

# Protecting children during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond

A report on child protection needs during the pandemic in five African countries



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Joining Forces for Africa (JOFA), the consortium formed by six major child-focused NGOs (Child Fund International, Plan International, Save the Children, SOS Children Villages, Terre des Hommes International Federation, and World Vision) has released its new report “Protecting children during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond”. The study highlights the most prevalent child protection risks in Mali, Senegal, Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia during the COVID-19 pandemic:

Physical and emotional violence against children has risen and the risk of sexual and gender-based violence has increased. High stress levels due to movement restrictions and loss of incomes were behind increased risks of violence against children in Uganda. Early and forced marriages are increasing in number, facilitated by a lack of official oversight and economic pressures on families.

The report evidences an important increment of child labour, abuse, and exploitation in Uganda. Children are supplementing family earnings with heavy, dangerous labour. In Uganda, child-headed households and children on the street are highly vulnerable to food insecurity and negative coping strategies, like child labour. Some girls are forced to exchange sex for money and food while other children are forced to beg.

Both children and their parents are experiencing increase psychological and emotional distress, and children are facing higher levels of emotional and psychological abuse from parents and caregivers. In Uganda, children reported more emotional abuse during the pandemic – being shouted at, bullied, cursed and intimidated. While some children are ending up joining armed groups or gangs, the pandemic has amplified the risks that children with disabilities already face.

## The JOFA project will respond to the findings by

- ▶ Integrating into planned interventions specific measures to prevent and respond to **child labour** and to help **children associated with armed forces and groups**.
- ▶ Integrating content to tackle **child marriage, harmful practices and sexual violence and sexual exploitation and abuse** – such as with positive parenting, communications and social behaviour change, community engagement, and training children’s groups.
- ▶ Pursuing advocacy asks with government and key policy makers, prioritising social protection programmes and a safe return to schools for all children.
- ▶ Continuing and increasing our efforts to implement positive parenting programmes and group-based activities for child wellbeing – especially **mental health and psychosocial support**.
- ▶ Continuing to work with disabled people’s organisations and other experts to ensure our activities are inclusive and address the needs of **children with disabilities**.



Download the  
report “Protecting  
children during  
the COVID-19  
crisis and  
beyond”

Co-funded by the European Union, the JOFA project aims to benefit nearly one million children, parents, caregivers, and service providers in Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Senegal, and Uganda until 2023.