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# “YOUNG VOICE REPORT ON COVID 19”, ALBANIA

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## ALBANIA

“YOUNG VOICE REPORT ON COVID 19”,ALBANIA

Expert

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## Foreword

These and other findings result from the study “Young Voices Report on Covid-19” conducted by “Save the Children” in collaboration with the Children Led Group “Voice16 +...”, which gathered the views and experiences of children and young people on their rights during the pandemic.

COVID-19 first broke out in Albania on March 9, 2020 and it still continues to spread throughout the country infecting people of all ages. The impact of the imposed lockdown on the most deprived and vulnerable categories has been extreme and is disrupting the delivery of much-needed services to children and their families, which in turn is critically and directly affecting their health, education, protection and access to food, hygiene and other bare necessities. There is also the great concern that children and women in particular will be exposed to domestic violence, which continues to be prevalent in families and communities throughout Albania. Depending on the community to which they belong, children and young people are being affected differently from school closures. Although Albanian children had the opportunity to attend an online curriculum, a significant number of students could not attend said curriculum due to economic conditions or lack of technology. Throughout this study, children’s views and ideas for the realization of their rights during COVID-19 are presented by analyzing their critical concerns and proposing some solutions through short- and medium-term policies.

“Young Voices Report on Covid-19” aims to assess children’s views regarding the issues that affect them under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in the context of the pandemic. The study was conducted by Save the Children in collaboration with the Children’s Group “Voice 16+”<sup>1</sup>, in the framework of the “Child to Child” project, created by Save the Children Albania in cooperation with the Ombudsman’s Office in Albania, the State Agency for the Protection of Children’s Rights and groups of children in the child rights governance program.

“Young Voices Report on Covid-19” was led by the study “Young Voices”, a nationwide survey on children’s opinions on various issues, which was conducted for the first time in 2017 using questionnaires as a key tool for face to face interviews. In order to identify the issues

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1. “Voice 16+” is a group of children (CG) that has operated since 2000 in four Albanian municipalities, and aims to make children’s voice heard in society and monitor the exercise of their rights. Each group consists of a facilitator and 50 members and volunteers aged 12-18. The partners of the CG work closely with children and adults, various local and national government institutions, as well as civil society organizations, in order to conduct fieldwork, monitor the exercise of children’s rights in Albania and advocate on behalf of the children they represent.

that concern children since March 2020, as the result of the global pandemic of Covid-19, the survey was repeated on a more modest scale, respectively in four municipalities of the country: Durrës, Elbasan, Mat and Dibra, while maintaining the methodology standards employed in the previous study. This study took into account the voice of 500 children aged 12, 14, and 17, thus the collection, elaboration, analysis, and presentation of children's ideas and views was enabled, in terms of respect for their rights during the pandemic, aiming to propose solutions based on the children's critical concerns for education, healthcare, food, recreation, development, violence, security, exclusion, their future, etc.

"Young Voices Report on Covid-19" also gathered children's opinions on the upcoming school year and their future. Therefore, the findings of this study will be a useful tool in the discussions with politicians, policymakers and other stakeholders, to support local and national government institutions and to make them aware of the need to realize the rights of children, even during pandemics, despite the challenges posed by the circumstances.

## What is "Young Voice"

"Young Voice" is a nationwide survey of children's opinions on various issues. The study was conducted for the first time in 2017, using questionnaires as a key tool for face to face interviews. In order to identify the issues that concern children since March 2020, due to the global pandemic of Covid-19, the survey was repeated on a more modest scale, respectively in four municipalities of the country: Durrës, Elbasan, Mat and Dibra, while maintaining the methodology standards employed in the previous study.

## What does Save the Children wish for?

"Young Voice" provides relevant and up-to-date information on how children look at the situation and what they think about their rights observance. The aim is to make such information public, and to capture the attention of adults who make decisions on behalf of children, to ensure that children's voices are heard and that the appropriate measures are taken, despite the critical situation both globally and in Albania.

As part of its program, Save the Children in collaboration with key stakeholders, urged the government and parliament to use structures effectively, such as: State Agency for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, Child Rights Units, and Child Protection Units at the local level, as well as other structures which will listen to their views and ensure that they are taken into account in decisions regarding them.

Save the Children Albania hopes that the findings of "Young Voice" will have impact on the design of child-focused policies, as well as on the allocation of the appropriate budgets at the local level to implement them effectively and to ensure that no child is excluded.

## Key findings of “Young Voice”, 2020

Over 90% of children know their rights, while over 80% of children know their rights from the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is estimated that in each municipality, there is a difference of about 10% between the percentage of those who know their rights and those who know them from the convention, which indicates the need to intensify efforts for the raising awareness and knowledge about the Convention on the Rights of the Child, mainly through the education system, thus schools.

Almost 100% of children are informed about Covid-19. Gender differences in the level of awareness are almost insignificant, with the exception of the Municipality of Mat, in which 100% of girls are informed, while the boys are less informed at only 88%.

Children are also informed about ways to protect themselves from Covid. Washing of the hands, wearing a mask and social distancing are the most highly-rated measures, by over 60% of children, with the exception of children interviewed in Elbasan, where less than 50% of children rated these measures.

Although children know their rights regarding education, only 40% of them think that their right to education was realized during the pandemic. With the exception of the children interviewed in the municipality of Elbasan, all other children share the same opinion that is “the pandemic has hindered the realization of their right to education.” Most 6th graders think that their rights have been realized (about 40%), while only about 20% of 10th graders think that the “right to education” has been realized during the pandemic.

The “quality of online teaching” as well as the “difficulties with understanding the instructions” are among the most essential causes, respectively from ½ of respondents, who feel that their right to education has been violated during the pandemic.

Although online schooling has been conducted by employing more than one tool in all municipalities taken into analysis, according to 74% of the respondents’ opinions, online mobile platform turns out to be the most dominant tool. Children are not satisfied with online learning mainly due to lack of equipment or network connection. More than ½ of them have never been satisfied or they have been satisfied very rarely. Only 21% of them have always been satisfied.

The analysis by municipality shows that the children of the municipality of Elbasan are more satisfied than their peers (about 1/3), compared to 1/5 or even less, in other municipalities. The children of the Municipality of Mat are the most dissatisfied with online learning (64% of them have never or very rarely been satisfied). 10th graders are the most satisfied with online learning, which matches perfectly with their ability to use technology.

Children are more likely to use the Internet than the computer. Whereas 81% of them confirm that they can use the Internet, only 58% admit that they can use the computer. Only 7% to 9% say they use the internet or computer occasionally. 33% of children find it impossible to use a computer.

Only 60% of children have their own room (72% in Elbasan and 47% in Mat) and 73% of children have the means to afford a mobile phone (84% in Durrës and 64% in Dibra).

½ of children (51%) admit that they are always assisted at school, while only 31% of them admit that they are always assisted at home. The highest % of children that confirm to receiving school assistance is higher in Elbasan (72%) and lower in Mat (35%).

It is disturbing that about 1/3 of the children think that they are rarely assisted at home, especially the children of the municipalities of Durrës and Elbasan. Only 16% of children confirm that they are rarely assisted at school, especially in Mat and Dibra this data is more critical, because respectively 22% and 21% of children think that they are rarely assisted at school.

Only 29% of children claim that children with disabilities have had the same opportunities.

Despite the issues and the critical situation, the facts show that in three municipalities about 90% of children managed to successfully complete the school year, with the exception of the municipality of Mat, in which only 70% of children managed to successfully complete the school year.

½ of children and more than ½ of children in the municipalities of Durrës, Elbasan and Dibra reason that road safety, the implementation of hygienic measures in schools and social distancing are applied always or often. Children in the municipality of Mat are less convinced that the approved safety protocols keep them safe and protected from the virus than their peers (40% of children).

1/3 of children feel positive about the possibility of realizing the right to education in the 2020-2021 academic year, but ½ of them are skeptical about the possibility of exercising their right to education. Children that are particularly distrusting are those of the Municipality of Mat and Durrës, while those of the Municipality of Elbasan are the most positive ones (40%).

Only 23% of children are positive about the likelihood of delivering normal and effective classes during the new academic year. Whereas the gender difference is insignificant, about 90% of 10th graders do not believe in the possibility of the development of normal and effective learning.

About 60% of children confirm that “Covid-19” has impacted the deterioration of their diet, respectively by reducing the amount of food per meal (21%), increasing the amount of dough (19%), reducing the amount of fruits and vegetables (17%), reducing the number of meals (16%) etc.

Although only a very small portion of children needed health care during the period March-June 2020 (on average 12% and 16% in Durrës and Mat respectively, 13% in Dibra and 7% in Elbasan), almost all of them requested and received proper assistance by public institutions.

Over 90% of children during lockdown have stayed with parents, who for the most part have demonstrated positive behavior (about 60%). Less than 20% of children have noticed negative changes in their parent’s behavior.

More than 1/3 of the respondents think that there are working children (more than ½ in Durrës and Mat).

8% of children report experiencing domestic violence (12% in Mat and 3% in Elbasan are the highest and lowest values reported by municipalities). A very significant fact about almost all children in need is the request for assistance and the benefit of appropriate services.

On average, 60% of the families have the means to provide additional didactic materials for their children; about ¼ do not have the means, while the rest 15% do not have the necessary information.

It was found that only 13% of children were detained by the police during the period of movement restriction. About 60% of cases were handled in the presence of a psychologist; the parents were notified in all cases, while the Covid protection guidelines were fully observed.

The situation caused by Covid-19 has enhanced insecurities in the family, for many reasons, of which “fear of contracting the disease” is the most critical issue (48%), followed by “the difficulty of attending online schooling” (41%), “lack of entertainment” (36%) as well as “fear of losing loved ones” (31%).

More than 50% of the children are convinced that the situation has impacted the denial of their rights. Unfortunately, only 1/3 of the respondents are convinced that measures can be taken to reduce the negative impact of the situation on child rights. Approximately 2/3 of children deem the municipality, local government as the institution responsible for taking mitigation measures, 1/3 of children deem “the school” as the responsible institution, ¼ of the children deem the community, while about 15% of them think that even “family” can have an effect on the mitigation of the consequences of the situation.

## Methodology and process

The data collection process for the “Young Voice” Survey was conducted during the period September - October 2020. The methodology was drafted by the staff of “Save the Children” Albania, based on the model of “Save the Children” Sweden. The questions were reviewed by children aged 14-17, in collaboration with Save the Children staff in Albania and a local consultant.

The fieldwork was carried out by the facilitators of the children’s groups “Voice 16+”, (4 facilitators), who were assigned and trained as field researchers for data collection. They organized and managed data collection teams through an online questionnaire distributed in the target areas. Each of the teams consisted of 2-3 interviewers, depending on the number of questionnaires for each target area. They collected data in selected schools in urban and rural areas. Special attention was paid to the issue of “anonymity”, therefore a special training session on reliable interviewing techniques was held to convince respondents of data protection.

A multi-stage random sampling methodology was also used. After the samples were analyzed, four municipalities in Albania were covered. A total of 20 schools were selected, while the research units consisted of 4 mini-municipalities. In addition to school sampling, the random sampling of grade and students was also performed.

The target group of the survey was lower secondary students between 6th and 8th grade, as well as upper secondary students. A sample of nearly 500 respondents served to gather the required information. The data was collected through face-to-face interviews, and were then entered into Excel spreadsheets from which a descriptive analysis was performed. Each questionnaire had an identification number in order to avoid mistakes.

### Participants

493 children in Durrës, Dibra, Mat and Elbasan were inquired through the “Young Voice” survey about their rights as a result of the impact of the critical situation caused by Covid-19. Table 1 in Annex 1 shows all respondents by gender, place of residence, grade and municipality, while figures 1, 2 and 3, below show the percentage of boys and girls who participated, the distribution of participants by grade, the percentage of respondents by gender and place of residence and the number of children interviewed in each municipality.

As shown in Figure 1, the percentage of respondents from the municipality of Elbasan is higher at 31% while those from Durrës, lower at 21%.

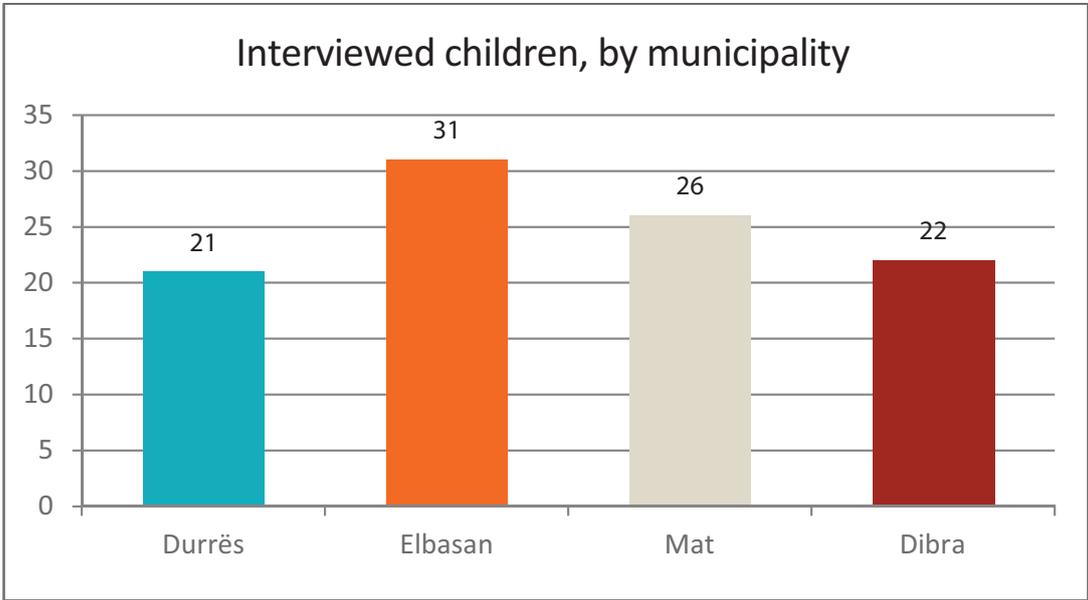


Figure 1: Interviewed children, by municipality, in percentage

Figure 2 shows children interviewed by gender, place of residence and grade, in percentage. As stated, 77% of the participating children are from the city, 63% are girls and 42% are 10th grade students.

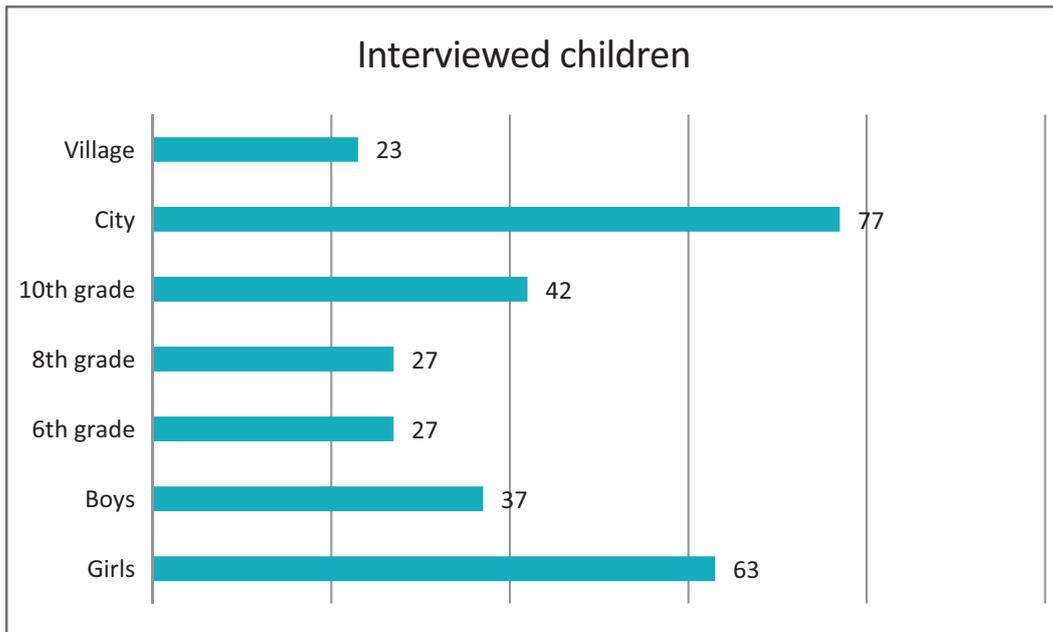


Figure 2: Interviewed children, by gender, grade and place of residence

Figure 3 shows interviewed children, by gender, place of residence, grade and municipality distribution, in percentage. You can easily notice that there are more girl participants than boys in each municipality, from 52% in Elbasan to 71% in Durrës, also the participation of children from the city is higher than those from the village, with the exception of Dibra in which participation from both settlements is proportional. The distribution by grade of the participants is different in different municipalities. Two criteria were considered: the female population is higher than the male population, and the number of girls in lower and upper secondary schools is higher than that of boys.

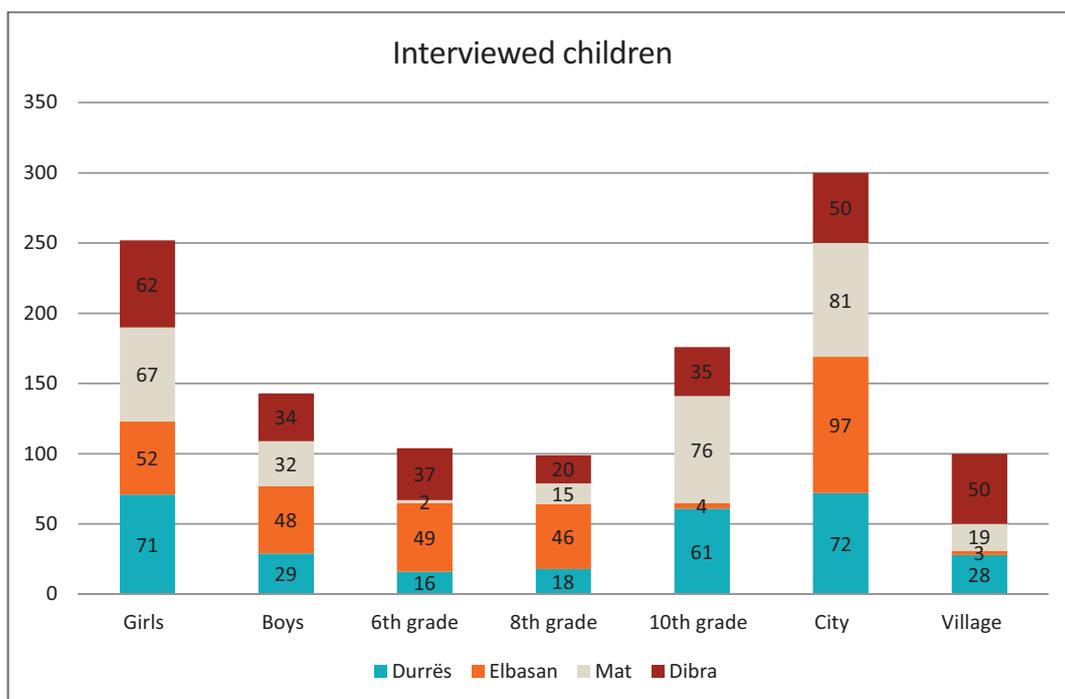


Figure 3: Interviewed children by gender, place of residence, grade and municipality distribution, in percentage.

The questionnaire starts with questions about the demographics, followed by two standard Young Voices Survey questions about children’s rights and a question about information on how COVID-19 is spread.

The questions were grouped in three categories:

- Education;
- Basic needs for food and health care;
- Social protection.

The descriptive analysis was drafted comparatively by municipality. The results are explained and discussed in the following chapters.

### Level of awareness on child rights

In general, children have a high level of awareness about their rights, about 93% of them (98% in Mat and 91% in Durrës) know their rights, as shown in Figure 4.

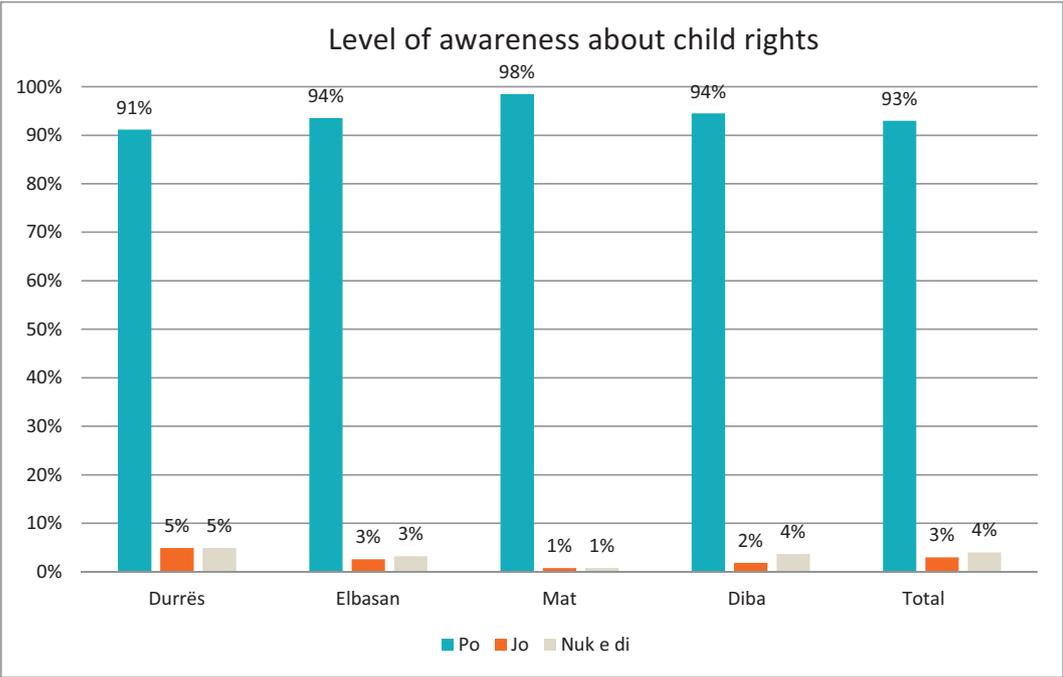


Figure 4: Level of awareness about child rights by municipality, in percentage.

Figure 5 shows the level of awareness about child rights from the Convention, by municipality, in percentage. 90% of children in Mat are aware of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, while 76% of children interviewed in Durrës became aware of their rights from the Convention. It is estimated that in each municipality, there is a difference of about 10% between the percentage of those who know their rights and those who know them from the convention, which indicates the need to intensify efforts for the raising awareness and

knowledge about the Convention on the Rights of the Child, mainly through the education system, thus schools.

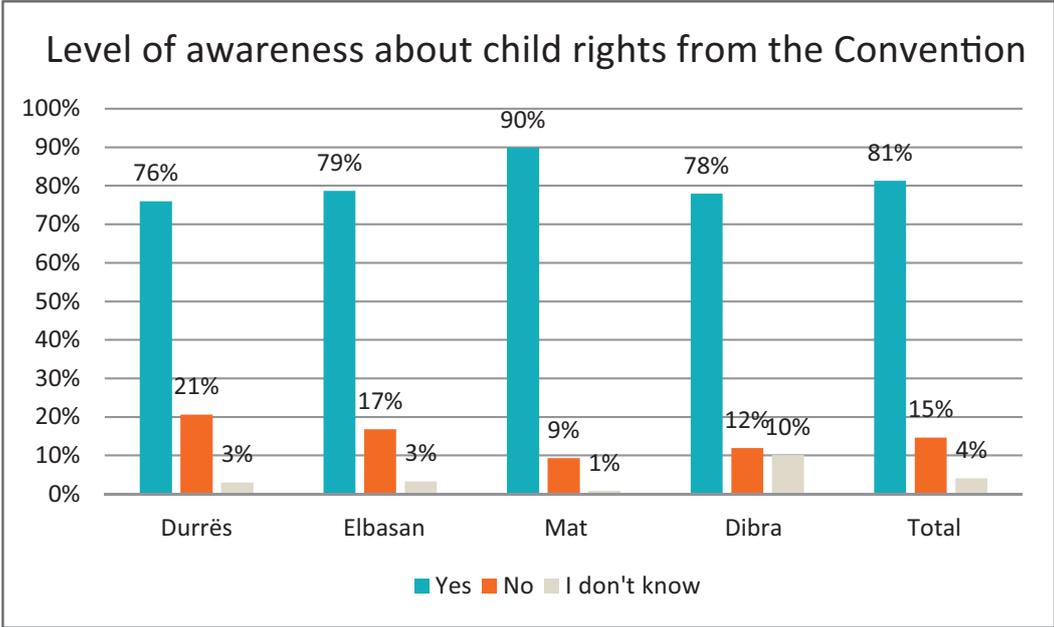


Figure 5: Level of awareness about child rights from the Convention, by municipality, in percentage.

### Information about Covid-19 and how it is spread

Children are informed about Covid-19. As per the data in Figure 6, 97% of them are informed. The lowest rate of information is observed among the children in the municipality of Mat, 96%.

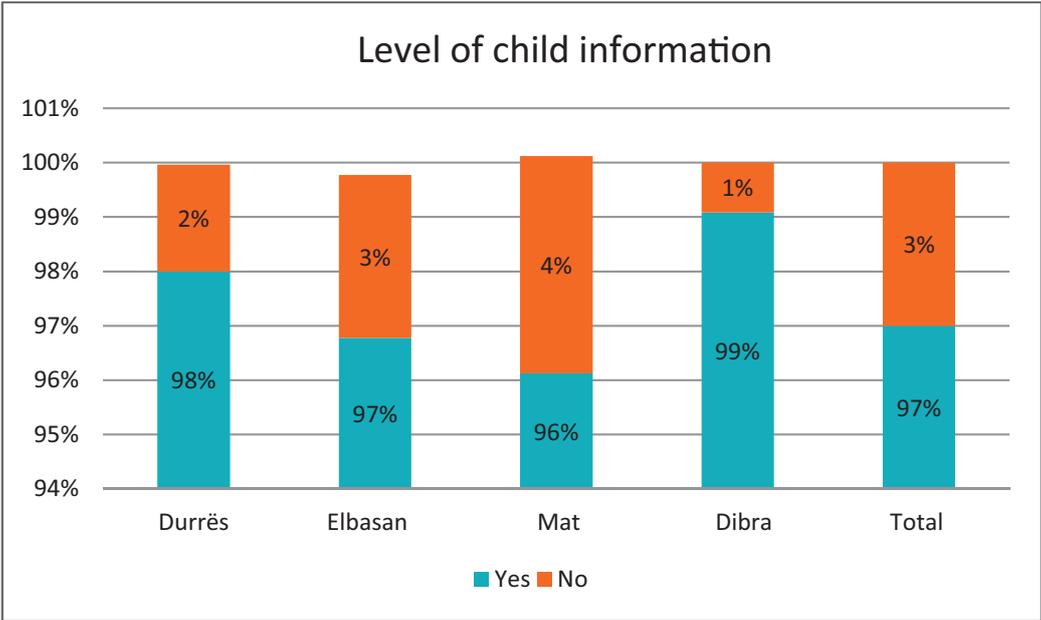


Figure 6: Level of information about Covid, by municipality, in percentage.

However, if we analyze the level of information by gender, we notice that the differences are almost insignificant. The only exception is the Municipality of Mat, where although 100% of girls are informed, the boys are less informed at only 88 % ( figure 7).

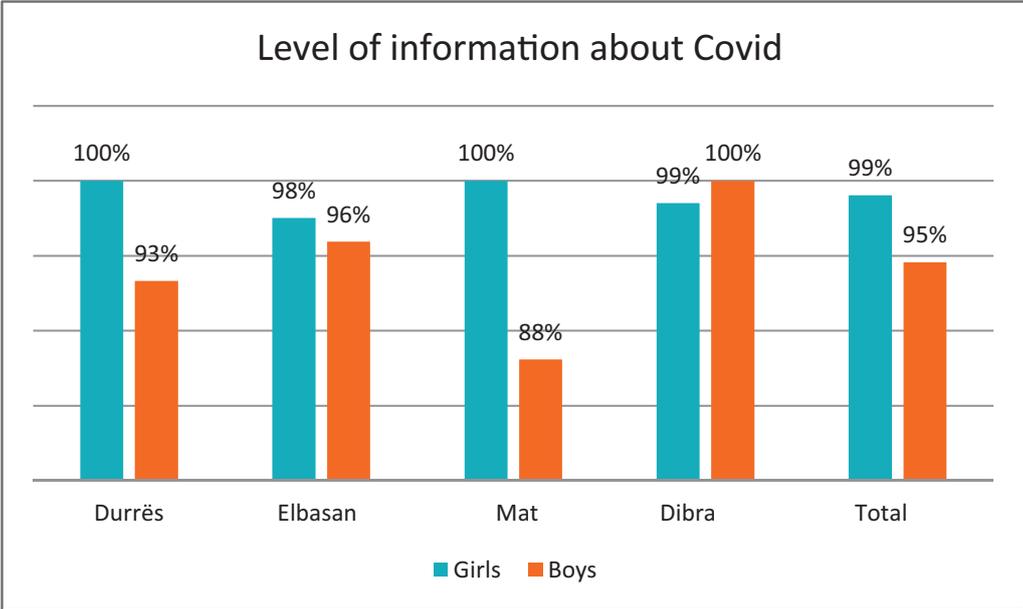


Figure 7: Level of information about Covid, by municipality and gender, in percentage

Figure 8 further emphasizes the information shown in Figure 7. This figure shows the level of information children have about how to protect themselves from Covid. It results that hand washing, wearing a mask and social distancing are the most highly-rated measures, by over 60% of children. In particular, children interviewed in the Municipalities of Dibra and Mat rate these measures the most (over 70%). In contrast to these two municipalities, the level of information of the children interviewed in Elbasan is lower, less than 50% of children rate these measures. “Avoidance of public transport” is ranked among the least considered measure.

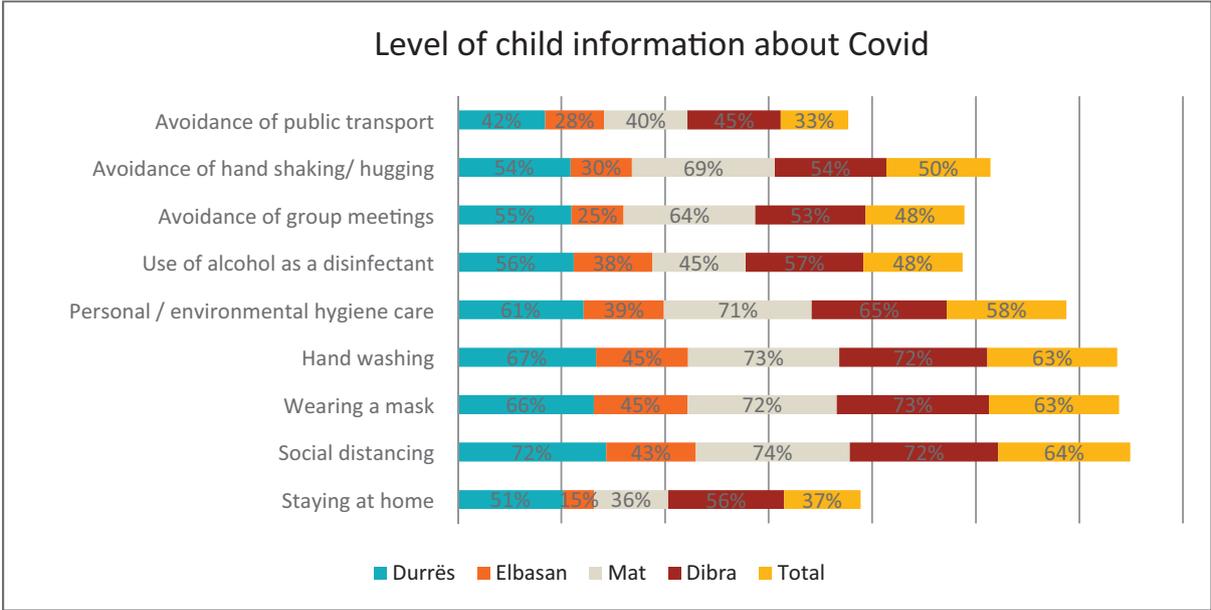


Figure 8: Level of information about protection against Covid, by municipality, in percentage

## The right of the Child to education

Children know their right to education, as confirmed by Figure 9.

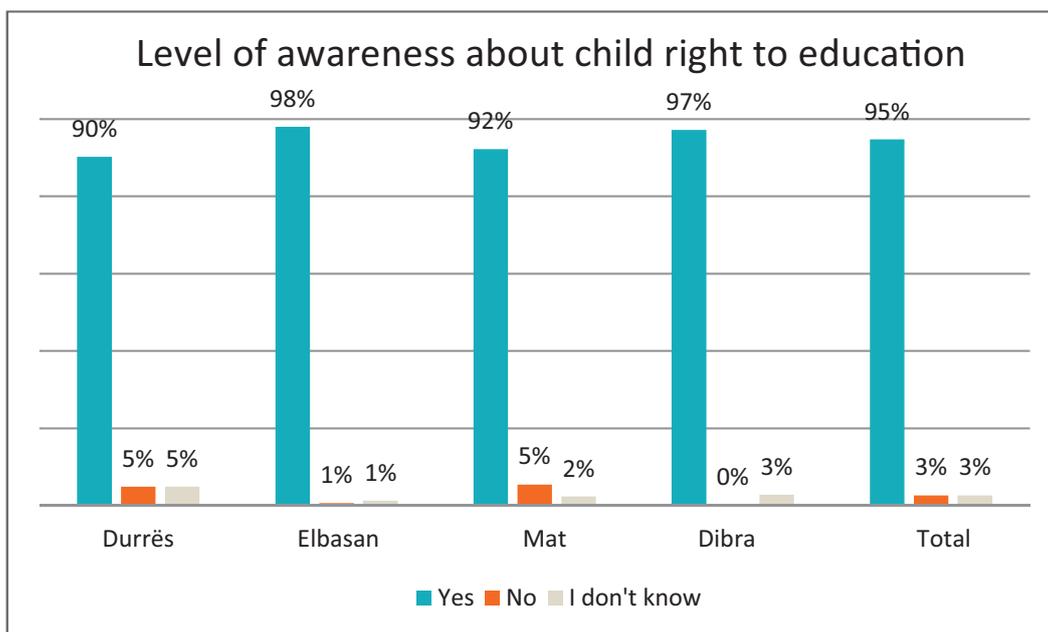


Figure 9: Level of awareness about child rights from the Convention, by municipality, in percentage

But even though the children know their rights, they do not share the same opinions about their realization during the pandemic. Only 40% of children think that their right to education has been realized during the pandemic. 47% think that their rights were not realized during the pandemic. With the exception of the children interviewed in the municipality of Elbasan, all other children share the same opinion that “the pandemic has hindered the realization of their right to education.”

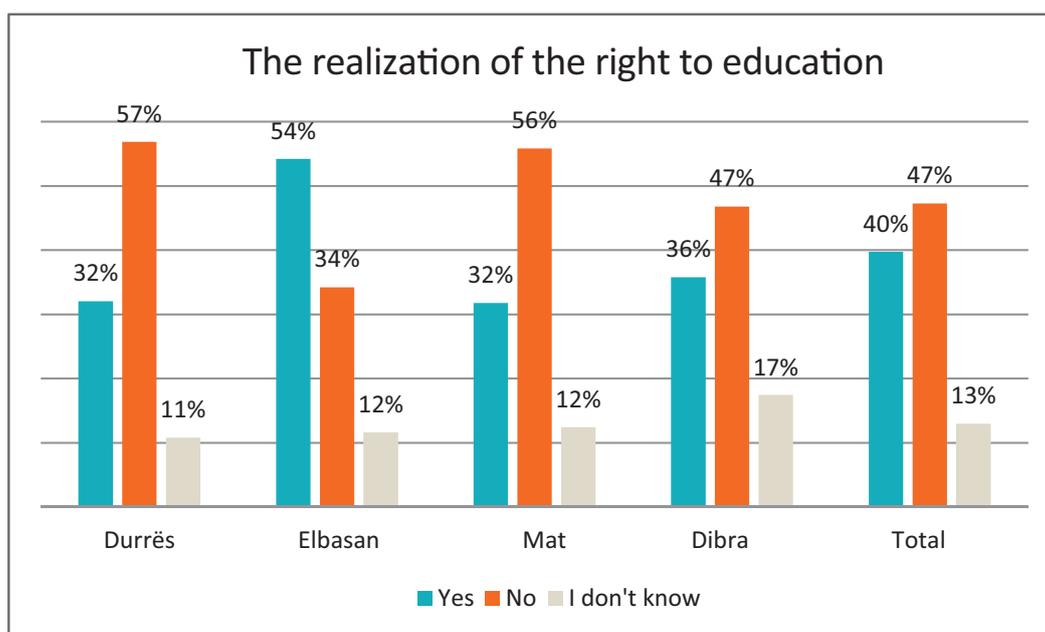


Figure 10: Children’s opinion about the realization of the right to education due to the pandemic, by municipality, in percentage.

Figure 11 confirms that most 6th graders think that their rights have been realized (about 40%); whereas 10th graders think that the “right to education” has been realized during the pandemic.

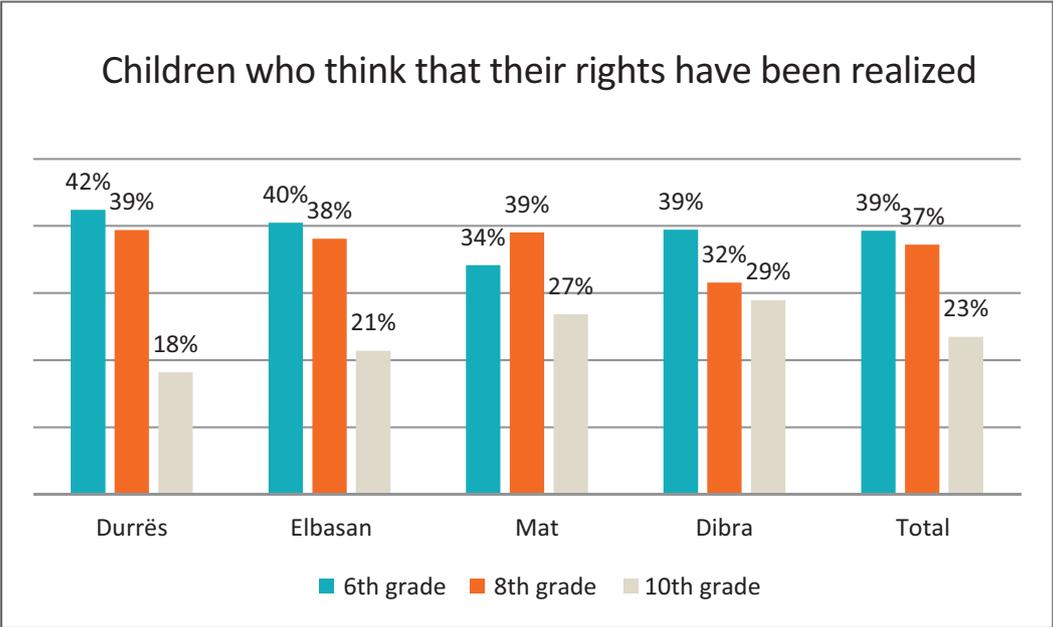


Figure 11: Children who think that their rights are realized by grade.

Children have clear ideas of the reasons that impact their opinions on the realization of their right to education. As shown per the data in Figure 12, there are various factors that have impacted the children’s opinions, but the “quality of online schooling” as well as the “difficulties in understanding the instructions” are among the most essential.

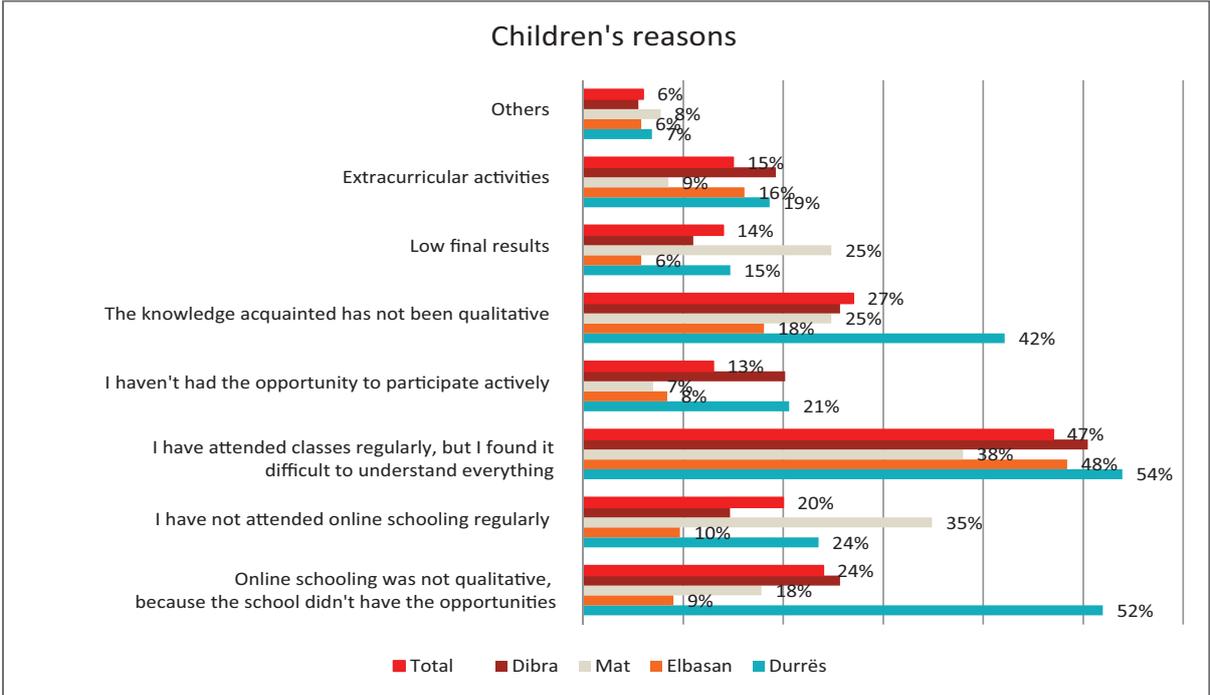


Figure 12: Reasons why children feel that their right to education has not been exercised

It has been confirmed (Figure 13) that online schooling has taken place in all municipalities reviewed, although more than one tool was used depending on the circumstances. According to 74% of respondents, the mobile online platform is the most popular among children. 38% have also used the computer-based online platform, while 35% have attended TV learning sessions. Yet, not all respondents are satisfied with the quality of teaching, mainly due to lack of equipment or network connectivity.

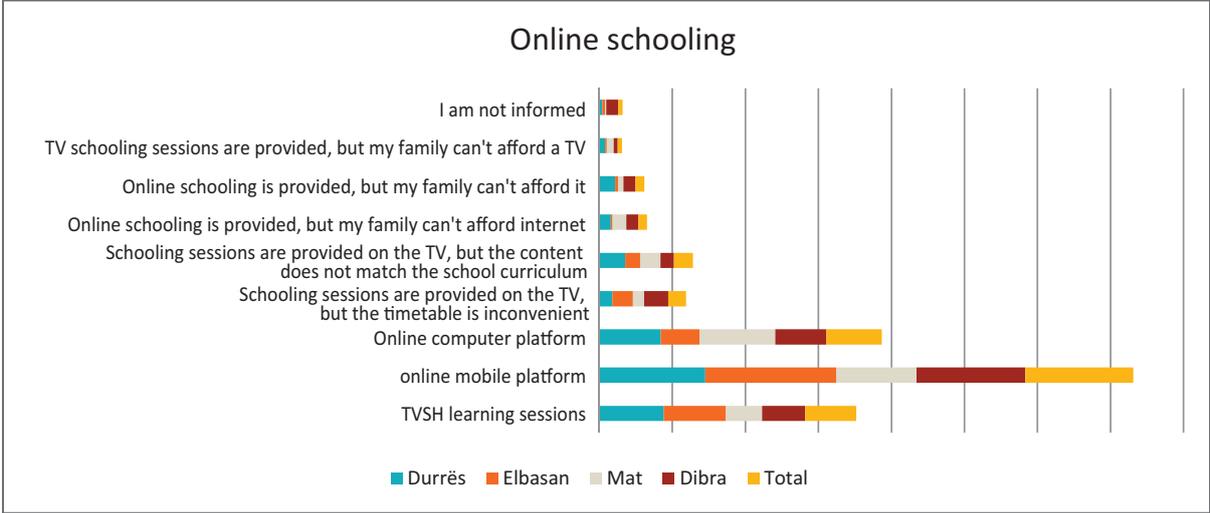


Figure 13: Online schooling and online schooling quality, by municipality

Children have greater access to the Internet rather than computers. While 81% confirm they can access the Internet, only 58% affirm they are able to use the computer. Only 7%-9% declare they are occasionally able to use the Internet or the computer. 33% of children cannot use the computer (Figure 14).

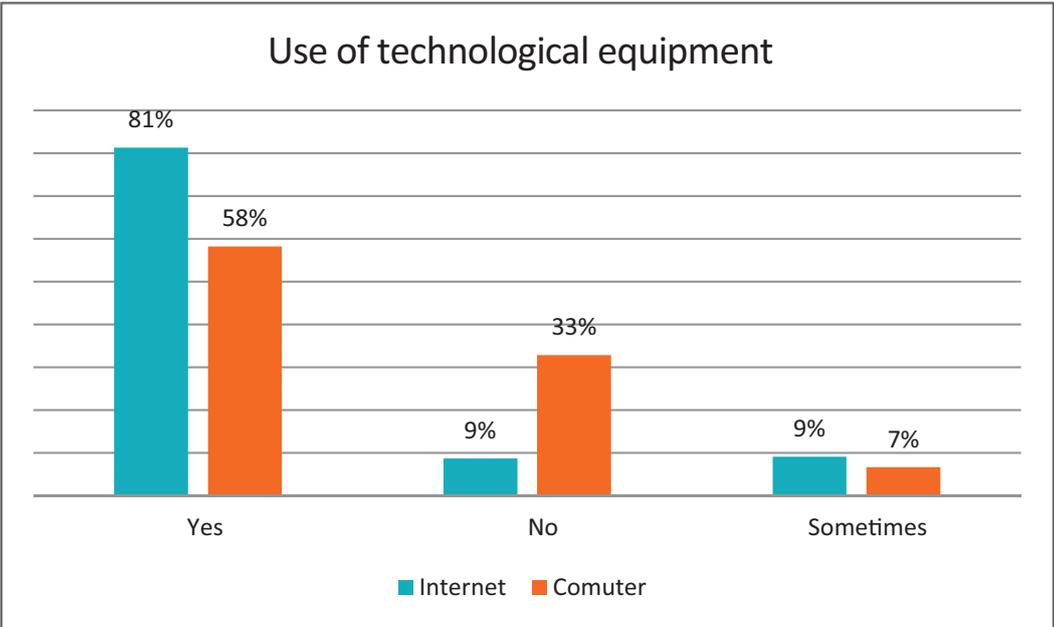


Figure 14: Children’s likelihood to use technological equipment, in percentage.

Figure 15 confirms the use of technological equipment, namely internet and computer, according to municipalities.

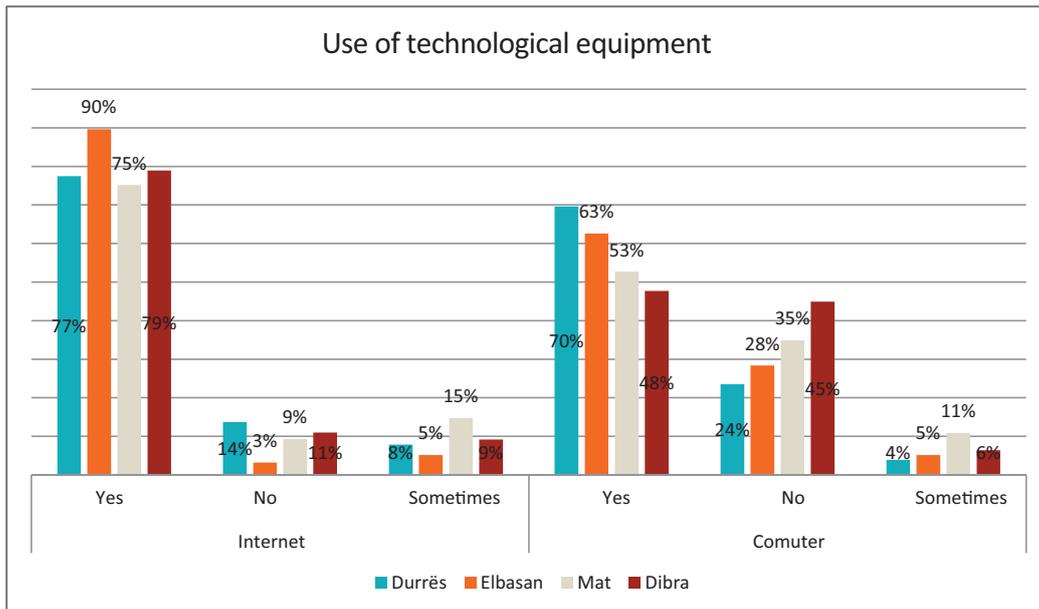


Figure 15: Children’s use of technological equipment, by municipalities,

Children in the Municipality of Elbasan have greater access to the Internet, while is relatively less in the other three municipalities. The computer utilization is higher in the Municipality of Durrës and lower in Mat (Figure 15).

Not all children can have their own room or mobile phone, both essential to ensuring quality lesson preparation (Figure 16). Only 60% of children have their own room (72% in Elbasan and 47% in Mat, while 73% have a mobile phone (84% in Durrës and 64% in Dibra).

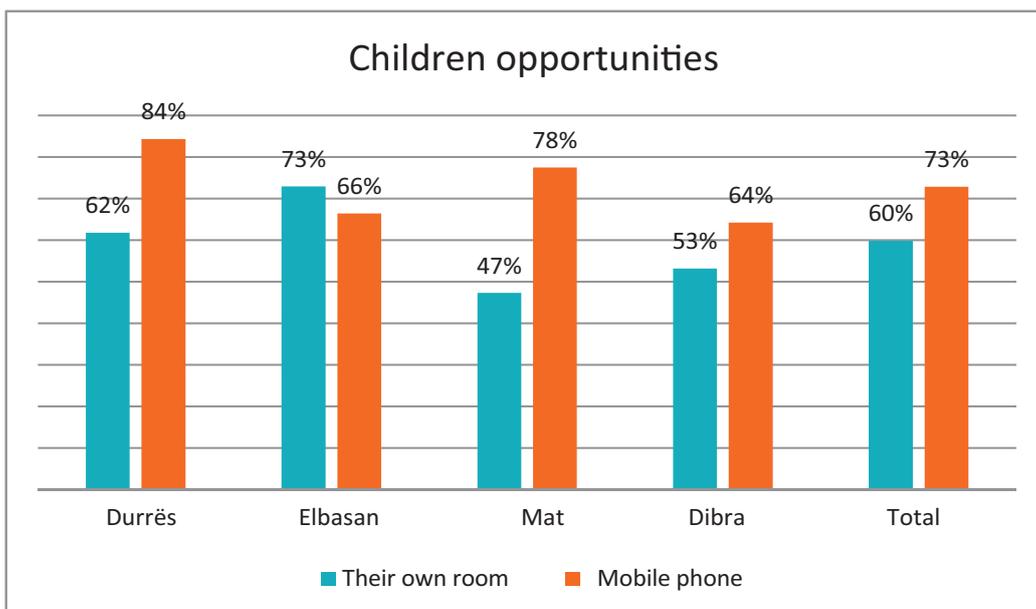


Figure 16: Children’s likelihood to have their own room, mobile phone, by municipality, in percentage

Careful consideration is required to whether children are assisted at home and at school to complete their tasks. While facing the pandemic, supporting children during this process is of major importance. Figure 17 shows the children’s opinion in each municipality about the assistance they receive at school and at home, according to which half of the children (51%) admit to always receive assistance at school, while only 31% of them admit to always being assisted at home. There is a higher percentage of children confirm receiving school assistance in Elbasan (72%), while a lower percentage is indicated in Mat (35%).

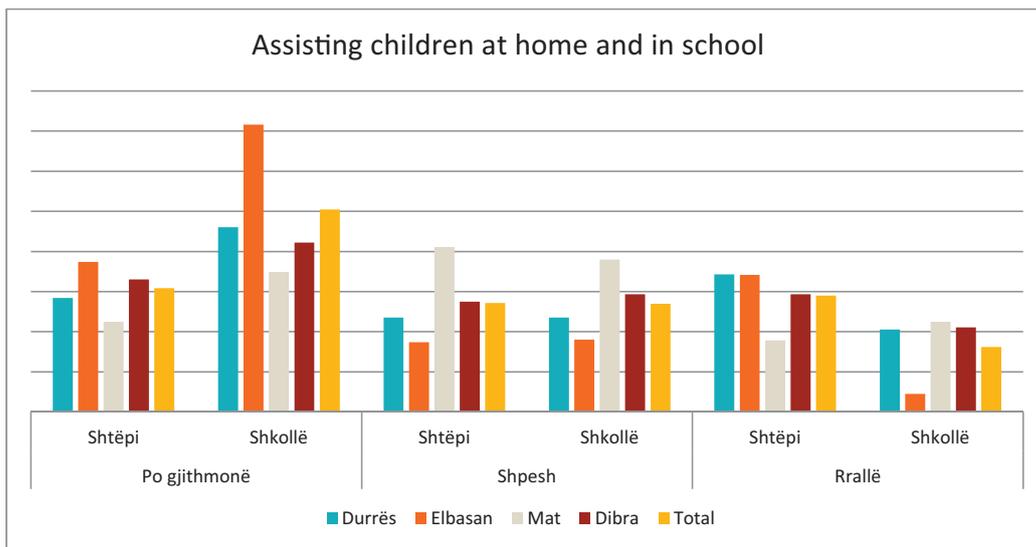


Figure 17: Children’s assistance at home and at school, by municipality, in percentage.

Alarmingly, around 1/3 of children believe they are assisted quite rarely at home, especially those in the Municipality of Durrës and Elbasan. Only 16% of children confirm they are hardly assisted at school, especially in Mat and in Dibra. This data is more critical as 22% and 21% of children, respectively, feel that they barely receive assistance at school.

Children are not satisfied with online teaching. More than half of them have never or very rarely been satisfied. Only 21% of them have always been satisfied (figure 18).

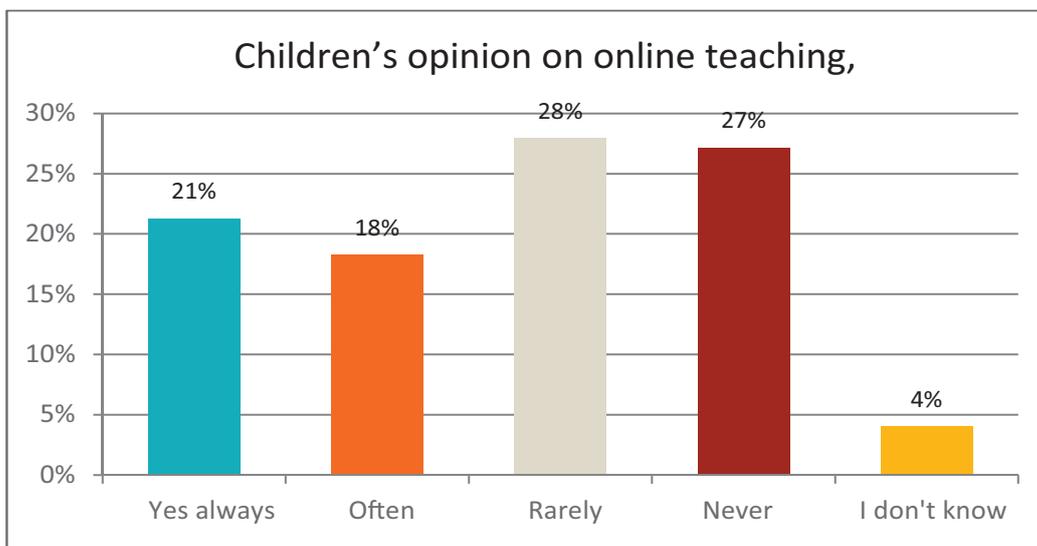


Figure 18: Children’s opinion on online teaching, in percentage.

The analysis according to municipalities shows that the children in the Municipality of Elbasan are more satisfied than their peers (about 1/3) compared to 1/5 or even less in other municipalities. Children in the Municipality of Mat are the least satisfied with online teaching (64% of them have never or very rarely been satisfied) (Figure 19).

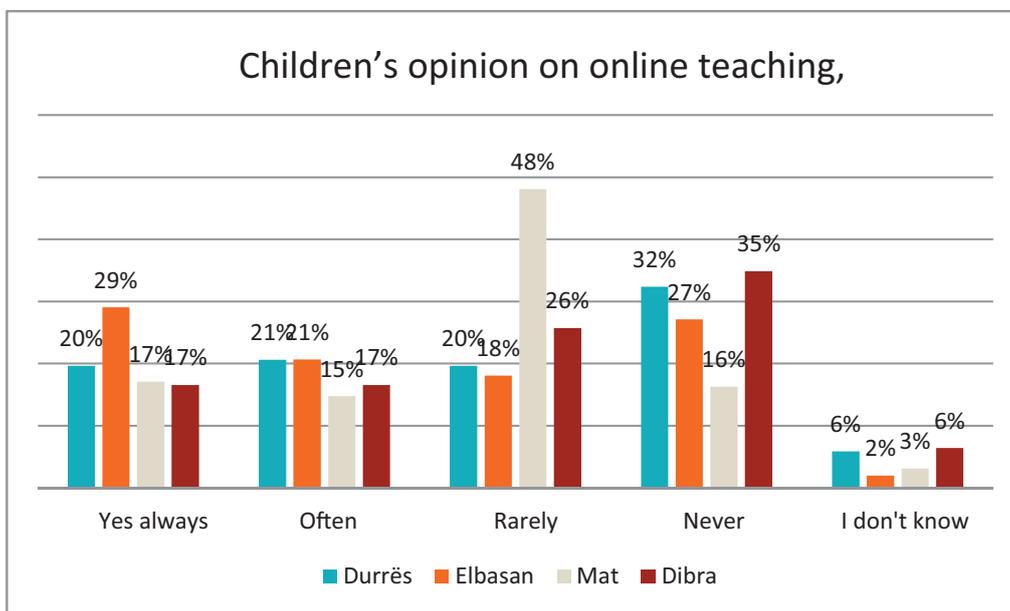


Figure 19: Children's opinion on online teaching, by municipality, in percentage.

The analysis of children's satisfaction based on grades shows that 10<sup>th</sup> grade students are most satisfied with online teaching, which best matches their access to technology (figure 19).

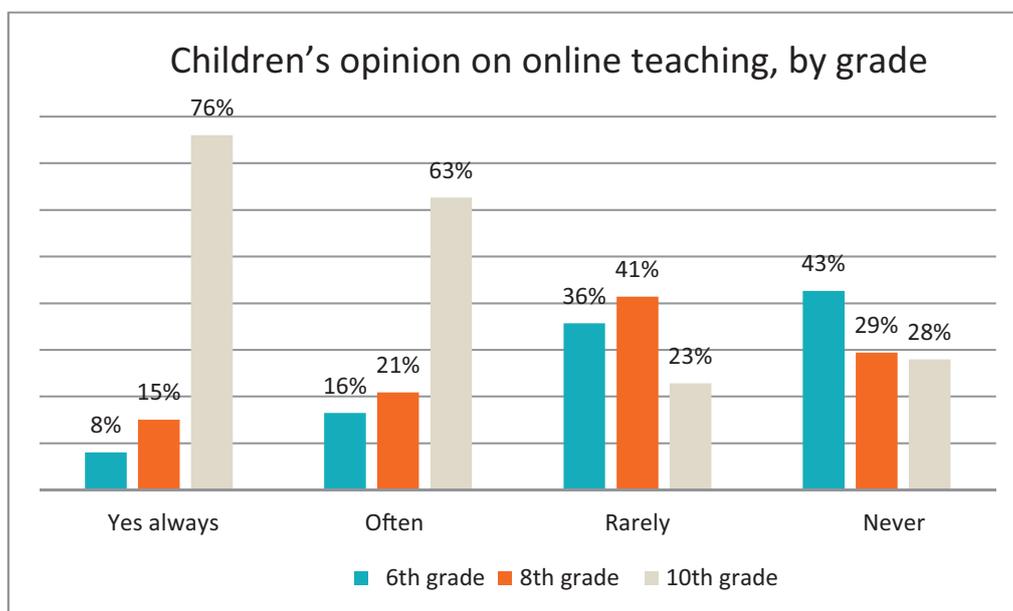


Figure 20: Children's opinion on online teaching, by grade, in percentage.

It is extremely alarming that almost half of children (44%) are not informed whether children with disabilities are provided the same opportunities to attend online classes, with only 29% of them confirming the latter.

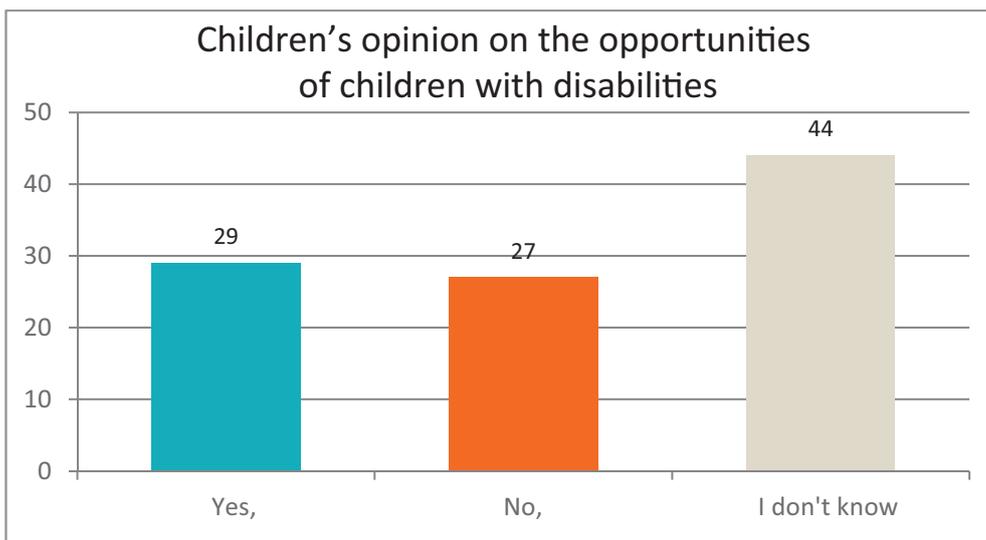


Figure 21: Children's opinion on opportunities for children with disabilities to attend online schooling, in percentage.

Despite the problems and the critical situation, around 90% of the children managed to successfully complete the school year, an evidence indicated in three municipalities, apart from the Municipality of Mat, where only 70% of the children were able to do so (Figure 21).

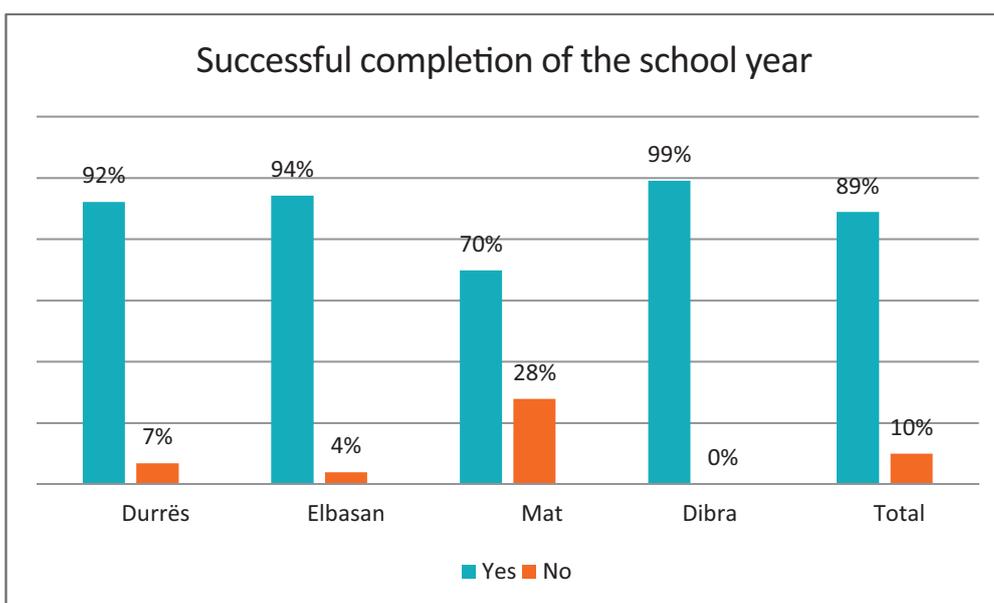


Figure 22: Successful completion of the school year by municipality and in total, in percentage.

A series of questions (Tables 20, 21, 22, 23, Appendix) are used to analyze children's opinion on safety in and outside school premises, mainly in public transport, in relation to protection against infection. While the tables provide detailed data, Figure 22 summarizes the children's positive feedback, answering with "always" and "often". As shown in Figure 22, 1/2 of the children and more than half of them in the Municipalities of Durrës, Elbasan and Dibra reckon that road safety, hygiene practices in schools and maintaining a safe distance are always or often adopted. The children in the Municipality of Mat are less confident than their

peers (40% of children) that the only way to protect themselves against Coronavirus, is by implementing certain measures.

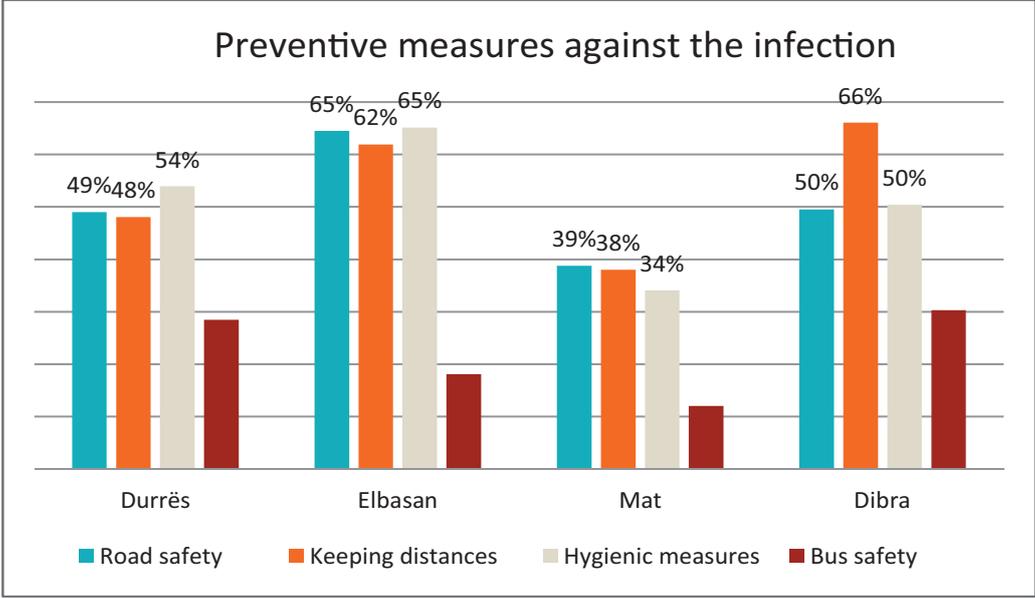


Figure 23: Children’s opinion on preventive measures, by municipality, in percentage.

Regarding “bus safety”, data is less favorable, although this may be due to the lack of or unnecessary use of transport services due to the short distance from home to school, particularly in the Municipality of Mat and Dibra.

Information regarding the possibility of realizing the right to education in the new 2020-2021 academic year is a matter of special interest. 1/3 of the children feel confident about the realization of their right to education, but half of them believe otherwise. The children in the Municipality of Mat and Durrës are highly doubtful, while those in the Municipality of Elbasan feel the most confident (40%).

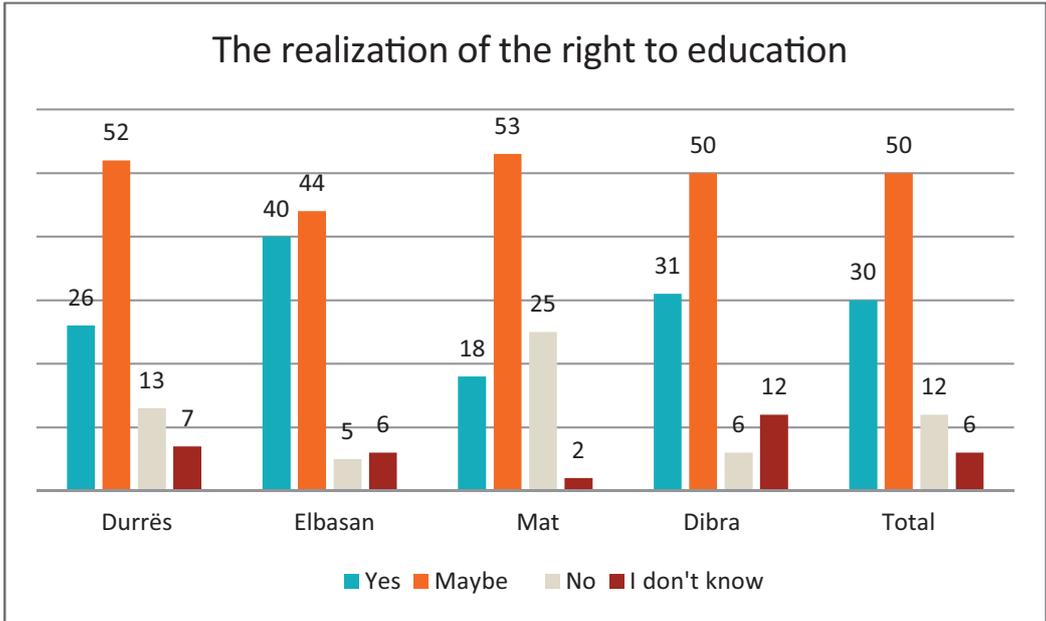


Figure 24: Children’s opinion on the realization of their right to education during the new 2020-2021 academic year, by municipality, in percentage.

In a more in-depth analysis based on gender and grade, regarding opinions on the possibility of developing classes normally and effectively, only 23% of children remain optimistic about this possibility. While the difference based on gender is negligible, the emphasis is on differences by grade. As shown in Figure 24, 10<sup>th</sup> grade students are not confident in the possibility of receiving schooling effectively (11%).

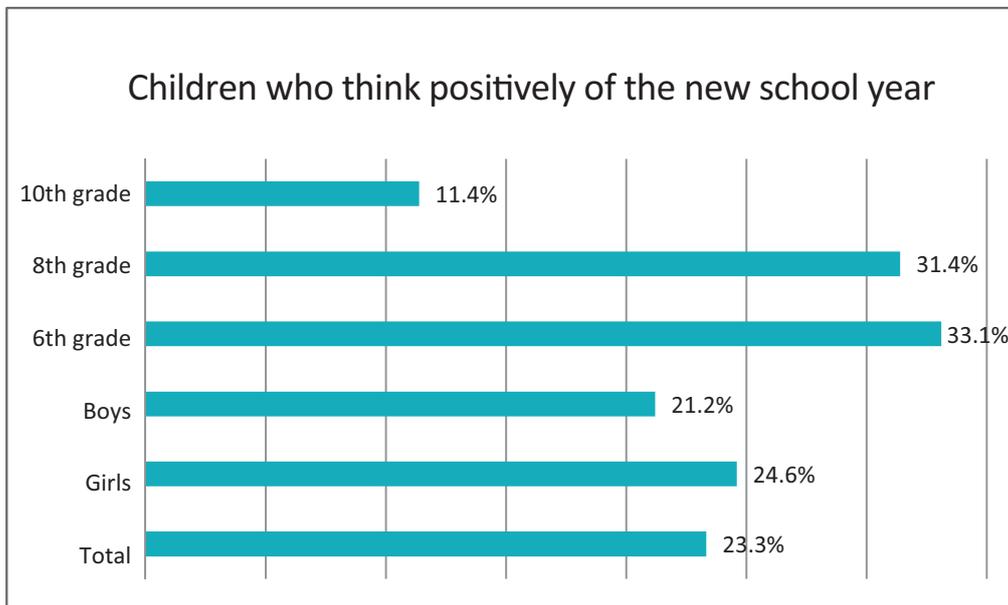


Figure 25: Children’s opinion on likelihood of delivering normal and effective classes in the new academic year, in percentage, by gender and grade.

## The Right of the Child to Adequate Nutrition and Health Care

Figure 25 reflects children’s opinion on changing their diet due to Covid-19. As shown, 41% of children believe that Covid-19 has not affected their diet. Around 60% of them confirm that there have been changes in diets among all families (17%), in many families (22%), in most families (16%), in the poorest families (2%).

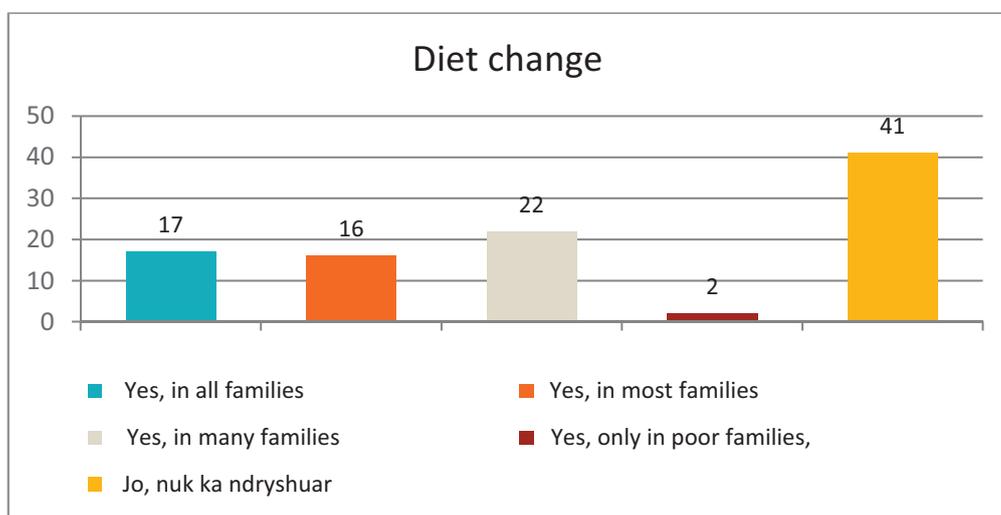


Figure 26: Children’s opinion on changing their diet due to Covid-19.

In-depth analysis of changes (figure 26) shows that some elements have changed: the amount of food per meal has been reduced (21%), the amount of dough-based food has increased (19%), the amount of fruits and vegetables has been reduced (17%) , the number of meals has been reduced (16%), etc.

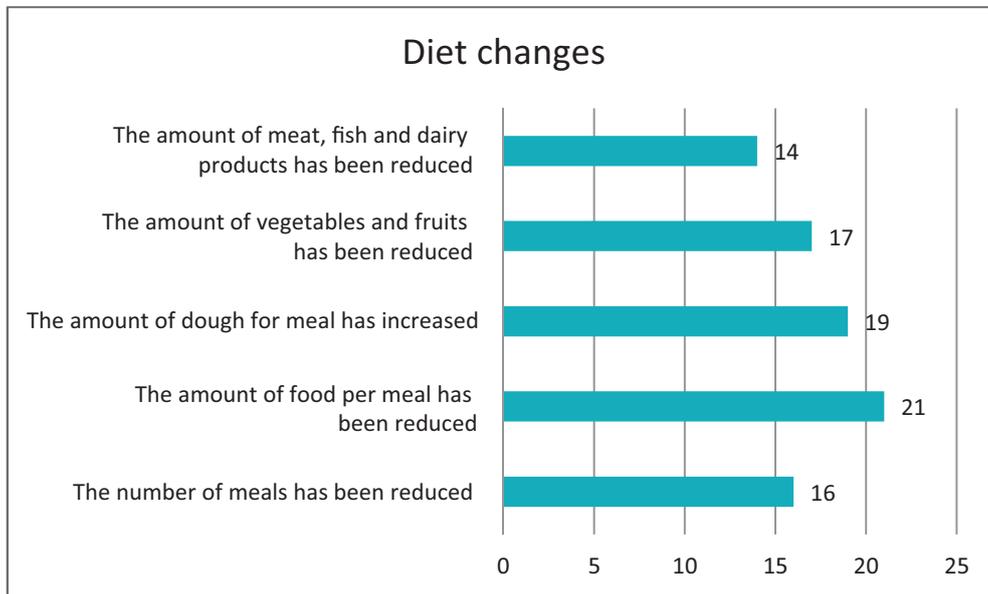


Figure 27: Children’s opinion on changing their diet due to Covid-19.

An in-depth analysis according to municipalities (Figure 27) shows that Covid-19 had a significantly negative impact on the diet changes in the Municipality of Mat (70% of the children accept this), less in Elbasan and Dibra (50%) and even less in Durrës ( 60%), data that also corresponds to the country’s poverty distribution. It is must be pointed out that most of the respondents accept the Covid-19 impact not only on poor families. On the contrary, they believe that all families have been affected (1%-3% of respondents state that Covid has only affected poor families).

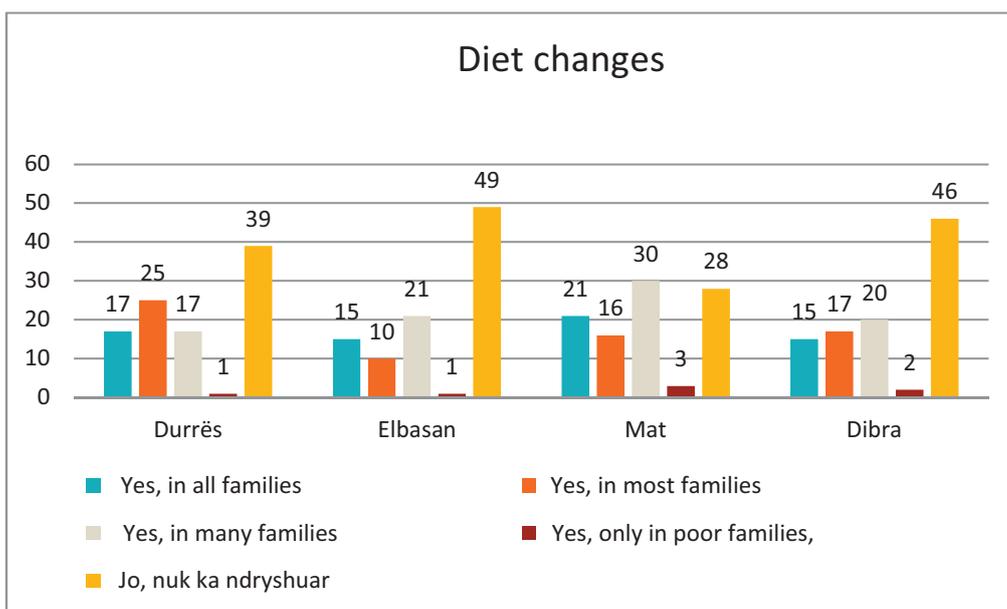


Figure 28: Children’s opinion on changing their diet due to Covid-19, by municipality.

Although only a small number of children required medical care between March and June 2020 (an average of 12%, 16% in Durrës and Mat, 13% in Dibra and 7% in Elbasan), almost all of them solicited and were provided with appropriate assistance by public institutions (Figure 28).

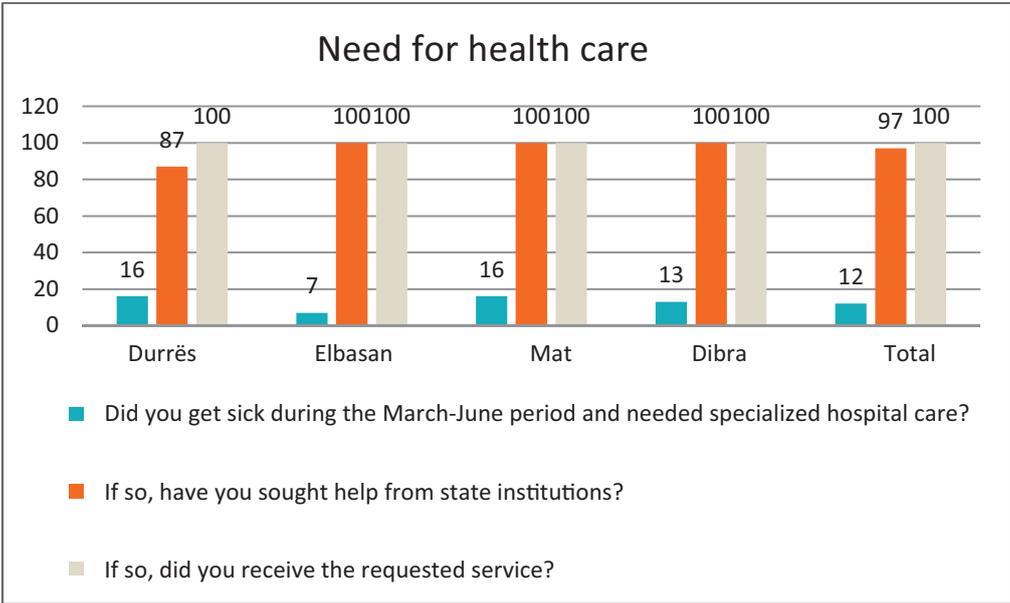


Figure 29: The need for health care and its completion, by municipality, in percentage.

### The Right of the Child to Social Protection, Development, Participation and Recreational Activities

Over 90% of the children stayed with their parents during lockdown, with the majority of them behaving properly (Figure 29). About 60% of children (only 70% in Dibra) have noticed

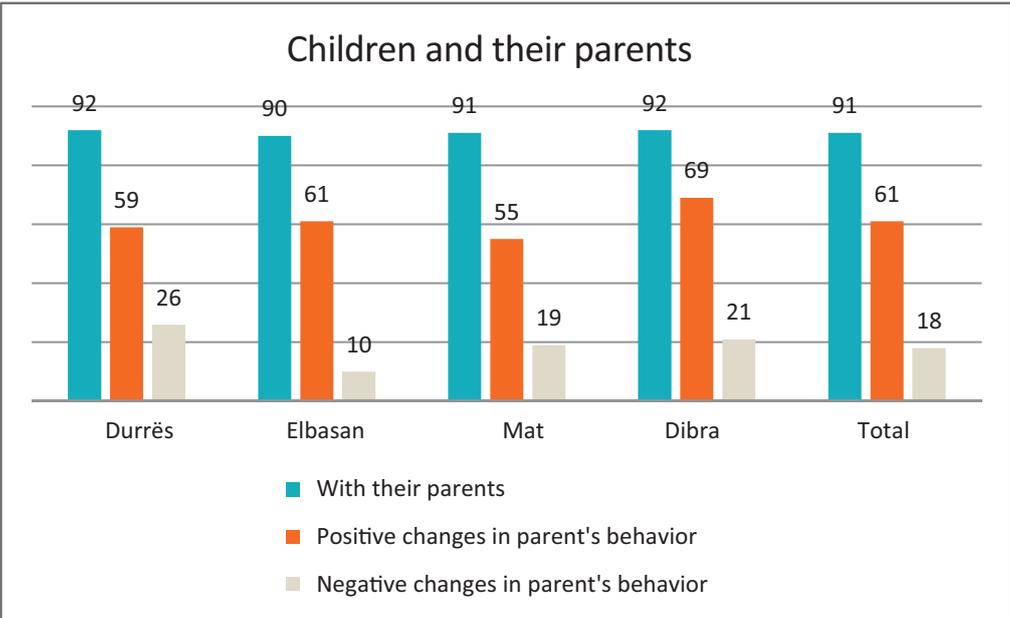


Figure 30: Relationships between children and parents during lockdown, by municipality, in percentage

positive changes in parental behavior, while 18% of them observed negative changes (26% in Durrës and 21% in Dibra). Tables 31 and 33 in the appendix provide detailed information about the types of changes that children have noticed.

More than 1/3 of the respondents believe there are working children (more than half of them in Durrës and Mat). Despite 45% of respondents lacking information about working children, child labor allegations remain of major significance regardless of the percentages. Child labor is a violation of their rights, therefore it must be outlawed.

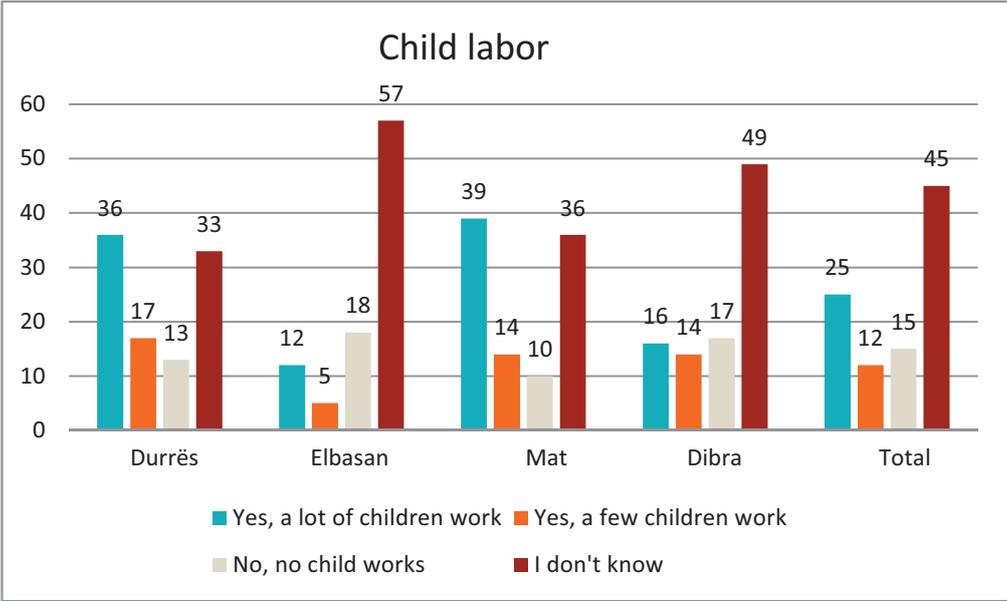


Figure 31: Child labor, by municipality, in percentage

8% of children report having experienced domestic violence (12% in Mat and 3% in Elbasan are the highest and lowest rates indicated in the report based on municipalities). Seeking support and proving all children in need with appropriate services, as indicated in Figure 31, is of crucial importance.

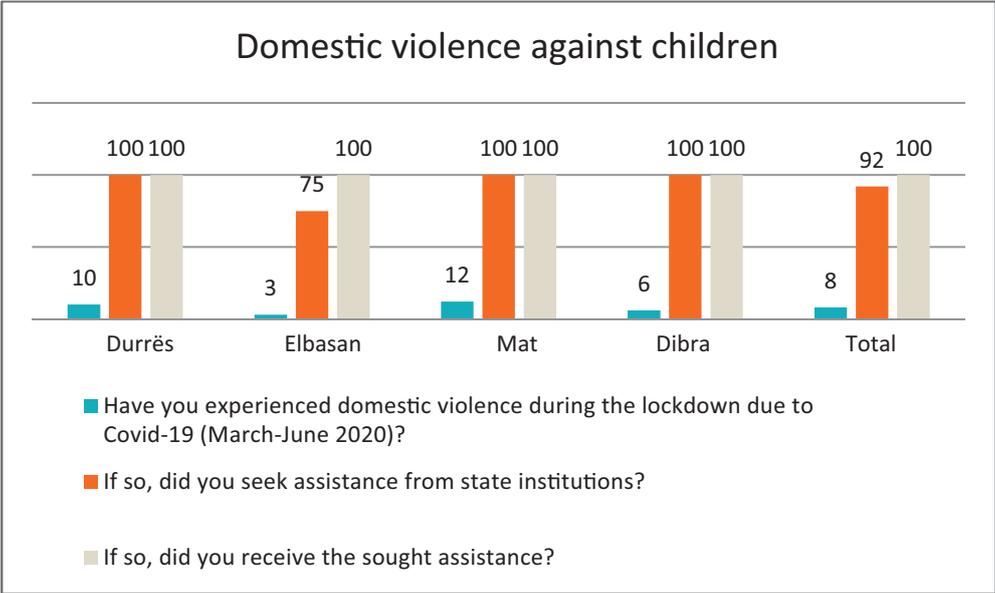


Figure 32: Child domestic violence, by municipality, in percentage.

In the context of the right to protection, development and recreational activities, data on the families' likelihood to provide didactic materials was also collected, such as children's reading books, drawing materials, textbooks, paints and other painting tools and toys, with the aim of promoting children's creative and developmental skills during isolation due to COVID-19. According to Figure 32, data shows that these materials are affordable for approximately 60% of households, unaffordable for around ¼ of them, while others (15%) are not properly informed. According to the interviewed children, parents in the Municipality of Mat have fewer means to provide their children compared to parents in other municipalities, while parents of children in Elbasan have greater opportunities.

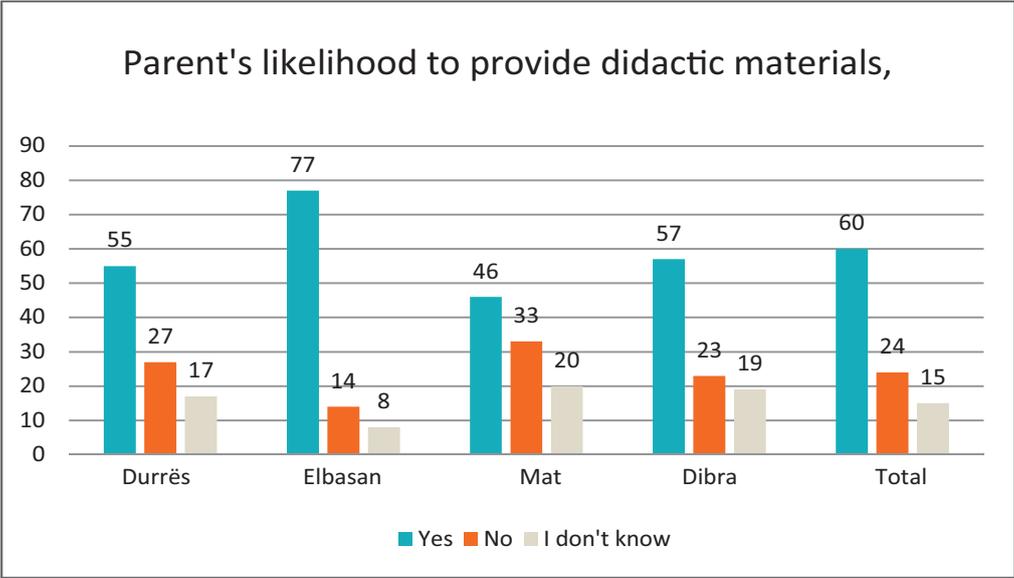


Figure 33: Parents' likelihoods of ensuring didactic materials, by municipality, in percentage.

Of particular interest is the investigation of police detainment cases in the context of anti-Covid measures and the type of treatment during the detainment. It has been noted that only 13% of children (Figure 34) were detained by the police. A psychologist was present

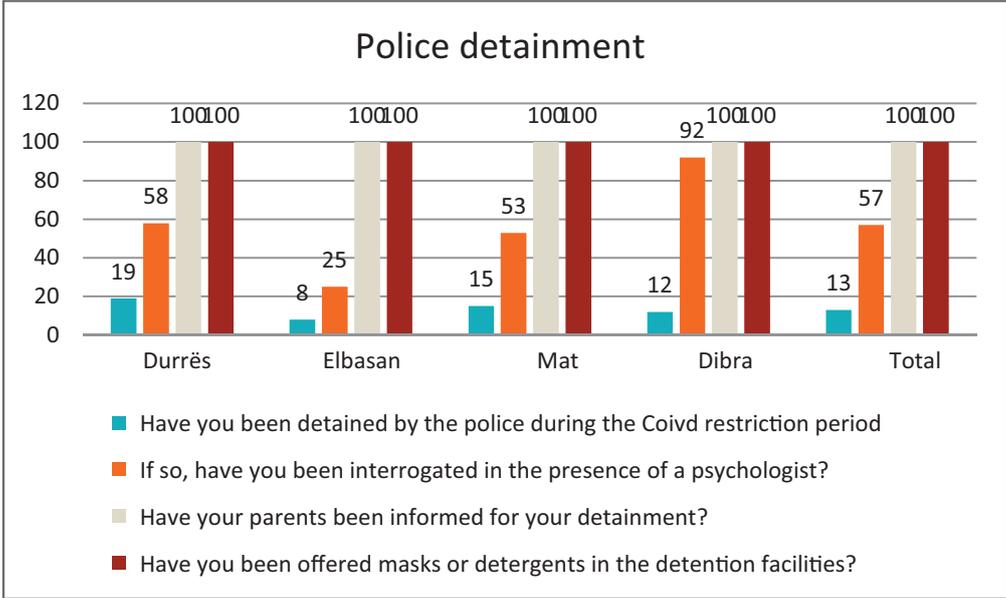


Figure 34: Police detainment and handling of cases, by municipality, in percentage.

in approximately 60% of cases, but parents were notified in all cases, while fully applying protective measures against Covid.

The situation caused by Covid-19 has increased family insecurity for many reasons, with “fear of contracting the disease” being the most critical, as indicated from data in Figure 34 (48%), followed by “challenges of online classes ” (41%), “lack of entertainment” (36%) and “fear of losing loved ones” (31%). These results are also indicated in the analysis based on municipalities.

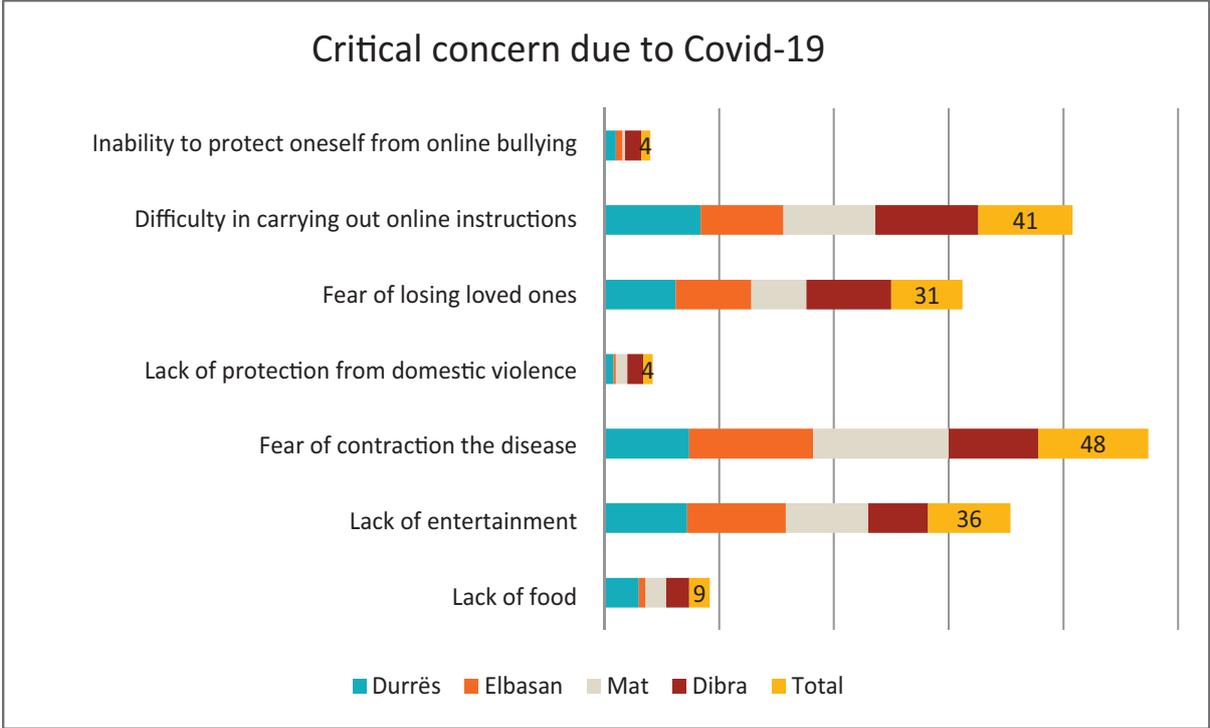


Figure 35: Children’s concerns as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown, by municipality, in percentage.

Children are convinced that the situation has affected the denial of their rights. More than 50% admit their rights have been violated, 60% of children in the Municipalities of Durrës and Mat, 49% in Mat and 37% in Elbasan, respectively. Unfortunately, only 1/3 of respondents believe that the negative impact of the situation on children’s rights could be reduced through certain measures. Children in the Municipality of Durrës feel more confident about the implementation of measures, while in Elbasan they are less confident or do not consider them as necessary, as only 37% of them believe that their rights have been violated. The institution responsible for the adoption of mitigating measures is the Municipality and local government according to about 2/3 of the children, school according to 1/3, community according to ¼ , whereas around 15% of them believe that family itself can have an impact on the mitigation of consequences deriving from the current situation (Figure 35).

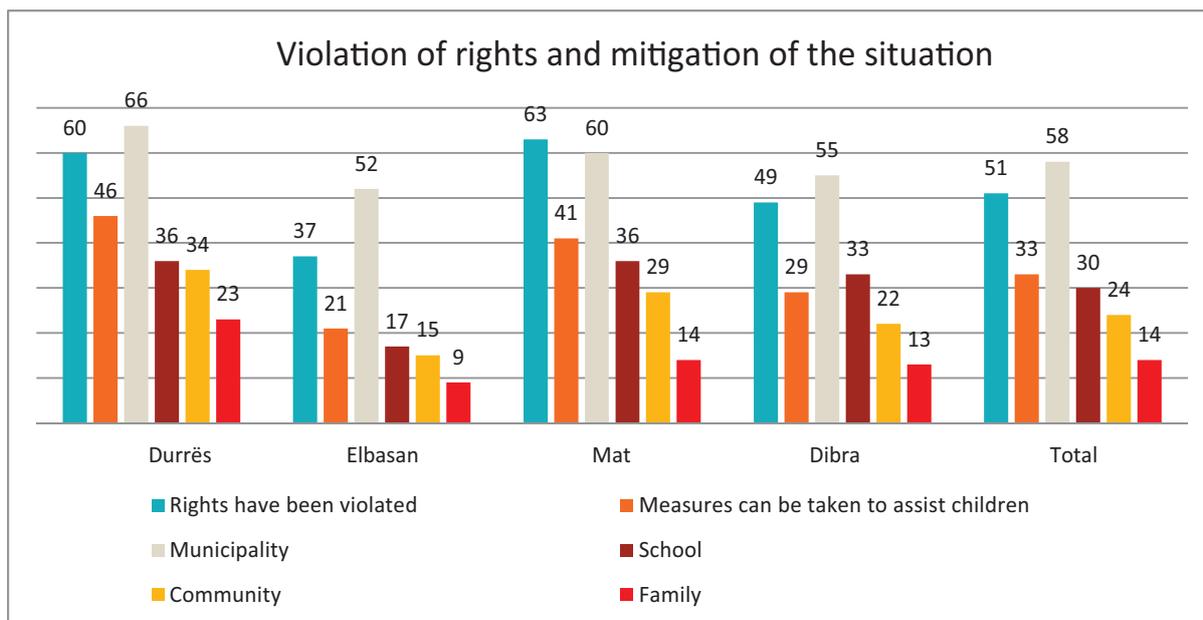


Figure 36: Violation of child rights and the responsibilities of institutions to mitigate the situation, by municipality, in percentage.

## Key messages/recommendations

In addition to the country's general political, economic and social situation, the pandemic caused by Covid-19 has affected the violation of both Albanian citizens in general and children's rights in particular, more importantly the right to education.

### Recommendations:

Based on the study findings as well as their analysis, the recommendations are formulated in three dimensions, namely in terms of exercising the right to:

1. Education
2. Adequate nutrition, health care
3. Social protection, development, participation and recreational activities.

However, considering the common responsibilities of the actors in implementing children's rights, the recommendations are focused on creating and ensuring:

1. Adequate environment for the implementation of children's rights, regardless of situations;
2. Equal access to education, protection, development and wellbeing services;
3. The service provider capacities to provide children with basic public services in a comprehensive and friendly way, regardless of the situation.

## Dimension 1: The realization of the right to education

The decline in the quality of teaching and learning, caused by lack of technological equipment or Internet access, has resulted in the violation of the right of the child to education during the pandemic. Due to the way in which classes were developed, children have been experiencing also greater, often critical, homeschooling difficulties. The whole situation has had a negative impact on the support services delivery both at school and at home, resulting from the complex difficulties teachers and parents have encountered during the course. Some children were unable to use additional didactic materials to enhance the quality of their education. The situation of children with disabilities, who had fewer quality education opportunities, was even more critical.

Children are also concerned about the relatively low level of road safety, the implementation of hygiene practices at school and keeping a safe distance, which also determine their opinion on the likelihood of realizing the right to education during the 2020-2021 academic year. Therefore, we suggest:

- ✓ Cooperating with policy-making institutions for the development of a Short-Term and Medium-Term Child Education Strategy during health emergencies.
- ✓ Strengthening the cooperation with educational facilities at the local level to support effective online schooling for high school students, at least until the end of the first semester of the 2020-2021 school year.
- ✓ Providing additional and further information about preventive and protective measures with regard to the spread of the infection, as well as increasing the responsibility of school and local government in implementing these measures responsibly.
- ✓ Organizing continuing short-term online training with teachers and local government officials, to increase their awareness and responsibility, as well as enhancing teaching capacity.
- ✓ Strengthening cooperation with groups of children and parents, early collaborators of Save the Children, in order to mobilize community resources and support groups in critical need.
- ✓ Engaging municipal child protection structures, as well as Mayors in ensuring adequate child transportation services from home to school and vice versa.
- ✓ Capacity building of civil society and volunteer groups working with children at the local level to provide support in improving the quality of learning, even though school or parents are unable to do so due to the situation.
- ✓ Strengthening cooperation with local governments in better understanding their needs and challenges, as well as finding ways to support their initiatives to help children and the community.

## **Dimension 2: The Realization of the Right to Nutrition and Health Care**

According to the study, Covid-19 has contributed to the deterioration of nutrition, namely by reducing the amount of food per meal, as well as deteriorating its quality. As for the need of health care and its fulfillment, data showed that the relevant health structures have provided the required assistance. Therefore, we suggest:

- ✓ Working with political institutions to develop a short- and medium-term specific economic support and assistance measures strategy to the most excluded families, in order to provide children with economic protection in health emergencies.
- ✓ Ensuring effective cooperation between the Economic Assistance and Child Protection Office to assess the possibilities for providing specific economic support packages to children of families with critical economic and social needs.
- ✓ Capacity building of municipal workers responsible for social welfare and services to identify and prioritize critical cases.

## **Dimension 3: The Realization of the Right to Social Protection, Development, Participation and Recreational Activities.**

The study showed that despite the critical situations and problems encountered and that are still present, family remains the safest shelter for children. However, although parents have generally tried to help and support their children, it is not uncommon for children to notice negative changes in their behavior. Moreover, children are sometimes forced to work to support their families. Domestic violence is also a serious matter of concern.

This situation has increased the risk of children violating the law to a certain extent. Nevertheless, the relevant legislation on the realization of children's rights has been responsibly implemented by public order bodies.

To summarize, the situation caused by Covid-19 has increased family insecurity for many reasons, with "fear of contracting the disease" being the most critical, followed by "challenges of online schooling", "lack of entertainment" and "fear of losing loved ones". Therefore, we suggest:

- ✓ Working with policy-making institutions for the development of a Short-Term and Medium-Term Specific Child Social Protection Measures Strategy during health emergencies.
- ✓ Capacity building of Child Social Protection Unit at the municipal level, as well as of other local offices, responsible for guaranteeing the right of the child to protection, particularly in cases of violence, child labor cases and their exploitati
- ✓ Capacity building of the municipalities with regard to the promotion of initiatives to create and strengthen the environment, in terms of child development and integration.

- ✓ Strengthening cooperation between local governments, public order bodies and schools to prioritize domestic violence cases.
- ✓ Raising children's awareness on how to deal with domestic violence and other issues that affect the realization of their right.

The study confirmed that most children are convinced that the situation has led to the deprivation of their rights. To make matters worse, it has been found that only a small number of children believe in minimizing the negative impact of the current situation on children's rights by means of certain measures. However, characterized by a sense of responsibility and participation, children feel that both Municipality and local government should assume greater responsibility to develop initiatives that implement mitigating measures for such a critical and global health crisis.

Without neglecting the role of community, school, family and children themselves, Save the Children can and should contribute in promoting harmony, coordination and cooperation with its partners:

At the program level by including the findings in the interinstitutional agenda, as a means of addressing the impact of the pandemic on the deteriorating social and economic situation of the most vulnerable groups, attracting donor attention to review strategies, in particular emphasizing the "development of short and medium-term policies that mitigate the impact of the crisis".

At the local government level by using the study report to raise awareness regarding the necessity of harmonizing efforts and the realization of the fundamental children's rights also during emergencies.

At the institutional level, the report should draw attention to capacity building, coordination and harmonization to provide the most vulnerable groups with education and social care services, as being severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.