



ISSUE BRIEF

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children's Learning in Indonesia

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What is the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's learning in Indonesia?

This issue brief outlines the findings of monitoring on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the likelihood of children and adolescents continuing their education, conducted across 354 districts in 33 provinces in Indonesia from September to December 2020. The issue brief begins by outlining the context and scope of the monitoring and then describes the overall profile of the parents, children and adolescents who participated. The main findings relate to those children and adolescents who have already dropped out of education as well as those who remain enrolled but having risk factor(s) for dropping out. The main findings are then discussed and used as reference to identify some suggested actions to address the issues that have arisen due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the continuation of education for children and adolescents in Indonesia.

CONTEXT

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on children's education at all levels in Indonesia. Although the school

year officially started in July 2020, with students enrolling in early childhood, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary school levels as well as non-formal education, schools in many parts of Indonesia have remained closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Classroom learning has been replaced with distance learning, including online learning, courses on television and radio, and offline learning packages. However, many children from socio-economically disadvantaged families, particularly in rural areas, have faced significant challenges to engaging in continued learning, due to inadequate capacity of schools and teachers to provide effective distance learning and lack of resources and facilities, including internet access. In addition, many families have suffered from loss of employment and income, with reduced ability to provide financial support for their children's education. This situation has discouraged and decreased the interest and motivation of children and/or parents to continue children's education. As a result, many children and adolescents have dropped out altogether, while others may be at risk of dropping out.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, in Indonesia there were an estimated 4.3 million children and adolescents aged 7–18 years out of school.¹ While there are several interrelated factors that contribute to children being out of school, the main reason was economic – lacking money for the so-called hidden costs of education (e.g., uniforms, transport, stationery), as well as needing to earn additional income for their families. The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to increase the risk of more children dropping out in the near future, due to its significant impact on the economic conditions of poor households.

From September to December 2020, UNICEF, working closely with the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration (Kemendesa PDTT), conducted monitoring on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on out-of-school children and adolescents. In particular, the monitoring aims to identify the impact of the pandemic on continuation of children's and adolescent's learning, especially among those aged 7–18 years from socio-economically disadvantaged families. This issue brief documents the key findings of the results of this monitoring.

¹ UNICEF calculation using the 2019 SUSENAS data.

SCOPE OF MONITORING:

The monitoring utilized purposive sampling with families selected from the beneficiary databases of Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH) and Bantuan Langsung Tunai Dana Desa (BLT-DD)² with a particular focus on families with children aged 4–18 years. Overall, the coverage of the monitoring included 1,151 villages across 354 districts in 33 provinces. Sample village selection was based on the categories of the Ministry of Villages in the Village Development Index (*Indeks Desa Membangun* – IDM).³ While the survey included data on children in the early childhood education age group, the main focus was on those aged 7–18 years who might be out of school or having risk factor(s) for dropping out due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In total, 112,911 families participated in the monitoring, involving 150,294 children and adolescents. The data obtained from the monitoring were then validated and analysed to identify the following key findings.

Key Findings:

Overall profile – parents:

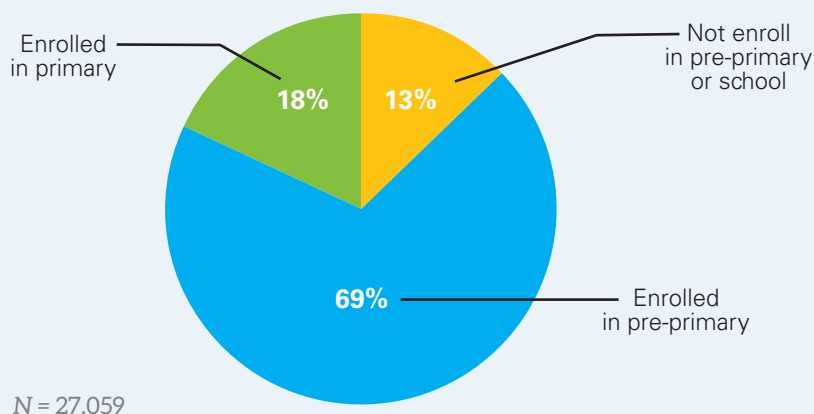
Heads of families covered in the monitoring were mainly working as labourers (27 per cent), farmers (26 per cent) or traders (26 per cent), with the remainder in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs with low cash incomes – 56 per cent of households were earning less than 1,500,000 Indonesian rupiah per month. The monitoring also found that most of the heads of families had a very low level of educational attainment – 52 per cent had either completed primary education only, or did not complete primary education, or had not attended school at all. Previous research conducted by UNICEF on out-of-school children and adolescents has shown that the education level of parents, particularly mothers, is an important factor in determining whether children are more likely to drop out.

Among children and adolescents aged 7–18 years from all disadvantaged families included as respondents, 1,243 had already dropped out of school due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overall profile – children and adolescents:

Of the children and adolescents aged 4–18 years covered in the monitoring, 18 per cent were children aged 4–6 years, 43 per cent were in the 7–12 years age group (primary school age), 21 per cent were in the 13–15 years age group (junior secondary school age), while 18 per cent were 16–18 years of age (senior secondary school age). Of children aged 4–6 years, 69 per cent were enrolled in some form of early childhood education, while 18 per cent were attending primary school; 13 per cent of this age group were not enrolled in early childhood education or school at all.

Figure 1. Educational status of children aged 4–6 years



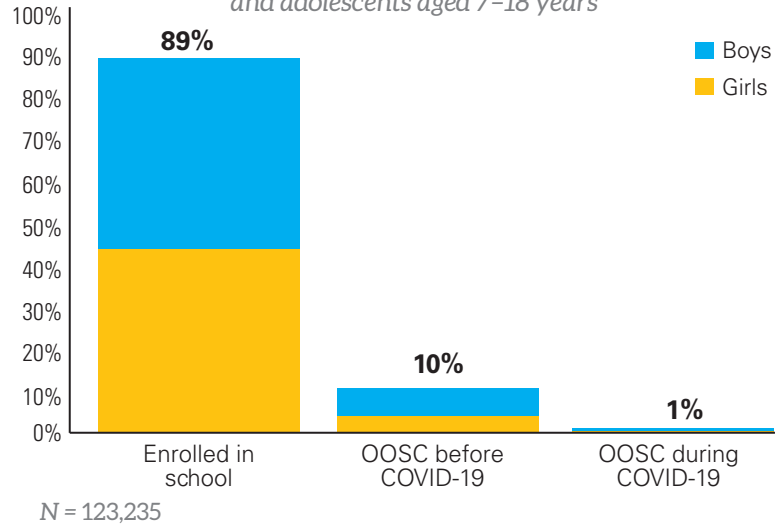
² PKH is a conditional cash transfer programme under the Ministry of Social Affairs (Kemensos), while BLTDD is direct cash assistance for poor families from Village Funds or *Dana Desa*, under the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration (Kemendesra).

³ Three IDM categories of village were used to ensure a balanced sample selection of villages in each of 33 provinces – *Mandiri/Maju* (independent), *Berkembang* (developing), and *Tertinggal/Sangat Tertinggal* (underdeveloped).

⁴ The exact number of children who have dropped out cannot be confirmed yet as children do not physically attend school. Once face-to-face learning starts in the majority of schools, it is expected that the extent of the dropout phenomenon will become more evident.

Of the total 123,235 children and adolescents aged 7–18 years covered in the monitoring, approximately 10 per cent (around 12,700) were already out of school prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, with most of these children and adolescents in the senior secondary school age group (16–18 years), 59 per cent of whom were boys. Around 1 per cent (1,243) had dropped out of school due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, with most of these children and adolescents in the senior secondary school age group (16–18 years), also of whom 58 per cent were boys.⁴ Of the total number of children and adolescents involved in the monitoring, 1 per cent were reported to have some kind of disability, particularly a physical disability.

Figure 2. Educational status of children and adolescents aged 7–18 years



Out-of-school children:

Although children and adolescents who reportedly had dropped out of school as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic made up only 1 per cent (1,243) of the total number of children and adolescents aged 7–18 years covered in the monitoring (see Figure 2), this indicates that a significant number of children and adolescents from disadvantaged families throughout Indonesia may also not continue their education due to similar circumstances.

As mentioned above, a larger number of children and adolescents, comprising 10 per cent of the total number covered in the monitoring (12,700), had already dropped out of school prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The profiles of each group of out-of-school children (OOSC) based on gender, age group and disability status are presented in Figure 3 and Figure 4.

Figure 3. Profile of OOSC due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic

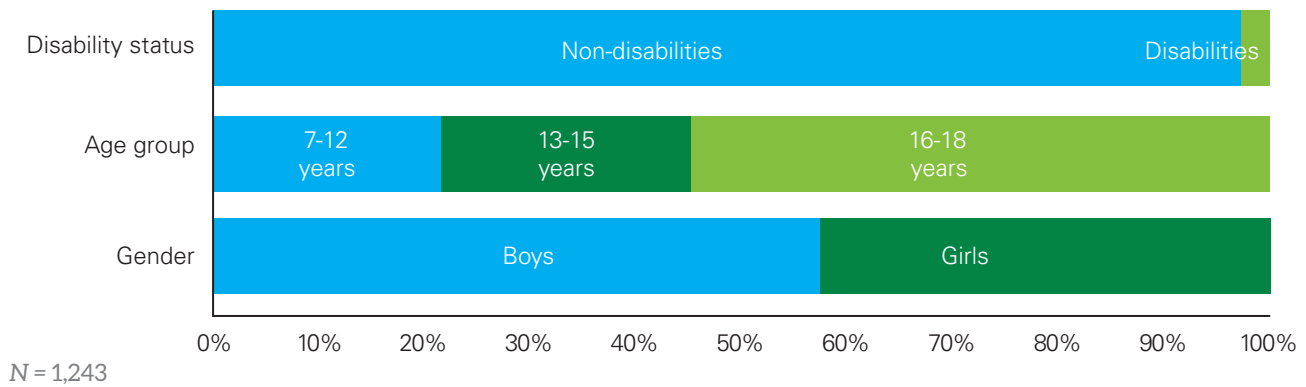
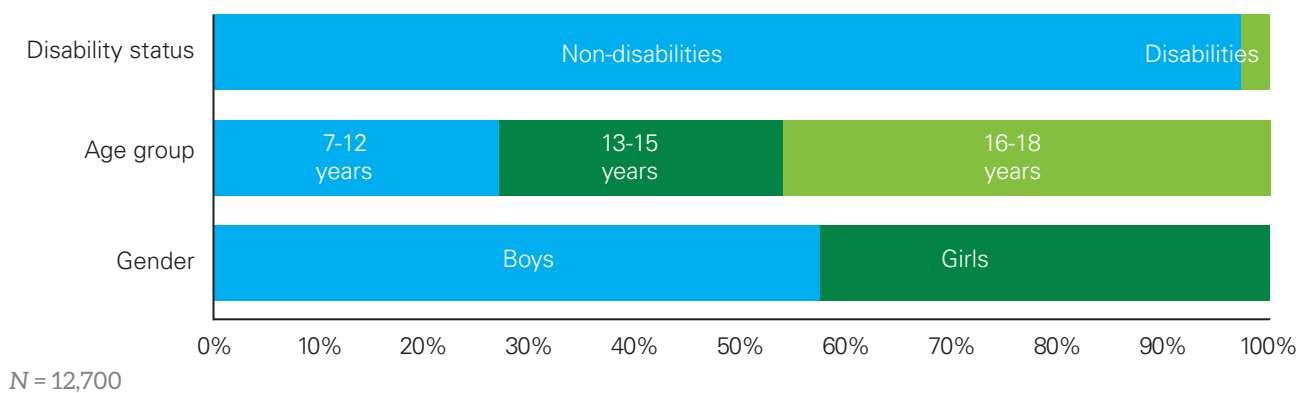


Figure 4. Profile of OOSC before the COVID-19 pandemic

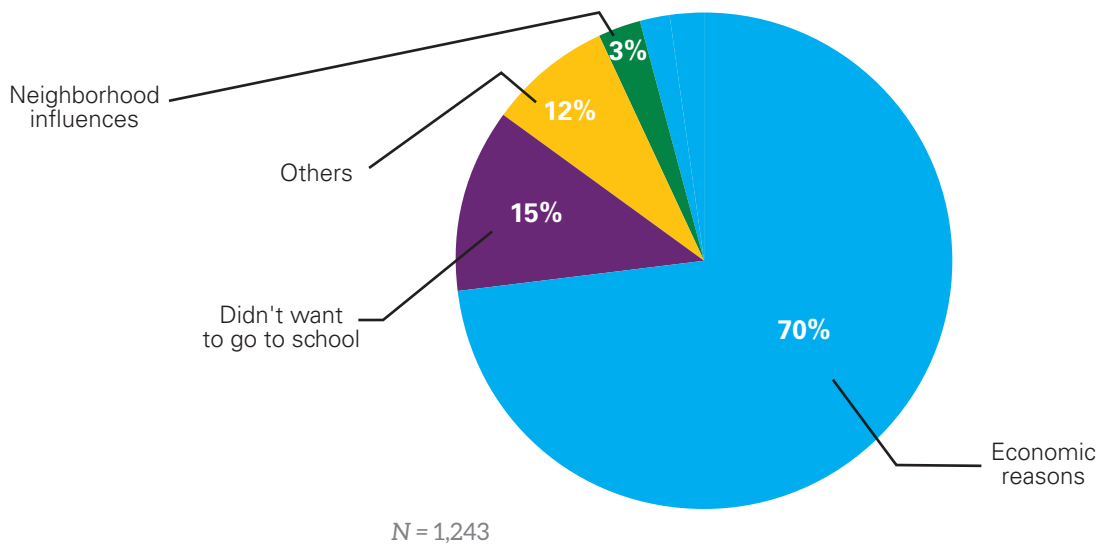


70 per cent of children and adolescents who had dropped out of school during the COVID-19 pandemic did so due to economic reasons.

The lack of money within the family was overwhelmingly the main reason for 70 per cent of children and adolescents having dropped out of education due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This condition might be influenced by a decline in household income as a result of the pandemic.

Apart from the economic factor, the next reason was that they did not want to go to school (15 per cent). Other reasons given for dropping out included neighbourhood influences (3 per cent), early marriage, unpaid work and disability, etc., which made up the remaining 12 per cent (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Reasons for dropping out due to the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic



Most of those who have dropped out of school during the pandemic are adolescents aged 16–18 years. The proportion of boys was greater than that of girls.

Some 54 per cent of those who dropped out of school as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic were adolescents aged 16–18 years.

Furthermore, the proportion of boys who dropped out of school was greater than that of girls, namely 56 per cent to 44 per cent, respectively.

Girls were 10 times more likely than boys to have dropped out of school during the pandemic due to early marriage.

Although the numbers of children who dropped out due to early marriage were not high, they were almost all girls, which is a challenge in itself, given the extent of child marriage in

Indonesia. It shows that much remains to be done to address this problem. Based on UNICEF analysis, one in nine girls in Indonesia marry before they turn 18 years of age, and most of them drop out of school.⁵

⁵ SUSENAS data 2018.

⁶ UNICEF's study on Support for Students with Disabilities during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Most children and adolescents with disabilities who dropped out of school due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic face more obstacles to continue their education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it more difficult for children and adolescents with disabilities to access education. In addition to economic factors that have largely pushed them to drop out of school, children and adolescents with disabilities also faced additional challenges that hampered them from continuing their

education. These include unavailability of learning support such as assistive devices and modified learning materials, loss of mental health support and routine therapies due to mobility restrictions during lockdown, and the loss of personal learning support by teachers and other school communities.⁶

12.700 children had already dropped out prior to the pandemic.

A total of 12,700 (10 per cent) children and adolescents surveyed had already dropped out of school prior to the pandemic, with 59 per cent being male. The main difference between this group and those who had dropped out of school as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic was in the proportion of children and adolescents who stopped schooling due to economic reasons. Of those who dropped out of school due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, 70 per cent

cited economic reasons as the main factor, compared with only 38 per cent of those who dropped out before the COVID-19 pandemic. The rest said they dropped out of school because they did not want to go to school anymore (34 per cent), they worked for wages (5 per cent), felt that their education was sufficient (5 per cent), had a disability (4 per cent), married early and/or took care of the household (2 per cent), the school was too far from their home (2 per cent), or other reasons (10 per cent).

Children with risk factors for dropping out:

Essentially all children and adolescents included in the monitoring are in a vulnerable condition, as they come from underprivileged families. However, the monitoring that was carried out attempted to further clarify the vulnerable conditions they faced, especially with regard to continuing their education. Children and adolescents who are in school have different levels of vulnerability for dropping out, which is determined by the number of risk factors they have. The factors that were used to assess the level of vulnerability for dropping out are as follows:

01 Paid work

02 Unpaid work

03 Taking care of younger sibling(s)

04 Marriage

05 Disability

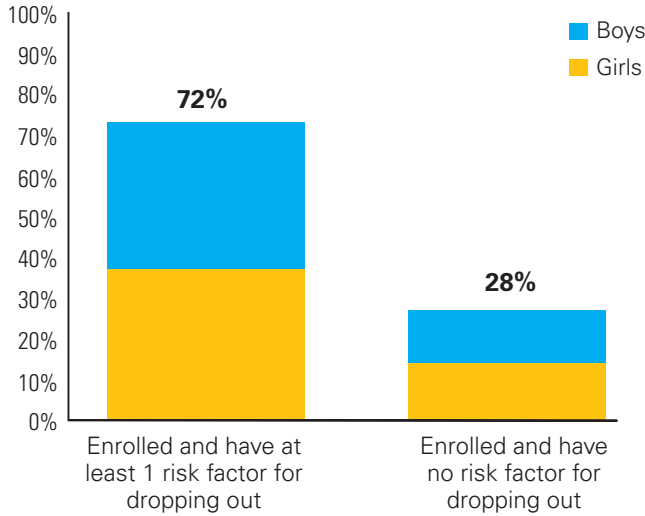
06 Engaged in other substantial activities unrelated to education (e.g., playing all day)

07 Parents plan to withdraw their child from education

08 No monitoring by teachers or principal or by the village government during distance learning

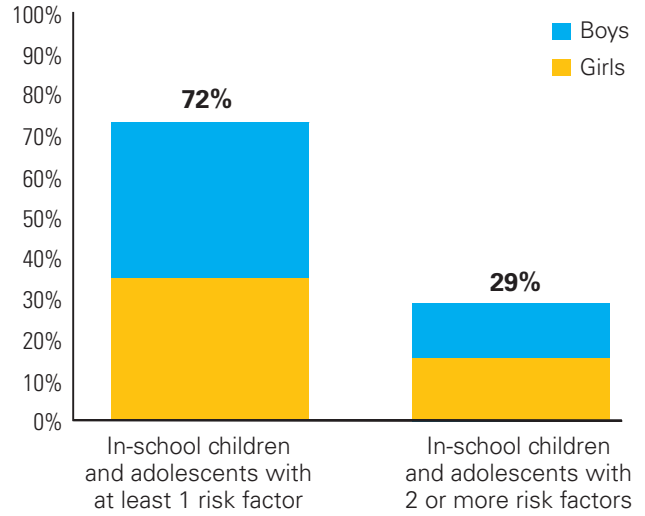
09 Number of mobile phones per family in relation to the number of children enrolled in school.

Figure 6. Percentage of children and adolescents aged 7–18 years enrolled based on risk factors



N = 109,292

Figure 7. Proportion of in-school children and adolescents based on the number of risk factors



N = 109,292

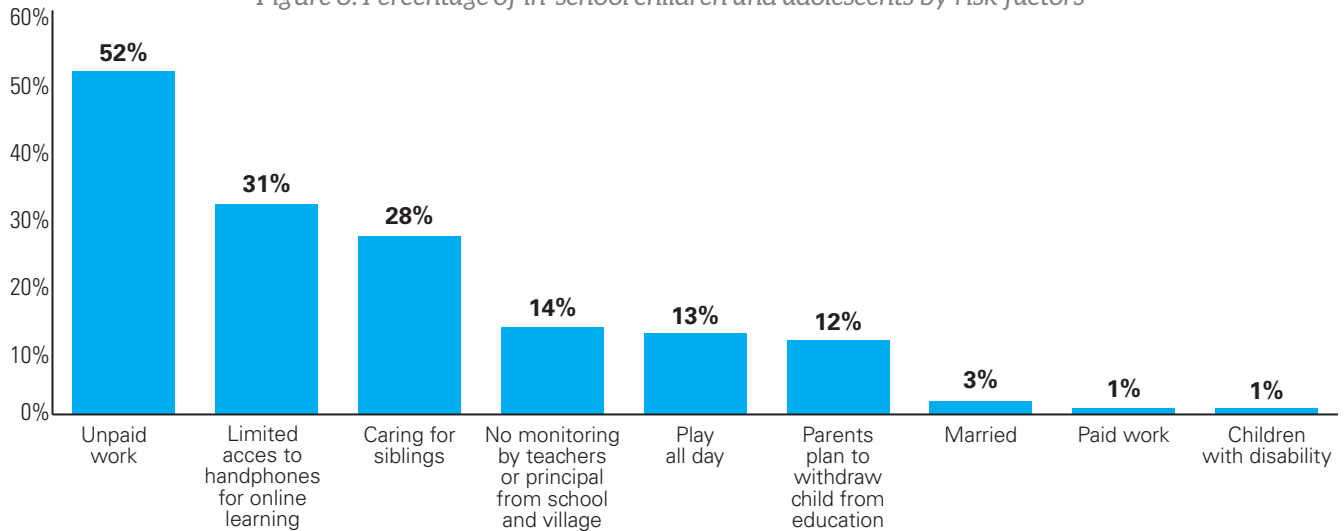
Monitoring results showed that three out of four (72 per cent) children and adolescents aged 7–18 years who were enrolled in school had at least one risk factor for dropping out (see Figure 7). Within that group, almost a third of all children and adolescents enrolled were at higher risk for dropping out, because of having two or more risk factors (see Figure 8).

Unpaid work is the risk factor that may push more than half of children and adolescents to drop out.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economic condition of poor families can affect children’s activity patterns. As Figure 10 shows, more than half of children and adolescents (52 per cent) had worked without pay. It is assumed

that those children and adolescents who have to work without pay are those who need to help their parents or families alleviate the economic hardships experienced during the pandemic.

Figure 8. Percentage of in-school children and adolescents by risk factors⁷



N = 78,895

⁷ Note: An individual child may have more than a single risk factor.



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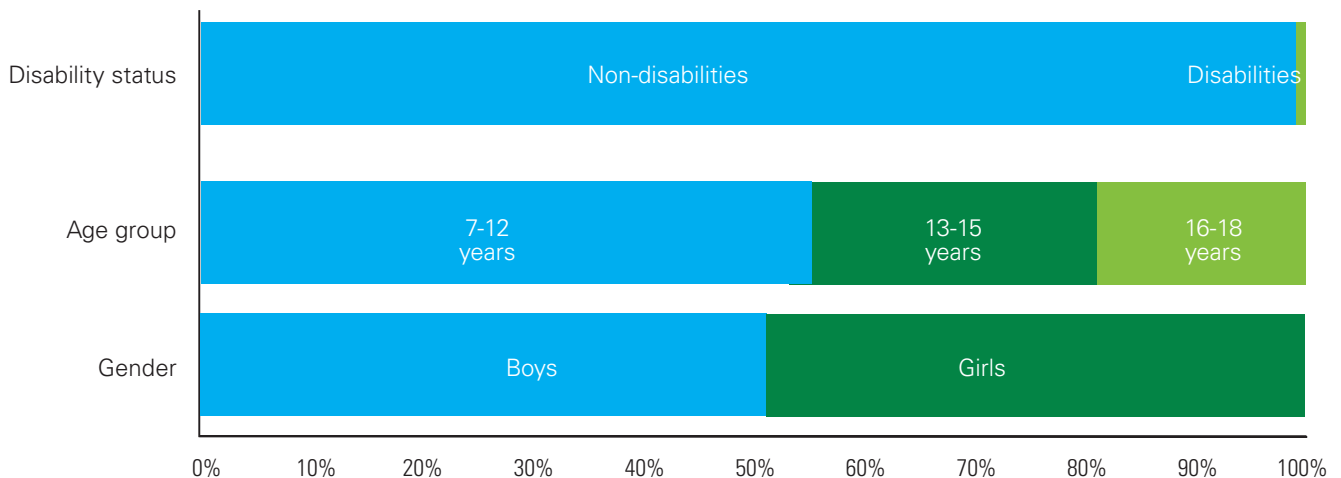
Among children and adolescents from disadvantaged families aged 7-18 enrolled for this school year and continuing their education, three out of four have at least one risk factor for dropping out.

Boys and girls were equally at risk of dropping out.

The results of the monitoring show that unlike the major gender difference among those who had already dropped out (where more boys dropped out than girls at all levels), there were

no significant gender differences in the group that have at least one risk factor for dropping out – boys and girls are equally vulnerable (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Profile of children and adolescents who have at least one risk factor for dropping out based on gender, age group and disability status



N = 78,895



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Children and adolescents with a disability are twice as likely to have two or more risk factors than other children and adolescents, and are thus at higher risk of dropping out due to COVID-19.

Of all children and adolescents with disabilities covered by the monitoring process, 43 per cent were found to be enrolled in school. However, 71 per cent of them may be at

higher risk of dropping out because they have additional risk factors in addition to their disability that can cause them to drop out.

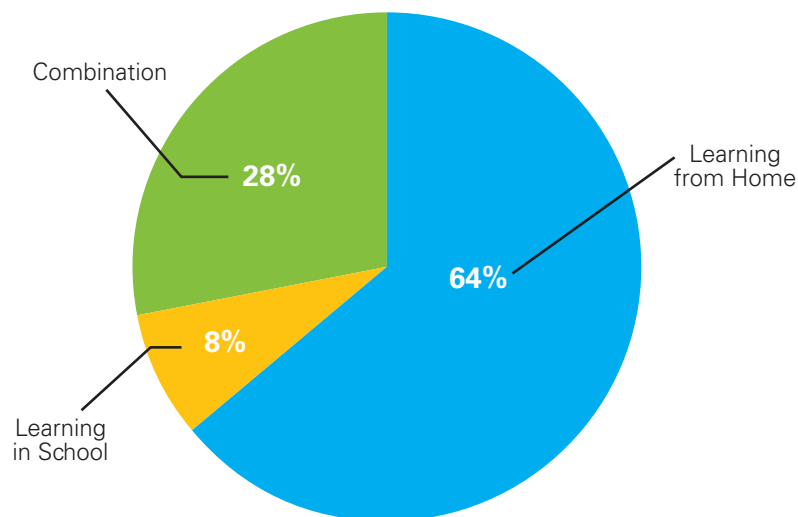
Children and adolescents studying only at home are at greater risk of dropping out, mainly due to lack of facilities for online learning as well as limited monitoring by schools and village governments.

As can be seen in Figure 10, during the COVID-19 pandemic, 64 per cent of children and adolescents who are enrolled in school were learning from home. Among those enrolled, 14 per cent reported not receiving adequate monitoring or support from both the school and the village government. About 84 per cent of families with children and adolescents who were in school use mobile phones as a distance learning tool. However, only 61 per cent of those families have a sufficient number

of mobile phones for their children to take part in online learning. This indicates that there are still many children and adolescents who are lacking the tools to adequately participate in distance learning.

In addition, 38 per cent of families with children and adolescents who enrol in school also use TV as a learning resource, and 15 per cent use modules or printed materials as learning materials.⁸ The limited facilities for children and adolescents and their families to engage in distance learning can increase the risk of dropping out of school.

Figure 10. Percentage of children and adolescents aged 7–18 years enrolled based on type of study during the COVID-19 pandemic



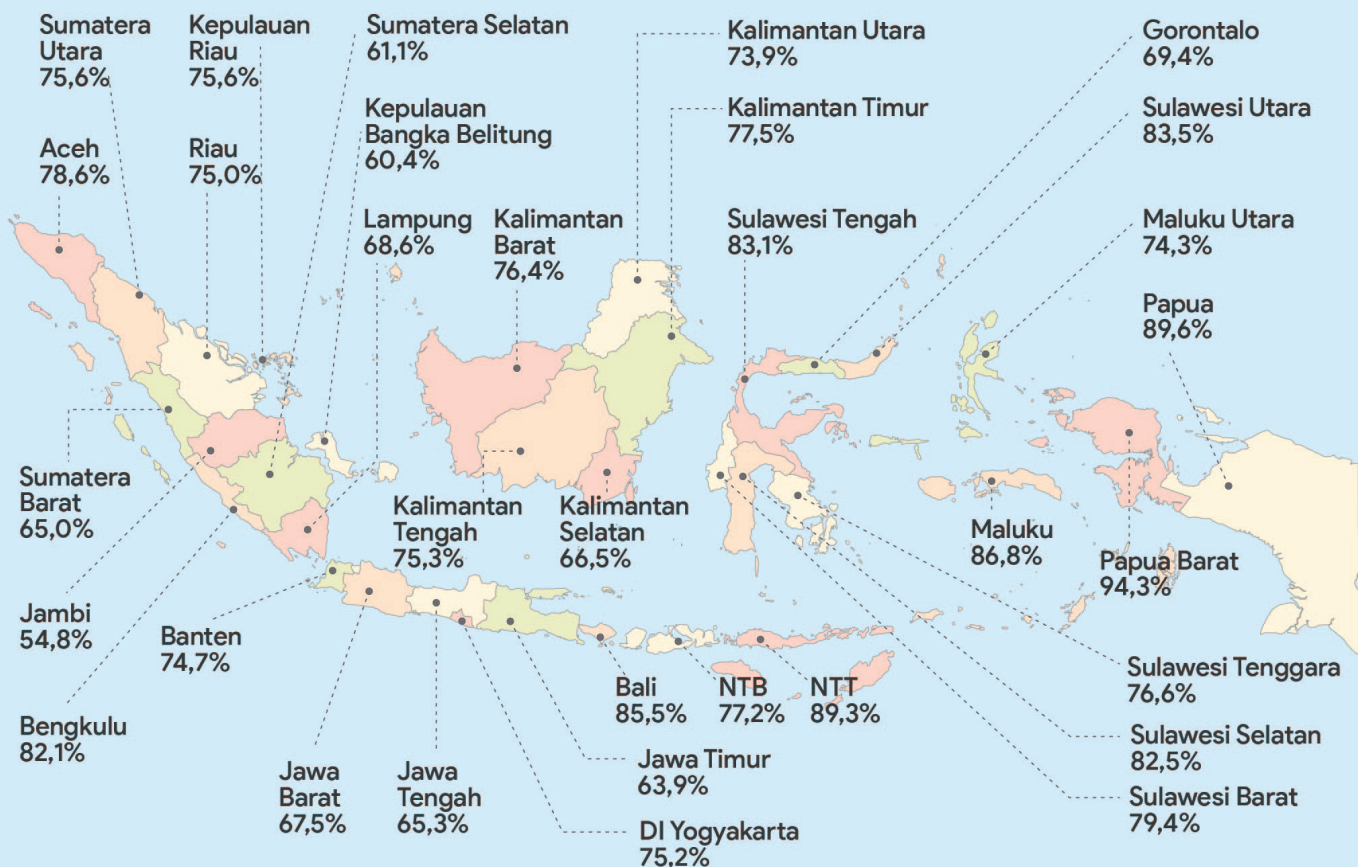
⁸ Respondents could mention more than one facility used when their children are participating in distance learning.

Children and adolescents in the eastern part of Indonesia are at higher risk of dropping out than in other regions.

Within eastern Indonesia, the highest percentages of children and adolescents who have at least one risk factor for dropping out were found to be in the provinces of Papua, West Papua, East Nusa Tenggara and Maluku. Figure 11 below shows the level of vulnerability of children and adolescents for dropping out across 33 provinces in Indonesia. The colour gradations

illustrate the variation in the level of vulnerability for dropping out between provinces: the darker the colour the higher the percentage of children and adolescents with at least one risk factor for dropping out. Compared with the western part of the country, the proportion of children and adolescents with risk factor for dropping out is higher in the eastern part of Indonesia.

Figure 11. Geographical distribution of risk factors





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Action Needed:

- » Further monitoring is needed on the impact of COVID-19 on children and adolescents who have dropped out of school or having risk factor(s) for dropping out, as the phenomenon of dropping out of school will become more evident after most schools have restarted face-to-face learning. This is particularly important because of the income shocks due to the economic downturn, which has not fully rebounded, and the majority of families are still struggling to cope with job losses and unpredictable social assistance responding to COVID-19.
- » Accurately identify children and adolescents in the community who have already dropped out due to COVID-19 (by name and address). At the subnational level, this could be done, among
 - » others, by supporting national and subnational government (such as the Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Villages, Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, and their subnational counterparts) to integrate monitoring of vulnerable children, adolescents, women and families in their programmes.
 - » Establish relevant policies and conduct affirmative actions to immediately facilitate the identified out-of-school children and adolescents to return to education (formal or non-formal). This can be done through coordinated school and community interventions to enable collaboration and sharing of resources in addressing the issue.
 - » Local governments (province, district, subdistrict, village) need to support schools and teachers in their efforts to encourage children to continue their education, among others through distribution of learning modules, ensuring provision of opportunities and infrastructure needed to start face-to-face learning, and facilitation for social protection assistance for those who are economically affected by the pandemic.
 - » Since school closure could potentially exacerbate the pre-existing learning crisis in the country, it is crucial to establish an appropriate remedial programme to assist children and adolescents in catching up the learning lost during the pandemic, especially for those who are considered at risk of dropping out.
 - » Local governments at provincial and district levels need to work together to implement and achieve universal education. This effort should be supported by relevant policies and strategies, capacity development, as well as improvement of quality and relevance of both formal and non-formal education, to ensure out-of-school children and adolescents can return to learning and achieve their right to quality education.



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Case Study 1

Dropped out due to lack of access for online learning

Dini, a 17-year-old girl, was a second grade student at a vocational secondary school, majoring in multimedia. She had previously dropped out of school in 2018 for economic reasons, as her school was quite far from her home, and she did not have a motorcycle or the 20,000 rupiah needed each day for transportation. However, she was eager to study and so she returned to school again at the start of the 2019 school year. She was able to get a ride with her friend each day and so did not need money for transportation.

However, when the COVID-19 pandemic came, her school was closed but continued to offer online learning. However, this was difficult for Dini, as she did not have a mobile phone to access the online lessons. Initially she studied with her friends, using their phones to access the online lessons, but this was difficult, so she decided not to continue her education. Currently she stays at home helping her mother.

Teachers at her school asked her if she was going to continue her education, but Dini was embarrassed to tell them that she had decided to drop out and the reason why. So, she told them that when the school opened again and classes resumed, she would try to return to study, although she is not sure that she will be able to do this. Dini is a smart student and eager to learn, but because of her family's economic condition and the lack of alternatives to online learning, she has had to drop out.

Case Study 2

Dropped out due to lack of support for his disability

Yanto is a 15-year-old boy with autism disorder, and a Grade 5 student at a special education school. The school is about an hour away from his village by motorbike. If

his father has to go to sea as a fisherman and cannot take him to school, Yanto often goes to school with villagers who work in the city. Since the COVID-19 pandemic came, schools have closed and teachers have asked students to study at home. His parents do not have a mobile phone to access online lessons and they do not know how to help Yanto study at home, especially as he often gets angry if he feels bored. During the pandemic, he has mostly played football with his friends in the village or worked as a labourer drying fish. Yanto and his parents are happy to get the extra money, and he has no plans to go back to school even though the school is open.



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