

**CHILD RIGHTS IMPACT  
EVALUATION OF COVID-19  
RESTRICTION MEASURES**

Executive summary

## BACKGROUND

The World Health Organization declared the coronavirus outbreak a 'pandemic' on March 11th 2020, following its spreading in 220 countries. All governments were called upon to deal with an emergency placing an unprecedented burden on national health systems. The main strategy chosen to deal with the crisis was social or physical distancing isolation.

Greece implemented restriction measures, introducing among others stay-at-home orders, curfews, limited sized gatherings, closing schools, banning of sports activities, restricted entry to Greece unless proof of a negative COVID test and a mandatory 14-day period of quarantine.

These measures aimed to safeguard the right to life and the right to health for adults and children. However, such measures had and may have at the same time a negative impact on other rights.

The impact of such restrictions on human rights and the constitutional issues that they have posed vis-a-vis the proportionality principle, has been the subject of various scientific discussions.

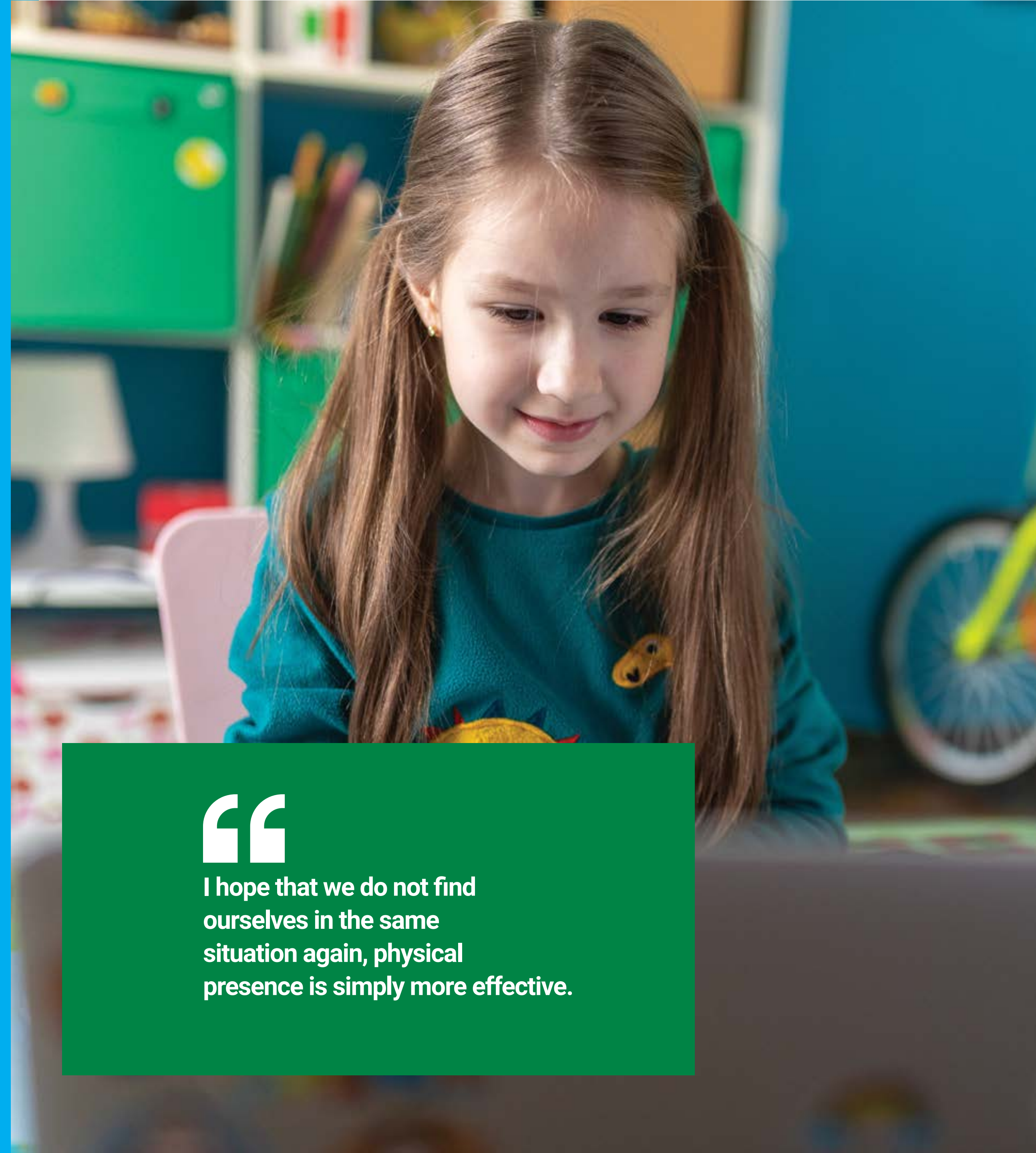
However, at the level of public debate, throughout the pandemic, much less attention has been paid to the immediate impact and possible medium-term effects of restriction measures on children, as in most countries no child rights impact assessment process has been established.



**863 participants**



**3 areas of evaluation**



**I hope that we do not find ourselves in the same situation again, physical presence is simply more effective.**

## CHILD RIGHTS IMPACT

## ASSESSMENT (CRIA)

## AND CHILD RIGHTS IMPACT

## EVALUATION (CRIE)

## PROCEDURES

The process of drafting a report on the possible impact of proposed draft laws, policies and other administrative procedures and/or projects on children's rights, is otherwise known as a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA). The process of drafting of an evaluation report on the impact of all the above on children's rights is a Child Rights Impact Evaluation (CRIE). The adoption of both CRIA and CRIE processes by states is advocated by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF and the Ombudsmans for Children's Rights.

It should be noted that the review of potential impact (CRIA) takes place before the decision or action is taken (ex ante). On the other hand, the Child Rights Impact Evaluation (CRIE) focuses on the impact of legislative changes, policies and other administrative decisions on children and youth and takes place following the adoption of measures or decisions (ex post).

In light of the above, a CRIE was carried out on the effects of the COVID restriction measures on the rights of children in Greece, under the auspices of the Greek Ombudsman and with the coordination and oversight of the Greek Deputy Ombudswoman for the Rights of the Child in collaboration with UNICEF.



## OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE OF THE CRIE

The main objective of the evaluation report on the impact of COVID 19 restriction measures on children's rights was to answer the following interrelated questions:

- 1 whether the measures applied with regard to children were appropriate and necessary and whether there were alternative measures to achieve the same goals.
- 2 what was the impact of these measures on education, mental health, and protection from domestic violence.
- 3 whether the government considered the rights of children when adopting and enforcing the restriction measures.

## METHODOLOGY AND MAIN

## DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

The research was based on the analysis of data collected through questionnaires distributed online on the aforementioned topics, as well as relevant literature, case law and legislation with reference to the measures implemented during March 2020 - February 2021.

The questionnaires were addressed to children of different education levels, parents / guardians and professionals. In total, 863 people participated in the study, among whom 361 were children, 56% girls and 44% boys. In addition, among other participants there were 266 teachers, 142 parents and 42 child protection professionals, as well as 52 child protection professionals focusing on children of the move.

Furthermore, in the respective thematic areas, results were informed by the recommendations of the Youth Advisory Panel of the Greek Ombudsman, as the former have been involved in intensive consultations on the impact of COVID - 19 restriction measures on children's rights.

Additionally, in the education thematic area, results have also been informed by the Report of the Greek Ombudsman on "The Integration in the education system of children living in Open Accommodation Sites and RICs of the Ministry of Migration & Asylum" (April 2021).



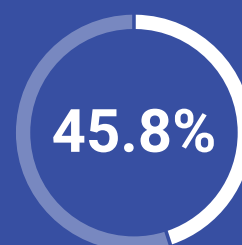
## MAIN FINDINGS PER THEMATIC AREA

### EDUCATION

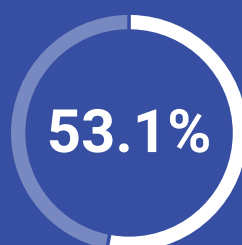
It is worth noting that the vast majority of secondary school students stated that they encountered problems during distance education (90.6%). The main problems were the lack of a proper internet connection (53.1%), the lack of interest in the learning process (51.5%), the technical problems with the platform (48.4%) and the inability to concentrate and attend the course (45.8%).



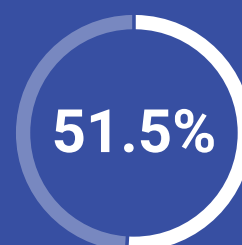
Encountered problems during distance education.



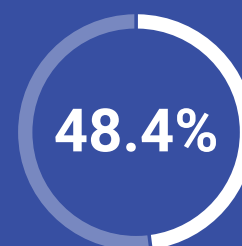
Faced technical problems with the platform.



Didn't have a proper internet connection.



Couldn't concentrate and attend the course.



Showed lack of interest in the learning process.

### KEY FINDINGS

- The teaching material and process was not adapted to the needs of distance education; namely a more interactive, experiential and less tedious approach for children was not followed.
- Groups of students were in fact excluded from education, in cases when they did not have the technical infrastructure or the necessary technical knowledge to use it.
- The existing connectivity infrastructure was not equally sufficient across the Greek territory to meet the needs of distance education.
- The teachers did not receive appropriate technical support to respond to the new conditions and relevant needs.
- The exclusive implementation of distance education for many months (for about 5.5 months compared to 7.5 months of the school year) exacerbated the negative effects of fatigue and exclusion and had an impact on the normal psycho-emotional development of students, since they lost their physical space in terms of socialization and expression.
- The absence of consultation with student communities throughout the implementation of distance education, deteriorated the feeling of students that they are excluded from the process of decision-making on issues that concern them, contrary to the provisions of Article 12 of the CRC.
- The most vulnerable children (Roma, migrant/refugees, with special teaching needs, etc.) were mostly affected.
- With regard to the integration of children living in Open Accommodation Sites for Asylum Seekers in the education system, further exclusion from the educational process was observed due to the lack of material and technical equipment, teaching staff and support, while exclusion had already been reported for as long as schools were open due to various administrative obstacles.

### RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE YOUTH ADVISORY PANEL OF THE GREEK CHILDREN'S OMBUDSMAN REGARDING EDUCATION

The Youth Advisory Panel focused particularly on the fact that the suspension of physical education should be used as a measure of last resort and only after all other measures (smaller classrooms, better hygiene conditions within schools, etc.) have been exhausted. In this light, they emphasized the need for a higher number of teachers to adequately support students who face increased challenges and respectively the need to reduce the number of students per classroom. Along the same lines, the importance of systematic teacher training was also emphasized.

Regarding distance learning, the Youth Advisory Panel pointed out the need to adopt a more experiential/playful and less sterile teaching approach, as well as the need for greater interaction between the teacher and the virtual classroom. The Youth Advisory Panel further stressed the need to ensure the necessary technical resources (wi-fi, equipment) - which are a prerequisite for participation - for all children and especially for the most vulnerable. Finally, it was argued that in emergencies, the scope of the curriculum and the examination process should be adjusted so that students do not become overstressed.



Children lost their right to social life, which apart from the family environment refers also to their connection with school and friends.

## MENTAL HEALTH

The parents/guardians who participated in the research expressed their concerns on the changes in children's daily habits, behavior and mental health. 83.9% of those who participated agreed that their children's psychology was affected during the pandemic. In particular, the vast majority of parents/guardians (87.2%) reported that their children were more nervous and anxious, while a smaller percentage of parents reported that their children experienced emotional instability (42.4%), and that they seemed more introvert (24.5%). Also, a smaller percentage of parents (13.6%) stated that children encountered sleeping difficulties or regression (10.9%), that is behaviors that correspond to a younger age during the effect of restriction measures.

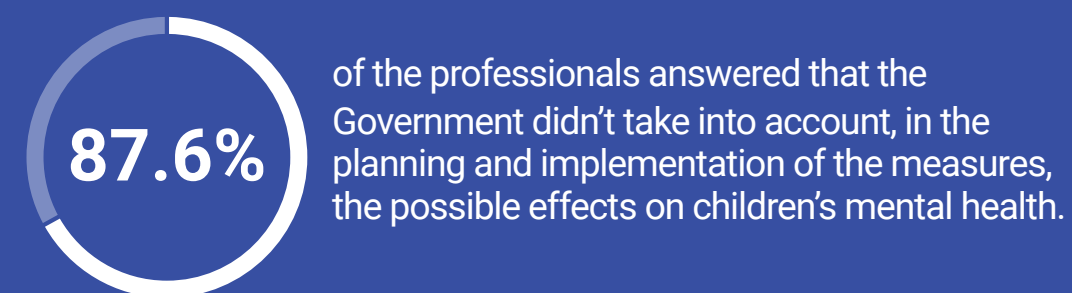
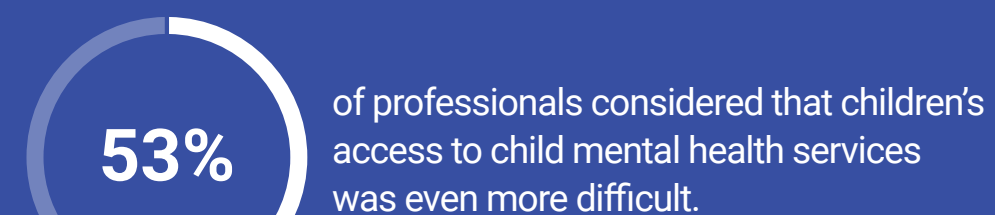
Taking into account the above, it is worth noting that the majority of parents (70.6%) stated that they did not feel the need to seek support from mental health professionals despite the above mentioned problems, while a significantly lower percentage (25.8%) stated that they felt that need. What is also interesting is that a very small percentage (only 6.9%) of parents eventually sought support from professionals of either the public or the private sector, such as public mental health services or psychologists from the private sector.

Regarding the protection of children's mental health during the pandemic, the majority of professionals (53%) considered that children's access to child mental health services was even more difficult, during the period that restriction measures were applied.

When professionals were asked whether the Government took into account, in the planning and implementation of the measures, the possible effects on children's mental health, the majority of professionals (87.6%) answered that they do not think that this has been the case.

## MAIN FINDINGS

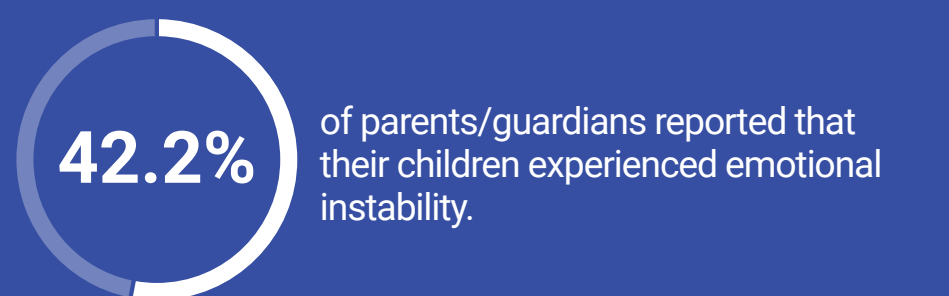
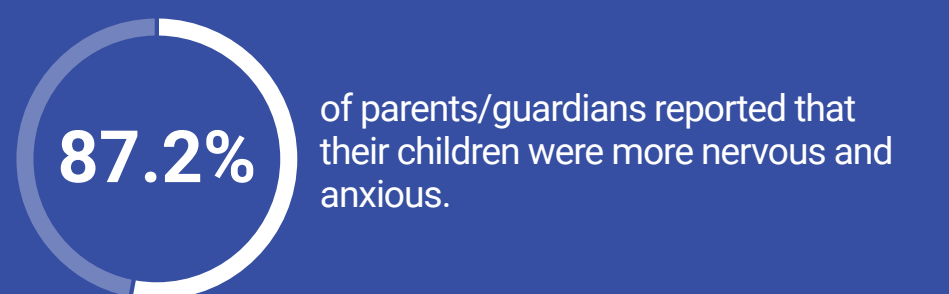
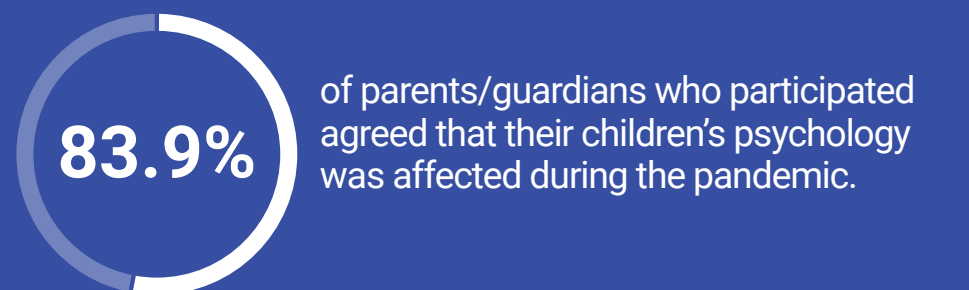
- Lack of direct contact with friends and classmates led to changes in children's behaviour, who felt more stressed and presented problems in their behaviour.
- The psychological pressure on children increased significantly since the beginning of the restriction measures, especially after school closure, while at the same time access of children to child mental health services was even more difficult.
- All parents whose work was suspended during the pandemic stated that the psychology of their child/children had been burdened, a fact that might also relate to financial insecurity.
- About 9 out of 10 parents acknowledged that their children faced mental health challenges but did not seek professional support. This is a finding that might be attributed to the fear of stigma or the families' lack of awareness on mental health issues.



## RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE YOUTH ADVISORY PANEL OF THE GREEK CHILDREN'S OMBUDSMAN REGARDING MENTAL HEALTH

The Youth Advisory Panel stressed the need to strengthen the mental health services system and available services in the neighborhood, by increasing the available service delivery points and the number of professionals respectively.

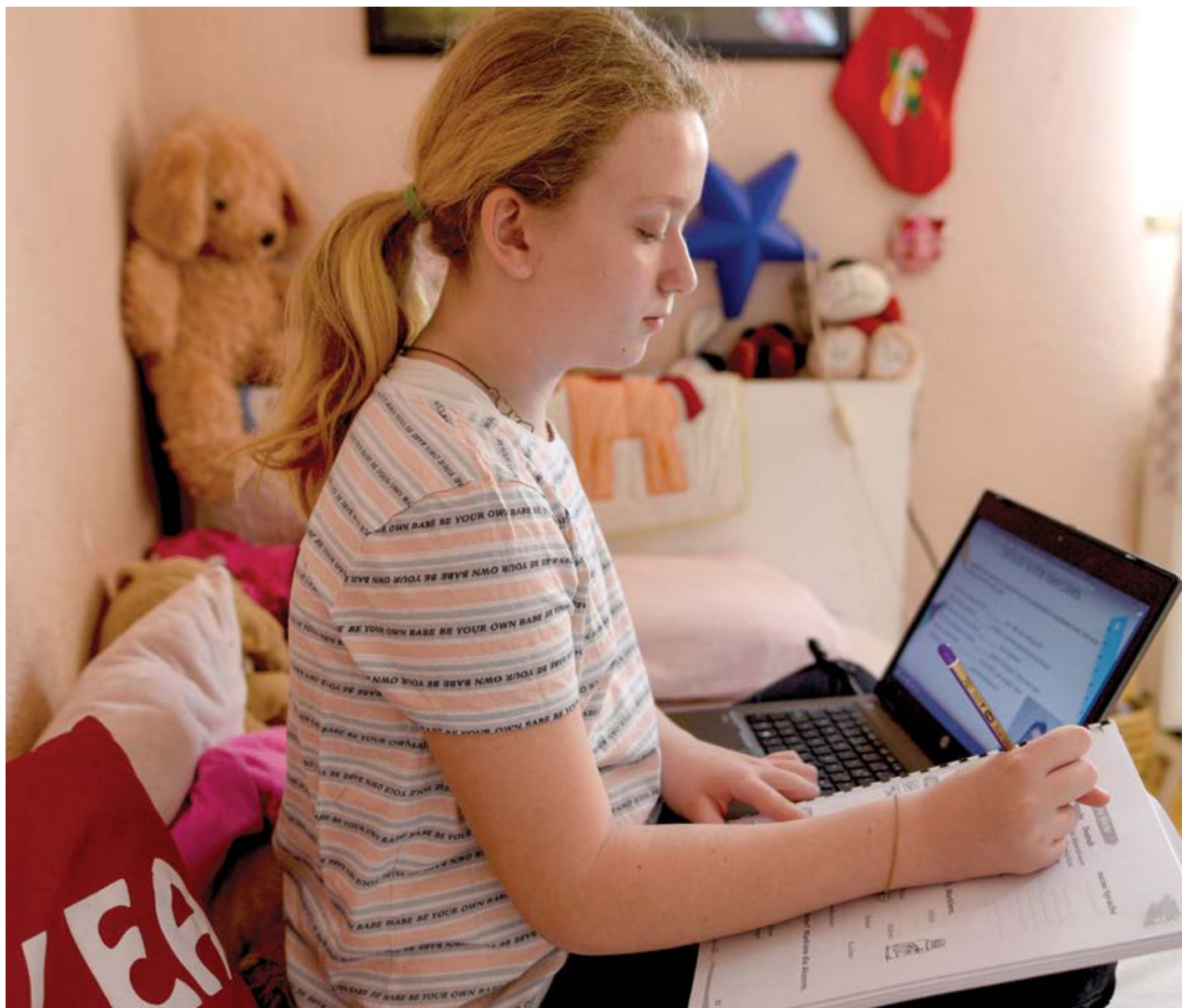
They also proposed awareness raising campaigns on mental health challenges faced by children. In addition, they noted that it would be particularly useful to introduce a curriculum on mental health issues at schools, so that relevant issues are discussed - within the school community - and with parents with a view to ensuring parental response, informing children and sensitizing the community.



## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The majority of professionals (77.6%) stated that they perceived an increase in domestic violence incidents. With regard to the reasons behind that increase, the main were considered to be social isolation from relatives and friends (69.6%), compulsory stay at home orders (67.8%), the limited ability of children to seek support and access appropriate services and lawyers (66%) and school closure (41%).

Regarding the effectiveness of the responsible services to manage domestic violence cases, the majority of professionals (56.9%) considered them as not effective, while only a small percentage (16.6 %) considered them effective.



## MAIN FINDINGS

- While data from sources such as the National SOS Hotline for Children 1056 are extremely useful and indicative of domestic violence cases against children, there is a lack of disaggregated data to shed light on the extent and different forms of domestic violence.
- The lack of timely identification of domestic violence during the suspension of school operation was pointed out, as a result of the disruption of contact between children and professionals (especially teachers).
- The increase in domestic violence cases did not lead to an increased response on behalf of the child protection system, on the contrary, the inadequacy and the difficulty of response on behalf of the competent services emerged during the implementation of the restriction measures.
- The need to further strengthen social services was highlighted, so that in cooperation with the school units they can identify families that are faced with increased challenges in a timely manner.



## RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE YOUTH ADVISORY PANEL OF THE GREEK CHILDREN'S OMBUDSMAN REGARDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Youth Advisory Panel suggested reinforcing the competent services in terms of human resources and ensure systematic training of the competent professionals. They also stressed the need for mandatory training for all teachers and the importance to ensure relationships of trust and support within the daily school life. They further suggested empowering children with information on child abuse, from an early age, in a simple and easy to understand language, so that children are able to recognize themselves and report abusive behaviours.

**77.6%**

of professionals stated that they perceived an increase in domestic violence incidents.

## RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE YOUTH ADVISORY PANEL OF THE GREEK CHILDREN'S OMBUDSMAN

The Youth Advisory Panel proposed the strengthening of student communities and the provision of adequate information to school unit representatives with a view to empowering them so that they can better respond to their role. Overall, the entire school programme should more actively promote democratic participation and open discussions on problems/concerns/issues that concern the school community (and not limited to the school environment).

In addition, the development of an online platform for consultation with children by the Ministry of Education was proposed aiming to ensure that children's views on decisions and issues that affect them is taken into consideration.

The Youth Advisory Panel also stressed the importance of foreseeing in legislation that the representation of children and their right to be heard is taken into account when introducing laws or making decisions that affect them, through youth councils at the municipal and national level and through a national council with an advisory role to the Parliament.

## SUMMARY OF GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Institutionalization of the processes of assessing and evaluating the impact of laws and decisions on children's rights (CRIA and CRIE).
- Provision for consultation procedures with children (empowerment of children within the student communities, establishment of municipal and national youth councils, development of an online youth consultation platform that can also be used in emergencies).
- Elaboration of sustainable strategies for the child at European and national level (including mapping, objectives, indicators, monitoring mechanism).
- Ensure that in similar circumstances in the future alternative measures to distance education are exhausted (smaller number of students per classroom, the obligation to keep distances, hygiene measures, provision of periodic and free COVID 19 tests) with a view to continuing the physical presence of students in schools.
- In similar circumstances in the future, adaptation of the curriculum and the teaching process to the needs of distance learning, indicatively ensuring a more playful and interactive way, informed by the particularities of the individual groups of students and their age.
- Reinforcement of front line services (social and mental health services), but also of the education system with sustainable resources and adoption of intervention protocols to be followed by all involved professionals in emergencies.
- Awareness raising among parents and children regarding mental health issues through trainings and open discussions in schools and in the community in general.
- Increased preparedness for the identification of child abuse (safe spaces, greater investment in building relationships of trust in schools, systematic teacher training, provision of information to children, etc.) and introduction of relevant identification and management protocols.
- Provision of information at the beginning of each school year to all children, regarding the available actors and services that they can contact - by phone or online – to seek support, but also ensuring the establishment of and awareness on the available communication lines with the school unit to ensure confidentiality.
- Common and uniform recording of reported cases of child abuse and neglect and their involvement among responsible services/actors.
- Immediate implementation of emergency support measures for children and families considering the expected upcoming increase of poverty and social exclusion.
- Establishment and operation of inter-ministerial mechanisms that will supervise compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.



A research of the **Greek Ombudsman in collaboration**  
with the **UNICEF Greece Country Office**

