. Challenges related to accessing water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services – including for menstrual hygiene management – have also increased.<sup>42</sup>

Yet, in the context of so many negative indicators, investing in adolescent girls’ healthy, safe and successful transition to adulthood offers a unique opportunity to reap a triple dividend: for them now, for their adult lives, and for their children’s futures.<sup>43</sup> It benefits girls themselves, their communities and the wider struggle to achieve gender equality. Addressing the gendered impacts of the pandemic on girls’ and adolescents’ education is critical.

Fany, from Honduras, holds a sign reading, 'I want a happier world for girls. I don't want to be afraid. I want to be protected.'

A young girl with dark hair and a blue shirt is smiling and holding a large white sign. The sign has handwritten text in Spanish. The background shows lush green foliage and a stone wall.

Quiero un mundo  
Mas Alegre para las  
Niñas 😊  
No quiero sentir miedo  
Quiero estar Protegida



# METHODOLOGY

This mixed-methods study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to investigate the effect of COVID-19 on adolescents' education in low and middle-income countries, particularly for adolescent girls. Primary data was collected from adolescents, parents, teachers and local leaders in five countries: Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Nepal and Sudan. These countries were selected by Plan International UK based on research interest. The different responded groups were purposefully chosen to understand their unique perspectives of how impact COVID-19 impacted adolescents' education.

## Research ethics

Ethics approval was sought from Plan International's Ethics Review Team (ERT), which ensured the research study was in line with Plan International's *Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning (MERL) Policy and Standards*, the *Global Policy on Safeguarding Children and Young People*, and the key ethical principles outlined in the *Framework for Ethical Monitoring, Evaluation and Research*. Ethics approval was granted by the ERT before the start of the study. Researchers were required to adhere to strict codes of conduct, including Plan International's and Plan International UK's child protection and safeguarding policies.

Data was collected anonymously. Quantitative data was extracted for analysis as respondent numbers. For the qualitative data, collectors assigned a code to each interviewee, corresponding to the consent form, which were included in transcriptions. The research complied with the 2018 Data Protection Act of the United Kingdom and follows the data protection guidance of the Social Research Association (SRA).

Written and/or verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants in this research. For survey participants, information was shared about the research at the beginning of the survey, in line with Plan International's *Guidance for Ethical Internet Research*, before participants chose to click to 'take part'. Double consent was sought from adolescents and their parents/caregivers for the qualitative data collection, following the distribution of information sheets about the research, including its aims and objectives. This was reaffirmed before the start of the data collection. Consent forms were stored securely by the Plan International Nepal and Sudan offices. Research participants were given the option to leave email addresses so they could receive a copy of the final research report.

## Literature review

The literature review explored both grey and peer-reviewed literature through 27 pre-defined search terms and included a process of citation chaining/reference mining. A total of 283 documents were reviewed, 15 of which were peer reviewed.<sup>b</sup> The literature review answered the main research question: *What is the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's education in low and middle-income countries, particularly for adolescent girls?* The main research question was broken down into seven sub-research questions (see Annex 2). The results were used as triangulation of the primary research.

Additional evidence has also been included from other relevant Plan International research and analysis in the write up of this report. Country spotlights and highlights from the findings are presented in standalone boxes.

## Quantitative data

An online survey was created, in English, Spanish, Arabic and Nepali, to gather quantitative data. It consisted of open and closed questions, the latter mostly using a five-point Likert scale<sup>44</sup> (strongly agree; agree; neither agree, nor disagree; disagree; strongly disagree) as well as some multiple-choice questions.<sup>c</sup> The survey was piloted by a group of individuals who spoke the prominent languages within the countries selected for the study before being conducted in full. Different surveys were offered to adolescents, parents and teachers.

Quantitative data was collected in two phases. Surveys were carried out in Guatemala, Honduras, Nepal and Sudan between March and April 2021. Data collection in Kenya took place in June 2021. Collection methods varied between countries, ranging from entirely online in Nepal, to WhatsApp texts and phone calls in Guatemala and Honduras. In instances where connectivity and/or access to electronic devices was not possible, interviews were carried out in person, in line with COVID-19 safety protocols (Sudan and Kenya). In-person data collection took place in communities that Plan International works for logistical considerations.

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<sup>b</sup> At the time of the literature review (March 2021), there were relatively few peer-reviewed articles. This could be explained by the short period since the start of the pandemic.

<sup>c</sup> A Likert scale, sometimes referred to as a rating scale, is a close-ended, forced-choice scale used in a questionnaire that provides a series of answers that go from one extreme to another. For example, a scale might have five choices that start at one end with 'strongly agree' and end at the other with 'strongly disagree', with less extreme choices in the middle three points. Likert scales are one of the most reliable ways to measure opinions, perceptions and behaviours.



**TABLE 1: SURVEY RESPONSE RATES, BY COUNTRY**

Survey N=1,750	Adolescent Female	Adolescent Male	Adolescent Prefer not to say	Teacher Female	Teacher Male	Parent Female	Parent Male	Parent Prefer not to say	Total
Guatemala	111	35	3	72	93	134	43	n/a	491
Honduras	76	14	1	24	22	23	7	n/a	167
Kenya	190	91	n/a	91	116	212	66	n/a	766
Nepal	41	4	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	45
Sudan	55	32	2	67	25	54	45	1	281
<b>Total</b>	<b>473</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1,750</b>

Sampling among the adolescents, parents and teachers was random to provide an accurate overview of the situation within the communities selected and avoid responder bias. Demographic data was collected in relation to gender, age and disability. Originally, data on belonging to an ethnic or religious group or identifying as LGBTQ+ was also included, but at a national level some countries decided not to collect this data, which meant comparison across countries was not possible and was therefore omitted from the analysis.

Data was collected from adolescents aged 14 to 19 years. The relatively high number of female adolescent respondents (72%) meant a comparative gender analysis was not possible. Data was also collected from parents who indicated they had children aged between 10 and 19 years of age.

For those teachers who are not currently working, answer logic<sup>d</sup> in the survey meant several questions did not apply to them. The number of people who responded to each question is shown for each graph (N=).

The quantitative analysis using Excel is based on 1,750 surveys. Analysis based on age, gender and disability has been carried out where the sample allows. Any significant differences across groups have been presented in the report.

In addition to displaying each question on the spectrum of strongly agree to strongly disagree, the Likert-scale questions were also calculated to provide a numerical score between 1 and 5, as shown in figure 1. This score is multiplied by the number of respondents who have chosen this particular response.

**FIGURE 1: FIVE-POINT LIKERT SCALE**



<sup>d</sup> Answer logic or skip logic (sometimes referred to as 'branching') allows you to take your respondents through a certain path, depending on the answer they give to a previous question. For example, if a respondent answers 'yes', you could ask them a follow-up linked question. If they answer 'no', you could skip to the next set of questions.

The resulting five numbers are then added up and divided by the total number of respondents for each question. This provides an average score for that question. A score below three indicates most respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statements set out in the survey.

The questions were subsequently grouped into the following eight domains: access to education; quality of education; home-learning environment; well-being; impacts of home learning; decision making; returning to education; and safeguarding. This grouping is based on the literature review, as well as discussions with Plan International UK. The advantage of using domains with average scores is that it provides an instant overview of the findings, even though it might hide outliers to specific questions. An overview of these domains is set out in the *Overview and key findings* section of this report.

The answers to the open questions in the surveys were part of the qualitative research analysis and will be discussed in the next section on qualitative data.

## Qualitative data

Qualitative research was carried out through 134 key informant interviews and focus group discussions with adolescent girls and boys, parents, teachers and local leaders in Nepal (one urban and one rural location) and Sudan (three urban and one semi-rural location). Interview questions were informed by the literature review and particularly by the gaps identified in the literature, such as the quality of education and understanding the home-learning environment.

An additional 21 adolescent girls and 30 adolescent boys (aged between 10 and 19) participated in a 'photovoice diary' methodology. This is a form of participatory research that allows participants to express their views, perspectives and feelings through taking photographs that are then discussed collectively.<sup>45</sup> Adolescents in Nepal and Sudan were asked to take photos, using their own cameras or those provided by Plan International, that responded to the question: ***What effect has the COVID-19 pandemic had on your education?*** As part of a facilitated discussion, the adolescents themselves chose 58 images and accompanying quotations to form the research output. A total of 22 images have been included in this report, chosen by the research team, and presented throughout the report.

**TABLE 2: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH RESPONSE RATES, NEPAL AND SUDAN**

Qualitative N = 185	Method	Adolescent girls (10–19)	Adolescent boys (10–19)	Parent	Teacher	Local leader	Total
Nepal	Key informant interviews	20	20	23	8	4	75
	Photovoice diaries	20	20	n/a	n/a	n/a	40
	Focus group discussion	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Sudan	Key informant interviews	7	13	22	8	5	55
	Photovoice diaries	1	10	n/a	n/a	n/a	11
	Focus group discussion	4	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	4
<b>Total</b>		<b>45</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>185</b>

In addition, semi-structured key informant interviews were held with adolescents, parents/caregivers, teachers and community representatives (generally, local government officials) over a period of two weeks. Interview guidelines and questions were provided for each respondent type.

Data was analysed using a coding frame, developed by the researchers following an inductive approach (using the data itself to guide the creation of the coding frame). The qualitative data collected from Sudan and Nepal was analysed against this coding frame and subsequently used to triangulate the quantitative findings by using respondents' quotes to provide further depth to the findings. Care was taken to ensure representation from all different countries, age groups and gender within this process. Quotations obtained through the qualitative data collection in Nepal and Sudan are in **blue** throughout this report.

The qualitative data obtained from the survey's open questions were analysed in Excel using a word count. Percentages are calculated from the total responses to a given question and presented in donut graphs. In addition, quotes from the open answers are used to provide further insight into the quantitative findings, as the open questions were often follow-up questions from the Likert-scale questions. These quotes are presented in **orange**.

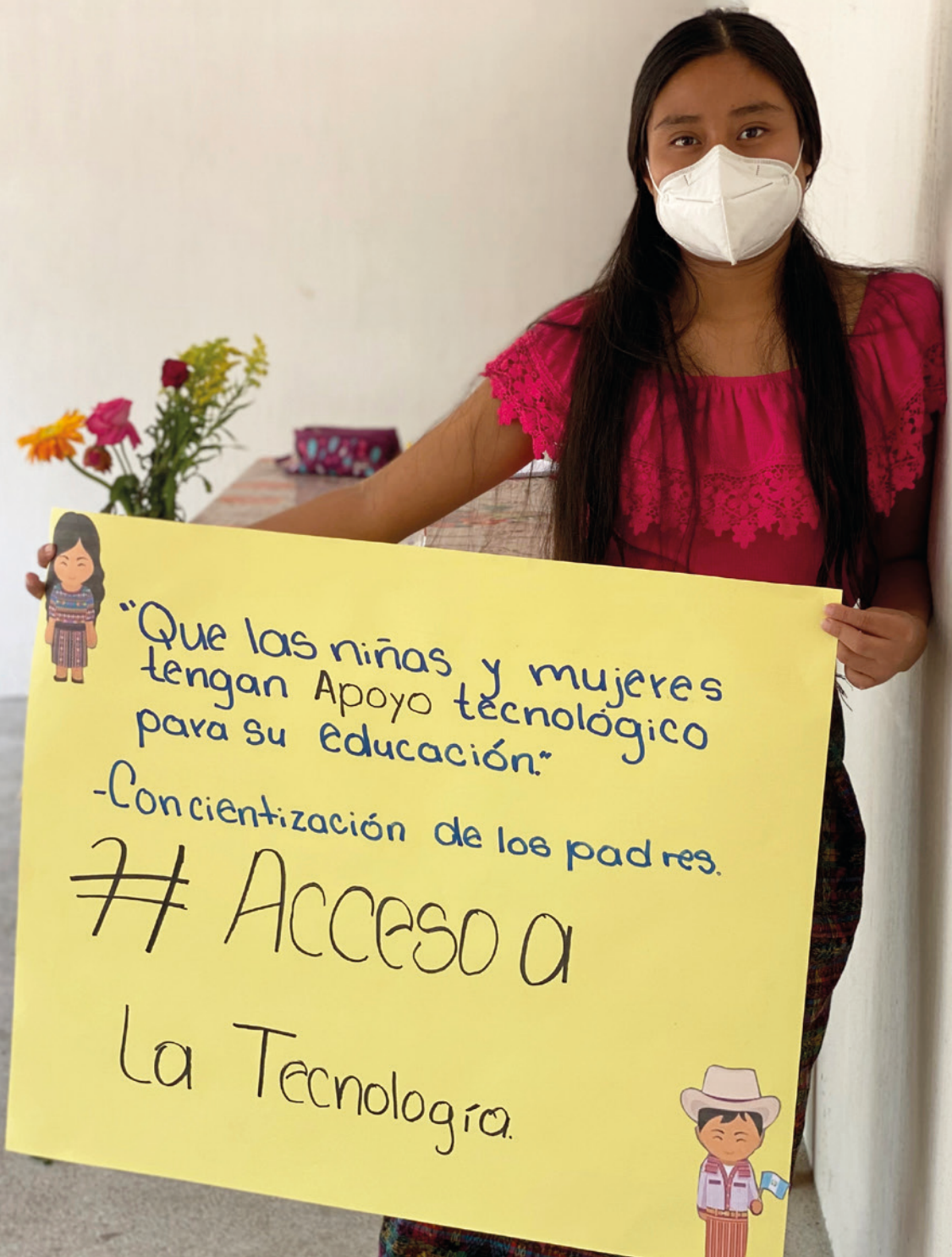
## Limitations

There are several limitations to the methodology:

1. The data is not representative for any of the countries or regions selected for the report, as data was only collected in areas where Plan International works.
2. Online surveys do not reach the most marginalised populations. However, this was partly mitigated through most of the data being gathered through in-person and telephone-based data collection.
3. As the research has a particular focus on adolescent girls, most (72%) of the adolescent survey respondents were female, and a comparative gender analysis could not be carried out. However, parents were asked to respond to the survey in relation to either their daughter or son, which in this case allows for comparison by gender.
4. Additional data collection in Kenya was conducted in person through a large team of research assistants. While it was therefore possible to collect data from many more respondents than those in other countries, this can skew the data towards Kenya for some of the questions. Therefore, data has been presented by country throughout the report, with notable variations highlighted in the text.
5. Due to the limited uptake of the online survey in Nepal (where in-person or telephone-based data collection was not undertaken), it was not possible to collect adequate comparable quantitative data from parents or teachers, and therefore this data was not included in the analysis for these groups.
6. In Darfur, Sudan, quantitative and qualitative data collection was limited due to the resurgence of violence during the period of data collection. This meant it was not possible to collect data from refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) in Sudan, as was originally intended.

For a more detailed description of the methodology, including the survey and interview questions, email [policy@plan-uk.org](mailto:policy@plan-uk.org).

Sucely, from Guatemala, holds a sign reading, 'That girls and women have technological support for their education.'





# KEY FINDINGS

Between March 2020 and March 2021, schools in Guatemala and Honduras were fully closed for 35 and 37 weeks, respectively. In Nepal, schools were completely closed for 26 weeks and partially closed for a further 26 weeks. Schools in Kenya were shut for 28 weeks and partially open for nine weeks. In Sudan, schools were fully closed at the national level for an average of 15 weeks, although each state could evaluate the local health conditions and adjust accordingly.

## Key findings

This study presents wide ranging impacts of COVID-19 on adolescents' education. Key findings include:

- Already weak and overstretched education systems failed to adapt and cope with the sudden shift to remote learning.
- A lack of electronic devices, digital infrastructure and electricity meant most adolescents – particularly those in rural locations – were unable to access any education.
- The existing inequalities in the education system were worsened by the pandemic, particularly for girls, who face challenges unique to their intersecting experiences of gender and age.
- The home environment was generally not conducive to learning, with adolescents feeling easily distracted, unsupported, and limited in study time due to competing demands such as increased household chores.
- The social and economic impacts of the pandemic, isolation, concerns about the future, and stressful home-learning environments placed additional burdens on students, parents and caregivers. Adolescents reported significant negative impacts on their mental health and well-being.
- Reduced numbers of adolescents have returned to school. The reasons why include fear of catching the virus or some deciding, or being forced, to enter marriage or find work. Others did not return because they felt they had missed so much education they were unable to catch up.
- While half (48%) of adolescents had been engaged in decisions about the COVID-19 response, nine out of 10 wanted greater and more meaningful involvement in decisions about their education and how to respond to the pandemic in their community.

## Country facts

To help provide context for the data collected in the five countries in this study, country facts are included in Annex 1 and referred to in the analysis.

## Overview by domain

The impacts of COVID-19 on the education of adolescent girls and boys in these countries, as perceived by respondents to the survey, are significant. To provide an overview, questions have been grouped into eight domains, based on the literature review and discussion with Plan International. A score below three indicates an area of concern.

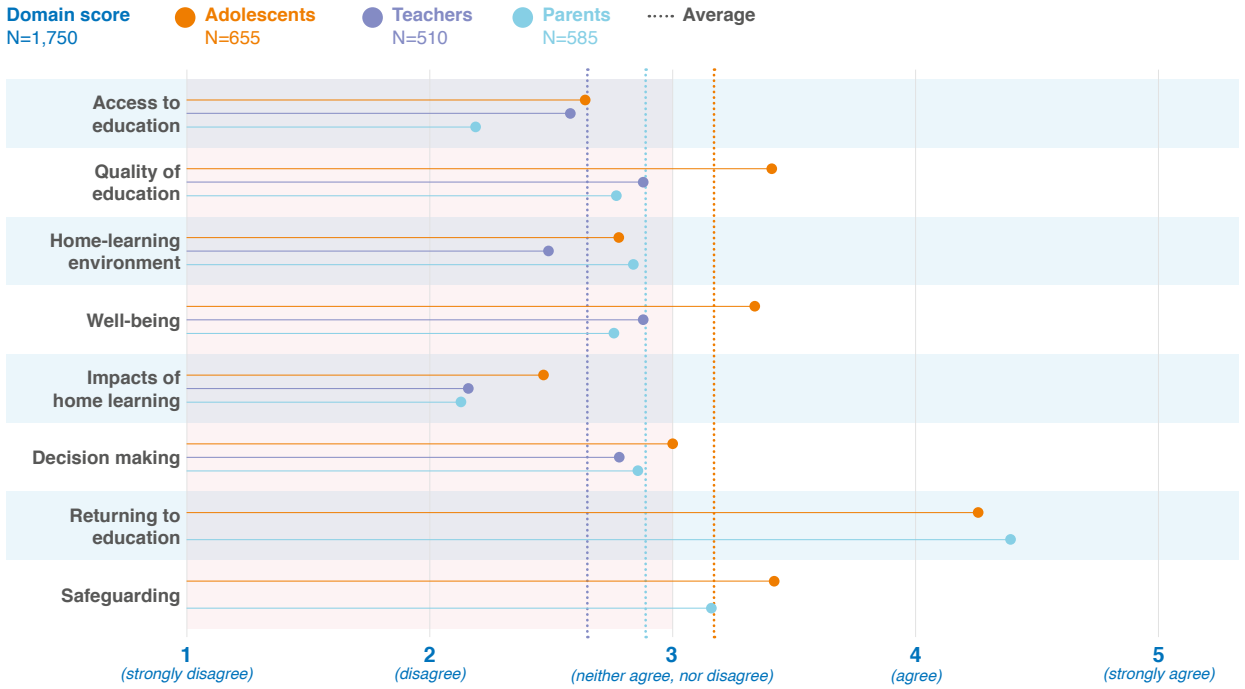
Survey results across the three respondent groups highlight challenges in six of the eight domains (access to education, quality of education, home-learning environment, well-being, impacts of home learning, and decision making). Across these domains, most scores are below three (shaded) for each respondent group.

Average domain scores among adolescents vary by country, with adolescents in Sudan responding most negatively and those in Honduras most positively. Overall, however, adolescents are more positive than parents and teachers. While those who returned to school expressed happiness at being able to see their friends and enjoy in-person classes, many were concerned about having fallen behind and the impact this would have on their future.

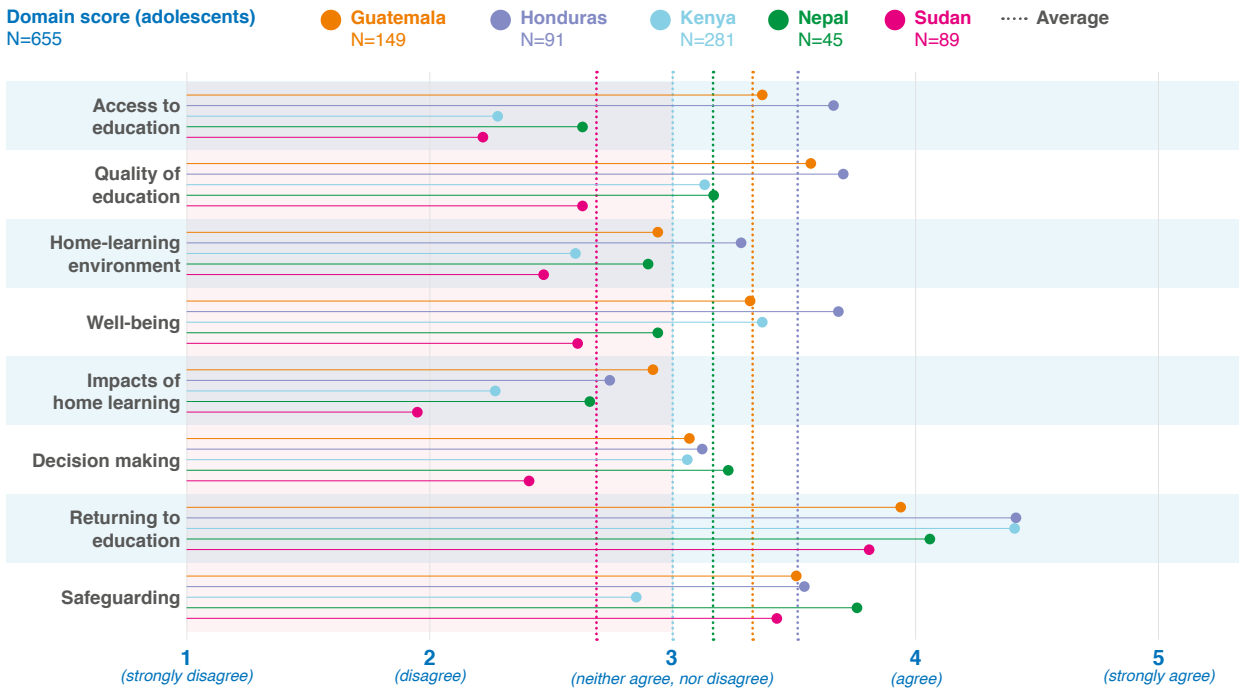
Response scores for Sudan are the lowest across all but three domains. Survey respondents raised most concerns over the impact of home learning and their lack of inclusion in decision making.

The data in the domains is further unpacked in the following sections of this report.

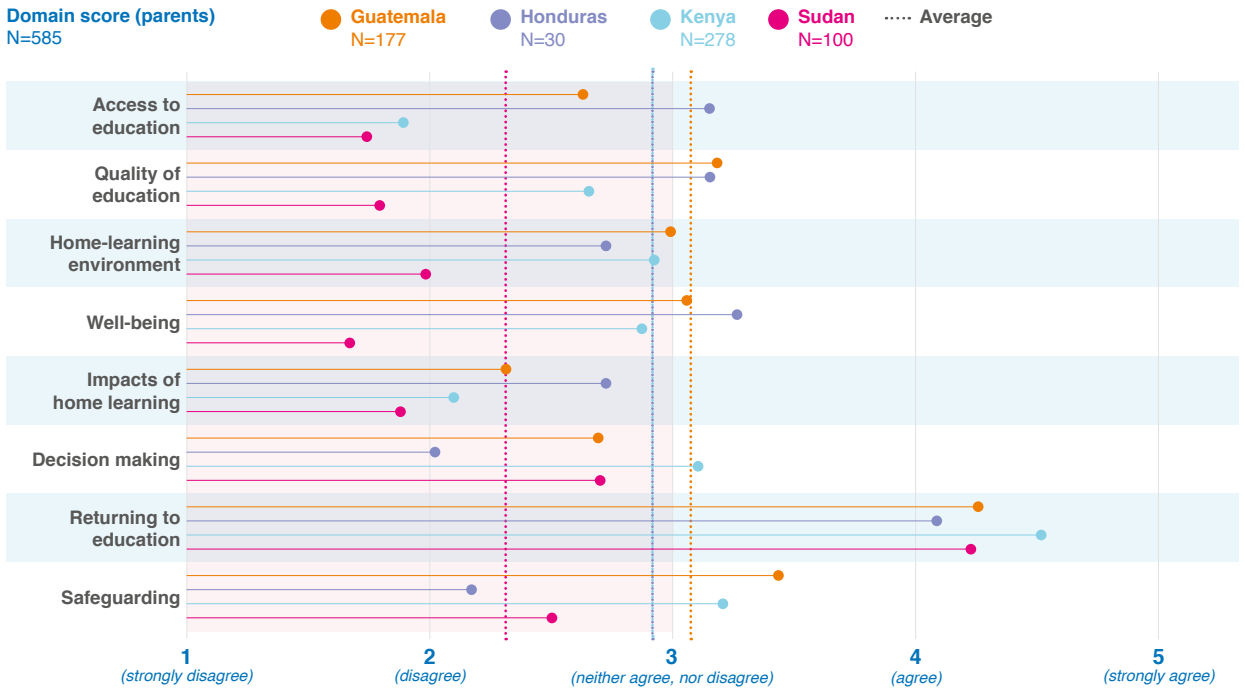
**FIGURE 2: AVERAGE DOMAIN SCORES, BY ADOLESCENTS, TEACHERS AND PARENTS**



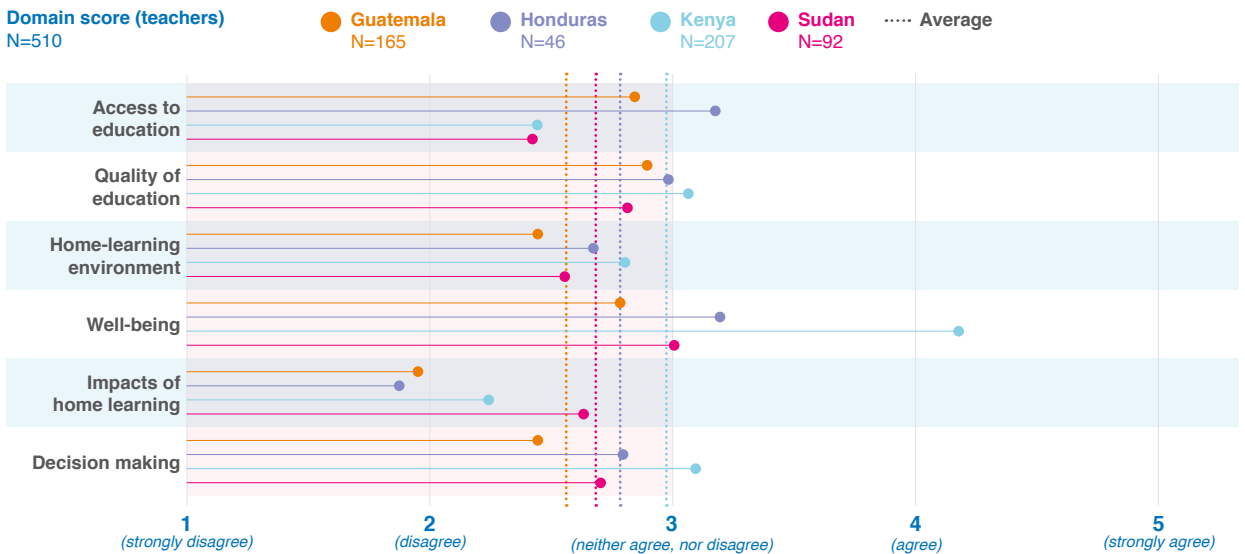
**FIGURE 3: ADOLESCENTS' DOMAIN SCORES, ACROSS ALL FIVE COUNTRIES**



**FIGURE 4: PARENTS' DOMAIN SCORES, ACROSS FOUR COUNTRIES**



**FIGURE 5: TEACHERS' DOMAIN SCORES, ACROSS FOUR COUNTRIES**





## PHOTOVOICE DIARY: AN ADOLESCENT GIRL IN DARFUR, SUDAN, HIGHLIGHTS THE LONELINESS THAT MANY FELT DURING SCHOOL CLOSURES



“ We can see in this picture the school yard empty of activities and the students [because of COVID-19]. We can see... loneliness due to restriction by COVID-19. This picture I think the best shows how the coronavirus has impacted on my education. ”

*Adolescent girl, age unknown, Darfur, Sudan*

# ACCESS TO EDUCATION

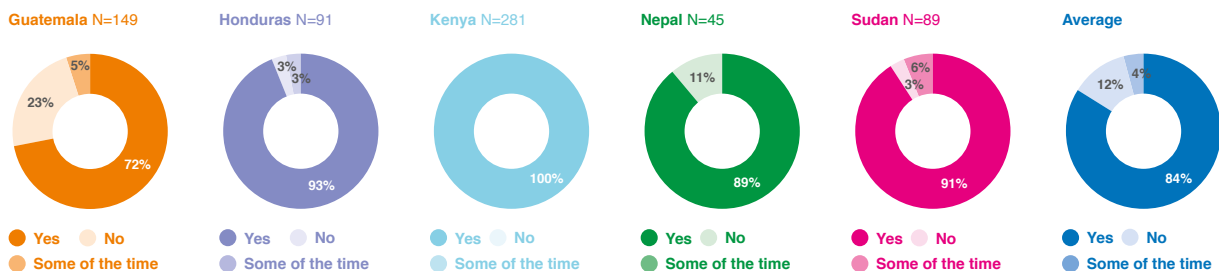
By the end of April 2020, 159 out of 210 countries had imposed country-wide closures of all educational establishments to counter the spread of COVID-19 and prevent healthcare systems being overwhelmed.<sup>46</sup> Closures ranged from weeks to a full academic year, with some national school systems experiencing cycles of partial closures and openings as infections rates rose and fell. On top of the 168 million children whose schools have been completely closed for the last year, it is estimated that a further 214 million children have missed more than three-quarters of their in-person learning.<sup>e,47</sup>

Of the 655 adolescent respondents (473 female, 176 male and six who preferred not to specify their sex), 7% stated they were not in education before the national lockdowns were imposed, and a further 2% attended school some of the time.<sup>f</sup>

When looking at age in relation to school attendance, as might be expected, 19-year-olds account for the highest percentage of those out of school.

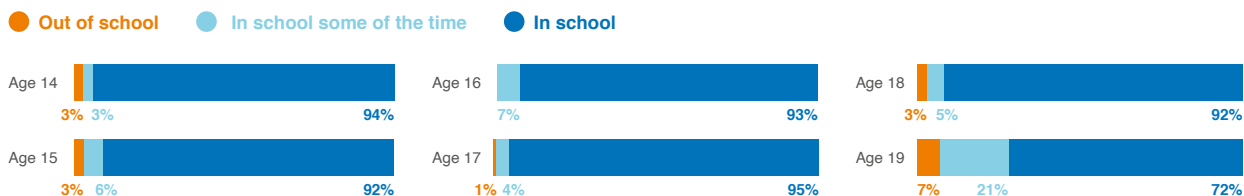
**FIGURE 6: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS ATTENDING SCHOOL BEFORE THE PANDEMIC, BY COUNTRY**

Adolescents: Before the coronavirus pandemic, I went to school N=655



**FIGURE 7: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS ATTENDING SCHOOL, BY AGE**

Adolescents: Age and school attendance N=655



<sup>e</sup> At the time of writing, UNESCO reported schools in 12 countries being fully shut due to academic breaks.

<sup>f</sup> The quantitative analysis in this report is based on findings from adolescents who were in school before the pandemic but whose school temporarily closed during it. As most survey questions were focused on the home-learning experience, skip logic omitted those adolescents who were not in school before the pandemic or whose school remained open during lockdown (which was the case in one of the research locations in Sudan).

## State schools compared with non-state schools

Eighty-three per cent of the adolescent survey respondents attended a state school. On average, 90% mentioned that their schools closed due to the pandemic. However, non-state schools<sup>g</sup> (also referred to as private schools) remained open more often than state schools. Around a fifth to a quarter of primary and secondary school children across the world are educated in the non-state sector.<sup>48</sup>

## School/student communication during lockdown

Only 54% of adolescents reported that their school had been in touch with them during the school closures, although there are strong differences between countries. Eighty-four per cent of the adolescents in Sudan reported little or no communication from school, compared with 68% of adolescents in Kenya and 30% in Nepal.<sup>h</sup> In Guatemala and Honduras, however, over 90% of adolescents reported hearing from their school. State schools were more often in touch with their students compared with non-state schools.

**FIGURE 8: PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOL CLOSURES, BY PRIVATE AND STATE SCHOOL**

Adolescents: My school temporarily closed because of the coronavirus N=607

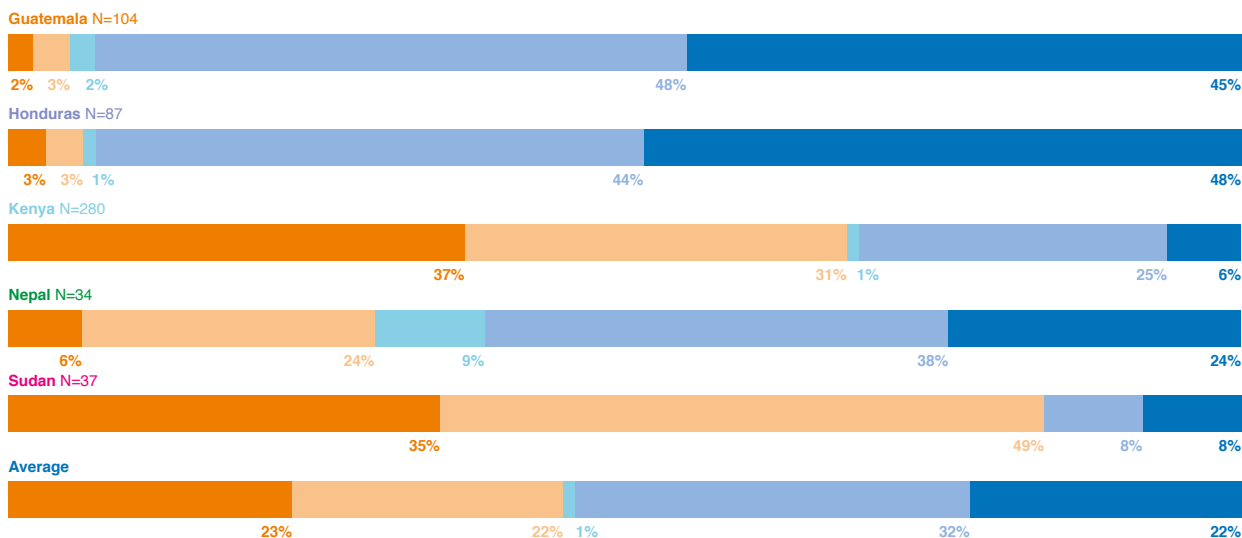
● Yes ● No



**FIGURE 9: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS REPORTING THAT THEIR SCHOOL WAS IN TOUCH WITH THEM, BY COUNTRY**

Adolescents: My school was in touch with me when it closed because of the coronavirus N=542

● Strongly disagree ● Disagree ● Neither agree, nor disagree ● Agree ● Strongly agree

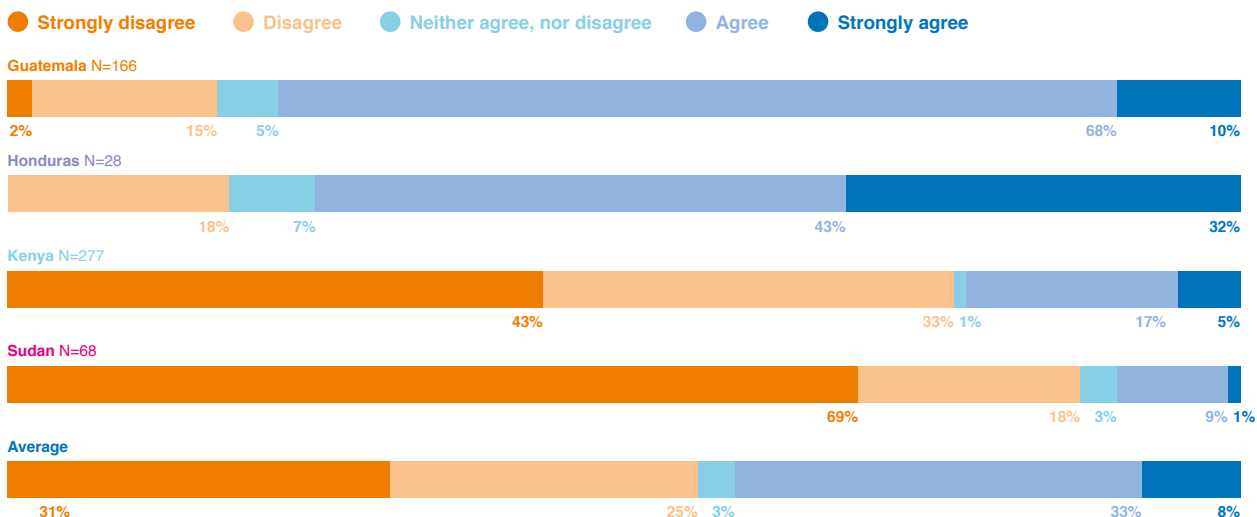


<sup>g</sup> Non-state schools encompass a range of different schools, such as philanthropic, religious and/or low-fee-paying.

<sup>h</sup> Figures relate to adolescents whose schools had closed during the pandemic.

**FIGURE 10: PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS REPORTING THAT THEIR CHILD'S SCHOOL WAS IN TOUCH WITH THEM, BY COUNTRY**

Parents: My child's school was in touch with them when it closed because of the coronavirus N=539



**“Two to three months after the lockdown was announced, our school gave us some books to study at home.”**

*Adolescent girl, 13 years old, Sunsari, Nepal*

**“Until the end of the year [teachers] loaded the students with tasks that they never explained.”**

*Mother, location unknown, Guatemala*

Parental and/or carer support and engagement in children's education has always been important. It became even more critical following the school closures and the transition to home learning. Yet support provided to parents and carers in the home-learning process has been limited, with just over half (56%) having been contacted by their children's school during lockdown.

Parents of children in Sudan and Kenya, who reported the least contact between schools and students during lockdown, highlighted better communication as one of the things their child's school could have done differently throughout the pandemic. Parents in Kenya also noted the importance of a greater community effort to encourage engagement between parents, teachers and community leaders in supporting education.

**“Community awareness on [the] need for education should be encouraged. I appeal for parents' support during this pandemic.”**

*Father, Machakos, Kenya*

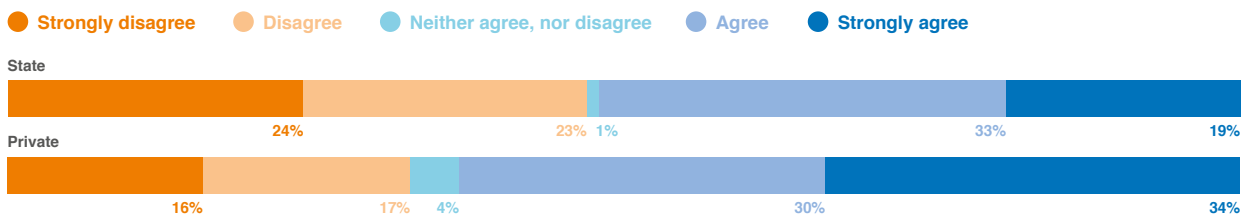
**“All stakeholders (parents, teachers, chiefs) should be in one mind to make sure all pupils hold first to education being that COVID really destabilised them.”**

*Mother, Homabay, Kenya*



**FIGURE 11: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS' SCHOOLS BEING IN TOUCH DURING THE PANDEMIC, BY PRIVATE AND STATE SCHOOL**

Adolescents: My school was in touch with me when it closed because of the coronavirus N=540



## Access to devices and the internet

Home learning during the pandemic has highlighted the need for affordable and dependable communication devices and internet connections, with an estimated 67% of school-age children (three to 17 years) unconnected at home, globally.<sup>49</sup> During the pandemic, 47% of all primary and secondary school students that were targeted exclusively by national online learning platforms did not have access to the internet at home.<sup>50</sup> While the share of students with no internet access is less than 15% in Western Europe and North America, it is as high as 80% in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>51</sup>

Thirty-one percent of schoolchildren (463 million) were unable to access remote learning at all during the pandemic.<sup>52</sup> More than 70% of these lived in rural areas and over three-quarters came from the poorest 40% of households.<sup>53</sup> With no access to electronic devices or electricity, or the family income to afford phone or internet fees, many adolescents in rural communities could not access online learning through radio, TV or the internet.<sup>54</sup>

**“We were in the rural areas and the learners were not able to access all the requirements needed, i.e. TV, radio, smartphones. All of the devices.”**

*Female teacher, Homabay, Kenya*

**“They should think of home learning that is accessible to all people, those in the poor and rural communities and those in urban areas.”**

*Father, Kifili, Kenya*

**“The education system must be strengthened. Many children in rural areas do not have access to technology [and we are not able to] meet the basic needs of the population.”**

*Female teacher, location unknown, Guatemala*

In Nepal, while online learning platforms have been created, the government’s own data reported that only 12% of state schools have the capacity to offer information and communication technology-based learning.<sup>55</sup> Very little data exists on connectivity in homes, although more than 60% of Nepal’s households own a radio and 49% of the population rely on radio broadcasts as a regular source of news.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, radio broadcasts have been seen as a key method of supporting children with home learning through the closures.

## BOX 4 COUNTRY IN FOCUS: KENYA

The Government of Kenya imposed a nationwide closure of schools between March 2020 and January 2021, disrupting the education of approximately 18 million learners.<sup>57</sup> Fifteen million of these children are in primary and secondary schools. Evidence suggests the disruption to education caused by the pandemic is having a negative impact on already vulnerable students, such as girls and children living in poor households.<sup>58</sup>

Reports from some regions also suggest school closures and a limited police presence have left young girls increasingly at risk of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C).<sup>59</sup> School closures and increased financial strain on families, particularly the poorest, mean girls are choosing or being forced into work, marriage or sexual exploitation, placing them at increased risk of violence.<sup>60,61,62,63</sup> Since schools closed in March 2020, it is estimated that up to 1,000 more adolescent girls have been exploited in prostitution in three Nairobi neighbourhoods, primarily due to the need to supplement family income.<sup>64</sup>

Children with disabilities, especially those with difficulties hearing, seeing and in cognitive functioning, face barriers in accessing inclusive public health information and communication strategies that are crucial as preventative measures during pandemics. Communication about COVID-19 in disability-inclusive and child-friendly formats has been scarce in Kenya and unsuitable for people living with different disabilities and in different age groups.<sup>65,66</sup> While the government has provided free online, radio and TV lessons,<sup>67</sup> they were not designed to be differentiated to meet the varied learning needs of students, especially learners with disabilities, who have been largely excluded.<sup>68</sup> Many parents have been unable to assist their children with disabilities with their education needs.<sup>69</sup>

Lockdowns and school closures have meant women and girls with disabilities, who generally live in greater social isolation and exclusion than those without disabilities, are finding themselves at greater risk of abuse at home, often perpetrated by spouses, parents or caregivers.<sup>70</sup> A lack of awareness of the financial support available for people living with disabilities has prevented many isolated families of children with disabilities from accessing it.<sup>71</sup>

While there are no official statistics on gender-based violence in Kenya, the number of calls to helplines have surged more than 10-fold since lockdown measures were imposed in late March 2020.<sup>72</sup> Evidence also suggests COVID-19 has changed patterns of sexual violence against girls and boys, with one study finding that victims are younger compared with before the pandemic.<sup>73</sup> School closures have also reportedly resulted in an increase in offenses perpetrated by individuals known to the survivor, gaining access under the pretext of providing educational resources and support, such as laptops and internet access.<sup>74</sup>

Overall, Kenya's education infrastructure lacks the capacity to deliver and sustain effective online teaching and learning, particularly for those in rural areas and vulnerable and marginalised students. Despite attempts by the Government of Kenya to mitigate the closure of schools through radio, TV and online learning content, students accessing remote learning fell below the numbers anticipated. The lack of internet connectivity, data bundles, electricity, mobile phones, radios and televisions, as well as the broadcast timetables being inaccessible to many learners, meant efforts generally failed to achieve the learning outcomes expected.<sup>75</sup>

The survey findings for this research back this up. Eight in 10 parents (78%) reported that their children were unable to study on an electronic device. Of those who did have a device, only 40% reported having access to the internet.<sup>i</sup> Home internet access by adolescents varies widely in our sample. Of the five countries included in this research, respondents from Kenya reported the lowest access (55%), followed by Nepal, where 53% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the survey statement on access to the internet at home. Lack of connectivity also featured strongly in the qualitative data.

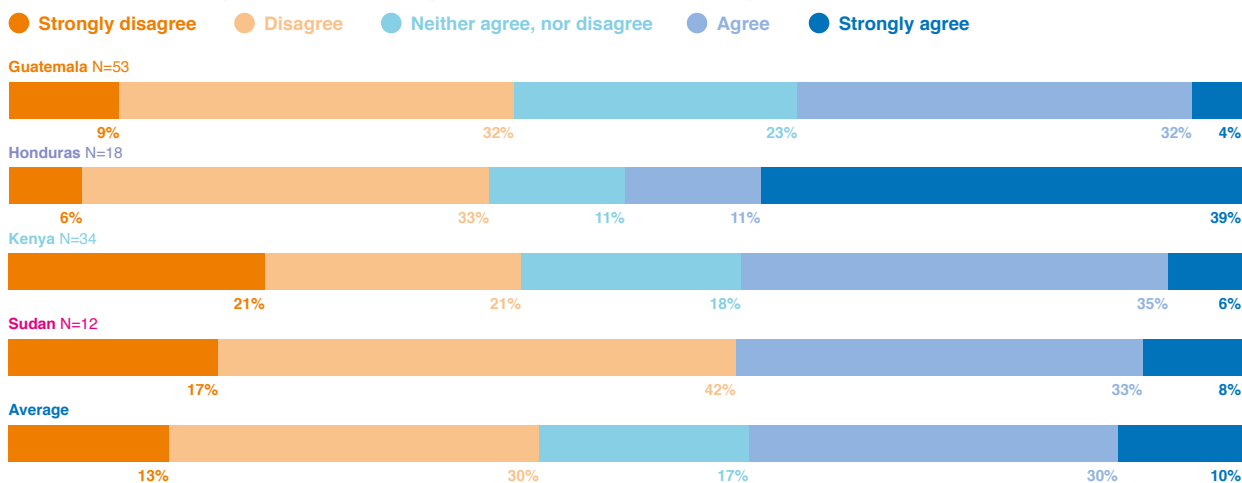
**FIGURE 12: PERCENTAGE OF HOMES WITH ELECTRONIC DEVICES FOR HOME LEARNING, AS REPORTED BY PARENTS**

Parents: Our home had the electronic devices my child needed for learning when their school was closed because of the coronavirus N=540



**FIGURE 13: PERCENTATE OF HOMES THAT HAD INTERNET ACCESS FOR HOME LEARNING, AS REPORTED BY PARENTS, BY COUNTRY**

Parents: Our home always had internet when my child had to access online learning when their school was closed N=117



<sup>i</sup> This survey differentiated between having access to a digital device and having access to the internet. The drop in number of responses between adolescents reporting access to a device and those with access to the internet (N=585 compared with N=117, being the total number of parent respondents) is explained through skip logic in the survey: if respondents answered that they did not have access to a device, they were not asked whether the internet could be accessed through the device. The drop reflects the 78% of parents saying they do not have a device in the home.

**“We do not have the resources for internet and computers.”**

*Father, location unknown, Honduras*

**“Remote learning is essential in such a pandemic but we lack resources for that.”**

*Male local leader, Sunsari, Nepal*

Although the proportion of the overall population with access to electricity and network coverage in Sudan is the lowest of the countries included in this research,<sup>76</sup> only 14% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the survey statement. Firm evidence for why this is the case could be identified within our data analysis, but it should be noted that the number of respondents is extremely low (N=7) due to respondents having answered earlier that they do not have access to a device.

**“In the community there is no internet signal and 90% of the students have no smartphone and are poor.”**

*Male teacher, location unknown, Guatemala*

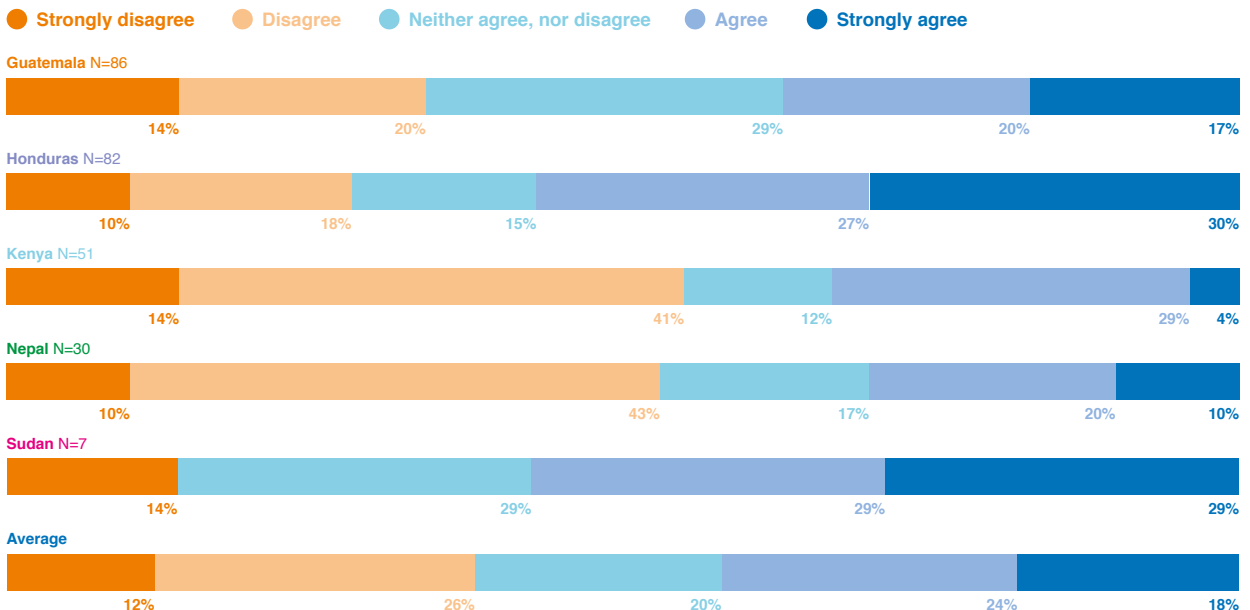
**“Education is not only for those who have a mobile phone, but [should be] available for everyone.”**

*Adolescent girl, 14 years old, location unknown, Honduras*

Seven in 10 adolescents (69%) had to share a device for home learning with their siblings, potentially jeopardising the time available to access good quality online learning.

**FIGURE 14: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS THAT ALWAYS HAD ACCESS TO THE INTERNET WHEN NEEDED, BY COUNTRY**

Adolescents: I always had access to the internet for my home learning when I needed it N=256



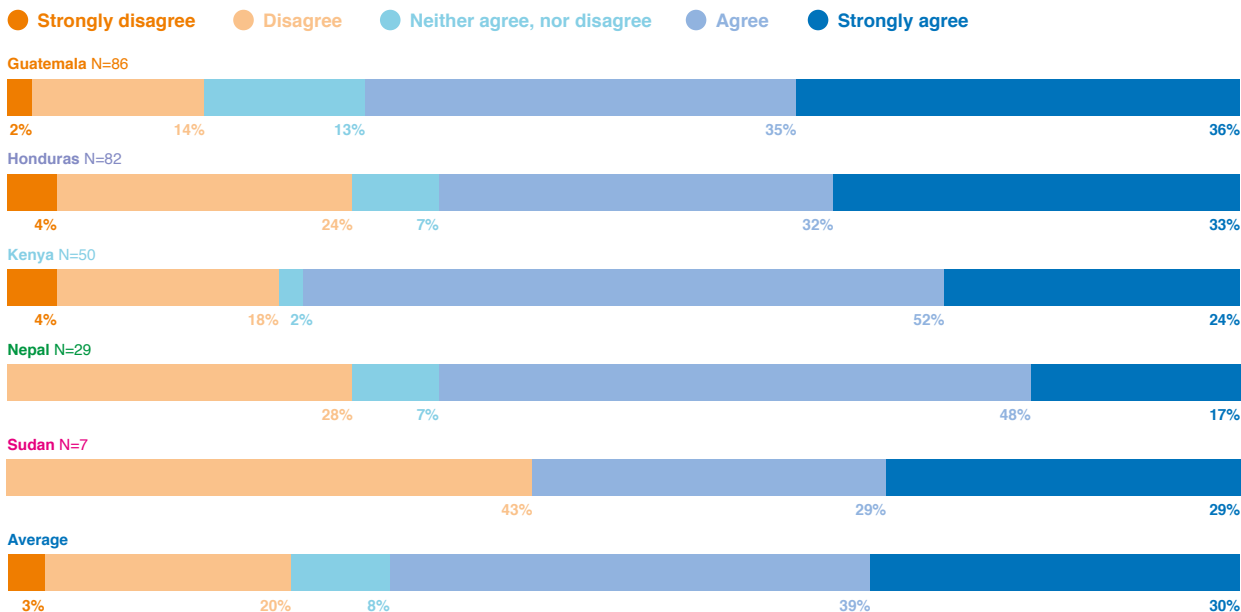
**FIGURE 15: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS ABLE TO ACCESS LESSONS THROUGH AN ELECTRONIC DEVICE**

Adolescents: I was always able to access my lessons on an electronic device when I needed to N=255



**FIGURE 16: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS THAT SHARED A DEVICE FOR HOME LEARNING, BY COUNTRY**

Adolescents: I had to share the electronic device used for home learning with my brothers and sisters N=254



## BOX 5 THE DIGITAL GENDER DIVIDE

The gender gap in mobile internet use was significant before the pandemic, with more than 300 million fewer women accessing the internet from a mobile device than men in low and middle-income countries.<sup>77</sup> Gender norms favouring boys in the use of electronic devices and the internet have left girls with less access to household computers and the internet than their male relatives.<sup>78,79,80</sup> This limits girls' access to information and communication technology (ICT) and, even in contexts with high mobile and internet coverage, can translate into reduced learning opportunities.

In Iraq, for example, prevailing gender norms limit girls' access to online education and prevent them from communicating with male teachers using the telephone.<sup>81</sup> Low or no ICT literacy skills further limits girls' access to online learning. Just 8.5% of females over the age of five living in rural India have the skills needed to access and navigate the internet.<sup>82</sup>



## Teachers' online access

To be effective and interactive, home learning requires both students and teachers to have access to communications technology and the internet. However, of the 425 teachers that responded to the survey, 77% had not been able to teach remotely due either to a lack of devices or their students' lack of access to devices. For those that were able to teach remotely, only half had access to an electronic device and even fewer had consistent access to the internet when they needed it.

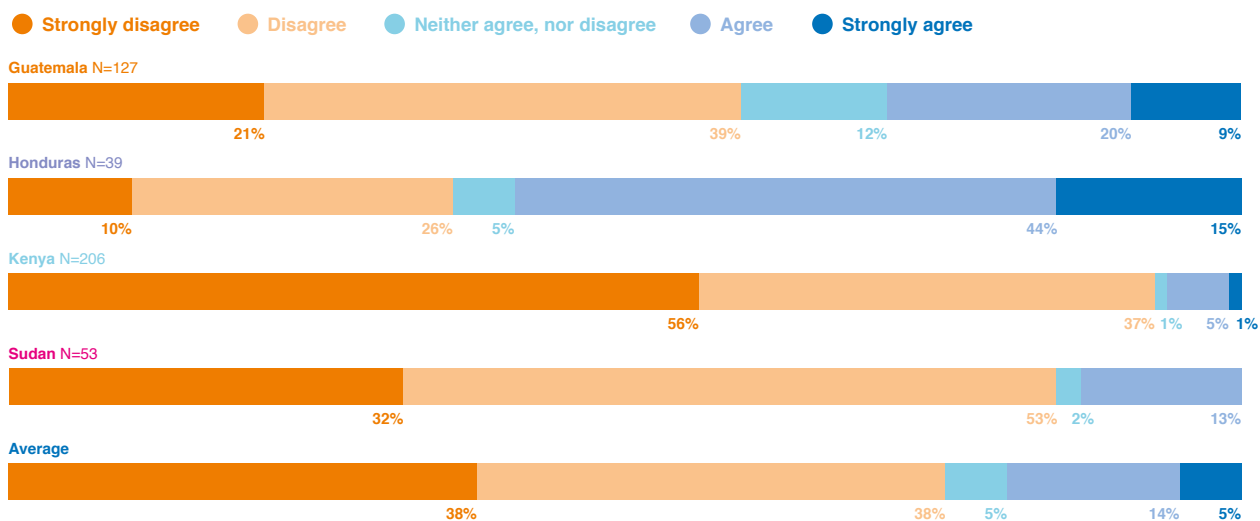
**“I did not have the opportunity to teach online because there are no resources and the community where I work is poor and there is no internet access.”**

*Female teacher, location unknown, Honduras*

Teachers in Kenya were the least likely to be able teach lessons remotely (93%), followed by Sudan (85%) and Guatemala (60%). Other research has found that many teachers were also unprepared to adapt to this new method and lacked the technological competencies needed.<sup>83</sup>

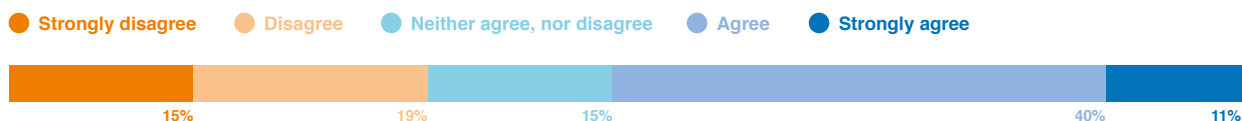
**FIGURE 17: PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS ABLE TO TEACH REMOTELY, BY COUNTRY**

Teachers: I was able to teach lessons remotely N=425



**FIGURE 18: PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS WITH ACCESS TO DEVICES TO TEACH ONLINE**

Teachers: I had access to an electronic device to conduct lessons remotely N=114



**“Due to lack of signal, I cannot work online and not everyone has access to online systems.”**

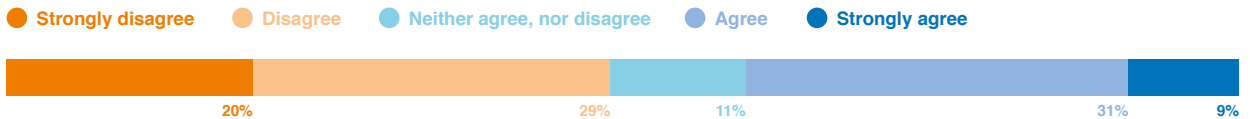
*Male teacher, location unknown, Guatemala*

To support educational continuity in communities that lack connectivity or devices, teachers highlighted the importance of reaching students through low or no-tech solutions, including through the physical distribution of paper-based learning materials and resources.

Teachers in Guatemala and Honduras reported that either they or their schools had attempted this. However, participants reported that no learning materials were distributed in Sudan, which was further compounded by the challenges faced in providing online classes to many students.

**FIGURE 19: PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS WITH ACCESS TO THE INTERNET TO TEACH ONLINE**

Teachers: I always had access to the internet when I needed it to teach remotely N=114



## **BOX 6 THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON THE EDUCATION AND PROTECTION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES AND VULNERABLE LEBANESE COMMUNITIES IN WEST BEKAA AND MOUNT LEBANON<sup>84</sup>**

In December 2020, Plan International Lebanon surveyed 256 adolescents (134 girls) aged 10 to 17 and 341 female and male caregivers as part of an education and child protection needs assessment in West Bekaa and Mount Lebanon. Most respondents were Syrian refugees (79% of adolescents and 67% of caregivers), followed by Lebanese (20% of adolescents and 32% of caregivers) and Palestinian refugees from Lebanon (1% of adolescents and 1% of caregivers). The survey found:

- 41% of adolescents reported having dropped out of education since the pandemic began. The rest were already out of school.
- Of the adolescents that continued to receive an education, 90% reported doing so through distance learning and only 45% were satisfied with its quality.
- 57% of adolescents and 64% of caregivers reported knowing children in their community who were engaged in child labour in the three months before the survey.
- 34% of adolescents and 38% of caregivers reported knowing people who married before the age of 18 in the preceding three months.
- 25% of adolescents and 33% of caregivers reported knowing adolescents who became pregnant before the age of 18 in the preceding three months.

## Radio and TV lessons

It is estimated that globally 69% of schoolchildren in pre-primary to secondary education were reached through broadcast and digital media during the pandemic.<sup>85</sup> A slightly lower proportion (61%) of adolescents in this study agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to access radio or TV learning. Of these, 75% reported learning new things and 76% thought these lessons were useful.

While a similar proportion (76%) of parents agreed on the usefulness of radio and TV lessons, teachers were more critical. Teachers in Kenya, however, felt that when students were able to access and engage with radio and TV lessons, they had a positive impact on their learning.

**“It was useful... immediately [after] they resumed they were given some tests which showed some positive results.”**

*Male teacher, Bondo, Kenya*

**“The students were able to respond to questions pertaining to what they were taught.”**

*Female teacher, Homabay, Kenya*

### FIGURE 20: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS ABLE TO ACCESS RADIO AND TV LESSONS

Adolescents: I was able to listen to lessons on the radio or TV when my school was closed because of the coronavirus N=528



### FIGURE 21: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS LEARNING NEW THINGS FROM RADIO AND TV LESSONS

Adolescents: I learned new things when listening to lessons on the radio or TV N=320



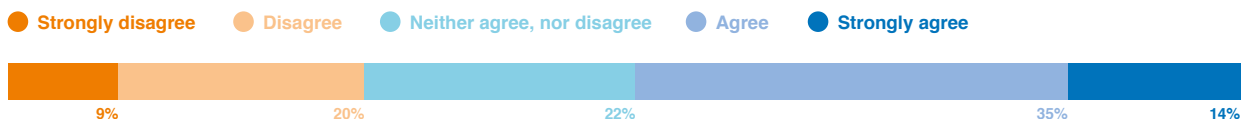
### FIGURE 22: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS WHO FOUND RADIO AND TV LESSONS USEFUL

Adolescents: The lessons on radio or TV were useful to me N=321



### FIGURE 23: PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS REPORTING THAT RADIO AND TV LESSONS WERE USEFUL

Teachers: The lessons on radio or TV were useful N=249



### FIGURE 24: PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS REPORTING THAT RADIO AND TV LESSONS WERE USEFUL

Parents: The lessons on radio or TV were useful for my child N=200



**“Some lessons laid a foundation for the teachers in that they were things they had not taught.”**

*Male teacher, Kisumu, Kenya*

In Sudan, however, there were parents and teachers who said they would have liked the government to have offered lessons through radio or TV.

**“Seriously invest in remote and radio education.”**

*Female teacher, location unknown, Sudan*

**“Provide local radio and TV programmes for revision and teaching.”**

*Mother, location unknown, Sudan*

**“Our school did not provide any remote lessons. However, the government had given [some] on television. It was a nice programme. We could watch and attend the class on TV.”**

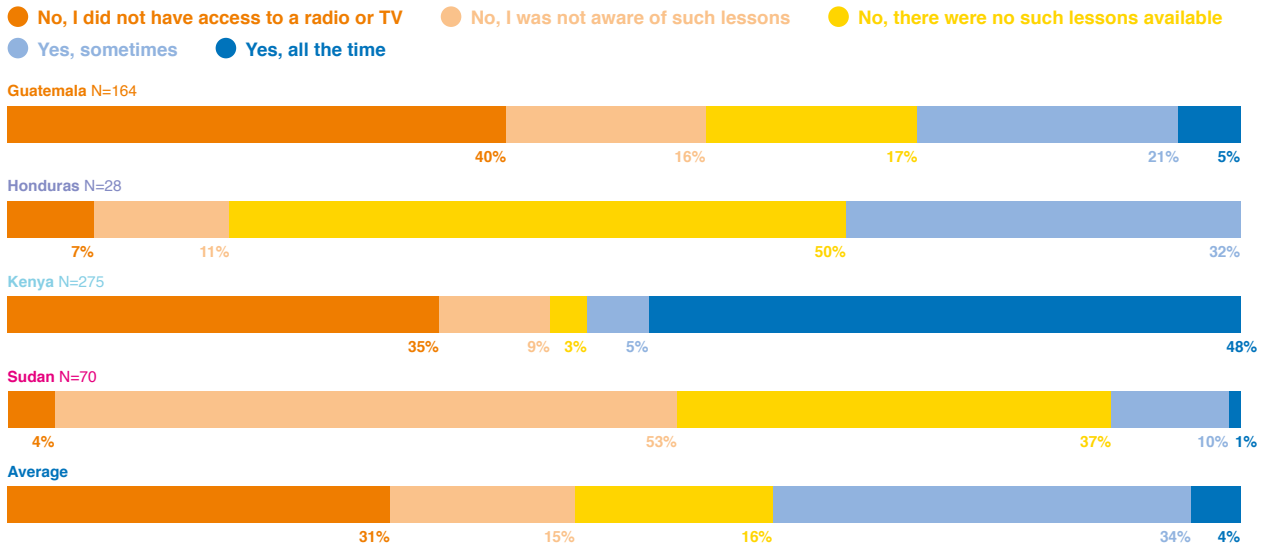
*Adolescent girl, 16 years old, Sunsari, Nepal*

In the absence of in-person education, most responses by adolescents and parents indicated that radio and TV lessons are considered a useful way of learning from home. However, 13% were not aware such lessons existed and 16% were unable to access them because they did not have a TV or radio. Parents, however, reported lower levels of access, particularly in Guatemala and Kenya (40% and 35%, respectively).

The reasons for this may be varied, and possibly linked to the geographical location and degree of poverty of a community. The cost of access to electricity, devices, the internet and other materials makes home learning prohibitively expensive for poor families. The communities in Guatemala that took part in this research are among the poorest and, in some cases, the most remote in the country (Jalapa, Quiché, Alta Verapaz, Baja Verapaz and Escuintla), which could explain the high percentage of respondents with no access to radio or TV.

**FIGURE 25: PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS WHOSE CHILD LISTENED TO RADIO AND TV LESSONS, BY COUNTRY**

Parents: My child listened to lessons on the radio or TV when their school was closed N=537



This evidence suggests that if remote lessons were offered through radio and TV in a future pandemic or crisis, investments in awareness raising and outreach are needed, and alternative provision must be made for those unable to access these lessons.

## Disability

People with disabilities are defined as having long-term impairments that in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.<sup>86</sup> Disability is both a cause and consequence of poverty and is the single largest factor in being excluded from education.<sup>87</sup> Fifty percent of children with disabilities in low and middle-income countries are not currently enrolled in school<sup>88</sup> and many of them have never been enrolled.<sup>89</sup>

Of the 655 adolescents who responded to this survey, 44 (7%) self-identified as having a disability. While the numbers are relative low, the available data does show that before the pandemic there was already a higher proportion of adolescents with disabilities who were not going to school compared with their peers. One fifth (20%) of respondents with a disability reported not attending school before the pandemic, compared with 6% of adolescents without a disability.

**“She is disabled and the school bus stopped coming for her.”**

*Mother, Kisumu, Kenya*

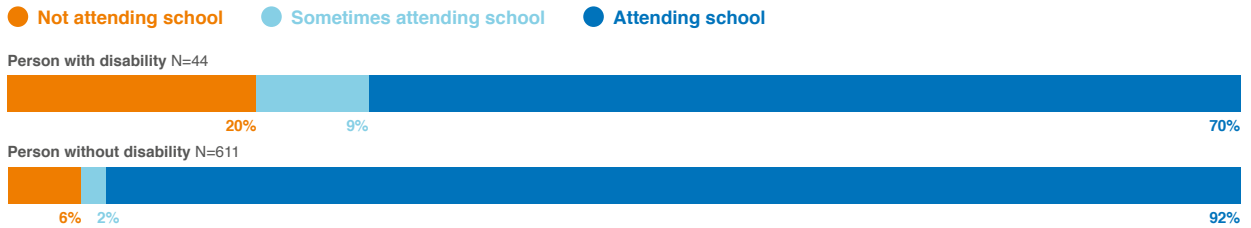
**“He’s disabled, so perhaps if he had enough time to go to school, he would have done better.”**

*Adolescent boy, 17 years old, Machakos, Kenya*



## FIGURE 26: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS WITH AND WITHOUT A DISABILITY ATTENDING SCHOOL BEFORE THE PANDEMIC

Adolescents: Self-reported disability and school attendance before the coronavirus N=655



**“My child is a special case in normal public [state] school with no hearing aid. She gets nothing at school. She may try to see and copy.”**

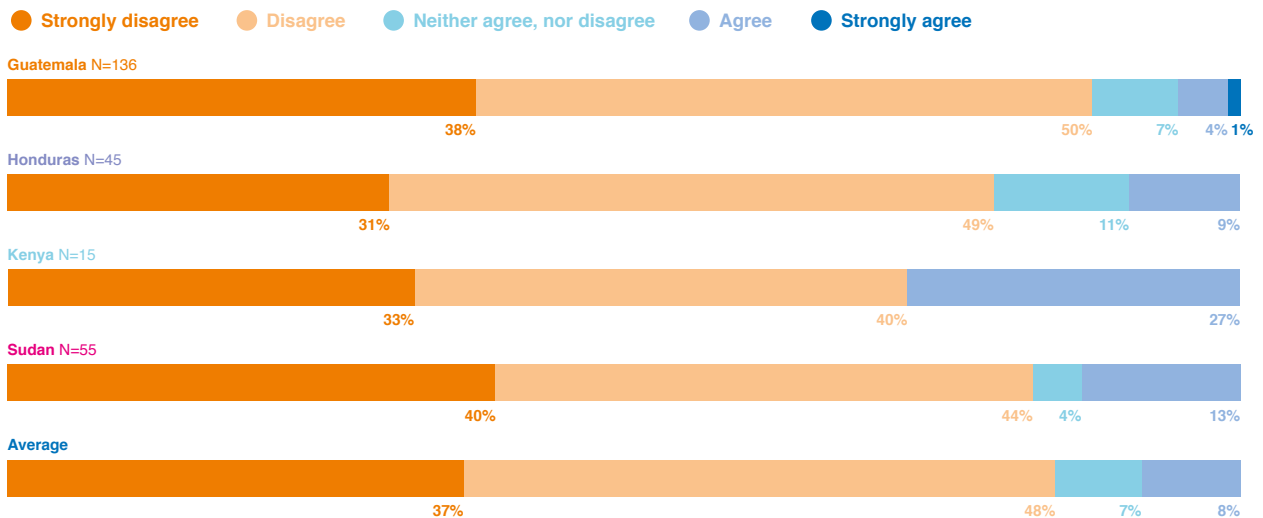
*Father, Homabay, Kenya*

Distance learning is unlikely to have been designed with children with disabilities always in mind, excluding many from accessing an education during the pandemic.<sup>90</sup>

A Plan International assessment across the eight countries<sup>j</sup> in West Africa found very few measures implemented by governments to ensure girls, children with disabilities, and displaced children were able to access remote learning programmes.<sup>91</sup> At the start of the pandemic, only 15 countries were offering remote learning in more than one language.<sup>92</sup> No further data on the impact of the pandemic on access to education for adolescents living with a disability came to light through the quantitative and qualitative data collected for this research.

## FIGURE 27: PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS REPORTING EQUAL ATTENDANCE OF REMOTE AND IN-PERSON LESSONS, BY COUNTRY

Teachers: The same number of students attended my online lessons as would have been the case for my lessons at school N=251



<sup>j</sup> Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), Guinea, Mali, Niger and Nigeria.

## PHOTOVOICE DIARY: ADOLESCENTS IN SUNSARI, NEPAL, REPORT HOW SCHOOL CLOSURES HAVE INCREASED THE TIME CHILDREN SPEND WORKING IN AGRICULTURAL LABOUR



The adolescent boy who took this photograph described the picture:

**“ In the picture, a school-going [age] child is cutting wheat. During the school closure, parents took them to the field, and after the re-open of school also, she needs to help her parents. ”**

A female participant said:

“During the lockdown, she was helping her parents in their field. So, she continued it after lockdown also. She is missing her school to do that, as she gets daily wages by working.”

Another participant said:

“There was no school for nine months. Now what will happen by studying for four or five months? Therefore, it is better to work in the field and make some income.”

Another female participant said:

“The compulsion to work [is] because of poverty. Because of lockdown, parents have borrowed money from others, and they do not have money to pay it back. So, in order to help her parents, she is working and not attending school.”

*Photovoice diary group discussion with adolescent girls and boys, Sunsari, Nepal*

## Poverty and child labour

The pandemic has already caused a severe global economic recession, compounding deep pre-existing inequalities, significantly affecting livelihoods and household incomes, and reducing access to resources and services, pushing people further into poverty. This has led to child labour levels starting to rise for the first time in 20 years, with an impact on educational continuity.<sup>93</sup> Child labour is one of the contributing factors to fewer students attending online lessons compared with pre-pandemic school attendance levels, as reported by nearly nine in 10 teachers (85%).

**“The boys went fishing and concentrated on that. Others thought they were of age and went mining into the gold mines.”**

*Male teacher, Bondo, Kenya*

**“When we started home-to-home teaching,<sup>k</sup> it was difficult to find students... some were at work... so, not available at home to teach.”**

*Male teacher, Sunsari, Nepal*

**“I think they did the right thing to establish rules during the curfew, but something they did not do was provide food for needy families [so] some went out to find menial jobs to support their families.”**

*Adolescent boy, 19 years old, location unknown, Guatemala*

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**k** Home-to-home teaching is when teachers go to their students' houses to hand out teaching materials and explain how to complete them.

## PHOTOVOICE DIARY: ADOLESCENTS SUPPORT THEIR FAMILY TO EARN AN INCOME, IN MAKWANPUR, NEPAL



The adolescent who took this photograph said:

**“ In my village, some people just stayed in their house [during] the lockdown period. Others went to work in the field. Those who worked needn't beg for the government's support. ”**

When the facilitator asked how many adolescents helped their parents to work in the field, six out of 20 students raised their hands.

*Photovoice diary group discussion with adolescent girls and boys, Makwanpur, Nepal*

## BOX 7 FOOD INSECURITY AND CONFLICT IN SOUTH SUDAN

South Sudan is facing multiple humanitarian crises, with many parts of the country affected by inter-communal violence, armed conflict, cyclical drought and perennial flooding. Years of conflict have resulted in displacement, increasing food insecurity, a protracted macro-economic crisis, high food prices, a devalued local currency, limited access to quality basic health and nutrition services, asset depletion, low crop production, and poor access to water, sanitation and hygiene.<sup>94</sup> The impact of COVID-19 restrictions on society and the economy have increased these challenges.

Around 1.4 million South Sudanese children under the age of five are expected to be acutely malnourished in 2021 – the highest number since 2013.<sup>95</sup> In Pibor, only 17% of children are meeting the minimum dietary diversity requirements.<sup>96</sup> Under-fives and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition because of the increased rate at which they are growing and their bodies changing. Lack of access to nutritious food during early childhood and adolescence can stunt children’s growth and have significant impacts on brain development, undermining educational attainment, health and economic outcomes.<sup>97</sup>

Gender norms and entrenched gender inequalities, discrimination and stereotypes result in girls and women often eating less and last when food is scarce. Their nutritional needs may not be valued as highly as those of boys and men.<sup>98</sup> Women and girls are usually responsible for collecting food and water, exposing them to harassment, assault and sexual violence. As already stretched assets and resources become ever more depleted, families increasingly resort to negative coping mechanisms to survive.<sup>99</sup>

Girls face enormous barriers to accessing and remaining in education. In 2018, only 25% of girls in South Sudan were enrolled in primary school.<sup>100</sup> As families face mounting food insecurity, girls are increasingly called upon to care for younger siblings so parents can work or seek food, forcing even more to miss or drop out of school.

COVID-19 has amplified these risks due to school closures and reduced access to already poorly resourced lifesaving child protection and gender-based violence response services. An estimated 2.4 million children were out of school in 2020 due to the COVID-19 crisis and localised communal conflict.



## PHOTOVOICE DIARY: PARTICIPANTS IN SUNSARI, NEPAL, DESCRIBE THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON HOUSEHOLD POVERTY



The photographer described the photo:

**“ The economic condition is weak because of loan and no earning during the lockdown. She is feeding salt, oil and rice to her brother. ”**

Another participant added:

**“Parents have gone to search for work and the sister is feeding her small brother what she could manage at home. There is no curry, no lentils, just salt, oil and rice.”**

A female six grade participant said:

**“Not going to school and looking after the younger brother.”**

*Photovoice diary group discussion with adolescent girls and boys, Sunsari, Nepal*

## BOX 8 COVID-19: A CRISIS LAYERED OVER MULTIPLE CRISES

### Increasing number, complexity and protracted nature of humanitarian crises

The multidimensional impacts of policies to limit the spread of COVID-19 expose the complex vulnerabilities of adolescent girls, particularly in humanitarian contexts.

The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance and the related funding requirements were at record highs even before the pandemic. The frequency and duration of conflicts and their human cost have continuously increased over the last 20 years. The number of climate-related disasters has tripled in 30 years.<sup>101</sup>

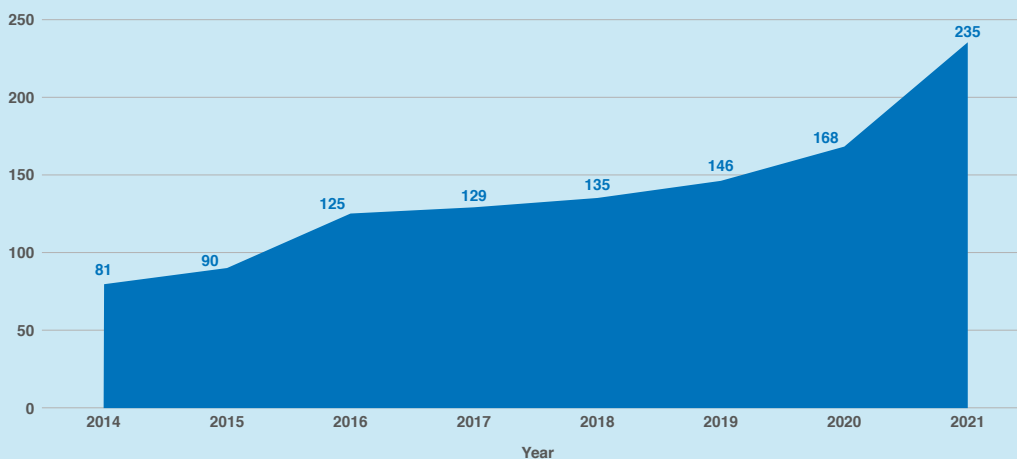
As a result, the number of humanitarian crises receiving an internationally led response almost doubled from 16 to 30 between 2005 and 2017.<sup>102</sup> During the same period, the average length of crises rose from four to seven years.<sup>103</sup>

The overwhelming majority of humanitarian responses now take place in complex emergencies – bearing elements of conflict and natural disaster.<sup>104</sup> Armed conflicts are killing and maiming a record number of children and forcing them to flee their homes.<sup>105</sup> Complex emergencies frequently cause mass displacements. Women and girls are often disproportionately affected, making up 70% of the world's internally displaced population.<sup>106</sup>

Overlaying the COVID-19 crisis adds a significant downward trend. Half of the countries requiring aid to deal with the pandemic are already in protracted crises, experiencing conflict or natural disasters.<sup>107</sup> Globally, in 2021, one in every 33 people (235 million) are in need of humanitarian assistance, a rise of 40% from 2020 and the highest number since record keeping began.<sup>108</sup>

**FIGURE 28: NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN NEED OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE<sup>109</sup>**

Number of people in need of humanitarian aid (millions)



This is almost entirely a result of the pandemic,<sup>110</sup> which has driven secondary impacts such as economic hardship and food insecurity, disrupted education and health systems, and led to a ‘shadow pandemic’ of gender-based violence. These trends are placing an increasing strain on resources and threaten to worsen funding challenges to the humanitarian sectors most critical for meeting the needs of girls in crisis, particularly child protection, GBV and education, which are also often the most underfunded.<sup>111</sup>

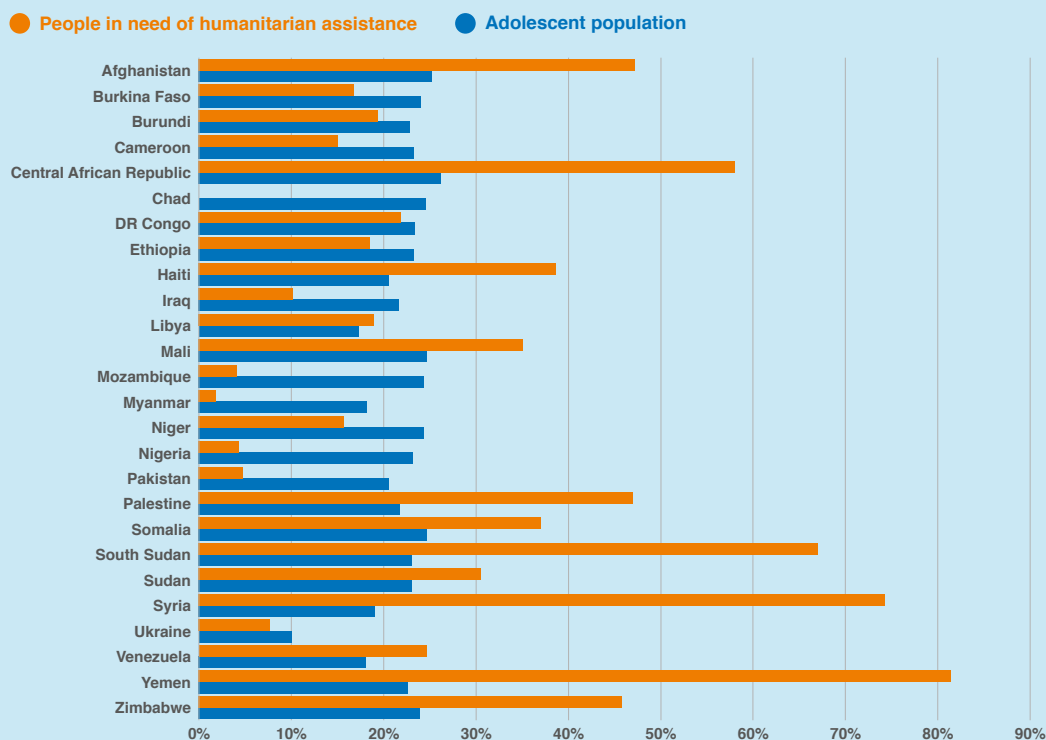
Globally, as a result of COVID-19, extreme poverty is expected to increase for the first time in more than two decades.<sup>112</sup> In fragile contexts, 26 million more people are projected to fall into extreme poverty due to the pandemic and its socio-economic impact.<sup>113</sup> Estimates show that by the end of 2020 as many as 142 million more children could have been living in monetary poor households, taking the total number to more than 725 million.<sup>114</sup>

## Girls in crisis

Adolescents are increasingly affected by humanitarian crises. Countries with UN humanitarian appeals in 2021<sup>115</sup> have, on average, an adolescent population<sup>116</sup> that makes up nearly a quarter (22%) of the total population. Half of these people are female.

**FIGURE 29: HUMANITARIAN NEED AND ADOLESCENT AND YOUTH POPULATION, UN HUMANITARIAN APPEALS 2021<sup>1</sup>**

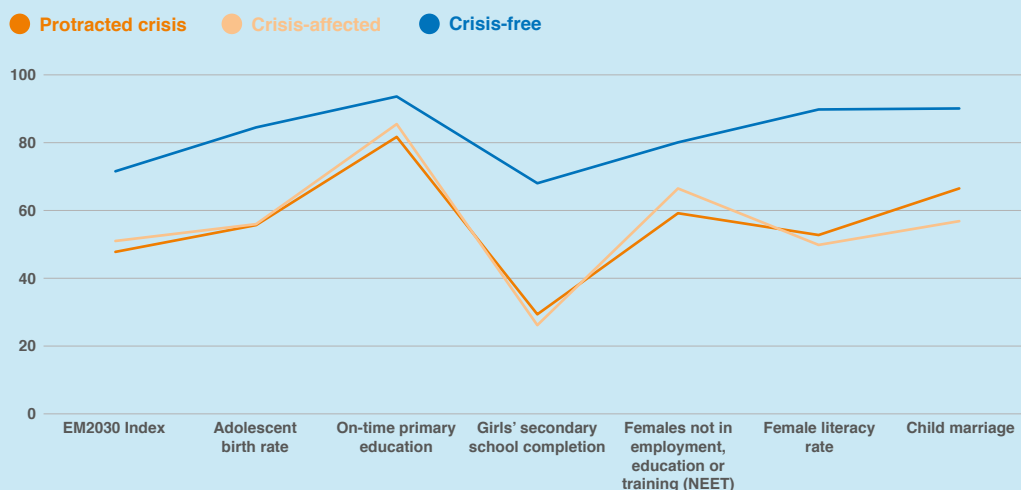
UN appeals 2021



<sup>1</sup> Data has been calculated based on information in the *Global humanitarian overview* (people in need of humanitarian assistance) and UN population data: <https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population>.

**FIGURE 30: EQUAL MEASURES 2030 SDG GENDER EQUALITY INDEX AND GIRLS' RIGHTS AND WELL-BEING DATA, BY CATEGORY<sup>m</sup>**

Equal Measures 2030: Girls rights and well-being



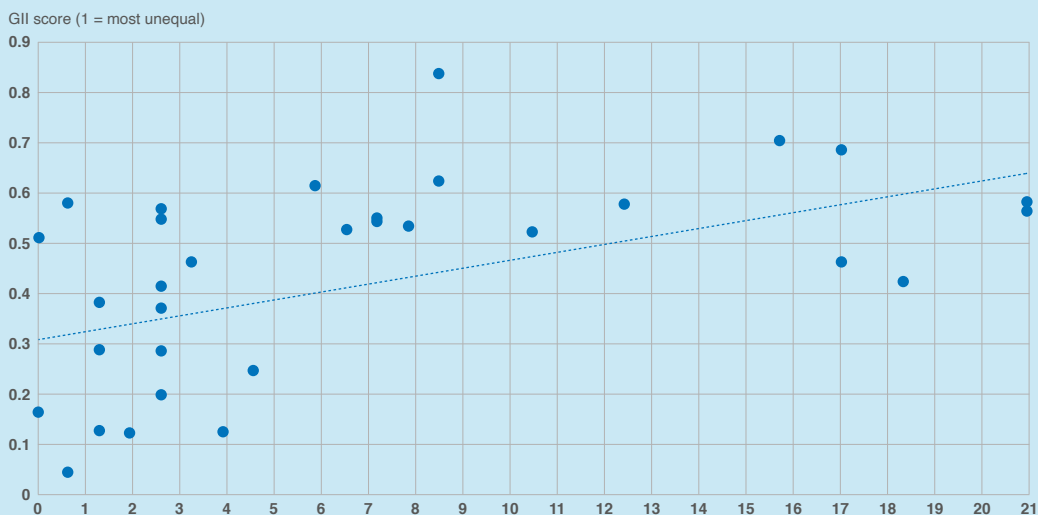
Girls and young women in countries affected by humanitarian crises are already living in more acutely gender-inequitable contexts compared with those in countries that are not. In many contexts where crises occur, women and girls are valued less than their male peers and have less power to influence decisions affecting their lives. Data from Equal Measures 2030<sup>117</sup> shows that countries experiencing a crisis<sup>m</sup> are far less likely to be on track to meet key SDG indicators on girls' rights and well-being, further compounding inequality.

Countries that have not experienced a humanitarian crisis in the 10 years up to 2020 also perform substantially better than those that have in both the UN Development Programme (UNDP)'s Gender Inequality Index<sup>118</sup> and Gender and Social Norms Index,<sup>119</sup> as well as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s Social Institutions and Gender Index.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>m</sup> Analysis was carried out for an unpublished Plan International report. The definitions used to define the country classifications are as follows: (1) **Crisis-affected**: Countries that in the 2020 Financial Tracking Service (FTS) United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) tracked UN coordinated humanitarian appeals or have had at least three UN appeals in the last five years (2016-2020). This analysis is based on OCHA's World Humanitarian Data and Trends 2018 and the 2018-20 FTS tracked appeals. To avoid double counting in our analysis, we have excluded countries that are classified as having a protracted crisis. This group of countries are analysed as a separate category. (2) **Protracted crises**: Protracted crises with consecutive UN inter-agency funding appeals running for at least five consecutive years to 2020. This analysis is based on OCHA's World Humanitarian Data and Trends 2018, and the 2018-20 FTS tracked appeals. (3) **Crisis-free**: Countries that have not had a UN humanitarian appeal in the 10 years to 2020.

**FIGURE 31: GENDER INEQUALITY INDEX, BY NUMBER OF UN HUMANITARIAN APPEALS, 2000-2020**

Number of UN appeals (2000-2020)



Conflict and disaster further amplify the gender and age-based discrimination that adolescent girls face, as pre-existing inequalities are worsened. Adolescents are at a vulnerable time of transition between ‘childhood’ and ‘adulthood’ as they begin to assume adult responsibilities and roles, but without the skills, networks, tools and capacities to safely navigate the beginnings of adulthood during crises.<sup>121</sup>

Women and girls face an overwhelming burden during and after crises.<sup>122,123</sup>

Humanitarian crises expose adolescent girls to unique challenges and risks that are different both from adolescent boys, men and women, and in ways that are often overlooked. Their protection and assistance often falls through gaps in humanitarian responses and their voice is unheard. Girls in the most vulnerable situations, including those with disabilities, unaccompanied and separated girls, and girls who are married or pregnant face additional barriers to assistance.<sup>124</sup>

Studies have shown that access to resources, capabilities and opportunities significantly influences the extent to which people are affected by crises.<sup>125</sup> Lower economic and social status, social norms and cultural practices all affect women and girls’ ability to survive and the extent to which they suffer harm.<sup>126</sup> Poverty and economic shocks – experienced on a global scale with COVID-19 – are major drivers of negative coping strategies for women and girls being left behind, such as sexual exploitation, child, early and forced marriage, and the removal of girls from education. Despite this, gender-responsive interventions, such as measures to prevent gender-based violence and the provision of essential services to women and girls, including critical support and assistance for survivors of GBV, are severely under-funded and under-prioritised in humanitarian crises.<sup>127,128</sup>



## Education in crisis

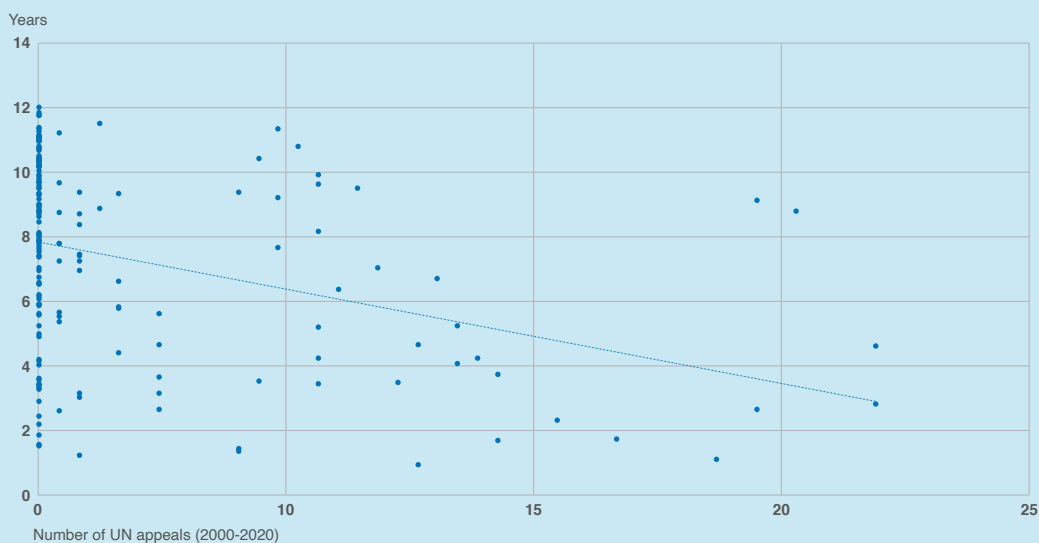
Conflict and disasters can have a devastating impact on girls' ability to go to school. Recent research from Plan International UK found that 14 million children were out of secondary school because of humanitarian crises, and 7.7 million (54%) were girls.<sup>n,129</sup>

Girls are often kept out of school due to concerns about safety, but also as a result of unwanted or unintended pregnancy, and child, early and forced marriage.<sup>130,131</sup> Adolescent girls in conflict zones are 90% more likely to be out of school compared with girls in conflict-free countries.<sup>132</sup>

At times of economic hardship, boys' education is prioritised in many contexts. In droughts, evidence has shown girls are more likely to miss school as they are needed to collect water and care for family members.<sup>133</sup> The more frequent a country experiences a humanitarian crisis, the shorter amount of time a girl can expect to stay in school. For example, girls who live in countries that have not had a UN appeal since 2000 can expect to receive an average of 9.3 years in school. This compares with their peers living in countries that have had more than 10 appeals who can expect to be in school for an average of just 4.6 years.<sup>o</sup>

**FIGURE 32: GIRLS' MEAN YEARS OF SCHOOLING IN COUNTRIES, BY NUMBER OF UN HUMANITARIAN APPEALS<sup>q</sup>**

Mean years of schooling: Female



<sup>n</sup> These figures were calculated by identifying how many school-age children needed humanitarian assistance in 2018 – 50 million – and then applying an out-of-school rate in each country (or an average for crisis-affected countries if national data is not available) and adding to this population an extra percentage to reflect the increased out-of-school rates in crisis-affected regions of countries.

<sup>o</sup> Calculations based on analysis of data from [www.unfpa.org/data/world-population-dashboard](http://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population-dashboard) and World Humanitarian Data and Trends 2018.

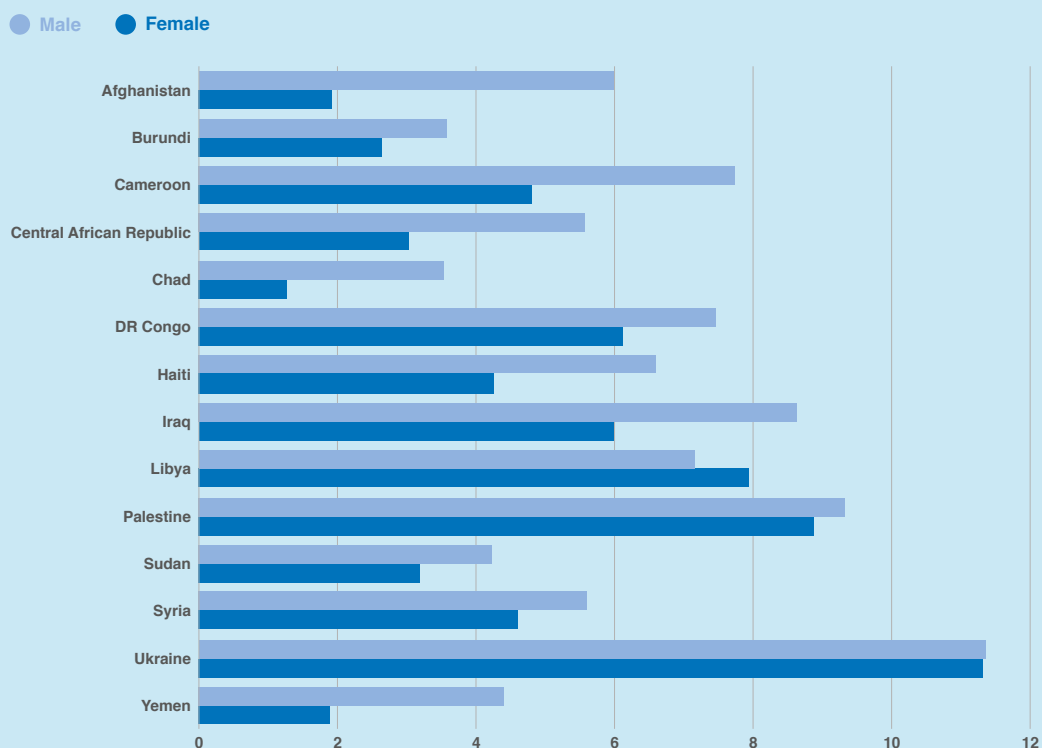
<sup>p</sup> Calculations based on analysis of data from [www.unfpa.org/data/world-population-dashboard](http://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population-dashboard) and World Humanitarian Data and Trends 2018.

In protracted crises, girls (who average just 4.9 years in school) are also far more likely than boys (who average 6.5 years) to be out of school.

The impacts of disaster, conflict and displacement are felt particularly acutely by girls and young women, and gender inequality is often reinforced and amplified during times of crisis. Girls encounter a range of gender-specific barriers to accessing and returning to education and face specific protection risks, including sexual and gender-based violence, and child, early and forced marriage. COVID-19 has intensified an education emergency that is playing out on a scale not experienced in living memory.

**FIGURE 33: GIRLS' AND BOYS' MEAN YEARS OF SCHOOLING, IN COUNTRIES EXPERIENCING PROTRACTED CRISES\***

Mean years of schooling: Protracted crises



\* Calculations based on analysis of data from [www.unfpa.org/data/world-population-dashboard](http://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population-dashboard).

# QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Every child has an equal right to complete a quality education in a safe environment free from gender bias. A quality education should provide children and young people with the necessary skills and knowledge, attitudes and behaviours to lead positive and productive lives.<sup>134</sup> Many children have been unable to access any education during the pandemic. For those who have been able to access remote learning, there are serious questions about its quality. Most children were suddenly relying on teachers who had little, if any, training in teaching remotely.<sup>135</sup>

## Teacher training

Out of 425 teachers surveyed, 346 were unable to teach remotely. Of those that could, 31 (only 7% of the total number of teachers surveyed) reported receiving training on remote teaching. Most of these (81%) confirmed it helped improve their online lessons.

**“More awareness sessions should be provided. Teachers should go on trainings.”**

*Male teacher, Kwale, Kenya*

**ONLY 7%**  
of teachers surveyed received training on remote teaching.

**FIGURE 34: PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS WHO RECEIVED TRAINING ON TEACHING REMOTELY, BY COUNTRY**

Teachers: I received training on how best to teach remotely N=118

● Strongly disagree ● Disagree ● Neither agree, nor disagree ● Agree ● Strongly agree

Guatemala N=62



Honduras N=31



Kenya N=15



Sudan N=10



Average



**FIGURE 35: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS POSITIVE ABOUT THE QUALITY OF THEIR TEACHERS' ONLINE LESSONS**

Adolescents: My teacher was good at teaching lessons online N=251



**FIGURE 36: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS ABLE TO ASK QUESTIONS DURING OR AFTER ONLINE LESSONS**

Adolescents: I was able to ask my teacher questions during or after online lessons N=251



**84%**

of adolescents in Sudan did not receive any home-learning materials.

Adolescents were asked whether they thought their teacher was good at teaching online. In response, 41% agreed and 23% strongly agreed, with most (66%) feeling able to ask their teachers questions during or after online lessons.<sup>r</sup> However, some adolescents raised concerns over the quality of remote teaching.

**“I would like [it if] they had given training to the teacher. That would make it much easier [for them] to use the devices and give the visual classes in a clearer way.”**

*Adolescent girl, 18 years old, location unknown, Guatemala*

**“Provide more help [for] teachers to teach remotely.”**

*Female teacher, Kwale, Kenya*

## Home-learning materials

**“There were no teachers around to help them learn.”**

*Female teacher, Machakos, Kenya*

Having materials to study at home became even more important for those children for whom online learning was not available. While 50% of adolescents agreed their school provided materials for home learning, this provision was inconsistent and often insufficient to make effective learning possible. In Sudan, 84% of adolescent respondents reported not receiving any home-learning materials, compared with 53% in Nepal, 48% in Kenya, 41% in Honduras and 22% in Guatemala.

**“I only had books but no pencils.”**

*Girl, 14 years old, Kisumu, Kenya*

<sup>r</sup> These findings only apply to those adolescents who had access to remote teaching.

**“Materials for teaching were not available.”**

*Father, location unknown, Sudan*

**“We gave books to grade 1-3 students [primary]... We could not provide any other kind of remote learning materials because neither the students nor the teachers have the facility of internet in our area.”**

*Male teacher, Sunsari, Nepal*

## **BOX 9 COUNTRY IN FOCUS: SUDAN**

Sudan is a low-income country with a significant and growing humanitarian need. In the past five years, Sudan has seen an increase in the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance from 5.8 million people in 2016 to 13.4 million in 2021.<sup>136</sup> An economic crisis, worsened by COVID-19, and high inflation have resulted in high levels of food insecurity and severely curtailed livelihoods.

Despite the peace agreement in August 2020, instability and violence remain in parts of the country, particularly Darfur, eastern Sudan and the Kordofan regions. Gender inequalities are persistent across Sudan. The protracted nature of the conflict continues to reinforce pre-existing gender inequalities, restricting the opportunities of girls and women and placing them at increased risk of sexual violence.<sup>137</sup>

Before COVID-19, the literacy rate of people aged 15 to 24 was below 75%, on average 20% lower than in the other countries included in this study.<sup>138</sup> Enrolment in secondary schools for both girls and boys stood at 31%.<sup>139</sup> Schools closed in March 2020 due to the pandemic and remained closed for an extended period, affecting at least 6 million children.<sup>140</sup> Pre-pandemic, country-wide network coverage was below 50% and less than 60% of the population had access to electricity,<sup>141</sup> substantially hindering the provision of effective remote learning.

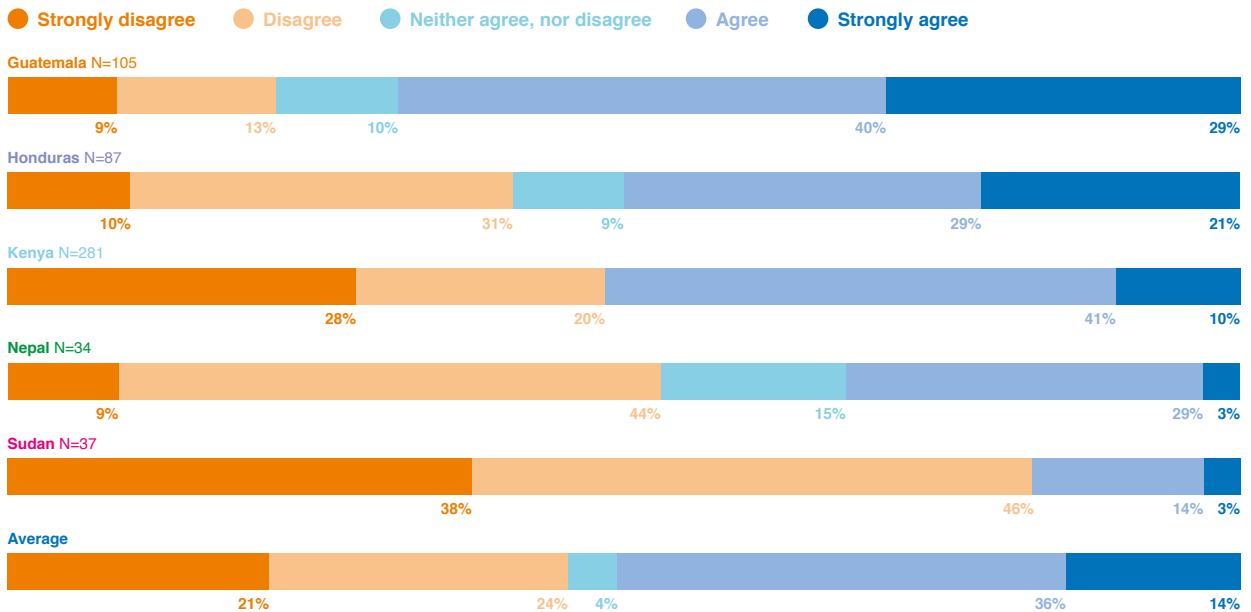
School closures are likely to heighten sexual and gender-based violence, child labour, child, early and forced marriage, and recruitment into armed groups.<sup>142</sup> Lockdown conditions are also reported to have increased the risk of girls being subjected to female genital mutilation/cutting, as families no longer feared sanction by the community.<sup>143,144</sup>

Less than 50% of children have access to soap and water for handwashing at school,<sup>145</sup> a significant barrier to a safe return to education for many children. It is expected that the most vulnerable children, particularly those living in areas affected by conflict, will not be able to return to school this year, unless more support is provided.<sup>146</sup>



## FIGURE 37: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS WHOSE SCHOOL PROVIDED MATERIALS FOR HOME LEARNING, BY COUNTRY

Adolescents: My school gave me materials to help me learn at home when it was closed because of the coronavirus N=544



**“If we can be provided with story books and other text books to help us read and concentrate on them. We should be given homework and some revision papers.”**

*Adolescent girl, 14 years old, Kisumu, Kenya*

Of those adolescents who received learning materials, just under half (49%) reported being able to learn at home with the materials provided by their school. Some reported challenges in receiving feedback on their progress from their teachers. Teachers themselves raised concerns that learning materials, if provided at all, were often unfit for purpose.

**“Lack of study materials and lessons with teachers will cause my grades to go down.”**

*Girl, 15 years old, Kisumu, Kenya*

**“I don’t think the [home] learning is sufficient, because [teachers] just sent the homework without knowing whether [pupils] have made mistakes or not.”**

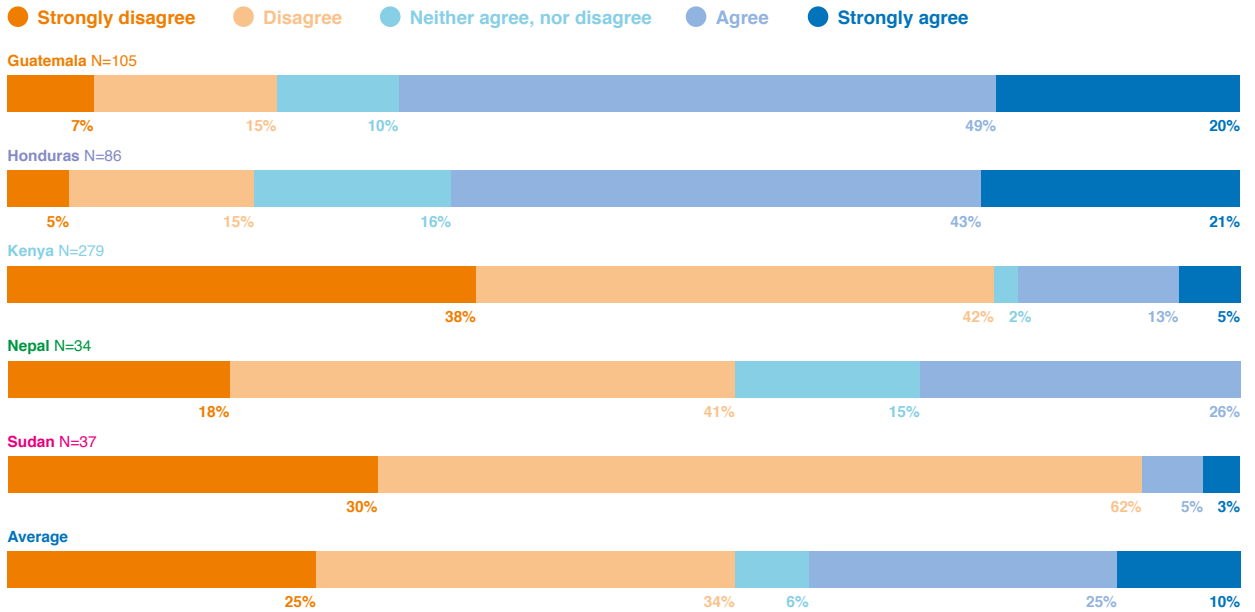
*Mother, location unknown, Guatemala*

**“Schools should find ways of communicating to students and offer learning materials.”**

*Adolescent boy, 17 years old, Bondo, Kenya*

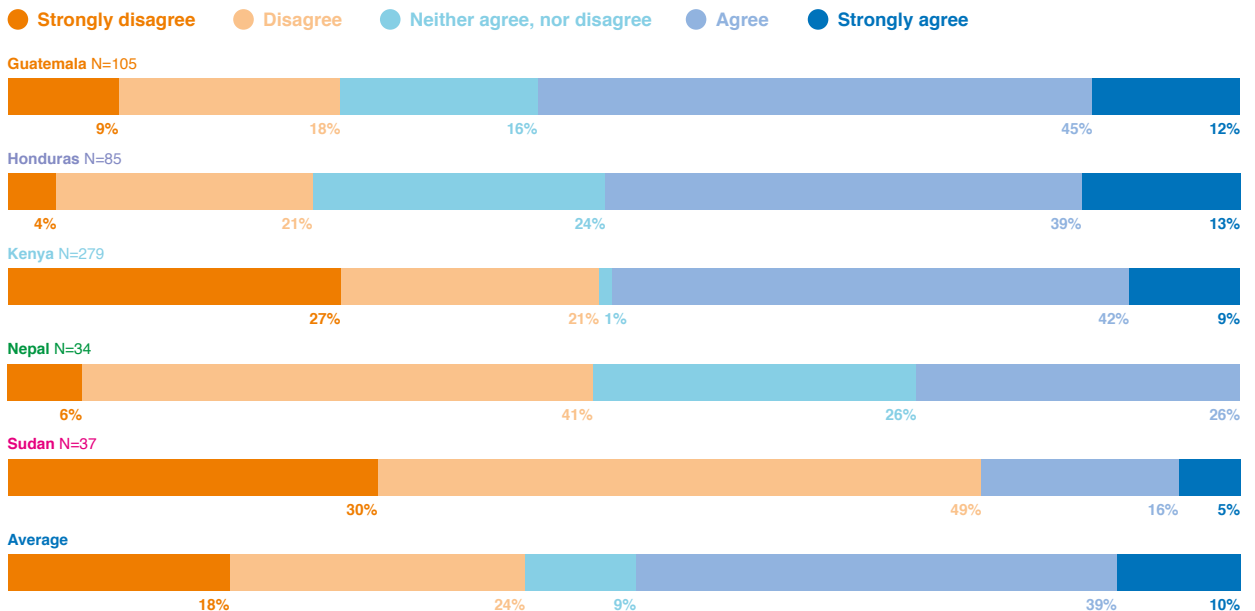
**FIGURE 38: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS WHOSE SCHOOL PROVIDED UPDATED MATERIALS, BY COUNTRY**

Adolescents: My school sent me updated materials on a regular basis for learning at home N=541



**FIGURE 39: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS ABLE TO LEARN USING MATERIALS AT HOME, BY COUNTRY**

Adolescents: I was able to learn at home with the materials the school gave me N=540



## PHOTOVOICE DIARY: THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL CLOSURES, BEYOND LEARNING, IN GULI, SUDAN



**“ I captured a photo of a tree that we used to care of before the time of COVID-19. When school closed, we couldn't care for it any longer. It became dry and thirsty. ”**

*Adolescent, gender and age unknown, Guli, Sudan*

**“The authorities should go to the communities and see what situation they are in to be able to help and not only send documents and projects that are very far from reality.”**

*Female teacher, location unknown, Guatemala*

**“Due to a lack of devices, there was no state support with printed material. The textbooks were very few. I had to make prints of my teaching materials.”**

*Male teacher, location unknown, Guatemala*

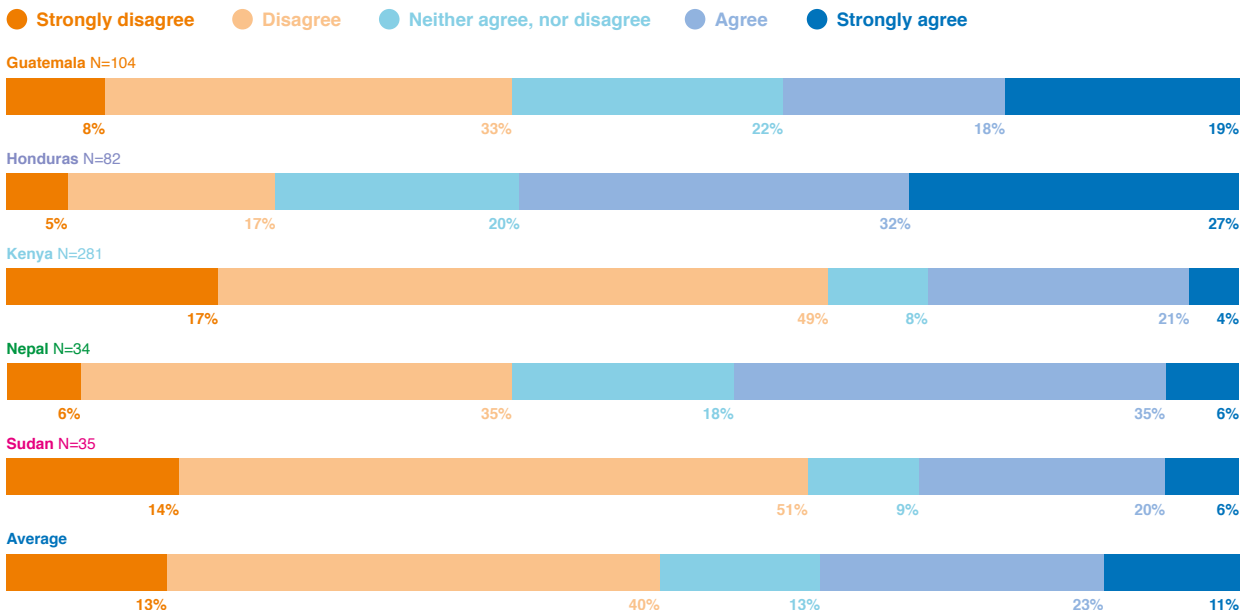
When adolescents were asked if they felt they had everything they needed to learn well from home, on average, 53% felt they did not. Considering the limited access to devices and home-learning materials, this result is not surprising.

## Parental support

In addition to support from their schools and teachers, adolescents needed help with learning from their parents, carers and family members throughout the lockdowns and school closures. Families with a lower level of parental education attainment typically have access to fewer economic and social resources and have less knowledge to help their children with school tasks.<sup>147</sup> The availability or lack of financial resources and the corresponding ability to access the devices and internet connectivity needed for home learning are key factors as to whether a child could continue learning.

**FIGURE 40: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS WHO HAD EVERYTHING THEY NEEDED TO LEARN WELL FROM HOME, BY COUNTRY**

Adolescents: I had everything I needed to learn well at home N=536



Parents were asked if they felt able to support their child’s learning needs. More than half (53%) did not, a similar proportion to when adolescents were asked the same question. When asked why not, the most common reason was they felt they lacked the ability or knowledge due to their own limited education. Time and work commitments were also mentioned as a constraint, but less so.

**“I do not have all the knowledge and many things I have forgotten already.”**  
*Mother, location unknown, Honduras*

**“There is no time even to rest.”**  
*Mother, location unknown, Sudan*

**“My concern is that the students did not learn the way they should, since most parents are illiterate.”**  
*Female teacher, location unknown, Guatemala*

**“It was difficult because one does not have the preparation that the teacher has.”**

*Father, location unknown, Guatemala*

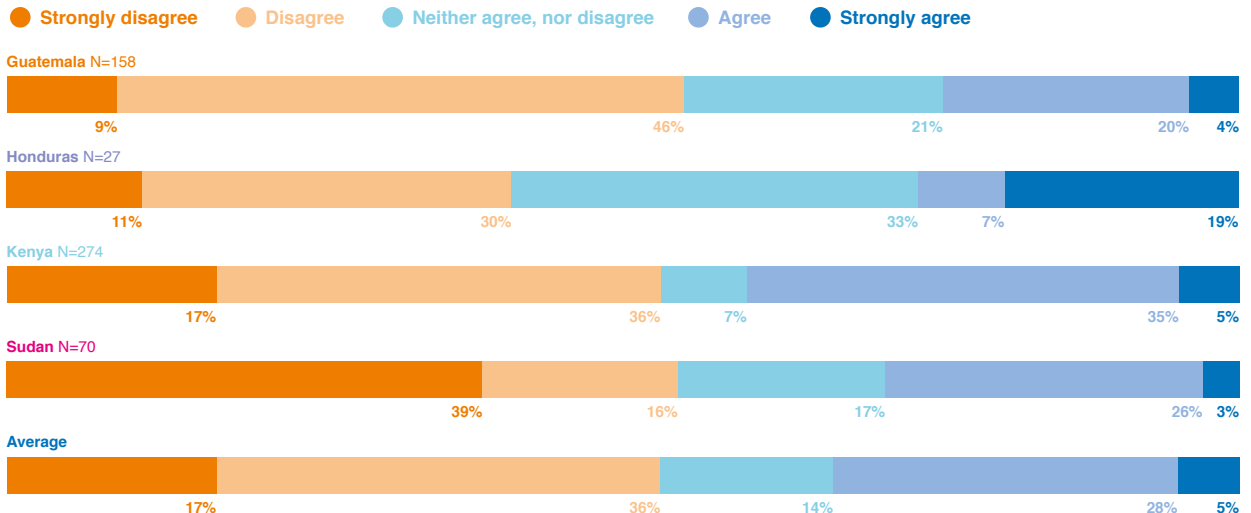
**“I always support her emotionally, but I found using the materials [provided], the computer, the internet difficult.”**

*Mother, location unknown, Guatemala*

Plan International research on the impact of the pandemic on adolescent girls in Indonesia, Kiribati and Vietnam also found that with children at home, job losses and other pressures, the home was not always a safe or supportive learning environment for adolescent girls. Girls felt unsupported in remote learning by parents struggling to understand the technology, who themselves had low education levels and/or were stressed due to the pandemic and its consequences. This, at times, led to household conflict and a difficult home-learning environment.<sup>148</sup>

**FIGURE 41: PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS WHO FELT ABLE TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILD’S LEARNING, BY COUNTRY**

Parents: I felt able to support my child’s learning while they were not at school N=529





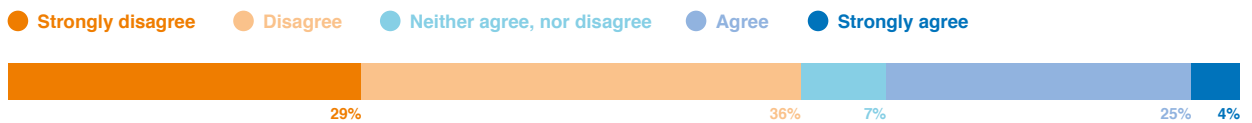
### FIGURE 42: PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS RECEIVING INSTRUCTIONS ON HOME LEARNING

Parents: My child's school gave me instructions on how to support my child with their learning when it was closed due to the coronavirus N=539



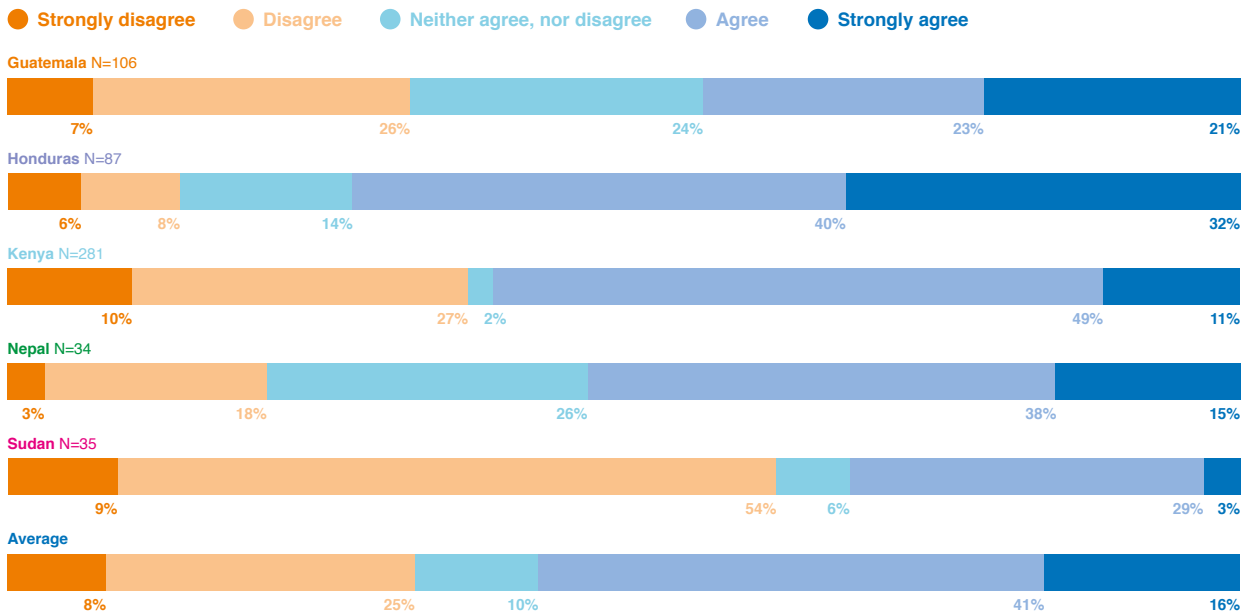
### FIGURE 43: PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS WHO ASKED THE SCHOOL FOR FURTHER SUPPORT ON HOME LEARNING

Parents: I was able to ask my child's school for additional support on how to help my child with their learning when it was closed because of the coronavirus N=538



### FIGURE 44: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS WITH SOMEONE AT HOME TO ANSWER QUESTIONS, BY COUNTRY

Adolescents: Other people in my home were able to answer my questions when I was learning at home N=543



Research on the extent to which the level of parental education affected children's ability to cope and thrive using remote learning indicates a clear relationship between engagement in the learning process and parental background, in terms of family economic, social and cultural capital.<sup>149</sup>

Unequal parental capacities to help children with their homework and different uses of family time produce significant differences in the learning opportunities for children from different types of socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>150</sup> Less than a third (32%) of parents said their child's school provided them with the necessary instructions to support their learning at home, and slightly fewer parents (29%) felt able to ask the school for additional support.

## BOX 10 VENEZUELA'S REFUGEE CRISIS

Since 2015, 5.6 million people have fled Venezuela because of the declining socio-economic and security situation in the country.<sup>151</sup> Neighbouring countries, notably Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, host many Venezuelan refugees, but the continuing arrivals and pre-existing needs in these countries have made integration challenging.

Refugee and migrant children struggle to access their right to education, with girls facing additional gender-specific barriers. Even before the pandemic, it was estimated that around 50% of Venezuelan migrant, asylum-seeking or refugee children in Ecuador, Colombia and Peru were not enrolled in school.<sup>152</sup> Lack of food, livelihoods and housing; discrimination and xenophobia; and a lack of documentation are contributing factors. School closures due to COVID-19 have further undermined access to education and deprived children of a protective environment and source of life-saving information and psychosocial support. Children on the move, who usually have less access to devices and internet connectivity, face additional challenges in accessing education remotely.

The crisis has increased the risks of all forms of violence and human rights violations faced by Venezuelan and host-community children, with girls – especially those in transit – at particularly high risk of gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and trafficking.<sup>153</sup> This upsurge is partly driven by xenophobia, the sexualisation of Venezuelan girls and women, and the loss of access to livelihoods due to COVID-19.<sup>154</sup>

Girls are often unable to access life-saving information and services to protect themselves from unwanted or unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. And they have little control over their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). SRHR services, information and supplies have been severely disrupted in Venezuela, resulting in an increase in adolescent pregnancies of 65%<sup>155</sup> since 2015 and HIV cases by 24%.<sup>156</sup> The right to sexual and reproductive health is highly restricted for refugee and migrant girls in their host countries. Gender-based violence and limited access to SRHR information and services can be significant barriers to girls accessing and remaining in education.

# HOME-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

A Plan International survey conducted in mid-2020 found that, in addition to many of the practical challenges with distance learning outlined in the previous chapters, children reported a range of concerns including loneliness, feeling they were unsupported and falling behind, and losing confidence.<sup>157</sup> In a follow up study, many discussed having little space, too many noisy siblings, being easily distracted by online apps and social media, and, in some cases, not having enough time to study.<sup>158</sup> These issues are also commonly cited by participants in this research, highlighting that the environment where a child learns is an important factor in learning outcomes.

**“Home provided a challenging environment. My dad drinks and sometimes when he comes home he becomes noisy and thus causes disturbance making me not [able] to concentrate on my studies.”**

*Adolescent girl, 16 years old, Bondo, Kenya*

Adolescents were asked whether they were able to concentrate at home, whether they had enough time to study, and whether they felt they had everything they needed to learn effectively from home.

## Ability to concentrate at home

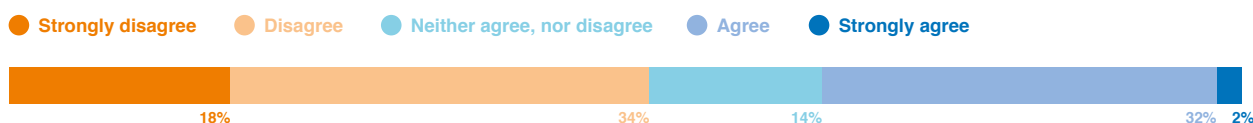
Parents reported that their children were unable to concentrate at home more often than adolescents themselves. Only 34% of parents thought their children were able to concentrate on their learning at home, compared with 48% of adolescents. An inability to concentrate at home was reported more frequently in Sudan, where 58% of adolescents reported concerns.

**“The children are having [a] hard time concentrating.”**

*Adolescent girl, 15 years old, Homabay, Kenya*

**FIGURE 45: PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS WHOSE CHILD WAS ABLE TO CONCENTRATE AT HOME**

Parents: My child was able to concentrate when learning at home N=538



## PHOTOVOICE DIARY: ADOLESCENTS DISCUSS THE DISTRACTION OF TV AT HOME, IN SUNSARI, NEPAL



The photographer describes the first photo [left]:

**“ In the picture the student is watching TV. She has just returned from her school and her concentration is first on TV. Neither [has] she changed her school dress nor took off the bag. ”**

Another participant added:

“The habit of watching TV has been built during lockdown so as soon as she arrives home, she is watching TV.”

“She is in confusion, either to go to school or to stay at home and watch TV.”

“She is waiting to see if there is any news of lockdown broadcasted on the television.”

The photographer also took the similar photo on the right, this time of three boys.

*Photovoice diary group discussion with adolescent girls and boys, Sunsari, Nepal*

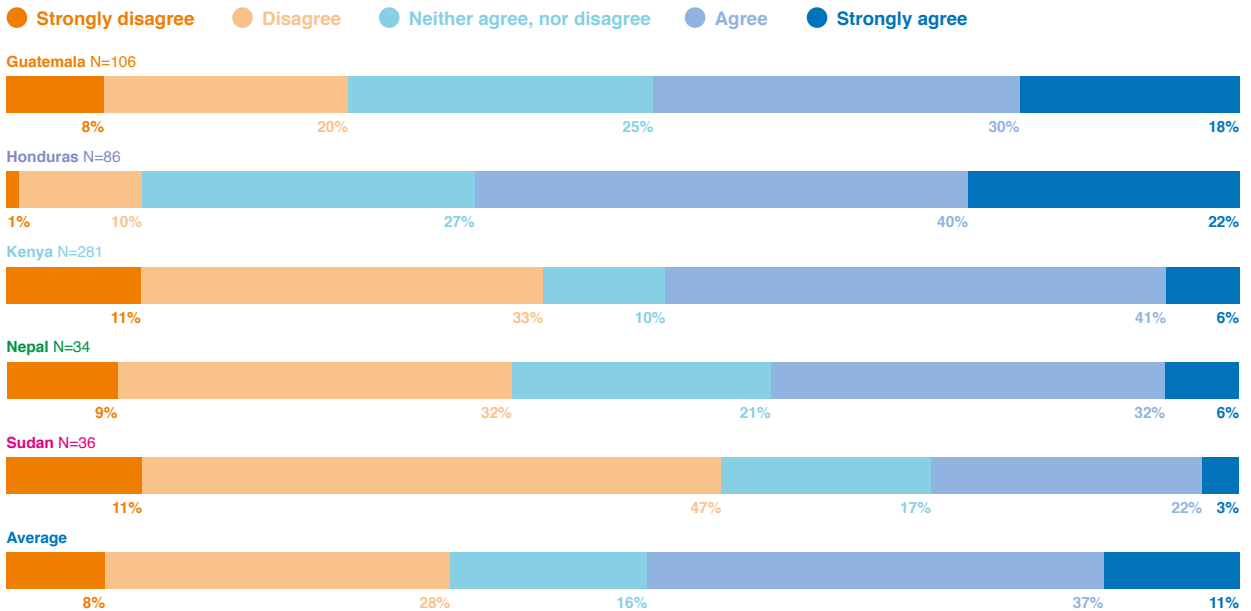
**“At home, concentration in learning is challenging. Friends most often will want you [to] play. My performance also dropped. I had a B in my first term, then when schools reopened, I got a D+.”**  
*Adolescent girl, 17 years old, Bondo, Kenya*

**“In the school you learn more. It is not the same having classes by phone [or] in person, because [in school] there are no distractions and they learn more.”**  
*Mother, location unknown, Honduras*

**“There would be frequent interruption. I would get disturbed when someone entered the room during class time. I had no separate room [to study in].”**  
*Adolescent girl, age unknown, Makwanpur, Nepal*

**FIGURE 46: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS ABLE TO CONCENTRATE FROM HOME, BY COUNTRY**

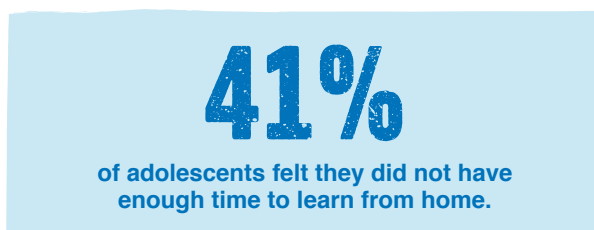
Adolescents: I was able to concentrate when learning from home N=543



## Time for learning

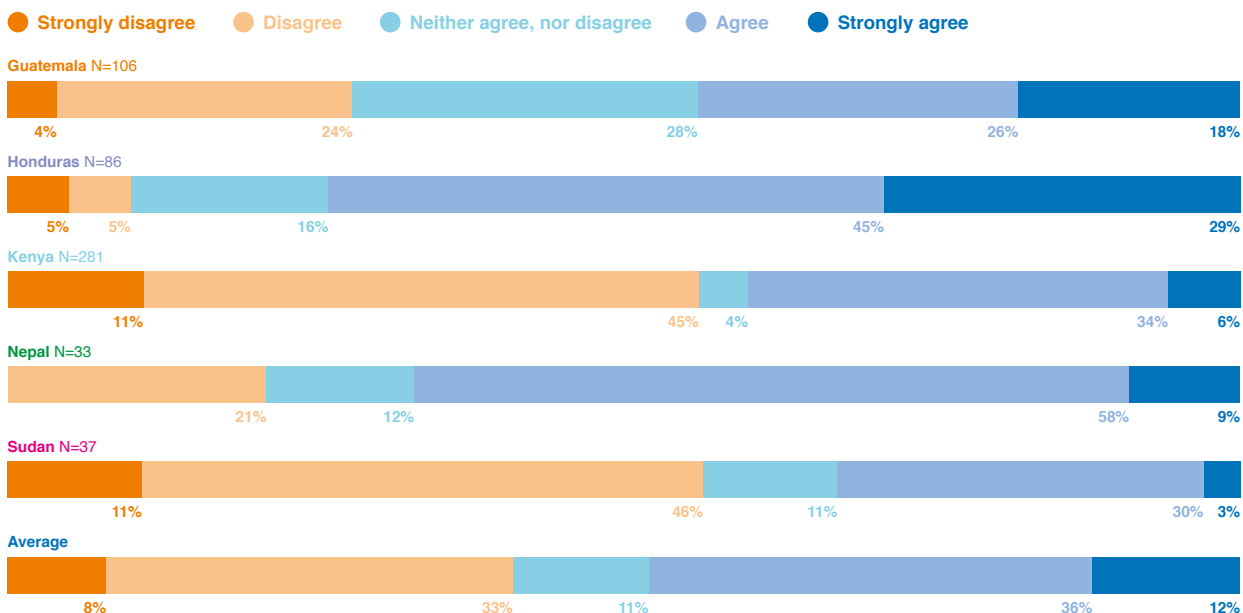
In addition to the home proving a challenging environment to learn in, many adolescents also found they had little time available to study. On average, 41% felt they did not have enough time to learn from home, with particularly negative responses in Sudan (57%) and Kenya (56%).

Although not possible with the adolescents' data, comparative gender analysis of responses by parents to a similar question (who were asked in relation to their sons and daughters) shows that boys were reported to have less time to study than girls. There was no follow-up question asked as to why, but there were numerous references to the open questions that indicated boys had to go to work, which might offer an explanation.



**FIGURE 47: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS WITH ENOUGH TIME TO LEARN FROM HOME, BY COUNTRY**

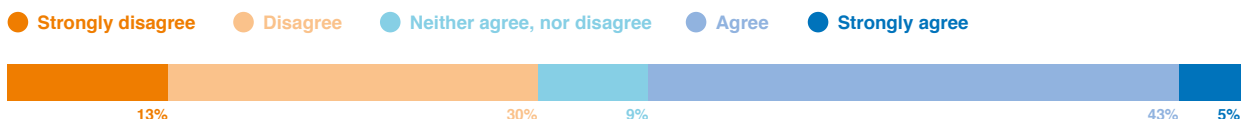
Adolescents: I had enough time for learning when I was home N=543





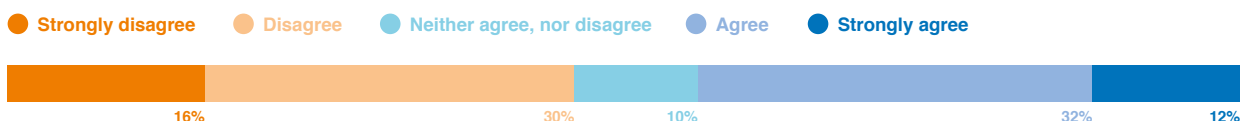
**FIGURE 48: PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS WHO FELT THEIR DAUGHTERS HAD ENOUGH TIME FOR LEARNING**

Parents: My child (girl) had enough time for learning when they were home N=375



**FIGURE 49: PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS WHO FELT THEIR SONS HAD ENOUGH TIME FOR LEARNING**

Parents: My child (boy) had enough time for learning when they were home N=210



## Unpaid chores and care burdens

Globally, divisions of labour within the household are predominantly unequal, with caring responsibilities and household chores most often falling to women and girls.<sup>159,160</sup> In a pandemic, traditional gender stereotypes and norms of girls and women being seen as ‘homemakers’ often means girls’ household chores and care burdens increase.<sup>161</sup> During the Ebola outbreak in West Africa (2014 to 2016), girls whose mothers were infected with the virus were forced to take over their caregiving responsibilities. Even when their schools were not closed, girls found it increasingly difficult to balance their care burdens with education, leading to increased absenteeism and school drop-out rates.<sup>162</sup>

In a recent survey in 13 countries in the Americas and the Caribbean, involving 3,723 people from sponsored communities, Plan International found very high rates of gender inequality in relation to domestic chores during the pandemic.<sup>163</sup> Of those interviewed, just 2% stated that men are responsible for preparing meals and 6% for cleaning the bathroom. The predominant caring role of women was also reflected in relation to education. Most respondents (72%) reported that female parents and caregivers were responsible for supporting their children’s education during lockdowns. And 84% said women were responsible for playing with their children. These figures are evidence of the profound gender inequalities in the domestic environment, aggravated by the conditions of social isolation generated by the pandemic.

Household chores are one of the main barriers to girls having enough time to study at home.<sup>164</sup> In one survey of more than 13,000 adolescents, 63% of girls reported an increased household burden, compared with 43% of boys.<sup>165</sup> Girls' involvement in domestic work often meant they could not follow remote education programmes, creating a risk of falling behind.

**“Most pupils couldn’t access the radio lessons and those that did the house chores were kept occupied.”**

*Male teacher, Homabay, Kenya*

In this research, parents were asked to comment on whether their sons and daughters were required to help with household chores more during the pandemic than before.<sup>s</sup> Household chores increased significantly for both girls and boys, with 62% of adolescents experiencing an increased unpaid care burden, but more so for girls. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that they also had less time to study.

**“I used to see them hold books even when doing their household chores – an indication that proves to me they really missed going to school.”**

*Mother, Bondo, Kenya*

**FIGURE 50: PERCENTAGE OF GIRLS HELPING WITH HOUSEHOLD CHORES, AS REPORTED BY PARENTS**

Parents: My child (girl) needed to help with household chores more than before the coronavirus N=345



**FIGURE 51: PERCENTAGE OF BOYS HELPING WITH HOUSEHOLD CHORES, AS REPORTED BY PARENTS**

Parents: My child (boy) needed to help with household chores more than before the coronavirus N=195



<sup>s</sup> A limitation should be noted here that the level of household work before the pandemic is not known, and this might have already been negatively skewed towards girls.

## BOX 11 COUNTRY IN FOCUS: NEPAL

Even before COVID-19, Nepal was wrestling with structural challenges in delivering quality education to its population, with educational opportunities unequally distributed across urban and rural settings, genders, income groups, geographies, and other elements of individual and community identity.<sup>166</sup> While significant strides had been made in getting young children into education – 95% of children were enrolled in primary school in 2019 compared with 80% 10 years earlier<sup>167</sup> – almost half the population remained illiterate. Progress was hindered by unequal socio-economic conditions and limited technological infrastructure.

Girls continued to face many barriers to completing their education, including child, early and forced marriage, taboos around menstruation, and a high domestic workload. The combination of these pre-existing challenges has hampered the Nepali education sector's response to the pandemic.<sup>168</sup>

School closures ordered in March 2020 resulted in an estimated 4.46 million more girls in Nepal at risk of not completing their education.<sup>169,170</sup> In rural areas, 89% of girls were spending more time carrying out domestic duties and supporting their families with the harvest, limiting the amount of time available for self-study, and there is evidence of cases of gender-based violence and forced marriage rising.<sup>171,172</sup>

**“Girls were involved in household chores and found to be getting ready for marriage. Whereas boys spent most of the time with friends.”**

*Male local leader, Makwanpur, Nepal*

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the factors that drive child marriage: a lack of education; family economic hardship, with parents unable to provide for their children; parental death; and teenage pregnancy, which is forecast to increase due to disruptions in the supply and access to contraception.<sup>173</sup>

## Gender-based violence

The pandemic has highlighted and worsened long-standing structural gender inequalities. Women and girls, especially those who are discriminated against due to a range of intersecting factors (such as race or disability), have disproportionately borne its impacts. A survey is not an appropriate data collection method through which to ask adolescents about violence, so questions around this were not included. However, the literature review provided evidence that violence against women and girls (VAWG) and other vulnerable groups has intensified during the pandemic, to the point where it is now commonly referred to as ‘the shadow pandemic’.<sup>174,175,176,177</sup>

The reality of limited social protection and underfunded, understaffed and poorly coordinated essential services to address VAWG has been exposed by the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>178</sup>

For some children, school offers a safe and supportive environment that might shelter them from violence at home. Schools can also offer services such as school meals and psychosocial support. When girls are not in school, they miss out on this protective space and the access to information and services it can offer. Access to sexual and reproductive health and rights information, health services and referral pathways to support were suddenly unavailable during the pandemic. Out of school, girls are at greater risk of being exploited through harmful work and being trapped in a cycle of violence.<sup>179,180</sup>

**“[When schools are closed, girls become] vulnerable to abuse [and] ended up in pregnancy.”**

*Adolescent girl, 18 years old,  
Homabay, Kenya*

**“Some could not remember anything on schoolwork, some girls got pregnant, and some are stigmatised and traumatised due to the pandemic.”**

*Female teacher, Homabay, Kenya*

## BOX 12 CONFLICT, COVID-19 AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION IN NORTH-WEST AND SOUTH-WEST CAMEROON

In 2016, protests broke out in the Anglophone North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon against perceived discrimination and marginalisation of English speakers, including the posting of French-speaking teachers in English-speaking regions. The North-West and South-West regions of the country have been engulfed in conflict since. It is estimated that 3 million people, from an Anglophone population of 5 million, have been affected.<sup>181</sup>

The education system has been a direct target of violence. In 2017, non-state armed groups in the region declared a symbolic independence from Cameroon, and clashes between the Cameroonian army and the secessionist groups have occurred since that time.<sup>182</sup> The separatist armed groups also declared a boycott of schools in 2016, as part of a civil disobedience campaign for a separate state.<sup>183</sup>

Schools have become both an ideological and literal battleground in the conflict. Thousands of schools have been closed and many have been attacked and burned.<sup>184,185,186</sup> Less than 30% of schools in the area were operational in early 2021.<sup>187</sup> Students, parents, teachers and school personnel have been subjected to violence, abduction and intimidation when they have defied the boycott. Since 2018, more than 300 students and teachers have been kidnapped and subsequently released.<sup>188</sup> The impact of the fighting, coupled with the pandemic, has denied an estimated 1,033,000 children of an education.<sup>189</sup>

The fighting in the area, together with the restrictions placed on communities through the response to COVID-19, means many families are unable to work and have little money available to pay for school fees, uniforms and books. Boys out of school are at a higher risk of recruitment by the rebel groups and of violence at the hands of the military, which is reported to have targeted young boys.<sup>190</sup> Poverty and a lack of access to education can push adolescent girls into harmful and exploitative work, where they are at risk of sexual violence, ill treatment, and not receiving pay for work done. Ninety percent of respondents in Plan International's research mentioned a lack of basic income as a push factor for sexual exploitation.<sup>191</sup>

# WELL-BEING

## Mental health and well-being

Long-term confinement and isolation from educational spaces are eroding adolescents' social support networks.<sup>192</sup> There is emerging evidence of increased mental health issues for adolescents because of the pandemic.<sup>193,194</sup> The lack of social contact; worries and anxieties about health, the economy, future education and job prospects; and higher stress within families are all playing a part. Home learning also limits the teaching tools available to educators, placing an extra burden on students and caregivers.

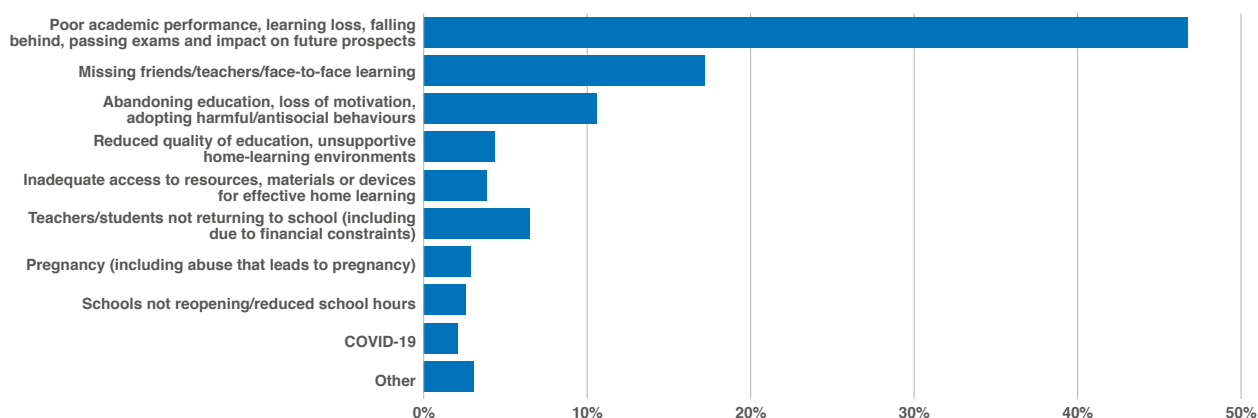
When adolescents were asked what worried them most about school closures and remote learning, academic performance, falling behind and the impact this might have on their future was the most frequently reported concern (47%). This was followed by worries around missing friends and teachers (17%) and concerns over the loss of motivation for education and the potential for this to lead to negative or harmful behaviour (10%).

**“I feel very bad about the situation. My anxiety and stress make me worse. Adding to this, the academic load they give us. Not to mention that I have to wait to see if one of my sisters lends me their computer. When they cannot, many times I am left without submitting my work.”**

*Adolescent girl, 17 years old, location unknown, Honduras*

**FIGURE 52: WHAT WORRIES ADOLESCENTS MOST ABOUT MISSING SCHOOL, AS REPORTED BY ADOLESCENTS, PARENTS AND TEACHERS**

What do you worry about most having missed school? N=1,632





**“I am worried about the financial crisis that people are still facing due to pandemic. I am also worried about my exams and its result.”**

*Adolescent girl, 19 years old, location unknown, Nepal*

**“Initially, my siblings were so excited that they were going to stay home and not go to school. But with weeks passing they started to forget the poems they were taught... to forget their friends... and became withdrawn.”**

*Adolescent girl, age unknown, Khartoum, Sudan*

**“I miss face-to-face classes, learning with my classmates and teachers, enjoying breaks with my friends. I miss learning and sharing with them.”**

*Adolescent girl, 15 years old, location unknown, Honduras*

Similar findings emerged from Plan International research in the Asia-Pacific region<sup>195</sup> as well as in a survey of more than 7,000 girls and young women in 14 countries<sup>t</sup> between June and July 2020.<sup>196</sup> Of those surveyed, 88% had experienced moderate to high levels of anxiety. Girls and young women in high and upper-middle-income countries had lower levels of anxiety than girls and young women in lower-middle and low-income countries.<sup>u</sup> Feelings of tension and anxiety were also expressed in the qualitative data collection for this research:

**“The COVID lockdown in Nepal lasted for nine months. The Nepal education system decided to cut their course content by 30% to end the school year successfully. But now they have retraced their steps and the course needs to be followed 100% and the school year needs to end in Jestha [May/June] which normally ends in Chaitra [March/April]. I didn’t like that. So, either course content should be reduced to 70% or they should give us more time to cover 100% of the course.”**

*Adolescent girl, 15 years old, location unknown, Nepal*

**“Our children were not happy about the school being closed. They were in much tension for not getting [the] chance to study and play at school.”**

*Mother, Sunsari, Nepal*

**“The teachers are depressed in one way or another, and in turn they cannot give [their] best.”**

*Male teacher, Kisumu, Kenya*

This impact is likely to set learners back even further. Mental health and well-being concerns could contribute to a reduced ability to learn and may lead to higher drop-out rates.<sup>197,198</sup> Not only will schools have to deal with a learning loss, but also the psychosocial impact of the pandemic. While most education interventions aim to improve well-being and learning, both will now be prioritised.<sup>199</sup>

<sup>t</sup> Australia, Brazil, Ecuador, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Spain, the United States, Vietnam and Zambia.

<sup>u</sup> Explanations for this could be related to weaker health systems and less social protection, greater financial insecurity, and reduced access to educational continuity through remote learning. The psychosocial impact of losing loved ones due to COVID-19 has a fundamental impact on well-being.

## PHOTOVOICE DIARY: THE IMPORTANCE OF EVERYDAY AND INFORMAL LEARNING, IN MAKWANPUR, NEPAL



**“ When there was no school, I often went in this park and spent time. We can see different things here and learn many things. Our municipality needs to make many children-parks in the city centre. Now there are just two and both are far from my house. ”**

*Adolescent boy, age unknown, Makwanpur, Nepal*

## Motivation to learn at home

The psychosocial impacts of the pandemic also affected adolescents' motivation to learn remotely. In this study, only 46% of adolescents reported enjoying learning from home and 53% were motivated to learn remotely.

In Sudan, motivation was particularly low, which is perhaps understandable given the lack of materials and access to remote learning opportunities.

**“I felt bad, lazy, as I had to stay at home. There were no activities around. I was not able to meet my friends. I was not allowed to go out of the home for six or seven months.”**

*Adolescent boy, 11 years old, Sunsari, Nepal*

**“It was a devastating feeling, not being able to go to school.”**

*Adolescent boy, age unknown, Guli, Sudan*

**“Some students have stopped being hardworking.”**

*Male teacher, location unknown, Sudan*

**“We need to motivate the community [so] that the students do their homework.”**

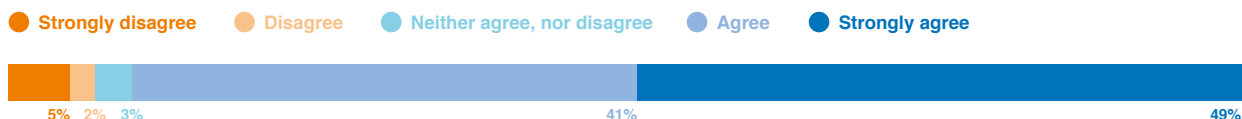
*Male teacher, location unknown, Guatemala*

**ONLY 46%**

of adolescents reported enjoying learning from home and 53% were motivated to learn remotely.

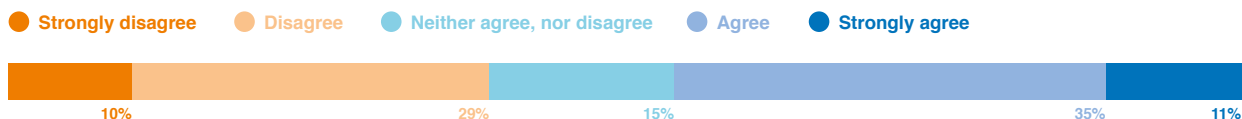
**FIGURE 53: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS REPORTING ENJOYING GOING TO SCHOOL**

Adolescents: I enjoyed going to school N=606



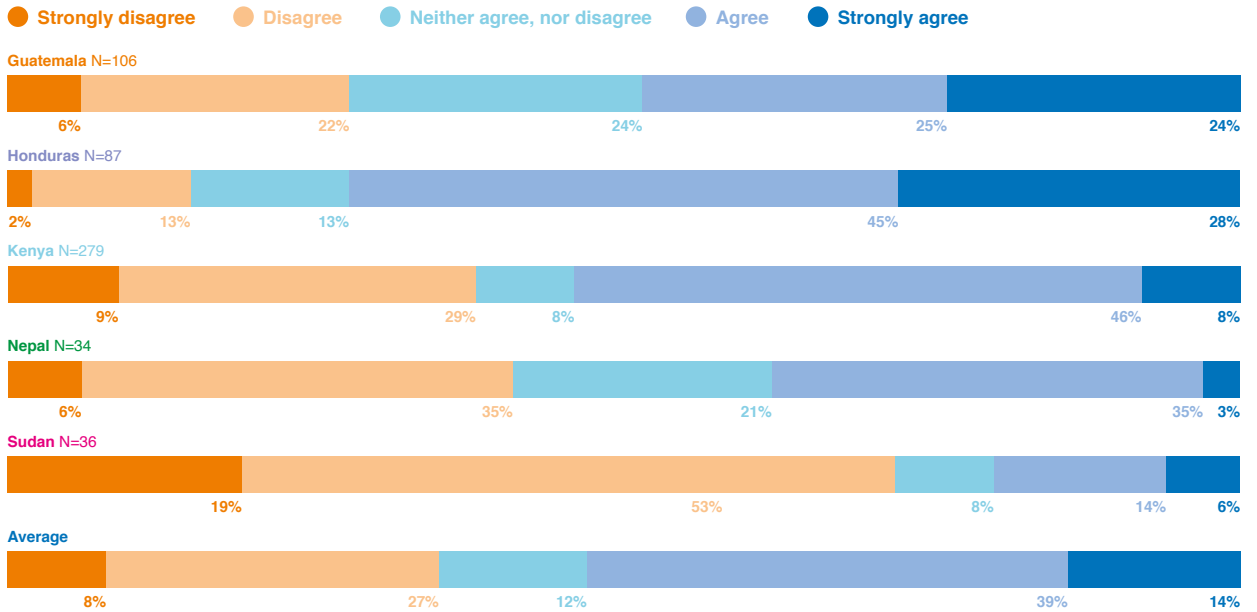
**FIGURE 54: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS REPORTING ENJOYING LEARNING FROM HOME**

Adolescents: I enjoyed learning from home N=542



**FIGURE 55: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS MOTIVATED TO LEARN FROM HOME, BY COUNTRY**

Adolescents: I was motivated to learn at home N=542



**PHOTOVOICE DIARY: AN ADOLESCENT BOY IN GULI, SUDAN,  
DESCRIBES HIS FEAR OF THE SPREAD OF THE VIRUS**



**“ In [this] photo the dirt and rubbish is surrounding the houses, and could affect our health. And this will make coronavirus spread easier. The windows are near the rubbish place which bring[s] nasty smell. ”**

*Adolescent boy, age unknown, Guli, Sudan*

## Online safety

Evidence shows that online sexual abuse has risen during the pandemic, highlighting the risks adolescents face when forced to continue their education online.

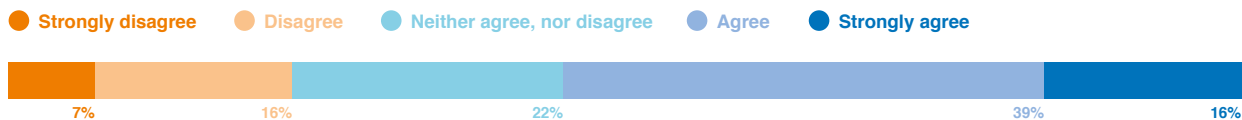
In Thailand, for example, the Internet Crimes Against Children taskforce received reports of online sex abuse daily, with victims as young as eight years old.<sup>200</sup> Cambodia also reported an increase.<sup>201</sup>

In the Philippines, the Department of Justice reported in May 2020 that online sexual exploitation of children increased by 264% as the country battled COVID-19.<sup>202</sup>

Adolescents who had access to devices – whether for all or part of the time – were asked if they felt safe online. Most of them did, and their parents agreed, although it should be noted that the response rate to this question was low due to the high number of respondents who did not have electronic devices.

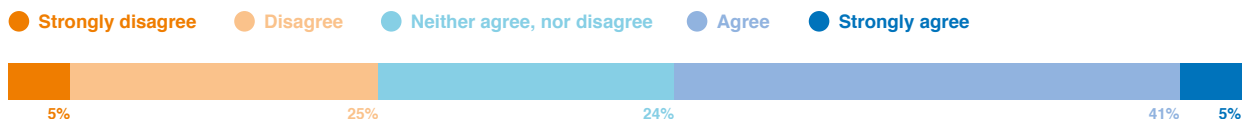
**FIGURE 56: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS WHO FELT SAFE ONLINE**

Adolescents: I felt safe when learning online N=252



**FIGURE 57: PERCENTAGE OF PARENTS WHO FELT THEIR CHILDREN WERE SAFE ONLINE**

Parents: I felt that my child was safe when learning online N=103





**PHOTOVOICE DIARY: SCHOOL BUILDINGS HAVE BEEN  
NEGLECTED DURING THE PANDEMIC, IN GULI, SUDAN**



**“ The picture shows the wall of our school and the paint is peeling, which shows how neglected our school and by extension, our community, became. ”**

*Adolescent boy, age unknown, Guli, Sudan*

# RETURNING TO EDUCATION

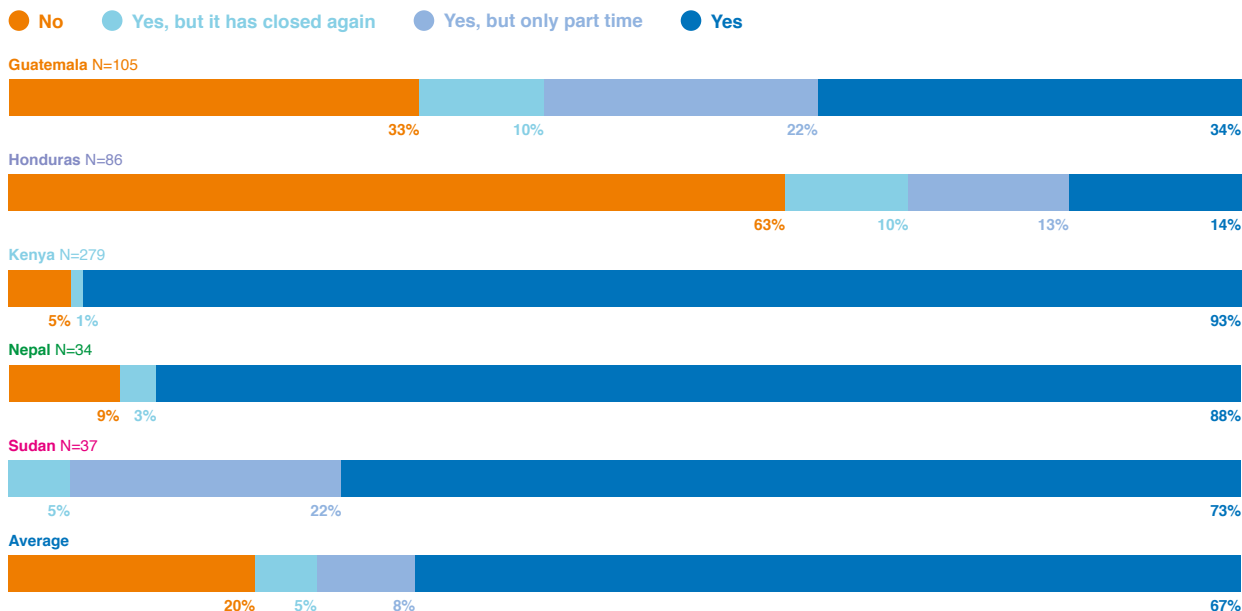
More than 15 months since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a pandemic, 19 countries are still imposing complete school closures.<sup>203</sup> It is estimated that 11 million girls will not return to school due to the pandemic,<sup>204</sup> in line with research that shows girls who are out of school for extended periods are less likely to return.<sup>205</sup>

**“Some were not able to access [sanitary] pads and they were lured by men to help them get the sanitary towels and they ended up being pregnant. Some got married. Some are engaged with some work which they earn money [from] so they don’t see the need to be back to school.”**

*Adolescent girl, 15 years old, Kisumu, Kenya*

**FIGURE 58: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS RETURNING TO EDUCATION, BY COUNTRY**

Adolescents: I have returned to school N=541



## PHOTOVOICE DIARY: STUDENTS IN SUNSARI, NEPAL, DISCUSS PREVENTION MEASURES IN SCHOOLS



An adolescent boy described his photo:

**“ School has made it compulsory to wear mask in the school. ”**

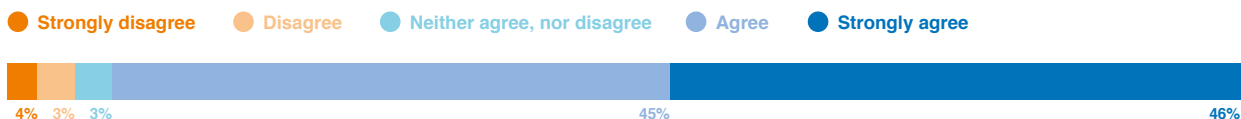
Another student said:

**“We used to wear mask when the school reopened. We did it for first few days. Now students do not always wear masks.”**

*Photovoice diary group discussion with adolescent girls and boys, Sunsari, Nepal*

## FIGURE 59: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS HAPPY TO BE BACK AT SCHOOL

Adolescents: I am happy to be back at school N=430



The global economy shrunk by 4.4% in 2020, the worst decline since the Great Depression of the 1930s.<sup>206</sup> This has significantly affected public finances. Past evidence also shows that crises are often followed by budget cuts, including to aid budgets, resulting in education systems being further underfunded and educational inequalities growing, leaving the poorest and most marginalised children still further behind.<sup>207,208</sup>

**“We have not worked for a year. We were confined to our homes. How are we to support our children to go back to school?”**

*Mother, Nairobi, Kenya<sup>209</sup>*

This survey shows that 33% of students have not fully returned to in-person education, compared with 67% whose schools have fully re-opened. Like the students, not all teachers have returned to teaching, as lockdowns and school closures continue. However, adolescents who have returned to school are happy to be back.

**“The school atmosphere, the students, the teachers, the butterflies, the sound of the bell, the Easter time, and soooo many things. I love my school very much.”**

*Adolescent boy, 19 years old, location unknown, Sudan*

Analysis of an open question that asked why adolescents have not returned to education shows that fear of catching COVID-19 is the main reason (24% of answers mentioned this as a concern). Despite only affecting girls, one in 10 responses (10%) cited early pregnancy, the fifth most reported reason for adolescents not returning to school.

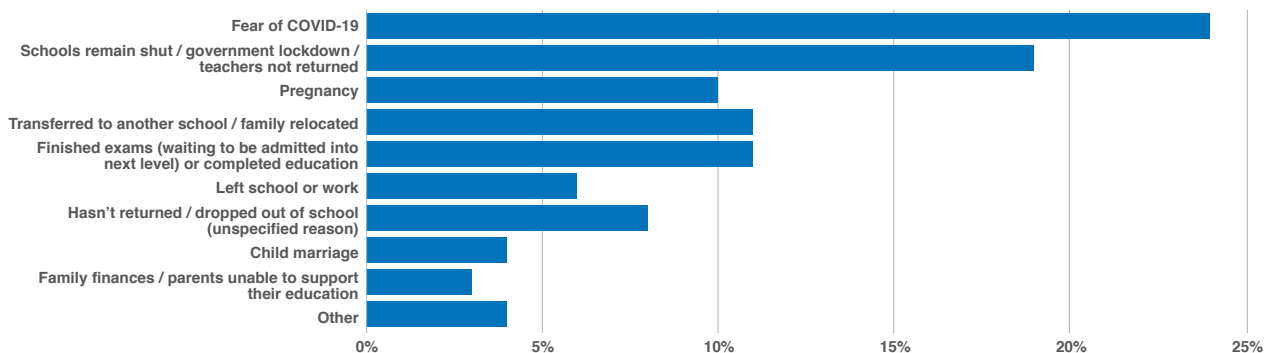
Early pregnancy is one of the most significant causes and consequences of child, early and forced marriage, often a key factor in girls dropping out of school. In addition, some countries have policies in place to restrict girls from returning to education if they are (visibly) pregnant, while others lack re-entry policies or laws to protect pregnant girls' right to education.<sup>210</sup>

**“A number of girls got pregnant during that time and health education was not done. [Access to] sanitary pads is a major challenge to girls.”**

*Female teacher, Homabay, Kenya*

**FIGURE 60: WHY ADOLESCENTS HAVE NOT RETURNED TO SCHOOL, AS REPORTED BY ADOLESCENTS, PARENTS AND TEACHERS**

Why have you/your friends/your child/you students not (all) returned to school? N=411



## The impact of lost learning through the pandemic

The challenges of learning at home have worsened the learning experience of already marginalised children, with extended periods of school closure increasing the learning losses of those who have previously had limited or interrupted access to formal education. According to the World Bank, COVID-19 could increase the number of ‘learning poor’<sup>v</sup> children by 72 million to 454 million.<sup>211</sup>

Simulations show that, if no or limited remediation or mitigation measures are put in place to counter the effects of school closures, learning poverty could increase for primary-school-age children from 53% to 63%.<sup>212</sup> In Kenya, for example, it is estimated that by the time schools had fully reopened 53% of students had experienced learning loss in maths and reading to the equivalent of 13 months of schooling.<sup>213</sup> Catching up will present challenges for more marginalised learners in school assessments and national exams, compared with more privileged peers, possibly leading to school year repetition.<sup>214</sup>

Recovering from learning loss could be particularly acute for students already behind in their progression through the education system, as is the case for many of the participants in this research. When analysing the age of the adolescents and their education level in this survey, 38% of 15-year-olds and 32% of 16-year-olds reported being in primary education.

These lags are likely to increase with the gaps in learning provision because of the pandemic, with only 23% of adolescents reporting they learned as much remotely as they would have done being in school.

**“I feel like I am no longer a student.”**

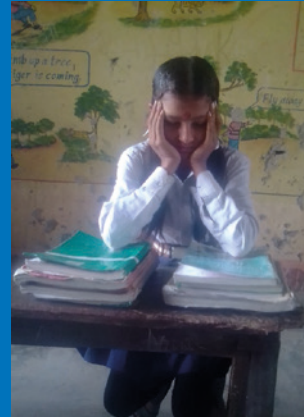
*Adolescent girl, 15 years old, Kwale, Kenya*

**“[I worry] if I will go to the next class because I have forgotten most of the things while I was home and I used to do a lot of house chores.”**

*Adolescent girl, 15 years old, Kisumu, Kenya*

<sup>v</sup> Learning poverty is a World Bank indicator of children not in school and/or unable to read and understand an age-appropriate text by the age of 10.

**PHOTOVOICE DIARY: GIRLS AND BOYS IN SUNSARI, NEPAL,  
DESCRIBE DIFFICULTIES IN KEEPING UP AND PREPARING FOR  
EXAMS, HAVING RETURNED TO SCHOOL**



The photographer said:

**“ School was closed for nine months; nothing was read through any medium. Now school has opened, there is only three months left for the exam of this session. She is thinking, ‘How to write my exam, what to read, what to write, how to complete the course, there is lot to read.’ ”**

Another student said:

“It is difficult to understand what teachers have taught after such a long vacation in the name of lockdown, so [she is] holding [her] head.”

*Photovoice diary group discussion with adolescent girls and boys, Sunsari, Nepal*



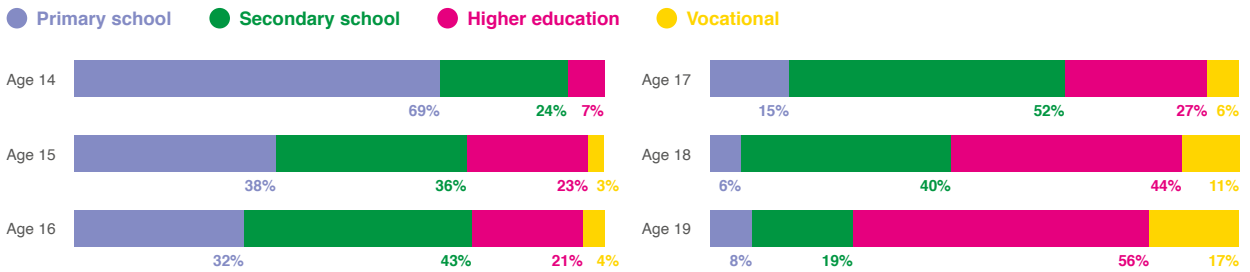
**“They came back very blank and learning had to start afresh.”**  
*Female teacher, Bondo, Kenya*

**“It seems that students are two to three years behind in the school requirements [compared with] children in previous years.”**  
*Male teacher, location unknown, Guatemala*

Nearly nine in 10 (86%) teachers that responded to this survey believe the year of lost learning will have a negative impact on their students’ futures. This is a serious concern not only for them, but also their communities, given the catalytic role that education plays in reducing poverty, improving health and livelihood opportunities, and contributing to social stability.<sup>215</sup>

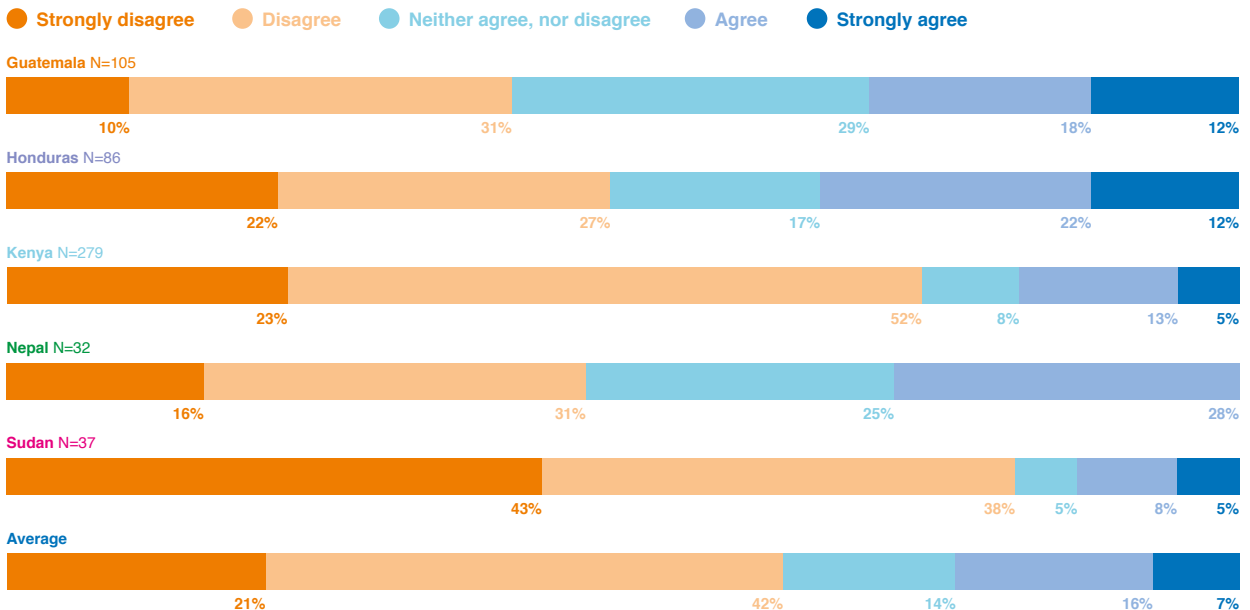
**FIGURE 61: ADOLESCENTS’ SCHOOL LEVEL, BY AGE**

Adolescents: Age and education level N=586



**FIGURE 62: ADOLESCENTS’ LEARNING OUTCOMES, BY COUNTRY**

Adolescents: I learned as much with home learning as I would have done being at school N=539



**FIGURE 63: PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS WORRIED ABOUT THEIR STUDENTS HAVING MISSED SCHOOL**

Teachers: I worry having missed school will negatively affect my students' futures N=444



Teachers and parents linked learning loss, as well as behavioural changes and a deterioration of social skills, to an amplification of pre-existing weaknesses in education systems and challenges with supporting adolescents to catch up. Not only can learning loss cause significant anxiety and worry for students, but it may also lead to a loss of motivation to continue with education.

**“I think it disturbs a lot. Students weaken their study habits. And they may have problems in socialisation as well.”**

*Female teacher, Makwanpur, Nepal*

**“Deficiencies that already existed in the education system [are now more evident].”**

*Female teacher, location unknown, Guatemala*

**“They say teachers are running lessons too fast. Maybe teachers are also in the pressure to finish the course on time, but I think just finishing course without understanding has no meaning.”**

*Father, Makwanpur, Nepal*

**“I’m worried about school performance. Now that the schools have re-opened, students were assessed, and the truth is that it is very weak. The boys and girls did not learn anything.”**

*Male teacher, location unknown, Guatemala*

**“They are not able to understand or keep up.”**

*Male teacher, location unknown, Sudan*

**“Discipline, performance deteriorated. Drop out rates for students went [up].”**

*Female teacher, Kifili, Kenya*

## Dropping out of school

Data from the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone and Liberia shows how school enrolment dropped due to the financial pressures families faced, and that girls and boys who had started to earn an income to support their family were unlikely to return to education.<sup>216</sup> In Sierra Leone, where schools were closed for nine months as a result of the Ebola crisis, there was a 19% increase in the number of girls aged 12 to 17 engaged in income-generating activities.<sup>217</sup> The crisis also led to increased violence against children, early pregnancy, and child, early and forced marriage, which also kept girls from returning to school.<sup>218</sup> These impacts are being replicated in the current pandemic in many contexts.

**“Some dropped out of school due to pregnancy cases. The boys went fishing and concentrated on that. Others thought they were of age and went into the gold mines.”**

*Male teacher, Bondo, Kenya*

## PHOTOVOICE DIARY: AN ADOLESCENT GIRL IN SUNSARI, NEPAL, DESCRIBES RETURNING TO SCHOOL DETERMINED TO SUCCEED IN HER EXAMS



The adolescent girl who took this photograph said:

**“ She is thinking that it is better to focus on study than to make noise like other classmates. Exam is coming and there is lot to read. ”**

An adolescent boy responded:

“This picture shows that girls and boys are in the classroom. Some are standing, some are talking, and few are reading.”

The photographer again commented on the photo:

“I do not care what friends are doing in the class, but I have to read and be first in the final exam. Let them make noise, it will not disturb me. I will study anyhow.”

*Photovoice diary group discussion with adolescent girls and boys, Sunsari, Nepal*

**“Some got pregnant and married. Most boys got... boda [motorcycle taxi] jobs.”**

*Adolescent girl, 15 years old, Kisumu, Kenya*

**“After dropping out of school, I worry about who will teach me how to read.”**

*Adolescent girl, 18 years old, location unknown, Nepal*

In addition to some of these gendered barriers to returning to education, teachers also reported that economic reasons, lost motivation, and fear of the virus were also preventing adolescents returning to school.

**“They lost their motivation, their enthusiasm.”**

*Male teacher, location unknown, Honduras*

**“They don’t believe they are learning in the current system.”**

*Female teacher, location unknown, Honduras*

**“Parents put them to work.”**

*Male teacher, location unknown, Guatemala*

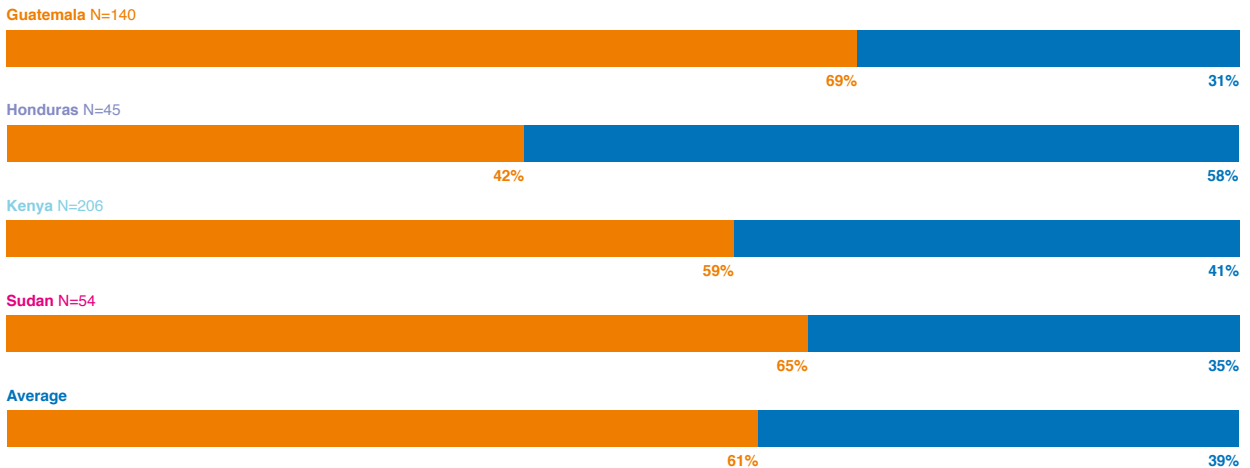
**“Not everyone has the economic capacity [to continue education].”**

*Male teacher, location unknown, Guatemala*

**FIGURE 64: PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS WHO SAY THEIR STUDENTS HAVE RETURNED TO SCHOOL, BY COUNTRY**

Teachers: All my students have returned to school N=445

● No ● Yes



**FIGURE 65: PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS WHO RETURNED TO TEACH IN PERSON**

Teachers: I have returned to teaching N=441

● No ● Yes, but the school has closed again ● Yes, part of the time ● Yes



## PHOTOVOICE DIARY: INCREASED PLAY DURING LOCKDOWN, IN SUNSARI, NEPAL



The adolescent boy who took this photo said:

**“ Students get some pocket money for lunch, and the students in the picture bought some marbles from that money and [are] playing during the school time or they might be playing during the lunch time. ”**

An adolescent girl said:

“There were no teaching [or] learning activities during lockdown for eight or nine months. Now what will happen [to] reading and going to school? Let us play marbles and have fun.”

*Photovoice diary group discussion with adolescent girls and boys, Sunsari, Nepal*

## PHOTOVOICE DIARY: SOME ADOLESCENTS IN SUNSARI, NEPAL, REPORT LOSING MOTIVATION TO RETURN TO SCHOOL



The photographer said:

**“ The picture shows that a student in his school uniform, carrying a school bag, is going to school. Another boy is holding a cricket bat and not attending his school. It’s due to lockdown effect. ”**

Another male participant added:

**“Some students developed the habit of playing during lockdown, so there is no interest to go to the school. ...some students were waiting for the school to re-open.”**

One of the female participants said:

**“His uniform is now shorter for him, and he cannot go to school without wearing uniform. His parents cannot buy him a new uniform as they had no earning during the lockdown, so he is playing with his friends during the school time.”**

*Photovoice diary group discussion with adolescent girls and boys, Sunsari, Nepal*



## BOX 13 IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON YOUNG PEOPLE IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

In West and Central Africa, an estimated 128 million children were affected by school closures.<sup>219</sup> The pandemic has added to pre-existing challenges: violence and insecurity; poverty; child labour practices; harmful social norms; lack of quality education services; and challenges related to internal displacements.<sup>220</sup>

The crisis affecting the Lake Chad Basin, for example, is one of the most severe humanitarian emergencies in the world. COVID-19 has overlayed additional burdens on people, and communal violence has increased as a result.<sup>221</sup> Following the suspension of non-governmental organisation (NGO) activities, violence against children and gender-based violence have gone unreported. Food insecurity has significantly increased. School closures have meant cases of students dropping out have increased, as young people have dropped out of school to support their parents in income-generating activities.<sup>222</sup>

The pandemic has had severe economic impacts in the region of West and Central Africa, particularly on the poorest people. Populations have been affected by a sudden rise in food prices and difficulties in selling local products. This has reduced their ability to pay school fees and expenses (uniforms, books, transport) now that schools have reopened. In Guinea, for example, many parents – particularly those who support several children – reported finding it extremely difficult to pay for the direct and indirect costs of education.<sup>223</sup>

Children, especially adolescents, have also been forced to abandon school in search of income-generating activities. In Nigeria, girls have been kept from returning to school by parents needing support with agricultural activities. In the Central African Republic, while schools were closed, many parents were forced to take their children to work in hazardous conditions in gold mines.<sup>224</sup> In these situations, girls are most exposed to the risks of human trafficking and exploitation.<sup>225</sup>

**“The parents don’t want the students to attend, as they have family members with underlying health conditions.”**

*Female teacher, location unknown, Honduras*

**“[They have not returned] because of the [fear of the] second wave of coronavirus.”**

*Male teacher, location unknown, Sudan*

These findings mirror those in a Plan International assessment in West and Central Africa, which similarly found that fear of contracting the disease is one of the key factors in students dropping out, despite communication efforts and specific hygiene practices being put in place.<sup>226</sup> In Cameroon and Niger, for example, community members highlighted their fear of the pandemic as one of the reasons preventing them sending their children back to school.<sup>227</sup>

**PHOTOVOICE DIARY: AN ADOLESCENT BOY IN GULI, SUDAN,  
HIGHLIGHTS CONCERNS ABOUT SHARED WATER**



**“ This water can only has one cup, which forces people to come near each other when they want to drink, and also using one cup will help spread germs and viruses. And that will not be helpful in time of pandemics. ”**

*Adolescent boy, age unknown, Guli, Sudan*

## PHOTOVOICE DIARY: A GIRL IN DAFUR, SUDAN, DESCRIBES LIMITED COVID-19 PREVENTION MEASURES IN HER SCHOOL



**“ This picture represents our bad situation at the school where we have no face masks, no sanitisers. ”**

*Adolescent girl, age unknown, Darfur, Sudan*

## Child, early and forced marriage

For girls, schools can provide protection against child, early and forced marriage,<sup>228</sup> which occurs across the globe. Every year 12 million girls marry before the age of 18,<sup>229</sup> often into a life of limited economic, educational and employment opportunity, with increased risk of violence, abuse, ill health and early death.

Underpinning child marriage is a combination of poverty, gender inequality, the desire to control female sexuality, and a lack of protection for children's rights. These drivers are frequently compounded by limited access to a quality education and employment opportunities, and are reinforced by entrenched social norms<sup>230</sup> – all worsened by the pandemic.

### BOX 14 COVID-19, EDUCATION AND CHILD MARRIAGE IN JORDAN<sup>231</sup>

In Jordan, measures put in place to control COVID-19 shut down access to critical support services that adolescent girls rely on for their health, safety and well-being. A significant number of girls in Jordan reported that many adolescent girls in their communities got engaged or married during the lockdowns.<sup>232</sup>

Limitations on girls' access to healthcare, psychosocial support, and gender-based violence prevention and response services have been linked to increases in child marriage. Girls also reported that the financial hardship caused by COVID-19 has resulted in pressure from parents to marry. The most reported individual-level risk factors for child marriage, however, were linked to education. This included feelings that, with schools closed and few opportunities for employment, girls have no better alternative to child marriage.<sup>233</sup>

The economic fallout from the pandemic and the disruption to programmes and interventions focused on preventing child marriage will lead to millions more child marriages globally in the future.<sup>234</sup> One estimate shows that 10 million more girls will be at risk of child, early and forced marriage this decade, with school closures likely to have increased the risk of child marriage by 25% per year.<sup>235</sup>

Plan International research in the Asia-Pacific region found that, as the pandemic further entrenched gender norms and expectations, girls and their families were more likely to consider marriage or work to be more financially viable options than keeping girls in school.

For adolescent girls that participated in this research in the Asia-Pacific region, child, early and forced marriage was highlighted as one of the biggest concerns during the pandemic.<sup>236</sup>

In Nepal, where the legal age of marriage is 20, it is also reported that child marriages have increased as the pandemic has intensified drivers such as a lack of education, economic hardship, parental death and early pregnancy.<sup>237</sup>

While this research did not directly address child, early and forced marriage, some respondents to the research raised this as an impact of the pandemic that is keeping adolescent girls from returning to school.

**“Many girls got married but I have no idea whether they have intention to return to school or not... Girls are impacted negatively the most, because many families talked to them about marriage since schools are closed and the opening date still unknown.”**

*Female teacher, Blue Nile  
Shabasha, Sudan*

**“Students felt very frustrated that the school will take long time to open, so they took the step of marriage.”**

*Male local leader, White Nile  
Shabsha, Sudan*

**“Students stop studying and look for work or marriage instead.”**

*Male teacher, White Nile  
Shabsha, Sudan*

**“Some got married off.”**

*Adolescent girl, 15 years old,  
Kwale, Kenya*

**“Some could not remember anything on school work, some girls got pregnant, and some are stigmatised and traumatised due to the pandemic.”**

*Female teacher, Homabay, Kenya*

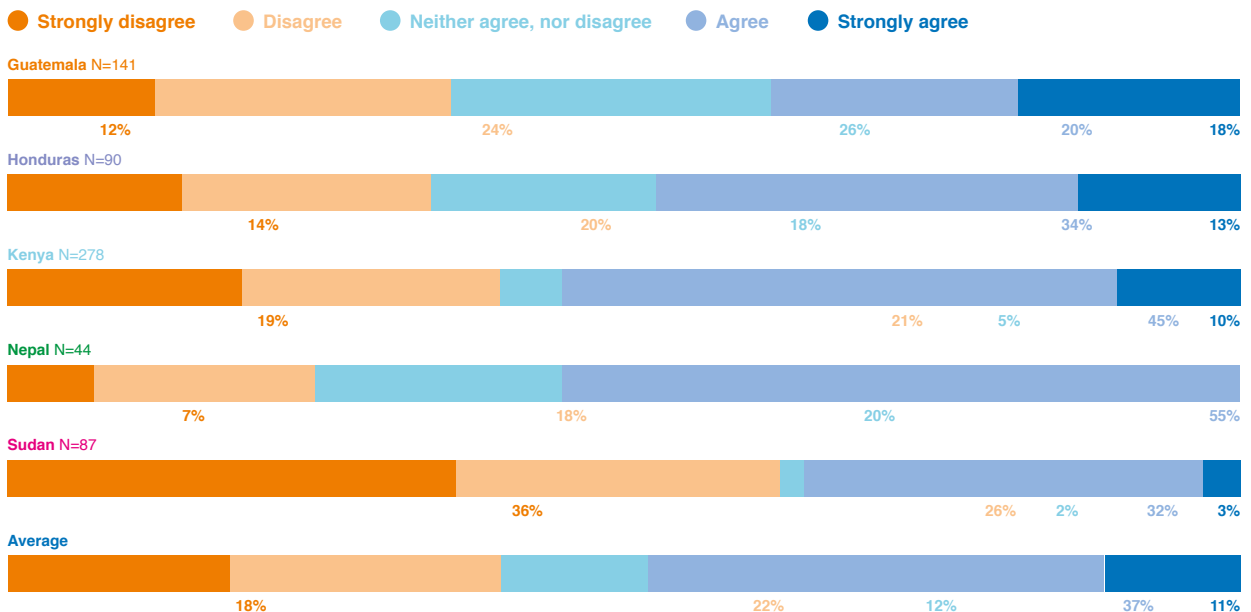
# LISTENING TO ADOLESCENTS

Young people's rights to access information and participate individually and collectively in decision making are guaranteed across international human rights treaties, including in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most widely ratified human rights treaty, and in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. As well as being central to a rights-based approach, listening and responding to adolescents helps governments, donors, and development and humanitarian actors better understand their experiences and tailor responses accordingly. Despite this, adolescents are often excluded from decision-making processes, locally, nationally and globally.

They are constrained by social norms, entrenched hierarchies and expectations (based on age and traditional gender roles) that hinder their ability to participate in decision making or engage with adults on an equal footing. For adolescents living through crises, including the current pandemic, these hierarchies and power dynamics are magnified.

**FIGURE 66: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS WHO SAY THEIR LOCAL AUTHORITY/LEADERS INVOLVED YOUNG PEOPLE, BY COUNTRY**

Adolescents: My local authority/leaders asked young people how best to respond to the coronavirus pandemic N=640





## FIGURE 67: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS WHO WOULD LIKE TO BE MORE INVOLVED IN DECISION MAKING

Adolescents: I would like be more involved in decisions about the education system in my community N=645



Yet, when asked, adolescents emphasise their desire to be consulted and listened to, so they can contribute and be part of solutions to problems.<sup>238,239,240,241</sup> They are experts in their own lives and know what needs to change. Many individuals and youth-and-girl-led groups are already playing a significant role in responding to COVID-19 and the knock-on impacts on education. In fact, on average, 48% of adolescent participants in this research indicated that they were asked for input into local decision making for the COVID-19 response.<sup>w</sup>

The overwhelming majority (91%) of adolescents wanted to be more involved in decisions about the education system in their community. This could indicate that for some of those that had been engaged in decision making, this was not meaningful. Adolescent participants in the qualitative interviews in Nepal and Sudan highlighted they had either not been consulted or were not engaged meaningfully in decision making. Others suggested that they did not always expect to be consulted:

**“They asked us, but we didn’t fully understand what they need[ed].”**

*Adolescent boy, age unknown, Guli, Sudan*

**“No one has asked anything. Everyone was scared and were thinking of themselves.”**

*Adolescent girl, 13 years old, Sunsari, Nepal*

**“Who are we that they would ask to us? We were never asked about anything.”**

*Adolescent boy, 13 years old, Sunsari, Nepal*

**“No. [laughs] I am so small for that.”**

*Adolescent boy, age unknown, Makwanpur, Nepal*

**91%**

**of adolescents wanted to be more involved in decisions that affect them.**

<sup>w</sup> These numbers are higher than expected based on extensive comparable research conducted by Plan International. One reason for this could be that the research was conducted in areas where Plan International was already working, with child participation core to our programme approach.

# CONCLUSIONS

The pandemic has created an unprecedented education emergency that has placed the future of the world's most marginalised children and adolescents in jeopardy. The impact of lockdowns and social distancing measures have brought to light the lack of resilience and adaptability of educational systems and models globally, with fragile contexts most badly affected. Local and national governments were unprepared to deal with the large-scale disruption caused by COVID-19.<sup>242</sup>

Economic, gender, social, geographic and technological inequalities – already barriers to education – have been heightened during the pandemic, particularly in conflict and crisis affected contexts. These factors, on their own or combined, have limited the ability of students to access education following the sudden shift to remote learning.

Many students in this research were unable to access education from home, due to a lack of devices, electricity or digital infrastructure, and limited alternative no-tech approaches in many cases. For the same reason, many teachers were also unable to provide lessons. Those who could, received little, if any, training on how best to teach remotely. The potential of existing low or no-tech ways of continuing education was often not fully tapped into or overlooked altogether.

Most parents and adolescents were ill-prepared and under-supported, or had too many competing demands on their time, to manage education at home.

Too few were consulted on how to improve the situation. Adolescents struggled to motivate themselves or concentrate to learn effectively at home, in an all-to-often unsupportive and impractical learning environment. The psychosocial impacts of the pandemic, isolation, and worry about exams, academic performance and future career prospects also affected the mental health and well-being of the adolescents.

Thirty-three percent of the students surveyed had not yet returned to full-time education. The learning time missed due to school closures continues to grow and often comes on top of existing learning gaps, raising serious concerns about educational outcomes. Falling behind in their education and being away from the support structures schools can offer increases the chances of students dropping out. Due to the global recession that has resulted from the pandemic, it is expected that many more families will not be able to afford to educate their children.

Despite the global commitment to guaranteeing a quality education for every child, millions more girls now face a future outside of the classroom. The risk of them never returning to school is drastically heightened as they take on additional unpaid care, are forced into marriage or domestic servitude, and shoulder increased economic burdens. Without addressing the gender-based barriers preventing girls accessing a quality education, the long, uneven and uncertain recovery from this education crisis will stall. The stakes have never been higher.

## PHOTOVOICE DIARY: ADOLESCENTS IN MAKWANPUR, NEPAL, DISCUSS COVID-19 AND THE ENVIRONMENT



The adolescent boy who took this photo said:

**“ Trees stay together in harmony. Why not we humans? ”**

As part of the group discussion, an adolescent girl responded:

**“COVID is a punishment for us because we destroyed nature.”**

*Photovoice diary group discussion with adolescent girls and boys, Makwanpur, Nepal*



Training healthcare providers on how to use personal protective equipment, Sudan.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

The pandemic threatens to undo years of progress and hard-won gains on gender equality and girls' education. Action to reverse the catastrophic impacts of a year of lost learning for children and adolescents must be accelerated. Viable solutions to adapt and strengthen the resilience of education systems to ensure continuity of learning during future climate crises, economic shocks and disruptions need to be put in place. Funding must be increased and moved quickly, inclusively, and through locally led processes. And girls and young women must be at the centre, able to access decision-making spaces, occupy leadership positions, and help shape an equitable and just recovery.

National governments and local education authorities are critical in leading change in consultation with teachers and learners – particularly girls and women. Donors and local, national and international organisations, including youth-and-girl-led groups, are critical to supporting this. The key milestones of the Global Partnership for Education Replenishment Summit and the COP 26 summit are unmissable opportunities to make concrete commitments. And these political commitments must be matched with the necessary resources and action to avoid more empty promises.

Now is the time for global solidarity. Wealthy nations – including the UK – must step up and help put in place a truly transformative agenda to address the monumental challenges the pandemic has presented. Incorporating lessons learned from the experiences of the last year is critical to informing efforts to build back better, more equitable, more inclusive and more resilient education systems that can withstand climate crises, health shocks and disruptions. With this in mind, we call upon donors, national governments, humanitarian actors, and education providers to work together and in partnership with adolescents to:

# 1. Urgently increase and sustain financial support to meet the education needs of adolescent girls and boys, including those living through conflict and humanitarian crises, and address the US\$200 billion annual shortfall<sup>243</sup> to education, so every girl can lead, learn, decide and thrive.

- Invest critical resources into the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), fully funding it by meeting its funding target of US\$5 billion over five years. Ensure other multilateral donors are also fully funded, including Education Cannot Wait at its upcoming replenishment in 2022.
- Fully fund GPE's Girls' Education Accelerator to ensure we close the gap in learning outcomes between girls and boys and place gender equality at the heart of transforming education systems around the world.
- National governments should make every effort to protect and increase spending on education and allocate at least 20% of national budgets to education. An increased focus should be placed on improving all aspects of the quality and gender-responsiveness of education, to ensure all children acquire the requisite knowledge and skills to fully develop and participate in the political, economic and social progress of their societies.
- Donors should urgently reverse any cuts to overseas development assistance (ODA) and accelerate efforts to spend at least 0.7% of gross national income. All donors should progressively commit to spend 15% of ODA on education and 10% of humanitarian aid on education by 2025, delivered through equitable, inclusive and gender-transformative<sup>x</sup> programmes and approaches.

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<sup>x</sup> A gender-transformative approach goes beyond addressing 'symptoms' to explicitly tackle the root causes of gender inequality, particularly unequal gender power relations, discriminatory social norms, and systems, structures, policies and practices. It improves the daily condition of girls and women, while advancing their position and value in society.



## **2. Work in partnership with women and girls, men and boys in all their diversity, to eliminate the systemic and gendered barriers that are preventing adolescent girls from accessing and completing a quality education.**

- Systematically and meaningfully engage adolescents in decision making on COVID-19 education response and recovery planning at local and national levels. Adolescent girls should be supported to participate meaningfully in needs assessments, planning, and monitoring of plans to safely open schools and deliver a quality education. This should include participatory gender, disability inclusion and age analyses, using sex, age and disability-disaggregated data and evidence.
- Use the findings of the participatory analyses to inform COVID-19 recovery and education policies and programmes that address the gendered, economic, health and social impacts of the pandemic, and seek to proactively reduce inequalities in access to, transition towards, and completion of a quality education. This might include removing the financial costs (for example, school fees) that act as barriers to learning and increasing social protection to support the poorest and most marginalised children to return to school. Ongoing monitoring should include in-built child-friendly community feedback and accountability mechanisms.
- Work with boys and men to change harmful attitudes and behaviours towards girls and women, tackle the root causes of gender inequality and reshape unequal power relations – including in relation to decisions about girls’ education – to ensure home (learning) environments are safe and supportive for adolescent girls in all their diversity.
- Prioritise action to support poor and marginalised adolescents, including working children and those that have had limited access to distance learning, back into education. This should include culturally relevant, gender-responsive and disability-inclusive back-to-school campaigns and the promotion of integrated approaches that address girls’ holistic education, health, economic and protection needs. Education-sector plans should be reviewed to ensure they contain active measures on inclusion and contain specific sub-targets for girls with disabilities.
- Put in place targeted measures for pregnant and married girls, including removing discriminatory school policies that prevent them from attending and promoting flexible learning opportunities.
- Recognise the role of adolescents as agents of change, increasing multi-year flexible and accessible funding to grassroots child, girl and youth-led groups and organisations, to meet the needs defined by young people themselves. Commit to and adequately resource the meaningful participation of girl-led groups and girl activists in key global decision-making processes through collaborative partnership models, ensuring accessible information is available and providing flexible funding to support participation and self-organising.

### **3. Support quality inclusive learning environments through a focus on the well-being of teachers and learners and a whole-school approach.**

- Work with education providers to ensure learning environments are safe, inclusive and gender-responsive, and safeguard the rights of adolescent girls. Ensure prevention and response mechanisms are in place to address school-related gender-based violence and that appropriate and accessible support is available for girls who have witnessed or experienced violence during school closures.
- Promote and prioritise learner-centred teaching and school-based comprehensive sexuality education and life-skills training, to strengthen resilience, especially among girls, to manage stress, negotiate difficult circumstances, and respond to the specific challenges faced during school closures.
- Prioritise adolescents' well-being and re-engagement with learning as part of catch-up plans, and address mental health and well-being needs through school-based approaches. This could include the provision of gender and age-responsive psychosocial support for children, adolescents and teachers, for example, by integrating mental-health and well-being modules into existing curricula. Strengthen school-and-community-based referral mechanisms to promote access to health and psychosocial support services.
- Ensure teachers' health, safety and well-being are prioritised in response and recovery plans, with attention to specific needs. Ensure this is continuous and part of broader efforts to improve teacher satisfaction, motivation and psychosocial well-being, especially in crisis contexts.

## 4. Strengthen the resilience of education systems to protect learning during the ongoing COVID pandemic and be prepared to respond to future pandemics, climate-related shocks, insecurity and other crises, incorporating the capacity to shift safely and effectively between face-to-face and distance learning as required.

- Protect learning during COVID-19, ensure a safe return to school, and prevent further lost learning for all children, particularly adolescent girls. Support and develop education policies and programmes that: promote equality, non-discrimination and human rights for children in all their diversity;<sup>y</sup> prioritise fully accessible catch-up classes that balance children's need to learn with other responsibilities; address mental health and well-being needs; and promote good hygiene practices and prevention measures.
- Support initiatives that strengthen teachers' resilience and equip them with the knowledge, skills and resources to help their students navigate distance education and blended learning, and ensure they can continue teaching in the event of future shocks. This should include being able to offer gender-responsive and disability-inclusive support to students, parents and caregivers, through both online and low or no-tech distance-learning approaches that best enable access to appropriate learning materials and educational support.
- Plan for future shocks and strengthen the resilience of education systems to enable continuity of learning through climate-resilient, flexible, context-specific delivery mechanisms that minimise disruption and keep all children who are affected by climate crises learning. Accelerate efforts to close the digital divide for the most marginalised people, especially women and girls. Promote increased availability of alternative and non-formal education programmes, accessible to those with different needs and abilities in times of crisis.
- Plan for the delivery of education during future shocks through an appropriate mix of technology-enabled and low-tech (pens, paper, textbooks) methods. Ensure contingency plans include provisions for awareness raising and outreach, so marginalised communities are aware of and can access the provisions on offer (such as remote lessons through radio and TV) in future pandemics or crises.

<sup>y</sup> Plan International believes in a comprehensive vision of education, consistent with state obligations and the aims of education, as set out in Articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Education should be relevant to the needs of students, and delivered in learner-friendly, safe, secure and healthy environments. Education should seek to achieve the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity. Education sector plans, budgets, curricula, textbooks, teaching materials, methods and learning environments should be gender sensitive and promote equality, non-discrimination, human rights and peace. See: <https://plan-international.org/publications/financing-right-education>.

**5. Promote health and COVID-19 prevention measures, including equitable access to water, sanitation and hygiene and to safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines, particularly in low and middle-income countries.**

- Audit school facilities to identify gaps in access to WASH provision and other COVID-19 prevention measures. Ensure every school has safe, accessible, age-responsive and hygienic single-sex WASH facilities to ensure a safe return to school for female learners and staff.
- Treat COVID-19 vaccines as a public good and recognise equitable access between and within countries as a fundamental human rights issue and a humanitarian imperative. Distribute vaccines based on need, not the ability to pay, and ensure all low and middle-income countries – including those in conflict and crisis-affected contexts – have equitable access to sufficient supplies and are supported to roll out effective mass vaccination programmes. The ongoing failure to do so is not only impeding progress towards ending the pandemic but hindering the return to education and compounding the setback to girls' and women's rights, leaving them even further behind.

## BOX 15 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ADOLESCENTS, PARENTS AND TEACHERS

The following quotes are a small selection of recommendations from the participants in this research about how their local and national governments could improve their COVID-19 response. Their views and experiences have informed the recommendations in this report.

**“I would like our local authorities to have asked the students about what they were facing during those times – if they are mentally and physically stable or not.”**

*Adolescent girl, 16 years old, location unknown, Nepal*

**“Provide proper lessons to students during lockdowns. This lockdown, all shows on TV were focused on health and COVID discussions, but no one thought of students’ lessons until a long time had passed.”**

*Adolescent girl, age unknown, Khartoum, Sudan*

**“[I would have liked them] to have asked us what we think about the classes.”**

*Adolescent girl, 18 years old, location unknown, Guatemala*

**“They should ask the students what the most convenient way is to access education during these times.”**

*Adolescent girl, 18 years old, location unknown, Honduras*

**“I would ask them to reconstruct the schools well, in a way that would allow us to live through such pandemics in the future without further affecting the students or further compromising our studies.”**

*Adolescent girl, age unknown, Guli, Sudan*

**“I wish our local authority will take strict actions to prevent coronavirus in school or [the] community and they will provide food to needy people and also provide vaccines to all.”**

*Adolescent girl, 14 years old, location unknown, Nepal*

**“Provide learning materials for the needy students because not all students can access TVs and radios.”**

*Mother, Homabay, Kenya*

**“Seek a way [to support] students who do not have the means to receive virtual classes [so they] don’t lose out.”**

*Mother, location unknown, Guatemala*

**“Develop distance education and give students smart devices.”**

*Adolescent boy, 19 years old, location unknown, Sudan*

**“All students must be supported with clothing, books and notebooks.”**

*Adolescent boy, 18 years old, location unknown, Sudan*

**“In case of a future pandemic, the schools should put us in small groups in the village and provide us with learning and assessment materials.”**

*Adolescent girl, 16 years old, Kisumu, Kenya*

**“Take into account [that] the teaching population [is also] vulnerable to COVID-19 [and]... are the second group of priority to receive a vaccination, because the education system in our country cannot be paralysed.”**

*Female teacher, location unknown, Honduras*

**“The local authority should provide materials for study and provide counselling.”**

*Adolescent girl, 17 years old, location unknown, Nepal*

**“Help the teens [who are] pregnant in the community on how they can come back to school.”**

*Adolescent girl, 14 years old, Tharaka, Kenya*

**“Help cut the rate of pregnancy and drop-out cases through sensitisation programmes locally organised in the community.”**

*Mother, Kisumu, Kenya*

**“Let all the children have access to education... The government [should] support the disabled. They need secondary schools... those who want to study since not all of them want to attend vocational training.”**

*Adolescent boy, 17 years old, Machakos, Kenya*

**“They should mobilise other implementing partners to especially focus on girls to help fight teenage pregnancy.”**

*Adolescent girl, 16 years old, Bondo, Kenya*



## ANNEX 1: COUNTRY FACTS

<b>COVID-19</b> Source: Johns Hopkins University and UNICEF	<b>Guatemala</b>	<b>Honduras</b>	<b>Kenya</b>	<b>Nepal</b>	<b>Sudan</b>
<b>Confirmed COVID-19 cases</b> 22 Jan 2020 – 21 Jun 2021	280,507	253,875	179,075	621,029	36,347
<b>Confirmed COVID-19 deaths/million</b> 22 Jan 2020 – 21 Jun 2021	22	29	3	28	1
<b>Length of school closure – full weeks</b> (March 2020 – March 2021)	33	37	28	26	15
<b>Length of school closure – partial weeks</b> (March 2020 – March 2021)	12	9	9	26	7

<b>Literacy rates</b> Source: UNESCO	<b>Guatemala</b>	<b>Honduras</b>	<b>Kenya</b>	<b>Nepal</b>	<b>Sudan</b>
<b>Literacy rate, youth total</b> (% people aged 15 to 24)	94%	97%	88%	92%	73%
<b>Literacy rate, youth (age 15 to 24)</b> Global Parity Index	0.98	1.03	1.00	0.97	1.00
<b>Literacy rate, youth female</b> (% females aged 15 to 24)	93%	98%	88%	91%	73%
<b>Literacy rate, youth male</b> (% males aged 15 to 24)	95%	95%	88%	94%	73%

<b>Not in education, employment or training</b> Source: International Labour Organization	<b>Guatemala</b>	<b>Honduras</b>	<b>Kenya</b>	<b>Nepal</b>	<b>Sudan</b>
<b>Share of youth not in education, employment or training, total</b> (% youth population)	27%	28%	14%	34%	33%
<b>Share of youth not in education, employment or training, female</b> (% female youth population)	47%	43%	18%	47%	46%
<b>Share of youth not in education, employment or training, male</b> (% male youth population)	7%	12%	9%	22%	20%

<b>School enrolment</b> Source: UNESCO	<b>Guatemala</b>	<b>Honduras</b>	<b>Kenya</b>	<b>Nepal</b>	<b>Sudan</b>
<b>School enrolment, secondary</b> (% net)	44%	44%	48%	62%	32%
<b>School enrolment, secondary, female</b> (% net)	43%	47%	46%	63%	31%
<b>School enrolment, secondary, male</b> (% net)	45%	41%	49%	61%	32%

<b>Digital</b> Source: Mobile Connectivity Index	<b>Guatemala</b>	<b>Honduras</b>	<b>Kenya</b>	<b>Nepal</b>	<b>Sudan</b>
<b>Network coverage of national population</b> (2G to 5G) (%)	82%	62%	74%	59%	47%
<b>Proportion of the national population with access to electricity</b> (%)	94%	91%	73%	94%	57%
<b>Gender gap in social media use (\$)</b> (indicator that drives mobile internet adoption among women) (\$ range of 0 to 100, with a higher score representing a stronger performance)	72.6	100.0	56.6	40.4	50.0
<b>Gender gap in mobile phone use (\$)</b> (\$ range of 0 to 100, with a higher score representing a stronger performance)	64.6	78.1	81.8	83.9	66.7

## ANNEX 2: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research aims to answer the following research question: *What is the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's education in low and middle-income countries, particularly for adolescent girls?*

This has been broken down into sub-questions:

- Who have been able to access quality education during the COVID-19 pandemic? And who have not?
- What are the barriers that young people have faced/face to access quality education during the COVID-19 pandemic? And is this different depending on sex, age, ethnicity or ability?
- How did/do social norms and practices affect access to quality education for young people during the COVID-19 pandemic? And is this different depending on sex, age, ethnicity or ability?
- Do pre-existing marginalisation factors (for example, household poverty) exacerbate the impact of COVID-19 on the ability of adolescent girls to access education? And if so, in what way?
- What are the barriers that young people face in returning to in-person education? And is this different depending on sex, age, ethnicity or ability?
- How have young people been consulted in their local COVID-19 response?
- What can be the expected medium and long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescent girls?

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