

# Children's Worlds National Report

## Italy



Paloma Vivaldi Vera (INAPP)

Paloma Vivaldi Vera, Matteo D'Emilione, Antonietta Maiorano, Federica Mancini, Paolo Raciti (INAPP)

Laura Migliorini, Nadia Rania (UNIVERSITY OF GENOA)

Giordana Francia, Raffaella De Luca (CISP)

Research group: Anna Grimaldi, Paloma Vivaldi Vera, Anna Ancora, Marco Cioppa, Franco Deriu, Matteo D'Emilione, Giovanna Giuliano, Antonietta Maiorano, Federica Mancini, Gabriella Natoli, Paolo Raciti (INAPP)

Laura Migliorini, Nadia Rania (UNIVERSITY OF GENOA)

Giordana Francia, Raffaella De Luca (CISP)

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Context and population

Italy is a peninsula of the European continent crossed by the chain of the Apennines and bordered by four seas: Ligurian Sea, Tyrrhenian Sea, Ionian Sea and Adriatic Sea. It is one of the three peninsulas that make up Southern Europe with the Iberian Peninsula and the Balkan Peninsula.

Italy is a South European country with a population of 59 236 213 inhabitants (Istat, 31th dec. 2021). The population of the 10- to 12-year-old age group is 1 696 512, which corresponds to 2.86% of the total population. In the last 30 years, Italian society has witnessed an increase in immigration. Considering the entire foreign population of 5.026.153, 6.5% is represented by children 5–9 years of age (51.8% males) (Istat 2016).

Italy was the first country in Europe to deal with COVID-19. Measures taken by the government to contain the spread of the virus were based on quarantine and social distancing, with economic, social, and psychological consequences. During pandemic period, Italian children and adolescents faced school closures, which have caused a disruption in the daily lives of all young people and their families. At the end of March, only 67% of schools had activated distance learning, reaching 6.7 million students out of 8.4 million enrolled (Senato della Repubblica).

Quarantine and social isolation have been a stressful and potentially traumatic event and could have negative impact on children's and adolescents' psychological well-being. Moreover, this situation will mainly affect those children and adolescents with pre-existing vulnerabilities (Caffo, Scandroglio, Asta, 2022).

Furthermore, during pandemic Internet-related technologies, such as social media and online games, also gave children and young people the opportunity to keep their relationships alive. Nevertheless, young Internet users were more exposed to the oversharing of private information and intimate content, this might have exposed them to the risk of being groomed by predators.

### Context of COVID-19 in individual country contexts

Italy has been hardly hit by the Covid 19 pandemic since the end of February 2020: on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020, a total of 10.943 people died and almost 99.000 people were infected. The situation did persist severe during the following months. By the end of December 2020, 2.126.673 cases and 74.237 deaths were recorded, and at the end of 2021, the cases became 6.153.639 while deaths increased to 137.404.

The government decreed a total lockdown, from March 9<sup>th</sup> to May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, to contain the contagions and the damage to the population and the health system: all public and private places were closed, except food shops, hospitals, and pharmacies. A new serious wave in October-November 2020, led Italian government to decide new restrictions, including

schools' closure, up to January 2021. Furthermore, health authority and government classified the Italian regions into temporary four areas - red, orange, yellow and white - corresponding to risk scenarios, for which specific restrictive measures were foreseen. Then some regional authorities decided to keep the schools closed for longer than others to prevent the risk of new peaks of infection.

Education system reacted by organizing online lessons in all schools and universities. Education Ministry allocated funds for schools that needed to purchase and distribute devices to all students. Then organised a technical assistance service for school staff who needed support in managing the technologies required for distance learning with students attending classes in remote.

Despite the considerable effort made by teachers and school leaders, distance learning presented several problems: (i) a significant proportion of teachers were unprepared for this mode of teaching, both in terms of technical skills and in terms of adapting methodologies and content; (ii) several areas of the country suffered from a weak Internet connection; (iii) many students, especially in primary school, were left without devices with which to participate in lessons and maintain relations with teachers and classmates (iv) the most vulnerable students tended not to show up during video lessons or not to log on; (v) during the March-May and then October-December 2020 restrictions, sports, recreational and cultural activities were also suspended, so that children and adolescents suffered abrupt social as well as physical isolation; (vi) parents had to take on additional support for their children's learning, especially in the primary school age group.

The impact of Covid 19 on learning can be seen by observing the results of the INVALSI (PISA OECD) 2021 survey: at national level, 8<sup>th</sup> Grade students who do not achieve adequate results, i.e., not in line with the National Indications, are:

Italian: +9 percentage points compared to 2019

Mathematics: +9 percentage points compared to 2019

English-reading (B2): +3 percentage points compared to 2019

English-listening (B2): +2 percentage points compared to 2019.

In all subjects, the greatest learning losses occur among pupils from more disadvantaged socio-economic-cultural backgrounds. Moreover, among the latter, the rate of higher-achieving students decreases the most. The equalising effect of schools on students who achieve good or very good results despite coming from an unfavourable background (so-called resilient learners) is thus reduced.

Covid 19 pandemic exacerbated the gap among children living in Italian South regions, internal areas, suburbs of large cities and/or already poor families/environments, as well as with disabilities or migration background, increasing inequalities.

Isolation during the pandemic fostered the onset of behavioural problems and a worsening of pre-existing conditions in 65% of children under 6 years of age and 71% of those between 6 and 18 years of age, with an increase in irritability, sleep and anxiety disorders (Vicari 2021).

## **1.2 Sampling: Strategy and outcome**

The survey was conducted on a non - representative sample of Italian children population from Rome, Genoa but mainly from the South of Italy (Campania and Calabria regions): difficulties in reaching schools given closure impediments (for summer break), emergency covid- related issues (such as green pass obligation for teachers) and difficulties in having

parents' consent, made impractical in terms of time and effort to collect the data needed to build a representative sample.

The survey was carried out from May 20th to September 30th, 2021, and all possible channels were used to involve children in the whole Country. In particular: schools, social media, WhatsApp groups, parents' associations, our Institutional websites, summer schools, third sector associations, other research institutions.

The questionnaire was administered online through a user-friendly web platform to 970 children. At last, after data cleaning of incomplete survey responses, 919 fully completed questionnaires were used. The sample is balanced both by gender (50.4% males and 49.6% females) and by age, in fact all age groups considered (10-11- 12) are equally distributed (33%).

## 2. Results

### 2.1 About you: Q1-2, Q5-10

Table 1: Q1. How old are you? (% valid)

Age	%
9 years old	0,1
10 years old	31,6
11 years old	33,2
12 years old	30,0
13 years old	4,8
14 years old	0,3

Chart 1: Q2. Are you...? (% valid)

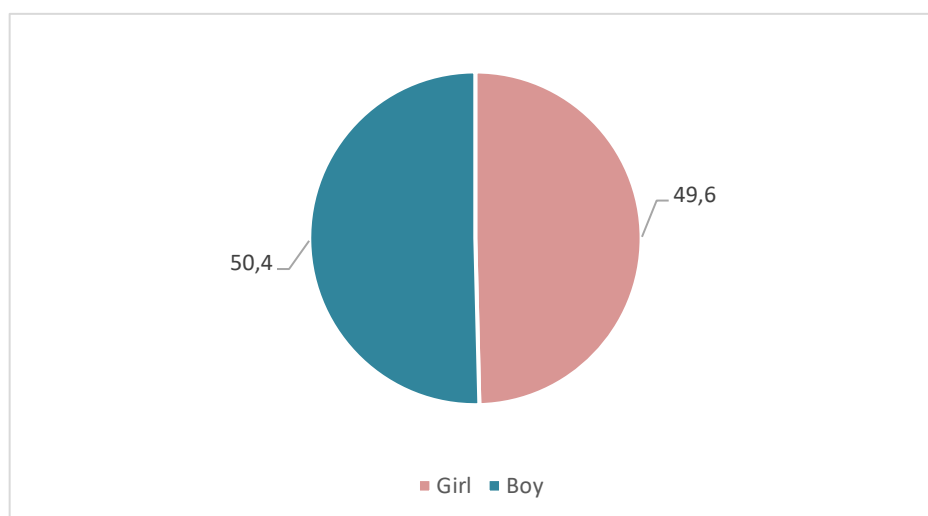


Table 2: Q5. At present, with whom do you live? (% valid)

Item	%
With my family, in our home	87,6
With my family, but at a different place (not at our regular home)	0,8
With my family, but in more than one home, because my parents live in different homes	8,6
With my family, but in more than one home, because my family has more than one home	2,9
In residential care	0,1

Table 3: Q6. Please describe what your situation was (or still is) during the Coronavirus pandemic (% valid)

Item	yes	no	not sure
Everybody in my city/town/village was in lockdown for many days	71,3	17,3	11,4
Me or somebody in my home got infected with Coronavirus	11,9	87,3	0,8
Somebody in my family (not living with me) got infected with Coronavirus	97,3	2,7	-
Somebody I know got infected with Coronavirus (e.g.: from my neighborhood or in a friend's family)	96,3	3,7	-
At home we had to be very careful because somebody was considered at high risk of getting very ill if they got infected with the Coronavirus	88,9	11,1	-
I had to stay at home for many days	74,6	25,4	-
I could not attend school for many days	98,4	1,6	-

Table 4: Q7. Do the following statements describe your situation during the Coronavirus? (% valid)

Item	yes	no	not sure
My family had to move to another home	4,3	95,2	0,5
I had to be in quarantine once	36,0	63,2	0,8
I had to be in quarantine more than once	16,7	82,5	0,8
At least one of my parents was forced/had to stop working and receive money from the government	24,9	68,8	6,4
At least one of my parents was forced to stop working and did not receive money from the government	<i>Not asked in this country</i>		
My school was closed during lockdown	95,6	3,8	0,5

There were times where I had to be in my home all day (including the garden, yard or balcony, if you have) because of the Coronavirus	58,2	40,1	1,6
There were times where I was only allowed to leave my home for a few hours during the day because of the Coronavirus	64,7	32,9	2,4

Table 5: Q8. How much do you agree with each of the following sentences? (% valid)

Item	I do not agree	I agree a little	I agree somewhat	I agree a lot	I totally agree
I feel safe at home	0,7	2,4	18,3	28,6	50,0
I feel safe at school	3,1	14,6	42,1	25,2	15,1
I feel safe when I walk around in the area I live in	6,4	23,2	44,3	16,4	9,6
I feel safe with my friends	3,2	11,9	37,4	28,2	19,3
I feel alone	56,7	22,2	12,1	4,1	5,0
I feel protected from the Coronavirus	25,6	25,6	27,4	11,7	9,7
I feel bored	27,7	31,0	22,6	8,6	10,1
I miss my friends	15,6	12,1	25,9	20,4	26,1
I miss my relatives (e.g. grandparents, a parent living or working far from home)	15,9	11,0	20,3	22,8	30,0
I have problems with siblings	44,1	24,0	16,9	8,4	6,5

Chart 2: Q9. Which of the following do you have at home? (% valid)

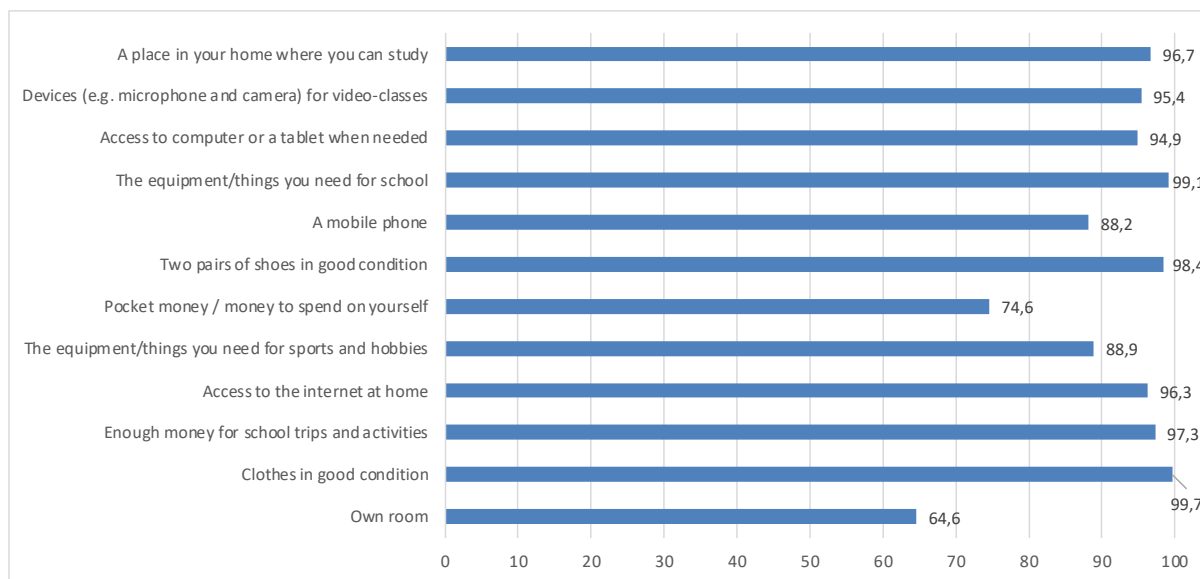
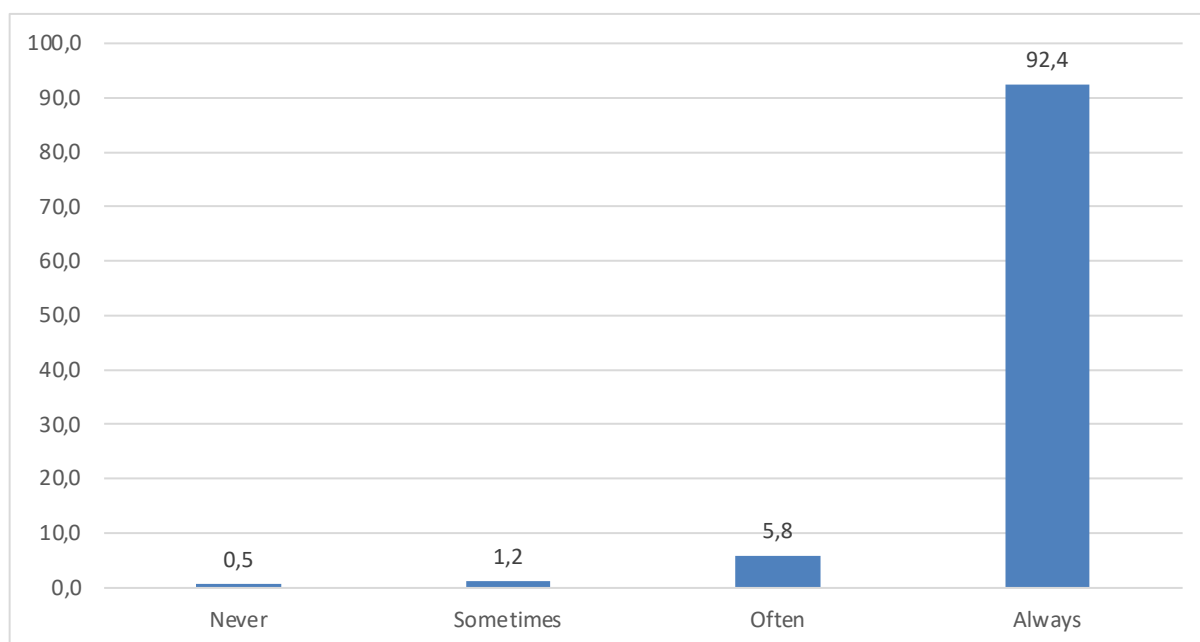


Chart 3: Q10. During the lockdown did you have enough food to eat each day? (% valid)



## 2.2 Your life during the Coronavirus: Q11-14

Table 6: Q11. How much do you agree with each of the following sentences? (% valid)

Item	I do not agree	I agree somewhat	I agree a lot	I totally agree
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	a little				
I have enough information about the Coronavirus	1,8	6,1	39,1	28,8	24,2
We speak together about the Coronavirus in my home	6,7	13,1	36,7	25,9	17,6
My opinions about the Coronavirus are taken seriously in my home	4,1	5,8	31,1	28,5	30,5
I received a lot of information about the Coronavirus from my family members or caregivers	2,6	6,4	29,7	28,2	33,1
I received a lot of information about the Coronavirus from other children	17,3	28,5	35,9	11,4	6,9
I received a lot of information about Coronavirus from teachers	1,8	6,4	26,0	34,0	31,9
I received a lot of information about Coronavirus through social media (Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, etc.)	22,0	16,3	25,9	19,8	15,9
We watch news about the Coronavirus at my home	<i>Not asked in this country</i>				
I received a lot of information about the Coronavirus through the news	4,5	7,3	23,7	27,2	37,3
I think that a lot of the news about the Coronavirus are unreliable	29,4	37,1	20,5	7,8	5,3

Table 7: Q12. How satisfied were you with each of the following things in your life BEFORE the Coronavirus? M(SD)

Item	Total
With how I normally spent my time	8.6 (1.9)
With the things I used to learn at school	8.7 (1.7)
With the relationships I had with my friends	8.7 (2.0)
With the relationships I had with people I live with	9.2 (1.6)

Table 8: Q13. How satisfied are you with each of the following things in your life now DURING the Coronavirus? M(SD)

Item	Total
With how I normally spend my time	6.2 (2.6)



With the things I learn at school	7.1 (2.4)
With the relationships I have with my friends	6.6 (2.8)
With the relationships I have with people I live with	8.6 (2.2)

Table 9: Q14. During the last month, how worried have you been about the following things in your life? M(SD)

Item	Total
By the Coronavirus situation	7.0 (2.7)
That I may get infected by the Coronavirus	6.6 (3.2)
That people I know may get infected by the Coronavirus	7.3 (2.8)
That I may infect other people with the Coronavirus	6.3 (2.4)
That I may get bad school marks because of the Coronavirus situation	<i>Not asked in this country</i>
The money my family has during the Coronavirus period	5.2 (3.7)
The changes in my life as a student because of the Coronavirus situation	6.5 (3.1)

### 2.3 School and relationships: Q16-19, Q22-23

Chart 4: Q16. During the Coronavirus, when schools were closed, how did you learn at home? (%) (*more than one answer is possible*)

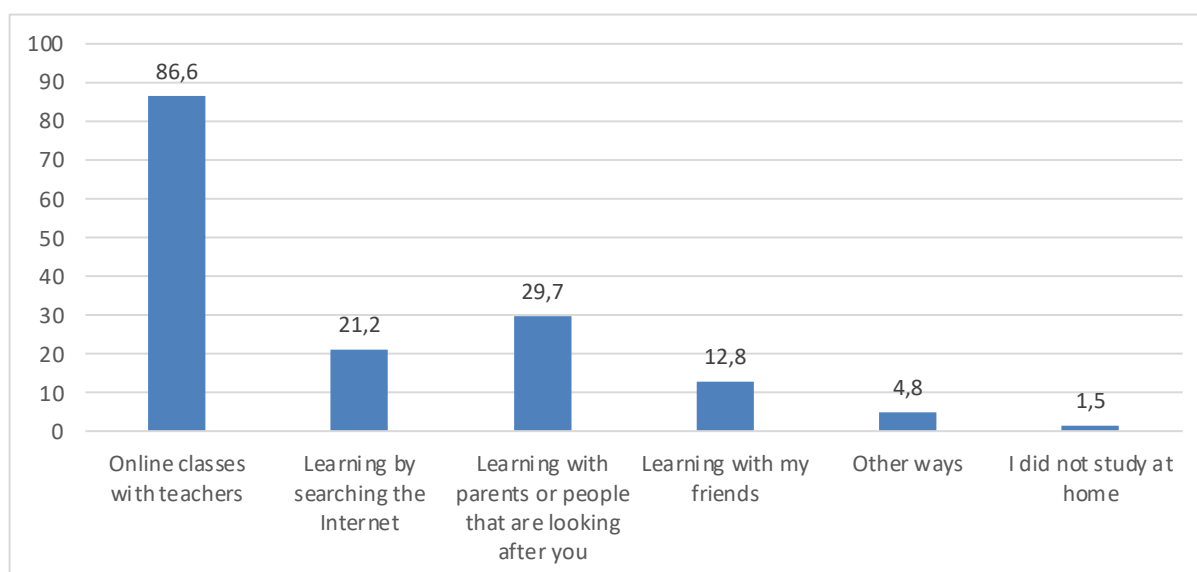


Chart 5: Q17. How much do you agree with the following sentence: “During the Coronavirus, when schools were closed, I managed to continue with my learning from home”? (% valid)

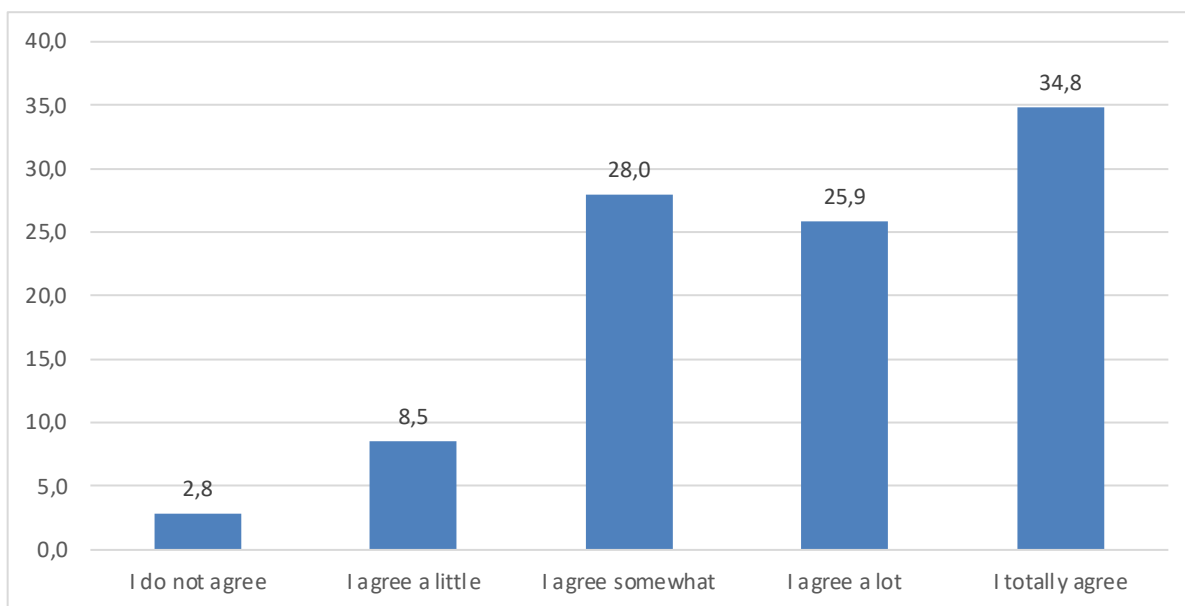


Chart 6: Q18. Please, answer the following questions. During Coronavirus... (% valid)

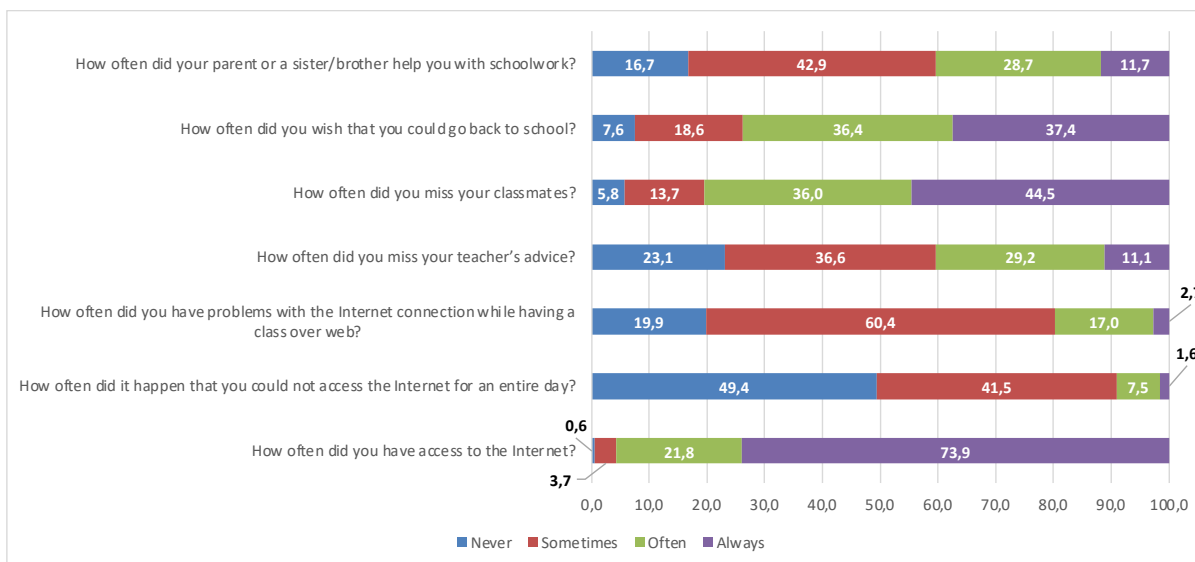


Chart 7: Q19. How do you keep in touch with your friends during the Coronavirus lockdown? (%) (more than one answer is possible)

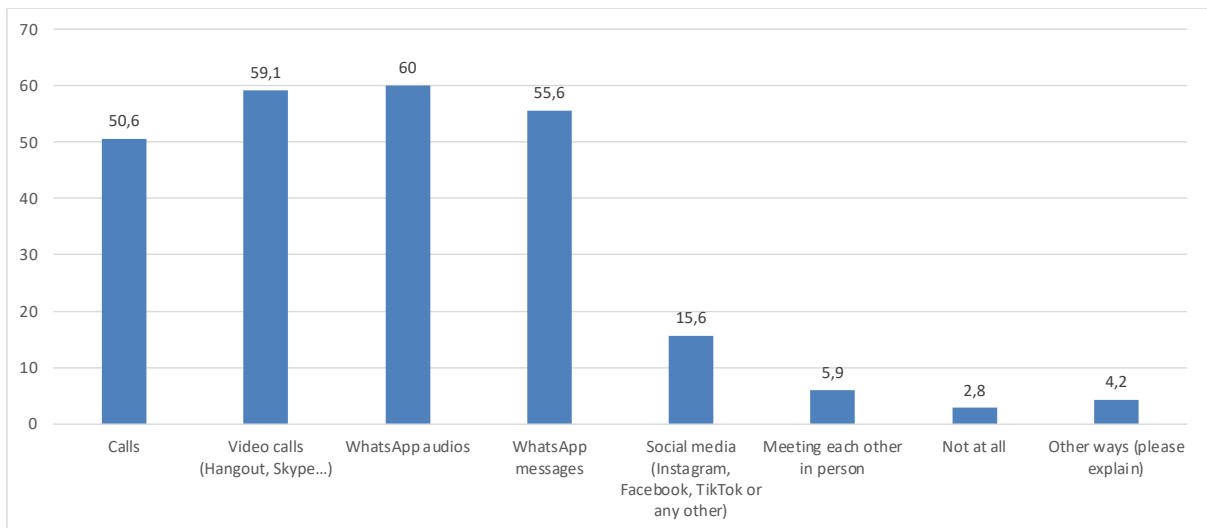


Table 10: Q22. How much do you agree with the following sentences? During the Coronavirus, I felt well-supported by... (% valid)

Item	I do not agree	I agree a little	I agree somewhat	I agree a lot	I totally agree
some of my friends	8,7	19,4	36,2	22,7	12,9
some of my teachers	5,4	13,2	37,8	27,6	16,0
some people I live with	1,5	3,0	13,7	29,3	52,5

Table 11: Q23. How much do you agree with each of the following sentences? (% valid)

Item	I do not agree	I agree a little	I agree somewhat	I agree a lot	I totally agree
During the coronavirus, I became closer to some members of my family	7,9	13,7	25,2	25,6	27,7
My relationships with my friends was affected during the Coronavirus	24,9	23,2	24,2	15,4	12,3
I made new friends with other children online during the Coronavirus	51,5	18,7	13,4	9,3	7,1

## 2.4 How do you feel about life: Q24-28

Table 12: Q24. How much do you agree with each of the following sentences about your life as a whole? M(SD)

Item	Total
I enjoy my life	8.9 (1.7)
My life is going well	8.8 (1.7)
I have a good life	9.1 (1.5)
The things that happen in my life are excellent	8.1 (1.9)
I am happy with my life	8.9 (1.8)
I like being the way I am	8.7 (2.0)
I am good at managing my daily responsibilities	8.0 (1.9)
People are generally friendly towards me	8.4 (1.8)
I have enough choice about how I spend my time	8.4 (1.8)
I feel that I am learning a lot at the moment	8.0 (2.1)
I feel positive about my future	8.4 (2.0)

Table 13: Q25. Below is a list of words that describe different feelings. Please read each word and then tick a box to say how much you have felt this way during the last two weeks M(SD)

Item	Total
Happy	8.4 (1.8)
Sad	4.0 (3.0)
Calm	7.1 (2.6)
Stressed	4.6 (3.3)
Full of energy	8.0 (2.4)
Bored	4.8 (3.2)

Table 14: Q26. How much do you agree with the following sentence? (% valid)

Item	I do not agree	I agree a little	I agree somewhat	I agree a lot	I totally agree
I am very afraid of the Coronavirus	13,9	21,0	34,6	15,5	15,0
It makes me uncomfortable to think about the Coronavirus	30,5	26,7	23,6	10,9	8,2
My hands become sweaty when I think about the Coronavirus	67,8	19,3	7,1	2,9	3,0
I am afraid of losing my life because of the Coronavirus	42,8	24,0	16,3	6,8	10,2
When I watch news and stories about the Coronavirus on the TV and social media, I become nervous or anxious	36,2	27,0	22,2	8,7	5,9
I cannot sleep because I'm worrying about getting the Coronavirus	70,8	20,2	5,3	2,1	1,5
My heart races (beats very fast) when I think about getting the Coronavirus	55,1	21,0	14,3	5,3	4,3

Table 15: Q27. How satisfied are you with each of the following things in your life? M(SD)

Item	Total
The people you live with	9.3 (1.5)
The house you live in	9.2 (1.4)
The area where you live	8.5 (2.0)
About how safe you feel	8.7 (1.6)
Your friends	8.6 (1.9)
How you use your time	8.4 (1.7)
The way you look	7.9 (2.4)
The things you have	9.1 (1.4)
The freedom you have	8.7 (1.8)

What may happen later in your life	8.0 (2.0)
How you are listened to by adults in general	8.0 (2.1)
Your health	9.1 (1.5)
Your life as a whole	9.0 (1.6)

Table 16: Q28. Please, answer the following questions. M(SD)

Item	Total
Thinking about how your life was before the Coronavirus, how happy were you with your life as whole?	9.1 (1.6)
Thinking about how your life now during the Coronavirus, how happy are you with your life as whole?	7.8 (1.9)

### 3. Conclusions

This report presents the main findings of a descriptive analysis of Italian 10-12 - years old children who participated to the Children’s Worlds COVID-19 Supplement survey.

Observing the characteristics of children’s family context, it can be pointed out that the rate of children who live with their family at home is predominant (87.6%) compared to the rate of those who live with their family, but in more than one house because parents live in separate houses (8.6%). The rate of those who state to live in different situations (residential care, in a family different than mine) is residual.

Data clearly show that, the safest place for children is their home, in fact 50% “totally agree” in considering themselves safe at home, 28.6% “agree a lot”, 18.3% “agree somewhat” and the residual part (3.1%) “do not agree at all”. The school, on the other hand, is perceived as a "more uncertain" place, in fact only 15.1% “totally agree” in considering themselves safe, 25.20% agree a lot, 42.10% agree somewhat, 14.6% agree a little and a very small part do not agree at all (3.1%). Despite children isolation generated by the pandemic, only a small rate (9.1%) “agree a lot” or “totally agree” with the statement “I feel alone”.

Life satisfaction before and during the pandemic was also investigated, highlighting a sharp decline in the satisfaction degree during the coronavirus pandemic with regards to learning at school and the way in which boys and girls usually spent their time. In the first case, 45.5% of children were satisfied before the pandemic, but only 19.5% during the pandemic: this significant change maybe due to remote teaching mode. Regarding the second issue, 47.3% of children were totally satisfied by the way they spent their spare time before the pandemic, and only 11.8% during the pandemic. Again, 54.4% were “totally satisfied” with the relationships they had with friends before the pandemic, and about 20% during the

pandemic. Such decrease is presumably due to both the long schools' closures and to the suspension of sports, recreational and cultural activities that lasted for months: 80% of the sample state that they have "always" or "often" missed their classmates during the pandemic, and 73% "always" or "often" wished to go back to school.

With regards to the possibility of continuing with their learning from home during pandemic, 11.3% of children reported they "did not agree" or "agreed a little". This difficulty is probably due to three factors: 19.7% of children had problems with the Internet connection while having a class over web, 16,7% were never supported by parents or siblings with schoolwork and 18.6% did not feel supported by their teachers..

A slight decrease in the level of satisfaction is also found in the relationships they had with the people they live with (before the pandemic 65.4% of children were satisfied, during covid only 52.2%), but the family remains the "safe harbour" of these children. In fact, more than half of them (52.5%) state they "totally agree" in having found support during the pandemic from the people they live with and got closer to some family members (53, 3% of the sample "agree a lot" or "totally agree" with this statement).

During the pandemic there is also an evident decline in children's happiness, going from 58.9% of children who state to be "completely happy" with life in general before the coronavirus to 19.9% during the pandemic. This last evidence is a clear effect of the consequences that the pandemic has had on the well-being of children who have suddenly been forced to experience a period of isolation at home characterized by anxieties and uncertainties.

After the survey, findings will be shared with children and schools involved, as the administration of the questionnaire has to be conceived as an opportunity for collective reflection.