

# RESEARCH ON CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO RIGHTS DURING CORONA DAYS IN DIFFERENT DISTRICTS OF ISTANBUL

Final Report for Adults



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## Institutions Involved in This Research

**Başak Culture and Arts Foundation (BCAF)** was founded in 2003 by a group of human rights activists, educators and social scientists with the intention of removing the obstacles before the development of children and youth who live in vulnerable areas marked by massive internal displacement since the forced migration period of the 1990s as well as ensuring their equal access to education. In the establishment phase, the foundation conducted a field study with its target group of displaced families to better know them and identify their needs. The results of this field study demonstrated that the conditions of the families who were living in relative poverty prior to forced migration to Istanbul deteriorated in the post-migration period, with the children being the most affected group. BCAF is carrying out works based on human rights for children and youth who are affected by internal displacement, socio-economic disadvantages, lack of social security, inability to access to education services or further one's education, and gender inequality. With these works, BCAF aims at increasing the capacities of self-expression and equal participation in the society of children who have migrated or have been affected by the migration process.



**Sulukule Volunteers Association (SVA)** was established in 2010 in Karagömrük by a group of volunteers working in the area of demolition to alleviate the psychosocial effects of demolition and to prevent children who are living in the area from leaving school. SVA aims to improve the access of children who are under risk\* and who live in disadvantaged districts to education and to encourage them to attend school. With this intention, SVA collaborates with the teachers, psychological counsellors, school administrators as well as children and their parents. In so doing, SVA engages in long-term monitoring of the children who have been participating in the activities of the association since its establishment. When it was established in 2010, SVA's target groups were limited in number. Today, the association is continuing its projects with a vast group of children with different needs from different ethnic backgrounds (Roma, Turkish, Kurdish, Syrian).



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\* According to Yeniden Health and Education Society's book titled Children and adolescents that are showing risk behaviors, there are defining symptoms of children under risk. These are skipping school, alcohol and/or substance abuse, running away from home, propensity for violence, committing a crime or being delinquent, self-mutilation, working on the streets and underage sexual activity.



**Tarlabası Community Center (TCC)** was established in 2016 with the intention of empowering the inhabitants of Tarlabası who are excluded from social life and struggle with various forms of poverty on account of migration as well as supporting their access to rights. In Tarlabası, an area where people from different ethnic backgrounds live together, the majority of the inhabitants are Roma people. Other groups include Kurds who were displaced during the military conflict and state of emergency of the 1980s and 1990s as well as irregular migrants and refugees from Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and various African countries. Following the Syrian civil war, Syrian Arabs, Syrian Kurds and Syrian Doms also began to settle in the district. TCC primarily carries out works that focus on children. The difficulties in accessing public services in the area, inequalities in the education system, scarcities, and the political situation of the country worsens the privation experienced by the children and makes it even more difficult for them to access to rights. To address these issues TCC undertakes projects that aim at empowering children and supporting their access to rights.



**Small Projects Istanbul (SPI)** was established in 2015 with the aim of supporting and empowering the displaced individuals and families of the MENA region who are refugees or under temporary protection while they resettle in Istanbul. In the community center located in Fatih and through the collaborative works carried out with other service providers, in addition to ensuring that the refugee populations from Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Afghanistan have access to rights and services, social integration and means of livelihood, SPI also aims at empowering the social participation of these groups. As of 2020, the community of people that SPI has reached out amounts to 250 Syrian families, including approximately 400 children and young people. In designing and implementing its services and programs, SPI pays active importance and approaches with great care to the needs and demands of the displaced children, young people and women in the community who are particularly under high risk.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AÇSHB</b>	Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services
<b>ASAM</b>	Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants
<b>BCAF</b>	Başak Culture and Art Foundation
<b>CRC</b>	UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
<b>EBA</b>	Education Information Network
<b>ERI</b>	Education Reform Initiative
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>MEB</b>	Ministry of National Education
<b>MEBİM</b>	Ministry of National Education Communication Center
<b>SPI</b>	Small Projects Istanbul
<b>SVA</b>	Sulukule Volunteers Association
<b>TCC</b>	Tarlabası Community Center
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCRC</b>	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

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## SUMMARY

The aim of the “Research on Children’s Access to Rights during Corona Days in Different Districts of Istanbul” is to assess children’s access to rights in vulnerable areas and areas-at-risk during the Covid-19 pandemic. In other words, it aims at determining the current state of children who should be supported through particular measures<sup>1</sup> as well as identifying the areas in which rights are inaccessible for children; how this affects them and what short- and long-term measures should be taken.

We, the experts on children’s rights, know that in crises and disasters, children are the most affected social group for a protracted period of time. We also know that children are usually the first group to be rendered invisible in such cases. It was known that children with whom we had interviews were experiencing various deprivations and impoverishment. For this reason, we set off to work in order to identify and visibilize rights violations and to urge authorities to take action. One of our most significant motivations while conducting this research was to underline that children who have been socially represented as powerless, victims, dependent and helpless are actually the active agents of their own lives and the society. Thus, with this research, we aimed at hearing children’s voices and making them heard by the society.

This monitoring research was designed and co-conducted in April-June 2020, in cooperation with four institutions which have been working with children and addressing similar target groups that have various and different disadvantages: Başak Culture and Art Foundation (BCAF), Sulukule Volunteers Association (SVA), Tarlabası Community Center (TCC) and Small Projects Istanbul (SPI). In April 2020, the above institutions started working in coordination with the support of Monitoring Compliance with International Human Rights Framework Etkiniz EU Programme.

This monitoring research consists of various research phases which include phone interviews, preliminary research reports, infographics regarding first and second round of interviews, final report, a website prepared for children and adults and the children-friendly report.

Arabic, Kurdish and English translations of the final report and the child-friendly report will be finalized in July 2020. Finally, research findings and relevant policy recommendations will be disseminated through advocacy work in an effort to make them accessible to the public and decision-makers.

Following the research phase, we prepared [www.covid19cocukhaklariizleme.org](http://www.covid19cocukhaklariizleme.org) for adults, and [www.koronadacocukhaklari.org](http://www.koronadacocukhaklari.org) for children.

In this research which consists of two phases, we conducted interviews with 123 children

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<sup>1</sup> The General Comment No. 17, UNCRC Article 31 defines girls, children in destitution, children of minorities and indigenous populations, children who experience humanitarian and human-made and natural disaster zones as “children requiring particular attention”. Throughout the report, this definition is used as “children who should be supported with particular measures”.

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and 89 caregivers<sup>2</sup> in April-May 2020 (first quarter). At the end of May 2020, each institution published their preliminary research reports based on their findings in the first round of interviews.<sup>3</sup> Concomitantly, children and caregiver infographics which were compiled from the overall findings were published following the preliminary research reports.<sup>4</sup>

In the second phase of the research in May 2020 (last quarter), we conducted a second-round of interviews with 122 children and 83 caregivers.<sup>5</sup> As dictated by the monitoring research, we endeavored to have interviews with the same children and caregivers. This report is co-authored in June 2020 with the data collected from the first- and second-round of interviews.

In both phases of the research, through the interview questions, we aimed at assessing the current situation of children's access to rights. In so doing, we asked children questions regarding their everyday practices, emotional moods and dreams, their access to education, information and media as well as questions which might be associated with the right to play. Caregivers were asked questions which might be connected to the children's access to right to education as well as their own everyday practices, concerns, demands, changing economic conditions, access to healthcare and access to media and information.

Both in the preliminary research report and in this one, we presented the findings that are related to the following articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:

Article 6 the inherent right to life, survival, and development;

Article 17 the right to access timely, accurate, and comprehensible information and media;

Article 24 the right to access healthcare services;

Article 27 the right to the conditions of living necessary for the child's holistic development;

Article 28-29-30 the right to access education;

Article 31 the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout the monitoring research, caregiver refers to the persons who are primarily responsible for childcare.

<sup>3</sup> <http://covid19cocukhaklariizleme.org/yayinlar>

<sup>4</sup> <http://covid19cocukhaklariizleme.org/yayinlar>

<sup>5</sup> Total population of children in the interviewee households is 269.

## Key Research Findings

We provided an in-depth analysis of the access to above rights and their violations under the “Findings” section. Here we briefly outlined the key findings. 18 interviewee children were at the age of 3-5; 25 were at the age of 6-10; 55 were at the age of 11-14; and 24 were at the age of 16-18. 36 children stated that they regularly follow EBA (Education Information Network), 27 children stated that never follow it. 39 out of 104 children who attended school expressed that they did not have any communication with their teachers during the Covid-19. 23 children stated that they could not have any communication with their friends in this period. During the interviews, we found out that for both the children and the caregivers the primary source of information on the Covid-19 is television, more particularly, television news. 69 children and 61 caregivers stated that they access information through these channels. Some of the interview questions directed to the caregivers was about the changes in living and economic conditions. 50 out of 85 caregivers stated that at least one person in the household lost their jobs. 22 caregivers stated that they received food parcel deliveries, benefited from TRY1000 financial aid support<sup>6</sup>, and/or Bill on the Hook campaign<sup>7</sup> and yet their needs were not fully met. There were 46 households which stated that they could afford house quarantine conditions in case when someone in the household tested positive for the Covid-19.

During the Covid-19, children, who were the least affected group by the disease, were rendered the most invisible due to distant education and lockdown for persons under 20. Children stayed at home for protracted period of time, away from schools, parks, streets and their friends and peers, and faced many obstacles in accessing rights. As elaborated on in the Recommendations section, a need for a rights-based approach which prioritizes children on the basis of four main principles of the UNCRC (non-discrimination, child’s best interest, the child’s participation, and to support the child’s inherent right to life and development) continued during the Covid-19 as before. We hope that measures to be taken during and after the Covid-19 will fully protect children’s rights and compensate for the current rights violations.

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**6** Financial aid delivered by the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services within the scope of social support programme.

**7** A solidarity movement initiated by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality for paying water and natural gas bills during the Covid-19.

## OUR STORY

In this monitoring research, our goal is to assess the access of children who should be supported by particular measures to rights during the Covid-19 in order to determine the fields in which children's right are violated, identify the effects of the violations on children and propose the necessary measures that should be taken.

It is known that children are the most affected social group in the long term, in times of crisis and disasters. Additionally, children are at the top of the list of groups that are rendered invisible at times like these. For this reason, we believe that it is the responsibility of experts in the fields of human rights and children's rights who should pinpoint, visibilize, and urge authorities to take action on how children's rights are or can be violated during and after the Covid-19 period.

The spread of coronavirus has led to an increase in already existent social inequalities in Turkey. The fact that during and after the Covid-19 period the current deprivation of children, who should be supported with particular measures, will further deepen, makes this period and its aftermath a period to be monitored in terms of children's rights. In order to address this need, we came together as four institutions carrying out advocacy works in various neighborhoods with different vulnerabilities in Istanbul: Bařak Culture and Art Foundation (BCAF), Sulukule Volunteers Association (SVA), Small Projects Istanbul (SPI) and Tarlabası Community Center (TCC). Our aim was to listen to how children experienced the Covid-19 period and make their voices heard. Therefore, we have commenced the research "Research on Children's Access to Rights during Corona Days in Different Districts of Istanbul" with the support of Monitoring Compliance with International Human Rights Framework Etkiniz EU Programme.

Our main motivation in this study was to render visible that children are active agents in both their own lives and within society, even though social perception deems them as victims and they are depicted usually as passive, helpless and powerless. With this in mind, we have identified to hear children's voices and to support their voices to be heard as the first goal of the monitoring research. In order to achieve this, we made an effort to produce digital means through which children can amplify their voices.

We hope that this report provides a framework to the institutions who work specifically on children's rights and to the general public, in understanding the state of children in need of particular support during the Covid-19 period. It also highlights the necessary steps to take in order for these target groups to be supported.

## BACKGROUND

Coronavirus has been spreading throughout the world rapidly since December 2019. Since 10 March 2020 when the first Covid-19 positive case was detected, Turkey's agenda has been largely about the Corona virus. Like many other countries that the virus was spreading, Turkey also went into quarantine.

Following the closing of schools on 13 March 2020, the week of 16-20 March was declared the winter break. Afterwards, 23-27 March was declared to be the date when the distance education through EBA would commence in the first phase.<sup>8</sup> The distance education was prolonged twice.<sup>9</sup> During this period, education was provided through EBA TV channels (TRT EBA TV Elementary School, TRT EBA TV Middle School, TRT EBA TV High School) and via internet. December was determined as the month when distance education would end.<sup>10</sup>

Following the "voluntary quarantine" period that lasted a few weeks, within the scope of the Covid-19 measures, on 3 April 2020, a lockdown for individuals under the age of 20 was declared.<sup>11</sup> After this, starting from April 10, and in the weekend of 11-12 April, for 15 metropolitan cities and the city of Zonguldak the government declared universal lockdowns. This regulation also applied for the following national holidays and for the 30-31 May weekend. Starting from first day of June, with the normalization period, the lockdowns for 20 and under was changed to 18 and under. Following this regulation change, the age group of 0-18 were able to move freely during Wednesdays and Fridays between 14:00-20:00. And starting from June 10, the lockdowns for 18 and under was lifted on the condition that children are to be chaperoned by their parents. At the same time, the ban on intercity travel was also lifted.

Even though this period has impacted everyone, it has more deeply affected children who face various difficulties to access to rights and has added new cases of violation of children's rights. The statement that children were less affected by the coronavirus than adults has also rendered children invisible subjects during this period in terms of preventing and addressing violations and their empowerment.

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- 8 "Uzaktan Eğitimle İlgili Süreç Hafta İçi Simülasyonlarla Anlatılacak" dated 14 March 2020, MEB news. Access date: 08.05.2020. Access link: <http://www.meb.gov.tr/uzaktan-egitimle-ilgili-surec-hafta-ici-simulasyonlarla-anlatilacak/haber/20513/tr>
- 9 "Uzaktan Eğitim 30 Nisan'a Kadar Devam Edecek" dated 25 March 2020, MEB news. Access date: 08.05.2020 Access link: <http://www.meb.gov.tr/uzaktan-egitim-30-nisana-kadar-devam-edecek/haber/20585/tr> and "Uzaktan Eğitim 31 Mayıs'a Kadar Devam Edecek", dated 29 April 2020, MEB news. Access date: 08.05.2020. Access link: <https://www.meb.gov.tr/uzaktan-egitim-31-mayisa-kadar-devam-edecek/haber/20803/tr>
- 10 "EBA TV'den eğitim 19 Haziran'a kadar sürecek" dated 18 May 2020, Gazete Duvar, Access date: 15.06.2020, Access link: <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2020/05/18/eba-tvden-egitim-19-hazirana-kadar-surecek/>
- 11 "Erdoğan: 31 il araç giriş çıkışına kapatıldı, 20 yaş altına sokağa çıkma yasağı geldi" dated 3 April 2020, Evrensel news, Access date: 08.05.2020, Access link: [https://www.evrensel.net/haber/401268/erdogan-31-il-arac-giris-cikisina-kapatildi-20-yas-altina-sokaga-cikma-yasagi-geldi?utm\\_source=anasayfa&utm\\_medium=manset&utm\\_campaign=haber&slide\\_order=01](https://www.evrensel.net/haber/401268/erdogan-31-il-arac-giris-cikisina-kapatildi-20-yas-altina-sokaga-cikma-yasagi-geldi?utm_source=anasayfa&utm_medium=manset&utm_campaign=haber&slide_order=01)

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Before the Covid-19, children who should be supported with particular measures<sup>12</sup> had already difficulty in accessing rights in Turkey. Within the axes of the four principles of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, there were many rights violations.

For children who receive formal education<sup>13</sup>, which could be considered the most important part of their daily lives, the regulation of distance education and the closing of schools, brought about circumstances that created inequalities in access and distribution of materials and resources. Especially for some children, the differences between Turkish language skills has made access to education even more difficult.

The fact that Turkish education system was not built on the principles of a multilingual and inclusive education has made some children who have different native languages (Arabic and Kurdish within the scope of this study) even more disadvantageous.

On 3 April 2020 UNICEF published an emergency action plan that upholds six principles for the protection of children from the negative impacts of the pandemic.

1. Children's health must be protected.
2. Children in vulnerable conditions has to be provided access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene opportunities.
3. It should be ensured that children continue education.
4. Families should be supported to provide for their children's needs and care.
5. Children should be protected from violence, exploitation, and neglect.
6. Children who are refugees, migrants, and impacted by conflict should be protected.<sup>14</sup>

During this period in Turkey, it has become starkly apparent that there is an urgent and imperative need for a policy that will prioritize children's benefits and will be inclusive of children with special needs, refugee children, children who are forced to work, seasonal worker children, and undocumented children.

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**12** The General Comment No. 17 of the Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that girls, children in destitution, children of minorities and indigenous populations, children who experience conflict and natural disaster are identified as "children requiring particular attention". In this report, this definition was used as "children who should be supported with particular protection measures".

**13** According to the 2018-19 findings, in Turkey, there are 16,529,169 students in formal education and 1,579,691 students in open learning education prior to higher education. Source: <https://www.egitimreformugirisimi.org/turkiyede-koronavirusun-egitime-etkileri-i/>

**14** Protecting the most vulnerable children from the impact of coronavirus: An agenda for action, UNICEF, 03.04.2020. Access link: <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/agenda-for-action> erişim tarihi: 15.06.2020

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Scope

This research which was co-conducted by four institutions is comprised of two phases. The first phase of the study was in April-May 2020 when the preliminary interviews were made. The preliminary reports were authored separately<sup>15</sup> and the infographics that presented the findings were shared at the end of May.<sup>16</sup> This report at hand is a synthesis of the first and second round of interviews conducted in May.

In the first phase, in-depth telephone interviews were conducted with 123 children and 89 caregivers. In the second phase, in-depth telephone interviews amounted to 122 children and 85 caregivers.

During both phases, the aim of the questions posed to both children and caregivers were to explicate the present state of children's access to rights. In this sense, questions regarding their everyday practices during the Covid-19 period, their emotional states, dreams, access to education, access to media and information, and access to play time were asked to children. As for caregivers, questions regarding their daily lives, concerns, demands, their changing economic circumstances, their rights to access healthcare, media and information were asked.

In the preliminary and final reports of the study, the following articles from the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child were relevant to the findings of the study:

Article 6 the inherent right to life, survival, and development;

Article 17 the right to access timely, accurate, and comprehensible information and media;

Article 24 the right to access healthcare services;

Article 27 the right to the conditions of living necessary for the child's holistic development;

Article 28-29-30 the right to access education;

Article 31 the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

The findings were associated with the four main principles of the UN Convention, which are; non-discrimination (Article 2), best interest of the child (Article 3), the child's participation (Article 4), and to support the child's inherent right to life and development (Article 6).

<sup>15</sup> Covid-19'da Çocukların Haklarına Erişimi Raporlanıyor, Etkiniz duyurular, Access link: <https://etkiniz.eu/blog/istanbul-covid-cocuk-haklari/>. Accessed on 09.06.2020

<sup>16</sup> Covid-19'da Çocukların Haklarına Erişimi Raporlanıyor, Etkiniz duyurular, Access link: <https://etkiniz.eu/blog/istanbul-covid-cocuk-haklari/>. Accessed on: 09.06.2020

By taking into consideration the above four main principles and the implementation of the rights, we think that it is crucial to look at the children's rights in light of these principles. Moreover, we must stress that this fundamental approach is indispensable and that all these rights apply at all times and for everyone, keeping in mind that human rights and children's rights cannot be decoupled from each other.

As stated in the Article 4 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the State Parties pledged to uphold the principles and necessities of this convention. They are to provide the necessary resources and, if needed, form international cooperation in order to take necessary precautions. The Article 90 of the Constitution of the Turkish Republic is bound to this Convention.

The findings in this research were collected through in-depth interviews appropriate to qualitative analysis. All the interviews were conducted via telephone. It was important for the interviewers to have known the children prior to the meeting; the interviewers were chosen based on their acquaintance with the children through workshops or other direct involvement and relationship with the children. Before starting the interview, the aim of the interview was stated, and the interviewees' oral consent and approval were heard. The interview questions, for both phases of the research, were prepared by the four institutions that conducted the study simultaneously, separately for children and caregivers. The interviews were conducted as part of the framework presented in Appendices 1 and 2.

### Limitations

The most explicit limitation of the research was that, due to the Covid-19 period, the interviews were conducted via telephone. The insight and information of the people who did not have access to telephones had to be excluded from the research.

The fact that most households where interviews were conducted were crowded, and that most of the time these households lived together in a single room did not allow for a private space for interviewees. In these cases, children were interviewed with their caregivers present and this has the potential to affect the answers of children. Besides, since it is difficult to communicate via telephone with children whose developmental skills for oral testimony are underdeveloped, the access to children from a pre-school age group was limited.

Most of the children from the age group of formal education were high in their schooling rate. However, we must clarify that children groups that the institutions work with experienced economic deficiency, exclusion, and a lack of provision to inclusive educational conditions. For these reasons, low schooling rate is still an important and top priority problem areas.

In addition to these limitations, the group of Dom that Tarlabası Community Center (TCC) works with left the neighborhood due to seasonal labor migration in March 2020.<sup>17</sup> Their lack of access to a permanent phone line rendered this group inaccessible.

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<sup>17</sup> Interview conducted with the *muhtar*-representative of Çukur neighborhood in Tarlabası, Beyoğlu on 30 March 2020.

Since all of the target group of Small Projects Istanbul (SPI) are refugees, interviews with caregivers were conducted in Arabic, and in Turkish with children.

Finally, it must not be forgotten that these findings represent an underrepresented group and is not representative of the experiences of child workers and children from various disability groups.

## Ethical Framework

In conducting this research, like in any other research done with children, we have taken the standards of human rights and children's rights among which is the UN Convention on the Right of the Child. During the research process, due to the present state of emergency, the ethical board approval was not obtained. Along with this, we put maximum effort to implement all the rights of the children and protect them from any risk.

While creating the ethical framework of this study, we have taken into consideration the four fundamental principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ethical principles of the American Psychological Association-APA prepared specifically for research conducted with child participants. These principles are beneficence and nonmaleficence, fidelity and responsibility, integrity, justice, and respect for people's rights and dignity.<sup>18</sup> In addition, we have drawn from the 16-article ethics code of Society for Research in Child Development-SRCD<sup>19</sup> that includes principles like family consent and anonymity.

In accordance with the principle of doing no harm, we have chosen to exclude from the study any questions that might trigger child participants' traumas, remind them of their violent experiences as well as any question that will be difficult for them to answer in the presence of their family members.

We have taken utmost care that our ethical principles were in line with the three ethics principles of respect, benefit, and justice identified in "Ethical Research Involving Children" by UNICEF.<sup>20</sup>

In accordance with the confidentiality policy, we must stress that the participants' identifications are reserved with the institutions that prepared this report; and in so doing, the report does not include any testimonials that reveal the identification of the participants in this study.

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<sup>18</sup> "Ethical Principles of Psychologists And Code of Conduct", American Psychological Association, (2017). Access link: <https://www.apa.org/ethics/code/ethics-code-2017.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> "Ethical Standards for Research with Children", Society for Research in Child Development, (2007). Access link: <https://www.srkd.org/about-us/ethical-standards-research-children>

<sup>20</sup> Ethical Research Involving Children, A.Graham, M. Powell, N. Taylor, D. Anderson, R.Fitzgerald, UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti. 2013 Trans. Uluslararası Çocuk Merkezi. Access link: [https://childethics.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ERIC\\_Turkish.pdf](https://childethics.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ERIC_Turkish.pdf) Access date: 09.06.2020

## FINDINGS

According to the data obtained from and observations made in this research, since March 2020, there is a significant correlation between the measures taken against the spread of the pandemic and the rights access of children who should be supported with particular measures during the Covid-19. Children who live in vulnerable neighborhoods that are more disposed to contagious diseases were either having difficulties in taking the necessary precautions, or even when they could take the precautions, their already strained opportunities to access to rights is further diminished.

For this reason, in this research, the following questions pertaining to children who should be supported with particular measures during the Covid-19 period were scrutinized: How do children experience the Covid-19 period; do they experience difficulties in accessing distance education due to household conditions; can they reach correct and reliable information; how will the economic loss suffered by the households that sustain their living on day-to-day labor affect children's short- and long-term lives and development; how do boys and girls experience the period of staying at home; how does the distance education affect children's communication with their schools; and do children experience difficulties in accessing right to health.

### Sufficient Living Standards and the Right to Holistic Development

According to the findings of this research, one important point is the necessity to monitor and address the short- and long-term effects of economic difficulties as well as separation from school, friend circles and social life on the development of children during the Covid-19.

According to the Article 6 of the UNCRC, the *life, survival and development* principle states that "necessary regulations and measures should be taken to ensure that children can live, survive and be supported in all fields of life and the governments should do all they can to ensure that children are protected and develop to their full potential".<sup>21</sup> The questions we asked to the caregivers during the interviews were in line with the abovementioned principle. We asked about the economic condition of the family, the changes in living conditions due to the pandemic, and the access to support offered during the Covid-19. We endeavored to understand the conditions of the children and the family via the answers provided by the caregivers. That said, we also included relevant statements of the children under this heading.

### Deepening Poverty

Covid-19 had more devastating effects for those households inhabited by people who are working in irregular, precarious, and informal day-to-day jobs. It was observed that stress and anxiety levels increased in households that could only meet their quotidian needs with day-to-day jobs. Almost none of the families we interviewed were economically

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<sup>21</sup> Article 6 of the UNCRC stipulates that

1. States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life.

2. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.

comfortable prior to the Covid-19 period. Thus, the negative effects of the Covid-19 period began to be felt in these households from the very first day.

The first round of interviews demonstrated that the mandatory lockdown, one of the measures taken during the Covid-19, caused loss of income in the households. Yet again, in the second round of interviews, an increase in the number of households that suffered loss of income was observed. Whereas in the first round of interviews, 29 out of 89 caregivers stated that they lost their jobs, in the second round of interviews, 50 out of 85 caregivers stated that they lost their jobs. Additionally, in the final interviews, some of the caregivers told us that they experienced difficulties in procuring food.

We interviewed 85 caregivers who were responsible for the care of 269 children in their households. Even this limited and non-representative group demonstrates the high number of children who are affected by the economic consequences of the Covid-19. Confirming this data, global studies reveal that the total number of children living under the poverty line in the low and middle-income countries may reach 672 million by the end of the year unless immediate action is taken to protect families from the financial effects of the Covid-19.<sup>22</sup> “The dimensions and depth of financial hardship that the families are experiencing constitutes a threat which can reverse the progress achieved in decreasing child poverty over the years and deprive children from basic services.”<sup>23</sup>

Only 11 caregivers managed to keep their jobs during the Covid-19; and only 3 have been on paid-leave. Following the interviews which provide data for the preliminary reports, it is seen that households' incomes decreased, and payment of rent and bills became gradually more difficult. In the second round of the interviews, most of the caregivers stated that they either faced difficulties in paying their rent and bills or were worried about not being able to pay them in the following month. Additionally, it is observed that the possibility of “not being able to find food” was a fear inducing concern.

***“We are very scared of this situation, if it goes on like this, we will be left without even a piece of bread in the house.” (Mother of three)***

***“We reached a point where words have no meaning. What can I say? My husband is not working; we have been through many hardships. I even told the teacher of my son the other day; I was deeply embarrassed but believe me I had no other choice. I called my paternal aunt to ask her to give her alms-charity to us this year and she gave me 25 liras, but I accepted it anyways. What can I do? At least I thought I could buy some bread with it; it is really difficult.” (Mother of two)***

***“Nobody is working in my family. We survived with the supplies you have sent. But they are finished as well.” (Mother of three)***

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**22** “Çocuk Yoksulluğu Artabilir» UNICEF News, 28.May.2020 [https://www.unicefturk.org/yazi/covid19\\_yoksulluk](https://www.unicefturk.org/yazi/covid19_yoksulluk)  
Access Date: 09.06.2020

**23** “Çocuk Yoksulluğu Artabilir” UNICEF News, 28.May.2020 [https://www.unicefturk.org/yazi/covid19\\_yoksulluk](https://www.unicefturk.org/yazi/covid19_yoksulluk)  
Access Date: 09.06.2020

### **The Right to Benefit From Social Security**

The loss of economic income forced the families to apply for social support. When we asked them about whether or not they have been receiving support during the Covid-19, 42 out of 85 caregivers said that they received food parcel deliveries from institutions such as the municipality, the district governorship or the mukhtars; and 16 answered that they benefited from the 1000 liras worth social support provided by the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services. 19 caregivers stated that they applied for some form of support, but they could not receive any.

***“Bills are coming and piling up. Yesterday I heard from the Syrians that some unit in the district governorship is handing out help. I went there but they did not even let me in. They said we will see in September. I said to them ‘at least pay the bills’. They replied saying that their support is only for the disabled. They did not even register me, so I returned back.” (Mother of three)***

***“We were not able to receive proper support from anywhere. Finally, some food supplies have arrived at the mukhtar, I went and told them that we are in a difficult situation, and we were able to receive only a box of food.” (Mother of two)***

In addition to this data, 19 caregivers stated that they benefited from social support program and/or Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality's "Bill on the Hook" campaign. However, they also added that they were still in economic need.

***“We received 1000 liras worth support, but it is finished now. It is not possible to have three kids, pay the rent and do the grocery shopping at the same time. If we cannot find a job, then we will go to the village.” (Mother of three)***

***“We received food parcel delivery and card support from Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. Also, there was the 1000 liras that the state distributed... This is better than nothing, but not enough for someone who has to pay the rent.” (Mother of three)***

***“They could have helped us in paying our bills, they could have helped us in paying our rent. 1000 liras are not enough for anyone. I mean I am grateful that they helped us, but they could have done more. The state could have done more for its citizens. However, they do not help us in normal times, why would they in times of crises...” (Mother of three)***

Some of the refugee caregivers with whom SPI works mentioned the link shared by the Metropolitan Municipality of Istanbul [referring to the Bill on the Hook Campaign] however they were not able to benefit from it since the bills were not registered in their names or they faced difficulties in filling the online forms in Turkish.

Some families stated that they received rent support only for once, and some others told us that they were able to postpone the rent after negotiating with their landlords; however, they were still worried that their rent debt will accrue. 7 out of 85 caregivers stated that their landlords did not charge any rent during this period, and that this support had relieved them greatly.

We also observed that there were technical difficulties in accessing the help/support. The fact that the half of the households did not have internet connection demonstrates that there are obstacles before accessing to help/support. Caregivers stated that in such situations they asked help from their neighbors or acquaintances.

## Protection from Labor Exploitation and the Conditions of Working Children

In the last quarter of May when the second round of interviews were conducted, the caregivers stated that some members of the household were going back to work or hoping that they would return to work in early June. Although the hardships in living conditions that the families face were not a priority issue in the interviews conducted with the children, when asked about what they would change if they had a magic wand, most of the children wanted to change the living conditions of their households and access technological tools to which they had limited access. One of the children said that “I want to do away with money so that everyone would be able to get whatever they want”, and another one said that “(s) he will make sure everyone gets equal amount of money”. Yet another child said that “(s)he will help the poor.” There were other children who said that they wanted to change their lives, houses, and rooms and wanted to buy a computer, a phone or toys.

*“I would have liked my father to earn more, but I also do not want him to get too tired.” (Age 8)*

*“I would have liked to help people like us who have to work all the time.” (Age 17)*

*“I have conscience. I would have taken from the rich and give it to the poor. I wish the rich would become poorer, and the poor would become richer during this period. I would have liked them to understand how it is to be poor, what it feels like to lose someone when you are poor.” (Age 16)*

*“I am dreaming of a house where I could feel like I am outside.” (Age 12)*

In the interviews, the children who were compelled to work prior to the Covid-19 were asked about their current work situation. 7 children said that they were working prior to the Covid-19, but things changed since the start of the pandemic.

*“My cousin opened a bakery in Beylikdüzü. Initially, I was going there. Now there is not any work. So, I am in Fatih.” (Age 16)*

*“Our income decreased, of course. My father and I are working. I have three siblings, but the others are still too small. My father cannot work right now, so I go out to collect paper, but I cannot do it regularly anymore. When there are lockdowns I cannot go out. How would we pay the fine? But it is not clear what we can do at home either.” (Age 17)*

Two of the boys who were interviewed by SVA and BCAF stated that they continued working despite the interdictions.

*“My father got a permission so I can deliver orders by a motorbike.” (Age 16)*

The rights to safe space in terms of right to life, survival and development is violated when children are forced to work under conditions without sufficient precautions and bring money to their household. On the other hand, it was observed that the caregivers were unable to ensure the well-being and welfare of themselves and their children.

As it was indicated in the research limitations section, we were not able to interview the Doms who are amongst the groups TCC works with. Unfortunately, it was not possible to collect data neither on how the families and their children who left Istanbul in March to work in seasonal agriculture experienced the Covid-19 nor about the conditions under which the children were compelled to live and work. As the institutions working in the field state, this early migration amounts to children staying in the agricultural fields under unfavorable conditions for a longer period of time.<sup>24-25</sup>

Mothers stated that during the Covid-19 period their household responsibilities increased, and they found it rather difficult to set aside time for themselves. Concomitantly, whereas the domestic responsibilities of girls increased in comparison to boys, it was observed that for boys, who were expected to bring income to the household, the lifting of the restrictions was enough for them to begin working. Possibly, unequal gender division of labor has been reproduced, became more ingrained and affected children through the mother-father roles.

*“I was working at the coffeehouse. I cannot anymore. Once the prohibitions are over, I will start working again.” (Age 15)*

### Safe Space and Ageism

Both the children and the caregivers stated that they got really bored at their small and crowded houses where they did not have the materials or the technology to support their development. For this specific reason, in the period between the first and the second round of interviews, we observed an increase in the number of children who went out during the lockdown. 45 out of 122 children said that they went out even on days when it was not allowed and did not see being on the street in their own neighborhoods as a significant risk. However, the living spaces of the majority of the children are located in crowded areas with narrow streets. This situation shows that children are at risk without taking precautions, away from safe areas. Some children gave the following reasons for going out: grocery shopping, taking care of their younger siblings, playing on the street, and taking fresh air. A significant portion of the children who had very limited communication with their friends and did not have the access to an inclusive education or sufficient conditions to support their development at their houses, understood being outside as a relief and relaxation despite the restrictions and the risks.

*“I am outside from morning till evening. The city police see me and tell me to go back to my house. I go and leave again after 10 minutes.” (Age 15)*

*“We spend so much time without any movement. Going outside and moving helps a lot, otherwise we will all become obese.” (Age 12)*

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24 Covid-19 Salgınında Mevsimlik Tarımda Çalışan Ailelerin ve Çocukların Korunması, Support to Life Bulletin, 22.04.2020 Access Link: <https://www.hayatadestek.org/bulten/covid-19-salgininda-mevsimlik-tarimda-calisan-ailelerin-ve-cocuklarin-korunmasi/> Access Date: 09.06.2020

25 Virüs mü, Yoksulluk mu?- Korona Virüs Salgınının Mevsimlik Gezici Tarım İşçileri ve Onların Çocukları ile Bitkisel Üretime Olası Etkisi, Kalkınma Atölyesi, 01.05.2020, Access Link: <http://www.ka.org.tr/dosyalar/file/Yayinlar/Raporlar/TURKCE/Virus%20mu%20yoksulluk%20mu.pdf> Access Date: 30.06.2020

*“We only have one big window and it sees the backyard. I wish that it saw the streets, so that I could have watched the people from the window.” (Age 11)*

*“My siblings and I go outside. Sometimes I go outside on my own. I ride my scooter, we play football or tag.” (Age 10)*

The information we retrieved from the interviews showed that there were obstacles before and problems about children’s access to right to life, survival and development. Furthermore, these issues and problems pose the risk of getting worse over time. Additionally, we presented the findings on how children’s rights to rest, play and leisure are violated in this process in the relevant section.

During the Covid-19 period, just like in many other countries, children in Turkey together with people who are over 65 and young people who are between 18-20 were affected by the lockdown and exposed to ageism.<sup>26</sup>

### **Right to Access Sufficient Living Conditions**

It is obvious that the problem is not limited to the Covid-19. The picture portrayed above shows that children and adult members of households had reasonable worries about meeting their needs such as healthy food, basic hygiene materials and housing. As other research conducted during the Covid-19 demonstrate, unemployment and economic insecurity due to pandemic can increase the number of child laborers, the risk of adolescence pregnancy, the rates of forced child marriages as well as childhood neglect and abuse.<sup>27</sup>

Monitoring the effect of lack of access to basic needs on children’s psycho-social development, living conditions, child labor, school attendance, as well as taking preventive and supportive measures should be among the critical steps to be taken after this period. It should be emphasized that taking care of the child’s development is not only about preparing him/her for the future, it is also about creating the most favorable conditions for him/her present life in which (s)he can fulfill his/her current potential. It should be noted that the Article 6 of the UNCRC mentioned under this heading is one of the four basic principles and that it is a guiding principle together with the other three principles in the implementation of all rights defined in the Convention

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<sup>26</sup> Eliminating age discrimination from lockdown curfews, 10.06.2020, Access link: <https://home.crin.org/readlistenwatch/stories/eliminating-age-discrimination-lockdown-curfews> Access date: 01.07.2020

<sup>27</sup> Covid-19 Pandemisinin Çocuklara Yıkıcı Etkileri, Terrabayt, 19.05.2020, Access link: <https://terrabayt.com/yasam/covid-19-pandemisinin-cocuklara-yikici-etkisi/>, Access date: 09.06.2020

## Right to Access to Education

UNCRC emphasizes that all children have the right to access equal, free and quality education and underlines that states parties are obliged to take measures to encourage regular attendance to school and to decrease school dropout rates.<sup>28</sup> The Convention also stipulates that it is necessary to develop the personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities of children to their fullest potential. The Convention adds that States Parties agree to take measures for the development of respect in children for human rights, for his or her own as well as other people's cultural identity, language and values, for differences and for the natural environment.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, the convention guarantees children's right to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, and to use his or her own language.<sup>30</sup>

Assessing the practices of formal education and developing them according to the needs during the Covid-19 period is important for ensuring children's right to education in Turkey who is a party to the UNCRC. Within the scope of the measures taken during the Covid-19

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### 28 UNCRC Article 28

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:
  - (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;
  - (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;
  - (c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;
  - (d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;
  - (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.
3. States Parties shall promote and encourage international cooperation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

### 29 UNCRC Article 29

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
  - (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
  - (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
  - (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;
  - (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;
  - (e) The development of respect for the natural environment.
2. No part of the present article or Article 28 shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principle set forth in paragraph 1 of the present article and to the requirements that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State  
(When ratifying the Convention Turkey placed a reservation on Article 29.)

### 30 UNCRC Article 30

- In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.  
(While ratifying the Convention, Turkey placed a reservation on the Article 29)

period, school education was suspended since March 2020. Since 23 Mart 2020, formal education, to which approximately 17,5 million students<sup>31</sup> attend, was continued as distance education via EBA. It was possible to follow the distance education courses via the website of EBA, TRT EBA TV channels and TRT Watch application. MEBİM Call Center was giving support to distance education and all the operators were providing free access to EBA. The “cohesion classes” which aim at improving the Turkish of Syrian and other refugee children<sup>32</sup> were also available in EBA from the second week onwards.

Interviewee children who participated in the system and lived in different districts of Istanbul shared their experiences of distance education in the first and second round of interviews conducted in April and May 2020, respectively. The interviews conducted with children and their caregivers revealed that some children and caregivers experienced various difficulties throughout the distance education period.

### Access to Distance Education

In the first round, of all the children who shared their views in the interviews, 39 stated that they used EBA all the time, 22 stated that they sometimes used it and 33 stated that they were not able to access EBA at all. In the second round of interviews, besides the children who said that they stopped following EBA, there were children who expressed that they managed to resolve some of the problems they experienced in accessing EBA and began to follow the courses. However, like the Syrian Doms living in Tarlabası, children who had difficulties in schooling or attending school due to various reasons such as language barrier, child labor, and discrimination prior to the Covid-19 period might have had more difficulty in accessing distance education. According to Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM) research conducted with refugees during the same period, the ratio of children who cannot access to distance education was 48%.<sup>33</sup>

### Limitations Regarding Technology and Equipment

This research reveals that the main reason for the difficulty in accessing distance education is the lack of technology and equipment. The abovementioned ASAM research also underlined that half of the families gave lack of technological equipment as the reason for not being able to access distance education.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, in our research, 12 children said that they did not have devices such as a TV or a computer. Children who

31 ERI (2020). Türkiye’de Koronavirüsün Eğitime Etkileri, <https://www.egitimreformugirisimi.org/turkiyede-koronavirusun-egitime-etkileri-iii-uzaktan-egitimin-ilk-iki-iki-haftasi-nasil-gecti/>

32 The number of Syrian children in state schools in Turkey has increased from 40,000 to 684,919 between 2014/2014 and 2019/2020. MEB (January 2020). Yaşam Boyu Öğrenme Genel Müdürlüğü, Göç ve Acil Durum Eğitim Daire Başkanlığı, [https://hobgm.meb.gov.tr/meb\\_iys\\_dosyalar/2020\\_01/27110237\\_OCAK\\_2020internet-BulteniSunu.pdf](https://hobgm.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2020_01/27110237_OCAK_2020internet-BulteniSunu.pdf)

33 ASAM’s research was conducted with 1126 people. SGDD (May 2020). Covid-19 Salgının Türkiye’de Mülteciler Üzerindeki Etkisinin Sektörel Analizi, [http://panel.stgm.org.tr/vera/app/var/files/a/s/asam\\_covid\\_anket\\_raporu\\_200518\\_2\\_tr.pdf](http://panel.stgm.org.tr/vera/app/var/files/a/s/asam_covid_anket_raporu_200518_2_tr.pdf).

34 SGDD (2020, May). Covid-19 Salgının Türkiye’de Mülteciler Üzerindeki Etkisinin Sektörel Analizi, [http://panel.stgm.org.tr/vera/app/var/files/a/s/asam\\_covid\\_anket\\_raporu\\_200518\\_2\\_tr.pdf](http://panel.stgm.org.tr/vera/app/var/files/a/s/asam_covid_anket_raporu_200518_2_tr.pdf).

accessed EBA via telephones in expressing the difficulties they faced in following EBA stated that they have to get into a queue to be able to use the telephone. Similarly, the research conducted by Education Reform Initiative (ERI) indicated that there were children who had to wait for their parents to return home to use their telephones and therefore could not follow the courses since there are no evening classes.<sup>35</sup>

***“I did not watch it at all. It is not possible to follow the courses on our TV.” (Age 12)***

***“I have never used EBA. I used to be able to follow EBA on my mother's phone, but now it does not work at all.” (Age 12)***

***“I used the phone, but my sister uses it more often and she does not give it to me.” (Age 9)***

It was observed that even in houses where there are TVs, computers or telephones, children still experienced difficulties in accessing EBA. Children mentioned the connection problems and the fill factor. There were also children who said that they could not find EBA or did not know how to set the channel on the TV. Another factor that caused difficulties in setting the channel was related to the fact that their caregivers were not literate. Some children stated that they did not know or were not able to access the password or that the password did not work properly. In the second round of interviews, some of the children stated that the latter problems were resolved.

***“I was not able to access it in the first month after they closed the schools... My password was correct, but it still did not work. Now, I can access it.” (Age 16)***

Teachers also identified lack of equipment or other technical issues as problems they had to tackle with from time to time. This situation reveals that meeting the equipment and information needs of teachers in the field of technology use is a priority issue.

***“The teacher of my younger child cannot communicate with us because (s)he does not have a smart phone.” (Mother of 6)***

Distance education also added some additional costs such as printing for children who could not do their homework on telephone.

***“They assign homework to children via online groups. However, we have to get a printout to be able to do them because children cannot do their homework on the telephone. This is a heavy burden for us. I had to spend 100 liras in one week. I am no longer getting the printouts. In any case the children do not listen to what I say, they stopped following the courses.” (Mother of two)***

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35 ERI (2020). Türkiye'de Koronavirüsün Eğitime Etkileri, <https://www.egitimreformugirisimi.org/turkiyede-koronavirusun-egitime-etkileri-iii-uzaktan-egitimin-ilk-iki-haftasi-nasil-gecti/>

## Issues Pertaining to the Content Offered by EBA

Some children had difficult time following EBA since they found the classes offered to be repetitive, too advanced for their level or too long and fast. Some children also stated that they found the content of the classes inadequate or not appropriate for their age. Moreover, there were others who underlined the difficulties they had in following a class offered by a teacher with whom they are not acquainted.

***“It is as if EBA is made for very small children. After speaking to you I gave it another try, but I could only stand it for five minutes.” (Age 13)***

***“Distance education is a bit fast when compared to normal education. I would have liked them to explain the topics more slowly and more in depth.” (Age 15)***

***“It would have been better with our own teachers. We are used to our teachers’ way of teaching. For instance, our religious culture and moral knowledge teacher, English teacher, etc...” (Age 12)***

Particularly, the refugee children said that the classes were too advanced for their level and both children and their caregivers said that children were given too much and too difficult homework assignments.

## Limited Interaction with Teachers

Only a small group of 28 children said that they were able to regularly communicate with their teachers. Caregivers who stated that they were able to communicate with the teachers said that they found it very useful when the teachers followed-up on the children. It was observed that there were differences in the way teachers interacted with children. Whereas some teachers provided the necessary support for children, others lagged behind in this regard. It is seen that the communication between children and their teachers was a one-way interaction from the teacher to the student and focused only on the content of the lessons. Many children stated that they were not able to ask their teachers what they wanted to ask. Additionally, it was also seen that children missed their teachers and those students who were not able to communicate with their teachers were affected emotionally.

***“We are in constant touch with my teacher. (S)he assigns homework and tests. We are doing our classes online.” (Age 14)***

***“It would have been better if I could see and talk to my teacher. Don’t you think that the teacher should call the children and ask them about how they are doing?” (Age 10)***

***“My teachers did not call me even once. I cannot ask questions. We are doing our writing assignments, but then what? I am doing arithmetic problems on my own. They are asking question about topics we have not yet covered.” (Age 11)***

***“We only talk about questions that are relevant to the courses. I ask my teacher only the hard questions. For easy questions, the teacher says to me ‘We covered these topics, do them yourself.’” (Age 11)***

***“I would have liked to see my teachers.” (Age 8)***

Lack of communication with the teachers affected the children in need of special education more adversely. Since in distance education programs tools such as audio description, sign language, subtitles, etc. were not used, children who are visual and hearing-impaired were excluded from distance education.<sup>36</sup>

In the second round of interviews some caregivers stated that there was an increase in the teachers' attention. However, even after one month, some children still stated that they cannot regularly follow EBA, that they are bored or were not sufficiently encouraged by their teachers to follow EBA.

***“We did nothing. The teachers said that if you do not attend distance education lessons, nothing will happen. It was as if they were saying ‘do not follow EBA’. I think this serves their interests better.” (Age 16)***

### **Children's Motivation for Education, School and EBA**

***“I don't want to be on summer holiday, I want to be at school.” (Age 11)***

***“Before, I used to wish for holidays to come, now I wish to go to the school.” (Age 10)***

During the Ramadan, a decrease in children's motivation to follow EBA was observed. In the interviews it was expressed that children's sleeping hours have been altered, they missed or did not take the classes seriously, or they felt like they are “on holidays”. During this period, the caregivers were not able to regularly monitor the children. It was also underlined that the classes offered were not designed in accordance with children's pace of learning and the different ways they learn.

***“I do not prefer to follow EBA. We are already stuck in the house; I see no need in smothering myself in school courses. I am not going to lie, for the past 1-2 months, I have not followed EBA at all. For instance, I did not follow it at all during the fest period. When I do, I try to attend the live broadcasts.” (Age 13)***

***“They can access it, but they do not prefer to do it... They have early morning classes. I cannot wake 'I' up. As for 'M', the child says that ‘there are no classes for us in EBA’. I only have authority over 'M'. The teachers do not care since they give passing grades anyways.” (Mother of three)***

The ERI report also mentions that the parents had difficult time in encouraging their children, particularly the middle-school students.<sup>37</sup> Two other reasons that were given for the decrease in the motivation of children to follow EBA were the knowledge that schools would not reopen during that period and students would not fail the classes. However, the fact that only the grades from the first term would be valid rendered disadvantageous

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<sup>36</sup> ERI (2020). Türkiye'de Koronavirüsün Eğitime Etkileri, <https://www.egitimreformugirisimi.org/turkiyede-koronavirusun-egitime-etkileri-iii-uzaktan-egitimin-ilk-iki-haftasi-nasil-gecti/>

<sup>37</sup> ERG (2020). Türkiye'de Koronavirüsün Eğitime Etkileri, <https://www.egitimreformugirisimi.org/turkiyede-koronavirusun-egitime-etkileri-iii-uzaktan-egitimin-ilk-iki-haftasi-nasil-gecti/>

some students who were not successful during the first term. Some children also expressed their worries and anxieties about missing a term.

***“The lessons are too short, and you cannot stop the broadcast on the TV. It would have been better if we could have asked the teacher the topics we do not understand. I don’t think it is a good idea to directly pass to the 8th grade. We do not even know the subjects of 7th grade, how are we to do those of the 8th grade.” (Age 13)***

Syrian refugee children were particularly worried about falling behind in their education. Taking into consideration that the education of the refugee children was interrupted during the war and the migration period, it is of utmost necessity to approach this issue with great care.

### **Difficulties that Caregivers Face while Helping Children with their Education**

The caregivers who shared their worries about children’s education stated that they cannot help their children because of their own education levels (some of them were illiterate) and language barriers. It was also observed that some of the caregivers were not adequately informed about EBA.

Adults gave the following reasons for not being able to access EBA: lack of literacy, access to internet and information provided by the school administration or teachers. Limitations in Turkish language skills were making it particularly difficult for the caregivers to tutor children. The ERI report also mentions that children who do not know Turkish have hard time following EBA.<sup>38</sup>

***“Since the schools were closed, they were not able to access EBA at all. We cannot do it either. They gave us a password and said that the children have to access it. But they did not provide any information, and we cannot do it either.” (Mother of 3)***

***“Being home does not work for me. I did not like it. I missed my friends and teachers. When I did not understand something, I was asking them; people at home do not know.” (Age 11)***

***“Turkish is not easy for us. I reached B1 level, but I am not able to explain things to my son. Translating from Turkish to Arabic is particularly difficult for a small child. It takes some time; I read and understand but I need more time to be able to explain it to my son.” (Mother of 2)***

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38 ERG (2020). Türkiye’de Koronavirüsün Eğitime Etkileri, <https://www.egitimreformugirisimi.org/turkiyede-koronavirusun-egitime-etkileri-iii-uzaktan-egitimin-ilk-iki-haftasi-nasil-gecti/>

### **Difficulties in Interaction with Schoolmates**

It was observed that majority of children engaged in limited interaction with their schoolmates. Children expressed their longing for their schools and friends.

*“I missed it a lot. I missed all my friends. I missed my friends from the other school as well. We love them too.” (Age 5)*

Children were often limited to communication with their schoolmates on the phone via online groups or social media. One of the refugee children participating in the study stated that (s)he was not accepted to the online group formed by students and teachers in his class. This experience reveals that the discrimination (s)he experienced at school had continued throughout this period.

### **Children's and Caregivers' Recommendations on Access to EBA and Schooling**

Taking into consideration children's recommendations on distance education and central education is of utmost importance for the right to participation which is a fundamental right and principle. In our research, we also asked children who experienced distance education for 2.5 months about their recommendations. Children told us that they were in need of more play, materials, interaction with their friends as well as more communication during the learning process.

*“I wish there were plays suitable for our age. It would be better if I were not alone and able to speak more to my friends.” (Age 13)*

*“If they were to do teleconference, then we would be able to communicate with our teacher and feel like we were actually in the classroom.” (Age 12)*

*“It would have been better if they had sent us books and assigned us problems to solve. Besides the TV, we could have studied like this.” (Age 12)*

*“They could have translated English to Turkish and explain things that way. They could have given us many books to read before the school closed.” (Age 11)*

It was noteworthy that when asked about his/her recommendation one of the children emphasized that the adults do not hear him/her.

*“If the adults asked your ideas about how distance education should be, what would you say?”  
“They would never ask us about how it should be like, they would not listen to us.” (Age 9)*

We also asked children about what they would change if they were given a magic wand. They replied by saying that they would reopen the school; change hours of EBA; prohibit mandatory schooling, exams, homework and punishments; and lengthen the breaks. One of them said that since (s)he has a magic wand, (s)he would “stop the time in exams.”

## Right to Access to Information and Media

Article 12<sup>39</sup> of the UNCRC which regulates right to participation designates it as a main principle for access to and interpretation of other rights.

UN remarks that Article 13 pertaining to freedom of expression and Article 17 pertaining to access to information are prerequisites for the effective implementation of right to participation. Moreover, UN emphasizes the significance of these two articles for children to be the active agents of their rights and implement these rights on their own right and in accordance with their development.<sup>40</sup>

Article 17<sup>41</sup> of the UNCRC regulates States Parties' responsibilities of ensuring that children can obtain information and documents from national and international sources particularly those aiming at promotion of children's social, psychological and moral well-being as well as improving their physical and mental health. In the remaining part of the article, ways of fulfilling this responsibility were outlined.

### Access to and Use of Internet

During the monitoring research, in order to assess state's responsibilities, we asked children questions pertaining to the above rights: whether or not they have access to internet where they live; if they do, through which tools and to what extent they can use internet. We attempted to learn for what purpose children with internet access use it. 100 out of 122 children stated that they have access to internet, albeit to varying degrees.

48 children could only use the mobile internet on cell phones. Considering the cases where there was only one cell phone in the entire household, connecting internet via cell phone brought about some limitations; for example, only one person could have access to internet in the household at once and when the internet data bundle is used up, access to internet becomes impossible.

#### 39 UNCRC Article 12:

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

40 General comment No. 12 on the participation of the child, Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009. <http://www.cocukhaklarizleme.org/wp-content/uploads/BMCHK-Genel-Yorum-12-Katilim-Hakki.pdf>, Access date: 11.06.2020

#### 41 UNCRC Article 17:

1. Encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child and in accordance with the spirit of article 29;
  2. Encourage international co-operation in the production, exchange and dissemination of such information and material from a diversity of cultural, national and international sources;
  3. Encourage the production and dissemination of children's books;
  4. Encourage the mass media to have particular regard to the linguistic needs of the child who belongs to a minority group or who is indigenous;
  5. Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being, bearing in mind the provisions of articles 13 and 18.
- (While ratifying the Convention, Turkey placed a reservation of Article 29).

***“I am connecting via phone. However, our internet data finished. They send extra GB for EBA on Fridays. I am waiting for that.” (Age 13)***

In the first round of interviews, we observed that 15 caregivers did not have any access to internet while in the second round this number was 8. In the first round 15 and in the second round 7 children stated that they could not have internet access. We observed that internet access increased in the course of time. Some caregivers expressed that internet access became more important compared to the pre-Covid-19 period. Other studies on the subject confirm the significance of internet access, and deprivation of it becomes an obstacle to accessing other rights.<sup>42-43</sup>

***“We did not support internet use. With the spread of the disease, children got locked in the house. There is no open space or park for children to play. We bought internet connection so that children wouldn't start fighting. I do not want internet connection at home after the pandemic ends.” (Mother of three)***

Children with internet access used it for social media, playing games, following the classes, communicating with their friends, watching films, series and videos. Total lack of internet access in this period meant that children who could leave their homes could not have any access to information, education, play and their friends..

### **Sources of Information**

Children with whom we had interviews within the scope of this research were asked whether or not they had information about the Covid-19 and, if they did, from which sources they received this information.

According to the first- and second-round of interviews, majority of children received information from TV channels and mainstream media. Data about the process and the publications of the Ministry of Health were closely followed by the children.

***“I heard in the news that the virus is spreading very fast. We should constantly wash our hands and should not stay next to each other.” (Age 9)***

We found out that, children obtained information from internet and, particularly, social media after the TV channels. It is established by previous studies that one in every 3 users of internet, which is seen to be an important source of information for children, is a child.<sup>44</sup>

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42 Promising Practices for Equitable Remote Learning. Emerging lessons from COVID-19 education responses in 127 countries, UNICEF, Access link:<https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB%202020-10%20CL.pdf>, Access date: 01.07.2020

43 Koronavirüs günlerinin gün yüzüne çıkardığı eşitsizlik: Dijital uçurum, BBC Türkçe, 29.04.2020, access link: <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-52464019>, access date: 30.06.2020.

44 Dünya Çocuklarının Durumu 2017, Dijital Bir Dünyada Çocuklar, UNICEF, 2017. Access link: [http://www.unicef.org.tr/files/bilgimerkezi/doc/SOWC\\_2017\\_SUM\\_TR.pdf](http://www.unicef.org.tr/files/bilgimerkezi/doc/SOWC_2017_SUM_TR.pdf), Access date:11.06.2020

Growing risks due to increasing screen time possibly cause worry regarding children's safety and well-being particularly in the Covid-19 period.<sup>45</sup>

In our research, families and caregivers were listed as sources of information following internet and social media. We found out that the preschoolers accessed information mostly through their mother.

In the second-round of interviews conducted during the preliminary research report, we observed an increase in the number of children who stated that they did not receive any news and that they did not want to receive any information anyways. Moreover, there were children who expressed they were following the process less compared to early stages.

***“I am not interested in Corona anymore. Nobody around me speaks about it any longer. I act as if it does not exist. When I hear the news about Corona, I say ‘Ah, I am bored.’” (Age 11)***

We can possibly argue that children's diminishing interest in the process and their lack of interest in hearing about Covid-19, including the informative content, is a manifestation of lack or inaccessibility of tools and content that are appropriate for children.

***“I listened to it on TV, but I don't listen anymore.” (Age 11)***

***“I don't follow the news, my mother said, ‘you do not look’” (Age 11)***

Furthermore, contents that are not appropriate for children, their age and developmental level caused substantial increase in children's anxieties.

***“I got information about the virus on the TV. For example, on her day off we went to my grandmother's house, someone in that neighborhood was infected with the virus. I know that the virus is spreading very fast, I got really scared that the virus would come to our house, too. I couldn't sleep at night.” (Age 12)***

***“Since Corona is a bit bad, I think people should be more careful speaking about it. Children might get scared; they should talk about it carefully.” (Age 10)***

***“At the beginning, my classmates and I gave a lot of thought about why it happened. We researched everything. Now, it gives us depression. We were afraid and hesitant, then we did not follow.” (Age 16)***

It was observed that lack of access to information appropriate for children's age and development, and inadequacy of children-friendly broadcasts and broadcasts that observe children's well-being might result in misinformation. Besides, misinformation might cause confusion that might amount to discrimination.

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<sup>45</sup> Tüm dünyayı etkileyen COVID-19 salgını nedeniyle çocuklar çevrimiçi ortamda daha fazla riskle karşı karşıya, UNICEF, 15.04.2020. Access link: <https://www.unicef.org/turkey/bas%C4%B1n-b%C3%BCtenleri/unicef-t%C3%BCm-d%C3%BCnyay%C4%B1-etkileyen-covid-19-salg%C4%B1n%C4%B1-nedeniyle-%C3%A7ocuklar-%C3%A7evrimi%C3%A7i-ortamda>, Access date:11.06.2020

***“If I had a superpower, I would have sent all the Chinese people to another planet.” (Age 13)***

Monitoring research revealed the need for all children to obtain information through appropriate tools and contents as to how children can protect themselves during the Covid-19. However, we must also emphasize that, in doing so, guiding principles as set forth in the Article 17 of UNCRC should be taken into consideration in order to protect children from information and documents that could harm their well-being.

In a similar vein, caregivers were also asked about where they obtained information on the Covid-19 and whether or not the information they obtained was sufficient and accurate.

72 out of 85 caregivers who participated in the second round of interviews stated that they obtained information from TV news. Parallel to children's answers, the second source of information for caregivers was internet and social media. Besides, it was observed that caregivers did not fully trust the information they received from these sources and found it insufficient for themselves and their children. It was noteworthy that, as is the case among children, the lack of trust in sources of information caused heightened anxiety among caregivers.

***“In the beginning I was watching the news very often but then it made me depressed. Not just me, children, too. We've had enough of Corona. Also, in the discussion programs one says white while the other says black. We didn't know whom to believe. Then, I stopped watching.” (Mother of three)***

Caregivers also voiced their demand for support regarding how they can inform their children about the process.

***“Of course, children got anxious, they keep hearing worrisome sentences. We are worried, too, naturally we are picking on each other. But, seriously, I couldn't figure out how I should approach children in this process. It would be nice if someone informed the parents.” (Mother of two)***

In relation to sources of information, adults who participated in the interviews conducted by SPI were asked what they should do if they notice Covid-19 symptoms. It was observed that the interviewees were mostly informed about the subject. However, in some interviews, caregivers mentioned ineffective methods showing that caregivers were still in need of information and guidance about the process and precautions.

Some caregivers stated that they trust less in information shared by “lay people” on the communication applications. We observed that Syrian caregivers followed the process through various Arabic/Turkish TV channels. However, we noticed that language barrier posed an obstacle to joining some online platforms and lowered trust in the accuracy of the information.

***“But we don't understand the language, do you see what I mean? We are afraid that there will be something that is not right.” (Mother of five)***

Another remarkable point was that due to their previous experiences of spam<sup>46</sup> and fraud, caregivers did not trust some internet links. Some caregivers told that they did not want to give their personal information required for access to information or services.

Majority of the caregivers who stated that they did not follow the process as much as they previously did was women. Some of them pointed out that this situation is directly related to the intensity of domestic chores.

***“It would be lie if I said I follow regularly. When my husband is at home, he watches the news. When he is not home children watch cartoons. I anyway don’t have time to follow.” (Mother of six)***

Taking into account the effective implementation of right to participation, these interviews, which were assessed in terms of right to access to information and media, should be thought in relation to freedom of expression regulated by the Article 13 of the UNCRC.<sup>47</sup> Freedom of expression refers to having an opinion, expressing that opinion, and seeking and receiving information through any media.<sup>48</sup>

This monitoring research revealed that given children’s means for accessing information and media, their opportunities to express their views on the process, to be heard and participate in the processes were immensely limited. However, in order for children’s rights to be effectively implemented, children should be able to express their opinions, be sufficiently informed and arrive at answers. This is a requirement for them to be the subjects of their rights.

***“I learn from the news. I am curious about why the Chinese people eat bats... Do you know that the majority of the people who died had vitamin D deficiency? I would like to ask a medical doctor why only people above 65 and under 20 have to be at home... I am also curious about this: three baby tigers and two baby lions were infected with Corona virus; didn’t they say animals are not infected?” (Age 11)***

In this context, children were asked whether or not they received adequate information, how they could have better access to information and what way of learning they like the most.

Confirming the conclusions inferred from the interviews, children expressed their opinions underlining the need for tools and contents appropriate for their developmental levels. It was also remarkable that the majority asked us when the pandemic would end.

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<sup>46</sup> Junk e-mail

<sup>47</sup> UNCRC Article 13

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice.

2. The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

(a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or

(b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.

<sup>48</sup> General Comment on right to participation of the child, No. 12, Committee on Rights of the Child, 2009. Access link: <http://www.cocukhaklarizleme.org/wp-content/uploads/BMCHK-Genel-Yorum-12-Katilim-Hakki.pdf>, Access date: 11.06.2020



Play is the most effective learning process which might or might not have certain rules, in which the child participates willingly and gladly, and which supports the child's social, emotional, physical, cognitive and linguistic development. Play and recreation are seen to be an important tool which improves the child's skills and enables him/her to participate in everyday life. It is of great importance for the health and well-being of every child. It helps to improve the child's creativity, imagination and self-confidence.<sup>52</sup> In this respect, right to play and leisure is immediately linked to right to non-discrimination (Article 2), best benefit of the child (Article 3), right to life, survival and development (Article 6), and right to participation (Article 12).

UN Committee on Rights of the Child General Comment No. 17<sup>53</sup> underlines that right to rest and leisure is as significant to a child's development as basic needs such as nutrition, housing, health and education and defines right to rest and leisure as follows:

“The key characteristics of play are fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non-productivity. Together, these factors contribute to the enjoyment it produces and the consequent incentive to continue to play. While play is often considered non-essential, the Committee reaffirms that it is a fundamental and vital dimension of the pleasure of childhood, as well as an essential component of physical, social, cognitive, emotional and spiritual development.”

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No.17 (Para. 1)

The Covid-19 period has produced worrying effects on children's opportunities to enjoy their rights set forth by the Article 31 of the Convention both in Turkey and in the world. According to a UNICEF statement, “99% of children and young people under 18 worldwide (2.34 billion) live in one of the 186 countries with some form of movement restrictions in place due to COVID-19. 60% of all children live in one of 82 countries with a full (7%) or partial (53%) lockdown - accounting for 1.4 billion young lives.”<sup>54</sup>

Corresponding also to the time frame of the first round of interviews of this research, on 3 April 2020, Turkey declared a lockdown for persons under 20.<sup>55</sup> Later, as of 13 May 2020, children under 14 were given permission to go out on Wednesdays and while the age group of 15-18 were given permission to go out on Fridays, in total for four hours in a

52 Ender Durualp&Neriman Aral, “Çocukların İnce ve Kaba Motor Gelişimlerine Oyun Etkinliklerinin Etkisinin İncelenmesi”, *Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 2018; İshak Kozikoğlu&Nur Uygun, “Okul Öncesi Eğitim Kurumlarına Devam Eden Çocukların Oyun Davranışlarının İncelenmesi”, *Anadolu Journal of Educational Sciences International*, 2019.

53 General comment No. 17 (2013) on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (art. 31) UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013, <http://www.cocukhaklarizleme.org/wp-content/uploads/CRC17-R.pdf>, Access date 09.06.2020

54 “UNICEF: Çocukların Salgınin Gizli Mağdurları Olmasına İzin Vermeyelim”, *bianet*, 10.April.2020, <http://bianet.org/bianet/print/222758-unicef-cocuklarin-salginin-gizli-magdurlari-olmasına-izin-vermeyelim> Access date: 12.06.2020.

55 “Koronavirüs kısıtlamaları kimleri kapsıyor? Kimler seyahat ve sokağa çıkma yasağından muaf?”, *TRT Haber*, 9.April.2020, <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/koronavirus/koronavirus-kisitlamalari-kimleri-kapsiyor-kimler-seyahat-ve-sokaga-cikma-yasagindan-muaf-474735.html> Access date 15.06.2020

week.<sup>56</sup> Finally, on 12 June 2020, movement restriction of children under 18 was lifted on the conditioned that they would be accompanied by their parents.<sup>57</sup>

122 children who participated in our research and their caregivers were asked questions about their communication with their friends, what they did on the days they could go out and how they were spending their time at home.

### Chances of Communication with Friends

Interviews explicitly revealed children's needs for maintaining their communication with their friends. In the preliminary report, the number of children who had not had any communication with their friends were remarkably high (29). However, in the second round of interviews the number of children who met with their friends online (47); and at home, outdoors and in the neighborhood (51) increased. Weekly permissions for children to go out played an important role in this increase.

*“- I speak to my friends on the phone. We talk about classes. Sometimes we play games. We plan about what to do and where to go if we go out.*

*-What would you like to do?*

*- I would like to wander all the streets, go to all the parks” (Age 13)*

*“When we last met, I said that we were having video chat but, now, we are just texting. I feel like I sit at home, watch TV. It is all the same stuff that we are talking. There is nothing left that we can talk about.” (Age 14)*

Nevertheless, there were children (23) who had not had any communication with their friends. For these children, the reasons for not having any communication were lack of access to online tools or limited internet quota, living far away from their friends and not having communication devices of their own.

*“Since my friends also don't go out, we don't see each other. I check sometimes, they are not online, either.” (Age 16)*

*“Here (somewhere outside Istanbul) I don't have any friends. I don't have internet either, so I don't speak to anyone.” (Age 17)*

*“My friends always play games. Our internet bundle is not enough for games, that's why we can't meet.” (Age 12)*

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<sup>56</sup> “81 il Valiliğine 18 Yaş Altı ile 65 Yaş ve Üzeri Kişilerin Sokağa Çıkma Kısıtlaması Genelgesi” TC İçişleri Bakanlığı, 29.May.2020, <https://www.icisleri.gov.tr/81-il-valiligine-18-yas-alti-ile-65-yas-ve-uzeri-kisilerin-sokaga-cikma-kisitlamasi-genelgesi> Access date 12.06.2020

<sup>57</sup> “Erdoğan: 18 yaş altı için kısıtlama ebeveynleri refakatinde olmaları şartıyla tümüyle kalkmıştır”, Haberler.com, 9.June.2020, <https://www.haberler.com/erdogan-18-yas-alti-icin-kisitlama-ebeveynleri-13307828-haberi/> Access date: 15.06.2020

***“Some friends texted me, but my father didn’t tell me. You know I don’t have a phone, sometimes my friends thought that his [my father’s] number is mine and texted him. I saw it later.” (Age 11)***

As can be seen in the above accounts, the majority of children who expressed that they had no communication with their friends thought that they couldn’t do so since they did not have access to technological means.

***“If I had a computer, of course I would have played with my friends. We had one but it is broken now. I used to go to the internet café in the neighborhood, but it is closed, too.” (Age 13)***

### **Permitted Days of Going Out and Spending Time Outside**

While the second round of interviews were conducted, children under 14 were permitted to go out on Wednesdays between 11.00-15.00 and the age group of 15-18 were permitted to go out on Fridays between 11.00-15.00, for four hours a week. Children expressed that they were looking forward to that time slot and did not want to go back home.

***“I am very excited. I can sing until I go to Silivrikapi” (Age 10)***

58 out of 122 children said that they went out on the permitted days while 48 said that they went out on other days as well to play, see their friends, go to park, ride a bike and wander about.

***“I went out on Wednesday. That night I stayed at my aunt’s place and the next day I came back home. It was so nice to be out, I missed it.” (Age 14)***

***“It was rainy on the permitted day. So, I went out on Thursday. No one gets fined in our neighborhood.” (Age 16)***

***“Honestly, I go out, we play football sometimes. But you know we have permission, don’t you? I got so bored at home; I can’t stay in any longer. My mother gets angry, but I don’t touch my face. We don’t go to park, though. We did the other day, but we came back right away. I won’t go if it’s crowded but I can’t stand staying at home anymore. We sleep, we wake up, we do the same thing all the time.” (Age 14)***

***“I saw my friends in the neighborhood. It’s said that schools won’t open. We will go to the village when the roads are open. I let them know. We had a chat and I came back home.” (Age 13)***

Lack of spaces where children can enjoy contact with nature such as parks and gardens were a challenge for children and their need for nature was manifested in their wish to go to parks on the permitted days.

***“I put the budding part of the onion in water, it makes me feel good watching it grow. I also planted a small flower in front of the door, and I am taking care of it.” (Age 11)***

Based on the interview notes, restrictions and regulation on permitted days were stretched and neither the children nor the caregivers faced any sanctions. Additionally, it was also recorded that explaining children why they could not go out while other children could go out was challenging for the caregivers.

***“In time everyone started going out and the children saw people outside. So, they became more aggressive and ill-tempered. I can’t explain the children that there is a lockdown. They see people go out and ask what happened to the ban?” (Mother of two)***

In the research data, it was noteworthy that some children did not want to go out because they were afraid of the disease while some other children were not allowed to go out by their parents. A Syrian mother told that due to discriminatory attitudes, on the permitted days she preferred to take their children to their friends' places instead of letting them go out.

***“In the stores people tell us to stay away in a very rude way. I don’t exactly understand why. Is it because we are Syrian?” (Mother of four)***

***“I didn’t go out. I couldn’t go out on the permitted day either. My father didn’t let me. I wanted to go out so much. We even made plans on the phone with my friends.” (Age 13)***

***“I can’t go out on Wednesdays. My mother has work to do. Also, my father doesn’t let me. He says, ‘You have stayed at home until now, so don’t go out now’.” (Age 13)***

***“I don’t go out, there is no need...” (Age 16)***

### **Spending Time at Home**

When we asked children how they spent their time at home except for spending time on digital devices, the most frequent answers they gave were “I don’t do anything”, “I sit at home”, and “I get bored”.

Living in small houses led to children’s getting bored, feeling suffocated and “getting aggressive” in some caregivers’ words. In a similar vein, caregivers also felt bored and helpless.

***“The biggest challenge is boredom. Children become insufferable. We can take them out only on Wednesdays. It was rainy yesterday, so we couldn’t take them out. We amuse them with painting and games but when it finishes, they want to go out. In the beginning I thought I would become a cleaning addict, I was scared. But then I let it go, I told myself, stop. Sometime children help me out, sometimes my husband helps.” (Mother of three)***

As reasons for not being able find anything to do, children mentioned lack of play materials, not having friends to play with, overplaying and consuming play materials (feeling saturated), and not wanting to do anything.

***“I want to play; I want to paint for example. If we bought watercolor, I would paint.” (Age 8)***

***I don’t feel like doing anything anymore. I am overwhelmed. So many people are in the same house. My mother said, ‘do not go out on you own’, but she couldn’t go out herself either and the day passed.” (Age 12)***

***“When we play in the living room, they get mad at us for making noise. I cannot play football at home. Once Corona is over, I want to go out and play football.” (Age 11)***

In the Tarlabaşı leg of the research, children stated their longing for boardgames and in the Karagümruk leg, for the workshops at the school.

***“Stationary store is closed, maybe we could have bought boardgames. If we had Söz Küçüğün board game, we would play it. I asked the stationary store once, but they didn’t have it either. We play Parcheesi or Bingo. Once my younger sibling made a Söz Küçüğün but it got lost.” (Age 13)***

***“We play games that you post on your Instagram account. But my sibling changes the games. All of a sudden it becomes football.” (Age 14)***

Except for children in Tarlabaşı, the most frequently mentioned games by children were those that could be played on digital platforms. Watching television, reading, painting, and handicrafts were also the activities frequently referred. Games that could be played on digital platforms stood out as a useful instrument for children to maintain communication with their peers.

It can be argued that the main variable that makes diversified the children’s means of spending time at home is having a sibling. Especially those who have younger siblings expressed that they spent time and play games with their siblings.

***“Yes, I play. Hide and seek, blindman’s buff, a tisket a tasket, jumping rope, painting eggs... I usually play with my sibling.” (Age 11)***

It can be argued that children were happy with spending time with their families and playing with their siblings and parents and that during the quarantine, their relationships and connections became strengthened. On the other hand, there were some children who stated that they felt lonely because their parents were tired and couldn’t play with them and join physical activities.

***“The good thing is, previously we couldn’t spend time with my family. My father would go to work and I wouldn’t see him all day. Now I see him often. We can have more activities together.” (Age 11)***

***“It was not possible for me to be close with these people [meaning the family members]. I was addicted to the phone. I used to go to school, and we did not get to see each other much. Now, we are having our meals together, we speak and understand each other. They figured me out. I think this was the best side of the quarantine.” (Age 16)***

## RESEARCH ON CHILDREN'S ACCESS TO RIGHTS DURING CORONA DAYS IN DIFFERENT DISTRICTS OF ISTANBUL

Conversely, especially in Istanbul Kayışdağı district, in households where children did not have their own rooms, children and caregivers stated that domestic quarrels increased.

***“Same things every day, all day... It is boring. Honestly, our screen time increased a lot. We can't go out to the garden, there is no space. My daughter gets bored and picks on me and I pick on her constantly.”*** (Mother of one)

***“I am so bored... I do not have a room. Wherever I go, they tell me not to stay there or to clean up the room... I think the school was swell.”*** (Age 13)

It was also observed that the domestic responsibilities encumbered particularly on girls increased during the quarantine.

***“Mostly, I don't have any time for playing.”*** (Age 13)

***“I help my mother; I sweep the floor.”*** (Age 9)

Obstacles to children's access to right to rest, leisure, play and participation in cultural life and arts as well as children's need for leisure came to light in this period.

Article 2 of UNCRC remarks that all rights apply to all children without any exception. However, as seen in the case of a Syrian mother who stated that due to discriminatory attitudes, she preferred to take her children to their friends' home instead of letting them go out, refugee children's and their parents' right to non-discrimination (Article 2), one of the main principles of UNCRC, is violated.

As stated in UN Committee on Rights of the Child General Comment No. 17, leisure refers to “time and space without obligations, entertainment or stimulus, which [children] can choose to fill as actively or inactively as they wish.” However, in physically small houses where the household members are crowded in number, meeting this need clearly becomes more difficult. At this point, we must underline the significance of the implementation of the Article 3 of UNCRC which regulates the best benefit of the child.

***“I used to think that my life was very boring, but now sitting at home is even more boring.”*** (Age 15)

Interview results showed that children's right to play and leisure as well as its significance for children's well-being, health and development were not fully comprehended. It was observed that children suffered from not being able to go out and have contact with the street and their friends. However, peer interaction is very important and necessary for children's development.

During the interviews, children expressed that they missed “very simple things” including their friends, schools, being outside and going to the market. In this respect, as far as supporting children's development and developing capacities is concerned, right to play and leisure is intrinsically related to the Article 6 which regulates right to life, survival and development.

We observed that children were never asked what they wanted; neither during the lockdown for children, nor when they were “permitted” to go out once a week in a particular time slot, nor when they were allowed to go out under the chaperonage of their parents. This indicates that children are not taken seriously as citizens.<sup>58</sup> That children were not asked for their opinions on the subject in which they are implicated shows that their right to participation regulated by the Article 12 of UNCRC is not implemented.

## Right to Access to Healthcare Services

Under this heading, we included the findings pertaining to the access of children supported with particular protection to their rights during the Covid-19. We directed questions to caregivers regarding children’s access to rights to health in an attempt to understand children’s experiences. In this respect, we assessed whether or not household members needed healthcare services during the Covid-19, how they met these needs, how they covered healthcare expenses, and whether or not they had adequate information on the right to health.

Article 24 of UNCRC<sup>59</sup> pertains to right to health and regulates children’s access to health in with a holistic approach. In the Article 24, children’s access to right to health is not limited to taking necessary measures in a timely manner; improving health; therapeutic, rehabilitative and palliative services. It also encompasses the development of children in a way to realize their full potential and the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health. The Constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO) also attests to the consensus of the States Parties on the subject.

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**58** “Ailemin Bekçi Gibi Başında Durması Hoşuma Gitmez”, bianet, 10.June. 2020, [http://m.bianet.org/bianet/toplum/225511-ailemin-bekci-gibi-basinda-durmasi-tabii-ki-hosuma-gitmez?fbclid=IwAR3UqQgEo0IXJCQIQ5DhJX\\_M9rQVFemX8dxt2qjkBT2Ckyb4ANYXbJYkIk](http://m.bianet.org/bianet/toplum/225511-ailemin-bekci-gibi-basinda-durmasi-tabii-ki-hosuma-gitmez?fbclid=IwAR3UqQgEo0IXJCQIQ5DhJX_M9rQVFemX8dxt2qjkBT2Ckyb4ANYXbJYkIk) Access date 15.06.2020

**59** UNCRC Article 24

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.
2. States Parties shall pursue full implementation of this right and, in particular, shall take appropriate measures:
  - (a) To diminish infant and child mortality;
  - (b) To ensure the provision of necessary medical assistance and health care to all children with emphasis on the development of primary health care;
  - (c) To combat disease and malnutrition, including within the framework of primary health care, through, inter alia, the application of readily available technology and through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking-water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution;
  - (d) To ensure appropriate pre-natal and post-natal health care for mothers;
  - (e) To ensure that all segments of society, in particular parents and children, are informed, have access to education and are supported in the use of basic knowledge of child health and nutrition, the advantages of breastfeeding, hygiene and environmental sanitation and the prevention of accidents;
  - (f) To develop preventive health care, guidance for parents and family planning education and services.
3. States Parties shall take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children.
4. States Parties undertake to promote and encourage international co-operation with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the right recognized in the present article. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

Accordingly, States Parties agree that “health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”<sup>60</sup>

Drawing on the definition of health set forth by UNCRC and the WHO Constitution, this research, with the aim of analyzing children's complete well-being, scrutinized the physical, mental and social indicators of right to health.

### Physical Well-being of Children

When we analyzed access to healthcare in terms of physical well-being, we saw that during the Covid-19, certain setbacks occurred in the access to preventive healthcare services and medical treatment of children who should be supported with particular protection measures. The majority of 85 households which participated in the research stated that they have reservations about access to medical treatment or that their treatment was interrupted since they had difficulties in accessing medication.

***“My shortness of breath got worse. The doctor referred me to Yedikule. I got an appointment, but I was not able to get my medication because there were Corona patients. The neighbor also suffers from the same disease, so I got some pills from her. The health care centers do not work either, I have to go to the hospital.” (Mother of three)***

Another important point was that in some of these households there were people with chronic diseases or pregnant women. It should be noted that appropriate pre-natal and post-natal care for the mother is an important factor affecting the lifelong health of the child.

***“For instance, I have to take my baby to the hospital to vaccinate him/her this month, but I am not sure about what to do. I am confused about which hospital is safer. They say some hospital to not take Corona patients, but you never know. Maybe (s)he does not know that (s)he is sick, how are we to know that?” (Mother of three)***

***“I have a muscle condition. I have to go to the doctor on a regular basis. I did not go recently. Going to the doctor is more dangerous but if I have an attack, that would cause problems.” (Mother of two)***

The decision published in the Official Gazette on 13 April 2020, stipulated that personal protective equipment, diagnostic tests and drug treatment should be provided free of charge to everyone who applied with the suspicion of Covid-19 regardless of ownership of health insurance.<sup>61</sup> However, as the statements revealed, due to lack of information, some caregivers had problems in accessing healthcare services other than the pandemic services. It can be argued that these problems occurred because the Ministry of Health did not provide sufficient briefings on healthcare services other than the pandemic and did not provide content support to media.

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**60** From the introduction of the WHO Constitution which was accepted in the International Health Conference on 22 July 1946.

**61** “Koronavirüs Tedavisi Ücretsiz Yapılacak” bianet, 14.04.2020 <https://bianet.org/bianet/saglik/222930-koronavirus-tedavisi-ucretsiz-yapilacak> Access Date:10.06.2020

The interviews conducted within the scope of this research revealed that amongst the caregivers there were people who did not have social security and who could not access health services on account of deteriorating financial conditions. The interviewees stated that transportation and medication expenses constituted obstacles in accessing health services.

***“Going to the hospital is a cause of anxiety these days. I do not want to use public transportation. Ambulance comes if you have Corona, but I am pregnant, it won’t come for me. So, I was not able to go. (Mother of two)***

***“I got three stitches, they prescribed medicine, but we were not able to get it because we do not have money. Our neighbor gave us this colored water and his/her father is doing the medical dressing. I cannot do it, I have hemophobia.” (Mother of four)***

***“I went to the hospital. I do not have insurance. I buy it with my own money. They made be wait for too long.” (Mother of four)***

***“Neither my children nor I have an insurance. Their father is unemployed. I am a cleaner, I also do not have an insurance. And now we have to stay in this house, and it made our situation even more complicated. We did not go to the hospital, but if we have to, I am not sure about how to go there. Will the state cover all the expenses? Medication for instance, we cannot afford it right now. Last month my daughter got a fever, we waited, and she recovered.” (Mother of two)***

Despite the decision which stipulates that everyone will be ensured to access healthcare services and treatment regardless of person’s ownership of healthcare insurance, Syrian refugees faced barriers to accessing healthcare services due to not being registered in the city of residence. It is known that irregular migrants refrain from applying to hospitals due to their fear of being deported and registered refugees due to being subjected to previous decisions which limited their have access to healthcare services to the city where they are registered.<sup>62</sup>

Children and parents with whom we have interviews within the scope of this research were registered in their city of residence. In other words, we could not reach out to such disadvantageous households. However, it must be noted that there are refugees who cannot access right to health on account of the fear of being deported or sent back to the city of registration.

Another problem which Syrian families face in accessing healthcare services is the language barrier. Since children with whom we had interviews go to school, we can say that at least one member of the household speaks Turkish. Indeed, members of these households stated that they overcame the language barrier, yet they did not have sufficient information about how and where they could access healthcare services. They expressed that they obtained basic information on the Covid-19 from Arabic materials.

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**62** Murat Erdoğan & Zeynep Balcioğlu, “What does it mean to be an urban refugee in Turkey during a pandemic?” Open Democracy (2020) <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/what-does-it-mean-be-urban-refugee-turkey-during-pandemic/?fbclid=IwAR0eZtSK77ENwM3ZZHx6fH-oPJpti6BGLTI6HVydGAR6NzzSwyRYTXrzE> Access Date:09.06.2020

However, it must be noted that this is not widespread among Syrian refugees whose access to information-communication technologies is very limited.

Interviewees were also asked about the measures they were taking. Except for 10 interviewees who said that they did not take any measures and did not think it is necessary, 44 interviewees said that they avoid going out except for vital household needs and 73 expressed that they used mask and gloves if they went out.

Later in the interviews, we asked how they accessed to protective equipment, that is, masks, to those who stated that they did not go out without a mask. We received answers contradicting with the previous one. A large majority of the interviewees stated that they could not access to masks bought at the pharmacies.

After the announcement of mandatory use of masks in the public spaces on 3 April 2020, free mask distribution started on 5 April 2020 and mask sales were banned on 6 April 2020.<sup>63</sup> However, although people who are not covered by the health insurance were included in the mask initiative, interviewees told that they waited for the free mask password SMS from the Ministry of Health and they did not receive it. This being the case, they told that they either had to go out without mask or made masks out of their headscarves.

***“But I got offended only by the fact that they asked money for the masks. On the one hand they tell us to wear a mask when we go out, on the other hand, they are selling the mask. I went to the supermarket the other day, I forgot my mask and they did not let me in. I got very offended. Now, when I go out, I put a mask on my child’s face, but I cannot wear one, we do not have that many masks, so what should we do now? We saw that in the elections they spend tons of money only on papers, but they cannot find a mask now, I do not understand this.”*** (Mother of three)

***“At first we could not find any. I used to cover my face with the headscarf when I go shopping.”*** (Mother of four)

***“We continue taking precautions. I wash the masks all the time, we do not have enough, so this is what I do. I do not know if I am doing something wrong, but I wash them.”*** (Mother of four)

The Covid-19 period showed us that in addition to access to healthcare services, good hygiene and housing conditions which are vital for strengthening one’s immune system are very important. However, living conditions of the children who constituted the target group of the institutions were not always providing them with an environment where they could be resilient against the pandemic. Majority of the households interviewed were comprised of members who were working precarious day-to-day jobs. Parallel to the household income, the physical and social structures of the houses did not provide the necessary conditions for quarantine in case a member of the household were to be diagnosed with the Covid-19. 41 out of 85 households that we interviewed states that their houses are not suitable for social isolation.

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<sup>63</sup> “Ücretsiz maske dağıtımı karmaşası: Maske zorunluluğunun getirildiği 3 Nisan’dan bu yana hangi açıklamalar yapıldı, nereden nereye gelindi?”, 29.04.2020 <https://medyascope.tv/2020/04/29/uccretsiz-maske-dagitimi-karmasasi-maske-zorunlulugunun-getirildigi-3-nisandan-bu-yana-hangi-aciklamalar-yapildi-nereden-nereye-gelindi/> Access Date: 08.06.2020

***“We have two rooms but one of the rooms does not have a window. We cannot close the door of that room because we want to ventilate it. God forbid, if one person gets sick we cannot provide a separate room.” (Mother of four)***

***“We all live in a single room.” (Father of three)***

39 interviewees stated that they had a spare room which they can use for quarantine if a member of the household became sick with Covid-19. However, their expressions showed that they tried to find a solution out of necessity.

***“We would each live in one room and quarantine ourselves.” (Mother of two)***

***“If we are left in such a situation, we would perhaps use the children’s room.” (Mother of three)***

It can be argued that obstacle to self-quarantine in crowded and socio-economically disadvantageous households were experienced all the more intensely in the Syrian households due to socio-economic conditions.<sup>64</sup> The Association of Public Health Professionals suggests that refugees who are diagnosed with Covid-19 be provided temporary accommodation for a month.<sup>65</sup> A similar measure could be suggested for citizens of Turkey who need it.

## **Supporting Children’s Mental Health and Access to Rights to Health Services**

Besides supporting children’s access to health services in case of crises and offering physical protection, providing psycho-social support that can prevent possible fears and traumas is also a fundamental aspect of a holistic approach to health. At this stage, it is important to scrutinize the kind of changes the Covid-19 period caused in the psychological worlds of the children. In the interviews we saw that the emotional moods of the children had been affected due to the changes they experienced in their everyday lives during the Covid-19. Majority of the children stated that they were experiencing feelings such as boredom, loneliness, longing, anxiety and fear.

***“I missed all those things that I do not like. I would go to school, to the grocery, and take my siblings to the park. I would do all these things, but I do not want to sit at this packed home anymore. We can even hear each other breathing.” (Age 14)***

Another important finding revealed that the children due to the anxiety they experienced refrained from going out even on permitted days.

***“I did not go out even on the permitted days. I do not want to. I saw on the news that one can be infected with the virus immediately. I think we also have it in our neighborhood. That is why I do not want to.” (Age 12)***

<sup>64</sup> Murat Erdoğan&Kemal Kirişçi, “Turkey and Covid-19: Don’t Forget Refugees”, [https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/04/20/turkey-and-covid-19-dont-forget-refugees/?preview\\_id=800577&fbclid=IwAR3DDn-08VD77ikAJSjoxTATyy6ZBDfbaCEs3ZU0getb8PaAWq93PGX5nYU](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/04/20/turkey-and-covid-19-dont-forget-refugees/?preview_id=800577&fbclid=IwAR3DDn-08VD77ikAJSjoxTATyy6ZBDfbaCEs3ZU0getb8PaAWq93PGX5nYU) Erişim Tarihi: 9.06.2020

<sup>65</sup> “COVID-19 ve Mülteciler İle İlgili Eyleme Geçmeliyiz” HASUDER, 29.03.2020 <https://korona.hasuder.org.tr/covid-19-ve-multeciler-ile-ilgili-eyleme-gecmeliyiz/> Access Date: 7.06.2020

***“I have suspicions about having Corona... My mom sometimes suffers from shortness of breath, but I think it is because of something else, not Corona... What if we have Corona, what if we go to the hospital and die and we could as well have Corona right now...” (Age 11)***

In the interviews, some of the caregivers stated that they did not let the children go out. In relation to this situation, some children complained saying that since their families did not give permission, they were not able to go out even on the permitted days. During a pandemic, it is natural to be anxious and scared; however, it seems like the overly anxious parents had negative effects over the psychological health of the children and the young people.

Turkish Association for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry states that coping with anxiety entails that the person clearly identifies the risk (s)he encounters and labors to practice what (s)he can do within the limits of his/her control.<sup>66</sup> The best way to achieve this is to receive information from accurate sources. Moreover, the Article 24 of UNCRC designates it a responsibility of the state to ensure that all segments of society, especially children and caregivers have access to basic information of child health and are supported in its use. States are responsible for ensuring that information of health is physically accessible, comprehensible, and appropriate for the child's age and developmental level. For this reason, the fact that children were not informed about the Covid-19 before the schools were closed should not be overlooked. A more detailed information on the significance of access to children-friendly and reliable information was given under the heading of Access to Information and Media.

Whereas some children were stuck at their homes and got worried because they could not access child-friendly information, others who could not stay at home had developed different anxieties. For example, a child who collected paper prior to the Covid-19 to support his/her family expressed his/her feelings in the following words:

***“It feels like Corona made our job fouler. Before, while I was collecting paper waste, I realized that people do not look at me, but now because I work, they think I have the virus, and therefore, I think that they are avoiding me. I would have liked this to change, I would have liked to stay at home, but this is not that easy for us. I would also not want to get sick.” (Age 17)***

The juxtaposition of the concepts of hygiene and security with poverty is common in mainstream media, and this representation not only hardens the difficulties of children living in poverty in accessing their minimum basic needs, but also reinforces the social, cultural, spatial and political discrimination they experience. Therefore, the image of a poor person which is drawn with concepts of hygiene and security lays the ground for the exclusion of wastepaper collectors from public spaces. Thus, it is necessary that the hygiene discourse formed during the Covid-19 should not develop into a language used to exclude children who experience socio-economic disadvantages from the urban spaces.

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<sup>66</sup> Türkiye Çocuk ve Genç Psikiyatrisi Derneği COVID-19 (Korona) Virüs Salgını Sırasında Aile, Çocuk ve Ergenlere Yönelik Psikososyal ve Ruhsal Destek Rehberi”, Turkish Association for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, <https://www.ankara.edu.tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2020/03/cogepdercovid-19rehberi30mart2020.pdf> Access Date: 09.06.2020

## **Social Well-being of Children**

As indicated on the responsibilities of the state regarding the right to health includes the physical, emotional and social well-being of all children. At this point, we can assess the phenomenon of social exclusion based on the poverty deepened by the Covid-19 period in the context of social well-being.

The new problems caused by the Covid-19 period made the effects of deepened poverty felt more acutely. Children, who are left amidst this state of deepened poverty had difficulties in accessing their social rights to education and health and in participating the cultural life and its spaces in the city.

Amongst the people interviewed within the scope of this research, those who are having economic hardship were not able to cover their transportation and medication expenses and physically reach health services since they could not access correct and reliable information. This situation was of course not so different before the Covid-19 period; however, the decrease in the household income of people who make their living via day-to-day jobs, forced families to cut down on fundamental health and food expenses.

Another important issue that needs special attention is the effect of the Covid-19 precautions and limitations on the psychological health of the children. The fact that children could not reach information appropriate for their age and developmental level and the inadequacy of broadcasts that are children-friendly and that take children's well-being into consideration, led to an increase in the anxiety levels of the children.

As a consequence, all these variables that affect the capacity of access to right to health not only affected the individuals, but through a chain reaction caused a psycho-social state which affected the society as a whole.

## CONCLUSION

In this research, we aimed at assessing children's access to their rights during the Covid-19 in different districts of Istanbul; identifying the areas in which children cannot access their rights and how they are affected by this lack of access; and presenting short- and long-term measures. In this conclusion section of the report, we offer a holistic approach to the findings from a children's rights perspective and detail them in the light of the four main principles of the UNCRC. Next, based on our observations and research findings, we map out the steps and measures to be taken.

It is of great importance to explore how the lack of access to basic children's rights affect the target group children who have been living in deprivation and destitution even prior to the Covid-19 and who should be supported with particular measures in terms of current and future psycho-social development, living conditions, and school attendance. As outlined in the Findings section, obstacles before the access to right to life, survival and development; access to education, healthcare, information and media; and participation in play, leisure, cultural life and arts hinder the realization of other rights. We know that the four main principles of the UNCRC, namely, non-discrimination, best interest of the child, the child's participation, and to support the child's inherent right to life and development, are guiding principles for protection and promotion of all the rights specified in the Convention. All the measures that should be taken during the period we are going through should be planned not with a short-term approach but with a long-term rights-based approach prioritizing children.

Realization of children's rights is possible not by preparing children for the future but by creating an environment in which the best conditions are ensured for the children's current lives so that they can realize their potential as children. This perspective should be valid for all children of all ages.

Now, if we are to assess the access of children who should be supported with particular measures during the Covid-19 to their rights...

### Right to Life, Survival and Development

*"States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life.  
States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and  
development of the child."  
UNCRC, Article 6*

The fact that children were relatively the least affected group by the Covid-19 made them invisible in this period. Due to the risk of being a virus carrier, children's physical, emotional, social and developmental needs were postponed, and they became one of the first groups to be affected by the precautions. Children stayed at home away from their schools, streets, parks and their friends and peers for more than two months. In this period, social and economic conditions of the caregivers became almost the only determinant on children's lives and development. As stated in the Findings section, children who should be supported with particular measures had different experiences than their peers due to insufficient living conditions, scarcity of materials that could support their development and limited

access to technological material. In some cases, they were kept away from vital services such as vaccination due to misinformation of parents and/or risks attached to these services.

## Non-discrimination

*“States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his or her parent’s or legal guardian’s race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.”*

UNCRC, Article 2, Para. 1

States Parties pledge to ensure that all the children within their jurisdiction will fully benefit from the rights set forth in the Convention. However, as mentioned above principle of the right to life, survival and development, during the Covid-19, the access (or lack thereof) of children to their rights was almost entirely dependent on the conditions of their caregivers. Presupposing that children are a homogeneous group and neglecting individual differences and developing capacities, precautions formed the basis for discrimination. Inequalities in accessing information and communication technologies and inability to provide internet access in some households posed obstacles to children’s access to right to education. Additionally, some children who have different native languages, who have difficulties in having a strong command in Turkish or who are in need of special education due to various obstacles have been left behind in terms of accessing both right to education and media and information.

## Child’s Best Interest

*“In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.”*

UNCRC, Article 3, Para. 1

The principle of children’s best interest aims at full realization of rights set forth in the Convention and holistic development of the child. UNCRC specifies this right as a holistic concept which simultaneously embraces the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral, psychological and social development. Determining the primary/high benefit of the child entails a multidimensional perspective. The assessment of whether and to what extent the Covid-19-related decisions comply with the principle of children’s best interest should be evaluated on the basis of their short- and long-term impacts. Certain examples given below show that during the Covid-19, the principle of children’s best interest should be approached more carefully: there was no children-friendly information systems or application mechanisms in cases of possible violations; decision-makers did not make any statements that would prioritize children; central exam dates were changed in a way to cause anxiety among children and preventive and protective measures within the household were not thoroughly supported.

## Respecting the Views of the Child/Right to Participation

*“States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”*  
UNCRC, Article 12

Participation is a process which requires the support of the child to be included in the decisions which impact him/her and the creation of an environment in which the child can express his/her opinion. In child's participation, children are not passive receivers of the decisions that affect them, but active determinants of those decisions. However, during the Covid-19, children have been the passive receivers of a wide range of decisions from lockdowns to method of distance education; from central exam dates to interaction with their teachers. Information and news sources dedicated to children are limited in number and, most of the time, they are not children friendly sources; moreover, these sources can solely be reached through online tools. Combined together, these reasons kept children away from the information needed for making decisions for themselves and their lives.

Basic characteristics of human rights underline that rights are indivisible, inalienable and interdependent. As we emphasize throughout the research, removing the obstacles before children's access to rights to education, health, information and media, and participation in play, cultural life and arts is dependent on implementation of the four main principles that are non-discrimination, life, survival and development, best benefit of the child and right to participation. Accordingly, various recommendations for NGOs and state institutions were developed within the research and in the next section, these recommendations were listed under the title of rights in an effort to make necessary steps visible.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of findings of this research, we developed recommendations aiming at ensuring children's access to right to life, survival and development, access to information and media, access to education, health, right to engage in play, right to rest and leisure and participation in cultural life. However, it should be noted that this research was not conducted with a representative group and it does not adequately include the experience of children with disabilities as well as some groups of children beyond our reach such as refugee children, children who do not attend school and child workers.

In order to ensure the universal accessibility of children's rights, these recommendations should be evaluated with a preventive and supportive perspective that requires process monitoring. Preventing violations of children's rights and making rights universally accessible for all children is only possible through a holistic policy on children (and children's rights). This holistic policy will enable an adequate preparation for conditions that affect all the children such as another pandemic, disaster or other extraordinary situations.

### Life, Survival and Development

- In order to ensure that children are provided with necessary life standards, food and hygiene support should be delivered to households based on the age and developmental needs of the children.
- Social supports should be diversified in accordance with the number of children and household needs.
- In order to make sure that children's development is not interrupted, education materials should be freely accessible for everyone.
- In order to meet the need for clean, safe and green areas to which children can have access in the neighborhoods where we conducted this research, policies for children-friendly spaces should be developed immediately and in the aftermath of the Covid-19.
- Children should be supported in all areas in order not to interrupt their cognitive, psycho-social, psycho-motor and physical development.
- While returning to school, children should be offered long-term and rehabilitative support services that are supportive of their social-emotional development.
- Using appropriate means for groups that took part in this study, psycho-social support should be offered to children.
- Advocacy works should be carried out in order to hold the institutions which are responsible for social assistance during the Covid-19 are transparent and accountable.
- Neighborhood-based needs assessment should be carried out and social assistance applications should be disseminated in platforms other than online channels.

- Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services (AÇSHB), the responsible institution for the implementation of UNCRC, should prepare a roadmap in order to ensure the protection and promotion of children's rights while taking the precautions and necessary steps during and in the aftermath of the Covid-19.
- AÇSHB should carry out a needs assessment which renders visible the needs of children who should be supported with particular measures and share these assessments with other ministries.

### **Right to Access to Education**

- All children should have access to education, and works should be carried out not to leave any children outside the distance education.
- Policies focusing on increasing the inclusivity of the education for all the children who have different educational requirements should be developed.
- In order to ensure that education is free for all children, additional costs arising out of distance education should be covered and children should be given access to television, tablet, computer, internet and other equipment required for distance education.
- Multilingual programs should be developed in order to overcome the learning difficulties of children.
- Support mechanisms which can support children to learn Turkish or prevent the loss of their existing linguistic skills in Turkish should be increased.
- Web pages or online sources in different native languages should be shared in order to support children in their school courses.
- New projects should be launched for groups who should be immediately supported with particular measures due to differences such as disability, refugeehood or other differences.
- EBA contents should be made more children friendly. Every aspect of children's development should be monitored, and new projects should be offered to children to support their physical, mental and linguistic development.
- It must be ensured that teachers arrange meetings and share videos that are supportive of EBA program with their own students.
- It must be ensured that during the Covid-19 teachers give limited amount of homework, support the homework process and give one-to-one feedback. Children's access to their teacher should be increased and new mechanisms should be developed for children to direct their questions to their own teachers.
- Distance education should be supported with printed materials along with digital materials.

- All children should have access to online classroom groups, there should be online homework clubs and children should be supported in their homework.
- New platforms that promote children’s participation should be created in order to update EBA content in accordance with children’s feedback.
- During the distance education, research should be conducted to assess the needs and well-being of teachers and teachers should be supported in accordance with their needs.
- Teacher training programs should be restructured in a way to include media literacy; teachers should be supported with the technological infrastructure (computer, smart phone, unlimited internet connection, etc.) required by distance education.
- Measures should be taken for children to maintain their interaction with their classmates. Opportunities for socialization through online classes or homework groups should be enhanced.
- Upon returning to the school, children should be offered psycho-social support in order to ameliorate psychological difficulties they have been through during the Covid-19 and increase their interaction with their friends and teachers.
- While preparing the weekly programs of the first months of 2020-2021 AY, new programs and contents should be developed in order to support children’s social-emotional learning skills and help them make sense of the Covid-19 period that they have experienced. Children should be supported for establishing new strong bonds with the school, their teachers and friends.
- Parents and other caregivers whose native language is not Turkish should be offered programs that facilitate learning Turkish in order to enable caregivers to support their children’s education.
- Children, parents and other caregivers should be effectively informed about the distance education both in Turkish and in other languages.
- 8383, Ministry of National Education Mobile Information Service, should regularly inform all the parents without subscription requirements or service fees.

## **Right to Access to Information and Media**

- Information specific to children and its sustainability should be made one of the primary elements of communication policy.
- All communication channels of ministries should share a joint approach towards coronavirus briefings specific to children.
- Briefings on the Covid-19 should be done in accordance with children’s age and development levels, in their native languages and through children-friendly tools. These briefings should be communicated to children using appropriate methods.

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- Considering that access to internet is low, suitable printed materials should be delivered to children.
- Free-of-charge phone lines should be established for children to ask their questions about the Covid-19.
- Children should be enabled to receive information from people whom children trust such as their teachers and employees of civil society organizations.
- Teachers should be encouraged to communicate with the children who stay away from their school and teachers during distance education.
- Technological equipment required for distance education should be included in the scope of social assistance programs.
- Caregivers' access to guiding content in their native languages should be promoted so that they can communicate the process with the children, give them information about the Covid-19 and ease their anxieties.
- Visible tools through which children can express their opinions should be created. In order to make sure that their opinions go beyond simply being expressed and are taken into consideration, children's opinions and suggestions should be positively or negatively responded and responses should be justified.
- To ensure children's access to information about and measures taken during the Covid-19 without increasing children's anxieties, TV channels which are broadcasting programs designed for children should broadcast such contents.
- In such cases where the internet is the prerequisite for right to access to information and media, public and free-of-charge internet access should be made widely available.
- Obstacles before the access to information and media of some groups such as children who are deprived of their freedom and children with disabilities should be made visible and these obstacles should be removed on the grounds of non-discrimination.

### **Right to Rest, Leisure, Play and Right to participation in Cultural Life and Arts**

- Since children stay away from their schools and friends, their needs such as books and indoor play material should be met.
- For the time they spend with their children, caregivers should be provided with play materials as well as indoors physical activity suggestions.
- As emphasized by the children during the interviews, EBA system should be made more conducive to meet the need for play and should offer indoors play contents.

- Observing children’s age and developmental needs, children’s need for play and toys should be met by the state institutions.
- Play contents and books should be inclusive and take into consideration language barriers and different ways of learning.

### **Access to Healthcare Services**

- Financial aid criteria should be expanded to encompass refugees and economic barriers to children’s access to healthcare should be removed.
- In crowded and socio-economically disadvantageous households where self-quarantine for the Covid-19 positive people is not possible, temporary accommodation for a month should be provided in case of disease.
- Empowering support mechanisms should be implemented for children and their caregivers to cope with the problems and the longing for their everyday life, schools and friends.
- Healthcare services which include periodical vaccinations such as infant vaccines should be provided in accordance with quarantine conditions.
- In order to give multilingual information about the long-term planning and ensure that personal hygiene skills are enhanced, online education programs on the Covid-19 period should be developed.
- It must be assured that access to healthcare is not neglected in cases of diseases other than Covid-19. Families’ access to healthcare services should be secured.
- In accordance with their needs, children should be informed about healthcare services and social services.
- Refugees should be provided with access to healthcare services regardless of their status of registration, legal status, or health insurance ownership. Refugees’ safe application to healthcare services should be guaranteed.

## APPENDIX

### APPENDIX 1 Framework of caregiver interview

Interview date:

Interviewer:

Interview duration:

Short info about the interviewee:

#### Interviewer's notes:

Household information (family structure/profile, employment status of caregivers, physical conditions of the household, whether or not the household receives social assistance, etc.)

#### Questions

1. How are you? How are the children? How are you passing your days?
2. Which measures did you take in this period? Were you able to meet your needs? If yes, through which means? Do you think measures that you took were sufficient? Do you think government's measures are sufficient?
3. What did you know about pandemic and did you need additional information? How did you access this information?
4. What has changed in your life? Did you experience physical and psychological changes?
5. Who works in the family? Did their working status change during the pandemic? (loss of job, remote working, paid leave, etc.) Was the economic condition of the family affected?
6. Do you know anyone who is Covid-19 positive in your surroundings?
7. Did you have any healthcare needs? If yes, how did you meet this need? Were you on any regular medication and how did you obtain it in this period?
8. Is there a form of social assistance/support that you started receiving in this period, or you have been already receiving? If yes, where are you receiving this support from? What is your expectations from the state?
9. What are the challenges you face in this period? What are the new challenges? Did the domestic division of labor change?
10. How do children pass their days? Schools started distance education via internet or TV, can the children follow EBA?
11. Does the teacher provide you with information? How has your children's relationship with their school, teachers changed in this period? What should teachers, Ministry of National Education and schools have done to make this period more efficient?
12. (if they have children at the relevant age) What do you think about the changes in the dates of central university and high school exams?
13. Do you have access to internet? If yes, which devices do you use?

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Framework of child interview**

Interview date:

Interviewer:

Interview duration:

Short info about the child:

Short info about the caregiver:

#### **Interviewer's notes:**

Did the interviewer freely speak to the child without any family or similar pressure?

#### **Questions:**

1. How are you? How are you passing your days? If you could pass these days as an animal, which animal would you like to be? Why? What do you think this animal is feeling right now? What made you laugh these days, what made you happy?
2. (In the second round of interviews) Did you go out after we spoke almost a month ago? If you did, what were the reasons?
3. Are you in touch with your friends? If so, how do you communicate with them? Did you go out on your permitted day? What did you do? Which measures did you take while going out?
4. Can you access distance education? If yes, with which devices? What do you think about distance education? Do you wish anything to be different?
5. Could you talk to your teacher? Does (s)he send you homework? Can you reach your teacher?
6. What do you do at home?
7. Do you play games? Which games do you play at home? Who/what do you play with?
8. What have you learned in this period? What did you learn about the pandemic? Where do you get this information? What else would you like to learn? What kind of content would you like to see in this period?
9. Is there anything you would like to ask about Corona?
10. What would you like to change if you had a magic wand/authority?
11. (If there is a child at the relevant age) What do you think about the changes in the dates of central university and high school exams?
12. Did you miss school?

