



Youth Insights

The impact of COVID-19 on young people and their participation in the response.

Summary

Youth insights: a summary

VSO conducted research over April–July 2020, gathering stories from nearly 300 young people on how they have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Stories were gathered from young people in 19 different countries across VSO's three regional hubs, mainly through an online tool, supplemented by some phone interviews and hard copy distribution. Slightly more young men participated than young women with just over 40% from an urban area, 32% from a semi-urban area and 35% rural.

Research questions

- **IMPACT:** How are young people, their families and their communities being affected by COVID-19?
- **ACTION:** How are young people responding to the COVID-19 pandemic? What action are they taking? What challenges are they facing in this regard?
- **SUGGESTIONS:** What suggestions do young people have for governments, organisations, young people and communities to be more prepared for a future pandemic?

How are young people being affected?

The main effects reflected in the stories are described as:

- Disruption of livelihoods and loss of income.
- Interruption of education, training or development work.
- Disruption to social relations – for some, not being able to see family and friends was a major sacrifice. For others, the challenges of lockdown were tensions in the family home and increased sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) affecting young women and girls.
- Negative impacts on health and wellbeing – with the stresses and strains of trying to cope negatively affecting young people's emotional health. For others with special needs, the restrictions had made it difficult to access healthcare facilities and services.

What actions are they taking in response to COVID-19? And what challenges are they facing?

Young people reflected on the activities they were engaging in to counter the impact of the pandemic. Most young people (80%) described how they were participating or supporting COVID responses and actions in their communities and, in a few cases, nationally through online and offline platforms.

Sensitisation and awareness raising about COVID-19

Around two-thirds of the young people from the Nairobi and Bangkok hub areas are engaged in sensitisation and awareness raising activities about COVID-19, and 76% of those in Pretoria. These include online, radio broadcast and face-to-face information campaigns addressing fake news and making sure those who are most vulnerable understand how to protect themselves.

Mitigating the impact of COVID-19 restrictions

- Distributing food and personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks, hand sanitiser and other hygiene products.
- Using local knowledge to identify and monitor the most marginalised populations and supporting those most in need to access emergency provision and essential social and healthcare services.
- Raising funds to support the most vulnerable and providing psycho-social support to people in their communities who have been particularly badly affected by the virus and the restrictions. .
- Lobbying and advocating for the needs of the most marginalised populations and evidence generation on the impact of COVID-19 to strengthen social accountability.

Not all young people were participating, and some were not doing as much as they would like. Young people related stories of the barriers and challenges they face, including:

- Lack of appreciation or recognition of their roles by key stakeholders, lack of resources and a lack of opportunities
- Fear of contracting the virus with no PPE or safety measures provided
- Restrictions of movement, lack of transportation, curfews and family responsibilities.

What suggestions do young people have for governments, organisations, young people and communities to be more prepared for a future pandemic?

The final question young people were asked was about their suggestions for the future. The **overall approach** young people were calling for can best be described as a **disaster preparedness plan** with governments, supportive organisations, young people and communities each playing their part.

- Providing resources and resourcing the disaster preparedness plan was seen as the governments' responsibility.
- Supportive organisations were asked to liaise with governments to ensure support for young people's involvement in the planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of the plan.
- Young people can contribute by volunteering to help those in need, researching need and community mapping, raising awareness and empowering and supporting the most vulnerable young people in their communities.
- As well as calling on government to devise a preparedness plan, a few young people referenced the need to **strengthen accountability**.

Conclusions and recommendations

The research has highlighted how young people and those who are most marginalised in their neighbourhoods and communities have been adversely affected by COVID-19 and the restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the virus. But it also highlights the enormous contributions young people have been making, engaging in the local responses to COVID-19 despite the challenges they themselves are facing.

The report concludes with recommendations for VSO:

- **Playing a convening** role by facilitating a new COVID-19 aware dialogue with governmental agencies and community leaders and young people.
- **Piloting youth networks focused initiatives**, to explore and support their creativity to lead sustainable community responses.
- **Reflecting on what programming opportunities exist** within VSO's portfolio to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on highly vulnerable communities.
- **Adopting a more integrated and holistic approach** to its programming, especially in fragile settings.
- **Following up all community volunteers** that ended their placements while lockdown restrictions were in place and offering some short-term support.
- **Building clear accountability and monitoring mechanisms** at different levels and for governments to put in place social protection policies and inclusive practices, including access to digital technology.
- **Continuing support for youth networks** formation and strengthening and promoting youth participation and leadership in future preparedness planning.
- **Promote and enhance youth volunteering** through the networks formation and strengthening and **promoting youth participation and leadership** in future preparedness planning.
- Promote and enhance youth volunteering through the networks as a pathway for **personal development, youth voice and civic engagement**.