

COVID ONE YEAR ON: WHY CHILDREN ARE STILL OUT OF SCHOOL



Save the Children

Why children in Nigeria are still out of school – and at risk of dropping out for good

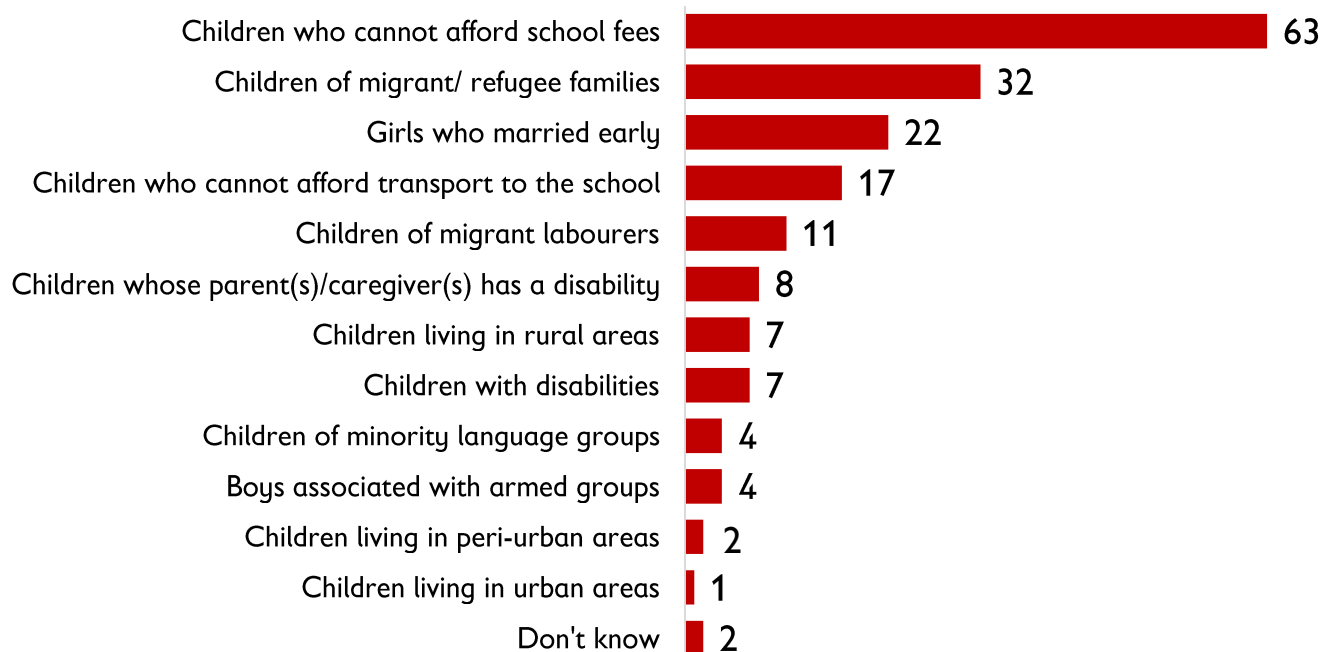
Results of our snapshot survey in Nigeria

A snapshot survey carried out by Save the Children suggests that more than one year after the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close, significant numbers of Nigeria's most vulnerable children are still out of school as a result of child labour, child marriage, relocation and other consequences of the pandemic – and girls are particularly at risk. 1 in 5 children at schools we surveyed have not returned to school and are at risk of dropping out for good – with potentially devastating consequences for their and their country's future.

In spring 2020, during the first wave of the global pandemic, schools around the world suddenly shut their doors to 1.6 billion children. Some children were able to learn remotely while their school was closed and have since returned to their classroom, but our snapshot survey of 95 schools in Nigeria indicates that significant numbers of children – including girls, children from low-income households, migrants and refugees – are still out of school.

We must act now and invest in getting the world's children safely back to school, to ensure that a generation of the most vulnerable children do not get left behind.

Figure 1: Which children are out of school?





Key findings

More than 1 in 5 children at the schools we surveyed have not returned to school

- 21% of children enrolled at the schools we surveyed before the pandemic, have dropped out
- In nearly 1 in 10 schools we surveyed, more than 1000 students had dropped out since the pandemic
- Almost half the schools we surveyed said some enrolled students aren't actually attending
- 92% of schools said there are children in their community who could be attending school, but are not

Half the schools we surveyed said girls are more likely to be out of school

- Half the schools we surveyed (50%) said that girls are more likely than boys to be out of school, while only 22% said boys were more likely to be out of school (the rest said both boys and girls are likely to be out of school)

Children from low-income households³, married girls, migrants and refugees are most likely to be out of

According to the schools we surveyed, the children most likely to be out of school are:

- Children who cannot afford the school fees
- Children of migrant or refugee families
- Girls who have married early
- Children who cannot afford the transport to school

COVID caused schools to close, but fear of catching or spreading the virus is not the main reason why children are still out of school

The schools we surveyed said that the main barriers to children attending school are more likely to be:

- They are working to help their family
- They are looking after their parents and/or their siblings
- Their family has relocated
- They have married
- They cannot afford the costs of school, such as fees and transport
- Parents are not encouraging of education

Very few schools said that COVID-related factors such as fear of catching the virus, or a lack of personal protective equipment, were the main barriers to children returning to school.

Getting children safely back to school

Save the Children's biggest global priority right now is getting children safely back to school, because we know that when a child misses out on their education, it can have a devastating impact on their health, their safety and their future life chances.

Children that are already vulnerable and disadvantaged - including girls, children from low-income households, children with disabilities, and migrant and refugee children – are at the greatest risk of being left even further behind.

And to stop this tragedy, the schools we surveyed said that to get children back to school, we need to distribute more food, books, uniforms and sanitary products for young girls, and to engage more with parents and community leaders.

“The support given to the children (school materials - bags, books, writing materials, uniforms...) helped in keeping the children in school”

Staff member at a peri-urban primary school in Sumsamma

A note about using this data

Gathering detailed data on how many children are out of school at any one time is a complex task, particularly in vulnerable contexts. In light of the urgent need to get the world's children safely back to school as soon as possible, we carried out a small-scale, light-touch survey to quickly gather indicative information that will act as a foundation for more detailed data collection and future programme interventions.

The findings reflect what is happening in the schools we surveyed and will help us to tell the story about how many children are out of school and why, so that we can provide support, fundraise and advocate to get millions of children safely back to school. However, the findings are not representative of all children and should not be scaled up to describe the situation nationally or globally.

What we are calling for

- **Governments and donors invest substantially** in education now, so we can build better education systems for the future.
- All children can continue to learn while schools are closed, **through inclusive distance learning**.
- **Every child is supported to return to school** when it is safe to do so.
- **The most vulnerable and marginalised children are prioritised**, including girls, children from low-income households, children with disabilities, and migrant and refugee children.
- **Collection and ongoing tracking of national and global data** on how many children are out of school, to enable timely and targeted action.
- **Within Nigeria**, distribution of essential school supplies, investment in feeding programmes, and more support for education from parents and communities.

Get in touch

It's not too late to make a difference. For more information or to discuss how you can support our essential work to get millions of children safely back to school, please get in touch with:

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¹ Children who are out of school include those who have dropped out (not enrolled) or have enrolled but are not attending

² From May – July 2021, Save the Children carried out a survey with 95 schools that had fully or partially reopened in Nigeria, to gather information about how many children were out of school, who they were, and the reasons why they had not returned or dropped out. Data was collected online, face to face and by phone via Kobo.

³ Defined as families who cannot afford the school fees or cannot afford the transport to school

