

HALTING LIVES 2

IN THEIR OWN VOICE:
GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN ON
THE IMPACT OF COVID-19



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the last year Plan International has been conducting research into the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of girls and young women. This current study took place, with three sets of data collection, between July 2020 and January 2021. It accompanies an earlier survey, carried out in June and July 2020, with 7000 respondents across 14 countries and involves in depth interviews with 70 girls and young women, aged 15-24, across the same 14 countries. The research tracks their experiences of COVID-19 and supplements the statistical analysis with a more granular understanding of the particular impact of the pandemic on girls and young women. What has emerged as the major challenge in girls' lives? How do they view the future? What measures need to be put in place to make sure that their lives and opportunities are not be irreparably damaged? The pandemic exacerbates pre-existing inequalities which makes girls and young women particularly vulnerable: the research reveals resilience but overwhelmingly it charts the negative effects of this year of COVID-19 on all aspects of their lives.

"I learned I am not great at studying and coping with stress. I know it's been a horrible year for my mental health and it was already horrible going into quarantine, but it's just been going downhill."
Clara, 16, United States

What we have learned: education, mental health and family income emerged as key overlapping concerns.

- **Education:** issues with remote learning in terms of access to technology, lack of space to study at home and schools and colleges themselves struggling to adjust were frequently discussed. As were the difficulties many were finding with being able to concentrate and focus when learning from home. Loneliness and domestic responsibilities also interfered with girls' and young women's ability to cope with distance learning.
- **Mental health:** stress and anxiety were mentioned by the majority of the respondents. They missed their friends, they felt they were failing to keep up with their school or college work, they worried about their friends and family catching the virus and they were anxious about money and the future.
- **Livelihoods:** family members losing their jobs meant concerns about money for food, education and many of life's basic necessities and often caused family tensions which added to the mental health problems many were experiencing.

"I hardly eat, there are days when I feel like I'm under pressure, I don't know how to explain it, but it's a pretty hard sadness, quite strong." Ana, 16, Nicaragua

Girls and young women felt that adolescence was a crucial time for them and that the pandemic, and the measures taken to curtail it, was particularly hard on the young.

NEXT STEPS

"The goals have not changed but since the learning has been disturbed by COVID-19 most of my friends who have dropped out of school have been telling me to also stop going to school. But I am determined to continue so that I live a better life in future." Audre, 16, Zambia

The determination to pursue their dreams, despite the pandemic, was expressed by many of the respondents. To do this they will need support and this means funding and political will

from international organisations and national governments and from authorities everywhere, who must:

- **Ensure** that all families have an adequate income and basic necessities, including food supplies and essential medicines.
- **Provide** counselling and increase mental health services, recognising the **psychological impact of the pandemic, particularly on girls and young women**.
- **Recognise** that the impact of the pandemic will fall differently according to **age and gender** and plan and invest accordingly, particularly in education.
- **Prioritise** learning continuity during school closures and take measures, **including investing in appropriate both high-tech and low-tech, affordable and gender-responsive** distance education methods.
- **Engage** with families, communities, leaders, school teams, children and young people to **identify gender norms** that impede education, and help to construct alternative, positive ones. Ensuring that **girls return to school** once they re-open must be a priority.
- **Continue** to support **gender equality** and drive toward **the Sustainable Development Goals**.

INTRODUCTION

This report is the second part of *Halting Lives: The Impact of COVID-19 on Girls* research series. The first report was released in September 2020, utilising quantitative research methodologies to conduct, a primarily online, closed-question survey with over 7000 girls and young women aged 15-24 from fourteen countries. The initial research study asked questions about girls' and young women's knowledge and experience of thematic areas such as education, wellbeing, economic security, livelihoods, and access to technology in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. This second, qualitative study, conducted in the same countries, builds on the earlier research and offers a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of the challenges facing girls and young women and their changing experiences as the COVID-19 pandemic evolves. Together the two pieces of research will give us a deeper understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on girls and young women. And this understanding will help build a future that fosters equality and protects girls' rights.

METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION

Part 2 of the *Halting Lives* research, utilised qualitative research methodologies to conduct a study over time, using semi-structured in-depth interviews, with data collection at three points in time. This was intended to understand and investigate the changing lived realities of girls and young women, and their experiences, in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic as it evolved. Qualitative data was collected in fourteen countries which included: Australia, Brazil, Ecuador, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Spain, USA, Vietnam and Zambia.

Data was collected at three time points over a six-month period. The first round of data collection took place between July-August 2020, the second round of data collection took place in October 2020, and the third and final round of data collection took place between December 2020- January 2021. Each country aimed to conduct interviews with the same five research participants in all three rounds. Owing to the nature of a study over time, in addition to it being conducted remotely during a global pandemic, a very small number of research participants dropped out of the second round of data collection and a few more dropped out of the third and final round of data collection; over the study seventy-one interviews were conducted in round one, sixty-eight in round two and sixty-three in round three of data collection (please see table 1 below for further details).

The interview templates used for the semi-structured, in-depth interviews included between six to eight questions, with additional sub-questions, through all three sets of data collection. Using both deductive and inductive research methodologies the first round of questions investigated established themes, whilst the second and third rounds of interview templates explored themes that had begun to emerge from the data collected in the previous rounds in order to build upon, and further explore, particular topics; particularly in relation to education and mental health, as well as global developments in relation to the pandemic such as the emergence of the vaccine. All questions were open-ended and intended to be explorative, offering the girls the opportunity to give as much or little information as they felt comfortable with.

The qualitative interviews were conducted predominantly using digital methods such as telephones, or video conferencing applications such as Microsoft Teams, WhatsApp, Zoom and Skype, which helped ensure the safety of both data collectors and research participants in respect of the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews were held in English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Arabic and Amharic, transcriptions and translations were mostly undertaken by in-country data collectors, whilst some transcriptions were completed by an online service.

SAMPLING

Purposive sampling was employed, and a selection-criteria based on gender and age was applied, research participants were female and aged between 15-24, drawn from Plan International’s programme participants. Overall, 71 girls and young women took part in the research.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis was undertaken through content and sentiment analysis using qualitative NVivo software. A combination of deductive and inductive coding techniques using a hierarchal coding frame was used. Whilst the coding approach was predominantly deductive, it was necessary to allow some inductive coding to enable new themes to emerge.

ETHICS AND SAFEGUARDING

In line with ethics and safeguarding procedures qualitative interviews were conducted by two members of Plan International staff. Information sheets were provided ahead of time, and informed consent and assent, for girls under 18, were given prior to the interviews; verbal consent was also given to record the interviews. Ongoing informed consent and assent was also gained verbally before round two and three of data collection as an important part of ethical practice across a study over time. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the data collection, analysis and write up process.

Ethics approval for the research was granted by two international children’s rights academics from the Department of Public Law and Jurisprudence, University of the Western Cape in South Africa and Professor of Children's Rights in the Developing World, University of Leiden in the Netherlands.

Table 1: Number of interview participants across all 3 round of data collection by country

Country	Round 1 <i>(July-August 2020)</i>	Round 2 <i>(October 2020)</i>	Round 3 <i>(December 2020- January 2021)</i>
Australia	5	5	5
Brazil	5	4	4
Ecuador	5	5	5
Egypt	5	5	5
Ethiopia	5	5	4
France	5	5	5
Ghana	5	5	3
India	6	5	5

Mozambique	5	5	5
Nicaragua	5	4	4
Spain	5	5	5
USA	5	5	4
Vietnam	5	5	4
Zambia	5	5	5
Total interviews per round of data collection	71	68	63

SETTING THE SCENE

On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) was formally notified about a cluster of cases of pneumonia in Wuhan City, home to 11 million people and the cultural and economic hub of central China. The cause of the severe acute respiratory syndrome that became known as COVID-19 was a novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2. On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organisation declared the outbreak a worldwide public health emergency. Over a year later, only a handful of countries remain unaffected by the virus,¹ with 128,377,922 confirmed cases and 2,806,679 global deaths.² Many countries are currently experiencing a third period of lockdown and, despite the vaccine roll out, cases remain high. Last year, modelling predicted that the overall COVID-19 pandemic was expected to last for a period of at least 12 to 18 months.³ In April 2021, at time of writing, with a third lockdown and a third wave of the pandemic across the world, this prediction seems optimistic. It now looks as if COVID-19, in some shape or form, may be with us for very much longer than that and it is very clear that the outbreak of this virus has implications that reach far beyond the direct impact on peoples' physical health.

COVID-19 is having an effect on all sectors of society across the world. But its impact does not fall equally: the virus itself does not discriminate between rich and poor, young and old, male and female but it does take advantage of pre-existing inequalities which over the last year have come sharply into focus.⁴ With this in mind, Plan International, in line with its continuing focus on gender equality and girls' rights, commissioned research to look specifically at the impact of the current pandemic on girls and young women, collecting data in: Australia,⁵ Brazil,^l Ecuador,^l Egypt,^p Ethiopia^k, Ghana,^p India,^l Mozambique,^k Nicaragua,^l Spain^l, United States^l, France,^l Vietnam,^l and Zambia.^k

¹ "COVID-19 situation update worldwide" European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 28 August 2020, <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/geographical-distribution-2019-ncov-cases>, accessed 31 March 2021.

² "https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/" accessed 7 February 2021.

³ Taylor, Tegan. "How long will the COVID-19 pandemic last?" *ABC News Australia*, 20 March 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/health/2020-03-20/coronavirus-covid19-pandemic-how-long-will-it-last/12043196>, accessed 26 August 2020.

⁴ "Coronavirus vs. inequality: How we'll pay vastly different costs for the COVID-19 pandemic?" UNDP, 2020, <https://feature.undp.org/coronavirus-vs-inequality/>, accessed 27 August 2020.

⁵ Countries marked with ^l signify that Ipsos collected the data for the respective country, countries marked with ^k signify that Kantar collected the data and ^p signifies that Plan International Country offices collected the data.

This large quantitative survey involving 7000 respondents, was followed by a series of interviews with seventy-four young women across the same 14 countries. These in-depth conversations with each interviewee were conducted three times between July 2020, and January 2021 in order to drill down into the changing nature of girls' and young women's experiences. A year into the pandemic what has emerged as the major challenge in their lives? How do they view the future? What measures need to be put in place to safeguard girls and young women as we all navigate out of this crisis and how do we make sure that their future lives and opportunities will not be irreparably damaged?

WHY GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN?

Over the past year, as the world has sought desperately to deal both with the medical impacts of the virus and to prepare a response to its many secondary effects, research on COVID-19 has accelerated. However, there is limited research on the social impacts of COVID-19 and on the consequences for young people, especially those specific to girls. Adolescence, particularly mid to late adolescence (15-19 years), when numerous overlapping transitions can define and limit their potential, is a critical period for all young people. For girls and young women, in many countries across the world, it is a time when they are particularly at risk: decisions are often made for them that are detrimental to their future, and the expectations and opportunities, for girls, in all their diversity, diverge considerably from their male peers.⁶ In later adolescence decisions are often being made for girls about their education, marriage and career paths. The burden of household responsibilities grows heavier and their freedoms may well be curtailed in line with gendered expectations about female behaviour and girls' vulnerability to sexual violence. A global pandemic which pulls girls out of school and has a detrimental impact on family income can only make matters worse.

The longer it goes on the impact on a generation whose education and development has been so severely affected will become increasingly severe. There are concerns, also, for the mental health of young people and young women in particular report anxiety and depression.⁷ The girls and young women we spoke to were very open about the toll on their mental health but also demonstrated a determination to persevere, whatever difficulties they encountered:

"I think that the main thing about a person who has goals in their life is to try to break down those small obstacles because deep down we know that we can achieve it despite the situations and that if at some point you fall you have to learn to get up alone, go ahead and don't let the situation affect you or your dreams." Peque, 15, Ecuador

Despite this determined optimism it remains true that the scale of the pandemic affects girls and young women in all aspects of their daily lives: their safety, wellbeing, education, economic security, health, nutrition and access to technology. All pre-existing inequalities are made worse by COVID-19.⁸ Its impact on girls and young women, who face unique vulnerabilities, needs to be acknowledged and it is their experiences and perspectives this research seeks to understand.

⁶ "How investing in adolescent girls can change the world" *Plan International Australia*, 2020.

⁷ [Mental health in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic: cross-sectional analyses from a community cohort study | BMJ Open](#). Accessed 11 February 2021

⁸ [Coronavirus vs. inequality \(undp.org\)](#)

FINDINGS

Findings are discussed in relation to twelve overarching themes:

1. **life and well-being**
2. **awareness of virus/pandemic**
3. **measures to deal with the pandemic: personal circumstances that made containment measures more difficult**
4. **education: learning from home/return to school**
5. **worry, stress, anxiety and support to cope**
6. **contact and communication**
7. **relationships with friends and family and how they are coping**
8. **health**
9. **income and livelihoods**
10. **access to information,**
11. **awareness and perceptions of the vaccine**
12. **the future – both personal and general.**

Some themes - **awareness of virus/pandemic, awareness and perceptions of the vaccine, life and well-being, health, income and livelihoods, access to information and personal circumstances that made containment measures more difficult** - were only explored in one data collection round. The remaining thematic areas were included in either two or all rounds of data collection and are discussed chronologically.

1. LIFE AND WELL BEING

In the first round of interviews, when asked more generally about the pandemic, the girls and young women would centre their thoughts on some common impacts and themes. These themes were education, health, income and livelihoods. In the first round, when they were posed with a question on how, if at all, the pandemic had affected their own lives, these were again the themes that the girls centred their answers on (and were subsequently explored in more detail during succeeding rounds of data collection). Overwhelmingly, the

girls and young women spoke of the negative effects of the pandemic on these aspects of their lives.

In the quantitative survey only five per cent of girls and young women surveyed said that the pandemic had caused only positive effects in their lives.⁹

“Before COVID-19, life was normal and very happy. Because, we can actually go out and get our essential stationary, or related to school or college essentials. But now, after COVID-19 pandemic, I started experiencing anxiety, or worry and fear, including fear of transmission of COVID-19, or fear of what it takes or what it means to undergo medical treatment for this.” Avani, 18, India

“I also felt it becoming worse in many ways, because we all know that it’s not always possible to have a good mental health when you’re not able to go out, see people and have physical contact, it makes me very sad because I was always a very social person and now staying at home with only two people is not easy at all.” Rita, 18, Brazil

“But I guess the uncertainty really set in and sometimes I would get a little bit scared, I guess, thinking about how the world might look like. So I guess that was the main impact that I had.” Mia, 18, Australia

“It was very happy because I could attend class, I used to relate to my teammates and not now, I’m not even studying now, God willing until next year, that’s why I feel locked up, that’s sad...heartbroken...” Emily, 17, Ecuador

“I definitely say I’m not as happy as I was before. I feel like I don’t get to see my friends as often. I don’t know. I just feel like I’m just not as happy as I was before.” Sara, 15, United States

“I really want to go back to the way things used to be, because the new normal doesn’t really appeal to adolescents” Rosa, 17, Spain

In relation to education, the most frequently discussed problems were not going to school in person, problems with alternative learning methods, and the consequences of falling behind

“I worry about school. For us who are in examination classes, we are no longer learning the way we used to learn before COVID 19. At the moment, we are learning for a short period of time and compared to before. This may lead to pupils not passing the examinations.” Audre, 16, Zambia

“Life is not as happy as pre COVID-19. And also education, it shifted towards online education. So, there must be a disruption of education. I think, it is also one of the major changes. Because, we are not used to attending classes through online or distance learning programs. So, this is the very first time we are attending.” Avani, 18, India

“Now we need to stay at home and the closing of schools and universities hurts a lot, especially those who are not used to distance learning. I started college this year and only had classroom lessons for a month and then online and this is difficult because I feel like I’m not learning right.” Rita, 18, Brazil

“The school closures. It is very difficult to study, everything is just so busy. I can’t keep up, I feel like I’m not learning.” Barbara, 16, Brazil

“Because when COVID is in, we weren’t able to go to school. Since March, I’ve been in the house all this while.” Dede, 17, Ghana

“Well, with regard to education, since we are doing everything online, it is more difficult to understand what teachers are telling us” Emily, 17, Ecuador

⁹ Halting Lives, Part One: the impact of COVID-19 on girls. Plan International September 2020

and attainment of their grades. More generally, the research participants identified the fact that their education was being put on hold and being disrupted.

When discussing not being able to go to school in person, the difficulties that were provided included not being able to see teachers and get sufficient support from them as well as home not being a good learning environment. In particular, the lack of contact with their friends and classmates was also mentioned.

“And us being at home too, a lot of us were not able to study. Before we came back, a lot of us were not able to study at home, because the house chores, the errands, and other stuffs, you wouldn't be able to study.” Miriam, 23, Ghana

“Even now in Ecuador there is a macho society, where girls, no matter how young they are, have to do housework and are forced to do these things and put their education aside. They say: you already lost the school year so it is better that you do things around the house, help out, and so they do not study any more. I have heard that in several occasions.” Gaby, 17, Ecuador

“Like back in school, even if it was so stressful, it just made life so much easier seeing my friends and going through the stress together, studying for tests during lunch and rushing everything. Now we don't even have a single test. It just made me value school so much more and life before. And I used to hate it. I used to dread going to school. I used to be like “Wow, the school day is so long,” but now I want that. I miss that so much.” Sara, 15, United States

“To me, I also realized that the efficiency of studying also decreased during because of the things that we have to study online. And interaction with your friends and having discussion with your friends is very important. But now, you cannot do that as much as before so I think it's a difficulty.” Ha, 20, Vietnam

In relation to alternative learning methods, some of the problems that they mentioned related to poor internet connections and lack of access to smart phones or devices on which to do distance learning. These responses came from girls and young women who were situated in lower- and middle-income countries, namely India, Ecuador, Ghana and Nicaragua, who discussed such problems in relation to both themselves and their peers.

"In my community, due to the lack of internet, many of my neighbours have not been able to study, or they were trying to educate themselves using books. The most difficult thing is the lack of internet ...Furthermore, the fact of not having internet has made it difficult for me to study...I used to use the neighbour's internet, but I don't know what happened and she cut off the internet even when my mother was helping her to pay the cost. I don't know what happened, if she got angry or what happened. And as I was telling you, when they recharged my cell phone for Plan meetings, I shared the internet with my brother and sister so that they could do their homework and continue studying."

Emily, 17, Ecuador

"Well, we had to meet once a week with our colleagues to write our homework, some special work that had to be done, some project that had to be implemented, we met every Saturday at the university all day, But now I cannot, it is complicated for us, so we do by internet and we communicate with the teachers by telephone, by emails, by WhatsApp. It is highly important to know when and where to add a phone top-up to be able to communicate and avoid failing the school year... so I did not even want to leave my room because I did not have a job how I would continue the university, and later I failed a class because I could not to contact the teacher to receive an email and even more complicated because failing a class for me is not the best I was drowning in a glass of water..." Margarita, 18, Nicaragua

"But now I do not go out of my house. Online classes are sometimes more strenuous ...t would be good for people to reconsider the situation we have experienced and to feel empathy for other people, and that the government issues new reforms regarding certain laws due to the current disorder; for example with regard to education, because some of my school friends were unable to connect to online classes. The government should have supported online classes in a better way for people who could not connect and receive classes." Peque, 15, Ecuador

"Furthermore, education is not so good and nice in these times. [Researcher] Why? What happened? G. For example, in the schools that do not have much access to the internet, teachers decided, the teachers' committee decided that classes should be received only by WhatsApp because some of the students are poor and do not have money to pay for an Internet plan, and at most they can WhatsApp, so they decided to use only WhatsApp to share pedagogical cards, which are a few sheets that they share in PDF together with a Word file where they say what is going to be done daily, teachers send it and say "solve this kids, and let me know if you have any questions", so it is very limited.... No, I do not feel that I have learned something, nothing has been learned yet" Gaby, 17, Ecuador

"But now we are, we are not getting ... they are conducting online classes, but so many people are not having internet connection in their home." Pinky, 16, India

"That is about the education. They used to complain because it's not all of them that have the smartphone, that will get access to what they've teaching. And so, they are more worried..." Dede, 17, Ghana

Importantly, the majority of girls and young women were worried about a range of attendant issues and consequences related to not being able to go to school and alternative learning methods. These included being concerned about attaining their grades and passing examinations which may affect their ability to study further or get a job. They also mentioned suffering from lack of motivation to study and diminished concentration while trying to study. In some instances, too much schoolwork was seen as a challenge, while on the other hand some of the participants spoke of having too little schoolwork.

"I keep studying and attending the Zoom lectures even though I have no motivation for them for uni. I think you just have to look at the positives in a situation and try and reach out and hold onto those to be able to build a good future for yourself." Mia, 18, Australia

"In terms of education, because obviously I'm at uni, online uni is weird. It's very weird and it's very easy to fall behind because there's no one looking over your shoulder, there's no lectures you actually have to attend. And then Zoom calls, you just can turn off your video and not be there if you want to. And so it's very hard to keep the motivation going, it feels like it's not real learning, so you're kind of like, "Is it worth it?" Jenni, 18, Australia

"Yeah. Before I mentioned that time, I had to stay at home to study online. I felt the education quality went down, and it was quite hard for me to absorb new knowledge, and could not easily ... make my lecture too. And I also had to cancel my plan, which I had made before. And sometimes, I thought it made me lazier when staying at home all day, and I was really bored." Mi, 22, Vietnam

"There are two things that I worry most about. The first thing is, the fear that I might be affected by COVID-19... And second worry is that, education. Because, right now I'm studying plus two... So, further education, I think there might be a problem economically or academically." Avani, 18, India

"One thing that I've been really worried about is with college coming up, because I'm a rising senior in high school. There were still things I was planning on doing during my senior year, and with options possibly not being there anymore, it's really getting into my head like, "Oh, what about college? There's all these things that you had planned and that you won't be able to demonstrate this as a strength in your application." And it's just hoping that colleges will be understanding of the current situation because they're always sending out these emails saying that they are, but what extent will that understanding go to as far as extra curriculars, test scores, just things like that. And so it's just hoping that what I have is enough and that I've demonstrated what I believe in, and my passions, do what I've already done. And that's one main thing that COVID has really impacted for me." Mary, 17, United States

"And education. Even right now, because we're supposed to do our attachments, where we'll go to the organizations, and they will have some practical experience ...But here in the case being, we cannot go because of the Covid. We were asked to ... and then prepare a report, on an organization we haven't been to. So everything, you have to do every research, everything on the internet. Or better I say, if you know someone from the organization, then you just call, and then ask them this, this, this, this... then you use it to prepare your report....But if you don't also have airtime, or even data to do those research, you wouldn't be able to do it." Miriam, 23, Ghana

"So after COVID I would wake up, do my homework. I'd end at around 3:00. After 3:00 I wouldn't do any work. I would do everything... I don't know. I got things done really quickly. The workload was so small. I don't know. I expected homework every single day and to be due at a specific time, but what they did was that they would only send one assignment and we would have it due the next week. So you can literally wait until Sunday... I don't know why they did that because I know other schools didn't but they were like "Oh yeah, nothing's due until June 26th." You can still submit it in time and you won't get credit off. And I was like "I ain't doing that. I'm going to do my work before Sunday." So yeah, that's how my schedule would work because I feel like a lot of the courses, I barely learned anything. I feel like if... so if I had to take exams, I would most likely fail. Yeah. Especially for geometry, I would have had... I want to take AP World next year, and I probably am taking it, I'm not sure how I'm going to do because I missed so much from pre-AP World. As for languages, I'm taking Mandarin this year and I missed also a lot. So I tried using Duolingo and that didn't really work" Sara, 15, United States

"The day I go to class I'm more concentrated, I am able to take notes, but it's still very complicated" Marina, 17, Spain

Only a handful of girls and young women mentioned any positive effects derived from the pandemic in relation to education. Notably, they were from high income countries (United States and Australia). These positive effects included experiencing a better school/life balance; obtaining support from their university; a revised system of grading which enabled better grades; and having less distractions so they could study.

“But none of them were live, my teachers would just assign me work, I would do it. Honestly, it was really good for my GPA. You couldn’t get a lower grade than the semester before, or the quarter before, and basically it’s completion grade for a lot of stuff. And I also took the AP tests at home, which was good. They changed it a lot, it was really unprecedented of how they did it, of the questions themselves. But I think it went well, the scores come out tomorrow, so I’m really nervous.” Zara, 17, United States

“I think they did a pretty good job, and especially the college, they did a lot to make sure that we were in it together. The uni struggled a bit with the ... obviously online university, it’s hard to really keep track of how your students are doing, but they definitely put measures in to make sure that they were looking after you, especially the student union, they’ve been incredible, just making sure that we’re getting what we need...” Jenni, 18, Australia

“I think one difference for me before COVID and after COVID was during school, because of the workload that they gave us, I was staying up really, really late. And then when quarantine started in, they were doing virtual learning. They were required to lessen the workload to, in total it had to be 20 minutes a day of both instruction and work combined. That’s what was the rule that was put out. And so I got more sleep, so that was one thing.” Michaela, aged 17, United States

‘I think it’s because I have more time to do stuff. I mean, I think it is harder to learn online, but I really do feel like there’s less distractions right now. And if I’m just home alone, I know I can just do it by myself really quickly and get everything done and then I’ll be fine” Mary 17, United States

Following the discussion on education, the girls and young women next spoke of how accessing health services had been negatively impacted by the pandemic. The negative effects that were discussed ranged from the fear of catching COVID-19 from attending health facilities, to difficulties getting appointments or medication. Some spoke of local facilities being closed during the peak of COVID-19 (at the stage of the first interview of this study) and bigger hospitals ‘collapsing’ due to being overrun. Additional effects included health services only attending to COVID-19 patients and a dislike of online appointments.

Importantly, the adverse health effects of lockdown were also reflected in the interviews, though not widely. Some girls and young women spoke of over- or under-eating related to stress; suffering from back pain from sitting all day; and ‘weakness’ or lack of energy from being inside all the time.

A small number of the research participants said that they had not experienced any change in healthcare as a result of the pandemic, and only one participant mentioned a positive effect. In this instance the girl’s parents were General Medical Practitioners and she also felt she had great mental health support provided by her university counsellor.

“There is no access for us to... I mean, there is access, but there is a lot of fear in mind to go to hospitals these days.” Avani, 18, India

“Some other people, and some of my friends I've seen. They see the hospital to be scary. I say before you go there, you can contract COVID, you can meet some COVID patients, you might not even know they are COVID patients, then they get infected there.” Miriam, 23, Ghana

“So far, I am thankful because luckily, I have not had to go to a hospital or to a health center, but I have acquaintances who have had to go to the health center because they are sick and it is closed. It was reopened again recently because everything is returning to normal. However, when the pandemic was at the highest top, the health centers near the communities were closed and those that were open were the largest hospitals which were collapsed, not only with COVID cases, but also with cases of dengue and so on” Gaby, 17, Ecuador

“With regard to health, not being able to go to any health center because they do not attend you unless you have COVID...For example, when my mom got sick, we called an ambulance to help us and they didn't come because if it wasn't for COVID they wouldn't come, so we had to find out what to do. The same happened with my neighbours who called an ambulance because their blood pressure was low, and no ambulance arrived, and the health sub-centers were not giving appointments.” Emily, 17, Ecuador

“The health care provided in the sub-center is very low and they do not have the conditions to attend a person who has the virus, and that worries me a lot. People with COVID have been moving to the Canton's main city, for example that has happened in my family.” Chinita, 18, Ecuador

“In this lockdown, my brother was ill, and lockdown was going on, and the clinic and the hospital were not open. So it also created a lot of problems that time.” Anita, aged 16, India

“Just appointments being cancelled and things like that.” Mary, 17, United States

“My health got worse, I'm eating a lot of bullshit, because I get anxious. Since I am not going out, whenever I go I get anxious and I gained even more weight because of that.” Barbara, 16, Brazil

“... I hardly eat, there are days when I feel like I'm under pressure, I don't know how to explain it, but it's a pretty hard sadness, quite strong.” Ana, 16, Nicaragua

The negative effects of the pandemic on jobs and livelihoods and the consequences on their financial security were also pointed out by the study participants. Most of the girls and young women mentioned the main household earner (e.g. father, sister) or themselves losing their jobs or having their work hours reduced. One of the respondents from Vietnam said this affected manual or temporary workers more. Two of the girls from India spoke about how this caused tension within the family. The respondents also spoke about some positive effects, but these were very specific to high income countries and the fact that the respondents were young and/or studying: some mentioned getting summer jobs in restaurants due to there being less people wanting to work there and others mentioned getting paid more as online tutors.

"In my family, I observed that economics could stress the economic burdens have increased...Because, few of my family members also lost their employment opportunities. Or, there has been decrease in their salaries....So I think, their stress has been put on the other family members....I think, women who actually do the household activities or care for the older ones and also ill people, they are being really affected. Their mental health is affected. Because, men actually try to speak with very anger... Speak furiously to women....So I think their mental health is disturbed." Avani, 18, India

"Okay, I think that one of them is economic measures. I think it affected all the families, it also affected me because my sister was fired from her job and she was also a fundamental support for the family, my dad stopped working too, and since they were not working, obviously, nobody could go out, only to the hospitals and I think it affected us a lot, but also thanks to the blessing and the help of the Municipality and of foundations that brought food and distributed food baskets, we only have to spend money on vegetables, some fruit or things like that." Irie, 17, Ecuador

"In my personal life, maybe with my family, for example, my father had his salary reduced in half, because they reduced his working hours and that's why they pay him less, it caused a fairly strong imbalance." Gaby, 17, Ecuador

"Well, I think the most thing that's affected is the economic aspect. Because initially, thought it wasn't already easy, but it was better. But when there was COVID, like when you ask your daddy for money, or when you ask your mommy for money, they'd be like, "There's no money now," maybe when there's... how do I say it? The lockdown, when it is released, or when she gets the time to out, when she get the hand sanitizer and nose mask, those things, then she'll go out...So sometimes, it was kind of difficult to get money from people, because everyone is complaining of no money, no money, no money. So it was economically not easy for me." Miriam, 23, Ghana

"Well, let me tell you about the Coronavirus pandemic in my country because this is affecting all Nicaraguan people in an incredible way because we don't have the way to take the needed measures to prevent it. Nicaraguan people especially my family as others in my community we don't have a steady job therefore we don't like it or not we have to go out to earn a daily living to feed our family. This is really affecting us in a hard way, even with the coronavirus in our country I had to go out to support my mom but now I have than 2 months of being at home, lockdown, because you see the situation is complicated, very hard, this is an economic problem, sometimes there is sometimes there isn't and it's not only for my family but for all families in the community. All the country is living a hard time....employment, completely was a mess because I lost my job and I still don't have one, to have a job at the university in my mind and having no job is super complicated, my mom is a single mother and obviously we have to see how to solve our issues, such as university and the home economy is completely complicated , so I did not even want to leave my room because I did not have a job how I would continue the university..." Margarita, 18, Nicaragua

"Our family is hugely affected by the pandemic economically before the pandemic only depend on my father income but now even his income decreased as it was not consistent." Zeineb, 17, Ethiopia

"No. It was actually pretty easy to get my summer job, which was actually pretty surprising. I feel like a lot of people were leaving their jobs, especially because I'm working in the restaurant industry, so a lot of people didn't want to work there anymore. Which, the place I work for has put in so many different protocols so that we're all safe. But it was super easy to get a job." Clara, 16, United States

"It is like a paradox when it comes to employment. Actually, in the COVID-19, I'm a tutor. I'm an English tutor. Actually, in the COVID-19 pandemic, I earned more money than when compared to the time when there is no pandemic." Ha, 20, Vietnam

Linked to this was the issue of food insecurity, which was mentioned specifically by respondents from Mozambique, India, and Ecuador.

“The pandemic has affected us economically, the country is bankrupt and they have had to take many measures such as reducing wages and reducing working hours. That has affected my family and also my community, because with less income there are fewer possibilities to feed ourselves.... ..The most difficult thing is the lack of internet and the shortage of food...What worries me the most is the economy, to be able to get ahead. And that affects everyone a lot, my community, because the lower the wages the higher the food prices....” Emily, 17, Ecuador

“Most people depend on leaving home to feed themselves, to feed their children. It is difficult to stay at home knowing that you have nothing to put on the table” Celsa, 17, Mozambique

“Majority of people depend on businesses to survive so it is difficult to stay at home...Even without business people need to go out to look for food.” Nisia, 15, Mozambique

Finally, the adverse effects of the pandemic on mental health came out in numerous ways and was the most commonly discussed issue affecting the girls and young women’s daily lives and well-being. The factors that affected them were extensive and ranged from stress, anxiety, sadness and depression to insomnia, anger, fear and loneliness.

“But now, after COVID-19 pandemic, I started experiencing anxiety, or worry and fear, including fear of transmission of COVID-19, or fear of what it takes or what it means to undergo medical treatment for this.” Avani, 18, India

“My anxiety got a little worse, because it is a complicated situation that we are facing right now, but overall, all is well” Mariele, 18, Brazil

“And then with my mental health and stuff, I feel like the first couple of weeks it probably went a little downhill because you have so much time to yourself, and you just have so much time to overthink things over and over again. And that probably wasn't the best for my mental health” Clara, 16, United States

“I could not sleep due to stress and the same happened to the rest of my family, we had insomnia until 4am and woke up several times” Peque, 15, Ecuador

“Definitely just mental health has been really bad mostly because I don't really like face-timing people. I mean, my friends FaceTime me every day, but sometimes I just won't answer it because I'm not in the mood. And before I feel like I used to be such an extrovert or people used to see me as an extrovert. I would go out with a lot of different people and now I've had to just find myself kind of, I'd rather stay home and do nothing. I'd rather just stay home and watch TV and just do my own thing. I've been working on my ... for my school because we don't have one. So I've been working on that, trying to get one at our school. And yeah, I'd rather do that. So I guess like it's been pretty bad on my mental health especially since I've been staying up really late. That kind of gives me time to like, there's a time period where like from 12:00 AM to 3:00 AM, I'm just kind of up listening to really sad music and thinking. So it gets really bad at that point, but during the day I try to keep myself occupied, but it's kind of hard.” Michaela, 17, United States

“If then COVID is over, it brings a lot of fear in our minds and fear sets in our mind that, be away from everyone. Don't just to go near someone. It creates distance in our mind and our relatives.” Anita, 16, India

“It was a week when I had a terrible time. Not having a future perspective, it's uncomfortable. I'm a person who plans everything and now you can't... uncertainty....” Raquel, 19, Spain

While the research participants overwhelmingly spoke of the negative consequences of COVID-19 on their mental health, they also saw some positive outcomes of the pandemic.

They mentioned how they had experienced self-growth and development through learning things about themselves and increasing their self-confidence; breaking bad habits; and being grateful for what they have. In addition, some had adopted new hobbies or taken up opportunities such as internships, running support groups or volunteering. They also referred to having more free time for exercise and being able to be closer with their friends/family. This latter point was also interrogated in more depth during the course of the study and more specific findings are detailed in section seven.

"I thought about that a lot and I feel like it really did give positive change. I know my friends and everyone's so much more educated on things like this. And I feel like we'd be more prepared in the future. Just thinking about the positive parts of the virus. It's offered me so many more opportunities to learn and grow like with virtual internships, things like that. I don't know. After the virus everyone's like, "Oh, it's cancelled," but then new things came up. I got to do so many coding things. And honestly the pandemic made me realize how much I liked the tech industry. Originally, this is so random, I really want to pursue like entrepreneurship, things like that, but then after the pandemic, I started researching coding things and technology, and now I met this whole community of girls on this thing called Slack...and now I'm part of 18 slacks with a bunch of girls and I met so many people online. If the virus were to occur, I wouldn't have gotten any of this. I don't know where I would be right now. I'd probably be really stressed and exam scores would come out. I don't know where I'd be honestly. But I'm glad. Not to say that the virus was a good thing, but it's just opened me up to a new reality." Sara, 15, United States

"I think the most positive change that the pandemic brings to us is that, we have more time for reflection of ourselves, our life, can see that health a important thing. And we don't just run too fast, and we have to look back about our personal life what is the most important thing." Nguyet, 23, Vietnam

"I spent more time for my startup and I also can fulfil my life with the short-term activities such as like joining Plan and doing mentors for several program." Trinh, 22, Vietnam

"I think one of the few things that I feel it has improved a lot is that I am having a learning time about myself and that is just wonderful...This period helped me a lot to discover things about myself that I didn't know, there were things about me that I just didn't know; in this pandemic period, I decided to adopt my natural hair...I completed my transition this year and it made me very happy, it has increased my self-esteem. Suddenly, everything just stopped and I thought that suddenly I wasn't being me and I was like: ok, it's about time." Mariele, 18, Brazil

"So it was really different, but also I began to start working on myself more like my health and my ... exercising, focus on my food, things like that.... ..So we now have a routine and so I have my exercise in the morning and then we'll have ... I'll wake up a little late, like 9:00 or 9:30 and, yeah, I'll get my exercise done. I have books I'm reading right now and I'm also taking a course online, a psychology course, and then I'm also doing an internship. It's an online internship with a graphic design company, which I've been doing for a while. And yeah, I have tennis lessons, but the sport itself is pretty socially distanced." Zara, 17, United States

"I don't know, it gave me like an opportunity to really plan out my days and to set new goals, develop new habits and all that" Mia, 18, Australia

"Now I have a lot of time to think about myself, I was always so busy, didn't have time to think. Now I do more of what I like to do: Instagram and makeup. There are days when I'm sad, doing nothing, because I'm always doing something. I looked for things to do and change, then I started doing makeup." Bruna, 18, Brazil

"I have learned a lot. With regard to me, to listen to me more and to take care of me, to love me. I used to feel bad and I kept it to myself, as if nobody would care. And with regard to the world... I think we've learned not to take anything for granted, we've all learned that. For my birthday I was going to bowl and that now, look, it looks like a 'luxury'" Raquel, 19, Spain

2. AWARENESS ON THE VIRUS/PANDEMIC

In the first round of interviews the girls and young women were almost all aware of COVID-19 and the fact that it was a global pandemic. Only one research participant said she was not aware of the virus, but still provided a basic overview which meant that she did actually have some understanding of what was happening. Most of the research participants were aware of how it had taken hold in their countries and local contexts, though some did discuss how it affected other countries and how widespread it was both geographically and the sheer scale of infection.

"Yes ma'am. COVID-19 is a disease which started by Coronavirus...And it was firstly started in China on December....To every country and it is now with the country we are and maybe ...and many people are suffering from this Coronavirus." Pinky, 16, India

"I know that COVID-19 began in China where the first cases were reported and that in March the cases began to increase in Ecuador, not only affecting health but also the economy. I live with my grandparents, my mother is a teacher and she was afraid that they would fire her, she also heard comments from relatives who live in Spain saying that the number of deaths was increasing." Peque, 15, Ecuador

"When we compare the situation to other countries I think that we're handling it well as well. And I think that I somewhat feel safe because the government is handling it in a good way. So yeah, I'm pretty aware of it. I look up the numbers in the news every day and see where the active cases are and whatnot and I encourage my family to wear masks and to maintain that hygiene, and my friends as well." Mia, 18, Australia

In the quantitative survey 32 per cent of girls said they knew a lot about the pandemic, 41 per cent and 25 per cent said they knew something or a little.¹⁰

The girls and young women predominantly spoke of COVID-19 in terms of its impact, such as social impacts, rather than the nature of the virus or the status of the pandemic more generally. There was understandably limited discussion on a more scientific level concerning the virus, but a handful of participants- including girls from Vietnam, Ghana and Zambia - gave some detailed descriptions of the virus' origins as well as a range of symptoms of the disease.

¹⁰ Halting Lives, Part One: the impact of COVID-19 on girls. Plan International September 2020

"Yeah, of course. I know. COVID-19, pandemic broke out in China last years and spread within China to the rest of the world. And COVID-19 can call the Coronavirus, can cause the respiratory infection and ranging from the common cold to marked CVTCT. And sometimes it may lead to deaths, and this disease can spread from person to person, through the droplets or ... when inserted droplets on objects and some other person touch them, and then touch their eye, nose. Yeah. And in my country when we are updating the news about COVID-19, most of the people in my country have been very positive to protect themselves from COVID by using face masks, when going out and washing hands regularly." Mi, 22, Vietnam

"I've heard that it's a disease, now they said its even... What is the name? It's airborne. First they said it's not airborne, now I've heard it's airborne. That it's a new disease, that has come in 2019. Started from in China, now in Ghana. And the spread of it, now nobody even know how you get it, they say some people when they get it they don't show signs and symptoms. And when you get it and you have any other conditions that decrease your immune function you may die... but they can even give you some treatment. People are recovering alright. So really that's a summary of what I know... .. Okay, people are afraid now, you can't sneeze or cough anywhere. When you sneeze or cough, people will run away from you. When you're blowing your nose when you have ... people start to separate themselves from you..." Nasi, 23, Ghana

"Okay. The virus are small, small organisms. And when they enter into your system, it may damage the body. And then they said some places that the virus can pass through our eye, our ear and our mouth. Even sometimes, it may pass through our hands even. And so, we are engaged or we are educated to wash our hands severally so that it prevents them from entering our body." Dede, 17, Ghana

"I know that it can spread from one person to other...That it affects the respiratory organ of a human...It can kill you." Kalice, 17, Ghana

"Yes, I know. COVID 19 is an airborne disease which can be prevented by cleanness such as washing of hands" Audre, 16, Zambia

"Yes, of course, I know about the pandemic; in fact, when it started I had friends who were on exchange in China and when it arrived in Spain they came back, and they warned us about what could happen. In my environment I have not experienced it very closely, although my aunt and uncle have been hospitalised but nothing serious" Luna, 22, Spain

The girls and young women provided comprehensive insights into the effect of the virus on a vast range of aspects of daily life. They spoke of the effect of the pandemic on both their education and schooling more generally; of missing opportunities; jobs and economic insecurity; lockdowns and their related measures including a lack of clear government guidance and the general public not adhering to restrictions; increases in gender-based violence and child abuse; health or access to healthcare; and food insecurity and panic buying. Many of the effects that they spoke of were interrogated in more detail during the course of the interviews and these findings are presented throughout this report.

Some of the participants provided information on where they had sourced their knowledge on the virus, thereby providing some insights into how girls and young women from these countries get information on current affairs. Generally, they mentioned that they got information from 'the news' (most frequent) and social media, whilst some specifically stated that they got the information via webinars, the radio and television. In the third round of the study the girls and young women were specifically asked about their access to information and these findings are available in section ten of the report.

"Yes. I would say I'm aware to the extent of understanding the situation, more so on the level of how it's impacting communities and things like school, businesses, and then a slight understanding of the nature of the virus itself. And recently I learned after listening to a webinar, they talked a lot about a lot of people are mentioning waiting for a vaccine, but we should be focusing more on countermeasures, like wearing masks, staying at home. So just like the understanding of places where like here in America, where we've missed opportunities to really flatten in our curve and reduce the amount of cases that we have. So I would say I have that understanding concerning the pandemic." Mary, 17, United States

"While going through newspaper, news channels, I found that COVID cases are rapidly increasing in our country." Avani, 18, India

"I follow the news from my state and my city. The cases here are decreasing and next month we will be back to our activities" Mariele, 18, Brazil

"I watch the news. Almost no one is respecting it and here at the ... show that there are a lot of cases where we live, but, yes, we're facing a very serious situation." Bruna, 18, Brazil

"...it made me feel even worse to watch the news, because for us it is like hearing about 1000 new deaths on the news in the country, it is like a very strong blow because it does not happen all the time..." Irie, 17, Ecuador

"My school and a bunch of other social media pages all informed me, like Instagram, TikTok even. They would always post things like "Okay, you got to do this". Like take these measures or else you might get it. It's always important." Sara, 15, United States

"...we have a lot news on TV or on social media so people know that's like we have two area that are effected really bad about a COVID-19 pandemic..." Trinh, 22, Vietnam

"Yes, certainly I'm aware of the COVID-19 pandemic.... Social media, they just kept updating news and we have many new cases daily." Ha, 20, Vietnam

"[Researcher] On the radio and on TV, have you been hearing about the Corona? N. Yes." Nana, 16, Ghana

3. MEASURES TO DEAL WITH THE PANDEMIC

In each of the three rounds of interviews, the girls and young women were asked questions relating to what government measures were put in place to deal with the pandemic, how they experienced them and what had changed since the last round of interviews. This was to gauge the change over time and their interrelated perceptions and experiences of these measures.

In the quantitative survey, when asked how government measures had affected their lives, 83 per cent of the girls and young women said that virus containment measurements had caused either a major or a moderate change to their lives.¹¹

In the first round of interviews (July-August 2020) there were three main groupings of measures discussed by the girls and young women, namely:

- closures of institutions and facilities (schools, places of work, shops etc);
- lockdowns, stay at home orders and curfews; and
- hygiene measures (facemasks, sanitizing and social-distancing).

¹¹ Halting Lives, Part One: the impact of COVID-19 on girls. Plan International September 2020

At this point in the study there was nothing to compare the measures to, but the girls and women discussed an array of difficulties that they experienced as a result of them. They specifically called out unclear messaging from governments about how to deal with the pandemic and the confusion it caused, juxtapositioned with a criticism of the general public for failing to adhere to government measures. They also called out the direct effects of some of the measures: a police presence in some territories; difficulties acquiring masks or hand sanitiser because of costs- at a time when there was already diminished livelihoods and financial security; panic-buying; having to resort to alternative learning methods (and the associated challenges discussed in section one above and 4.1 and 4.3 below); boredom and loneliness at having to stay home; and difficulties in breathing with masks.

"Yes. And there is no clarity between guidelines, among guidelines. Like, in each state, there are different guidelines. If I talk about First State. So they are saying you can come in it, you can go in it, there is no need of anything. But in certain states, they are saying we need pass if you want to come in. So you must have your pass. In Third State they are saying you must have your pass, sanitizer, your mask, your COVID-19 report. So there is no clarity between guidelines. In one state there is nothing. But in Third, there are a lot of things that you need to fulfil." Pinky, 16, India

"Also, it makes me angry because the government doesn't do anything and I don't want to go too deep into the government and the politic, but I am not a fan of the president whatsoever. And I just wish that we handled the situation much better. And yeah, America's like... You expect so much from them, but they just don't do anything. And not just the coronavirus, but a lot of other social issues." Sara, 15, United States

"I've been really aware of it ever since it started, but I have also been aware of our extremely poor response, as an entire country, to COVID. And I've also been seeing, in comparison to other countries, how we're doing, and it's honestly really, really embarrassing how poorly we're doing as one of the leaders of the world. We are one of the top, most developed countries, and we're dealing with it so poorly. And less developed countries are overcoming it, and we just don't even treat it like it's that big of a deal." Zara, 17, United States

"So, yeah, I've been working right now, and definitely a thing ... I'm working at a restaurant, so something that's made me more aware is that everybody comes in not necessarily wearing a mask. It's required by law, we wear a mask indoors now, but some people are really angry. There was even a cafe that had a sign in their window, and it says, "This is a mask-free zone. Please take off your mask when you come inside." And definitely just being aware of the pandemic right now, I know some people that have had COVID-19 in my community, and just, yeah." Clara, 16, United States

"One major thing I have observed is that the social distancing is not observed in the market. And through this maybe somebody can get the virus there and then spread it around." Dede, 17, Ghana

"When you wear it, you can't breathe or you start to sweat. And the sanitizers, they say you should wash hands... Washing hands with soap and water that one we are able to manage it but getting yourself sanitizer, because of coronavirus it's now costly. You get small bottle ... it won't last for a week, you have to go and buy again. So because we have not been buying those things.... The materials they use to sew them, some are thick. And then me for instance, I'm a health student and the one we use at the facility the one is always soft and you can breathe with it, but sometimes... And it's difficult to come by those ones. So the material you go and buy is thick, they even use some thickness on it, it's too thick for you, when you wear you can't breathe well. And some... The quality ones are expensive, we can't afford. So you only afford what you can buy." Nasi, 23, Ghana

"I think those lock downs and having to wear a face mask. In my area, my parents don't allow me to go outside due to this coronavirus. But if I go anywhere outside, ... My parents are not allowing me to go anywhere, but if I go to Aunty's house, if it's nearby my house, I saw so many people who don't wear masks. But in the lockdown, I saw so many people who were unemployed but still they used to work by selling vegetables on the road, without face masks, and without any safety precautions. They're just not used to have face masks on their face... Also they're just not used to have sanitizers, et cetera. So there was zero safety precautions in my area." Pooja, 19, India

"Wearing a mask is very uncomfortable, but I understand that it is for the well-being of all." Peque, 15, Ecuador

"I think that the most difficult measure to comply with is the use of the mask and I think that is why many people do not wear masks." Emily, 17, Ecuador

"The only thing that has been difficult for me to adapt is to wear the mask because you sweat a lot, it seems that one is suffocating." Isabel, 15, Nicaragua

"In my country, in the first wave of the pandemic, at the very beginning, masks were completely sold out in the blink of an eye. People hurried to super markets and small trading places to buy food and groceries and face mask. They prepared for lockdown and physical distancing mandate of the government." Ha, 20, Vietnam

"But another thing was, whenever you did get a chance to go to the store, the amount of items were very limited because everyone's trying to get as much as they can. So, and I live in a large household, so we always buy a lot every time we go to the store and just not being able to do that, that was probably the hardest part." Mary, 17, United States

"I think that the most difficult thing for me has been that, the pressure, to go out on the street and maybe, I don't know, to buy something, and have the police there and feel a little pressure to be there, you know. I think the police pressure is what has not been able to overwhelm me more. The lockdown, yes, but above all, going out, and then the uncertainty that we don't know very well what I was able to do, and then that it couldn't be done, and... But I think that the police presence on the streets when you weren't doing anything, but riding your bike or whatever, was a little bit of a thing, and I think that's what affected me the most" Vera, 18, Spain

Finally, they called out the more indirect effects of the measures: stigma associated with having COVID-19; spending more time online; and dislike of alternative learning methods. One girl from Mozambique specially mentioned how being a girl in such precarious times could lead to even more challenges and injustice.

In the second round of data collection (October 2020) the three main groups of COVID-19 government measures were re-iterated by the girls and young women: closures, lockdowns and hygiene measures. But the changes that had ensued since the first interviews were clear - some measures had been eased and others tightened - and the majority of girls and young women were quite strident in their criticism of the measures, as well as governments and members of the public.

A good number of the research participants spoke to what measures had been relaxed: with the main relaxation of measures being the lifting of lockdowns or curfews easing, and reopening of institutions and facilities such as shops and restaurants, and some schools and places of worship. However, although there was this easing, these changes still drew criticism from a small number of the girls and young women with only two girls expressing some level of satisfaction with the changes. The others spoke of experiencing feelings of

"[Researcher] Yeah. It's been a long time here. I think you're right, I don't know about you, did you feel like at the beginning, maybe the first lockdown, there was more of sense of we're all in this together, whereas now, because we're in a much harsher place than the rest of Australia for a much longer time, it sounds like what you're saying is that it has shifted a bit, that kind of sense of everyone being in it together. M: Oh yeah, I just think here is like, we're the unlucky ones that got the worst out of it. I definitely think that feeling... No, we aren't really all in this together, because there's six million of us who can't even get out of their five kilometers. Others elsewhere are going clubbing. It's unfair." Mia, 18, Australia

"I am not taking it badly, it seems to me ... I mean, I am taking it as well as possible, it seems to me that it is logical that measures must be taken if we have more cases, so in a personal sense it is not affecting me much. My neighborhood has not been confined at any time, that is, I understand that ... Yes I am staying less with my friends, that is true ... we are trying to stay as not so frequently or have spaces ... and not stay that long. But ... well, and in open spaces, with a mask, etc, etc. In that sense, it does affect me more, and then on the other hand it does affect me the fact that I see that what they are doing in Madrid in particular is not fair, that does piss me off a lot" Raquel, 19, Spain

"Some things have opened here, and are back to normal hours, such as bars, restaurants and shops, and people are not worried anymore, I have asked them if they have found the cure to Covid-19. People walk around with no masks, and think that because things are opened, we can already go out normally. I feel insecure to leave my house because people are not taking care of themselves" Mariele, 18, Brazil

"I find the curfew a little more complicated to respect. For the confinement, I relied on the rules and I had no problem respecting it. But given that after the confinement we had another wave of freedom, the fact that now with the curfew, from 9pm we can't do much, it's annoying, because it's true that now I'm also on holiday, where we want to enjoy, see friends, have parties, and it's not possible because of the curfew. So it's true that it prevents us a little bit from breathing, from taking the pressure off when we go out. And even, the constraints of being 6 people per house...it's negative for our mental health because we can't take advantage of this breath of fresh air which define the holidays, to stop stressing and see our friends. So it's true that the curfew is harder to accept than the total confinement, which can be weird. For example, I do sports and in my club we had to move the training schedules because the schedules didn't coincide with the curfew, we had to change everything, to find another rhythm of life, find other tricks to keep human contact and in the long run it becomes cumbersome." Eve, 15, France

"Here, the security measures of wearing a mask, using hand sanitizer and social distancing still apply, but people are not respecting the measures, especially having social gatherings in this time of politics. The measures have not changed, but people are continuing to follow their own measures." Barbara, 16, Brazil

unfairness about different areas within a country having different rules; feeling uncomfortable about the relaxations of government measures in relation to safety; and confusion and annoyance with new rules compared to the old ones.

On the other side of the spectrum, measures had been tightened in some countries leading to more restrictive curfews and lockdowns, universities or schools closing when they hadn't previously been, borders closing, businesses and other places operating at reduced capacity, and masks becoming mandated.

The majority of girls and young women still spoke about experiencing difficulties with the measures, and it is clear from the findings that their experiences were becoming more nuanced and pronounced as time went by. They spoke of the mental health toll of attending online classes; continuing to fall behind in their education due to online learning; having to wear masks all day when at school and how they are suffocating, difficulties wearing facemasks with spectacles or headscarves, and also as a barrier to social interactions; fear of passing the virus on to others; loss of freedom and physical contact with others; and social isolation. There is a sense through some responses that they perceive the public to have had enough of measures and that they are acting like normal. Their main criticism for lack of adherence to measures seems to have been in relation to people not wearing facemasks or social distancing.

"So, no. I am not learning anything online. Firstly, because I have anxiety and so I have trouble focusing. Even in in-class classes I have to ask teachers not to put too much information in their slides, because for instance, if there is something green in the slide, I will only focus on the green and not on what the teacher is saying. In the online classes its even worst because I attend class through my phone or a computer where there are lots of distractions: WhatsApp, Instagram, games. So, I have even told my teachers that I am not learning anything online." Mariele, 18, Brazil

"No because my school has too many students so we do not have online classes. They only send us links of courses for the students to complete. I cannot focus e sometimes I do not understand what is being said in the courses. I am a very communicative person, and for me, to have contact with other people is very important. At home it feels very "beige". I cannot handle it, there are too many emotions for me to deal on my own" Márcia, 15, Brazil

"Right now, I feel like ... At first I said like, "Online school is really easy." I still think it's really easy, but it has definitely ... It has a really huge toll on my mental health. Especially this year with college stuff. It's really, really bad. Because I feel like I'm not learning anything, but I don't really necessarily think it's the teachers' fault. It's just because they don't really know how to teach online, and like ... Oh, one big thing is like there's ... It's a lot more screen time. So last year we would get out at like 11:00, and now we get out at 2:30 everyday, maybe a little bit longer. It's like I'm ... I feel like I'm so used to staying inside, and my parents have realized that. So they try to get me out of the house in like a little walk or anything. But like I'm just so used to being inside that I kind of like staying in here, which I feel like is really bad. Because I used to be really, I would say, extroverted, but now I've turned very introverted." Michaela, 17, United States

"Distancing is fine, because we respect it, but it's nice because everyone has a bigger office. In the school canteen, it's true that it's weird with distancing, but you get used to it. And we have to wear the mask from 9 am to 7 pm, but after 3-4 hours, it becomes unpleasant and it's unbearable at the end of the day, everyone touches his mask moreover." Charlotte, 18, France

"It's complicated to wear the mask at school because it makes the days longer and heavier. You have to express yourself with it, when it was hot it was difficult to manage. Now when it's cold it's a bit better. But from a general point of view, it's not easy, especially for the teachers." Marie, aged 17, France

"And then also, I wear a headscarf and so whenever I have my under cap on, which is tight, it's so hard to take off and on my mask and it messes up my headscarf and it's really, really annoying. So, yeah" Zara, 17, United States

"There are many people who still complain about using the mask, that heat, they can't breathe, that itches. Also the people who wear lenses complain but it is more the use of the mask" Milena, 18, Nicaragua

"No, it's okay, sometimes it's the mask thing, I feel like it suffocates me but I'm already adjusting, the alcohol sometimes I have to put on." Soledad, 18, Nicaragua

"I think it's selfish to say that we're not going to wear the mask. I am not in a selfish logic so I wear the mask to protect others. But it's true that if you're in a slightly selfish perspective, it's annoying in the long run because you always have it on your face. During school time, from 7 :20 a.m. I have it on my face and I take it off at 6 p.m. so I wear it all day long, it creates a crack with the real world. That is to say that we no longer have the possibility to see people as they really are, we just see their eyes, I find that this encourages individualism, which means that we no longer really see people as they really are, and that doesn't necessarily make people want to meet other person, it puts an additional barrier. It's quite annoying from a health point of view because you have to change it every 4 hours, you have to have it all the time and have a supply of masks, and from a social interaction point of view, it spoils people's discovery and prevents dialogue, it's really annoying...With my friends, we find that it's a difficult, strict and severe measure even if you respect all the measures. The more it goes on, the less freedom we have. We must not forget to live" Eve, 15, France

"I think it is mostly the fact of having to stay home and in social isolation, not being able to go to certain places and not going to school. It is still difficult" Barbara, 16, Brazil

"At the start of stage four, I was like, "Okay, this isn't so bad. The cases will go down. In four to six weeks, we'll be out, and things will be fine. I can see my friends and go back to uni." But that's not the case, and I think in the last two to three weeks, everyone has been fed up with the restrictions, and everyone wants them to ease at this point. Even the people who supported the restrictions, like me, I was actually kind of happy that we did stage four, because then this would really work properly, and we would be able to get out of it quickly, but that's clearly not really the case right now. It's a longer process than I thought, so yeah, it's definitely... It makes me feel drained and that there's not much to do...In the last two weeks, I kept thinking, this is my first year of uni, I'm supposed to be making new friends and going to all the first year parties and all of that. I haven't had a chance to do that, and I don't think we'll ever go back to being properly normal. I don't know how it's going to be, but whenever I have these moments where it's like, I'm missing out. The fear of missing out was really prominent during restrictions, I think, because I have some friends in Canberra, and it's all normal for them. They can go to uni, they can see friends. It's definitely a bit of... Not that I wasted a whole year, but it's just been really, really draining and annoying that this kept going on for months. So I definitely felt like it had an impact on how I use my time, as well, and how much I need social interaction. Because at the start, I was like, "This is cool. I don't mind staying home now. I can actually get work done. I can read all the books that I bought." But, yeah, I kind of want to see friends now." Mia, 18, Australia

There also seems to be a link being made between instances where measures have relaxed (for example lockdowns or curfews being removed) and this causing an increase in the lack of adherence to measures. This can be seen from the following quote:

"I think that some aspects have changed, before people were a little more cautious. And now they have lifted the curfew and there are fewer restrictions, then people no longer respect social distancing so much, now people go out even when they have no need to go out and people are no longer abiding by restrictions so much." Emily, 17, Ecuador

Interestingly a good number— though still a minority— of girls and young women said that they had none, or less difficulty with the government measures to control the pandemic. The reasons they provided included them getting used to face-masks and other measures; adapting to the 'new normal' and understanding that the measures are for their own good.

"[Researcher]During the last time we spoke, you mentioned certain things that it was quite difficult for you to do and for your household people to do. You mentioned wearing of the face mask, that it was quite difficult, you don't feel comfortable but you are compelled to wear them and stuff like that. Do you still feel the same or is there any other parts of the measures that is difficult for you and your family people? D. No please. We have put that into practice so it has become part of us" Dede, 17, Ghana

"Yes, in the past people were a little afraid of the pandemic, now they are used to the new normal, it doesn't scare them much... People were afraid to leave home, to travel now they are more used to it...Preventive measures that are still in effect are: Frequent hand washing, use of masks and distance between people...No, it is no longer difficult to comply, it is part of me...Communities are also already adapted to preventive measures, these measures are already part of people's daily lives." Celsa, 17, Mozambique

"Prevention measures are no longer difficult to comply with, there are several partners who are distributing masks in the hidden areas, thus making it easier for people to take preventive measures." Xiluva, 17, Mozambique

"Well, in terms of the containment measures, I wouldn't say I'm finding them as challenging anymore just because I've gotten a bit used to it now with the staying at home and not being able to go out and visit places. I think just the awareness that I have right now because I'm a senior in school. And so I really wanted to, for example, just visit friends before going off to college, but just that sense of, Oh, I might not really get the chance to do that is on my mind. But again, it's a reality I have to come to terms with. It's not something I'm crying about every single day, but it's still a bit disappointing. But I wouldn't say anything has gotten particularly more difficult to follow just because of how long it's been." Mary, 17, United States

"When the measures were first put in place, they were challenging but now we are used to them. It was difficult to wear face masks and observe social distance but we now able to observe these measures." landisa, 17, Zambia

"No difficulties because I am now used to the New Normal" Yolana, 17, Zambia

"To me personally the measures that the authorities have taken and that we have been told to comply. I have been very upset, especially because I have had to get used to it, but I know that it is for my own welfare and for the welfare of all. Also, it has been possible for us, as a family, to support each other and our neighbors. It is necessary to take into account that this illness, which is not a joke at all, in fact has been an experience to learn that we have to take many things seriously and not as a joke" Chinita, 18, Ecuador

"Especially the mask, because for example in class I spend maybe ten hours with the mask on... it's as if I wasn't wearing it at all. And the rest of the measures, there hasn't been much change since a few months ago. Well, I just try to respect the distances, I'm doing well with my hands, although sometimes they get a bit irritated and so on, from washing them so much, but well, I think I'm doing better because I've got used to it and I've put it more into practice." Luna, 22, Spain

In the third and final round of data collection there was much more evidence of the measures either having eased or staying the same. The girls and young women recounted how they were adapting to the restriction measures and a 'new normal'. A small number elaborated on how the measures were affecting them personally and noted that they were doing better emotionally than the previous round of data collection. Importantly, a number of girls and young women spoke of how the measures relating to education had either eased to let them return to school or they had become more adjusted to alternative learning. There was some disappointment though around how the holiday season was affected and one girl from Zambia mentioned that while measures had gotten easier, food had gotten more expensive.

"No difficulties because I am now used to the New Normal." Yolán, 17, Zambia

"Well, I don't think much has changed since we spoke. But hey, I did tell you a bit that doing online classes was not turning out to be very easy for me, but the truth is that now I'm super comfortable with them" Vera, 18, Spain

"It is easy now because I am happy to start school." Ekram, 17, Ethiopia

"For now it's easier. [Researcher]It's easier? K. Yeah. [Researcher]Okay. What makes it easier for you now? What makes life a bit easy for you? K: For now, they've resumed schools and I know definitely, I'm going to school." Kalice, 17, Ghana

"... from October to now the truth is that my life has changed quite a bit, I keep doing the same and... anyway ... well, Christmas it did bother me a bit that they changed because we were going to be ten people and suddenly there are six, I don't care that there are six of us, it seems logical, but ... that they say it one week after Christmas ... well, it's not cool, but otherwise nothing has changed..." Raquel, 19, Spain

A relatively small number of girls and young women spoke of how the measures had in fact gotten worse and more restricted. They mentioned the worsening rates of infection that were plaguing many countries as well as experiencing difficulties with the measures around education and impacts on the girls and young women's mental health.

What became clear over the three rounds of data collection is that the girls and young women started off by mostly being critical and frustrated by the measures taken by governments to deal with the pandemic, however over time the criticism and frustration seemed to largely give way to a level of acceptance and increasing ability to adapt to the measures. Another important point that can be observed is how the measures around education were the ones that the girls and young women focused on together with hygiene measures, specifically the use of facemasks. The latter in particular seemed to reach high levels of acceptance by round three of data collection. Despite the acceptance of the government measures gradually increasing, there were still constant references to how the measures adversely effected their mental health.

"It got worse! For a short time the COVID-19 situation at seemed to have stopped a little, schools opened up, but now a lot of people are dying, sometimes I can't go to school because someone took a test and the result was positive." Celsa, 17, Mozambique

"Well, for the past couple of months, it's been definitely, probably worse for me and my family just because we all kind of got hit with COVID recently. So the whole family just kind of got hit and so we haven't really seen anyone for like the past two months, really just to be extra precautions." Michaela, 17, United States

"Yeah, it has been changed because as the lockdown occurs we are just staying in the home. I'm not leaving the place and all the study has been stopped for a while. So we faced a difficulty." Pooja, 19, India

"How has my daily life changed since then? Well I don't have school anymore. And as someone who needs to be pretty occupied to be contented, it was pretty hard. And also, having those constant connections at school, and all of the structure of school, not being able... I think throughout the year, I felt... And I probably said this in an interview, that I didn't feel that connected to school anymore. The fact that I hadn't been there all year meant I didn't really have that much emotional connection there anyway. It was just a matter of getting through. But I think I really realized how much I missed it after exams finished, and I was like, "Oh shit. I'm actually not going back at all." And I don't have these constant communications with people everyday and work to do and things to focus on. So it definitely was hard. I was just kind of seeing it hard and not knowing what to do. Yeah. And I had a bit of a moment. It was really, really hard. It was probably the hardest week I can remember having..... But yeah, it was really hard. And it was kind of like my life just got stripped away and there weren't the structures that I didn't realize that I needed there anymore. And I don't think I actually realized how much I depended on school and seeing people, and talking to people, especially during COVID. I was even more close during COVID. I got really, really close to people. I was talking to them one-on-one everyday, like... at lunch, or after school and that kind of thing. Even closer I think than I might've been at school. But I mean I don't know that because I didn't really fully get that experience...So it was really hard to go from talking to people one-on-one for like 40 minutes everyday, to not talking to them for about a week. Or even more than that. So yeah. I had a bit of anxious spell, probably a bit depressed. More than a bit. Yeah. My parents would probably say more than a bit. But I'm okay now. I'm seeing a psychologist soon." Janet, 18, Australia

"My life has changed a lot, I don't know if for reasons related to COVID, or maybe yes, or indirectly ... in general everyone is quite unsettled with this, but in me there has been quite a big change ... I was. It was better, when we spoke in October.... And around November I got very dramatically worse, I don't know why. ... I think that at the end of October, after the interview ... I got worse ... to the point that I had to take a break from studies until I was well, because I wasn't able to go to class and do anything ... I was very very bad ... there was a lot of trouble with the medication because they changed it a thousand times..." Vera, 18, Spain

PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES THAT MADE CONTAINMENT MEASURES MORE DIFFICULT

In relation to this, research participants in round one were also asked whether they believed that their experience of the government protection measures were made in any way more difficult by personal characteristics such as gender, age, migrant status, if they identify as a member of the LBGTIQA+ community or other intersectional characteristics. The overwhelming majority of girls and young women did not identify as having intersectional characteristics that may have affected the way they experienced the protection measures. Of the research participants who did discuss personal characteristics as impacting the experience of protection measures, many did so by speaking generally or about other people that they know.

Age was the most commonly discussed characteristic to have impacted the experience of government safety measures. Comments were made by a small number of girls in relation to adolescence being a time of development and for socialising with friends, making limitations on freedom such as curfews or lockdown measures more difficult to adjust to. One girl, from Spain, specifically mentioned a lack of consideration of adolescents within the development of government lockdown measures and two girls from Australia believed young people were being unduly blamed or incorrectly perceived as not following government protection measures.

"In the end, I don't think it's us and it is really quite frustrating because I don't know... a lot of the people I see not social distancing are middle aged people... going out and having a full 10 dinner guest party as soon as quarantine is over.... no one was doing that in my circle. We are all very... we are even more conscious I believe, than a lot of middle aged people, especially upper middle class middle aged people, the people I am surrounded by, who still have jobs, stable income... they are just working from home now. Whereas we are thinking about the fact that, you know, our travel plans, our jobs in the future, our ability to study overseas, live by ourselves, have any sort of part time job during uni... of course we are aware of it, like we aren't ignoring everything, we aren't completely ignorant. It is affecting us more than anyone, I think it's very stereotypical and pointed to point the finger at young people as being... wanting... to be wilfully ignorant when that is really not the case." Janet, 18, Australia

"Perfectly, I think what I have said before is the question of age. Adolescents have not been thought of at all in the matter of quarantine, isolation and all that, and that has been noticed, and we have been left out, and that can be noticed. Well, of course, then, an adolescent who is going through a very difficult time, a very complicated time in which the family wants but at the same time does not and in which the only place of comfort is to be with their peers who are going through the same thing as them, who are friends, it has not been thought of, so then, we have even been criminalized - they have gathered to party, but the cafés are also full of older people, which means ...erm...so I think the blame of this mass outings of adolescents is that they have not thought about them in the lockdown, that their only escape or their only pleasure is sometimes spending time with their peers." Marina, 17, Spain

"I think being a young person, especially when you are coming up to the later years of being a teenager, like 17/18. There is sort of an expectation that you have a bit more freedom and that you can hang out with friends, and go places that you like, I used to go to the art gallery all the time... and parks... I think the lockdowns were definitely more difficult, because at the start of the lockdowns I was like this flourishing young person that just wanted to go out and explore the city and do cool things, so that was a bit tough. And then also the targeting on young people, because I felt as if we were being like, outed to the community as being the problem of it and that was a bit more difficult to deal with." Amie, 17, Australia

"Considering my age it is difficult to follow the measures because we like to have fun in public places and social gathering." Dahlia, 18, Zambia

Gender was also mentioned by a handful of girls and young women as a characteristic that impacted the experience of protection measures. Girls and young women were considered more frequently to be adversely affected, the reasons given related to both general observations and personal experiences. General reasons discussed by a small number of girls and young women included: inequitable food distribution; pressure to go look for food; gender-based violence; pressure for those acting as primary caregivers; as well as personal experiences such as increased household chores and responsibilities and difficulties dealing with hormones and menstruation during lockdown. Interestingly, three girls (from Egypt, India and Vietnam) discussed how they felt men and boys were struggling more with the prevention measures. This was predominantly due to not being used to staying at home and having limitations on their freedom and therefore finding it harder to adapt to lockdown measures. One girl also mentioned manual labour jobs being more effected by the pandemic through loss of jobs or reduced hours, which they believed to be a male dominated sector. In addition, economic status was also mentioned by a very small number of girls both generally, and in relation to themselves, who mentioned protection measures being harder on those with low or limited income.

"Because we are in a male-dominated community, boys have more freedom than girls and they are used more than girls to go out so I feel they were impacted more than me by the virus due to the lockdown. For me I am already used to the idea of the curfew at my house because I am a girl and my parents require me to come back by a certain time." Asmaa, 16, Egypt

"As we all know that girls used to live in homes... of our fathers, our brothers. Well, they used to live outside, but... live outside. So they always used to be aggressive and sad, and they would want you to go out. They are facing more problems than girls according to me" Anita, aged 16, India

"Due to gender gap I become more involved in the housework compared to previous time, the workload is huge" Ekram, 17, Ethiopia

"They force the girl to go out to look for food" Xiluva, 17, Mozambique

"Not particularly, not because I'm a girl. But maybe that for those around me, it was more difficult when we simply have our period. I have a bit of a bloody behaviour when that time of the month comes so it was hard for my family, even if afterwards they saw me every day and got used to it. But apart from that I didn't have any negative aspects concerning the fact that I'm a girl." Eve, aged 15, France

Race and ethnicity was also mentioned by a very small number of the girls and young women as impacting the way protection measures were both experienced and enforced. This included comments around increased instances of racism in their community, and a belief that ethnic minority communities were facing stricter enforcement of protection measures, which was mentioned by two girls in Australia and one in France. One girl in Australia, also mentioned encountering what she described as indirect racism from

"...Well, I guess I am in the sense that any mention of migrant communities in the media I take to my heart, I take it personally because I am a migrant. But I'm not part of an active community where there's people that are from the same background as me that shares the similar values. There's not really a big Arab ... Oh, there's a big Arab population but not around my area where we all visit each other and all that...It doesn't really happen around my side of town, but yeah, definitely being a migrant it does affect me a little bit. And now that I work, I think a lot of my work mates and some of my managers, they don't know that I'm a migrant and a lot of the times they are indirectly racist, not towards me, but to customers. So if they see a lady wearing a hijab who can't speak proper English they ... I don't know the way that they treat them, you can tell it's a little bit different than them treating someone who speaks fluent English and looks and sounds like them. Even yesterday, one of my workmates, she's only, I think 16, she's 17 actually, so I always try and teach her new stuff and she's quite naive but I was pretty naive at that age as well. And she told me something about, she painted a whole religion with one brush, basically, painted everyone with one brush...And I was like, "Dude you can't like say that." There's extremists in every single religion and every single community so you can't say all Muslims want to do this and that. And I taught her that that sounds a little bit racist and she was like, "Oh," and then I'm like, "Yeah, you can't say that." And she's like, "Oh." And I was like, "I thought I taught you better."...She was like, "Oh, I'm really sorry." And I was like, "No, it's okay. I know you." She's a little bit narrow-minded but she's willing to learn. So I guess I feel like I do have a duty in that I call out racists comments, generalizing comments at my workplace. So yeah, that's been a big one for me. And I remember I had to explain to my manager why it's bad to say all lives matter. [Researcher] Oh, really? M: She genuinely didn't understand the concept of it. And I didn't get upset or anything, I just got really passionate when I was speaking to her about it that she thought that I took offense. And she was like, "Are you upset because I'm dumb?" And I was like, "No, no, I'm glad that you asked about this because I would explain it to you." And she was like, "Oh yeah, because I really don't know much about it." And I was like, "Honestly, the first step is to admit that you lack knowledge." It's good that she asked about it. [Researcher] That's brilliant, because those conversations are so important to have, aren't they? M: They really are. Yeah. And I'm glad I can have them in the workplace, a place that I feel safe to share my own opinions." Mia, 18, Australia

colleagues whilst at work towards Muslim customers, which she had challenged and discussed with said colleagues.

“My mum is very Latin and dark and she always speaks Spanish... and there has been a lot more micro aggressions. A lot more racism. And I live in a conservative community that is mostly Greek and White, and we live next to a more Asian community. If I ever go the suburb next to me that is predominately Asian, there is definitely more racism. So conducting throughout the community is harder... ..Oh definitely, let’s just say for anyone that isn’t white. They’ll look at you... and look up and down... and then suddenly try and move slowly away. The way they look up and down, and then you see when a white person and there is no worries because obviously contamination only happens when you are ethnic... [sarcasm]. My best friend of 10 years, she is Chinese, she is already being completely racially discriminated against... and now, you get the go back to where you came from, the Chinese virus...100% amplified because of COVID. One of her experiences was her walking down the street with a mask on, and someone shouted out of their car... stop eating bats... which a bit more swearing that I don’t want to say...And I thought my experiences were bad because people were shuffling to get away from me... but then you have people shouting out of cars. It is unacceptable. Especially getting the back to where you came from from white Australians... they don’t understand why that doesn’t make sense... Just hearing about those stories, the Chinese virus... those same aggressions have happened to my friend who is Korean... I have so many awful stories, but it is nice to have a community to laugh about it with.” Max, 16, Australia

“Probably not for me personally. I think we’ve covered most of the ways that it’s impacted me. I think, yeah, there’s a lot else to be angry about, about how a lot of the reasons that it’s affecting people disproportionately can’t just be fixed with a different policy change now, it’s because of decades of ... creation of vulnerability, which is what we saw in that lockdown of 3000 residents in ... which is something that did happen in my community. I possibly should have said that earlier, but the fact that when it was rich people returning from overseas countries we put them in nice hotels, we let heaps of rules slide, and the moment that it is poorer people of colour that are being affected, you bring in the police force and blame. And that’s not just an issue about locking down a tower and bringing police in, it’s an issue that was created, that the systems have created their vulnerability for centuries. And I think that’s not a personal thing, but it’s something that I’m angry about” Jenni, 18, Australia

“Uh, not necessarily more difficult, but I think that, for example, I noticed that my city, my department was much more subject to debate, I had the impression that we were more stigmatized than other departments, depending on our origins, our beliefs or our skin colour. Because I didn’t in fact see the same... how shall I put it, the same restrictions or the same measures applied to us as in other towns because my sister who was pregnant had to, we often had to go to an area to the hospital where she had to make appointments .. and over there at least I saw people, during full lockdown, walking outside, going for a walk, laughing, touching each other, sitting on benches, while we, if we saw the same things happening, well, we would see policemen coming in or we would see the television constantly talking about it, so I think some departments, some cities in particular, must have been much more on the lookout than others. And yet I lived here for many years but, I don’t know, I just saw the difference and I thought it was a pity. [Researcher] The difference in treatment? M: That’s it! [Researcher] Between where you live and other cities which are more prosperous perhaps? M: That’s it, and yet I found that, objectively speaking, people in my town respected these measures much more than in other towns. [Researcher]: Okay, even if at first you said you thought the barrier measures were not necessarily applied right away very well? M: Well, they weren’t applied right away very well, but I think that’s for all of France, it was the case in all the countries, but then, at least from my point of view, from my point of view, some communities were much more stigmatized than others, I realized that there was a difference in treatment depending on how we were seen by the media, by the politicians in place and by the police.” Marie, 17, France

Illness, disability and education status were mentioned by one girl each as characteristics that may impact the way protection measures were experienced. In relation to disability, this was not answered directly by the participant when asked this question but was discussed in a note within the transcript, which discussed difficulty wearing a facemask whilst using hear aids.

LGBTIQA+ identities were only mentioned by one girl from Australia who discussed this in relation to her friend's experience of protection measures. She commented that they had struggled during lockdown after returning from college to their family, who were unaware of their gender identity or sexual orientation. The research participant herself, discussed her own experience being positive due to her family being aware and accepting of her own identity.

"I think a lot of my friends who were queer and had to go home to their parents, they're not out to them, it's not the same environment they found at college where they were suddenly surrounded by the people with the same identity as them, some of them for the first time. And so you'd been thrown initially into that lovely environment where you're surrounded by people with your identity, and then you're forced to go back home to your really really religious parents, and I think a couple of my friends have struggled with that, having to be in lockdown with parents who don't know about this particular part of their identity. And I've got really really accepting parents and they've got two out of three daughters who are gay, so that wouldn't have been a problem for me, but seeing it with other people, you can be really quite aware that that did put friends in a shitty situation" Jenni, 18, Australia

4. EDUCATION

For the girls and young women that participated in the study, this was a critical issue that they mentioned time and time again throughout the course of the research. The first round of the study was designed in such a way that the research respondents were given the opportunity to identify the issues that they felt were the aspects of their lives most impacted by the pandemic and the measures taken to combat it. Education was almost unanimously identified as having been dramatically impacted. Obviously, not all girls were at school, but most were in some form of education or waiting to undertake examinations. Otherwise, even if they were not in education, they made general observations about the effect on schooling. Therefore, education became a key component of the questions posed to girls and young women in rounds two and three in order to assess any changes in time to their experiences around education. Each round sought to get the research participants to also reflect on the changes that had occurred in previous rounds.

Overall, the girls and young women felt that face to face learning was the optimal way to be taught. While they adapted to alternative ways of learning, they continued to find it problematic for various reasons discussed below – which provide some key insights into how alternative learning methods needs to be adapted and improved if ever to be regarded as effective. Even when they returned to school, and nonetheless faced challenges with the return, they still expressed a firm preference for in-school learning, than learning from home.

In round one, as mentioned in section one above, most of the respondents discussed the negative effects of the pandemic on their education, and grouped these effects into 3 main categories: (a) not going to school in person; (b) problems with alternative learning methods, (c) falling behind/ levels attainment. As highlighted previously, some of the key difficulties encountered with alternative learning methods were practical in nature – internet connection difficulties or not having access to a device to use for remote learning.

Others related to the home not being a good environment in which to study, not being able to interact sufficiently with teachers, and not being able to see friends.

"...And us being at home too, a lot of us were not able to study. Before we came back, a lot of us were not able to study at home, because the house chores, the errands, and other stuffs, you wouldn't be able to study." Miriam, 23, Ghana

"One is poor education.....Because when COVID is in, we weren't able to go to school. Since March, I've been in the house all this while. So I think one is education. [Researcher]:So how has that affected your education? D: Because ... and even sometimes when works are being given, I don't even understand the question before answering them. So it has become more difficult of me doing that." Dede, 17, Ghana

"When I used to go to school, I learn and don't stay idle so I wasn't forgetful. Now, all we do is stay at home and do house chores so our mind is affected." Tsedey, 16, Ethiopia

"[Researcher] And how was that before? A: it was very happy because I could attend class, I used to relate to my teammates and not now, I'm not even studying now, God willing until next year, that's why I feel locked up, that's sad." Ana, 16, Nicaragua

"But at the height of COVID-19, I was at my house, I had online Zoom classes, I didn't necessarily have an activity to go to in the afternoon because everything was shut down. I was thankful that my parents own a gym, so I was able to go there and work out, but I know a lot of people don't have that opportunity. So, I was basically just very isolated, I never saw my friends, online school, again, that was pretty hard. So, it changed very dramatically." Clara, 16, United States

"And because I am really invested in school, I took it so emotionally and personally because I invest most of my time in it and I love being at school because it is such a privilege to get an education, and I just felt that was being stripped of me being in that environment with people who support me and people that I love to talk to... I felt quite angry and just a little bit lost? Because added to that, this is the year, the most important year, that you really want to do well. And I was anxious about how this would affect that... a bit emotional for me." Amie, 17, Australia

"For example, I am quite young... education worries me because the number of students per class is going to be reduced and I don't know if there will be equal conditions for people to access a school or a university." Vera, 18, Spain

What is also evident from round one of the data collection is how education features across multiple issues that were interrogated. It also emerged in discussions around livelihoods, but more importantly when asked about what worried them the most. In this instance, they spoke of education (both theirs and others' more generally): the need to sit exams and how the pandemic and measures taken to address it would affect their grades with a knock-on effect on their futures; the challenges they faced with using alternative learning methods; concern about not being able to go back to school and simple everyday stresses; for instance forgetting facemasks so not being granted access to school.

“The other difficult thing is that we are not learning. Now, the summer is almost over and it was almost time that we were promoted to grade 10 but because of this, we are stuck at grade 9.” Tsedey, 16, Ethiopia

“This hindered me a lot, I had many work plans and courses and everything just fell apart.” Bruna, 18, Brazil

“Definitely education. Being forced to repeat a year or having my scores go down... I have had a general idea of where I want to go and what I want to do, and having that all being shaken from underneath me is really hard and stressful and worrying because you just don’t know. It is all this uncertainty that is really hard to grasp... because maybe 6 months ago it seemed like everything would stay on path.” Max, 16, Australia

“What worries me most is having changed my plans to finish college at age of 20, this change worries me.” Celsa, 17, Mozambique

“I really like to study, but now I don’t go to school anymore, now the only way I have to study is through the worksheets. Covid-19 is harmful to my studies. Now don’t learn anything that we could have learned, we have not learned because of the state of emergence due to COVID-19.” Chana, 15, Mozambique

“Maybe if you look at me, am in an examination class, there may be a chance that I leave my face mask at home and we are not allowed to enter the classroom without the face masks. So, it may be a challenge to education.” Bupe, 17, Zambia

“What worries me the most is whether I will be able to complete my education since schools are closed.” Iandisa, 17, Zambia

“Next year I’m worried about the possibility of attending lessons in person, I’m going to the last year of high school and it’s not easy to attend virtual classes” Rosa, 17, Spain

Based on the responses to the questions in round one, rounds two and three specifically addressed questions on alternative learning methods and learning from home, as well as returning to school.

4.1. LEARNING FROM HOME

In the second round of data collection, the girls and young women were asked a series of questions about whether they were learning from home, and if so, their perceptions of any alternative learning methods and how they felt they were progressing in their studies. In addition, if they had been using alternative learning methods in round one, they were asked to reflect on whether there had been improvements as well as the nature of teaching and support that they received whilst learning remotely.

In the second round of data collection, two of the girls and young women who were not able to go to school were also not receiving alternative learning methods to help them continue their studies. They were both from Ethiopia. In round three, only one study participant – from Brazil – who could not go to school was also not receiving alternative learning methods.

A small number of girls and young women spoke of their home environment being good for learning. Examining their responses, it is evident that there are certain factors which contribute to this. Most of them referenced having a separate area in the home where they could study and concentrate. Additionally, having supportive families seemed key to being able to study at home. This was enhanced by other factors such as having enough time to study at home (as opposed to having to do household chores), and good internet access.

“Before I did not have a desk and I used to study in the dining room, then they were noisy and I could not concentrate. I asked my dad for a desk and he already put it in my room and so now I have a more private place to study.” Emily, 17, Ecuador

“Yes, I can study from home, I have a good place to study.” Xiluva, 17, Mozambique

“To get started, have your own space, and I see it very important that it has light, because now not so much, but for example last semester when I couldn't go out, it was very nice at least to be able to see the street. And then personally what I like is to differentiate my workplace and my resting place; I don't care which one is which but I need the study to be as uncluttered as possible, that there are few things on the countertop and so on, but I do like to separate the spaces because ... my head kind of fits me better, I mean, I'm not mixing ... at the end there comes a point, now not so much, but before there was a point where there were no schedules in my life, it was not like at two I finish and then I do something else, no, it was like ... everything was at any time, and I think space does that a lot” Raquel, 19, Spain

“I don't take any private lessons and studying at home is something I am used to and I have a quiet place to focus there” Asmaa, 16, Egypt

“Yes, my mommy supports me a lot just like my daddy. When I go to do homework, they try to be silent so that they do not deconcentrate me and I can progress, or at least understand the few things they are teaching to us.” Gaby, 17, Ecuador

“My family always supports me to study in this time” Shanti, 18, India

“I have help from my mother and brother. My mom does everything to give me 3 hours of time to help me with some subjects. When I can't do anything related to studies, she helps me.” Luana, 16, Mozambique

“My dad helps me whenever I find something difficult for me to understand because I don't have private tutors.” Asmaa, 16, Egypt

[Researcher] Do your family support you to study at home or allow the time to study? J: Ah yes, ma'am. [Researcher] Okay. Your family is supporting you for online classes? J: Yes, ma'am. Oh yes, my family supports me.” Jia, 19, India

“I manage to reconcile studies with domestic tasks. My parents know that I need to study and I, as a daughter, also understand that there are certain tasks that I have to participate at home.” Nisia, 15, Mozambique

Interestingly one girl mentioned how being more confident to speak up on screen rather than face to face contributed to home being a good studying environment:

“But apart from that, I even feel more comfortable to talk to my teachers online. I have difficulty in talking to people being in front of them. I feel more comfortable with people not seeing my face. Even though I have already created that bond with the teachers and the students and I am able to talk to them, but I still feel embarrassed in class to raise my hand and ask a question, for instance.” Mariele, 18, Brazil

Unfortunately, this positive take on learning from home and alternative learning methods was overshadowed by the large-scale discontent that most of the girls and young women spoke of in relation to learning from home and alternative learning methods. The most

common reason for this mentioned by the study participants was the fact that they felt they were falling behind with their studies. Only two study participants who were studying from home felt that they were not falling behind with their studies.

HALTING LIVES: THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN- WAYS GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN WERE ABLE TO CONTINUE THEIR EDUCATION AT HOME, N=12,387¹²

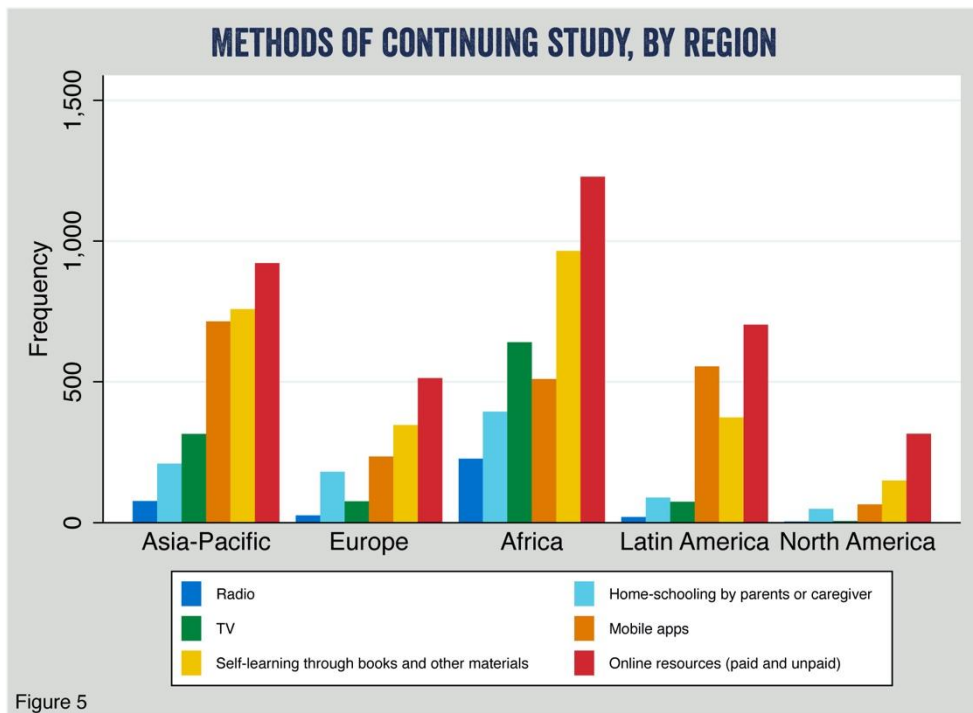


Figure 5

¹² Halting Lives, Part One: the impact of COVID-19 on girls. Plan International September 2020

“...It's really, really bad. Because I feel like I'm not learning anything, but I don't really necessarily think it's the teachers' fault. It's just because they don't really know how to teach online, and like ... Oh, one big thing is like there's ... It's a lot more screen time”

Michaela, 17, United States

“Well, if I'm being honest, it's a really big, hard, no. It's a lot harder to just keep track of everything, especially if the system isn't working and then all of a sudden you notice something that wasn't there before like an assignment...” Mary, 17, United States

“The opinion I have is that I felt that I didn't learn anything, that all I solved was with the internet...” Ana, 16, Nicaragua

“No, I can't study from home...” Chana, 15, Mozambique

“I'm learning but it's not the same as being in school, I think I'm falling behind, because the subjects that we would have this year will not be the same when starting classes again, I doubt that we will start where we left off...I believe that teachers will teach the most important subject and some topics will be left behind.” Xiluva, 17, Mozambique

“[Researcher]‘You are still attending classes from home. Do you think you are able to learn properly from home? A: No, ... not at all.”

Anita, 16, India

“I still only have online classes. I am not learning anything, and I have given up, because there are not the right conditions for learning.” Barbara, 16, Brazil

“I am not learning anything online.” Mariele, 18, Brazil

“I'm definitely very nervous and anxious about how being at home has impacted my ability to meet the requirements of exams...”

Amie, 17, Australia

“I don't think I am learning properly from home. As the classes are not adequate to replace the formal class.... I feel like I am falling behind even if I am allowed the time to study at home.” Zeineb, 17, Ethiopia

“Teachers don't know how to do it either, they are very lost” Marina, 16, Spain

There were a range of additional factors mentioned by the girls and young women that demonstrate the difficulties that they encountered with studying from home and alternative learning methods. First, having to endure multiple distractions while studying at home. These distractions can be grouped into factors beyond their control, and factors which they could control but didn't. For instance, the former consists of problems with - dogs barking or other noises in the background; loud neighbours and siblings also having to study in the same space. Whilst the latter is unfortunately linked to the distractions that present themselves when using a device that connects to the internet, so the girls and young women spoke of the distractions of online apps and social media. Finally, the point was made that when using large scale online conferencing methods for studying, the option to switch off the camera and microphone is there and this leads to getting distracted and not focussing on the lesson at hand. The study participants also spoke of having limited time to study, simply by being at home due to household chores or other responsibilities such as caring for siblings; or having no suitable place to study.

"The thing that didn't get better was doing assessments at home, that was really, really hard for me. And that's actually the thing I wrote down on the piece of paper that I got from the authority. Yeah, I just said, "Look, you haven't listed it, but I have-"... "A really tough time doing assessments at home. [Researcher] Yeah, how did that actually work online? J: We had our cameras down, our cameras on the piece of paper. They'd release the questions or whatever, and our teacher would be on the call watching us. [Researcher]: Oh wow. J: And it's, my dog would be barking, and noises going on. And for me, the environment is really important. Especially in one subject, I definitely feel like my scores and my ability to succeed was heavily affected by the fact that I wasn't at school. And it really frustrated me, because I knew that if I'd ... There was one particular assessment where I knew that if I'd been at school I would've done well. But after stepping out of it at home, I knew it hadn't gone well, and I do know that now. And the disparity between the tests I did at home and the tests I did at school was big." Janet, 18, Australia

"It is true that everyone stays quiet for me to assist to my classes. But my sister has class during the same time that I do and we are at the same place. So, I hear her class and she hears mine and we get our topics mixed." Mariele, 18, Brazil

"It is hard to find a quiet space here. The neighbours are very loud, which makes it hard to focus. At home it is not 100% suitable for studying." Rita, 18, Brazil

"My home is too busy and noisy. I am not able to follow the classes." Barbara, 16, Brazil

"Apart from the noise outside, sometimes they play loud music and that makes it difficult for me to understand." Irie, 17, Ecuador

"No, ma'am. It is so much difficult because the children of my street too comes to play and they shout outside" Pinky, 16, India

"But in my family, we have only one ... and we are two sisters, and our online classes begin the same time. So one of us still can take the class, ... leave the class. So it's like tournament. If we have any queries, many people in online class, so we can't able to ask." Anita, 16, India

"My parents have given me time to study, but it is not easy, I have siblings and they hardly understand that I have to study, sometimes they get in the way." Celsa, 17, Mozambique

"Because at home we have the comfort of going out at any time, going to eat, going to the bathroom, leaving class, since we only have to be present for the roll call; and even if we try to stay present, it sometimes is out of our hands and we cannot stay present in class." Rita, 18, Brazil

"I cannot focus in Zoom class at all. I probably can't really focus... Oh, the sun. I can't really focus that much in a regular classroom so the Zoom classroom where you can have your camera off, you can have your sound off. I've been kind of challenging myself to keep my camera on so that I won't get distracted, but even then I can be on my computer behind the Zoom screen, doing something." Clara, 16, United States

"Well, sometimes it is also a bit difficult to study from home and it is not only due to the internet, but you need a space where you can concentrate and do homework, even to receive classes." Chinita, 18, Ecuador

"Yes, it's positive about the library, you can go and work there and it's good because it's not always easy to work when you're at home with your bed next to it and the TV next to it, it really makes you want to sleep. I'm really happy that the library is open for work, unlike the second semester when it was closed because of the confinement." Seny, 19, France

Then there was the issue of technology and internet access – raised multiple times before- which they either experienced themselves, or which they knew some of their classmates were struggling with, as well as system errors in digitally loading or accessing assignments. Fourth, linked to the issue of having to use the internet and devices for many alternative learning methods is the interrelated challenge posed by the pandemic, and mentioned in section one above and discussed in more detail in section nine below, namely lack of financial means. Some of the study participants mentioned the lack of sufficient devices in a family, for example two devices that needed to be shared between four siblings. Additional comments included them not having money to print slides or for phone data to participate in online lessons.

“Yes, ma’am, but not completely. If matter comes to me, I’m having a good internet connection, but few are not having that connection so they can’t get completely what they want to teach us.” Shanti, 18, India

“It is difficult to study from home, we do not understand everything taking into account that certain subjects are new subjects. So being at home becomes difficult, especially for people who do not have access to the internet, they end up giving up. With this pandemic, I don’t do all the subjects, we only do the subjects that have exams. For example: I only take math classes once a week. The teacher only comes in for an hour and explains. But all exercises are sent to the WhatsApp group and for those who do not have WhatsApp makes learning difficult.” Nisia, 15, Mozambique

“Well, if I’m being honest, it’s a really big, hard, no. It’s a lot harder to just keep track of everything, especially if the system isn’t working and then all of a sudden you notice something that wasn’t there before like an assignment that just didn’t load up when you first checked your work to do or just not being able to write out an assignment, but having to type it out.” Mary, 17, United States

Finally, not having any support that could help explain concepts or lessons adversely affected the respondents’ perceptions of alternative learning methods. Likewise, shorter lessons, and a less structured learning environment, including not having an opportunity to ask questions were some of the factors that mitigated against learning from home.

“Yes. I was talking about the time I was in school, when I couldn’t print out my handout, we were given soft copies in our WhatsApp pages. But by then, my phone was faulty. So, I didn’t know what to use to study. So, I was actually using a friend’s phone somehow, together with things. And then she later said she needed to do something, but I went to someone else, and ... phone. So, I couldn’t use a phone again. But, I didn’t even know how I’ll be able to print them. Because I called home, and they said, oh, they’ll send me my data at a later date...So, as and then, I was just almost feel stupid. Because my mates were studying and all, and I couldn’t study. That affected me. Meanwhile, we’re all writing the same exam. So, I called a friend who later sent me money. And then I used it to print it. But, as I said, it just so almost frustrating. Let me just say almost frustrating. Because it was getting to exams too. By then it was getting to exams, so it wasn’t easy getting someone else’s phone or slides to use. And then even those who printed the hard copy, you couldn’t go ... So that as one frustrating experience when I went back to school. It was just like ... I didn’t forget that one. So that was just one frustrating experience I had.” Miriam, 23, Ghana

“What I think is that online is good. That is a very best way but there are a lot of people who are facing connectivity issues, and I too face that and we are four siblings. So, we all have our classes and my sister, there is my elder sister and she is in college. So, we all have to take our online classes and they are on same time, all school times that is all the same. So, we face a lot of problems because there are only two devices and we are four, so we are not able to take our online classes. And there is a lot of connectivity issue.” Pinky, 16, India

“Yes, I can have alternative study methods, the challenge is that I don’t have megabites, I attend classes on television and radio.” Xiluva, 17, Mozambique

"The time and date are short." Zeineb, 17, Ethiopia

"However, it is not a good place to learn, it is not easily accessible and the time given for my grade is not enough." Faiza, 16, Ethiopia

"I feel like behind as it is only one way of communication, if I have any question there is no mean to get a response." Tsedey, 16, Ethiopia

"It is not the same, at school we have a more practical approach and we can ask questions, in the online classes we have little opportunity to ask questions and the teachers only give the lesson and do not clarify our doubts." Barbara, 16, Brazil

"I have always had face-to-face classes, studying from home is an opportunity to continue studying and researching, but it is not easy, it was something that was not within my plans, teachers are not always close to answer my questions." Celsa, 17, Mozambique

"The opinion I have is that I felt that I didn't learn anything, that all I solved was with the internet, I didn't know how to do an exercise, so I kind of felt that I don't know if I keep studying or going out, but I had left school and then I deliver work but it wasn't the same as learning because maybe you want to ask a teacher and it's not like the teacher is there telling you this is the case, there is no such as the explanation of them, then the online classes like I feel that I do not receive because we had no contact with the teachers, only gives us the work and for that day deliver and now if there is difference because the teacher explains, the teacher makes all the effort as he did when we were in online classes but it is not equal, you don't get the same explanation that I'm getting now face-to-face." Ana, 16, Nicaragua

In round three of data collection a final question was posed to the girls and young women which sought to understand what new learning techniques they had adopted if they were still learning from home. Most of the answers alluded to them having found new sources of information to supplement their classes for example online channels and videos, developing a schedule for online learning and becoming more organised, creating better work spaces and one girl even having procured a private tutor.

"As a new technique I have had to adapt and make a schedule to carry out my tasks, to do my tasks or to study, that is what I have had to do to adapt a little more to this way of learning that we are having now." Peque, 15, Ecuador

"I don't know if you can call it new techniques but I think I'm a little bit better organised than before, I used to try to be quite organised before but now it's much more fluid and much faster because when I'm at home I do my classes during the day and I also get ahead of the classes that are coming up, on homework that I'll have for the next week or on questions that I could ask my teachers when I'm in class, so that I don't get delayed and also I can understand some points better." Marie, 17, France

"I don't think I have learned any new techniques, maybe what I am doing is putting into practice what I already knew which is that if I did not understand something at school, I looked for it on the internet and could learn better. Now as it is only through WhatsApp, it is a little different, as now they only send audio notes, explaining what they send in photos, and you try to understand but you are left with many doubts so you have to look for other learning methods, such as videos on YouTube, but obviously it is only possible for those children who can have internet, while other children don't, but they also try to find other methods to learn, for example looking in the books they have at home." Irie, 17, Ecuador

"I started to search for online learning platforms such as channels on YouTube to help, I found these channels very helpful ... I didn't use these channels before COVID and I didn't even know these channels exist" Laila, 17, Egypt

"When I was learning at home, I used a mobile phone to get a better explanation and I discuss with family members" Faiza, 16, Ethiopia

"I'm not studying, but I still like to research things that I don't know about my career. I always like to be informed" Milena, 18, Nicaragua

"So in terms of studying techniques, honestly, I've always struggled to know which one works for me, but I think online school kind of taught me that how I learn best is just to watch more videos online. I feel like, given right now and online learning, videos have been super helpful, especially because synchronous lessons are very limited, so I spend a lot of my time, if I need to learn extra topics or study for a test, I'll always, my teachers also provide me videos I can look for." Sara, 15, United States

4.2. PERCEPTIONS ON SUPPORT FROM TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

To build on this point, in round two, the girls and young women were specifically asked about their perceptions of whether and how teachers and schools have been more supportive with alternative learning methods. While there was a good amount of acknowledgements that some teachers had been supportive and helpful during the time that they spent learning from home; the majority sentiment was that there was big room for improvement and that the schools and teachers were not supporting enough and suitably managing the alternative learning methods.

A good number of study participants spoke of how it was difficult to get hold of teachers or the obstacles that needed to be overcome. Some mentioned not having any contact at all with their teachers due to teacher's disabling the chat function and microphones on conferencing calls or ignoring virtual 'hands up'. Alternatively, they would have limited contact hours and not be particularly responsive or not be available to help with homework. While it is clear that some of the circumstances were such that it was difficult for teachers to provide support – one teacher with lots of requests for support online or because of a school policy not being able to hold one-on-one teacher/student calls – it seemed that more needed to be done to monitor and ensure teachers were providing sufficient and quality support to students.

“Yes, there are a lot of students, but in this platform in Zoom we can raise our hand and everything, but the teacher can disable the chat, he can disable the microphones and not be able to speak, then when you want to ask you raise your hand, but teachers do not realize it, consciously or unconsciously this is how it is, and it is there when you have difficulties.” Irie, 17, Ecuador

“But what was difficult was to work alone and on our own. But for me, if the pandemic continues, either they need to employ more staff to help them, or...I don't know but I think there is an improvement to be made, I think they really need more staff. There, in terms of schooling, you can only call them between 1.30 and 3pm. So if they do that, it's probably because they're understaffed. They have to adapt to the situation. Because it's not always the same thing when classes are in person and students can go and see you, and when you are at a distance, you have to reach them on the phone, you send e-mails, they don't answer so you don't know if they've received them, and you're worried. You don't know” Seny, 19, France

“But it's been really hard because we can't, beforehand, we weren't able to actually talk to our teachers one on one because there wasn't ... My school has a policy where we can't video call another teacher one on one, even with a parent in the background for some reason. It's just very strange...But in the schooling system I'm in, it's really important to talk to teachers about things one on one. And so it's been kind of hard, because I think me and a lot of others have felt like we lacked the guidance that we needed at the start of all of this. And to be honest, I'm weaving in and out of a lot of doubt over whether or not I'm doing the right things for everything.” Janet, 18, Australia

“There are some teachers with whom I completely lost contact, they sent no messages during the whole confinement.” Émilie, 16, France

“Sometimes he says he'll send an email about the work that we have to do, doesn't end up sending it, and it's very all over the place, this unit. I don't think I feel very supported in that. I had to seek an external tutor to help me with the stuff, because it's quite hard” Mia, 18, Australia

“I feel like just that, but then also some teachers don't have time to have those meetings as well. Or I'll have a question, but I don't want to take up 30 minutes of the teacher's time to ask one question, so then it really falls back on myself to either figure it out or gain the courage to have to go talk to the teacher for five minutes, but yeah. [Researcher]: Or wait for an email, which could delay your timetable too. C: Yeah, I definitely noticed that. I was doing a project and I wanted to know if we had to cite it or something. I emailed my teacher at maybe 4:00 and they got back to me at like 8:00. So it really does delay the process.” Clara, 16, United States

“I feel like to a certain extent I can, just, I feel like I'm missing out on that one-on-one teacher time. You can set up on office hours obviously, but just casually, just like getting together with teacher after class or even during class, like having discussions with your class and things like that, that I really feel like we're missing out on.” Zara, 17, United States

“I used to attend classes online with my school since the start of the outbreak. It was very hard to me and I lost a lot of information in the sessions. Also I didn't like that I can't ask my teacher at any point if I don't understand a point as with online classes I have to wait till he finishes and then I might have time to ask, by that point I would have forgot what the question was.” Laila, 17, Egypt

“When you are at home, there are teachers you don't have any notice about, so you are totally disconnected from the subject that week” Luna, 22, Spain

Likewise, some of the study participants commented on how teachers had not adapted their teaching methods to the alternative learning methods at all. They mentioned teachers speaking too quickly or not explaining points enough; teachers struggling with technology or just not trying to make lessons engaging. It was also noted that teachers did not seem to be able to understand the nuances of knowing when students are ready to move on or not when lessons were being held online. In addition, it was noted that the learning from home and alternative lessons were disorganised in that teachers had failed to attend classes or send lesson materials; or they were too slow to grade papers or provide feedback. They also failed to schedule breaks during teaching and there was too much content that the students

were being required to absorb. Some study respondents even felt that teachers exhibited an unsupportive attitude in that it was felt that teachers had withdrawn, and that rather than being helpful, they didn't care about their students or their wellbeing.

"Most teachers use, well, at least in high school, some type of PowerPoint to demonstrate lessons. But in some of my classes, I feel like teachers don't really get... Students are trying to take notes off these PowerPoints, but they're just... Most of my classes, people turn off the cameras and the engagement level is really low. So the teacher doesn't know, like, Oh, we're still taking notes, but they're just going through the PowerPoint. And so in a class setting, you wouldn't even have to say anything like that. A teacher could see that you're not finished taking notes. And so they might pause and wait a little bit. But that just sense of... Or even in a lesson, if the teacher notices everybody's faces, they're confused, they'll stop and try to elaborate, but now those little things aren't there. And it's understandable. Teachers aren't used to not being able to see students' faces and different aspects like that." Mary, 17, United States

"So I see that a lot, that tutors just leave us a second to reply and if we don't immediately reply, we've moved on, so the discussion isn't happening and people look not engaged and things like that, just because the format isn't quite how you normally communicate with people. Lots of interrupting and talking over and things like that. It's a bit chaotic." Jenni, 18, Australia

"It's hard when a teacher is not captivating, some are handling the situation, others have problems with computers so it's true that it's hard with some teachers." Charlotte, 18, France

"There was no improvement in learning, I think it is worse now, before the teachers gave themselves time to explain the subject, but now the teachers no longer teach online, to study I rely on the analytical plan with the support of my uncles and colleagues. Because the teachers have not been giving classes online, there has been a negative change, the teachers have no interest in giving classes, even though we as students have doubts about some topic, they have not given an explanation. Teachers have not supported the continuity of studies from home... Teachers should not withdraw from students, they should support us more, because of their withdrawal, some students also no longer care about their studies because they no longer have the support they had before. Before, students were concerned because they knew that at any moment the teacher could appoint someone to talk about a topic. But now that the teachers are far away, the students end up leaving everything behind" Celsa, 17, Mozambique

"No. I don't think, at least I don't think with my teachers. Just because they don't know how to teach online." Michaela, 17, United States

"I think it depends on the faculty that you're in. With my units, I'm in two faculties, because I'm doing this one unit that's like methods and calculus shit, it's really hard. The tutor is, you can tell, he just doesn't know how to basically run an online class. I think the first few weeks I attended the classes, they got so boring I could not sit through them" Mia, 18, Australia

"I want improvement in timetable. Some schools, they have given time like they are taking one hour classes and they are not giving any gap. Not even five minutes gap. So they should give at least five minutes gap by which students get refreshed and can focus more on studies or whatever the class is going on." Pinky, 16, India

"Okay, ma'am. I think it's better to change the timings, ma'am. They're completely ... In afternoon sessions from 2:00 to 5:00, and in morning sessions from morning 8:00 to 12:00 are continuously teaching classes, ma'am. Regardless are comfortable. So it is good to change the timings. That's it." Shanti, 18, India

"That I can't say but it's not my fault, it's the fault of the teachers who take 1000 years to correct our papers, I haven't got any grades yet!" Charlotte, 18, France

"I think that in my case it has remained and has even worsened because of course, the weeks that we have to do online all we have is to do homework, read texts and two other things, and before a teacher gave class, right?" Luna, 22, Spain

"Some teachers support but not all, only two teachers created a WhatsApp group to explain the students. To improve this process, teachers should always be available, whenever students need it, as well as guardians. Teachers can help by providing books, more material, reviewing assignments." Xiluva, 17, Mozambique

"They should help me in future I think. [Researcher]: In what ways you want their support or help? J: Encouragement, ma'am." Jia, 19, India

"When you get to the university, the teacher is not interested if you are going to deliver your work or not, they are not interested in how you feel or why you could not get to class, the only thing they are interested in is that the work is there in one way or another, I was trying to ask the teacher, "Teacher, how did you wake up? Excuse me for bothering you, could I send you my work?" And you face different situations, like "I'm busy, I don't want to know anything about you because I'm still busy, I'm going to give a deadline. Sometimes I had to send emails and I did not have internet and you can imagine the teacher in his show that I am not going to review your work today, it does not help much, I feel that it has to do with one's personal, how prepared are you to face yourself to your own teachers, this country is like that, you have to simply worry about yourself and yourself, just that, because others are not interested in how you feel or how you are, or what you are going through, simply that they cover your responsibilities is enough. So I feel that there is not a total support of the teachers towards their students with the situation that the country is experiencing." Margarita, 18, Nicaragua

The girls and young women also noted that the schools did not attempt to bring in additional resources to try and address some of the challenges that students were facing. They mentioned issues like a lack of psychological support, or failure to proactively follow up on students including asking about their wellbeing. Additionally, they were provided no extra help for exam preparations, not providing more or better teaching materials or advice, lack of recognition of people falling behind or being overwhelmed, and no support in demonstrating to students how to use the technology or devices now being used.

“And the school is being atrocious with that one specifically. But getting all of this... Sorry, this might sound a bit angry because I am. We're getting all this, "Look, we're here to support you. We're here for your mental health. We're here for any exam stress you might have." They gave us this one hour workshop on how to manage exam stress which I kid you not, the essential bottom line was just don't stress. I know. It essentially just said, "You can change your mindset if you want to, even if you have a clinically diagnosed mental disorder." Max, 16, Australia

“I think making it proactive instead of kind of just reactive at the moment where if someone comes to them with an issue, they'll probably help you, but they're not making... and they're saying here's everything you can go to, but it is still about us getting up and saying... and because we're not interacting with as many people, we don't know if anyone else is feeling that same kind of thing, so we think maybe everyone is just feeling stressed at the moment, therefore, it's not a valid reason to go and get help. So I think being more like not just oh, the supports are here if you need it, but actually actively checking in and saying how are you and how are you feeling and here is a service directly. I think that type of thing would be good because people aren't very good at actually going and getting help, even if they need it, and asking for help and asking for...” Jenni, 18, Australia

“The secretariat of my course are not providing any psychological support or any extra resources, like books, we do not have a lot of proximity to the secretariat, they could offer things like lectures or seminars, but for now we have not had anything” Rita, 18, Brazil

“A lot of anxiety, because at the end of the day you were at home all day, right? and I was often alone because my parents are essential workers so they had to go to work, and sometimes you felt a bit overwhelmed because ... I don't know, the teachers weren't very present either, you talked to your classmates and maybe you all talked together to do ... I don't know, a job, and you didn't hit the ground running, so I don't know, you were overwhelmed because the work was accumulating ... And stress, yes, because of the University, because we didn't know anything, what was going to happen, we were practically two weeks in which we did nothing because all the teachers were practically convinced that we were going to return, after the exams we also had no idea how they were going to be, if we were going to have to put a camera, I don't know what ... it was all quite stressful” Luna, 22, Spain

“[Researcher]What do you think how they can improve? How they can help you or support you?J: If my ...foundation helping, ma'am, getting online classes and they were explaining ..in the evening session, and in the morning session they were explaining MS Office and how to use computer, and what are the basics in computers, ma'am. [Researcher]: That's the NGO which is working in your area, which is helping you. But do you getting any support from your college teachers? J: No, ma'am.” Jia, 19, India

On the other hand, a minority of the research respondents were of the opinion that teachers and schools were supportive. Some of the examples of the types of support that they experienced included; teachers following up with students to make sure that they understood the work, checking in on students wellbeing if they were not attending classes, providing extra guidance or additional lessons and generally being flexible including

extending deadlines. One respondent made mention of a school life coordinator offering mental health support.

“During the lockdown, when we all had a mental breakdown, I was able to talk to my school life coordinator. It is a referent person for each level, which allows the students to refer to one person. In my case, it was my tenth-grade coordinator, she would send us emails telling us that we could call or email her if we had problems because of the classes or if we didn't feel well. So it allowed us to be monitored mentally and psychologically during the confinement. I've e-mailed her a couple of times, and it went well, she cheered me up. Otherwise, we could also talk to our main teacher, who was also a good listener. So the pedagogical team and the teaching staff were really very present and very good on this one.” Eve, 15, France

“Yes, very much and I admire all those who have worked to try to make it easier. Our teachers were really there, they checked up on us, they tried to cheer us up and they really worked hard to make it as easy as they could” Marie, 17, France

“But for example, there are some teachers who, if they saw that you weren't coming to class, they would send you a message to see how things were going, they would pay attention to their pupils so the link was well kept” Émilie, aged 16, France

Importantly, the girls and young women also provided examples of how teachers had themselves positively adapted to the alternative learning methods: sending out slides and summary of class presentations in case someone had connectivity issues, adding question and answer sessions to the end of class, providing alternatives for children without internet access and explaining lesson content more than once.

“They ask if we have any issues and if we do, they help us solve it. For instance, the students who do not have internet access, receive the content in a printed form at their homes so that they can follow the content of the classes. If we have issues with the platform, we contact our teachers, who contact the school's secretariat. If they think that it is too heavy and they are giving too much content, they also ask to slow down the classes. Since, the teachers are always the first to know about what is happening at school, they always try to inform us of what is happening. So, I think that they try to always include us in everything” Mariele, 18, Brazil

“Yes, here in my town there were so cellphone chips given in secondary school and the principal created some activities for those who live in the rural area to follow the classes.” Barbara, 16, Brazil

“We have had the support of teachers, for example for students who do not have internet. As I did not have internet before, some teachers called us to find out if we had understood the classes.” Emily, 17, Ecuador

“Most of the teachers try to understand, they know that if one of my classmates does not connect, it is because of the Internet connection problems or the type of electronic device. Besides, some of them send the slides to the platform as well as a summary of the classes” Peque, 15, Ecuador

“For example, some kids from my school, from my class or from other classes who do not have a telephone or at least 'WhatsApp, they try to give them printed cards. For example, these cards are printed, they tell students or their parents or tutors to go on that day and they give the cards to them, they have to go to school where the teacher gives them the cards so that students can continue studying and do not get stuck because of the internet.” Gaby, 17, Ecuador

4.3. GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN'S VIEWS ON ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF TEACHING

In addition to the questions asked of the research respondents above, their views on alternative methods of learning were specifically sought, including whether there had been improvements since the first round of data collection or whether they were still experiencing difficulties with the alternative methods.

A small minority of girls and young women spoke of improvements to the alternative methods: some spoke of the methods becoming more organised in that previously teachers were using multiple digital platforms but that they were now all trying to use one, the quality of teaching had improved and there was improved internet access and access to resources.

"I honestly have no idea, because what happened during online school is that not only was there that my society and culture teacher would use Adobe Hangouts and my modern history teacher would use Google Hangouts and then all of my other teachers would use Zoom and some would post on ... and some would post on Google Classroom and some would just send emails, right? All of that, which was fun. ... It's gotten better I think, ... teachers have transferred almost completely onto Zoom" Max, 16, Australia

"I think definitely, in comparison to when we transitioned to online in the first semester, this semester has been so much better, in that I know exactly when my classes are, and I know what to prepare in order to make the most out of them." Mia, 18, Australia

"Yeah. I mean, my teachers, I know they're working their best ability. Some of them don't know how to use Zoom, and they're really trying their best. I know, for example, my AP World teacher, he really, really wants the best for us, and I really, really appreciate that. Even though he works so hard, people would typically be complaining. This is the best they'll get at this time. And you should just appreciate it. I think my education's been going pretty well. My school has... In terms of the curriculum, they kind of did it a lot differently. We're doing spring and fall courses to ensure that whatever education we're learning right now, they don't want to over pack our schedule with all the courses that we would typically case in an eight-period day. So they split it up so we can really focus on like two subjects, or three core subjects...And then they have support classes that I can go to. And then sometimes my teacher would do an additional lesson...[Researcher]: That's great. And do you feel like that's different from how school was happening in the spring, when you abruptly started- S: Yeah definitely. None of the teachers knew what was going on. They wouldn't do live lessons. Now they do live lessons, which is great. Originally they would just dump us with a bunch of videos, and maybe a 15-minute recording of themselves teaching." Sara, 15, United States

"I feel like for me, just everything is so much more organized with teachers. We have everything in our Google Classroom. They put all the dates, we have everything that's done on that date and we can do it. I feel like it also minimizes the waste of handouts and stuff as well, because we are doing everything online. So we use a bunch of software and stuff where we can just highlight it through our computers. Everybody has a computer that belongs to my school because it's a state school and we have computers. So that's nice, especially to minimize the waste that we're putting out. It's been good. It's really easy to get in contact with our teachers now as well. I don't know. I wasn't at the school last year, I just transferred, but it was harder last year to get in touch. But now they're always on emails. They're always on Zoom. You can schedule Zoom meetings with them really quick, so I found that really good." Clara, 16, United States

"One of my older brothers decided to put Wi-Fi in my house and since the situation is getting better for me, it has been easier for me because sometimes, without work, I did not have money to recharge, now the situation a bit best" Margarita, 18, Nicaragua

"We have a schedule and we connect by Zoom, Google Media, or Teams. This year the government gave us some books, they gave me two books and we are going to start working with the books. Teachers teach us through PDF and slides, and during the synchronous hours we deliver our homework... Before I did not have internet and I had no way to communicate with teachers, now I can write to them to comment on my doubts or questions." Emily, 17, Ecuador

Unfortunately, most girls and young women spoke of a continued difficulty with the alternative learning methods. These difficulties manifested in various ways including limited interaction with teachers, a dislike of online presentations and pre-recorded videos, a lack of interactive lessons or break out discussions, difficulty focusing, not understanding teachers or the lessons, unrealistic expectations by teachers and/or schools, and finally online classes either being cancelled or not happening at all.

"The positive aspect of being at home is mainly that all of us are protected, and the negative aspect is that we do not learn 100%, classes are not the same as if you were in the classroom, when they explained better and now in my case it is through WhatsApp, they send a photo, we don't understand almost anything, and it gets complicated. It is difficult especially for us who are in the third year of high school since we are about to graduate and have to take exams, so it is much more complicated. The methodology they implemented in my school was focused on those who do not have access to the internet, and the only option they had and that everyone could access was WhatsApp, but I still think there is a gap there, it is not the same through video conferences, just as you and I are speaking in this conversation, but everything is through a photo and an audio." Gaby, 17, Ecuador

"It's actually... I've been falling a lot more behind than I was last sem and I've no clue really why because last sem I was quite on top of it. I was kind of like yeah, first sem uni, had all these motivations to try and do really well and stay on top of everything and this sem it's just kind of a bit like after seven months of studying online and every single part of my life being on Zoom, it's quite difficult to maintain that kind of motivation to actually do well, especially when marks don't count for us this year at uni, which is a good measure..... I think it's definitely motivation, but the format as well. Watching lectures, you have to watch some things a few times because you're not quite getting it in. Whereas when you're live, you're not doing that because if you miss it, you just miss it and you don't have to go back and re-watch it. You just kind of accept that that little point you're not going to get, so that kind of perfectionism there..."

And I think we could definitely... yeah, I think the uni needs to get better at noticing that online learning is never going to be the same as in-person learning. You can't run it on the exact same schedule and the exact same types of tutorials that they're running now and expect us to get as good marks and expect us to be as engaged and be on time and things like that, because it's a lot harder." Jenni, 18, Australia

"[Researcher]: What is it that your teacher ... What are some things that you think your teachers could be doing better? M: Definitely that some of them give us days where we don't have to go on Zoom. But a lot of them don't, and they take up the full 90 minutes to just lecture. It's a little bit different when you're in the classroom than when you're on Zoom. You're just kind of sitting and just watching. Like in the classroom, you had friends... I think ... I don't know. I think like just honestly the way that everything's structured is really hard and difficult. It's like I think they're trying to accommodate us, but they're not really ... I feel like they're giving a lot more work than they used to when we were at school. Because they think that we have more time at home, which is not the case. I feel like a lot of people that I know, and I know I have responsibilities around the house now like more than usual. A lot of my friends have siblings to take care of and all that stuff. So we get a lot more work, and we have a lot more responsibilities I feel like. When I feel like it shouldn't be like that, and it's really overwhelming." Michaela, 17, United States

"The communication has been poor on that end as well. The changes they've made to our curriculums have been barely anything. The workload is barely decreased...It's been very half-assed, pardon that phrase. And it's literally taken a minimal amount of the load off. It doesn't feel like they're ... They've given us, I remember about two days ago in class...given us a sheet where we need to fill out and kind of rank how effected we were in a certain aspect of COVID in the year. And none of the things that were listed were things that I felt applied to me. And I literally just wrote at the bottom, "This is how I felt. This is what ...I know that they have a large volume of this, but it's like, couldn't you just let us write a statement? Because it's all affecting us so differently. Yeah, the school has been good, but it's really just, it's the governmental part that's been really quite lacklustre. And we don't understand if we're being advantaged, or how it's working, or how much of this or that counts. They haven't explained it to us, so it's not reassuring at all. It's not reassuring to know, they're not saying, "Hey, the assessments you did at the start of the year, they're going to count more." Or they haven't told us that necessarily. They aren't saying that, "Oh, those exams you're doing at the end of the year aren't necessarily going to be as bit as they previously were." There's no clear explanation about anything." Janet, 18, Australia

"Not really. It's been a lot of the same expectations. From the curriculum point of view, I think little bits of our curriculum got cut out and that was in the first period of remote learning, but on an individual teacher's level, they are understanding that it's a bit harder to get work done, but the same expectations are there and the same amount of work is there, and if anything, I feel as if the time limits are a bit more restrained now just because of trying to catch up on whatever anybody missed in the home period because there was a lot of disengagement from students just because it was too much. And now, sort of where, really pushing the time limit a lot and it's decreasing as we go and we're just expected to just push through with it." Amie, 17, Australia

4.4. RETURN TO SCHOOL

The second and third round of data collection enabled the study to capture the views of girls and young women who had been studying from home and had now returned to school.

Some of the issues that were investigated in the second round of data collection included whether the study respondents had returned to school, and how they were adjusting to being back. This included any changes, if they felt positively about being back at school or any difficulties they were facing since returning. At this point it is important to note that only one girl had never stopped going to school and twenty-six other girls and young women were still not back at school or their place of study. During the third and final round of data collection, the study respondents were similarly asked whether they had returned to school, and if they had, whether they felt their education was still being disrupted because of the pandemic, and whether they felt that they were learning more being back at school than they did when they were at home.

For those who had returned to school, or their place of study, a range of positive experiences were observed in both rounds of data collection: the girls spoke about feeling back on track with their education as they generally felt they learnt better in a classroom than online; they also mentioned being able to interact with friends and classmates and how this enhanced being able to learn from class engagement and how face to face studying reduced miscommunication; and they felt that being physically back at school was beneficial in that it represented a change of scenery and they were not sleeping, living and working in the same space. In addition, it appeared that interactions with teachers in person was highly valued and seen as beneficial, as was having access to learning materials such as those in libraries.

Round 2

“The positive side that this is good for my education path, because if they have cancelled the term, it would have impacted my academic achievement.” Asmaa, 16, Egypt

“Yes, it's very positive to go back to school because human contact is extremely important when you're studying. From a pedagogical point of view, learning math or physics on your own during confinement was quite difficult. So it's true that there, to really see teachers again, to have teachers who are in front of you and who can answer you, who can have an interaction when you don't understand or to have a physical explanation when a student doesn't understand, it's really very important in the learning process in my opinion, that's what was missing during the confinement with the online courses. So being in a classroom is a big positive point, you can have the opportunity to reconnect with the teacher, be able to ask questions and even be more concentrated because you're in the classroom, on your chair and not in bed as you could be during the confinement when you had class at 9 o'clock and you weren't awake, that wasn't perfect conditions to study in my opinion. So going back to school, from a course and work point of view, it's very important for me and from a social point of view it is as well, school is learning, it's work but it's also having friends, taking advantage of the break to chat with friends. It's a whole social environment, which is talking with your friends, with your teachers” Eve, 15, France

“Sure, you get out of this, you change your scene ... because right now, I mean, I work, study and rest in the same room so in the end it's like you say ... I can't take it anymore. But now the truth is that even if I go for only two days, it is greatly appreciated.” Raquel, 19, Spain

“Yes, it's positive about the library, you can go and work there and it's good because it's not always easy to work when you're at home with your bed next to it and the TV next to it, it really makes you want to sleep. I'm really happy that the library is open for work, unlike the second semester when it was closed because of the confinement.” Seny, 19, France

“I definitely think one of the positives is being around friends. I think today was really good to reconnect with people on that more personal level because it's quite hard on screens for such a prolonged amount of time, so it's really good catching up with people who previously hadn't been at school since March because of the lockdown. So that was good and I think it was good reconnecting with teachers, particularly those that weren't as present during remote learning and home learning. That was good to see them again and hear back from them, and I think overall, it's better that we're there now coming up to the end of the year because I think it really brings back the focus and demotivates kids, I think, particularly in view of exams and things like that.” Amie, 17, Australia

“I mean, you already know this but students can be like, “Wow, I really like online learning,” or they don't. There doesn't really seem to be an in-between and I happen to be on the don't side. I found it really difficult to learn essentially anything through the computer because I prefer face-to-face interaction and discussion....Now that I'm back, in terms of discussion and in terms of learning at face value and just immediately absorbing information, it's great.” Max, 16, Australia

“Oh, luckily I have come back to my university. I have made my lectures, my friends. It is wonderful to see them again.” Mi, 22, Vietnam

“Since schools opened it has given us an opportunity to learn to that we can improve our lives in future.” Audre, 16, Zambia

Round 3

“Definitely learning more now, at least understanding more. I think that teaching hasn't changed just because I was at home doing online learning and now I'm just at school doing online learning. But like I mentioned, I can ask questions now and also just I can concentrate better. At school I have this automatic like I'll put my phone away type sense. But at home the teachers talking and then sometimes I'm like, "Oh, a notification." I really, really thrive on that separation from school and home. And now that the two are together, it threw me off completely.” Mary, 17, United States

“Well I would purely say learning in school is far better, because at home, you barely have time. When you wake up in the morning, you have so many house chores to do, you have errands to run and all that. Even in the evening, you don't even get the chance to study. It's either you are too tired you want to sleep, or you just say, "Okay, let me just postpone it and do this and that." But you will be cleaning instead. I would say that at least when you're on campus, you're like, "We are here on campus." Even if you are not studying and you see your colleagues going to study, you will go and study.” Miriam, aged 23, Ghana

“Studying regularly, college is the better one, ma'am. Because not everyone has an internet facility. And we might have also faced internet connective problems, technical problems, like that. But when we attend regular to the classes, we cannot observe these types of problems” Shanti, aged 18. India

“It's better to learn in school because we use school resource like the library but when we are at home we don't have such resources except the lessons transmitted on TV.” Hilina, aged 17, Ethiopia

“It's better now, because I had a hard time keeping up with online classes because I couldn't share experiences and in person I feel that I learn more, even through contact with people and a more didactic way of learning than at home, alone on the computer without being able to question and everything else.” Rita, 18, Brazil

“Yes, because I like to study there looking at the teacher's face in person, because I'm very expressive, when I don't understand you, if you look at my face you will know that I don't understand you, but by the mobile phone you won't know whether or not I understand you because you're not seeing me. So it's much better to be there in the room, because if the teacher asked me and looked at my face, he already knew I didn't understand and said, I'll explain again” Mariele, 18, Brazil

“I prefer learning at school as I have a teacher to explain whatever I don't understand, while during studying at home I don't have this kind of support even if I am watching the educational channels on national TV and YouTube...” Amina, 15, Egypt

“Its better we learn in school because, we're taught by teachers face to face. When we are at our home it isn't easy to learn, the situation doesn't invite us to learn. There is channel called AfriHealth TV but the schedule wasn't known when it starts, but towards the end of the year they informed us the schedule.” Zeineb, 17, Ethiopia

“I'm learning more in school than online learning. Because sometimes you won't understand what... Even when you come... WhatsApp like... When you come, many messages will be there. They'll just post a weird assignment. But sometimes they even explain with voice notes, but you won't understand. But this one, in a school, they write whatever they suppose to write on the board for everyone to... If you don't understand, you can ask questions. But that one, you can't ask questions, and it is compulsory for you to do your assignment and send it to them” Dede, 17, Ghana

“We had difficulties studying from home, being at school I'm able to move forward with the help of my colleagues and some teachers. I can learn more when I'm at school than when I'm at home.” Xiluva, 17, Mozambique

“The truth is that since I returned to classes I learned more, because with online classes I did not understand anything and I was lost in some topics” Ana, 16, Nicaragua

“Definitely. I mean, as I said before, studying at home would've been, I think, detrimental to my success. So being able to go to school was really important. And yeah, it definitely felt like seeing teachers regularly, we kind of got a little bit more of that closeness. Because we weren't able to talk one-on-one with teachers on Teams or Zoom at all during the year, which is a big, big part of year 12 is going to see teachers in their office randomly, just asking a quick question, showing them things. And it's a lot harder online and it's a lot more formal.” Amie, 17, Australia

“I learn much more in class, because the online classes are an hour and a half only telling you things, which sometimes are repeated” Raquel, 19, Spain

In discussing their return to school, in both rounds of data collection, the girls and young women also recounted some of the changes that they had experienced in returning to their place of education. The most predominant of these was the proliferation of COVID-19 prevention measures. The research respondents spoke about the use of facemasks, social distancing, the need for hand sanitiser and disinfecting desks and chairs, not being able to share equipment, having smaller numbers of learners in rooms and temperature checks. Apart from the prevention measures, other changes included blended or hybrid learning where some schooling was done online; as well as reduced or altered school hours; as well as staggered returns to school for different learners. A couple of mentions were made of where changes to curriculums having had occurred where the learning curriculum had been reduced or teachers were now trying to cover as much as possible.

Round 2

"But there's a little bit of an issue that every teacher has this mindset of we need to be prepared just in case we go back. Because honestly, the government tomorrow could just say, "Oh no, we're going back into lockdown," and we could shut down.... Every teacher has that sort of mindset, which not only makes a lot of the students very anxious of we could go back into online learning any second and it's our exams now but it also has this effect on how we're learning. It's more so cram everything you can right now before we go back to online learning and then you won't learn anything. Or even if you work better on paper, you should write everything down on the computer because that's where you're going to get all your information if we go back to online learning." Max, 16, Australia

"We have returned to school. The difference now is that we are not learning as we used to learn before COVID. This time you will find that we only learn one subject." Audre, 16, Zambia

"The most tiring part of the in person classes is that we have to continually disinfect the table and chair where we sit in each class." Rosa, 17, Spain

Round 3

"I returned to my school on October however it was closed after 2 months due to the increasing cases detected. Of course it is not the same as pre-COVID, now we needed to wear the mask all the time and keep social distancing. Also, we are in fear from each other and we don't stay after school for hanging together as we used to." Laila, 17, Egypt

"Studying at school has changed a lot due to COVID as the school day got reduced to only 3 hours per day and this is impacting our studying of course and the quality of the education we are receiving, also, these 3 hours at school students don't pay attention and play all the time, some stopped paying attention at the classes." Amina, 15, Egypt

"Currently we are on vacation but since we spoke the school has changed dramatically than pre-COVID, now we have to wear face masks all the time, use alcohol, and they reduced our attendance days to only 2 days per week" Salma, 17, Egypt

"It's not the same at all, before COVID in my class room we were 36 now we are 17 students when we are going to school we are wearing masks and also going to school by rotation in two groups for example some of us go to school on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and the other half will be going on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday." Zeineb, 17, Ethiopia

"It's not the same at all, now when are going to school wear a mask and keeping our distances. Attending our education while wearing masks makes it very hard for us since we are feeling suffocated." Ekram, 17, Ethiopia

"...we returned to face-to-face classes with the protection measures. With use of masks and alcohol, but all good thank God." Ana, 16, Nicaragua

"So, some of my semester one classes are going to be online. And then I think two of them will be dual delivery. So, for some, we'll go in and then for like tutorials and classes they'll be in and then lectures will be online. So, it's sort of half and half, which is I think really good because I think I'd be a bit anxious if it was just all normal and everyone on campus because it's like quite a lot of people. So, I think this is a good sort of staggered way of going about it." Amie, 17, Australia

"In fact, in my school, we work part-time, well I don't really know how to explain the system, that is to say that we work 50/50: there are days when we are at school and days when we do school at home." Marie, 17, France

"Yes, of course, because I'm more at home and in addition, as we're 50/50, we're in half a group, because there are 30 of us in my class, so now there are about fifteen of us in my class, which is a lot more pleasant for a class because there is less of us and since there is only one of us per table there is no chatting and we progress better and the teacher has more time to answer all our questions, so there is more interaction I mean and it is more pleasant to follow the classes even if we have classes half the day." Émilie, 16, France

"It's still very, very different, especially like sometimes I go to class and I'm the only one in there and the teacher is still teaching virtually. So really I'm just there with my Chromebook or my laptop and listening as if I was at home. And at first I really wasn't expecting that. I don't know why it hadn't occurred to me that even though I'd be at school, the virtual learning would still be taking place. I thought like, "Oh, I would get that instructor standing up and teaching like that." But it has been easier for me to ask questions now while I'm at school, but it's definitely still very, very different." Mary, 17, United States

"But that aside too, there are some other classes that are [inaudible] and our classes. Most of our lecturer courses, they are combined with other course. Other course mix their course, like their lecture. As in we do the same course, then one or two courses, we do the same course with different... Let's say agribusiness, we do information literacy with agribusiness, as well... So our class alone is like 120-something students. And then agribusiness will add, so like 200 and something. So we had it yesterday, and then you notice that we are so many in the classroom and you're not even able to observe the social distancing. But later the lecturer said, "Okay, we'll have to divide the class into two. We'll divide except the..." it's a three credit hours course, so it will be one hour 30 minutes for each department or each course...With regards to social distancing protocol, it's really not observed. It's not only that class, in previous lectures, we'll have to combine. Or sometimes, we say we can't observe the social distancing or physical distancing, but then we'll have to cope with it. So other people have come from different regions and we don't know what they have, whether they have the COVID or not, whether they have a sickness or not, we still have to combine seat for lectures. ..Sometimes the lecturers will say we'll have to go online. But the issue with the online is that the network is very bad and other ones will not want us to go online. We can't also observe social distancing because they're [inaudible]. So that is some kind of a challenge for us here on campus currently. Because you don't want to go online because the network is always so bad. You can end up getting only 20 out of 100-something people at a lecture online. Unless someone are trying to convince the lecturer to let us go online because some of us might not take part in the online classes...As a result you have to sit altogether, as many as 100 and something, that's if agribusiness students are not added to our class. So you'll see that we'll be like 100 and something in one class. And social distance, physical distancing, you can't even observe that. So there are so many different things happening on campus right now, but at least we're able to manage." Miriam, 23, Ghana

"I returned to classes in January and I have an exam; the teachers give a lot of material in a short time, they are afraid of COVID-19; they give notes and leave because they are afraid and send us to the library. We as students are afraid to gather in the library and we end up doing nothing." Nisia, 15, Mozambique

While there was an overwhelming sense of relief and positivity at being back at school, in both the second and third rounds of data collection, the girls still spoke of a number of difficulties that they experienced. Having described the prevention measures that had been put in place for their return to places of education, the girls and young women also described the problems associated with those prevention measures such as some teachers not enforcing the rules, schools not responding to COVID-19 cases, intensive safety protocols, and confusion around measures for sports, and difficulties experienced at school canteens and common areas.

Round 3

"But currently it is, go back to school as normal. If you guys saw my previous two interviews, I said, "They really haven't been doing much, in terms of COVID safety in the school. Except they're having hand sanitizer that is just so watered down, essentially, it's just water" So we haven't really had the best, in terms of safety measures put in place. And I don't think that will be changing any time soon, unless there is enough pressure put on the school board, or the Education Board in general of the State. To say, "No, let's all go into online."... And I'm concerned that cases will spike up. There'll be a need for more safety measures, and the school might hopefully impose something, and no one will listen. That scares me a bit. I know I'm going to hope that people are wearing masks on public transport, and having hand sanitizer, but I can only do it for myself. And that does worry me, that I'm going to get to school, and it's just going to spike up. But I'm also worrying about online schooling, because if I'm distracted both in school, out of worry for my safety, and then out of school, because I can't concentrate on online learning, how am I going to win?... You get in there, hoping that you can remember everything that you need for the exam, and stay focused. And then someone coughs next to you. And then someone requests tissues. And then another person sneezes to your right. And then you're like, "Is it safe for me to be in here?" And some teachers are wearing masks, and others aren't. And there's hand sanitizer on one side of the hall, but not on the other. And you're sitting there being like, "I need to focus on my test, but I've also just brushed past three people. And I'm pretty sure two of them coughed." So it's crazy hard to focus. That was a big issue. I don't know how they're going to be running the exams again, probably the same way. Like I said, they're not really the best at actually putting in COVID safe measures. Now that we have the new year coming into our school, we have over 1,000 kids coming in. And the school's already crazy overcrowded. So I don't know how they're going to be doing exams, or general assemblies." Max, 16, Australia

"Still as happy and full of energy to go to school, well it depends on the days, when you have a mock baccalaureate... but that's something else, but frankly really happy that my school respects the protocol etc...Even if obviously there are huge inconsistencies everywhere, but that's... Anyway in this pandemic, there have always been inconsistencies, at the level of government directives and also the applications of security barriers, all that, there were inconsistencies everywhere. And school health protocols are not exempt from some inconsistencies either, but otherwise yes, always happy to go to school." Eve, 15, France

"With regards to social distancing protocol, it's really not observed. It's not only that class, in previous lectures, we'll have to combine. Or sometimes, we say we can't observe the social distancing or physical distancing, but then we'll have to cope with it. So other people have come from different regions and we don't know what they have, whether they have the COVID or not, whether they have a sickness or not, we still have to combine seat for lectures." Miriam, 23, Ghana

Round 2

“There are a lot of cases in my Institute, the day you wrote me you had just had a case sitting next to me, positive, asymptomatic. And the protocol says that if there is a person in the class who is positive, it is assumed or what I had understood, that the entire bubble class is confined for fifteen days although, although it does not matter, My school, what did they do? Nothing, he sent us an email. He told us “hey, there is a positive in your class but nothing, keep acting normal and living normal, and tomorrow there is class”, like this. And of course, That’s why I went to do a test because let’s see, if my school is saying no, it doesn’t matter ... when it’s not the law, well I’m going to do it even if it’s on my own. I went to do it, it was negative, thank God but ... so again, a teacher in my brother’s class who goes to the same institute, the director who is the English teacher has also tested positive for coronavirus. The Director, with the number of teachers with whom he will have been. His tutor, who is the economics tutor, has tested positive for coronavirus but they do not confine the classes ... and so we are going to end, all infected, because it is impossible to control it if you do nothing to control it.” Marina, 17, Spain

“On the other hand, the negative point of being in the classroom is the extremely heavy health protocol. In my case, I’m in a private high school and most of my friends are in a public high school, so we can compare our experiences with the health protocol in our high schools, and it’s true that in mine, the health protocol is quite heavy. You have to wear the mask all the time, in front of each room you have to clean your hands with gel, when you go out too, the cafeteria is closed because of COVID-19, as there were too many people at the beginning of the year when it was open. In the same way, at the school canteen we pass by level whereas before we were freer, we wash our hands and at the tables we have 1 meter of distance between each person, so we have scotchies on the table not to sit down next to each other, the chairs are put at a distance so that we keep a social distance when we eat, and we are always watched to see if we keep the mask, if we wear it well. The sanitary protocol is quite heavy and quite cumbersome, but hey, that’s what it takes.” Eve, 15, France

“But on the other hand, of course the masks cut off spontaneity, you go to see someone to say hello but you remember that you can’t say hello like before, by kissing them for example, so on this aspect it’s a bit complicated. But otherwise, yes, it’s good to see people again and to be able to talk to real people...I don’t know if my high school is a special case but they have kept a certain life of the high school, all the clubs are open, but as far as the canteen is concerned, I don’t eat at the canteen anymore since this year because of the sanitary instructions, it has become too complicated. The canteen is too small, there’s a huge queue so I’m going home because I can go home. It’s complicated, long for the canteen. Otherwise, my school has kept a lot of activities even though I still have to wear a mask. What really changes is sport. Normally you don’t have to take the mask off but when you have to do sport, you have to take it off because doing sport with a mask is complicated. So when we do sport, suddenly everyone takes off the mask and we all get stuck, so I think it’s a bit stupid.” Émilie, 16, France

The study respondents in round two also spoke of their difficulties with adjusting to learning back in a classroom which included adapting to the classroom structure and schedule after a long period away and teachers rushing to get through learning in case of further lockdowns. An additional factor emerged, and was mentioned in round three as well, which was the fear of being around people and a possibility of catching the virus and spreading it within their family unit.

Round 2

"I think mainly, probably just a routine. I found it hard because we've been so many months doing things at home, so I've had a different timeframe of doing stuff at home, but at school it's a bit more rigid and you've got to follow that structure so that was a bit new again, I suppose, because I had to relearn timetables and I was a bit all over the place at the beginning of the day, but I think as the day progressed, the anxiety I mentioned before was sort of subdued and got back into the swing of things relatively quickly...Yeah, it's a bit daunting actually because going in and out of lockdown and just being expected to come back to school normal and being surrounded by so many people. It's such a difference. I was like, whoa, there's so many people around me and it was a bit overwhelming in that sense because it was a whole school come back, so like 1,000 kids on campus. The first time, it was staggard and I think it was only senior school. So, that was a big overwhelming, just kids everywhere, and younger kids who were excited to come to school and they were just flying around the place, and I was a bit anxious in the morning but that's a positive change that has come around." Amie, 17, Australia

"Afterwards, it's true that the return to class after having had distance courses that we sometimes did from our bed, it's true that the return of seriousness and the beginning of the face-to-face classes in September made it hard for me to concentrate. At the beginning, getting used to the rhythm again, getting up early, it's true that at the beginning, it was a step." Mi, 22, Vietnam

"I'm really excited about it. But actually, it's quite hard for me to keep up with new lessons with my lecturers are teaching me at the university because last time I study online and the material and the way they taught me was different from now. So it takes a little bit time for me to adapt" Charlotte, 18, France

"It was positive because I missed the interaction with my teachers and classmates, but what was negative was the anxiety-provoking atmosphere, everyone is afraid, which is normal in itself but it's a bit complicated to be all together." Marie, 17, France

"Yes, ma'am, we don't know who are having that pandemic virus in them, so if we take preventing measures, it's okay. But if we are not able to then we might face that same virus. And if we come back to our home, that same thing spreaded to our family members also. That's the difficulty we share, but we're instructed to also, we have to go. But by taking preventing measures, it is okay." Shanti, 18, India

Round 3

"Also, we are in fear from each other and we don't stay after school for hanging together as we used to." Laila, 17, Egypt

"Currently we are on vacation but the last semester since we talked on Oct 2020 was different than pre-COVID as we only go 2 days per week and everyone is scared most of the time of infection, also, the restrictions inside the school due to COVID such as reduced capacity and mandatory face mask and constant sanitizing is making it hard to learn there" Asmaa, 16, Egypt

"No, we always continue with blendedness and the truth is that I think it's fine. I don't remember what I told you in October but I think we have all realized that it is good for us, because that face-to-face week you feel like everything is more normal, as before. It has been difficult for the teachers because after all they are repeating the same thing every week, so to speak, but now that we are finishing the truth is that I like the blendedness thing although at first it could be a bit scary because of transportation, having to be here on the subway for example with a lot of people and such, but with the passage of time I have gotten used to it and that is what I prefer" Luna, 22, Spain

A small amount of girls and young women in both rounds spoke of how the schools themselves were disorganised or lacked enough teachers, and how the school environment itself had changed in that no one was socialising or talking to each other and facemasks made socialising more difficult.

Round 2

"It was just one or two lecturers who decided to keep ... And then when you come, ... they wouldn't get the lecturer, or they wouldn't get to have that lecture. The lecturer might say oh, that is how he's busy or they are ..." Miriam, 23, Ghana

"With face-to-face teaching, you have to keep the masks on, you get used to them but it's not often easy. We have both face-to-face and distance learning courses. In fact with the COVID, it's not always obvious, it's not easy to organise, there are a lot of us as students, so sometimes we have the impression that they are not organised, but when you think about it, you realise that there are a lot of us and that the university has to manage a lot of students, but we have to find a solution so that we are satisfied because it really has consequences on our training. So they really need to find a solution." Seny, 19, France

"Very few. I mean, the day I go ... I'm more focused, I can take notes, but it's still very complicated, the teachers have no idea what they're doing, they teach the same class twice ... it's just a disaster, now himself is a disaster, at my school at least. Then, the day I am at home, which is online, it is assumed, some classes we do virtual but the school's wifi goes, it stops or nothing is seen, like that constantly during an hour of class, then neither the from home or class are learning or understanding something because they spend all the time trying to make the call or the Google Meet or whatever works. So well, the truth is that few ... that is, I ... to a point, I even prefer that if they were well organized and knew how to give classes from their home each from their home ... then giving class as a meeting" Marina, 17, Spain

"Already the positive points are that it's good to see people again and I think I said it last time but I didn't like video-conferencing classes at all, it's difficult to hold on and it doesn't make sense because you're all alone at home, so on this aspect it was really good to go back to school to resume a social life and hold on to classes. But on the other hand, of course the masks cut off spontaneity, you go to see someone to say hello but you remember that you can't say hello like before, by kissing them for example, so on this aspect it's a bit complicated. But otherwise, yes, it's good to see people again and to be able to talk to real people." Émilie, 16, France

"I chose to be on the hybrid model and I thought it would feel a lot better being back in school, but it almost feels worse. It's just being at school and you barely hear anything. Nobody's talking. It's not like I was someone who talked a lot at school anyway, but just the normal sounds of school aren't there anymore. And at school it's not normal learning as it would have been regularly going to school." Mary, 17, United States

Round 3

"It is different because we don't mingle and study." Bupe, 17, Zambia

"Now it is difficult, classes are divided into two shifts, the first group has two hours and the remaining two more hours. The classes have been one week at school and the other at a distance, and even during the week at school some students and teachers say they have symptoms of COVID-19 and cannot come to school and it ends up being complicated. Even in online classes, teachers do not show up because they say they are not able to do so." Celsa, 17, Mozambique

"What we have been most concerned about has been the official university entrance exam because we do not know if it will be like last year, if it will be normal, and how they are not virtual classes and ... will they do it all face-to-face, but for example there are institutes that do have face-to-face classes, so it doesn't seem fair to them that those who have face-to-face and those who have online have to do the same exam because it is not the same to give it at home than to give it in class . So we are all very lost and the teachers are just as lost and everything is a bit up in the air" Rosa, 17, Spain

5. WORRY, STRESS, ANXIETY AND SUPPORT TO COPE

It was evident from the initial Halting Lives study that mental health issues were a considerable concern therefore in the current study each round of data collection sought to identify the issues facing girls and young women's mental health status. In addition, the difficulties faced by the study respondents as far as stress, anxiety, worry and all the attendant emotions became evident in their responses to other questions, not just those on their mental health. Therefore, the findings paint a vivid picture of how girls and young women, as well as their families and friends, have struggled with the pandemic and its effects on them.

In round one a specific question was posed which sought to understand what the girls and young women were most worried about in relation to COVID-19 as well as what support mechanisms they had to help them deal with their concerns. Overwhelmingly their biggest concern was in relation to their education followed closely by the worry that their loved ones or themselves would become ill and finally the economic effects of the virus. In discussing these concerns what also emerged was anxiety around the virus itself: mention was made of the speed at which the virus spread, potential mutations of the virus (this being somewhat prescient of the mutations which took hold in November/December 2020), second waves, and the measures to combat it being ineffective. Some other mentions were made of concern around increasing gender-based violence, the effects of climate change, not being able to attend social gatherings and not being able to travel, but these were minimal. Only two girls, both of whom were in Ethiopia, did not disclose any concerns.

"The main thing is my education. That is what I use to worry most about." Dede, 17, Ghana

"Maybe this is the biggest problem that the pandemic brings to me. I should have been doing an internship abroad in June, and I should have graduated from university, but because of the pandemic I have not finished it. My university gave us a permission to delay the internship, that is a must have for our graduation. So yeah, I still not have graduated, even I finished all of my study in university, and I don't know when I will graduate, so does all of my friends." Nguyet, 23, Vietnam

"During this time, I was worried about my results. Because my test results were about to out. But- [Researcher]How much did you score? P: I have scored 84%. [Researcher] Congratulations, that's great. P: Thanks. [Researcher] So now, what else worries you? P: And I was worried about my admissions, what will I choose? Because after this, we have testings. [Researcher]: I agree. Yeah. P: So my whole day went like, what will I do? What will I test in? Now I'm thinking about that only. What will I choose in 11 Class and continue the test? [Researcher} Right. Higher education and... Okay." Pinky, 16, India

"There are two things that I worry most about. The first thing is, the fear that I might be affected by COVID-19. [Researcher} Okay. A. Or my family members..." Avani, 18, India

"I'm afraid of losing the people I love. You can like several people, but you love few" Márcia, 15, Brazil

"That my family members become infected and may die, even those who are outside the country. I maintain a good communication with my best friend and it makes me feel good." Peque, 15, Ecuador

"What worries me a little more is the health of my mom and dad." Ana, 16, Nicaragua

"I'm worried that I may get it, or a friend or a member may also get it." Nasi, 23, Ghana

"What worries me the most is the economy, to be able to get ahead. And that affects everyone a lot, my community, because the lower the wages the higher the food prices. Everyone is looking for a way to get ahead with more ventures, and people do not take care of themselves and there are more and more infections." Emily, 17, Ecuador

"Yeah. I'm grieved the most about the speed of coronavirus threats in Vietnam, and they may transform to another type of a virus. Which are more dangerous, and more easily cause death. And, we still have not had the vaccine yet, and I'm scared that more and more people may die because of this issue" Mi, 22, Vietnam

"What worries me most is that there is a new outbreak like the first time the virus came, that it there is a new regrowth due to the lack of awareness among people in the society. Then, that is the fear that would affect all of us at health, economic and education levels." Gaby, 17, Ecuador

"The amount of waste that is being generated, the masks, the gloves.... A few months ago we were at the global climate summit here, and we wanted to evolve... and it's all going down the drain..." Raquel, 19, Spain

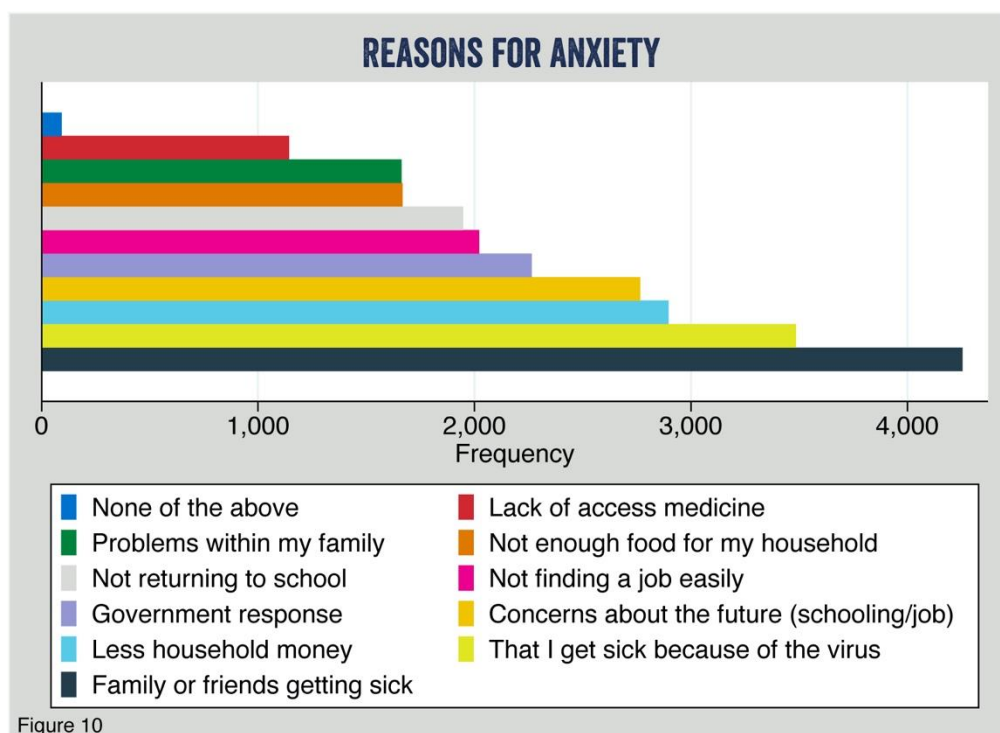


Figure 10

When asked about how they managed these concerns girls and young women spoke of relying on their friends most frequently, this was followed by talking to their families and within the family it was mainly female family members that were mentioned. Far fewer mentioned reaching out to teachers or specialised organisations. A small number of girls spoke about being unable to talk about their concerns and one mentioned having no one to talk to.¹⁴

¹³ Halting Lives, Part One: the impact of COVID-19 on girls. Plan International September 2020

¹⁴ This was followed up with respective country office and in-country safeguarding focal point.

"With this pandemic, I was more concerned with talking to friends and we're lifting the spirit of each other, I have 2 friends who help me a lot, they ask how I'm feeling and we're growing stronger together. Because I never was the one who talks about their concerns, anguish and all we can do now is, in some way, talk and the way I found was definitely talking and opening up to some people." Rita, 18, Brazil

"I maintain a good communication with my best friend and it makes me feel good." Peque, 15, Ecuador

"Luckily, I have a group of friends who always discuss and debate about social issues. When there is any problem, we will text or we will sit down or have phone call just to discuss and debate about those kind of issues. Whatever comes to my mind, I can talk to them and we will have further discussion and anything. It is very fruitful and helpful during the pandemic. I'm really grateful for that." Ha, 20, Vietnam

"I feel that everyone is worried about this, so I can talk to both my closest friends and a group of friends at work. Everyone is listening, everyone is watching, and they discuss a lot about the pandemic." Nguyet, 23, Vietnam

"Well, my older sister has been a great support for me, she has always been there and now more, because I use to sit with here and talk about the plans we had for this year that were not fulfilled and that we maybe should have to postpone until next year, to do them next year. In terms of how I have felt emotionally, her support has been very nice, because she has always encouraged me to keep going and not stay there feeling bad, especially because of the deaths we have had in our family that have been close, she is the one who has told me that I have to be well, for myself and for others." Irie, 17, Ecuador

"I share with my mother only, ma'am." Jia, 19, India

"That's right, with my mom, she's the one who always gives me advice and I listen to them and I should receive them for my well-being and well-being in my family." María, 15, Nicaragua

"I do talk to my classmates, teachers, coordinators and family." Mariele, 18, Brazil

"I do have channels of trust, I have a close relationship with my parents, we have always talked about everything in my house. We get on very well with my sister. With certain friends I wouldn't talk about these issues, but there are many with whom I am talking about these issues" Vera, 18, Spain

By the second round of data collection the picture had changed slightly, but then so had the question. In this round of data collection, the girls and young women were specifically asked if they were experiencing feelings of anxiety, stress and loneliness. As opposed to round one where only two girls mentioned not having any concerns about the virus, in the second round of data collection ten girls and young women said they were not experiencing feelings of anxiety, stress or loneliness in response to the question. While the questions were different it is still significant that this was a small number of girls and young women who were not indicating any mental health issues linked to COVID-19 compared to the overall number of girls that the study spoke to.

Interestingly, in round two, the girls who did experience feelings of anxiety, stress and loneliness related these to the pandemic containment measures, such as staying at home and not seeing friends and family, more than they did to education. Though education was still an important concern in particular; around falling behind at school and not being able to write or pass exams.

“And yeah, it's just like I feel like I can't ... I feel like I need to breathe a little bit, but I don't know how because I don't really have the capability to do that, because I'm at home all the time. And for me, I know that the way I recharge, and the way that I reset is by socializing and leaving my space, and I'm always in my space, and it's really hard to relax.” Janet, 18, Australia

“I think I have felt a bit of everything. It is very stressful to stay at home all the time. I did not like to leave my home all the time, but having to stay inside without going anywhere else is very stressful. I had an anxiety attack because since the psychologists and psychiatrists are not working, I am not able to be treated, I am only staying home. But I have been so stressed that I got to the point where I put everything aside” Mariele, 18, Brazil

“I have experienced stress because I do not go out, I have only reached the door of my house, and knowing that I could not go out stressed me more. I was more stressed to know that I still had homework to do, homework that I didn't understand, so doing my homework made me even more stressed.” Gaby, 17, Ecuador

“Yes, maybe I get stressed a lot, I get frustrated a lot because I used to go out a lot to my classes, to my groups, to my games, I went out to play with my friends, sometimes I went for a walk, so keeping me at home all the time made me feel bad and lowered my self-esteem” Irie, 17 Ecuador

“For loneliness, when you are at home alone... Sometimes I'll sleep and wake up around five. Then I'll be tired. Even my mom will not let me go out, so for the loneliness, I've experienced some during this pandemic.” Dede, 17, Ghana

“I felt alone because I had no colleagues to interact with. To overcome this feeling we should go back to normal. Communicating with friends can help overcome feelings of loneliness.” Chana, 15, Mozambique

“I think I have some stress because of firstly I can't do my work normally because I become lazier and also I'm an extrovert person, so I want to go outside and hang out with my friends and I don't want to stay at home for a long time because it's boring.” Phuong, 22, Vietnam

“I think definitely, last time because again, we were at that height and there were so many cases every day, my main concern was catching COVID, giving it to someone else, but now that it's sort of been suppressed, I think my main concern now is just educational, just trying to get those final exams done. I think that's definitely my main concern now and my main source of anxiety, which I guess is a bit better than being worried about COVID because COVID's a bit more, obviously way more serious than exams. So I think that shift in what I'm worried about has been better for me because it's less of a burden, being worried about exams because at the end of the day, they're just exams, whereas COVID can threaten your life so severely. So, I think the change in worries has been ironically, a bit better.” Amie, 17, Australia

“During the confinement, yes I was afraid of falling behind in my sports activity. On the other hand, after the confinement, I was very anxious about my entry into the preparatory class because I dropped out a little at the end of my last year of high school because I knew very early on that I had my high school diploma. So I was stressing about the start of the new school year, I was wondering if I had my place, at the beginning of September, I had a lot of trouble concentrating, I told myself that if I couldn't do it, it was perhaps because I wasn't in the right track, so yes, I had a lot of doubts about my schooling. Afterwards, in sport, I didn't have any important competitions. So yes, in September, I was stressed about my adaptation” Charlotte, 18, France

“I would have to say probably not necessarily loneliness. I have a big family. So I don't really ever feel lonely. But stress and a bit of anxiousness definitely surrounding school. And just the difficulty with keeping up with everything.” Mary, 17, United States

A number of other manifestations of anxiety, stress and loneliness came to light. The research respondents spoke of the general uncertainty that had taken hold by round two including not knowing when the virus would end and the uncertainty that was associated with rules being put in place by governments. Likewise, a number of girls and young women spoke about their feelings of being unproductive and not being able to achieve their goals.

"Oh, the other emotion, it's probably pretty unique to me, but I put a lot of pressure on myself to constantly be excelling. So during a pandemic you just can't do that. I wanted to be getting internships and getting into student politics and doing all these things, and we weren't on campus. There was no way of me really connecting with clubs on campus and this type of stuff meant that I just want getting that university and this excelling and this... everyone was like, "I. you're going to absolutely love university. It's going to be so great for your activism." And I just wasn't getting any of that, so I got this immense sense that I was losing time. Like it was a waste of a year and I wasting my youth and I was wasting a whole year where I could have been getting ahead in student politics or things like that. It's probably a feeling everyone's feeling when you waste a year of your life because of corona." Jenni, 18, Australia

"Okay. So yeah, just the lack of communication. Just the boredom, too. I feel really guilty if I'm not productive, and I find myself... My screen time is very high. But I feel like what's really causing the stress, like yeah I said lack of social interaction, but also you lose the... I don't know how to explain this. But the productivity that you used to have when you were to go to school, or you were to do weekend activities, whether it be an extracurricular like going to soccer and stuff, or if you were to just hang out with your friends. Nowadays you just feel so drained, and you feel so... Your energy, you just lose that motivation that you had from before. And I don't know. My body feels it too, along with my mentality. My body feels so... I do one stretch and my bone cracks. One little... Yeah. It's just so tiresome. I barely do anything in a day, and I feel just as tired as I was." Sara, 15, United States

"Yeah, and it's really hard. I'm somebody who needs control in my life. I need control over what I'm doing, when I'm doing it. And I know, even I think school has taught me that, and the amount of work I've had to do this year, if I don't have control over when I'm doing it and how I'm doing it, then I will get really anxious and burned out. Actually, it's sort of a different kind of burnout. It's like I'm getting to a point where I don't have the energy to invest in worrying about this anymore. I just hope it's going to peter out. I just, I can't be bothered hoping that anymore, because it hasn't felt worth it, given how everything's going right now. And yeah, it's just a weird patch of time I think." Janet, 18, Australia

"It has been very difficult and I think that I am still going to continue feeling this way because I do not see a change coming." Chinita, 18, Ecuador

"The only ... I feel like in a major way, it affected me because now, everything ... you don't know what's going to happen in the future. You don't know anything. You plan these huge things you have ever ... you have so many plans, you have so many expectations, but then it came out of nowhere. You never saw coming and totally demolish them or create new things or maybe it's a start of something new, you know what I'm saying? I've seen a lot of posts like, "We don't want to go back to normal. We want to progress in this way" Zara, 17, United States

"I had previous anxiety problems, and in March they got worse" Marina, 17, Spain

As with the first round of data collection the most frequent source of support that the girls and young women mentioned was family and friends. There was a slight increase in those that sought out their teachers or coaching staff to help them with their feelings. Girls and young women now also spoke of turning to activities and other outlets to deal with their feelings of anxiety and stress such as watching television, going online, doing schoolwork or meditation and exercise.

"I think it mainly comes from friends, talking with friends and sharing experiences because they're in the same position so you don't need to describe it and then really talk about how you feel. They just understand that context." Amie, 17, Australia

"I talk with friends, not with a psychologist" Barbara, 16, Brazil

"Well, with friends... friends, I can even just call them and tell them I need this, I need that." Miriam, 23, Ghana

"Because during this pandemic, I was sharing my feelings with parents, my siblings and we were enjoying a lot. And whatever was our problem, we were sharing, we were getting solutions and we were talking to our friends by video calling, we were talking to our relatives, we were asking about their health and other things" Pinky, 16, India

"I shared feelings of sadness with my family and friends" Nisia, 15, Mozambique

"I think I need the support of a coach and the athletes. Here for example I am in a training structure and with the athletes, we support each other a lot because we live the same experience. And the coaches also help us a lot mentally because they know how the athletes are working and they know how to talk to us." Charlotte, 18, France

"My friends and family and teachers" Anita, 16, India

"Sometimes you go and watch television, that's all." Kalice, aged 17, Ghana

"In terms of support, I would need mobile and television so that I can be reading and learning" Bupe, 17, Zambia

"Access to digital and e-learning platform and I can learn how to use them" Dahlia, 18, Zambia

"To deal with stress and anxiety it is necessary to exercise and read." Nisia, 15, Mozambique

Interestingly, a small but significant number of girls from across all types of countries (high, middle and low income) spoke of seeking out or wanting to seek out counselling services, both in or out of school, from medical or healthcare professionals and school counsellors.

"I'm very lucky that my school has psychologists for us. And then my parents, I talk to my parents. Yeah, but it's just trying to tell me that I can do things as well, so far." Janet, 18, Australia

"It was sort of just really disregarded before this year but our wellbeing counsellors have been amazing in letting us know that we can always talk to them about whatever, even if we don't want to talk about COVID, it can just be a casual conversation, so that's really great. I feel just having that support in the background, even though I haven't necessarily used it, is just very comforting to have that in the background, to know that there's that person who's willing to hear about it" Amie, 17, Australia

"To deal with stress it is necessary to approach health professionals, only they will be able to help me, I have already spoken with a health provider as soon as it is available, I will go to the health unit. I know that in the health unit I can have all the support." Xiluva, 17, Mozambique

"I think I need a psychiatrist ...my mom has depression. She goes to the psychologist and the psychiatrist, and people have a lot of prejudice, they say that psychiatrists are for crazy people, but the psychologist is more for listening. I think that the psychologist is for milder situations and my head is very confused, I cannot describe what I am feeling at the moment." Márcia, 15, Brazil

"Well, as I told you, I have been looking for support. In the past I had an almost similar problem and frankly a psychologist helped me, so thanks to her I had not felt that way for more than two years but now I started to worry again, it's like these feelings become more and more strong and everything accumulates." Chinita, 18, Ecuador

"I started seeing a psychologist after the pandemic. It was something I was already thinking about doing and I've decided to do it now." Raquel, 19, Spain

In the quantitative survey 88 per cent of the girls and young women surveyed had experienced anxiety ranging between high and moderate levels. Only 12 per cent reported not being anxious at all.¹⁵

In the final round of data collection the girls and young women were asked what they had done to cope with their feelings of stress and anxiety that they found most useful, and whether they would continue to utilise this going forward. Only three of the study respondents said that they had done nothing, the remaining responses can be divided into three categories: first, a range of activities; second, talking to and spending time with someone who was supportive; and finally health related actions. The first category listed a wide array of activities from exercise to watching television, to taking up new hobbies, to doing chores. As was found in the first two rounds of data collection the girls and young women still relied heavily on friends and family for support as well as seeking support from teachers, coaches and mental health professionals. Finally, the girls and young women spoke of proactively looking after their mental health by limiting social media or exposure to the news, improving their sleep or diet, and exercising self-care or self-reflection. Interestingly, while on the one hand girls spoke of going online and using social media as a

¹⁵ Halting Lives, Part One: the impact of COVID-19 on girls. Plan International September 2020

coping mechanism, on the other hand it is clear that in some instances they also understood the adverse effects that might cause to their mental health. Two of the research respondents spoke of taking medication.

"The most useful thing is to exercise or practice some sport, and sometimes it helps just to sleep the full hours. The doctor told me that I should sleep the full hours. I still try to divide my time, but I try to play some sports at home. I have a large patio, so if I have the possibility of playing for a while with my brother, we play basketball or soccer, and that's what I do." Irie, 17, Ecuador

"But afterwards, when I felt this stress, I went to rugby, I played sport, I was exercising, I did a lot of sport at home with my brother, it made me think of something else. And then we would talk about it from time to time with friends, even if we avoided talking about it because it was a bit of a downer, but doing sport, it was fine" Eve, 15, France

"It was very good for me, when the quarantine was over after two months that we were locked up at home and then you could only go out for a walk, a friend and I started to go running and we have continued until now and it has been very good because between when we had exams, when we were unable to study anymore and our heads were bursting, you would go out for half an hour or an hour and you cleared up a lot. Then there have been people who have dedicated themselves to painting or drawing, and it has also served them a lot to distract themselves for a while and not to turn their heads all the time. But to me about going out for a run, we continue now..." Rosa, 17, Spain

"Doing household chores to help my parents with their burdens, watching movies, and reading books." Ekram, 17 Ethiopia

"I sometimes read books and do household chores and I will continue to do that." Zeinab, 17, Ethiopia

"I started to do a lot of new things, for example playing the guitar, having tea, learning new types of coffee, reading more, reading books on other themes, sociology, detective novels, diversifying a lot, I like series, films and moving on until I find myself" Rita, 18, Brazil

"With regard to the emotional part, if you get overwhelmed you get too stressed, but you don't have to shut yourself up in your world, you have to try to do something at home, be it drawing or doing exercises, to keep distracted and to prevent having anxiety and depression problems because these are mental disorders that affect us too much and nobody wants that in our family. I draw, I think it is a beautiful way of expressing what you feel. Listening to music also relaxes me a lot. At times when I am very stressed what I do is put my headphones on and listen to my favourite music, I relax for a moment and then I return to my activities." Peque, 15, Ecuador

"Yeah. I started playing ukulele and I tried to finish my Chinese course, I suffered a lot. [Researcher] So I feel you tried to get busy to escape from the feeling of stress, right? Is that true? T: Yes, you're going to be stressed because of the way of somethings. But I think that it's going to be much more stressful if you're doing nothing." Trinh, 22, Vietnam

"So I saw a school psych regularly, and that was really good. And I actually found seeing them online much easier, because I feel like the whole process... I used to go to a psychologist in person outside of school, and the whole process of doing that is a little bit nerve racking. Going to the office, having this formal setting, that kind of thing. It feels a little bit cold and not as comfortable. Whereas being at home... And I'd already seen the school psychologist before in person. So I already knew her. I had a relationship with her. I knew who she was. She helped me before. So it was really easy, and I actually felt a bit more comfortable being at home. So I think maybe even trying to continue with the psychologist I'm seeing next week... I think even seeing her over Zoom wouldn't be a bad idea for me because I think I actually benefited from it a little bit." Janet, 18, Australia

"I think I've just taken some time for myself, little moments where I can find myself alone, without necessarily working or being surrounded, a little moment where I lie down and relax, after that I can get back to the course of my life and I think it's important to do that because we neglect it too often, whether there is COVID or not, there are moments when we think we have to do things quickly and because of living too much in this rush, we forget to live in the moment." Marie, 17, France

"It's a very crazy thing, because I'm a very social person, so having to stay away from that, from those people, has been a trial by fire, so when I can do that, I'm finding it very good for me. I renew myself, I become 100% again, I think it's the main thing I'm doing in relation to my mental health. So at the same time that I want to be close to these people through the social networks I want to get away. Sometimes staying away from social networks has been a great remedy. I started to do a lot of new things, for example playing the guitar, having tea, learning new types of coffee, reading more, reading books on other themes, sociology, detective novels, diversifying a lot, I like series, films and moving on until I find myself." Rita, 18, Brazil

The second part of the question around whether they would continue to use these methods to help them cope with mental health difficulties had a lower response rate. Nonetheless, of the seventeen respondents who answered the question, fifteen answered in the affirmative while two said no. One of the latter responses gave the reason that they would no longer have time to do so.

"Number one thing I've learned, is that I need to learn how to take breaks. I've never really been one to be like, "Oh, let's just take a break since I've done this assignment." I've always been like, "Go. Next thing, next thing, next thing." That's all, until end of the year. But then going through such a high stress situation has made me feel like, "Okay. Maybe I do need to take a couple of days, and just not do homework. Read a book, draw, talk to friends only, and then not feel guilty about it." That thing, just to give yourself a break has been the huge thing that I've learned that I need to do. [Researcher]: Amazing. [Researcher 2]: Sorry. I was going to say, are you going to try and make sure you take that into the coming years? M: Yes." Max, 16, Australia

"Actually, during the pandemic I had no anxiety or stress. I think I was still pretty happy at that time. In the pandemic, I think that because other things are postponed, so I was happy to have much more time for self-caring. I do yoga and I go running around lakes every night, and I have time to study the things that I like. Every day I will have my home-schooling for myself, sit at the table and learn some stuff about history or things that I like and I feel like that was such a time for myself when school stuff are reduced and many things are cancelled. We aren't distracted with the busy life for a while and yeah, I think I was pretty happy and productive actually at that time. Yeah. [Researcher]Yeah. You're a really industrious person. Let me see, so you're going to keep continue doing those habits after the pandemic is over, right? H: Actually, I cannot do all the habits that I kept in the pandemic up to now, because now things has changed and I have other stuff to do. I have to go to school, run some projects and also do my work. A lot of time for myself are reduced and time for myself is limited, so there are things that I cannot learn. For example, the habit of reading books every day. In the pandemic I read a lot, but now I do not even have 30 minutes in a day for self-reading, so I'm a bit annoyed by the fact that I cannot read books" Ha, 20, Vietnam

As noted above, the difficulties around mental health and how girls and young women coped was one of the golden threads that emerged from the three rounds of data collection, both in response to the questions which were posed to them and in the way they answered other questions. The significance of having friends and family to help them deal with the challenges they faced with stress and anxiety cannot be emphasised enough. Likewise, the self-awareness that the girls obviously possess in order for them to speak so openly about their worries and concerns is notable, as is the proactiveness that a number of them demonstrated in coping with the challenges they faced.

6. CONTACT AND COMMUNICATION

Given that two of the main types of government measures aimed to prevent spread of the pandemic resulted in the closure of institutions and facilities, as well as lockdowns and stay at home orders, understanding how girls and young women maintained contact with others and communicated with their friends and families is important. Questions on how they contacted and communicated with family members outside of their households as well as friends was asked in round one and round three of the data collection.

In round one it appeared that almost all of the research respondents used mobile phones as the tool through which they stayed in touch with friends and family, though the different ways in which contact could be achieved through a mobile phone differed. Calling was the most frequently mentioned method and this was followed by use of mobile applications that aided communication for example, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, FaceTime and Instagram. The girls and young women also mentioned texting as a way of communication used mostly alongside other methods. For those who used online conferencing applications Zoom was the most frequently mentioned that girls and young women used to stay in touch.

Despite the varied use of mobile phones to stay in touch mentioned above, a small number of girls and young women did mention problems with having limited access to communication devices. These girls and young women were all situated in lower- and middle-income countries (Ghana, Mozambique, Zambia, India, Brazil, Ecuador). They spoke of themselves or their families having either no internet access, a shared family phone, not having any device or a lack of data or electricity. In two countries, Ghana and Nicaragua, girls mentioned writing letters or emailing.

“It was just online, we used to do everything online. But the issue was that if you do not have data, then you are lights out. You don't speak to anybody, nobody speaks to you. Sometimes when you don't also text that one they don't text you. So if there's no bundle, then power cut. You wouldn't hear from anybody, nobody will hear from you.” Miriam, 23, Ghana

“It's more complicated with the family because they live in the rural zone and they don't have access to the internet, so we haven't talked to them in a long time.” Mariele, 18, Brazil

“Sometimes when you even go to look for them, they don't want to come out. During the pandemic when you want to talk to someone, for our area, we used to write letter. I can say letter and-... Yeah, because they don't even want you to talk to them. So we write letters. What you want to tell them, you'll just write it on paper and then you'll send it.” Dede, 17, Ghana

About a third of the girls and young women spoke of maintaining face to face contact with friends and family members, with most discussing precautionary measures to enable this such as social distancing, wearing facemasks, using hand sanitiser and meeting people only in their bubble.

“I meet friends on the street, our neighborhood is very small, me and my most distant family members look for ways to get together, we feel that we need to meet, especially on birthdays, we get together to eat a cake together. The elders don’t go. We always wear masks, because we fear for my grandmother.” Bruna, 18, Brazil

“[Researcher] And it sounds like you have a little bubble that you've created with a couple of close friends. M: Yeah. But that's it, we don't go out of that bubble.” Michaela, 17, United States

“Yeah, well, I did communicate with my friends and my family members outside my household, by texting or calling them via messenger or zoom, other online apps. And when we met up outside, we stay two meters apart and we also did not gather in a big crowd of 10 person.” Mi, 22, Vietnam

“[Researcher] Okay. And during times that something compels you to go out, how were you managing your outing? M: That means you'll have to have your hand sanitizer with you. You will have to have your nose mask with you.” Miriam, 23, Ghana

“If I want to communicate with them, they go back. For that one, I can say the social distancing has been observing that time. Because they don't even want to come closer to you and talk like how we used to do during the past days.” Dede, 17, Ghana

By round three girls and young women were asked again what methods they were using to stay in touch with friends and family and what their preferred method of staying in touch was. The usage of devices versus face to face remained relatively the same. Though as lockdown eased in some places it appeared there was more face to face contact with family as opposed to friends, and where face to face contact with friends did occur this was mainly at school.

“I met with my friends face to face only during school but my mom doesn’t allow me to get out with my friends since we started to stay at home again and closing school because of the fear of infection” Laila, 17, Egypt

“I saw almost all my friends again in real life because they are almost all in the same school as me so I meet them when I go to class but otherwise we continue to exchange via social networks and confinement” Émilie, 16, France

“We are going out for study purposes only, we are not going out to meet our friends and relatives and communicating with them through phone only” Anita, 16, India

Not all of the research respondents spoke about what their preferences were, but those that did overwhelmingly preferred face to face contact to digital or alternative means. Those that chose the latter spoke of how they felt safer and more protected through using that means of communication.

"I prefer to socialize in person, I thought doing that in social media/online was not something could do it, I've had friends in the social network and so on, but in person you look in the eye of the person, you talk, you look in the face of the person, you have contact and virtually it's complicated, because sometimes you speak in one tone and the person understands in another, in what they want to understand, in the social network is not something you can explain, by audio and message the person understands how they want, you can't know how the person reacts, so it's complicated" Márcia, 15, Brazil

"For me the question doesn't even arise, of course it's much nicer to see your friend or family face to face, to have a real contact and to dialogue and communicate. That's what the word is for, so for me it's obvious that I prefer to have the person in front of me." Eve, 15, France

"Face to face meeting in normal conditions are much better as through face to face meeting we can understand and express each other very well, but in current situation of corona, talking through phone and other social media is better." Pinky, 16, India

"Face-to-face meeting is ... I think it is good, ma'am, because we can solve the problems immediately and also we can know what they are thinking and what they want to say and we can also solve the problems at that moment only, ma'am." Pooja, 19, India

"I like personal socialization because that way we tease each other, we laugh at everything, we see people's the expressions, smiles, joy, being together." Milena, 18, Nicaragua

"I definitely prefer seeing people face-to-face rather than over phone, but now ... I don't know. It's better to FaceTime or something than to text, just so you can hear their voice, see their facial expressions, because if you're just texting, you don't know what their demeanor is. But definitely, it's better to see them face-to-face, but I know you shouldn't be doing that right now" Clara, 16, United States

"I'm still using digital media, just thinking about leaving home gets me anxiety crisis." Mariele, 18, Brazil

"During pandemic the best approach is to talk via online channels and this is not causing me any issues as I know this is in my best interest to protect myself from the infection." Salma, 17, Egypt

"So which do you prefer for socializing? Face-to-face meeting or phones or something like this? J: Phones, ma'am. [Researcher] Phones. J: Yes ma'am. [Researcher] Okay. And why? J: In this situation, phones are only, safety ma'am." Jia, 19, India

In addition, they were asked whether their preferred method of communication had changed, not many of the girls and young women answered this question but almost all who did said that their preference had been impacted during the course of the pandemic. They spoke of having become more used to communicating online and while they preferred face to face communication overall when government measures were in place they preferred digital means as they regarded this as safer. One girl mentioned her experience of not seeing anyone during lockdown and then when lockdown was lifted how she experienced 'social burnout' when returning to face to face contact.

“Over the new year and everything, yeah. Things got a bit better. And I managed to actually get out of the house, which that made me really happy. But it definitely also... Going from zero to a hundred also takes a toll on my social battery. So I remember, I think it was on New Years, I was like “Why do I not feel like a hundred percent?” This feels so weird because I haven’t been able to actually go out for so long, and I just feel exhausted that I’ve been doing all of this literally in a few months...Yeah. I think I felt a little bit of a burnout, maybe the last week of December, I was like, “Oh, boy. I’ve been going out every weekend.” And I remember I tried to go on a two day bender with my friends, and by the first day, I was like, “I want to go home and sleep in my bed.” So I think because we’re also keen on going out, it all kind of hit us pretty strongly, the aftermath of going out and seeing people that you haven’t seen in a while, and doing things you haven’t done in a while. So I definitely experienced a little bit of burnout, maybe in the last week, but I think I’m pretty good now.” Mia, 18, Australia

Having asked the research respondents this question only at the start and end of this study, it is interesting to note that their methods remained constant over time and while there were clearly a wide range of alternative communication methods used by the girls and young women they resoundingly chose face to face communication as their preferred choice and seemed to easily return to this once government measures changed.

7. RELATIONSHIPS WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY AND HOW THEY ARE COPING

Given the research was aimed at understanding the lived realities of adolescent girls and young women, it was important to understand how their relationships with friends and family had been affected during the pandemic. Therefore, in round one of the data collection the research respondents were asked whether their relationships with friends and family had changed as a result of the pandemic and the nature of the change.

There was an even split of responses between the girls and young women with half speaking about how their relationships had been adversely affected and half speaking about how their relationships had been positively impacted. The adverse effects mentioned by the respondents included not being able to socialise with friends, feeling disconnected with family members, both physically and emotionally. Whereas on the positive end of the spectrum the girls and young women spoke about becoming closer with their family

members by speaking with them more openly and spending more time together. Only seven girls said their relationships had not changed in any way.

"The friends are distant now, because usually I used to meet them more at school. I lived more at school." Bruna, 18, Brazil

"[Researcher]So let's talk about the change in terms of positive and negative. You can pick any of them and then talk about it..."

...M: But with the negative, you are not even able to go to them. If not through the social media or phone call, you are not able to go to them as much as you used to. And even extended families nowadays, if you don't want to go visiting or something, they use the COVID as an excuse so you don't come. They're always like you might come and infect. They are taking the precautionary measures seriously, they don't want you to come and then maybe you have the COVID and you infect them or their children. So those things, they have also been some negative aspects of it." Miriam, 23, Ghana

"Negatively? I can't think of anything, honestly. It just made me miss them much more because if coronavirus didn't exist, I would be visiting them. Literally my parents are immigrants, so they left their homes to come to America, to provide for me and my sister and for more opportunities for themselves. So my whole family, mom and dad's side, are from Malaysia and I don't get to see them any other time but the summer. So originally I was supposed to go in August, like the whole August, to just visit my family and spend time with them. But that was cancelled. Actually, it didn't even have to be, it's just if I were to go, I would have to quarantine myself for 14 days. That's like my whole trip basically, so there's no point in going. And it was cancelled and I don't know what I'm going to do in August now." Sara, 15, United States

"There has been a reduced number of friends to play with. Even when you go to church, you will find very few people in church." Audre, 16, Zambia

"Maybe the most troublesome thing is that, I cannot visit my family in hometown, even though we have some gathering for the whole family, and now we cannot organize it anymore because we cannot travel. I have to call my parents and ask for the help, and listen to their concerns by phones. Maybe my parents are a little upset because I cannot come back home like every summer. Yes." Nguyet, 23, Vietnam

"I think it has brought some positive changes, ma'am. Because, we started communicating with the family, extended family as well as friends. Because, right now we are concerned about each other's health, their well-being. So I think, this pandemic actually had some positive impact on relationships." Avani, 18, India

"I felt that during the quarantine my interaction with my family improved, we were able to laugh more together and talk a lot. I realized that what I really needed was to talk so this pandemic period is helping me a lot in this regard" Mariele, 18, Brazil

"I think this has brought us together a lot, we are always calling each other by video calls, I think it strengthened our communication a lot." Peque, 15, Ecuador

"In my family we are talking more and have more communication because every day all of us had to do various things. My father used to work and I also used to go out, so we did not have time to talk, and during the pandemic we talk about how we are and how we feel, even with my classmates we have strengthened our ties of friendship." Emily, 17, Ecuador

"Well, with my family, it did make us bond a little better at the spot because I think pre COVID my dad was mentioning that we barely eat dinner together because everyone's out in one area of the city and whatnot. So pre pandemic we all had something going for us and we would rarely see each other. But now being able to sit at the dinner table together and chat about our day, that made us bond a lot better." Mia, 18, Australia

"The truth there has been positive changes because I used to relate them not much and now with the pandemic there is more communication with them, we get along better, we have more conversation and not before, there is more fluent communication but by calls." Ana, 16, Nicaragua

"Much more than before, because everything is connected by video call. For example, in order not to lose traditions, every Sunday we had the aperitif by video call with my family" Rosa, 17, Spain

"My mother. [Researcher]Okay. S: Because she's taking lead everything. She's the leading person in our family. She's taking everything, whatever, what is good, what are the problems we are facing and all. So she is feeling more difficult if our families are facing any problems in this" Shanti, 18, India

"[Researcher] Who in your household has found the situation more difficult? A: My mother, because she used to manage everything"
Anita, 16, India

"My Mother is the most affected as she does not believe COVID exist and she only wears a mask when going in town for shopping."
Audre, 16, Zambia

"My mom is very careful about going outside, she also has anxiety, and when she has to go outside, she gets really nervous, so it has been a problem for her as well." Mariele, 18, Brazil

"Mainly with my mommy because she's very nervous, if a person comes and starts talking about it, she feels the symptoms that she has that, so since my mom is very attentive to my mommy, we cook soursop leaf tea, chamomile tea, if she has a sore throat, headache, but has been slowly coming out of that fear, of nerves and thank God it's fine." Ana, 16, Nicaragua

"In my family I think that the one who has had more difficulties is my brother, he is very small and locked up... He is very hyperactive, for my little brother being locked up and being very hyperactive was also stressful because he could not go out. He used to say "Mommy I want to go out" and of course he couldn't." Gaby, 17, Ecuador

"I think my younger brother, because for my younger sister, she enjoy her movies on laptop or a TV. So actually, she's introvert, so she can spend all day at home. My younger brother, after school he wants to play sports or because he do martial arts, so during the COVID-19, he cannot go to the stadium to play that sport. Also, boys, they really, just attractive with everything. If he go to school, so teacher can, that attention on him, and he had to follow the instruction of the teacher, but during the COVID-19 they have to study online. Actually nobody knows what is he doing. He played games on mobile phone and still open the laptop to the online. After sitting like eight hours a day to study online, he will play online game instead of going to the stadium to do martial art. So just like, I think he just suffering that one with 12 hours a day with laptop, like online. I think he also being aggressive a little bit, like angry, when somebody's talking to him because of the negative feeling and kind of tired with the physically." Trinh, 22, Vietnam

"I think it was my father, he couldn't stand the confinement because we were in the city center while he loved nature, so he lived it badly. But he believes a little in conspiracy theory, he thinks that the State manipulates us, he has his own ideas." Charlotte, 18, France

"My father, I think, is the one who has had it the worst because being at home takes it quite badly, and it may be that he is the one who has had the worst experience or even my grandmother because of the fear that they could reach you to hit and such because being an older person and such well ... you have much more respect for the virus than people my age, really" Rosa,17, Spain

"My family members are observing the measures put in place. However, Dad is affected as he cannot go and do business as before."
landisa, 17, Zambia

"I think my sister. Well, my older sister. She's in college. And so I think just having that college experience and missing out on getting your first apartment and campus life. I feel really bad for her in that aspect. But I think with the online learning, she's probably doing a lot better than the rest of us. And my younger siblings, they're just so little. Well, they're not so little. They're 13 and 10, but, I think they're so little. And they just make friends so easily and they miss their friends and they just miss like being around people and talking with people." Mary, 17, United States

"It has been more difficult for my little sister; it seems that it is harder for her to understand what was happening. On the other hand, since we are older, we have already gotten used to it or we tell to each other how we are doing, and then feel better." Emily, 17, Ecuador

In round two, the focus shifted to finding out how the girls and young women's friends and family were coping with the pandemic and how the girls and young women were supporting their family and friends. Generally speaking the family members that were seen to be struggling the most were immediate family members and mostly mothers and brothers. Fathers and sisters were also mentioned but less frequently. Some concern was expressed for children and the elderly more generally and extended family members, but much less frequently.

When asked about how they supported friends and family members the majority of answers focused on spending time with them or speaking with them, but some concrete examples were also offered such as helping with chores or household responsibilities, helping

"We use to ask each other how we are, also with my friends, we ask each other how we are and how we are doing." Emily, 17, Ecuador

"In my family we try to have small conversations, for example my grandparents tell us how was education in the past and give us advice, we try to support each other in that way" Peque, 15, Ecuador

"Yes, actually we have a tradition, we have a family Messenger group and we talk all the time so we talked every day via Messenger, we always kept in touch. And with my cousin, we called her, we sent her messages, to get news, we all supported each other by calling each other and getting in touch." Eve, 15, France

"We support each other through dialogue" Chana, 15, Mozambique

"We talk quite often and we usually spend time in a weekend to cook and talk and share anything. So yeah, that's all I can do for my brother." Nguyet, 23, Vietnam

"So, I was helping my mother by doing some household work, by which she will not feel bad ... and if I talk about my siblings and I was playing with them and I was talking to them and if they have any work so I was doing for them." Pinky, 16, India

"Sometimes when my mom is not at home, or sometimes when they've gone to a workshop or something, we've been taking part in some of the house chores and we've been helping them" Dede, 17, Ghana

"My friends and I support each other with homework, for example, some of them do not have a computer to do homework, so they tell me, please help me doing this homework and I will explain this exercise to you. What we do is supporting each other in that way because we know that, even if we are studying online, we must fulfil our responsibilities." Peque, 15, Ecuador

"[Researcher] Okay. So, how you or your family are supporting or helping your brother to overcome this situation? P: Actually, I started him to make him study about what is, about the intermediate classes and I'm teaching him by using the previous books" Pooja, 19, India

"Yeah, it is. But it's also, I think it's also hard for us to consider the fact that there are other people in the household who are going through different kinds of exhaustion, because we all feel like, "Well, you're not more stressed, or this, or that, than I am." But then, it's subjective, and everyone is going through different things. I think everyone in my house, the jobs that my parents do have a lot going on right now. Yes, obviously they're very lucky to still have jobs. I'm very grateful for that. But what they do, especially my dad, he has a lot going on right now, very busy. He's stressed. And then I have this going on right now and I'm stressed. And we're all like, "Well, I'm more stressed than you, and I need this." "Well no, I'm more stressed than you and I need this. And this is going on." It's like we can't, it's kind of hard I think for us to understand that we're all stressed, it's all subjective, everyone's going through a separate stressful year." Janet, 18, Australia

financially by getting a job or income, and helping out with homework. Interestingly, two of the respondents struggled with providing support to others and spoke of how it was difficult to support family members who were going through different things when they were too.

8. HEALTH

Health emerged as a theme in the girls and young women's answers to the livelihood-based question in round one, which sought to understand what, if any, effect COVID-19 had on their lives and well-being. As discussed in section one a range of negative impacts to health and access to healthcare services were discussed, as well as some girls and young women reporting that there had been no impact. In round two the theme of health and healthcare was explored in more detail, asking whether the girls or their families had been able to access healthcare services if needed (in relation to any health issues, not just in relation to COVID-19), and if not what were the problems they had faced.

Overall, there was an encouraging majority of girls and young women who discussed by round two of the interviews (held between October and November 2020) that they had access, or good access, to healthcare services. Some of the reasons given by the girls and young women to substantiate this included, family member's having had positive experiences in accessing services such as going to the hospital or physical therapy appointments, access to prescription medication, dentists, prompt COVID-19 testing and mental health support. Girls and young women also mentioned having access, and in one case (Ecuador) even improved access to SRHR services including information meetings being

held and increased service at their health centre in relation to this, as well as access to menstrual hygiene products.

'Yes, I particularly have been going to the dentist every month; I only had difficulties during the first 3 months of the pandemic.'

Barbara, 16, Brazil

'Recently the health centre near my house held a meeting because they were going to explain about sexual and reproductive rights and we met with the girls and those doctors told us that if we had any questions we should not hesitate to go and ask because they would be there to give us support. I think that now there is going to be more support than before for us.' Irie, 17, Ecuador

'I have visited the Health Centre and they have given to me the best attention they can. I do not feel bothered in that aspect. Lately, during this time, services here in the Health Centre have increased as well.' Chinita, 18, Ecuador

'Myself, I came to fall sick for about two, three weeks. But now I am okay. [Researcher]Okay. Did you go to hospital? D: Yes please. [Researcher] Okay. And you were able to get treatment and now you're fine? D: Yeah, I was given drugs. [Researcher] Okay. That's good. What about your menstrual hygiene products? Like your menstrual pad, and those things. How have you been managing during corona and up to now? ...D: Oh, okay. My daddy used to buy it in bulk for me so for that one I don't have problem. And then I could remember we go for a program ... and we were given the Days for Girls ... So for that one, I'm okay.' Dede, 17, Ghana

'[Researcher]Earlier you told me that many things are not available to like sanitary pads or all medical facilities and something like this. J: Now all are available, ma'am. [Researcher] Now everything is available. J: Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am.' Jia, 19, India

'[Researcher]Okay. Are you able to get menstrual hygiene products like sanitation pads and all, regularly? P: Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am. [Researcher]: Earlier you told me that the medical shops are closed and they're difficult to get. P: No, ma'am. They are open and we are able to get all the sanitation stuff.' Pooja, 19, India

'We have really good access to health resources here. COVID-related, I did get a test like a month ago, I think. I don't know, three weeks ago. I woke up, and I was like, "I have a sore throat, this is kind of scary," so I went and got tested, and I got results in less than 24 hours. That's been really good. My family and I, just occasional doctor visits, GP visits about iron deficiency or anything like that, that's also been really accessible, and we have one centre that's two kilometers away from my house. It's still within 5K, and it's really accessible, so we really haven't had any trouble with that.' Mia, 18, Australia

'I had access to health services including menstrual hygiene products' Xiluva, 17, Mozambique

'Well, in general we have been able to access without problem, as are the telephone consultations, that also makes it a little easier, although in these months since September or October everything is a little heavier, right? but in general we have been able to access it quite well.' Luna, 22, Spain

'I think we don't have any difficulties to access health service and public health service. And my family, my parents who are living in the hometown, my hometown is a small village, but I don't heard they complain about any difficulty to access health service.' Nguyet, 23, Vietnam

There were, however, a large number of girls and young women who also discussed problems or barriers which limited access to healthcare for either themselves or their families. Similar to what was mentioned in round one, the fear of potentially contracting COVID-19 if attending a health facility was discussed, as well as health services being overrun or preoccupied with COVID-19 patients was also mentioned. There were also many more reasons detailed such as; choosing to put up with a health issue rather than seek treatment during the pandemic; only being able to seek emergency care; no emergency

service available; no access to transport to healthcare services; lack of access to COVID-19 testing and ineffective track and trace mechanisms; only having access due to family members being healthcare professionals or needing to use private healthcare services due to general facilities being too busy; limited stock or medications being too expensive and finally problems accessing sexual and reproductive health services including menstrual hygiene products.

A handful of girls and young women discussed that they believed they would have access, or good access to healthcare services, however they and their families had not actually needed to use healthcare services throughout the pandemic.

“If my mom was not a nurse technician and did not work at a community health clinic, we probably would not have access to these services, because these places are always full of people and have terrible infrastructure, so if it was not for her, we would not be able to have access” Rita, 18, Brazil

“No, the truth is that in recent days we have wanted to make a medical appointment in the Social Security, but we have not been able, even yesterday I was still trying to make a medical appointment online and the page is there loading ... loading ... and it never loads. You can also call to make a medical appointment and they hang up, they never speak, never answer. We are trying to make a checkup appointment and another appointment with a specialist because these weeks I have been with severe pain in my knee, I cannot flex it, that is why I have been looking for the appointment. We also need an appointment for my brother for his treatment, but it has not been possible either.” Gaby, 17, Ecuador

“My mother had health problems unrelated to COVID-19, she had back problems, with a pinched nerve that hurt her very much. The doctors took a long time to analyze her file, she spent a whole day at the hospital emergencies and came home very late and in the end she didn't get the right treatment, her file was overlooked, so she made another appointment with our general practitioner who told her that the subject was not treated properly by the emergency doctor because hospital emergencies were overbooked.” Eve, 15, France

“Yes, for example. I went to the ophthalmologist, about two months ago, and I had to buy a medicine, it is a dropper because they did not have in the pharmacy, only one, because there were two, and it cost C \$ 470.00, I could not buy it and now I have an appointment for again on November 7th and hope to go” Soledad, 17, Nicaragua

“So I think the access is there, definitely, but sometimes the presented need for precaution or awareness of precaution from different medical services isn't really there, for example, like the dentist. Just very highly interactive between you and the dentist. They're in your mouth. But the first thing that they said , Oh, if you catch COVID, it's not going to be on us. It was your choice to come here. And so we've been holding off on things like dentist appointments” Mary, 17, United States

“No we have not accessed any service due to transport challenges. We have no money for transport to health facility as it very far” landisa, 17, Zambia

“We have been facing challenges. Sometimes we do not get medications.” Yolana, 17, Zambia

“Health facilities were available, but we had no need to go to health services. There is a health unit in the community but they do not offer reproductive health services. I didn't have access to menstrual hygiene products, due to lack of money to buy.” Chana, 15, Mozambique

“We still have no access to menstrual hygiene products since the non-governmental organisations have not been distributing the things needed. Buying of Pads (Menstrual hygiene product) is a challenge as they are expensive. Currently, am using cloth materials” Dahlia, 18, Zambia

“Yes, but there are issues of shortage of medicines (Drugs). SRHR services are not provided since COVID 19 started” Bupe, 17, Zambia

9. INCOME AND LIVELIHOODS

Impacts on income and livelihood was also investigated in the third and final round of data collection. The research participants were asked whether either themselves or family members had lost their jobs or income due to the pandemic and whether, if this was the case, they or their family members had either managed to go back to work or found another source of income.

Most commonly, girls and young women answered that they and their families had not faced problems relating to income or job loss. Out of these respondents, some girls and young women did discuss general problems relating to members of their community or extended families, whilst two girls from Ghana and Zambia mentioned themselves and their families had not been financially impacted however went on to discuss economic issues such as their business no longer being profitable or struggles relating to affording school supplies or admission fees.

In the quantitative survey 31% of girls and young women were unemployed with no household income.¹⁶

"Nobody in my family has lost their job, and I do not know the economic situation of my neighbours, but I think this situation has been complicated for some families, which is why they have had to look for other sources of income to be able to move forward and seek a livelihood. They have set up small business projects in agriculture, livestock or stores with the objective of having some money to support their families. I have been seen that in our parish there are many people selling animals in the fair which is attended by a large number of people. I think the business is going very well for them, which is why they continue with it." Chinita, 18, Ecuador

"I wouldn't say that it's especially in my family but in my close circle, I have friends who have experienced these situations concerning their parents so it was quite complicated for them, it's true. Otherwise, concerning the students who could have stopped school because of the economic repercussions, I don't know them personally but I have dealt with this type of case as a delegate of the school council, on the school board, we tried to find solutions because our school helps, has a fund to help students who find themselves in difficult situations." Marie, 17, France

"Well, I have just been lucky that neither of my two parents have had any financial problems. My mother is working in a centre for the elderly and the truth is that they are full, they have a YouTube channel and everything to try to do remote activities so very well. And my father ... has been working during the quarantine as well, that is, he left home. So we have not had any problems, but it is true that many people around me have had problems, that is, their parents ..." Raquel, 19, Spain

"Family members no, but if I count friends and close people, yes, there were people who lost jobs, either because of the workload or because of the service they had to do for the owner of the company, or they simply decided to close down, so many people lost their jobs or did not even have the opportunity to enter a job" Rita, 18, Brazil

"From what I know, nobody has such a situation. Like my sisters, they are not employed yet. They are done with university, but they're not employed yet. And my uncles have already been working, I think, even during the COVID. He was lucky. A lot of offices or a lot of workplaces, they were now running shift. There were not so many at the office. So I think they were already working or something and they are still working. [Researcher] Okay. So there has not been issues of loss of job and loss of income, right? M: No. [Researcher] Okay. So that's even why you're able to get back to school. Is that right? M: Well, yes and no. Yes and no in the sense that yes, I am back to school. No in the sense that I haven't been able to buy anything to school yet. Because I had to come to continue with the lectures. I don't want to lag behind. That's why I didn't stay at home, I had to come. [Researcher] Yes. So on that note, how did you finance your going back to school? What kind of support did you get? M: Because our school is almost ... I have a roommate and she was coming back to campus for her lectures. ... so I came with her to campus. [Researcher]: So mostly, we know when children are going back to school, they have to do some shopping, they have to pay some school fees or some utility fees at the school and stuff. How have you gotten support to manage this so far? Either from your family, from your community or anywhere. M: Well, right now my dad doesn't have money. He said he doesn't have money, so maybe later he'll help me with it. I've not been able to buy any provisions for school. We are using my roommate's provision for now. Now that we are on campus, we're using my roommate's provisions. So I've not been able to buy any provision. But with regards to the school fees, our admissions are not really out yet. It's when the admissions come out and then we'll be asked to pay fees and do our registration of our courses. [Researcher]: Right. So that definitely is an impact on you because you've not been able to go to school with the needed supplies for now. You're depending on your colleague on campus, right? M: Yes, sure." Miriam, 23, Ghana

"Family members have continued to do business with no challenges but with no profit." Dahlia, 18, Zambia

For the research participants who identified as having jobs or income effected by the pandemic, the main sources of financial support related to themselves or family members

¹⁶ Halting Lives, Part One: the impact of COVID-19 on girls. Plan International September 2020

returning to work, either at their previous or a new job. A handful of girls and young women also discussed receiving financial support from the government, other family members, non-government organisations and charities and colleagues.

A small number of girls and young women also answered that a new source of income or job has not been found. Importantly the girls and young women's answers provided insights into some of the impacts of this such as reduced salary or profits, food insecurity and limited job or employment opportunities.

"[Researcher]Who is the earning member of your family? Your father- J: My father, my father. [Researcher]: Your father. So he's going to his job regularly? J: He will to go to carpenter work, ma'am. [Researcher] Okay. He's getting his work regularly? J: No, ma'am. For monthly he go ...5 to 10 days only. [Researcher]: Oh, 5 to 10 only. Before corona also this situation is same or because of corona this situation occur? J: Before corona, he will go 20 days month. After corona, he will go. Only 10 days. [Researcher]: Okay. Because of Corona only he is, working days- J: Yes, ma'am. [Researcher]: Less and less. Okay. ... Then the source of income is also less now ... how you all are managing it? J: Ma'am? [Researcher]: Is source of income is also less now. He's earning less. So how you all are managing all this in your family? J: My grandfather is living in a village, ma'am. He will send all the things for what we need, like rice, dal. [Researcher]: Okay. Okay, so- J: Yes, ma-am. [Researcher]: That's where you are managing. J: Yes, ma'am." Jia, 19, India

"If we talk about today, the only person who does not have a job is my father, but my mother has a temporary job maybe once a week, so we can say that my whole family has lost their jobs during the pandemic, but as time goes by, what we have learned helps us to apply for different jobs so now my sister, my brother and my mother are working. I would also like to work, but I don't know what will happen in the future. For a while I was able to support my family a little because I was working two days a week and earned some money, not much but I was helping a little. The municipality, together with Plan International and other organizations such as Hogar de Cristo have given us food baskets that have helped us a lot, because food is essential, we need food every day and I think that, thanks to God, we have been blessed in that way." Gaby, 17, Ecuador

"I know that they got support from the government. They got about one million Vietnamese Dong for a month and the job that they are working right now is mostly selling clothes and maybe the waiter and the drinks, like the coffee shop. So it's really manual jobs that they can do right now." Trinh, 22, Vietnam

"My father had lost his job during the lockdown, now he has resumed his job after lockdown but his salary is reduced to half of his earlier salary. So we are still facing financial problems. We got free ration twice from Plan India and for few months from Government and once through NGO Gunj but other than that we didn't get any other help." Pinky, 16, India

10. ACCESS TO INFORMATION

In the third round of interviews girls and young women were asked about where they had accessed information in relation to COVID-19 throughout the pandemic. The majority of girls discussed that they had got information from the television or news, followed closely by social media apps and networks. Online sources (including government or health department websites), friends and family, the radio and newspapers or newspaper apps were also discussed by many girls as important sources of information. A handful of girls also mentioned school, healthcare professionals, youth groups or their community as sources of where they received information relating to COVID-19. The majority of girls and young women accessed a combination of different sources of information.

“Well, I got most of mine from the ABC News app, and a couple other news apps as well. But I know that Facebook was also a go-to I guess to make sure that... To actually get people's reactions, I always used to be like a comment-reader because I just found it interesting.” Mia, 18, Australia

“I resort to social networks and also to television because sometimes I watch the news and information that comes out. There is also information on social media platforms, for example, with specific information about each of the pharmaceutical companies, which country vaccines come from, and when they are going to implement them. It has been useful to know how they are going to do things in my country and in other countries.” Peque, 15, Ecuador

“So in fact, I mixed all this up a bit, I tried to get different information so as not to have just one fixed idea, then I went to sites that were reliable enough not to have fake news and I think that it's all this that allowed me to have a little reflection about COVID or at least to start thinking about it. [Researcher] And what kind of reliable sites, for example? M: I went on the government site, then I also went on "pass-santé", I don't know if you know it, on another site whose name I don't remember and the others I don't remember the name very well. I watched the news too, sometimes on social networks, and if not, I talked with my family and friends about it.” Marie, 17, France

“Yes, ma'am. Actually, I used to see in the YouTube in the news only ma'am, news channels, and from the WhatsApp messages and through internet.” Pooja, 19, India

“My main source is usually social media platforms, such as Instagram or Facebook, and mostly Facebook. You don't even have to look for the information. You just go to your news feed and everything was already there.” Ha, 20, Vietnam

“I feel the official channel that I got the information is YouTube. I will see a really quick update news from YouTube, but the unofficial channel is my friends because they are all over the world, so we have a group and they just share a lot of things in their country.” Trinh, 22, Vietnam

“I get access to information from the radio, family, friends and at school.” Dahlia, 18, Zambia

“When I want information, if it's usually something specific, I'll Google it or I watch the news every morning. Also, I know it's a newer thing, but with TikTok and stuff, there are many news channels on TikTok and there's news reporters on there that will help. So basically, the internet” Clara, 16, United States

The girls and young women were also asked whether they felt the information had been useful in helping them understand what was happening about the virus. Overwhelmingly the participants perceived the information as being in some way useful for helping to learn either about the virus or protection measures. Some found that it was both useful and limited, whilst only one girl described the information in solely negative terms as disappointing and hard to navigate.

“But yeah, that's something that I've found a bit difficult in trying to navigate because you really just want the information of say how many cases there are today. But then you sort of have to filter through slander and kind of propaganda against restrictions and stuff like that. And yeah, just that makes it a little bit harder to get the information you need... .. But yeah, at its peak, it was... Yeah, really disappointing and difficult to get information properly.” Amie, 17, Australia

“Yes I find these information very helpful and also provide me with information on protecting ourselves” Laila, 17, Egypt

“[Researcher] Has this information you have received helped you understand what is going on with Covid? S. Yes [Researcher] Why do you think this information has been useful? S. Because I am aware of everything and one must be well informed to avoid infecting people. And above all to prevent, because if I didn't know, who knows where I would be right now” Soledad, 17, Nicaragua

“I think I've been going on the Guardian app on my phone. That's where I check every morning and throughout the day. The livestream there, and I find that really accessible. We know exactly what time all the press conferences are. We know exactly when to tune in for case numbers, and things like that. And they also have a whole page that's the hotspots, that you can check whether you've been to any of them” Jenni, 18, Australia

“I found this information very useful to protect myself from the pandemic by distancing myself from people, wearing masks and using hand sanitizer” Ekram, 17, Ethiopia

“We get information about COVID 19 from Arogya setu app, TV news channels, newspapers and social media channels. This information makes us aware and we can take precautions accordingly. Through Arogya setu app we are aware about the situation of COVID 19 in our nearby area, and we can make other people aware also using this information.” Pinky, 16, India

Of the girls and young women who identified the information they had accessed as being in some way limited or less useful, the main reason listed for this related to the information or source being considered misleading or unreliable. Other concerns included being overwhelmed with negative news and information relating to COVID-19, information being unclear in regards to current protection measures, limited access to information including having to pay subscription fees to access online articles or limited scope of content, for example focusing only on national rather than global news.

"I'm very skeptical about this, I always try to look carefully at what places people are informing me, because wrong information hurts a lot of people. I always look for local news and national and international news, reliable websites, which are not unknown, which are large and which have truthful content and work...And social media, like Instagram on more reliable pages, and on twitter, it is a very crazy thing and not a lot of news but it has information, a lot does not circulate in Instagram, in whatsapp but it has on twitter and we can know what is happening." Rita, 18, Brazil

"Yes I find these information very helpful especially that internet publish everything thing on the pandemic, however, I need to make sure to get the info from a trusted website and not believe everything I read online." Amina, 15, Egypt

"I definitely found some of it interesting and helpful, but you really have to be cautious on what you read. So I definitely had to do a lot of fact checking on what I was reading. So, using multiple sources to make sure that it was a good source." Clara, 16, United States

"I found the information useful because it's always good to find out what's going on around us but afterwards, at one point, I felt it was a bit too much, all the time we were talking about COVID, when you turn on your TV, at some point I couldn't even get there, I had the impression that when you turn on your TV, it's always COVID COVID, as if apart from this COVID there was nothing else around, at some point it made me... I don't know.... It was too much. There was a bit of misuse of information." Seny, 19, France

"My main source is usually social media platforms, such as Instagram or Facebook, and mostly Facebook. You don't even have to look for the information. You just go to your news feed and everything was already there. You don't even have to look for that. But it also comes with the issue of fake news and misleading views about the pandemic, so it is so important that we have to categorize which news should we listen to and wish news should we get rid of" Ha, 20, Vietnam

"So I make sure I check the exposure slides, and the number of people who got COVID every day, but now I don't really check because it sort of comes up on your newsfeed once, and that's how it is sort of thing. But I definitely caught myself I guess towards the end of the year, I would know when I would be scrolling too much, and looking to the news that it would make me feel a bit anxious, and I would be like, "Okay, time to turn off the news, or turn my phone off." So that was a nice realization, reflection on how much news I consume." Mia, 18, Australia

"At the beginning, for example, I always went to the OMS, or if I wanted to see something specific, I would go to those who tell you "coronavirus live" who release news ... that they are not 100% objective ... yes, that was taken into account, but if I wanted to see that "they have been confined, I don't know what" because at the time I was going to look at it there. For example, what do I know... the newspaper website or... Lately I have decided not ... before it was like an obsession to be all the time ... at first I say, in March, to be all the time every two minutes looking at the number of deaths, the number of infected ... and lately it has been decreasing and I have decided ... eh .. unless it is something that affects me 100%, or at least I have to corroborate a fact that they are telling me and I am not believing it much, which I think may be true but I want to see it with my eyes if it is true, there I look for it on a website that is official and that's it. Or if I want to know if something has happened... a new measure or something like that, but I'm not looking at the infected or the dead, if it worsens or improves ... I have no idea right now, and I prefer it that way, because if not ... it doesn't work for me ... what I have to do will help me, and if everyone does the same, they will go down, but be there all the time ...I mean, I mean, bad information is very present right now, over-information is very present right now ... and it generates anxiety in people, Even if they do not realize it or do not want to admit it, it creates stress, because how can it not cause you to be overwhelmed to see that the world is falling apart, and that is why I have decided to take what is useful to me, that is, I want to know what affects me, if it affects me that I can only go out until midnight..." Vera, 18, Spain

11. AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION OF THE VACCINE

In the third and final round of data collection the research participants were asked about their perception on the vaccine, specifically how they felt about getting the vaccine, whether they felt positive about the development of it, and if they had any worries or concerns in relation to it.

Overall, the majority of girls were aware of the development of a vaccine in relation to the COVID-19 virus. Interestingly, the overwhelming majority of girls and young women provided mixed responses with both positive and negative feelings towards the vaccine. There was a small number of girls and young women who were either decisively positive or negative in their reflections about the vaccine, out of these there was a considerably larger amount of girls and young women who were concerned or held negative views.

In relation to the positive feelings the girls and young women discussed about the vaccine the most commonly held view was a general positivity or excitement around the idea of the vaccine and perceiving it be a good thing. Out of those who held positive views, a reasonable portion suggested they would have the vaccine if it was available to them, whilst a few discussed the vaccine offering a chance for a COVID-free future or return to normal life, and excitement that others (especially their loved ones) would be able to access the vaccine.

"Yeah. Pretty positive about the developments that they've made, which are quite amazing in themselves because it's been a year and they've been able to do this, which I think is quite amazing. So, yeah, just sort of in awe of that as well that they've managed to roll this out. But yeah, I'm feeling pretty positive about it. And I think my concerns are just hearing recent stuff about... In Denmark perhaps or Norway, I don't know if they're in the same place but elderly people had had it and then were experiencing bad side effects and then had passed away." Amie, 17, Australia

"It is something that I really want, because it is almost a year that we are in isolation, my God, but thank God the vaccine has come. I am a little afraid because the vaccine was only on trial until two months ago, but the expectations are the best and I want to go back to school and see my friends." Barbara, 16, Brazil

"Although we can't afford it, I recommend that the vaccine should be distributed fast to both developed and underdeveloped countries; giving priority to students. To me I feel positive about it but many people in our community don't want to get vaccinated because they think the pandemic is over and the vaccine has side effects" Zienab, 17, Ethiopia

"It is good that the vaccination for corona is going to be released soon but we are worried about the side effects of this vaccine, how will it effects different people, It will take time to understand about the side effects of the vaccine and may be it will be too costly to be afforded by the common man and we don't know how much time it will take to launch in India." Pinky, 16, India

"I would like to be vaccinated, but I am concerned that the vaccine will damage my body." Luana, 16, Mozambique

"I think those who live with me know that I am extremely happy with the situation I have been waiting for. I am not so excited for myself, but for my mother who is in the health area and is going to take. I am excited, it is the word." Rita, 18, Brazil

"It is a good initiative, COVID-19 is not visible on people's faces, it is a disease that cannot be controlled worldwide. If the government has this vaccine initiative it will help to reduce deaths." Xiluva, 17, Mozambique

"I am happy with the Vaccines and it protects from the COVID 19." landisa, 17, Zambia

"I am happy that there is a vaccine now and can't wait to have it. This is important because it is able to prevent us from contracting COVID pandemic." Audre, 16, Zambia

"It will be good to have vaccine as world will be safe from Corona and new opportunities will open for earning and people will be able to move out freely." Anita, 16, India

"It is very good ma'am because after such a long time we are moving outside. Because of this pandemic, the world has stopped a little at once. So, after getting the vaccination, it may be work properly according to the previous one. And I think there will be a lot of changes after this." Pooja, 19, India

"It is positive to have a vaccine, but I am afraid that the vaccine will not have the desired effects because we are talking about COVID-19, it is a difficult disease to deal with. But we hope that the vaccine will have positive effects for everyone, so that life returns to normal." Nisia, 15, Mozambique

"I will be happy to be vaccinated and I have no concerns about the vaccine" Ekram, 17, Ethiopia

"Obviously, I'll get it as soon as I can. But I'm much more concerned about more vulnerable people getting it first up. Because I know the moment that mom has that vaccine, oh my God. The worry... shoulders. Yeah, because it's put on some stress for me this year. Earlier on in the year she was really sick, and so we were really concerned about her getting COVID and then dying." Michaela, 17, United States

"Regarding the vaccine, last time I heard that if boys, girls of adults are allergic to an antibiotic, it can affect them in some way, and people have told me that since I am a person who has allergy issues, for the moment I should not be vaccinated. However, I am learning a little more and it have found that it was a lie, I know that we need the vaccine and I would like to receive the vaccine if it is possible, because in that way I would be helping myself and also helping my family." Peque, 15, Ecuador

"I will be happy to take the vaccine taking into consideration that it has more benefits more than the damages/side effects it could

The most commonly discussed concern about the vaccine related to potential side effects, limited testing or rolling out the vaccine too quickly. Access, availability and cost were also very widely discussed concerns. The majority of girls and young women who discussed concerns in relation to cost were from low- and middle-income countries (Ecuador, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Nicaragua, Vietnam and one from the United States). There were a number of other less frequently discussed concerns raised which included; how effective the vaccine might be, worried others may elect not to have the vaccine, putting their faith in their religious beliefs rather than the vaccine, and limited scientific understanding of the vaccine among the general population or lack of clear scientific information available about the vaccine. Interestingly, two girls in Ghana reported hearing rumours that the vaccine was being used to spread Covid-19 or to experiment the vaccine within Africa.

“So personally, I don't see myself getting the vaccine tomorrow even if there was a possibility of getting it. I'm not confident enough, I'm waiting to see results that are much more relevant than assumptions. Then I think it's a good thing, in any case a solution had to be found. As I said I am waiting to see how things will evolve because the first people who had tested the vaccine at the very beginning, I saw that some were paralysed and it is a bit scary. I'm not totally sceptical that there is a vaccine but I think the best thing to do for now, especially as I'm not part of the health care staff or a medical team, is to wait and see how things develop.”

Marie, 17, France

“I have seen on the internet that the vaccine is not good because it can cause complications, that the vaccine has chemicals that can make the disease stay in our body. I saw information that says that Madagascar has the cure but that they stole the information about the medicine / cure, I am not sure or satisfied if the vaccine will bring the cure or not.”

Celsa, 17, Mozambique

“I feel very uncomfortable about the vaccine because I don't know the chemicals and how challenging it will be to access”

Bupe, 17, Zambia

“The truth is that I feel some distrust. I do not believe that vaccines will reach my family or my community. I am concerned that vaccines will not reach me or my family, and that not everyone will have the same possibility to access the vaccine. I think that they will only reach people who have money. I rather think that side effects will depend on each person.”

Emily, 17, Ecuador

“About the cost, I think that when the vaccine arrives here in Ecuador, people who have a very high economic status will be the first to buy the vaccine and maybe the vaccine will run out and there will not be enough vaccines for all Ecuadorians to buy it, I also think they will be very expensive, like when the pandemic began and COVID tests were very expensive, everything became expensive, if people are desperate to heal, I think they won't let that other people who do not have money buy the vaccine.”

Gaby, 17, Ecuador

“Definitely the cost. I know that with vaccines or medications that a lot of people need, big pharma will drive the price up. I'm pretty sure because it's such a horrible pandemic, the government will probably not let them do that. But if they're able to do that, definitely the cost would be a big concern, especially, not just for me, but just for other people in my community, like high-risk people that don't necessarily have enough money or insurance to get that vaccine.”

Clara, 16, United States

“With it being expensive, that one, it has been on my mind when I think about it. That's if it's good. Because really, me, I want to use the vaccine, but it might be expensive when it comes. Because right now, even if you're going to check for COVID, it's expensive, if you're going to test for COVID. I hear it's now expensive if you're going to just test yourself, so talk less a vaccine, you getting a vaccine for yourself. It will be very expensive.”

Miriam, 23, Ghana

“No, I do not feel positive to have the vaccine. I would only put myself in the hands of God.”

Ana, 16, Nicaragua

“I have mixed feelings: on the one hand I feel strange that a vaccine has been obtained in such a short time, but on the other hand I am the first one who would get a vaccine.”

Raquel, 19, Spain

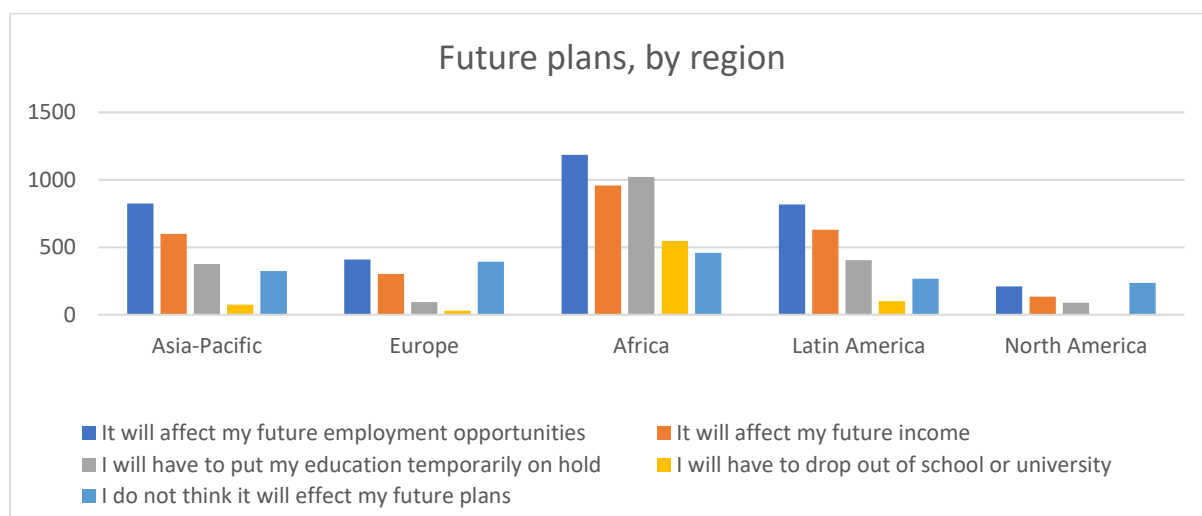
“Right now, I have some mixed feelings about it. In the sense that I've watched so many videos and also many people talked ill about the vaccine, like we should not use the vaccine because there might be... Some was like, "Definitely they have to add someone with COVID's blood or something inside the vaccine." So it makes feel like people's perception about the vaccine is bad. And then me personally, I would have used the vaccine at least to prevent myself from COVID...So there are so many rumours about the vaccine. It might rather be something that would rather spread the virus more among Africans...At least from what I have heard and then listened to from videos shared, other media platform...Yes. In one case I want to use it, that's if whatever people are saying about it is not true. I'll really like to use it because I want to protect myself from getting the virus and family, that's all, and everybody around me. So me personally, I would have loved to use it, if only the rumours about the vaccine I've heard is not true. The problem is that we cannot truly confirm that.” Miriam, 23, Ghana

‘[Researcher] Vaccine. Okay. You have heard of it? D: Yes. [Researcher]: What did you hear about it? D: Well, they said the whites want to bring their medicine to the Africans, for them to have an experiment on them. Then, we were like, why didn't they test it there. Because they know we are monkeys. They are bringing it here. That was what me, I heard in the school. Not even on school, on social media and stuff. [Researcher]: Okay. So when you heard about the vaccine, what kind of feelings do you have? How are you feeling about the vaccine coming for us? D: I heard some of the ... the big men, like the ... they said they won't allow them, to fight to bring the vaccine to Ghana, not even Ghana, let me say, Africa. So we were like, they shouldn't bring it. But some of them too were saying, they'll collect bribe and then they'll allow them to bring the medicine in, and test it on the blacks. That was what I heard too. [Researcher]Okay. So how do you feel about it? Are you afraid, are you okay? What are your feelings around that? D: Yeah. I was afraid ... So if the whites give them big money, like ... they will maybe allow them to give the medicine on us. So I felt bad. [Researcher]: Why are you feeling bad? That what? D: I felt bad that what if they ... it and then we'll die. That was what came into my mind.’ Dede, 17, Ghana

12. FUTURE

One of the themes that it was intended the study would pursue in all three rounds of data collection was the girls and young women’s outlook on the future and their futures in light of the pandemic. In the first and final rounds of data collection questions were posed around how they perceived the future in more general terms. In all three data collection rounds questions were posed in relation to how they were feeling about their own futures. Overall the girls and young women’s answers were more focused on how the pandemic would impact their own futures and this was evident not only in the responses to these questions but it also became evident through their responses and views to education as mentioned in section four.

HALTING LIVES: THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN- HOW THE PANDEMIC WILL AFFECT FUTURE PLANS¹⁷



12.1. COVID-19 AND THEIR FUTURES

In the first round of data collection the overwhelming majority of girls and young women framed their responses in relation to completing their schooling and pursuing higher education. There was an array of incredible aspirations mentioned by the girls and young women including becoming healthcare professionals, human rights lawyers, journalists on international social change, academics and environmentalists, to name a few. Linked to this more longer-term view of their future were some personal goals including pursuing activism

¹⁷ Halting Lives, Part One: the impact of COVID-19 on girls. Plan International September 2020

to make a difference, becoming independent, as well as owning their own homes, marriage and families. In the more short-term the girls and young women framed their futures yet again in the realm of education, referring to returning to school and assuming their 'normal routines'.

"I wish to be a government worker... I want to be a medical doctor." Kalice, 17, Ghana

"I want to become a medical personnel after school" Dahlia, 18, Zambia

"I am planning to become a nurse, and after corona outbreak now I aspire to be a nurse more than ever." Asmaa, 16, Egypt

"I hope I can get to university and work. When I grow up I want to be a doctor" Luana, 16, Mozambique

"In terms of just practical, my future, I'm doing my arts degree at the moment, and I think it's definitely allowed me to ... I've been angry at systems for a long time and it's given me a lot of language to talk about how those systems work, and a bit of credibility. And I'm doing my law degree after that... and so I definitely want, just in concrete terms, I want to be doing that kind of human rights law with international." Jenni, 18, Australia

"For my future after finishing 12th grade I would like to take a law course to become a lawyer. Then I can be a judge, I would like to be a lawyer to defend girls because they suffer a lot from GBV and are discriminated against. In some communities, girls do not go to school" Nisia, 15, Mozambique

"I attend School of Law and, in the future, I would like to graduate and do an exam to join the Federal Police, my dream has a lot to do with giving voice to people who don't have it." Rita, 18, Brazil

"I think I mentioned earlier, I want to be a children's rights lawyer. So that's something that I'm really set on as of right now. I do want to work internationally, so in college I do want to travel abroad so that I can have a widespread impact. I really like working with children and I at first considered being a teacher, but then I realized something that I really want to do is have an impact. Go different places and have impacts that will outlive me. So I think teachers do have that, but I think that as a lawyer I can fight to create sustainable environments and sustain the rights of children for a long period of time, which is something that I think would be wonderful." Mary, 17, United States

"I wish to succeed in my studies in order to put myself at the service of environmental NGOs, I want to do missions, to be active and to serve with the knowledge I have acquired. I would really like to devote my life to that" Charlotte, 18, France

"I wish to be a... Oh well now, I want to create change. I want to... I don't know. I just want to... If I were to have a career, I would definitely want to dedicate it to a social change. Like if I were to code something, I would want to code something for gender equality, something I'm really passionate about." Sara, 15, United States

"Well, I'm even excited to talk about my future, I see myself as an entrepreneur with my own business, and working for my community, working for young people, for the voices of each one of those violated girls, of each one of those people raped, - that I feel something in my blood just to remember things like that and this is how I see myself, as a strong woman, prepared with a business and getting ahead supporting my community and doing what I like most to share with teenagers, and to know every day more of different themes on violence, on some themes that are affecting young people." Margarita, 18, Nicaragua

"For myself? I really hope that college opens, is in person whenever I'm attending in the Fall of 2021. I really, really hope that because I don't want it to be online. I'm more of a social person and college being online would be really bad for my ... I would be really unmotivated, I feel like. And I feel like college is the time where you meet lifelong friends, you see groups of people with your same interest and that encourages you. And there's so many clubs and different things that you can take too. It might be just one big, missed opportunity if we don't get to do it in person." Zara, 17, United States

"I am hoping they can find the medication or vaccine for COVID 19 so that we can go back to school and start playing the way we used to play." Audre, 16, Zambia

"Well, I hope that I can have a normal life that everyone else had, uni education and go out and party and meet people and hopefully travel. So I hope I can still do all these things without major change happening. I really still want to live a normal life. So I guess I hoped for that in the future." Mia, 18, Australia

"Yeah, I wish I could come back to normal life soon, and continue doing my things" Mi, 22, Vietnam

"I want schools to re-open and we stop thinking that a virus will infect us, I just hope we stop worrying" Amina, 15, Egypt

"My hopes? Maybe that when we start the next school year, that everything will be back in order and that we can go back to school in good conditions" Seny, 19, France

"I hope the Pandemic can end and we can get back to school." Luana, 16, Mozambique

"I hope to go back to school to finish 12th grade, finish that level so I can make my dreams come true." Nisia, 15, Mozambique

In round two girls and young women were asked whether or not the goals or future ambitions that they had mentioned in the first round had been impacted by COVID-19 and whether they were still able to continue progressing towards them as before. Generally, the majority of responses indicated that the girls and young women felt that their future aspirations were still within their grasp and they remained positive that they would attain their goals, despite setbacks. In fact, a couple of the girls mentioned how living through the pandemic has actually increased their motivation to attain their future dreams.

"No, I think it's the opposite. Knowing that the pandemic could affect my goals or what I wanted to do in the future made me want to do better, made me want to work even harder to make sure that there wasn't too much impact, even though I knew that the pandemic could still have an impact on that." Marie, 17, France

"I am still able to continue with my goals and my dreams. COVID-19 helped me understand that there will be some problems equal or worse, covid-19 taught me how to deal with some problems and increased my hope for the realization of my dreams and goals" Celsa, 17, Mozambique

"In a way, the dreams and wishes stay the same, but with a different perspective, for sure. For instance, many things that I planned for myself physically, there have been changes. Something that bothered me before, I am ok with today, so it can be a dream left behind. But the goals such going to university, having a profession, family, continue, the essential goals that are the strongest ones continue: finishing my undergraduate course, getting a job within the public sector, having my Lawyer's authorization to work, and being a counsel attorney or a delegate" Rita, 18, Brazil

"I think that the main thing about a person who has goals in his life is to try to break down those small obstacles because deep down we know that we can achieve it despite the situations and that if at some point you fall you have to learn to get up alone, go ahead and don't let the situation affect you or your dreams." Peque, 15, Ecuador

"I still have many plans; my goals are still there. Perhaps along the way reaching those goals will become somewhat complicated due to the pandemic, as right now in the educational system learning is complicated, and entering the university is much more complicated, so it is a challenge for me, but it is still one of my main goals. Academically, one of my first goals is to graduate, and then to enter university. The main limitation and not only mine but of all the young people of Ecuador, is the educational process that we carry out, mostly in public schools. I try to keep good grades with the commitment and the responsibility of keeping everything up to date, so I maintain my grades, but I don't know if I will be able to maintain my learning" Gaby, 17, Ecuador

"I would say that I am very positive, I try to tell myself that since beginning of March, we have been living with the pandemic, it's going to be almost a year, so I tell myself that we have to learn to live with it while waiting to find a solution. So I tell myself that nothing can stop my objectives, not even this pandemic. I'm not going to give up and I remain focused on my goals. Maybe it could have moved faster without the pandemic but I don't want to stop because of the pandemic" Seny, 19, France

*"Yes a little. I was taking a course, to study for a medical exam we stopped because of COVID-19. For a while I thought I wouldn't be able to do medicine, there are people in my family who say that I won't be able to do medicine say that they study a lot and that I don't have the competence to do medicine. But I believe I can and I will be able to do medicine. I have a sister who tried to do medicine and was unable to enter * university and she said it is very difficult. I told her that I will try and then I will see if I will succeed or not."* Luana, 16, Mozambique

"Yes, well look, one of my goals was to get a job, which I think was something that I saw as absolutely impossible, and today they just gave me a job" Raquel, 19, Spain

"I think I can continue towards them although maybe, if I had something you said ... well, in five years from now I want to be doing this and I have to do this to achieve it. Well maybe now instead of 5 years you see it at 6 or 7 because you do not know, for example, to what extent all countries are going to open or what measures you are going to have to take to move to a country or things like that. So I think that I do continue to advance towards them but it is true that maybe not in such a hurry but more calmly as "well, let's see how the situation goes, I keep trying to do this but ... little by little" Luna, 22, Spain

"The goals have not changed but since the learning has been disturbed by COVID-19 most of my friends who have dropped out of school have been telling me to also stop going to school. But am still determined to continue with school so that I live a better life in future." Audre, 16, Zambia

Nonetheless, the girls and young women did refer to examples of how their goals have been impacted and effected while still remaining positive that they would be achieved. Seemingly education was the main aspect of the goals that was affected, most of the girls who mentioned being impacted spoke of their grades slipping, uncertainty of whether they were able to get places in university, school and higher education fees rising, and the loss of internships or other opportunities. Other girls spoke of the economic impact of the

“Yeah, I'm excited about going to uni next year, but what's happening right now in terms of the education, which I touched on earlier, is really upsetting me. And I hadn't even thought about the amount of money I was going to have to pay back until recently...I realized how much it's going up, and the fact that I'm also subsidizing science students. And I just, it makes me so livid, that's the worst. To me, I think this whole crisis in a way has kind of quickened this transformation in our economy, where universities and places of exploration and learning are being turned into job factories. And an understanding of the world, and an understanding of how the world has worked through history, through literature, through sociology, through anthropology, is being degraded by our government. And I think that's what's going to keep separating us in crises like this.” Janet, 18, Australia

“Other goals have changed but not because of COVID, because of my government changing the prices of degree costs ... which is fun... Yeah, when your degree that you want increases by 114%, that's fun.” Max, 16, Australia

“Well, with being a senior, college is definitely on my mind. And so just applications and finding things to... I want to do things that I really enjoy doing while at the same time... To put on the application of course, but also just to really get a sense of what I want to do when I get to college. And maintaining doing things like this, Plan and getting involved in different community-based projects and maintaining school at the same time has been a lot harder than I thought it would be. And definitely with grades, just maintaining everything, definitely a lot harder. I've been making it through, but it's so much harder than I expected it to be...So I think with goals like applying to college soon and sending in my choice school applications soon, just those types of things have been on my mind in terms of reaching for my goals and working towards my goals. This is definitely been something that I did not expect to happen. No one expected this to happen. I'm somewhat of a planner and so it just threw things off” Mary, 17, United States

“And for my goal at university, as I told you before I have to join internship and because of the pandemic, the schedule has been changed for the internship. And that affect a lot for my work and some of my other opportunity in work, like self-study because I have some plan and that changed. So yeah, I believe that if the time of the internship weren't changed due to the pandemic, that would be much better for me, but that's okay” Nguyet, 23, Vietnam

“For my studies, the school days will be less, so this might affect my grades and my understanding to the information I receive, also, they might cancel the first term so this will delay our academic achievement, just like what happened in the second semester at 2019/2020 when they cancelled schools and we only did research paper to pass our school year.” Amina, 15, Egypt

“I have not yet achieved my goals and parents are still having challenges to pay school fees” Bupe, 17, Zambia

“[Researcher] Do you think that dream of having your own startup to start a business has been a bit stagnant by the COVID? M: Yes, because I cannot generate a business through the market because this are not buying unnecessary things because they are stocking up on the only important thing which is food and medicines.” Margarita, 18, Nicaragua

“Okay. It ...because when it happens like that, I in particular was supposed to start working in April, but due to the pandemic, things changed and it has affected a lot of things like income. It has made me to be dependent person on my people because at that time, I was thinking that I'll be an independent and rather supporting member, correcting a change” Nasi, 23, Ghana

“I've learned a lot about my mental strength, I thought I couldn't handle it. I have also learned about the solidarity of many people, although there have also been those who have wanted to take advantage of this situation” Vera, 18, Spain

pandemic on their ability to be independent and a small number mentioned how travel and friendships had been impacted.

In the final round there was still a significant amount of responses that signalled that the girls and young women remained steadfast in their education aspirations however they were also asked whether they were going to do anything differently in the next year because of the pandemic. Their answers seemed to indicate a more altruistic approach of spending more time with friends and family, helping others, and living more environmentally friendly. A good proportion of responses mentioned improved hygiene and health practices to protect themselves and others from the virus as well as improving their lifestyles and diet. A minority of responses indicated that there was still doubt around how or when countries would be moving on from the virus in that the girls and young women were deliberately not making plans or stating that they didn't believe that things would return to normal.

"What else am I going to do differently? I think I might end up throwing myself into friendships a bit quicker than I did. I think I probably had a bit of a barrier up, and a bit of a, "Oh, I already have great friends." And convinced that girls couldn't like me back or things like that. And I think, might throw myself into people and friendships a little bit more, which will be lovely. I'll very much enjoy that." Jenni, 18, Australia

"A lot of little things. Just like scheduling for friends, doing more independent research to get myself ahead, taking more breaks. I feel like it's all of those little things that I'm going to be changing" Max, 16, Australia

"Yes, I think I have a little more fun, going out with my friends, paying more attention to them" Barbara, 16, Brazil

"I have greatly valued seeing my friends and the moments we share. I have also realized how precious those moments are." Emily, 17, Ecuador

"I think I'll be a little bit more farsighted and if I have the opportunity to see my friends for a while, to see my family, I'll go, because these are priceless moments, and then just keep paying a little bit more attention to myself and to the people around me" Marie, 17, France

"I don't know, yes ... I also thought a lot about the situation of ... well, this pandemic, doing some kind of volunteering that could help, etc ... that is, I had already thought about it before but with this pandemic ... I decided to do it before but now with the pandemic ... I think I will do some volunteering that can help others. I have it quite clear, that is, I had thought about it but I was not very clear, and now I am ready, I really want to do it." Marina, 17, Spain

"Well, people believe that COVID-19 is some kind of a punishment for mother nature because we have been damaging our environment too much. And I agree with this opinion in some way. It is the matches from nature, forced us to think about what we have done, and I have been thinking too. This make me feel like I have to take more responsibilities for taking action to protect our environment then. And there are so many problems out there and I really want to give a hand to make the world better but, maybe just... Well, first and foremost, I think I have to improve myself every day." Mi, 22, Vietnam

"Oh yes, of course! I'm lucky we'll say that in a way because I have my parents who are really involved in it, already having parents who support you in it helps you because then together with my parents we think about solutions to change things at our level, we pay attention to our water consumption, we changed our gas supplier etc. So it helps me a lot to have my parents who are somehow on my side, not really on my side but who have the same ideas as me. And so of course I'm going to try to keep talking about it around me to try to wake people up and instil some ecological values in them. Even for the social struggles too, in relation to all the inequalities that we have seen during this confinement. The pandemic just strengthened my determination to want to change things, I think. Because then we could see all the things that weren't right and we'll be able to solve them all the better, I hope, in any case, that's it." Émilie, 16, France

"I would definitely say being more careful. I know that there's a vaccine now, but it was just eye-opening to see the things that we weren't doing before prior to COVID that now just started happening. Like in terms of sanitation and things, just being more careful. I've always been kind of a germophobe, but now it's just like, now I'm just having a more focused lik, "Oh, I need to keep this clean. I need to watch how I'm leaving my water bottle out with the top unscrewed." Just being more conscious of those things. And then also definitely working on my sleep schedule. Like just seeing how my sleep has improved, just a bunch of things in my mood. And I just feel better. So working on making time to have a pretty regular sleep schedule, especially with college and things like that." Mary, 17, United states

"Yes, I think I am not going to greet people in the same way, I am not going to say hello with kisses and hugs. There are some people who go out without a mask, and I think it is complicated for me since I have gotten used to go out with a mask, trying to keep my distance and not greeting people, I have stuck with that. So, when the moment comes, and I hope that moment will arrive, it will be difficult for me to return to normality even though I want to return, but it will be difficult for me" Irie, 17, Ecuador

'I will continue with keeping myself safe.' Ekram, 17, Ethiopia

'Protect myself based on the recommendations. Faiza, 16, Ethiopia

"Doing things differently, uh... I don't really see... maybe even more, more and more improving my hygiene, I think, but otherwise I don't see what's special I'm going to integrate in my life." Seny, 19, France

"It's already true that I can hardly imagine myself without the Covid, when we'll be able to go out without the masks, to stop eating in a staggered way in the canteen, to come back as before, I find it hard to believe, so maybe it's going to happen, but I don't think that next year we'll be able to do the integration weekends again, live normally, go to the supermarket, give people kisses..." Charlotte, 18, France

"As I just told you, I'm flowing with the flow. So in fact, I don't have any plan for the whole year, for the next whole year." Nguyet, 23, Vietnam

"I'm not living like that, but I got some plans. Just dropped it by COVID this year, but I feel worried about the COVID-19, so I think I will wait and everything will depend on the situation. In other words, I mean, I have not made any decision about, "Should I redo the thing I could not do this year?" And people don't even know what will happen, like no one. So I think just wait." Mi, 22, Vietnam

The final round of data collection also posed the question around what the research respondents had learnt over the course of the pandemic. The majority of responses indicated that there was a fair amount of self-reflection and positive learning that had occurred amongst the girls and young women. They spoke of being more focused on self-care and self-reflection; the importance of relationships; prioritising living life to the fullest and acting on opportunities; adopting new skills and being adaptable and resilient. Two of the girls and young women responded by saying that they had not learnt anything new, whereas another two mentioned having to learn to deal with mental health difficulties.¹⁸

¹⁸ This was followed up with respective country offices and in-country safeguarding focal points, who provided resources and relevant referral services to the two research participants.

"I think 2020 has been the most on self-reflection. And getting to know who I am and how I interact with people. Yeah. It's actually been massive on those things, and that's probably what helped me cope with feelings of stress and anxiety when they came about. Because I sort of knew what I was feeling, and I knew where these feelings would come from, like what I'm anxious about. And so I would... I sort of... it's gotten easier to be able to name those feelings and be like, "Okay, what I'm feeling is a little anxiety because of this." But it's okay to feel like this, but also, keep in mind that this is also out of your control, so you shouldn't really worry about this. So I sort of have these conversations in my mind" Mia, 18, Australia

"In addition, I have learned to have more confidence in myself and to support my family in difficult times, assuming certain responsibilities that contribute to the wellbeing of the family" Chinita, 18, Ecuador

"I also found that I don't get scared easily, for example, people were freaking out about the pandemic however I stayed calm and just protected myself from the infection" Amina, 15, Egypt

"Yes, I think I have learned a lot of lessons from this pandemic and this whole period in general. I have already understood that we are much stronger than we think at first sight, that in life it can happen that we don't feel good, that we are not necessarily strong but we should not give up, that we should help people, even sometimes just ask "are you okay?" can save a person in need, especially in these times of social distancing. It's important to continue to create this link with people in another way, to be in solidarity in fact, to be united, and I would say that COVID has taken us all by surprise, but in the end we will all learn a lesson in one way or another, or it will help us understand something. Life is ephemeral and sometimes the most important thing is to be with people and enjoy the moment, I think that's really the most important thing I've learned." Marie, 17, France

"Personally I found myself older, more autonomous, more mature, taking decisions, more responsible." Eve, 15, France

"A lot has happened in recent times since the last meeting that has made me change a lot, such as at the relationship level, more and more I start to prioritize people, the person as they are, what they like, what they want to be, so prioritize these relationships has been very positive, I have discovered many things and this I end up discovering. A person is part of my life, that person is a piece of me." Rita, 18, Brazil

"Overall, I think I've learned to value being with people, to talk more. Because I lived very isolated, I was always locked up, I didn't like to talk, to hug, I didn't like anything. Then, when we started to be kind of forced not to, I realized that I really liked to have people close to me, to have contact, to look at people's faces. I started to talk more with my family because I didn't used to talk to people here at home, I came home from school tired and went to sleep, I played something on my mobile phone. Then I realized that people needed this time to look at other people and to think is that what I want from my life" Mariele, 18, Brazil

"I also learned that I have to check on my friends and socialize with them even digitally but the important thing that we stay in touch and talk to each other even if it is online" Laila, 17, Egypt

"During the crisis, I also learned to value more about the connection between people. I realized that it is really important how the connections between people can keep us alive and happy and healthy. It is a very important part of life as we are human beings and we always need social connection." Ha, 20, Vietnam

"I think I'm going to start living my life as if every day was the last day of my life, because I was always looking at tomorrow, what will happen and that I had to live every day just to live, today I woke up and tomorrow was going to be the same as today, but now I see it as: I will make the most of today and every day, now I am happier and more content because I will be working with 7 communities nearby and I will be able to share with many teenagers and see the problems in their communities and see how I can help them and that makes me even happier...I have learned to know myself better, it made me find myself, it made me put my priority above anything else, think differently and say: this 2021 is mine I am going to do something but for me..." Margarita, 18, Nicaragua

"I think we have to enjoy every minute of our lives, because I particularly have not lost anyone to covid, but I have friends who have lost and many people have lost, we managed to see in the news all the sad news" Barbara, 16, Brazil

"I learned about the value of life, now I think that we shouldn't be angry or upset with each other as we might die at any point, I learned about myself that I am social and going out with friends used to be a great source of joy for me." Asmaa, 16, Egypt

"I think the main thing that I've learnt is that a lot of things can sort of... Not be alleviated but made better from your mindset. And prior to COVID, I was like I never wanted to hear the mindset cliché like, it's all about how you think about it. And yeah, I was just really sort of tone-deaf to that idea. But I think this year definitely, I think maintaining a relatively level-headed and positive mindset has been really... Yeah, just changed the way that I've viewed this year because I think it was super easy to sort of go into a little hole and be like, "This is the worst. I don't want to do anything.....But I think, yeah, just being a bit resilient and contextualizing everything because I think even though we are in Victoria, relatively on a global scale, it was quite a privileged place to be in considering how other countries have handled the pandemic. And I think just always going back to that and just zooming out on little me in this whole world I think was really good in helping me sort of just come to terms with it and just rationalize and be more at peace with it." Amie, 17, Australia

"I think 100% it made me deal with uncertainty so much better and easier as well, knowing that there are definitely things I can't control. But also knowing the things I can control was nice for me to add stability back into my own life." Mia, 18, Australia

"Things change anytime and we need to prepare for anything in the world" Bupe, 17, Zambia

"I learned I am not great at studying and coping with stress. I know it's been a horrible year for my mental health and it was already horrible going into quarantine, but it's just been going downhill." Clara, 16, United States

"Many changes, a lot of instability. I am very analytical ... I always ... one of my greatest ... they are the analysis of others and myself ... so I am always looking for things, I do not leave myself alone ... I am always looking for ... traumas or things that I have out there ... inside why I behave as I behave ... this therapy took nothing ... two weeks, three weeks ... but it has helped me a lot, they are doing projective tests and another type of test for ... well, they really asked for a diagnosis to see why it is like that, but hey , yes, I'm learning a lot about myself..." Marina, 17, Spain

12.2. COVID-19 AND THE WORLD MORE GENERAL

As for the girls and young women's thoughts about the future post-COVID-19 in more general terms, in the first round of data collection the majority discussed their hopes for changes to occur after the pandemic and that these would be positive changes to ensure that the good that happened during the pandemic continued. For example, some spoke about their desire for social reform to the education and healthcare systems; social support for the elderly and disabled; youth empowerment; and the desire that a work/life balance would be achieved through innovations in technology. In addition, a number of the research respondents also spoke of their desire for improved health and hygiene practices as well as the development of a vaccine and how this would be managed for the current and future pandemics. Finally, girls and young women also spoke of keeping the value of community and family relationships. Not all of the responses were positive, a sizeable number of the research participants were concerned about the economy, both on a personal level (the financial status of families) and on a national or global level (leading to food insecurities). Other concerns mentioned included the changed dynamics of physically interacting with others, government corruption, gender-based violence and other inequalities. Interestingly, one participant discussed the potential for an increased risk in child, early or forced marriage (CEFM) or pregnancy in relation to school closure and economic hardships related to the COVID-19 pandemic: *'That we may return to classes; that there is no increase in cases of early marriages during the pandemic, because I think that during this period some girls will be subjected to early marriages, others will be pregnant. Because the girls are at home doing nothing, some family members do not accept that the girl does not contribute to food. They force the girl to go out to look for food; for parents, having a girl at home is a burden on their backs and to get rid of the weight they hand over their daughters to a man'* (Xiluva, aged 17, Mozambique).

"It would be good for people to reconsider the situation we have experienced and to feel empathy for other people, and that the government issues new reforms regarding certain laws due to the current disorder; for example with regard to education, because some of my school friends were unable to connect to online classes. The government should have supported online classes in a better way for people who could not connect and receive classes" Peque, 15, Ecuador

"I think that, with regard to girls, they have been one of the most affected sectors. I believe in gender equality, in access to quality education, in their right to education, in their reproductive rights, and in all their rights. They should also have access to technology without limits. Let's remember that very few schools have access to technology, so that is limited and now in these times we are seeing that. Now we can see that, as in the past there were no computers in schools, now it is being reflected in the fact that children do not know how to operate a computer, so now the previous errors of the education and health systems are being reflected in these moments."
Gaby, 17, Ecuador

"I think that you need an absolute systems change, you need to defund or completely abolish any system that is creating and perpetuating inequalities. And I think the pandemic has definitely exposed that, there's definitely been a ... I think people are waking up to the fact that we have really bad welfare systems... And I think definitely the future that I hope for, post-COVID, is pretty shown in that report, that type of world where your work, you love to do it, but it's also not your whole life and you have so many other things. For me it's that balance of freedom to be doing what you love, being who you are without that discrimination, with that security. So you've got the financial means to be doing what you love, you've got back up plans from governments if things go wrong. Because I think liberal society tends to focus and say, "Oh my God, we're so free. People can do whatever they want." But they can't if they don't have the security. If you haven't stepped people up to be able to enact their freedom, they can't do it. And so hopefully that world will look like that, with that kind of peace, that sense of peace and passion and security in your life. And I think the pandemic has the potential to bring that about, people are realizing." Jenni, 18, Australia

"Globally, the pandemic also reveals many facet of the world order and the way the governments are working. It raises the question of what is better: communism or capitalism. It also reveals some negative truth about cheating in some governments and global crimes and corruption in the system. When it is revealed, I think this is a good thing because we will have a more multi-faceted perspective of the world which we have been seeing every time. When we have a more multi-faceted perspectives, we will have better judgment and evaluation of what should we do and how can we solve the problems that are always here, but are only reviewed and shown up thanks to the pandemic. When we are aware of the problems, it is the opportunity for us to raise our voice and to give our opinions and make changes for a better society." Ha, 20, Vietnam

"I believe that the poorest people should be taken into account, because it is very frustrating to see that there are people who get a disability card to have a retirement pension, when there are people who do not even have food to eat have real disabilities, and do not get help. For example, in the case of a friend, his father was disabled and they did not want to give him a card, nor did they want to help him, and his disease is quite serious. I think there must be some justice against those who want to take advantage of the rights of people who have real disabilities, because taking things so lightly seems very serious to me." Emily, 17, Ecuador

"About positive change, yes. In a perspective, I think COVID-19 does have some positive change. For example, as in Vietnam, I need to say that the pandemic pushes us to shift everything to online, like studying, working, meeting. Everything is shifted to online platforms So I think this will promote digital and technological industry. Maybe, I would say, that it is a motivation for companies and other corporations to learn more and to be more flexible and creative in working, creating, and developing apps and online platforms, to adapt with a situation. Also, it improves our adaption. So I think, this is such a chance that the companies and some business can grab to improve their technology and to... how to say it? And to catch the trend that we have now during pandemic... Also, the pandemic shows love between people. Like in Vietnam, we can see people helping each other wholeheartedly.. we can see people have raised ATMS or maxed ATMs to help each other. I think it's such a nice thing. In the situation of adversity, you can see the love and the sharing and the empathy between people. I think it's such a beautiful thing to see in this kind of time" Ha, 20, Vietnam

"If I'm coming to positive changes, I think we are well taught by COVID-19 that it is very important to inculcate some healthy habits, to have good food and immunity boosting foods." Avani, 18, India

"Positive changes, like I said earlier, like sanitation measures, maybe being one step ahead and taking precautions to prevent the widespread, if we do end up going through another pandemic this time we're more prepared." Mary, 17, United States

"But everyone is going to do safety precautions, follow that also. Like using sanitizers or washing their hands. So they will become more hygienic after this." Pooja, 19, India

"So then, again, there's a lot going on in this world along with COVID-19, and I feel like once there's either a vaccine or it just washes it out, then ... I feel like COVID-19 is giving a lot of people time to reflect. So then people will come out with fresh ideas, new things that they can do. I feel like overall it might make, not the world a better place, but at least my community a better place, and other people's communities." Clara, 16, United States

"I think it has brought people closer in a certain way. And I has brought humanity closer, I think. It's also brought everyone, we've all faced this challenge together. We might have not all overcome it together, but we've all tried solving it. We all put our minds together, honestly, and we've just ... I feel like as an entire human race, it's been good for us to just come together" Zara, 17, United States

"I think there are going to be positive and negative changes. The positive thing is that families can be more united, the negative thing is that we cannot go out to work."
Emily, 17, Ecuador

"This pandemic, despite being horrendous, has changed the minds of many people, or has given them the opportunity to ...it has taught them that they can telework, lower environmental emissions...if they can have a positive impact... and then you can't know because in three months we'll still be the same. It has changed people's minds and made them aware that we have to take care of ourselves and take care of where we live." Marina, 17, Spain

"No ma'am I. I think, I didn't find any negative changes. During COVID-19, I think there are negative changes. But, post COVID-19, they might not be. Personally, there may be economic and globally negative changes... I think, below poverty line people, or middle-class people may face recession or they may not be able to find employment opportunities..." Avani, 18, India

"About the negative ones, I think it will have really long-term impacts on people. Firstly, it broaden the gender gaps. According to The Atlantic, the COVID-19 it is a bad thing for feminism and for gender equality. Secondly, it will affect the economy badly. Thirdly, it will have a really huge impact on minorities groups. For example, in Lao Cai. Lao Cai shares a border with China. It is impacted earliest by the COVID-19...Why did I say it broadened the gender gaps? Because in those kind of rural areas, girls are always thought to be those who take care of the child and their siblings. I think due to the pandemic lockdown, girls would need to take a lot of burdens on their shoulders like working, taking care of the family. Also, even in the city, according to a research, girls will lose their job more than men because of the social norm that men can work better than women. Women who are working as teachers and helpers, they will lose their job because due into the lockdown mandate of the government. It is predicted that even though when they can go to work after the pandemic, women seem less likely to get their job back as soon as men. They will earn less even after the pandemic... The pandemic is also causing a lot of negative impact in the economy, like many countries' GDP... rates are just dramatically decreasing and cause many negative impacts. People all over the globe, especially the poor. When it comes to the middle class or the upper class, we can still have enough money and materials to survive and to keep us safe during the pandemic. But when it comes to the poor, the pandemic will have the biggest influence on their lives because they are poor and they don't have enough money and materials to keep their head above the water during the pandemic. It will lead to even more poverty and lack of education. Especially, I think it is such a really deep suffering for children in the poor family."
Ha, 20, Vietnam

"Madam, the economy will reduce.... The economic activities will reduce... During the lockdown, producers are not able to produce more goods to sell but I think after COVID is gone, I think they'll be able to produce more goods or resources to sell." Dede, 17, Ghana

"Okay the positives is your key point now. But then the negatives too, I don't know, but this COVID, it has separated a lot of people. I wouldn't say unity, per se, but physically. People don't like to mingle with each other, or maybe extended family ...So it has separated people from their loved ones, at a point that I don't know whether things will remain the same after COVID leaves. So it's some other aspect I've seen. I say it wouldn't be normal again, like it used to. Because it has left people so wide apart." Miriam, 23, Ghana

"But I think also, in terms of negative changes, there's also massive potential, because we've seen the inequalities just skyrocket. You've had billionaires gaining money in this time and people just losing jobs, losing pretty much all their income. And if that's not addressed, that could completely disintegrate into something appalling" Jenni, 18, Australia

When this issue was revisited in the final round of data collection, the question about how they perceived the future more generally was coupled with a question regarding what they had learnt throughout the crisis, this question had a lower response rate but when answered the majority spoke about the growing understanding of health and hygiene measures. Generally speaking, most of the research participants felt that their outlook on the world had adversely changed resulting from distrust in governments; general public failing to care for families and the elderly; and general distrust in people. Others spoke in more positive terms of countries coming together to fight the pandemic, there being more equality and humanity and more attention to social issues.

"Politically, it's been interesting. I think it's really confirmed to me that I have a lot of disbelief in political systems and politicians in general, who I feel just seem to be so focused on their own individual ego, power, and fulfilment than actually caring about the constituents who voted them in. Even in Australia. But I think it's also given me faith in people. Obviously there's a lot of people who... And there's been a lot of lack of faith in people. It's shown that there's a whole entire group in the world who are really not good human beings. But I think it's actually made me even more inclined to want to know why they believe that, want to know... And that's the thing that I have with the progressive left right now is that I feel like people don't try and understand why people think the opposite of them." Janet, 18, Australia

"But honestly, in terms of looking at on a world scale, the pandemic has this made me lose even more faith in world leaders, to be completely honest. I always try and look at the bright side, but it's very hard to look to the bright side, when leaders of global superpowers are letting 400,000 people die from a disease, that could have been easily contained if you imposed actual laws. As well with our Premiers and our Prime Minister, but I do have to give them a significantly bigger piece of the pie, in terms of credit, when it comes to the amount of people that have been infected and died from infection. I do have to give them more credit, but looking at the world as a whole, it's been that, "Wow, I'm incredibly disappointed in every single one of these people, who are meant to be our leaders." Max, 16, Australia

"Corona situation taught us who our true well-wishers are. Due to corona world has changed a lot, now people are a little bit cautious about their wellbeing but people are self-centred in this world and only few people are helpful to others. People are not taking good care of their parents. People are hiding their original behaviour from others..... I have learnt that people are not taking care of their parents, they pretend like they are very good, obedient children but in reality they are not. I want to do something for such parents." Pinky, 16, India

"I used to view the world as a separate countries that don't help each other at all, however due to the pandemic, many countries started collaborate to produce the vaccine which is a good thing for humanity" Amina, 15, Egypt

"That later it has also been seen that for example in all the queues of hunger, which is a bit ugly ... all the people who have needed help, so many people who have helped, who have volunteered, who have put money and food for that, like that, so many associations and people who have wanted to help. The pandemic has also helped me, the fact that not everyone by nature is bad but that we are here to help people even though we do not know them" Vera, 18, Spain

"Now I view the world that we are all equal and at the time of pandemic, the rich ones weren't better off than the poor ones as we are all in this together, money didn't save the people from pandemic" Asmaa, 16, Egypt

"Yeah, I think it definitely has, because I think since we're all at home, we're definitely paying attention to a lot of other things now. Things that were like really, really bad to begin with, but we just didn't have the time or energy to look at them. Like important social movements or even things that are dangerous and just keeping up with the news, especially what's been happening in the last week too." Michaela, 17, United States

CONCLUSION

“I am still able to continue with my goals and my dreams. COVID-19 helped me understand that there will be some problems equal or worse, COVID-19 taught me how to deal with some problems and increased my hope for the realisation of my dreams and goals.” Celsa, 17, Mozambique

The aim of conducting the study at different points in time was to capture any fluctuations in attitudes and experiences in the lives of girls and young women, in the 14 study countries, over the pandemic year. From the findings set out above it is evident that, unsurprisingly, the pandemic has changed girls’ and young women’s lives in fundamental ways. Overwhelmingly, it has had a negative effect: most of all in the areas of education and mental health.

Girls’ and young women’s educational experience went through considerable fluctuations over the three interview points: they were in and out of school and college, struggling with remote learning and adapting to lockdown and studying at home. This, fear of the virus itself, and the measures taken to combat the pandemic, took their toll and many of the participants struggled with stress and anxiety. It is issues with mental health and education that dominate the data collection across the seven-month period - though attitudes and coping strategies changed and developed over time.

“I think I'm going to start living my life as if every day was the last day of my life, because I was always looking at tomorrow, what will happen...but now I see it as: I will make the most of today and every day.” Margarita, 18, Nicaragua

It was interesting to note the openness and self-awareness which the girls and young women demonstrated in speaking about their feelings and concerns. Their openness provides insights into the coping mechanisms that they employ - including some that are potentially harmful – which in turn provides opportunities to learn from them and improve mental health provision for this particular target group in the future. Their discussions also revealed just how resourceful the girls and young women are – how they adjusted quickly to the measures put in place to combat the pandemic and how they have adapted to what a few of them term ‘the new normal’.

“Well, I don't think much has changed since we spoke. But hey, I did tell you that doing online classes was not turning out to be very easy for me, but the truth is that now I'm super comfortable with them.” Vera, 18, Spain

Likewise, their outlook for the future – despite all the challenges and problems they spoke of - remains positive: they are determined to achieve the goals they have set for themselves. To support them in the future special attention must be paid to the two areas that will remain problematical regardless of their ability to adapt: education and mental health. The measures that interfered with their enjoyment of the former continue to frustrate them, and the anxiety, stress and sadness felt over this pandemic year will not magically be eradicated.

Policies and programmes need to be focused on these issues if girls and young women are to achieve their ambitions. The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and, as several respondents noted, gender equality is at risk. Building back and moving forward has to be done with equality at its heart - paying attention to the concerns and suggestions of girls and

young women whose futures are very much in jeopardy. The cumulative effect and the interconnected nature of the impacts of the pandemic also mean that the efforts of international authorities, governments and NGOs have to be global, comprehensive and not tackled in separate silos.

“Globally, the pandemic also reveals many facets of the world order and the way the governments are working...It also reveals some negative truth about cheating in some governments and global crimes and corruption in the system. When it is revealed, I think this is a good thing because...when we are aware of the problems, it is the opportunity for us to raise our voice and to give our opinions and make changes for a better society.” Ha, 20, Vietnam

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a real fear, recognised and articulated by some of the girls and young women taking part in this study, that COVID-19 has the capacity to set back the cause of women's and girls' rights for years. It is incumbent on authorities and civil society everywhere to continue to support gender equality and drive toward the Sustainable Development Goals: in particular by addressing the structural barriers and gender norms that prevent girls from accessing and completing education, and funding and implementing gender transformative learning environments. Once the virus is under control, the priority must be a just recovery, one which addresses those most in need. The transition to a more sustainable, climate-responsive and gender-equal future must focus in particular on girls and young women in all their diversity, and must include targeted support for their families and communities. This should be at the core of all response strategies from governments, global and regional institutions and resourced accordingly.

Global, regional and national decision-makers must:

- **Recognise** when planning and implementing measures to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak and its aftermath **that the pandemic has affected people differently according to their multiple and intersecting identities**. They should ensure that policies and interventions are equitable, gender-transformative, protective of human rights, inclusive of the poorest and most vulnerable people in society, and responsive to the different needs and risks faced by individuals.
- All service providers should gather **gender and age-disaggregated data on reported cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and child, early and forced marriage (CEFM)**, during COVID-19 in a way which ensures the safety of survivors and does not put them at any further risk of violence.
- **Ensure** equitable access to and availability of **safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines** in low- and middle-income countries. Failing to do so will be a 'catastrophic moral failure'¹⁹ that will not only impede progress towards ending the acute pandemic; it will compound and deepen the setback to girls' and women's rights, leaving them further behind.
- **Protect** aid budgets: post-COVID recovery will be dependent both on funding and political will. **Sustainable Development Goal Four's commitment to quality education** focusing on disadvantaged girls, needs to be honoured with a renewed commitment to spend 0.7% of gross national income on overseas development assistance (ODA) with 15% of ODA going to education by 2025.
- **Promote and ensure** the involvement of girls and women, as well as their wider communities – including local leaders, families and caregivers - so that their interests are represented in **the pandemic response and the solutions adopted** to protect lives, prevent the spread of the virus and plan for the future.

¹⁹ WHO Director General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus "<https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-148th-session-of-the-executive-board>

- **Ensure** the availability of accessible, objective, age-responsive and gender-appropriate information about the crisis, **through institutional campaigns on digital platforms** used by adolescents and young people.

National governments must:

- **Ensure** that all families have an adequate income and basic necessities, including food supplies and essential medicines. This may involve **providing and expanding gender-responsive social protection systems and provision**, as well as assessing and monitoring the potential impact of cash and other transfers on gender roles and gender-based violence.
- **Take** robust measures to safeguard all children, and particularly **to protect girls and women from gender-based violence**. All service providers responsible for delivering child protection and sexual and gender-based violence services must adapt these to ensure accessibility during the outbreak, including through remote provision. This should include awareness raising campaigns, counselling and other mental health and psychosocial support services, case management, hotlines and reporting mechanisms. **Mechanisms for reporting gender-based violence must be easily accessible and safe spaces** provided for girls and women at risk.
- **Provide** counselling and increase mental health services, recognising the **psychological impact of the pandemic, particularly on girls and young women**. Ensure information and services, which should include helplines and digital access, are accessible, non-discriminatory and stigma free. Psychological services, including **trained counsellors, should be available in schools and colleges** and **support made available to families** as tensions at home are exacerbated by COVID-19.
- **Fund** technological infrastructure improvements and provide the relevant resources so that all students have access to, and are able to benefit from, remote learning. In parts of Africa and Southern Asia, internet penetration is less than 50% compared to 96% in Northern Europe. **Access to the internet, laptops and mobile phones** should be as fundamental to education as text books and pens.
- **Increase** support to promote girls' employment and entrepreneurship with particular attention to their inclusion in **key future labour markets** related to STEM careers and green employment opportunities.

Education ministries must:

- **Fund and enable** a safe return to school for all students, recognising that **girls are at heightened risk of dropping out permanently**. It is imperative that **back to school planning addresses the specific needs of girls and young women** in a way that is inclusive and gender-responsive, with efforts to involve families and communities and ensure individual monitoring of the most vulnerable adolescent girls, including pregnant girls. **Community learning centres** where girls can catch up on education

missed and which also provide vocational training are a useful, and often more accessible, alternative to formal school attendance.

- **Prioritise** learning continuity during school closures and take necessary measures to ensure distance learning is accessible for all, particularly the most marginalised girls. This includes; **investing in appropriate both high-tech and low-tech**, affordable and gender-responsive distance education methods using radio, TV, and online spaces as well as distributing school kits with lesson plans, stationery and pens.
- **Recognise** that blended and flexible learning is here to stay and **train both students and teachers in the use of technology** to improve the quality of remote learning, working with communities and families where possible to ensure children and young people are supported at home with distance learning. **Plan for future closures** with prepared distance learning materials and ensure that schools and colleges **consult students, particularly girls and young women**, to identify those most in need of support.
- **Engage** with families, communities, leaders, school teams, children and young people to **identify gender norms** – including those on sexual orientation, disability, or early pregnancy – that impede education, and **help to construct alternative**, positive ones.
- **Ensure** psychosocial support for children and young people, prioritising girls and other vulnerable groups. As schools reopen, psychosocial support and socio-emotional learning activities need to be a priority. **Age responsive gender-sensitive, inclusive, accessible messages on psychosocial wellbeing and stress prevention** should be incorporated into school curricula.
- **Address** financial barriers to girls' returning to school by ensuring the most vulnerable girls and their families have their **food needs met** through food vouchers, meal deliveries, take home rations, in-school meals and cash transfers.

UN agencies, international donors and civil society actors must:

- **Pay attention** to the critical needs of low-income countries, in particular those in fragile contexts and those facing humanitarian crises: **including rapid, flexible funding, additional grant funding and technical cooperation.**
- **Encourage** national governments to **protect aid budgets** to ensure that the health, economic and social burden of the COVID-19 pandemic does not fall on the poorest countries and the most vulnerable populations.
- **Prioritise** programming that addresses the digital divide and redresses the gender **inequalities in internet access and access to technology** so that the particular needs of adolescent girls and young women in respect of both education and mental health support are addressed.
- **Support** communities in **raising awareness** of mental health issues involving both individuals and their families and help provide services targeted at adolescent girls and young women and their parents and carers: matching resources – radio, TV, phones, online platforms, print materials – to local circumstances.

- **Advocate** with Ministries of Education to ensure a gender-responsive approach to improve the quality of curricula, teacher training programmes, textbooks, policies and plans: ensuring that **content on gender equality, human rights, mother-tongue education, conflict sensitivity, comprehensive sexuality education, and resilience** is integrated into national curricula and is included in distance learning.
- **Strengthen** cross-sectoral partnerships that recognise the crucial links between social and environmental issues that are the key to a better future. COVID-19 has presented unprecedented challenges, never has there been a more critical time for strengthening partnerships and securing the next ten years of **collaboration for sustainable development**.

PLAN INTERNATIONAL: ADAPTING TO COVID-19, PROGRAMME AND PRACTICE

Education

- **Indonesia:** Plan International reached 28,000 girls and boys *through “equal access to learning”* activities. This included distributing 4,850 school kits containing books and stationery, 2,385 menstrual health management kits and 29,956 board games, to support children to learn at home. We also worked closely with the Education Office to adapt lessons to accommodate distance learning, training teachers to deliver ICT-based lessons via video and radio. In collaboration with the **Indonesian Psychologist Association** education personnel were trained to provide mental health and **gender-sensitive psychosocial support** to children, parents, and their support networks.
- **Ghana:** to address COVID-19 school closures, the **Make Ghanaian Girls Great!** project in Ghana supported distance learning by designing, recording and broadcasting lessons on the Ghana Learning TV channel. Where children lack access to the internet, lessons via radio ensured education continued during the pandemic in many countries.

Psychosocial Support

- **Philippines:** Increased reporting of abuse during COVID-19 meant that we intensified existing work with partners – as in Cambodia and Uganda – **to set up or strengthen online counselling and toll-free helplines** for children to report abuse or to ask for information about the virus.
- **Latin America:** To support children during COVID-19 quarantines the regional office developed *The Adventures of Zuri*, a self-learning package with cartoon characters, that offers **a gender equality perspective and emotional support for children**, adapted for three different age groups, and caregivers.

Youth Participation

- We supported young people to raise awareness about COVID-19 in their communities and to raise their voices about how they are affected by the pandemic. We **facilitated girls’ inclusion in decision-making** spaces in **Uganda’s** response, provided training on digital participation in **Paraguay**, and equipped young people in **Peru and Guinea** with devices and credit for data to help them participate this way.
- With UNICEF in **Togo**, we co-organised a **Facebook webinar** on the impacts of COVID-19 on children, reaching 23,974 people. We also financed the activities of 22 child and youth organisations to fight the virus. Three digital campaigns produced by children and young people reached 100,000 people.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Services

- Adapting to COVID-19 restrictions, we developed and increased **the use of digital tools to inform young people on sexual and reproductive health and rights**. Laos created the popular “*Merlin Pha Hoo*” learning tool, which may be included in national education curricula. **Bangladesh, Peru, Indonesia and Zimbabwe** were also among places to adapt projects to deliver health and rights messages and education digitally.
- In **Zimbabwe**, we worked with the Ministry of Health and Child Care to **provide sexual and reproductive health services to adolescent girls** and young people through mobile clinics. We also supported mentors and SRHR educators to deliver sessions via WhatsApp and SMS during the national lockdown.

ENDNOTES

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13. Halting Lives, Part One: the impact of COVID-19 on girls. Plan International September 2020
14. This was followed up with respective country office and in-country safeguarding focal point
15. Halting Lives, Part One: the impact of COVID-19 on girls. Plan International September 2020
16. Halting Lives, Part One: the impact of COVID-19 on girls. Plan International September 2020
17. Halting Lives, Part One: the impact of COVID-19 on girls. Plan International September 2020
18. This was followed up with respective country offices and in-country safeguarding focal points, who provided resources and relevant referral services to the two research participants
19. WHO Director General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus "<https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-148th-session-of-the-executive-board>



Cover photograph: A 15-year-old girl is pleased to receive her PeriodPanties to help her manage her menstruation, Mozambique. ©Plan International

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No photographs were taken during the course of this research.

About Plan International

We strive to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it's girls who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 80 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 75 countries.

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