

CHILDFUND ALLIANCE · WORLD INDEX 2026

Safe Enough to Have a Future

How children's safety determines the futures they can build.

134
countries · 30 indicators

2,344
children surveyed · 27 countries

834
children mapped · 21 countries

The second edition of the ChildFund Alliance World Index reads the structural picture through children's own accounts of safety — and finds that what protects a child is not the absence of danger, but whether protective systems were built before danger arrived.

About this report

ChildFund Alliance is a network of child rights organisations working in more than 70 countries. Every two years it publishes the World Index on the Rights of Women and Children — a composite indicator that measures how well 134 countries implement rights for children and women across 30 indicators, organised into three sub-indexes: Context, Children, and Women.

This second edition is built on a central research question: how do inequalities in the implementation of women's and children's rights translate into the everyday conditions of children's lives — and what do those conditions mean for the futures children can build? To answer it, the Index is combined with direct evidence from children themselves: a survey with **2,344 children and adolescents across 27 countries**, and Safety Mapping — participatory sessions in which children draw and discuss their own environments — conducted with **834 children across 21 countries**.

The starting point is not the Index. It is children's lived experience. The Index provides the structural frame; children's accounts are the primary lens through which that frame is read. Where the two converge, the finding is reinforced. Where they diverge, the divergence is itself the evidence.

Why safety, and why the future

This report is grounded in a concept ChildFund Alliance introduced in the 2024 edition and develops further here: the **right to the future**. It describes the conditions that allow children not only to be protected in the present, but to develop aspirations, exercise agency, and act on a life trajectory they have some part in shaping. The right to the future is not denied primarily through the formal absence of rights. It is eroded by the accumulation of conditions — instability, fear, displacement, exclusion from decisions — that narrow what a child can realistically plan for.

Safety is the lens through which this report examines that erosion. Not as one outcome among many, but as the condition that determines whether every other right — to education, to health, to participation — can actually be exercised. A child who does not feel safe cannot fully use the school they are enrolled in, the services available to them, or the voice they are nominally entitled to. Safety is the hinge.

Within this frame, gender is treated as a structural determinant, not a subgroup of interest. Women's access to education, economic opportunity, and freedom from violence shapes the environments in which children — and especially girls — develop their sense of what is possible. This is why the Women's Sub-Index is analytically central to this report, not supplementary to it.

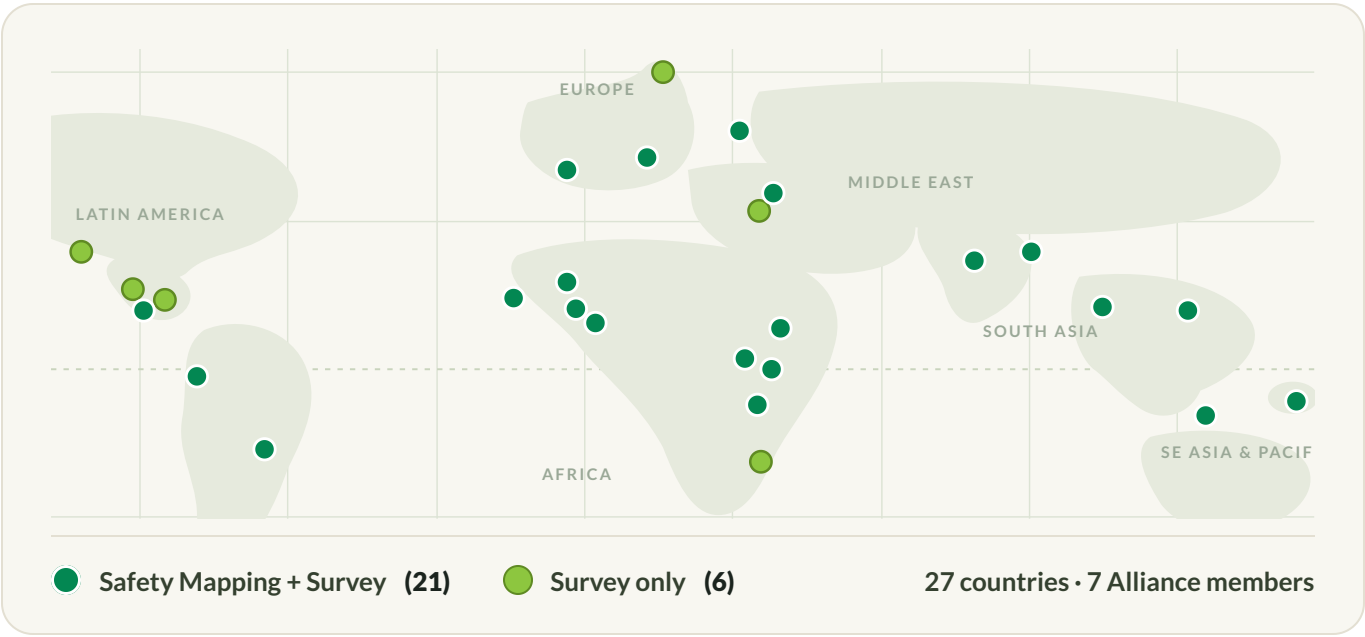
The overarching message

The systems children need to be safe are the same systems that protect every investment made in their name — in education, in health, in climate resilience, in stability. Where those systems are locally embedded and sustained, they continue to function even under severe pressure. Where they are absent, defunded, or dismantled at the wrong moment, no amount of goodwill — and no amount of trust between a child and a caring adult — substitutes for them.

This report does not show that children's safety is determined by how dangerous their environment is. It shows that it is determined by whether protective systems were built and sustained **before danger arrived**. That distinction — between exposure and infrastructure — is the central finding of this edition.

Where the research took place

The participatory research spans **27 countries** across Latin America, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and South, Southeast and Pacific Asia, coordinated by seven ChildFund Alliance members. The full survey ran in all 27; **Safety Mapping** — the participatory drawing sessions — ran in 21 of them.



- **Bangladesh** — Educo
- **Benin** — Educo
- **Bolivia** — ChildFund Intl · Educo
- **Burkina Faso** — WeWorld
- **Cambodia** — WeWorld · ChildFund Australia
- **Ecuador** — ChildFund International
- **El Salvador** — Educo
- **Ethiopia** — ChildFund International
- **Guatemala** — ChildFund International
- **Honduras** — ChildFund International
- **India** — Children Believe
- **Italy** — WeWorld
- **Kenya** — WeWorld
- **Mali** — WeWorld
- **Mexico** — ChildFund International
- **Mozambique** — WeWorld
- **Palestine** — WeWorld
- **Papua New Guinea** — ChildFund Australia
- **Philippines** — Educo
- **Senegal** — ChildFund International
- **Spain** — Educo
- **Sweden** — Barnfonden
- **Syria** — WeWorld
- **Tanzania** — WeWorld
- **Timor-Leste** — ChildFund Australia
- **Uganda** — ChildFund International
- **Ukraine** — WeWorld · ChildFund Deutschland

Seven findings at a glance

FINDING 01

Children describe safety through **people, not places** — the presence of a trusted adult is what makes any space feel safe, not its physical properties.

FINDING 02

Trust and the ability to act on it are different things. At country level they are statistically unrelated (**r=0.05**) — having someone to talk to does not mean having somewhere to turn.

FINDING 03

Structural rights scores do not predict lived safety. Italy (81.6, Strong) records **38%** help-seeking; Bangladesh (52.4, Limited) records **91%**.

FINDING 04

Crisis severity does not determine whether children can cope. What matters is whether protective systems existed **before** the crisis — not how severe it is.

FINDING 05

What children propose in Safety Mapping — and whether they stop proposing — reveals whether they believe change is still possible, and it moves **before standard indicators do**.

FINDING 06

Girls' future agency is linked to the structural conditions of the women around them (**r=0.42**) — not to children's own indicators. The right to the future is gendered and intergenerational.

FINDING 07

What children ask for is **relational, not programmatic** — care, responsive adults, schools that support, and the experience of being taken seriously, consistently, across all 27 countries.

2.1 How children understand their own lives

Before asking children about danger, the consultation asked them something more basic: what does it mean to be a child? Six themes emerged, ordered by frequency. **Joy and positive experience** is the most dominant (n=570) — children describe childhood first through happiness, freedom, and enjoyment. **Play and social life** follows (n=479), then **learning and future development** (n=333), **normative behaviour and expectations** (n=262) — respect, obedience, the social regulation of childhood — and **dependency and vulnerability** (n=179).

> *"Being a child means being protected, understood, and loved."*
>
> — Girl, Senegal

> *"Being a child means sometimes feeling afraid and unsafe because of conflict or threats in the surrounding environment."*
>
> — Girl, Palestine

The least frequent theme — **rights and agency** (n=133) — is the most analytically revealing. It appears more often in Mozambique (24%), Cambodia (19%), Italy (12%), Palestine (12%), and El Salvador (10%): contexts that differ structurally but share direct exposure to rights-based language, through programming, civic education, or its conspicuous absence. Children do not describe childhood through the language of rights by default. They describe it through relationships and feeling — consistent with the report's broader argument that rights are lived, not declared.

> *"Being a child means living in a free and supportive environment. It means having the right to go to school and the right to express your own opinions."*
>
> — Boy, Mozambique

The data also offer a baseline on daily access to basic opportunities, against which the safety findings that follow should be read. **Two in three children** report regular school attendance; in East and Central Africa, this drops to roughly **one in two**. **One in five children** report not having regular access to play and relaxation — among children with disabilities, this rises to roughly **one in four**.

2.2 How children experience safety

Children were asked where they usually feel safest. **74%** name home, **54%** name family or caregivers, **45%** name school, and **28%** name friends — with this last figure rising sharply in Western Europe (61% in Sweden, 58% in Spain, 52% in Italy), reflecting a developmental shift toward peer relationships that formal protection systems rarely account for.

74%
name home as their safest space

45%
name school

58%
identify at least one place they avoid as unsafe

These figures need to be read carefully, because they describe a condition, not a place. Home is safe *when* family is present and responsive — the same home becomes unsafe when they are absent, or when violence occurs within it. School is safe *when* teachers are known and responsive — the same building

becomes threatening when they are not. In Palestine, 93% of children name home as their primary safe space — not because domestic environments there are especially comfortable, but because almost every external alternative has been removed.

> ***"If the teacher is present, no one can hurt us."***
> **— Girl, 12, Mali**

> ***"My father used to beat me and my mother whenever he had been drinking."***
> **— Girl, 14, India**

The second quote is essential to how this report reads safety. If safety is relational, then the same relational logic that makes a space protective can make it dangerous — danger and protection are not opposites located in different places; they are two states of the same relationship. Child-friendly spaces are most prominent precisely where household and institutional safety are most fragile — 36% in Burkina Faso, 28% in India, 18% in Benin — suggesting that where formal systems weaken, children and communities build substitute anchors.

Where children do not go. Across the sample, **58%** identified at least one place in their area considered unsafe for children. Physical risk dominates the reasons given: accidents or injuries (**52%**), harm from other people (**32%**), traffic (**30%**). Water hazards are concentrated in East and South Asia — 78% in Cambodia, 58% in India. Perceived threats from people peak in Western Europe (52%), with Sweden recording 75%, the highest in the dataset for this category — a reminder that structurally strong countries are not exempt from children's fear of other people, even if the underlying cause differs from fragile contexts.

Palestine records the highest share of children reporting unsafe places "often" (36.7%), consistent with protracted conflict and restricted movement. The more analytically interesting case is **Mali**, which scores near the bottom of the World Index, faces active armed conflict, and yet records only **1.9%** of children reporting feeling unsafe "often." This is not evidence of safety. It is evidence of normalisation: where insecurity is chronic and long-standing, it can stop registering in children's accounts as something exceptional to report — a pattern this report returns to in Section 2.5.

> ***"They can run me over. They can kidnap me or steal from me."***
> **— Girl, 11, Bangladesh**

> ***"You can meet a bad person, get injured — there is no way to hide from shelling."***
> **— Boy, 12, Ukraine**

How children feel about what they face. Health concerns generate the most intense emotional response of any category — **45%** of children report feeling "very worried" or "mostly sad or scared," ahead of conflict and climate-related concerns. Girls are consistently more likely than boys to report high

distress across every category measured. This gender gap in emotional experience, separate from differences in exposure, recurs throughout the chapter.

2.3 Why safety is not stable: trust, help-seeking, and the gap between them

61% of children find it easy or very easy to talk to a trusted adult when they feel scared or upset. This is not evenly distributed: among the youngest children (8–11), one in four reports difficulty; this rises to one in three among 12–15 year-olds, and to nearly one in two among adolescents aged 16–18 — trust, perhaps counterintuitively, becomes harder to access as children grow older, possibly reflecting the narrowing of adult attention as children are seen as more capable of managing alone. Children with lower school participation report substantially more difficulty (22.8% vs 14.9%), suggesting school functions as relational infrastructure beyond its formal curriculum.

The report's central finding

At country level, trust in adults and the ability to seek help are statistically unrelated — a correlation of **r=0.05**, indistinguishable from zero. Countries with very high trust do not reliably produce high help-seeking. Countries with only moderate trust can produce very high help-seeking.

COUNTRY	TRUST	HELP-SEEKING
Palestine	60%	14%
Tanzania	76%	31%
Cambodia	80%	41%
Ukraine	75%	79%
Ethiopia	83%	89%
Bangladesh	63%	91%
Philippines	68%	96%

Trust in adults versus help-seeking, selected countries (Kobo survey, 27 countries).

Ukraine maintains 79% help-seeking capacity under active armed conflict. Tanzania, with no comparable conflict, shows 31%. The variable that explains this is not the severity of what children face, but whether protective infrastructure — referral systems, known community actors, accessible services — was locally embedded *before* the disruption occurred. At the individual level, the relationship between trust and action is real: 78% of children who find it very easy to talk to a trusted adult say they would seek help, against 55% of those who find it difficult. But that individual-level relationship does not scale into a country-level pattern, because action depends on systems that exist independently of any single relationship. **Trust is necessary. It is not sufficient.**

When children do seek help, they turn first to parents and family (**80% overall**, rising above 90% in India, Tanzania, and Bangladesh), then to teachers (**46%**). Children with disabilities show a distinct profile: lower reliance on family (74% vs 82%) and higher reliance on formal actors — social workers (21% vs 18%), police (30% vs 25%) — a pattern consistent with greater dependence on institutional systems where household-based protection is insufficient or inaccessible.

> ***"The Barangay officials are the ones who will help us improve the things we feel unsafe or uncomfortable about."***
>
> **— Girl, 12, Philippines**

Most children believe adults in their community consider their safety important — but belief in concern is not the same as belief in action. In Bangladesh, only **14% of children with disabilities** report that adults consider their safety "very important," against 28% of children without disabilities. Recognition of a problem and investment in solving it are, again, two different things.

2.4 The world children live in: structural context from the World Index

Nearly **1 in 4 countries** (23.9%) falls into the Limited or Minimal tiers of rights implementation. In population terms, this is not a marginal share: **1 in 3 children worldwide** — roughly 2.5 billion — and **1 in 7 women** — roughly 2.3 billion — live in a country where rights are only weakly implemented.

23.9%
of countries in the Limited or Minimal tiers

2.5bn
children — 1 in 3 — live in one of them

2.3bn
women — 1 in 7 — live in one of them

The global trend is not uniform. Access to information has expanded sharply (+29%), driven by internet access; children's health, education, and overall living conditions continue to advance. But conflict is increasing across multiple regions, democracy and civic space are contracting in several parts of the world, and environmental performance has shown almost no movement in a decade — not because exposure to climate disasters has been static, but because government action on the environment has been.

The persistent structural gap is gender. Women's Education has improved more than any other indicator (+25%) but, at a score of **37.3**, remains the **lowest-scoring dimension in the entire Index** — lower than any children's indicator, lower than any context indicator. At current rates of progress, eliminating the forms of gender-based violence tracked by this Index would take approximately **173 years**.

This is where the Index and the participatory evidence are designed to speak to each other. In most cases, they diverge — and the divergence is the finding. But in a small number of cases, they align in ways that are equally informative. Children's access to education tracks the World Index conflict dimension (D3) closely, at **r=0.56**: where conflict is structurally worse, children are reliably less likely to be in school. This is one of the few places in the dataset where a structural indicator predicts a child-level outcome directly — and it confirms that conflict is not only a safety crisis but an educational one, with consequences extending well beyond its duration.

> **"IT'S USELESS TO WRITE WHAT WE WANT TO IMPROVE BECAUSE NOTHING WILL EVER CHANGE."**
>
> **— Children, 11–13, Italy (Strong tier, 81.6) — written in all caps by the participants themselves**

2.5 Living under polycrises

For most children in this consultation, crisis is not an interruption to ordinary life. It is the structural condition within which childhood is lived. Climate vulnerability, armed or social conflict, and institutional fragility frequently overlap, and where they do, their effects compound rather than simply add together.

Climate is described by children in concrete, immediate terms — flooded roads, droughts that force families to migrate, heat that prevents school attendance — rather than as an abstract global phenomenon. In Bangladesh, nearly all children report direct experience of severe weather. Climate-related distress is not confined to structurally weaker countries: in Spain, following the 2024 DANA floods, children report emotional intensity comparable to children in far less wealthy contexts, evidence that exposure to acute climate shocks produces similar psychological effects regardless of national income.

> *"We have to migrate with livestock in search of pasture during drought."*
>
> **— Boy, Kenya**

> *"My house is next to the bridge and I'm afraid it will flood again."*
>
> **— Child, Spain**

Conflict generates a distinct emotional signature. Ethiopia records the highest levels of conflict-related distress in the dataset. Ukraine, despite active armed conflict, reports *lower* distress than Ethiopia or Kenya — consistent with the institutional continuity that also explains its comparatively strong help-seeking capacity. Mali shows low reported distress for the opposite reason: prolonged exposure to conflict has normalised insecurity to the point where it no longer registers in children's responses as something distressing to name.

> *"The crisis in Syria, which lasted for 14 years, made us feel afraid... Empty agricultural fields may contain landmines."*
>
> **— Boy, 12, Syria**

> *"Before the war, there were schools, kindergartens, creative centres. Now there are very few places where you can have fun."*
>
> **— Girl, 13, Ukraine**

Social violence — organised crime, gang activity, generalised insecurity short of formal conflict — produces spatial effects that resemble armed conflict: constrained movement, narrowed public space, fewer options perceived as viable.

> *"There are gunshots and fights." / "Better not to go out."*
>
> **— Child, Ecuador**

When crises compound, five patterns emerge that are not visible from any single country's data alone.

First, crisis severity does not consistently predict agency or help-seeking — Ukraine (79% help-seeking, active conflict) versus Tanzania (31%, no major conflict) is the clearest illustration. **Second,** structural system strength does not reliably predict relational safety — Italy (38% help-seeking) and Sweden (65%) report lower rates than several lower-tier contexts, despite far stronger Index scores. **Third,** the solution space — what children propose as remedies — captures constraint that aggregate future-agency scores miss: Syria and Ecuador report broadly similar future-agency percentages (90% and 97%), yet their solution spaces are opposite. **Fourth,** social violence resembles armed conflict spatially, but only partially: in Ecuador, Mexico, Honduras, and El Salvador, public space contracts in visually similar ways, but the accountability mechanisms differ fundamentally. **Fifth,** disability and gender act as consistent, independent amplifiers of inequality in every single context studied, without exception.

What distinguishes systems that hold

Not the severity of the crisis, but three structural conditions present before it arrived: **institutional continuity** (schools and services kept functioning across previous shocks), **local embedding** (protective actors known to children personally, not only by role), and **prior legitimacy** (children and families have experienced these systems respond when activated).

Afghanistan and Lebanon illustrate this at its most acute. Afghanistan (29.3, Minimal tier — last of 134 countries) combines institutional fragility, armed conflict, and climate vulnerability under a governance context that has removed girls' access to education beyond a certain age — a direct, policy-driven foreclosure of the right to the future as this report defines it.

> ***"Children, when asked about their future, mostly share their wishes and desires: education, life in prosperity, becoming effective members of society. But observing the current situation, the path they are on is the contrary of their goals."***
>
> **— Child protection worker, Afghanistan**

Lebanon (53.2, Limited tier) shows the cumulative form of polycrisis — not a single catastrophic event, but the progressive erosion of protective systems through one shock after another.

> ***"He frequently says that his generation is a 'war generation' — he has already lived through two wars despite being only sixteen years old."***
>
> **— Parent, Lebanon**

2.6 Safety and the right to the future

This section returns to the concept that frames the entire report. The right to the future is not measured directly — it is inferred from whether children believe they can make choices about what they become, whether they are heard, and what they propose when asked what should change.

67% of children across 27 countries say they can make free choices about their future. 17% say "maybe." 10% say no. A further **1%** — small in share, significant in meaning — say they do not think about their future at all; in Mali this rises to 8%, in Syria to 7%. The "no" responses describe a geography of constraint: **Kenya (55%), Burkina Faso (29%), Benin (24%), Palestine (17%), Bangladesh (16%), Tanzania (15%)**. Disability is the strongest single predictor — in Bangladesh, only 14% of children with disabilities feel able to make free choices about their future, against 58% of children without disabilities.

Participation functions as a mechanism that produces agency, not only as a right in itself. Children who are heard are more likely to develop a sense of control over their future; children who are never heard show the sharpest declines — **84% in Kenya, 80% in Bangladesh, 100% in Palestine** report no future agency among children who say they are never asked their opinion. But the relationship is not linear or automatic. Ukraine and El Salvador report identical participation rates (65%), yet Ukraine records only 45% future agency against El Salvador's 80%. What appears to mediate the relationship is whether participation has, historically, produced visible change — participation without consequence does not build agency the way participation followed by response does.

> ***"Helping our parents with household work in our free time makes them more willing to listen to us and support what we ask for."***
>
> **— Child, Timor-Leste**

The single most sensitive diagnostic

The solution space — what children propose, and who they name as capable of acting — is the most sensitive diagnostic this report identifies for the right to the future. Where children include **themselves** among the actors capable of change, the future remains open. Where agency is located exclusively in adult or institutional authority, the future has been delegated rather than owned. Where no actor is named at all, it has effectively contracted.

Ecuador generates the most diverse and structurally oriented solution space in the dataset: demands for community organisation, institutional accountability, youth participation in decisions. Children position themselves explicitly as part of the answer, not only as its beneficiaries. **El Salvador** shows a comparable pattern — a 14-year-old names ADESCO, the local community development association, and calls on it directly to consult children on decisions that affect them.

> ***"We would like ADESCO... to also consult children on issues such as activities aimed at children, leisure, or any other topic."***
>
> **— Child, 14, El Salvador**

Italy demonstrates equivalent analytical capacity — children identify governance gaps and propose specific interventions with precision — but pairs this capacity with a markedly different relationship to its own conclusions:

> ***"I don't think the school will ever change — who listens to us?"***
>
> **— Boy, 11, Italy**

The difference between Ecuador and Italy is not children's analytical ability. It is the accumulated history of whether prior proposals led anywhere. **Spain** sits in between: a nine-year-old proposes to "organise a protest so they listen to us at school" — an emerging belief that being heard is possible, combined with an active attempt to build the mechanism to make it happen. **Syria** represents the opposite pole. After 15 years of conflict, the solution space is oriented almost entirely toward containment and survival — safe playgrounds, fencing canals, securing abandoned buildings. No civic or governance-oriented proposals appear at all. **Ukraine** occupies an intermediate position: children continue to propose, but even social and communicative demands are reframed through the logic of protection.

> ***"Create safer environments for children and adolescents to communicate with. Build modern shelters."***
>
> **— Boy, 12, Ukraine**



Safety Mapping: children draw and discuss their own environments, naming safe and unsafe places, the actors responsible, and what they would change.

What children say needs to change converges, across all 27 countries, on the same set of relational conditions, not on programmes or services. **Care and supportive relationships** is the most prominent theme (n=374). **Education and school environment**, understood as a relationship rather than a sector, follows (n=358). **Protection from harm** through accountable, identifiable actors comes next (n=317), then **respect and fair treatment** (n=201), **community environments** built on mutual care (n=179), and **voice and participation** (n=112, the least frequent theme — not because children value it less, but because most have not experienced enough of it to name its absence as a missing condition).

> ***"For me, the key is for children to feel that their voice has weight — that adults not only take care of them physically but listen to them with respect, validate their emotions, and treat them as citizens."***
> **— Child, El Salvador**

The right to the future is gendered and intergenerational. Girls' future agency correlates with the Women's Sub-Index at **r=0.42** — a substantially stronger relationship than with any child-specific structural indicator. Girls place more emphasis than boys on care (19% vs 13%), education (17% vs 13%), respect (10% vs 7%), and voice (6% vs 3%) when describing what they need. This is not only a difference

in priorities. It reflects the report's broader argument: the conditions that determine whether girls believe a future is theirs to shape are formed in households and communities whose own structural conditions — captured by the Women's Sub-Index — remain the weakest area of the entire Index. Investment in women's structural conditions is not a parallel agenda to investment in children. It is the mechanism through which children's futures, particularly girls', are actually produced.

How this report was built

This report combines three sources of evidence, each answering a different question.

The World Index measures whether rights for women and children are implemented at the structural level — through legislation, institutions, and national policy — across 134 countries. It tells us what the conditions are. It cannot tell us how children experience those conditions in daily life.

The Kobo survey captures what children themselves report about safety, trust, help-seeking, and their sense of the future, across 27 countries. It tells us what children say. It cannot, on its own, explain why.

Safety Mapping — participatory sessions in which children draw and discuss their own environments — captures how children navigate their surroundings and what they believe is possible to change, across 21 countries. It explains the mechanisms behind the patterns the survey identifies.

None of the three sources was designed to replicate the others. Their value comes from bringing them into dialogue. Where they converge, the finding is treated as robust. Where they diverge — as with Italy and Bangladesh — the divergence is treated as a finding in its own right: evidence that structural implementation and lived experience are related but distinct conditions, not a methodological problem to explain away.

A note on what this data can and cannot show. Both participatory components were conducted through ChildFund Alliance programme areas, using convenience sampling rather than a nationally representative design. This means country-level figures reflect the experience of children reached through Alliance programming — not a statistical estimate of the national child population. The direction of this bias is not uniform: in some contexts it likely captures more vulnerable children than the national average; in others, children already supported by functioning programmes.

Country-level statistical associations in this report are based on 27 country observations. This is enough to identify clear patterns, but not enough to support precise causal claims. Where this report identifies an association — for example, between girls' future agency and the conditions of women in the same

country — it should be read as a meaningful and consistent pattern worth acting on, not as definitive proof of a single causal pathway. The broader research literature, cited throughout, supports the directionality this report proposes.

Two countries — Afghanistan and Lebanon — are not covered by the participatory components, due to active conflict and access restrictions respectively. Their analysis draws instead on secondary research and interviews with child protection practitioners, and is presented as a distinct and complementary form of evidence.

This report does not claim to measure every child's experience everywhere. It claims something more modest and, we believe, more useful: a consistent, cross-validated picture of how safety is produced or undermined for children reached through one of the world's largest child rights networks — and what that picture implies for where investment should go next.

Five recommendations

1 Adopt cross-sectoral child-safety approaches

Child safety consistently falls between sector mandates. Roads — unsafe in every country in this study, at every income level — sit between education, urban planning, and transport. No single sector owns them.

THE ASK Make child safety a cross-cutting objective across education, health, livelihoods, climate adaptation, and peacebuilding. Use children's territorial knowledge as a shared input across sectors.

THE INVESTMENT CASE Cross-sectoral approaches are more effective per unit of investment because they address the conditions that make all other interventions work.

The right to the future depends on environments that are safe across their full geography.

2 Fund continuity across Humanitarian–Development–Peace transitions

The systems that protect children during crises are those locally embedded before the crisis arrived. Building child protection systems during crises is exponentially more expensive than sustaining them before.

THE ASK Multi-year, flexible funding with explicit continuity objectives. Transition planning as a core budget line. Locally-led organisations as the primary vehicle for continuity.

THE INVESTMENT CASE Donors funding education and health in fragile contexts are already paying the cost of this gap — in reduced effectiveness and in children who have lost the protective floor that would have made that programming matter.

The right to the future requires that protective systems outlast the crises that test them.

3 Invest in the systems that turn trust into action

Most children have a trusted adult. The gap is not relational — it is systemic. Referral mechanisms and trained frontline actors are consistently the under-resourced components of child protection — and the ones that determine whether everything else works.

THE ASK Fund the connective tissue of child protection as a core component. Require programmes to demonstrate the full trust-to-action pathway.

THE INVESTMENT CASE Where these systems exist, even moderate relational trust produces high help-seeking. The investment needed is not large — it is simply different from where resources currently flow.

The right to the future requires that trust has somewhere to go.

4 Integrate children into anticipatory action as knowledge-producers

What children propose — and whether they stop proposing — is a more sensitive and earlier indicator of deterioration than displacement figures or conflict event data.

THE ASK Integrate child-derived signals into early warning frameworks. Fund participatory monitoring tools. Engage children as active participants in trigger design.

THE INVESTMENT CASE Child-derived signals are lower-cost to collect and more contextually specific than aggregate structural data. Children are already producing this early warning. The question is whether our systems are designed to receive it.

The right to the future requires that children's knowledge reaches the actors who can act on it — before the window closes.

5 Adopt gender-transformative and intergenerational programming

The conditions that determine whether girls can imagine futures are shaped by the structural conditions of the women around them. Women's Education is the lowest-scoring dimension in the World Index.

THE ASK Integrate women's structural conditions as a component of child protection theories of change. Design programmes with intergenerational logic.

THE INVESTMENT CASE Investment in women's structural conditions produces returns transmitted directly to the next generation. It is the upstream condition for children's outcomes.

The right to the future is intergenerational. It cannot be secured for this generation without improving the conditions of the women who shape it.

Closing

> ***"Safe environment, safe life."***
>
> **— Girls, 8–12, Tanzania**

> ***"The only thing we want is peace."***
>
> **— Child, Ecuador**

Children across 27 countries described the same conditions: adults who respond, schools that support, communities that look out, the experience of being heard. The systems that produce those conditions exist in some contexts and not others. The difference is not the severity of what children face. It is what was built, and sustained, before the crisis arrived.

Investing in those systems upstream costs less, lasts longer, and reaches children before the damage becomes irreversible. The right to the future is being determined now — by the decisions that adults, governments, donors, foundations, and practitioners make about whether to sustain the conditions that make it possible.

ChildFund Alliance World Index 2026: Safe Enough to Have a Future. World Index: 134 countries, 30 indicators. Kobo survey: 2,344 children, 27 countries. Safety Mapping: 834 children, 21 countries. Data collected through ChildFund Alliance programme areas; not nationally representative.