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Press Release

“Child abuse has soared during COVID-19” - JOFA report shows alarming child rights violations during the pandemic.

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

Alarming findings

The findings are extremely concerning. Physical and emotional **violence against children has risen** and risk of sexual and gender-based violence has increased. Early and **forced marriages are increasing in number**, facilitated by a lack of official oversight.

“We have seen an **important increment of child labour, abuse, and exploitation**” says Andy Hill, Project Manager JOFA: “Children are supplementing family earnings with heavy, dangerous labour. Some girls are forced to exchange sex for money and food while other children are forced to beg.”

Boys in Mali said that all the girls they knew aged 13 to 18 were married during the crisis.

Children and their parents are experiencing increase **psychological and emotional distress**, and children are facing higher levels of emotional and psychological abuse from parents and caregivers. While some children are ending up joining armed groups or gangs, the pandemic has amplified the risks that children with disabilities already face.

A joint response to protect children

“We are taking specific measures to prevent and respond to these risks by actively engaging children, communities, and policy makers” says Hill.

JOFA is working with local organisations in all five countries to ensure no child is left behind by implementing behaviour change campaigns and training children’s groups and communities to tackle child exploitation, abuse, and harmful practices against children.

“Advocacy is key” says Hill: “We are working together with key policy makers to prioritise social protection programmes, strengthen child protection systems, and ensure a safe return to schools for all children”.

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

[Download the report “Protecting children during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond”.](#)

Keep up to date on the progress of the project by [signing up to JOFA’s quarterly newsletter](#).

[Contact Andy Hill – Joining Forces for Africa \(JOFA\) Project Manager](#)