

Children in the
COVID-19 Crisis

Children in Germany and Ghana 2021

5th World Vision Children Study

Advance Publication



Foreword



World Vision is a Christian aid organisation with more than 70 years of experience in development work. By strategically helping others to help themselves, World Vision supports children and families of all religions and world views around the world in the fight against poverty and injustice. As part of our political advocacy work, research projects are carried out at regular intervals to examine children's perspectives and their ability to act within their living environments. Our concern is to increase the social participation of all children.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a social challenge that impacts children and youth to a particular degree, as they are presumably threatened less by the disease itself and more by the containment measures. Nearly everywhere in the world, children and young people are affected by the closure of daycare centers, care facilities and schools with insufficient remote learning opportunities. Recreational activities are suspended, community facilities are closed and private meetings are subject to contact restrictions. Hardly any other segment of the population experiences such a severe impact on their everyday life due to the pandemic as young people.

From our Children Studies which we have conducted since 2007, we know that there are major differences in how children perceive their cohabitation 'at home': whether they have their own room, what they spend their time doing, whether they receive attention from their parents, whether they have a say in family life and whether their opinions are heard. Nearly all children are equally

affected by the limitation of their living environment to their own household, but there are major inequalities in their access to resources and opportunities to manage this situation. Our survey was collected in Germany and Ghana and demonstrates that these inequalities exist not only between different countries, but above all within the individual countries. In this study, we examine the question of how children in different living situations experience the pandemic, which circumstances and events jeopardise their well-being and what gives them strength.

Beyond all national, regional and socioeconomic differences, this study shows one thing: **Children make a major contribution towards overcoming the pandemic.** Without their responsibility of protecting their families by complying with rules concerning contact and hygiene, without their willingness to accept any form of education to the best of their abilities, without their sacrifice of meeting friends and pursuing their hobbies, without their patience, optimism and hope that life will return to 'the way it used to be' or 'better than it was before', it would not be possible to tackle this pandemic.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Ch. Waffenschmidt". The signature is fluid and stylized, with a large initial "Ch." and a long, sweeping line extending to the right.

Christoph Waffenschmidt
CEO of World Vision Deutschland e.V.

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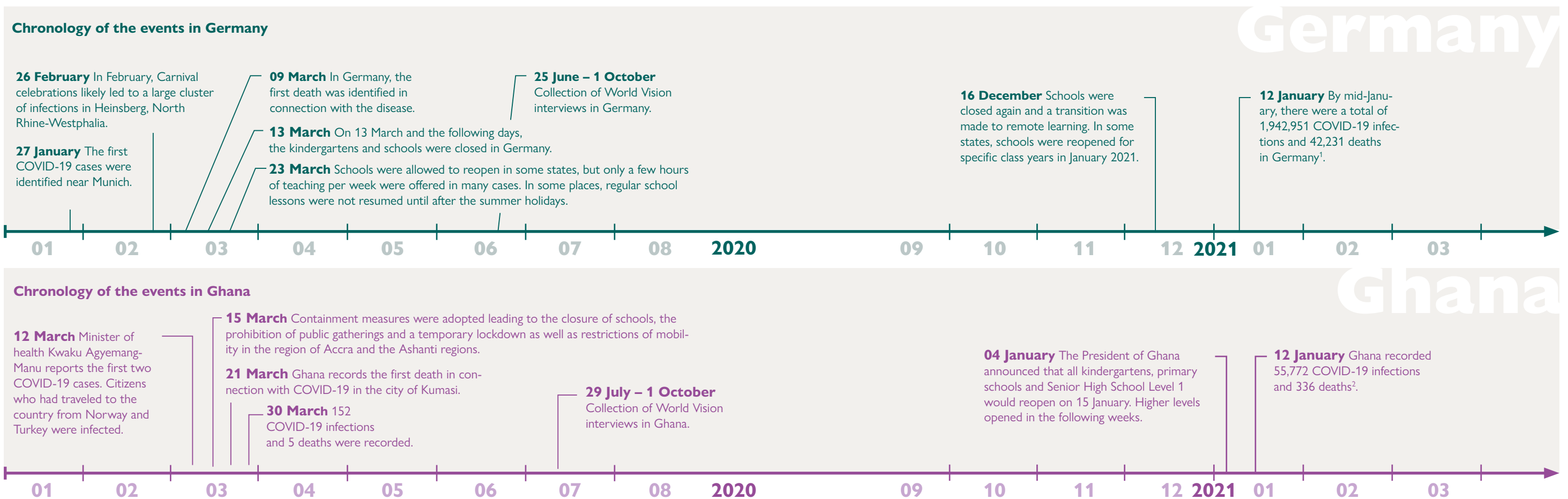
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A photograph of a child with blonde hair, seen from behind, writing the word 'HOMESCHOOLING' in colorful chalk on a dark chalkboard. The child's right arm is raised, holding a piece of yellow chalk. The letters are in various colors: H (pink), O (blue), M (yellow), E (green), S (purple), C (blue), H (yellow), O (green), O (pink), L (blue), I (purple), N (green), G (yellow).

HOMESCHOOLING

Introduction



Since 2007, World Vision Germany regularly conducts its representative Children Study that offers reliable information based on qualitative and quantitative interviews with children concerning their well-being and their view of the world. As an international child welfare organisation, we are committed to ensuring that this “view of the world” presents more than just a German perspective. With the assistance of World Vision Ghana and Prof. Dr. Britta Konz, Professor of Religious Education at Dortmund University, we designed the 5th Children Study as an international comparative investigation for this reason. Originally, the study was oriented towards an examination of the diversity in religion and world views among the living environments of children in Germany and Ghana, since this topic is current and relevant for both countries. However, in spring 2020 it became apparent that any research we would conduct that year would directly address the COVID-19 pandemic. On the one hand, the concern was whether and how in-depth personal interviews could even be conducted with children while following hygiene and contact rules, and on the other hand it seemed impossible to overlook the lockdown and homeschooling when considering the fundamental question of children’s wellbeing. For that reason, we decided to integrate a series of questions concerning children’s experiences in the pandemic

in our 5th Children Study and would like to publish the results of this qualitative sub-study in advance before the overall study is published in spring 2023.

Nowadays, young people are growing up in a period of “multiple crises” (Gärtner 2020:10). Like no other catastrophe, coronavirus “is not deterred by national borders” and can only be overcome on a global scale (Gärtner 2020: 11). Nevertheless, those affected by poverty are at greater risk from these catastrophes if they are less able to protect themselves or offset negative consequences. Reactions to coronavirus are different not only at the political level but also on an individual level (Gärtner 2020: 12). At the same time, the perception of children in the pandemic can be described as very one-dimensional, particularly in Germany. At the start of the pandemic, it was assumed that they contribute heavily to the spread of the virus through asymptomatic infections and would endanger elderly people in their own families. The closure of daycare centres and schools in Germany and Ghana took place at nearly the same time in mid-March 2020. Particularly in Germany, the media focus then shifted to parents, especially mothers, who expressed their inability to reconcile the responsibilities of working at home, homeschooling and childcare (Pelizäus/Heinz 2020: 14). As

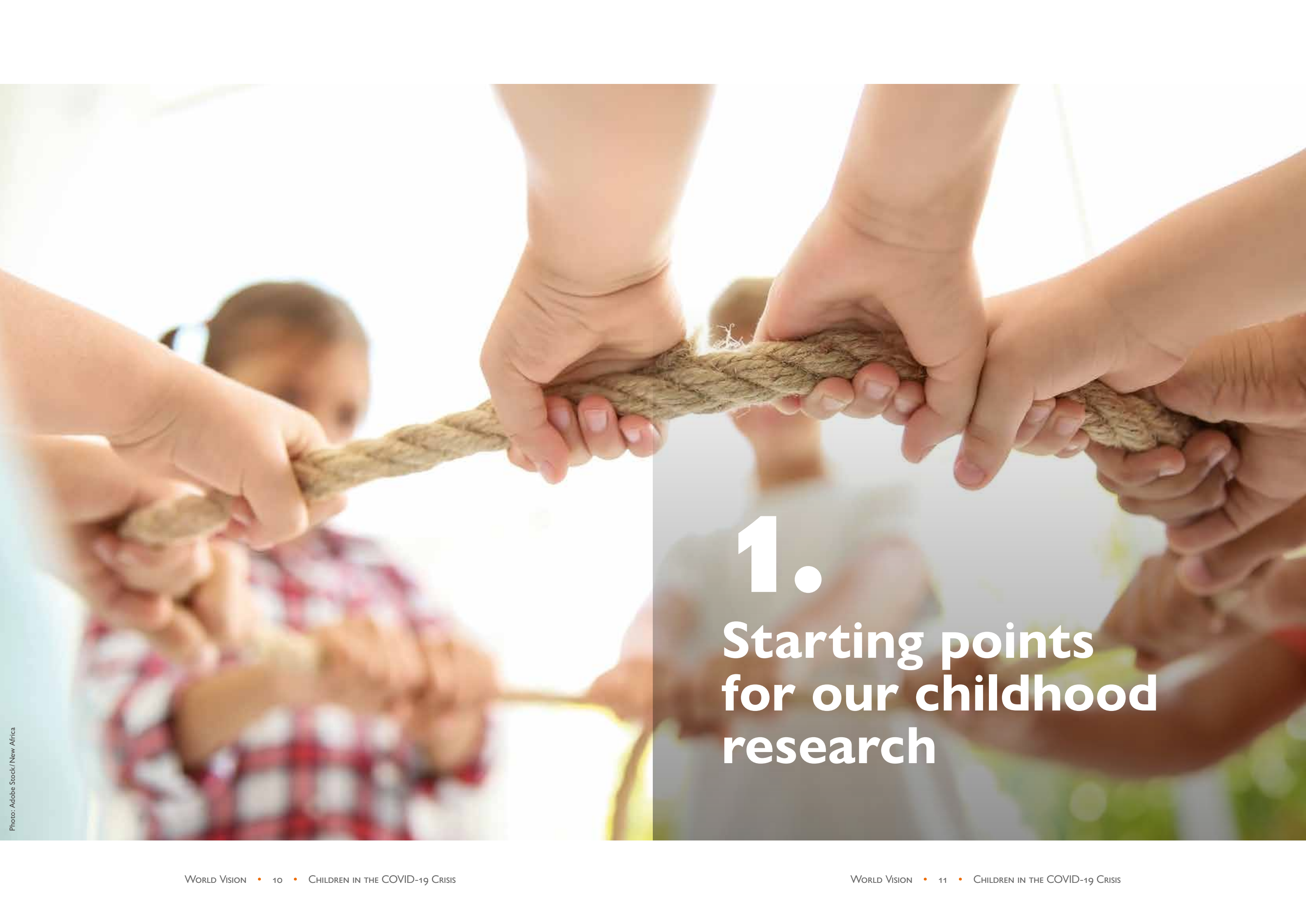
a result, children were subsequently viewed as an object of parental concern that conflicts with their professional lives. In summer, it became generally accepted in Germany that children do not transmit the virus to an increased degree and that there is no great danger involved with schools and daycare centres as their most significant places of contact. Around this time, questions arose concerning what degree of contact and hygiene rules are reasonable and feasible for children; at the same time, images circulated of older youths and young adults gathering in public and apparently not complying with the rules. In this context, the perception of children and young people in the pandemic fostered the assumption that they would not contribute to curbing the pandemic either due to their lack of maturity or due to their lack of a sense of responsibility. With renewed school and daycare closures in December 2020, concerns were finally raised that painted an equally generalised picture of children as the “COVID generation” suffering more than any other generation under the restrictions and risking a loss of education (Pelizäus/Heinz 2020: 11-12).

Children are discussed frequently in the public discourse, but their own voices have scarcely been heard so far.

But this is precisely what is needed in order to better assess mitigation efforts with respect to their feasibility and the extent of their side-effects and to review them with respect to preserving children’s rights. In this regard, it must not be ignored that children are not a homogeneous group, but rather exist in various social, economic, cultural, religious or infrastructural contexts that impact their actions. The childhood research on which this study is based examines the behaviour of children – their agency – understood as their capacity to help in decision-making and play a role in determining what happens within their living environments, as well as to participate and contribute in society. Accordingly, this study pursues the question of how children in Germany and Ghana between the ages of 6 and 16 experienced the COVID-19 pandemic and related measures in the summer and fall of 2020, what actions they had to take as a result and how they managed them.

¹ <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/germany/>

² <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/ghana/>



1.

Starting points for our childhood research

From the very start, the World Vision Children Studies have been grounded in a concept of children's well-being that examines the "social framework conditions of growing up for children from different backgrounds, beginning with the assessments and perspectives of the children themselves" (Andresen/Neumann 2018: 35). In this regard, factors such as education, material situation, health, social relationships or social security are considered in their multi-dimensional interactions in order to comprehend the complexity of children's living environments. Children's well-being must therefore be researched from a "double perspective": on the one hand, recording, describing and evaluating the living conditions of children, and on the other hand determining their subjective perception of this living environment (Andresen/Neumann 2018: 35). Our childhood research follows the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child resolved in 1989 and ratified by Germany in 1992, which ascribes great significance to the participation of children along with their rights to protection and support. This means that they are surveyed as providers of information and experts concerning their living environments, instead of obtaining information about them from their care providers. Our research is aimed at making the experiences and perspectives of children visible, particularly if these are scarcely considered in the current political and academic discourse.

Academic debate concerning the biographical and social phase of childhood has undergone a decisive transformation in the past 30 years: While children were perceived as passive learners of an "adult culture" into the 1980s, this focus shifted in the 1990s to the role children play as social actors in shaping their society (Corsaro 1996; Honig 2009; Mayall 2001) and how they "express their own interests and needs through their decisions and actions" (Wihstutz 2019: 28). This constructivist perspective examines how the experience of being a child is rendered tangible through specific practices and routines (see James/Prout 1990; James/Jenks & Prout 1998). 'Child' is a binary category which results from the intergenerational dichotomy with the category of 'adult' or in the family context of the 'parent' (Honig 2017). Nevertheless, understanding childhood and adulthood as interrelated categories must not distract from the fact that a crucial component of childhood arises from intragenerational relationships with other children, particularly in their free time and at school. Organised recreational activities (associations, courses, music lessons, religious classes etc.) and the educational system lead to an institutionalisation of childhood (Honig 2017) resulting in highly structured daily routines.

**Children are
social actors who
contribute to
shaping society.**

Since 2010, the Children Study has followed the "Capability Approach" originated by Martha Nussbaum, which examines people's capability to achieve and opportunities for action within their living contexts (Andresen/Hurrelmann & Fegter 2010; Fegter/Richter 2013). This approach poses the question of "capabilities and opportunities for self-determination" (Andresen/Neumann 2018: 43) which develop within important social relationships to parents and friends and are framed by the formal and informal institutions of school and free time (ibid. 44). However, it is necessary to critically examine to what extent this concept entails a "Westernization of childhood" (Bühler-Niederberger 2011) and neglects other constellations of childhood that could be relevant for contexts in Ghana. Childhood research is often permeated by a normative Eurocentric perspective which portrays the development of children outside the "Western world" as deficient (Oppong 2015: 28). A similar assertion is also expressed by Matsumoto and Juang (2004: 172): "Westerners judge people from other cultures (and minorities within their own countries) in terms of how closely they resemble Westerners, thereby placing themselves at a relatively superior level of development." Following Teo (2008: 57) we can speak of "epistemological violence" when concepts and assumptions developed in a Western context are transferred to contexts outside Europe without reflection and the interpretation of the collected data conceives of these children as 'others' who fail to fulfil a set standard. Oppong (2015: 29) also argues that deviations from the Eurocentric standard in African contexts are interpreted as deficiencies due to poverty, but are actually the result of unsuitable concepts and involve an inherent pressure to adapt to this standard.

In the existing research on childhood in Ghana, frequent reference is made to the fact that different family constellations must be considered which vary from the European small family context. The influence of extended family in which raising children is a communal task can be considered significant particularly for rural regions, while in urban environments, nuclear families and small families have already become widespread (Hosny et al. 2020: 3522; Amos 2013), which corresponds to the family constellations of most of the children interviewed in this study. Although the population in Ghana can be understood as highly heterogeneous due to varying ethnicities, languages and religions, there are overarching values of mutual assistance, reciprocal obligation and the difficult to summarise concept of "obedience" (in terms

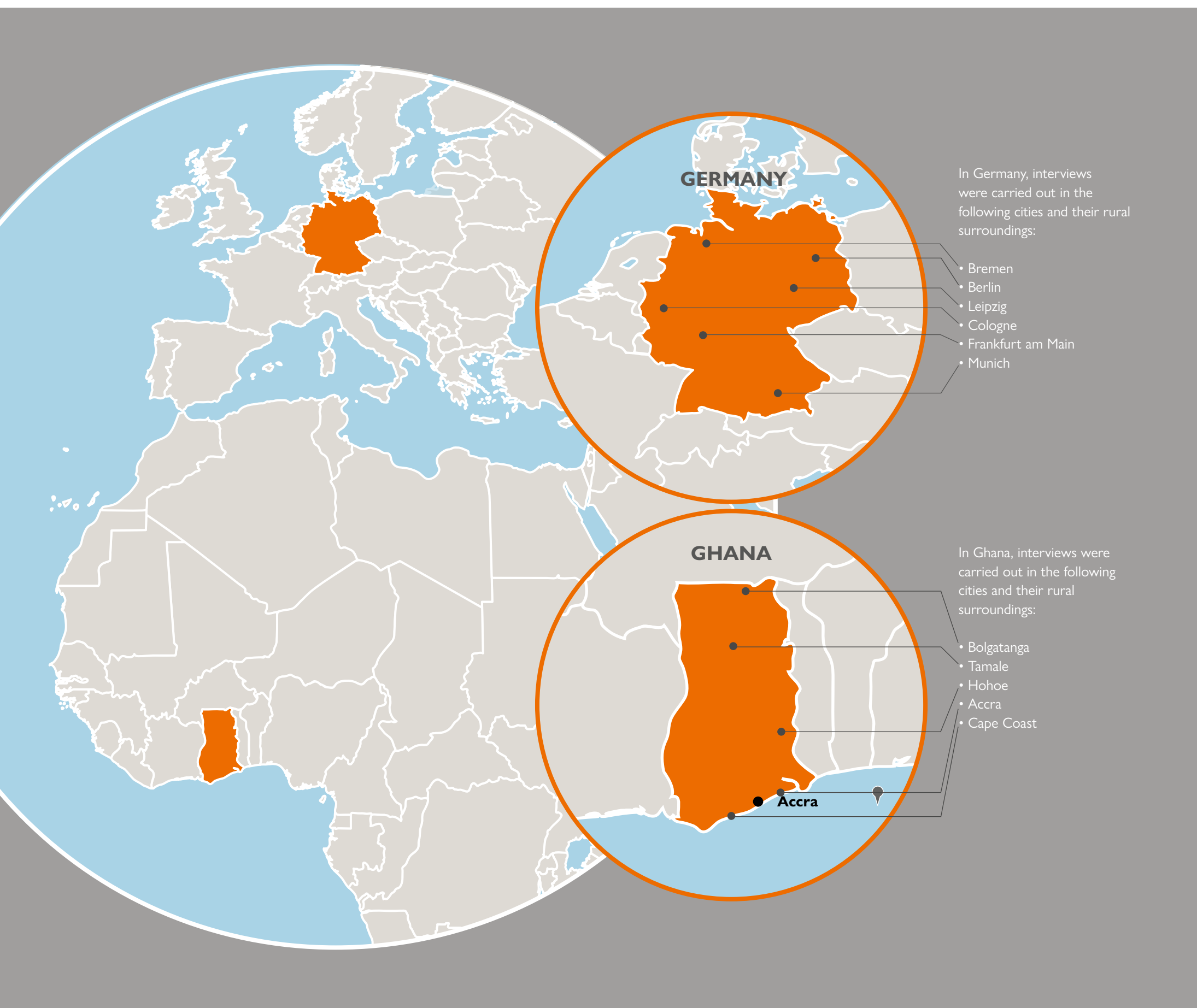


of adherence, subordination and adjustment to a community) which structure social relationships (Hosny et al. 2020: 3522 with reference to Twum-Danso Imoh 2013). In daily life, this is demonstrated by the fact that children take on family responsibilities in the household or pursue gainful employment depending on their age and abilities (Hosny et al. 2020: 3526). Twum-Danso Imoh and Okyere (2020: 6) argument that the 'western concept' which views children's participation as a 'voice' (that is, an explicit expression of their perspectives, co-determination and involvement) overlooks the fact that children in West African countries achieve their social participation through

their labour contributions in and for the family and also gain co-determination in this context. "Children's labour contributions can enhance their status in the family and community and facilitate their ability to participate in decision-making" (ibid. 5). In their empirical study on children in Ghana and Nigeria, Twum-Danso Imoh and Okyere show that clear age categories which are used in 'Western societies' to differentiate stages of development are not relevant here to the same degree, and that co-determination and participation depend rather on whether children take on responsibility and are thereby recognised as "people who have earned the right to be consulted" (ibid. 5).



2. Sample group and methods



Between June and September 2020 in Germany and Ghana, 15 interviews were conducted in each country with children and youths between the ages of 6 and 16. The interviews lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours. In four cases, pairs of siblings were interviewed. Except for one interview which was conducted with a fifteen-year-old girl via video conference, all the interviews were carried out face-to-face in the children's households. Depending on the hygiene and contact rules applicable in the respective regions at the time, the interviews were always conducted in line with the statutory requirements.

The goal of the qualitative interviews was to explore topics that would later be transferred into the forms for the quantitative survey. For this reason, the sampling explicitly aimed to interview children from a wide range of different social groups. Various large cities were selected in different regions of both countries where interviews were conducted and from which trips were made to rural areas for the purpose of interviews. In Germany, the study was carried out in the cities of Bremen, Berlin, Leipzig, Cologne, Munich, Frankfurt and the surrounding rural areas. In Ghana, the study was carried out in the cities of Accra, Cape Coast, Tamale, Bolgatanga, Hohoe and rural areas. The sample also included various ethnic groups. In Germany, seven cases involved a migrant background (Turkish, Polish, Greek, Italian, Pakistani). All children were interviewed in German according to their language abilities. The children who were interviewed in Ghana belong to the ethnic groups of Ga, Akan, Kasin, Ewe, Gurma, Ga-Adangbe and Mole Dagbani. Interviews were conducted in the languages of English, Ewe, Fante, Ga and Gurma. English was spoken primarily during the interviews, but children switched to a different language at times in order to provide additional explanations. For the purpose of anonymisation, the children were asked to choose a first name under which they wished to be quoted. Many children in Ghana chose acronyms (such as QZN) that are either composed of the initials of multiple first names or are a transliteration of names from their respective language.

An interview guideline with equivalent meaning was used for all interviews; this was developed in collaboration between World Vision employees in Germany and Ghana and translated into the different languages. The interview guideline included episodic/narrative questions, conceptual/semantic questions and projective questions in order to explore the research topic in as much depth and from as many perspectives as possible. In addition, stimulus material was prepared to help the children and youths during the interviews when putting their thoughts and feelings into words. For the series of questions about the COVID-19 pandemic, we used picture cards that made use of emojis to portray different emotions and activities that structure daily routines.



3.

What do children know about the pandemic and how do they explain the pandemic to themselves?

The pandemic itself and the measures taken to curb the pandemic affect different groups of the population in very different ways (Mairhofer et al. 2020: 8). In Germany, it is considered a reliable state of research that children rarely develop severe symptoms from a COVID-19 infection and have a very low probability of dying from this illness. On a global perspective, it must be assumed that children from disadvantaged populations groups in Sub-Saharan Africa have a greater risk of falling ill and dying from global infectious diseases since the healthcare system is less equipped and ongoing conflicts and humanitarian crisis negatively impact the provision of healthcare (Coker et al. 2020: 2). In both countries, COVID-19 is perceived by children as a potentially deadly infectious disease without excluding their own generation from this risk. The children interviewed were able to position this knowledge in connection with various measures adopted to curb the pandemic and recognise the necessity of these measures. None of them doubted the existence of the virus or the fundamental usefulness of the hygiene and contact measures.

“(It’s not called) coronavirus, it’s COVID-19. Before that there was the SARS virus. And that is very contagious. I know what the symptoms are: Runny nose, coughing and fever.”

Benny, 9 years old, Germany

„It is a deadly disease and then some of the symptoms are cough, difficult in breathing, sneezing, sore throat. And then if you want to prevent yourself, you have to wash your hands with soap under running water for at least twenty seconds and use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser not below 70%.”

PP, 8 years old, Ghana

However, a significant difference is evident between Germany and Ghana when it comes to the importance of the containment measures for the well-being of the children. While the children interviewed in Germany tended to discuss the risk of illness in regard to their older relatives or those with pre-existing conditions (see further below), children in Ghana also refer to children’s risk of dying and also reflect on the side effects of the containment measures. Twelve-year-old JA says that she is worried: “Now some children are not supposed to die because of the Covid-19. They have to live and see the world.

Depending on their living conditions, children are threatened by the secondary consequences of lockdown to varying degrees.

But because of it people are dying. Children are dying.” Fifteen-year-old Tiana also answers similarly that she is concerned about the elderly and children: “Yes because maybe the aged their immune system aren’t strong they get infected by the virus and then the infants too.” Tiana also says that isolation could severely affect some children: “They will be lonely. They will be only left in their room. They will say nobody should go near to them. They will be bored. They can even commit suicide.” In Ghana, a social and economic lockdown can increase the vulnerability of many children due to the loss of household income and poor access to healthcare (Coker et al. 2020: 2; UNICEF 2020: 8), if measures for the prevention, immunisation and treatment of other potentially life-threatening diseases such as tuberculosis, measles, HIV, malaria etc.

are interrupted, leading to a rise in mortality from these causes (Quar- tey 2020: 3; Coker et al. 2020: 3). It can also be assumed that school closures and the corresponding lack of school meals can have a negative effect on the nutritional condition of undernourished children (Coker et al. 2020: 6; UNICEF 2020: 8-9). Nevertheless, in Germany it has also been demonstrated that the lack of school meals has a very negative impact on children who do not receive any warm meals in their families or who do not receive ade-

quate nutrition (Billanitsch 2020), although this was not expressed in our interviews.

Characteristically for the different social structures in the two countries examined, more children in Ghana than in Germany reflect on the relationship between their family’s financial situation and the opportunities of protecting themselves against COVID-19. PP (8 years old) refers to the necessity of using disinfectants with a certain level of quality that are more costly. Tiana (15 years old, Ghana) also explains that there are counterfeit disinfectants in circulation which poorer people are forced to buy because they cannot afford high-quality disinfectants from pharmacies. She adds that proper hand washing is an alternative, although this is not always possible in Ghana: “Maybe when travelling and you don’t have water and soap you just have to sanitise your hands.” This demonstrates the major significance that many children in Ghana attribute to the provision of so-called “Veronica Buck- ets”. These are transportable water buckets with a tap making it possible for people to wash their hands where there are no adequate sanitary facilities. Some children

emphasize that schools must be equipped with “Veron- ica Buckets” and a supply of masks in order to make it safe to attend school. With respect to international aid, the provision of hygiene products and masks was also viewed as highly important for combatting the pandemic. In some interviews, children talk about the fact that the lockdown could worsen the nutrition situation as a sec- ondary effect, and therefore food must also be provided by Ghana’s government and aid organisations. Fifteen- year-old Bless reflects that, especially for poor social strata, the lockdown itself poses a risk that can be just as deadly as the virus:

“It is a very dangerous thing. You might not know when it will catch up with you or you might not know whether you are going to recover or die of it. So, I think the only

remedy is for you to stay at home, but you can die of hunger as well.”

Bless, 15 years old, Ghana

Given the thematic orientation of the 5th World Vision Children Study on how children engage with religious living environments, the sample includes many children who are nominal adherents of a religion and several children who also practice their religion seriously. Many of the religious children in both countries state that they pray for the pan- demic to end and for the health of their family and friends. Thirteen-year-old Muslim Natascha from Germany suffers from isolation in lockdown; at the end of the interview, she says “Corona is killing me”. Prayer is a way for her to calm down, “alone time with God” that lets her find peace. She found it natural to ask God for help against the pandemic in



Photo: World Vision



Photo: Shutterstock/Kwane Amo



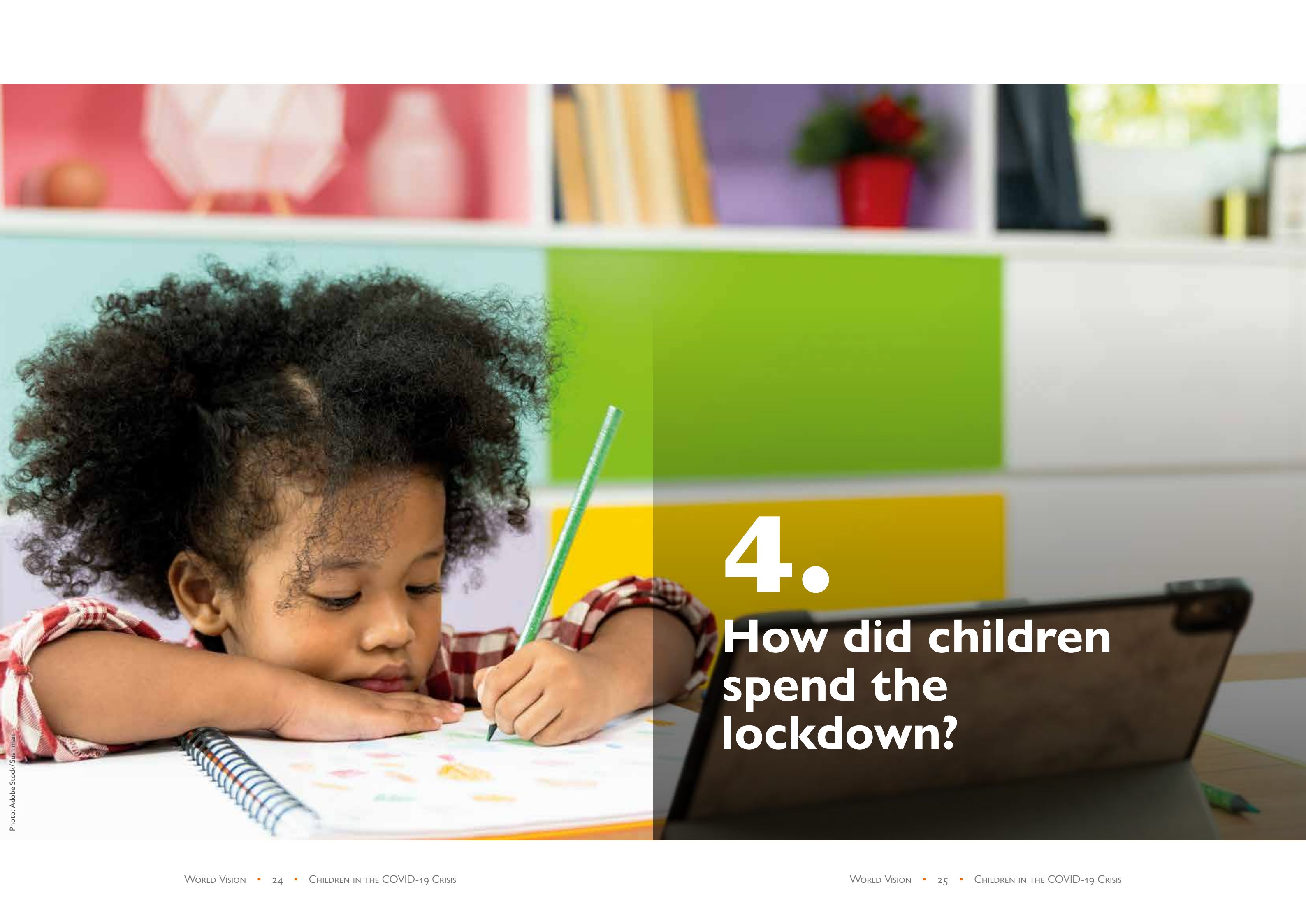
Adobe Stock/Halpoint

her prayers. Fourteen-year-old Muslim Kerem also “often prayed that it would go away, that everyone would get well”. Some children in Germany miss the meetings in their faith communities, like Vanessa (11 years old, Catholic). If she were able to decide, she would allow religious services with restrictions – face masks, low numbers of people. She describes a certain intensification of her faith during the lockdown period: “My faith was – I believe – I bit stronger. But I didn’t pray for homeschooling to be over quickly. I just prayed that my family or friends wouldn’t get coronavirus.” However, it is striking that particularly in Germany, children who describe themselves as religious and practice a religion do not place the pandemic in connection with their ideas about God and faith practices; in contrast, they reject a connection. One example of this is the interview with sixteen-year-old Peter. He belongs to the Greek Orthodox faith and values the orthodox tradition as a form of togetherness. Peter is highly interested in politics and he is familiar with hygiene measures since his mother was a nurse. In his view, the pandemic can only be tackled through medical initiatives. He emphasises: “I didn’t really pray for it to go away. And I wasn’t really in the church during COVID either. Not at all. That’s why I believe – there was zero connection between COVID and religion.”

In contrast to Germany, invoking religious patterns of interpretation in everyday life is not unusual for the social context of Ghana, since most people in Ghana identify as religious. Many of the children interviewed in Ghana actively practice prayer and seek direct contact with God in this context as a way to overcome the pandemic. Across religions and denominations, children said that they prayed against the virus. For example, ten-year-old Muslim QZN says: “Every time I prayed to God to take this

pandemic.” In contrast to the interviews with children in Germany, direct incentives for action and value orientations are derived from faith. Some of the children interviewed in Ghana interpret the pandemic as a punishment or test from God to see whether people are capable of changing their behaviours. For example, fifteen-year-old Tiana, who belongs to an evangelical community, says: “Because of our sins maybe that is why the Corona came. He just has to forgive us and send it back.” Twelve-year-old Catholic IAD also believes that God sent the virus to test people: “Maybe it might be true that God has sent it to see those who are righteous to him.” In Germany, only one child refers to the interpretation of the pandemic as a test. Fourteen-year-old Muslim Susan says: “Maybe it’s just a test of how humanity can deal with it. How they will control it.” In some interviews with the children from Ghana, the idea of the virus as a punishment is also associated with a social criticism of exploitative ways of life and corruption. The virus can kill, says twelve-year-old Davida, who belongs to an evangelical community, and it doesn’t differentiate between the poor and the rich: “It can kill people.[...] The virus don’t know whether you are rich or you are not rich.” Similarly, the pandemic can be understood as an opportunity of finding a path to a life that pleases God. JA, 12 years old and member of a charismatic congregation, sees this as a call for change: “This Coronavirus is because of some bad things we do that is why God brought this to change the world. To get his people back from evildoing.” Among the children we interviewed in Ghana (as well as the German Muslims Susan), however, the wide-spread interpretation of COVID as a punishment or test from God does not lead to a rejection of hygiene measures or scientific interpretations of the virus’s course.¹

¹ While a current study observes a correlation between certain free church denominations and skepticism against government measures (Pollack 2021), this was not found in our study. Instead, the plurality of free church and evangelical communities was demonstrated here (Pollack 2021).



4.

How did children spend the lockdown?

Everyday family routines in the pandemic under the conditions of lockdown and homeschooling were very similar in Germany and Ghana. Differences with respect to which family members are at home and how they spend their time are instead the result of the parents' specific professions. Some parents had to keep going to work and left their children alone at home or with siblings. In both countries, children were interviewed who accompanied their parents to work. A large proportion of the children in both countries spent multiple months at home with one or both parents, since they were not able to work or had to work from home.

Especially in the German-language literature, it is noted that child support and education, due to the stronger involvement of women in family care work, is primarily provided by mothers, who often carry out extra work in the form of cooking, shopping and cleaning in addition to their own professional activity and homeschooling (see for example Langmeyer et al. 2020; Schröder et al. 2020; Andresen et al. 2020a and 2020b; Bünning et al. 2020; Müller et al. 2020). In line with expectations, the DJI study "Being a child in the age of coronavirus" demonstrates for Germany that direct contact between parents and children has intensified, while contact with friends has decreased, also causing children to experience feelings of loneliness (Langmeyer et al. 2020: 25).

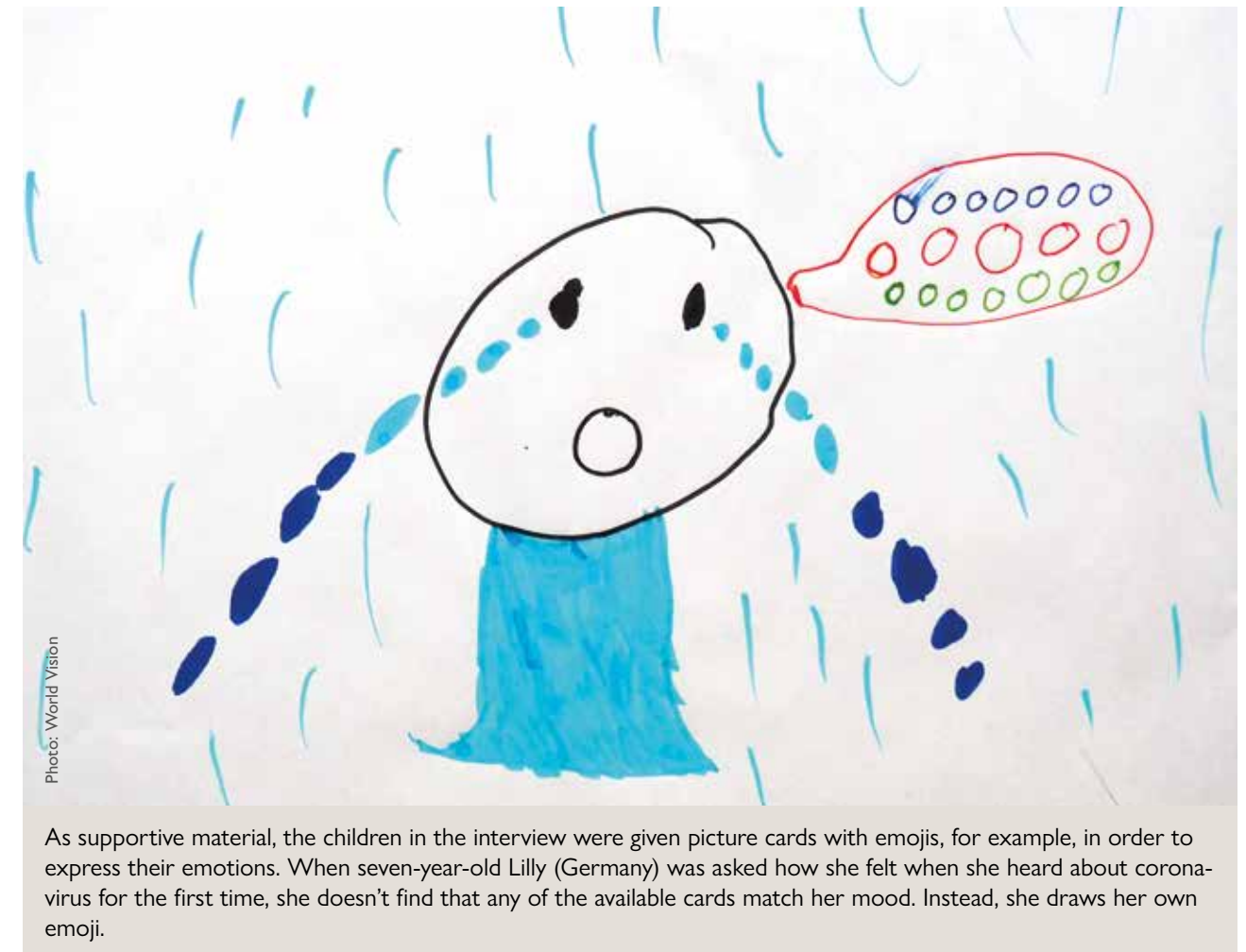
Having more time with their parents was experienced as thoroughly positive by many of the children interviewed. Fifteen-year-old Bless from Ghana, who lives together with his single mother and his brother, emphasizes that although he is worried about the collapsing economy and the lack of education, he enjoys the fact that his mother, who works as a teacher, is now able to spend more time at home. **"Mostly when we go to school, she teaches in the SHS¹. She doesn't really come home early. Around four, five o'clock and when its night time she feel stressed and lazy so she gets to bed early. But now we kind of have our family time mostly."** Twelve-year-old Davida also says that her mother, who is no longer able to perform her work in a hotel during the pandemic, now spends more time with her, which was otherwise not possible in the stressful daily routine of school and work: **"My mum now spends time with me."** In the past, it was always

just: **"Hurry up and let's go. I want to go work and you to go to school."** Many children in Germany also stated very similarly that they enjoyed spending more time with their parents at the start of lockdown, for example eleven-year-old Isabel, who was now regularly able to see her father who lives separately from the family, since he was working short-time. Thirteen-year-old twins Maya and Finn also say that they were able to spend more time with their parents because they were working at home and they found this nice particularly at the beginning. In the interviews from both countries, it is apparent that pre-pandemic everyday life for many families was very strenuous due to timing requirements and the highly regulated daily routine as a result of work and education. But when family time, gainful employment and education are forced to take place at home because of lockdown and contact with individuals outside the household are scarcely possible, this can also give rise to new strains. In both investigated countries, the interviews indicate that the increased

amount of time spent at home was primarily taken up by media consumption (TV/streaming, mobile phone, tablet/computer, digital games, audio books), and less frequently by reading and playing games. Langmeyer et al. (2020: 25) talk about children experiencing a "blurring of school time and free time" because education was moved to their homes and destructured.

For all of the interviewed children, the initial excitement about additional free time gave way to disillusionment that hardly any activities are allowed. Some children were still allowed or able to meet friends with whom they spend their time, primarily outdoors with ball games, walking or riding bicycles. However, a lack of permitted activities combined with increasing pressure of managing homeschooling "having to learn something" led to frustration and inactivity among many children. "Being lazy" or "relaxing" was then perceived only as a burdensome condition, not as a way to rest, and gave way to major motivation problems with respect to learning at home. **"Because I was really just angry and annoyed that we can only sit around at home and we're not allowed to go out anymore. And we can't do anything with friends anymore. We can't go to school. There's no riding lessons. Just lying around, lazing on the couch and watching Tik Tok."** Isabel, 11 years old, Germany

**During
homeschooling,
many children
experience a
blurring of their
education and free
time that can cause
them stress.**



As supportive material, the children in the interview were given picture cards with emojis, for example, in order to express their emotions. When seven-year-old Lilly (Germany) was asked how she felt when she heard about coronavirus for the first time, she doesn't find that any of the available cards match her mood. Instead, she draws her own emoji.

"Because school is not there. I feel sad then here am sitting relaxing."
QZN, 10 years old, Ghana

The current research for Germany and Ghana assumes that lockdown is even more stressful for families to the extent that their financial situation has worsened during the pandemic, and that the already existing social inequalities are becoming more pronounced (Andresen et al. 2020b: 22; Darko 2020). It is assumed that families which are subject to the severest strain experience an increase in existential fears and conflict between the family members (Kelly/Hansel 2020; Sistovaris et al. 2020; The Alliance 2020). In our interviews, none of the children reported additional financial problems for their family during the pandemic², but rather tensions resulting from the fact that during lockdown, too many family members have to spend time together in a limited space without the possibility of avoiding one another.

Twelve-year-old twins Midas and Ally from Germany say that the constant presence of all family members in a small flat was very stressful for everyone: **"Our father works in our room. Because we don't have a separate office. And I already have to share my room with this guy [points to her brother]. But now I also have to share it with my father."** Ally feels forced out of her own room by her father and his need for a quiet place to work. In addition, there were constant fights between Ally and Midas, which caused stress particularly for their mother. Midas says: **"Horrible. Mum doesn't want us to be at home anymore. Because of coronavirus."** Seven-year-old Lilly says that her friends want to pick her up to go play, but her grandmother drove them away: **"And then they were out front by the fence. And they asked if I could play with them. And then Grandma yelled at them and said 'Go away'. She is just trying to protect me. But she doesn't need to yell, does she?"** Some children experienced tensions and conflict in public

¹ Senior High School

² It can be assumed that parents avoid taking with children about these problematic situations or that the interviewed households had not yet experienced any significant loss of income at the time of the interviews in summer 2020 or were able to compensate for such losses.

Daily routine during lockdown

Vanessa, 12 years old, from Germany

- Morning:**
- Learning with schoolbooks and work materials
 - Piano lesson
- During the day:**
- Housework (tidying, washing up)
 - Meet friends
 - Go to the playground with little brother
 - Cycling
- Evening:**
- Tidying
 - Drawing
 - Tablet
- In between:**
- Watch TV whenever her favorite series are on

QZN, 10 years old, from Ghana

- Morning:**
- Housework (cleaning)
 - Learning with schoolbooks and work materials
- During the day:**
- Lesson with private teacher
 - Meet friends
 - Play ball games with brother
- Evening:**
- Watch cartoons
 - Drawing
- In between:**
- Use mobile phone

spaces as well. For instance, thirteen-year-old Natascha was criticised by elderly people she didn't know for not wearing a mask outside:

“And then there were three older people – well, an older man and two older women. And then they said “Ugh, young people these days are a real shame...dangerous for elderly people” – and I responded “Hey, what do you mean? Can you explain that to me” – and he said “Well you're not wearing a face mask, so you could give us COVID” – and then I said “Wait a second”, I stood up for myself because I don't want anyone to speak to me like that. Seriously. Because I don't have COVID. No one in my family has COVID. If my mother has no problem with me not wearing a face mask outside, why do you have a problem with it? You have no right to talk to me that way. You're not one of my relatives who would say something like that. As long as I follow the rules and do that in supermarkets and everything, why do you have a problem with the fact that I'm not wearing one now?”

Natascha, 13 years old, Germany

Some children from Ghana also talk about conflict and tension, but this relates more to situations within their families. For example, twelve-year-old IAD says: “Some-times like your siblings will make you angry in the house. When you go to school your friends will make you happy and you forget about it.” As IAD emphasises, contact with

other children outside of their own family is an important resource for managing family conflicts and experiencing their own identity through different social relationships. Particularly in Ghana, current research says that the reduction of contacts outside the home can have a negative impact on the mental health of children and young people (Darko 2020: 2; UNICEF 2020: 3). A representative survey in Ghana has shown that approximately half of households have experienced emotional distress for children as a result of lockdown. Almost 80% state that their children miss school and their friends, and the same number of households report that their children are worried because of the pandemic (UNICEF 2020: 4). In Germany as well, the lack of contacts outside the household is discussed as a risk, in particular for children in vulnerable living situations. A study of the DJI (Langmeyer et al. 2020) conducted a survey of youth welfare offices in April and May 2020 which found that although no increase in endangerment to child welfare was reported, youth welfare offices nevertheless assume that this is due to the interruption of communication channels as a result of closing daycare centres and school, as these are the most important interfaces for reporting suspected cases (ibid. 5). Other players involved in the area of child protection also assume that the restrictions of contact and the isolation of households lead to an increase in tension and violence within families (see Fegert et al. 2020; German Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) 2020;

Independent representative for issues of child sexual abuse 2020). The research in Ghana also focuses attention on the fact that lockdowns and homeschooling can endanger children with respect to violence at home. It is estimated that approximately one in every five children in Ghana lives in a household where physical punishment is used, and that this has increased in the course of the pandemic (UNICEF 2020: 5). None of the children we interviewed gave occasion to suspect that their family conflicts in lockdown constituted a potential endangerment to child welfare, which is presumably also connected with the fact that families under such strain would not consent to an interview. Nevertheless, many of the interviewed children reported a high degree of distress due to the boredom and low levels of activity during lockdown, which does not match their usual way of life and their specific developmental needs. The largest challenge for most families is to find activities that are compatible with the contact rules in order to bridge the waiting period until the end of lockdown and the reopening of schools and recreational facilities. With respect to the organisation of housework, education and gainful employment under pandemic conditions, the interviewed children report a wide range of experiences. For children in Germany and Ghana, the suspension of classroom teaching means that a large component of their daily lives become deregulated and they have to restructure this newly available time either independently or together with their family members. Most

of the children's activities were carried out in their house or flat or were limited to outdoor activities that complied with the applicable hygiene and contact rules.

When describing their daily routine during lockdown and home schooling, they demonstrated the differing involvement of children in housework between Germany and Ghana. Nearly all of the children interviewed in Ghana, regardless of their family's socioeconomic class, described activities in the household such as cleaning, washing, cooking or activities outside the household such as fetching water, agricultural tasks or market tasks as self-evident elements of (pre-pandemic) daily life that contribute to the function of family life. Although the literature assumes that boys and girls carry out different activities in line with gendered socialisation (Mariwah et al. 2011: 21), no differences could be found within our sample in this regard. In the interview with the ten-year-old QZN from Ghana (whose family has a domestic worker), it can be seen how he structures his daily routine through his tasks in the household, learning and his interests. “I learn with my Teacher in the day, I paint in the evening, I do house cleaning in the morning, I eat in the morning, evening, afternoon.” Fourteen-year-old FAG also says that she spent her time learning, eating and doing housework: “This is my duty. I always clean the house.” These activities are judged very differently among the children. Most children conceive of housework as a self-evident element



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of their daily life and some say that they enjoy it. On the other hand, twelve-year-old IAD says that she hardly had any time for herself before the pandemic since her daily routine was completely structured by school lessons, homework and housework. “Before Corona, I did not have free time because if you come back from school [...] you are coming to the store or you go home. Do my house chores or do my homework.” She was only able to meet her friends at school and has no opportunities of arranging her time freely since the pandemic. A few of the children interviewed in Ghana also work with family members outside their homes, which can be difficult to reconcile with their homeschooling. For example, eight-year-old PP says that her daily life during the pandemic is primarily structured based on when her mother needs her help with buying or selling at the market and she can use the rest of the time for learning or her free time.

The integration in family work and gainful employment constitutes a significant difference between the children interviewed in Ghana and Germany, although in our sample it cannot be determined that these activities are fundamentally disadvantageous for the children. If sufficient time remains for their own interests and education, they can contribute to structuring daily life especially during the pandemic. This explains the fact that children in Germany who previously had scarcely any responsibilities in the household are increasingly taking on tasks during the pandemic.

“Well, I’ve learned a lot. Because we were given a lot of tasks. Every now and then I took the bike to go shopping. Cleaned up. Helped my parents in the kitchen.”
Susan, 14 years old, Germany

“If I didn’t have anything else to do, I cleaned my room.”
Kerem, 14 years old, Germany

“I started doing the laundry. Hanging it up. Started cleaning my room. Then I – we divided the tasks. Me and my mother clean my room, the hallway and bathroom. My stepfather takes care of the living room and kitchen.”
Natascha, 13 years old, Germany

In the German discourse concerning the difficulty of reconciling gainful employment and homeschooling or child-care, it is assumed that this double burden is taken on by mothers in most cases. In this context, little attention is given to the fact that older children are involved in child-care within some families and have to balance this task with their learning and relaxation time. This experience is shared by twelve-year-old Vanessa, who lives in Germany, and fifteen-year-old Tiana, who lives in Ghana:

“My brother was always getting on my nerves and wanted to play with me early in the morning. And then he was always annoying me. So I was unable to do any school-work, I always had to play with him. Then I had to do my schoolwork in the evening too if I wasn’t finished.”
Vanessa, 12 years old, Germany

“I am always in the room and most of my siblings disturb me when learning online. So sometimes I just have to maybe sack them out of the room for them to go and play outside for me to have a peaceful learning.”
Tiana, 15 years old, Ghana

When gainful employment and education are relocated into homes, the problems that arise when juggling their professional responsibilities may be passed on from parents to their children, who then have to give up their bedroom for use as an office, take care of younger siblings or help out with housework and gainful employment. Our study indicates that children make a contribution to the increased care work in households, although the level of this contribution varies considerably from case to case, and that children cannot merely be viewed as passive objects who receive education and care from their parents or mothers. In our interviews, the level of priority which is given to the education and recreation of children within family life under pandemic conditions and the resources which are available can be seen as a decisive factor for when and how homeschooling can actually take place. In contrast to classroom teaching which specifies the time periods for learning, homeschooling can be treated as less important than the child’s other tasks depending on the family situation, which consequently means that the child is no longer able to dedicate their full energy and concentration to learning at home.

The term “care” refers to the complex interplay of activities related to support and emotional attention which make up family life. Apart from caring for someone, the concept of care also includes caring about someone (Ungerson 2006: 277). Therefore, care is a “relationship-oriented activity” (Brückner 2011: 78l) for which actions are oriented towards other people who are seen as important. In general, the work of care is understood more as the activity of parents, particularly mothers, on behalf of their children. However, our interviews demonstrate that concern for the health of family members and related actions can also be performed by children and youths. It is striking that in Ghana, only one child mentions a parent staying at home due to a pre-existing condition, while four children in Germany explicitly refer to ‘people of risk’ in their household, and with other children it is not entirely clear whether the parents are generally concerned

or have pre-existing conditions. This could be a coincidence, but it can also be assumed that risk groups and the resulting behaviours are perceived differently in the two countries. Only the German sample includes children who restrict their contact and hygiene behaviour beyond the recommended behaviour guidelines in order to protect family members.

“Well before the school holidays we had, I think, another month of classes. But I couldn’t go yet because my mother was a risk patient and that’s why I had a certificate and it wasn’t mandatory for me to go.”
Kerem, 14 years old, Germany

“People were allowed to go back to school. Only I wasn’t allowed to go because [my mother] was sick”
Natascha, 13 years old, Germany
“Of course, I was always at home in spite of that. My mother is also a risk patient. Of course I didn’t want to contribute any risk. [...] I normally am the kind of person who goes out. This was not a very nice time for me. [...] I missed my friends. For example, my aunt, we didn’t see each other. My family. My friends. Going out.”
Mehmet, 16 years old, Germany

Caring about and for persons of risk at home constitutes a crucial aspect of the care work performed by children, which is arranged between children and parents.

Children perform care work in their families and protect family members against infection by consistently complying with hygiene and contact rules.

Sixteen-year-old Peter says that his mother was very worried that he would “spread the virus in the flat” by not wearing his mask correctly or not washing his hands. It was important for him to relieve his mother of these concerns by showing her that she can trust him to comply with her rules. On the other hand, fourteen-year-old Kerem says that because he was afraid for his mother, he made sure that she followed the hygiene rules: “I was a bit afraid for my mother. I was just worried about her. Made sure that she washed her hands and didn’t touch things and all that.” Sixteen-year-old Mehmet also says that he stopped meeting his friends, since he could otherwise potentially be guilty for infecting his mother: “If I had done that and then my mother had COVID because of me, then I would also be – if anything happened to her, I would always feel it was because of me.”

These interviews clearly demonstrate that children bear a high degree of responsibility for protecting their families in the way they handle hygiene and contact. The compliance of rules and routines when dealing with people

outside the household offers security when taking action in the pandemic and can help to balance stress with respect to the fear of infection. At the same time, it must also be noted that children who belong to a risk group themselves, or who have members of a risk group in their household, experience a new form of inequality if they are not able to participate in contact opportunities to the same extent as other children and become even more isolated as a result.



5.

How did children experience homeschooling?

All the interviewed children are sorry not to be able to go to school during lockdown. In the interviews with German children, the most important reason given is generally the inability to meet with friends. When asked how he felt when schools were closed, seven-year-old Luka from Germany says: **“That was lousy.”** He explains: **“I couldn’t see my friends. I couldn’t play with them.”** On the other hand, children in Ghana frequently state that the biggest disadvantage of school closures was that they couldn’t learn enough without classroom teaching. This was expressed by thirteen-year-old Elizabeth: **“Sometimes I feel lazy to learn at home. But when I go to school, I learn.”** In the other responses concerning experiences with homeschooling, it becomes clear that the primary concerns voiced by each group of interviewed children are also important to the other group (see more on this below).

Some children were able to see a positive side to the school closures that primarily involved slowing down and deconstructing their everyday lives. These children found it relaxing to have more time for themselves, to be able to structure their time themselves and to sleep in longer (this was exclusively mentioned in Germany). One child in the German sample also stated that she didn’t feel comfortable with two teachers in her primary school classes, since they heavily criticised the students for incorrect answers. As a result, she felt relieved to have no direct contact with them because of homeschooling¹. With respect to the educational opportunities that children received in Germany and Ghana after school closures, there is a great deal of variance. The principal difference can be seen in the fact that national, free educational TV was already available in Ghana in summer and fall 2020, which most of the children interviewed were able to receive, but did not necessarily consider as very helpful. In addition, some schools also provided digital educational opportunities. According to representative data from UNICEF, approximately 39% of children at the primary level and secondary level I engaged in learning through TV programmes. Approximately 26% of these children had teaching sessions with an instructor; approximately 31% of them learned independently, approximately 20% did work assigned by their instructors at home and approximately 15% used digital apps (UNICEF 2020: 6). Digital educational offerings

cannot be used comprehensively due to the frequent lack of internet access or lack of devices as well as insufficient knowledge in how to use them (Owusu-Fordjour et al. 2020: 96), which is confirmed by some of the children we interviewed. In the German discourse as well, this is understood as a problem for children from poorer households. This does not seem to apply to the families with interviewed, since the children had access to various devices. Only nine-year-old Benny says that he didn’t have a mobile phone or tablet of his own and primarily learned using paper materials, but was sometimes also allowed to do homework on his family’s computer. However, this situation can be attributed to Benny’s young age rather than to the financial situation of the family.

The offering and quality of homeschooling varies considerably and scarcely corresponds to the children’s needs. Many of them fear a loss of education.

Apart from educational television, the children we interviewed in Ghana frequently learned with the help of written exercises that they received from their instructors by email, app or on paper. Many children also used their workbooks and schoolbooks for homeschooling. In some cases, live digital lessons were held which the children often attend using a mobile phone or tablet. The children interviewed in Germany reported that they primarily received schoolwork via email or mail, and in some cases via online platforms and apps. Overall,

the educational opportunities seem to be highly dependent on the specific school and instructor; some children report that they received no educational opportunities or offerings at all in specific subjects during homeschooling. Live digital lessons or exchanges were held more rarely. Although there was often a theoretical possibility of contacting instructors online, many of them did not respond to questions. If digital lessons were held, there was generally just one session per week. Some younger children also reported that instructors sent voice messages. At the time of the interviews in summer 2020, some children in Germany had returned to school, but only received one lesson in alternating groups with a few classroom hours per week. Generally, the available educational opportunities during the period of school closures in Ghana is viewed very critically. Apart from the worsening of the health situation, one of the major risks considered in Ghana is that the economic situation could deteriorate. Here part of the focus is on school closures, which could limit future productivity due to the loss of learning (Quartey 2020: 5).

Even before the pandemic, the education system in Ghana faced criticism that children and young people were not being educated to their full potential due to large class sizes, a lack of teachers, a lack of materials and insufficient sanitary facilities combined with the deficient nutritional situation of some segments of the population (Aurino et al. 2020: 1). There are major concerns that the state of education could worsen through homeschooling. In Germany as well, initial studies identify the quality and success of education as a problem with homeschooling. The DJI study “Being a child in the age of coronavirus”² is based on online surveys conducted in April and May 2020 of parents of children between the ages of three and fifteen as well as children between the ages of seven and fifteen (Langmeyer et al. 2020). This study found that children had very little contact with educators and teachers in the period when they were unable to attend daycare or school (ibid. 5). In this context, the frequency of contact increased with their age. Approximately 65 of primary school-aged children had contact with their teachers via email, while this was figure was around 86 percent for secondary school-aged children (ibid. 6) and there were children in every age group who had no contact with their teachers. “The results concerning support and contact with teachers and educators suggest that so far it has been left up to parents to manage the situation in case of doubt – and if this does not work, the children have to bear most of the responsibility.” (Langmeyer et al. 2020: 25). The research in Ghana also assumes that children lack the ability to independently and effectively structure their learning process at home without becoming distracted (Owusu-Fordjour et al. 2020: 96). This was described by the children interviewed in Germany and Ghana as one of their main problems with homeschooling:

“Since the Coronavirus came and we are not going to school, I will become lazy in the subject. That is why I want us to go back to school so that I can learn so I do not forget my subjects.”
AN, 13 years old, Ghana

Midas: “Because it’s hard to learn at home than at school.”
Ally: “Because you know the mobile phone is just a few metres away. And then you can learn too – when you’re doing maths, you know it’s a calculator. So you take it as well. I used the calculator through the phone.”
Ally & Midas, 12 years old, Germany

“When I’m at home, I can’t concentrate so well. Because I know I can also do other things. But of course I had to learn. But I had other things on my mind.”
Mehmet, 16 years old, Germany

Because of their professional activity or lack of experience and knowledge, students in Ghana were scarcely able to rely on the help of their parents (Owusu-Fordjour et al. 2020: 97). Darko argues (with a view to Ghana, but this is transferrable to Germany) that a particular potential for conflict and violence could arise if children who are particularly stressed by the pandemic have to conduct homeschooling for their children without possessing the necessary professional skills (Darko 2020: 1).

The high degree of responsibility which many children bear for their own learning processes is very ambivalent. It offers them leeway to arrange their learning based on their own needs, but at the same time it requires a high degree of discipline and self-motivation. Nine-year-old Sophia from Germany says that her remote learning was primarily organised using the study app “Anton” and that she had to distribute her weekly tasks herself because her single mother (partially working from home, partially going to work) had set no rules and was only available if she had specific questions. **“So one day I always did everything for maths. Then the other day I did everything for German. The next day, it was all “ANTON” – the study app. And then I had the rest of the days off.”** Older children such as thirteen-year-old Maya also emphasise that they enjoy organising their days themselves and **“doing something for school in pajamas.”** As school closures become protracted, however, most of the children interviewed are increasingly concerned that they are not learning enough with homeschooling and will therefore not achieve the necessary level of knowledge in the end.

“When we don’t go to school we cannot learn, and we cannot do many things that we do in the school.”
Francis, 13 years old, Ghana

“If we are sitting at home, we are doing nothing. By the time we get to school we will now jump, we will not learn what we have not learnt.”
AD, 14 years old, Ghana

“I’m just afraid about – we’re in seventh year now. It keeps getting more difficult, and how are we supposed to keep up with the material if we can’t do anything?”
Ally, 13 years old, Germany

¹ It must also be considered that for students who have experienced bullying, school closures can be a relief, although bullying also occurs in digital spaces of course. None of the children we interviewed reported such experiences.

² When considering the results, it must be noted that given the survey methods, there is probably a higher percentage of parents (at least one parent in the family in 81% of the cases) have a university entrance qualification or the German Abitur (secondary school leaving certificate) (Langmeyer et al. 2020, S.: 2), which means that individuals with a higher level of education are overrepresented in the sample.

“Not all of the teachers uploaded something for us to do. For example, I didn’t do anything in French class for months. Which wasn’t great for me either, because in the next school year we – I had almost forgotten French. But I found that kind of sad.”

Anna, 15 years old, Germany

In part, the children interviewed attributed the assumption that they were suffering a loss of education through homeschooling to their difficulty staying motivated. On the other hand, after just a few weeks during which new content was primarily introduced through worksheets, schoolbooks, videos or educational TV, comprehension problems arose that could not resolve themselves. Although many children try to find answers using the internet and ask “Dr. Google”, in the words of twelve-year-old Ally, this often does not help them progress. For many children it was very frustrating that their teachers were hardly available or not available at all to answer their questions, in contrast to their classroom lessons.

“I had to prepare for the test and couldn’t ask my subject teacher any questions. [...] I was just at home practically all the time. Of course I was able to learn, but I still didn’t know much about the topics. And then there were no teachers for the subjects. So I wasn’t able to learn very well”

Mehmet, 16 years old, Germany

“Because in class, when you don’t understand something, the Master will explain it into details to you, but here they only give you homework. You copy from the book and give him the answers. If you don’t understand anything, you will only tell him that you don’t understand. The he might just record a voicemail for you, but you will not understand it much like if you are in school for him to explain it.”

IAD, 12 years old, Ghana

“There was a worksheet that said how everything went. But even still, it was hard to understand everything properly.”

Vanessa, 12 years old, Germany

“But it was hard with the teacher because she can’t talk with me and when you have to write, you understand less than when you talk.”

Kerem, 14 years old, Germany

Many children determined on their own that they need a contact person in order to acquire new educational content. ‘Talking about’ a subject is an important element of their learning processes, but this is precisely what is not

happening for all children with homeschooling. The interviewed children developed varying strategies for handling difficulties in terms of motivation and comprehension. The options they are able to use in this context depend heavily on the socioeconomic resources of the family and the individual networks of the children. Children with family members who have the time and knowledge to assist with their learning processes, and thus replace the ‘learning by dialogue’ element of classroom teaching, are in a privileged position.

“For a while there was no more school. But I felt like I was at school anyway. I also played school with Mum. I did exercises at home with her.”

Lilly, 7 years old, Germany

“I did some things on my own, and for some things the teacher just wrote ‘Watch the video’ and then it was poorly explained so I just asked my parents.”

Finn, 13 years old, Germany

“Our parents – if we have questions, they each specialise in a different subject, so to speak. My father for sciences, chemistry, physics, maths. And my mother for language or biology and that kind of thing.”

Sarah, 16 years old, Germany

In Ghana as well, some parents took on responsibility for homeschooling. Fifteen-year-old Bless, whose mother is a senior high school teacher, receives lessons from her at home. While in Ghana, the knowledge and skills of parents is considered to be decisive for their involvement in homeschooling their children (Owusu-Fordjour et al. 2020: 97; Darko 2020: 1), the German-language research also fundamentally sees the active participation of parents in educational processes as an extremely important factor for the success of their children’s education as “effects of primary origin”. This includes monitoring or assistance with the completion of homework or test preparation as well as providing motivation to learn and encouraging scholastic ambition (Solga/Dombrowski 2009: 23). The participation of parents in their children’s educational processes occurs less frequently in social strata with lower levels of education, placing these children at a disadvantage (Solga/Dombrowski 2009: 23). It can essentially be assumed that parents who are unable to assist their children with learning processes in times of regular teaching will also likely be unable to manage the heightened requirements of homeschooling. Nevertheless, in our sample it can be seen that parents with a lower level of formal education also assist with their children’s home learning, particularly in the area of primary education.



For example, the thirteen-year-old AJW from Ghana says that her mother only has a basic level of education and is a stay-at-home mum, but her mother explains to her everything that she does not understand in digital lessons or her workbooks. The parents of thirteen-year-old Elizabeth from Ghana (her father is a driver and her mother is a kindergarten teacher) also assist her with her learning at home. She enjoys that her parents now have more time for her since she is scarcely able to motivate herself on her own.

In other families, parents with a higher level of education had difficulty assisting in the homeschooling of their children during the day, as they are too busy at work or working from home. For example, this is evident in the interviews with Vanessa and Anna, who each have at least one parent with a university degree.

“My mother often received phone calls from work or she had a meeting with the boss on the computer, I wasn’t allowed to ask questions or interrupt her. My father also did that, I couldn’t interrupt him either.”

Vanessa, 12 years old, Germany

“When he [my father] was working from home, then I couldn’t ask him questions, he had his work after all and he also had to get through it, he had so much – that if I’m interrupting him, it’s a bit silly for him. And it was the same with my mother.”

Anna, 15 years old, Germany

This indicates that a rough classification of homeschooling experiences along socioeconomic levels does not necessarily correspond to the individual family situations during the pandemic. Yet homeschooling and childcare are very difficult to balance with nearly full-time employment, even when working at home. Family models in which both parents are engaged in a (nearly) full-time employment that also demands a corresponding input of hours during the pandemic are scarcely able to provide their children with multiple hours of care or education. Especially during school closures that last for months, homeschooling is not comparable with the sporadic assistance of children when they have certain difficulties in specific subjects, which many of these families would otherwise provide. Homeschooling involves accompanying children during the day with their learning at home, which is only possible for parents whose working hours are minimal or flexible.

In some instances across both countries, families with the corresponding financial resources hire a private instructor who assists with the homeschooling of their children either in person or via video. Ten-year-old QZN, whose family belongs to the urban middle class, receives private online lessons via WhatsApp four days a week, during which a private instructor teaches him the content prescribed by his school for homeschooling. QZN finds this form of teaching to be important. “Because if I go back to school, I will know everything they ask.” But at the same time, he also says that he enjoys his individual lessons



less than the more interesting classroom lessons at school: “Sometimes we visit the Science lab, the computer laboratory, play football and the school is really interesting. They bring ideas and what you are learning is also interesting.” Similarly, twelve-year-old BBG, who is currently in an important testing phase (Basic Education Certificate Examination), explains that he receives private lessons at home, but that he does not enjoy them at all: “You are the only one answering the questions but in the class, there will always be a debate in answering questions.” With this remark, he contrasts the importance of school as a place of dialogue and the mutual learning process among students with the isolated setting of homeschooling. Private instructors are also hired in Germany – frequently using the term “tutoring”. Thirteen-year-old Natascha says that she didn’t understand maths. Her parents (who come from Pakistan) could not help her, since they do not understand the assigned educational content themselves. “I told my mother that she should do something at some point. Because I can’t understand it, and then she said: ‘Wait, I’ll get you a tutor.’” The decision to let a tutor come to the house twice a week is notable because the family observes very strict contact and hygiene rules due to her mother’s pre-existing condition. Over time, the tutor helped Natascha not just with maths, but also assisted with her homeschooling for all subjects.

In addition to support from parents, siblings or private tutors, a number of children report that contact with friends was very important in order to manage the requirements of homeschooling. Fifteen-year-old Anna from Germany says that she actually needs “speaking contact” in order to understand certain assignments. Since neither her schoolteacher nor her parents, who work full-time, were able to offer this, she arranged with a friend to do their assignments together on the phone every day. “That was our ritual – talking on the phone, school. And that helped as well.” Anna explains that she was able to resolve comprehension problems with her friend.

She had an easy time getting motivated and structuring her day if she was tied to a specific time of day for homeschooling because of her arrangement with her friend. Cooperative learning via chat or video calls in individual partnerships or as a class group was mentioned in many of the interviews in Germany:

“We received the assignments by email. And then I had to complete them myself. And we did everything together with our friends [...] We did a video call.”

Kerem, 14 years old, Germany

“We already have a class group. If anyone had a question, we tried to help. Because unfortunately the teachers didn’t usually answer.”

Mehmet, 16 years old, Germany

“Then in the class group when we got an email from the teacher, we talked about whether it was good or bad – the email. That’s how we already talked in our class.”

Maya, 13 years old, Germany

The fact that chat groups are not frequently used for homeschooling can probably be explained by the fact that fewer children have smartphones and the required volume of data, which means that their living environments are less digitalised. Nevertheless, in our German sample, younger children of primary school age are also not yet digitally networked, which means that they are hardly able to help one another. Thirteen-year-old Natascha also says that although there are WhatsApp groups in her class, she doesn’t participate in them and doesn’t want to, “Because

they write lots of stupid things. And I have no interest in that”. In the interview it is not clear what she is implying by this, but it must be considered that the digital living environments of children also involve hierarchies and are characterised by dynamics of belonging and exclusion.

Furthermore, in self-organised and non-moderated groups it is possible that inaccurate information may be shared, which is not very helpful for homeschooling.

Among the children interviewed in Ghana, mutual assistance tends to be provided in family relationships rather than between friends. Nevertheless, the importance of friendship for self-organised educational opportunities can also be seen in the interview with fifteen-year-old Tiana from Ghana.

Children develop different strategies in order to manage difficulties in homeschooling by cooperating together.

“So, I told some of my friends that this is what they are going to do during the lockdown [private online lessons]. So, when I told them they also came up with me and we bought the bundle for our Teacher and we started doing the Zoom. [...] The online one. Yes, because we have time.”

Tiana, 15 years old, Ghana

Tiana, who often lacks the data volume to participate in her school’s digital offerings, says that she connects with friends to purchase data volume together for a private tutor. Now they participate together in lessons via Zoom while they wait in lockdown for their school to reopen.



6.

How do children assess the measures adopted to curb the pandemic?

The current German discourse frequently focuses on whether children and young people are able and willing to observe contact and hygiene rules. This perspective of an ability to maintain distance, consistent mask wearing and hand washing that is contingent on maturity fails to account for the conscious or unconscious disregard of these rules by adults. In many interviews with children from both countries, on the contrary, the children observe that both children and adults need to implement the existing rules more consistently, but also that some of the rules seem illogical and incomprehensible.

“The people in Aldi or T-Gut don’t have to put masks on them themselves. So we should we have to put them on!”
Natascha, 13 years old, Germany

“For example, all customers in the supermarket have to wear a mask, but the employees don’t wear any. I find that a bit strange.”
Maya, 13 years old, Germany

“For example the rule about avoiding contact. Some people really keep 1-2 metres of distance when they walk past each other. And then I see 20 young people or older people smoking in a group somewhere.”
Finn, 13 years old, Germany

Eight-year-old PP explains that the positive part about learning to keep a distance is to protect against the risk of being infected by teachers: **“If your Teachers are going out for Teachers training and maybe if they get the coronavirus and they bring it to the school, the students can get some.”** Fifteen-year-old Tiana prefers learning at home in order to protect herself against infection on public transportation. **“Maybe going back to school people will be sitting in the vehicles [...] maybe someone who doesn’t have money to buy the sanitiser will just sit there and also be infected.”** Many children in Ghana emphasise that a positive aspect of the pandemic is the increased awareness of hygiene, and specifically more frequent hand washing among the population. It is possible to learn from the pandemic, according to thirteen-year-old Elizabeth: **“Washing of our hands and applying of the hand sanitiser.”** Fifteen-year-old Bless says that hand washing and disinfecting could protect against other diseases such as Ebola and cholera in the future. Peter (16 years old, Germany) also underscores the positive aspect **“that many people suddenly – I don’t understand why – are placing a lot of importance on hygiene.”**

One highly complex thematic area in the interviews was to pose children the question of whether and how they

would have contributed to the decisions adopted to curb the pandemic. When directly requested to express their demands or expectations of public policy, the children’s reactions vary widely. In both countries there are a number of children who believe their co-determination would be very beneficial. In a very similar way, thirteen-year-old AJW from Ghana and twelve-year-old Vanessa from Germany call for children’s voices to be considered, since they might have alternative ideas for fighting the pandemic.

“To see what we the children too have in mind about the pandemic, because not everyone is perfect. You don’t know, someone may have something in mind but because the person is not given the opportunity.”
AJW, 13 years old, Ghana

“I also find it important that they’re not always the ones doing things. Instead they should ask sometimes how the children feel, or young people. Because maybe young people and children have a different opinion. And their opinion might even be better.”
Vanessa, 12 years old, Germany

Nevertheless, in Germany and Ghana, some children reject the ability or legitimacy of co-determination involving children. For example, twelve-year-old IAD addresses children’s lack of authority: **“They should have rather consulted the grown-ups, but not children, because the children they will not have any decisions to make.”** Fourteen-year-old Susan from Germany, on the other hand, calls into doubt whether children are able to make useful decisions: **“Most of them don’t have so much responsibility and they don’t understand much about the world either, they would say they want to go out anyway and they don’t want to wear a mask.”** These passages reveal internalised power structures, which mean that children sometimes follow decisions made by adults as a matter of course, and trust that these decisions will benefit everyone. Like Susan, sixteen-year-old Peter also addresses the narrative which is widespread in Germany: that young people are less responsible with observing hygiene and contact rules and play a major role in spreading the virus.

“It would probably be hard to involve young people in the process. Because we’re not very...they say young people are not grown up yet. [...] I actually think, so far the way it’s been is that we children and young people are the ones who probably spread the virus the most, because we are meeting up the most and everything. And that would be the biggest danger to Grandma and Grandpa, it would be hard to involve us in the process.”
Peter, 16 years old, Germany

Our interviews from Ghana, on the other hand, rarely express the idea that children are less responsible in observing the hygiene and contact rules or that they contribute more to transmission because they can be asymptomatic. Here, social responsibility is associated less with age than with individual perspectives and behaviours, which is potentially also connected with the fact that children are given more responsibility and contribute more actively within the family.

When asked which decisions they would make, the interviewed children from both countries in the study often take this as an opportunity to discuss in relative detail which containment measures they believe would be better. On the one hand, this reveals their fundamental perception of the needs of children and young people; on the other hand, this sheds light on existing social inequality. For the children interviewed in Ghana, unequal access to education is a crucial issue before and during the pandemic. Twelve-year-old JA criticises that, in her view, the corrupt government in Ghana does not allow any social redistribution: **“They should stop thinking about themselves. All they do is to think about what they have to do for their own well-being.”** Fifteen-year-old Tiana asserts that children from all social classes need to be better equipped to participate in digital teaching. **“Those needy they don’t have enough money, so the government must come to their help for them to get the bundle to do the online learning.”** Fifteen-year-old Bless also calls for teaching for all children in a community, with lessons held outside and in compliance with the contact and hygiene rules.

„Most people go on farming, fishing and all those things which they don’t even have time for their books. So, I think everybody should have a one hour or two lesson. [...] It should be done in community, as a community but a very broad place [...] that can take all the children in that place and also following the precautions.”
Bless, 15 years old, Ghana

The children interviewed in Germany are less likely to argue from the perspective that there is inequality between children from different social classes; instead they highlight the inequality between children and adults, where the needs of the younger generation are not properly considered. Eleven-year-old Isabel says that **“Young people [...] need lots of time with their friends”**. **“And if you’re just sitting around at home with your parents all the time, at some point you get sick of it. And then things happen that you don’t want [...], maybe you break something. Or you run away from home, something like that.”**



Twelve-year-old twins Midas and Ally criticise the fact that nail salons are open but schools are closed. Ally reasons: **“The thing is, is it more important to them for adults to be happy, or an educated future?”**

In Germany and Ghana, children are uncertain when they will receive regular teaching again, and some of them criticise the partial return in preparation for school exams (in Ghana) or reduced-size classes in alternating groups (in Germany). The children experience this arbitrary division into groups, which do not match their interests or their level of ability and which separate them from their friends, as a strong form of external control that makes their school attendance burdensome. Twelve-year-old JA is disappointed that an AG – an essay club – in which she normally participates is now only being offered to students in higher years in order to fight the pandemic. Twelve-year-old Vanessa from Germany similarly complains that with alternating lessons, she is not together with her friends in a group. Fourteen-year-old Susan finds it unfair that she is taught in a course with “chaotic kids” who are not at her same level of ability, and twelve-year-old Ally says that she finds it essentially “meaningless” to only go to school once a week: **“We could have also done our assignments in that time. Instead of sitting in school and talking about COVID.”**



7.

Conclusions

The goal of the lockdown and the closure of daycare centres and schools is to ensure that children and adults spend as much time as possible in their own flats and houses and have as little contact as possible with people outside their households. The lockdown restrictions affect children more strongly than adults.

- *At times, contact rules regulated nearly all activities outside the family, which become increasingly important for the psychosocial development of children as they grow older in order to separate themselves from their family and gain independence.*

At the same time, children had and have to manage new stresses that are different from their previous ways of life. These include long phases of being on their own and associated experiences of loneliness, independent structuring of learning processes and assimilating new content as well as dealing with fears and concerns in their families concerning potential infection.

- *For children, the pandemic manifests itself as a social crisis through the closure of schools and recreational facilities, which means that their living environment is almost entirely restricted to private spaces and the resources of their families.*

Public institutions established with the aim of balancing the social inequalities of the private sphere are sidelined. Given the background that the political representation and co-determination of children is scarcely established at the moment, **the needs of children in lockdown become invisible for the public** and can only be negotiated within families. Decisive factors for managing challenges include which resources a family has, which individual problems they have to overcome, to what extent parents can offer support and encouragement and how much they restrict their children's activities.

- *Because of this reduction to core families, the way in which children experience the pandemic is highly dependent on how their parents are able or willing to shape their lockdown situation.*

Many of the surveyed families were able to cope well with the pandemic – at least in the summer and fall of 2020 when this study was conducted – and their children were largely able to adjust to the changes in their living environments. Some were even able to see positive factors in the pandemic, for instance increasing contact with parents or the option of structuring their days for themselves. There may be children who benefit from the intensive individual teaching during homeschooling, even though none of the children we interviewed assess their own situation in that way. It must be noted in this context that our study was conducted at a time when (at least in Germany) restrictions had just been eased and the situation seemed to be relaxing. At the time it was not foreseeable that the measures would be tightened again, which likely involves more extensive consequences for children than is portrayed in our study.

As a children's aid organisation, World Vision provides strategic help for children who are threatened by disadvantageous conditions and marginalisation. This study indicates that protracted school closures, as one of the most significant measures for containing the pandemic in both countries in the study, involves a **high risk** of heightening **long-existing social inequalities** such as a poorer educational background among parents, intensive involvement of children in family work and gainful employment, poor health or nutritional condition or limited living space. With the transition in homeschooling to digital methods of education, the **technology available to families becomes more important** than ever. But particularly because the existing opportunities have not met the needs of the children and their families so far, there seems to be an increasing demand for **private teaching (tutoring)**, either digitally or in person, though this is only available for families with an adequate household income. Our data also indicate that **new inequalities arise for children who belong to a risk group themselves, or who have members of a risk group in their household** and are more restricted in their in-person contacts as a result. Another group of children who did not seem to be at risk of educational inequalities in the past are those who come from families **where the high workload of the parents (including work from home) cannot be balanced with adequate homeschooling to meet the children's needs.**

From the children's perspective, homeschooling as **a form of education is not as valuable as classroom teaching.** Although many children emphasise that school is important for them in order to meet their friends, they also refer to the fact they need contact with other children in order to learn together. The interviews clearly demonstrate

that **learning processes depend on 'talking about content'** and therefore require dialogue with teachers and fellow students. This context clarifies the disadvantage faced by children without contacts who are capable and available to learn by communicating with them, such as parents, siblings, private teachers or friends. They must rely on their own skills to learn educational content themselves during month-long school closures. This also applies for children in primary school and secondary level 1 (equivalent in Ghana: basic education), for whom learning based on writing with worksheets, books and other online information is a major challenge. **The child's right to education** (Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) **is transferred into their family's responsibility during homeschooling.** They must ensure that their children can make use of educational offerings and procure alternative education strategies to supplement insufficient or unavailable offerings. In families where this does not occur, children are unable to exercise their right to education, **and at the same time there are currently no suitable tools in order to process the educational inequality that has been created or intensified.**

- *To remain in contact with others and maintain dialogue is highly important in order to overcome the psychosocial stresses of the pandemic caused by loneliness, fears and a lack of encouragement and activities.*

Given this perspective, it is essential to adopt a holistic understanding of the right to health anchored in Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and incorporate the importance of mental health. **Social contact with other children and adults in the educational system and organised recreational activities is a crucial aspect of child protection** and the social participation of children. Particularly for younger children who do not yet use social media, or children who are not digitally connected, lockdown eliminates the opportunities for interaction and dialogue with people outside their home that are highly important for their age-specific development. For children who are already well-connected digitally, these contacts can prevent the feeling of social isolation. **However, it must be noted that in digital spaces** – regardless of whether they belong to the children's recreational sphere or scholastic educational spaces – there has not yet been a systematic implementation of measures for child protection **and a large potential for addiction can be assumed in times of social isolation.**

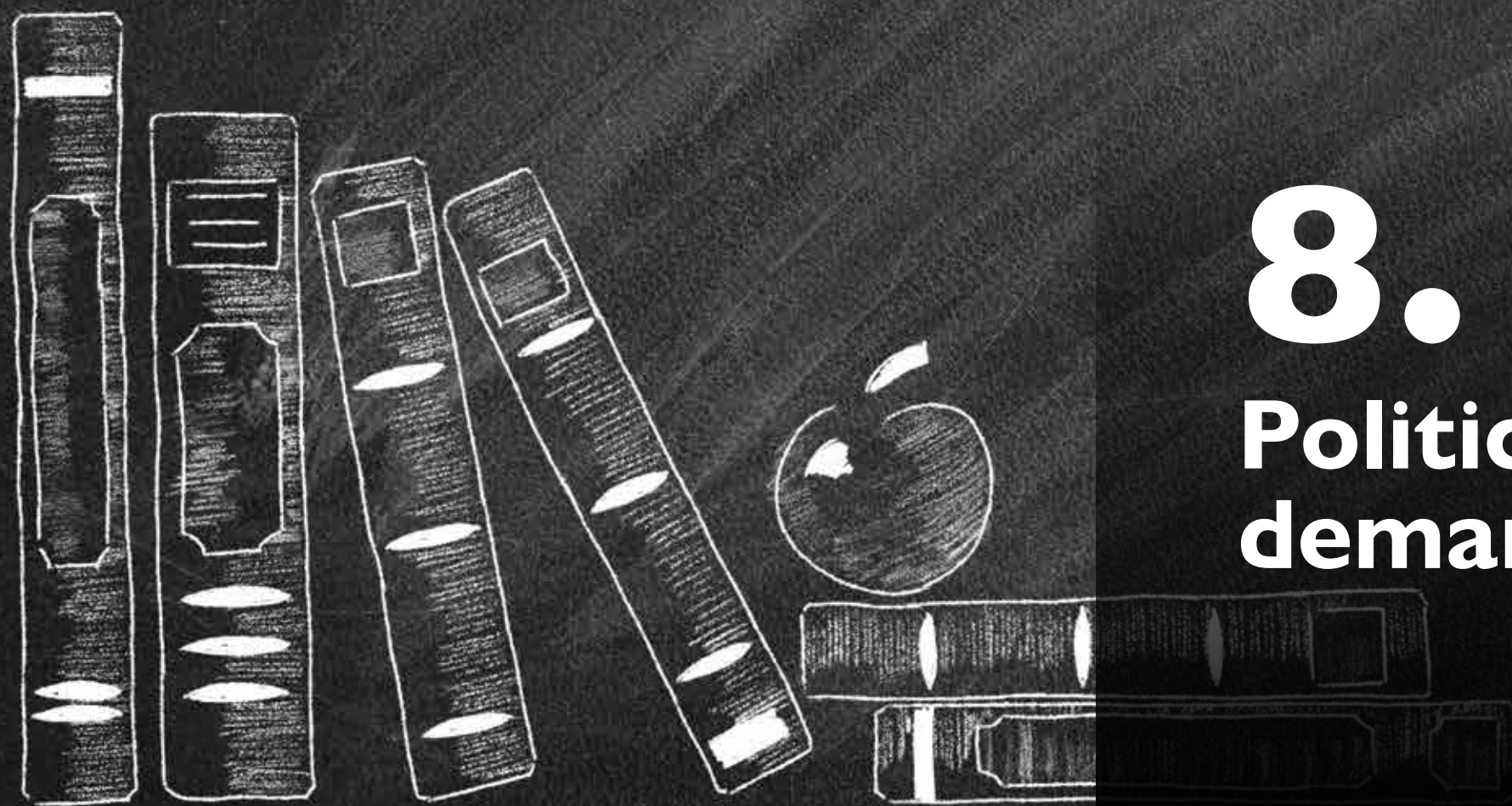
Before the pandemic, childhood in Germany and Ghana was highly regulated through the involvement of children in educational and recreational institutions and their responsibilities for housework and gainful employment (more pronounced but not exclusively in Ghana) which often resulted in **a rigid everyday structure. For many children, the lockdown has led to a slowdown and deregulation of their childhood and the living environments of education and recreation have been shifted into their homes, along with their parents' gainful employment in some cases, where responsibilities and priorities must be renegotiated.** In some households, children are faced with a conflict of reconciling different responsibilities that was previously only described for the situation of adults, usually mothers. They have to balance their own education with caring for younger siblings and their own housework and professional work. This seems to occur more markedly but not exclusively in Ghana. In Germany, on the other hand, it was more frequently observed that children were unable to participate in classroom lessons in order to protect persons of risk in their household and that parents working from home were unavailable to assist with homeschooling. These varying effects indicate consequently **that the conditions for meeting children's homeschooling needs are not met in many families for social and economic reasons.**

- *Children require classroom teaching, since this offers fixed times and spaces with qualified support during which their education is prioritised.*

The pandemic containment measures introduced in Germany and Ghana in 2020 and maintained until now require children to show dedication, discipline and sacrifice. They wear masks, observe hygiene and contact rules, care for siblings, take on housework as well as gainful employment in Ghana and learn independently as well as they can with the educational offerings provided to them, even if these offerings are entirely unsuitable in many cases. Children trust that the containment measures are correct and observe them. Without their collaboration, these measures would not be possible as they stand.

NO SCHOOL

COVID-19



8. Political demands



1 Month-long closures of schools and daycare centres have a detrimental impact on children's social life, learning processes and mental health, which is why they should only be implemented as a last resort to fight the pandemic. **For this reason, reopening educational institutions soon and keeping them open permanently must be treated with the utmost priority and on a uniform basis nationwide.**

2 In order to counteract extensive closures of educational and recreational facilities, we call for greater freedom, flexibility and alternative possibilities for location-specific COVID measures as required at schools (and a stronger orientation based more on the local infection figures rather than state borders). There is also a **need for reliable and practical concepts for safe classroom teaching and unified implementation nationwide** in order to prevent the creation and intensification of educational inequalities among students.

3 The success and quality of education in homeschooling must not be left up to parents and families any longer. **In order to gauge the extent of the consequences of month-long homeschooling, learning level surveys are urgently required.** Building on this, unified standards must be established for teaching staff, classrooms and teaching methods which ensure equal access to education for all children – even for homeschooling. One essential requirement in this regard is to ensure improved financial, personal and technological equipment for educational systems.

4 As this study demonstrates, joint “learning in dialogue” with other children and “talking about new educational content” are important elements of a child's learning process. For this reason, we call for the formal **establishment of small, constant learning groups** for mutual support according to the respective learning level of the students, and – where possible – taking their friendships into account, since a trust-based learning environment contributes greatly to educational success. In addition, teaching staff must commit to being available for children to contact in case of questions and to evaluate learning progress in regular individual and group meetings with the children.

5 **The successive establishment of digital educational opportunities must pay significantly more attention to the unequal prerequisites of students.** To this end, the prerequisites must be met for all students to participate in digital education. If it is not possible to arrange for digital-based learning at home, it is necessary to provide suitable locations (e.g. by renting empty rooms in adult education centres, community centres, youth hostels etc.), devices, sufficient data volume and support with how to use these tools.

6 **Digital educational offerings must be developed based on science and expanded through continuing education** such that they meet the age-specific needs of students and are suitable for communicating specific educational content. Merely creating a new form of digitally transmitted teacher-centred learning must be avoided in this context.

7 **Adequate technical equipment and continuing education must enable teachers** to suitable use digital opportunities in a structured way for the requirements of different class years and subjects.

8 In order to minimise the loss of education, students should be allowed to voluntarily **repeat classes without consequences in order to obtain the knowledge they lack or improve their marks.** In addition, for intermediate exams and final exams, additional testing attempts must be set up at suitable intervals to allow students to assess and improve their level of learning. It must also be reviewed whether an alternative performance and assessment system can be introduced during the pandemic which excludes phases of learning at home due to the inequality in at-home learning opportunities.

9 Due to a lack of available activities and the accompanying increased consumption of media during lockdown, **effective measures and clarification are essential to combat cyber-bullying and online crime** to provide children and youths with more protected and controlled access to the extensive possibilities of the internet. Digital educational offerings must also be “safe spaces” for children. Just like in real schools, third parties must not be allowed to access digital learning spaces.

10 Educational and recreational institutions are highly important points of contact for children and youths where potential endangerments to child welfare can be detected and endangered children can achieve help without major hurdles. **If these spaces are closed, alternative functional contact points and interfaces for detection and assistance for endangerment to child welfare or family problems must be created that are suitable for children** – particularly given the estimates that domestic violence has increased significantly during the lockdown.

11 Even during a global pandemic, children's voices must be heard and their right to participation in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child must be guaranteed, particularly for topics that directly affect them. **Therefore, we call for the establishment of an interdisciplinary expert council made up of students,** representatives from health authorities, specialists from the education sector and parental organisations to engaged in regular dialogue evaluating the intersection of measures and consequences for educational policy as a result of the COVID crisis.

12 In order to equalise double burdens and the difficulty of balancing family and professional life during lockdown, more flexible **regulations are needed for the work day.** Caring for small children at home and homeschooling cannot be accomplished at the same time as professional work; instead, they require a reduced workload with full wage compensation or subsidised or free third-party care at home (for example in the form of family assistance or childcare support).



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