



World Food Programme

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# Rebuilding human capital amidst the pandemic

A global analysis of the impacts of COVID-19  
on school-aged children and youth

October 2022

# Acknowledgements

This publication is the result of a joint effort between the Research, Assessment and Monitoring (RAM) Division and the School-based Programmes (SBP) Service of the World Food Programme (WFP). It consolidates the joint analysis of both teams in better understanding the extent to which COVID-19 has impacted school-aged children and youth and identifies actionable recommendations to reinforce their resilience and build back their education and livelihoods.

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# Executive Summary

While all people and in all societies have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, an entire generation of school-aged children and youth risk facing the ripple effects of this crisis over their entire lifetime. Family income losses in combination with lack of access to education and health, and increased food insecurity have contributed to the rise in the number of school-aged children and youth facing acute hardship. If actions are not taken to help increase their resilience and build back their education and livelihoods, trends in human capital growth risk being set back and reversed, with severe implications for the future workforce and economic development of countries.

This joint study by the Research, Assessment and Monitoring (RAM) Division and the School-Based Programme (SBP) Service aimed to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted school-aged children and youth through a global web survey conducted across seven countries Cambodia, Colombia, Ghana, Haiti, Iraq, Kenya and Zimbabwe from May to July 2021. The survey was translated into 10 languages, allowing for a total of 13,485 random and anonymous respondents to participate. This includes 5,119 parents of school-aged children aged 6–14 years and 8,366 youth aged 15–24 years. Through a child roster, parents reported on behalf of 6,900 school-aged children, which allowed for detailed sex-and-age disaggregated analysis. Due to the limitations of the web survey technology, the survey is not representative of the general population. This report presents the global key findings of the analysis using quantitative and qualitative data collected regarding impacts on education, livelihoods, food security, access to health, and safety of these two groups.

› **Losses of livelihoods, school closures and concern for the COVID-19 virus have pushed around 6 percent of school-aged children and 12 percent of youth to drop out of school in 2021.**

When comparing enrolment of school-aged children before the pandemic and during the

2021 school year, around 6 percent of pupils were reported to have dropped out of school, with the top reasons being the inability to cover education-related costs (31 percent), school closures (19 percent) and concern over COVID-19 (14 percent). Young girls aged 6–9 years (10 percent) were twice as likely to drop out than boys aged 6–9 years (4 percent). Among youth, 12 percent of respondents reported to have left school during the pandemic (excluding those who graduated and who never went to school). Main reasons for dropping out were closed schools (25 percent) and the inability to cover costs (18 percent). More students aged 20–24 years (14 percent) left school than those aged 15–19 years (10 percent). Furthermore, the bulk of parents of school-aged children (83 percent) and youth (71 percent) reported that the quality of learning has been severely disrupted, mainly due to lack of interactions with schoolteachers and peers followed by lack of access to equipment/internet.

› **Three out of five parents of school-aged children and one in two youth have suffered from income losses since the start of the pandemic.**

Around 60 percent of parents of school-aged children reported a reduced income since the start of COVID-19, which is likely to have had a direct impact on the food security situation of their household and children. About 64 percent of parents who reported feeling concerned about where their next meal would come from also reported a reduced income. Among youth respondents, 46 percent reported losing their jobs (or one of their jobs) since the start of the pandemic, and another 22 percent reported reduced salary/working hours. Young women were most affected, with 50 percent reporting losing their jobs compared to 44 percent of young men.

› **The food security situation of school-aged children and youth illustrate worrying trends. One in four school-aged children**

**and youth were found to be compromising their food consumption, while 14 percent of school-aged children and 18 percent of youth were going to bed hungry.**

About 26 percent of school-aged children were reported by their parents to have eaten one or no meals the day prior to the survey, which is a worrying indicator of compromised food consumption. Even more so when considering that 65 percent of parents reported having felt worried about not having enough food to eat for their family. Around 14 percent of children were reported to have gone a whole day without eating and 33 percent were found to be skipping meals in the previous month.

Just over half of youth respondents (51 percent) reported feeling concerned about where their next meal would come from, while 23 percent reported to have compromised their food consumption by eating one or no meals the day before the survey. Impacts on income and reduced food consumption were found to go hand-in-hand. Around 38 percent of youth who reported losing their jobs also reported compromising their food consumption. The use of food-based coping strategies was also widespread with 18 percent of youth reporting to have gone to bed hungry, while 24 percent skipped meals in the past month due to lack of food.

› **Lack of money was the top reason for 60 percent of parents who faced challenges in accessing medical services for their children over the past year.**

Almost one in two parents (46 percent) reported facing challenges accessing medical services for their children. While it is well known that healthcare and medical facilities have been put under severe strain due to the pandemic, this was not found to be the main reason for lack of access to these services. For the majority of parent respondents who faced challenges in getting healthcare for their children, lack of money was the central driver, which is likely to be closely linked to income losses stemming from pandemic containment measures.

› **More than one in four parents reported lack of access to sufficient and nutritious food as the main challenges currently**

**faced by their children.**

Overall, the top three most important challenges faced by children are access to education (39 percent), access to sufficient food (27 percent) and lack of nutritious food (26 percent). This highlights a critical concern for the food security of school-aged children, which has been hampered by income losses and lack of access to school where many can benefit from daily nutritious meals. These three challenges were found to be higher among girls than boys. For youth, the top challenges were reportedly lack of work/unemployment (26 percent), access to education (22 percent) and high living costs (including food) (21 percent). Not surprisingly, lack of work and high living costs were reported to a greater extent by 20–24 year-olds, while access to education was found to be a greater challenge among youth aged 15–19 years.

› **Safety concerns have been on the rise with more than half of parents noticing an increase in tensions and violence, while 36 percent of youth felt unsafe in their environment.**

Overall, 56 percent of parents of school-aged children reported an increase in tensions and violence in their community over the past year. Increased crime rates were reported by one in four parents, followed by increased levels of domestic violence (17 percent) and increased levels of violence (16 percent). Alarming, 80 percent of parents reported that these increases in violence affected their children.

› **More than one in three youth (36 percent) reported feeling unsafe in their environment, with more 20–24 year-olds (39 percent) feeling unsafe than 15–19 year-olds (34 percent) and slightly more young women (37 percent) feeling unsafe than men (35 percent).** A higher percentage of young women (12 percent) reported increases in violence within their family than young men (8 percent). Among both parents of school-aged children and youth, the greater the feeling of unsafety or perceived violence, the greater the food security concerns: 73 percent of parents who perceived increased

tensions and violence in the past year also reported feeling worried about having enough food to eat. Similarly, 56 percent of youth who did not feel safe in their environment were also concerned about food.

› **Young people need access to education, training and employment opportunities to be successful in the future.**

Young people are the backbone of societies and can become meaningful agents of change if they have the right tools to achieve their full potential. Opportunities to pursue their education (21 percent) and employment (21 percent) were found to be equally critical for youth to be able to contribute to the economy and were reported as their top needs for success in the future. These two needs were found to be even greater among young women (24 percent education; 22 percent job opportunities) than men (18 percent education; 19 percent job opportunities).

## RECOMMENDATIONS



The COVID-19 pandemic and actions taken to contain its spread is not a temporary crisis but a profound disruption that is likely to impact an entire generation of young people, with broader consequences on countries' economic development in the long-term. WFP recommends six priority actions to mitigate the immediate and long-term impacts of COVID-19 for school-aged children and youth.

1. **Ensure that children and youth who are facing acute hardship can access humanitarian and/or government assistance to meet their food and other essential needs.**
2. **Increase investments in multi-year social protection and economic strengthening programmes to build back the resilience of poor households with children and improve their ability to afford safe and nutritious food, access healthcare and pay education fees and costs.**
3. **Promote and invest in decent jobs for youth, including improved job protection schemes and unemployment benefits, as well as access to specialized training programmes for young entrepreneurs.**
4. **Invest in inclusive internet infrastructures and access to technologies to ensure that all school-aged children and youth can sustain their education using remote learning modalities if in-school learning is not an option.**
5. **Recognize the heightened human security risk that the pandemic has engendered, including increased violence particularly affecting young women and girls. Dedicate resources to more children and youth violence prevention programmes and promotion of peace throughout renewed development efforts.**
6. **Improve data and analysis at intra-household level to better understand and monitor how the COVID-19 pandemic affected school-aged children and youth throughout the response and recovery of the crisis.**

# Introduction

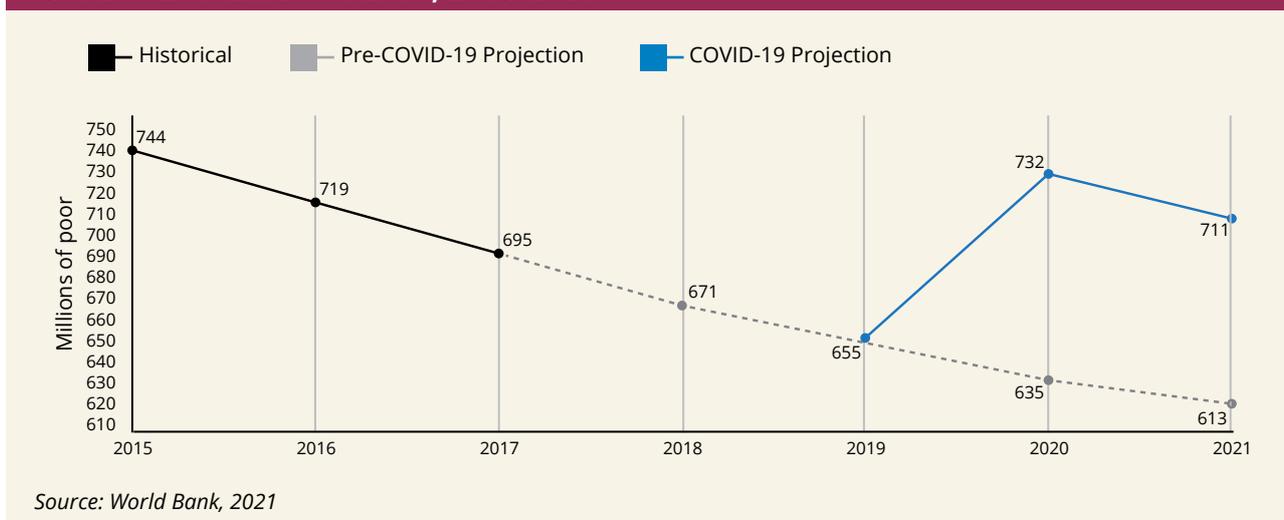
More than two years since the start of the pandemic, and it seems the world is still lingering in the aftermath of the shock. COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on the lives and livelihoods of people around the world, mainly due to its evolution from a health crisis to an economic and social crisis. As people are adapting to the “new normal” this pandemic has imposed, losses of hard-won development gains are becoming increasingly more obvious and the pathway to recovery is likely to be long.

In 2020, the global economy contracted by an unprecedented -3.3 percent<sup>1</sup>, and triggered the most severe labour market disruptions since the 1930s, including lost working hours equivalent to 525 million full-time jobs in the second quarter of 2020.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the proliferation of conflicts, the increasing climate and weather-related shocks, and economic slowdowns and downturns are pushing an ever-greater number of people into dire need. An estimated additional 97 million people fell into extreme poverty in 2020 due to the consequences of the pandemic, representing an extraordinary increase in global poverty which affected 732 million people.<sup>3</sup>

The goal of zero hunger has also been put to a difficult test. The number of chronically undernourished people is estimated to range between 702 and 828 million people globally. When considering the middle range, this represents 150 million people more since the outbreak of COVID-19. While it is still challenging to estimate the impacts of the pandemic on malnutrition, in 2020 stunting was found to affect 22 percent of children under 5 years globally. In addition, 6.7 percent of children were affected by wasting and 5.7 percent were overweight.<sup>4</sup> The number of people facing acute food insecurity (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above or equivalent) has also been on the rise and reached 193 million people in 53 countries/territories in 2021 – an increase of nearly 40 million compared to the previous high reached in 2020.<sup>5</sup>

While all people and in all societies have been affected, an entire generation of school-aged children and youth risk facing the ripple effects of this pandemic over their entire lifetime. Human capital – which is the sum of a population’s health, skills, knowledge, and experience – is increasingly being recognized as the main driver of sustainable

**FIGURE 1: EXTREME POVERTY, 2015–2021**



1 IMF. April 2021. [The World Economic Outlook. Managing Divergent Economies.](#)  
 2 ILO. January 2021. [ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Seventh Edition. Updated estimates and analysis.](#)  
 3 World Bank. June 2021. [Updated estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty: Turning the corner on the pandemic in 2021?.](#)  
 4 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2022. [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022.](#)  
 5 FSIN. 2022. [Global Report on Food Crises 2022.](#)

and inclusive long-term economic growth. It is built through fundamentals of access to health and education as well as food security and nutrition. Disruptions caused by COVID-19 have led many families to lose their income, impacting the provision of the most essential needs to children and youth including food. It has also led to severe disruptions of health systems, limiting access to the most vulnerable populations, and induced massive school closures affecting the learning of millions of students around the world. The combination of these consequences has inevitably impacted advances in human capital and may hamper economic growth of countries in the long run. Indeed, the World Bank estimates that the pandemic could induce the loss of a full percentage point from the global Human Capital Index<sup>6</sup> of the future workforce in 2040. And although this may not seem alarming, in the long-run human capital losses to COVID-19 are likely to be greater for girls in low-income settings, and children from minority, poor rural or urban backgrounds as well as those with physical and mental disabilities.<sup>7</sup>

**The socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic are likely to push more children into vulnerability.** In 2020, UNICEF and Save the Children estimated that the number of children living in monetary-poor households could increase by 122–142 million in developing countries, reaching the staggering figure of 715 million children in 2020 and possible reduction to 700 million in 2021.<sup>8</sup>

Children at risk of poverty are likely to be deprived of their essential needs, including access to food. Malnutrition can have long-lasting impacts on children's physical and cognitive development, and slow down human capital growth. At the same time, COVID-19-induced school closures have disrupted critical education,

health, nutrition and protection services delivered in and through schools. At the height of the crisis, around 1.6 billion children and young people in more than 190 countries were unable to attend classes. One year after the pandemic, UNESCO estimated that more than 800 million students – half of the world's student population – were still affected by full or partial school closures.<sup>9</sup> As of September 2021, although schools reopened in 117 countries allowing for around 539 million learners to return to class, there were still 117 million students who remained out of school due to full closures in 18 countries. In 2022, thanks to the implementation of health protocols and vaccination programmes, schools are open in most countries. Yet, the consequences of a two-year disruption in education in terms of learning, health, well-being and drop-out are considerable.<sup>11</sup>

Half of the total number of learners kept out of the classroom by the COVID-19 pandemic did not have access to a household computer and 43 percent had no internet at home.<sup>12</sup> The pandemic has uncovered existing inequalities between children from better-off homes who have the means to access technology and internet, and those from poorer households for whom access to these assets and services is often limited. Although remote learning has helped maintain a certain level of attendance in some areas, the quality of learning is likely to have diminished in many contexts increasing learning losses and the likelihood of school dropout, especially for girls.<sup>13</sup>

Children and youth who do not attend school were found to be at increased risk of food insecurity and malnutrition. School meals and nutrition programmes represent one of the most important safety nets and best long-term investments to increase human capital. School meals provide children with the daily nutrients to grow and learn, while also encouraging school

6 The World Bank's [Global Human Capital Index](#) (HCI) measures the human capital that a child born today can expect to attain by her 18th birthday by analyzing how current health and education outcomes shape the productivity of the next generation of workers. It has three components: (1) a measure of whether children survive from birth to school age (age 5); (2) a measure of expected years of quality-adjusted school, which combines information on the quantity and quality of education; and (3) two broad measures of health—stunting rates and adult survival rates.

7 World Bank. 2020. [The Human Capital Index 2020. Human capital in the time of COVID-19.](#)

8 UNICEF. 2020. [Child poverty and COVID-19.](#)

9 UNESCO. 2021. [One year into COVID-19 education disruption: Where do we stand?.](#)

10 UNESCO. 2021. [UNESCO warns 117 million students around the world are still out of school.](#)

11 UNESCO. 2022. [Education: from school closure to recovery.](#)

12 UNESCO. 2020. [Startling digital divides in distance learning emerge.](#)

13 World Bank. 2020. [The Human Capital Index 2020. Human capital in the time of COVID-19.](#)

attendance and reducing risks of drop out. At the peak of the school closure crisis, 370 million children were deprived of daily meals<sup>14</sup>, putting the nutritional burden on parents who were also impacted by income losses. When families face hunger, they are often obliged to adopt negative coping strategies, which in turn have been linked to increasing protection concerns.

The cumulative effect of these disruptions for millions of pupils is affecting the development of human capital, especially in fragile and conflict-affected contexts where, typically, there is a lower starting point due to sustained periods of disinvestment. The World Bank estimated that COVID-19 learning losses could result in approximately USD 17 trillion of earnings lost for this generation of children, which amounts to one-tenth of global GDP.<sup>15</sup>

Youth transitioning into the labour market have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Globally, there are an estimated 1.23 billion youth aged 15–24 years.<sup>16</sup> At this age, youth are generally finalizing their education and transitioning into the labour market. This is a critical age for developing a country's human capital: a continuous focus on helping young people achieve their full potential can strengthen a country's competitiveness in a rapidly changing world.<sup>17</sup> If young people are equipped with relevant skills and knowledge, they are more likely to become positive agents of change and contribute to the socioeconomic development of their countries.

The pandemic has severely disrupted both the education and livelihoods of youth. Even before COVID-19, the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that nearly 267 million young people aged 15–24 years were not in employment, education and training (NEET).

Young women were twice as likely have the NEET status than young men.<sup>18</sup> The economic crisis triggered by the pandemic has deeply affected young people who tend to mainly work in the service sector and informal economy, which were the hardest hit. Indeed, a global study conducted by ILO across 112 countries found that one in six young people aged 18–29 years were reported to have stopped working due to the pandemic, with youth aged 18–24 years being particularly impacted. And among young people who continued to work, working hours have fallen by 23 percent, while 42 percent reported a decrease in their income.<sup>19</sup> Reduced or lost income among youth is likely to have direct impacts on their households, as they are often key contributors to their family's essential needs including food. Two years after the outbreak of the pandemic, recovery in youth employment is still lagging.<sup>20</sup>

The pandemic has also taken a toll on the education of youth. The same study by ILO found that three quarters of youth respondents aged 18–29 years who were studying prior to the pandemic were impacted by school/university closures. Sadly, the transition to remote learning was not feasible for all. Around 13 percent of youth reported not being able to access their courses due to lack of access to internet and technology. Quality of learning was inevitably affected, and indeed the report finds that 65 percent of young people felt they learnt less since the start of the pandemic, while 51 percent believed their education would be delayed.<sup>21</sup> This immense impact on the education of youth is likely to delay their access to the labour market and deprive them of the knowledge and skills they need to par. These gaps in human capital are likely to be wider in low-income countries.

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14 WFP. 2021. [The State of School Feeding Worldwide 2020](#).

15 World Bank. 2021. [Learning Losses from COVID-19 Could Cost this Generation of Students Close to \\$17 Trillion in Lifetime Earnings](#).

16 UNDESA. 2022. [World Population Prospects 2022. Total population by age groups – both sexes, 2022 estimates](#).

17 Bundy, D. A. P., N. de Silva, S. Horton, D. T. Jamison, and G. C. Patton. 2018. [Re-Imagining School Feeding: A High-Return Investment in Human Capital and Local Economies](#).

18 ILO. 2020. [Global employment trends for youth 2020](#).

19 ILO. 2021. [Youth and COVID-19: Impacts on jobs, education, rights and mental well-being](#).

20 ILO. 2022. [Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022: Investing in transforming futures for young people](#).

21 ILO. 2021. [Youth and COVID-19: Impacts on jobs, education, rights and mental well-being](#).



## OVERVIEW OF THIS REPORT

Through its social protection programmes, including school health and nutrition, WFP is a key actor contributing to building human capital. Better understanding of how school children (6–14 years) and youth (15–24 years) have been affected by the COVID-19 crisis can inform evidence-based recommendations for strategic planning and advocacy, helping to increase the resilience of youth and school-aged children and build back their education and livelihoods. This is precisely the goal of this joint study by WFP's Research, Assessment and Monitoring (RAM) Division and the School-Based Programme (SBP) Service. The teams joined forces to collect primary

data from youth and parents of school-aged children across seven countries, representing all WFP regions and produce a global analysis of the situation. This report presents the key findings of this assessment. Section 2 covers the sample design and innovative web-survey methodology used to collect this information. Section 3 articulates the global key findings of the survey for all countries combined. Finally, section 4 reflects on the key conclusions of this study and recommends priority actions for decision-makers in the international community. Separate case studies have also been written and published for all case studies.

# Methodology and sample description

As younger generations tend to be more connected and active on social media than any other group within societies, this study offered a unique opportunity to use a novel web survey technology<sup>22</sup> to collect information from random and anonymous respondents in near-real time. This research initiative built on data from families with school-aged children aged 6–14 years and youth aged 15–24 years<sup>23</sup> across seven countries – Cambodia, Colombia, Ghana, Haiti, Iraq, Kenya and Zimbabwe, – with the overall objective to increase the knowledge base on their needs and inform evidence-based responses. These countries were selected to represent each of WFP’s regions as well as all three school-based programme contexts, as per the WFP School Feeding Strategy 2020/2030.<sup>24</sup> An additional selection criterion was the relatively good internet coverage in each of these countries, which ensured a good representation of the target groups covered.<sup>25</sup>

Two thematically similar surveys were designed to target parents of school-aged children and youth. Both surveys were translated in 10 languages to meet the linguistic needs of each

country. The overall target sample size was of 6,720 completed surveys. For each country, there was a national target of 960 completed surveys with the following disaggregation (Table 1) to ensure representativity of school-aged children and youth from different age groups. Moreover, the sample was distributed proportionally to population size by admin 1 level in each country.

Data collection was conducted between 13 May and 26 July 2021, with countries starting and finishing at different times during this period. Overall, **13,485 surveys** were completed, exceeding national targets in all countries. Map 1 shows the number of completed surveys per country. All disaggregated targets were also met, except for parents of school-aged children in Cambodia (see Table 2). A total of **8,366 youth** and **5,119 parents** of school-aged children completed the survey. The parent survey included a child roster where respondents were invited to provide information for each of their children (up to five children). Parents reported on behalf of **6,900 children** aged 6–14 years, which allowed for sex- and age-disaggregated analysis on questions related to this group.

**TABLE 1: OVERVIEW OF SAMPLE AND DISTRIBUTION PER COUNTRY<sup>26</sup>**

<b>480 x Parents of school-aged children (6–14 years)</b>	240 x school-aged children (6–9 years)
	240 x school-aged children (10–14 years)
<b>480 x youth (15–24 years)</b>	240 x youth (15–19 years)
	240 x youth (20–24 years)

22 WFP contracted RIWI Corporation to implement web-based surveys using its patented Random Domain Intercept Technology (RDIT™). Detailed information regarding RDIT can be found on the service provider’s website: <https://riwi.com/>.

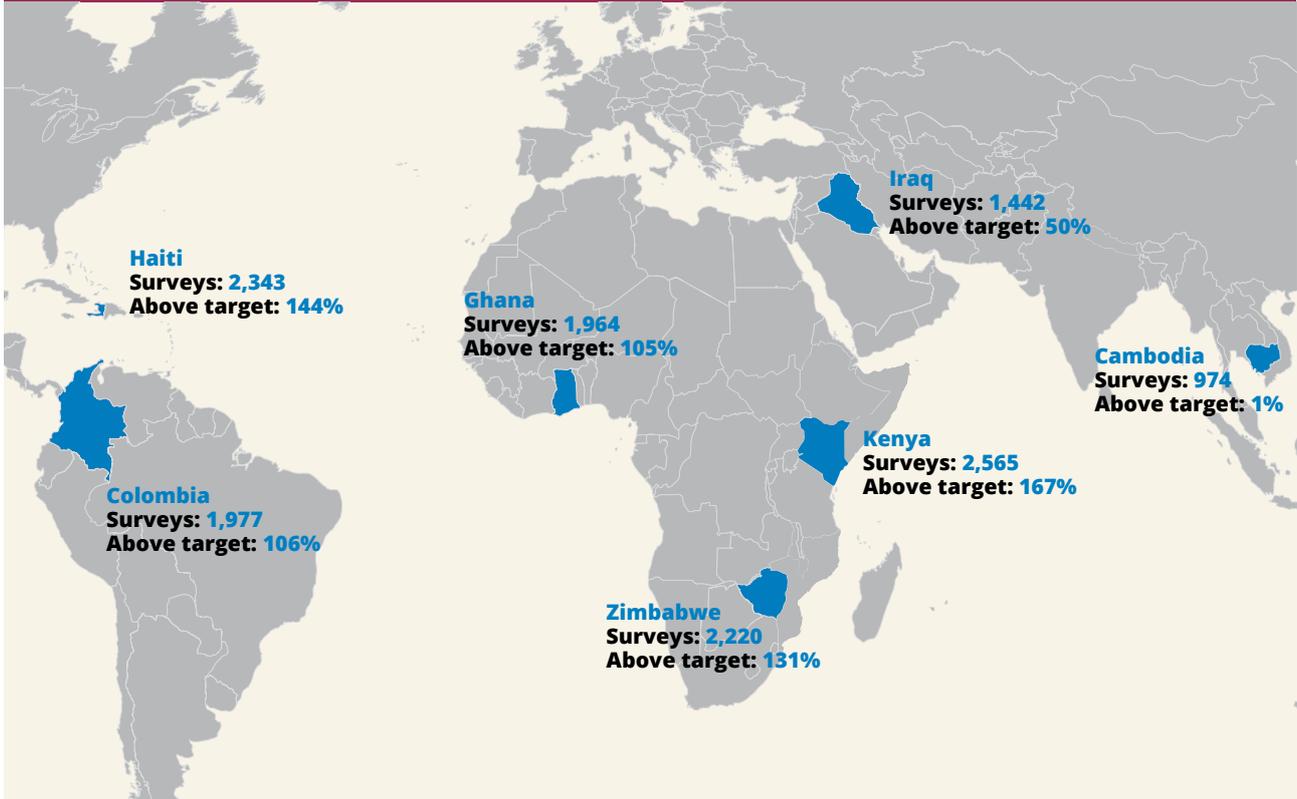
23 For the purposes of this report, school-aged children are defined as being between 6 and 14 years of age. The definition of youth follows the one from the [United Nations](#) which defines them as being between 15-24 years of age.

24 School-based programme contexts include Context 1: Providing operational support (Haiti); Context 2: Transitioning to national programmes (Cambodia, Iraq, and Kenya); Context 3: Consolidating and strengthening national programmes (Colombia, Ghana and Zimbabwe).

25 A minimum threshold of 30% of internet users within the total population. Data on internet users for 2020 was retrieved from: <https://datareportal.com/>.

26 The overall sample of 480 completed surveys per target group is based on a confidence level of 95 percent and a margin of error of 5 percent.

**MAP 1: TOTAL NATIONAL SAMPLE BY COUNTRY**



**TABLE 2: TOTAL DISAGGREGATED SAMPLE BY COUNTRY**

	Target parents	Parents of school-aged children	Target children	Children (reported on)	Target youth	Youth
Cambodia	480	335	480	387	480	639
Colombia	480	883	480	1,060	480	1,094
Ghana	480	610	480	843	480	1,354
Haiti	480	629	480	803	480	1,714
Iraq	480	548	480	775	480	894
Kenya	480	1,309	480	1,902	480	1,256
Zimbabwe	480	805	480	1,130	480	1,415
Total	3,360	5,119	3,360	6,900	3,360	8,366

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through these surveys. Questions mainly covered access to and quality of education, livelihoods and income sources, food security situation and livelihood coping, access to healthcare (for children), main challenges faced, safety concerns as well as aspirations for the future (youth). Because the web survey technology only reaches literate populations connected to the internet, the survey is not

representative of the general population. Nonetheless, to correct the bias introduced by the technology, a three-variable weighting system was introduced during the analysis phase to ensure that both sexes, geography and people with different educational backgrounds were represented according to the prevailing national statistics. When and where possible, data was triangulated with secondary sources to complement key findings.

## PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

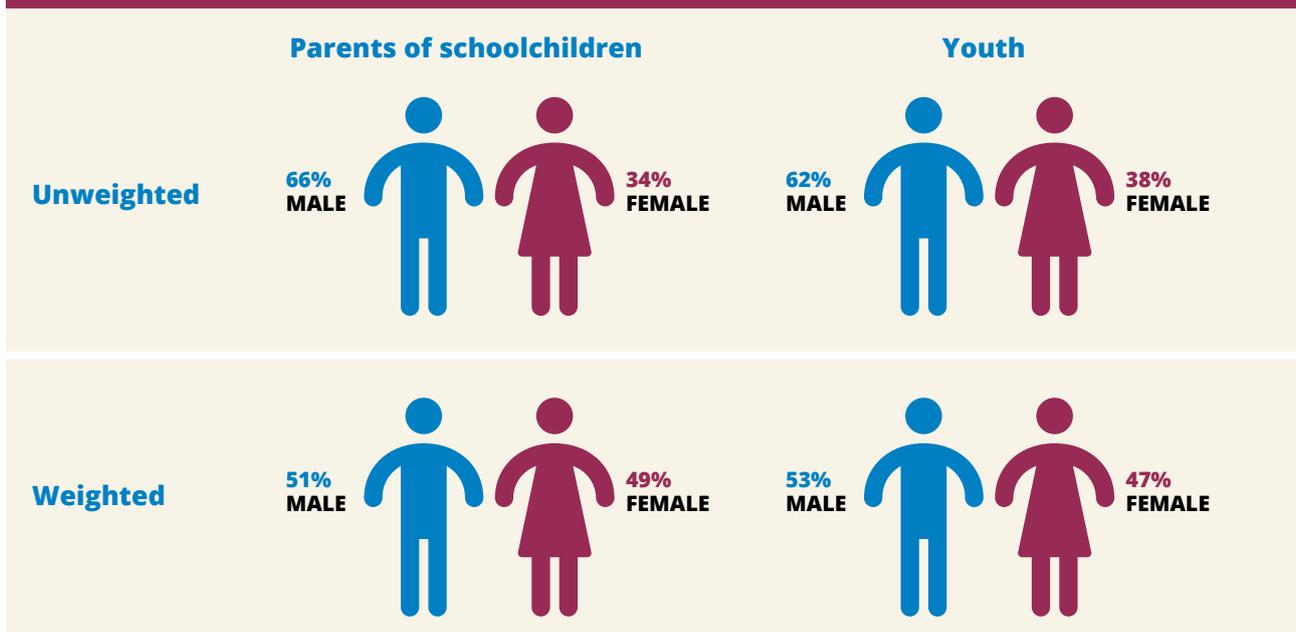
Surveys across all seven countries targeted parents who had children aged 6–14 years as well as youth aged 15–24 years. In both samples before weighting was introduced, male respondents tended to be overrepresented which is most likely due to their greater presence on the internet. Nonetheless, a considerable number of women responded to the survey. Figure 2A illustrates how the weighting system helped correct the bias in the sample, bringing the distribution closer to a 50/50 divide which is often found in the general population of a country.

With regards to the age of the respondents, after weighting, parents of school-aged children were found to be mostly falling between the ages of 35 and 54 years. For youth, these are aligned with

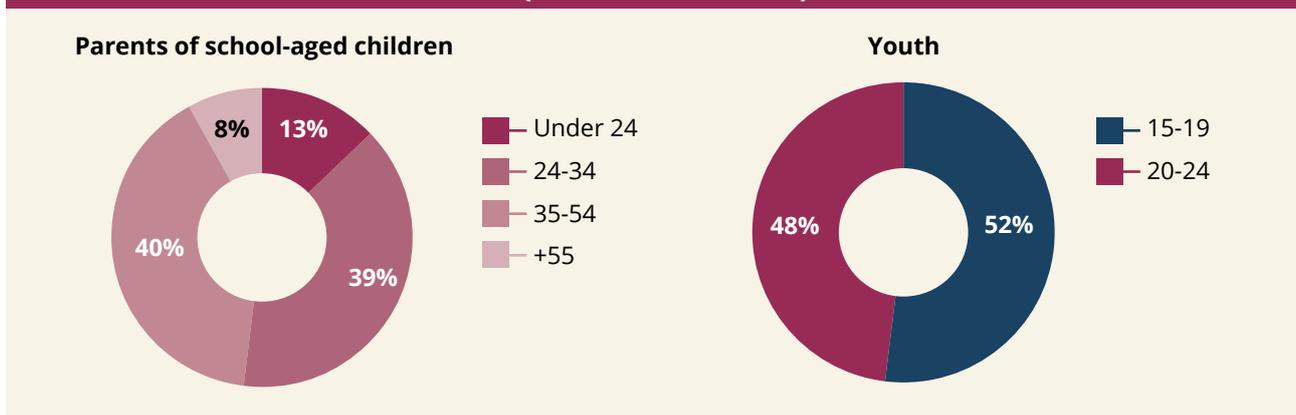
the 50/50 targets that were set out for the two age groups (240 for 15–19 years and 240 for 20–24 years). Indeed, the overall sample after weighting was relatively well distributed by group of interest with 52 percent of youth aged 15–19 years and 48 percent aged 20–24 years.

In terms of education, the sample for both parents and youth showed a greater participation of more educated respondents, which is to be expected with the use of the web-survey technology. However, the weighting system helped correct this bias by recalibrating the sample based on education statistics for each country. This provides a greater voice in the sample to those with lower education levels, which is often a proxy of lower socioeconomic status, and illuminates the specific challenges and needs these groups are facing.

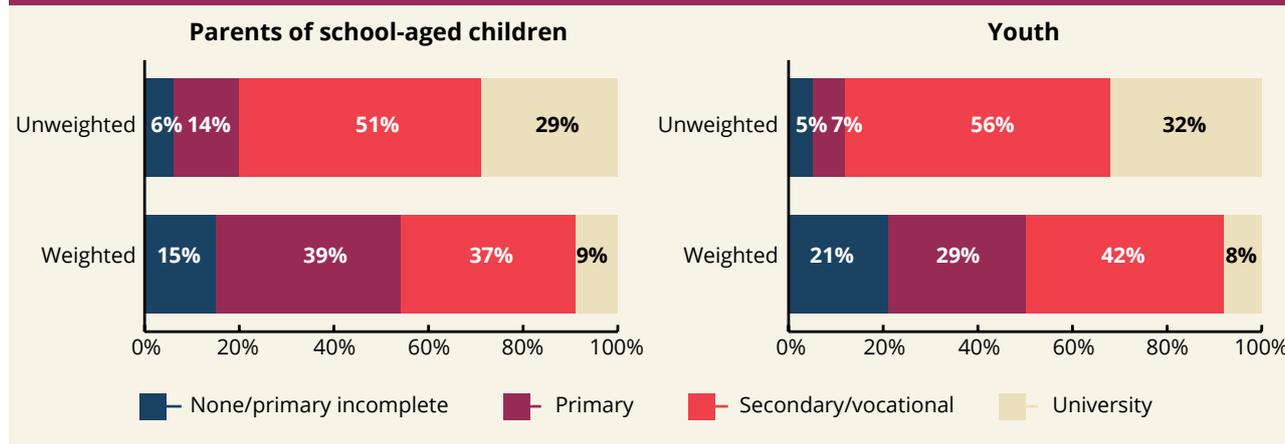
**FIGURE 2A: SEX OF RESPONDENTS UNWEIGHTED AND WEIGHTED**



**FIGURE 2B: AGE OF RESPONDENTS (AFTER WEIGHTING)**



**FIGURE 3: EDUCATION OF RESPONDENTS UNWEIGHTED AND WEIGHTED**



## Access to and quality of education

Education is a central component of human capital. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring access to education globally was a challenge. Despite the highest enrolment rates in pre-primary, primary and secondary levels in history, more than 250 million children were out of school and nearly 800 million adults were illiterate.<sup>27</sup> Access to school is not the only concerning issue. Even when attending school, students are not always receiving quality education, impacting their learning. Indeed, UNICEF estimates that 617 million children and adolescents around the world are unable to reach minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics, even though two thirds of them are in school.<sup>28</sup> The pandemic has further deepened existing challenges, especially for disadvantaged children and girls who already faced limited education opportunities before COVID-19. Differences in quantity and quality of education are often what creates the biggest differences in the Human Capital Index score across different socioeconomic groups within a country.<sup>29</sup> Hence, for this survey it was crucial to assess how the

pandemic affected both access to and quality of education of school-aged children and youth.

### SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, around 13 percent of children in the sample were not enrolled in school. A higher proportion of girls aged 6–9 years (15 percent) and boys aged 6–9 years (14 percent) were not enrolled than girls aged 10–14 years (12 percent) and boys aged 10–14 years (9 percent). A slightly higher share of children living in villages/rural areas (14 percent) were not enrolled than children living in urban areas (12 percent)<sup>30</sup>, which is line with global statistics on education.<sup>31</sup> When asked about the main reason why children were not going to school, 37 percent of parents attributed it to not being able to cover school fees/costs.

Parents were asked if their children were enrolled in school during the ongoing school year, and it was found that overall 6 percent of children had dropped out of school<sup>32</sup>, with the number of

27 United Nations. 2020. [Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond](#).

28 UNICEF. 2021. [Education. Every child has the right to learn. Accessed on October 13th, 2021](#)

29 World Bank. 2020. [The Human Capital Index 2020. Human capital in the time of COVID-19](#).

30 Respondents were asked to self-locate the area where they were living at the time of the survey. Options included 1) Large city (more than 500,000 inhabitants); 2) Small city/town (30,000 to 500,000 inhabitants); and 3) Village/rural area (less than 30,000 inhabitants). For the purpose of this analysis, urban areas are comprised of large cities and small cities/towns while rural areas include villages/rural areas.

31 UNICEF. 2021. [Education. Every child has the right to learn. Accessed on October 13th, 2021](#).

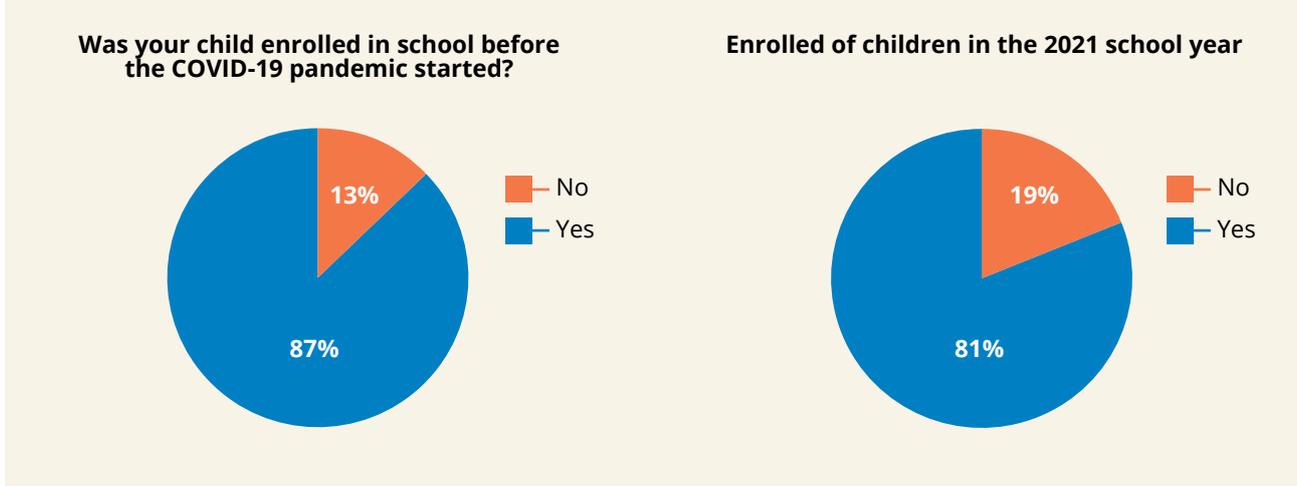
32 The number of children who dropped out of school is the difference between the percentage of children not enrolled before COVID-19 and the percentage of children not enrolled at the time of the survey (May-July 2021) using the same sample of children.



children not enrolled in school rising to 19 percent (see Figure 4). In September 2020, UNESCO estimated that around 24 million students from pre-primary to tertiary education were at risk of dropping out of school, with girls and young women representing nearly half (11.2 million). When calculated out of 1.6 billion learners worldwide, this represents an estimated 2 percent global dropout rate.<sup>33</sup> Although age groups and geography are not comparable between these two analyses, it still provides an indication that globally the number of children who dropped out of school is likely to be within this range.

The survey further found that twice as many girls (~10 percent) were reported to have dropped out than boys (~4 percent), which is again in line with UNESCO estimates. A slightly higher proportion of children living in urban areas (~7 percent) left school than those living in rural areas (~4 percent). The primary reasons for not attending school in 2021 included the inability to afford costs (31 percent), school closures (19 percent) and concerns over COVID-19 (14 percent). Inability to pay school fees/costs (33 percent) and insecurity/violence (9 percent) were found to be key reasons why young girls were not attending school compared to young boys (28 percent and 2 percent respectively).

**FIGURE 4: ENROLMENT OF CHILDREN BEFORE COVID-19 AND IN THE 2021 SCHOOL YEAR**



<sup>33</sup> UNESCO. 2020. [UNESCO COVID-19 education response: how many students are at risk of not returning to school?](#)

**FIGURE 5: PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN THAT DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL BETWEEN BEFORE COVID-19 AND MAY-JULY 2021, BY COUNTRY**

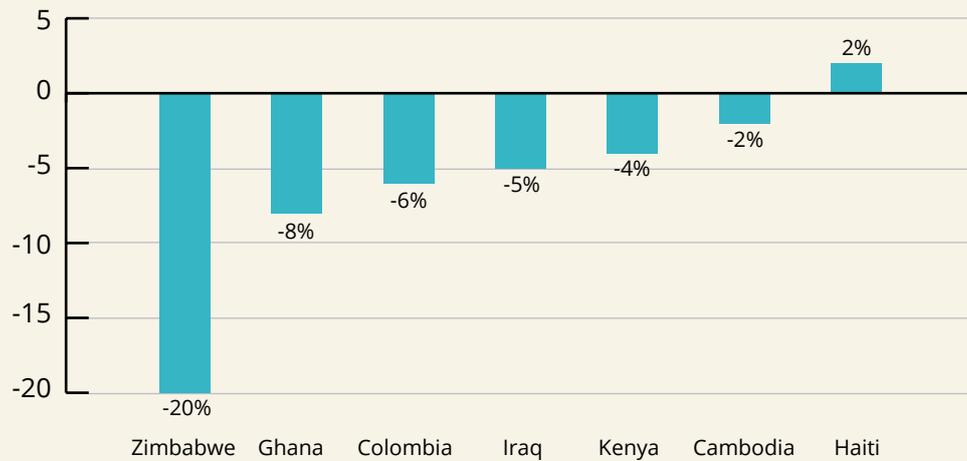


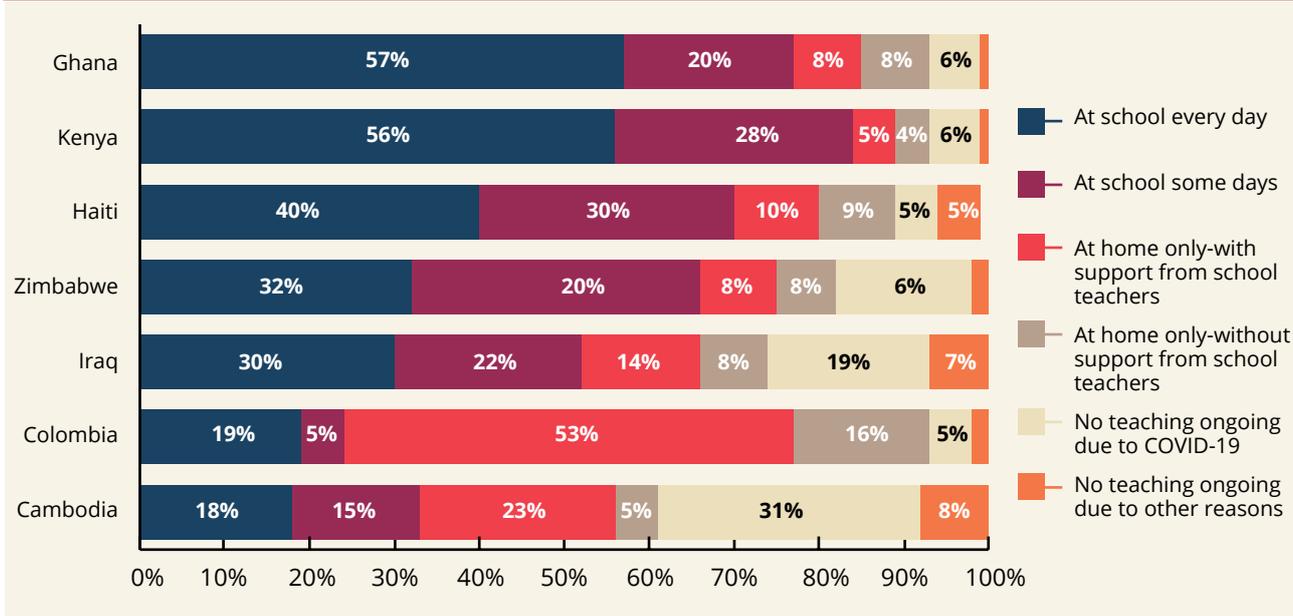
Figure 5 illustrates dropout rates in all countries in this study. Worth noting is the high percentage of children who left school in Zimbabwe, which has mainly been attributed to the inability to cover school costs and fees. In Haiti, dropout rates were not recorded at the time of the survey, which may be explained by the fact that national school closures were only put into place from March to June 2020, with children missing around 70 days of school compared to the global average of 95 days. Moreover, schooling restarted from August to October 2020, so children were able to recuperate at least 50 days that had been lost in earlier school closures.<sup>34</sup>

The analysis also sought to further understand where children currently enrolled in school were learning. Overall, the majority were found to be physically going to school with 41 percent attending every day and 23 percent attending on some days. Around 16 percent were reported to be learning from home only with the support of teachers and 8 percent were at home with no support. And although most children are now going back to school, 12 percent were reported not being able to receive schooling due to COVID-19 or other reasons.



34 UNICEF. 2021. [3 enfants sur 5 qui ont perdu une année scolaire entière dans le monde habitent in Amérique Latine et Caraïbes](#). Accessed in October 2021.

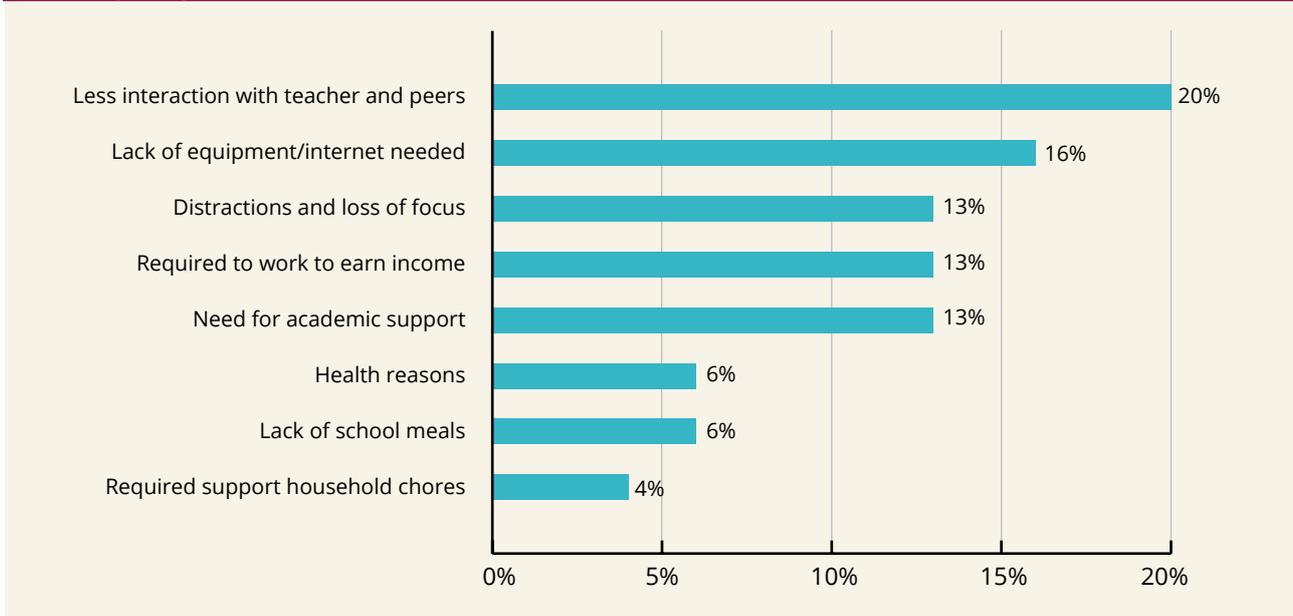
**FIGURE 6: MAIN PLACES WHERE CHILDREN WHO ARE ENROLLED IN SCHOOL IN 2021 LEARN AND/OR STUDY, BY COUNTRY**



Access is not the only component of education that has been affected. School closures and alternative learning methods put in place to ensure continuity of education also had an impact on the quality of education children received. Overall, 83 percent of parents reported that COVID-19 affected the quality of learning of their children. Figure 7 illustrates the main reasons why and shows that

one in five parents reported that less interaction with schoolteachers and peers was an important reason, highlighting the importance of the human factor in education. Indeed, school-aged children worldwide rely on school settings to interact with their peers, seek support, access health services and nutritious meals. School closures have heavily disrupted access to these critical services.

**FIGURE 7: WHAT WAS THE MAIN REASON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING OF YOUR CHILD(REN) WAS AFFECTED?**



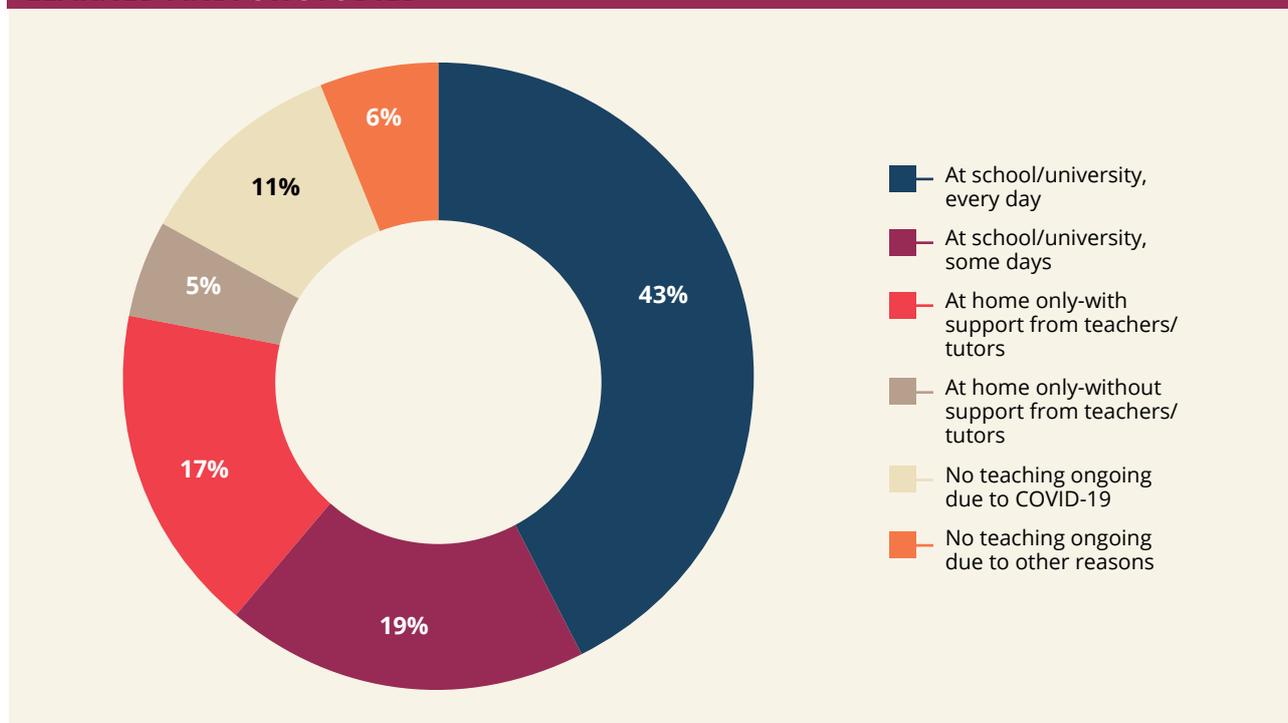
## YOUTH

The enrolment of youth aged 15–24 years of age in schools or other academic institutions was also impacted during the 2021 school year. Overall, 12 percent of youth respondents reported leaving school during COVID-19, meaning that they were enrolled before the start of the pandemic but did not re-enroll in 2021. This excludes all those who graduated or never went to school. Out of those who left school, 25 percent reported that the main reason was school closures, while 18 percent reported that they were unable to cover costs/fees. Not surprisingly, more students aged 20–24

years (14 percent) left than those aged 15–19 years (10 percent). And while most students were physically going to school, around 17 percent of youth reported that no teaching was ongoing due to COVID-19 (11 percent) and other reasons (6 percent).

Just like school-aged children, the quality of learning of youth was impacted. Around 74 percent of youth felt that the pandemic had affected the quality of their learning, mainly because of fewer interactions with teachers and peers (24 percent), distractions and loss of focus (17 percent) and lack of equipment/internet needed (16 percent).

**FIGURE 8: MAIN PLACES WHERE YOUTH ENROLLED IN SCHOOL/UNIVERSITY IN 2021 LEARNED AND/OR STUDIED**



# Livelihood activities and income

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered an unprecedented labour market crisis. ILO estimated that working hour losses were four times greater in 2020 than during the global financial crisis of 2009. Employment losses also reached a record high, with an estimated 114 million jobs lost compared to 2019. The service sector including food services, accommodation and arts and entertainment was among the hardest hit.<sup>35</sup> And although the roll-out of vaccines and the lifting of mitigation measures emerged as a critical factor for economic recovery, its progress was uneven across regions and countries and the labour market stalled throughout 2021.<sup>36</sup> Both households with school-aged children and youth were inevitably affected by this economic shock, which resulted in greater difficulties in accessing basic services and meeting essential needs such as education, health and daily nutritious food – essential inputs for greater human capital. Understanding the extent to which these groups have been affected

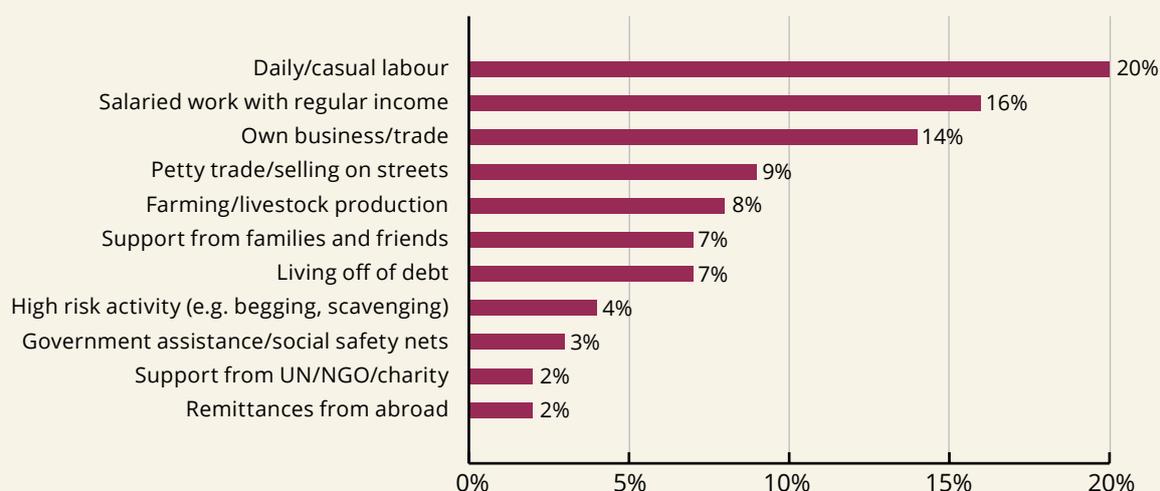
by loss of livelihoods and how this affected their ability to meet their food consumption and other needs was another core part of this survey.

## SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

The analysis of data collected across seven countries showed that for one in five parents of school-aged children, daily/casual labour makes is their main household income. Daily and casual workers, especially those working in the service and informal economy, were particularly hard hit by lockdown measures, with many having lost their main income source either temporarily or permanently. Low-paid and low-skilled workers suffered the most from job losses compared to high-skilled workers.

Indeed, 60 percent of parents participating in the study reported that their household income had reduced since the start of the pandemic. Households living in urban areas (62 percent)

**FIGURE 9: WHAT IS YOUR HOUSEHOLD'S MAIN INCOME SOURCE?**



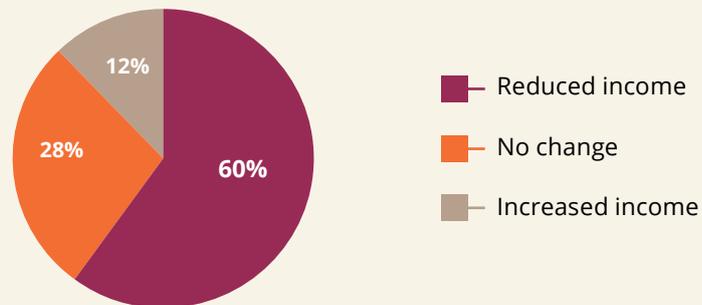
35 ILO. January 2021. [ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Seventh Edition. Updated estimates and analysis.](#)

36 ILO. October 2021. [ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Eight Edition. Updated estimates and analysis.](#)

reported a reduced income to a greater extent than those living in rural areas (55 percent). Livelihood losses have immediate repercussions on children. Figure 11 illustrates that 64 percent of parents who reported feeling concerned about where their next meal would come from also reported reduced income since the start of COVID-19. Children in these households are likely to be struggling more to meet their daily food needs.



**FIGURE 10: HAS YOUR HOUSEHOLD'S INCOME LEVEL UNDERGONE ANY CHANGES SINCE THE START OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?**



**FIGURE 11: CONCERNS OVER FOOD AND IMPACTS ON INCOME**



## YOUTH

The crisis has had particularly devastating effects on the livelihoods of young people, especially young women. Around 34 percent of surveyed youth aged 15–24 years reported to be working before COVID-19. Already then, a higher proportion of young men (40 percent) than young women (27 percent) were working. Overall, around 6 percent of youth in the sample reported to no longer be working, excluding those who never worked. Comparative analysis also shows that the sectors where youth were working before the pandemic and at the time of the survey have shifted.

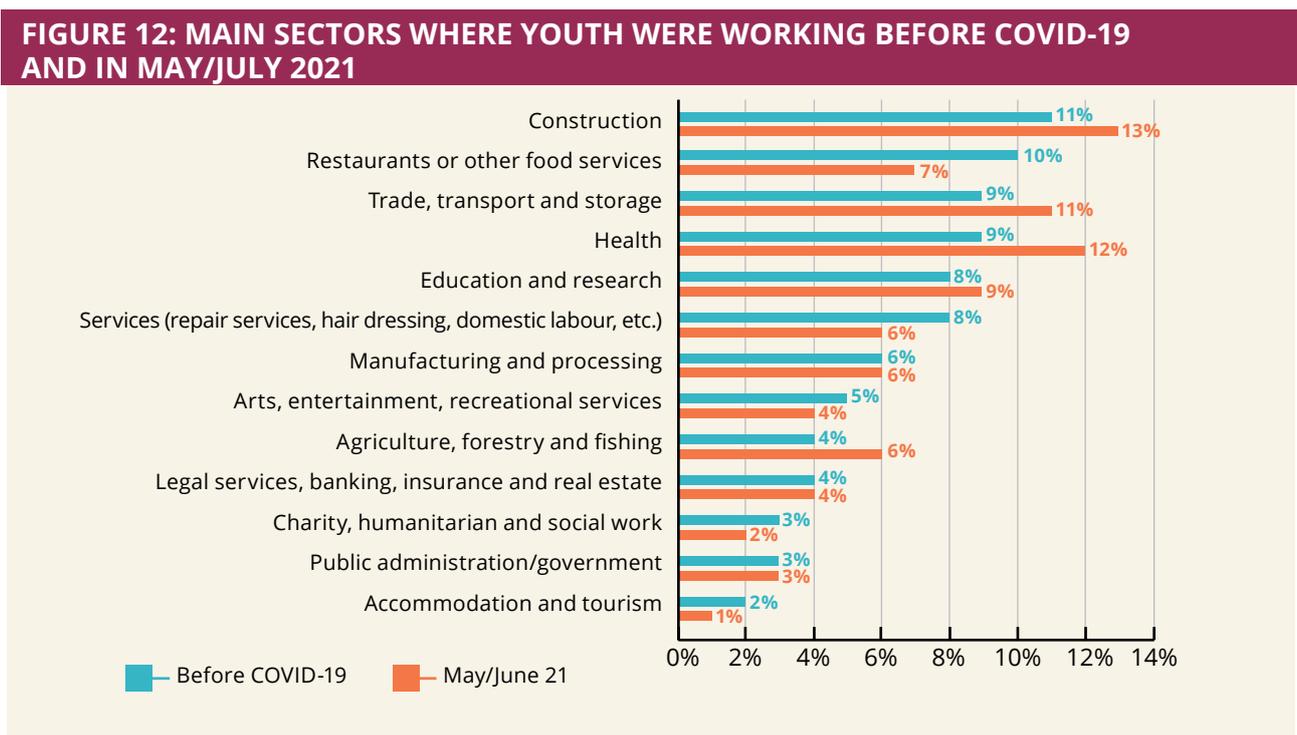
In line with the ILO study featured above, fewer youth reported working in the service sector, such as restaurants and food services as well as hairdressing or domestic work, post COVID-19 compared to before COVID-19. Other sectors such as construction, trade, transportation and storage, health, education and research and agriculture employed more youth than before.

As work can be dynamic with periods of employment followed by unemployment, another economic indicator was used to assess

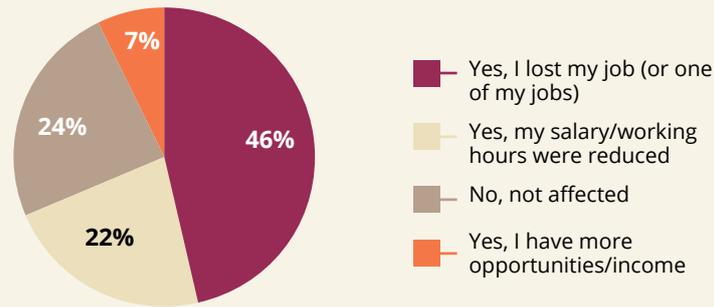
how youth income has changed since the start of the pandemic. The overall picture of the impact on their livelihoods is much more alarming from this perspective. Figure 13 shows that 46 percent of youth reported losing their jobs (or one of their jobs) since the start of the pandemic, and another 22 percent reported reduced salary/working hours. Young women were most affected, with 50 percent reporting losing their jobs compared to 44 percent of young men.

Figure 14 illustrates variations of income disruptions found among youth from different countries. Notable is the severe impact on youth in Cambodia, Kenya and Haiti with more than 50 percent of respondents reporting having lost their jobs or one of their jobs.

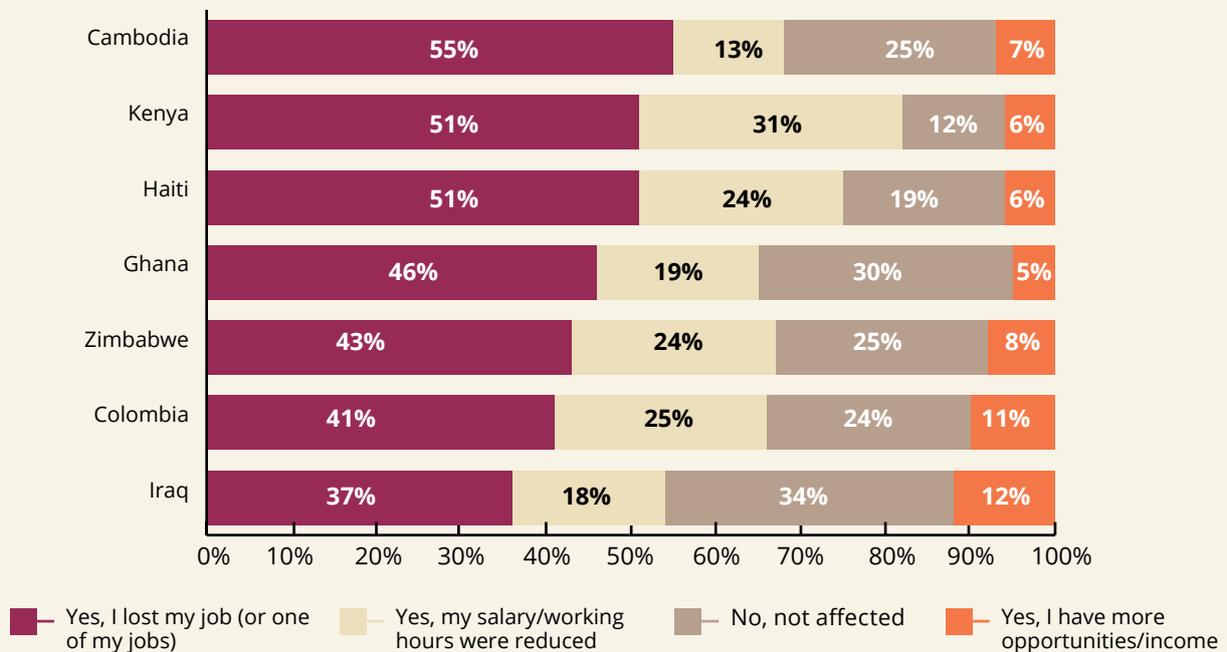
This survey also covered mobility of youth for work purposes. Youth were asked if over the past year they had been living away from home for work purposes, with around one third reporting that they were, including 19 percent who were still living away from home at the time of the survey and 24 percent who reported to have returned home. Among these, losing their job (36 percent) was the main reason for returning home followed by personal reasons (33 percent).



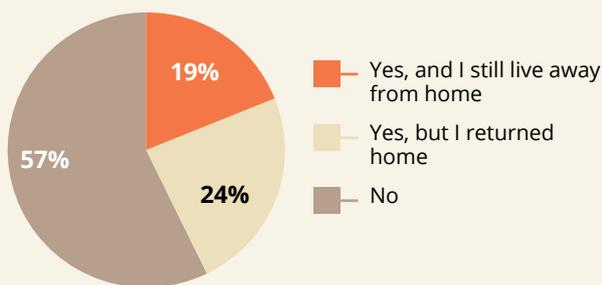
**FIGURE 13: HAS YOUR ABILITY TO EARN AN INCOME CHANGED SINCE THE START OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?**



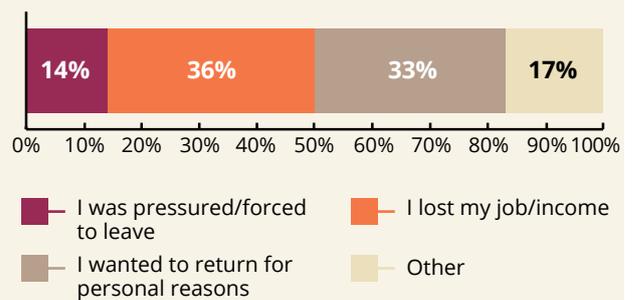
**FIGURE 14: CHANGES IN THE ABILITY OF YOUTH TO EARN AN INCOME SINCE THE START OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**



**FIGURE 15: OVER THE PAST YEAR, HAVE YOU BEEN LIVING IN A PLACE AWAY FROM YOUR HOME FOR WORK PURPOSES?**



**FIGURE 16: WHAT WAS THE MAIN REASON YOU RETURNED HOME?**



# Food security and livelihood coping

Food security and nutrition are at the centre of increased learning, skill development and good physical and cognitive health, which are key for a country's workforce and economic growth. Sadly, this crisis has set back and reversed all progress towards the goal of zero hunger. Out of the 20 million additional people facing acute hunger in 2020 compared to 2019, more than half – 12 million – were children.<sup>37</sup> In combination with losses of household income and high food prices, losses of school meals for some 370 million children due to school closures has had a direct impact on increasing hunger. Monitoring the food security situation of children and youth is critical to inform responses aimed at building back human capital. This study used three proxy indicators – measuring food consumption, concern over food and the use of food-based coping strategies – to assess the overall food security situation of these groups.

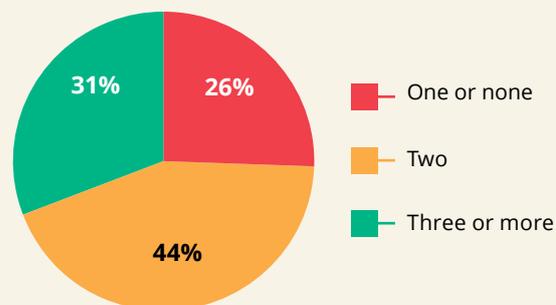


## SCHOOL CHILDREN

With increased poverty due to income losses and high food prices, it is not surprising that 65 percent of families with school-aged children reported feeling worried about not having enough food to eat in the month prior to taking the survey. Concern over food was found to be greater among households living in rural areas (69 percent) compared to urban areas (63 percent), reinforcing already existing food security challenges in rural areas.

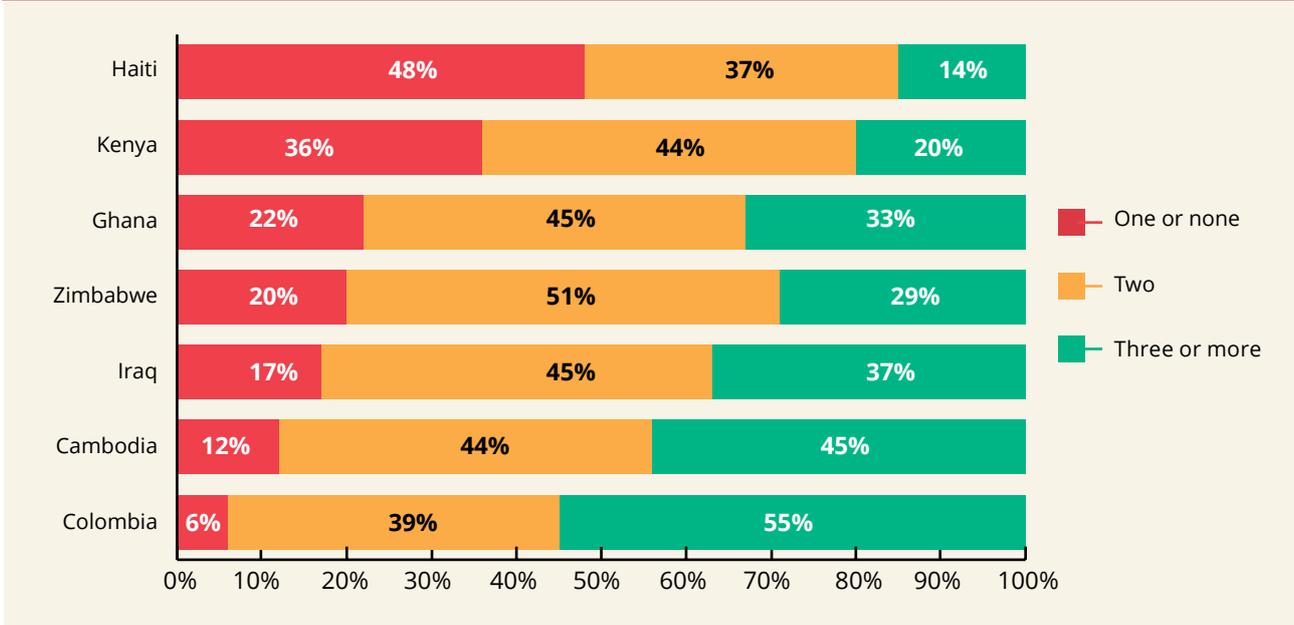
Food consumption of children was also found to be compromised. Indeed, the study shows that 26 percent of children were reported to have eaten one or no meal the day before the survey (see Figure 17). And although no significant differences were found between young boys and girls from different age groups, children living in rural areas (33 percent) were found to be more likely to have eaten one or no meal the day before the survey than those living in urban areas (21 percent), which is in line with findings above. Figure 18 illustrates differences in the food security situation of children across the countries of this study, with Haiti raising the highest concern.

**FIGURE 17: HOW MANY MEALS (INCL. BREAKFAST) DID YOUR CHILD(REN) EAT YESTERDAY?**



<sup>37</sup> World Vision. 2021. [COVID-19 and Child marriage: How COVID-19's impact on hunger and education is forcing children into marriage.](#)

**FIGURE 18: NUMBER OF MEALS CHILDREN ATE THE DAY BEFORE THE SURVEY BY COUNTRY**

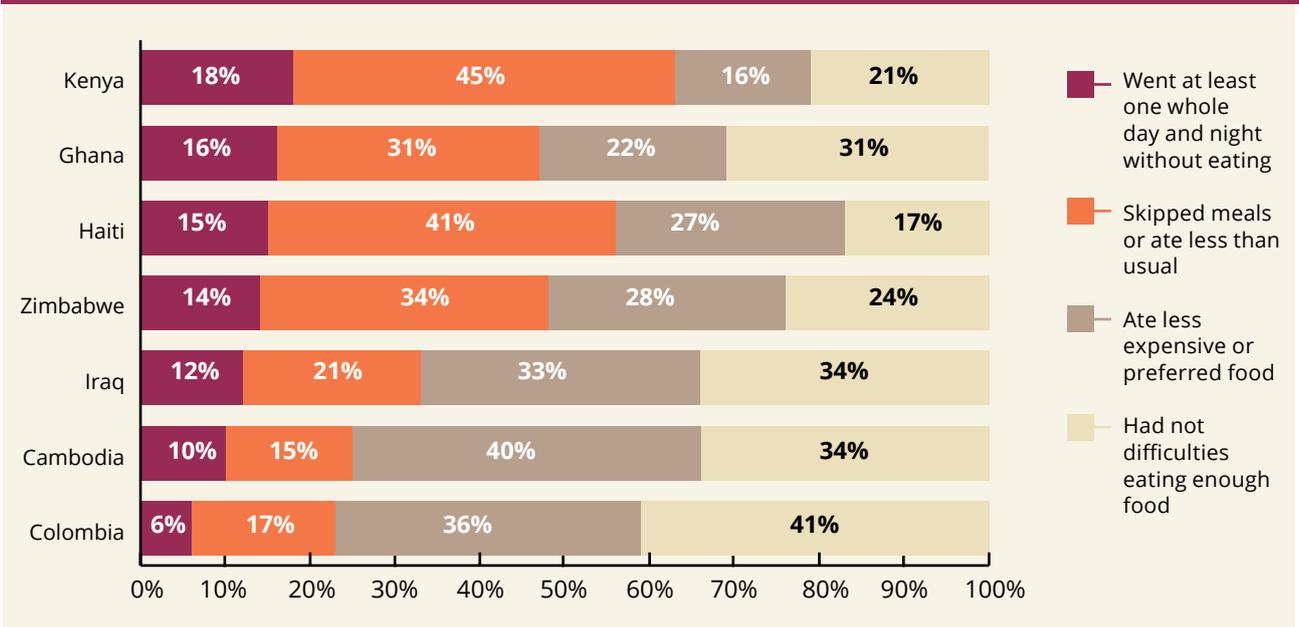


Parents were also asked to describe their children’s food situation in the last 30 days by selecting the main food-based coping strategy that best describes their situation. Worryingly, 14 percent of children were reported to have gone at least a whole day without eating, while one in three had skipped meals. No significant differences were found between boys and girls of different age groups, however, the parental surveys showed that a higher proportion of children living in rural areas were forced to adopt these coping mechanisms than those in urban areas. The use of severe food-

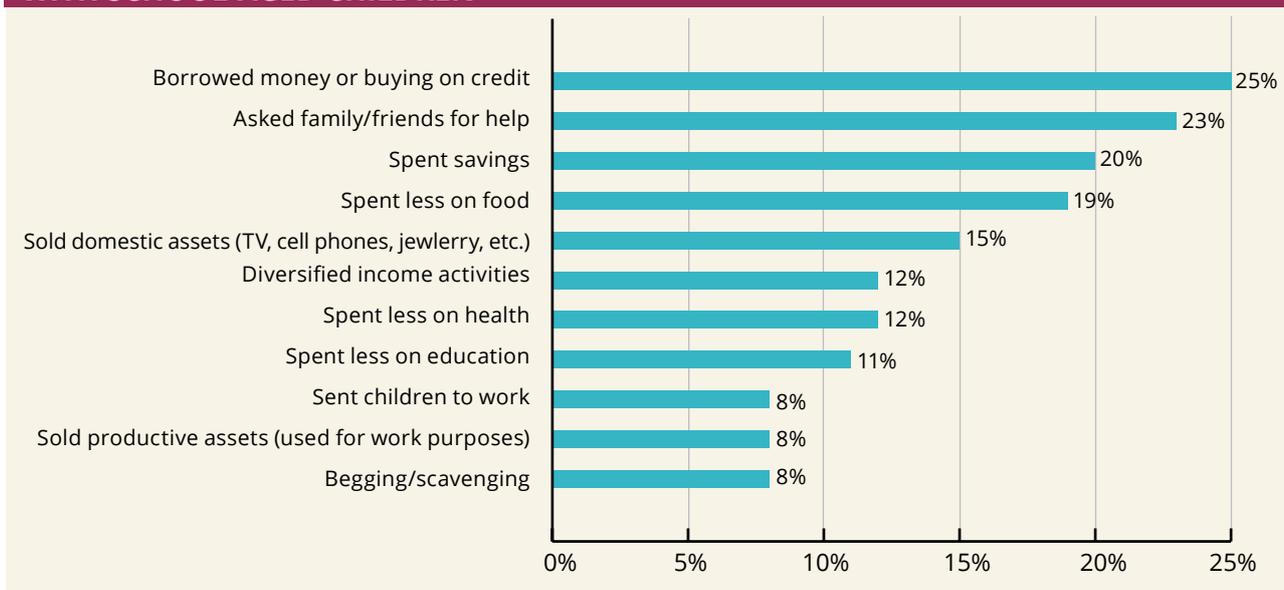
based coping strategies were found to be greater in countries like Kenya, Ghana, Haiti and Zimbabwe.

In order to cover their most essential needs, including food, education, health, rent and other, 79 percent of households reported to have used one or more livelihood coping strategies in the last 30 days, while 8 percent reported not having the capacity to do so and 13 percent reporting no need to cope. A slightly higher proportion of households living in rural areas (10 percent) reported not having the capacity to cope than in urban areas

**FIGURE 19: WHICH STATEMENT BEST REFLECTS YOUR CHILD(REN) FOOD SITUATION OVER THE PAST 30 DAYS?**



**FIGURE 20: MAIN LIVELIHOOD-BASED COPING STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY HOUSEHOLDS WITH SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN**

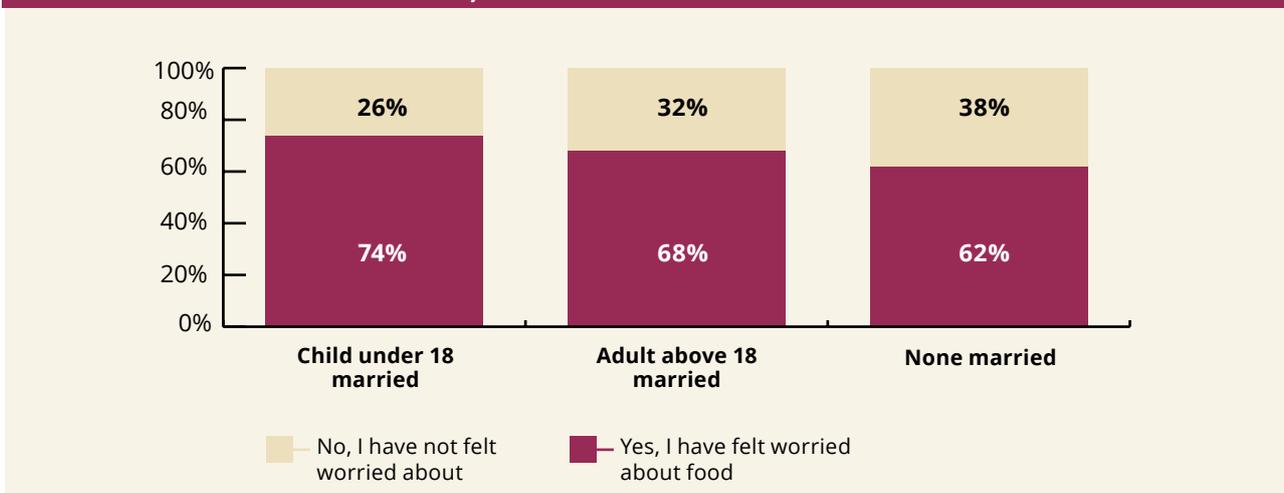


(7 percent). Figure 20 illustrates the main coping strategies used by families with school-aged children. Borrowing money or buying on credit, asking families and friends for help and spending savings were among the top coping strategies adopted. Nearly one in five households also reported spending less on food, which may result in members of the household, including children, eating less or consuming less nutritious meals.

The analysis also revealed that more than one in ten parents – 14 percent – reported that a child under 18 years was married over the past year. Child marriage is often a negative coping strategy

used by households to help make ends meet in times of extreme difficulty. Although a lack of comparative data makes it impossible to draw up a proper comparison before and after the pandemic, data from this survey shows that girls under 18 years (8 percent) were twice as likely to have been married over the past year than boys (4 percent) of the same age. UNICEF estimated in 2021 that over 10 million girls will be at risk of becoming child brides in the next decade as a result of the pandemic.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, households who married off a child under 18 were also found to be more concerned about food than others.

**FIGURE 21: OVER THE PAST YEAR, HAVE ANY OF YOUR HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS MARRIED?**



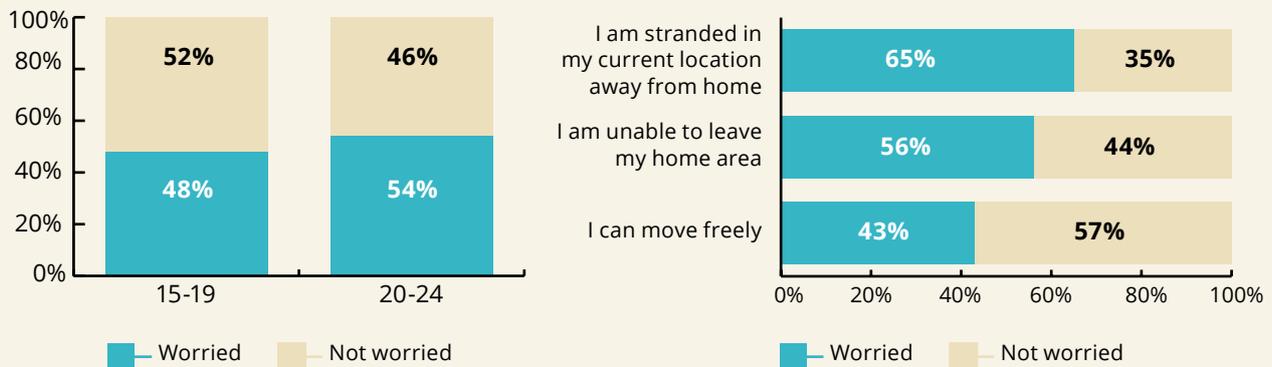
38 UNICEF. 2021. [COVID-19: A treat to progress against child marriage.](#)

## YOUTH

Just over half of youth respondents (51 percent) reported feeling worried about where their next meal would come from. Concerns over having enough food to eat was found to be higher among youth aged 20–24 years and youth living in village/rural areas. Moreover, youth who reported having mobility restrictions were also found to be more concerned over food.



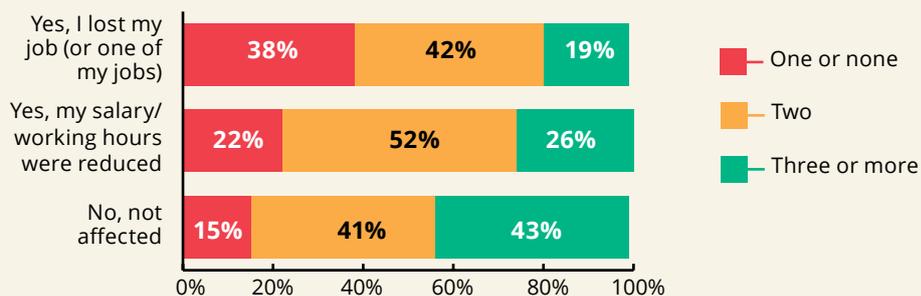
**FIGURE 22: IN THE PAST 30 DAYS, HAVE YOU FELT WORRIED ABOUT NOT HAVING ENOUGH FOOD TO EAT?**



When asked how many meals they had eaten the day before the survey, nearly one in four youth reported eating one or no meals, while 45 percent reporting eating two meals and 33 percent ate three or more meals. These findings show a similar food security situation to school-aged children. Youth aged 20–24 years (25 percent) and those living in rural areas (28 percent) were more likely to be compromising their food consumption than youth aged 15–19 years (20 percent) and those living in urban areas (20 percent).

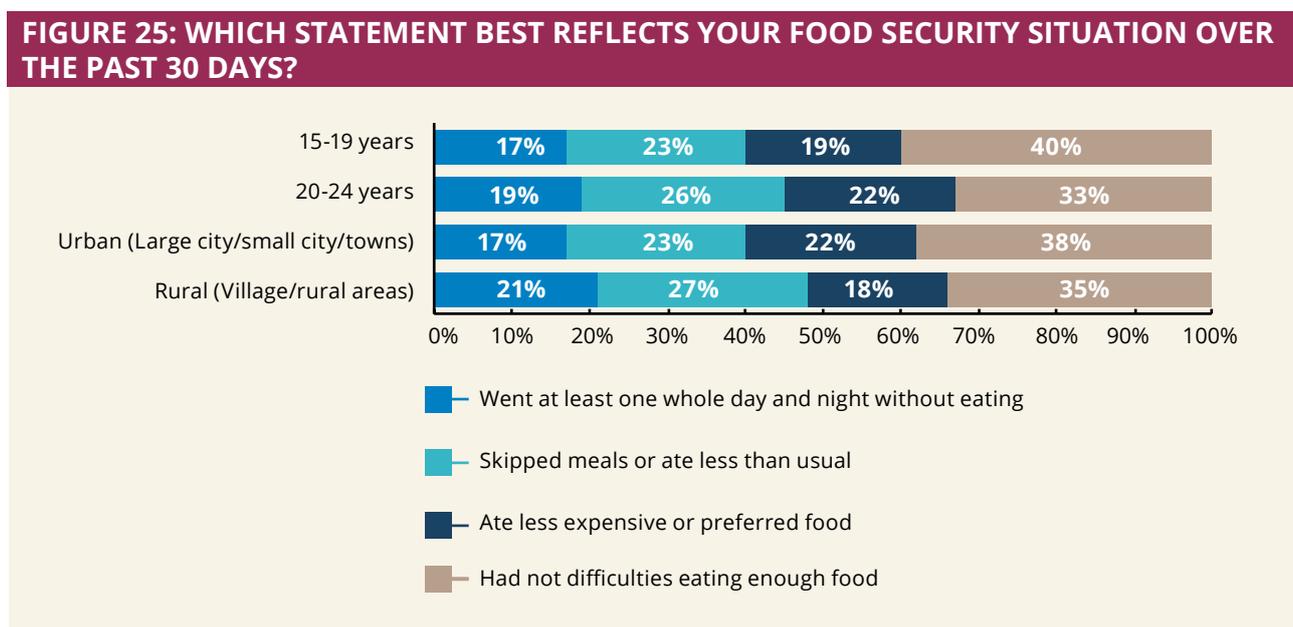
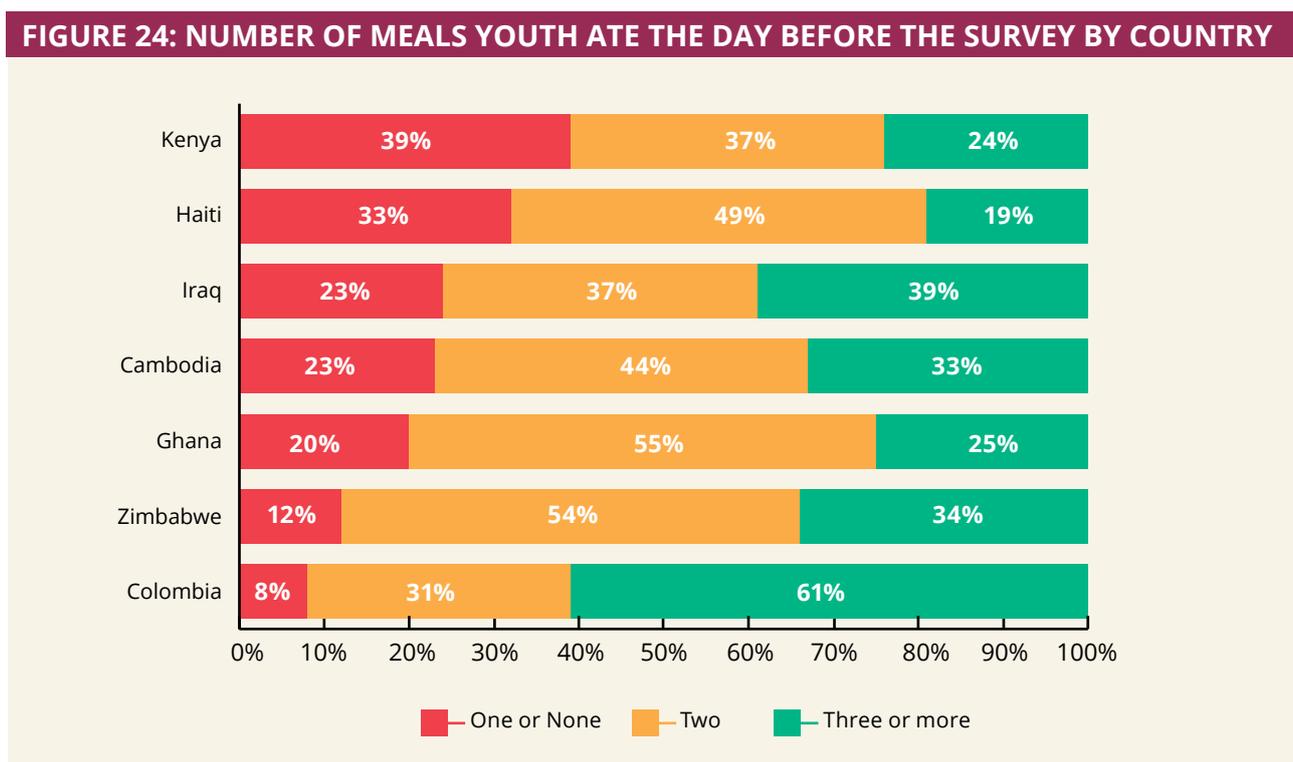


**FIGURE 23: IMPACTS ON INCOME AND FOOD CONSUMPTION**



Moreover, youth who lost their jobs or one of their jobs since the start of the pandemic were found to be eating fewer daily meals than those who reported that their income had not been affected, highlighting the close link between reduced income and increased food insecurity. Figure 24 illustrates the differences in food consumption of youth by country.

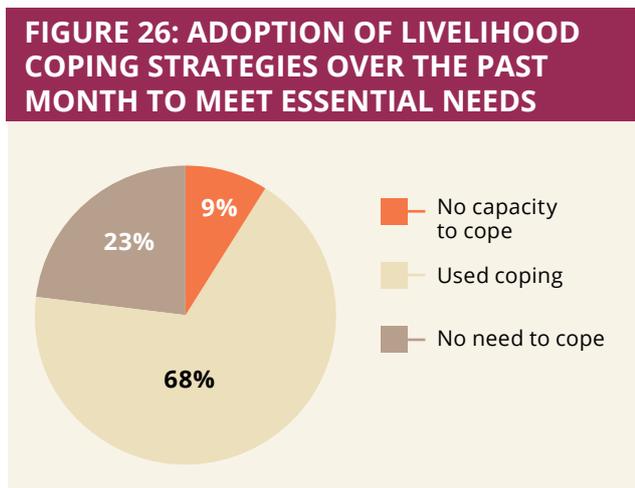
Applying food-based coping strategies due to the lack of food or means to buy food over the previous month was reported by over half of youth respondents. Nearly one in five (18 percent) reported going a whole day without eating, while nearly one in four (24 percent) reported skipping meals or eating less than needed. Yet again, when disaggregating data, youth aged 20–24 years and those living in rural areas were found to have the most critical food security situation.



Furthermore, about 68 percent of youth respondents reported using at least one livelihood coping strategy to meet their most essential needs over the past month, while 9 percent reported not having the capacity to do so.

Spending savings was found to be the most used coping mechanism by youth, followed by borrowing money or buying on credit and asking friends and family for help. This quote from a 23-year-old young man in Ghana illustrates quite well what some youths have been going through:

“I spent all my savings to make ends meet. I skip breakfast and eat just once a day. There is a high unemployment rate in the country and job opportunities are scarce”.



# Access to medical services

Health systems across the world have inevitably suffered major disruptions. The fight against COVID-19 has put medical personnel and facilities under serious strain, diverting resources from other essential health services, possibly leading to more lost lives in the long run. At the same time, fear of the virus may have pushed many not to seek medical treatment. Adding to this is the hardship encountered by many families who lost their income due to lockdown measures and found themselves with insufficient means to access healthcare. Thus, one important component of this survey was to try to understand the challenges faced by families in accessing healthcare for their children during the pandemic.

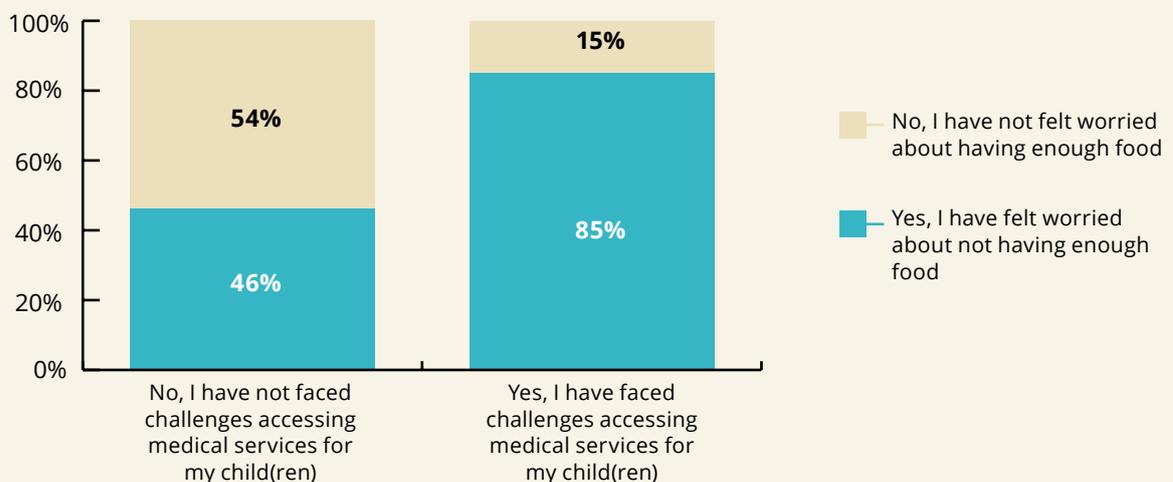


## SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

Nearly half of parents surveyed (48 percent) reported having faced challenges accessing healthcare services for their children over the past year. Households living in villages/rural areas (53 percent) reported this difficulty to a greater extent than parents living in urban areas (46 percent). Out of those who reported difficulties, lack of money was found to be by far the main reason, with 60 percent of parents stating this as the main challenge they faced. Other (lesser) challenges faced by parents included being denied access due to lack of capacity (9 percent) and long distances to reach health facilities (8 percent). Not surprisingly, the latter was found to be a greater issue in rural areas.

Challenges in accessing health and concerns over food were found to be closely intertwined. Indeed, 85 percent of parents who reported facing challenges in accessing medical services for their children also reported feeling concerned about where their next meal would come from. Lack of money is likely to be a central driver of these deprived needs.

**FIGURE 28: CHALLENGES IN ACCESSING MEDICAL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND CONCERN OVER FOOD**



# Main challenges faced

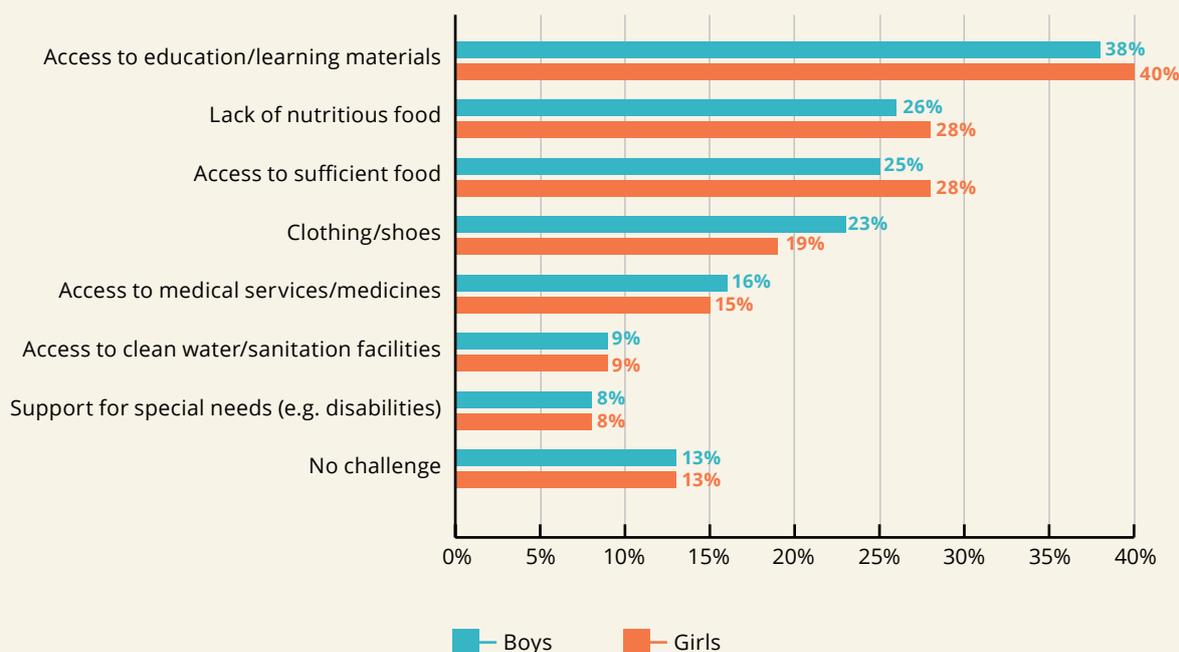
As the COVID-19 crisis affected many aspects of people’s lives, this study sought to identify the main challenges school-aged children and youth were facing. Individual data allowed for more granular analysis and distinction between challenges faced by young women and men, girls and boys of different ages.



## SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

Overall, the top three challenges faced by children include access to education (39 percent), access to sufficient food (27 percent) and lack of nutritious food (26 percent). Figure 25 illustrates the differences in challenges faced by gender of children and shows that access to education as well as access to sufficient and nutritious food were found to be greater challenges for girls. These same challenges were experienced to a greater extent by children living in rural areas than those living in urban areas. In line with the above-mentioned secondary sources, these findings confirm that food security is a critical challenge for children aged 6–14 years, which raises important concerns and requires careful monitoring over time.

**FIGURE 29: MAIN CHALLENGES SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN ARE CURRENTLY FACING BY SEX (MULTIPLE RESPONSE)**



## IN THE WORDS OF RESPONDENTS -PARENTS OF SCHOOL- AGED CHILDREN

Parents of school-aged children were asked what worries them the most about raising their children. Although country contexts are all quite different, parents seemed to have the overall same concerns for their children. The pandemic led to losses of income everywhere, and increased difficulties in meeting food needs and accessing basic services such as education and health services. Inequalities regarding access to technologies and internet for children to pursue their learning was found to be a concern faced by many. At the same time, worries that children were not interacting with each other socially due to remote learning modalities was found to be an issue. Insecurity and violence have been on the rise in most countries due to the pandemic, which further affects the safety and security of children – another critical worry for parents.



A young mother from Colombia reported:

“with the pandemic, the situation has overall worsened. The quality of healthcare and education systems deteriorated, and insecurity and violence grew by 100 percent”.

A father from Haiti stated:

“I worry for the future of my child and my family. It is hard for my child to go to school every day because we do not have money. We have no access to medical care. We have problems with insecurity. I am renting a small apartment that I cannot afford. The situation is very critical, and my family is almost on the street”.

A mother from Cambodia said:

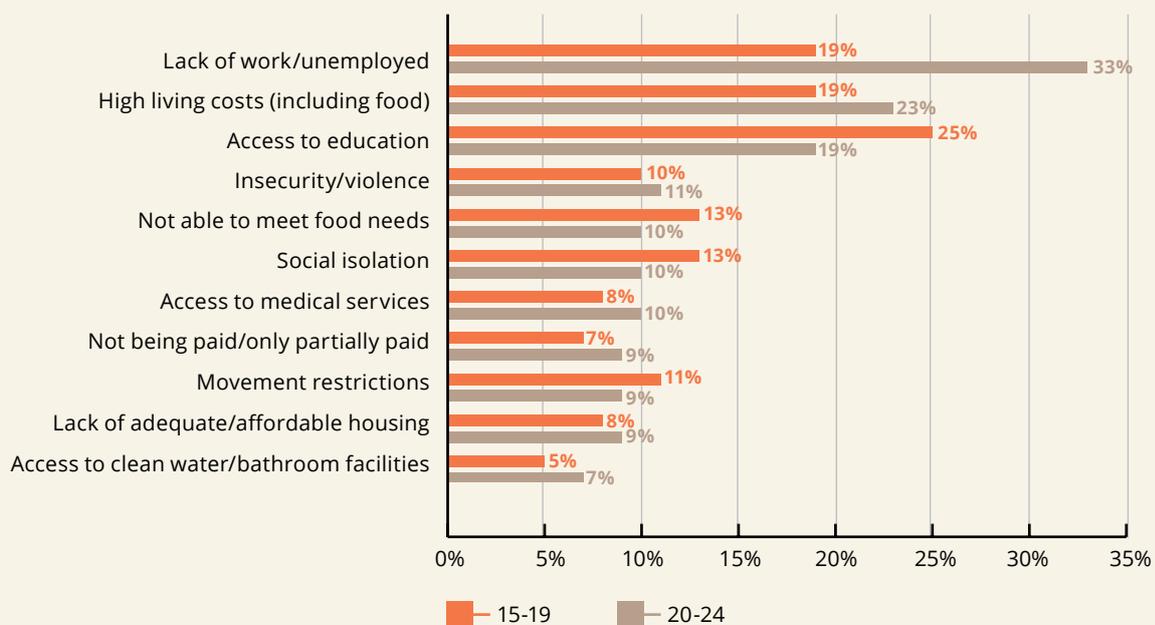
“I’m concerned about the quality of education and child mental health during COVID. My children do not get out of the house very much, and spend a lot of time in front of electronic devices, which is not good for their intellectual growth and health.”

## YOUTH

The top three most important challenges for youth were lack of work/unemployment (26 percent), access to education (22 percent) followed by high living costs (including food) (21 percent). Figure 30 illustrates how challenges differ between 15–19-year-olds, who are mainly concerned about accessing education, and 20–24 year-olds who face challenges with regards to

accessing jobs and living costs. The latter group has been particularly hard hit by the pandemic, which is in line with findings from the ILO study.<sup>39</sup> Youth aged 20–24 years are often transitioning from school to the labour market. The COVID–19 crisis has made it very difficult to do so, leaving many with delayed education and with limited work opportunities rendering them more vulnerable than younger youth aged 15–19 years.

**FIGURE 30: MAIN CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUTH BY AGE GROUPS (MULTIPLE RESPONSE)**



39 ILO. 2021. [Youth and COVID-19: Impacts on jobs, education, rights and mental well-being](#)

# Safety concerns

There is a well-established link between conflict, insecurity, violence and food insecurity. Indeed, conflict continues to be the main driver of food insecurity globally. Out of the 193 million acutely food-insecure people in need of urgent assistance (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) in 2021, conflict and insecurity were the key drivers for 139 million.<sup>40</sup> Conflict disrupts livelihoods and supply chains which consequentially affects access and availability of food. The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced and accelerated insecurity and violence in certain contexts. Using proxy indicators of perceptions of safety, the analysis sought to further understand how insecurity is affecting school-aged children and youth.

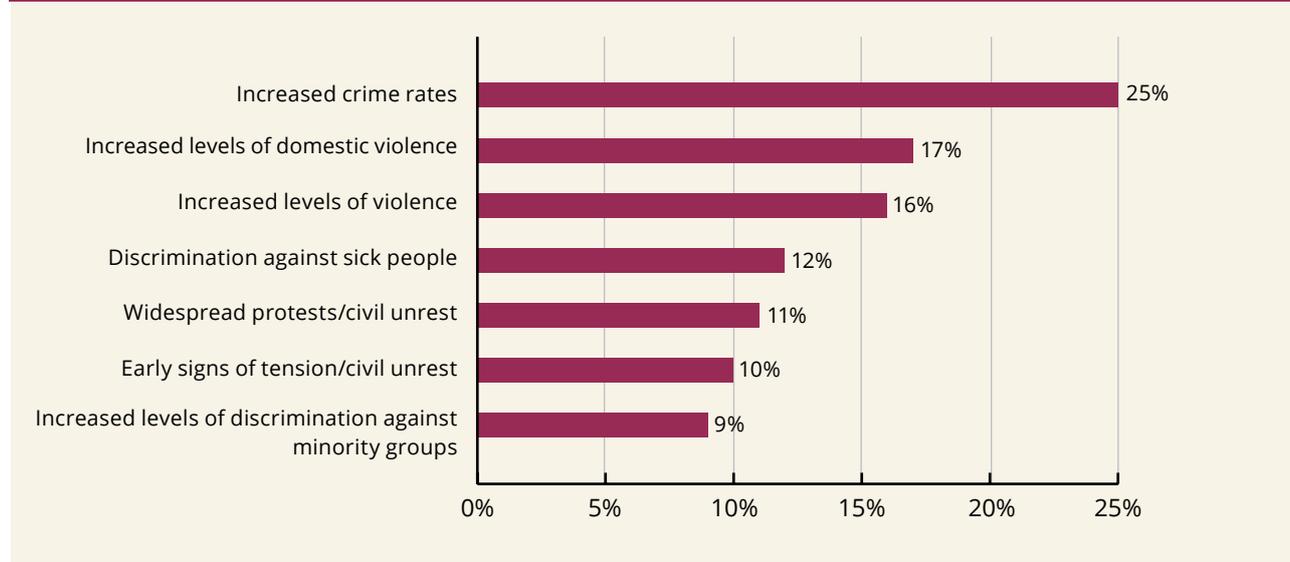
## SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

Overall, 56 percent of parents of school-aged children reported noticing an increase of tensions and violence in their communities over the past

year. Figure 31 illustrates the main types of tensions and violence perceived, with increased crime rates being reported by one in five parents. The high number of parents reporting increased levels of domestic violence is also concerning. According to UN Women, incidences of domestic violence, particularly for women and girls have intensified since the start of the pandemic. Calls to helplines have increased five-fold in some countries due to movement restrictions, social isolation and economic insecurity.<sup>41</sup>

Around 80 percent of parents reported that these increases in insecurity have impacted their children, with 43 percent reporting 'very much' and 36 percent reporting 'to some extent'. Although these findings vary from one country to another, this global finding raises important protection concerns for children and should be further investigated and monitored at country level.

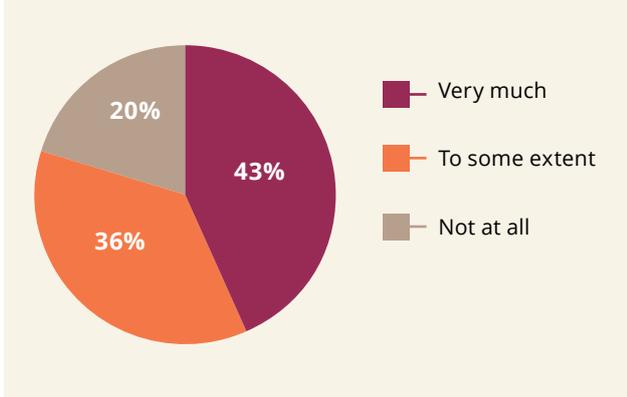
**FIGURE 31: MAIN TYPES OF TENSIONS AND VIOLENCE PERCEIVED BY PARENTS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES (MULTIPLE RESPONSE)**



40 FSIN. 2022. [Global Report on Food Crises 2022](#).

41 UN Women. 2021. [Facts and figures: Ending violence against women](#)

**FIGURE 32: HOW HAS THE INCREASE IN TENSIONS AND VIOLENCE OVER THE PAST YEAR IMPACTED YOUR CHILD(REN)?**

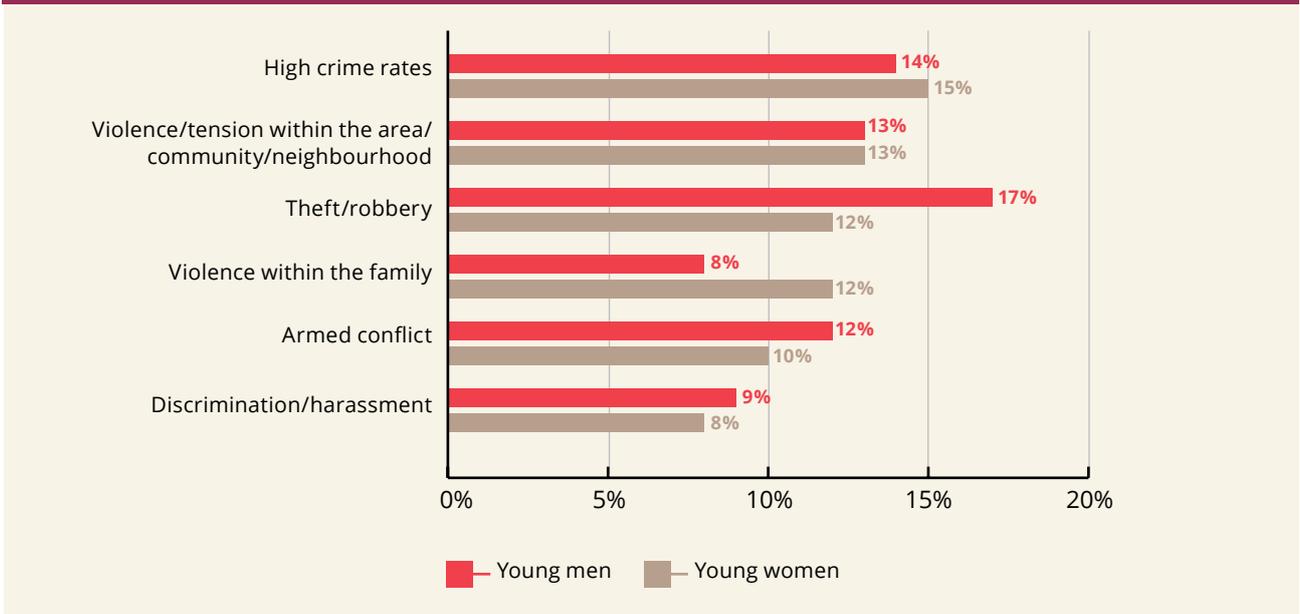


### YOUTH

At the time of the survey, more than one third (36 percent) of youth respondents reported feeling unsafe in their environment. A slightly higher percentage of youth aged 20–24 years (39 percent) reported feeling unsafe than youth aged 15–19 years (34 percent). Figure 33 illustrates the main reasons why youth reported feeling unsafe. Notably, more young women reported feeling unsafe due to violence within their family, while theft/robbery appeared to be a greater preoccupation for young men.



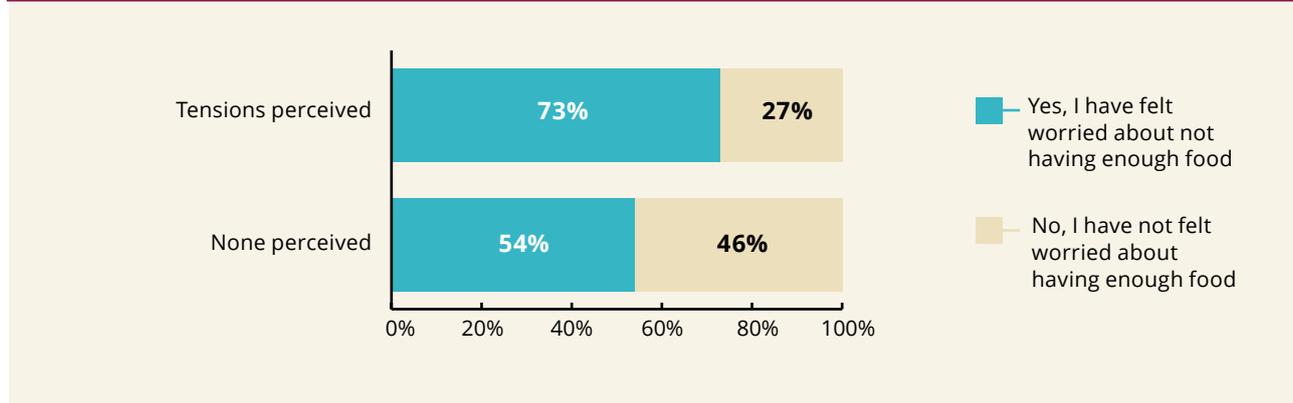
**FIGURE 33: MAIN REASONS FOR FEELING UNSAFE, BY SEX OF RESPONDENTS**



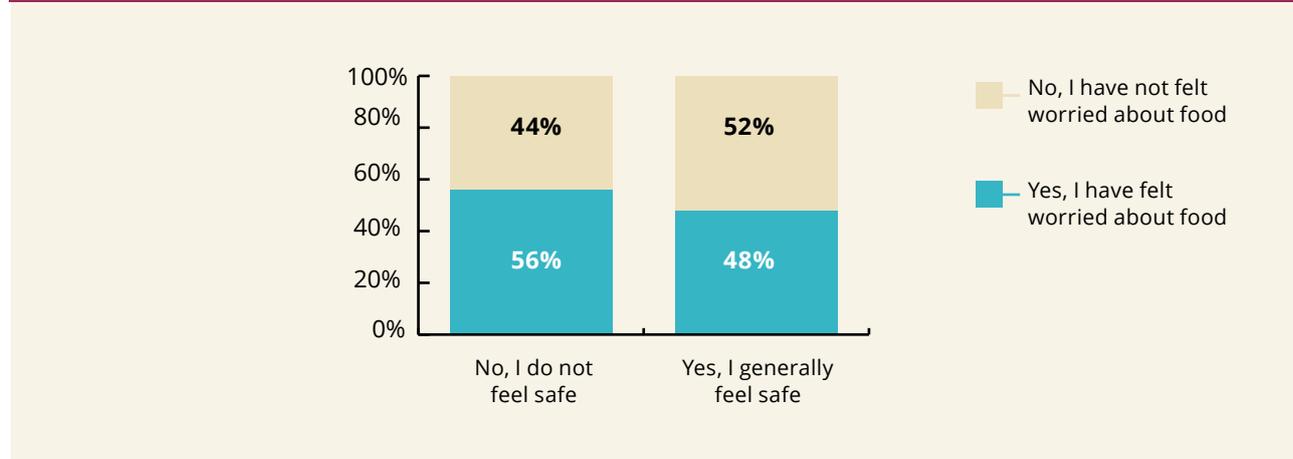
For both school-aged children and youth, safety concerns and food security concerns were found to be closely intertwined. The higher the feeling of unsafety, the more likely households with school-aged children and youth were to feel worried about having enough food to eat. These findings reinforce the nexus between conflict, violence, insecurity and food insecurity and call for concerted actions to promote peace. Figure 29 shows that 73 percent of parents who perceived increased tensions and violence in the past year, also reported feeling worried about having enough food to eat. Similarly, figure 35 illustrates that 56 percent of youth who did not feel safe in their environment were also concerned about food.



**FIGURE 34: TENSIONS/VIOLENCE PERCEIVED BY PARENTS OF SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN AND CONCERNS OVER FOOD**



**FIGURE 35: YOUTH PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY AND CONCERNS OVER HAVING ENOUGH FOOD**

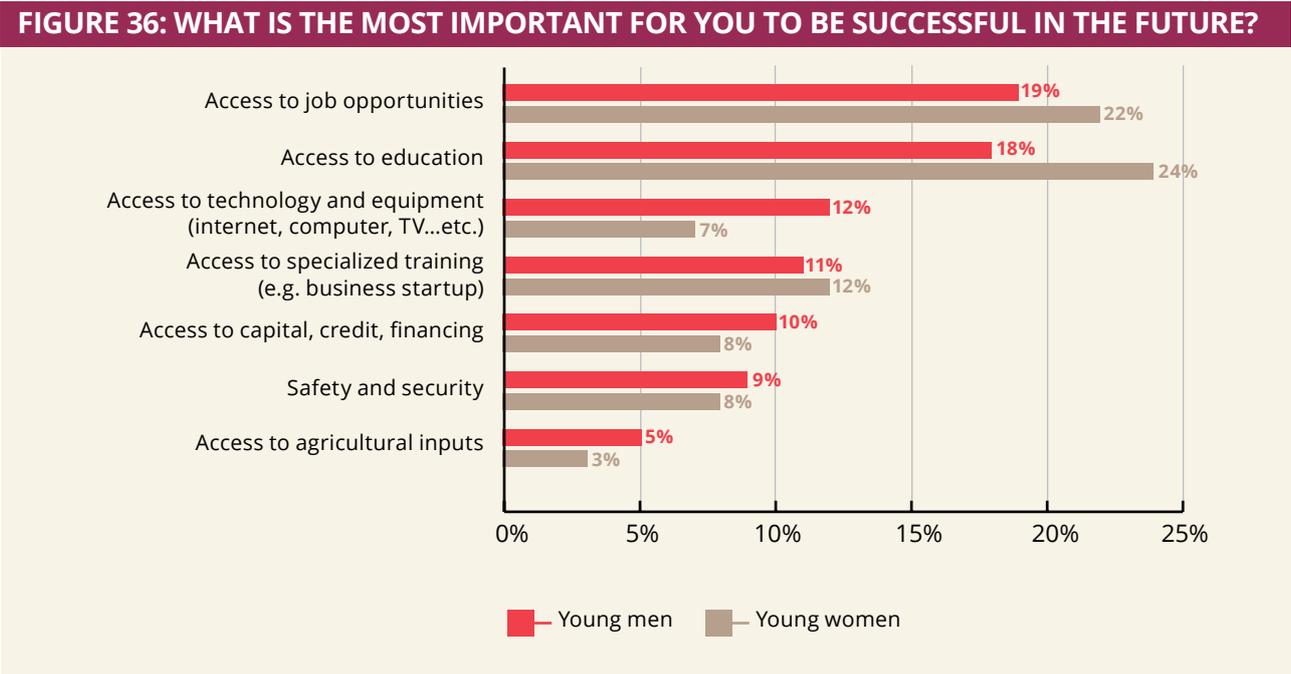




# Aspirations for the future

The COVID-19 crisis has severely hampered opportunities for youth. When they were asked about what they would need to be successful in the future, access to job opportunities (21 percent) and access to education (21 percent) were the top needs reported. Young women highlighted the need to access education and job opportunities to a greater extent than young men.

When disaggregating data by age groups, youth aged 15–19 were more likely to identify education as their most important need (25 percent), while youth aged 20–24 were more likely to identify access to job opportunities as their top need (25 percent). This is likely due to the fact that older youth have already completed their education and are now entering the job market, while younger youth are focused on completing their studies.



## IN THE WORDS OF RESPONDENTS – YOUTH

Youth were asked what it would take to help them through the current crisis. Unanimously across countries, youth reported access to job opportunities and financial support among their top needs.

A 23-year-old man from Iraq expressed:

“It would help to have job opportunities in the private and public sector. This would help exploit youth talent and energies to build a better and more developed society”.

Alongside employment, another critical theme for youth is education. As seen in other sections of this report, the continuation of education of youth has been severely hampered by school closures, consequently generating learning losses and delays.

A young woman from Kenya:

“many young people do not receive schooling beyond the secondary level, especially those who are not in a financial position to meet their needs. Providing more support to access education would surely help”.



These qualitative findings are very much in line with results from the previous section showing what youth need in order to be successful in the future.

Other themes that emerged from qualitative data include access to healthcare and sufficient food, improved security, psychological support/ advice and access to specialized trainings for self-employment and business development.

A 20-year-old man from Zimbabwe said:

“[I would suggest] training young people in starting, managing and scaling up a business. Job opportunities are scarce, self-employment is the only route to success.”

# Conclusions and recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic and mitigation measures adopted to contain its spread are likely to have profound consequences on this generation of school-aged children and youth, impacting the growth of human capital, equity, and socioeconomic development of countries in the long-run. Over two years since the start of the crisis, and findings from this survey illustrate the extent to which the education of school-aged children and youth has been impacted. Almost 6 percent of school-aged children and 12 percent of youth in the sample were reported to have dropped out of school; and the bulk of parents and youth have reported a severe impact on the quality of education mainly due to the lack of interactions with teachers and peers and lack of access to internet/equipment.

At the same time, the food security situation of school-aged children and youth was found to be worrying, worsened by the loss of livelihoods among families and lack of social safety nets, including school meals. Youth transitioning from education to work have been hit particularly hard since the start of the pandemic, resulting in almost one in two youth losing their jobs (or one of their jobs). For parents of school-aged children, income disruption has been one of the central drivers of lack of access to education, healthcare and increased food insecurity among children.

Human security also emerged as a critical concern, with increases in tensions and violence being reported by the majority of parents of school-aged children. At the same time, more than one in three youth were not feeling safe in their environment. Safety concerns and food security concerns were found to be closely intertwined and highlight the need for policies and programmes that promote social cohesion and peace.

In light of the joint analysis presented in this paper and to ensure that school-aged children and youth are duly considered throughout the COVID-19 response and recovery, the Research, Assessment and Monitoring Division and the School-based Programmes Service propose the following six priority actions.

- 1. Ensure that children and youth who are facing acute hardship can access humanitarian and/or government assistance to meet their food and other essential needs.**

Preventing further declines in the food security and nutrition situation of school-aged children and youth should be the topmost priority for governments and the international community. A healthy generation of young people today will be more likely to learn better and gain the knowledge and skills to positively contribute to the workforce of tomorrow. Delivering nutrition-sensitive assistance to families and their children as well as youth should be prioritized based on their needs, through effective joint assessment and targeting exercises with partner organizations.

- 2. Increase investments in multi-year social protection and economic strengthening programmes to build back the resilience of poor households and improve their ability to afford safe and nutritious food, access healthcare and pay education fees and costs for their children.**

The employment crisis triggered by the pandemic has revealed the great instability and precarity of millions of families around the world. Daily and casual workers, who often do not have access to job protection have been hit hard, impacting the main income source for many families and their children. Lack of effective and responsive social protection programmes have left many with the need to adopt negative coping strategies to make ends meet. Multi-year, flexible funding to enhance national social protection schemes and economic and resilience strengthening programmes for vulnerable households is of critical need to ensure that families can provide the most essential needs for their children, including healthcare, education and food, and that no one is left behind.

**3. Promote and invest in decent jobs for youth, including improved job protection schemes and unemployment benefits, as well as access to specialized training programmes for young entrepreneurs.**

There is an urgent need to reintegrate youth who have lost their jobs due to the pandemic in the labour market. Investments in economic sectors that have the potential to hire and train youth, such as the technology sector for example, could help decrease youth unemployment and help kickstart economic growth. Other measures include providing subsidies to businesses for hiring youth and providing training programmes that can help youth self-innovate and start small businesses. Investments in job security benefits to protect youth who are transitioning into the labour market are critical. Taking care of this generation of youth and providing them with the opportunities to contribute to the economy will be beneficial in the immediate and long-term economic recovery of countries.

**4. Invest in inclusive internet infrastructures and access to technologies to ensure that all school-aged children and youth can sustain their education using remote learning modalities when in-school learning is not an option.**

Multiple studies conducted by different organizations throughout the pandemic have revealed the deep and persistent digital gap that exists among children and youth who are better-off and those from poorer households. Access to technologies and the internet should no longer be a privilege, but an essential service and right for children and youth to be able to continue their education through remote learning modalities. Investments in internet infrastructures and access to technologies, especially in low-income countries are critical to promote more inclusiveness and universal access to education. Training teachers on the use of these technologies is also essential, so they feel better equipped

with tools and methods to ensure the delivery of quality education. It is also a good prevention mechanism should the world be faced with another such crisis in the future.

**5. Recognize the heightened human security risk the pandemic has engendered, including increased violence particularly affecting young women and girls, and dedicate resources to children and youth violence prevention programmes and promotion of peace through renewed development efforts.**

The international community must continue advocating and raising awareness around the increased security risks triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and engage with public and private stakeholders to encourage safe spaces and protection for victims of violence. It is critical that violence protection programmes for children and youth are developed and enhanced within schools and other public spaces. Outcomes of peace should guide all renewed efforts to stimulate sustainable development.

**6. Improve data and analysis at intra-household level to better understand and monitor how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting school-aged children and youth, including those with disabilities, throughout the recovery phase of the crisis.**

Sex- and age-disaggregated data allows for better comprehension of the specific challenges and needs faced by different members of a household. Increased collection of individual data among school-aged children and youth are key to monitoring their situation and wellbeing over time, while providing insights on how to adjust operational responses. Investing in innovative remote monitoring and assessment tools is therefore critical. Where already in place, monitoring and assessment activities should be expanded to cover intra-household dynamics and provide more detailed analysis on children and youth.

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