ChildFund Alliance World Index 2026

SAFE ENOUGH TO HAVE A FUTURE



ChildFund Alliance

ChildFund Alliance World Index 2026.

Safe Enough to Have a Future

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Credits
This report is the product of collaborative, collective, and participatory efforts. Such a result would not have been possible without the invaluable work of the ChildFund Alliance members, country offices, and local partners, and especially the children and youth who shared their perspectives on the future they envision.

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Foreword

Every child deserves more than the promise of protection. Every child deserves to feel safe — at home, at school, in their community, and in the world around them. They deserve to grow up free from violence and fear, with the confidence to imagine a future and the opportunity to shape it.

Yet for far too many children, this remains an aspiration rather than a reality.

The *ChildFund Alliance World Index 2026: Safe Enough to Have a Future* confronts a fundamental question: are the systems we have established to protect children truly delivering the safety they need in their everyday lives?

The findings reveal a troubling gap between protection on paper and safety in practice. Laws, policies and institutions are essential, but their existence alone does not guarantee that a child can access support, trust those responsible for providing it, or receive help when it matters most. Protection must be measured not only by the commitments we make, but by the difference those commitments make in children's lives.

This edition brings together an assessment of women's and children's rights across 134 countries with the perspectives of more than 3,000 children in 27 countries. Together, these findings offer a powerful picture of both the progress achieved and the challenges that remain.

Global evidence shows that progress is possible, but remains far too slow and uneven. One in three children worldwide — approximately 2.5 billion — live in countries where the implementation of women's and children's rights remains limited or minimal. Behind these figures are children whose opportunities, well-being and futures are shaped by inequalities and barriers that should no longer be acceptable.

Perhaps most importantly, the children who participated in this research remind us that safety is deeply personal. It is found in trusted relationships, in being listened to and believed, in the ability to move freely, and in knowing that help will be available when needed. Yet the research also reveals that trust does not always translate into access to support. Even children who feel comfortable speaking to a trusted adult may remain uncertain that they can obtain help in a crisis.

These findings should challenge all of us — governments, civil society, communities and institutions — to look beyond whether protection mechanisms exist and ask whether they genuinely work for the children who need them.

This challenge is becoming more urgent as children navigate an increasingly uncertain world. Armed conflict, displacement, climate-related disasters, economic insecurity and other overlapping crises are placing enormous pressure on families, communities and the systems intended to keep children safe. These pressures do not affect all children equally. Girls, children with disabilities and those already experiencing exclusion often face compounded barriers to protection and opportunity.

At ChildFund Alliance, our commitment is to ensure that children's rights are upheld not only in principle, but in practice. Our strategic priorities — ending violence against children, advancing child-sensitive humanitarian action, and protecting child rights in a changing climate — reflect the interconnected challenges documented in this Index. They also reinforce our conviction that children's safety cannot be addressed in isolation from the wider conditions shaping their lives.

The 2026 World Index is therefore more than a research publication. It is a call to strengthen the relationships, services and institutions that children rely upon; to invest in protection systems that remain accessible and effective even in times of crisis; and, above all, to ensure that children's experiences and perspectives inform the decisions that affect them.

I am particularly grateful to the children and young people who shared their experiences, concerns and hopes with us. Their contributions are at the heart of this report and remind us that children are not simply beneficiaries of protection. They are rights holders, active participants and essential partners in shaping a safer and more equitable world.

I also extend my sincere appreciation to the members of ChildFund Alliance, our research partners, country teams and local organizations whose collaboration made this publication possible.

The message of this Index is clear: **a child's right to a future must be supported by the reality of safety today**. Our collective responsibility is to close the distance between the two.

We hope that the evidence and recommendations presented here will inspire renewed commitment, stronger partnerships and meaningful action so that every child, everywhere, can grow up safe, heard and empowered to shape their own future.

Tamar Manuelyan Atinc
Chairman, Board of Directors
ChildFund Alliance



Executive Summary

What does it take for a child to experience safety in practice? The 2026 edition of the *ChildFund Alliance World Index* approaches this question by examining not only whether systems of protection exist, but whether children are able to access and benefit from them in their everyday lives.

The central focus of this edition is the relationship between structural conditions, children's lived experiences and the pathways through which protection becomes meaningful. It examines how inequalities in the implementation of women's and children's rights shape the environments in which children grow, learn and develop their aspirations, and how overlapping pressures — including climate-related risks, conflict, social violence, economic insecurity and institutional fragility — influence children's ability to experience safety.

The evidence presented in this report suggests that protection is not determined solely by the existence of laws, institutions or services. It depends on whether children can navigate the relationships, mechanisms and responses that connect them to support when they need it.

The right to the future

The report builds on the concept of the right to the future, introduced by ChildFund Alliance in the 2024 edition of the World Index and further developed in this edition. **The right to the future is understood as the possibility for children to develop meaningful life trajectories: to grow up in conditions that support safety, learning and play; to form aspirations; and to have the agency and opportunities needed to pursue them.** Although not established as a standalone legal right, the concept is grounded in a human rights-based approach and reflects broader international thinking on children's rights, sustainability and intergenerational equity.

The right to the future is not equally available to all children. It is shaped by the social, institutional and environmental conditions surrounding them, and it is most constrained for children whose access to protection, participation and resources is already limited.

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Safety as the analytical lens: moving beyond protection on paper

This edition examines the right to the future through the lens of safety and makes a distinction that is central to the analysis: safety and protection are related, but they are not the same. Protection refers to the formal and informal systems, institutions, relationships and practices established to prevent and respond to harm. Safety refers to whether children are able to live without violence, navigate risks, seek support and exercise agency within the specific environments and relationships that shape their daily lives.

The two dimensions are connected but do not automatically coincide. **Protection systems may exist while remaining difficult for children to access. Conversely, children may experience safety through trusted relationships and forms of support that are not captured by formal indicators.** Understanding this distinction allows the report to move beyond the question of whether protection exists and examine whether protection can be reached.

Bringing together structural evidence and children's perspectives

The World Index combines complementary sources of evidence:

1. The structural component examines the broader environment for women's and children's rights across 134 countries, including legal, institutional and policy conditions.
2. The participatory component captures children's own perspectives through a survey of 2,344 children and adolescents aged 8 to 18 across 27 countries, complemented by Safety Mapping exercises involving 834 children across 21 countries. Through these processes, children identified places and relationships associated with safety and risk, and proposed changes that would make their communities safer. Given the sensitive contexts in which this participatory work was conducted, including with children in Syria, Palestine, Ukraine, Burkina Faso and Mali, the research followed appropriate safeguarding and ethical standards, including a deliberate decision not to elicit children's personal experiences of harm. The findings should be understood as children's perspectives and priorities, rather than as prevalence estimates or representative measures of the scale of harm.
3. A review of secondary country-level and international sources.

These two forms of evidence describe different dimensions of the same reality. Structural indicators cannot fully capture children's lived experiences, and children's experiences cannot replace analysis of national systems. Together, they provide a more complete understanding of the conditions under which protection becomes meaningful — that is, protection a child can actually reach and act on, rather than protection that exists only in law or on paper.

What the evidence shows

ACCESS TO HELP DEPENDS ON MORE THAN TRUST

- One of the central findings of this edition concerns the relationship between trusted relationships and effective access to support.
- Children's ability to speak with a trusted adult is an important foundation of protection. However, the evidence shows that trust alone does not guarantee that children believe they can obtain help — that is, that they have what this report calls the perceived capacity to seek help, defined and examined in Section 2.3.2.
- Even among children who report that it is very easy to talk to a trusted adult, more than one in five do not believe they would actually be able to access support. Across the full sample, only 63% of children believe they would be able to ask for help, meaning more than one in three either do not believe they could activate a response or are unsure. Among those who find it very easy to talk to a trusted adult, 14.9% say they would not seek help and a further 6.8% are unsure whether they would do so. These are distinct barriers: reluctance to seek help may reflect fear, shame, retaliation risks or previous experiences of non-response, while uncertainty about accessing support may point to gaps in referral pathways or response capacity.
- This highlights the importance of the mechanisms that connect disclosure with response: accessible services, referral pathways, trained frontline actors and effective coordination between institutions.
- A trusted relationship can open the door to protection, but the pathway beyond that relationship determines whether protection becomes possible.

STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS AND LIVED EXPERIENCE CAPTURE DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF SAFETY

- The Index demonstrates that national conditions and children's experiences should not be interpreted as interchangeable measures.
- For example, Italy scores 81.6 out of 100 on the World Index, yet only 39% of children consulted report that they could seek help in a crisis. Bangladesh scores 52.4, while 91% of children consulted report that they could access help. These figures are illustrative of the distinction between structural conditions and children's experienced realities, rather than comparable estimates of child safety in the two countries, given differences in sample size and administration modality. Palestine presents an equally important—and particularly urgent—signal: only 13% of children consulted report that they could seek help in a crisis, the lowest perceived help-seeking capacity in the dataset by a margin of 17 percentage points, while 93% identify home as a safe space. This combination illustrates how relational safety can coexist with severely constrained pathways to action.
- These differences do not indicate that one form of evidence is more valid than another. Rather, they demonstrate that structural indicators and lived experience measure different aspects of protection.
- The key question is therefore how systems connect these dimensions: whether institutions, services and relationships create accessible pathways through which children can obtain meaningful support.

OVERLAPPING CRISES ARE RESHAPING CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF SAFETY

- Children increasingly experience climate-related risks, conflict, displacement, economic insecurity and institutional fragility as interconnected realities rather than separate challenges.
- Climate change is experienced through everyday consequences: whether children can safely travel, attend school or use public spaces. Conflict and social violence reshape children's sense of safety through fear, disruption and uncertainty.
- Across the 27 countries included in the consultation, these pressures frequently overlap, creating conditions in which the ability of protection systems to remain functional becomes increasingly important.
- The evidence suggests that resilience depends not only on the availability of services, but on the continuity, legitimacy and local accessibility of the structures that connect children to support.

SAFETY IS CREATED THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS AND ENVIRONMENTS

- Children's accounts demonstrate that safety is produced through everyday relationships and places, not only through formal institutions.
- Through Safety Mapping, children identified schools, homes, community spaces and places of worship as environments associated with safety, while identifying risks linked to poorly lit areas, unsafe roads, rivers, isolated spaces and locations affected by violence. Children also identified interpersonal risks, including adults or others who might frighten or hurt them, harassment and gendered forms of harm. In particular, gender-based violence rarely appeared through direct naming, but emerged cumulatively through references to being stared at, followed or commented on—patterns the report interprets as evidence of the normalisation of gendered risks.
- Children's perspectives show that safety is shaped by the interaction between physical environments, social relationships and the presence of supportive adults.

"If the teacher is present, no one can hurt us." — a girl of 12 in Mali

GIRLS' FUTURES ARE SHAPED BY THE CONDITIONS SURROUNDING THEM

- The evidence also highlights the intergenerational dimensions of children's opportunities and agency.
- Across the countries included in the Index, girls' expectations about their own futures are closely connected to the structural conditions affecting women and girls around them. Women's Education is the lowest-scoring dimension of the Index, with a score of 37.3, highlighting persistent barriers that influence girls' opportunities and aspirations.
- Girls' accounts also show that access to public space is often conditional, shaped by concerns about harassment, violence and gendered expectations about where and when they can move safely. These constraints affect not only girls' present experiences of safety and participation, but also the opportunities available to them.
- Disability is the most consistent dividing factor across the consultation data: children reporting functional difficulties report lower participation, lower future agency, greater exposure to risk and fewer spaces experienced as safe. This points to an important intersection between gender, disability and the wider conditions shaping children's opportunities and futures.
- At current rates of progress, eliminating the forms of gender-based violence measured by the Index would take approximately 173 years.
- These findings reinforce the importance of approaches that address not only the immediate risks faced by girls, but also the social, educational and institutional conditions that shape their futures across generations, while ensuring that children reporting functional difficulties are not excluded from opportunities for participation, safety and agency.

> Children's accounts demonstrate that safety is produced through everyday relationships and places, not only through formal institutions.



Implications for action

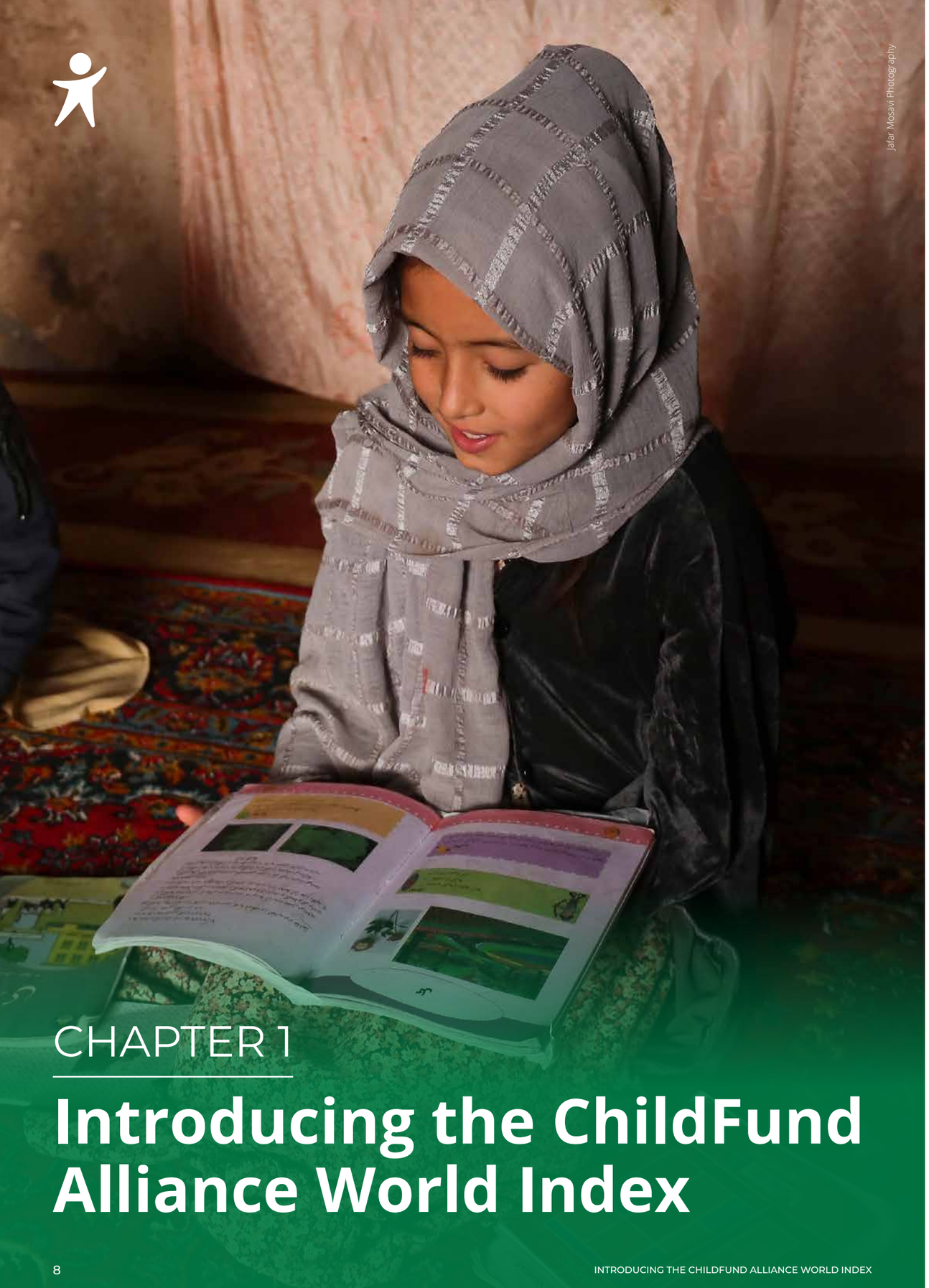
TAKEN TOGETHER, THE FINDINGS SHOW THAT SAFETY IS NOT A FIXED CHARACTERISTIC OF A COUNTRY OR A SYSTEM. IT IS A CONDITION PRODUCED WHEN STRUCTURAL CAPACITY, TRUSTED RELATIONSHIPS AND ACCESSIBLE RESPONSE PATHWAYS COME TOGETHER IN CHILDREN'S EVERYDAY LIVES.

The report identifies six areas for action:

1. Strengthen the pathways connecting children to support by investing in referral mechanisms, frontline capacity and response systems that enable trusted relationships to lead to effective protection.
2. Maintain protection systems under conditions of crisis and uncertainty by ensuring continuity of essential services before, during and after emergencies.
3. Integrate child protection into climate action by recognising climate-related pressures as drivers of risk and incorporating children's experiences into adaptation approaches.
4. Strengthen implementation and enforcement of violence prevention laws and policies so that formal commitments translate into effective practice.
5. Use children's own knowledge as evidence for planning and prevention, recognising their identification of risks and protective factors as valuable contributions to safer environments.
6. Adopt gender- and generation-transformative approaches that address the structural conditions shaping girls' future agency and opportunities.

"Parents, teachers, and the government should work together to ensure safe environments for children."
— a boy in Tanzania

The central message of the 2026 World Index is that ending violence against children requires more than establishing protection systems: **it requires ensuring that children can access, navigate and experience those systems as meaningful sources of safety.**



Jafar Mosavi Photography

CHAPTER 1

Introducing the ChildFund Alliance World Index

1.1
Purpose, Scope, and Political Framework

Children's futures are shaped not only by the risks they face, but by the conditions in which those risks are encountered and by the systems and relationships available to protect them. Protection and safety are closely connected, but they are not the same. Protection refers to the systems, institutions, relationships, and practices intended to prevent and respond to harm. Safety, by contrast, is situated: it is experienced in particular places, relationships, and circumstances, and shaped by how risks and protective resources are encountered in everyday life. A protection system may exist formally without producing safety in practice, just as children may draw on forms of protection that remain invisible in formal systems.

For millions of children, this is not a theoretical concern but a defining condition of everyday life. Armed conflict, the climate crisis, economic instability, forced displacement, and widening inequalities are not isolated pressures. They interact and reinforce one another, producing cumulative effects that are unevenly distributed and concentrating risk among children already living in contexts of poverty, exclusion, and insecurity.

Protection and safety are closely connected, but they are not the same. Protection refers to the systems, institutions, relationships, and practices intended to prevent and respond to harm. Safety, by contrast, is situated: it is experienced in particular places, relationships, and circumstances, and shaped by how risks and protective resources are encountered in everyday life. A protection system may exist formally without producing safety in practice, just as children may draw on forms of protection that remain invisible in formal systems.

As these pressures accumulate, violence can cease to appear as an exceptional event and become embedded in everyday life. It operates not only through direct harm, but also as a persistent condition that shapes children's environments, relationships, opportunities, and expectations. At the same time, the systems and relationships that should provide protection — families, schools, institutions, and communities — may be progressively strained, weakened, or made inaccessible. What is affected is not only children's immediate exposure to harm, but the conditions in which they can exercise their rights, participate, act, and imagine viable futures.

This report examines these dynamics through the 2026 edition of the *ChildFund Alliance World Index*, developed by ChildFund Alliance, a global network of child-focused organisations working across more than 60 countries. It brings together different complementary sources of evidence: a quantitative global ranking comparing 134 countries across 30 indicators of women's and children's rights, and participatory research conducted with more than 3,000 children and adolescents across 27 countries through a survey and safety mapping activities, and a review of secondary country-level sources, combined through the triangulation described in the Annex.

Together, these sources address a central question: **how do structural inequalities in the implementation of women's and children's rights shape the situated conditions in which children experience safety, and what determines whether formal and informal protection systems, relationships, and practices translate into real, accessible, and actionable safety in contexts of polycrisis?**

ChildFund Alliance supports nearly 36 million children and their families worldwide through programmes aimed at ending violence and exploitation against children, delivering child-sensitive humanitarian action in fragile and crisis-affected settings, and promoting climate policies and programming that centre the voices and participation of children and youth. Across these areas, the Alliance works in partnership with children, families, and communities to strengthen the conditions in which children can live safely, participate meaningfully, and build more secure and hopeful futures.

This report is not intended to be descriptive alone. It is designed to support decision-making across policy, programming, and advocacy. **By examining how structural inequalities shape the conditions in which children experience safety, and how these conditions vary across contexts, it seeks to identify where and how interventions can strengthen protection before risks materialise, and how they must adapt when existing systems are already under strain.**

Within this framework, safety is not understood as a universal or fixed condition. It is situated in particular places, relationships, and circumstances, and shaped by the ways in which children encounter risks and access protective resources in their everyday lives. Protection refers to the formal and informal systems, relationships, and practices through which harm is prevented, addressed, or navigated. The two are closely connected, but cannot be assumed to coincide: protection systems may exist formally without being accessible or effective in practice, while children may experience protection through relationships and forms of support that remain invisible in formal systems.

Violence — in its physical, structural, institutional, and environmental forms — must therefore be understood not only as an immediate violation of rights, but also as a process that can progressively reshape the conditions in which safety becomes possible. Repeated or overlapping exposure to violence and insecurity can undermine stability, restrict access to opportunities, and narrow the space in which children can exercise agency and influence the trajectories of their own lives.

The approach adopted in this report reflects this understanding. **The World Index identifies structural patterns in the implementation of women's and children's rights and the broader conditions in which protection systems operate. The participatory research examines how these conditions are experienced in particular contexts — through children's perceptions of safety, their relationships, and their ability to act in situations of risk.** These forms of evidence are complementary but not interchangeable. Structural indicators[1] cannot capture how rights and protection are lived in specific contexts; lived experience cannot be fully understood without situating it within the broader systems and inequalities that shape it.

Bringing these sources together allows the analysis to move beyond description towards explanation. The report does not only identify where inequalities exist; it examines how they shape the conditions in which children experience safety, how formal and informal protection systems operate within those conditions, and when they translate — or fail to translate — into real, accessible, and actionable safety.

This perspective is grounded in an explicitly intersectional[2] understanding of inequality. Children do not experience vulnerability along a single dimension, but through overlapping forms of disadvantage linked to gender, age, disability, socio-economic status, migration status, and minority identity. Within this framework, gender functions as a central structural determinant. The conditions under which women live — their access to resources, protection, education, and decision-making power — directly shape children's environments, influencing caregiving, exposure to violence, and access to support systems. These dynamics are reproduced over time, linking present inequalities to future outcomes.

The implications are intergenerational. Evidence[3] consistently shows that exposure to unsafe environments in childhood has enduring consequences across the life course, affecting health, education, social participation, and economic opportunity. Violence, in this sense, does not only violate rights in the present. It structures inequality over time, constraining not only current wellbeing, but the horizon of possibilities available to children as they grow (Felitti et al., 1998; Shonkoff et al., 2012; Hughes et al., 2017).

1 Structural indicators here are the World Index measures: the legal, institutional and policy conditions for the rights of women and children across the three sub-indexes (Context, Children, Women). They describe the environment in which protection systems operate, not children's direct experience of them.

2 The term "intersectionality", coined in 1989 by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, describes the way in which race, class, gender, and other personal characteristics intersect and overlap. It highlights how multiple social identities combine to shape individuals' experiences, particularly in relation to discrimination, oppression, and systems of domination. This concept recognises that certain groups—such as children, women, people living below the poverty line, ethnic minorities, people of colour, individuals within the LGBTQIA+ community and those with diverse SOGIESC identities, Indigenous peoples, refugees, and persons with disabilities—are disproportionately exposed to violations of their rights (Crenshaw, 1989). As a result, they are more likely to experience overlapping and compounding forms of discrimination, for example on the basis of gender, age, ethnicity, or race. An intersectional perspective therefore draws attention to the cumulative impact of discrimination and structural inequality experienced by those who fall outside the dominant male-centred norm. In societies that privilege a white, adult, heterosexual male standard, individuals who do not conform to this model are more likely to face marginalisation in multiple forms. Intersectionality provides a framework for understanding these marginalised identities together, while also acknowledging the specific and distinct forms of exclusion that different individuals encounter. Within this context, women and children are often identified as key groups, as they frequently experience significant rights deprivations and illustrate these patterns clearly. For them, intersectionality encompasses not only discrimination based on gender or age, but also additional layers of disadvantage linked to ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other social categories. These overlapping forms of discrimination create a compounded disadvantage that is not yet fully addressed by existing legal frameworks or legal practice.

3 The World Health Organisation has consistently documented that violence against children adversely affects physical and mental health, neurodevelopment, educational attainment, and social functioning, with effects that extend into adulthood (WHO, 2020; WHO, 2016). UNICEF similarly identifies violence as a key driver of multidimensional deprivation, shaping children's access to safety, learning, and participation, and undermining long-term development outcomes (UNICEF, 2017; UNICEF, 2021). The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) framework provides robust empirical evidence that cumulative exposure to violence and household instability is strongly associated with poor health, reduced socioeconomic attainment, and increased risk of intergenerational transmission of disadvantage (Felitti et al., 1998; Hughes et al., 2017; Hughes et al., 2019). Developmental neuroscience further shows that chronic exposure to violence and toxic stress can alter brain architecture and stress-response systems, with lasting implications for cognition, behaviour, and health trajectories (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012). From a broader development perspective, longitudinal studies in economics and sociology demonstrate that early-life adversity is a key determinant of inequality persistence, shaping income, education, and labour-market outcomes in adulthood (Heckman, 2006; Currie & Almond, 2011). Human rights scholarship similarly situates violence as a structural constraint on the realisation of rights, linking protection from violence to the effective exercise of civil, political, social, and economic rights over time (OHCHR, 2006; UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2011).

This report is situated within the *ChildFund Alliance Strategic Framework FY2026–2030*, which places children's rights, participation, and evidence-based action at the centre of its work and explicitly focuses on the conditions that enable children to live safely and build a future over time. Across its three pillars — Ending Violence Against Children, Child-Sensitive Humanitarian Action, and Child Rights in a Changing Climate — the Alliance prioritises the systems that shape children's everyday environments: families, schools, communities, digital settings, and institutions.

Within this framework, children are not positioned only as recipients of protection, but as rights holders and contributors to knowledge and as agents whose perspectives are essential to understanding how safety is actually produced, sustained, or undermined in practice. The evidence presented in this report is intended to directly inform this strategic direction.

Evidence consistently shows that exposure to unsafe environments in childhood has enduring consequences across the life course, affecting health, education, social participation, and economic opportunity. Violence, in this sense, does not only violate rights in the present. It structures inequality over time, constraining not only current wellbeing, but the horizon of possibilities available to children as they grow.

TERMINOLOGY USED IN THIS REPORT

This report uses a controlled vocabulary to maintain clear distinctions between concepts that are closely related but not interchangeable.

- **SAFETY AND PROTECTION ARE NOT SYNONYMS.** Safety is understood as a situated condition experienced in particular places, relationships, and circumstances: the extent to which children are able to live without harm, navigate risks, and exercise agency in their everyday lives. Protection refers to the formal and informal systems, relationships, institutions, and practices intended to prevent and respond to harm. Protection can contribute to safety, but the two cannot be assumed to coincide. Protection may exist formally while remaining inaccessible or ineffective in practice; conversely, children may draw on protective relationships and forms of support that are not captured by formal systems. A central concern of this report is therefore the conditions under which protection becomes meaningful and actionable in children's everyday lives.

- **RISK AND DANGER ARE NOT SYNONYMS.** Risk refers to exposure to potential harm, including the probabilistic and structural conditions that shape risk landscapes. It is the term used in the report's risk mapping and in relation to the indicators included in the World Index. Danger refers to an immediate and present threat, including the specific unsafe places, situations, or moments described by children.

- Help-seeking, in this report, refers to a child's **PERCEIVED CAPACITY** to obtain effective help in a situation of crisis or risk — that is, whether a child believes they could reach help, not whether they have sought it or whether help was in fact provided. It is measured through a single survey item capturing this belief. It is therefore a perception, distinct from trust, which concerns the availability of a responsive adult, and from provision, which concerns whether a service actually responds.

- **"CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM" AND "LAWS, POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONS" REFER TO DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ANALYSIS.** "Child protection system" refers to the formal apparatus through which protection is organised and delivered, including referral mechanisms, case management, specialised staff, and services. "Laws, policies and institutions" refers to the wider normative and institutional environment measured by the World Index. Where the report refers to the connective layer through which protection becomes accessible in practice, it refers specifically to referral pathways and trained local actors. The term "infrastructure" is reserved for physical infrastructure, such as roads, water systems, and buildings.

- **SAFEGUARDING** refers to the responsibility of organisations and adults in contact with children to prevent harm arising from their own activities, staff or programmes — distinct from the wider protection system, which addresses harm wherever it occurs.

1.2.
The Right to The Future and Safety as an Analytical Lens

This report is grounded in the concept of the right to the future, introduced by ChildFund Alliance in the 2024 edition and further developed here as both a normative and interpretive framework. **The right to the future is understood not as an abstract aspiration, but as the possibility for children to develop meaningful life trajectories, exercise agency, and access and pursue opportunities over time.** This possibility depends not only on the formal recognition of rights, but on the conditions in which children are able to exercise them.

These conditions are shaped by the risks children encounter, the relationships and systems available to support them, and the opportunities they have to act within their environments. Exposure to violence and unsafe situations — across their physical, structural, institutional, and environmental forms — can progressively constrain these possibilities. What matters is therefore not only the occurrence of individual events, but how risks and forms of violence accumulate, interact, and shape the conditions in which children live, develop, and exercise agency.

The right to the future includes the possibility of living in conditions that support safety, learning and participation, play and social development, the formation of aspirations, and the ability to act upon them. These possibilities are not experienced in the abstract, but take shape in particular environments, relationships, and circumstances. **The right to the future therefore shifts attention from the formal recognition of rights to the conditions that enable or constrain their meaningful realisation over time.**

In this edition, safety provides the central analytical lens through which the right to the future is examined. Safety is understood as a situated condition that takes shape in particular places, relationships, and circumstances, and that shapes how children encounter risks, access protection, and exercise agency in their everyday lives. Examining safety in this way makes it possible to explore not only whether rights are formally recognised, but the conditions under which children can meaningfully exercise them and sustain viable trajectories over time.

CHILDFUND ALLIANCE'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE RIGHT TO THE FUTURE

What characterises the present moment is not the occurrence of isolated shocks, but the persistence of a multidimensional and protracted crisis environment in which environmental, economic, social, and political disruptions interact and reinforce one another. Their effects are unevenly distributed. Children, adolescents, and women — particularly those living in conditions of marginalisation, poverty, exclusion, or insecurity — are more likely to experience the cumulative effects of these pressures. It is within this context that the right to the future emerges as a central concern. The question extends beyond the protection of rights in the present to the conditions that shape whether children will be able to develop, exercise agency, and pursue meaningful trajectories over time. Present inequalities and rights violations do not only affect children's current circumstances; they can also constrain the opportunities, capabilities, and aspirations through which future possibilities are formed.

ChildFund Alliance operationalises this concept through five interrelated pillars:

- **Sustainable development** — the responsibility to sustain the environmental, social, and economic conditions on which present and future generations depend.
- **Intergenerational justice** — the fair distribution of rights, risks, responsibilities, and opportunities across generations.
- **Capabilities** — the real opportunities and freedoms people have to pursue valued ways of living.
- **Capacity to aspire** — the socially shaped ability to imagine, formulate, and pursue possible future trajectories.
- **Child participation** — both a rights-based requirement and a condition for legitimate and meaningful decision-making concerning children's lives and futures.

The Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) provides the normative foundation for this framework. Although the "right to the future" is not explicitly formulated as a standalone right in international treaties, the concept can be understood through existing legal principles and their evolving interpretation, particularly those reflected in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), sustainable development frameworks, and broader human rights obligations.

Figure 1
ChildFund Alliance Understanding of The Right to The Future



The right to the future is not a formally codified legal right. Yet, recent international policy developments increasingly reflect a future-oriented approach, particularly in relation to climate governance, sustainability, and risk management. Although these developments are not always framed explicitly in terms of rights, they increasingly recognise that decisions taken in the present shape conditions and possibilities across generations. The right to the future provides a framework for examining these longer-term consequences through the conditions that enable or constrain children's ability to develop, exercise their rights, and pursue meaningful futures[4].

ChildFund Alliance also grounds this framework in direct empirical work. Through global consultations with children and adolescents, it has sought to bring lived experience into policy analysis and decision-making, recognising children and young people not only as subjects of rights and protection, but as participants in defining the priorities and conditions that shape their futures.

Figure 2
ChildFund Alliance Understanding of The Right to The Future

THE 5 PILLARS	REFERENCES	CRC LINKED RIGHTS
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	• World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), Our common future • UN (1992), Agenda 21 • UN (1992), Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development • UN (2015), Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development • UNFCC (2016), The Paris Agreement • UN (2021), Our Common Agenda • UN Foundation Next Generation Fellows (2021), Our Future Agenda • HLCP (2023), Common Principles on Future Generations	• Right to life and development (Article 6) • Right to be heard and respected (Article 12) • Right to freedom of expression and of thought, conscience and religion (Articles 13 and 14) • Rights to freedom of association and of peaceful assembly (Article 15) • Access to information and education (Articles 17 and 28) • Rights to health, water, food, environment, and a safe home (Articles 24 and 27) • Freedom and safeguarding of culture, language, and religion (Article 30) • Protection from violence, harmful work, sexual abuse, exploitation, and war (Articles 19, 32, 34, 36, 38)
INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE	• UN (1987), Our Common Future • UN (1997), Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change • UNECE (2011), Intergenerational Solidarity: Strengthening Economic and Social Ties • UNFCC (2016), The Paris Agreement • UN (2021), Our Common Agenda • HLCP (2023), Common Principles on Future Generations • Rights of Future Generations (2023), Maastricht Principles on the Human Rights of Future Generations	• Non-discrimination (Article 2) • Best interests of the child (Article 3) • Right to life and development (Article 6) • Right to be heard and respected (Article 12) • Rights to freedom of association and of peaceful assembly (Article 15) • Rights to health, water, food, environment, and a safe home (Articles 24 and 27) • Right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts (Article 31) • Protection from violence, harmful work, sexual abuse, exploitation, and war (Articles 19, 32, 34, 36, 38)
CAPABILITIES	• Sen, A. (1974), On Economic Inequality • Sen, A. (1979), Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation • UN (from 1990 onwards), Human Development Report • Sen, A. (1999), Development as Freedom • Nussbaum, M. (2011), Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach	• Right to be heard and respected (Article 12) • Right to freedom of expression and of thought, conscience and religion (Articles 13 and 14) • Rights to freedom of association and of peaceful assembly (Article 15) • Rights to health, water, food, environment, and a safe home (Articles 24 and 27) • Right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts (Article 31) • Protection from violence, harmful work, sexual abuse, exploitation, and war (Articles 19, 32, 34, 36, 38)
CAPACITY TO ASPIRE	• Appadurai, A. (2004), The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition • Un (2010), World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) • Nussbaum, M. (2011), Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach • UN (2011), Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training • ILO (2020), Youth Aspirations and the Future of Work	• Right to be heard and respected (Article 12) • Right to freedom of expression and of thought, conscience and religion (Articles 13 and 14) • Rights of the child to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly (Article 15) • Access to information and education (Articles 17 and 28) • Rights to health, water, food, environment, and a safe home (Articles 24 and 27) • Right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts (Article 31)
CHILD PARTICIPATION	• UN (1989), Convention on the Rights of the Child • Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009), General Comment N°12 • UN (2015), Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development • UN (2021), Our Common Agenda • UN Foundation Next Generation Fellows (2021), Our Future Agenda • HLCP (2023), Common Principles on Future Generations	• Right to be heard and respected (Article 12) • Right to freedom of expression and of thought, conscience and religion (Articles 13 and 14) • Rights to freedom of association and of peaceful assembly (Article 15) • Right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts (Article 31)

4 This evolving debate has gained institutional momentum since 2020. The United Nations Secretary-General's report Our Common Agenda (2021) called for a renewed multilateral system capable of addressing both present and future challenges. It proposed a Declaration on Future Generations, a UN Futures Lab, and a Special Envoy for Future Generations. However, while advancing a strong future-oriented agenda, it did not explicitly recognise future generations as rights holders under international law, nor fully address the persistence of historical injustices across time. In parallel, the Maastricht Principles on the Human Rights of Future Generations, finalised in 2023 by an international group of experts, sought to clarify how existing human rights law applies across generations. They affirm that human rights extend fully to future generations, emphasising three key ideas: the intergenerational dimension of present decisions, the need to adapt decision-making processes for long-term justice and sustainability, and the central role of children and youth in intergenerational governance. Importantly, children and young people are described as occupying a unique position because of their proximity to future generations, and their participation in long-term decision-making is therefore accorded special weight. Alongside these legal developments, youth-led initiatives have contributed to reshaping the debate. The report Our Future Agenda (2021), produced by young leaders supported by the UN Foundation, argues for a renewed social contract that recognises young people as active contributors to shaping the future. It identifies four priority domains—education, employment, environmental protection, and participation—as central to ensuring intergenerational justice and sustainable development. These ideas contributed to broader institutional processes, including the Summit of the Future (2024), which produced the Pact for the Future, the Global Digital Compact, and the Declaration on Future Generations. Although not legally binding, these documents consolidate a growing international consensus on the importance of future-oriented governance. Similarly, the UN System Common Principles on Future Generations (2023) reaffirm that present decisions inevitably shape future human rights outcomes and emphasise children and youth as a distinct group requiring meaningful participation in long-term governance (see *ChildFund Alliance World Index on the Rights of Women and Children 2024*).

Adopting this perspective shifts the analytical focus of the report in three ways:

- **FIRST,** it moves attention beyond short-term outputs towards the longer-term conditions that shape children's trajectories, opportunities, and ability to act.
- **SECOND,** it expands the understanding of rights beyond protection alone to include participation, agency, and the conditions that enable children to influence the circumstances and futures that affect them.
- **THIRD,** it redirects attention from individualised notions of vulnerability towards questions of structural accountability. Institutions are responsible not only for the fulfilment of rights in the present, but also for how current policies, decisions, and omissions shape the conditions within which children's future possibilities are formed.

This edition is organised around a central proposition: in a context of polycrisis, the right to the future is shaped in significant part by the conditions in which children encounter risk, access protection, and experience safety in their everyday environments. Safety does not guarantee the realisation of rights or a particular future trajectory. It shapes the conditions within which children can navigate risks, exercise agency, access opportunities, and pursue meaningful possibilities over time. Where those conditions are progressively undermined, the space for exercising rights and shaping viable futures can become increasingly constrained.

CHILDFUND ALLIANCE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK (FY2026–2030)

This report is directly grounded in the Alliance's strategic mandate for FY2026–2030, which places children's rights, participation, and evidence-based action at the centre of its global work.

The ChildFund Alliance Strategy 2030: Championing Child Rights in a Changing World is structured around three interconnected pillars:

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN (EVAC): reaffirming violence prevention and response as a core organisational priority, with a focus on visibility, accountability, and sustained investment.

CHILD-SENSITIVE HUMANITARIAN ACTION: strengthening humanitarian response and recovery to ensure that children's rights and protection remain central in crisis contexts.

CHILD RIGHTS IN A CHANGING CLIMATE: addressing climate change as a defining child rights issue and strengthening children's role in adaptation, resilience, and environmental justice.

These pillars are supported by four enabling commitments: participation of children and young people; locally led action; learning and evidence generation; and joint advocacy and resource mobilisation. These are not operational add-ons, but core mechanisms through which impact is achieved.

This report provides the evidence base aligned with all three pillars. The participatory research directly enacts the commitment to children's participation. The Index supports evidence generation and joint advocacy. The recommendations in Chapter 3 are designed to support locally led action and resource mobilisation decisions.



1.3
From Indicators to Lived Experience: Children, Safety, and Polycrises

This edition introduces a deliberate shift in how the World Index is used analytically. Rather than beginning with macro-level indicators and using them to infer children's realities, the report begins with children's lived experiences and sets the Index alongside them as an independent description of national conditions, without treating either source as the key to the other.

This is both a methodological and an epistemological choice. Children do not encounter rights as statistical categories, rankings, or institutional classifications, even though rights are also produced through exactly those systems — laws, standards, institutions and measurement. They encounter them as lived experience: as safety or its absence, as being heard or ignored. **Children's accounts therefore provide insight into how rights and protection are experienced in practice: where systems are accessible and responsive, where protection breaks down, and where exclusion persists despite formal recognition.**

Across contexts, children describe safety in concrete and relational terms. It is associated with trusted relationships, the ability to move through everyday environments without fear, and access to conditions that provide stability and predictability. Safety is therefore not understood simply as the absence of harm, but as a situated condition shaped by the social, environmental, and institutional circumstances in which children live. These circumstances can support continuity, trust, and agency, or progressively constrain them. In contexts characterised by overlapping and mutually reinforcing crises, children's everyday realities are shaped by disruptions to education, healthcare, and essential services, as well as by exposure to violence, environmental instability, and uncertainty about future opportunities. These effects are not evenly distributed. They are structured by pre-existing inequalities that shape both exposure to risk and access to protection.

> Safety is therefore not understood simply as the absence of harm, but as a situated condition shaped by the social, environmental, and institutional circumstances in which children live.

These dynamics are analysed across four interacting levels following the ecological model for human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979): the individual child, including age, gender, and ability; the relational world of trusted adults; the community layer of local actors and referral pathways; and the wider social and structural conditions measured by the World Index. This ecological reading, developed in Chapter 2, makes it possible to examine how conditions at different levels interact. Safety experienced in one setting may be undermined by failures elsewhere, while protective resources at one level may compensate, at least partially, for weaknesses at another. The recommendations therefore focus on the level at which the conditions limiting children's safety and ability to exercise their rights can most effectively be addressed.

A full technical description of the methodologies underpinning both the World Index and the participatory components is provided in the methodological annex of this report.

Integrated Mixed-Methods Approach

To capture these dynamics, the report adopts an integrated mixed-methods approach combining structural and participatory evidence. In practice this means three kinds of data: a structural index of countries' legal and institutional conditions, participatory research with children (a survey and Safety Mapping exercises), and a review of secondary country-level sources, combined through the triangulation described in the Annex.

CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATORY COMPONENTS

The participatory evidence in this report is generated through two complementary data collection exercises implemented by members of ChildFund Alliance (Barnfonden, Children Believe, ChildFund Australia, ChildFund Deutschland, ChildFund International, Educo, and WeWorld) across programme countries.

1. Survey (Quantitative Participatory Component)

A structured survey was conducted with 2,344 children and adolescents (aged 8–18) across 27 countries, capturing perceptions of: education and learning opportunities; play and social development; adult support and protection systems; exposure to violence and insecurity; wellbeing and future-oriented aspirations; and perceived ability to influence one's own future. Responses were standardised into comparable indicators to enable cross-country and regional analysis. The survey is not intended to produce population estimates, but to identify patterns in perceptions and reported experiences across programme contexts.

2. Safety Mapping (Qualitative Participatory Component)

76 Safety Mapping exercises were conducted with 834 children and adolescents (aged 8-18) across 21 countries. Safety Mapping is a qualitative and spatial participatory tool designed to capture how children understand safety within their everyday environments. Through collective exercises, children identify: spaces perceived as safe, unsafe, or ambivalent; reasons underlying these perceptions; actors associated with protection or risk; and possible solutions and pathways for change.

Methodological Constraints and Limitations

Both components are implemented within ChildFund Alliance programme areas and are not statistically representative of national populations. The survey and Safety Mapping are treated as distinct datasets due to differences in methodology, elicitation format, and unit of analysis.

Data collection on the ground was affected by operational constraints, including conflict, climate-related shocks, and limitations in institutional access, resulting in uneven geographical coverage. In Afghanistan and Lebanon, participatory data collection was not possible due to security and access restrictions; contextual understanding in these cases is supported by qualitative inputs from child protection experts, which are not equivalent to participatory data. The objective is not statistical generalisation, but the production of contextualised and programmatically relevant insights grounded in children's lived realities[5].

5 Country-level figures derived from these components are therefore indicative of patterns within programme contexts and should not be read as national estimates or used for cross-country ranking.

THE WORLD INDEX

The World Index is a composite index assessing the implementation of women's and children's rights through a comparative ranking of 134 countries, based on 30 indicators covering health, education, safety, economic participation, and environmental conditions.

Theoretical Framework

The Index is grounded in the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA), complemented by the Capabilities Approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011). The HRBA defines the normative structure of rights — based on universality, indivisibility, participation, accountability, and non-discrimination. The Capabilities Approach specifies the substantive freedoms required for those rights to be meaningfully exercised, emphasising the role of social, economic, and institutional conditions in shaping effective freedom.

Structure

The Index is structured around three Sub-Indexes: Context, Children, and Women. Each Sub-Index contains five dimensions, each measured through two indicators. The Context Sub-Index captures structural conditions: environmental quality, housing, exposure to conflict, democratic performance, safety, and access to information. The Children's and Women's Sub-Indexes capture rights realisation across health, education, economic conditions, participation, human capital, and exposure to violence. This structure reflects a core analytical assumption: structural conditions and outcomes are distinct but interdependent. Improvements in context do not automatically translate into improved rights realisation, and inequalities may persist even in relatively strong structural environments.

Figure 3

The Structure of the World Index

CONTEXT SUB-INDEX	ENVIRONMENT		1 - CO2 emissions per capita
			2 - Level of water stress
	HOUSING		3 - People using safely managed drinking water services
			4 - People using safely managed sanitation services
	CONFLICTS AND WARS		5 - Global Peace Index
			6 - Refugees per country of origin
	DEMOCRACY AND SAFETY		7 - Global Democracy Index
			8 - Intentional homicide rate
	ACCESS TO INFORMATION		9 - People with access to electricity
			10 - Individuals using Internet
CHILDREN'S SUB-INDEX	CHILDREN'S HEALTH		11 - Under-five mortality rate
			12 - Adolescent mortality rate
	CHILDREN'S EDUCATION		13 - Lower secondary completion rate
			14 - Share of youth not in education, employment or training
	CHILDREN'S HUMAN CAPITAL		15 - Population covered by at least one social protection benefit
			16 - Government expenditure on education
	CHILDREN'S ECONOMIC CAPITAL		17 - Unemployment rate
			18 - Poverty headcount ratio at $6.85 a day (2017 PPP$)
	VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN		19 - Children out of school
			20 - Adolescent fertility rate
WOMEN'S SUB-INDEX	WOMEN'S HEALTH		21 - Lifetime risk of maternal mortality
			22 - Life expectancy at birth, female
	WOMEN'S EDUCATION		23 - Educational attainment (upper secondary), female
			24 - Tertiary school enrolment (gross), female
	WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES		25 - Vulnerable employment, female
			26 - Ratio of female to male labor force participation rate
	WOMEN'S DECISION-MAKING PARTICIPATION		27 - Women in ministerial level position
			28 - Women Business and Law Index
	VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN		29 - Intimate partner violence, female
			30 - Intentional homicide rate, female

Methodological Limitations

As a composite index based on secondary data, the ChildFund Alliance World Index is constrained by data availability, quality, and comparability. It operates at the national level and cannot reflect internal disparities within countries or the heterogeneity of lived experiences across population groups. It should be interpreted as an analytical approximation of structural conditions of rights implementation, not a complete representation of lived realities.

Triangulation of Evidence and Analytical Interpretation

The World Index and the participatory research are complementary but non-equivalent sources of evidence, operating at distinct analytical levels. The Index provides a macro-level perspective on rights implementation based on standardised indicators; the participatory components offer direct insight into how children experience safety, rights, and wellbeing in their everyday environments. In this edition, children's lived experiences constitute the primary entry point of analysis. Participatory data do not serve to illustrate or validate structural patterns, but reveal how those patterns are translated, mediated, and sometimes contradicted in practice. The World Index describes, independently, national systems for implementing children's and women's rights — the laws, institutions and services through which rights are given effect- in place across the same countries. The relationship between the two sources is neither linear nor deterministic.

Together, these elements define the methodological foundation of this edition: an integrated, child-centred framework in which participatory evidence provides the primary lens for interpreting safety, while structural measurement offers the context necessary to understand how rights are enabled or constrained within complex and overlapping global crises.

In this edition, children's lived experiences constitute the primary entry point of analysis. Participatory data do not serve to illustrate or validate structural patterns, but reveal how those patterns are translated, mediated, and sometimes contradicted in practice.

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Ntanga Tchandrou/WeWorld Photography

CHAPTER 2

Being Safe or Safe Enough? How Safety is Built, Experienced, and Constrained across Systems, Relationships, and Contexts

2.1. Analytical Framework and Structure of the Chapter

> *"A safe place is a place where you feel happy. A place where you are free and no one does bad things to you."*
> — a girl in Tanzania

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the 2026 ChildFund Alliance World Index, drawing on three complementary sources of evidence: a quantitative assessment of 134 countries through the World Index; a survey with 2,344 children across 27 countries; and Safety Mapping exercises with 834 children across 21 countries.

Children do not experience safety at a single level. The same child is at once an individual with a specific age, gender and ability; a person embedded in relationships with trusted — or absent — adults; a member of a community whose actors and services may or may not respond; and a subject of laws, institutions and structural conditions that set the outer limits of what protection is possible. This chapter reads safety across all four levels at once, following the ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which locates the child within nested systems that continuously shape one another.

This framing is not merely descriptive; it does analytical work. It helps explain the chapter's central finding — that trust does not convert into protection on its own — as a failure of alignment between levels: a strong relational bond cannot produce safety when the community layer lacks referral pathways, or when the structural layer is under conflict or climate stress. It also disciplines the recommendations in Chapter 3, which are directed at the level where the binding constraint actually sits.



WeWorld Photography

A NOTE ON THE CHILDREN'S QUOTATIONS IN THIS CHAPTER

All quotations from children in this report are reproduced verbatim, in the children's own words (translated into English where necessary). They are drawn from two sources: the open-ended questions in the survey and the Safety Mapping sessions. Each quotation is attributed using the information available for the relevant source. Survey responses are attributed by gender and country. Age is not reported because it was collected in age bands (8–12, 13–15, and 16–18), and it was decided not to include this information in the attribution. The Safety Mapping sessions were conducted in group settings, where age and gender were not always recorded; some quotations are therefore attributed by country alone. The absence of an age or gender attribution reflects the information recorded at the point of collection, rather than an editorial omission. In some cases, gender is also not reported because the respondent did not identify with the binary gender categories used in the data collection.

AN ECOLOGICAL READING OF SAFETY

This report examines safety across four interacting levels. Each finding is situated within the level or levels at which the relevant conditions operate, while recognising that children's experiences are shaped by the interaction between them.

- **Individual.** The characteristics of the child — including age, gender, and disability — shape exposure to risk, access to protection, and the conditions in which safety is experienced. Across the dataset, the most disadvantaged profile is that of a younger girl with a disability.
- **Relational (microsystem).** The immediate relationships and environments in which children live, particularly family relationships and relationships with teachers. Children describe safety in relational and concrete terms — including as "a place where no one does bad things to you". This is where trust and everyday support are formed.
- **Community (exosystem).** The local actors, referral pathways, and services through which protection can become accessible and responsive in practice. This is the connective layer between children and formal systems, and one that is frequently weak or absent.
- **Social-structural (macrosystem).** The wider conditions shaped by laws, institutions, gender regimes, conflict, climate, and other structural forces. These are among the conditions measured by the World Index. Strong performance at this level does not necessarily translate into safety as experienced by children at other levels.

Read in this way, the World Index primarily describes broader social and structural conditions, while children's accounts illuminate how those conditions are encountered and experienced within relationships, communities, and everyday environments. The relationship between these levels — and the conditions under which they reinforce or undermine one another — is the focus of this chapter.

The analysis is structured through the lens of safety. Safety is not treated as a single outcome that can be reduced to one indicator, but as the situated condition through which the relationship between structural inequalities, lived experience, and future possibilities can be examined. It encompasses children's exposure not only to physical harm, but also to structural, institutional, and environmental forms of violence — interconnected processes through which insecurity can be produced, reproduced, and accumulated across contexts and over time.

> Safety is not treated as a single outcome that can be reduced to one indicator, but as the situated condition through which the relationship between structural inequalities, lived experience, and future possibilities can be examined. It encompasses children's exposure not only to physical harm, but also to structural, institutional, and environmental forms of violence - interconnected processes through which insecurity can be produced, reproduced, and accumulated across contexts and over time.

Safety cannot be directly measured through a single indicator across all dimensions of the World Index. It is approached instead as a relational and context-dependent condition that takes shape through the interaction between the systems in which children live and their everyday experiences within them. This framing draws on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which emphasises that children's development and wellbeing emerge through interactions between nested environmental systems — from immediate family and school contexts to broader institutional, cultural, and structural conditions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Within this framework, safety is not a property of any single system. It emerges, or fails to emerge, through the relationships between systems and the conditions they create for children's everyday lives. This shifts the analytical focus from whether rights exist formally to how rights, systems, and relationships shape the conditions in which children can experience safety, exercise agency, and pursue opportunities over time.

The analysis begins from children's perspectives. Participatory data provide insight into how safety is experienced in everyday life — including perceptions of risk, exposure to harm, and constraints on agency — and make visible forms of knowledge that aggregate indicators cannot capture. They show how children interpret their environments, navigate uncertainty, and assess the reliability of the relationships and systems around them.

These data are not statistically representative at a global level. Children were reached through ChildFund Alliance programmes, and the consultation was not designed to produce population-level estimates. Participatory evidence serves a different analytical function: it makes visible how rights and protection are experienced, where systems are perceived as accessible and responsive, and where formal protections fail to become meaningful in practice.

Children are treated throughout as active contributors to knowledge production (Hart, 1992; Schweiger, 2024; Bakhtiar et al., 2023). Participatory research with children challenges adult-centric knowledge hierarchies and treats children's accounts as primary analytical data rather than supplementary illustration (Clark, 2010; Tisdall et al., 2008). Participatory findings therefore do not simply complement the World Index. They shape the questions through which its structural findings are interpreted.

The World Index provides a distinct analytical layer. Grounded in a human rights-based and capabilities-informed framework (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011; Peleg, 2013; Hart & Biggeri, 2018), it captures the extent to which rights related to education, health, protection, economic opportunities, and gender equality are implemented across countries. What matters is not only whether rights exist formally, but the extent to which the conditions surrounding them create real opportunities for people to pursue lives they have reason to value. **In this chapter, the World Index does not explain children's experiences directly. It provides the broader structural conditions within which those experiences can be situated, highlighting how differences in institutional capacity, inequality, and governance shape exposure to risk and access to protection.**

Within this structural reading, gender inequality plays a central role. The conditions captured by the women's dimensions of the World Index are not separate from children's outcomes. They are among the conditions shaping the environments in which children grow up. Women's access to resources, rights, protection, and decision-making power can shape caregiving conditions, household stability, and access to services, influencing children's exposure to violence and the opportunities available to develop agency. These inequalities can also operate across generations, reinforcing the interdependence between women's rights and children's lived realities over time.

The analysis is explicitly oriented towards action. Its aim is not only to describe patterns of safety and insecurity, but to examine how those patterns emerge and what they imply for programming, advocacy, and policy. Particular attention is given to contexts in which the conditions for safety are under sustained pressure, including settings affected by conflict and those exposed to climate-related stress. In such contexts, insecurity often arises through the interaction of multiple and overlapping forces, producing cumulative effects on children's lives and on the systems and relationships available to support them.

The chapter is organised in five sections following this introduction:

- **SECTION 2.2** examines where and why children experience safety and insecurity.
- **SECTION 2.3** analyses the relationship between trust in adults and the perceived capacity to seek effective help.
- **SECTION 2.4** presents structural findings from the 2026 World Index ranking.
- **SECTION 2.5** examines how the climate crisis and conflict reshape the conditions in which safety is experienced and protection can become accessible.
- **SECTION 2.6** analyses participation, future agency, and what children identify as needing to change.



MAIN RESULTS

1. **Safety is experienced in relational and situated terms.** Across the 27 countries, 74% of children identify home as a place where they feel safe and 45% identify school. Children's accounts suggest, however, that safety is shaped not only by the setting itself, but by the relationships and conditions encountered within it. The same classroom may be experienced differently depending on whether a teacher is present, attentive, and able to respond. In Palestine, 93% of children identify home as a safe place. This finding should be interpreted in context: where external options for movement and support are severely constrained, the home may become the primary available space of safety without necessarily representing an absence of insecurity. Safety is therefore best understood as a situated condition shaped by relationships, environments, and access to protection.

2. **Trust in an adult does not, on its own, indicate a perceived capacity to access effective help.** Across the 27 countries, the share of children who report having a trusted adult and the share who believe they could obtain effective help in a crisis do not move together across countries. In Palestine, 60% report having someone they trust, while 13% believe they could obtain help. In Bangladesh, trust is slightly lower, yet 91% believe they could seek effective help. In Ukraine, under active armed conflict, 78% report that they could seek help, compared with 31% in Tanzania, where children are not experiencing the same level of active conflict. These differences suggest that the perceived capacity to seek help is shaped not only by the severity of the immediate threat, but also by whether referral pathways, trained local actors, and accessible services are available and known before a crisis occurs.

3. **Structural performance and lived experience capture distinct dimensions of rights realisation.** Across the countries covered, World Index performance and children's reported capacity to seek effective help do not move together. Italy scores 81.6 out of 100 in the Index, yet only 39% of Italian children report that they could seek help in a crisis. Bangladesh scores 52.4, while 91% of Bangladeshi children report that they could do so. Across these countries, neither trust, perceived help-seeking capacity, nor children's reported experience of safety moves with any single dimension of the World Index. This suggests that structural indicators and lived experience capture different aspects of rights realisation. Measuring one without the other may therefore provide an incomplete account of the conditions in which children experience protection and safety.

4. **Children's proposals provide insight into perceived future possibilities and agency.** In Safety Mapping sessions, children drew maps, identified responsible actors, and proposed solutions. Proposals focused on structural change — including community organisation, civic accountability, and youth participation — suggest that children continue to identify possibilities for changing the conditions around them. Where proposals narrow towards protective or survival strategies — such as fencing canals, creating safer playgrounds, or avoiding going out — they may indicate adaptation to risks that children do not expect to be addressed through broader change. Where proposals become more limited or disappear, this may signal a contraction in perceived future possibilities and agency. In some contexts, such signals may emerge before conventional indicators such as school closures, displacement, or conflict data register a comparable change.

5. **Pre-existing protective capacity of systems and communities appears to shape how systems respond when crises occur.** The evidence suggests that the capacity to sustain protection during a crisis is often related to what was already functioning beforehand. Three factors recur in distinguishing systems that remain accessible from those that break down: whether schools and services have remained functional through previous shocks; whether protective actors are personally known to children; and whether children have prior experience of those systems responding effectively. These conditions depend substantially on relationships, institutional capacity, and investment established before a crisis, rather than only on responses put in place after it begins.

6. **Girls' perceived future agency is associated with the conditions shaping the lives of women around them.** Girls' reported future agency is associated with performance on the Women's Sub-Index, while Women's Education is the lowest-scoring dimension across the Index, at 37.3. Gender inequalities affecting women's access to education, resources, rights, protection, and decision-making shape the environments in which girls grow up and the opportunities available to them. At current rates, eliminating the forms of gender-based violence measured by the Index would take approximately 173 years. For girls living in the most constrained contexts, this is not only a distant projection but an indication of the persistence of conditions shaping their lives in the present.

7. **Disability, gender, and age shape exposure to risk, access to protection, and the conditions in which safety is experienced in distinct and overlapping ways.** Children reporting functional difficulties report higher distress across every risk category studied, are less likely to report having a trusted adult, and rely more heavily on formal institutions when family support is absent. Girls experience a different configuration of risk from boys in the same environments. They more often describe restricting their own movement — timing routes by daylight or avoiding spaces that feel safe when accompanied but not alone — and report higher distress across health, conflict, climate, family, and displacement. In contexts of active conflict, girls tend to describe systemic breakdown in relational terms, referring to the loss of networks of accompaniment and supervision rather than only to individual events. Age also matters. Children aged 8–11 report the highest climate-related distress and fear of accidents, while older adolescents report greater concern about conflict and instability and lower reliance on parents. Among 16–18-year-olds, nearly one in two report difficulty talking to a trusted adult. These factors compound. Across the dataset, the most consistently disadvantaged profile is that of a younger girl with a disability, who reports the highest distress, the lowest access to trusted adults, the least participation, and the narrowest perceived range of future possibilities.

8. **Children tend to describe the conditions and relationships through which protection becomes meaningful, rather than services in isolation.** When asked across all 27 countries what would make them feel safer, better cared for, and more fairly treated, children most often describe adults who are present and responsive, schools that support as well as teach, communities in which people look out for one another, and relationships in which they are treated fairly and heard. These accounts point to the conditions through which protection becomes accessible and actionable in everyday life: the responsive trusted adult; the referral pathway that can connect trust to effective help; the community that notices and responds; and participation that provides children with evidence that speaking can influence what happens around them.

2.1.1. Sample Profile and Consultation Approach

Children and adolescents participated in the consultation through two complementary methods.

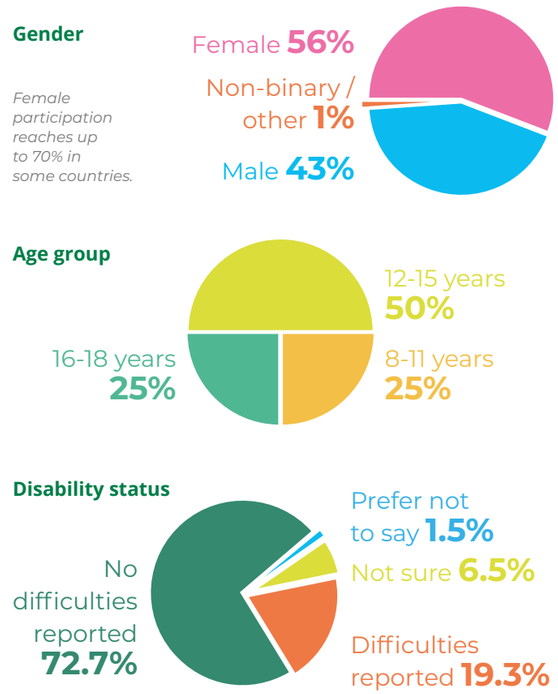
▸ SURVEY

A structured questionnaire was administered across 27 countries, reaching 2,344 children and adolescents aged 8–18 through ChildFund Alliance member organisations, in both urban and rural settings. The survey was administered online — through self-completion by children with internet access, or with the support of trained enumerators for younger children and those without connectivity. Depending on context and age group, it was either facilitated or self-administered.

Female participation accounts for 56% of the sample overall, with some countries showing shares up to 70%. Twenty-eight children in the sample do not identify within the binary definition of gender. The majority of respondents fall within the 12–15 age group; approximately one quarter are younger children (aged 8–11) and one quarter are older adolescents (aged 16–18).

19% of respondents report experiencing difficulties related to their body, senses, or learning — including seeing, hearing, moving, concentrating, or understanding — that may affect their ability to carry out certain activities.

Figure 4
Sample profile - Survey (n=2,344)



▸ SAFETY MAPPING

76 facilitated group exercises were conducted with 834 children and adolescents aged 8–18 across 21 countries, in both mixed and gender-separate groups, in urban and rural settings. Safety Mapping is a qualitative and spatial method: children draw maps of their communities, identify safe and unsafe spaces, name the actors they see as responsible, and propose solutions. Sessions were predominantly mixed-gender; Tanzania was the main exception, where separate groups were conducted for girls and boys. Children reporting functional difficulties participated in a limited number of countries and in small numbers within sessions.

Some children participated in both the survey and the Safety Mapping. Both components were implemented within ChildFund Alliance programme areas and are not statistically representative of national populations. Their purpose is the production of contextualised, programmatically relevant evidence grounded in children's lived experience — the kind of contextual knowledge that structural indicators cannot generate.

What the Consultation Data Show about Children's Daily Lives?

The children who participated in this consultation are children reached through ChildFund Alliance programme areas — by definition, contexts where the Alliance has identified need and invested in response. This means the sample is weighted toward settings of vulnerability: communities facing poverty, conflict, climate stress, or institutional fragility, where access to basic opportunities is already constrained.

The data on daily life reflect this.

- Approximately two out of three children report regular school attendance — a share that drops to around one in two in East and Central Africa.
- About one in five children report not having regular access to play and relaxation; among children reporting functional difficulties, this rises to around one in four[6].

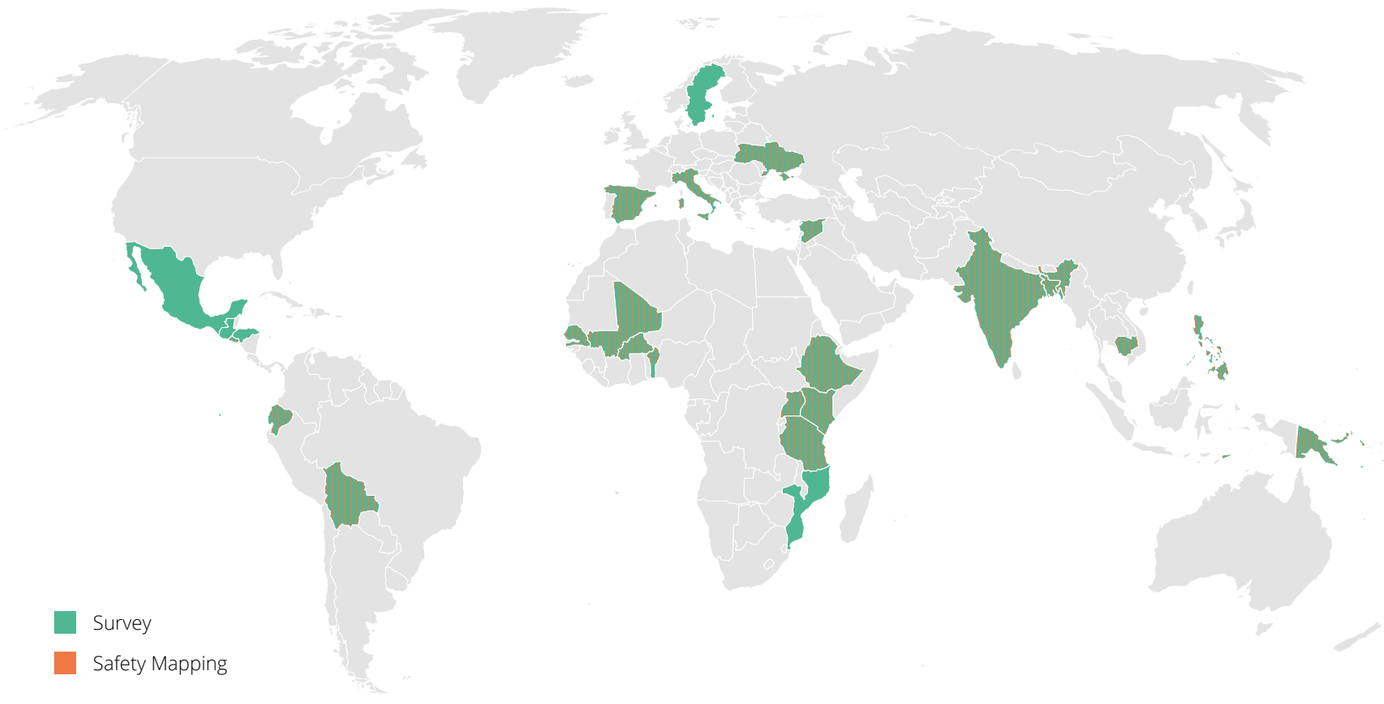
6 Access to play matters beyond its developmental function. In crisis-affected settings, recreational play gives children space to rebuild social worlds interrupted by displacement, regain a sense of control over their immediate environment, and practise emotional and social skills that underpin other developmental processes. A scoping review of play opportunities in conflict-affected and crisis settings identifies six conditions that make play meaningful in these contexts: safe environments, adequate time, opportunities to meet peers, access to nature, trained adult facilitators, and genuine agency and choice for children (Education and Conflict Review, 2026). The data in this consultation reflect the absence of several of these conditions for a significant share of the children reached — and the gap is largest for those with disabilities, for whom access to both play and to the relational conditions that make it safe is most constrained.

These figures matter not as statistical controls to be adjusted for, but as context. They describe who these children are before the question of safety is even asked: children for whom school attendance is not guaranteed, whose access to play — a basic marker of childhood — is already restricted, and who carry the double disadvantage of disability in environments that were not designed for them. When these children describe where they feel safe, who they trust, and what they think needs to change, they are speaking from within conditions of existing disadvantage. Their answers should be read accordingly: not as perceptions shaped by individual circumstance alone, but as assessments formed in environments where constraint is already the baseline.

How Children Define Childhood

The consultation asked children to describe in their own words what it means to be a child. Across 27 countries, six themes emerge from the responses, ordered by frequency. The responses describe childhood in several registers at once — play and joy, learning, protection and dependence, and emerging responsibility — and the themes below overlap rather than exclude one another.

Map 1
Countries involved in the research with children



COUNTRY	ALLIANCE MEMBER RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RESEARCH
Bangladesh	educo
Benin	educo
Bolivia	educo, ChildFund International
Burkina Faso	WeWorld
Cambodia	ChildFund Australia, WeWorld
Ecuador	ChildFund International
El Salvador	educo
Ethiopia	ChildFund International
Guatemala	ChildFund International
Honduras	ChildFund International
India	Children Believe
Italy	WeWorld
Kenya	WeWorld
Mali	WeWorld
Mexico	ChildFund International
Mozambique	WeWorld
Palestine	WeWorld
Papua New Guinea	ChildFund Australia
The Philippines	educo
Senegal	ChildFund International
Spain	educo
Sweden	barnfonden
Syria	WeWorld
Tanzania	WeWorld
Timor-Leste	ChildFund Australia
Uganda	ChildFund International
Ukraine	ChildFund Deutschland, WeWorld

- **Joy and positive experience (n=570).** This is the most dominant theme. Children describe childhood as a time of happiness, enjoyment, and freedom — "being happy," "enjoying life." Childhood is associated first with positive emotional experience. Joy is especially prominent in Spain (57%), El Salvador (48%), Ecuador (46%), Honduras (45%), and Bolivia (45%).

> *"I would describe children with these words: happy, carefree, and fun-loving."*
> — a boy in Ecuador

> *"Being a child means being protected, understood, and loved."*
> — a girl in Senegal

- **Play and social life (n=479).** Play, friendships, and social interaction are central — "playing with friends," "having fun." Childhood is understood as a social and interactive phase. This theme is particularly visible in Mali (71%), Timor-Leste (75%), and Bangladesh (42%).

> *"Joy, because they enjoy playing and sharing with others; learning, because they discover new things every day at school and at home; and hope, because they represent the future and have many dreams to achieve."*
> — a girl in El Salvador

- **Learning and future development (n=333).** Children describe childhood as a period of growth and preparation — "going to school," "learning for the future." This theme is especially strong in Timor-Leste (90%), Bangladesh (47%), and Italy (22%). In several contexts, children strongly connect childhood with education and hopes for the future.

> *"Being a child means having the right to learn and grow rather than doing heavy work, because children should be able to focus on their education."*
> — a girl in Cambodia

> *"I would describe children with these words: education, because every child deserves the opportunity to learn; play, because children need safe spaces to enjoy themselves; and expression, because every child should be free to share their thoughts and opinions."*
> — a girl in Syria

- **Normative behaviour and expectations (n=262).** Many responses highlight expected behaviours — respect, obedience, helping others. Childhood is not only experienced but socially regulated. This pattern appears particularly often in Timor-Leste (40%), Kenya (27%), Syria (25%), and Mexico (17%).

> *"I would describe children with these words: limited, because social expectations can restrict their choices; influenced, because society shapes many of their decisions; and pressured, because they are sometimes pushed toward paths they would not choose for themselves."*
> — a boy in Italy

> *"Responsibility, respect, and age, because younger children are often expected to be responsible while not always receiving the respect they deserve."*
> — a boy in Kenya

- **Dependency and vulnerability (n=179).** Some children describe childhood in terms of being young, dependent, or in need of care — "being small," "depending on parents." This is more prominent in Benin (35%), Burkina Faso (27%), Uganda (24%), and Cambodia (23%).

> *"Vulnerability, because many face difficult living conditions; insecurity, because they do not always feel safe; and uncertainty, because the future can seem unclear."*
> — a boy in Palestine

> *"Being a child means sometimes feeling afraid and unsafe because of conflict or threats in the surrounding environment."*
> — a girl in Palestine

> *"I would describe some children with these words: uneducated, oppressed, and without rights, because many children around the world are still denied the opportunities they deserve."*
> — a boy in Palestine

- **Rights and agency (n=133).** The least frequent theme. References to rights and freedom appear in Mozambique (24%), Cambodia (19%), Italy (12%), Palestine (12%), and El Salvador (10%). Children in these contexts refer explicitly to participation, protection, and equality as part of childhood.

> *"Being a child means living in a free and supportive environment. It means having the right to go to school and the right to express your own opinions."*
> — a boy in Mozambique

> *"I would describe children with these words: education, health, and peace, because these are the foundations every child needs to thrive."*
> — a boy in Mozambique

> *"Involvement, because they need opportunities to participate in meaningful activities; warmth, because they need care and affection; reading, because books help them learn and grow; and entertainment, because children need time for fun and play."*
> — a girl in Cambodia



Camila Miliani/WeWorld Photography

> *"Curiosity, because it drives them to discover the world, ask questions, and learn without fear; belonging, because feeling part of a family, community, or group gives them the confidence to grow; and resilience, because with the right support, children can overcome challenges and keep moving forward."*
> — a girl in Ecuador

> *"Independent thinking, because they should be encouraged to think for themselves and make their own decisions."* — a girl in India

These findings have direct implications for how safety programming is framed. Children experience childhood through everyday experiences, relationships, and social expectations rather than through the language of rights frameworks. Their accounts therefore point to what makes safety meaningful in practice: trusted and responsive adults, the freedom to play and move through everyday environments, the ability to learn and develop, and the possibility of being heard and taken seriously. **Safety programming should therefore begin not only from the formal systems intended to protect children, but from the situated conditions and relationships through which children experience protection, exercise agency, and participate in everyday life.**

AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

Differences between boys and girls are modest. Boys refer more frequently to play and social relationships (23% vs 19%) and behaviour-related descriptions (12% vs 11%). Girls place greater emphasis on learning and the future (16% vs 12%) and rights (6% vs 5%), suggesting girls more frequently associate childhood with education and aspiration. Joy appears at nearly identical levels for both (approximately 24%).

Children who did not report any functional difficulty refer more frequently to play (22% vs 14%), joy (24% vs 22%), and learning (16% vs 11%). Children reporting functional difficulties more often describe childhood through dependency (9% vs 7%) — a somewhat stronger association with needing support or adult care. Rights references are similar across both groups (approximately 5%).

2.2.
How Children Experience Safety

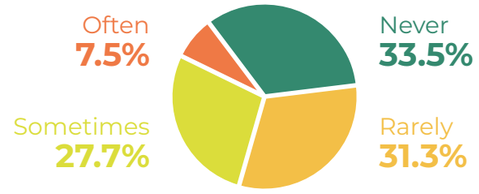
Highlights from this section

- Around one in three children reports experiencing insecurity sometimes or often. The context in which children live is more strongly associated with reported experiences of insecurity than age, gender, or disability status alone.
- Children experience greater safety where trusted and responsive adults are present. Home is the most frequently identified safe space, followed by school. The same physical environment may be experienced differently depending on the relationships, conditions, and forms of protection available within it.
- Children in Italy and Spain describe insecurity differently from children in Bangladesh or Kenya. In these contexts, insecurity is more often associated with social pressure, judgement, exclusion, and the experience of not being heard than with immediate physical danger.
- Roads are the most consistently identified unsafe spaces. Children may be protected at their destinations while remaining exposed in the spaces and journeys between them.
- Children reporting functional difficulties consistently report greater exposure to risk, fewer spaces experienced as safe, and higher levels of fear across the countries included in the dataset.
- Girls and boys experience the same environments differently. A market, park, or road may be experienced as safe by a boy and as unsafe by a girl at the same time, reflecting differences in exposure, social expectations, mobility, and access to protection.

The analysis begins with a direct question from the consultation: how often do children find themselves in situations that do not feel calm or safe? Responses to this question are subjective, but they offer a useful entry point into how safety is experienced in everyday life and how that experience varies across contexts.

Across the full sample, more than one in three children (35%) reports experiencing unsafe or non-calm situations "sometimes" or "often." This average, however, conceals large differences between countries. The most pronounced variation is between countries rather than between demographic groups within the same country — which points to the importance of structural and contextual factors over individual characteristics.

Figure 5
How often do children feel unsafe? — overall sample



Combined "sometimes" or "often": 35.2%. Survey, 27 countries. Data reflect children reached through ChildFund Alliance programme contexts and are not nationally representative.

Country context as the primary source of variation

The context in which children live is strongly associated with how often they report experiencing insecurity. Palestine records the highest share of children reporting that they feel unsafe "often" (36.7%), reflecting the conditions of protracted conflict and restricted movement. Bangladesh follows at 19.8%, a figure strongly influenced by the high reported exposure to risk among children reporting functional difficulties. Kenya, Benin, Uganda, and Burkina Faso each record between 10% and 15%. Ukraine, where data collection took place during active armed conflict, records 10%.

Palestine presents a pattern that will be examined further in Section 2.3. Despite recording the highest frequency of reported insecurity in the dataset, children there report the lowest perceived capacity to seek effective help in a crisis (14%). High exposure to risk and limited perceived capacity to act are not contradictory. They point to a context in which children may encounter significant threats while having limited access to the relationships, referral pathways, and services through which protection can become accessible and actionable. The finding therefore illustrates a central distinction of this report: experiencing danger or insecurity does not necessarily mean having the capacity to access effective protection.

Figure 6
Countries with the highest share of "often" responses

COUNTRY	"OFTEN"
Palestine	36.7%
Bangladesh	19.8%
Kenya	14.6%
Benin	13.6%
Uganda	10.2%
Burkina Faso	10.2%
Ukraine	10.0%

For reference: Mali 1.9%, Italy 9.0%, Sweden 3.2%.

Some of the most analytically significant cases are those in which children's reported experiences diverge from what national structural indicators considered by the World Index might suggest. Mali scores near the bottom of the World Index and faces ongoing conflict and institutional fragility, yet only 1.9% of children report feeling unsafe "often". Italy falls within the Strong tier of the Index, yet records 9%. These divergences should not be treated as measurement errors or as evidence that one source of data is invalid. They illustrate a finding that runs throughout this chapter: **the frequency with which children report experiencing insecurity in their everyday lives does not move with national-level indicators of rights implementation and structural conditions.**

Across the countries covered, reported insecurity does not move with any World Index dimension examined, including governance, conflict and children's education. This does not mean that structural conditions are unrelated to children's experiences. Rather, it suggests that national aggregates do not capture the local relationships, community norms, institutional environments and everyday conditions through which children encounter risk and access protection. This is why participatory evidence is analytically necessary rather than supplementary to structural measurement. It provides access to dimensions of lived experience that national indicators cannot observe directly, while the World Index describes a different order of conditions across the same countries.

In the case of Mali, the divergence requires particular interpretation. As discussed in Section 2.5, in contexts where crisis and insecurity have persisted over long periods, the meaning of "feeling unsafe" may itself be shaped by prolonged exposure and adaptation. A low frequency of reported insecurity should therefore not be interpreted automatically as evidence of low exposure to danger. It may also reflect how children understand, experience, and report insecurity within a context where conditions that might elsewhere be experienced as exceptional have become part of everyday life.



A girl participating in the Safety mapping activity in Cambodia

AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

AGE AND GENDER

- At the aggregate level, gender differences in the reported frequency of unsafe situations are small and inconsistent in direction. In Bangladesh, girls report higher "often" rates than boys (22% vs 17%); in Kenya the opposite holds. No consistent pattern emerges across the dataset as a whole. This does not mean gender is unimportant — the Safety Mapping data show clearly that gender shapes the forms of risk children encounter, the strategies they use to navigate them, and the solutions they see as possible. What it means is that the frequency indicator alone does not capture gendered differences in experience.

- Age-related differences are also modest. Older adolescents (16–18) report somewhat higher exposure in several contexts, likely reflecting both greater independence and a stronger capacity to recognise and articulate experiences of risk.

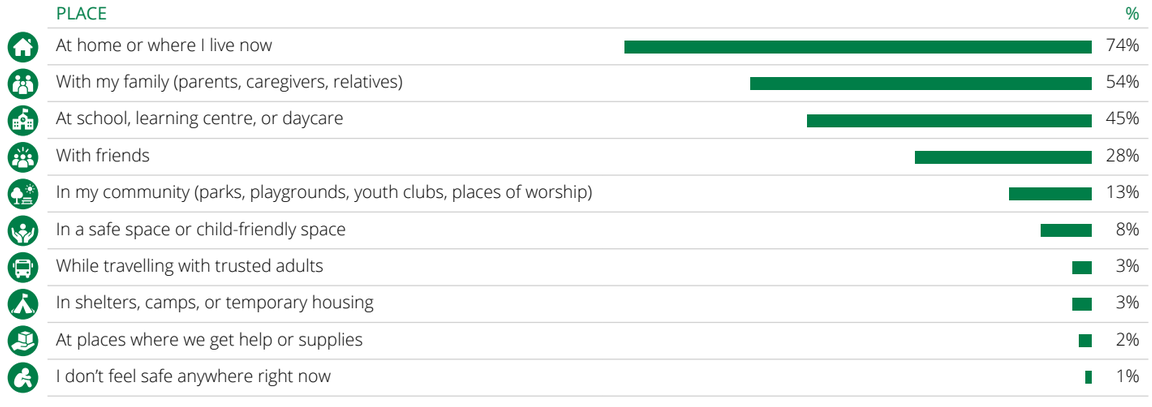
DISABILITY

The most pronounced within-country differences emerge in relation to disability status, particularly where baseline risk is already elevated. In Bangladesh, 57% of children reporting functional difficulties report feeling unsafe "often," compared with 17% among children without disabilities — a gap of 40 percentage points. In Palestine, children reporting functional difficulties consistently report greater vulnerability (43% vs 37%). These are large differences that country-level averages conceal entirely. In moderate-risk contexts, disability tends to shift the frequency rather than the intensity of exposure. In Kenya, the "often" share is similar across groups, but children reporting functional difficulties are substantially more likely to report "sometimes" (73% vs 58%). A comparable pattern appears in Cambodia.
In lower-risk contexts such as Italy and Spain, differences are subtler — primarily a shift away from "never" toward "rarely" and "sometimes," suggesting reduced stability rather than acute exposure. Disability amplifies existing vulnerability rather than creating independent risk. The effect is most pronounced where baseline insecurity is highest. Two cases diverge from this pattern: in Ethiopia and Mali, children reporting functional difficulties report equal or lower exposure than their peers.

2.2.1. Where Children Feel Safe and Where They Do Not

Children were asked where they usually feel safest. Home or the place where they currently live is identified by 74% of respondents, followed by family or caregivers (54%) and school, learning centres, or daycare (45%). Friends are cited by 28%. Community spaces, child-friendly centres, and institutional settings are mentioned less frequently. Only 1% of children report that they do not feel safe anywhere at the time of the survey.

Figure 7
Where do you usually feel safest? - Survey (multiple responses permitted)



The prominence of home and family appears to reflect not only the physical characteristics of these settings, but also the relationships and forms of support associated with them. Safety Mapping data from all 21 countries point to a consistent pattern: **across different environments, children are more likely to describe a place as safe when it includes adults they perceive as responsible, trustworthy, and non-violent.** This pattern extends beyond the home. Children also describe schools, places of worship, child-friendly centres, and public institutions in terms of the relationships and forms of protection available within them. The same physical environment may therefore be experienced differently depending on who is present, how adults respond, and whether children can access effective support. Safety is consequently not reducible to the physical properties of a place. It is a situated condition shaped by the interaction between environments, relationships, and the forms of protection available within them (Ungar, 2011; Tol et al., 2013).

Home

The home is the most frequently cited safe space in both the consultation and the Safety Mapping. Children describe it in relational terms: a space of care and belonging, contingent on trusted adults being present.

> "I feel safe at home because my father, mother, and siblings are there, and their presence makes me feel safe and secure. My home also protects me from strong winds and heavy rain."
> — a girl of 11 in Syria

> "I feel safe because I'm with my family, and I feel very calm. I have my cats and my mother."
> — a boy of 10 in Spain

> "We feel safe at home, school, religious places, and playgrounds due to the presence of trusted adults who provide emotional support and a sense of security for us."
> — a girl of 15 in Ethiopia

Safety at home is situated and conditional rather than fixed. The home may be experienced as a place of safety where trusted and responsive relationships are present, but also as ambivalent or unsafe where adults are absent or unresponsive, domestic violence is present, or poverty, overcrowding, and physical damage undermine stability and access to protection.

> "Our shelter is not in a secure place."
> — a girl in Bangladesh

> "My father used to beat me and my mother whenever he had been drinking."
> — a girl of 14 in India

> "After my house was damaged by a landslide, I don't feel fully safe."
> — a girl of 16 in Bangladesh

> "In some cases, my room is where I can be the most myself because my house is 80% a business. I feel free, I can be myself, and no one can tell me anything. But sometimes it feels like our parents invade our privacy."
> — a girl of 18 in El Salvador

> "Family is my safe place because there is communication, trust, and we are together all day. But for others, it depends on the relationship with their family and the economic situation."
> — a boy of 19 in El Salvador

> "People may commit harmful acts such as abuse." — a girl in Tanzania

> "There are arguments."
> — a child in Ecuador

This conditionality varies across contexts. The qualitative evidence suggests that the conditions associated with safety at home differ across settings. In rural sub-Saharan African contexts, children often associate home safety with the presence of trusted adults. In rural Asian contexts, homes may be experienced as safe while remaining vulnerable to environmental hazards and other structural pressures. In Latin American contexts, household safety is frequently described as fragile, while in European contexts children more often describe it as ambivalent. In conflict-affected settings, the experience of safety at home is closely connected to the stability of the wider environment.

These distinctions matter for child protection programming. They suggest that household safety should not be assumed from the existence of a home, but assessed in relation to the relationships, risks, and forms of protection available within and around it.

Country-level data from the survey reflect this variation. In Palestine, 93% of children identify home as a primary safe space. This finding should be read alongside the wider context of prolonged conflict and restricted movement, in which the home may become the principal available setting of safety even when the broader domestic environment is itself exposed to significant insecurity. In Uganda, both home (89%) and school (83%) record high shares, suggesting that family and institutional environments may provide mutually reinforcing sources of safety and protection. In Bangladesh, school (81%) is identified more frequently than home (62%), highlighting the protective role that schools may play where household conditions are more precarious. In Mali, home is cited by 56% of respondents, while family is cited by only 8% — the lowest share in the dataset. This divergence suggests that the physical setting of home and the relational conditions associated with family are not experienced as equivalent sources of safety.

AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

Children reporting functional difficulties identify home as a safe space less frequently than children overall (70% compared with 74%) and identify family less frequently as well (47% compared with 54%). They are more likely, however, to identify child-friendly or dedicated safe spaces as places where they feel safe (12% compared with 8%). This pattern suggests that, where household or family environments do not fully meet children's needs for safety, accessibility, or support, purpose-built spaces may provide an important additional source of safety and protection.

THE BIGGER PICTURE: LINKING PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH WITH THE WORLD INDEX

When consultation data are read alongside the World Index dimensions on violence against children (D10) and violence against women (D15), the findings suggest that these should not be treated as separate domains. Rather, they point to interconnected dimensions of the conditions in which violence, vulnerability, and protection are experienced across generations, families, and communities. This connection is recognised in the joint CEDAW General Recommendation No. 31 / CRC General Comment No. 18 on harmful practices.

The two dimensions should nevertheless be interpreted with care. D10 does not measure the prevalence of violence against children directly. It combines the share of children out of school and the prevalence of early pregnancies — indicators that can be associated with heightened vulnerability and exposure to harmful conditions, but that do not, on their own, establish whether a child has experienced violence. D15 uses female homicide and intimate partner violence as indicators of violence against women. These are more directly connected to violent harm, but they still capture only particular forms of violence and remain affected by differences in reporting, measurement, and data availability across countries. The associations between these dimensions and children's identification of family as a safe space are therefore informative, but should not be interpreted as direct tests of whether violence is present within individual households. Across the countries covered, D15 (violence against women) and the share of children who identify family as their primary safe space move together only weakly (r=0.22); D10 (violence against children) moves with it somewhat more (r=0.30). Both observations are little changed by excluding Kenya, which sits apart from the rest of the set (r=0.30 for D10; r=0.20 for D15). As descriptive observations they indicate where to look, not what is the case.

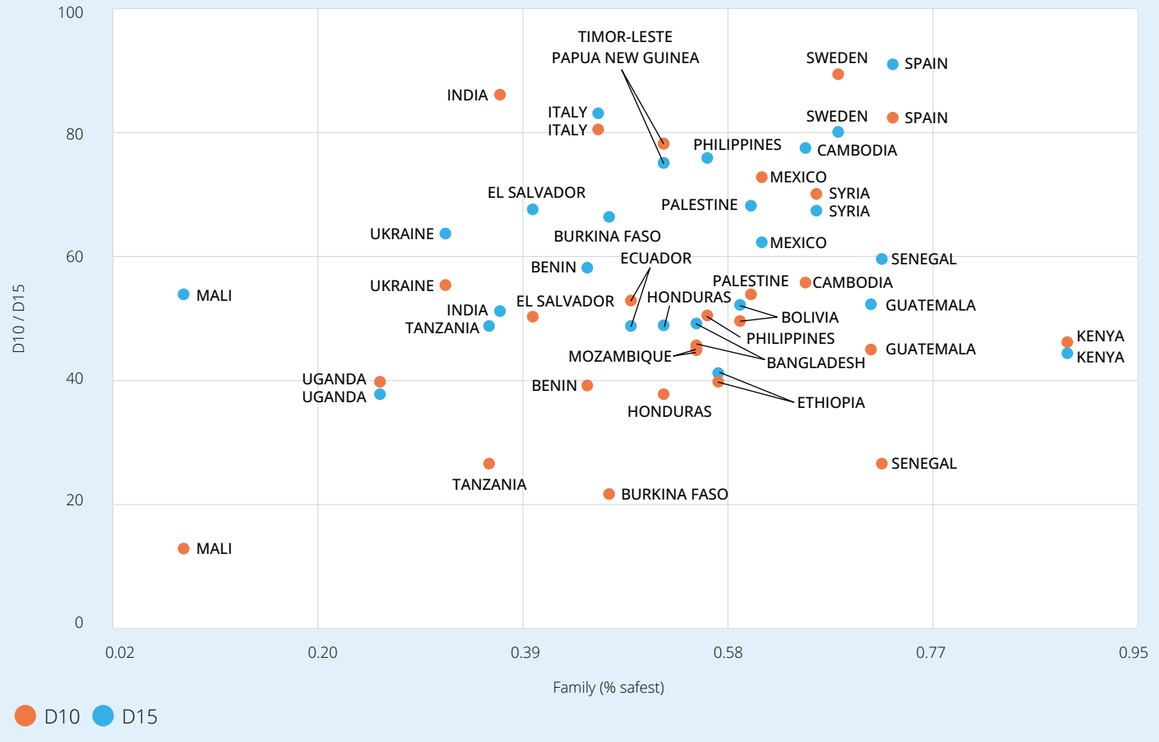
Across the countries covered, national indicators of violence and vulnerability and children's reported experience of family as a safe space move together only weakly. The remaining variation may reflect factors that the World Index does not capture directly, including household dynamics, social norms, economic stress, the availability of trusted adults, and the ways in which children understand and report safety within their own relationships and environments.

On the one hand, D15 captures two severe forms of violence against women: female homicide and intimate partner violence. These indicators provide information about the broader conditions in which women and girls live and about the risks present within intimate and family environments. They are relevant to children's experiences because violence against women and children's safety are often embedded within the same relational and structural contexts. However, the relationship is not deterministic. A high prevalence of violence against women at the national level does not mean that every child experiences their family as unsafe, just as a low national prevalence does not guarantee safety within every household. On the other hand, D10 captures two conditions associated with children's vulnerability: exclusion from education and early pregnancy. Both may reflect broader inequalities and circumstances that can limit children's access to protective environments and increase exposure to harmful conditions. The relationship with children's identification of family as a safe space is somewhat stronger than for D15, but remains far from linear. In lower-scoring contexts such as Mali and Uganda, fewer children identify family as their safest space, while in higher-scoring contexts such as Spain and Sweden, stronger structural conditions tend to coincide with higher reported perceptions of family safety. These patterns should nevertheless be interpreted alongside exceptions such as India, where stronger structural indicators do not necessarily translate into higher reported perceptions of safety.

Overall, neither D10 nor D15 explains children's reported experience of safety on its own. **The associations are consistent with a broader understanding of safety as a situated condition shaped by the interaction between structural conditions, relationships, and everyday environments.** Children may identify family as their safest space even in contexts where indicators of violence or vulnerability are concerning. This may reflect the importance of family relationships, the availability of trusted adults, or the limited availability of alternative sources of protection. Understanding these patterns therefore requires attention to how protection is experienced within relationships and across generations, rather than treating national indicators as direct measures of children's everyday safety.

Figure 8

Family as safest space and Index dimensions for violence - by country



School

Schools are identified as safe spaces by 45% of respondents, making them the most frequently identified institutional setting after home. Where educational systems are weak or disrupted, schools may represent one of the few structured and predictable environments available to children on a regular basis. In contexts affected by fragility or conflict, they may also provide continuity, social connection, and access to trusted adults when other systems are disrupted. Research has documented this broader protective role of schools in fragile and conflict-affected settings (UNICEF, 2023; Tol et al., 2013; Vostanis, 2024).

THE BIGGER PICTURE: LINKING PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH WITH THE WORLD INDEX

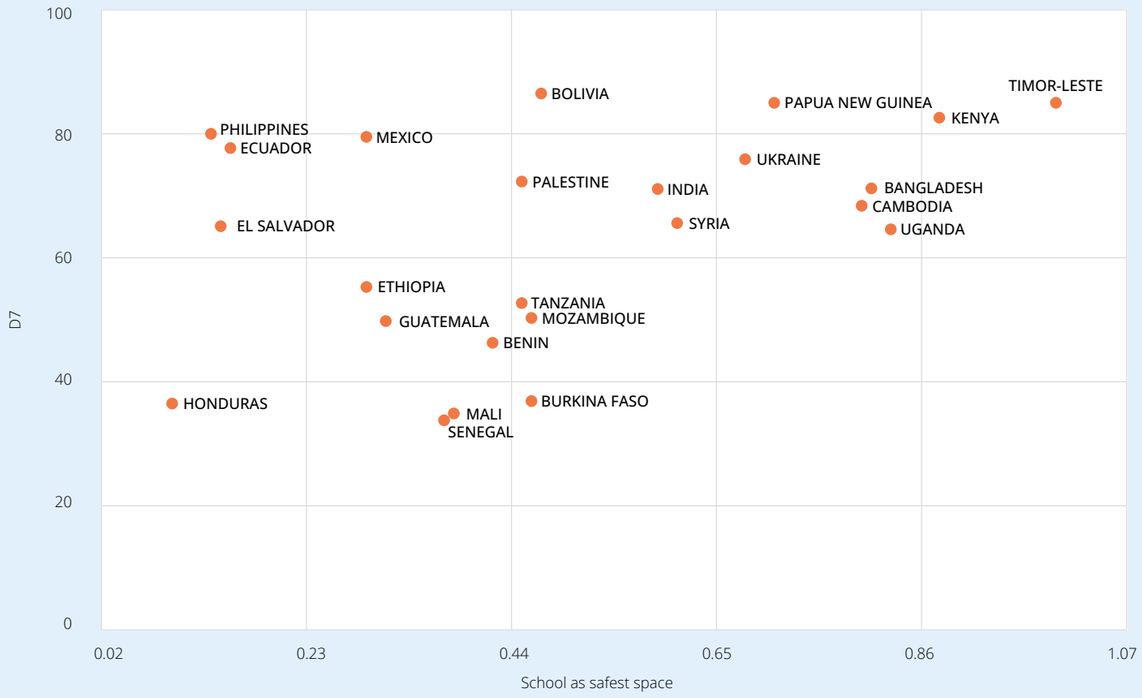
Read alongside the Children's Education dimension (D7), the consultation data suggest a complex relationship between structural educational continuity and children's experience of school as a safe space. D7 captures the extent to which children and young people remain connected to education and learning, through the lower secondary completion rate and the share of young people not in education, employment, or training.

In contexts where educational continuity is weaker, children who do attend school may be more likely to identify it as a primary safe space. This may reflect the distinctive role that schools can play where other structured environments and services are less available. The pattern changes in contexts where educational participation is more widespread and continuous, where access to school is less differentiating and the quality of relationships and everyday interactions within schools may become more important to how safety is experienced.

D7 and children's reported experience of safety at school do not move together across the countries covered (r=0.21). This reinforces a broader observation of the chapter: structural conditions associated with educational continuity and children's lived experience of safety at school capture different dimensions of the school environment. Educational systems may provide broad access and continuity without ensuring that every child experiences school as safe; conversely, a school may function as an important source of safety for children even within a wider context of educational disadvantage. The contribution of schools to children's safety therefore depends not only on educational participation and continuity at the structural level, but also on the relationships, everyday conditions, and forms of protection children encounter within them.

Figure 9

The relationship between educational access and children's perception of schools as safe spaces



"If the teacher is present, no one can hurt us." — a girl of 12 in Mali

"School keeps children away from strangers and harmful peer groups." — a boy of 17 in Uganda

"It is our second home — we spend almost the whole day there, and the teachers feel safe too. After the earthquake, this building became the place we trust most." — a child of 19 in Ecuador

"These environments are designed to be nurturing and stable, allowing us to express ourselves and explore our identities without fear of judgment or harm." — a boy in Ethiopia

"We have fun with our friends here — we are happy." — a girl of 8 in Benin

"School protects children from early marriages." — a girl of 14 in Uganda

In higher-income and urban contexts, schools are frequently described not simply as safe or unsafe spaces, but as environments in which safety is conditional. Children refer to stress, peer conflict, bullying, and relational pressure, alongside forms of support provided by teachers and other adults. The presence of buildings, rules, and adult supervision does not by itself ensure that children experience school as safe. What matters is how these conditions are encountered in everyday relationships and interactions.

"Sometimes the teachers are too strict or boring, but overall, they make me feel safe." — a boy in Italy

"There were times when classmates made fun of me, and I didn't feel good around them. But I felt listened to by the teachers." — a girl in Italy

"School is the least safe place there is — that's where you find people who might bully you." — a child in Italy

"There are many fights in the playground. When there are fights, the teachers don't notice." — a child in Spain

"When I have problems, I feel like they don't understand me." — a child in Spain

Research on school wellbeing distinguishes between physical and organisational conditions of safety and the relational dimensions through which safety is experienced (Hernandez et al., 2024). In higher-income contexts, where basic access to school and formal institutional structures are more established, the quality of teacher–student relationships and the responsiveness of the institution may become particularly important to how children experience safety. Physical security and formal supervision do not necessarily translate into a school environment that children experience as protective.

Italian children consistently distinguish between the formal school environment and after-school or child-friendly settings, where adult relationships are often described as more accessible and less hierarchical.

"In the afternoon I feel much better, calmer. The adults there are not strict, and I can talk to them about lots of things." — a girl in Italy

"At after-school club I can play, and I know that if something happens, there are people who help us make peace." — a boy in Italy

> *"In the afternoon, I feel freer. I think I can talk to them about things I wouldn't bring up in the morning."*
> — a girl in Italy

These accounts suggest that children experience safety not primarily through the institutional category of a setting, but through the relationships and forms of response available within it. Where adults are perceived as predictable, attentive, and responsive, children may experience an environment as safer. Where adults are experienced as distant, punitive, or primarily controlling, institutional settings may provide formal protection without providing the relational conditions through which safety becomes meaningful in everyday life.

This also helps explain a pattern that recurs across the consultation: the importance of school as a safe space can increase where other sources of safety are under pressure. **In contexts affected by conflict, climate-related stress, or family instability, children may rely more heavily on schools as sources of continuity, routine, and access to trusted adults** (see Section 2.5). This does not necessarily reflect stronger education systems or universally safer schools. It reflects the fact that, in conditions of wider disruption, school may remain one of the few relatively predictable environments available to children.

Community spaces, places of worship, and child-friendly centres

Beyond home and school, children identify a range of community settings as sources of safety, including sports and recreational spaces, youth centres, libraries, places of worship, child-friendly spaces, and institutional settings such as health centres and police stations. Across these different environments, the Safety Mapping identifies recurring conditions associated with children's experience of safety: the presence of known and trusted adults, clear and predictable rules, and the ability to express themselves and participate without fear.

> *"The park is safe because we are already familiar with playing here, and there are always people nearby — teachers, relatives, parents — watching over us."*
> — a child in Timor-Leste

> *"In the mosque, teachers help us feel safe."* — a boy of 11 in Bangladesh

> *"You communicate with God and he gives you peace."*
> — a girl of 17 in El Salvador

> *"At the social centre, we play games, we are helped to resolve problems, and people with difficulties are supported."*
> — a child in Benin

> *"The public park is safe because it is an open place where kids can play freely. It is close to our homes, and people always walk by."* — a girl of 11 in Syria

> *"I love football very much, and I never feel unsafe when I play with my friends."* — a boy of 12 in Syria

> *"The community leader's house — we can go there when something happens."*
> — a girl of 12 in Ecuador

> *"Cinemas and theatres — because there are many people, there is shelter."*
> — a girl of 11 in Ukraine

> *"The panchayat office and police station feel safe because help and protection are available when needed."*
> — a child in India

Child-friendly spaces are particularly prominent in Burkina Faso (36%), India (28%), and Benin (18%) — contexts in which children may have fewer consistently accessible sources of formal support and protection. Their prominence suggests that purpose-built, adult-supervised environments can provide an important source of safety where other settings are experienced as less reliable or less accessible. Their contribution, however, depends on the relationships, accessibility, and forms of response available within them.

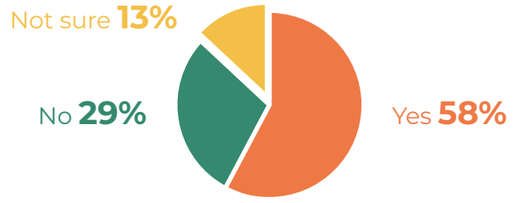
The identification of shelters and temporary housing as safe spaces in Bangladesh (26%), Mali (25%), and Burkina Faso (15%) also requires careful interpretation. These figures do not indicate that such environments are necessarily adequate or consistently safe. They may indicate that, in contexts affected by displacement or wider disruption, shelters provide one of the more structured and predictable environments available to children. When a shelter is among the safest spaces a child can name, the finding may therefore reveal as much about the conditions surrounding the shelter as about the shelter itself.

In Western European countries, friends are a particularly important source of reported safety: 61% in Sweden, 58% in Spain, and 52% in Italy. This pattern is consistent with the growing importance of peer relationships during adolescence and may also reflect the accessibility and relative informality of peer support compared with some adult–child relationships. The finding nevertheless points to an important dimension of safety: children may experience trusted peers as meaningful sources of support and belonging, particularly where formal adult relationships are perceived as more distant or less accessible.

2.2.2. Where Children Do Not Go: Risk Landscapes

Children were asked whether there are places in their local area where children should not go because they feel unsafe. Across the overall sample, a majority (58%) identified at least one unsafe place in their surroundings, while 29% reported that no such places exist, and 13% were unsure.

Figure 10
Children's perceptions of unsafe places in their local area - overall sample



Perceptions of unsafe places vary considerably across countries and regions. The highest levels are concentrated in parts of Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, where children appear to identify unsafe areas as a more visible feature of their everyday surroundings. In Timor-Leste and India, virtually all children identified at least one unsafe place (100% and 99%, respectively), followed by Kenya (95%), Cambodia (91%), Papua New Guinea (79%), Bangladesh (77%), Mali (75%), and Uganda (74%).

Conflict-affected contexts also record high levels of reported unsafe places. More than four in five children in Palestine (almost 82%) identified at least one unsafe place in their area, while the figure reaches 64% in Syria. In these contexts, perceived insecurity may extend beyond specific incidents or locations and shape children's broader experience of the environments through which they move.

Figure 11
Countries with the highest proportion of children identifying unsafe places

COUNTRY	% YES
India	98.8%
Kenya	95.5%
Cambodia	91.0%
Palestine	81.7%
Papua New Guinea	79.2%
Timor-Leste	78.0%
Bangladesh	77.2%
Mali	75.0%
Uganda	74.5%

By contrast, lower proportions of children identify unsafe places in parts of Latin America and Western Europe. Around one-third of children in Guatemala (30%), El Salvador (32%), and Honduras (32%) reported the presence of unsafe places, while Sweden records the lowest proportion in the dataset (19%). These countries also record some of the highest shares of children reporting that no unsafe places exist in their local area, reaching 63% in Guatemala and 55% in Sweden.

Figure 12

Countries with the highest proportion of children reporting no unsafe places

COUNTRY	% NO
Guatemala	62.6%
Sweden	54.8%
Honduras	50.0%
Senegal	48.9%
El Salvador	47.1%
Ecuador	40.1%
Bolivia	39.2%
Mexico	37.7%

These differences should be interpreted with caution. **Children's identification of unsafe places captures their experience and perception of local environments, rather than providing a direct measure of objective exposure to harm. Whether a place is perceived as unsafe may depend on the nature of the potential harm, the presence or absence of trusted adults, local norms and expectations, previous experiences, and the extent to which particular dangers are visible or socially recognised.** The findings therefore capture how children navigate their surroundings and where potential harm becomes salient in everyday life.

Children were also asked what makes these places feel unsafe. The most frequently identified concern was the possibility of being hurt or having an accident (52%), followed by the presence of people who might scare or hurt children (32%) and traffic (30%).

Figure 13

Main risk factors identified by children (overall sample – multiple responses permitted)

RISK FACTOR	%
Children could get hurt or have accidents	52%
There are people who might scare or hurt children	32%
Traffic (cars, motorbikes)	30%
Water — risk of falling in or drowning	27%
Fights, violence, or weapons	22%
Animals that could bite or harm children	22%
Children could get lost or be alone	13%
It makes children feel scared or uncomfortable	11%
Buildings or structures could fall or break	9%
Very dark or hard to see	9%
No adults to help or protect	8%

Water hazards are particularly prominent in East and South Asia, accounting for 78% of reported concerns in Cambodia and 58% in India. Concerns about harm from other people are most pronounced in Western Europe, where 52% of children identify this as a risk factor. Sweden records the highest proportion of children identifying fights, violence, or weapons as a primary concern (75%), while in Italy concerns about people who might harm children (67%) and fights or violence (46%) are particularly prominent. Environmental hazards are comparatively less frequently identified in the Italian data. These patterns in higher-income contexts should not be interpreted as evidence of equivalent or greater exposure to physical danger. They point instead to different configurations of perceived risk. Where some environmental hazards may be less salient in children's accounts, concerns related to social relationships, violence, and the behaviour of others may become more prominent. The comparison therefore reinforces the importance of distinguishing between structural conditions, exposure to potential harm, and children's situated experience of safety.

AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

Children reporting functional difficulties report somewhat higher concern across most physical risk categories: accidents (56% vs 51%), traffic (31% vs 29%), violence (25% vs 21%), and the absence of adults able to help or protect (10% vs 7%). The pattern is consistent with earlier findings in this chapter: disability is associated with greater reported concern across existing risk environments, rather than with exposure to categorically different types of risk. These differences should not be interpreted as evidence that disability itself produces greater risk. Rather, they suggest that the same environments may be experienced differently depending on children's individual circumstances, access needs, and the availability of adults and systems able to provide effective support.

Roads and movement: a universal and under-addressed gap

Roads, crossings, and home-to-school routes are among the most consistently identified unsafe environments across the countries in the dataset. Children refer to traffic, inadequate infrastructure, poor lighting, and the possibility of accidents. In conflict-affected settings, movement routes may also expose children to armed actors, unexploded ordnance, and informal checkpoints.

"They can run me over. They can kidnap me or steal from me." — a girl of 11 in Bangladesh

"The national road in front of my school is unsafe because the trucks, taxis, cars and motorcycles drive very fast. In 2024, an elderly person and a child had a traffic accident there." — a girl of 9 in Cambodia

"The road is not safe because many people pass there, and you may meet people with bad intentions. Cars move at high speed and can hit a child, especially while crossing. Someone can stop you and say bad words or do something bad to you, especially at night. If an adult helps you cross, it becomes safe." — a child in Tanzania

"On less-frequented roads, there are explosive devices and I could meet dangerous people." — a child in Burkina Faso

"You can meet a bad person, get injured — there is no way to hide from shelling." — a boy of 12 in Ukraine

"Bushy roads are not safe because bad people could rape girls." — a boy of 17 in Uganda

"You might come across explosive objects." — a boy of 12 in Ukraine

In Uganda, adolescents also identify certain night-time social environments — including venues associated with entertainment and alcohol — as specific sites of concern.

"It gathers different categories of people, including thieves." — a boy of 16 in Uganda

"It leads to early marriages." — a boy of 14 in Uganda

"It leads to harmful peer groups and drug misuse." — a boy of 13 in Uganda

Children are often protected at destinations but exposed during the journeys between them. Roads and routes are unavoidable parts of daily life, yet responsibility for their safety is distributed across sectors and institutions. They sit at the intersection of education, transport, urban planning, community safety, and child protection, without necessarily falling fully within the operational responsibility of any one of them. The result is a recurring gap in protection: children may be safe once they reach a school, home, or service, while the routes connecting these places remain less predictable and less protected.

Roads therefore provide a clear example of a broader pattern identified in the consultation: exposure to potential harm often occurs in the spaces between environments where trusted adults and formal systems are present.

Natural spaces

Natural environments — rivers, lakes, forests, open fields, and hills — are also frequently identified as places where children may encounter multiple forms of potential harm. In Sub-Saharan Africa, drowning and encounters with dangerous animals are prominent concerns. In South and East Asia, children frequently refer to flooding, snakes, and extreme heat. In Latin America, risks associated with rivers and landslides may be compounded in some settings by the presence of armed groups in remote areas. In conflict-affected contexts, natural terrain may conceal mines or be used by armed actors.

> *"The creek is dangerous because it is difficult to cross when it rains heavily. There is a bridge, but it has deteriorated and is no longer safe."*
> — a girl of 14 in El Salvador

> *"In the river you can find crocodiles — one was killed there once."*
> — a girl of 12 in Mali

> *"The river is dangerous because the water can carry children away, especially during the rainy season."*
> — a boy of 14 in Mali

> *"The forest is very dangerous — there are snakes and many wild animals that can bite or attack us. Nobody goes there casually, only adults looking for medicinal plants and hunters."*
> — a boy in Benin

> *"There are elephants there which can hurt someone."* — a boy of 16 in Kenya

> *"Girls are forbidden to enter the sacred forest. Wild animals are present."*
> — a girl of 16 in Benin

> *"Rivers, water areas, and secluded forests make it difficult for us to access basic services and resources. Such areas can also be sites of violence, which can disrupt normal childhood development."*
> — a girl of 16 in Ethiopia

The Safety Mapping suggests that the relationship between natural environments and safety is highly conditional. The environment itself does not determine whether children experience a place as safe. Rather, safety depends on the interaction between environmental conditions, the potential harms present, the presence of trusted adults, and children's ability to navigate the space and access help when needed. A river or forest may therefore be experienced differently depending on who is present, what conditions prevail, and whether children have the knowledge and support needed to move through it safely.

Markets, sanitation facilities, and crowded spaces

Markets are identified across multiple contexts as environments in which children may encounter concentrated social risks, including theft, adult conflict, alcohol-related violence, and harassment.

> *"At night, thieves come to the market area."* — a boy of 15 in Kenya

> *"You might be raped if you walk alone at the market."* — a girl of 15 in Kenya

Sanitation and hygiene facilities present a distinct set of concerns, particularly for girls and children reporting functional difficulties. Poor lighting, limited privacy, unsanitary conditions, and isolation from trusted adults are among the concerns children describe.

> *"At night it feels unsafe because there is no light, and some boys were hiding in the toilet area."* — a girl in Bangladesh

> *"Lack of cleanliness and poor conditions make children uncomfortable and fearful."* — a girl of 8 in India

> *"Open technical pits are dangerous because children might fall in while playing, and the dirty water inside can spread disease."* — a boy of 12 in Syria

Markets and sanitation facilities share a feature with roads and some natural environments: children may encounter them without consistent access to trusted adults or reliable forms of assistance. Their safety is therefore often conditional on factors such as time of day, who else is present, the physical environment, and whether help is accessible when needed.

Neutral and situationally variable spaces

One significant finding from the Safety Mapping is the prevalence of spaces that children classify as neither consistently safe nor consistently unsafe. Bus stops, parks, secondary roads, and local shops may shift between these categories depending on the time of day, who else is present, the level of adult supervision, and children's own age, gender, and circumstances.

This matters analytically for two reasons. First, children appear to maintain a continuously updated reading of their environments that fixed-response instruments can only partially capture. Second, the spaces most frequently described as situationally variable often fall between institutional responsibilities. Streets, transport nodes, and open public areas are relevant to multiple sectors, but may not be fully owned by any single one. They therefore illustrate a recurring challenge for protection: the environments through which children move are not necessarily the environments for which any one actor is clearly accountable.

Across these settings, the central finding is not that the presence or absence of adults alone determines safety. Rather, children's experience of safety emerges from the interaction between the characteristics of a place, the potential harms present, the relationships available within it, and the possibility of obtaining effective help when needed. The spaces between home, school, and other destinations are therefore not peripheral to children's safety. They are part of the environments in which safety is lived, negotiated, and sometimes lost.



Safety Mapping with girls and boys in Cambodia

AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

AGE

Younger children, approximately 8–11 years old, tend to describe spaces in more immediate and categorical terms — safe or unsafe — with safety often associated with the presence of a trusted adult. Their accounts focus primarily on physical forms of potential harm, including accidents, animals, drowning, and falling. Older children and adolescents describe risk landscapes in more differentiated terms. Their accounts more frequently introduce power relations, social norms, peer dynamics, surveillance, and institutional behaviour. Schools may become sites of relational stress; markets acquire greater social complexity; and public space becomes a setting in which access, movement, and visibility are negotiated. This developmental difference has direct implications for participatory research. The risk landscapes identified by adolescents cannot be fully captured through frameworks focused primarily on physical danger. Consultation data are consistent with this pattern: younger children report higher concern about traffic (33%) and accidents (54%), while older adolescents more frequently identify harmful individuals (35%) and violence (26%).

URBAN AND RURAL CONTEXTS

Urban and rural contexts present different configurations of perceived risk and access to safety. In rural settings, children more frequently describe concerns related to natural environments, infrastructure deficits, and distance from services. In urban settings, concerns more often involve social anonymity, harassment, and the behaviour of adults in public space. Children living in urban areas do not necessarily encounter fewer risks than children in rural areas. Rather, the potential harms they identify and the conditions under which they experience safety differ. Some urban risks may be less visible in aggregate data because they are embedded in routine social interactions and normalised patterns of movement, surveillance, or exclusion.

GENDER

Gender differences in the reported frequency of unsafe situations are limited at the aggregate level. More significant differences emerge in the forms that perceived risk takes, the conditions under which spaces are accessible, and the strategies children use to navigate them. Girls more consistently identify streets, markets, parks, and transit routes as environments in which safety is conditional. Their concerns are less often limited to traffic or physical accidents and more frequently include harassment, surveillance, unwanted attention, and the anxiety of being alone in public. Boys tend to describe public space as potentially dangerous; girls more often describe it as conditionally accessible — safer during the day, more concerning at night, and dependent on the presence of a trusted companion. Research documents this distinction across cultural contexts: women and girls experience public space as a form of conditional access in ways that differ from the experiences of men and boys (Valentine, 1989; Keel et al., 2025; UN Women, 2024), with age further shaping vulnerability in public and transit environments (Ceccato & Sundling, 2024).

In Safety Mapping sessions, the contributions of girls and boys may also differ in analytical emphasis. Girls' accounts more frequently introduce relational risk, institutional dynamics, and gendered social norms. This has implications for participatory design: processes that privilege speed, volume, or the most immediately expressed concerns may overlook forms of risk that are more indirect, cumulative, or difficult to name. Gender-based violence rarely appears through direct naming in the Safety Mapping data. Instead, it emerges cumulatively through repeated references to being stared at, followed, commented on, or made uncomfortable. These experiences may be described as persistent social friction rather than as discrete incidents. The pattern is consistent with the possibility that some forms of gendered risk become normalised within everyday experience and are therefore not always identified as violence or reported in explicit terms (Kavenagh et al., 2024).

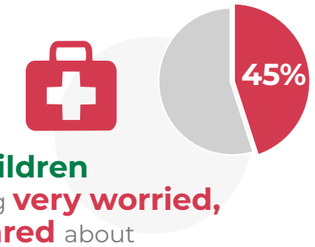
Gender also shapes the conditions under which particular environments are experienced as safe. Boys more often describe home as a stable source of safety, while girls' accounts more frequently make that safety conditional on the presence of specific relational conditions. Sports fields and recreational spaces may be described by boys as environments of freedom; for girls, access to the same spaces may depend more strongly on who else is present, the time of day, and whether they are accompanied. These differences do not indicate that gender determines children's experience of safety in any uniform way. They show instead that the same environment can offer different degrees of access, predictability, and perceived safety to children situated differently within it.

2.2.3. How Children Feel About What They Face

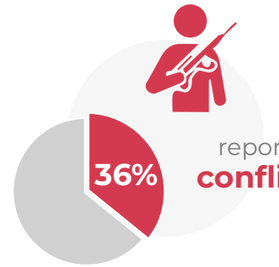
The preceding analysis has examined where children feel safe, which environments they identify as unsafe, and how perceived risk varies across contexts, gender, age, and disability. A further dimension is necessary to complete this picture: how children respond emotionally to the conditions they encounter.

Beyond the identification of risk, the consultation captures children's reported emotional responses to the challenges affecting their lives — including worry, fear, sadness, and calm. These responses provide insight into the emotional significance of the environments and events described in the preceding sections. They also show that the experience of risk is not evenly distributed across children or across contexts.

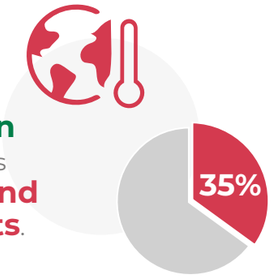
Children were asked whether they had recently experienced a series of challenges — bad weather, conflict, health problems, family difficulties, school problems, and changes in where they lived — and how they felt about each. The responses show that health concerns generate the most intense reported emotional response across the sample: 45% of children report feeling "very worried" or "mostly sad or scared." Conflict-related concerns follow closely: 36% report high distress about fighting or violence in their own country, and a similar share about conflict elsewhere. Climate and weather events generate high distress among 35% of respondents. Family problems and school difficulties generate lower but still substantial levels of reported worry. Changes in where children live generate the lowest overall level of distress, in part because the largest share of respondents report that this had not happened to them. Among those who had experienced such changes, however, the emotional response remains significant.



45% of children report feeling **very worried, sad or scared** about health concerns.



36% of children report high distress about **conflict and violence** in their own country, and a similar share about conflict elsewhere.



35% of children report high distress about **climate and weather events**.

Figure 14
Children's concerns and emotional responses — overall sample

CHALLENGE	"VERY WORRIED" + "MOSTLY SAD OR SCARED"	"MOSTLY CALM"
When I or someone close to me is sick	44.9%	12.3%
Fighting or violence in my country	35.9%	12.6%
Fighting or violence in other parts of the world	36.1%	14.6%
Bad weather or nature problems	34.9%	14.1%
Problems or arguments in my family	24.9%	21.1%
Problems at school	22.6%	21.7%
Changes in where I live	14.1%	22.1%

At the country level, the challenges most frequently reported vary substantially across contexts. In Bangladesh, 99% of children report experiencing bad weather or nature-related problems. In Kenya, family problems are the most frequently reported challenge (87%). Health concerns are the most frequently reported challenge in Benin, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Mozambique, Palestine, Papua New Guinea, Senegal, Syria, Timor-Leste, and Uganda. In Tanzania, changes in where children live are the most frequently reported challenge (49%). The relationship between structural context and emotional response is not mechanical. Children in structurally stronger contexts also report significant concern, particularly about global violence and health. Italy and Spain, for example, record substantial distress about conflict in other parts of the world, with 33% and 23% respectively reporting that they are "very worried", despite relatively limited concern about conflict within their own countries. Exposure to violence elsewhere — including through media and other information environments — can therefore form part of children's emotional experience even in comparatively stable settings.

These findings also clarify the relationship between safety and emotional experience. A child may feel safe in a particular place while remaining concerned about conditions elsewhere or about events that have affected their family, community, or future. Safety is therefore not equivalent to the absence of worry, fear, or sadness. It is a situated condition that coexists with — and may be undermined by — broader experiences of uncertainty and exposure to harm. The child who feels safe at home may still worry about a river that floods, conflict reported in the news, or a family problem experienced the previous day. **The consultation therefore shows that safety cannot be understood solely as a property of the space in which a child is currently located. It is also shaped by the wider conditions in which children live, the relationships on which they rely, and the extent to which they can expect those relationships and systems to provide support when conditions become difficult.**

AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

GENDER

Girls are more likely than boys to report high levels of worry and sadness across all problem types. Boys are more likely to report feeling calm or to indicate that a particular problem had not happened to them. This is one of the most consistent differences in the consultation and echoes the gendered patterns identified in the analysis of unsafe environments in Section 2.2.2.

DISABILITY

Children reporting functional difficulties report higher levels of distress across all problem types, in every country and across every category examined. This is the most consistent cross-cutting difference observed in the consultation. The finding should not be read as indicating that disability itself produces distress. Rather, it suggests that children reporting functional difficulties may encounter the same environmental and social conditions under different circumstances of exposure, access, support, and protection.

AGE

Younger children, particularly those aged 8–11, report higher levels of concern in relation to more immediate experiences such as health problems and climate-related events. Older adolescents, particularly those aged 16–18, more frequently report concern about broader social and political conditions, including conflict and instability. The pattern suggests differences in the types of conditions children identify as concerning and in the contexts through which those concerns are experienced and expressed, rather than a simple difference in the overall importance they attach to problems (Betancourt et al., 2010; Hickman et al., 2021).

> A child may feel safe in a particular place while remaining concerned about conditions elsewhere or about events that have affected their family, community, or future. Safety is therefore not equivalent to the absence of worry, fear, or sadness. It is a situated condition that coexists with — and may be undermined by — broader experiences of uncertainty and exposure to harm.

2.3. Why Safety Is Not Stable: Trust, Help-Seeking Capacity, and the Conditions for Action

Highlights from this section

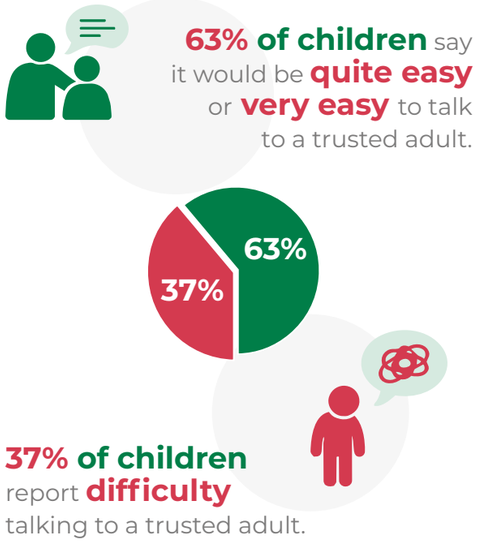
- Most children report having an adult they can approach when they are worried or scared: about two thirds say that talking to such an adult is quite or very easy.
- A trusted adult does not automatically translate into perceived help-seeking capacity. Across the countries covered, the two do not move together. In Palestine, children report relatively high access to trusted adults but very low perceived ability to obtain effective help — because the surrounding systems do not make action possible.
- When children need help, they turn first to family, in every country. Teachers are the second most frequently identified source. Formal child protection services are rarely mentioned. This may reflect not only children's preferences but also the features of protection systems — formal or informal, present or effective — and how directly children are exposed to them. Children also differ in how exposed they are to protection risks and in how familiar they are with the institutions available to them
- In some contexts — including Ukraine, Ethiopia, and the Philippines — relational trust appears more readily connected to action because referral pathways and institutions are perceived as accessible. In others — including Palestine, Tanzania, and Mozambique — trust does not translate as readily into perceived help-seeking capacity because pathways are weak, disrupted, or absent.
- Children reporting functional difficulties are more likely to report having no trusted adult to turn to. In Bangladesh, 14% report this, compared with almost none among children without disabilities.

The previous section showed where children experience safety and how that experience varies across places, relationships, and circumstances. This section examines what happens when safety is threatened: whether children know whom they can turn to, whether they believe effective help is reachable, and what determines whether relationships of trust can be translated into action.

The distinction between trust, help-seeking, and protection is central. Trust concerns the relational availability of a responsive adult. Help-seeking concerns a child's perceived capacity to reach effective help. Protection concerns the wider systems, relationships, and practices through which harm is prevented or addressed. These dimensions are related, but they are not interchangeable. A child may trust an adult without believing that help can be reached; a service may exist without being accessible; and a formal protection system may be present without producing experienced safety.

2.3.1. Trust in Adults: a Relational Resource, Unevenly Distributed

Children were asked how easy it would be to talk to a trusted adult when experiencing negative emotions. Across the full sample, 63% report that this would be "quite easy" or "very easy". A substantial minority — 37% — report difficulty, while a smaller but significant group report having no trusted adult to turn to. This measure captures the perceived accessibility of a trusted relationship, rather than trust as a general psychological disposition. Throughout the report, it is therefore interpreted as a relational condition that may support help-seeking, but does not by itself establish that effective help is available.



AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

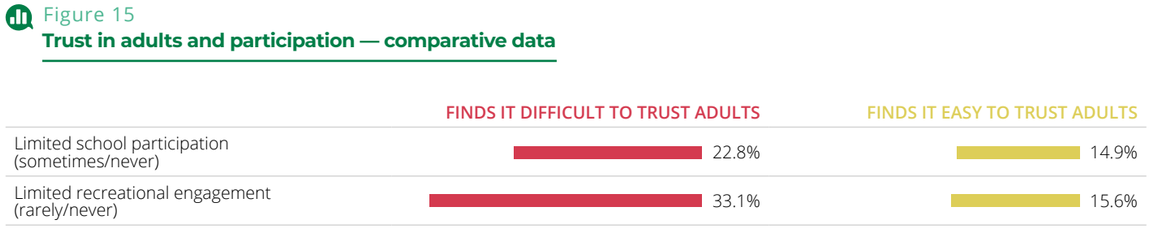
Age is the strongest individual-level difference in reported access to trusted adults. Among younger children aged 8–11, approximately one in four reports difficulty talking to a trusted adult. This rises to around one in three among those aged 12–15 and to nearly one in two among older adolescents aged 16–18. Within the oldest group, girls are particularly affected: 47% report difficulty, compared with lower shares among boys.

This pattern suggests that the conditions under which children can access trusted adults change over the course of adolescence. The gender difference concentrated in late adolescence may reflect the interaction between age, gendered social expectations, changing relationships, and the availability of adults perceived as safe and responsive in particular contexts. The data do not establish a single causal mechanism, but they show that access to trusted adults is not evenly distributed across childhood.

Access to trusted adults does not follow a simple regional pattern. Variation between countries within the same region is often greater than variation across regions, pointing to the importance of national structural and social conditions, as well as local relational environments, rather than geographic or cultural proximity alone. Several distinct country profiles emerge. In Mali (61.5% reporting "very easy"), Syria (approximately 85%), and Sweden (approximately 77%), large majorities report that talking to a trusted adult is easy or very easy. In Kenya (approximately 64% reporting difficulty), Mexico (approximately 43%), Italy (approximately 46%), and Benin (approximately 55%), a substantial share report meaningful barriers. The presence of substantial difficulty in Italy and Sweden — both high-income countries classified in the Strong or Advanced tiers of the World Index — reinforces a finding from Section 2.2: structural conditions and relational experience do not necessarily coincide, and macro-level indicators cannot by themselves capture whether children experience relationships as accessible and responsive.

Children with lower participation in school are substantially more likely to report difficulty talking to a trusted adult (22.8% versus 14.9%). The gap is even larger in relation to recreational activities (33.1% versus 15.6%). The relationship is likely to be bidirectional. Limited participation may reduce opportunities to develop relationships with trusted adults, while difficulty accessing trusted adults may constrain children's engagement in school and social activities. Research on trust-building in children's development similarly suggests that informal, activity-based interactions can create opportunities for children to engage with adult support systems (Lubell & Sørhaug, 2024). Relational access can therefore function as a condition through which formal rights and services become practically accessible. In Sen's terms, it may operate as a social conversion factor: a condition that influences whether formally available resources and services can be converted into real opportunities for children (Sen, 1999).

Figure 15
Trust in adults and participation — comparative data



2.3.2. Help-seeking: A Perceived Capacity, its Barriers, and the Reach of Systems

Help-seeking, throughout this report, denotes a perceived capacity — a child's own belief that they could obtain effective help — rather than a need, an observed behaviour, or a service that was in fact provided. No help-seeking behaviour was observed in this research; the measure is the child's stated expectation.

It refers to whether a child believes they could reach effective help in a situation of risk or crisis. It is distinct from having a trusted adult, which concerns relational accessibility, and from provision, which concerns the existence of services or formal support mechanisms.

Children were asked whether they would feel able to ask someone for help if they saw a child being treated harshly or unfairly[7]. **Across the full sample, 63% report they would be able to ask for help.** This means that more than one in three children either do not believe they could activate an effective response or are unsure whether they could do so. The finding therefore concerns not simply willingness to ask for help, but the perceived reachability of protection.

Country-level variation is large. The Philippines (96%), Bangladesh (91%), Ethiopia (88%), Uganda (85%), and Ukraine (78%) record the highest confidence. Palestine records only 13% — the large majority reporting either that they could not seek help or that they were unsure. Tanzania (31%), Mozambique (39%), and Italy (39%) also record particularly low levels.

AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

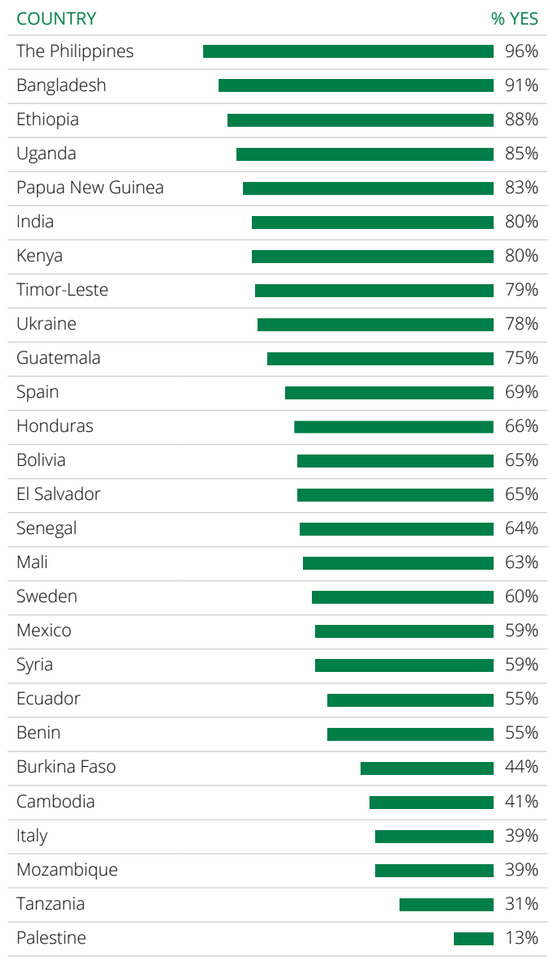
Age is consistently associated with reported perceived help-seeking capacity. Younger children aged 8–11 report the lowest levels, with approximately 56–59% saying that they could seek help. This rises to approximately 70% among adolescents aged 16–18. The pattern suggests that age shapes the conditions under which children perceive themselves as able to access support. It should not, however, be interpreted as a simple developmental increase in perceived help-seeking capacity. Older children may have greater knowledge of available actors and pathways, while younger children may depend more heavily on adults to initiate or facilitate a response.

7 This framing was chosen deliberately: asking about another child's situation rather than the respondent's own reduces social and emotional barriers to an honest response, while still providing a reliable proxy for children's own behaviour in distress.



More than **1 in 3 children** either **do not believe they could activate an effective response** or are unsure whether they could do so.

Figure 16
Share of children reporting ability to seek help - by country



Who children believe can respond: the relational and institutional pathways to help

Parents, caregivers, and other family members are the most frequently cited source of support, identified by 80% of children overall and by more than 90% in India, Tanzania, and Bangladesh. Teachers form the second most frequently cited source (46%), with substantial variation across countries — from 100% in Timor-Leste and 81% in Syria to 20–22% in Honduras and El Salvador.

Community leaders are cited by 28%, police or security services by 26%, and social workers, child protection workers, or NGO staff by 18%. Formal services — including helplines, health workers, and shelter staff — are consistently cited by smaller shares and rarely exceed 10% in any context. Peer support is identified by 4% overall, although it is notably more common in Italy (27%) and Ukraine (17%).

AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

Children reporting functional difficulties report somewhat lower reliance on parents or caregivers (74% versus 82%) and somewhat higher reported use of formal or institutional actors, including social workers (21% versus 18%), police (30% versus 25%), and peers (7% versus 3%). This pattern may reflect differences in children's familiarity with formal services, differences in the support available within households, or a greater need to access support beyond the immediate family. Teacher reliance is identical across the two groups (46%), suggesting that schools represent an equally important potential point of access to support for children with and without disabilities.

Three structural patterns emerge from these data.

1. **First, reported sources of support are overwhelmingly relational and informal.** Children most frequently identify family members, teachers, and known community figures rather than formal services. International evidence on help-seeking in child protection contexts similarly indicates that informal relationships are often children's primary and most accessible sources of support, while formal services remain marginal even where they exist (UNICEF/Chapin Hall, 2009; Kavenagh et al., 2024). Engagement with formal services depends not only on their existence but also on whether they are perceived as competent, fair, accessible, and responsive (Aas & Aas, 2024).

2. **Second, the role of institutions varies substantially by context.** In South and East Asia, schools often function as important secondary points of access to support, with teacher reliance particularly high in Cambodia (65%), India (62%), and Papua New Guinea (72%). In parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, community actors play a more prominent supplementary role, particularly in Burkina Faso and Benin. In Western European countries, formal systems and peers account for a larger, although still secondary, share of reported sources of support.

3. **Third, the distribution of reported sources is consistent with a pattern of substitution in some contexts.** Where family members are less frequently identified as a source of support, other actors appear to assume greater importance. In Uganda, for example, only 51% of children identify parents as a source of help, while community leaders (70%) and police (63%) are cited much more frequently. This suggests that children's help-seeking pathways are shaped partly by the availability and perceived accessibility of alternatives to family-based support.

Figure 17
Who children turn to for help — overall sample (multiple responses permitted)



The Safety Mapping provides complementary evidence. Across countries, children identify a broadly consistent set of actors as capable of contributing to protection and safety: parents and family members, teachers, local authorities, community and religious leaders, and NGOs where they are visible and accessible. A recurring theme is the expectation that adults should listen to children and take their perspectives seriously. This is not expressed only as a general aspiration; it is repeatedly identified as a condition that determines whether support is experienced as responsive. **The actor maps children draw are therefore analytically informative. Where children identify multiple actors — including, in some contexts, themselves and other young people — the perceived space for action is broader.** Children appear to recognise several possible routes through which conditions can change. Where they identify only distant authorities, or no actor at all, the perceived space for action is narrower. These maps do not measure the objective capacity of protection systems. They show how children perceive the actors available to them and the routes through which support might become possible. In this sense, they provide insight into the perceived architecture of protection: who children believe can act, who they believe will listen, and whether they can identify a credible path from concern to response.

> *"Parents, teachers, community leaders and elders should stop giving more attention to boys."*
> — a girl of 17 in Ethiopia

> *"The Barangay officials are the ones who will help us improve the things we feel unsafe or uncomfortable about."*
> — a girl of 12 in the Philippines

> *"Teachers provide guidance and protection from immediate dangers."*
> — a girl of 12 in Cambodia



Safety mapping with children in Ukraine

2.3.3. Trust Does Not Reliably Predict Action

The most important finding in this section concerns the relationship between relational accessibility and perceived help-seeking capacity, and it is clearest at the individual level. **Among children who report that it is "very easy" to talk to a trusted adult, 78.3% say they would be able to seek help. Yet even within this group — the children best placed to disclose a concern — 21.7% do not affirm that they could obtain help: 14.9% say they would not seek it, and a further 6.8% are unsure. Relational accessibility in its most favourable form therefore leaves close to a quarter of children without a perceived route to protection.**

The pattern across the remaining categories is equally instructive. Reported help-seeking capacity does not decline steadily as relational accessibility falls. It drops sharply between "very easy" (78.3%) and "quite easy" (59.1%) and then remains broadly flat: 54.5% among children who find it difficult to talk to a trusted adult, 57.8% among those who find it very difficult, and 55.8% among those who report no trusted adult at all. Below a high threshold of relational ease, the degree of trust makes little further difference to whether children believe help can be reached. Three readings are compatible with these data — a genuine threshold effect; the difference in referent between the two survey items, discussed in the methodological note below; and a social desirability effect concentrated among children who report difficulty — and the present evidence cannot discriminate between them. What the distribution does establish is that, for the majority of the sample, something other than the trust relationship determines whether protection is perceived as reachable.

At country level the picture is different. Across the 27 countries covered by the consultation, the two aggregate measures barely move together at all (r=0.05). This is a descriptive observation about these 27 countries, not the result of a test, and it does not establish that no relationship exists; the methodological annex sets out the analytical status of country-level coefficients in this report. What the observation does support is a narrower and sufficient claim: the national aggregate share of children reporting relational accessibility tells us very little about the national aggregate share who believe they could reach effective help, and cannot be used as a stand-in for it in programme design, targeting or monitoring.

Taken together, these results do not suggest that trusted relationships are unimportant. They suggest that relational accessibility, on its own, does not guarantee that effective protection can be reached. The distinction is between being able to tell someone and being able to activate a response. The first is relational; the second depends on the wider conditions through which protection becomes accessible and actionable.

Read down the final column, the table shows a threshold rather than a gradient. The share of children who would seek help falls by more than nineteen percentage points between "very easy" and "quite easy", and then varies by less than five points across all remaining categories — including children who report having no trusted adult. The implications of this pattern are discussed above.



Safety mapping with children in El Salvador

Figure 18
Trust in adults and perceived help-seeking capacity

HOW EASY TO TALK TO A TRUSTED ADULT	WOULD NOT SEEK HELP	UNSURE	WOULD SEEK HELP
Very easy	14.9%	6.8%	78.3%
Quite easy	33.0%	8.0%	59.1%
Difficult	31.6%	14.0%	54.5%
Very difficult	26.1%	16.1%	57.8%
No trusted adult	34.6%	9.6%	55.8%

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE ON THE TRUST AND PERCEIVED HELP-SEEKING FINDING

- **Status of the country-level coefficient.** The coefficient reported above describes how two measures are distributed across the 27 countries covered by the consultation. It is not the outcome of a hypothesis test: these countries are not a sample drawn from a wider population, and inferential statistics are not applied to them anywhere in this report. The coefficient is offered as a convergent observation alongside the individual-level distribution, which is what carries the argument. The methodological annex states this position in full.

- **Measurement gap.** Trust in adults and perceived help-seeking capacity are measured through different survey items with different referents: trust is assessed through a question about the ease of speaking to a trusted adult when scared, while perceived help-seeking is assessed through a hypothetical scenario about seeking help if a child were being treated harshly. These are related but not identical constructs, and some part of the divergence between them may reflect this measurement gap rather than a substantive difference. The finding is consistent with theoretical arguments in the child protection literature (UNICEF/Chapin Hall, 2009; Lubell & Sørhaug, 2024) and with the qualitative patterns visible in the Safety Mapping, which give it credibility.

- **Social desirability.** Both the survey and the Safety Mapping were administered through ChildFund Alliance member organisations, by facilitators operating within those organisations' programme areas. Children who are regular participants in Alliance programming may perceive the research team as affiliated with the organisation that supports them — an affiliation that could create a modest incentive to report more positively than they would to a neutral interviewer. This effect is well documented in survey research with children in programme settings (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Fargas-Malet et al., 2010) and cannot be fully controlled for in this study design. Both items are exposed to it: "I can talk easily to a trusted adult" and "I would be able to get help" are each the socially expected answer within a programme context, and there is no basis in the present data for assuming that one is inflated more than the other. The direction of the net effect on the observed relationship between the two measures is therefore indeterminate, as well as its magnitude. This is a further reason to rest the argument on the individual-level distribution reported above rather than on the country-level coefficient: the quantity that carries the argument — the share of children with the easiest relational access who nonetheless do not perceive a route to help — is a proportion within a single group, and is less sensitive to an inflation applied uniformly across items.

- **Programme investment as a partial explanation for variation across countries.** The consultation was conducted exclusively in countries where ChildFund Alliance members and their local partners are active, and several members have invested specifically in addressing the mismatch between relational trust and systemic help-seeking capacity — building both trusted adult-child relationships and the referral and response capacity that allows children to act on those relationships. In contexts where this investment has been sustained and integrated, the alignment between trust and perceived help-seeking may partly reflect programme success rather than the general structural conditions of the country. Conversely, where programming has focused more heavily on the relational side without equivalent investment in systemic protection, the mismatch may be more pronounced. This does not invalidate the finding — the absence of country-level co-movement holds across the full range of programme contexts — but it does suggest that variation between countries in the degree of alignment between trust and perceived help-seeking is itself programmatically informative: where alignment is strong, it is worth examining what combination of relational and systemic investment produced it.

Four distinct patterns emerge across the dataset. They should not be understood as fixed country types or as causal categories. Rather, they describe different configurations between the perceived accessibility of a trusted adult and children's perceived capacity to reach effective help. The variation between countries may also reflect differences in ChildFund Alliance programme investment, including the extent to which relational and systemic capacities have been developed together. The patterns are therefore analytically useful not because they establish causal explanations, but because they identify different points at which the relationship between trust, perceived help-seeking, and protection may become stronger or weaker.

1. **Relational accessibility supported by functioning pathways.** In Ethiopia, the Philippines, Guatemala, Ukraine, and Timor-Leste, the two measures are relatively closely aligned: children who report comparatively high relational accessibility also report relatively high perceived help-seeking capacity. These contexts are not uniformly stable — Ukraine is experiencing active armed conflict, while Ethiopia faces one of the world's largest internal displacement crises — but children in each context are able to identify adults and pathways through which support may become actionable. Schools are known and accessible, community actors are personally identifiable, and support structures are sufficiently embedded to remain available under pressure. The pattern is consistent with the importance of institutional continuity and local embedding, although the data cannot establish the extent to which these factors directly produce the observed alignment. In contexts where ChildFund Alliance members have invested over time in both trusted relationships and referral and response capacity, such investment may also contribute to the pattern.

2. **Relational accessibility without equivalent perceived access to action.** In Palestine, Tanzania, Mozambique, Cambodia, Sweden, and Italy, children report relatively high or moderate relational accessibility while perceived help-seeking capacity remains comparatively low. The mechanisms are likely to differ substantially across these contexts. In Palestine, 93% of children identify home as a safe space, while only 14% believe they could seek effective help in a crisis; the combination suggests a context in which immediate relational sources of safety coexist with severely constrained wider pathways to action. In Tanzania, perceived help-seeking capacity is low despite relatively high reported relational accessibility, suggesting that the presence of trusted adults does not necessarily translate into confidence that an effective response can be reached. In Cambodia, the divergence between the two measures is similarly substantial. In Italy and Sweden, formal institutional capacity is considerably stronger, yet children may still experience institutions as distant or relationally inaccessible in particular situations. Across these different contexts, the common feature is a divergence between the presence of relationships children can turn to and their perceived ability to activate effective help. The pattern therefore reinforces the distinction between relational accessibility and protection: a trusted adult may be available without a sufficiently accessible pathway through which protection can be reached.

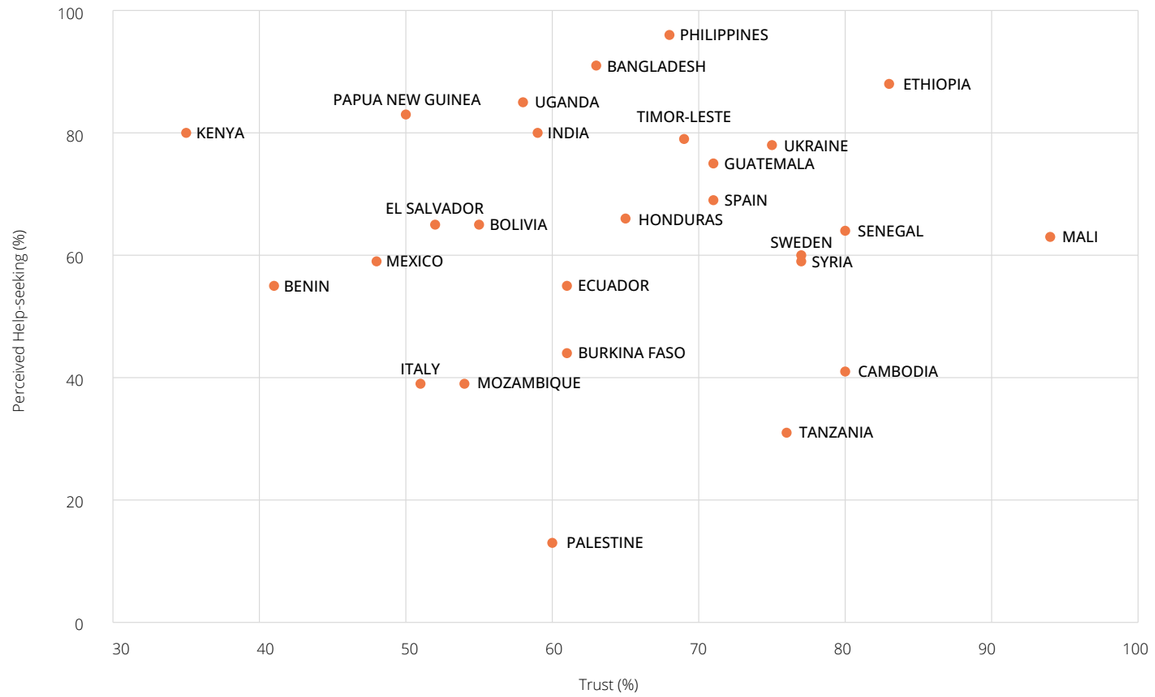
3. **Perceived access to help beyond individual relational accessibility.** In Kenya, Bangladesh, India, and Papua New Guinea, children report relatively high perceived help-seeking capacity despite more moderate levels of relational accessibility. This pattern suggests that children may be able to draw on wider community, institutional, or programme-linked pathways that do not depend exclusively on a single trusted adult. In Bangladesh, for example, camp-based humanitarian structures and embedded actors may provide accessible routes to assistance despite a fragile wider institutional environment. In Kenya and India, schools and semi-formal community structures may provide additional points of access. In Papua New Guinea, community structures appear to perform an important protective function despite weak formal governance. Uganda also illustrates this configuration: children report relatively low relational accessibility but high perceived help-seeking capacity, alongside substantial reliance on community leaders and police. These cases suggest that perceived access to help may sometimes be sustained through multiple pathways, even where no single relational source is consistently available. Such arrangements may nevertheless remain contingent on the continued presence and accessibility of the actors and organisations that sustain them.

4. **Fragmented or unevenly accessible pathways.** In Mexico, Ecuador, Senegal, Bolivia, and Burkina Faso, relational accessibility and perceived help-seeking capacity are only partially aligned. Some sources of support are available, but access appears uneven across contexts and circumstances. Children may identify trusted adults while remaining uncertain that these relationships can lead to an effective response, or may rely on formal and community actors whose accessibility varies by location and situation. In Ecuador, the coexistence of structural proposals with areas of strategic silence is particularly notable. Children appear able to identify risks and propose forms of collective change in some areas, while other risks may be more difficult to name or discuss openly. This interpretation remains tentative, but is consistent with the possibility that organised violence and local insecurity shape not only exposure to danger, but also the conditions under which children can speak about it and identify who can safely act. In these contexts, the relationship between relational accessibility and perceived help-seeking capacity may therefore be shaped by fragmented, locally variable, or context-dependent pathways to protection.

Figure 19

Trust and perceived help-seeking across countries

Countries display no consistent relationship between trust in adults and perceived help-seeking. The distribution highlights four patterns highlighted in the previous page.



What determines which pattern a context falls into is not the level of crisis it faces, nor its structural development as measured by the World Index — it is whether protection systems were embedded, accessible, and locally legitimate before each successive shock arrived. Section 2.5.3 examines the structural conditions behind these patterns in detail across all 27 countries, and identifies the three factors that appear most consistently associated with systems that hold under pressure: institutional continuity, local embedding, and prior legitimacy.

Neither trust in adults nor perceived help-seeking capacity moves with any dimension of the World Index across the countries covered. One might expect countries with stronger rights implementation — better governance, more developed child protection systems, greater gender equality — to record higher trust and perceived help-seeking. Across these countries, they do not. This is not evidence that structural conditions are irrelevant to relational accessibility or perceived help-seeking. It indicates that national-level Index scores do not provide a usable stand-in for either condition, and that the two operate at different analytical levels. The World Index describes the wider normative and institutional environment in which protection systems are embedded. The consultation captures whether children experience relationships as accessible and whether they believe effective help can be reached. These dimensions should therefore not be expected to move in parallel. **The central finding is consequently not that trust matters less than systems, or that systems matter more than relationships. It is that neither can substitute for the other. A trusted adult may make help-seeking possible at the relational level; a functioning pathway is needed for that help to become actionable; and protection becomes meaningful only when these conditions are connected in ways children can actually access.**



Safety mapping in Bologna, Italy

Do adults value children's safety? Children's perceptions

Children were asked how important they believe children's safety is to adults in their community. The question captures children's perceptions of adult priorities, rather than measuring the actual attitudes or behaviour of adults directly. Across most countries, children generally perceive that adults regard children's safety as important. Responses of "very important" are particularly high in the Philippines (96%), Mozambique (78%), Papua New Guinea (77%), Uganda (71%), Honduras (68%), and El Salvador (67%).

Figure 20

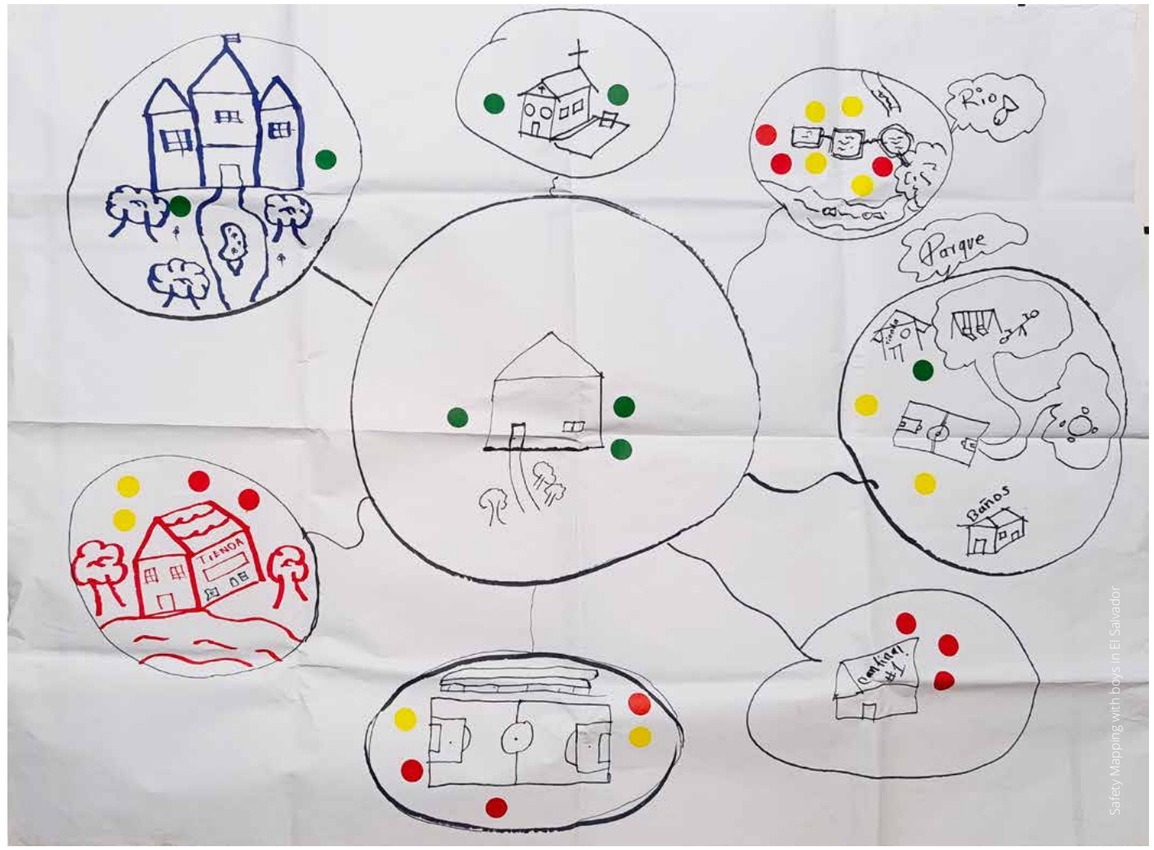
Percentage of adults who consider children's safety "very important" in their community - by country

COUNTRY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Benin	52%
Burkina Faso	57%
Mali	12%
Senegal	68%
Ethiopia	48%
Kenya	25%
Mozambique	78%
Tanzania	47%
Uganda	71%
Cambodia	53%
Papua New Guinea	77%
Philippines	96%
Timor-Leste	48%
Ukraine	45%
Bolivia	59%
Ecuador	64%
El Salvador	67%
Guatemala	59%
Honduras	68%
Mexico	62%
Palestine	68%
Syrian Arab Republic	41%
Bangladesh	46%
India	72%
Italy	55%
Spain	68%
Sweden	56%

The strength of this perception varies considerably across contexts. In Mali and Kenya, a large majority of children describe adults' concern for children's safety as "quite important" rather than "very important". This suggests that safety is widely recognised as a concern, but may not always be perceived as an overriding priority. In Sweden, the relatively high proportion of children who respond "I don't know" (21%) is also notable. It suggests that strong formal institutions do not necessarily make adult priorities visible or legible to children. Institutional capacity and children's perception that adults actively prioritise their safety are therefore distinct dimensions.

The findings also reinforce a broader pattern identified throughout this section. Children do not assess the importance adults attach to safety only through formal institutions or stated commitments. They are likely to infer it from what adults do: whether they listen, respond, intervene, make spaces safer, and act when children face risk. Perceived priority is therefore relational and situated. A community may have formal protection mechanisms while children remain uncertain about whether the adults around them consider their safety a genuine priority.

> Children do not assess the importance adults attach to safety only through formal institutions or stated commitments. They are likely to infer it from what adults do: whether they listen, respond, intervene, make spaces safer, and act when children face risk.



Safety Mapping with boys in El Salvador

AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

GENDER

Gender differences are generally limited at the aggregate level but emerge in specific contexts. In Bolivia and Mexico, girls are substantially more likely than boys to perceive children's safety as "very important" to adults. This may reflect the greater salience of safety concerns in girls' everyday lives, although the data cannot establish the mechanism. In Mali, the pattern is reversed. These differences do not form a consistent cross-national pattern and are better understood as context-specific variations in how children interpret adult priorities.

DISABILITY

The most pronounced inequalities again concern disability. In Bangladesh, 14% of children reporting functional difficulties report that adults consider children's safety "very important", compared with 47% of children without disabilities — a gap of 33 percentage points. In Burkina Faso, the gap is 42 points (34% versus 76%), while in Ethiopia, 17% of children reporting functional difficulties report that adults consider safety "very important", compared with 52% of children without disabilities.

These differences suggest that children reporting functional difficulties are substantially less likely to perceive their safety as a high priority within the environments around them. The finding is consistent with the wider pattern observed throughout this chapter: disability is associated not only with greater reported exposure to risk and distress, but also with weaker access to trusted adults, safe spaces, and forms of support. Here, the inequality concerns the perceived visibility and priority of children's safety itself. Whether this reflects differences in adult attitudes, the accessibility of protective responses, exclusion from decision-making, or the fact that risks affecting children reporting functional difficulties are less consistently recognised cannot be determined from this measure alone.

2.4.
The World Children Live In — Structural Context from the World Index

WHEN STRUCTURE AND EXPERIENCE POINT IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS

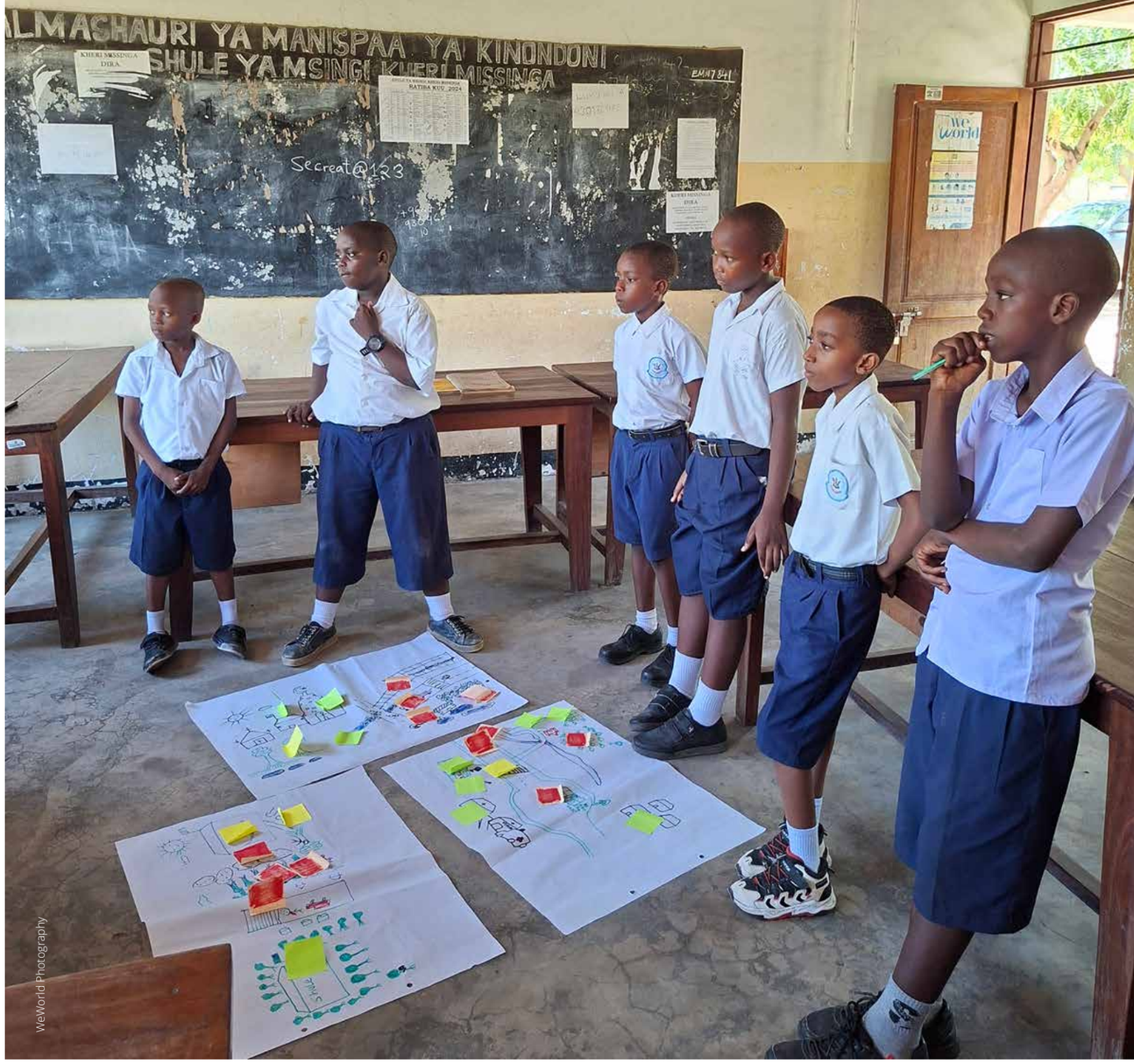
The World Index describes the extent to which rights are implemented at the national level through the legal, institutional, and policy conditions captured by its indicators. The consultation with children examines how conditions of safety, trust, and agency are experienced in everyday life. Comparing the two produces some unexpected results.

A note on how the Index is used here. This report does not ask which countries perform best, but rather in what conditions children experience safety, and it uses the Index to describe those conditions — the legal, institutional and policy environment of each country — rather than to rank national merit. The ordering of countries by score is retained because it is part of the instrument and because it is useful to those communicating comparative data, but the analysis that follows does not depend on rank position and does not treat a country's place in the ordering as a judgement of it. The Index is read here as a description of context, alongside what children themselves report.

- **Where they align.** Across the 23 consultation countries ranked in the World Index, children's reported access to education and the Conflicts dimension (D3) move together more closely than any other pair examined (r=0.56): countries facing more severe conflict tend also to show weaker educational access and participation. Children's sense of future agency and the Women's Sub-Index also move together, though less closely (r=0.42), consistent with girls' confidence in their own futures being bound up with the structural conditions of the women around them rather than with children's indicators or general governance scores alone. Both are descriptive observations across a small and fixed set of countries; neither is offered as a test, and neither is relied upon in the recommendations.

- **Where they diverge.** The frequency with which children report feeling unsafe does not move with any World Index dimension. A country can score in the Strong tier while children in the consultation still report substantial insecurity. Trust in adults and perceived help-seeking capacity are likewise unrelated to Index position across these countries. These observations do not show that no relationship exists — they are not the kind of evidence that could show that. What they do establish is that national-level measures of rights implementation cannot be used as a stand-in for relational trust or perceived access to help. These dimensions are shaped through specific relationships, local actors and the accessibility of response pathways, in ways that aggregate structural indicators do not capture.

Whether children identify school as a safe space also does not move with the Children's Education dimension (D7) or with other Index measures. This does not mean that education systems are irrelevant to safety. Rather, the structural indicators captured by D7 — lower secondary completion and the share of children not in education, employment, or learning — do not move with whether children experience school as safe. The protective function of schools depends substantially on the quality of relationships and institutional responsiveness within them, dimensions that national-level education indicators do not directly measure. These divergences are not a failure of measurement, but a finding: structural rights implementation and children's lived experience of safety are related but distinct conditions. Measuring one does not substitute for measuring the other. As the cases discussed below illustrate, structural conditions shape the context in which children's safety is produced — but they do not reliably predict how that safety is experienced.



WeWorld Photography

The findings in Sections 2.2 and 2.3 raise a set of structural questions: why do trust and perceived help-seeking diverge so consistently across countries? Why does the extent to which protection is accessible in practice vary so dramatically between contexts that share similar relational dynamics? Why are gaps in children's access to protection so pronounced and so persistent?

Participatory data alone cannot answer these questions. They require a structural lens — one that captures the broader systems of rights implementation within which children's experiences are embedded. This section introduces that lens through the World Index 2026, which covers 134 countries and measures the extent to which rights related to education, health, protection, governance, and gender equality are reflected in the legal, institutional, and policy conditions captured by the Index[8].

8 Two observations frame the use of the Index in this chapter. First, it is used here as a second and independent description of the same countries, not as a key to the first. The Index does not explain the patterns identified in the previous sections, and this chapter does not treat it as doing so. It describes a different order of conditions — the legal, institutional and policy environment measured at national level — alongside what children report about their everyday lives. The two descriptions are read together; neither decodes the other. Second, the two descriptions frequently do not align, and across the countries covered most of the measures examined do not move together at all. As the cases of Italy, Sweden, Mali and Bangladesh illustrate, structural rights implementation and children's lived experience of safety are related but distinct conditions. The non-alignment is not a residue to be explained away: it is the principal analytical yield of reading the two sources side by side. It marks the limits of what structural indicators can capture, and the dimensions of safety that participatory evidence is uniquely positioned to illuminate.

2.4.1. Global Findings from the World Index 2026

Highlights from this section

- The 2026 edition of the World Index covers 134 countries and reveals a world where the rights of women and children remain deeply uneven.
- Nearly one in four countries (23.9%) fall into the Limited or Minimal categories of human rights implementation. Weak protection of women's and children's rights is not an exception — it is a widespread global reality.
- In population terms, the scale is larger: one in three children (around 2.5 billion) and one in seven women (around 2.3 billion) live in countries where rights are only weakly implemented.
- Globally, progress is occurring, but slowly. The global average score increased from 60.7 in 2015 to 65.1 in 2026. Countries are not converging, and major inequalities persist.

Children's rights: the clearest area of progress. Fewer children are out of school, early pregnancies are declining, and human development indicators continue to improve. However, progress in education remains far too slow. At the current rate, achieving universal access to the education indicators measured by the World Index would take more than 88 years. Violence against children is also declining, but the World Index captures only part of the picture — measurement relies on proxy indicators while many other forms of violence remain largely invisible in the data.

Women's rights: the biggest gap. Women's access to education is improving (+25%), though from a very low starting point. Economic opportunities are advancing only marginally. Political participation continues to improve at a very slow pace. Violence against women shows almost no meaningful change. At current rates, eliminating the forms of violence measured by the World Index would take approximately 173 years.

WHAT IS IMPROVING

Since 2015[9]:

- Access to information has increased sharply (+29%), driven mainly by expanded internet access
- Housing conditions and access to basic services are improving in many countries
- Children's health, education, and overall living conditions continue to improve

WHAT IS GETTING WORSE

- Conflict is increasing across multiple regions
- Democracy and public safety are weakening, with shrinking civic space in many countries
- Environmental performance shows virtually no improvement — the issue is not exposure to disasters, but government action itself



Safety mapping with girls in Rohingya Girl, Bangladesh

9 The year 2015 is used as the baseline for comparison because it marks the launch of the first *WeWorld Index* by WeWorld, the Italian member of ChildFund Alliance. In 2024, the report became a flagship publication of ChildFund Alliance and was renamed the *ChildFund Alliance World Index*.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The World Index measures the implementation of rights for women and children on a scale from 0 to 100, where higher scores reflect stronger real-world implementation across 30 selected indicators. The World Index is grounded in a Human Rights-Based Approach combined with a capabilities-informed perspective. Rather than measuring capabilities comprehensively, it uses a structured set of indicators to approximate how rights are translated into real-life conditions across different domains and population groups.

The World Index is structured into three sub-indices:

- **Context Sub-Index:** captures the system conditions in which people live — institutions, governance, safety, conflict, public services. These are the basic enabling or disabling environments that shape whether rights can function at all.
- **Children's Sub-Index:** captures child-specific conditions of development and protection, including education, health, and exposure to harm.
- **Women's Sub-Index:** captures gender-specific structural constraints and risks, including access to education, economic participation, political voice, and exposure to violence.

This structure allows the World Index to distinguish between the system people live in, how that system affects children, and how it affects women — recognising that the same system produces different effects for different groups[10].

Countries are grouped into six tiers: Advanced (≥85), Strong (75–84), Moderate (65–74), Basic (55–64), Limited (45–54), and Minimal (≤45).

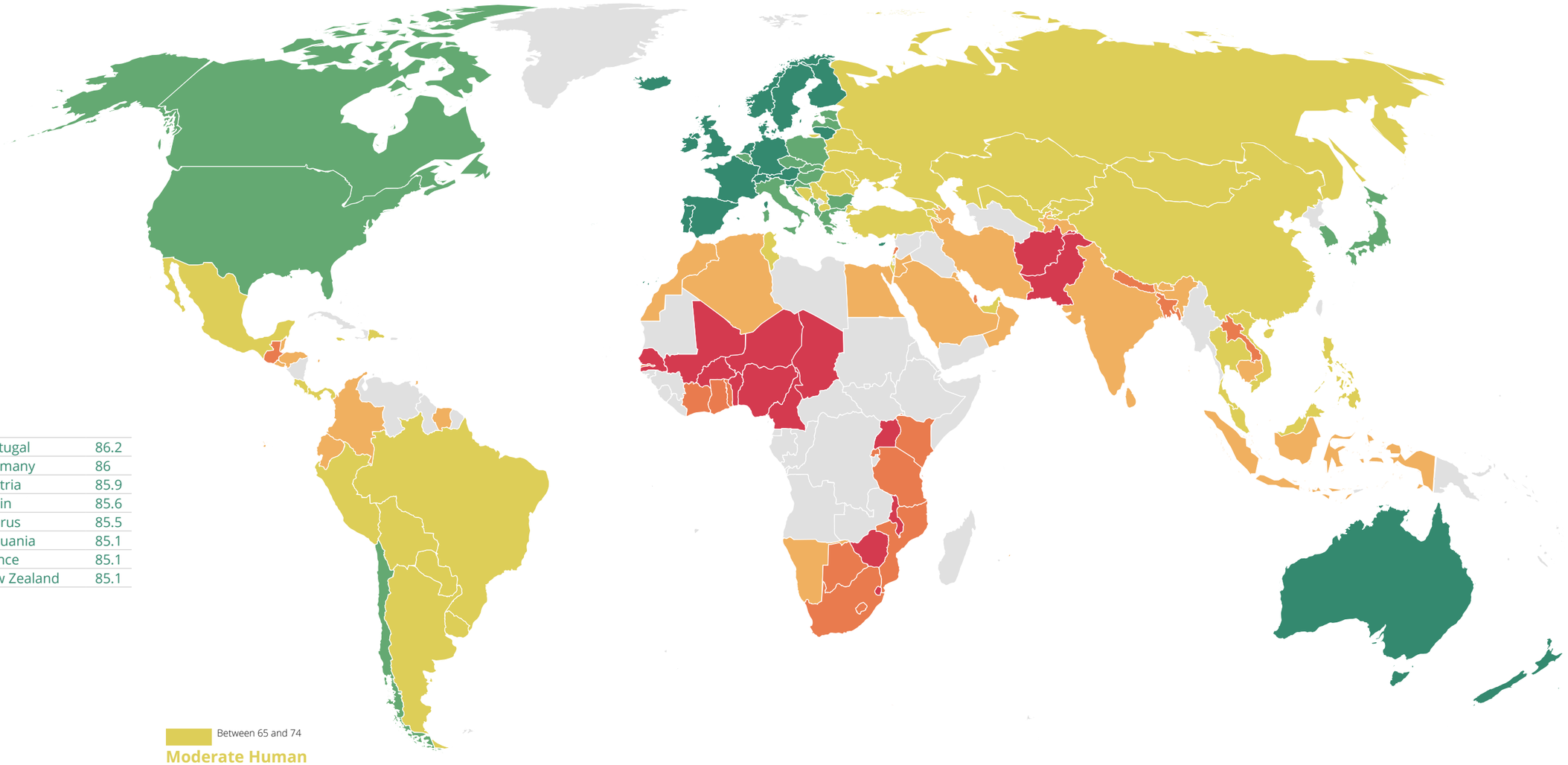
10 For further information on the rankings and data for each sub-index, please refer to the Annex.



Safety mapping with boys in Tanzania

Map 2

ChildFund Alliance World Index 2026
Global Map and Ranking



Equal or more than 85

Advanced Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

1	Sweden	90	
2	Iceland	89.4	
3	Norway	89.1	
4	Australia	88.3	
5	Denmark	87.9	
6	Switzerland	87.8	
7	Finland	87.5	
8	Netherlands	87.4	
9	United Kingdom	87.1	
10	Slovenia	87	
11	Ireland	86.7	
12	Portugal	86.2	
13	Germany	86	
14	Austria	85.9	
15	Spain	85.6	
16	Cyprus	85.5	
17	Lithuania	85.1	
17	France	85.1	
19	New Zealand	85.1	

Between 75 and 84

Strong Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

20	Estonia	84.9	
21	Belgium	84.7	
22	Canada	84.4	
23	Singapore	84.3	
24	Latvia	84	
25	Poland	83.2	
26	Greece	82.8	
27	Luxembourg	82.5	
28	Malta	82.4	
29	Japan	82.3	
30	Italy	81.6	
31	Korea, Rep.	81.3	
32	Czechia	80.8	
33	Croatia	80.6	
34	United States	80.2	
35	Slovak Republic	79.1	
36	Chile	78.9	
37	Hungary	77.1	
38	Albania	76.2	
39	Bulgaria	75.6	
40	Montenegro	75.6	

Between 65 and 74

Moderate Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

41	Israel	74.7	
42	Moldova	74.5	
43	Argentina	74.5	
44	Uruguay	74	
45	Serbia	73.5	
46	Romania	73.3	
47	Bosnia and Herzegovina	71.9	
48	Mongolia	71.8	
49	Georgia	71.6	
50	Belarus	71.5	
51	Kazakhstan	71.3	
52	Brazil	70.9	
53	Malaysia	70.9	
54	China	70.2	
55	Costa Rica	69.6	
55	Thailand	69.6	
57	North Macedonia	69	
58	Uzbekistan	68.3	
59	Turkiye	68.2	
60	Russian Federation	68.1	
61	Ukraine	67.8	
61	Armenia	67.8	
63	Bahrain	67.6	
63	Paraguay	67.6	
65	Panama	67.5	
66	Bolivia	67.3	
66	Fiji	67.3	
68	Kyrgyz Republic	67.2	
69	United Arab Emirates	66.8	
70	Viet Nam	66	
70	Mexico	66	
72	Tunisia	65.7	
73	Jamaica	65.6	
74	Philippines	65.5	
75	Dominican Republic	65	
75	Peru	65	

Between 55 and 64

Basic Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

77	Trinidad and Tobago	64.3	
78	Oman	63.9	
79	Indonesia	63.8	
80	Morocco	63.6	
81	Azerbaijan	63.4	
82	Colombia	63.2	
82	Tonga	63.2	
82	Ecuador	63.2	
85	Algeria	63	
85	Jordan	63	
87	Tajikistan	62.6	
88	Mauritius	62.4	
89	Saudi Arabia	61.5	
90	El Salvador	60.5	
91	Kuwait	60.4	
92	Belize	60	
93	India	59.5	
94	St. Lucia	59.3	
95	Iran, Islamic Rep.	58.6	
96	Egypt, Arab Rep.	58.5	
97	Bhutan	57.6	
98	Cambodia	57.3	
99	Suriname	57.2	
100	Namibia	55.6	
101	Sri Lanka	55.5	
102	Honduras	55.3	

Between 45 and 54

Limited Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

103	Nepal	53.3
104	Guatemala	53.2
104	Lebanon	53.2
106	Palestine	53.1
107	South Africa	52.6
108	Bangladesh	52.4
109	Lao PDR	52.3
110	Ghana	52
111	Botswana	51.2
112	Qatar	49.5
113	Kenya	47.9
114	Cote d'Ivoire	46.9
115	Lesotho	46.2
116	Togo	46.1
117	Gambia, The	45.8
118	Rwanda	45.7
119	Tanzania	45.5
120	Mozambique	45.4

Equal or less than 45

Minimal Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

121	Senegal	45
122	Cameroon	44.4
123	Zimbabwe	44.3
124	Nigeria	42.7
125	Pakistan	42.5
126	Uganda	42.4
127	Eswatini	41.4
128	Benin	41.1
129	Malawi	36.8
130	Burkina Faso	36.2
131	Mali	35
132	Niger	32.4
133	Chad	30.1
134	Afghanistan	29.3

ChildFund Alliance members

Data not available

The 2026 edition shows a world characterised by deeply uneven systems of rights implementation. **At the top of the ranking are Northern European countries — Sweden, Iceland, Norway, and Denmark — together with Australia.** These are contexts where institutions generally succeed in translating rights into relatively stable and predictable living conditions. **At the opposite end are countries in sub-Saharan Africa — Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Chad — alongside Afghanistan.** These contexts are characterised by the accumulation of inequality, poverty, and internal conflict, which weakens institutional capacity and limits the effective implementation of rights in everyday life.

Overall, almost one in four countries (23.9%) guarantees only a Limited or Minimal level of implementation of women's and children's rights. When moving from countries to populations, the scale becomes even clearer: one in three children (around 2.5 billion) and one in seven women (almost 2.3 billion) live in countries where rights implementation is limited or minimal. **Weak rights implementation is not confined to a small number of fragile states — it affects a substantial share of the global population.**

Comparing results with 2015, the picture is one of overall improvement, but with very uneven trajectories across regions, dimensions, and population groups. **The global average rises from 60.7 to 65.1, while 13 countries remain in the Minimal tier.**

At the regional level, several historically lower-performing regions record relatively strong improvements. South Asia shows the largest increase (+7.2 points), shifting from the Limited to the Basic tier. East and South Africa improve from 40.5 to 45.1, moving from the Minimal to the Limited tier. Similar improvements are visible in East Asia and the Pacific (+4.9), the Middle East and North Africa (+4.7), and Latin America and the Caribbean (+3.8). Regions that already performed comparatively well in 2015 continue to improve, though at a slower pace and from much higher baselines. The result is some convergence in rates of improvement, but persistent structural gaps in absolute levels.

Almost **1 country in 4** in the Index guarantees only a **limited or minimal level** of implementation of **women's and children's rights**



Globally, **1 in 3 children** (around 2.5 billion) and **1 in 7 women** (almost 2.3 billion) **live in countries** where **rights implementation is limited or minimal**.

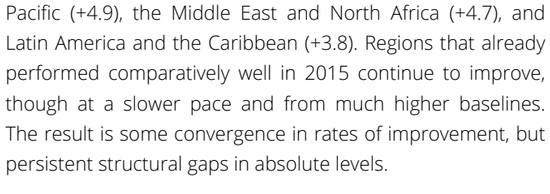
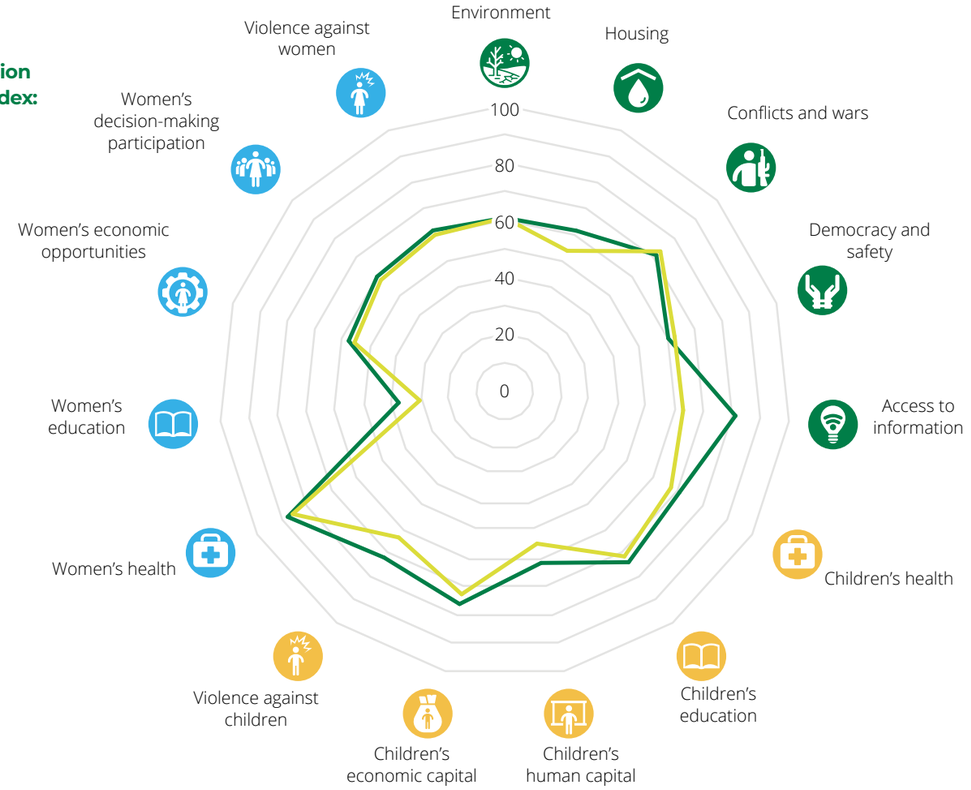


Figure 21
Geographic areas — World Index scores 2015 and 2026

GEOGRAPHIC AREA	SCORE IN THE WORLD INDEX 2026	SCORE IN THE WORLD INDEX 2015	TIER IN THE WORLD INDEX 2026	TIER IN THE WORLD INDEX 2015	SCORE VARIATION
West Europe and Other States	83.6	81.1	Strong	Strong	+2.5 ⬆
East Europe and Central Asia	71.3	69.0	Moderate	Moderate	+2.4 ⬆
East Asia and Pacific	69.9	65.1	Moderate	Moderate	+4.9 ⬆
Latin America and Caribbean	67.6	63.8	Moderate	Basic	+3.8 ⬆
Middle East and North Africa	59.6	54.9	Basic	Basic	+4.7 ⬆
South Asia	56.4	49.2	Basic	Limited	+7.2 ⬆
East and South Africa	45.1	40.5	Limited	Minimal	+4.6 ⬆
Central and West Africa	42.6	36.2	Minimal	Minimal	+6.4 ⬆

Figure 22
Performance in each dimension of the World Index: 2015 vs 2026



2.4.2. The Context Sub-Index

The Context Sub-Index captures the economic, social, and political environments in which women and children live — the broader institutional and structural conditions that shape whether rights can be implemented in practice.

The global average rises from 62.4 in 2015 to 66.6 in 2026. There are 13 countries in the Advanced tier and 10 in the Minimal tier. However, behind this overall improvement, several contrasting dynamics emerge.

- **The most significant deterioration concerns Conflicts and Wars (D3), which declines from 73.3 to 71.4. This likely reflects increasing fragility, the multiplication of overlapping crises, and the growing number of protracted conflict scenarios.** The countries performing worst in this dimension are **Palestine, Burkina Faso, Mali, Afghanistan, and Ukraine.** Many of today's conflict dynamics are internal, fragmented, or hybrid in nature — not simply interstate conflicts involving external actors.

- **Democracy and Safety (D4) also declines**, from 62.5 to 60.2. The decline reflects growing instability, restrictions on civic space, and authoritarian tendencies in several parts of the world. Even in 2015, this was already a relatively weak score.

- On the other hand, Housing and WASH-related conditions (D2) improve from 53.9 to 61.6, and Access to Information (D5) records the strongest increase across the entire Index, rising from 62.8 to 81.2, driven mainly by expanded internet access.

- The environmental dimension (D1) remains completely stagnant at 60.8. This dimension does not measure exposure to extreme weather events or disasters directly. It captures structural aspects — countries' resource consumption patterns and pollution intensity — reflecting the extent to which states are contributing to or mitigating environmental degradation. **Zero improvement over ten years suggests that states are still not doing enough to address long-term environmental pressures.**

The most significant deterioration concerns Conflicts and Wars (D3), which declines from 73.3 to 71.4. This likely reflects increasing fragility, the multiplication of overlapping crises, and the growing number of protracted conflict scenarios. The countries performing worst in this dimension are Palestine, Burkina Faso, Mali, Afghanistan, and Ukraine.

2.4.3. The Children's Sub-Index

The Children's Sub-Index is the strongest-performing area overall. The global average rises from 65.4 in 2015 to 70.5 in 2026, with 29 countries in the Advanced tier and 18 in the Minimal tier. **All dimensions improve, though at different speeds.**

- Children's Human Capital (D8) records one of the strongest improvements, rising from 54.4 to 61.3 — reflecting greater investment in reducing intergenerational poverty and improving children's starting conditions.
- Violence against Children (D10) also improves significantly, from 63.1 to 71.8. This reflects reductions in school exclusion and lower levels of early pregnancies — the proxies used by the Index — **but captures only part of the broader spectrum of violence children experience.** Many other forms remain difficult to measure and largely invisible in the data.
- Children's Health (D6) and Children's Economic Capital (D9) also improve, reaching 70.6 and 76.0 respectively.
- **Education remains a major structural bottleneck.** Children's Education (D7) improves from 71.3 to 73.8, but progress is extremely slow. At the current rate, it would take more than 88 years for all countries in the World Index to guarantee the educational rights considered within the framework.
- At the regional level, East and South Africa shows only marginal improvement in children's outcomes, with growth barely above zero despite some gains in overall scores. **More broadly, the weakest performers across multiple dimensions — including health, education, economic capital, human capital, and violence against children — are predominantly African countries.** The lowest-performing countries in combating violence against children include Tanzania, Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. In education, the lowest scores are recorded in Niger, Mali, Lesotho, Senegal, and Chad.

Children's Education (D7) improves from **71.3** to **73.8**, but progress is **extremely slow**. At the current rate, it would take more than **88 years** for all countries in the World Index to guarantee the **educational rights** considered within the framework.



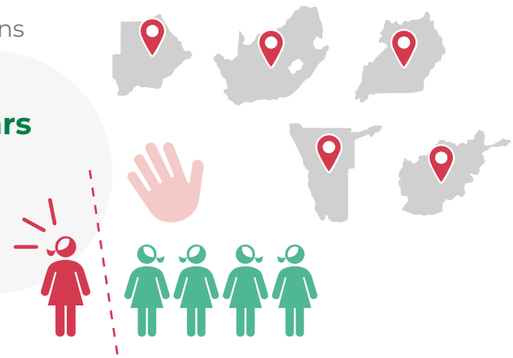
2.4.4. The Women's Sub-Index

The Women's Sub-Index remains the weakest-performing area overall. The global average rises from 54.8 in 2015 to 58.7 in 2026, with 15 countries in the Advanced tier and 22 in the Minimal tier — **meaning that almost one in six countries (16.4%) guarantees only Minimal levels of implementation of women's rights.** The issue is not widespread deterioration but the extreme slowness of change.

- Women's Education (D12) shows the largest improvement, rising by around 25% from 29.9 to 37.3. **This remains, however, one of the lowest scores across the entire Index.** Improvements from very low baselines can appear proportionally large while actual levels of implementation remain weak.
- Women's Health (D11) remains comparatively high, improving from 85.7 to 87.7. **Change is much slower in dimensions linked to structural inequalities and power relations.** Women's Economic Opportunities (D13) increase only marginally, from 55.3 to 57.4. Women's Decision-making and Participation (D14) rises from 58.3 to 60.1, and Violence against Women (D15) moves from 60.0 to 61.7.
- In the case of gender-based violence, **projections suggest that reaching full eradication of the forms of violence measured by the World Index would take approximately 173 years at the current pace of change.** The countries performing worst on D15 are **Botswana, South Africa, Uganda, Namibia, and Afghanistan.** These figures must be interpreted with care: gender-based violence is heavily affected by underreporting and by limitations in institutional reporting systems.
- **The lowest-performing countries on women's decision-making and political participation are Qatar, Iran, Palestine, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Afghanistan remains consistently among the lowest-performing countries across nearly all dimensions of the Women's Sub-Index**, representing the most extreme case of systematic exclusion of women from education, work, public participation, and autonomy — a condition widely described as gender apartheid (WeWorld (2025), *Her Future at Risk. The Cost of Humanitarian Crises on Women and Girls*).

> Afghanistan remains consistently among the lowest-performing countries across nearly all dimensions of the Women's Sub-Index, representing the most extreme case of systematic exclusion of women from education, work, public participation, and autonomy — a condition widely described as gender apartheid

In the case of gender-based violence, projections suggest that reaching **full eradication** of the forms of violence measured by the World Index would take **approximately 173 years** at the current pace of change. The countries performing worst on the prevention and eradication of violenza against women are Botswana, South Africa, Uganda, Namibia, and Afghanistan.





Safety Mapping with girls at Rohingya Camp, Bangladesh

2.5.
Living Under Polycrises

Highlights from this section

- For many children in this consultation, crisis is not experienced as a discrete event but as the enduring context within which everyday life unfolds. Climate-related stress, armed and social conflict, economic instability, and institutional fragility often coexist, producing interconnected forms of insecurity that accumulate over time.
- Climate-related stress and conflict undermine children's safety through distinct pathways. Climate change can gradually erode the environmental and social conditions that support predictability and long-term planning, while conflict can abruptly disrupt systems of protection, services, and social relations. In many contexts, however, these pressures are experienced simultaneously.
- Where multiple crises overlap and persist, their effects are not experienced in isolation. New shocks frequently emerge in contexts where protective systems have already been weakened, increasing children's exposure to risk and reducing the resources available to respond.
- Social violence can produce effects similar to those associated with armed conflict, constraining children's use of public space, limiting social participation, and narrowing the range of responses perceived as possible.
- Across crisis settings, girls frequently report carrying a disproportionate burden of managing insecurity. This is reflected in heightened risk awareness, greater self-restriction of movement and behaviour, and solutions that prioritise safety but may simultaneously constrain opportunities and agency.

For many children in this consultation, crisis is not an interruption to everyday life. It is part of the context within which childhood is experienced. What distinguishes many of these contexts is not the presence of a single, identifiable crisis, but the simultaneous and mutually reinforcing interaction of multiple pressures over extended periods. Climate disruption can weaken livelihoods and contribute to displacement; displacement can place additional pressure on institutions and services; institutional fragility can reduce the capacity to respond to subsequent shocks. Armed conflict can destroy schools and disrupt essential services; the loss of these structures can remove important sources of routine, protection, and adult supervision. These dynamics do not simply add together. They can compound one another, particularly where systems have already been weakened. This is the sense in which the concept of polycrisis is used in this chapter: not to describe the accumulation of separate shocks alone, but the interaction of overlapping pressures in ways that can amplify their effects and erode the systems that would otherwise help absorb them.

The World Index provides one structural lens through which these dynamics can be situated. As discussed in Section 2.4, performance on the Environment dimension (D1) remained unchanged between 2015 and 2026, while the Conflicts dimension (D3) declined over the same period. These trends should not be treated as equivalent or as evidence of a single causal process. They nevertheless point to a structural context in which environmental pressures and conflict-related insecurity coexist and may interact. Environmental degradation and climate-related stress can intensify displacement, livelihood insecurity, and competition over resources, while conflict can constrain the institutional capacity and public investment required to reduce vulnerability to environmental pressures. For children, the practical consequence is that these pressures may be experienced not as separate risks but as overlapping conditions that shape everyday safety and future possibility.

This dual pressure is directly reflected in the ChildFund Alliance Strategy 2030, which identifies Child Rights in a Changing Climate and Child-Sensitive Humanitarian Action as two of its three core pillars, alongside Ending Violence Against Children. The strategic choice to place these three priorities at the centre of the Alliance's work reflects the same reality documented by this chapter: for many children, climate-related stress and conflict are not exceptional conditions requiring only short-term emergency responses, but persistent features of the environments in which they grow up. Child protection programming must therefore be designed to respond to conditions in which acute shocks and longer-term structural pressures frequently overlap.

Children's own responses provide an important perspective on what polycrisis may look like from within everyday life. The solutions children propose during Safety Mapping exercises — and the actors they identify as responsible for change — reveal not only how they perceive present risks but also how they understand the possibility of change. Where children continue to articulate structural or civic solutions, this may indicate that they continue to see collective action and institutional change as possible. Where proposed responses shift toward coping, adaptation, or avoidance, children may be responding to conditions that they experience as increasingly difficult to change. Where children provide few proposals or none at all, this may indicate a narrowing of the perceived space for action.

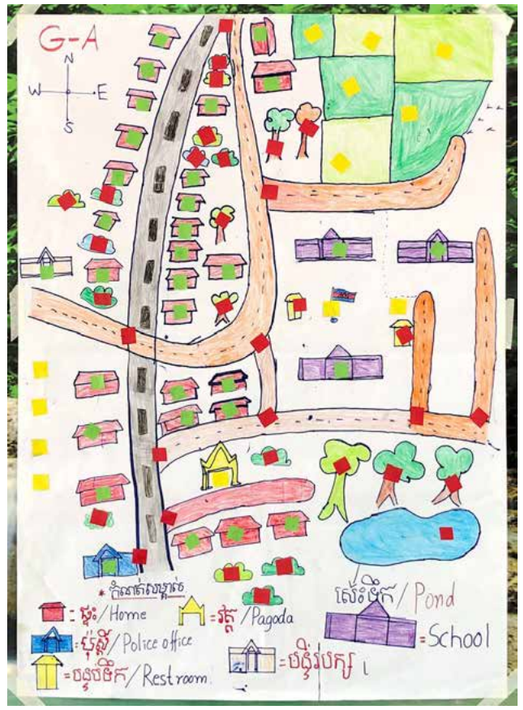
This progression — from structural proposals to adaptation and, in some cases, to silence or the absence of proposed solutions — is used in this chapter as an analytical framework for examining how prolonged insecurity may affect children's relationship to their own futures. It should not be interpreted as a linear developmental sequence or as a direct measure of psychological state. Rather, it provides a way of reading children's proposed solutions as evidence of the range of change they perceive as possible. The framework is developed further in Section 2.6. It is introduced here because it shapes how the crisis findings that follow should be read: not only as descriptions of exposure, but also as evidence of how prolonged and overlapping pressures may reshape children's expectations of agency, collective action, and the future.

> Children seldom refer to climate change as an abstract or distant phenomenon. Instead, its effects emerge through accounts of everyday disruption: recurring floods, extreme heat, damaged infrastructure, impassable roads, and interruptions to schooling, mobility, and social life. Environmental and weather-related risks are therefore experienced primarily through their consequences for children's immediate environments and daily routines, rather than as an abstract global issue.

2.5.1. Climate-Related Disruption: Safety as a Temporal Condition

Within the Safety Mapping data, climate-related insecurity is rarely articulated through the language of global climate change. Children seldom refer to climate change as an abstract or distant phenomenon. Instead, its effects emerge through accounts of everyday disruption: recurring floods, extreme heat, damaged infrastructure, impassable roads, and interruptions to schooling, mobility, and social life. Environmental and weather-related risks are therefore experienced primarily through their consequences for children's immediate environments and daily routines, rather than as an abstract global issue. This is consistent with research showing that children's concerns about climate change are often grounded in direct experiences of environmental disruption and its effects on everyday life (Léger-Goodes et al., 2022; Hickman et al., 2021).

The implications for safety are expressed primarily through changes in predictability and reliability. Across many of the contexts represented in the consultation, environmental conditions affect the circumstances under which children navigate everyday life, making safety dependent on changing weather patterns, seasonal conditions, and environmental events. Spaces that are considered safe under normal circumstances may become difficult to access or more hazardous during periods of flooding, extreme weather, or environmental degradation.



Safety mapping in Cambodia

Roads, bridges, and pathways are frequently identified as places where these risks become particularly visible, affecting children's ability to reach school, access services, maintain social connections, and move safely within their communities. **In this sense, climate-related insecurity is often experienced not as a single catastrophic event but through recurring disruptions that affect children's expectations of what can be relied upon and under what conditions. Safety is therefore not only spatial but temporal: a route, bridge, playground, or public space may be considered safe at one time of year or under particular weather conditions, and unsafe at another.**

These patterns are particularly evident in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Tanzania, Kenya, Ecuador, Burkina Faso, and Senegal, where environmental and weather-related pressures emerge as significant contributors to perceived insecurity. Children's accounts demonstrate a detailed understanding of how environmental conditions influence safety in their everyday lives. They describe how rainfall, flooding, reduced visibility, damaged infrastructure, and changing seasonal conditions affect their movement through space and their exposure to risk. Their accounts therefore show that children assess safety not only in relation to where they are, but also in relation to when and under what conditions they are there.

> *"During the rainy season, drains overflow with dirty water."*
> — a child in Bangladesh

> *"The roads become muddy and dangerous during rain."*
> — a child in Bangladesh

> *"We have to migrate with livestock in search of pasture during drought."*
> — a boy in Kenya

> *"Usually, no children go out to play when there are strong winds, heavy rain, or very hot weather."*
> — a boy of 10 in Timor-Leste

> *"Too much rain is bad for children because they cannot go to school."*
> — a boy of 14 in Uganda

> *"When it floods, we look for high places. There are no safe places to meet."*
> — a child in Ecuador

> *"Sometimes there are strong winds and extreme heat in the places where we play. We do not go out when there are strong winds, heavy rain, or very hot weather."* — a child in Timor-Leste

> *"When the weather changes, floods may occur. Drought may increase. Excessive heat can cause diseases. Girls are more affected during extreme heat."*
> — a girl in Tanzania

> *"My house is next to the bridge and I'm afraid it will flood again."*
> —a child in Spain

> *"I'm afraid there will be another DANA."*
> — a child in Spain

> *"We fear flooding and extreme heat."* — a girl in Benin

The consultation findings also indicate a substantial emotional burden associated with exposure to environmental and weather-related risks. **In Bangladesh, where nearly all children surveyed (99%) report experiencing bad weather or environmental problems (see Section 2.2.3), 40% report feeling "very worried" and 59% report feeling "mostly sad or scared" in relation to these experiences. Similar patterns emerge in Timor-Leste, where 73% of children report being "very worried" about environmental and climate-related threats—the highest proportion recorded across the 27 countries included in the consultation.** As a small island state exposed to recurrent flooding, cyclones, and other environmental pressures, Timor-Leste illustrates how repeated exposure to environmental hazards can become an important part of children's perceptions of safety and uncertainty about the future.

The emotional consequences of environmental disruption are not confined to lower-income or institutionally fragile settings. **In Spain, which experienced severe flooding associated with a DANA weather event in late 2024,** reported levels of concern are comparable to those in Kenya — although underlying vulnerability and institutional capacity to respond differ substantially between the two, so the comparison concerns children's expressed concern rather than their exposure or the protection available to them. This pattern highlights the importance of lived exposure in shaping children's perceptions of environmental risk. Structural conditions influence the resources available to anticipate, manage, and recover from environmental events, but direct experience of disruption can generate concern across a wide range of national contexts. Where children experience flooding, extreme heat, or other significant environmental changes, concerns about safety and uncertainty may emerge regardless of a country's overall level of economic development.

Figure 23
Emotional responses to bad weather and nature problems — by country
(Share reporting "very worried" or "mostly sad or scared"; Survey, 27 countries)

— indicates share below 1% or not reported.

COUNTRY	VERY WORRIED	MOSTLY SAD OR SCARED
Timor-Leste	73%	—
Kenya	43%	35%
Bangladesh	40%	59%
Philippines	35%	16%
Spain	33%	35%
Papua New Guinea	33%	13%
Uganda	29%	27%
Bolivia	26%	16%
Syria	25%	5%
Palestine	23%	3%
Guatemala	19%	9%
Italy	19%	9%
Burkina Faso	19%	5%
Benin	19%	6%
Mexico	18%	13%
India	18%	18%
Cambodia	17%	14%
Ecuador	15%	11%
Tanzania	13%	15%
Honduras	13%	2%
Mozambique	13%	6%
El Salvador	9%	7%
Senegal	7%	6%
Ukraine	5%	10%
Ethiopia	2%	7%
Sweden	2%	—
Mali	2%	—

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Disaggregating the data reveals differences in how environmental and weather-related risks are experienced across groups. Younger children (8–11 years) report the highest levels of distress, with approximately 39% indicating that they feel either "very worried" or "mostly sad or scared." Girls consistently report higher levels of concern than boys. In Kenya, 47% of girls report being "very worried", compared with 39% of boys; in Spain, 43% of girls report feeling "mostly sad or scared", compared with 27% of boys; and in Timor-Leste, the equivalent figures are 77% and 67%, respectively. Children reporting functional difficulties report the highest levels of concern across the categories examined. In Timor-Leste, all children reporting functional difficulties surveyed (100%) report being "very worried", compared with 71% of other children; in Kenya, the figures are 55% and 41%; and in Bangladesh, 71% report feeling "mostly sad or scared", compared with 58% of children without disabilities. These differences suggest that environmental and weather-related disruptions may be experienced as more emotionally significant by children who face additional barriers to mobility, access, communication, or support.

Figure 24
Who is most affected by climate distress

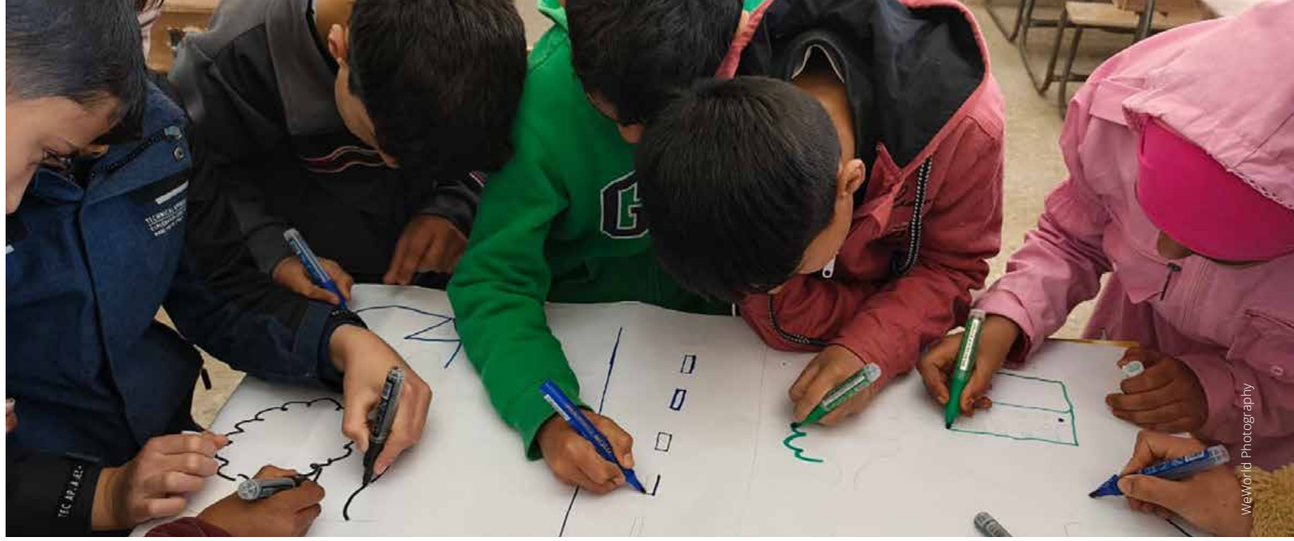
DIMENSION	PATTERN	MOST AFFECTED GROUP
Age	Distress decreases slightly with age	Younger children (8–11): ~39% combined high distress
Gender	Girls consistently more worried and scared	Girls in Timor-Leste (77%), Spain (43%), Kenya (47%)
Disability	Strongest amplification	Children reporting functional difficulties in Timor-Leste (100%), Kenya (55%), Bangladesh (71%)
Combined	Effects compound	Young girls with disabilities: most vulnerable profile in the dataset

The Safety Mapping data also reveal a distinct gendered pattern in how environmental risks are understood and navigated. Girls are more likely to describe environmental hazards in terms of their effects on mobility, supervision, and access to safe routes. Their accounts frequently emphasise the disruption of the social and relational conditions that enable safe movement through everyday spaces. Boys, by contrast, are more likely to describe the same hazards as physical obstacles or risks to be managed. Girls' assessments of safety also more consistently incorporate time of day and the presence of a trusted companion. Routes considered safe during daylight hours may become unsafe after dark, while spaces that can be navigated with an adult or trusted peer are often perceived as riskier when travelled alone. These patterns suggest that gender shapes not only exposure to environmental hazards but also the strategies children use to assess and manage them.

Climate-related Risk and the Solution Space

In contexts affected by environmental and climate-related stress, children's sense of agency remains visible, but it is expressed primarily through adaptation and risk reduction. The solutions proposed in the Safety Mapping exercises tend to focus on practical interventions such as improved drainage systems, safer bridges, better lighting, and improvements to infrastructure. These responses are generally oriented toward reducing exposure to existing risks and maintaining access to everyday activities rather than addressing the broader causes of environmental change. Children are therefore not simply describing environmental risks; they are identifying concrete ways in which their environments could become more navigable and predictable. The proposed solutions suggest that children continue to see possibilities for intervention, even where environmental disruption is recurrent.

The solution space is consequently constrained in some respects, but it has not disappeared. Children continue to articulate pathways for action and improvement, indicating that the future remains imaginable and open to intervention. At the same time, their proposed solutions are often directed toward maintaining safety and continuity under changing environmental conditions. The future is therefore represented less as a return to stable conditions than as a need for continued adaptation, investment, and repair. This pattern is consistent with research on children's experiences of climate-related disruption, which suggests that repeated and predictable environmental stresses can affect confidence in planning and anticipation over time, even in the absence of a single catastrophic event (Léger-Goodes et al., 2022; Hickman et al., 2021). The consultation data suggest a similar dynamic: children continue to identify possible responses, but the nature of those responses reflects an environment in which maintaining safety increasingly requires attention to changing conditions.



2.5.2. Conflict: Armed Violence and Social Violence

In contexts affected by armed conflict, organised crime, gang violence, or other forms of social violence, children's experiences of safety are shaped through different and sometimes overlapping mechanisms. While environmental and weather-related disruption often affects safety through changes in predictability, access, and everyday mobility, conflict and violence can alter the conditions under which children move through and interpret their surroundings**. In such contexts, distinctions between safe and unsafe spaces may become more pronounced, and children's everyday geographies may be increasingly shaped by the need to assess and manage immediate risks.**

The Safety Mapping data illustrate this pattern particularly clearly in Syria, Ukraine, displacement settings in Mali, and parts of Burkina Faso. In these contexts, children frequently associate particular environments with specific and identifiable risks. Agricultural land may be associated with landmines, abandoned buildings with physical danger, and public recreational spaces with insecurity. At the same time, locations not traditionally understood as protective—such as subway stations used as shelters—may acquire an important protective function. The findings suggest that prolonged exposure to conflict can change the way children classify and navigate their environments, as they develop increasingly specific assessments of where risks may be present and under what conditions particular places can be used safely (Tol et al., 2013).

> *"The crisis in Syria, which lasted for 14 years, made us feel afraid, and I was forced not to go to school. Empty agricultural fields may contain landmines."* — a boy of 12 in Syria

> *"I am a child from Deir Ezzor, and the war has changed my life completely. Many of our homes are destroyed, and there are still dangerous areas filled with remnants of war that could explode at any moment. A lot of children have lost their schools, or they can't reach them because the roads and schools are damaged."* — a boy of 10 in Syria

> *"The subway is a safe place during war."* — a boy of 11 in Ukraine

> *"Before the war, there were schools, kindergartens, creative centres. Now there are very few places where you can have fun."* — a girl of 13 in Ukraine

> *"You can meet a bad person, get injured — there is no way to hide from shelling."* — a boy of 12 in Ukraine

> *"The conflict in the north and centre forces us to abandon our belongings and come to settle here in Bamako."* — a child in Mali



WeWorld Photography

The consultation findings indicate a substantial emotional burden associated with exposure to conflict and violence. Ethiopia records the highest levels of reported distress related to fighting or violence in the country, with 57% of children reporting that they are "very worried" and a further 24% indicating that they feel "mostly sad or scared." Kenya (51%), Timor-Leste (52%), and Burkina Faso (44%) also record high levels of concern. These patterns are consistent with contexts in which conflict, insecurity, or violence form a significant part of children's lived environments.

The findings also indicate that children's concerns extend beyond direct or local exposure. **Perceptions of conflict and violence are shaped not only by events in children's immediate surroundings but also by information received through media, adults, and wider social networks.** Ethiopia again records the highest proportion of children reporting that they are "very worried" about conflicts they see or hear about outside their immediate environment (60%), followed by Bolivia and Palestine (both 37%). This suggests that children's emotional experience of insecurity can extend beyond the places they directly inhabit and include awareness of violence occurring elsewhere (Hickman et al., 2021).

Ukraine[11] provides an important point of comparison. Despite ongoing armed conflict, reported levels of conflict-related distress are lower than those observed in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Burkina Faso. This finding should not be interpreted as evidence of lower exposure or lower risk. It does, however, illustrate that reported emotional responses do not map mechanically onto the intensity of conflict. As discussed in Section 2.3, institutional continuity may be one factor shaping how children experience and respond to insecurity. Where schools, community structures, and other support systems remain at least partially functional, they may provide continuity and accessible points of support even under conditions of armed conflict. This interpretation is consistent with the finding that 79% of children in Ukraine report that they would seek support when needed, suggesting that pre-existing protection structures continue to play an important role under conditions of war (Tol et al., 2013; UNICEF, 2024).

Mali presents a different interpretive challenge. Children in the consultation report comparatively low levels of conflict-related distress across both measures. This should not be read as evidence of lower exposure to conflict-related risks or as an absence of insecurity. Rather, it highlights the difficulty of comparing emotional responses across contexts in which children may experience and describe different forms of adversity. In the consultation settings in Mali, children's accounts appear more frequently focused on health-related concerns and intrafamilial dynamics, which may influence which forms of distress are most salient and how they are expressed (see Section 2.2.3).

11 The protective role of institutional continuity in Ukraine is not only a structural feature of the pre-war context. It also reflects deliberate programmatic investment by ChildFund Alliance members operating in the country, including mine risk education — a form of child protection programming that directly addresses one of the most pervasive and lethal risks children face in conflict-affected environments, and one that requires sustained presence and trust-based relationships to be effective. Where Alliance members have maintained operational continuity and adapted their programming to crisis conditions — shifting from development to protection-focused activities while preserving the community relationships built over time — this continuity has likely contributed to the help-seeking capacity and resilience that the data document. This is consistent with the broader argument developed in Section 2.3: what distinguishes contexts where children can still access protection is not the severity of the threat they face, but whether functional systems and trusted actors were in place before the crisis arrived — and whether they were sustained through it.

Figure 25

Emotional responses to conflict — by country

(Share reporting "very worried" or "mostly sad or scared"; Survey, 27 countries)

Format: very worried % / mostly sad or scared %. — indicates share below 1% or not reported.

COUNTRY	VIOLENCE IN OWN COUNTRY	VIOLENCE IN OTHER COUNTRIES
Ethiopia	57% / 24%	60% / 26%
Timor-Leste	52% / 2%	54% / 4%
Kenya	51% / 19%	17% / 10%
Burkina Faso	44% / 3%	31% / 3%
Uganda	22% / 33%	30% / 36%
Bangladesh	24% / 32%	22% / 45%
Palestine	28% / 7%	37% / 23%
Bolivia	24% / 12%	37% / 16%
Ukraine	25% / 18%	10% / 15%
Philippines	21% / 16%	24% / 14%
Cambodia	20% / 28%	8% / 15%
Benin	20% / 19%	18% / 15%
Mozambique	19% / 13%	24% / 13%
Spain	26% / 13%	23% / 9%
Ecuador	17% / 15%	20% / 16%
Tanzania	24% / 24%	27% / 9%
India	20% / 21%	26% / 16%
Mexico	12% / 16%	15% / 21%
Syria	20% / 13%	21% / 2%
Senegal	8% / 9%	16% / 24%
Italy	15% / 12%	33% / 19%
Guatemala	10% / 4%	13% / 10%
Honduras	11% / 4%	9% / 5%
El Salvador	7% / 5%	13% / 5%
Papua New Guinea	6% / 25%	10% / 10%
Sweden	5% / 2%	6% / 5%
Mali	— / 2%	2% / 2%

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AGE

The disaggregated findings on conflict-related distress differ in important ways from those observed for climate-related concerns. Age differences are considerably less pronounced, with substantial levels of concern reported across age groups. Older children show a slight increase in the proportion reporting that they are "very worried", suggesting that violence and insecurity remain salient concerns throughout childhood and adolescence. This contrasts with climate-related distress, where the strongest responses are more concentrated among younger children. A different pattern emerges in relation to conflicts occurring beyond children's immediate environments. In this case, adolescents report the highest levels of distress. This may reflect greater exposure to news and social media, as well as a more developed understanding of broader political and geopolitical events. Awareness of distant conflicts therefore appears to be associated with greater concern among older age groups.

GENDER

Gender differences remain visible but are less pronounced than in the case of climate-related insecurity. In contexts directly affected by conflict and violence, both girls and boys report high levels of concern. This suggests that direct exposure to insecurity may reduce some of the gender differences observed in relation to other forms of risk, although it does not eliminate differences in how risks are understood and navigated.

DISABILITY

Children reporting functional difficulties continue to report high levels of distress. In Burkina Faso, for example, 60% of children reporting functional difficulties report being "very worried" about violence in their country, compared with 32% of children without disabilities. This heightened concern does not correspond to an equivalent reduction in reported perceived help-seeking capacity, which remains at 44% among children reporting functional difficulties. The finding illustrates an important distinction between perceived risk and the ability to identify or access support. As elsewhere in the consultation, disability appears to be associated with heightened concern about insecurity, although the relationship between distress, exposure, and support-seeking varies across contexts.

Figure 26
Comparing climate and conflict distress — age, gender, disability

DIMENSION	CLIMATE DISTRESS	LOCAL CONFLICT DISTRESS	GLOBAL CONFLICT DISTRESS
Age effect	Strongest among younger children	Relatively limited age differences	Increases with age
Gender gap	Girls consistently report higher concern	More moderate under direct exposure	Girls report higher concern in several contexts
Disability effect	Strong and consistent	Strong but context-dependent	Moderate
Overall intensity	High but variable	Consistently substantial	Moderate to high

Social violence and zones of silence

Social violence—including organised crime, gang activity, alcohol-related violence, and harassment in public spaces—can generate forms of insecurity that overlap with those observed in armed conflict settings, particularly where institutional presence and social cohesion are uneven.

Several countries included in the consultation face significant levels of organised or interpersonal violence alongside other forms of vulnerability. Ecuador has experienced a marked deterioration in public security since 2019, associated in large part with organised criminal activity and rising homicide rates. Honduras and El Salvador have long experienced the effects of gang activity in urban and peri-urban areas, although both countries have implemented major security interventions in recent years. In Uganda, adolescents identify particular night-time environments as concentrated sites of risk. In Italy and Mexico, forms of social violence in public spaces also feature in children's accounts of everyday insecurity, even where they may not be fully captured by broad structural indicators.

One feature of these contexts is the presence of risks that are only partially articulated. Children may identify that a place is dangerous without specifying why, or may use expressions such as "there are dangerous things", "they cannot be talked about", or "it depends". These responses should not be interpreted as a lack of awareness. They may reflect uncertainty, reluctance to disclose sensitive information, or an understanding that speaking openly about certain forms of violence is not always safe or appropriate in a group setting. In this sense, what children do not elaborate may also provide information about the limits of what can be openly discussed in participatory processes.

> *"There are gunshots and fights."*
> — a child in Ecuador

> *"Better not to go out."*
> — a child in Ecuador

> *"People take drugs."*
> — a child in Italy

> *"They steal and beat people."*
> — a child in Italy

> *"The disco hall gathers different categories of people, including thieves."*
> — a boy of 16 in Uganda

> *"The streets are dark, which can generate some kind of feeling of insecurity."* — a girl of 14 in Mexico

In both armed conflict and contexts affected by social violence, children often develop increasingly differentiated assessments of where, when, and under what conditions risks are likely to occur. This can narrow the range of spaces they consider accessible, particularly where movement is associated with threats that are difficult to predict or control. The resulting experience may therefore be similar across otherwise very different contexts: children restrict movement, avoid particular routes or places, rely more heavily on accompaniment, and adapt their behaviour to anticipated risks.

The distinction between armed conflict and social violence nevertheless remains analytically important, although it should not be understood as absolute. Armed conflict generally involves organised and sustained violence between parties to a conflict and engages specific obligations under international humanitarian law. Social violence encompasses a wider range of dynamics, including organised crime, gang activity, interpersonal violence, harassment, neglect, and violence associated with weak or uneven institutional protection. In practice, however, these categories may overlap. Criminal organisations may exercise territorial control in ways that resemble forms of governance; political violence may coexist with organised crime; and civilians may experience the resulting insecurity without being able to distinguish clearly between its different sources.

The more relevant distinction for children's everyday experience may therefore concern not only the source of violence, but also the way violence reorganises access to space and the availability of protection. In some contexts, armed conflict directly destroys or disrupts schools, services, infrastructure, and community networks. In others, social violence produces a more gradual but persistent restriction of movement, participation, and public life. Both can weaken the conditions that make spaces accessible and predictable, although they do so through different institutional and temporal pathways. The allocation of responsibility also differs, but is not always straightforward. Armed conflict activates a more clearly defined framework of international protection obligations, even where compliance is weak or protection is practically unavailable. In contexts of social violence, responsibility for prevention and response is more dispersed across state institutions, local authorities, police, communities, schools, families, and, in some cases, non-state actors. This diffusion of responsibility can itself become a source of insecurity, particularly when children cannot identify who is able or willing to act on their behalf.

The distinction is therefore best understood as one of dominant mechanisms rather than mutually exclusive categories. **From children's perspective, the central issue is often less whether a threat is formally classified as armed conflict or social violence than whether it makes everyday environments unpredictable, restricts movement, weakens protective relationships, and reduces the range of actions that appear possible. The Safety Mapping data suggest that both forms of violence can produce this contraction of everyday space, while the pathways through which they do so—and the possibilities for restoring safety—remain context-specific.**

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GENDER

Girls tend to demonstrate greater attention to indirect and relational forms of risk , included but not limited to violence, particularly those associated with movement, isolation, harassment, and the weakening of protective networks. Rather than focusing only on immediate physical dangers, their accounts more frequently connect spatial conditions with the broader circumstances that determine whether movement is safe. In conflict settings such as Syria, Ukraine, and parts of Burkina Faso, girls may therefore describe insecurity in relation to the breakdown or weakening of the social and protective conditions that support safe mobility (Keel et al., 2025; UN Women, 2024).

Across Safety Mapping exercises in both conflict and social violence contexts, boys are more likely to speak earlier and more frequently, whereas girls often contribute fewer statements but introduce more conditional and context-sensitive assessments. Their accounts more frequently link spatial conditions to relational dynamics, uncertainty, and variability. Girls are also more likely to describe safety as conditional: "it depends", "only if someone is there", or "not at night". These responses may reflect a more differentiated assessment of the circumstances under which a place can be safely accessed. The gendered dimensions of proposed solutions are similarly distinctive. Boys more often suggest responses centred on authority and control, such as increased policing, security presence, or stricter rules. Girls more frequently propose accompaniment, improved lighting, changes to the physical environment, and forms of relational support. These responses may be more directly connected to the constraints that shape their own mobility, but they can also imply additional restrictions on when and how girls are able to move through public space.

This pattern can be understood as a form of gendered constraint on opportunity: responses that reduce immediate exposure to risk may also limit mobility, participation, and access to opportunities. The finding should not be interpreted as evidence that girls lack aspirations. Rather, it suggests that the conditions under which girls assess safety may shape which forms of action appear practically available to them.

Conflict and the Solution Space

Research on children living in prolonged conflict settings indicates that exposure to armed violence can affect future orientation, educational continuity, and the ability to plan beyond immediate circumstances, with effects that may persist after active hostilities have subsided (Betancourt et al., 2010; Tol et al., 2013). The structural data in this study are consistent with the importance of this relationship. Across the 23 consultation countries ranked in the Index, children's access to education and the Conflicts dimension (D3) move together more closely than any other pair examined (r=0.56), consistent with higher levels of conflict accompanying lower access to education. The observation is descriptive and concerns these countries only.

The Safety Mapping data provide a complementary perspective. In contexts affected by environmental disruption, children's proposed solutions tend to focus on adaptation, risk reduction, and maintaining continuity. In contexts affected by conflict and violence, the solutions children propose more often address immediate security, protection, and the restoration of basic conditions for everyday life. The difference is not absolute, but it suggests that the type of crisis shapes the kinds of change children consider most urgent and feasible.

In some settings, children continue to propose structural changes and identify multiple actors who could contribute to improvement. In others, proposed responses become more focused on avoidance, protection, or the restoration of basic security. This indicates a narrowing of the range of solutions children consider immediately actionable, although the extent of this narrowing varies considerably across contexts.

> *"Safe environment, safe life."*
> — a girl in Tanzania

> *"The only thing we want is peace."*
> — a child in Ecuador

The contrast with climate-related disruption is therefore one of emphasis rather than a complete opposition. **Climate-related risks often lead children to propose measures that allow them to continue using existing spaces under changing conditions. Conflict-related insecurity more frequently leads them to prioritise the restoration of the basic conditions that make ordinary participation possible: safety, freedom of movement, access to school, and the ability to use public and community spaces without fear.**

In the most severely affected settings, immediate protection can become the dominant concern. This does not necessarily mean that children have lost the capacity to imagine longer-term change. Rather, the immediate conditions of insecurity may make basic safety the most urgent and concrete starting point from which other forms of participation and future planning become possible.

2.5.3. When Crises Compound: Polycrisis as a Structural Condition

In practice, climate-related stress, armed conflict, social violence, economic insecurity, and institutional fragility rarely occur in isolation. Across the 27 countries included in the consultation, children live in contexts shaped by different combinations of these pressures. In many cases, several forms of insecurity have coexisted over extended periods, influencing the environments in which children grow up and the resources available to them. **This is the condition referred to here as polycrisis. The term does not simply describe the simultaneous presence of several emergencies. It refers to situations in which multiple pressures interact over time, potentially intensifying one another and placing sustained demands on the systems, relationships, and institutions on which children depend** (Lawrence et al., 2024; IPCC, 2022; UNDRR, 2015).

The consultation does not allow the relative contribution of each crisis to be isolated, nor does it establish a single causal pathway between crisis exposure and children's reported experiences. What it does make visible is how different configurations of pressure are associated with different forms of lived protection. Children living in highly unstable contexts do not necessarily report the lowest capacity to seek help, while children living in contexts with comparatively stronger formal institutions do not necessarily report the highest levels of confidence in accessing support. The relevant question is therefore not simply which countries face the most severe crises. It is how different pressures interact with the protective environments available to children, and whether those environments remain accessible when conditions become more difficult.

Across the cases examined in this report, three features recur in contexts where children continue to identify accessible pathways to protection:

- **institutional continuity**, meaning the continued functioning, even in adapted or reduced form, of schools, health services, and community protection structures across periods of disruption (Betancourt et al., 2010; Education Cannot Wait, 2023);
- **local embedding**, meaning that protective actors are known and accessible to children not only through their formal institutional role but also through their presence in children's everyday social environments (Ungar, 2011; Lubell & Sørhaug, 2024);
- **prior legitimacy**, meaning that children and families have some basis for expecting that approaching a particular adult, service, or institution can lead to a meaningful response (UNICEF/Chapin Hall, 2009; Tol et al., 2013).

These factors should not be understood as demonstrated causal determinants in the present dataset. The cross-country design does not allow them to be isolated from the many other conditions that shape children's experiences. They are better understood as recurring features of protective environments that may help explain why some pathways remain usable under pressure while others become more difficult to access.

The table below brings these dimensions together for all 27 countries. It identifies the dominant crisis configuration documented in the country analyses, the country's position in the World Index, and the share of children who report that they would be able to seek help if they saw a child being treated harshly or unfairly. Perceived help-seeking is used here as the clearest available survey indicator of children's perceived ability to activate support in a situation of concern[12].

12 The analysis below draws on three sources of evidence. The first is the consultation itself: survey responses and Safety Mapping exercises showing where children feel safe, whether they believe they could seek help, how they describe risks, and what they propose should change. The second is the set of regional country analyses prepared for this report, which documents the security, climate, gender, child-protection, and governance conditions of each country using independent secondary sources. The third is the World Index 2026, which provides a comparative measure of national-level rights implementation. These sources measure different dimensions of reality: children's responses describe lived experience and perceived accessibility; the country analyses describe wider contextual conditions documented through external sources; the World Index measures the extent to which rights-related systems and institutions are established and implemented at the national level. None of these sources can substitute for the others as their value lies partly in comparison. Where children's accounts and contextual evidence point in the same direction, the broader context provides a basis for interpreting the pattern reported by children; where they diverge, the divergence is equally important as it may indicate that national-level indicators do not capture the conditions through which children experience protection in everyday life.

Figure 27

Crisis configuration, structural position, and lived protection across 27 countries

Crisis configuration is coded from the regional country analyses, drawing on BTI, Human Rights Watch, OCHA, UNICEF, UNDP, and national sources. World Index 2026 scores are out of 100. The Index covers 134 countries. Ethiopia, Papua New Guinea, Syria, and Timor-Leste are unranked because at least six of the thirty indicators were unavailable; this reflects a gap in data coverage rather than a judgement of low structural performance.

COUNTRY	WORLD INDEX 2026	DOMINANT CRISIS CONFIGURATION	PERCEIVED HELP-SEEKING CAPACITY
Sweden	90.0 · Advanced	Climate shocks · gang violence	60%
Spain	85.6 · Advanced	Climate shocks · economic strain · polarisation	69%
Italy	81.6 · Strong	Climate shocks · economic stagnation · political fragmentation	39%
Ukraine	67.8 · Moderate	High-intensity armed conflict · climate shocks · food insecurity	78%
Bolivia	67.3 · Moderate	Social violence · economic emergency · climate shocks	65%
Mexico	66.0 · Moderate	Organised crime · climate shocks · democratic backsliding	59%
Philippines	65.5 · Moderate	Social violence · typhoons · governance crisis	96%
Ecuador	63.2 · Basic	Declared “internal armed conflict” · organised crime · climate shocks	55%
El Salvador	60.5 · Basic	Gang violence · Dry Corridor · poverty	65%
India	59.5 · Basic	Localised insurgency · climate shocks · deep inequality	80%
Cambodia	57.3 · Basic	Border conflict (2025) · climate shocks · repression	41%
Honduras	55.3 · Basic	Gang violence · climate shocks · extreme poverty	66%
Guatemala	53.2 · Limited	Social violence · Dry Corridor · poverty	75%
Palestine	53.1 · Limited	Armed conflict · occupation · mass displacement	13%
Bangladesh	52.4 · Limited	Political transition · climate shocks · camp insecurity	91%
Kenya	47.9 · Limited	Social violence · drought · poverty	80%
Tanzania	45.5 · Limited	Climate shocks · poverty · weak infrastructure	31%
Mozambique	45.4 · Limited	Armed insurgency · cyclones · deep poverty	39%
Senegal	45.0 · Minimal	Localised insurgency · urban climate risk · poverty	64%
Uganda	42.4 · Minimal	Social violence · climate · poverty · repression	85%
Benin	41.1 · Minimal	Emerging armed spillover · flooding · poverty	55%
Burkina Faso	36.2 · Minimal	Armed conflict · military rule · Sahel climate	44%
Mali	35.0 · Minimal	Armed conflict · military governance · Sahel climate	63%
Ethiopia	Not ranked	Armed conflict · political fragmentation · drought	88%
Papua New Guinea	Not ranked	Social fragmentation · climate · weak governance	83%
Syria	Not ranked	Armed conflict · economic collapse · climate	59%
Timor-Leste	Not ranked	Localised unrest · climate · poverty	79%

Four recurring configurations emerge when children’s responses are examined across these contexts. They should not be understood as fixed country categories. Countries may display characteristics of more than one configuration, and the same country may move between configurations over time as conditions change.

1. Crisis exposure and lived protection do not move together in a linear way

The share of children who report being able to seek help does not follow a simple gradient of crisis severity. Ukraine, which is experiencing an active armed conflict, records 78% perceived help-seeking capacity. Tanzania, which is not affected by comparable armed conflict, records 31%. The Philippines, facing a combination of social violence, climate-related hazards, and governance pressures, records the highest level in the dataset at 96%. These differences do not demonstrate that crisis exposure has no effect on children’s ability to seek help. Rather, they indicate that the relationship is not adequately captured by crisis intensity alone. The consequences of disruption depend partly on the protective environments through which children access support. The country analyses provide contextual evidence relevant to this difference. In Ukraine, schools, community structures, and services established before the full-scale war have continued to operate in adapted forms in many areas, although with significant disruption and unevenness. In Tanzania, the country analysis describes a comparatively stable context in which protective capacity remains constrained by weak infrastructure, poverty, and inconsistent implementation of existing protections. The contrast therefore points not to a simple opposition between “high crisis” and “low crisis”, but to different combinations of exposure and available protective capacity. The same principle can be observed in the Philippines. The high level of reported perceived help-seeking capacity does not imply the absence of vulnerability. Rather, it suggests that, within the contexts represented in the consultation, children identify accessible adults and pathways through which support can be sought. The presence of such pathways may coexist with significant exposure to other forms of risk. The broader finding is therefore one of non-linearity. Crisis exposure matters, but its relationship with children’s perceived capacity to act is mediated by the availability, accessibility, and perceived responsiveness of protective relationships and systems.

2. Formal institutional strength and experienced accessibility are different dimensions of protection

The World Index provides information about national-level rights implementation and institutional capacity. Children’s help-seeking responses address a different question: whether children believe they could reach someone able to help in a specific situation. The two measures do not show a simple correspondence. Italy and Sweden occupy high positions on the World Index but record perceived help-seeking capacity rates of 39% and 60%, respectively. Bangladesh, Uganda, and the Philippines occupy considerably lower positions on the Index but record perceived help-seeking capacity rates of 91%, 85%, and 96%. This contrast should not be interpreted as evidence that formal institutions are unimportant or that weaker national systems necessarily provide more effective protection. The measures capture different dimensions of protection. A country may have extensive legal and institutional frameworks while children experience support systems as difficult to access, distant from everyday life, or insufficiently responsive to their immediate concerns. Conversely, children may be able to identify particular adults, community actors, schools, or programme-based structures through which support can be reached even where broader national systems remain uneven. The comparison therefore highlights a distinction between protection as institutional capacity and protection as experienced accessibility**.** The World Index is designed to measure the former. The consultation provides evidence about the latter. The difference is particularly important in contexts where children rely primarily on relational and community-based pathways. Bangladesh, for example, combines significant structural vulnerability with high reported perceived help-seeking capacity. The consultation data suggest that children can identify accessible actors and structures through which assistance may be reached, including family, teachers, and community-based or humanitarian actors. This does not eliminate the fragility of the wider environment. It indicates that national structural weakness and local accessibility can coexist. The same caution applies to higher-ranked countries. A strong national system does not guarantee that every child experiences protection as immediate, accessible, or relationally responsive. National indicators and children’s lived experience therefore need to be read together rather than treated as alternative measures of the same condition.

3. Future agency and the content of proposed solutions capture different dimensions of children’s relationship with the future

The consultation also reveals a distinction between whether children believe they have a future and what kinds of change they consider possible within it. Syria and Ecuador provide a useful comparison. Both record high levels of reported future agency, at close to 90%. Yet the content of children’s proposals differs significantly. In Syria, Safety Mapping proposals are more frequently oriented toward immediate safety, survival, and the restoration of basic services. A proportion of children also report that they do not think about the future at all. In Ecuador, children more frequently propose changes relating to infrastructure, governance, public safety, and collective action, and are more likely to position themselves as participants in

wider change. These differences suggest that future agency should not be treated as a single, undifferentiated construct. A child may retain hope and believe that a future exists while having limited expectations about the extent to which present conditions can be transformed. Conversely, children may articulate ambitious structural proposals even while living in highly insecure environments. The content of proposed solutions therefore adds information that a general measure of future orientation cannot capture. It provides an indication of the range of change children consider imaginable and actionable. The country analyses offer contextual information relevant to this distinction. Syria has experienced prolonged conflict, displacement, economic collapse, and extensive disruption of public services. Ecuador has experienced severe social violence and institutional strain, but retains a different degree of civic and institutional continuity. The contrast does not establish that these conditions caused the different forms of future-oriented expression. It does, however, show how children's proposals can be interpreted alongside the broader environments in which they are made. This distinction is important for understanding agency under conditions of polycrisis. The presence of hope should not be confused with the presence of broad practical options. Children may continue to imagine a future while narrowing the changes they believe can realistically be achieved. Conversely, a constrained environment does not necessarily eliminate the capacity to imagine collective transformation. The scope and content of children's proposals therefore provide a complementary measure of future orientation: not simply whether children see a future, but what they believe can change within it.

4. Social violence can produce comparable restrictions in everyday life without being institutionally equivalent to armed conflict

Social violence occupies a distinct position within the broader crisis landscape. Organised crime, gang activity, harassment, interpersonal violence, and insecurity in public spaces are not equivalent to armed conflict in legal status, organisation, or institutional responsibility. They should not be treated as interchangeable forms of violence. At the same time, children's accounts show that some consequences for everyday life can overlap. In Ecuador, Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and parts of Uganda, children describe restrictions on movement, concerns about specific public spaces, avoidance of certain times or locations, and reluctance to speak openly about particular risks. In these contexts, children may increasingly organise their daily geographies around where and when danger is perceived to be more likely. This spatial restriction can resemble some of the everyday effects observed in armed conflict settings. Children may avoid particular places, depend on accompaniment, limit their movement after dark, or identify areas in which it is safer not to speak openly. The similarity, however, is one of lived effect in specific domains, not of the underlying conflict structure. Armed conflict generally involves organised armed violence that directly affects civilian populations and is governed by specific legal frameworks and protection obligations under international humanitarian law. It may also generate displacement, destruction of infrastructure, and forms of harm that have no direct equivalent in ordinary contexts of criminal or social violence. Social violence operates through different mechanisms. Responsibility for prevention and protection is distributed across policing, justice, education, health, social protection, local government, and community actors. The absence of a single conflict framework can make the problem more institutionally fragmented, particularly where violence is persistent but not formally recognised as a national emergency. This distinction matters because the effects of violence on children's everyday lives should be recognised without collapsing different forms of violence into one category. A child who avoids a street controlled by organised criminal groups and a child who avoids an area affected by armed hostilities may experience a comparable restriction on movement, but the risks, legal frameworks, institutional responsibilities, and available forms of response are not the same. The Safety Mapping data also suggest that social violence may generate forms of partial disclosure or strategic silence. Children sometimes identify the presence of danger without specifying its nature, using expressions such as "there are dangerous things," "it cannot be talked about," or "it depends." These responses should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of a specific hidden form of violence. They may reflect uncertainty, reluctance to disclose, social norms, the presence of facilitators, or an assessment that speaking openly is not safe or useful. What is significant is that children sometimes communicate risk indirectly. In contexts where violence is socially or institutionally difficult to discuss, the limits of disclosure may themselves form part of the safety environment. This is an important consideration for participatory research: silence may reflect many different processes, and should be interpreted cautiously rather than treated as a direct measure of hidden violence. The implication is not that social violence is simply "the same as war". It is that forms of violence that are institutionally distinct can nevertheless create overlapping constraints on children's ability to move freely, use public space, seek support, and speak openly about risk. Understanding both the overlap and the difference is necessary for designing appropriate responses.

AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

GENDER

Girls across the dataset more frequently describe strategies centred on risk management, accompaniment, avoidance, and the careful assessment of when and where movement is possible. These strategies may reduce exposure to immediate risks while also narrowing the range of spaces and activities available to them. The country analyses document a related structural pattern: legal and policy frameworks addressing gender-based violence are widely present but unevenly implemented, while important gaps remain in protection and enforcement across contexts. These patterns are not confined to countries with the weakest national indicators. The persistence of gendered insecurity across different structural settings suggests that some barriers operate through relational, social, and institutional conditions that national-level improvement does not automatically resolve.

DISABILITY

Children reporting functional difficulties also experience a consistent disadvantage across the dataset. They report higher levels of distress, lower participation, and reduced access to trusted adults in several contexts. Under conditions of polycrisis, these disadvantages may become more consequential because children reporting functional difficulties often depend more heavily on services, infrastructure, continuity of care, and accessible communication. When these systems are disrupted, existing barriers may become more difficult to overcome.

What Polycrisis Reveals About Protection

Considered together, the findings suggest that children's capacity to act under conditions of polycrisis cannot be inferred from the severity of crisis, a country's structural position, or any single measure of future orientation. Rather, the consultation points to several dimensions that need to be considered in combination: the pressures to which children are exposed; the continuity of the systems and relationships through which protection can be accessed; the extent to which protective actors are locally known and perceived as responsive; the degree to which violence is institutionally recognised and linked to clear forms of responsibility; and the inequalities that shape which children are most affected when systems become strained.

The comparison between children's responses, the country analyses, and the World Index is therefore most useful when understood as a comparison between different levels of reality, rather than as a search for a single explanatory variable. The World Index describes the structural environment in which protection systems operate. The country analyses provide contextual evidence about the specific pressures affecting each setting. The consultation, in turn, shows how children experience these conditions, how they navigate them, and what forms of action they believe remain possible.

The distance between these levels is analytically important. **A country may have relatively strong formal systems while children experience support as difficult to access. Conversely, a country may face severe structural vulnerability while children continue to identify sources of assistance that they regard as trusted and reachable. Similarly, a child may retain a strong sense of future agency while proposing only immediate adaptations to present conditions.** These are not contradictions to be resolved by selecting one source of evidence over another. They reflect different dimensions of protection.

The central implication of the polycrisis analysis is therefore not that crisis determines children's capacity to act, nor that systems can be ranked simply according to whether they succeed or fail. Rather, it is that children's ability to seek help, move safely, speak openly, and imagine change depends on the interaction between multiple pressures and the protective relationships and institutions available to them. In this context, the durability of protection is not only a question of whether systems exist. It is also a question of whether children can recognise those systems, reach them, trust that they will respond, and continue to use them as conditions become more difficult.

The next section develops this argument further by examining what children's proposed solutions reveal about the space they perceive for change, adaptation, and collective action. It asks not only whether children believe they have a future, but also what kinds of futures remain imaginable under conditions of sustained insecurity.

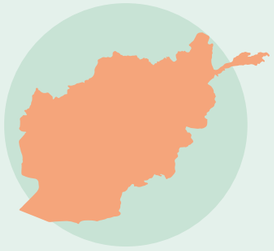
AFGHANISTAN AND LEBANON: COMPOUNDED CRISES, CONTRACTED FUTURES

Afghanistan and Lebanon were originally included in the consultation design as primary data collection sites. Both were selected because they represent particularly complex configurations of overlapping crisis: armed conflict and insecurity, institutional fragility, economic pressure, climate vulnerability, and prolonged disruption to children's access to education and protection. In practice, primary data collection with children was not feasible in either context. In Lebanon, ongoing conflict constrained fieldwork. In Afghanistan, restrictions on engagement with communities, together with risks to children and local staff, made participatory research with children impossible. Neither country is therefore included in the survey or Safety Mapping analysis presented elsewhere in this chapter. The evidence presented here is consequently different in nature from the participatory data collected in the 27 countries included in the consultation. It draws on secondary sources, humanitarian documentation, and qualitative key informant interviews: interviews with child protection practitioners in Afghanistan, and interviews with families affected by displacement in Lebanon through WeWorld programmes. All interviews were conducted within the ChildFund Alliance World Index data collection process and are fully anonymised. The material should therefore not be treated as directly comparable with the survey results or as representative of children in either country as a whole.

Their inclusion nevertheless serves a specific analytical purpose. Afghanistan and Lebanon illustrate two different ways in which prolonged and overlapping crises can constrain children's opportunities, disrupt protective systems, and alter the relationship between present experience and future possibility. The cases do not establish a general model of polycrisis, nor do they permit direct comparison with the 27-country dataset. Rather, they provide qualitative illustrations of processes identified elsewhere in the chapter: the cumulative effects of institutional disruption, the interaction between immediate survival pressures and longer-term opportunities, and the ways in which repeated shocks may alter children's relationship to education, home, safety, and the future.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan occupies the lowest position in the World Index 2026, with a score of 29.3 and a Minimal tier classification. The country illustrates the interaction between institutional fragility, armed conflict, economic hardship, climate vulnerability, and policies that have substantially restricted access to education and other opportunities for girls. Since August 2021, girls have been excluded from secondary and tertiary education, with significant implications for educational continuity and future opportunities (UN News, 2024; Kabul Now, 2026). These restrictions have occurred alongside broader constraints affecting the lives of women and girls and continuing economic and humanitarian pressures (Atlantic Council, 2025; UNICEF, 2025a).



The available qualitative evidence suggests that these conditions are not necessarily experienced by children as separate policy measures or distinct crises. Rather, they shape the everyday conditions through which childhood is lived: access to education, mobility, household economic security, protection from violence, and the ability to imagine possible future trajectories.



Jafar Mosavi/WeWorld Photography

> *"Children, when asked about their future, mostly share their wishes and desires: education, life in prosperity, becoming effective members of society. But observing the current situation, the path they are on is the contrary of their goals. I feel that their future goals will remain as a dream and will not come to reality. (...) Girls can study until the sixth class — up to thirteen years old. After that, there is no education allowed. No English or computer course is open to girls. If they are interested to continue education beyond sixth class, they should follow the Islamic centres led by the authorities, and the syllabus is provided in their favour. (...) Children are not safe in the community — not even from their own families. Economic hardship is the root of most risks: it pushes children into labour, unsafe migration, and away from education. (...) The only existing space where children feel safe and supported is in their parents' arms — if the family's economic condition is at least fair."*
> — child protection programme manager, Herat

Interviews from Balkh Province describe a related pattern in which economic pressure connects several risks affecting children. Child labour, child marriage, school dropout, and unsafe migration are described not as isolated problems but as consequences that may become linked within households experiencing severe financial pressure. In such circumstances, immediate economic needs can influence decisions about children's education, work, marriage, and movement, with potential consequences for longer-term opportunities.

> *"Children may not always describe the broader crisis directly, but many are aware of financial hardship, uncertainty, and family stress. Older children and adolescents appear more conscious of the challenges affecting their future. (...) Adolescent girls are forced into unwanted marriages due to financial troubles in the family. The authorities force unwanted dress codes and restrictions on education. Adolescent boys are forced to stop education and start working to hold a part of the family costs, or are pushed into unsafe migration. (...) Children reporting functional difficulties often feel hopeless and isolated in the community due to lack of awareness and support."*
> — child protection practitioner, Balkh Province

Across the interviews, practitioners describe manifestations of distress including anxiety, sadness, withdrawal, irritability, reduced concentration, and sleep difficulties. These observations are qualitative and should not be interpreted as prevalence estimates. They nevertheless point to the psychosocial dimension of prolonged insecurity and economic pressure, particularly where available support services are insufficient in coverage or capacity.

Climate-related pressures add another layer to this context. Afghanistan is highly vulnerable to drought and other climate-related hazards, while displacement and economic fragility reduce the resources available to households and institutions responding to them (IOM, 2025; UN News, 2026). Climate-related shocks therefore interact with existing vulnerabilities rather than operating as an entirely separate crisis.

Taken together, the available evidence suggests a context in which children's aspirations may remain present while the pathways through which those aspirations could be pursued become increasingly constrained. The central issue is not necessarily that children cease to imagine a future. Rather, the distance between what they want and the opportunities available to them may become increasingly difficult to bridge. This distinction matters: aspiration can persist even where the institutional and economic conditions required to realise it are severely restricted.



Lebanon

Lebanon illustrates a different configuration of compounded crisis. Rather than a single continuous emergency, the country has experienced a succession of major shocks, including economic collapse since 2019, the Beirut port explosion in 2020, renewed armed conflict and displacement, and continuing pressures on public services and household security. The country also hosts large refugee populations and faces significant climate-related pressures (World Bank, 2024; Sida, 2026; UNFCCC, 2025).

The available qualitative evidence comes from interviews with families affected by displacement. These accounts cannot be generalised to all children in Lebanon, but they provide insight into how repeated disruption may affect children's experience of home, routine, safety, and the future.

An interviewer reflection described a recurring concern: that children may grow up with repeated exposure to displacement, insecurity, and disruption to education and everyday routines, with consequences that extend beyond the immediate period of violence.

> *"My strongest hope is that the next generation of children in Lebanon will not grow up viewing conflict, displacement, and insecurity as normal parts of life. Children should not instinctively associate loud noises with airstrikes, wonder whether they will have to leave their homes again, or carry the emotional burden of repeated crises."*
> — interviewer reflection, June 2026



The interviews suggest that younger children may express the effects of disruption through changes in behaviour and routine. One parent described a five-year-old returning to behaviours he had previously outgrown after repeated displacement. The parent interpreted this as a response to the loss of familiar routines and the uncertainty of the surrounding environment.

> *"I accepted this regression because I understood that he was trying to cope with a situation that was overwhelming for him. We were not in our own home, our routines had been disrupted, and I felt that during that period he needed reassurance more than strict rules. (...) Even after the ceasefire and our return home, the fear remained with him. He became afraid to sleep alone or play by himself. Simple sounds — someone closing a door — can startle him and make him anxious."*
> — mother of a five-year-old, Lebanon

Another parent described how repeated insecurity had affected a child's relationship with home and place. The account suggests that displacement can alter the meaning of familiar environments, particularly when a place previously associated with belonging becomes associated with danger.

> *"She began associating safety with the place where we were displaced rather than the place where she was raised. (...) When the earthquake occurred in 2022, my immediate reaction was not to think that it was a natural disaster. I instinctively thought that a war had started. I immediately picked up my daughter and ran into the hallway."* — father of a ten-year-old, Lebanon

Among adolescents, the interviews suggest a different relationship to repeated crisis. One parent described a sixteen-year-old who referred to his generation as a **"war generation"** and who viewed the recurrence of conflict as part of his experience of life.

> *"He frequently says that his generation is a 'war generation' — he has already lived through two wars despite being only sixteen years old. He feels that conflict has become a recurring part of life and sometimes assumes that similar events will happen again."*
> — mother of a sixteen-year-old, Lebanon

This account should not be read as evidence that all adolescents in Lebanon share the same outlook. It does, however, illustrate a process relevant to the broader argument of this section: when major disruptions recur before families and institutions have fully recovered from previous shocks, expectations about the future may become shaped by the possibility of renewed disruption.

The interviews also highlight the importance of everyday protective systems. Schools were disrupted, relocated, or moved online; recreational opportunities became more limited; and some displaced families living outside collective shelters were described as less visible to humanitarian actors. Children reporting functional difficulties faced particular challenges where displacement disrupted routines and access to specialised support.

> *"Children living within collective shelters generally received support. But displaced families living outside shelters may be more vulnerable to being overlooked — particularly if they are staying with relatives or in rented accommodations and are less visible to service providers."*
> — mother of a five-year-old, Lebanon

The evidence therefore points to an important dimension of compounded crisis: the effects of disruption may continue after the immediate emergency has ended. Returning home does not necessarily restore previous routines, perceptions of safety, or access to services. For children, the consequences of displacement may extend into education, relationships, behaviour, and expectations about the future.

Lebanon consequently illustrates a different mechanism from Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, the evidence emphasises the interaction between institutional restrictions, economic pressure, and constrained access to opportunities. In Lebanon, the central pattern is cumulative disruption: successive shocks affecting systems that have had limited time or capacity to recover between crises. The two cases are therefore not equivalent. They illustrate different pathways through which overlapping crises may affect children's lives.

Taken together, the cases suggest that polycrisis should not be understood only in terms of the number or severity of crises affecting a population. The timing and sequence of shocks also matter. A new crisis may have different consequences when it affects a system with substantial protective capacity than when it arrives before the effects of a previous crisis have been addressed. In the latter situation, the consequences may accumulate across education, household security, psychosocial wellbeing, mobility, and access to protection.

Afghanistan and Lebanon therefore provide qualitative illustrations of the broader argument developed in this section: prolonged crisis can affect not only children's immediate safety but also the conditions through which future possibilities are formed. In both contexts, however, the evidence also cautions against treating children's futures as simply "lost" or "closed". Aspirations, adaptation, and forms of hope continue to coexist with severe constraint. The analytical question is therefore not whether children have a future to imagine, but how the conditions surrounding them shape the range of futures that can realistically be pursued.

2.6.
Safety and the Right to the Future

Highlights from this section

- 67% of children report that they can make free choices about their future. This proportion varies substantially across contexts: in Kenya, 55% report that they cannot, while in Burkina Faso the corresponding figure is 29%. A small proportion of children (1%) report that they do not think about their future at all.
- Children who report being listened to are more likely to report a sense of agency over their future. Where children report that they never share their opinions, future agency is substantially lower: 84% report "no" in Kenya, 80% in Bangladesh, and 100% in Palestine.
- Children reporting functional difficulties report the lowest levels of future agency and the highest levels of uncertainty. The pattern is reflected not only in lower proportions responding "yes", but also in higher proportions responding "maybe", suggesting that future possibilities may be experienced as more conditional or less secure.
- The solution space provides an important qualitative lens on how children relate to future change. Where children identify concrete pathways for action and name themselves or others as actors capable of producing change, future possibilities remain more visibly open. Where responses focus primarily on coping, avoidance, or immediate protection — or where few solutions are proposed — the range of change children appear able to imagine is more limited.
- Across the countries covered, future agency moves with the structural conditions captured by the Women's Sub-Index (r=0.42 across 23 countries) more than with children's own indicators or broader governance measures. This is a descriptive observation, not a test. It is consistent with — but does not establish — the possibility that children's future expectations are shaped partly through intergenerational pathways of inequality and opportunity.

The preceding sections have examined how children experience safety in the present: where they feel safe, what threatens that safety, and whether they believe they could seek support when needed. This section considers what these experiences may imply for how children relate to their futures.

The central premise is not that present safety determines future outcomes in a simple or linear way. Rather, the evidence suggests that children's experiences of protection, participation, and institutional responsiveness shape the conditions within which future possibilities are imagined and pursued. Where children experience repeated constraints on movement, voice, access to support, or opportunities to influence what happens around them, the range of futures they consider possible may also become narrower. Conversely, where children experience that adults listen, systems respond, and change can be produced through collective action, future agency may be more readily sustained.

> Where children experience repeated constraints on movement, voice, access to support, or opportunities to influence what happens around them, the range of futures they consider possible may also become narrower. Conversely, where children experience that adults listen, systems respond, and change can be produced through collective action, future agency may be more readily sustained.

The analysis therefore moves from asking whether children are safe in the present to examining how present conditions relate to children's perceptions of what can happen next. Four mechanisms structure this analysis:

1. **Future imagination**, understood through children's reported sense of agency over their own lives and their perceived ability to make choices about their futures.
2. **Participation**, referring to whether children experience that their views are heard and whether adults or institutions respond to what they say. Participation is considered here not only as a right in itself, but also as a process and a possible condition shaping children's sense that their actions can influence the world around them.
3. **The solution space**, referring to the range and nature of responses children propose when asked what should change and who should be responsible for bringing about that change. The analysis distinguishes between solutions oriented toward structural transformation, practical adaptation, immediate protection, and avoidance. These proposals do not provide a direct measure of children's psychological state or future prospects. They offer, rather, a qualitative window into the range of change children perceive as possible from within their current circumstances.
4. **Intergenerational transmission**, examining the relationship between children's future agency and the structural conditions affecting women in their broader social environment. The association with the Women's Sub-Index suggests that children's expectations of their own futures may be connected to wider intergenerational conditions of opportunity, equality, and constraint.

Together, these dimensions allow the analysis to examine the right to the future not as an abstract promise or a prediction of individual outcomes, but as the extent to which children experience their futures as open to choice, influence, and change. This distinction is important. A child may remain hopeful while having very limited practical options. Another may have access to formal opportunities but experience little influence over the conditions shaping their life. The analysis therefore considers both what children say about their futures and the conditions under which those futures are imagined.

2.6.1. The Capacity to Imagine the Future and the Role of Participation

Children were asked whether, when thinking about their future and their dreams, they feel able to make free choices about what they want to become. Across the full sample, 67% respond "yes", 17% "maybe", 10% "no", and 5% "don't know". A further 1% report that they do not think about their future at all.

Although small in proportion, this last response is analytically important because it points to a relationship with the future that differs from both uncertainty and perceived constraint. A child who responds "maybe" or "no" is still engaging with the question of future possibility. A child who reports not thinking about the future is expressing something different: the future is not currently functioning as a meaningful object of reflection within the terms of the question.

The highest proportions are recorded in Sweden (10%), Mali (8%), and Syria (7%). These contexts should not be interpreted through a single mechanism. In Sweden, the response may reflect a more present-oriented relationship to future planning among some adolescents, rather than an absence of opportunity. In Mali and Syria, by contrast, the finding appears in contexts characterised by prolonged instability and uncertainty, where planning horizons may be more difficult to sustain. The survey cannot establish why individual children report not thinking about the future, and the response should therefore not be treated as a direct measure of hopelessness or psychological foreclosure. It does, however, identify a small but important group for whom the future is not readily articulated as a space of personal choice.

The distribution of "no" responses shows a different pattern. Kenya records the highest proportion (55%), followed by Burkina Faso (29%), Benin (24%), Palestine (17%), Bangladesh (16%), Tanzania (15%), and Senegal (13%). These are not necessarily the countries with the lowest structural performance in the World Index. The finding instead suggests that future agency is shaped by conditions that are not captured by structural performance alone. Children's sense that they can make choices about their futures may depend on the interaction between safety, family circumstances, access to education, economic conditions, social expectations, and whether the institutions around them appear to offer credible pathways forward.

Participation and the experience of agency

Participation is one possible pathway through which children may develop a sense that their actions can influence what happens around them — at home, in school, in the community, and in decisions taken by others that affect them. However, the relationship should not be understood as automatic or causal. When children experience that their views are listened to and that what they say can contribute to visible change, this may provide concrete evidence that their actions have consequences. Conversely, repeated experiences of being ignored may contribute to the perception that expressing an opinion does not alter outcomes (Hart, 1992; Lundy, 2007; Tisdall et al., 2008; Schweiger, 2024).

These possibilities are important, but they should be distinguished from what the present data directly measure. The survey item captures how frequently children report sharing their opinions on matters that affect them. It does not establish whether those opinions are taken seriously, whether adults respond, or whether children experience a clear relationship between speaking and subsequent change. For this reason, **the relationship between participation and future agency is best understood as an association between two related but distinct dimensions of children's experience.**

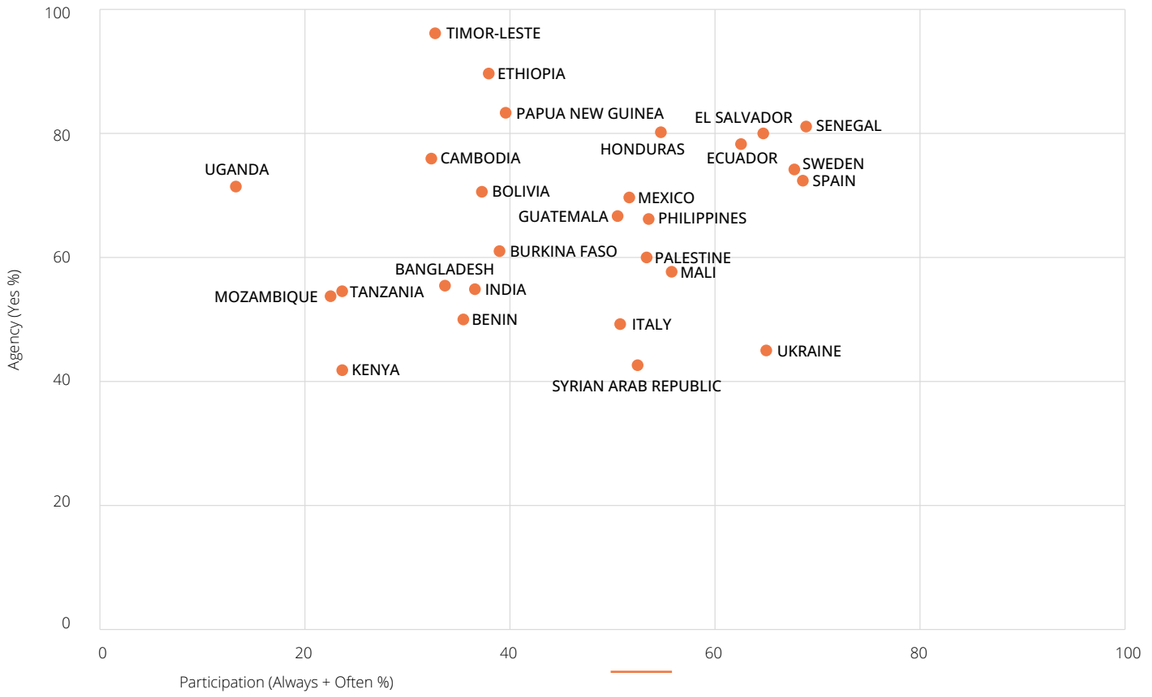
Children who report more frequent expression of their opinions may, in some contexts, also report greater agency over their futures. But the relationship is likely to depend on what happens after children speak.

Across the 27 countries covered by the consultation, participation — measured as the share reporting that they share their opinions "always" or "often" — and perceived future agency — measured as the share responding "yes" — barely move together (r=0.17). The observation is also fragile: excluding any single country moves the coefficient between 0.08 and 0.26. Nothing should be built on it[13].

This is consistent with the qualification set out above rather than in tension with it. The survey item measures how frequently children report expressing their views. It does not measure whether those views are received, acted upon, or seen to produce change. If, as the participation literature suggests, it is the response to a child's voice rather than the frequency of it that shapes a sense of agency, then a weak and unstable relationship between the two measures across countries is what should be expected. The absence of a visible association is therefore an observation about the limits of the available measure, not about the irrelevance of participation.

Figure 28

Participation and future agency - by country



13 Computed across the 27 consultation countries from the country table reproduced below. The range given is the full spread of the coefficient when each country in turn is excluded; the two extremes are produced by Kenya and Timor-Leste.

A MEASUREMENT NOTE ON WHAT THE PARTICIPATION ITEM CAPTURES

The survey item used in this consultation asks children how often they share their opinions on matters that affect them — "always," "often," "sometimes," or "rarely/never." This measures self-reported frequency of expression, not participation in a fuller sense. Participation, as understood in the child rights literature, encompasses not only the act of speaking but the conditions under which speech is received, taken seriously, and leads to visible response (Lundy, 2007; Lansdown, 2011; Hart, 1992). The survey item captures the first element — whether children speak — but cannot distinguish between expression that is consequential and expression that is not.

This distinction matters for how the data should be read. A child who reports sharing their opinions "often" in a context where those opinions are routinely ignored is not participating in the sense that produces agency. A child who shares opinions "sometimes" in a context where each instance leads to visible change may be accumulating more participatory experience than the frequency score suggests. The item therefore likely underestimates participation quality in responsive contexts and overestimates it in procedural ones.

The divergences documented in this section — Uganda (13.3% participation, 71% agency), Ukraine (65% participation, 45% agency) — are partly explicable through this lens: what the item measures is not equivalent across contexts, because the relationship between expression and consequence differs. This does not invalidate the participation data, but it reinforces the argument made throughout this section: that frequency of expression is a proxy for participation, not its direct measure, and that the conditions under which expression occurs determine whether it functions as a pathway to agency or not.

The country-level distribution illustrates why the relationship cannot be reduced to a simple gradient. Ukraine records relatively high participation (65%) but comparatively low reported agency (45%). El Salvador has a similar level of participation (64.7%) but substantially higher agency (80%). Bangladesh and Timor-Leste also report comparable levels of participation — 33.7% and 32.7%, respectively — but markedly different levels of agency, at 55% and 96%. Uganda presents the opposite configuration: only 13.3% report sharing their opinions "always" or "often", while 71% report that they can make free choices about their future.

These differences indicate that frequency of expression does not have the same meaning in every context. The same reported level of participation may occur within very different relationships between children, families, institutions, and decision-makers. A child who speaks frequently but experiences no response may have a different experience from a child who speaks less often but whose views are consistently taken seriously.

The data therefore point to several possible configurations[14].

- **participation and future agency may reinforce one another;**
- **future agency may remain relatively high despite limited reported participation;**
- **frequent expression may coexist with relatively low perceived agency.**

14 A further interpretive consideration applies to how participation is measured and what it captures in this dataset. The consultation was conducted through ChildFund Alliance programme areas, and several Alliance members have invested specifically in child participation as a programmatic objective. This means that participation rates in some contexts may partly reflect programme investment — contexts where children have been actively supported to share their views, through structured mechanisms built into Alliance programming — rather than general community or cultural norms around children's voice. Where such investment has been sustained, children may have accumulated more experience of participation producing visible outcomes, which would strengthen the link between participation and agency. Where participation programming has been more limited, or more procedural than substantive, the link may be weaker. It is also important to note that participation is understood differently across cultural and institutional contexts, and the survey item — asking whether children share their opinions "always," "often," "sometimes," or "rarely/never" — captures this diversity only partially. In some contexts, participation is primarily understood within the family; in others, it refers to school-based mechanisms; in others, to community processes. The same reported frequency of sharing opinions may therefore reflect very different relational dynamics and very different relationships between voice and consequence. Uganda's relatively high agency despite very low reported participation (13.3%) may reflect, in part, that children's sense of future possibility is sustained through family and community relationships rather than through the kind of participation channels the survey item primarily evokes.

These configurations are consistent with the possibility that participation is one factor among several shaping children's relationship to their futures. Future agency may also be influenced by family relationships, educational opportunities, cultural expectations, economic conditions, safety, and children's previous experiences of whether change is possible. The qualitative material illustrates this distinction:

> *"Helping our parents with household work in our free time makes them more willing to listen to us and support what we ask for."* — a child in Timor-Leste

Here, being heard appears to be experienced as conditional on fulfilling expectations within the family. The child is describing a relationship in which voice and responsiveness are connected, but not necessarily on equal terms.

> *"I hope that the adults will also listen."* — a girl of 10 in the Philippines

The statement frames being heard not as an established condition but as something still to be achieved. Together, these accounts illustrate that participation is experienced through relationships, expectations, and perceived responsiveness, not simply through the frequency with which children report speaking.

Across the full sample, 46% of children report sharing their opinions "always" or "often", 29% "sometimes", and 24% "rarely" or "never". Participation is therefore neither universal nor absent. It is distributed along a gradient, and that gradient does not map neatly onto national income, governance, or overall World Index performance. Countries with relatively low structural scores may report relatively high levels of children's expression, while stronger formal systems may coexist with lower reported participation.

This suggests that the frequency with which children report expressing their opinions is shaped by a combination of relational norms, family practices, institutional behaviour, and prior experience. Formal systems may create opportunities for participation, but they do not guarantee that children will use them or experience them as meaningful. Conversely, participation may occur through informal relationships even where formal mechanisms are weak.

The relationship between participation and agency is therefore better understood as a gradient with multiple pathways than as a single linear mechanism. Children who report sharing their opinions "sometimes" may occupy an intermediate position: they are not wholly excluded from expression, but neither do they consistently experience their voices as part of decision-making. This may help explain why uncertainty — the "maybe" response to future agency — is particularly important analytically. It can represent a future that is neither clearly open nor clearly closed.

The data also reveal an important asymmetry. High participation does not guarantee high future agency. The examples of Ukraine and Italy demonstrate that frequent expression can coexist with relatively limited perceptions of personal choice. At the same time, very low participation may reduce opportunities for children to experience their own views as consequential. Participation therefore appears less as a direct determinant of agency than as one of the conditions through which experiences of influence may be formed.

This distinction also highlights the risks of extractive participation. When children's views are repeatedly collected without visible response, participation may fail to strengthen a sense of influence. In some circumstances, it may even reinforce the perception that speaking has little effect. This is why the quality and responsiveness of participation matter as much as the existence of opportunities to speak (Hart, 1992; Tisdall et al., 2008; Schweiger, 2024; Bakhtiar et al., 2023).

The final implication is therefore not that participation automatically produces future agency. Rather, the data suggest that **the experience of having a voice and the experience of being able to influence outcomes are related but distinct**. The connection between them depends on the social and institutional conditions in which participation occurs.

> *"You need to listen to children and not assume they don't have a valid point just because they're younger."* — a girl in Italy

This statement captures the central issue. The right to participate is not exhausted by the opportunity to speak. Its significance for future agency depends, at least in part, on whether children experience their views as having weight in the relationships and systems that shape their lives.

AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

DISABILITY

Disability is the most consistent source of inequality observed across the participatory data. Across multiple contexts, children reporting functional difficulties report lower levels of participation and lower levels of perceived agency over their futures. In Bangladesh, for example, children reporting functional difficulties are disproportionately represented among those reporting that they share their opinions "rarely" (42.9%) or "sometimes" (28.6%), while children without disabilities are more evenly distributed across the participation categories and more likely to report frequent expression of their views. Similar patterns appear in Burkina Faso, Mozambique, and Tanzania, although the size and distribution of the differences vary across contexts. The differences are even more pronounced in reported future agency. In Bangladesh, 58.1% of children without disabilities report that they can make free choices about their future, compared with 14.3% of children reporting functional difficulties. In Kenya, children reporting functional difficulties are more likely to respond "no" than "yes", reversing the distribution observed among children without disabilities. In Palestine, the majority "yes" response among children without disabilities shifts towards a predominance of "no" among children reporting functional difficulties. Children reporting functional difficulties may face both fewer opportunities to express their views consistently and fewer conditions in which participation is experienced as meaningful or consequential. The data cannot establish that lower participation directly causes lower future agency. They do, however, show that the two forms of disadvantage frequently occur together.

The pattern is not uniform across all contexts. In Cambodia, for example, children reporting functional difficulties report relatively high levels of "always" participation, without a corresponding pattern of stronger or more stable future agency. This divergence is important as it reinforces the distinction between the opportunity to express an opinion and the experience of having influence. Participation, even when frequent, does not necessarily produce a stronger sense of agency if the surrounding social and institutional conditions do not make children's views consequential.

GENDER

Gender differences are more variable and context-dependent. Girls report higher levels of participation in some countries. In Ecuador, for example, 42.3% of girls report sharing their opinions "always", compared with 26.0% of boys. In El Salvador, girls also report higher levels of frequent participation, while in other contexts the differences are smaller or distributed differently across response categories. The patterns in future agency are similarly heterogeneous. In Italy, boys report higher levels of agency than girls (57.1% compared with 40.6%). In Ethiopia, the pattern is reversed, with girls reporting higher agency than boys. In Kenya, both girls and boys report relatively low levels of agency, with a comparatively limited gender difference. These findings do not support a single cross-national pattern in which one gender consistently experiences either greater participation or greater future agency. Rather, gender appears to interact with local social norms, expectations, family relationships, institutional practices, and exposure to different forms of constraint and opportunity. This contrasts with the more consistent pattern observed in relation to disability. The difference should not be interpreted as meaning that gender is less important. Rather, gender inequality appears to operate through more context-specific pathways, producing different configurations of participation and agency depending on the social environment in which children live.

> When children's views are repeatedly collected without visible response, participation may fail to strengthen a sense of influence. In some circumstances, it may even reinforce the perception that speaking has little effect. This is why the quality and responsiveness of participation matter as much as the existence of opportunities to speak.

THE BIGGER PICTURE: LINKING PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH WITH THE WORLD INDEX

The relationship between children's future agency and the structural conditions around them extends beyond the immediate participatory environment. The World Index provides one way of examining whether children's perceptions are associated with broader intergenerational conditions.

The Women's Sub-Index has a global average of 58.7, compared with 70.5 for the Children's Sub-Index. The largest gaps within the Women's Sub-Index include women's education (D12, 37.3), participation and decision-making (D14, 60.1), and violence against women (D15, 61.7). These dimensions describe structural conditions that can shape the environments in which children grow up, although the Index cannot establish how those conditions affect individual children in particular contexts.

Across the 23 consultation countries ranked in the Index, girls' reported future agency moves with the Women's Sub-Index (r=0.42) more than with the Context Sub-Index (r=0.15), the Children's Sub-Index (r=0.14), Children's Education (D7, r=0.05) or Children's Human Capital (D8, r=0.001). These are descriptive observations across a small and fixed set of countries: the ordering between them is not a ranking of strength, and no weight is placed on it in the recommendations. The pattern is nonetheless worth recording, because it points in the same direction as the qualitative material and the wider literature — **girls' perceptions of their future possibilities may be bound up more closely with the structural conditions affecting women than with aggregate child-specific indicators**. Several pathways may plausibly contribute, including the distribution of care responsibilities, household economic security, access to resources, exposure to violence, and the opportunities available to women within families and communities (Grépin & Bharadwaj, 2015; Smith et al., 2003; Nketiah-Amponsah et al., 2024).

The data do not demonstrate a single mechanism of intergenerational transmission, nor do they imply that women's structural position determines children's future agency. The association is better understood as evidence that children's expectations of their own futures may be embedded in wider social environments shaped by gender inequality and the opportunities available to the women around them.

The right to the future must therefore be understood not only through the opportunities formally available to children, but also through the wider social conditions that shape whether those opportunities can be accessed, sustained, and expanded. Children's future agency is formed within families, communities, institutions, and social systems. The structural position of women is one part of that environment — an important one, but not a single or deterministic explanation of children's futures.

These patterns indicate that participation is not a uniform condition but a stratified process. Some children are more likely than others to have regular opportunities to express their views. They are also more likely to experience different consequences when they do so.

Two related forms of inequality are visible:

- **Unequal access to participation:** some groups are more likely to be concentrated in the "rarely" or "sometimes" categories.
- **Unequal experience of influence:** even when children report participating, the relationship between expressing a view and feeling able to influence the future may differ substantially.

These patterns help explain why the overall relationship between participation and future agency is modest at the aggregate level. The relationship is shaped not only by differences between countries, but also by inequalities within them. Participation therefore should not be understood as a uniformly enabling condition. Its significance depends on who is able to participate, in what circumstances, how their views are received, and whether children experience any connection between expression and influence.

Intersectional inequalities consequently affect not only whether children participate, but also the conditions under which participation can become meaningful. Disability shows the clearest and most consistent pattern of disadvantage in the dataset. Gender differences are more context-dependent Together, these findings suggest that the relationship between participation and the right to the future is shaped by both the opportunity to speak and the social conditions that determine whether speaking can plausibly be experienced as consequential.

2.6.2. The Solution Space: What Children Propose, and What It May Reveal

If participation data provide an indication of how frequently children report expressing their views, the Safety Mapping exercises offer a different kind of evidence: they show what children propose when asked what should change and who should be involved. These proposals provide an important, though necessarily indirect, way of examining how children understand the relationship between present conditions and possible futures.

A proposed solution may contain several layers of information at once. It may indicate how a child understands a problem, which actors they consider capable of responding, and what forms of change appear imaginable within their circumstances. A proposal for improved drainage, for example, identifies a concrete environmental risk and assumes that the problem can be addressed through infrastructure. A proposal for greater participation in decision-making implies a different diagnosis: that safety is linked to governance, recognition, and voice. A statement such as "better not to go out" does not necessarily constitute a solution in the conventional sense, but it may indicate that the available response to risk has shifted from changing the environment to restricting one's own movement within it.



Raccontami/World Photography

The analytical value of these proposals therefore lies not in treating them as direct measures of children's future orientation, but in examining the range of possible responses that children articulate. This section refers to that range as the solution space. The term is used descriptively: it captures the breadth and type of changes that children identify as possible, rather than measuring a single psychological or social characteristic.

This distinction is important. A narrow solution space does not necessarily mean that children lack imagination, hope, or political awareness. Children may propose limited interventions because the question posed to them concerns a specific safety problem, because the participatory setting constrains what they feel comfortable saying, or because they have learned from experience that certain forms of change are more likely to be achievable than others. Conversely, the presence of broad or structural proposals does not demonstrate that children possess greater agency, nor that these proposals will produce change. **The solution space should therefore be understood as evidence about the conditions under which children formulate possible responses to the challenges identified, not as a direct measure of their internal capacity to imagine the future**[15].

15 Some methodological limitations should be mentioned. First, the Safety Mapping sessions differed in size, composition, facilitation, and the extent to which children may have felt able to express themselves within the research setting. An apparently contracted solution space may therefore reflect a genuine narrowing of perceived possibilities, but it may also partly reflect the conditions of the session itself. The absence of a proposal cannot automatically be interpreted as evidence that children do not imagine alternatives. Similarly, the presence of a proposal does not establish that the child considers it realistic or achievable. Second, the categories used below—structural proposals, mitigation, containment and avoidance, and silence or non-disclosure—were developed inductively from the material collected. They are an interpretive framework for organising recurring patterns in the data, not a validated measurement instrument. The comparisons that follow should therefore be understood as analytically grounded interpretations rather than precise country-level measurements of future agency. A further limitation concerns age composition. The average age profile of Safety Mapping sessions varies across countries. Younger children may be more likely to formulate concrete proposals relating to immediate environments, while older children may be more likely to refer to institutions, governance, or collective action. This means that differences between countries cannot be attributed to crisis conditions alone. Syria and Ukraine, for example, have relatively young average age profiles, while Ecuador and Italy have older ones. Age may therefore contribute to differences in the breadth or abstraction of proposals. At the same time, age does not appear sufficient to explain the entire pattern. Syria and Ukraine have closely comparable average age profiles but produce substantially different configurations of proposals. Italy, with an intermediate age profile, also illustrates a pattern that cannot readily be reduced to age: children may identify problems with considerable analytical precision while simultaneously expressing scepticism that proposed changes will be implemented. Age composition should therefore be treated as a relevant confounding factor, but not as a complete explanation of the observed differences.

A typology of solution spaces

Across the Safety Mapping material, four broad configurations recur:

SOLUTION SPACE	TYPICAL FORMS OF PROPOSAL	POSSIBLE INTERPRETATION
Broad and structural	Community organisation, institutional accountability, political participation	Children identify change as extending beyond immediate risk management
Active but adaptive	Infrastructure, lighting, safer routes, adult support	Problems are understood as changeable, but solutions remain focused on maintaining safety
Restricted and protective	Guards, fences, accompaniment, restrictions on movement	The available response increasingly centres on controlling exposure to risk
Minimal or non-articulated	Avoidance, silence, "stay inside", "do not go there"	The range of responses that children articulate is highly limited

These categories should not be read as a hierarchy of children's abilities. Nor do they necessarily represent a linear progression from "good" to "bad" conditions. A child who proposes a fence around a dangerous area may be demonstrating a highly concrete and realistic understanding of what can reduce risk. A structural proposal may be politically ambitious but practically unattainable. **The analytical question is therefore not simply whether proposals are "better" or "worse," but what kinds of change children regard as available, and where they locate responsibility for bringing that change about.**

This second dimension—the distribution of responsibility—is particularly important. Across the Safety Mapping exercises, children identify parents, caregivers, teachers, community leaders, local authorities, NGOs, police, and other institutions in different combinations. The presence or absence of children themselves within these actor maps provides a further indication of how agency is distributed in their accounts.

This should nevertheless be interpreted cautiously. Children may not name themselves as actors because the exercise asks who should address a problem, because adult responsibility is objectively greater in relation to certain risks, or because children understand their own role as collective rather than individual. The absence of children from an actor map therefore cannot be treated as proof of a lack of agency. It is better understood as one element in a broader pattern concerning where responsibility for change is imagined to lie.

Different solution spaces under different conditions

Ecuador presents one of the broadest solution spaces in the dataset. Children propose community organisation, institutional accountability, youth participation, and the recovery of public spaces. Their proposals extend beyond immediate protection and include demands for changes in how decisions are made. These proposals do not demonstrate that children in these contexts possess greater agency in any simple sense. They do, however, show that the problems they identify can be connected to institutional arrangements and that collective or political responses remain part of the range of possibilities they articulate.

El Salvador shows a similar pattern. The reference to ADESCO is significant not because it represents a generic demand for participation, but because it identifies a specific local institution and calls for a change in how it operates. The proposal is therefore both participatory and institutional: children identify a mechanism through which their views could become part of decision-making.

> *"We would like ADESCO, apart from taking into account the opinion of adults, to also consult children on issues such as activities aimed at children, leisure, or any other topic. Carrying out activities or dynamics to collect opinions."*
> — a boy of 17 in El Salvador

> *"They should take into account the safety of everyone, not just adults. They should know how to listen to children."*
> — a girl of 18 in El Salvador

Italy presents a different configuration. Children may identify problems with considerable precision and propose concrete responses, but these proposals are sometimes accompanied by explicit scepticism about whether institutions will respond:

> *"I don't think the school will ever change — who listens to us?"*
> — a boy of 11 in Italy

The relevant contrast here is not between children who can and cannot analyse problems. Rather, it concerns the relationship between identifying a possible solution and expecting that the solution will produce an outcome. In this sense, a solution space can remain intellectually present while becoming practically weakened. Children may know what could change while no longer expecting that their proposals will matter. Spain provides an intermediate example. Here formal participation structures exist — the point is not their absence, but that they do not always translate into a child's sense of being heard:

> *"Organise a protest so they listen to us at school."*
> — a girl of 9 in Spain

The proposal combines dissatisfaction with an attempt to identify a mechanism through which the former might produce a response. It therefore illustrates a form of agency that is neither passive nor necessarily institutionally embedded: the child identifies a problem, a responsible audience, and a collective strategy for seeking recognition.

The contrast with Syria is sharper. Here, proposals are predominantly concerned with immediate protection: avoiding dangerous areas, securing abandoned buildings, fencing hazardous spaces, and ensuring that children are accompanied. Such proposals are not devoid of agency. They reflect detailed risk recognition and practical knowledge about how to reduce exposure to danger. What appears more limited is the range of changes that children articulate beyond immediate survival and protection. Ukraine occupies a different position. Despite ongoing armed conflict, children continue to formulate proposals, but these proposals are strongly organised around protection and continuity:

> *"Before the war I used to go to the swimming pool — now it's closed."*
> — a boy of 11 in Ukraine

> *"Create safer environments for children and adolescents to communicate with. Build modern shelters."*
> — a boy of 12 in Ukraine

The solution space therefore remains active, but the conditions of conflict shape what change means. Social life, recreation, and communication are not abandoned as aspirations, but they are increasingly articulated through the need for protection. Bangladesh and Benin illustrate a more mitigation-oriented configuration:

> *"In the toilet area, there needs to be proper light at night."*
> — a girl of 9 in Bangladesh

> *"Install electricity poles in the school if possible."* — a girl of 15 in Benin

These proposals are concrete and externally directed. They do not necessarily indicate a restricted future orientation. Rather, they suggest that children identify specific environmental conditions that could be changed through relatively bounded interventions.

The differences across these cases therefore concern less the presence or absence of "solutions" than their scope, institutional orientation, and implied theory of change. Some children propose changes to immediate environments. Others identify institutional failures or collective processes. In contexts of severe and prolonged insecurity, proposals may increasingly focus on reducing exposure rather than transforming underlying conditions. In still other settings, children may continue to identify possible changes but express little confidence that these changes will occur.

Who can act?

The distribution of actors identified in the Safety Mapping exercises provides a second perspective on the solution space. Parents and caregivers appear consistently across contexts. This reflects both their central role in children's everyday lives and the fact that many safety problems are experienced through relationships of care and supervision. Local authorities are more visible where children encounter them as functioning or accessible actors. NGOs are particularly likely to be named where they are embedded in children's everyday environments. Police and security actors tend to appear more often in relation to containment and control.

The most difficult pattern to interpret concerns the extent to which children include themselves as actors. In Ecuador and El Salvador, children explicitly position themselves within processes of collective or institutional change. In other contexts, responsibility is located almost entirely in adults, institutions, or external organisations. **This difference may matter, but it should not be overstated. Children may reasonably identify adults or institutions as primarily responsible for addressing structural risks. The fact that children do not name themselves as responsible for repairing infrastructure, ending armed conflict, or reforming governance should not be interpreted as a lack of agency. The more relevant question is whether children appear to see themselves as capable of influencing at least some of the conditions that affect them**[16]**.**

Read in this way, the actor maps suggest a continuum of perceived influence. In some contexts, children appear to understand themselves as participants in collective processes of change. In others, they identify problems and solutions but locate the capacity to act almost entirely outside themselves. In still others, the range of actors itself becomes narrower, with responsibility concentrated within the family or in immediate survival networks.

The following table summarises these patterns as an interpretive framework rather than a ranking of countries:

Figure 29

Solutions, actors, and future logic by country – Safety Mapping

The final column is an interpretive synthesis by the research team, drawn from recurring patterns across each country's Safety Mapping sessions. Unlike the preceding columns, which record the solution types and actors that children named, it is a reading of those materials rather than a statement made by the children themselves. The categories describe the material collected in each programme context and should not be read as characterisations of the children of a country, still less as national generalisations, given the small and non-representative nature of each group.

COUNTRY	DOMINANT SOLUTION TYPES	ACTORS IDENTIFIED	INTERPRETIVE READING
Bangladesh	Mitigation (drains, lighting, bridges); relational (adult supervision near WASH and roads)	Camp authorities; local government; NGOs	Proposals directed almost entirely to external institutions (camp authorities, local government, NGOs) rather than to community or child action.
Benin	Containment (guards, fencing); relational (adult supervision on roads); some structural interventions	Village chiefs; municipal authorities; police; parents	Safety through social order. Multi-layered actor system blending traditional authority, formal state, and family.
Bolivia	Containment via policing; minimal mitigation; almost no structural proposals	Police; government; security services	Proposals handed upward to authority; few community-level or child-led solutions proposed.
Burkina Faso	Structural (bridges, fences, access roads); relational (volunteers, adult accompaniment); containment in conflict-adjacent zones	Local authorities; VDP community defence groups; parents; NGOs	Future at risk but still rebuildable. High territorial literacy — children identify specific public goods and responsible actors.
Cambodia	Mitigation (fences, lights, drainage); technical fixes	School authorities; local government; community adults	Continuity through technical adaptation. Children believe risk can be managed if infrastructure is adjusted.
Ecuador	Structural/political (youth spaces, community organisation, safe routes); relational (collective protection)	Community leaders; municipal authorities; NGOs; children and youth themselves	Future claimable through collective action. Most analytically complex solution space — children name governance failures and position themselves as actors.
El Salvador	Structural (youth participation spaces, community safety planning); relational (adults listening); some containment	Municipal authorities; community organisations; schools; children and adolescents	Protection as a condition for democratic participation. Adolescents link safety directly to civic voice.
India	Mitigation and structural (road design, alcohol regulation, accessibility); equity-aware proposals	School authorities; local government; parents	Articulated equity awareness — children explicitly reference disability and accessibility and propose regulatory interventions.
Italy	Relational (teachers paying attention, adults listening); minimal structural proposals	Teachers; parents; local institutions (rarely explicitly trusted)	Children articulate problems clearly but scale down solutions, expressing a strong perception that institutions are unresponsive.
Kenya	Mitigation (bridges, lighting); relational (parent supervision, adult accompaniment)	Parents; local authorities; community elders	Continuity through adaptation, not political change. Solutions are practical and local.
Mali	Avoidance and survival strategies; minimal mitigation; relational support within family	Parents; occasionally NGOs	Few structural or forward-looking proposals; solutions centre on getting through immediate situations. The near-absence of structural proposals is itself the observation.
Papua New Guinea	Mitigation; relational (community supervision, adults nearby)	Parents; community leaders; local authorities	Adaptive, community-anchored proposals. Moderate solution space.
Philippines	Relational and mitigation; school as key protective space	Teachers; parents; community adults	Strong school-as-safe-harbour pattern. Future linked to continuity of education.
Senegal	Mitigation (market reorganisation, lighting); relational (community supervision)	Municipal authorities; community groups; parents	Safety as collective negotiation. Community and local government named as co-responsible.
Spain	Relational (trusted adults, responsive institutions); emotional safety proposals	Teachers; parents; peers; local institutions	Safety defined by social pressure and institutional responsiveness. Future linked to being heard rather than being physically protected.
Syria	Avoidance/defensive (stay away, mark danger, escort children); no structural rebuilding proposals	Parents; teachers; local authorities only for control	Proposals centre on avoidance and marking danger rather than on changing or rebuilding environments.
Tanzania	Relational (adults staying close, assisting mobility); mitigation (water point security)	Parents; teachers; government (abstract)	Solutions rely heavily on adult presence and proximity to care; a strongly gendered pattern, with girls especially relying on adult accompaniment.
Timor-Leste	Mitigation (warning signs, infrastructure); relational (family accompaniment); environmental risk management	Parents; teachers; community adults	Climate risk dominant. Practical, adaptive proposals — future requires constant maintenance.
Uganda	Relational and containment (night-time risk management); community supervision	Community leaders; parents; local authorities	High perceived help-seeking capacity but low participation. Protective systems function but children's own voice is limited.
Ukraine	Containment and avoidance; minimal mitigation (shelters, warning signs)	Authorities (for coordination); parents and caregivers	Risk literacy is high; proposals focus on coping within current conditions rather than on changing them.

The table should therefore not be read as establishing that one country has a greater "right to the future" than another. It summarises the different ways in which children describe the relationship between present insecurity and possible action.

The solution space and the right to the future

Taken together, the Safety Mapping findings suggest that the range of solutions children articulate may provide useful evidence about the conditions under which the future is experienced as open, constrained, or difficult to influence. Where children identify multiple levels of action—individual, relational, community, and institutional—the future appears to be represented as containing more than one possible pathway. Where proposals focus almost exclusively on adaptation and immediate protection, the future remains imaginable but is organised around the maintenance of safety. Where avoidance becomes the dominant response, the range of action narrows further. Where children are unable or unwilling to articulate alternatives, it becomes more difficult to determine whether the future is being actively imagined or simply deferred.

The key analytical point is therefore not that a particular type of proposal proves the existence or absence of future agency. Rather, **the distribution of proposals, actors, and expectations provides a way of observing how children relate present conditions to possible change**.

This also helps explain why the solution space may reveal dimensions of the right to the future that are not captured by direct questions about future agency. **A child may answer that they can freely choose what they want to become while simultaneously proposing only highly constrained changes to their immediate environment. Conversely, a child may report uncertainty about their own future while still identifying collective or institutional changes that they believe should occur. Future agency is therefore not a single, internally consistent condition. Rather, it may vary across different domains of children's lives.**

16 This connects to the principle of the child's evolving capacities, under which capacity to participate in decisions develops with age and experience.

The solution space should consequently be treated as a complementary form of evidence. It does not measure children's future orientation directly, and it cannot establish causal relationships between crisis conditions and the content of children's proposals. Its value lies elsewhere: in making visible the practical and political boundaries within which children formulate possible responses.

From this perspective, the most significant signal is not simply whether children propose solutions, but what kind of relationship to change those proposals imply. Are children attempting to transform conditions, adapt to them, contain exposure to them, or avoid them? Do they identify only external actors, or do they also see themselves as having some capacity to influence what happens? And do they express confidence that proposed changes could produce an effect?

These questions point toward a more cautious formulation of the central argument. The solution space is not a direct diagnostic of the right to the future. It is an **interpretive window into the perceived availability of change**. Where children can identify problems, possible responses, responsible actors, and some role for themselves, the future appears to retain a greater degree of practical openness. Where the available responses narrow to protection, avoidance, or silence, this may indicate that the conditions for imagining and acting upon alternative futures have become more constrained. **The distinction matters because children can retain hope under extremely difficult conditions, and can lose confidence in change within comparatively stable environments. The right to the future is therefore not reducible either to objective crisis exposure or to a child's stated optimism.** The Safety Mapping data suggest that it also concerns whether children can see **routes between the present and a different future**, and whether those routes appear to contain actors—including, potentially, themselves—capable of moving along them.

2.6.3. What Children Say Needs to Change

The preceding section drew on the Safety Mapping data to examine what children propose as solutions, and what those proposals reveal about their relationship to the future. This section turns to the final question administered through the survey, which asked children to describe, in their own words, what would make them feel safe, cared for, and treated fairly in their community.

The two sources capture different dimensions of children's experience. The Safety Mapping exercises place children in relation to particular spaces, risks, actors, and possible interventions. They therefore show how children navigate their environments and where they locate the possibility of change. The survey question is less spatially specific. It asks children to identify, at a more general level, the conditions they regard as necessary for safety to exist in the first place. The distinction matters. A child may propose lighting a road, repairing a bridge, or increasing adult supervision in a Safety Mapping exercise, while describing safety in the survey through love, respect, education, or being listened to. These are not competing accounts of what safety means. Rather, they operate at different levels: one identifies what needs to change in a particular environment; the other identifies the relational and structural conditions that make an environment feel safe and fair.

Across the 27 countries, children's responses converge around a relatively consistent set of conditions. The most frequently identified themes are care and supportive relationships, education and the school environment, protection from harm, respect and fair treatment, and the community environment. Voice and participation appear less frequently, while basic needs are mentioned comparatively rarely as a standalone category. This distribution should not be read as indicating that children regard food, health, or material security as unimportant. Rather, it suggests that children often articulate safety through the relationships and environments in which material conditions are experienced. Basic needs may therefore be embedded in broader accounts of care, family support, and community responsibility rather than expressed as separate demands.



- **Care and supportive relationships (n=374)** are the most prominent themes. Children describe being loved, cared for, and supported as a foundational condition of safety. Care is rarely presented simply as a service that can be delivered through a programme. Instead, it is described as a relational environment: the presence of adults who protect, listen, encourage, and respond. The theme is most visible in the Philippines (42%), India (35%), Ethiopia (31%), Ukraine (31%), El Salvador (30%), and Guatemala (28%). These contexts differ substantially in terms of conflict exposure, institutional strength, and economic conditions. The fact that care appears prominently across such different settings suggests that the need for supportive relationships cannot be reduced to deprivation or crisis intensity. It appears instead to be a more general condition through which children experience safety.

Girls emphasise this theme more frequently than boys (19% compared with 13%), a difference consistent with the broader pattern in which girls place greater emphasis on relational conditions of care and support.

> *"Children feel safe when they receive love and attention from their parents, support from teachers, protection from authorities, and respect from community members. Educational activities, safe play spaces and awareness-raising on children's rights also contribute to their well-being."* — a girl in Benin

The response is notable because it does not locate safety in a single relationship or institution. Family, school, authorities, and the wider community are all included within the child's account of protection. A similar understanding appears in El Salvador:

> *"The children in my community feel safe and well-treated when they receive love and support from their family, respect at school, and live in an environment where there are rules of coexistence, safe spaces to play, and responsible adults who protect their rights."* — a girl in El Salvador

Here, safety is constructed through the interaction of relational, institutional, and environmental conditions. The child does not describe these as separate domains. They form a single ecology of protection.

Other responses make the relational nature of safety even more explicit. A boy in Benin described safety primarily through proximity to adults:

> *"What helps the children in my community feel safe is when they are with the grown-ups, because it is the adults who protect the children. What helps children to be treated well and respected is to respect the grown-ups and do what people want — helping mom and dad with work around the house and in the field."*
> — a boy in Benin

This response also introduces an important qualification. The relationship of protection is not necessarily experienced as symmetrical. Children may understand safety as dependent on adult protection while simultaneously understanding their own position within a hierarchy of responsibility and obedience. The relational conditions children describe as protective can therefore also be shaped by unequal expectations concerning what children owe to adults.

In Mali, the same emphasis on adult care appears in a more institutionalised form:

> *"There are many people here who look after the children, especially in the child-friendly space."* — a girl in Mali

In the Philippines, by contrast, care is linked to the protection of children's curiosity and initiative:

> *"I think children can feel safer if we give them reassurance and the chance to do something they're curious about or want to learn — because encouraging a child's idea is ideal for their mental and physical growth."*
> — a boy in the Philippines

The emphasis here is not only on protection from harm, but on the creation of conditions in which children can explore and develop. Safety is therefore understood not merely as the absence of danger, but as the presence of relationships that make growth possible.

A similar formulation appears in Italy:

> *"In my community, girls and boys feel really safe and cared for when they grow up surrounded by adults who listen to them attentively and treat them with respect — without fear or judgment."* — a girl in Italy

This response connects care directly to listening and respect, anticipating the relationship between safety and participation examined elsewhere in this chapter.

- **Education and the school environment (n=358)** are the second most prominent themes. Here too, children generally describe education less as a sectoral service than as a relational environment. They are not primarily asking for access to schooling as such, although in some contexts that remains an urgent demand. More often, they describe schools as places where children should be supported, respected, treated fairly, and given opportunities to develop.

The theme is most frequently mentioned in India (46%), Syria (36%), Kenya (34%), Cambodia (29%), Bangladesh (26%), and Benin (25%). Girls mention it more frequently than boys (17% compared with 13%), as do children reporting functional difficulties (19% compared with 15%). This is consistent with the broader findings of the chapter: for children who experience greater barriers in other areas of social life, the school may represent not only a site of learning but one of the most important available environments for protection, recognition, and future possibility.

> *"Enrolling a child in school is helpful. Teaching them many things at home is helpful. If you do it like this, the child knows that someone is taking care of them and they are treated fairly."*
> — a girl in Mozambique

The response links education directly to care and fair treatment. Schooling is valuable not only because it provides knowledge, but because it communicates that the child is being invested in and cared for.

In Bangladesh, the relationship between education and the future is more explicit:

> *"Currently, most of the learning centres are closed. If they open the education facilities, it will be better for children — and create opportunities for higher education."* — a boy in Bangladesh

Another child connects education to gender equality:

> *"Equal education opportunity for girls and boys; orientation for parents on the importance of girls' education."*
> — a girl in Bangladesh

Education therefore appears in the responses both as an immediate protective environment and as a mechanism through which longer-term opportunities are either preserved or restricted.

- **Protection from harm (n=317)** takes multiple forms across contexts. Children refer to violence and exploitation, but also to road safety, environmental hazards, unsafe public spaces, and economic conditions that expose them to risk. The theme is most frequently mentioned in Cambodia (39%), Bolivia (22%), the Philippines (21%), Benin (20%), Senegal (19%), and Honduras (18%).

Across contexts, protection is generally attributed to identifiable actors: parents, teachers, police, community leaders, and authorities. This is analytically important because it makes responsibility visible. Protection is not described as an abstract condition that either exists or does not exist. It is something that particular people and institutions are expected to provide. Its absence can therefore also be understood as a failure of responsibility.

> *"Parents should not hit children — advise them to do good and stay away from dangerous places."*
> — a boy in Burkina Faso

> *"To be safer in terms of the occupation, and to have a material income for people, because most people are below the poverty line."* — a girl in Palestine

These two responses point to the breadth of the category. Protection from harm may refer to direct violence within the household, but it may also refer to economic conditions that expose families and children to insecurity.

Other responses describe more specific forms of risk management:

> *"Uphold the fundamental freedoms of children, ensure their protection from all forms of abuse, and strictly prohibit the exploitation and trafficking of child labour."* — a girl in Cambodia

> *"Tell us not to walk alone and not to swim in rivers during the rain."*
> — a boy in Timor-Leste

The difference between these responses is substantial, but both express the same underlying expectation: children should not be left to manage risks that adults and institutions have the responsibility to prevent or reduce.

- **Respect and fair treatment (n=201)** appear consistently across the full range of structural contexts, including the Philippines (25%), Guatemala (20%), Benin (19%), Mexico (16%), El Salvador (13%), and Mozambique (13%). Its distribution is significant because it does not appear to be reducible to material deprivation. Across contexts, children describe being disrespected, humiliated, excluded, or treated unfairly as a form of insecurity in its own right.

Girls mention this theme more frequently than boys (10% compared with 7%). The responses often connect respect to communication, empathy, equality, and the recognition of children's capacity to think and decide.

> *"Education and communication — teaching children to express themselves and resolve conflicts peacefully is very important. Respect and empathy — treating children with respect and empathy helps build their self-esteem and confidence."*
> — a boy in Mozambique

> *"No bias — we need equality. Boys and girls are treated fairly. Give opportunities to think independently. We are encouraged to think and act on our own. Believe us — we are trusted and encouraged to follow our dreams."*
> — a girl in India

The latter response is particularly significant because it links fair treatment to autonomy. Being treated fairly is not only a matter of receiving equal treatment; it also involves being trusted and given the space to think independently and pursue one's own aspirations.

Other children describe respect through more immediate and intimate experiences:

> *"Children feel safe when they have love at home, caring adults, safe places to play, and when they are treated with respect and fairness."* — a girl in Honduras

> *"Communication and playing with them makes them feel safe. Not insulting and hitting them all the time."*
> — a girl in Senegal

> *"Let them see that there are no favourites. Give everyone a chance. Do not shout. Understand that everyone is different. Seeing dads treat kids well."*
> — a girl in Bolivia

Together, these responses show that fair treatment is experienced at multiple levels: through formal equality, everyday interaction, emotional recognition, and the absence of violence and humiliation.

- **The community environment (n=179)** situates safety at a collective level. Children describe safe communities as places of mutual care, familiarity, and visible responsibility, where people help one another and local leaders are present and responsive. The theme is strongest in Mozambique (36%), the Philippines (20%), Uganda (18%), Benin (15%), and El Salvador (12%).

The community occupies a position between the intimate sphere of the family and the formal sphere of the state. It is neither simply a network of personal relationships nor an institutional system. Rather, children describe it as a collective environment in which responsibility for safety is shared and made visible.

> *"When police come and talk about the rights of children in our community. Both parents should get involved in the care for the children."* — a boy in Uganda

> *"I believe that creating meetings — whether sports or community gatherings — where children can go with their friends and feel part of a group, like a family, without fear or worries."* — a girl in Ecuador

The emphasis on belonging is important. A safe community is not simply one in which risks are controlled. It is one in which children feel that they are part of a social environment that recognises and protects them.

> *"For children in a community to feel safe, secure, and treated fairly, it is critical that the environment combines both strong physical structures and a network of constant emotional support."* — a child in Ecuador

The response brings together two dimensions that are sometimes treated separately in policy: physical safety and emotional support. For children, these are not necessarily competing priorities. Both are part of what makes an environment inhabitable.

- **Voice and participation (n=112)** are the least frequently named of the major relational themes. It appears most often in El Salvador (21%), the Philippines (18%), Italy (14%), and Bolivia (12%). Girls mention it more frequently than boys (6% compared with 3%).

  Its relatively low frequency should not be interpreted as evidence that children regard voice as unimportant. Its distribution may instead reflect uneven experiential availability. Children who have experienced being heard may be more likely to identify participation as a condition of safety. Where participation has rarely or never produced a visible response, children may be less likely to name voice directly and more likely to describe the conditions that meaningful participation would provide: trust, respect, dialogue, and the ability to speak without fear.

> *"For me, the key is for children to feel that their voice has weight — that adults of the community not only take care of them physically but listen to them with respect, validate their emotions, and treat them as citizens with full rights, without favouritism or fear."* — a girl in El Salvador

> *"Helping children to trust their parents, so that if something happens, they have the courage to tell them."* — a girl in Mexico

> *"Seniors need to take good care of the children, especially giving them the opportunity to participate in decision-making."* — a girl in Cambodia

These responses illustrate that participation is not necessarily understood as a separate political demand. It is often embedded in the conditions of protection itself. A child who can speak without fear, trust an adult, and expect to be taken seriously is better positioned to seek help when something goes wrong.

> *"Their opinions are heard without being diminished due to age. The family is supportive. The child feels heard by the people around them."* — a girl in Palestine

> *"That there is equality. That children can give their point of view and have a vote — not only adults just because they are adults will always be right."* — a boy in Ecuador

Participation therefore appears in children's accounts not only as a mechanism of influence, but as a condition of recognition.

- **Basic needs (n=67)**—including food, health, and clean water—appear comparatively rarely as a standalone category and at similar rates among boys and girls (3%). Their limited prominence should be interpreted cautiously. The relative absence of explicit references does not imply that children regard these needs as unimportant. In many responses, material conditions appear to be incorporated into broader accounts of care, family support, and community responsibility rather than articulated separately.

> *"Buying basic needs for the child, allowing the child to play with friends and in open places, not giving children heavy work and duties."* — a girl in Uganda

> *"It helps them that there are no fights or conflicts in their house, that they are always healthy, and that they do not lack food on their table."* — a girl in Bolivia

  The broader pattern is therefore not that children distinguish sharply between material and relational conditions of safety. Rather, they often describe them as interconnected. Food, health, protection, care, education, and respect form part of the same environment in which children experience whether they are safe and whether they are treated fairly.

These findings reinforce a broader conclusion from the chapter. Children do not frame safety primarily as a set of programmes or interventions. They describe it through relationships: being cared for, supported at school, protected by accountable adults, treated fairly, and living in communities that take responsibility for one another.

The convergence between these accounts and the structural analysis developed throughout the chapter is one of the dataset's central findings. Across methods and contexts, safety repeatedly resolves into relational conditions. This should not be mistaken for a retreat from structural analysis. On the contrary, the relational conditions children describe—care, respect, protection, education, voice, and community responsibility—are themselves shaped by institutions, policies, inequalities, and the distribution of power. What children identify as the immediate experience of safety is therefore also a way of describing whether wider systems are functioning in ways that become visible in everyday life.

Nor should the emphasis on relationships be interpreted as evidence of resignation. Children demonstrate considerable analytical capacity in identifying risks, assigning responsibility, and proposing changes to their environments. Their responses instead suggest that, once these broader conditions are translated into lived experience, safety becomes intelligible through the quality of the relationships surrounding them.

Not all contexts retain this orientation equally. In Italy, recurring statements such as "nothing will change" or "who listens to us?" reflect accumulated experience of non-responsiveness rather than a lack of analytical capacity or disengagement from collective life. The gap between children's ability to identify problems and their expectations that anything will change is therefore not inherent. It can be produced over time through repeated experiences in which children are invited to express themselves but do not see their participation leading to visible consequences.

Children have provided detailed accounts of risk, responsibility, and response. What remains is not further extraction of information, but a response to what has already been expressed. Chapter 3 translates these findings into five recommendations: on cross-sectoral approaches; system continuity across humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding transitions; the capacity that turns trust into action; anticipatory action with children as knowledge-producers; and gender-transformative programming.

AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

GENDER

Girls place greater emphasis than boys on care (19% compared with 13%), education (17% compared with 13%), respect (10% compared with 7%), and voice (6% compared with 3%), while protection is reported at similar levels (14%). These differences do not indicate that girls and boys inhabit entirely separate worlds of safety. Rather, they suggest that gender shapes the conditions through which safety is experienced and articulated. Girls appear more likely to identify relational recognition, educational opportunity, fair treatment, and the ability to express themselves as central to feeling safe and supported.

DISABILITY

Children reporting functional difficulties place greater emphasis on education (19% compared with 15%) and respect (10% compared with 9%). This is consistent with earlier findings that children who face greater barriers to participation and inclusion may rely more heavily on schools and other external systems to compensate for gaps in household- and community-level support. The difference is small in absolute terms, but its direction is consistent with the broader pattern in the dataset: marginalised children are not simply exposed to greater risks; they may also depend more heavily on the institutions and relationships that are supposed to mitigate them.

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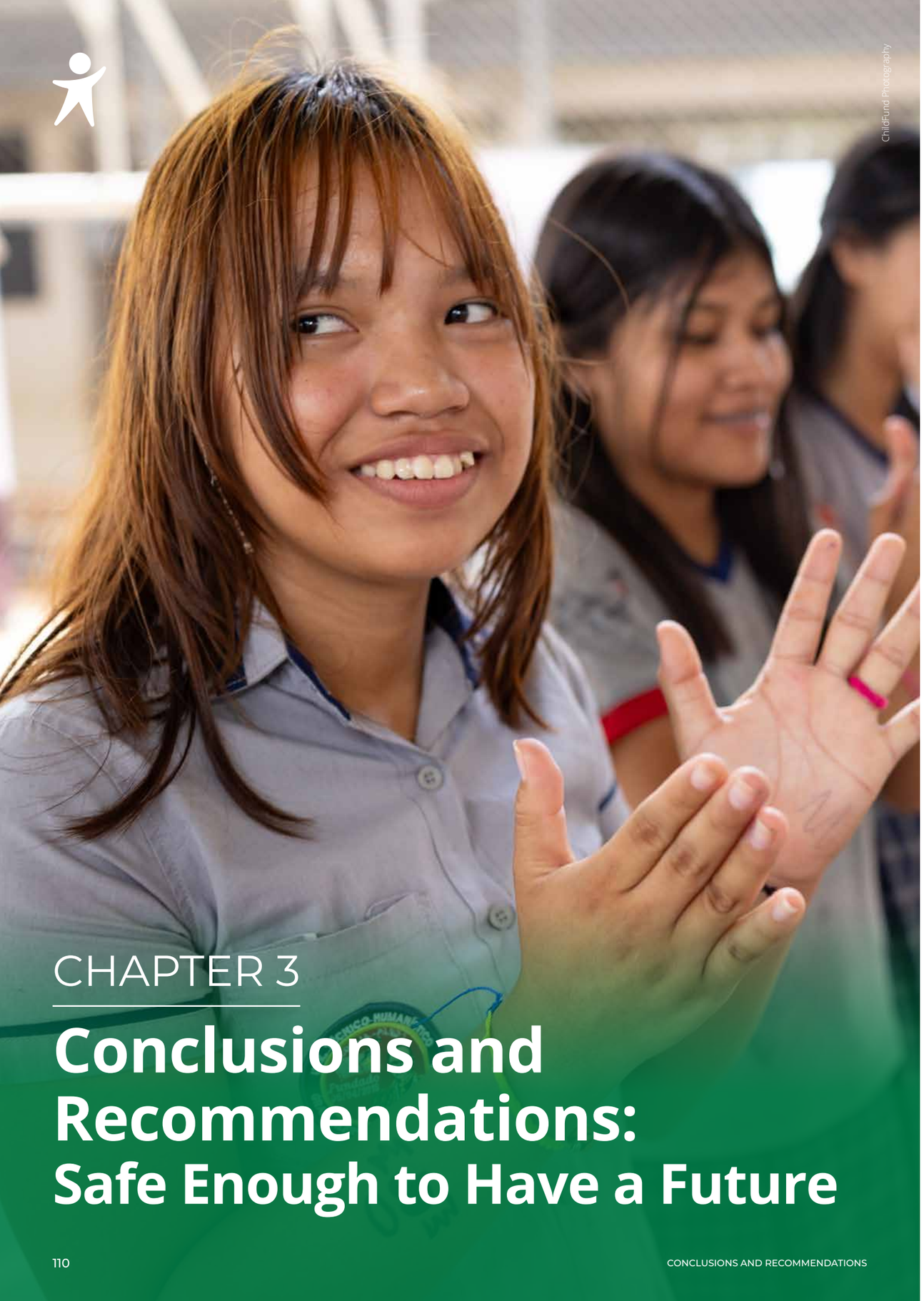
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CHAPTER 3

Conclusions and Recommendations: Safe Enough to Have a Future

3.1 Conclusions

This report began from a question that is deliberately simple in form and complex in implication: are children safe enough to have a future? The evidence presented in the preceding chapters does not allow for a single global answer. Across the World Index, which covers 134 countries, and the consultation with more than 3,000 children in 27 countries, safety emerges as a condition that is unevenly distributed, unevenly sustained, and often more fragile than national structural indicators alone would suggest. Children may live in countries where formal legal protections, public institutions and relatively strong aggregate performance are present, while still experiencing safety as uncertain, inaccessible, or dependent on relationships that do not reliably connect them to effective support.

The findings therefore require a conception of safety that is broader than the presence of protective institutions and more demanding than the absence of immediate harm. Safety is produced through the interaction of relationships, systems and environments over time. It is shaped by the conditions into which children are born, by the structural position of the adults and communities on whom they depend, and by the practical routes through which rights and protection can be made accessible in daily life.

The right to the future, as used in this report, brings these dimensions together. It is not presented as a new standalone legal right. Rather, it is used as an interpretive framework for reading existing obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a temporal continuum. Children have rights not only to protection in the present, but also to the conditions that allow them to imagine, influence and move towards a future. Where those conditions weaken, the future does not disappear at once; it contracts through the loss of routes to safety, participation and agency.

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Five conclusions follow from the evidence.

1. Safety is first encountered through relationships, but depends on systems beyond them

Across countries, children most often describe safety through relationships. They speak of adults who are present, attentive and responsive; of teachers who listen; of families that provide care; and of communities in which responsibility for children is visible. **A trusted adult is often the first point of reference when children think about where they can turn. At the same time, relationships are not inherently protective: a trusted adult can also be a source of harm, and violence within families is particularly likely to remain undisclosed. The prominence of home and family as safe spaces should therefore not be read as evidence that children are uniformly safe within those settings.**

This finding should not be interpreted as evidence that informal relationships can substitute for formal protection. Rather, it shows where children first encounter the protective system. The microsystem is where safety becomes tangible, but it is not where responsibility for safety ends. A trusted adult can provide reassurance, recognise a concern and help a child seek support. Whether that support becomes effective protection depends on the layers beyond the relationship: trained actors, referral pathways, accessible services and institutions capable of responding.

The distinction is important because the country-level data do not show a meaningful relationship between the proportion of children who report having a trusted adult and the proportion who believe they could obtain help. Trust and access are therefore related concepts but not interchangeable outcomes. A child may trust an adult without having a usable route to protection. Conversely, a child may live in a context where formal services exist but remain too distant, inaccessible or unknown to become part of their lived experience of safety.

This finding reinforces the principle, reflected in the Convention and in General Comment No. 14 on the best interests of the child, that the adequacy of a protection arrangement must ultimately be judged by its consequences for the child. The existence of a relationship, service or institution is not sufficient if the system cannot respond when a child needs it. Protection should therefore be understood as a chain. Relationships may be the point at which a concern becomes visible, but the chain must continue through recognition, referral, response and follow-up. Where one of these links is absent, the presence of the others may not be enough.

2. Trust acquires protective value when it is connected to accessible response pathways

The second conclusion follows from the first. The central issue is not whether children trust adults, but whether the relationships through which they seek help connect to systems capable of acting.

Children most often identify family members and teachers as people they would approach. Formal protection services are less frequently named as an immediate point of access. This is not necessarily evidence of a failure of formal systems. It may reflect the fact that children encounter family members and teachers more regularly than specialised services. It does, however, mean that the capacity of these first-line adults matters greatly. A child who tells a teacher about violence, a community leader about a threat, or a caregiver about an unsafe situation should not be left dependent on the individual adult's personal knowledge, confidence or ability to improvise. The adult needs to know what to do next, whom to contact, and whether the service to which the child is referred is available and able to respond.

This is where the community and institutional layers of the ecological model become decisive. The protective value of a relationship depends partly on the pathways around it. The same trusted adult may therefore represent very different levels of protection in different contexts. In one setting, the adult may be connected to a trained social worker, a functioning referral mechanism and an accessible service. In another, the adult may be caring and well-intentioned but have nowhere to refer the child.

The practical implication is that investments in awareness, trust and relationship-building should be assessed alongside the pathways through which those relationships can lead to action. General Comment No. 13, which establishes the State's obligation to protect children from all forms of violence, is relevant here not only because violence must be prohibited, but because protection must be made operational. A right that cannot be exercised through an accessible response mechanism remains incomplete in practice.

3. Continuity before and between crises is part of protection during crises

The third conclusion concerns time. Children experience crises as events, but protective systems experience them as interruptions to capacities that may have taken years to build.

Across the consultation, reported access to help does not appear to be explained simply by the severity of current crisis. Some contexts affected by armed conflict or major instability retain comparatively strong patterns of perceived help-seeking capacity, while some more stable contexts show weaker perceived access. This pattern is not evidence that crisis is protective, nor does it establish a causal relationship. It suggests instead that the capacity of systems to absorb shocks may depend partly on what existed before the shock and what was maintained between crises.

Locally rooted systems, including public protection institutions, community-based protection networks, trusted actors, and established referral relationships to function under pressure when they have been sustained over time. By contrast, systems that disappear when short-term funding ends may be difficult to reconstruct when a new emergency occurs. The loss is therefore not limited to the activities that stop during a funding gap. It may also include relationships, institutional memory, trained personnel and local knowledge that are slow and costly to rebuild.

This finding gives practical significance to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Continuity should not be treated as an administrative concern that sits between funding cycles. For children, it can determine whether a protective relationship remains connected to a functioning response when a crisis occurs. The principle of progressive realisation of children's rights, together with the obligation to use available resources for the implementation of those rights, also has implications here. Public budgeting for children, as addressed in General Comment No. 19, is not only about the volume of resources allocated. It is also about whether financing arrangements preserve the functions through which rights can actually be realised over time. The question is therefore not simply how much protection is delivered during a crisis, but whether the systems children rely on remain present when the crisis arrives.

Investments in awareness, trust and relationship-building should be assessed alongside the pathways through which those relationships can lead to action. General Comment No. 13, which establishes the State's obligation to protect children from all forms of violence, is relevant here not only because violence must be prohibited, but because protection must be made operational. A right that cannot be exercised through an accessible response mechanism remains incomplete in practice.

4. Formal recognition of rights and lived access to protection are distinct conditions

The fourth conclusion concerns measurement. The World Index provides important information about laws, institutions and structural conditions. These dimensions are indispensable. Yet they do not, on their own, predict whether children feel safe, whether they can reach help, or whether they believe that their voices can influence what happens around them.

This difference is not a weakness of structural indicators. It reflects the fact that rights have both an institutional dimension and a lived dimension. A law may exist without being known to children, enforced consistently or supported by accessible services. A school may exist without being experienced as safe. A reporting mechanism may exist without being usable by a child with a disability. A formal participation mechanism may collect children's views without producing any visible response.

The consultation therefore adds a different form of evidence. Children identify the points at which systems become accessible or inaccessible in daily life. They describe the routes they use, the adults they approach, the places they avoid and the changes they believe are possible.

This is particularly clear in the analysis of participation and future agency. The frequency with which children report sharing their opinions has only a modest aggregate association with whether they believe they can make free choices about their future. The relationship is therefore not linear. What appears to matter is not simply whether children speak, but whether they experience a relationship between expression and consequence.

This is consistent with the right to be heard under Article 12 of the Convention, as elaborated in General Comment No. 12. Participation is not exhausted by the collection of children's opinions. Children's views must be given due weight in accordance with age and maturity, and participation must be understood as a process in which children can experience their contribution as meaningful.

The same principle applies to Safety Mapping. Children do not merely provide illustrative quotations. They identify risks, locate them in specific environments, name responsible actors and propose responses. This is evidence that can complement technical and administrative information. It does not replace other forms of evidence, but it provides knowledge that conventional systems may not capture.

5. Future possibility is intergenerational and unequally distributed

The final conclusion concerns the distribution of future possibility. The evidence shows that children do not encounter risk equally. **Children reporting functional difficulties are the most consistently differentiated group in the consultation data, with lower reported participation, lower future agency and higher levels of uncertainty. In several contexts, the difference is not simply a shift from positive to negative responses, but an increase in "maybe" responses: the future is not entirely closed, but neither does it appear fully available.**

This is important because inequality does not operate only through exposure to risk. It also operates through the capacity to convert opportunities, relationships and participation into a sense of agency. A child may be present in a participatory space without having equal access to it, equal recognition within it or an equal likelihood that their contribution will lead to change.

Gender operates differently. Unlike disability, it does not produce a single consistent pattern across countries. Girls participate more in some contexts and report higher future agency in others, while boys show higher outcomes elsewhere. Yet girls consistently place greater emphasis on care, education, respect and voice in describing the conditions required for safety, and their future agency shows its strongest association with the structural conditions captured by the Women's Sub-Index.

This association should not be interpreted as proof of a single causal mechanism. It does, however, support an intergenerational reading of children's futures. Women's education, autonomy, exposure to violence and ability to participate in decision-making shape the environments in which children grow up and the range of possibilities they can observe and imagine.

The connection is recognised in the joint CEDAW General Recommendation No. 31 and CRC General Comment No. 18, which treat harmful practices affecting women and girls as interrelated. The broader implication of the present findings is that the structural conditions of women cannot be treated as external to the conditions shaping girls' futures. The right to the future is therefore not distributed evenly across children, countries or generations. It contracts first for those whose access to protection, participation and resources is already most constrained.

What the report does and does not claim

The report identifies recurring conditions that children associate with safety, care, fair treatment and the possibility of acting on their futures. It shows that these conditions appear across contexts with very different levels of income, institutional performance and exposure to crisis. It also shows that children's own accounts reveal dimensions of protection that are not fully captured by structural indicators.

The report does not claim that any single condition is sufficient to produce safety or future agency. Nor does it claim that the consultation samples are nationally representative or that the associations described constitute tested causal mechanisms. The findings should be read as evidence of patterns and relationships that merit attention, not as proof of a single explanatory model.

3.2 Recommendations

The six recommendations that follow translate the findings into areas where existing mandates, resources and institutional responsibilities can be better aligned with the conditions children associate with safety and future possibility.

They are not presented as a comprehensive blueprint for child protection. They are directed at different levels of the ecological system and address different points at which protection can weaken: the connection between relationships and services; the continuity of systems across crises; the structural impact of climate disruption; the gap between legislation and enforcement; the use of children's knowledge in planning; and the intergenerational conditions shaping girls' futures.

The recommendations that follow are therefore practical orientations grounded in the evidence generated by the report and in States' existing obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and related instruments. The question is not whether children have identified a new category of rights. It is whether existing rights are being implemented in ways that remain effective over time.

The findings suggest that the answer is uneven. In some contexts, children continue to identify themselves as actors, propose structural change and imagine a future that can still be influenced. In others, proposals narrow towards adaptation and survival. In the most constrained contexts, the solution space contracts almost entirely, and children no longer position themselves as actors capable of changing the conditions around them. The recommendations are intended to help keep that space open, and to support efforts to reopen it where it has begun to close.

Three principles run through all six recommendations.

1. **The first is continuity and local embeddedness.** Protection is more likely to remain accessible when systems are rooted in the environments where children live and when relationships, services and responsibilities survive changes in funding and crisis status. Local actors cannot be expected to carry responsibilities that belong to the State or to replace public systems. Where they are adequately supported, however, their proximity and continuity can be important components of a functioning protective environment.

2. **The second is meaningful participation.** Children in this consultation did not simply describe their experiences. They analysed risks, identified responsible actors and proposed possible responses. Their knowledge should therefore be treated as one form of evidence in decision-making. This is consistent with the right to be heard and with the broader obligation to ensure that children's best interests are a primary consideration in decisions affecting them.

3. **The third is do no harm, safeguarding and data protection.** Any effort to strengthen children's access to protection, participation or reporting mechanisms must be designed and implemented in ways that minimise the risk of harm. This includes appropriate safeguarding and PSEA measures, clear responsibilities for responding to disclosures, confidentiality and informed consent or assent where appropriate, and proportionate collection, storage, use and sharing of children's data. Children's participation and the circulation of information about their experiences should never increase their exposure to retaliation, stigma, identification or other harm. These safeguards should apply across all six recommendations, including the use of children's risk data in planning and decision-making.

RECOMMENDATION 1

INVEST IN THE REFERRAL AND RESPONSE PATHWAYS THROUGH WHICH TRUSTED RELATIONSHIPS CAN LEAD TO PROTECTION

> *"I hope that the adults will also listen."*
> — a girl of 10 in the Philippines

The consultation suggests that the existence of trusted relationships should not be treated as evidence that children have effective access to protection. Many children identify a family member, teacher or other adult whom they trust. Yet at country level, reported trust and perceived ability to obtain effective help do not move together. The implication is not that trust is unimportant. On the contrary, relationships are often the first point through which children disclose concerns or seek assistance. The issue is whether the relationship connects to a functioning protective response.

A teacher who recognises a concern but does not know where to refer the child cannot provide the same level of protection as a teacher connected to a functioning referral pathway. A community leader may be trusted but unable to access services. A parent may be the person a child most wants to approach but may lack information, resources or confidence about what to do next.

The first recommendation is therefore to invest in the connective layer between trusted relationships and protective services.

- **GOVERNMENTS**
  should finance, train and supervise the frontline actors whom children are most likely to approach, including teachers, community and – where relevant to the context – religious leaders, health workers and relevant local authorities. Any actor designated as an entry point for children's protection concerns should be subject to appropriate vetting, written safeguarding standards, regular supervision and clear limits on what they are responsible for handling directly, with referral pathways in place for concerns requiring specialised support. These actors should be able to identify concerns, respond appropriately and refer children through pathways that are operational in practice. Referral mechanisms should be known and accessible to children, and services should be sufficiently available to receive referrals. This reflects the State's obligation to make protection from violence effective in practice, through policies, institutions, budget and trained staff, not only formal in law. It also reflects the principle that the best interests of the child must guide the design of systems that affect children's safety.

- **PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DONORS**
  should finance referral systems, case management, supervision and frontline training as core components of protection programmes rather than as supplementary activities. This support should align with, and where possible strengthen, national child protection systems and social policies rather than operating parallel to them. Programme design should demonstrate the full pathway from a trusted adult to an actual protective response. Where trust is already relatively high but referral capacity is weak, additional investment in awareness or relationship-building may not address the binding constraint. Resources may need to be directed instead towards the capacity to respond, including at local level, where this is coherent with national child protection systems.

- **CIVIL SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATIONS**
  should assess the trust-to-action pathway at the beginning of programme cycles. Monitoring should distinguish between whether children know and trust an adult and whether that adult can help them reach an appropriate response. The objective is not to turn every trusted relationship into a formal service. It is to ensure that trusted adults are not the endpoint of protection when a child needs further help.

RECOMMENDATION 2

PRESERVE PROTECTIVE CAPACITY BEFORE, BETWEEN AND DURING CRISES

> *"Before the war, there were schools, kindergartens, creative centres. Now there are very few places where you can have fun."* — a girl of 13 in Ukraine

Children in the consultation experience overlapping pressures, including armed conflict, climate disruption, economic insecurity and institutional fragility. These pressures rarely occur in isolation. They can weaken the systems children rely on and reduce the capacity of those systems to absorb subsequent shocks.

The findings suggest that access to help is associated not only with the presence or severity of crisis, but also with whether protective systems were already functioning and locally rooted before the crisis occurred. This is a cross-contextual association rather than a tested causal mechanism. It nevertheless has important implications for how protection is financed and sustained over time.

A system that disappears between funding cycles may be difficult to restore when a new emergency begins. The loss may involve more than the activity itself. Trained personnel may leave, referral relationships may weaken, institutional memory may be lost and children may no longer know where to turn.

▸ GOVERNMENTS

should identify the child protection functions that must remain operational during shocks and embed them in preparedness, disaster-risk-reduction and climate-adaptation planning. This should include the schools, health services, community structures, referral actors and safe access points that children rely on, together with clear responsibility for maintaining them. Critical functions should include preventing family separation and ensuring family tracing and reunification, as well as maintaining continuity for children with open protection cases when programmes close, services are disrupted or populations are displaced. This should be supported by clear protocols for case transfer, case closure and the secure continuity and handover of case files and relevant information.

▸ PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DONORS

should support multi-year and flexible financing where possible and include continuity objectives in funding arrangements. Transition planning should be treated as part of core programme design rather than as an activity added at the end of a grant. Where reductions are unavoidable, financing decisions should distinguish between reductions in activity volume and the loss of the minimum functions that keep protective systems alive — referral coordination, trained local focal points, supervision and accessible points of support. These are less visible than direct activities, but they are often the most difficult to rebuild once lost, and the distinction between a recoverable and an unrecoverable cut is the one that most affects children.

▸ PHILANTHROPIC FUNDERS

are particularly well placed to sustain the functions that fall between acute emergency grants and longer-term public financing. Bridge and flexible financing of this kind is difficult for bilateral instruments to provide, which makes it a distinctive contribution that private foundations can make.

▸ CIVIL SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATIONS

should document what protective systems exist in each context, what sustains them and where the risks of handover or interruption lie. The cost of system collapse should be made visible to funders before a gap occurs, rather than only after protective capacity has been lost. The objective is not to preserve every activity indefinitely. It is to avoid treating the loss of protective capacity as if it were equivalent to a temporary reduction in programme volume. This analysis should also identify the economic pressures through which shocks can translate into child protection risks, including household hardship that may increase children's exposure to child labour, early marriage, school dropout or unsafe migration. Where such pressures are predictable, organisations and donors should link child protection preparedness to anticipatory action, including pre-agreed triggers, pre-positioned cash or other social protection support, and sufficient case-management capacity to respond when those triggers are reached. Where appropriate, this should include mechanisms for connecting emergency assistance to national social protection systems.

RECOMMENDATION 3

INTEGRATE CHILD PROTECTION INTO STATE-LED CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND DISASTER-RISK PLANNING

> *"We have to migrate with livestock in search of pasture during drought."*
> — a boy in Kenya

Climate and environmental disruption affect children's safety through the environments in which protection is delivered. Children experience climate stress through interrupted schooling, unsafe routes, displacement, loss of safe spaces and increased domestic or care responsibilities. Around 35% of children in the consultation report high weather-related distress, while in some contexts direct exposure is nearly universal. The Environment dimension of the World Index has not improved over the past decade.

Climate disruption therefore affects several layers of the ecological system at once. It can change the physical environment, disrupt schools and services, increase household pressure and weaken the routes through which children reach protection. Because the exposure is structural, the response cannot depend primarily on informal community capacity. Communities are essential partners in prevention and adaptation, but they cannot be expected to carry obligations that require public authority, legal responsibility and sustained financing.

General Comment No. 26 on the CRC, which recognises children's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and States' obligations to protect children from environmental harm, makes clear that environmental degradation and climate change have direct implications for children's rights and that States have obligations to protect children from environmental harm. The findings of this report add a specific protection dimension: climate adaptation must account for the routes, services and relationships through which children remain safe.

▸ GOVERNMENTS

should establish child protection as a standing component of national climate adaptation, disaster-risk-reduction and resilience planning. For schools, this planning should align with GADRRRES's Comprehensive School Safety Framework: safe learning facilities, school safety management and educational continuity, and risk-reduction and resilience education. Plans should also identify the health services, referral actors and safe routes that need to remain operational during climate shocks, and assign responsibility for maintaining them. Child protection continuity should be reflected in public adaptation and disaster budgets, consistent with the obligation to allocate resources for the implementation of children's rights. Children and adolescents should also have meaningful opportunities to contribute to adaptation planning, with their risk mapping used as a source of local evidence, building on established models such as the Children's Charter for Disaster Risk Reduction, which set out children's own priorities for DRR, including safe schools and their right to information and participation.

▸ PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DONORS

should treat State capacity to maintain child protection during climate shocks as a fundable objective. Financing should include government referral systems, local focal points, school safety measures aligned with GADRRRES's Comprehensive School Safety Framework and anticipatory-action mechanisms rather than focusing exclusively on community-level pilots. Adaptation investments should also be assessed for their effects on children's safety, mobility, schooling and access to support. An intervention may reduce aggregate environmental risk while leaving children exposed through unsafe routes or disrupted services.

▸ CIVIL SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATIONS

should design climate and child-protection programming in a mutually informed way. Safety Mapping can show how environmental risk is changing children's access to school, services and safe spaces and can provide evidence to the State actors responsible for adaptation and be followed by concrete, child-led risk-reduction activities in schools and communities.

RECOMMENDATION 4

STRENGTHEN THE IMPLEMENTATION AND ENFORCEMENT LAYER OF LAWS PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM VIOLENCE

> *"Parents should not hit children — advise them to do good and stay away from dangerous places."*
> — a boy in Burkina Faso

This recommendation is grounded differently from the others. It rests primarily on the World Index and the country-level analyses rather than on the consultation, since children described their experiences of safety and violence but were not asked about legislation. Read together, these structural sources show that legal protection against violence varies across countries in scope, implementation and enforcement, and that the existence of legislation does not by itself show whether children can report violence, whether cases are referred, or whether an effective response is available.

This distinction is particularly important because much violence against children takes place within homes and families, where reporting is limited and official data may undercount harm. The relationship between formal legal protection and children's reported experience of safety within the family is therefore necessarily complex.

The finding is not that legislation is ineffective. It is that legislation requires an implementation layer. Without trained personnel, accessible reporting channels, functioning referral pathways and available services, legal protection may remain distant from children's daily lives.

▸ GOVERNMENTS

should strengthen the implementation of existing laws through trained frontline personnel, supervision, child-friendly reporting mechanisms and functioning referral systems. They should also address gaps in the scope of legal and protective frameworks identified in country-level analysis, including, where relevant, comprehensive prohibition of corporal punishment in all settings, including the home; universal birth registration and access to legal identity; and child-friendly justice systems and safeguards for children in contact with the law. Progress towards SDG 16.2 should be monitored through indicators that show whether children can obtain a response in practice, including the availability of reporting channels, referral completion and access to appropriate services, rather than relying only on the existence of laws and policies. This approach

is consistent with General Comment No. 13, which frames protection from violence as an obligation requiring effective prevention, identification, reporting, referral, investigation and response.

- **PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DONORS**
  should finance the implementation layer alongside legislative reform. Workforce development, supervision, reporting systems, referral coordination and sustained prevention require investment over time.

- **FOUNDATIONS**
  and private donors can provide multi-year support for institutional strengthening that short project cycles are often unable to sustain.

- **CIVIL SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATIONS**
  should track both whether children have trusted adults and whether children can reach a response through those relationships. This distinction makes it possible to identify whether the main constraint lies in trust, information, referral capacity or service availability.

RECOMMENDATION 5

TREAT CHILDREN'S RISK MAPPING AS EVIDENCE IN LOCAL AND SECTORAL PLANNING

> *"Parents, teachers, and the government should work together to ensure safe environments for children."*
> — a boy in Tanzania

Children experience safety through the environments in which they move. The risks they identify frequently cross institutional boundaries. Roads, water hazards, unlit routes, abandoned buildings and market areas may involve education, transport, urban planning, infrastructure, water management and child protection simultaneously.

Children in the Safety Mapping exercises identified these risks with considerable specificity. They named locations, proposed remedies and identified actors they believed should respond. In some contexts, they also positioned themselves as actors capable of contributing to change.

This evidence should not remain within the boundaries of the programme that generated it. The right to be heard requires more than collecting children's views. General Comment No. 12 provides the basis for treating children's views as evidence that should inform decisions affecting them. In this context, Safety Mapping can provide a form of situated knowledge that complements technical and administrative data. This is most immediately applicable in local and urban planning, where the hazards children identify most often — unsafe roads, unlit routes, water hazards — fall directly within municipal authority and where community-level solutions can act on them without waiting for national reform.

- **GOVERNMENTS**
  should establish routine channels through which children's risk assessments can be considered in planning decisions relating to transport, urban development, water, infrastructure and other sectors relevant to the environments in which children live.

- **PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DONORS**
  should support the translation of participatory mapping into products that sectoral actors can use. Where programmes outside child protection materially affect children's safety, relevant funding arrangements should encourage consideration of children's safety concerns.

- **IMPLEMENTING ORGANISATIONS**
  should treat Safety Mapping outputs as analytical products with an audience beyond the child protection team. Findings should be shared with municipal authorities and sectoral partners in a form that allows those actors to assess and act on them. Before dissemination, outputs should be aggregated and anonymised and subject to a context-specific do-no-harm assessment. They should not be shared with actors whom children have identified as sources of risk, or in ways that could enable individual children, groups or locations to be identified or exposed to harm. This recommendation does not require child protection organisations to assume responsibilities belonging to other sectors. Nor does it require the Alliance or its members to expand their mandate beyond their strategic focus. It requires, more modestly, that knowledge already being generated through child participation reaches the institutions that have the authority to consider it in planning decisions, while also ensuring that children who contributed to the maps receive an age-appropriate account of how their views were used, what action was taken and, where relevant, why particular suggestions could not be acted upon.

RECOMMENDATION 6

ADDRESS THE GENDERED AND INTERGENERATIONAL CONDITIONS SHAPING GIRLS' FUTURE AGENCY

> *"Equal education opportunity for girls and boys; orientation for parents on the importance of girls' education."*
> — a girl in Bangladesh

Girls and boys identify many of the same conditions as necessary for safety, but girls place greater emphasis on care, education, respect and voice. Girls also report higher levels of distress in several areas of concern.

This recommendation rests on three convergent sources of evidence. The first is what girls themselves identify as necessary. The second is what the World Index measures directly about the conditions surrounding the women in children's lives. The third is an established research literature on intergenerational transmission. None of the three is a country-level correlation, and no part of what follows depends on one.

Women's education, economic autonomy, participation in decision-making and freedom from violence shape the environments in which children grow up. They influence household stability, caregiving conditions, access to resources and the models of possibility available to girls. The Women's Education dimension is the lowest-scoring dimension in the World Index, and progress in eliminating gender-based violence remains extremely slow[17].

The joint CEDAW General Recommendation No. 31 and CRC General Comment No. 18 provide a normative basis for understanding the rights of women and girls as interconnected. The findings in this report extend that logic by showing why women's structural conditions may also be relevant to how girls imagine their own futures.

The intersection with disability is also important. Children reporting functional difficulties report lower future agency, higher distress and weaker participation across multiple contexts. Formal availability of services and protection is therefore insufficient if children cannot access them in practice.

17 These are measurements of structural conditions rather than relationships between variables, and they do not depend on the size of any sample. Within what the Index captures, the conditions surrounding the women in children's lives are its least developed part. Together with what girls say and with the intergenerational literature, they support approaches that are transformative rather than accommodating: interventions that work on the gendered and generational conditions producing constrained futures for girls, rather than within them. A country-level association between girls' future agency and the Women's Sub-Index is also visible in the consultation data, and points in the same direction, but it is a descriptive observation on a small and fixed set of countries and no part of this recommendation rests on it.

- **GOVERNMENTS**
  should treat women's education, economic participation and protection from violence as relevant to child policy where evidence and mandate support such an approach. Child protection systems should also be audited for accessibility, including accessible information, referral channels, communication support and reasonable accommodation. Where relevant, national child protection planning should also connect commitments under Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace and Security frameworks to the conditions affecting children and adolescents.

- **PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DONORS**
  should encourage child protection programmes to consider how women's structural conditions shape children's environments where this is relevant to the theory of change. Investments in women's education, livelihoods and protection should, where appropriate, track plausible intergenerational effects on girls' safety, schooling and future possibility.

- **CIVIL SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATIONS**
  should use an intergenerational lens where appropriate and consistently disaggregate relevant findings by gender, disability and age. This can help identify forms of compounded disadvantage that national-level indicators may obscure. The objective is not to collapse child policy into gender policy. It is to recognise that the conditions shaping children's futures are sometimes produced through structures that sit outside child-specific indicators.



Daniele Ratti/WeWorld Photography

3.3
What follows

Children in this consultation mapped risks in their environments, identified actors they considered responsible and proposed possible responses. The findings suggest that this capacity remains visible in many contexts. They also suggest that when children's proposals narrow towards avoidance and survival, or disappear altogether, this may reflect a realistic assessment of constrained circumstances rather than a lack of imagination.

The six recommendations should therefore be read as practical orientations rather than as a comprehensive blueprint. They identify points at which existing resources, mandates and institutional responsibilities could be better aligned with the conditions children associate with safety and future possibility.

The central argument is that protection is not produced by any single layer of the system. Relationships matter, but they need functioning pathways to help. Services matter, but they need continuity. Community knowledge matters, but it cannot substitute for public responsibility. Laws matter, but they require implementation and enforcement. Children's participation matters, but it must lead beyond extraction of information towards consideration in decisions. The future of girls also cannot be separated entirely from the structural conditions of the women whose lives shape the environments in which girls grow up.

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These recommendations remain global in scope and require contextual interpretation. ChildFund Alliance members and their local partners, drawing on country-level evidence, monitoring data and partnerships, are best placed to determine which proposals are relevant in each setting and how they should be translated into dialogue with governments, donors and regional institutions.

> Children's future possibilities remain more open where relationships, services and institutions continue to form credible routes from risk to response, and where children can still identify changes as possible. They begin to contract when those connections weaken. The purpose of the recommendations is to protect and strengthen the conditions that keep those possibilities open.

The global framework is intended to support that work, not replace country-level judgement.

What children described is clear at the level of lived experience: safety depends on whether people and systems respond, whether environments remain navigable, whether children can reach help, whether their views have consequences and whether the future appears sufficiently open to be imagined.

The institutional implications are more complex. They depend on decisions about legislation, budgets, system maintenance and the distribution of responsibility across sectors and levels of government. But the direction of the evidence is consistent.

Children's future possibilities remain more open where relationships, services and institutions continue to form credible routes from risk to response, and where children can still identify changes as possible. They begin to contract when those connections weaken. The purpose of the recommendations is to protect and strengthen the conditions that keep those possibilities open.



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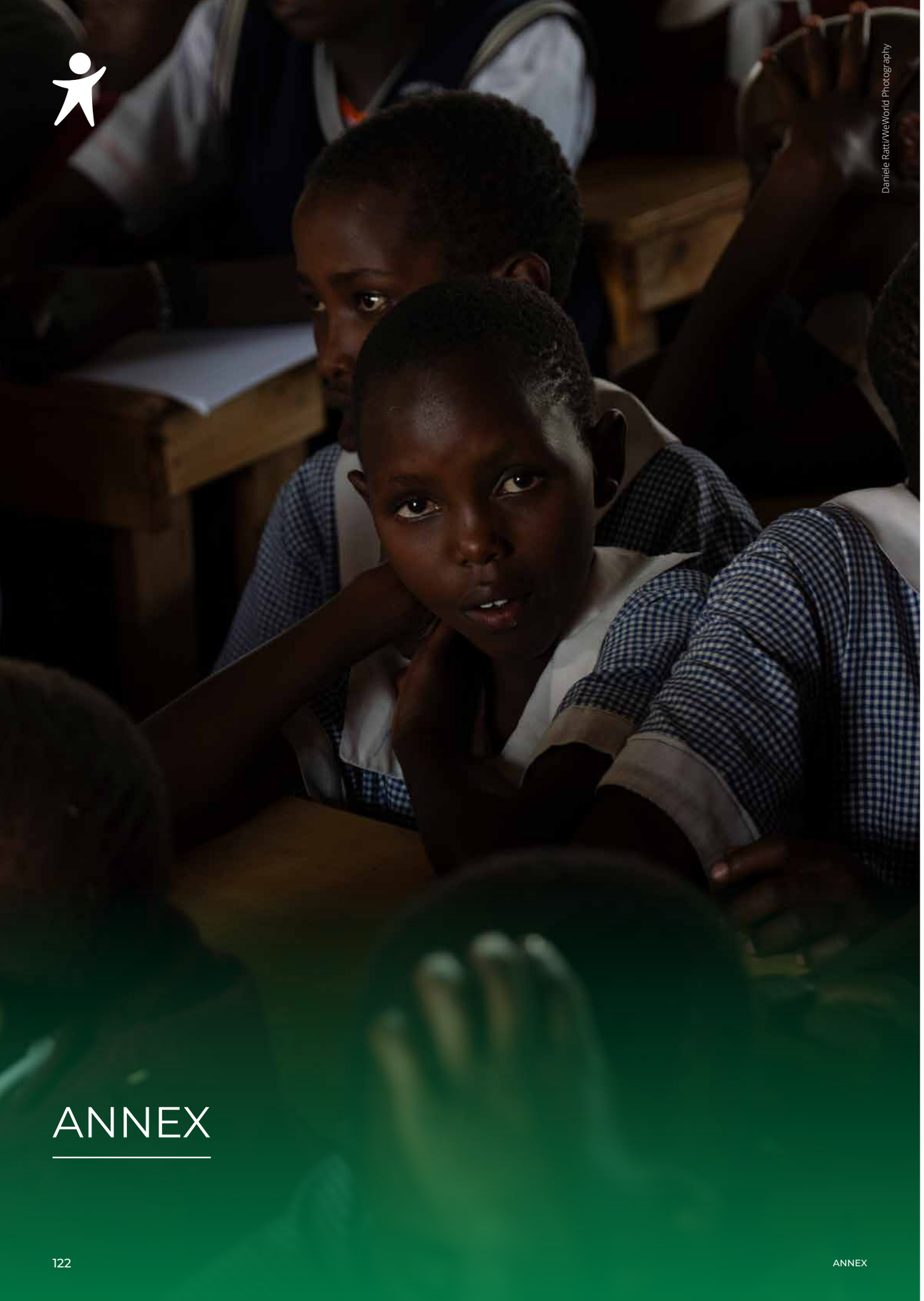
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ANNEX

A1. Methodology

A1.1 Research Design and Objectives

This report draws on a mixed-methods, multi-source research design that combines three complementary components, each designed to answer a different kind of question about children's rights and safety:

- **The ChildFund Alliance World Index** — a composite quantitative index measuring the implementation of women's and children's rights across 134 countries. It provides the *independent description of national conditions*: the institutional, legal, and governance environment within which rights are implemented.

- **The Global Consultation** — a standardised questionnaire administered to 2,344 children and adolescents across 27 countries. It provides a *description at the level of the child*: children's own reports of safety, trust, perceived help-seeking capacity, participation, and future agency.

- **The Safety Mapping** — 76 facilitated participatory group sessions with 834 children across 21 countries, in which children mapped their environments, classified safe and unsafe spaces, and proposed solutions. It provides the *spatial and contextual description*: how children navigate their environments and what they think needs to change.

The three components are read alongside one another through a triangulation strategy (Section 5) in which convergence, divergence, and elaboration across sources are all treated as analytically meaningful (Denzin, 1978; Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The design is not a validation exercise in which qualitative data illustrate quantitative findings, and it does not treat any one source as the key through which the others are read: each generates findings in its own right, and the relationships among them — including their frequent non-alignment — are themselves objects of analysis.

One consequence of this design should be stated at the outset, as it governs how the quantitative material is presented throughout the report. The countries covered by the consultation are not a sample drawn from a wider population; they are the countries in which ChildFund Alliance members operate. There is no superpopulation to which findings from them could be generalised, and inferential statistics — significance tests, p-values and confidence intervals — are therefore not applied to this material. Country-level correlation coefficients, where they appear, are descriptive observations about the specific countries covered, each reported with the number of countries on which it is computed; they can direct attention and motivate a hypothesis, but they do not carry a claim on their own. No finding in this report rests on a country-level coefficient. This position is set out in full in Section A1.6.

The design is guided by the central research question of this edition: how do structural inequalities in the implementation of women's and children's rights shape children's everyday conditions of safety, and what determines whether formal and informal protection systems, relationships, and practices translate into real and actionable safety in a context of polycrises? Safety is not treated as directly measurable through a single indicator: it is approached as a relational and context-dependent condition, emerging from the interaction between the systems children live in and their everyday experiences. This framing draws on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which emphasises that children's development and wellbeing emerge from the interaction of nested environmental systems — from immediate family and school contexts to broader institutional, cultural, and structural conditions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The research pursued four objectives:

1. to assess the structural implementation of children's and women's rights at country, regional and world level through the World Index;

2. to capture children's perceptions and experiences of safety, trust in adults, perceived help-seeking capacity, worries and participation across diverse contexts;

3. to understand how children interpret, navigate and respond to risk in their everyday environments, and what changes they propose;

4. to examine where structural conditions and children's lived experience align, and where they diverge — treating that gap as a finding in its own right.

A1.2 The ChildFund Alliance World Index

The ChildFund Alliance World Index 2026 ranks 134 countries from 2015 to 2025, combining 30 different indicators. The World Index — together with its three sub-indices, *Context*, *Children* and *Women* — aims at assessing the implementation of human rights for children and women at the country, regional and world level.

The methodology follows the approach introduced with the 2022 edition of the former WeWorld Index (an original product by ChildFund Alliance member WeWorld), revised and improved for the 2024 edition of the ChildFund Alliance World Index. The World Index tracks the absolute performance of territories and assesses their strengths and weaknesses in each feature composing it: scores are calculated for 30 indicators, grouped in 15 dimensions, 3 sub-indices and the overall index on an intuitive 0–100 scale, providing an absolute and relative benchmark with clear best and worst scenarios.

Theoretical framework and structure

The World Index is grounded in the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA), complemented by the Capabilities Approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011). The HRBA defines the normative structure of rights — based on universality, indivisibility, participation, accountability, and non-discrimination — while the Capabilities Approach specifies the substantive freedoms required for those rights to be meaningfully exercised, emphasising the role of social, economic, and institutional conditions in shaping effective freedom. Rather than measuring capabilities comprehensively, the Index uses a structured set of indicators to approximate how rights are translated into real-life conditions across different domains and population groups.

The Index is structured around three sub-indices — Context, Children, and Women — each containing five dimensions, each measured through two indicators. The Context Sub-Index captures structural conditions: environmental quality, housing, exposure to conflict, democratic performance and safety, and access to information. The Children's and Women's Sub-Indexes capture rights realisation across health, education, economic conditions, participation, human capital, and exposure to violence. This structure reflects a core analytical assumption: structural conditions and outcomes are distinct but interdependent — improvements in context do not automatically translate into improved rights realisation, and inequalities may persist even in relatively strong structural environments.

Indicator selection and data collection

Indicators are chosen based on their relevance concerning human rights implementation from the perspective of children and women. To guarantee statistical integrity, indicators with the fewest missing observations are selected. Data for the 30 selected indicators come from various sources: 26 indicators are retrieved from the World Bank database, the remainder directly from the source. All data used are the most recent available as of March 2026.

Table A reports, for each of the 30 indicators, the dimension it belongs to, its definition, unit of measurement and source.

Table A
The 30 indicators of the World Index: dimensions, definitions, units and sources

INDICATOR (UNIT)	DEFINITION	SOURCE (LAST UPDATE)
CONTEXT SUB-INDEX		
ENVIRONMENT		
1. CO2 emissions per capita (tonnes)	Carbon dioxide emissions stemming from the burning of fossil fuels and the manufacture of cement. They include carbon dioxide produced during consumption of solid, liquid, and gas fuels and gas flaring.	Climate Watch (2023)
2. Level of water stress (%)	Freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources: the ratio between total freshwater withdrawn by all major sectors and total renewable freshwater resources, after taking into account environmental water requirements.	FAO (2022)
HOUSING		
3. People using safely managed drinking water services (%)	Percentage of people using drinking water from an improved source that is accessible on premises, available when needed and free from faecal and priority chemical contamination. Improved water sources include piped water, boreholes or tubewells, protected dug wells, protected springs, and packaged or delivered water.	UNICEF, WHO (2024)
4. People using safely managed sanitation services (%)	Percentage of people using improved sanitation facilities that are not shared with other households and where excreta are safely disposed of in situ or transported and treated offsite. Improved sanitation facilities include flush/pour flush to piped sewer systems, septic tanks or pit latrines, ventilated improved pit latrines, composting toilets or pit latrines with slabs.	UNICEF, WHO (2024)
CONFLICTS AND WARS		
5. Global Peace Index (score 5–1)	Quantification of the absence of violence or the fear of violence to assess a nation's level of peace (Negative Peace). A higher GPI represents a higher level of violence in a country.	Vision of Humanity (2025)
6. Refugees per country of origin (%)	People recognized as refugees under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol, the 1969 OAU Convention, or the UNHCR statute; people granted refugee-like humanitarian status; and people provided temporary protection. Asylum seekers are excluded. Country of origin generally refers to the nationality or country of citizenship of a claimant.	UNHCR (2025)
DEMOCRACY AND SAFETY		
7. Global Democracy Index (score 0–10)	The Democracy Index is based on 60 indicators, grouped into five categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation and political culture.	Economist Intelligence Unit (2024)
8. Intentional homicide rate (per 100,000 people)	Estimates of unlawful homicides purposely inflicted as a result of domestic disputes, interpersonal violence, violent conflicts over land resources, intergang violence over turf or control, and predatory violence and killing by armed groups. Intentional homicide does not include all intentional killing.	UNODC (2023)
ACCESS TO INFORMATION		
9. People with access to electricity (%)	Percentage of population with access to electricity. Electrification data are collected from industry, national surveys and international sources.	IEA, World Bank (2023)
10. Individuals using Internet (%)	Individuals who have used the Internet (from any location) in the last 3 months, via a computer, mobile phone, personal digital assistant, games machine, digital TV, etc.	ITU (2025)
CHILDREN'S SUB-INDEX		
CHILDREN'S HEALTH		
11. Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	Probability per 1,000 that a newborn baby will die before reaching age five, if subject to age-specific mortality rates of the specified year.	UN IGME (2023)
12. Adolescent mortality rate (per 1,000 people ages 15–19)	Probability of dying between 15 and 19 years of age, expressed per 1,000 adolescents aged 15, if subject to age-specific mortality rates of the specified year.	UN IGME (2023)
CHILDREN'S EDUCATION		
13. Lower secondary completion rate (% of relevant age group)	Gross intake ratio to the last grade of lower secondary education (general and pre-vocational): the number of new entrants in the last grade of lower secondary education, regardless of age, divided by the population at the entrance age for that grade.	UNESCO (2024)
14. Share of youth not in education, employment or training (% of youth population)	Proportion of young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) to the population of the corresponding age group.	ILO (2024)
CHILDREN'S HUMAN CAPITAL		
15. Population covered by at least one social protection benefit (%)	Share of the population effectively covered by a social protection system, including social protection floors such as child and maternity benefits, support for persons without a job, persons with disabilities, victims of work injuries and older persons.	ILO (2023)
16. Government expenditure on education (% of GDP)	General government expenditure on education (current, capital, and transfers), expressed as a percentage of GDP. It includes expenditure funded by transfers from international sources to government.	UNESCO (2024)
CHILDREN'S ECONOMIC CAPITAL		
17. Unemployment rate (%)	Share of the labor force that is without work but available for and seeking employment. Definitions of labor force and unemployment differ by country.	ILO (2024)
18. Poverty headcount ratio at $6.85 a day, 2017 PPP$ (%)	Percentage of the population living on less than $6.85 a day at 2017 international prices.	World Bank (2024)
VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN		
19. Children out of school (% of primary school age)	Percentage of primary-school-age children who are not enrolled in primary or secondary school. Children in the official primary age group that are in pre-primary education are considered out of school.	UNESCO (2024)
20. Adolescent fertility rate (per 1,000 women ages 15–19)	Number of births per 1,000 women ages 15–19.	UN Population Division (2022)
WOMEN'S SUB-INDEX		
WOMEN'S HEALTH		
21. Lifetime risk of maternal mortality (%)	Probability that a 15-year-old female will die eventually from a maternal cause, assuming that current levels of fertility and mortality (including maternal mortality) do not change in the future, taking into account competing causes of death.	WHO (2023)
22. Life expectancy at birth, female (years)	Number of years a newborn infant would live if prevailing patterns of mortality at the time of its birth were to stay the same throughout its life.	UN Population Division (2023)

WOMEN'S EDUCATION		
23. Educational attainment (upper secondary), female (% of female ages 25+)	Percentage of population ages 25 and over that attained or completed upper secondary education.	UNESCO (2023)
24. Tertiary school enrolment (gross), female (%)	Ratio of total enrollment, regardless of age, to the population of the age group that officially corresponds to tertiary education, which normally requires, as a minimum condition of admission, the successful completion of education at the secondary level.	UNESCO (2024)
WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES		
25. Vulnerable employment, female (% of female employment)	Contributing family workers and own-account workers as a percentage of total employment.	World Bank, ILO (2025)
26. Ratio of female to male labor force participation rate (%)	Labor force participation rate is the proportion of the population ages 15 and older that is economically active. The ratio is calculated by dividing the female labor force participation rate by the male rate and multiplying by 100.	World Bank, ILO (2025)
WOMEN'S DECISION-MAKING PARTICIPATION		
27. Women in ministerial level position (%)	Proportion of women in ministerial or equivalent positions (including deputy prime ministers) in the government. Prime Ministers/Heads of Government are included when they hold ministerial portfolios; Vice-Presidents and heads of governmental or public agencies are excluded.	Inter-Parliamentary Union (2024)
28. Women Business and Law Index	Score between 0-100. Women, Business and the Law 2026 offers the latest global assessment of how laws, policies, and practices shape women's economic opportunities across 10 topics relating to their working lives: Safety, Mobility, Work, Pay, Marriage, Parenthood, Childcare, Entrepreneurship, Assets, and Pension.	World Bank (2026)
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN		
29. Intimate partner violence, female (%)	Share of women, aged 15 years and older, who experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner in the past year.	IHME (2023)
30. Intentional homicide rate, female (per 100,000 female)	Estimates of unlawful female homicides purposely inflicted as a result of domestic disputes, interpersonal violence, violent conflicts over land resources, intergang violence over turf or control, and predatory violence and killing by armed groups.	UNODC (2024)

Missing values imputation

Missing values imputation is a key step in the calculation of the World Index. The absence of data may be attributed to several factors, including a lack of coverage by the data source, incomplete reporting by the country to international organisations, or outdated data. Imputation seeks to balance two objectives: avoiding excessive modification of the available data sample, while filling in all missing data as required to obtain a composite index value. The data sample used in the calculation for each territory and year under consideration is determined as follows:

1. if present, the original observation is taken;

2. if the observation is missing from the sample, a linear interpolation is performed to fill in the missing value from the neighbouring observations or, if these are also missing, the last available observation is propagated forward or backwards for a maximum of 5 years (interpolation is performed only in the presence of missing values preceded or followed by a valid observation);

3. when a territory still lacks more than 6 indicators, it is excluded from the calculation for the present year; otherwise, the missing indicators are imputed from the area average for the indicator, calculated by weighting the available data based on the population of each territory in the area.[1]

Data transformations

Some transformations are necessary before normalising the indicators to the same scale. Some indicators need either to be capped by setting a clear cut-off value, or to be transformed to reduce the effect of extreme values that may affect the normalisation. In the second scenario, skewed distributions are addressed using a log transformation or a square root transformation. This methodology retains the distinctive variations in performance between countries while creating a more balanced distribution that is less extreme.

CAPPED INDICATORS. A top cut-off is imposed on four indicators: indicator 2 is capped at 200%, indicator 13 is capped at 100%, indicator 16 at 10%, and indicator 24 at 100%. Larger values of these indicators were considered unrepresentative for aggregation purposes.

LOG TRANSFORMATION. The logarithm transformation reduces the right side of the distribution when the indicator's range of values is wide or positively skewed. Indicators 1, 6, 8, 11, 12, 19, 21 and 30 are transformed according to the function:

$$x' = ln(x + 1)$$

where x is the raw data and x' is the transformed data. The addition of a positive constant ensures that the logarithm can be taken of all values within the distribution, including zeros, while preserving almost the same relative differences between countries.

SQUARE ROOT TRANSFORMATION. The square root transformation has the same objective as the previous one, but has less impact on the data distribution. Extreme values should not be considered erroneous, but preserved as a distinguishing feature of the countries they describe. Indicators 2, 20, 27 and 29 are transformed according to the function:

$$x' = \sqrt{x}$$

1 List of Countries and Territories excluded for the calculation of the 2026 edition of the World Index: Central African Republic, Congo, Dem. Rep., Congo, Rep., Cabo Verde, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Liberia, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, São Tomé and Príncipe, Angola, Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Sudan, Somalia, Fed. Rep., South Sudan, Seychelles, Zambia, Brunei Darussalam, Micronesia, Fed. Sts., Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Myanmar, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Korea, Dem. People's Rep., Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Samoa, Hong Kong SAR China, Macao SAR China, American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Turkmenistan, Kosovo, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, The, Barbados, Cuba, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, St. Kitts and Nevis, Nicaragua, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Venezuela, RB, Puerto Rico (US), St. Martin (French part), Turks and Caicos Islands, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, Curacao, Aruba, Sint Maarten (Dutch part), Iraq, Libya, Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen, Rep., Maldives, Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino, Gibraltar, Isle of Man, Virgin Islands (U.S.), Greenland, British Virgin Islands, Channel Islands, Faroe Islands.

Table B

Orientation, range and transformation applied for each World Index Indicator

INDICATOR	INVERTED	BEST_TYPE	WORST_TYPE	BEST_VALUE	WORST_VALUE	TRANSFORMATION	CAPPED
1	yes	best	worst	0,02	49,5	log	no
2	yes	best	theoretical	0,03	200	sqrt	yes
3	no	theoretical	worst	100	5,96		no
4	no	theoretical	worst	100	5,74		no
5	yes	theoretical	theoretical	1	5		no
6	yes	best	worst	0	25006,5	log	no
7	no	theoretical	theoretical	10	0		no
8	yes	best	worst	0	107,6	log	no
9	no	theoretical	worst	100	4,2		no
10	no	theoretical	worst	100	1,1		no
11	yes	best	worst	1,4	387,4	log	no
12	yes	best	worst	0,8	136,6	log	no
13	no	theoretical	worst	100	11,9		yes
14	yes	theoretical	worst	0	56,1		no
15	no	theoretical	worst	100	0		no
16	no	best	worst	16,4	0		yes
17	yes	theoretical	worst	0,1	34,6		no
18	yes	theoretical	worst	0	98,0		no
19	yes	theoretical	worst	0	66,0	log	no
20	yes	best	worst	0	180,1	sqrt	no
21	yes	best	worst	0	9,1	log	no
22	no	best	worst	88,5	25,6		no
23	no	theoretical	worst	100	0,6		no
24	no	theoretical	worst	100	0,9		yes
25	yes	theoretical	worst	0	96,4		no
26	double	theoretical parity	worst	100	7,1		no
27	double	theoretical parity	worst	50	0,0	sqrt	no
28	no	theoretical	worst	100	26,3		no
29	yes	best	worst	2,53	39,8	sqrt	no
30	yes	best	worst	0	17,5	log	no

Normalisation

All indicators are normalised using the min-max transformation with boundaries set at the indicator level. These boundaries are established in two possible ways: (i) theoretical best and worst values; (ii) maximum and minimum values recorded across the time series from 2015 to 2025. This type of normalisation allows for tracking the absolute trend and comparing territories not only within a single year but also over time. Each indicator is translated onto a positively oriented 0–100 scale, according to the following transformations:

$x' = 100 \cdot (x - xmin) / (xmax - xmin)$ *if x is positively oriented*

$x' = 100 \cdot [1 - (x - xmin) / (xmax - xmin)]$ *if x is negatively oriented*

$x' = 100 \cdot [1 - |x - xmin| / (xmax - xmin)]$ *if x is double oriented*

where x is the indicator value, $xmin$ and $xmax$ are its normalisation boundaries and x' is the normalised indicator score.

Aggregation

The Index of each territory is computed by aggregating the indicators' scores in a hybrid fashion, which consists of three sub-steps of aggregation. First, dimension scores are calculated by taking the unweighted arithmetic mean of the two indicators within each dimension. Then, to avoid full compensability, the geometric mean is employed across dimensions and sub-indices: in this way, a deficiency in one feature cannot be fully or partially compensated for by surpluses in another. Specifically, dimension scores Di, sub-index scores Sj and the final index I are computed as follows:

$Di = (x1 + x2) / 2$

$Sj = (D1 \cdot D2 \cdot D3 \cdot D4 \cdot D5)^{1/5}$

$I = (S1 \cdot S2 \cdot S3)^{1/3}$

where $x1$ and $x2$ are the scores of the two indicators within each dimension, Di is one of the five dimensions within each sub-index, and Sj is one of the three sub-indices that form the final index I of a territory.

Areas and world scores

To assess area and world performance on the World Index, population-weighted averages are first computed for each indicator; these values are then aggregated with the same procedure outlined above for actual countries. All the countries for which data are available are taken into consideration to compute indicator values for areas and the world, even those excluded from the Index because of too many missing values. In this way, regional and world scores are obtained for each feature of the Index.

Human Rights Implementation Groups

To provide an immediate overview of the performance of each territory, countries are divided into six tiers based on the scores obtained in the Index, according to the intervals reported in Table A. Tiers are provided for the Context, Children and Women sub-index scores as well. This division allows groups to be easily compared between years, since the underlying scale remains the same; the tiers are also employed in calculating the total children and women population in each group for every year taken into exam.

Table C
Intervals adopted to group territories

HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLEMENTATION	INTERVAL
Advanced	$s \geq 85$
Strong	$75 \leq s < 85$
Moderate	$65 \leq s < 75$
Basic	$55 \leq s < 65$
Limited	$45 \leq s < 55$
Minimal	$s < 45$

YEARS LEFT

Comparing values calculated for the different time steps, a rough projection of the variation rate of the Index, the sub-indices and the single dimensions at the world level can be assessed. The average variation rate between 2015 and 2025 is computed, and the number of years still needed to reach a score value of 100 from the present situation is then estimated. This method assumes the variation rate as constant over time and, in particular, cannot provide an estimate if the variation rate is negative.

A1.3 The Global Consultation

The global consultation was designed to gather children's and adolescents' own perspectives on safety, protection, trust, and participation — the experiential counterpart to the structural conditions measured by the World Index. The survey captured perceptions across six broad areas: education and learning opportunities; play and social development; adult support and protection systems; exposure to violence and insecurity; wellbeing and future-oriented aspirations; and the perceived ability to influence one's own future. Responses were standardised into comparable indicators to enable cross-country and regional analysis. The tool was developed by an internal WeWorld research group, reviewed and approved by WeWorld's global Education and Child Protection experts, and, following an initial pilot in Italy, subsequently refined and validated by the Steering Committee, which comprises representatives from all ChildFund Alliance member organisations.

The questionnaire was administered through the KoboToolbox platform and took approximately 10–12 minutes to complete. It opened with a child-friendly introduction — read aloud or shown to the child — explaining the purpose of the survey, the absence of right or wrong answers, and the possibility of stopping at any time, followed by a child-friendly consent form in which four statements (understanding of the survey's purpose, confidentiality and anonymity, the right to stop at any time, and agreement to take part) had to be actively acknowledged before starting. The instrument then comprised 17 numbered questions, plus conditional follow-ups, organised in five thematic sections, each introduced by a short script read aloud reminding children that they only needed to answer what they felt comfortable sharing:

- **ABOUT YOU** (questions 1–4) — country, gender, age group (8–11, 12–15, 16–18), and a functional-difficulty question asking whether anything about the child's body, senses, or way of learning makes some activities harder (such as seeing, hearing, moving, concentrating, or learning/understanding things).
- **DAILY LIFE AND WELLBEING** (questions 5–7) — current participation in learning activities; opportunities to play or do things that bring happiness or relaxation, even when life is challenging; and the ease of talking to a trusted adult when feeling strong emotions (fear, worry, sadness).
- **SAFETY AND PROTECTION** (questions 8–12) — the places where children usually feel safest (up to three choices, with an open option); the existence of places in their area where children should not go because they are not safe, with a conditional follow-up on the reasons; the frequency of situations that do not feel calm or safe; the perceived ability to ask someone for help if they saw a child being treated harshly or unfairly, with a conditional follow-up on where or whom they would turn to; and the perceived importance of children's safety to adults in their community.
- **FEELINGS, FUTURE AND HAVING A VOICE** (questions 13–15) — a matrix question asking whether any of eight changes had occurred in the child's life in the past few months and how each made them feel (problems or arguments in the family; problems at school or where they learn; changes in where they live; fighting or violence in their country; fighting or violence in other parts of the world; bad weather or nature problems; sickness of the child or someone close; another big change); perceived freedom to make choices about their future; and the frequency with which they get to share their opinion when decisions affecting them are made.
- **OPEN QUESTIONS** (questions 16–17) — what helps children in their community feel safe, cared for, and treated fairly; and three words to describe what it means to be a child in their community.

In line with the do-no-harm principle (Section 8), the questionnaire was sequenced to begin from children's positive experiences — play, wellbeing, trusted adults — before moving to risks and worries, used child-friendly language adapted to the 8–18 age range, and applied skip logic so that children were only asked follow-up questions relevant to their previous answers.

Target population and scope

The target population for the consultation consisted of children and adolescents aged 8 to 18 who live in countries where ChildFund Alliance member organisations operate and who participate in their programmes. Given the broad nature of the target population, obtaining a statistically representative sample was not feasible due to constraints related to time, resources, accessibility and ethical considerations. A convenience sampling approach was therefore adopted, enabling the consultation to reach a broad, although not statistically representative, sample. The consultation should therefore be regarded as an exploratory exercise, with the primary aim of capturing a wide range of perspectives and contextual insights rather than producing findings that are statistically generalisable.

Data collection

The data collection period spanned February to April 2026. The consultation was administered online, either through self-completion by children with internet access, or with the support and supervision of trained enumerators in cases involving younger children or children without access to the internet. Children and adolescents were reached on the basis of their accessibility to member organisations, mainly through project implementation. The process was carried out by the following ChildFund Alliance members: Barnfonden, Children Believe, ChildFund Australia, ChildFund Deutschland, ChildFund International, Educo, and WeWorld. The survey was available in 13 languages: English, Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Ukrainian, Khmer, Kiswahili, Bengali, Tetun, Tok Pisin, and Swedish.

Overview of the sample

The final clean dataset comprises 2,344 children and adolescents across 27 countries. The geographical distribution of the sample is reported in Table B.

Table D
Geographical distribution of the sample

COUNTRY	CHILDREN	MEMBER ORGANISATION RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DATA COLLECTION
Bangladesh	101	Educo
Benin	110	Educo
Bolivia	51	Educo
Burkina Faso	59	WeWorld
Cambodia	133	WeWorld + ChildFund Australia
Ecuador	267	ChildFund International
El Salvador	85	Educo
Ethiopia	58	ChildFund International
Guatemala	99	ChildFund International
Honduras	106	ChildFund International
India	82	Children Believe
Italy	67	WeWorld
Kenya	110	WeWorld
Mali	52	WeWorld
Mexico	122	ChildFund International
Mozambique	80	WeWorld
Palestine	60	WeWorld
Papua New Guinea	48	ChildFund Australia
Senegal	90	ChildFund International
Spain	105	Educo
Sweden	62	Barnfonden
Syria	61	WeWorld
Tanzania	55	WeWorld
The Philippines	71	Educo
Timor Leste	52	ChildFund Australia
Uganda	98	ChildFund International
Ukraine	60	WeWorld + ChildFund Deutschland
Grand Total	**2,344**	-

- **Gender.** Female participation is slightly higher overall, accounting for 56% of the sample, with some countries showing significantly higher proportions of girls, reaching up to 70%. Twenty-eight children do not identify within the binary definition of genders.
- **Age.** The majority of children and adolescents surveyed fall within the 12–15 age group (48%), while approximately one quarter of the sample (28%) is represented by younger children (aged 8–11) and another quarter by older adolescents (aged 16–18).
- **Disability.** Overall, 19% of respondents report experiencing difficulties related to their body, senses, or learning processes, which may affect their ability to carry out certain activities (such as seeing, hearing, moving, concentrating, or understanding). It is important to note that the sample was reached through project activities, which may have a specific focus on children with learning difficulties or physical disabilities. This may, in turn, contribute to a higher representation of children with such challenges within the sample. When disaggregation by disability status is performed, it refers to children who specifically responded "Yes" versus "No" to this question.

Quantitative analysis

A descriptive approach was applied to the consultation data, mainly through the construction of frequency tables for each question. Disaggregation by country, gender, age group and disability status was investigated for all questions.

To enable analysis at the country level and integration with the World Index, continuous variables were created by aggregating the frequency of responses at the country level, as follows:

Table E
Country-level continuous variables derived from the survey

VARIABLE	DEFINITION
Having a trusted adult to talk to	% of answers "Easy" and "Very easy" to question 7
Feeling safe at home	% of answers "At home" to question 8
Feeling safe in the family	% of answers "With my family" to question 8
Feeling safe at school	% of answers "At school" to question 8
Not feeling safe anywhere	% of answers "I don't feel safe anywhere right now" to question 8
Perceived risk near water	% of answers "There is water and children could fall in or drown" to question 9.1
Perceived risk of violence	% of answers "There are fights, violence, or weapons" to question 9.1
Perceived social risk	% of answers "There are people who might scare or hurt children" to question 9.1
Experiencing unsafe situations	% of answers "Often" and "Sometimes" to question 10
Ability to ask for help	% of answers "Yes" to question 11
Perceived importance of children's safety by adults	% of answers "Very important" and "Quite important" to question 12
Worrying about weather events	% of answers "Very worried" and "Mostly sad or scared" to the item "Bad weather or nature problems (floods, fires, strong heat, storms)" of question 13
Worrying about violence in their country	% of answers "Very worried" and "Mostly sad or scared" to the item "Fighting or violence in my country" of question 13
Worrying about violence in other countries	% of answers "Very worried" and "Mostly sad or scared" to the item "Fighting or violence in other parts of the world" of question 13
Worrying about family situation	% of answers "Very worried" and "Mostly sad or scared" to the item "Problems or arguments in my family" of question 13
Worrying about school	% of answers "Very worried" and "Mostly sad or scared" to the item "Problems at school or where I learn" of question 13
Worrying about health issues	% of answers "Very worried" and "Mostly sad or scared" to the item "When I or someone close to me is sick" of question 13
Ability to share their opinion	% of answers "Always" and "Often" to question 15

Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed to describe how measures are distributed together across countries, both among survey measures and between survey measures and the World Index's sub-indices and dimensions. Correlations were computed at the country level: across 27 countries where both measures come from the consultation, and across 23 where one measure is a World Index score, four consultation countries being unranked in the Index. These coefficients are used descriptively and not inferentially; their analytical status, and the risk of ecological fallacy, are set out in Section 6.

Qualitative analysis

The open-ended questions (16 and 17) were automatically translated into English to facilitate the analysis. A thematic analysis was conducted on the open-ended responses using a hybrid coding approach that combined deductive and inductive elements (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña, 2021). Thematic categories were defined based based on both the research focus - namely structural dimensions of children's wellbeing (family, education, community) - and themes that emerged directly from children's answers. (basic needs, play, social life and rights). These categories were operationalised through keyword-based coding in R, allowing each response to be assigned to multiple themes (multi-label coding).

Thematic coding for question 16 (feeling cared for, respected and protected):

Table F
Coding scheme for question 16

THEME	KEYWORDS
Care	care, cared, love, loved, support, kind
Respect	respect, fair, equal, treated well, discrimination
Protection	protect, violence, abuse, danger, police
Education	school, teacher, education, learning
Basic needs	food, water, health, shelter
Community	community, leader, NGO, neighbour, authority
Voice	voice, heard, listen, express

Thematic coding for question 17 (what being a child means):

Table G
Coding scheme for question 17

THEME	KEYWORDS
Joy	joy, happy, joyful, fun, cheerful, smile
Play/social life	play, game, sport, friend
Learning/future	school, study, learning, grow
Behaviour	respect, obey, help, behave, discipline
Dependency	small, minor, under, weak, dependent, innocent
Rights	rights, freedom, opinion, voice

A1.4 The Safety Mapping

The Safety Mapping methodology is grounded in a child-centred, rights-based, and participatory framework, drawing on principles of child participation, safeguarding, and "do no harm" (Hart, 1992; Lundy, 2007; Clark, 2010). It is designed to capture children's situated understandings of safety, risk, and protection as they relate to everyday environments, rather than to document individual experiences of harm or trauma. Conceptually, the methodology is shaped by three key assumptions:

- **Safety is relational rather than purely spatial.** Safety is not treated as an intrinsic property of a place, but as an outcome of social relations, power dynamics, adult presence, and institutional behaviour.
- **Children are competent analysts of their environments.** Children are understood not only as informants but as capable interpreters of risk, able to identify patterns, causal relationships, and responsibilities within their communities.
- **Risk is context-specific and structurally produced.** Children's exposure to risk is shaped by wider structural conditions, including poverty, governance, climate change, conflict, gender norms, and social inequality.

Within this framework, the Safety Mapping functions both as a participatory activity and as a qualitative data-generation tool for territorial and relational analysis of child safety.

Scope of the exercise and participants

The Safety Mapping activities were implemented by members of the ChildFund Alliance in areas where Alliance organisations have active programmes and long-term engagement. In total, 76 facilitated group sessions were conducted with 834 children across 21 countries. The exercise involved:

- children and adolescents aged approximately 8–19 years;
- groups differentiated by age where possible, and in some cases by gender, depending on context;
- both urban and rural settings;
- contexts affected by the climate crisis, armed conflict, displacement, or structural marginalisation, as well as comparatively stable environments.

The methodology does not aim to produce a statistically representative sample. Instead, it seeks to generate context-rich qualitative insights grounded in children's lived environments.

Table H
Safety Mapping: coded sessions and participants by country (source: session-level analysis matrix)

COUNTRY	CODED SESSIONS	PARTICIPANTS	MEMBER ORGANISATION RESPONSIBLE FOR DATA COLLECTION
Bangladesh	2	16	Educo
Benin	14	154	Educo
Bolivia	2	23 (15 from Educo; 8 from ChildFund International)	Educo + ChildFund International
Burkina Faso	2	20	WeWorld
Cambodia	3	29	WeWorld
Ecuador	20	280	ChildFund International
El Salvador	2	13	Educo
Ethiopia	1	10	ChildFund International
India	2	19	Children Believe
Italy	11	120	WeWorld
Kenya	1	10	WeWorld
Mali	2	17	WeWorld
Papua New Guinea	1	10	ChildFund Australia
The Philippines	2	16	Educo
Senegal	1	12	ChildFund International
Spain	2	14	Educo
Syria	2	22	WeWorld
Tanzania	2	12	WeWorld
Timor-Leste	1	10	ChildFund Australia
Uganda	2	15	ChildFund International
Ukraine	1	12	WeWorld
Total	**76**	**834**	

Design of the Safety Mapping activity

All sessions followed a common facilitator template developed for the exercise. The template served as a flexible guide, providing facilitators with room to adapt and contextualise the activity according to local realities and the diverse settings of the participating countries. At the same time, it ensured a minimum common denominator across all sessions, allowing the exercise to retain a shared methodological structure while remaining responsive to different humanitarian and long-term development contexts. It was designed for children aged 8–18 and adapted to the local context. Sessions involved groups of 6–12 children, divided by age (with narrower age bands where feasible, e.g. 8–10 and 16–18) and, where culturally appropriate, by gender, and lasted 60–75 minutes.

Each session followed six steps:

1. **Warm-up and creation of a safe space (10 minutes).** A short drawing or name game to relax the group, preceded by a child-friendly opening script explaining the purpose of the activity, clarifying that no personal stories were required, that there were no right or wrong answers, and that children could stop at any time.
2. **Collective mapping of everyday spaces (20 minutes).** Children drew the places they use regularly — home areas, paths and roads, school, water points and sanitation facilities, playing fields, markets and community areas, natural areas (rivers, forests, beaches, fields), and, where relevant, shelters, IDP sites, or temporary structures. For groups with low literacy, pre-prepared symbols, shapes, stickers, or icons were used, in some cases over a printed satellite image or drawn outline of the community.
3. **Safety coding (10 minutes).** Using a three-level, colour-based system, children collectively classified places as safe (green: places where children feel protected, listened to, welcomed, and respected), okay/neutral (yellow: places that feel mostly fine but could be better), or critical (red: places children might find difficult, uncomfortable, confusing, or risky), with the explicit reminder that the discussion concerned places in general, not personal stories.

4. **Guided group discussion (20 minutes).** Facilitated discussion — with all questions framed in general rather than personal terms — covering four domains: what makes safe spaces safe, who helps make them safe, and what children enjoy doing there; what makes critical spaces difficult, whether they are particularly challenging for some children (for instance girls or children reporting functional difficulties), what could be changed, and who could help; whether any places are more difficult because of flooding, heat, storms, drought, conflict, overcrowding, or displacement, and how these changes affect children's daily movements; and how children would like to share their ideas with adults, and what the best way is for adults to listen.

5. **Positive action messages (5 minutes).** Children were invited to formulate one message to adults to help make children safer, in the form of short slogans, drawings, or one or two words.

6. **Closing and wellbeing check (2–3 minutes).** A short check-out (e.g. thumbs up/side/down or coloured circles) to monitor how children were feeling at the end of the session.

This structure allowed children to discuss sensitive issues indirectly and collectively, reducing the risk of distress or exposure. Facilitators were explicitly instructed not to promise that changes would happen, but to promise that children's views would be shared.

Safeguarding within the activity

The Safety Mapping methodology is explicitly designed to comply with safeguarding and ethical standards (fully described in Section 8), including: avoidance of direct questioning about personal experiences of violence or abuse; a focus on places and systems rather than individual perpetrators or events; voluntary participation and the right to remain silent or disengage; and attention to group dynamics and emotional safety during sessions. Facilitators were instructed to observe and manage signs of discomfort, distress, or withdrawal, and to prioritise children's wellbeing over data completeness. Enumerators operated under a written referral guidance sheet — to be activated if a child disclosed a protection concern, showed visible distress, or the group identified a community-level risk requiring follow-up — requiring them to stay calm, avoid probing for details, ensure the child felt safe, follow the organisation's child safeguarding protocol, and inform their supervisor the same day. Each member organisation also maintained its own established referral pathways, which would have been activated where appropriate in line with organisational safeguarding procedures. However, no disclosures were recorded in the session notes or activity records from the 76 Safety Mapping sessions. Given that the methodology deliberately avoids eliciting children's personal experiences of harm, this should not be interpreted as an indication of the level of protection need in participating communities. **The absence of recorded disclosures may also reflect the non-disclosure design of the methodology and differences in documentation across sessions, rather than an absence of protection concerns. Where referral pathways were available, their functionality should be distinguished from their existence and, where possible, verified before sessions took place.** A do-no-harm and conduct checklist was completed before, during, and after each session (safeguarding protocols reviewed, location safety check, child-friendly and private space, no personal stories requested, no adults influencing responses, secure storage of materials, debrief with supervisor).

Data generation and documentation

Documentation followed a structured note sheet common to all sessions. Before content notes, note-takers completed a participant profile recording the date, location, whether the location had recently been affected by climate-related disasters or by conflict, group composition and age range, the number of participants (total, girls, boys), and the number of children reporting functional difficulties (visible or reported, with type where known). During and after each session, facilitators or designated note-takers then recorded:

- the list of places identified and their classification (safe, critical, neutral), with at least one direct quote explaining each classification;
- children's explanations and reasoning, captured as far as possible in children's exact words rather than paraphrase — note-takers were instructed to write what children said, not what they thought children meant, to record differing views within the group, and not to edit, judge, or filter children's ideas;
- improvement ideas exactly as children described them, without assessing feasibility;
- the actors children identified as responsible or capable of acting;
- climate, conflict, or crisis factors mentioned, in children's wording;
- internal observational notes on group dynamics — who spoke most and least, gender dynamics, participation of children reporting functional difficulties, signs of fear, tension or distress, and peer pressure or adult influence.

No children's names were recorded: quotations were attributed only through identifiers such as "Girl, 11" or "Boy, 9". Maps and notes were stored securely, handed to supervisors daily, and never kept on personal devices. All data were subsequently entered into a coding framework designed to enable cross-country comparability while preserving qualitative depth.

Analysis of the Safety Mapping data

Analytical approach. The analysis adopted a qualitative, comparative, and interpretive approach (Patton, 2015; Flick, 2018), moving beyond individual case studies to identify patterns across contexts. All session notes — produced by facilitating teams in several languages and translated into English where necessary — were consolidated into a single session-level analysis matrix. Each session constitutes one analytical unit, coded for: country, implementing organisation, site/community, urban or rural setting, group composition (gender, age range, number of participants, presence of children reporting functional difficulties), and the structural factors affecting the location (climate crisis, conflict, both, or none), together with children's quotations on climate change and conflict where these factors were raised.

Coding of places. The places identified by children were coded against a controlled typology of 14 location categories, applied identically to safe, critical, and neutral classifications: home; school; child-friendly centre/space; community spaces; place of worship; hospital/health facility; authority (police, municipality, administrative offices); market; street/road; crossing places (bridges, intersections); WASH facilities; natural points (rivers, forests, fields, mountains); distribution points; and other. Each coded classification remained anchored to at least one verbatim quotation — attributed by gender and age only — explaining why children perceived the place as safe or critical, preserving the link between the categorical coding and children's own words. The same physical place could be coded as safe in one session and critical in another, or as both within the same session (e.g. home, school, or WASH facilities), and these within-category ambivalences were treated as analytically meaningful rather than as coding inconsistencies.

Coding of solutions and actors. Children's improvement ideas were coded into nine thematic categories: child participation and agency; environmental and climate risks; hygiene and health; infrastructure and basic services; recreation and child-friendly spaces; safety and protection risks; supervision and adult support; violence and threats; and other. The actors children identified as responsible for or capable of supporting improvements were coded into eight categories: parents; teachers; adults in general; authorities; community leaders; religious leaders; NGOs; and other.

Triangulation within the Safety Mapping. Findings were derived through triangulation of spatial classifications, qualitative explanations and quotations, and observational notes recorded by facilitators. This allowed the analysis to distinguish between what children say explicitly, what they indicate indirectly, and what emerges through repetition, silence, or conditional language.

Cross-cutting and country-level analysis. The analytical process included the identification of cross-cutting global patterns; comparative analysis across geographic regions; country-level interpretation of risk configurations and solution spaces; and thematic deep dives on agency, gender, climate crisis, conflict, and the right to the future. The focus was on analytical coherence and explanatory depth, rather than on frequency counts or statistical inference.

Analytical positioning

Throughout the analysis, particular attention was paid to:

- recognising silence and ambiguity as meaningful data, especially in high-risk contexts;
- avoiding deficit-based interpretations of children's views;
- distinguishing between absence of expression and absence of risk;
- situating children's perceptions within broader structural and political contexts.

The methodology thus treats the Safety Mapping not merely as a consultation tool, but as a method for generating territorial and relational knowledge from children's perspectives.

Methodological strengths

The approach is non-intrusive and safeguarding-compliant; accessible across age groups and literacy levels; capable of capturing relational, spatial, and structural dimensions of safety; adaptable across diverse cultural and crisis contexts; and generates both analytical insight and programmatic guidance. While it does not produce generalisable prevalence data, it offers deep insight into how risk is produced, negotiated, and imagined in children's everyday worlds — making it particularly suited for programming, policy reflection, and advocacy. Its constraints are discussed in Section 6.

A1.5 Triangulation and Integrated Analysis

The study employs between-method triangulation within a convergent mixed-methods design: the three components were implemented independently, each with its own instruments and analytical procedures, and their results were integrated at the analysis and interpretation stage. Integration served the purposes identified in the mixed-methods literature (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989): *corroboration*, where agreement across methods strengthens confidence in a finding; *complementarity*, where one method elaborates or clarifies results obtained through another; *initiation*, where discrepancies between methods prompt the reframing of questions and generate new hypotheses; and *expansion*, where the combination of methods extends the scope of the inquiry beyond what any single method could cover.

Consistent with the overall design (Section 1), children's lived experiences constitute the primary entry point of the integrated analysis. Participatory data are not used to illustrate or validate the structural patterns measured by the Index. The Index is used instead as a second and independent description of the same countries, at the national level of legal, institutional and policy conditions. The two descriptions are read alongside one another rather than one through the other, and their frequent non-alignment is treated as a result of the analysis rather than as a problem within it.

Analytical function of each component

Each component addresses a distinct analytical question, at a distinct unit of analysis, with distinct limitations (Table G). No single component is treated as the criterion against which the others are validated: the relationships among their results — agreement, discrepancy, or elaboration — are themselves objects of analysis.

Integration procedure

Integration was conducted through a five-step analytical sequence, applied iteratively rather than strictly linearly.

1. **Establishing the experiential baseline.** The survey data were analysed first, to establish the distribution of children's reported experiences across the 27 countries and to identify the patterns requiring explanation — including the predominance of between-country over between-group variation, the absence of expected income or governance gradients, and null associations between related constructs.

2. **Mechanism identification through participatory data.** For each pattern identified in step 1, the Safety Mapping material was examined to identify the conditions under which the pattern holds (for instance, the conditional and relational character of the safety children attribute to home and school). The Safety Mapping corpus was also analysed in its own right and generated findings that the structured instrument could not anticipate, consistent with the expansion function of the design.

3. **Structural contextualisation through the Index.** The country-level variables derived from the survey (Section 3.5) were correlated with the Index's sub-indices and dimensions. Both statistically detectable associations and null results were reported; null results were treated as substantively informative about the relationship between structural conditions and reported experience, subject to the statistical caveats discussed in Section 6.

4. **Examination of discrepant results.** Where components yielded discrepant results, the discrepancy was examined systematically before substantive interpretation: first for measurement explanations (item wording, sample composition, administration conditions), then for contextual explanations, drawing on the Safety Mapping and on country context documentation. Discrepancies that survived this examination were reported as substantive findings on the distinction between structural rights implementation and experienced safety, in line with the initiation function of the design.

5. **Validation against country context documentation.** Interpretations were checked against country context documents compiled from secondary sources for each of the 27 countries, to ensure that explanations of unexpected patterns were grounded in documented contextual conditions rather than analytical conjecture.

Interpretation rules

Three rules governed the interpretation of integrated results. First, convergence across the three components was treated as corroboration and increased the confidence attached to a finding; the relational rather than spatial character of safety, supported independently by all three sources, is interpreted on this basis. Second, divergence was not treated as error: once measurement explanations had been excluded, divergent results were interpreted as evidence that the structural implementation of rights and children's experienced safety are related but distinct constructs — the inversion between Index tier and reported perceived help-seeking capacity observed in some country pairs is reported in these terms. Third, elaboration — where qualitative material accounts for a quantitative result — was used to move from the description of a pattern to the identification of its mechanism; mechanisms identified in this way are interpretive hypotheses grounded in the data, not statistically tested causal claims.

Table I
Analytical function, unit of analysis and principal limitations of the three components

COMPONENT	ANALYTICAL FUNCTION	UNIT OF ANALYSIS	PRINCIPAL LIMITATIONS
World Index	Measurement of the structural conditions of rights implementation (institutional, legal, governance)	Country-year (134 countries, 2015–2026)	National-level aggregation; secondary data; cannot capture lived experience or within-country disparities
Global consultation	Standardised measurement of children's reported perceptions of safety, trust, perceived help-seeking capacity, worries and participation	Individual child (n = 2,344; 27 countries), aggregated to country level for integration	Convenience sample; self-report; breadth without contextual depth
Safety Mapping	Contextual, spatial and relational analysis of how children classify their environments, explain risk, and formulate proposals	Group session (76 sessions; 834 children; 21 countries)	Non-quantifiable; no country-level estimates; programme-linked settings

A1.6 Limitations

The findings presented in this report should be interpreted in light of several methodological and analytical limitations. These limitations do not undermine the relevance of the data, but they do define the scope, comparability, and generalisability of the conclusions. They are presented here by component, followed by the limitations that apply to the integrated analysis.

Limitations of the World Index

The World Index aims to assess the multifaceted aspects of women's and children's inclusion in society by evaluating the implementation of fundamental human rights across different territories; it is, however, undoubtedly difficult to fully capture the complexity of these concepts. First, the indicators chosen for many of the dimensions are not perfect and do not measure certain aspects of the phenomenon; it is therefore crucial to further investigate relationships and correlations among these indicators. Second, the arbitrary choices made in the normalisation and aggregation process determine the outcome. Third, country performance is ultimately dependent upon the quality and availability of data published by other sources. Fourth, as a composite index based on secondary data, the Index operates at the national level and cannot reflect internal disparities within countries or the heterogeneity of lived experiences across population groups: it should be interpreted as an analytical approximation of structural conditions of rights implementation, not a complete representation of lived realities. Fifth, several source indicators are updated with a lag of two to six years: scores for the most recent years therefore rest partly on interpolated or propagated values (Section 2) rather than on newly observed data, and recent-year scores and rankings should be read as best available estimates whose precision declines toward the end of the series. Finally, the indicator set is periodically revised between editions (10 of 30 indicators were replaced between the 2022 and 2024 editions); all time comparisons presented in this report (e.g. 2015 vs 2026) are computed by applying the current methodology and indicator set retrospectively across the full series, so that observed variations reflect changes in the underlying data rather than changes in the measurement instrument. Scores are accordingly not comparable with those published in previous editions. Despite these weaknesses — common to all composite indices — the Index can serve as a reference to assess the relative performance of territories and identify specific areas of strength and weakness; the scoring on a 0–100 scale provides an intuitive benchmark to track relative and absolute variations over time.

Programme investment as an unmeasured variable. The consultation was conducted exclusively in countries where ChildFund Alliance members are active, and members differ in the balance of their investment between relational work and the referral and response capacity of protection systems. This variation is not currently coded and therefore cannot be controlled for or tested. It represents both the most significant unmeasured source of between-country variation in the present analysis and its most promising extension: coding countries by the composition of programme investment

would allow the central proposition of this report — that the alignment between trust and perceived help-seeking capacity depends on systemic capacity and not on relational capacity alone — to be tested directly rather than inferred. This is identified as a priority for the next edition.

Limitations of the Global Consultation

Sampling and representativeness. The consultation used convenience sampling rather than probability sampling, and was designed to capture the perspectives of children reached through the ChildFund Alliance network, rather than to produce statistically representative results. As participants were selected within specific programme contexts, the findings cannot be generalised to all children and adolescents in the countries included in the study. This is consistent with the epistemological tradition of purposive sampling in participatory research with children, where the goal is theoretical insight rather than statistical generalisation (Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher, 2008; Clark, 2010).

Sample composition. The disability rate in the sample (19%) is higher than national averages in most countries, likely because some programme areas have a specific focus on children reporting functional difficulties; this should be considered when interpreting disability-disaggregated findings. Younger children (8–11) are underrepresented relative to their share of the child population in most countries, and their experiences may be partially underweighted in aggregate findings. Female participation (56%) is slightly higher than male, possibly reflecting patterns of access through programme activities.

Cross-country comparability. Although a common consultation framework and questionnaire were used across countries, comparisons between contexts should be approached with caution. Children's perceptions and experiences are shaped by diverse social, cultural, economic and political realities, meaning that differences observed across countries may reflect contextual factors rather than comparable levels of wellbeing, agency or opportunities. Administration conditions also varied — some children completed the survey independently, others with facilitator support; some in group settings, others individually — and these differences may affect responses, particularly on sensitive topics. Social desirability effects may also vary across cultural contexts and administration modalities, and cannot be fully controlled (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Self-reported data. The analysis relies on self-reported data, which may be affected by factors such as differences in question interpretation, social desirability bias, age-related understanding, and variations in data collection settings. While efforts were made to ensure consistency in implementation, differences in facilitation and local conditions may have influenced participants' responses.

Thematic coding and translation. Thematic analysis of open-ended responses involved the coding and grouping of answers into broader categories. While coding procedures were applied consistently, some degree of interpretation was unavoidable, and certain responses could reasonably fit within multiple themes; thematic findings should be understood as indicative of key patterns rather than exhaustive representations of all perspectives expressed. The keyword-based, multi-label coding applied to the open-ended questions carries specific limitations of its own: keyword matching cannot reliably handle negations ("I do not feel safe" matches the same keyword as "I feel safe"), synonyms or paraphrases not included in the keyword lists, or figurative and context-dependent expressions, and its accuracy is further conditioned by the quality of automated translation. These limitations are attenuated by the descriptive use made of the coding — identifying the relative salience of broad themes rather than measuring precise frequencies — but coded theme counts should not be over-interpreted, and manual validation of a random sample of coded responses is recommended as a robustness check for future editions. The cross-country analysis also required the translation of responses into a common language, in some cases using automated translation tools, which may have resulted in the loss of nuances, cultural references or context-specific meanings — particularly for local dialects and expressions for which direct translations were not always available.

Limitations of the Safety Mapping

Coverage and representativeness. The Safety Mapping exercises were conducted exclusively in areas where members of the ChildFund Alliance have active programmes and ongoing operations. The dataset therefore does not provide a comprehensive picture of child safety conditions at the national level; it reflects situated and programme-linked contexts, often characterised by heightened vulnerability, prior engagement with child protection actors, or existing community mobilisation. The number of sessions and participating children varies significantly by country, depending on programme scale, operational capacity, and contextual constraints; this uneven distribution means that cross-country comparisons should be interpreted qualitatively rather than quantitatively. The analysis aims to identify patterns, configurations, and recurring dynamics, rather than to produce prevalence estimates or nationally representative conclusions.

Variability in data collection and documentation. Although a shared template and common methodological guidance were provided, data collection was facilitated by different organisations, teams, and note-takers operating in diverse linguistic, cultural, and institutional settings. There is therefore variability in the level of detail recorded in session notes; the extent to which verbatim quotations were captured; the depth of observation regarding group dynamics, gender differences, or emotional responses; and the interpretation and transcription of children's expressions, especially when mediated through translation. While the coding framework enabled structured comparison, some nuances may be more visible in certain countries or sessions than in others due to differences in documentation styles rather than differences in children's experiences. The completeness of the coded fields in the session-level analysis matrix also varies: not every classified place is accompanied by a quotation, and the coding of improvement ideas and supportive actors is available only for the sessions in which children generated such content — groups did not respond with the same density across all steps of the activity, so the absence of coded solutions or actors for a given session reflects the depth of that discussion rather than a gap in coding. Some sessions documented in a single source covering several communities were also disaggregated into separate analytical units, sharing contextual information across entries. Sessions also varied in size, gender composition (predominantly mixed, with exceptions such as Tanzania, where separate groups were conducted), and urban–rural context; facilitator experience and local norms around children's self-expression may have influenced the volume and content of what children shared (Johnson & Turner, 2003).

Expression, silence, and underreporting. The methodology intentionally avoids eliciting personal traumatic experiences, in line with safeguarding and "do no harm" principles. As a consequence, certain forms of risk — particularly gender-based violence, domestic violence, illegal economies, armed presence, and abuse by authority figures — may be indirectly referenced, partially expressed, or not verbalised at all. In several contexts, especially those characterised by social control, violence, or illegality, children use silence, ambiguity, drawings, or conditional language to signal risk. The absence of explicit mention should therefore not be interpreted as absence of exposure or concern, but rather as a structural constraint on what can be safely articulated. Differences across contexts may thus partly reflect variable degrees of discursive freedom, rather than differences in the underlying level of risk.

Analytical and interpretive limits. The analysis relies on qualitative coding and interpretive synthesis rather than quantitative measurement. While this approach is well-suited to capturing relational and spatial dimensions of safety, findings are interpretative and theory-informed, rather than reproducible through statistical testing. Some variables available in the dataset (such as age, gender, disability, or urban/rural classification) could not always be cross-tabulated systematically due to missing or unevenly recorded information. Finally, because the exercise captures perceptions at a specific moment in time, the data do not necessarily reflect longitudinal change or evolving dynamics, particularly in rapidly changing contexts such as conflict or climate emergencies.

The solution space framework. The framework used to classify children's proposed solutions was developed inductively from the Safety Mapping data, through iterative cross-reading of session outputs across countries. Its categories — expanded/structural, active/mitigation, contracted/avoidance, collapsed/silence — were developed to capture qualitative distinctions in the type and ambition of proposals, not mutually exclusive codes applied mechanically. Classification was carried out by researchers with contextual familiarity with the countries concerned; inter-rater reliability was not formally assessed. The framework should therefore be understood as a structured interpretive tool rather than a validated psychometric instrument: its value lies in identifying patterns across contexts, not in providing precise counts or scores. Future research could formalise the framework through systematic coding protocols and inter-rater reliability testing (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña, 2021).

Limitations of the integrated analysis

Analytical status of country-level coefficients. The countries covered by the consultation are not a sample drawn from a wider population: they are the set of countries in which ChildFund Alliance members operate. There is no superpopulation to which findings from them could be generalised, and inferential statistics — significance tests, p-values and confidence intervals — are consequently not applied to this material anywhere in this report. Country-level correlation coefficients appear here as descriptive observations about how measures are distributed across the specific countries covered, and as nothing more. Each is reported with the number of countries on which it is computed: coefficients derived from consultation measures alone cover 27 countries, while those involving World Index scores cover 23, four consultation countries being unranked in the Index.

What follows from this status. A descriptive coefficient can direct attention and motivate a hypothesis. It cannot support a claim. No finding in this report rests on a country-level coefficient alone: where a coefficient accompanies an argument, the argument is carried by individual-level distributions, by the qualitative evidence of the Safety Mapping, or by both, and the coefficient is offered as a convergent observation. Coefficients computed across this number of countries are also sensitive to the composition of the set — excluding a single country can change them appreciably — and this sensitivity is reported wherever it is material. Readers should not compare the

magnitude of coefficients against one another, nor read a low coefficient as evidence that no relationship exists.

Selection of the coefficients reported. A substantial number of variable pairs were examined across survey measures and Index dimensions. The coefficients reproduced in this report were selected on the convergence of three criteria — magnitude, theoretical plausibility, and consistency with the qualitative evidence from the Safety Mapping — and not on any statistical threshold. Under the descriptive framing set out above no threshold is applied, and no correction for multiple comparisons arises: the coefficients are reported as observations to be read alongside the other evidence, and the reader is told in each case how many countries they cover.

Measurement gap between related constructs. Some headline findings compare survey items with different referents. In particular, trust in adults and perceived help-seeking capacity are measured through different questions: trust is assessed through the ease of speaking to a trusted adult when scared, while help-seeking is assessed through a hypothetical scenario about seeking help if a child were being treated harshly. These are related but not identical constructs, and part of the weak country-level co-movement between them may reflect this measurement gap rather than a purely substantive disconnect. The finding is consistent with theoretical arguments in the child protection literature and with the qualitative patterns visible in the Safety Mapping, but it should be understood as a country-level ecological finding that identifies a pattern demanding explanation, not as a direct measure of the trust-to-action mechanism at the individual level.

Ecological fallacy. Country-level ecological correlations carry the risk of ecological fallacy — relationships observed at the country level may not hold at the individual level, and individual-level findings reported elsewhere in the report should not be conflated with country-level correlations (Robinson, 1950; Subramanian et al., 2009).

Selection of quotations. Translation of qualitative data into English for analysis introduces a layer of interpretation that cannot be fully controlled. Particular care was taken with quotes selected for inclusion in this report to preserve meaning rather than impose formulations from outside the original cultural and linguistic context; nonetheless, some nuance is inevitably lost, and the selection of quotes reflects editorial judgment and may not fully represent the range of voices within each country context.

Implications for interpretation

These limitations indicate that the participatory findings should be read as:

- context-rich but not representative;
- analytically powerful but not exhaustive;
- indicative of structural patterns rather than universal conditions.

Country-level figures throughout the report are indicative rather than nationally representative, and should not be used for cross-country ranking or population-level inference. The strength of the dataset lies not in generalisation, but in its capacity to reveal how children interpret, navigate, and respond to risk within their lived environments, and how these interpretations are shaped by structural inequalities, crisis conditions, and available forms of adult accountability.

Methodological Innovation

This report introduces three methodological contributions that distinguish it from comparable child rights reports.

Treating divergence between sources as evidence, not noise. Most multi-source reports treat convergence as the goal — findings are validated when sources agree. This report treats divergence as equally informative. When the World Index and the participatory data point in opposite directions, the gap between them is itself a finding: it identifies the distance between how rights are implemented in structural terms and how they are experienced in practice. This reframing shifts the purpose of triangulation from validation to diagnosis — the question is not "do the sources agree?" but "where do they agree, where do they diverge, and what does each type of result tell us?"

The solution space as a leading indicator. This report introduces the structure of children's proposed solutions in the Safety Mapping — what they propose, at what level of ambition, and who they name as capable of acting — as a diagnostic indicator of children's relationship to their own futures. This is methodologically significant because the solution space is both measurable (it can be classified by type and tracked over time) and temporally prior to standard outcome indicators: changes in the solution space appear before displacement figures, school closure rates, or participatory survey data register deterioration. The finding that children in certain contexts have stopped proposing structural change — or have stopped proposing anything — constitutes an early warning signal that existing monitoring systems are not designed to detect. The framework draws on research on children's participation (Hart, 1992; Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher, 2008), future orientation in crisis contexts (Betancourt et al., 2010; Tol, Song & Jordans, 2013), and the concept of anticipatory action, and applies it in a participatory research context for the first time at this scale. While further research is needed to assess its predictive value, the present findings should not be interpreted as evidence of a causal relationship between changes in the solution space and subsequent outcomes. Rather, they suggest that the solution space may function as a promising diagnostic indicator deserving of further longitudinal validation.

Integrating children as analytical subjects, not informants. Participatory research with children has a long tradition, but it is frequently used to illustrate findings generated through other means — children's voices as evidence for conclusions reached by adults. In this report, children's accounts are primary analytical data: they are read alongside the World Index rather than derived from it, they generate findings that the Index cannot produce, and they identify patterns — such as the trust-to-action gap and the normalisation of crisis — that would be invisible to adult-defined instruments. This is not methodologically novel in the academic literature on children's participation (Clark, 2010; Bakhtiar, Syed & Garg, 2023; Schweiger, 2024), but it is rare in policy-facing child rights reporting at global scale, where participatory data typically occupy a supplementary or illustrative role.

A1.7 Relationship with the 2024 Edition, Replicability and Future Research

This report builds on, but differs substantially from, the 2024 edition of the ChildFund Alliance World Index (ChildFund Alliance, 2024). The 2024 edition combined the Index — then covering 157 countries over 2015–2023 — with a global consultation of 11,014 children and adolescents, administered as a standardised questionnaire and analysed after a proportional bootstrap resampling (n = 10,000) designed to mitigate the biases of convenience sampling. The present edition redesigned the participatory strand in three respects. First, the consultation is deliberately smaller (2,344 children in 27 countries) and explicitly exploratory, with no resampling applied: rather than approximating population demographics through reweighting, the analysis treats the sample as what it is — children reached through programme contexts — and draws its claims accordingly. Second, a qualitative, group-based component (the Safety Mapping) was introduced alongside the survey, shifting the design from a single-instrument consultation to a multi-method participatory strand. Third, the thematic focus shifted from a broad assessment of rights implementation to safety and protection. The Index itself was also revised, with coverage changing from 157 to 134 countries.

Three implications follow for the reading of results across editions. Results from the two consultations are not directly comparable: the instruments, thematic focus, sample sizes and weighting strategies differ, and differences between editions cannot be interpreted as change over time. Index scores are likewise not comparable with those published in 2024 (Section 5). More generally, the two editions should be understood as methodologically complementary rather than continuous: the 2024 edition prioritised breadth of consultation, while the present edition prioritises depth, contextualisation, and integration across methods.

Replicability

The participatory components rest on fully documented, reusable instruments: the survey questionnaire (17 questions in 13 languages, implemented in KoboToolbox with skip logic and an embedded child-friendly consent module); the Safety Mapping facilitator template (including opening scripts, consent and assent modules, a structured note sheet, referral guidance, and a do-no-harm conduct checklist); and the session-level coding matrix with its controlled vocabularies (14 place types, nine solution categories, eight actor categories). These instruments make both components replicable in future editions and adaptable by other organisations working with children in comparable settings.

To strengthen replicability and enable the measurement of change over time, future editions should consider: maintaining a stable core of survey questions across editions, so that comparable time series of children's reported experiences can be constructed; retaining, where operationally feasible, a panel of Safety Mapping sites to allow longitudinal reading of the same communities; formalising the solution-space classification through a written coding protocol and inter-rater reliability testing; validating a random sample of keyword-coded open-ended responses through manual coding; and documenting administration conditions (self-completion versus enumerator support, group versus individual settings) systematically, so that their influence on responses can be assessed.

Directions for future research

The findings of this edition open several avenues for further inquiry. The most direct is the longitudinal tracking of the solution space as a candidate early-warning indicator: the hypothesis that contractions in the type and ambition of children's proposals anticipate deteriorations later registered by standard indicators is testable, but only with repeated observation of the same contexts over time. A second priority is the individual-level analysis of the relationship between trust in adults and perceived help-seeking capacity, with aligned item referents. The present edition establishes the trust-to-action gap through the distribution of individual responses rather than through a country-level association; estimating it directly at the individual level, with country fixed effects, would allow the mechanism to be tested rather than described. Third, extending data collection beyond programme areas — even on a limited scale — would allow an assessment of how far the patterns observed in programme-linked settings transfer to the broader child population. Fourth, both participatory components would benefit from more systematic disaggregation by disability, which the present data support only partially. Future editions should consider adoption of the Washington Group Child Functioning Module to strengthen the measurement of disability and functional difficulties and improve comparability with other datasets. Finally, on the Index side, further investigation of the relationships and correlations among indicators remains a standing recommendation of the technical notes, and mixed-methods case studies in the countries showing the largest divergence between structural scores and reported experience would provide the most efficient test of the interpretive framework proposed in this report.

A1.8 Ethics and Responsibility in Research with Children

esearch with children on safety, violence, and insecurity requires ethical standards that go beyond standard social research protocols. Children are not a generic vulnerable population requiring additional procedural caution — they are rights-holders whose participation in research is itself a rights-based act, and whose protection during that participation is a direct expression of the values the research aims to serve. This section describes the ethical framework governing the consultation, the specific safeguards applied across the 27 countries, the responsibilities that arise from the nature of the findings, and the limits of what this research can ethically claim.

Ethical framework

The consultation was designed and conducted in accordance with three intersecting ethical frameworks.

The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** provides the foundational normative frame. Article 12 establishes children's right to express their views on matters that affect them and to have those views given due weight. Article 3 requires that the best interests of the child be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children. Article 19 establishes the right to protection from all forms of violence, abuse, and exploitation. These three articles together establish that research on children's safety must both protect children during the research process and genuinely use their contributions to advance their interests — not merely extract their testimony.

The **ethical principles governing research with children** — as elaborated in the research ethics literature (Alderson & Morrow, 2020; Morrow, 2008; Powell & Smith, 2009) and in child rights programming standards — centre on five commitments: informed and voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity, do no harm, genuine contribution, and equitable access to findings. Each is described below in relation to how it was applied in this consultation.

The **ChildFund Alliance safeguarding policies and child protection standards** provided the operational framework within which all field activities were conducted. These standards apply to all interactions with children in Alliance programme areas and were mandatory for all staff and partner organisations involved in data collection.

Informed and voluntary participation

Participation in both the consultation and the Safety Mapping was voluntary. No child was required to participate, and no consequence — positive or negative — was attached to the decision to participate or withdraw. Where children declined to answer specific questions, their choice was respected without follow-up pressure.

Informed assent was obtained from all child participants prior to data collection. The purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, the way data would be used, and the anonymisation procedures were explained before any data were collected. In the survey, this took the form of a child-friendly introduction and consent form embedded in the questionnaire itself, in which four statements — understanding of the survey's purpose, confidentiality and anonymity, the right to stop at any time, and agreement to take part — had to be actively acknowledged before any question was asked. In the Safety Mapping, a caregiver/guardian consent module (used where required by local regulations and organisational policy) explained the purpose, procedures, risks and benefits, voluntariness, and confidentiality of the activity, and specified that no photos of children would be taken without additional permission; child assent was then obtained through a child-friendly script read aloud.

Parental or guardian consent was obtained where required by local ethical norms and national regulations. In some contexts, community-level consent—from community leaders or school directors—supplemented or, where permitted under applicable ethical and legal requirements, substituted for individual parental consent in accordance with local practice. **Where individual parental or guardian consent was not obtainable or was not required, the consent modality and its ethical and legal basis were documented at country level. Implementing organisation staff did not provide consent on behalf of children participating in the research.** The modality of consent in each country was determined in consultation with local ChildFund Alliance members, who hold the contextual knowledge necessary to ensure that consent processes are culturally appropriate as well as procedurally compliant.

Confidentiality and anonymity

All data collected through the survey are stored in anonymised form. Individual responses are not attributable to specific children, and no personally identifying information — name, school, or location more specific than country — is retained in the analytical dataset.

Quotes selected for inclusion in this report are identified only by age, gender, and country. No quote in this report carries sufficient identifying information to allow a third party to identify the child who produced it.

Safety Mapping outputs — drawings, maps, annotated photographs — were processed to remove any identifying features before being used for analysis or cited in publications. Where programme area locations are referenced in the analysis, they are described at the level of country or region rather than specific community.

The key informant interviews conducted in Afghanistan and Lebanon are anonymised at the level of role and location. Practitioners are identified by professional function and sub-national location but not by name or organisation. Families interviewed in Lebanon are identified only by the age of the child they were describing and the type of displacement they experienced.

Do no harm

Research on safety and insecurity with children carries a specific risk: that asking children to describe threats, fears, and dangerous spaces may itself cause distress, retraumatisation, or — in contexts of social violence — expose children to risk if their disclosures were to become known to actors who pose threats to them. Several measures were applied to mitigate these risks.

Topic framing. Both the survey and the Safety Mapping were designed to begin from children's positive experiences — where they feel safe, who they trust, what they enjoy — before moving to risks and challenges. This sequencing was not only methodologically appropriate (building rapport and establishing the relational conditions for honest response) but ethically necessary: entering a research session focused immediately on violence and danger with children in high-risk contexts is itself potentially harmful.

Facilitator training. All Safety Mapping facilitators received training that included recognition of signs of distress, protocols for pausing or ending a session if a child became distressed, and internal referral pathways to psychosocial support where available. Facilitators were instructed not to probe for details of specific incidents of violence or abuse, and not to ask follow-up questions that might encourage children to disclose experiences they had not chosen to volunteer.

Referral pathways. In all 27 countries, programme staff had established referral pathways to psychosocial or child protection services. Children who showed signs of significant distress during or after data collection activities were referred to available services through these pathways (even though no incident was reported).

Zones of silence. The Safety Mapping protocol was designed to allow children to mark risks without naming them. In contexts of social violence — where naming specific actors or locations carries risk — children were not prompted to disclose information they had not chosen to share. The analytical framework explicitly recognises that strategic non-disclosure is a rational response to dangerous environments, not a methodological failure, and the research design accommodated this by treating marked-but-unnamed risks as valid data rather than incomplete data.

Suspension of activities. In Lebanon, ongoing conflict prevented Safety Mapping activities entirely. In Afghanistan, the combination of restrictions on research involving children and the risks to both children and local staff made participatory data collection unfeasible. The decision to suspend activities in these two contexts reflects the application of the do no harm principle over the research objective of maximising coverage. The gap in data is explicitly acknowledged in the analysis.

Genuine contribution

Research that asks children about their experiences of insecurity, violence, and restricted futures imposes a burden on them. That burden is ethically justifiable only if the research genuinely advances their interests — not merely generates knowledge about them. This commitment shapes how findings are used.

Throughout the report, children are treated as analytical contributors whose accounts generate knowledge, not as informants who illustrate conclusions reached through other means. The findings on the trust-to-action gap, the solution space as a diagnostic, and the normalisation of crisis were generated from children's own accounts, not imposed from outside. This is not only a methodological choice, but an ethical one: it reflects a commitment to epistemic justice, the recognition that children's ways of knowing their own environments are valid and valuable (Fricker, 2007; Bakhtiar, Syed & Garg, 2023; Schweiger, 2024).

The recommendations in this report are grounded directly in what children identified as missing — care, responsive adults, schools that support, communities that watch out, and the experience of being heard. They are not translated from what children said into adult policy language; they attempt to remain as close as possible to the terms in which children described their own needs. This is the minimum requirement of genuine contribution: that the research produces outputs that would recognisably serve the interests of the children who participated in it.

Responsibility arising from the findings

Conducting this research creates responsibilities that do not end with publication. Children in extractive participation — consultation processes that collect their knowledge without producing visible responses — develop well-founded evidence that speaking does not matter. This is documented in the report itself. The act of conducting this consultation, if it produces no visible response, risks replicating exactly the dynamic the report identifies as most damaging to children's future agency.

The ChildFund Alliance and its members therefore carry a specific responsibility arising from this research: to communicate findings to the children who participated in terms they can access, in their own languages and communities; to demonstrate visible action on at least some of what children proposed; and to return to these communities in subsequent research cycles prepared to explain what changed and what did not, and why. This commitment is not separate from the research — it is part of it. Participatory research with children that does not close the loop of action and feedback is not fully ethical, regardless of how carefully the consent procedures, anonymisation protocols, and do no harm safeguards were applied (Hart, 1992; Lundy, 2007; Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher, 2008).

Equitable access to findings

The primary publication of this research is in English, which excludes most of the children whose participation made it possible. Equitable access to findings requires that summaries of the research be made available in the languages of the countries covered by the consultation, in formats accessible to children of different ages and literacy levels, and through the Alliance member organisations that facilitated the research. Dissemination in accessible formats — including visual summaries, child-friendly versions, and community-level feedback sessions — is part of the ethical commitment undertaken when children were asked to participate.



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A2.
World Index 2026 Ranking: Full Dataset

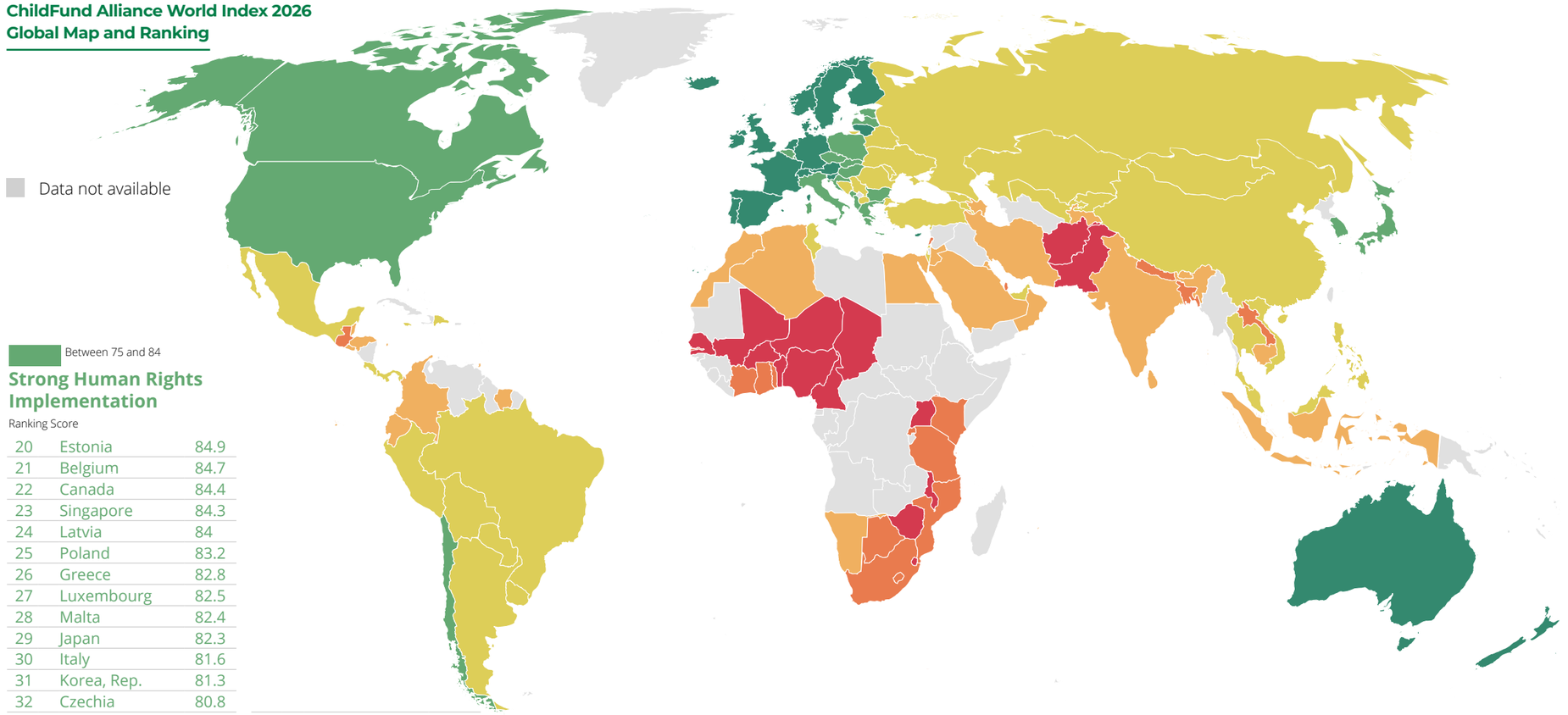
The *World Index 2026* covers 134 countries. Countries with more than 6 missing indicators out of 30 were excluded from the analysis. The most recent data available is from 2025, as the Index relies on secondary sources that are not always fully up to date; in some cases, the data are based on projections. This represents one of the inherent limitations of the tool (see the methodology appendix for further details). Consequently, not all recent global events are reflected in the Index.

The global ranking orders countries according to their level of implementation of women's and children's human rights, using a scale from 0 to 100. The same scale applies to geographical regions, the global average, the individual dimensions, and the performance of each country. Accordingly, scores should be interpreted positively as they move closer to 100, and negatively as they move closer to 0.

The full ordering is provided here for completeness and for readers working with comparative data. Within this report the ranking functions as a description of the structural conditions in place across countries, not as an evaluation of national performance: the analysis in Chapter 2 draws on the Index to situate children's reported experiences in context, and does not rest on any country's position in the ordering.

The following sections present the analyses for this edition from the perspective of the overall Index and its three sub-indices: the *Context Sub-Index*, the *Children's Sub-Index*, and the *Women's Sub-Index*. The reference year for the historical series is 2015, the first year in which the *World Index* (formerly the *WeWorld Index*, published by ChildFund Alliance member WeWorld) was released.

Map A
ChildFund Alliance World Index 2026
Global Map and Ranking



Equal or more than 85

Advanced Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

1	Sweden	90
2	Iceland	89.4
3	Norway	89.1
4	Australia	88.3
5	Denmark	87.9
6	Switzerland	87.8
7	Finland	87.5
8	Netherlands	87.4
9	United Kingdom	87.1
10	Slovenia	87
11	Ireland	86.7
12	Portugal	86.2
13	Germany	86
14	Austria	85.9
15	Spain	85.6
16	Cyprus	85.5
17	Lithuania	85.1
17	France	85.1
19	New Zealand	85.1

Between 75 and 84

Strong Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

20	Estonia	84.9
21	Belgium	84.7
22	Canada	84.4
23	Singapore	84.3
24	Latvia	84
25	Poland	83.2
26	Greece	82.8
27	Luxembourg	82.5
28	Malta	82.4
29	Japan	82.3
30	Italy	81.6
31	Korea, Rep.	81.3
32	Czechia	80.8
33	Croatia	80.6
34	United States	80.2
35	Slovak Republic	79.1
36	Chile	78.9
37	Hungary	77.1
38	Albania	76.2
39	Bulgaria	75.6
40	Montenegro	75.6

Between 65 and 74

Moderate Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

41	Israel	74.7
42	Moldova	74.5
43	Argentina	74.5
44	Uruguay	74
45	Serbia	73.5
46	Romania	73.3
47	Bosnia and Herzegovina	71.9
48	Mongolia	71.8
49	Georgia	71.6
50	Belarus	71.5
51	Kazakhstan	71.3
52	Brazil	70.9
53	Malaysia	70.9
54	China	70.2
55	Costa Rica	69.6
55	Thailand	69.6
57	North Macedonia	69
58	Uzbekistan	68.3
59	Turkiye	68.2
60	Russian Federation	68.1
61	Ukraine	67.8
61	Armenia	67.8
63	Bahrain	67.6
63	Paraguay	67.6
65	Panama	67.5
66	Bolivia	67.3
66	Fiji	67.3
68	Kyrgyz Republic	67.2
69	United Arab Emirates	66.8
70	Viet Nam	66
70	Mexico	66
72	Tunisia	65.7
73	Jamaica	65.6
74	Philippines	65.5
75	Dominican Republic	65
75	Peru	65

Between 55 and 64

Basic Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

77	Trinidad and Tobago	64.3
78	Oman	63.9
79	Indonesia	63.8
80	Morocco	63.6
81	Azerbaijan	63.4
82	Colombia	63.2
82	Tonga	63.2
82	Ecuador	63.2
85	Algeria	63
85	Jordan	63
87	Tajikistan	62.6
88	Mauritius	62.4
89	Saudi Arabia	61.5
90	El Salvador	60.5
91	Kuwait	60.4
92	Belize	60
93	India	59.5
94	St. Lucia	59.3
95	Iran, Islamic Rep.	58.6
96	Egypt, Arab Rep.	58.5
97	Bhutan	57.6
98	Cambodia	57.3
99	Suriname	57.2
100	Namibia	55.6
101	Sri Lanka	55.5
102	Honduras	55.3

Between 45 and 54

Limited Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

103	Nepal	53.3
104	Guatemala	53.2
104	Lebanon	53.2
106	Palestine	53.1
107	South Africa	52.6
108	Bangladesh	52.4
109	Lao PDR	52.3
110	Ghana	52
111	Botswana	51.2
112	Qatar	49.5
113	Kenya	47.9
114	Cote d'Ivoire	46.9
115	Lesotho	46.2
116	Togo	46.1
117	Gambia, The	45.8
118	Rwanda	45.7
119	Tanzania	45.5
120	Mozambique	45.4

Equal or less than 45

Minimal Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

121	Senegal	45
122	Cameroon	44.4
123	Zimbabwe	44.3
124	Nigeria	42.7
125	Pakistan	42.5
126	Uganda	42.4
127	Eswatini	41.4
128	Benin	41.1
129	Malawi	36.8
130	Burkina Faso	36.2
131	Mali	35
132	Niger	32.4
133	Chad	30.1
134	Afghanistan	29.3

Figure A

The Global Performance Over the Years as Measured by the World Index

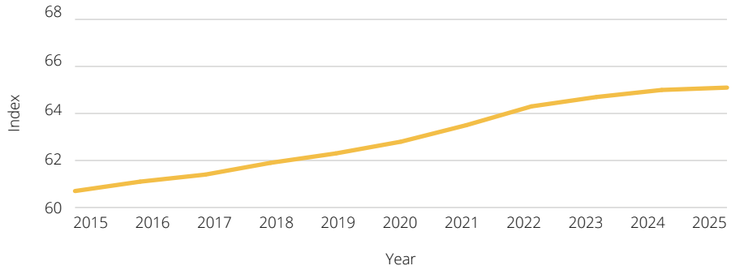


Figure B

Number of Countries per Tier of Human Rights Implementation and Their Respective Population of Women and Children

** In this case, the figure is derived from the sum of two population groups: children between 0-14 years and adolescents between 15-19 years. Sources used by World Bank 2025: United Nations Population Division. World Population Prospects: 2024 Revision; Statistical databases and publications of national statistical institutes; Eurostat: Population Statistics; United Nations Statistics Division. Population and Vital Statistics Report.*

TIER	NUMBER OF COUNTRIES	WOMEN'S POPULATION IN 2025	CHILDREN'S POPULATION (0-19 YEARS OLD) IN 2025*
Advanced	19	158.059.008	81.683.060
Strong	21	300.312.006	153.682.115
Moderate	36	994.174.157	659.652.432
Basic	26	728.331.016	752.953.179
Limited	19	169.407.177	254.583.523
Minimal	13	183.909.729	388.044.193
Total	**134**	**2.534.193.093**	**2.290.598.502**

Figure C

The Geographic Areas' Scores in the World Index 2026 and 2015

GEOGRAPHIC AREA	SCORE IN THE WORLD INDEX 2026	SCORE IN THE WORLD INDEX 2015	TIER IN THE WORLD INDEX 2026	TIER IN THE WORLD INDEX 2015	SCORE VARIATION
West Europe and Other States	83.6	81.1	Strong	Strong	+2.5 ⬆
East Europe and Central Asia	71.3	69.0	Moderate	Moderate	+2.4 ⬆
East Asia and Pacific	69.9	65.1	Moderate	Moderate	+4.9 ⬆
Latin America and Caribbean	67.6	63.8	Moderate	Basic	+3.8 ⬆
Middle East and North Africa	59.6	54.9	Basic	Basic	+4.7 ⬆
South Asia	56.4	49.2	Basic	Limited	+7.2 ⬆
East and South Africa	45.1	40.5	Limited	Minimal	+4.6 ⬆
Central and West Africa	42.6	36.2	Minimal	Minimal	+6.4 ⬆


Omar Ashtawy\ Apaimages Photography

Figure D

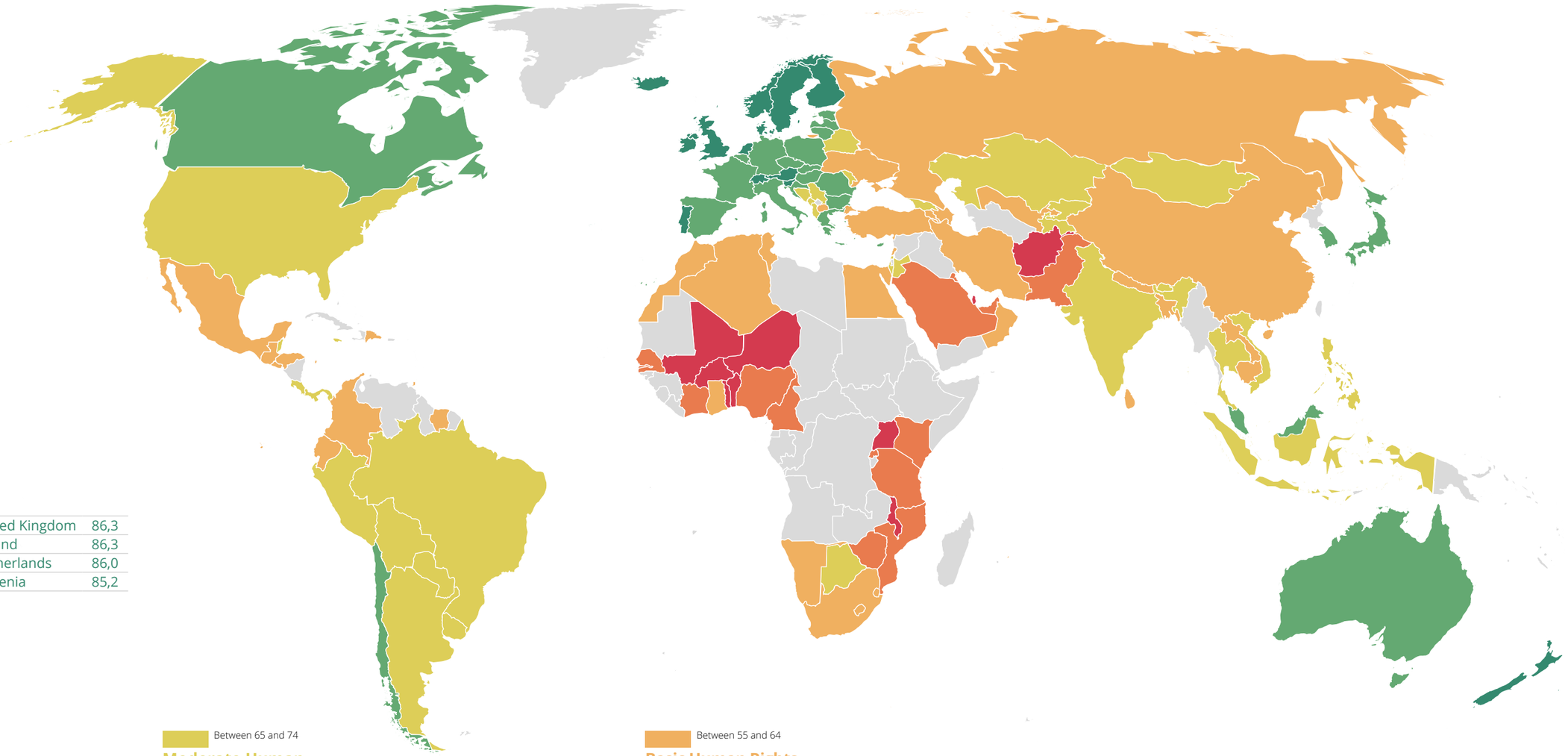
Performance in each dimension of the World Index: 2015 vs 2026



Context Sub-Index

Map B

The Context Sub-Index 2026: Map and Ranking



Data not available

Equal or more than 85

Advanced Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

1	Switzerland	90,3
2	Iceland	90,0
3	Sweden	89,0
4	Norway	87,3
4	Finland	87,3
6	Denmark	87,0
7	New Zealand	86,8
7	Austria	86,8
9	Portugal	86,4
10	United Kingdom	86,3
10	Ireland	86,3
12	Netherlands	86,0
13	Slovenia	85,2

Between 75 and 84

Strong Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

14	Australia	84,9
15	Luxembourg	84,3
16	Latvia	84,2
16	Lithuania	84,2
18	France	83,0
19	Germany	82,9
19	Japan	82,9
21	Spain	82,8
21	Greece	82,8
21	Malaysia	82,8
24	Estonia	82,6
25	Hungary	82,3
25	Slovak Republic	82,3
27	Singapore	81,8
27	Canada	81,8
29	Italy	81,1
30	Malta	81,0
31	Czechia	80,8
32	Romania	79,9
32	Cyprus	79,9
34	Chile	79,6
35	Belgium	79,1
36	Poland	78,8
37	Croatia	76,4
38	Korea, Rep.	75,9
38	Bulgaria	75,9

Between 65 and 74

Moderate Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

40	United States	74,9
41	Uruguay	74,2
42	Paraguay	73,7
43	Argentina	73,3
44	Albania	72,6
45	Montenegro	72,5
45	Brazil	72,5
47	Bosnia and Herzegovina	71,6
48	Moldova	71,5
49	India	71,4
50	Philippines	71,1
51	Kyrgyz Republic	70,8
51	Costa Rica	70,8
53	Bolivia	70,6
54	Panama	70,0
55	Indonesia	69,6
56	Bhutan	69,4
57	Jordan	69,2
58	Thailand	68,4
59	Israel	68,3
60	Fiji	68,0
61	Belarus	67,6
61	Georgia	67,6
63	Mongolia	67,3
64	Peru	67,1
64	Kazakhstan	67,1
66	Viet Nam	66,4
67	Jamaica	66,2
68	Botswana	66,1
69	Serbia	65,4
69	Belize	65,4
71	Tajikistan	65,3

Between 55 and 64

Basic Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

72	Tunisia	64,9
72	China	64,9
74	Uzbekistan	64,7
75	Turkiye	64,4
76	Bangladesh	64,3
77	Morocco	64,1
78	Lao PDR	64,0
79	Suriname	63,9
80	West Bank and Gaza	63,6
81	North Macedonia	63,3
82	Dominican Republic	63,2
83	Cambodia	62,6
84	South Africa	61,7
85	Ghana	61,5
85	Oman	61,5
87	Algeria	61,4
88	Ecuador	61,2
89	Nepal	61,1
90	Egypt, Arab Rep.	60,9
91	Mauritius	60,7
92	Ukraine	60,4
92	Armenia	60,4
92	St. Lucia	60,4
92	El Salvador	60,4
96	Sri Lanka	60,3
97	Azerbaijan	60,1
98	Colombia	60,0
99	Trinidad and Tobago	59,8
100	Guatemala	58,6
101	Russian Federation	58,5
102	Mexico	58,4
103	Lesotho	58,2
103	Bahrain	58,2
103	Honduras	58,2
106	Iran, Islamic Rep.	57,0
107	Tonga	56,6
108	Namibia	55,4
109	Lebanon	55,3
109	Eswatini	55,3

Between 45 and 54

Limited Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

111	Gambia, The	54,8
112	United Arab Emirates	54,5
113	Pakistan	54,2
114	Senegal	53,9
115	Kenya	53,5
116	Tanzania	52,3
117	Cote d'Ivoire	52,1
118	Kuwait	50,7
119	Saudi Arabia	50,0
120	Rwanda	47,5
121	Nigeria	46,9
122	Mozambique	46,8
123	Cameroon	45,8
124	Zimbabwe	45,1

Equal or less than 45

Minimal Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

125	Benin	43,8
126	Malawi	43,4
127	Uganda	41,4
128	Togo	40,6
129	Mali	39,1
130	Afghanistan	37,7
131	Burkina Faso	34,3
132	Niger	33,0
133	Qatar	28,5
134	Chad	22,3

Figure E

The Global Performance Over the Years as Measured by the Context Sub-Index

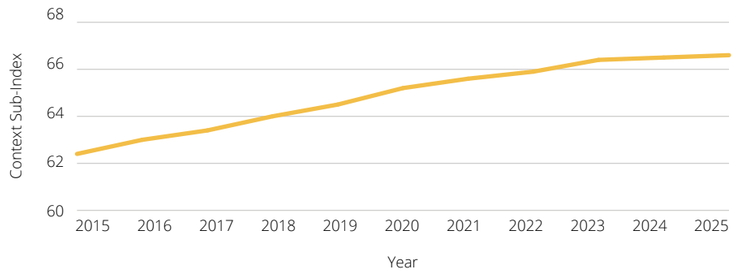


Figure F

The Geographic Areas' Scores in the Context Sub-Index 2026 and 2015

GEOGRAPHIC AREA	SCORE IN THE CONTEXT SUB-INDEX 2026	SCORE IN THE CONTEXT SUB-INDEX 2015	TIER IN THE CONTEXT SUB-INDEX 2026	TIER IN THE CONTEXT SUB-INDEX 2015	SCORE VARIATION
West Europe and other States	80.4	78.6	Strong	Strong	+1.9 ⬆
South Asia	68.0	59.0	Moderate	Basic	+9.0 ⬆
East Asia and Pacific	67.9	63.3	Moderate	Basic	+4.6 ⬆
East Europe and Central Asia	66.8	65.5	Moderate	Moderate	+1.2 ⬆
Latin America and Caribbean	66.1	64.3	Moderate	Basic	+1.7 ⬆
Middle East and North Africa	59.1	56.8	Basic	Basic	+2.3 ⬆
East and South Africa	47.2	41.1	Limited	Minimal	+6.1 ⬆
Central and West Africa	43.4	38.7	Minimal	Minimal	+4.7 ⬆

Figure G

The Performance of the Context Sub-Index Dimensions in 2026 and 2015

DIMENSION OF THE CONTEXT SUB-INDEX	SCORE IN 2015	SCORE IN 2026	SCORE VARIATION
Environment	60.8	60.8	0.0
Housing	53.9	61.6	7.7
Conflicts and Wars	73.3	71.4	-1.9
Democracy and Safety	62.5	60.2	-2.3
Access to Information	62.8	81.2	18.4


Raccontami/WeWorld Photography

Figure H

The Top 5 and Bottom 5 Countries in Each Dimension of the Context Sub-index 2026

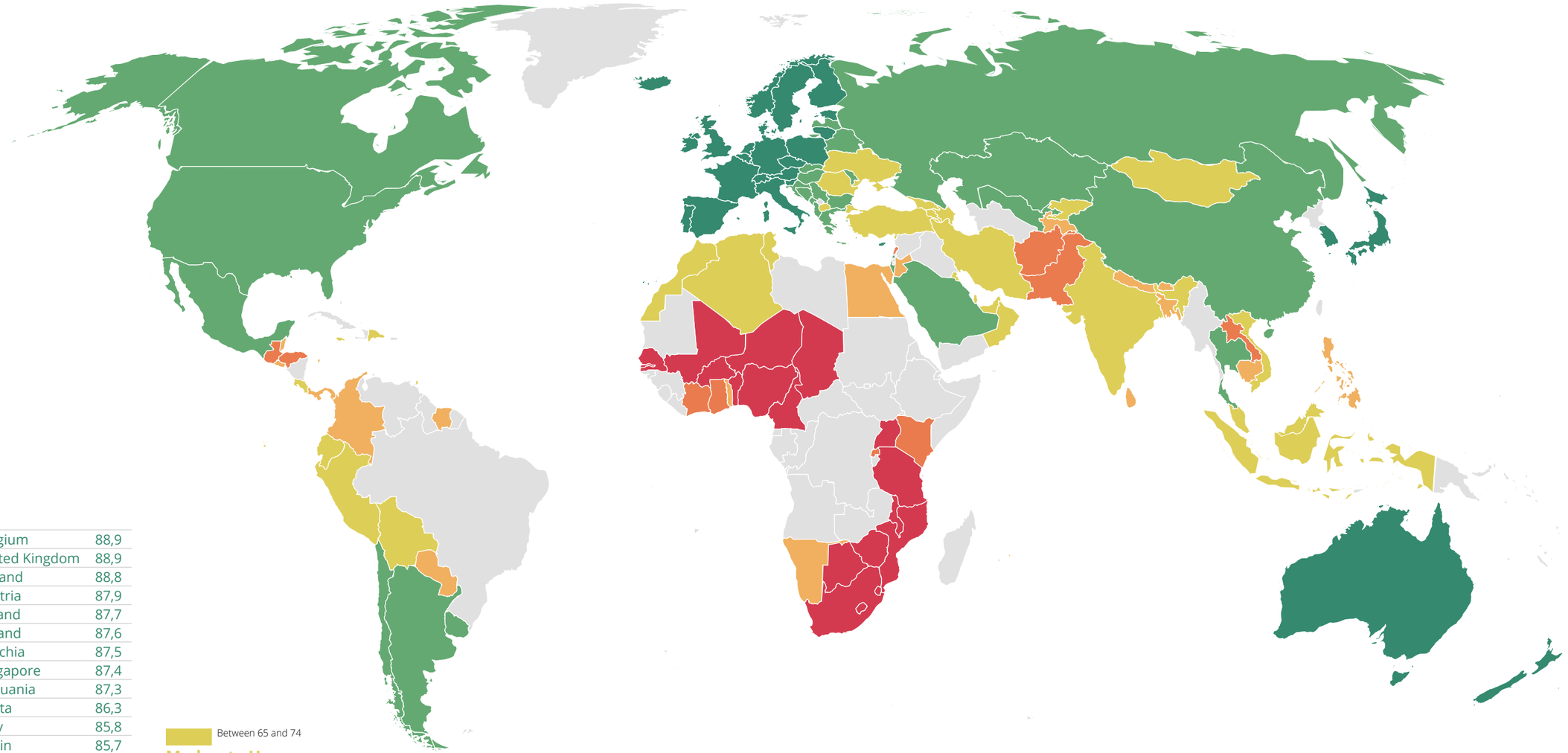
DIMENSIONS	TOP 5 COUNTRIES			BOTTOM 5 COUNTRIES		
	COUNTRY	RANK	SCORE	COUNTRY	RANK	SCORE
Environment	Mozambique	1	92.9	Bahrain	130	16.0
	Cameroon	2	92.6	Saudi Arabia	131	10.8
	Gambia, The	3	92.0	United Arab Emirates	132	9.7
	Chad	4	91.8	Kuwait	133	7.6
	Benin	5	91.6	Qatar	134	0.3
Housing	Kuwait	1	100.0	Uganda	130	14.2
	Singapore	1	100.0	Niger	131	12.1
	Malta	3	99.9	Benin	132	11.9
	Denmark	4	99.4	Togo	133	11.6
	Korea, Rep.	5	99.3	Chad	134	3.0
Conflicts and Wars	Switzerland	1	95.8	West Bank and Gaza	130	44.2
	Ireland	2	95.3	Burkina Faso	131	42.5
	Austria	3	95.0	Mali	132	38.2
	Finland	4	94.3	Afghanistan	133	26.8
	Japan	4	94.3	Ukraine	134	23.2
Democracy and Safety	Norway	1	93.2	Eswatini	130	35.2
	Switzerland	2	91.6	Ecuador	131	35.2
	Ireland	3	90.6	Niger	132	35.0
	Japan	4	90.2	Afghanistan	133	34.0
	Denmark	5	89.9	Chad	134	33.1
Access to Information	United Arab Emirates	1	100.0	Mozambique	130	26.1
	Bahrain	1	100.0	Niger	131	19.5
	Saudi Arabia	1	100.0	Burkina Faso	132	17.2
	Iceland	4	99.9	Malawi	133	14.5
	Denmark*	4	99.9	Chad	134	10.2

**In the "Access to Information" dimension, Kuwait also scored 99.9 out of 100 and is therefore considered in the top 5.*

Children's Sub-Index

Map C

The Children's Sub-Index 2026: Map and Ranking



Data not available

Equal or more than 85

Advanced Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

1	Sweden	92,0
2	Denmark	91,5
3	Netherlands	91,4
4	Switzerland	91,2
5	Norway	91,1
6	Germany	90,9
7	Korea, Rep.	90,8
8	Japan	90,7
9	Australia	90,0
10	Luxembourg	89,9
11	Iceland	89,8
11	Slovenia	89,8
13	France	89,5
14	Portugal	89,2
15	Cyprus	89,1
16	Belgium	88,9
16	United Kingdom	88,9
18	Finland	88,8
19	Austria	87,9
20	Poland	87,7
21	Ireland	87,6
22	Czechia	87,5
23	Singapore	87,4
24	Lithuania	87,3
25	Malta	86,3
26	Italy	85,8
27	Spain	85,7
28	Estonia	85,6
29	New Zealand	85,1

Between 75 and 84

Strong Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

30	Latvia	84,8
30	Greece	84,8
32	Croatia	84,5
33	Canada	83,6
34	United States	82,9
35	Slovak Republic	82,7
36	Hungary	82,2
37	Israel	82,1
38	Russian Federation	81,3
39	Chile	80,9
40	Uruguay	80,4
41	Montenegro	80,1
42	China	79,1
43	Belarus	78,6
44	Argentina	78,5
45	Kazakhstan	78,4
46	Bosnia and Herzegovina	78,3
47	Moldova	78,1
48	Thailand	77,3
49	Albania	77,2
49	Serbia	77,2
51	Bulgaria	76,8
52	Uzbekistan	76,2
53	Mexico	75,8
54	Saudi Arabia	75,6

Between 65 and 74

Moderate Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

55	Mongolia	74,1
56	North Macedonia	74,0
57	Turkiye	73,8
58	Bahrain	73,6
59	Iran, Islamic Rep.	73,0
59	Fiji	73,0
61	Azerbaijan	72,7
62	Tunisia	72,5
63	Tonga	72,2
64	United Arab Emirates	71,8
65	*"A safe place is a place where you feel happy. A place where you are free and no one does bad things to you."*	71,3
65	Ukraine	71,3
67	Kuwait	70,8
68	Romania	70,5
68	Viet Nam	70,5
70	Georgia	70,4
71	Oman	70,2
72	Algeria	70,1
73	Malaysia	70,0
74	Costa Rica	69,7
75	Bolivia	69,1
76	Trinidad and Tobago	68,9
77	India	68,8
78	Armenia	68,1
79	Kyrgyz Republic	67,0
79	Qatar	67,0
81	Jamaica	66,3
82	Dominican Republic	65,9
83	Morocco	65,7
84	Ecuador	65,4
85	Peru	65,2
86	Indonesia	65,1

Between 55 and 64

Basic Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

87	Panama	64,9
88	Colombia	64,2
89	Egypt, Arab Rep.	64,2
90	St. Lucia	63,8
91	Tajikistan	63,6
92	Bhutan	62,3
93	Sri Lanka	62,1
94	Mauritius	61,9
95	Paraguay	61,6
96	Philippines	61,4
97	Jordan	61,0
98	Belize	60,6
99	El Salvador	60,2
100	Cambodia	59,1
101	Nepal	58,7
102	Namibia	57,7
103	Bangladesh	56,8
104	Togo	56,1
105	Suriname	55,4
106	Guatemala	53,4
107	Afghanistan	52,9
108	Kenya	52,1
109	Honduras	50,5
110	Pakistan	50,2
111	Rwanda	49,6
112	Lebanon	48,8
113	West Bank and Gaza	48,6
114	Cote d'Ivoire	47,4
115	Lao PDR	46,9
115	Ghana	46,9

Between 45 and 54

Limited Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

Equal or less than 45

Minimal Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

117	Mozambique	44,2
117	Uganda	44,2
119	Benin	43,1
120	Cameroon	42,5
120	Tanzania	42,5
122	Senegal	42,3
123	Zimbabwe	42,2
124	Gambia, The	41,8
125	Malawi	39,2
126	Botswana	38,9
127	Burkina Faso	38,3
128	Lesotho	37,7
129	South Africa	37,6
130	Nigeria	35,2
131	Chad	33,0
132	Mali	32,7
133	Niger	31,6
134	Eswatini	27,9

Figure I

The Global Performance Over the Years as Measured by the Children's Sub-Index

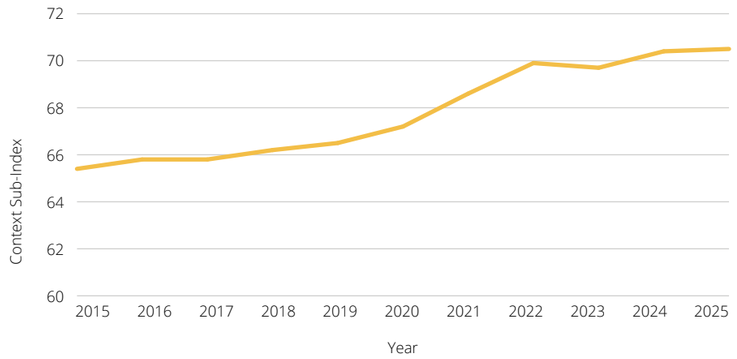


Figure L

The Geographic Areas' Scores in the Children's Sub-Index 2026 and 2015

GEOGRAPHIC AREA	SCORE IN THE CHILDREN'S SUB-INDEX 2026	SCORE IN THE CHILDREN'S SUB-INDEX 2015	TIER IN THE CHILDREN'S SUB-INDEX 2026	TIER IN THE CHILDREN'S SUB-INDEX 2015	SCORE VARIATION
West Europe and other States	86.3	84.7	Strong	Strong	+1.6 ⬆
East Europe and Central Asia	78.1	75.1	Strong	Strong	+3.0 ⬆
East Asia and Pacific	76.4	71.5	Strong	Moderate	+4.9 ⬆
Latin America and Caribbean	70.5	65.9	Moderate	Moderate	+4.5 ⬆
Middle East and North Africa	66.6	57.9	Moderate	Basic	+8.7 ⬆
South Asia	65.2	54.6	Moderate	Limited	+10.5 ⬆
East and South Africa	43.8	43.3	Minimal	Minimal	+0.5 ⬆
Central and West Africa	39.6	34.8	Minimal	Minimal	+4.9 ⬆

Figure M

The Performance of the Children's Sub-Index Dimensions in 2026 and 2015

DIMENSION OF THE CHILDREN'S SUB-INDEX	SCORE IN 2015	SCORE IN 2026	SCORE VARIATION
Children's Health	67.2	70.6	3.5
Children's Education	71.3	73.8	2.5
Children's Human Capital	54.4	61.3	6.9
Children's Economic Capital	72.5	76.0	3.5
Violence against Children	63.1	71.8	8.7



Figure N

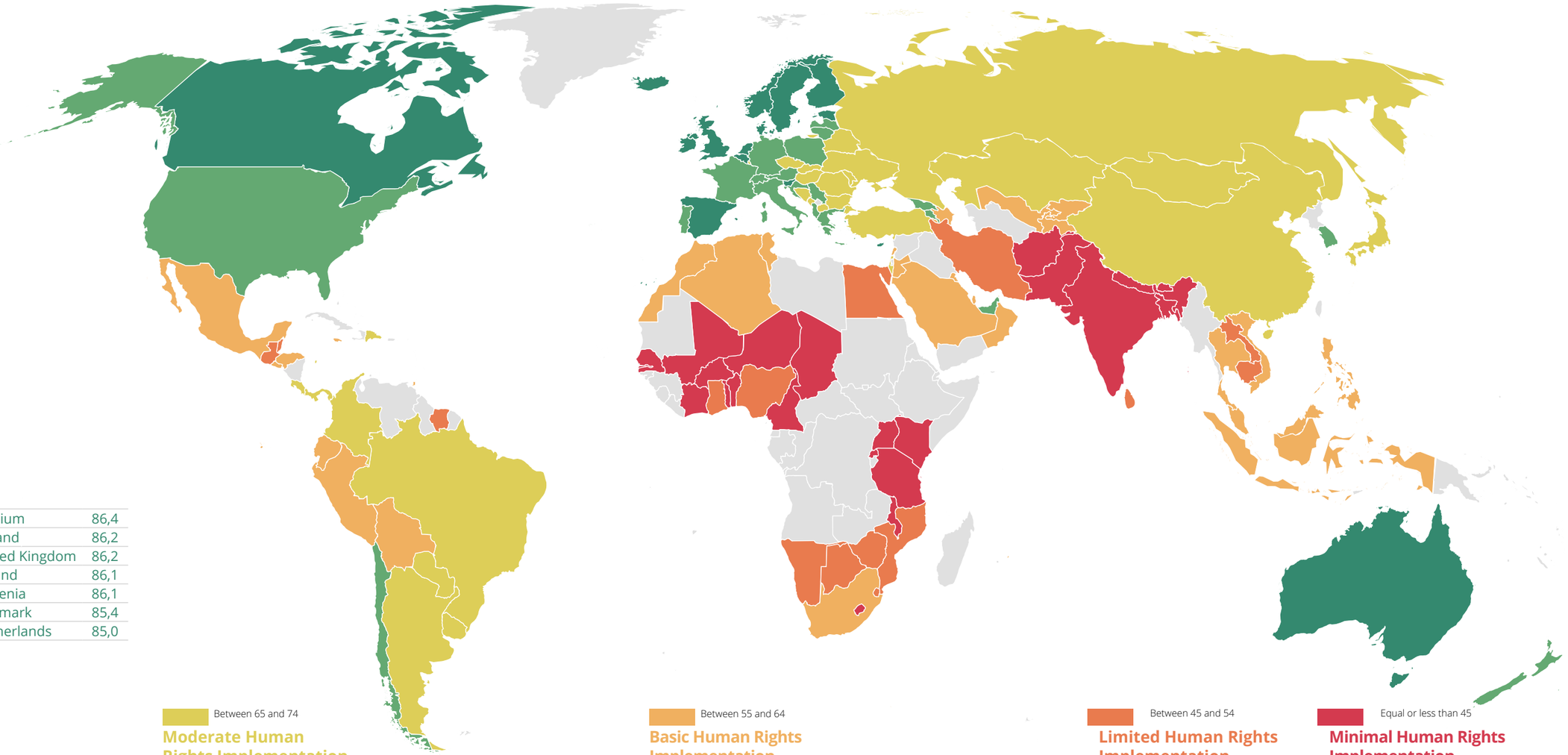
The Top 5 and Bottom 5 Countries in Each Dimension of the Children's Sub-index 2026

DIMENSIONS	TOP 5 COUNTRIES			BOTTOM 5 COUNTRIES		
	COUNTRY	RANK	SCORE	COUNTRY	RANK	SCORE
Children's Health	Luxembourg	1	95.7	Cameroon	130	45.4
	Slovenia	2	95.4	Benin	131	44.6
	Singapore	3	95.2	Mali	132	43.8
	Sweden	4	94.5	Niger	133	41.8
	Italy	5	94.3	Chad	134	38.8
Children's Education	Netherlands	1	96.0	Niger	130	35.6
	Iceland	2	95.2	Mali	131	34.9
	Sweden	3	94.9	Lesotho	132	34.8
	Ireland	4	94.8	Senegal	133	33.8
	Singapore	5	94.6	Chad	134	20.1
Children's Human Capital	Sweden	1	94.2	Qatar	130	32.1
	Finland	2	91.7	Uganda	131	28.0
	Denmark	3	91.6	Lebanon	132	26.7
	Belgium	4	91.4	Lao PDR	133	24.5
	Norway	5	88.5	Nigeria	134	13.2
Children's Economic Capital	Russian Federation	1	96.2	Malawi	130	30.1
	Czechia	2	96.0	Lesotho	131	25.3
	Korea, Rep.	3	95.9	Botswana	132	17.0
	Poland	4	95.5	South Africa	133	5.7
	Malta	5	95.3	Eswatini	134	2.3
Violence Against Children	Korea, Rep.	1	97.0	Tanzania	130	26.6
	Japan	2	94.4	Chad	131	26.5
	Switzerland	3	94.0	Burkina Faso	132	21.7
	United Arab Emirates	4	93.5	Mali	133	12.9
	Singapore	5	92.7	Niger	134	10.0

Women's Sub-Index

Map D

The Women's Sub-Index 2026: Map and Ranking



Data not available

Equal or more than 85

Advanced Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

1	Australia	90,2
2	Sweden	89,1
3	Norway	88,9
4	Iceland	88,6
5	Spain	88,3
6	Canada	87,9
7	Cyprus	87,7
8	Estonia	86,6
9	Belgium	86,4
10	Finland	86,2
10	United Kingdom	86,2
12	Ireland	86,1
12	Slovenia	86,1
14	Denmark	85,4
15	Netherlands	85,0

Between 75 and 84

Strong Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

16	Germany	84,5
17	Lithuania	84,0
18	Singapore	83,9
19	Poland	83,3
19	New Zealand	83.3
21	United States	83,2
21	Portugal	83,2
23	France	83,0
24	Austria	82,9
24	Latvia	82,9
26	Switzerland	82,1
27	Croatia	81,3
28	Greece	80,8
29	Malta	80,0
30	Albania	78,8
31	Serbia	78,6
32	Italy	78,1
32	Korea, Rep.	78,1
34	Georgia	77,2
35	Chile	76,3
36	United Arab Emirates	76,2
37	Armenia	75,8

Between 65 and 74

Moderate Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

38	Czechia	74,6
39	Israel	74,5
40	Montenegro	74,4
41	Mongolia	74,3
42	Bulgaria	74,2
43	Japan	74,1
43	Luxembourg	74,1
45	Moldova	74,0
46	Slovak Republic	72,6
47	Ukraine	72,4
48	Bahrain	72,2
49	Argentina	71,8
50	North Macedonia	70,0
51	Romania	69,9
52	Brazil	68,9
52	Kazakhstan	68,9
54	Belarus	68,7
55	Costa Rica	68,4
56	Paraguay	68,0
57	Panama	67,9
58	Uruguay	67,8
59	Hungary	67,7
60	China	67,5
61	Turkiye	66,9
62	Russian Federation	66,4
63	Bosnia and Herzegovina	66,3
64	Dominican Republic	66,0
65	Colombia	65,7

Between 55 and 64

Basic Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

66	Mauritius	64,8
66	Mexico	64,8
68	Uzbekistan	64,7
69	Trinidad and Tobago	64,6
70	Philippines	64,3
70	Jamaica	64,3
72	Kyrgyz Republic	63,9
73	Thailand	63,7
74	Qatar	63,3
75	Ecuador	63,2
76	Peru	62,9
77	South Africa	62,8
78	Bolivia	62,5
79	Tonga	61,8
80	Viet Nam	61,5
80	Saudi Arabia	61,5
80	Malaysia	61,5
83	Kuwait	61,4
84	Fiji	61,3
85	Morocco	61,2
86	El Salvador	61,1
87	Oman	60,5
88	Tunisia	60,4
89	Jordan	59,4
90	Tajikistan	59,0
91	Azerbaijan	58,4
92	Algeria	58,2
93	Honduras	57,6
94	Indonesia	57,2
95	Lebanon	55,8

Between 45 and 54

Limited Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

96	Belize	54,4
97	St. Lucia	54,2
98	Namibia	53,8
99	Suriname	52,9
100	Botswana	52,4
101	Egypt, Arab Rep.	51,2
102	Cambodia	50,9
103	Ghana	48,7
104	West Bank and Gaza	48,5
105	Iran, Islamic Rep.	48,4
106	Guatemala	48,2
107	Lao PDR	47,5
108	Nigeria	47,3
109	Eswatini	46,1
110	Zimbabwe	45,8
111	Sri Lanka	45,6
112	Mozambique	45,3

Equal or less than 45

Minimal Human Rights Implementation

Ranking Score

113	Lesotho	45,0
114	Cameroon	44,9
115	Bhutan	44,1
116	Togo	43,2
117	India	42,8
118	Nepal	42,3
119	Tanzania	42,2
120	Gambia, The	42,1
121	Cote d'Ivoire	41,9
122	Uganda	41,7
123	Rwanda	40,5
124	Senegal	40,0
125	Bangladesh	39,5
126	Kenya	39,4
127	Chad	37,1
128	Benin	36,9
129	Burkina Faso	36,1
130	Mali	33,4
131	Niger	32,5
132	Malawi	29,3
133	Pakistan	28,3
134	Afghanistan	12,6

Figure O

The Global Performance Over the Years as Measured by the Women's Sub-Index

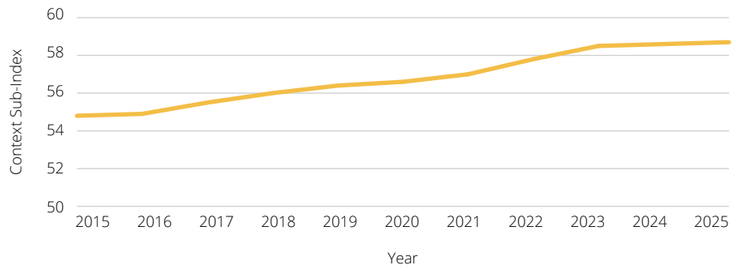


Figure P

The Geographic Areas' Scores in the Women's Sub-Index 2026 and 2015

GEOGRAPHIC AREA	SCORE IN THE WOMEN'S SUB-INDEX 2026	SCORE IN THE WOMEN'S SUB-INDEX 2015	TIER IN THE WOMEN'S SUB-INDEX 2026	TIER IN THE WOMEN'S SUB-INDEX 2015	SCORE VARIATION
West Europe and other States	84.2	80.3	Strong	Strong	+4.0 ⬆
East Europe and Central Asia	69.6	66.6	Moderate	Moderate	+3.0 ⬆
Latin America and Caribbean	66.4	61.2	Moderate	Basic	+5.2 ⬆
East Asia and Pacific	65.9	60.8	Moderate	Basic	+5.1 ⬆
Middle East and North Africa	53.8	50.4	Limited	Limited	+3.4 ⬆
Central and West Africa	44.9	35.3	Minimal	Minimal	+9.6 ⬆
East and South Africa	44.2	37.2	Minimal	Minimal	+7.0 ⬆
South Asia	40.6	36.9	Minimal	Minimal	+3.6 ⬆

Figure Q

The Performance of the Women's Sub-Index Dimensions in 2026 and 2015

DIMENSION OF THE WOMEN'S SUB-INDEX	SCORE IN 2015	SCORE IN 2026	SCORE VARIATION
Women's Health	85.7	87.7	2.0
Women's Education	29.9	37.3	7.3
Women's Economic Opportunities	55.3	57.4	2.1
Women's Decision-making and Participation	58.3	60.1	1.9
Violence against Women	60.0	61.7	1.7



Daniele Ratti/WeWorld Photography

Figure R

The Top 5 and Bottom 5 Countries in Each Dimension of the Women's Sub-index 2026

DIMENSIONS	TOP 5 COUNTRIES			BOTTOM 5 COUNTRIES		
	COUNTRY	RANK	SCORE	COUNTRY	RANK	SCORE
Women's Health	Japan	1	98.9	Mali	130	67.3
	Spain	2	98.6	Niger	131	67.0
	Korea, Rep.	3	98.3	Benin	132	66.2
	Switzerland	4	97.9	Chad	133	51.5
	France	4	97.9	Nigeria	134	50.7
Women's Education	Lithuania	1	80.2	Niger	130	4.6
	Singapore	2	79.9	Burkina Faso	131	4.5
	Canada	3	79.2	Benin	132	4.4
	Sweden	4	78.6	Afghanistan	133	3.6
	Latvia	5	78.4	Malawi	134	1.3
Women's Economic Opportunities	Norway	1	93.0	Chad	130	31.7
	Sweden	2	92.7	India	131	28.0
	Israel	3	91.3	Nepal	132	27.2
	Denmark	4	91.1	Pakistan	133	24.3
	Finland	5	91.0	Afghanistan	134	1.8
Women's Decision-making and Participation	Spain	1	100.0	Qatar	130	29.9
	Sweden	2	98.9	Iran, Islamic Rep.	131	25.8
	United Kingdom	3	98.3	West Bank and Gaza	132	22.4
	Germany	4	98.0	Pakistan	133	22.0
	Canada	5	97.8	Afghanistan	134	21.8
Violence against Women	Cyprus	1	94.8	Botswana	130	39.9
	Slovenia	2	94.6	South Africa	131	39.4
	Singapore	3	93.1	Uganda	132	37.8
	Croatia	4	91.1	Namibia	133	37.3
	Spain	5	91.0	Afghanistan	134	33.8

A3.
The members of ChildFund Alliance

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https://www.childfund.org.au/

ChildFund Deutschland

Max-Eyth-Straße 21, 72622 Nürtingen, Germany
https://www.childfund.de/

ChildFund International

2821 Emerywood Parkway, Richmond, VA 23294, United States
https://www.childfund.org/

ChildFund Japan

2-17-5, Zempukuji, Suginami-ku, Tokyo 167-0041, Japan
https://www.childfund.or.jp/english/

ChildFund New Zealand

Level 9/2 Kitchener Street, Auckland CBD, Auckland 1010, New Zealand
https://childfund.org.nz/

Un Enfant par la Main
Membre de ChildFund Alliance
Ensemble, construisons leur avenir !

2 Bd Albert 1er, 94130 Nogent-sur-Marne, France
https://www.unenfantparlamain.org/

barnfonden
Member of ChildFund Alliance

Kattsundsgatan 15, Box 4100 203 12 Malmö, Sweden
https://barnfonden.se/

Children Believe
Member of ChildFund Alliance

1200 Denison St, Markham, ON, Canada L3R 8G6
https://childrenbelieve.ca/

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Member of ChildFund Alliance

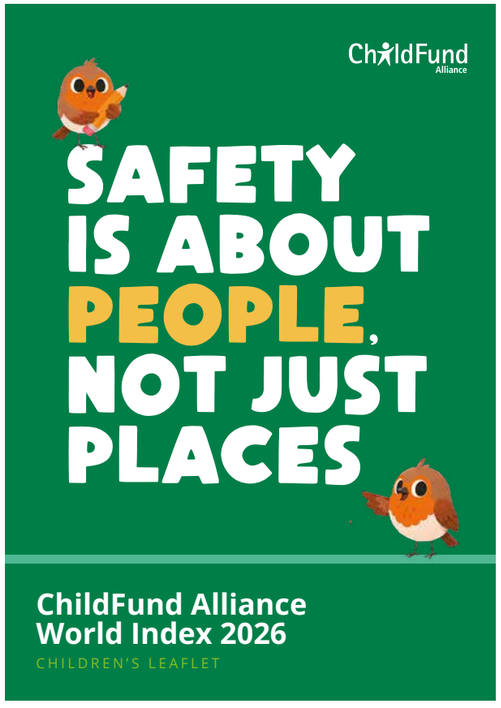
Avenida San Francisco Javier, 22 Edificio Hermes, 4º - 1
41018 Sevilla, Spain
Carrer Guillem Tell, 47, 08006 Barcelona, Spain
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Member of ChildFund Alliance

Via Serio 6, 20139, Milan, Italy
Via Francesco Baracca 3, 40133, Bologna, Italy
https://www.weworld.it/en

CHILDFUND ALLIANCE WORLD INDEX 2026:

Child and Adolescent-Friendly Booklets





ChildFund Alliance

ChildFund Alliance is a global network of 11 child-focused development and humanitarian organizations reaching nearly 30 million children and family members in more than 70 countries. Members work to end violence and exploitation against children; provide expertise in emergencies and disasters to ease the harmful impact on children and their communities; and engage children, families and communities to create lasting change.

With more than 80 years of collective experience, our commitment, resources, innovation, and expertise serve as a powerful force to help children and families around the world transform their lives.

MISSION

We work in partnership with children and their communities to create lasting change, and the participation of children themselves is a key component of our approach. Our commitment, resources, innovation, knowledge and expertise serve as a powerful force to transform the lives of children. Annually, our investment in children is more than $500M USD.

ChildFund's **VISION** is for a world in which all children enjoy their rights and achieve their full potential. Our mission focuses on working together with children to create sustainable solutions that protect and advance their rights and well-being. The collective strength of our members helps us serve as a global voice with and for children, to highlight the issues children care about, and to mobilize effectively to address threats to their lives, safety and well-being.