

SURVEY: CHILDREN, SPORT AND COVID-19

Centre for Sport and Human Rights



Centre for Sport
& Human Rights

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the Centre for Sport and Human Rights (CSHR) convened a process whereby experts shared their concerns related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children engaged in sport, ranging from those who are elite athletes to those on school or community teams. One of the outcomes of the process was the Report An Overview of the Sport-Related Impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Children. And one of the calls to action of the report was that "stakeholders should engage with children living in a variety of contexts to learn their perceptions and concerns about the impact of the pandemic on their sporting activities and ensure that their views are taken into account in decision making."

In December 2020, CSHR, in partnership with Jonathan Hannay MBE, Representative of the Child and Risk Foundation of the United Kingdom and member of the International Safeguards for Children in Sport, and with Right to Play Australia, elaborated a survey (<https://bit.ly/sport-children-covid>) to learn from children about the impact of the pandemic on their sporting activities. The target audience was children involved in sport, either through elite teams, grassroots sport, or sport for development.

As CSHR does not interact directly with children in its day-to-day activities, and for safeguarding reasons, it contacted sport bodies and sport for development organisations and asked them to disseminate the survey among the children they were already working with. The survey was available from December 2020 to April 2021, in 6 languages – English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Lao and Vietnamese.

Although the aim was to reach a broad range of children, including professional athletes, members of school teams, those living in the Global South, those in humanitarian situations, those with disabilities, LGBTQI+, those living in rural communities, etc., the survey received a much higher number of respondents from Europe and respondents who identified themselves as males. As a lesson learned for future initiatives, more efforts must be made to obtain the views of those typically more difficult to reach.

Even with the differences in the number of respondents, CSHR considered still relevant to disaggregate data per gender and per continent and use percentages to compare data. Because the survey was focused on children, the data presented in this report refer mainly to the respondents between 10 and 17 years of age. Responses from those 18+ years were used in this report separately, in comparison to children.

Because the survey was completely anonymous and non-identifiable, some questions regarding differences between children and youth, gender and continents remain unanswered and could be further explored in future investigations.

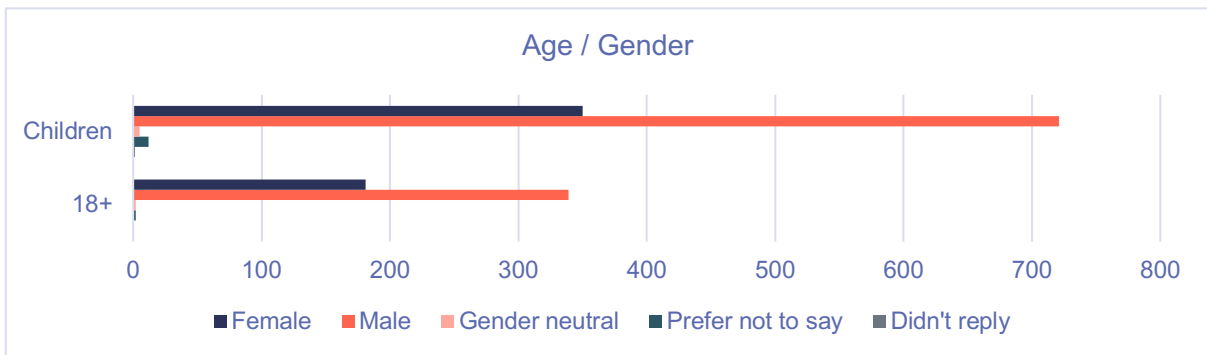
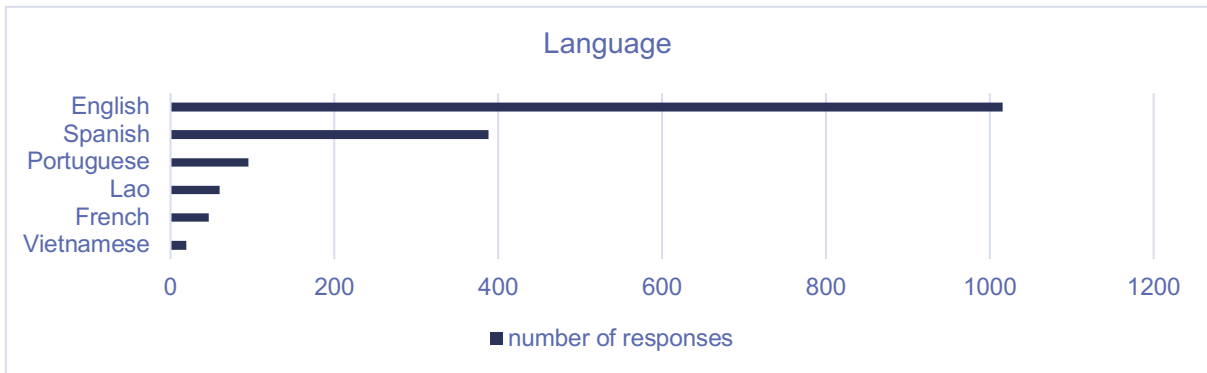
2. MAIN FINDINGS

- Around 70% of children that were engaged in sport prior to the pandemic were still playing.
- However, 68% reported playing less than before the pandemic.
- Children felt that their ability to train was significantly affected. On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (completely), 61.2% of children marked 7 or higher when asked how much their ability to train has been affected by the pandemic.
- Children are not as much involved in competitions as they were before the pandemic. 50.1% of children were not competing and 28.5% were competing less.
- The main barrier for children to play sport during COVID-19 was because their sport programme/team was no longer happening. Nevertheless, it is important to observe that the second main barrier highlighted from the survey is "None of the above", which indicates that the survey was unable to successfully identify some of the barriers for children to play sport.
- Some children (21.3%) started playing new sports during COVID-19, mainly collective (54.3%) and individual sport (47.4%). 8.2% of children started playing e-sport.
- 88.5% of children said they missed playing sport. On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (I miss it more than anything), 82.4% marked 7 or higher. 44.6% of children marked 10.
- When children are asked to pick what they miss the most about sport, friends and teammates are the most chosen option (35.5%) others reported "challenging myself" (18.6%); "learning new skills" (12.6%); "excitement of winning" (12%); and "getting exercise" (10.7%). Missing their teachers and coaches received the lowest score (1.6%),
- For 70% of children, sport was less fun than before the pandemic.
- 80.4% of children were feeling impacted (physically, mentally/emotionally or both) because they couldn't do sport the way they used to.
- When asked if the pandemic was disrupting their plans to become a professional or elite amateur athlete, on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (completely), 51.6% of children marked 7 or higher.
- 50% of children were receiving emotional support from their clubs or teams but 28.7% indicated they are not receiving any kind of support from their clubs or teams.
- 20% of children had a major loss of income from sport since COVID-19, and 40% said that their parents/guardians had a severe loss of income since the start of the pandemic. However, 81.1% of them indicated that the loss of income has not meant they could no longer play sport

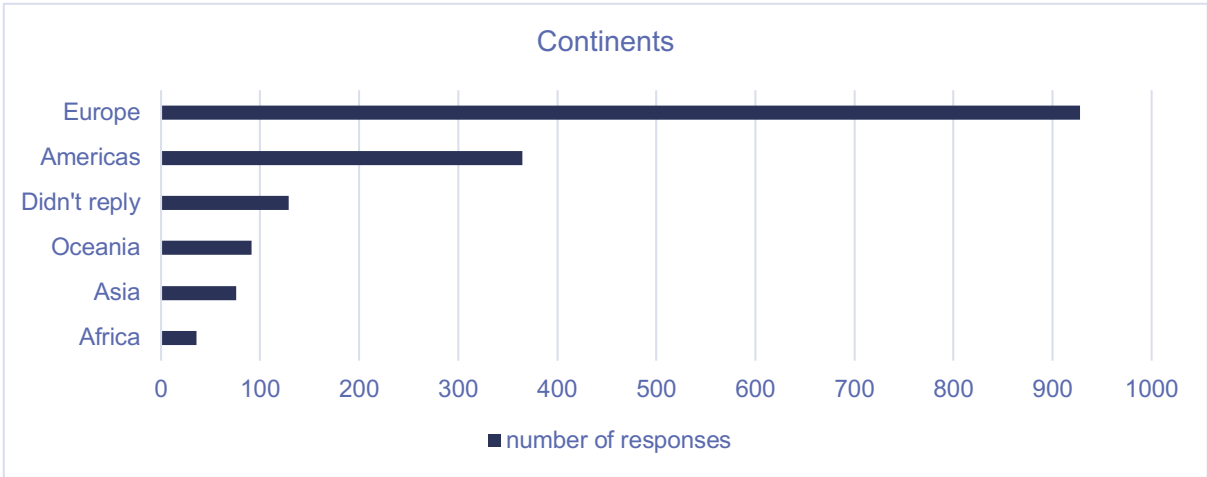
3. DETAILED RESULTS

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

From the 1625 responses received, 1016 were given in English, 388 in Spanish, 95 in Portuguese, 60 in Lao, 47 in French and 19 in Vietnamese. 1089 responses were given by children (from 10 to 17 years of age), being 350 girls, 721 boys, 5 gender neutral, 12 who preferred not to declare their gender identity; and 1 child who skipped the question. 524 responses were given by persons 18+ years, being 181 females, 339 males, 2 gender neutral, and 2 who preferred not to declare their gender identity.



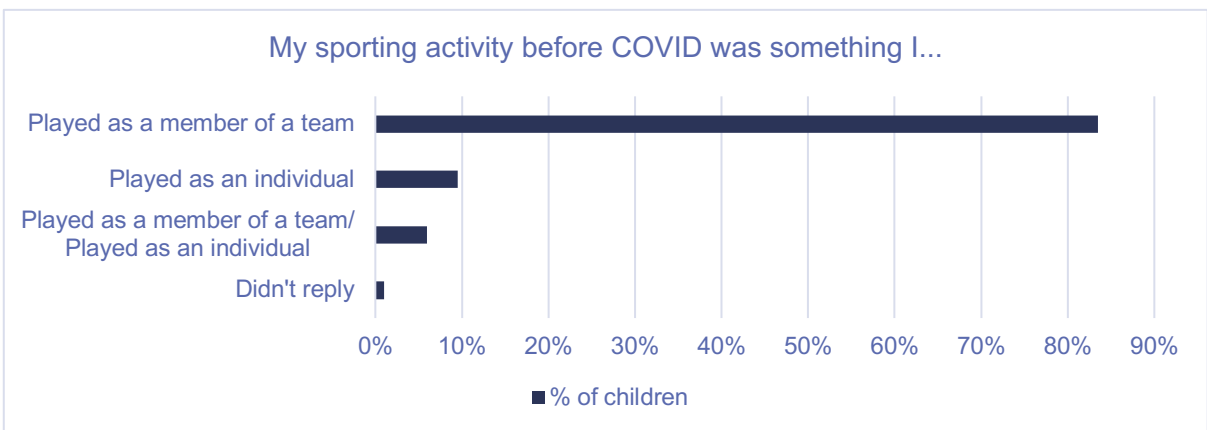
Most of responses were given by children and youth from Europe (628 and 293 respectively, and 7 that didn't inform their age), followed by the Americas (242 children, 121 over 18 years old, and 2 who didn't inform their age), Oceania (69 children and 22 over 18 years of age), Asia (47 children and 29 over 18 years old), and Africa (20 children and 16 over 18 years of age). 129 respondents (83 children, 43 over 18 years of age and 3 who didn't inform their age) didn't declare their country of origin.

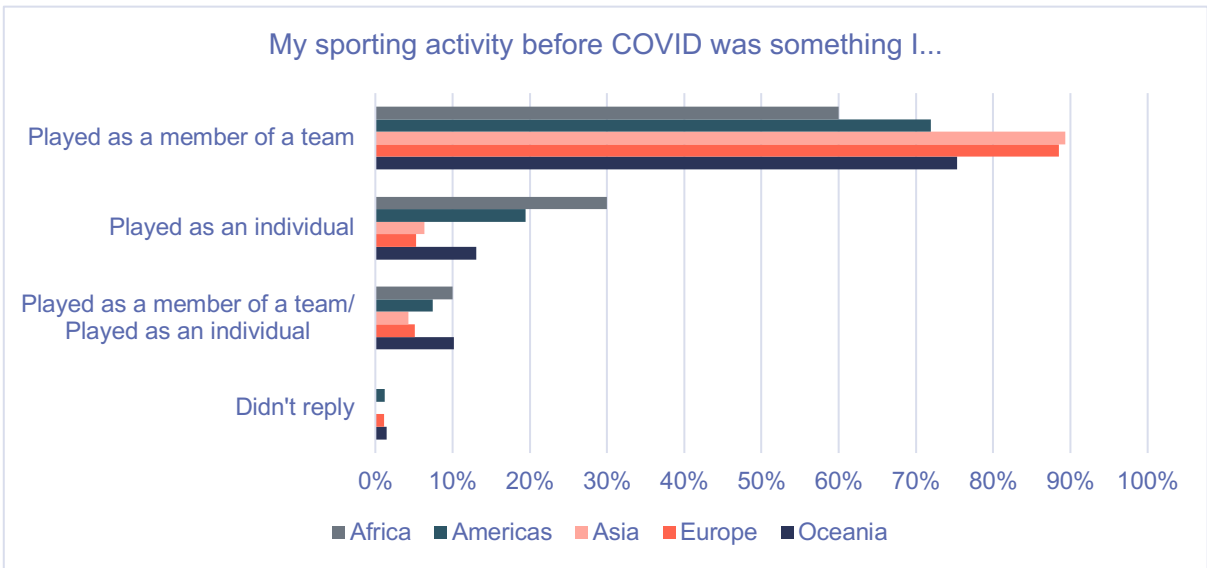
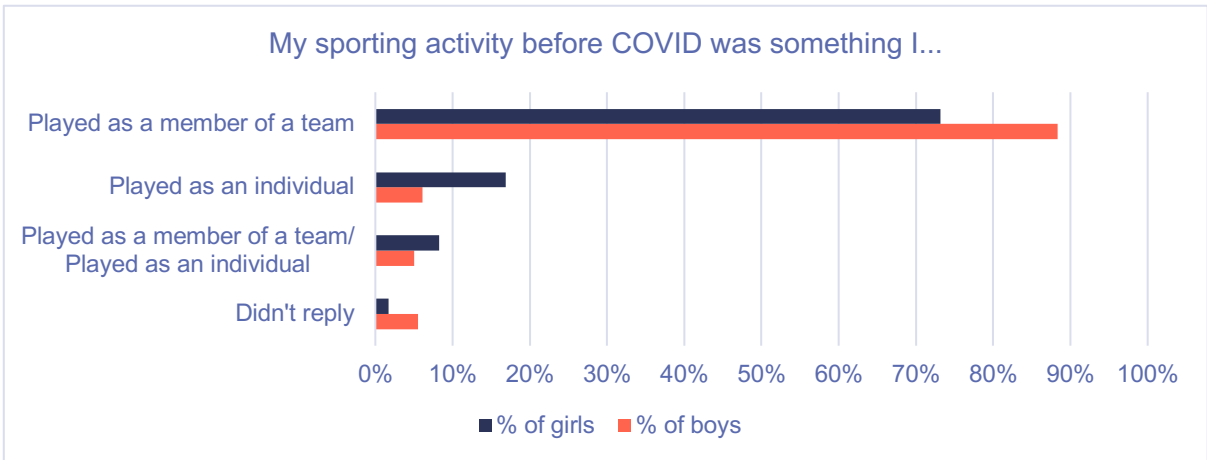
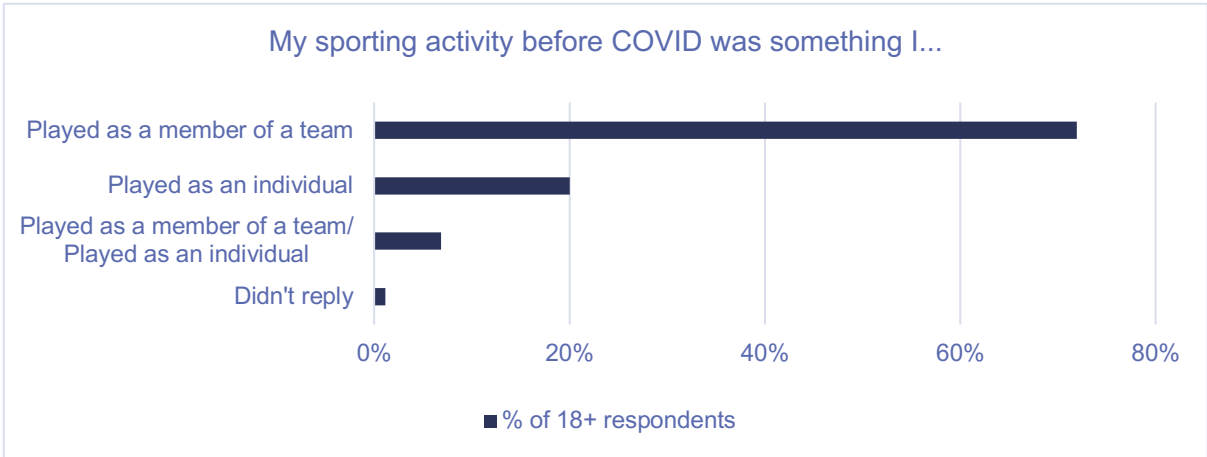


Most children who responded to the survey (83,5%) said that, before COVID-19, they played as a member of a team; 9,6% said they played individually; and 6% played both as a member of a team and individually. Among the 18+ respondents, the majority also played as a member of a team (71,9%), however the percentage playing individually was higher in comparison to children (20%). 6,9% of these respondents played both as a member of a team and individually.

In the disaggregation of data per gender, the percentage of boys playing as a member of a team was higher than of girls (88,3% versus 73,1%), while the percentage of girls playing individually was higher than of boys (16,9% versus 6,1%). Also, more girls played both as a member of a team and individually in comparison to boys (8,3% versus 5%).

Across continents, children played more collective than individual sport, with the highest percentage in Asia (89,4%) and the lowest in Africa (60%). The Americas presented the highest percentage of children playing individually (19,4%).

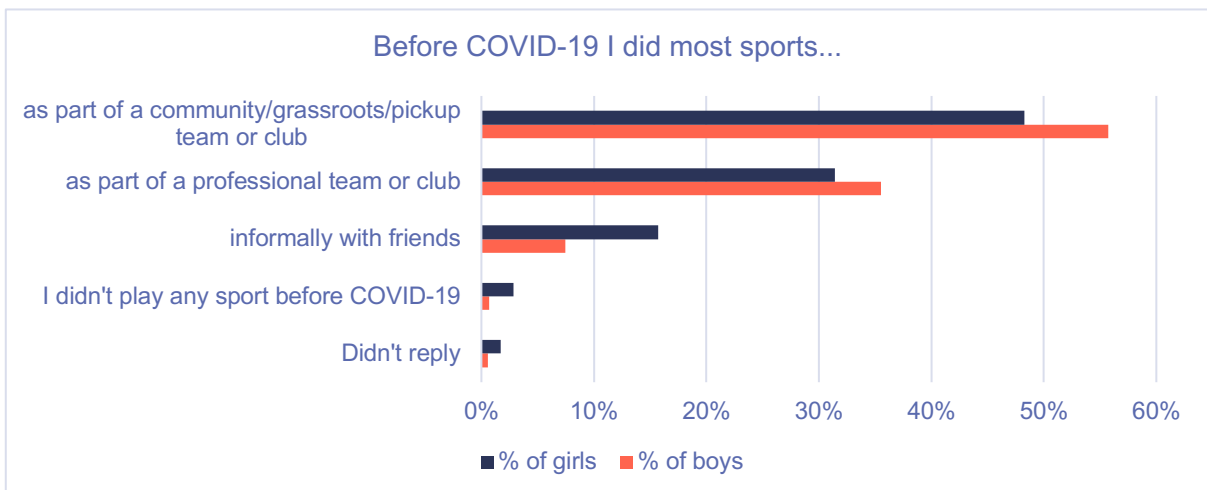
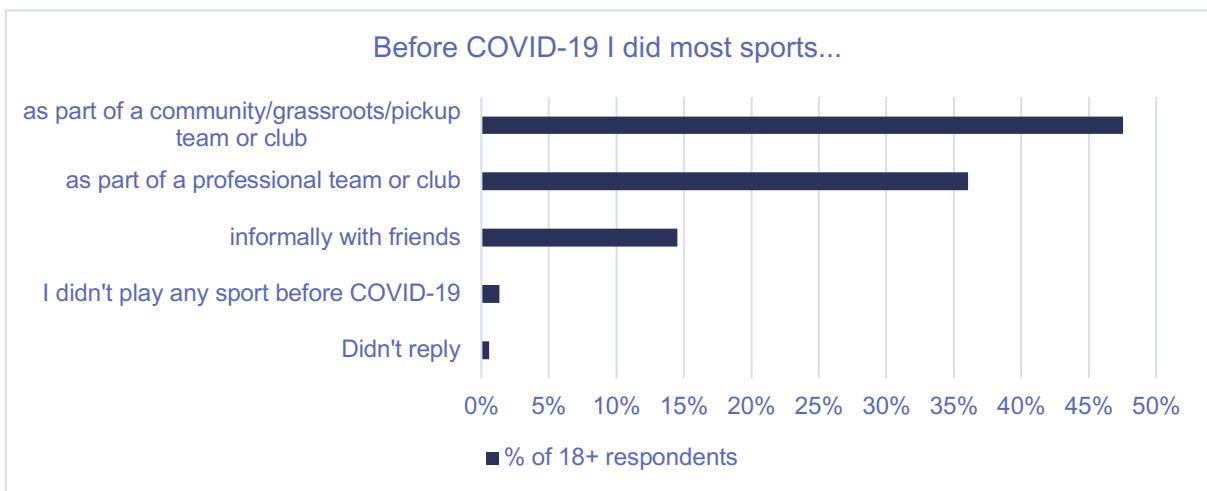
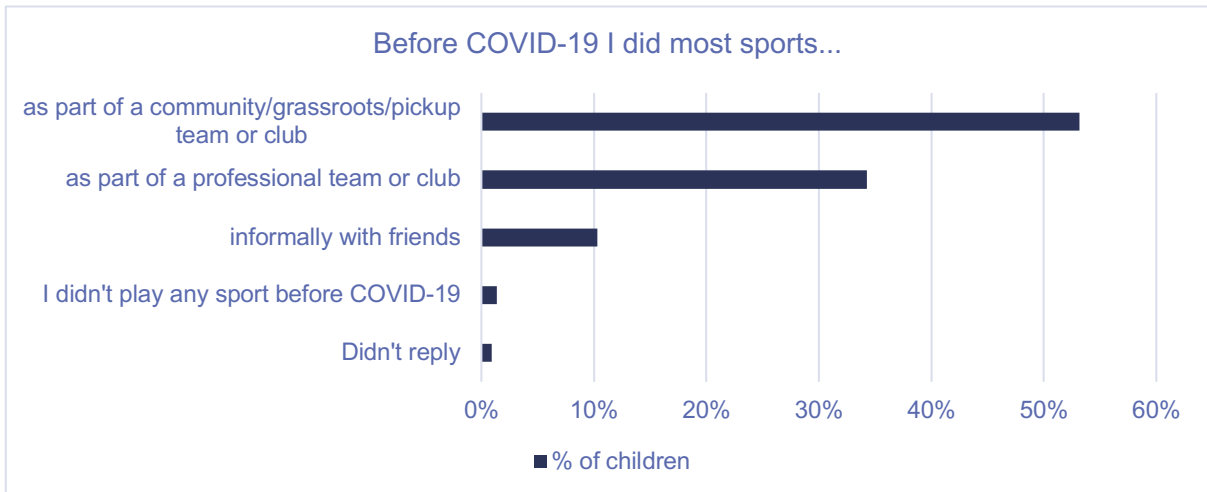


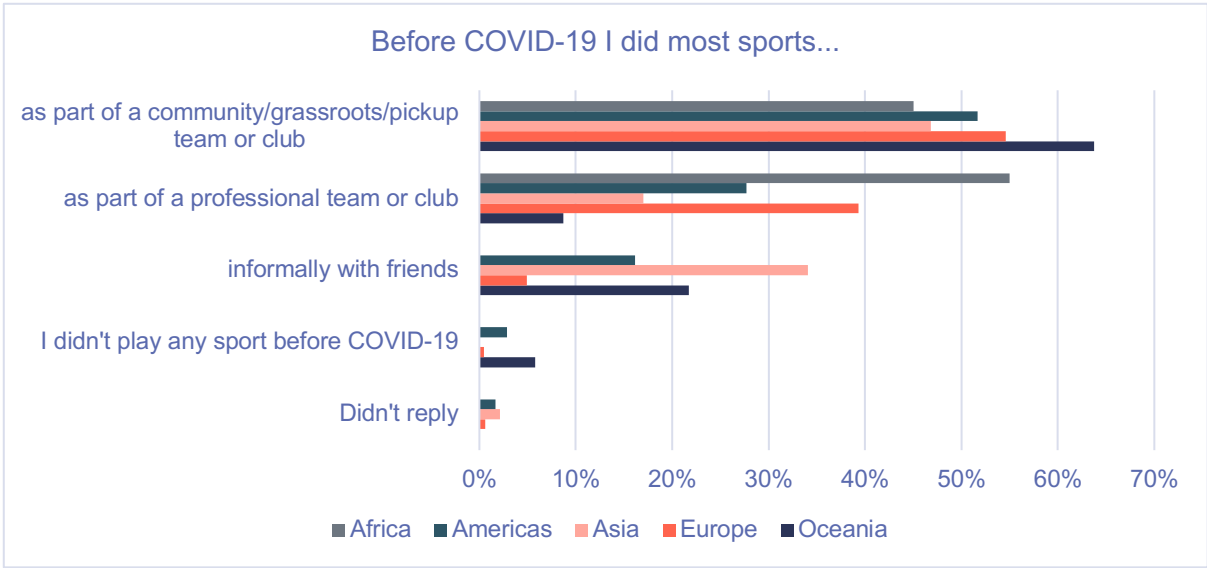


More than half (53,2%) of children did most sport as part of a community/grassroot/pickup team or club, and 34,3% played as part of a professional team or club. Another 10,3% of children played mostly informally with friends and 1,4% say they didn't play any sport before COVID-19. Among 18+ years respondents, the percentage of those playing as part of a community/grassroot/pickup team or club was lower (47,5%), and the percentage of those that played mostly as part of a professional team or club (36,1%) and informally with friends (14,5%), higher.

The percentages of girls playing both at community programmes (48,3%) and professional clubs (31,4%) are lower than of boys (55% and 35,5% respectively). On the other hand, a higher percentage of girls said they mostly played informally with friends (15,7%) than boys (7,5%).

In the Americas (51,7%), Asia (46,8%), Europe (54,6%) and Oceania (63,8%), most of children played as part of a community/grassroot/pickup team or club. In Africa, more children played as part of a professional team or club.



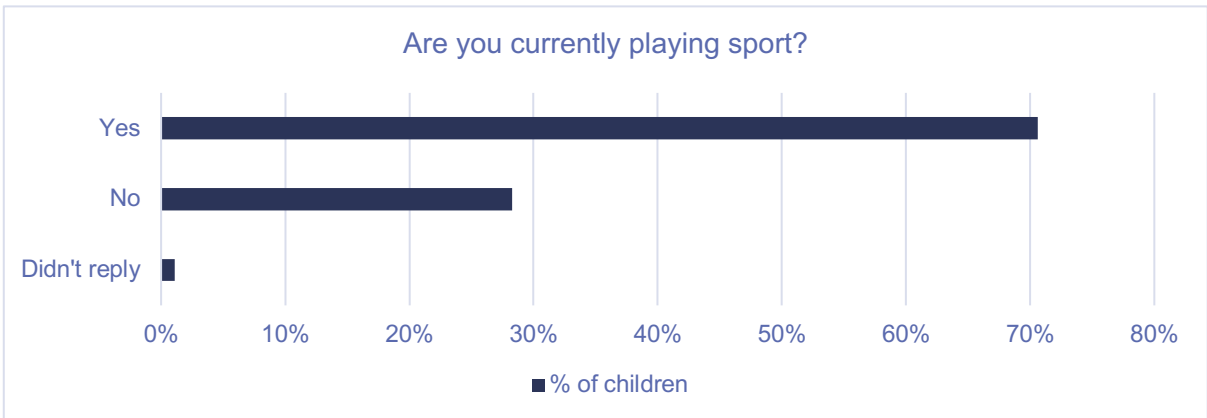


CHILDREN ARE STILL PLAYING SPORT

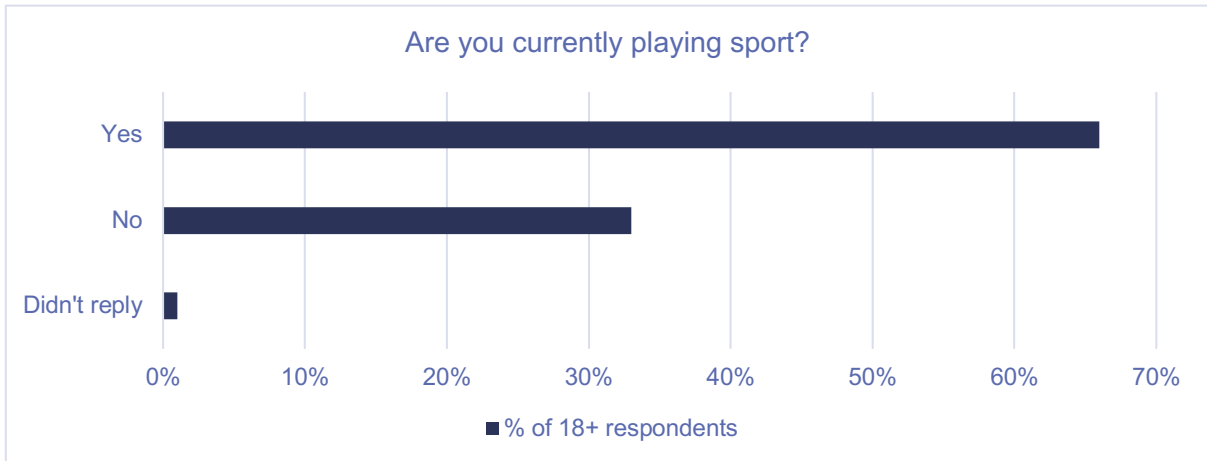
Most children (70,6%) said they were currently playing sport. A slightly higher rate in comparison to the 18+ years respondents (66%). The percentage of boys who reported playing was higher than the girls' (71,7% versus 66,9%). In every continent, the percentage of children respondents playing sport was higher than 60%, with the lowest rate in the Americas (63,2%) and the highest in Africa (95%).

However, because the survey was distributed through sport bodies and sport for development organisations to children with whom they were in direct contact, it cannot be assumed that this high percentage of children playing sport during the pandemic is reflective of the overall reality of children. What is interesting to observe is that among children who were playing sport before the pandemic and were still in contact with their sport organization, 28,3% were not playing sport.

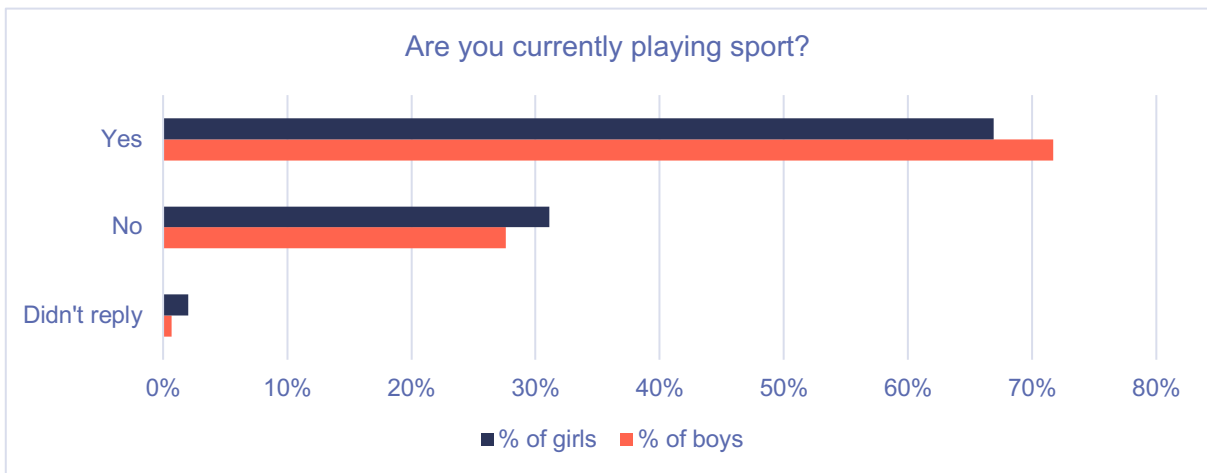
Children



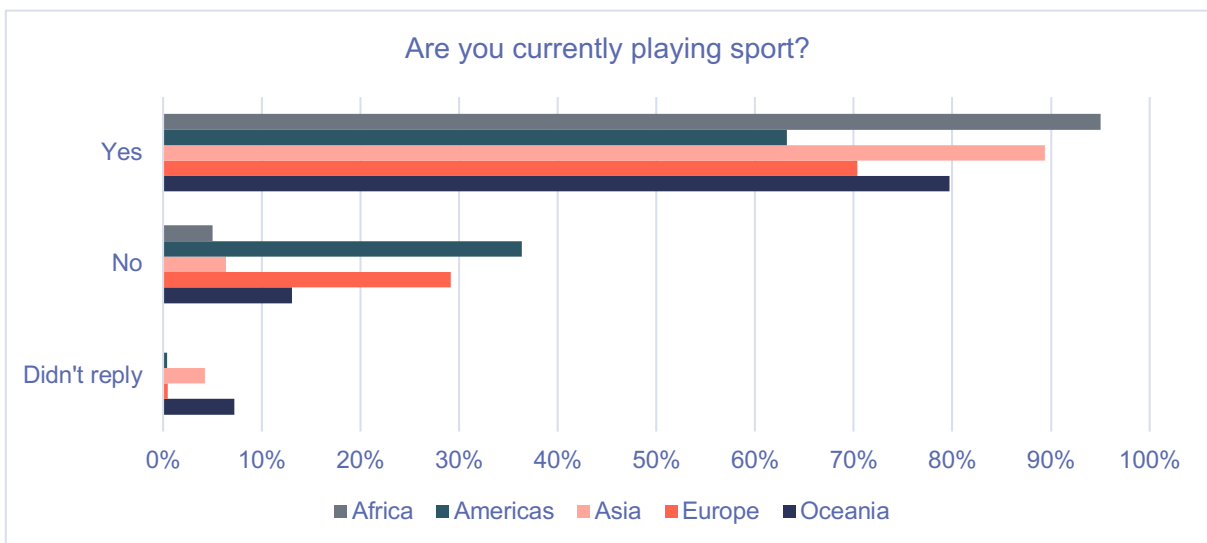
18+ years respondents



Girls and Boys



Children per continent

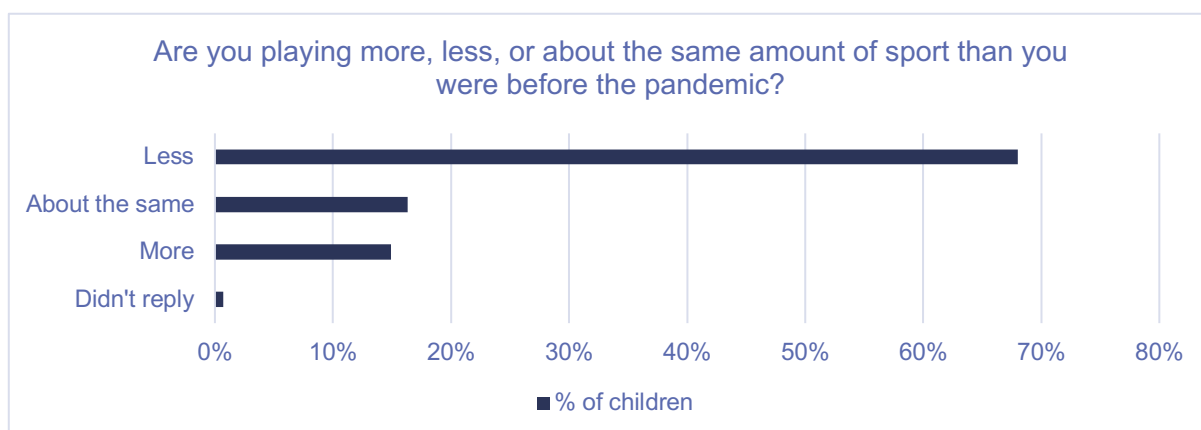


CHILDREN ARE PLAYING LESS SPORT

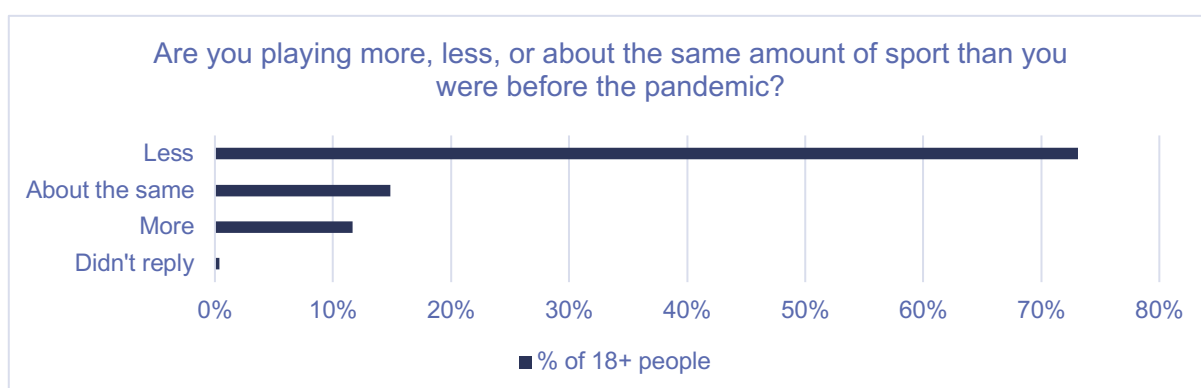
68% of children reported that they were playing less sport than before the pandemic. Whereas around 16% were playing more or less the same amount of sport and 15% are playing more. Among 18+ years respondents, the percentage of respondents playing less sport was higher (73,1%).

When data is disaggregated by gender, the percentage of girls reporting that they were playing as much sport as they did before (19,7%) or even more (18,9%) was higher in comparison to boys (14,7% and 12,3% respectively). In relation to continents, Africa (75%), Europe (73,4%), and the Americas (68,2%) followed the global trend of decrease in the amount of sport played. Oceania presented a smaller decrease: 40,6% of children were playing less sport. In Asia, 48,9% of children were playing more sport than before the pandemic and 19,1% were playing about the same.

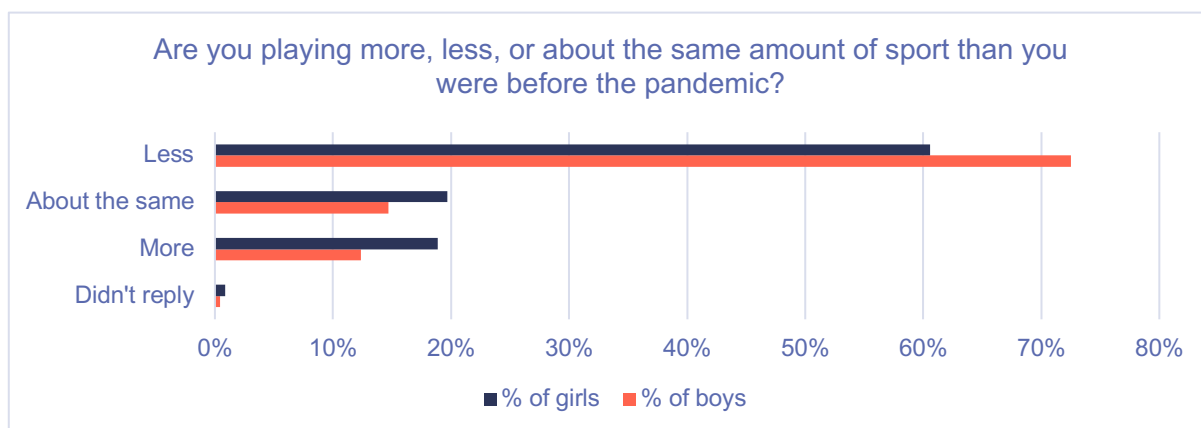
Children



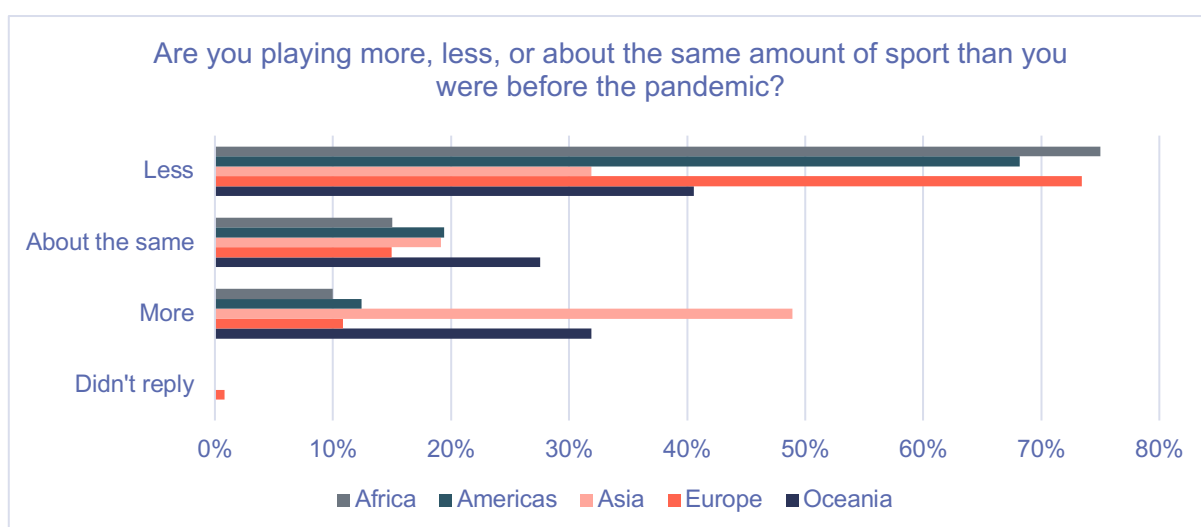
18+ years respondents



Girls and Boys



Children per continent



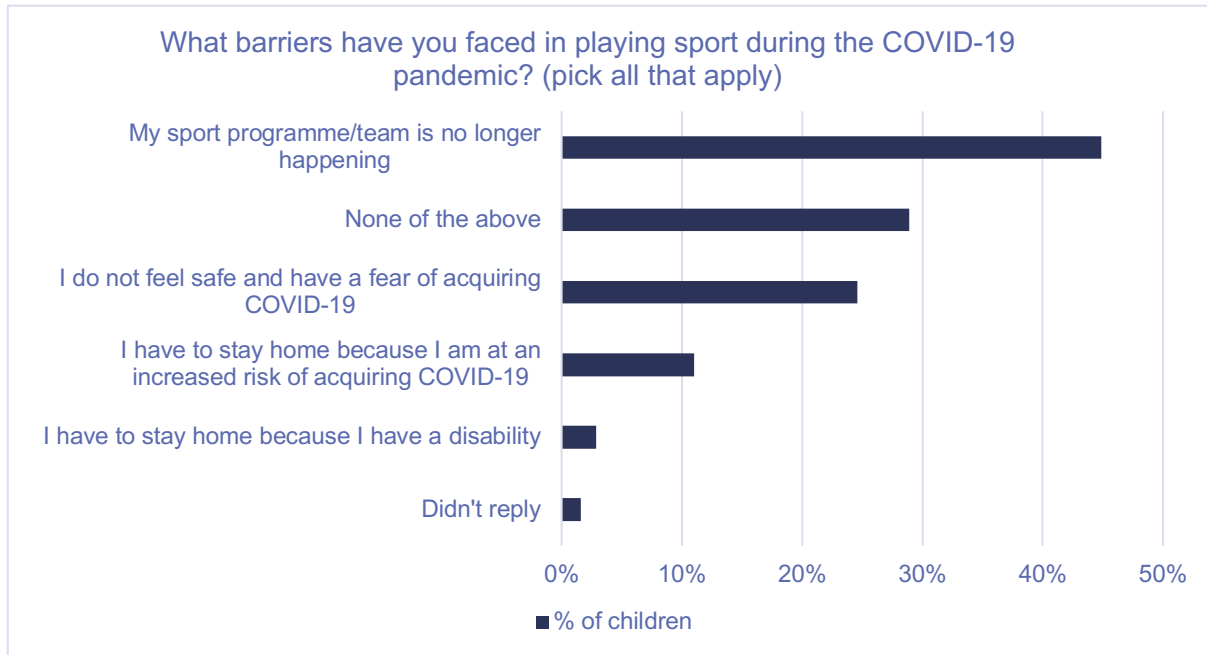
MAIN BARRIERS

When asked about what barriers they had faced in playing sport during the COVID-19 pandemic, 45,4% of children said that their sport programmes and/or teams were no longer happening. One in five children (21,5%) do not feel safe or had a fear of acquiring COVID-19 and 10,5% said they had to stay home because they were at an increased risk of acquiring the disease. Three percent of the children who replied to the survey said they had to stay at home because they have a disability. It is worth noting that 32,5% of children marked "None of the above", which indicates that this survey question may not have identified key important barriers for children to continue playing.

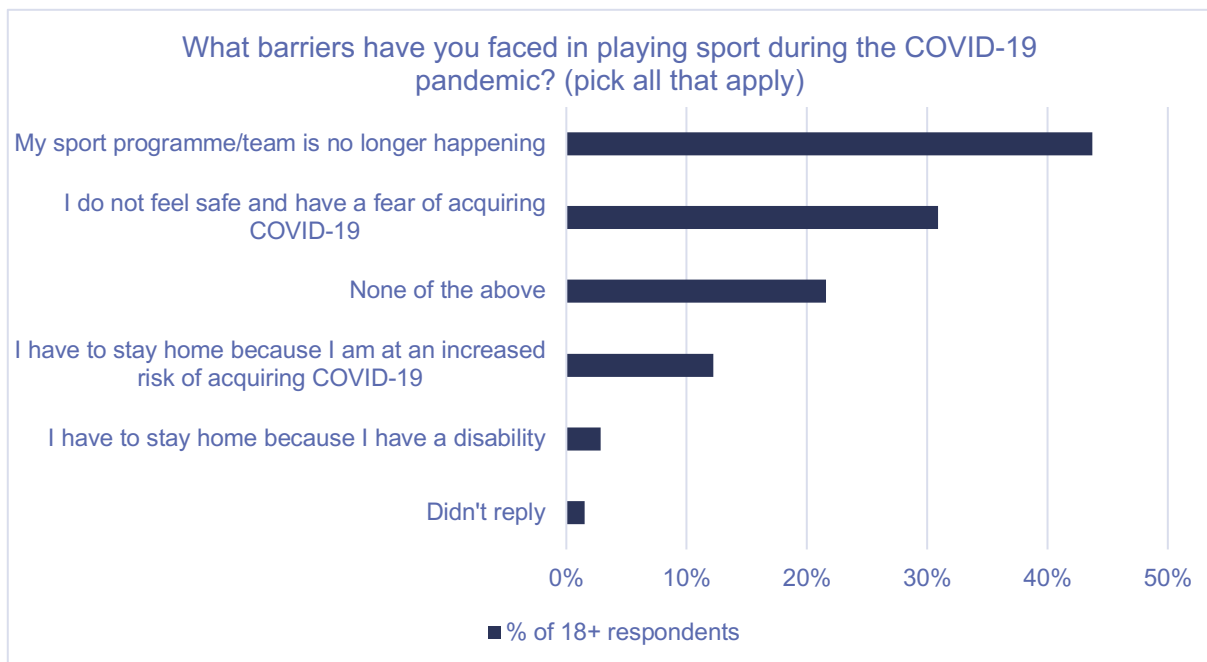
In the comparison between girls and boys, more boys reported that their sport programme was no longer happening (49,2% versus 37,1%) and that they had an increased risk of acquiring COVID-19 (11,4% of boys versus 8,6% of girls). On the other hand, girls expressed more fear of acquiring COVID-19 (28,6% of girls versus 18% of boys).

Between continents, Asia and Oceania presented higher percentages of children fearful of acquiring COVID-19. In Oceania (65,2%), Africa (65%), and Europe (51,1%), more than half of children affirmed their sport programme is no longer happening. The higher rate of children saying "none of the above" was in the Americas (40,9%).

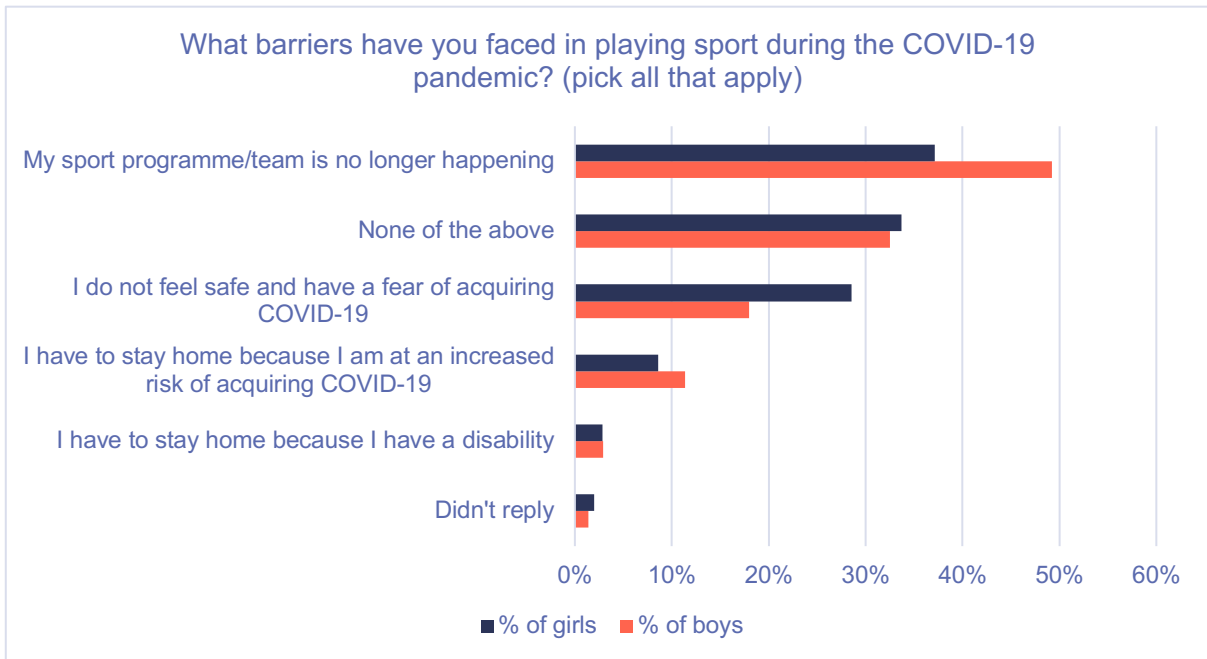
Children



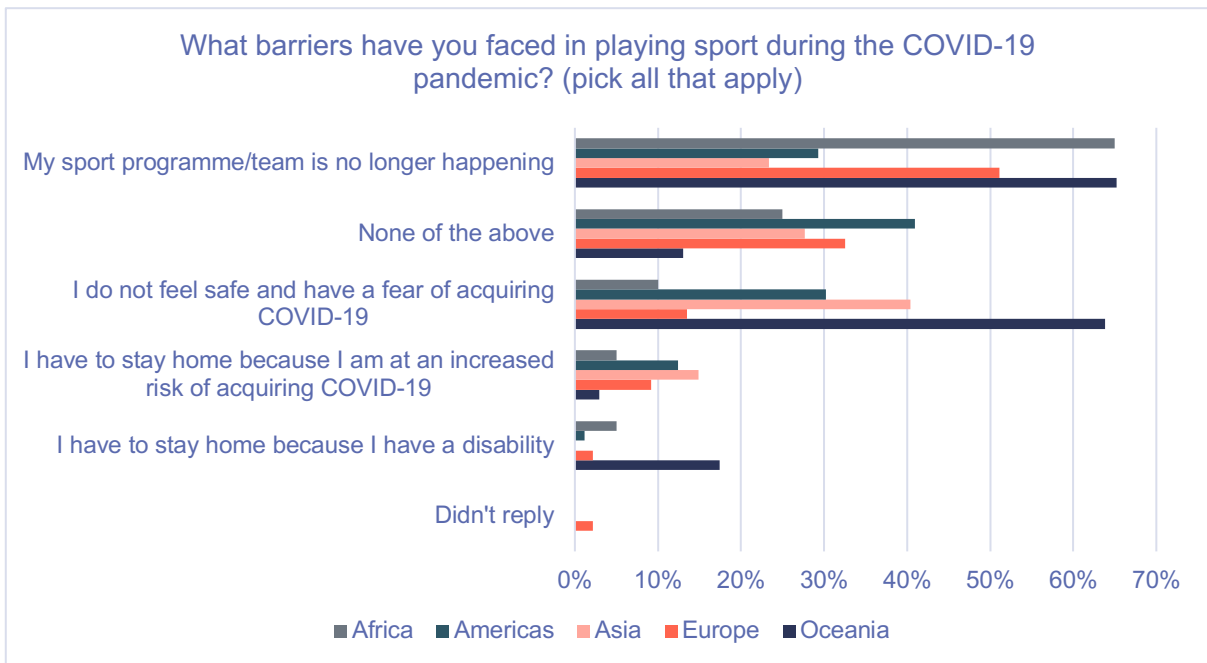
18+ years respondents



Girls and Boys



Children per continent



IMPACTS ON TRAINING

Respondents were asked about how much their ability to train has been affected by the pandemic, on a scale where 1 meant "not at all", and 10 meant "completely". 61,2% of children and 68,5% of the 18+ years respondents marked 7 or higher. In the comparison between girls and boys marking 7 or higher, the percentages were very similar, although there were more girls (24,3%) than boys (21,3%) marking 10. In the disaggregation per geographic location, at least 50% of children from all continents marked 7 or higher, with the exception of Asia (25,5%).

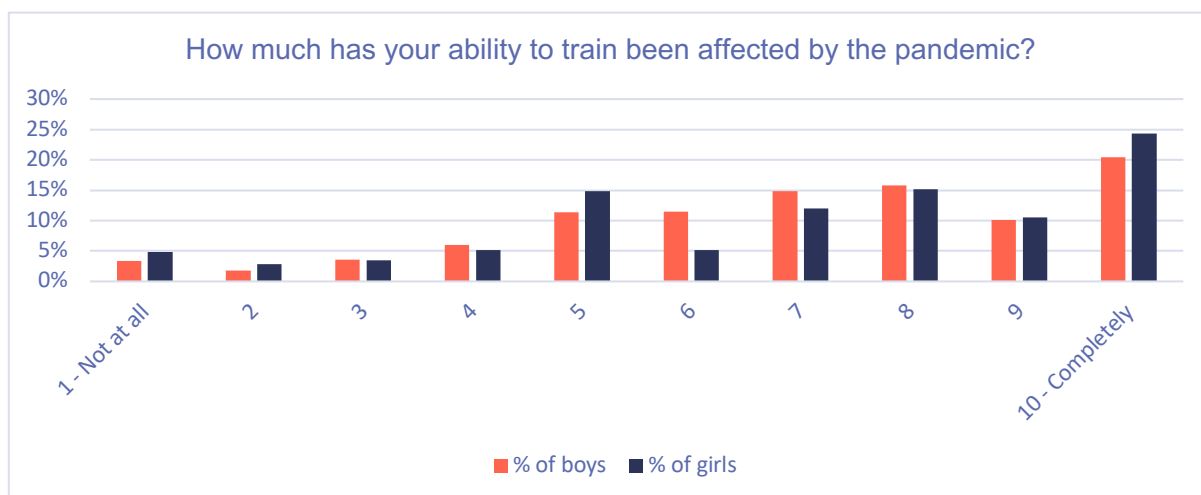
Children



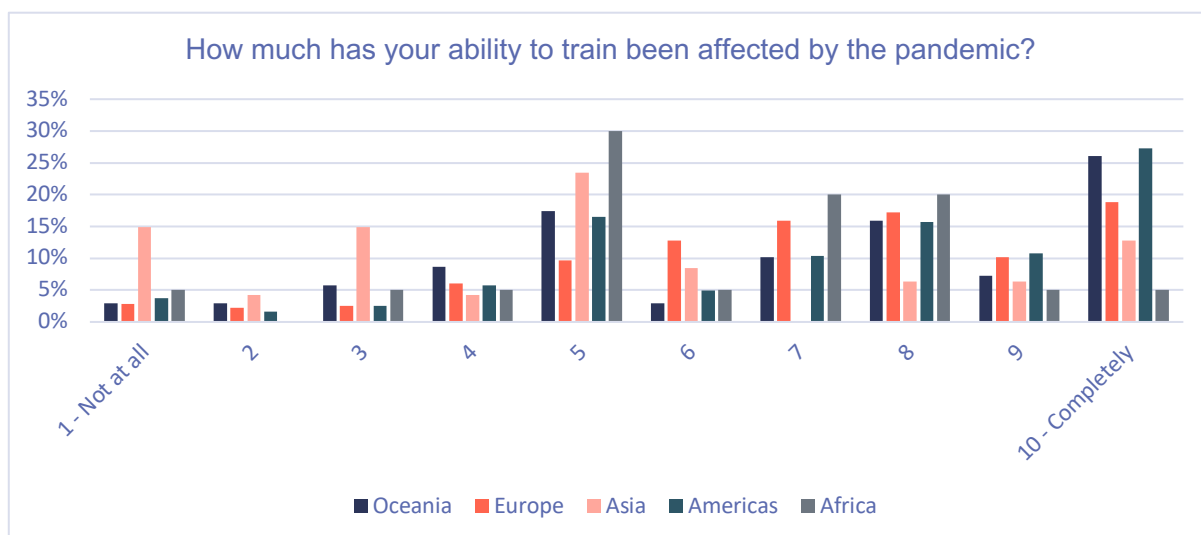
18+ years respondents



Girls and Boys



Children per continent

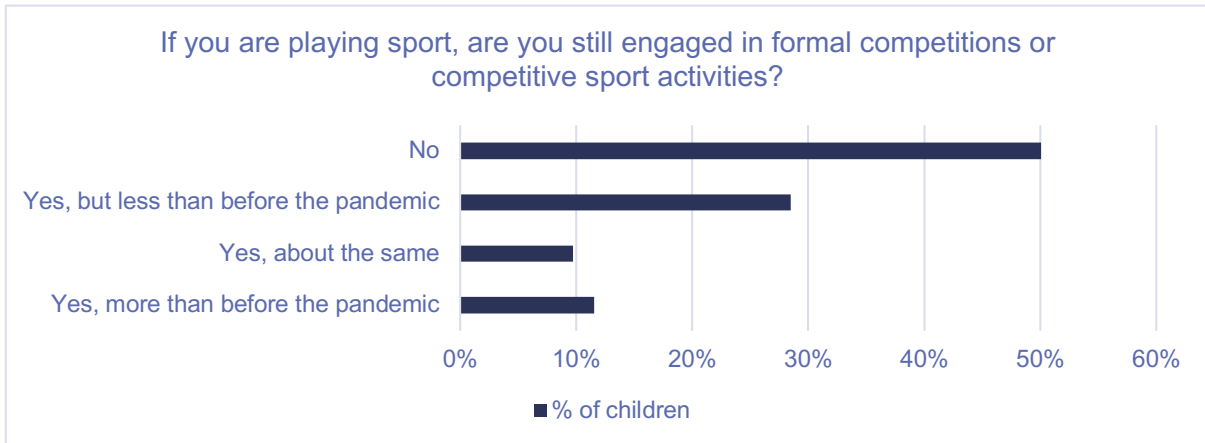


ENGAGEMENT IN COMPETITIONS

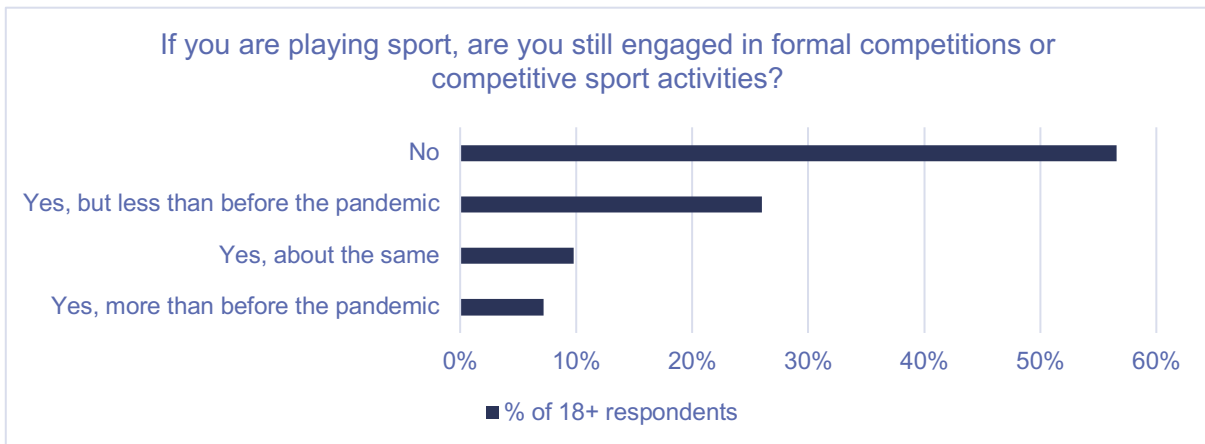
Half of the children who indicated they were currently playing were not engaged at present in formal competitions or competitive sport activities. 28,5% were engaged in competitions, but less than before the pandemic, 9,8% are competing about the same and 11,6% reported they were competing more than before COVID-19. The percentage of children engaged in competitions is higher than of those 18+ years old. The percentage of girls engaged in competitions was higher than the percentage of boys (61% versus 44%).

In Europe, most of children who were currently playing were not competing (60,4%). This is also true for the Americas (51%). In Africa, most of children who were currently playing are competing less than before the pandemic (52,6%). So they were in Oceania (38,2%). In Asia, the majority of children who indicated that they were currently playing said they were also competing more than before COVID.

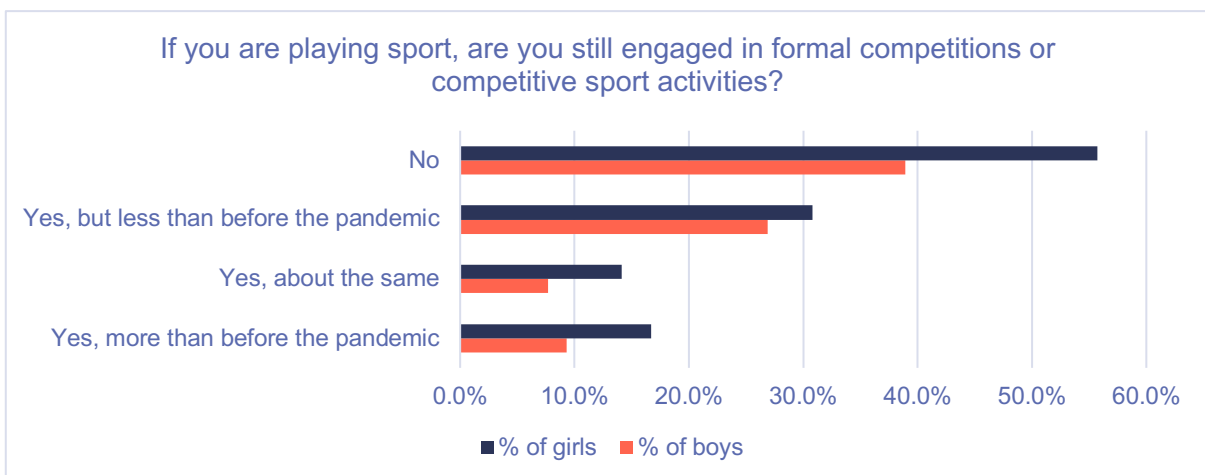
Children



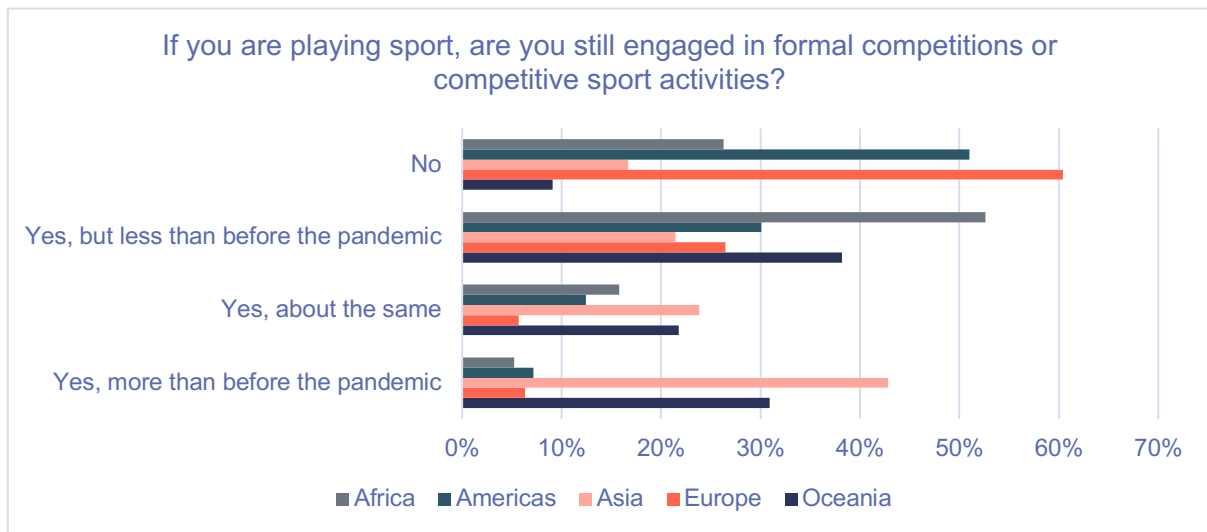
18 years + respondents



Girls and Boys



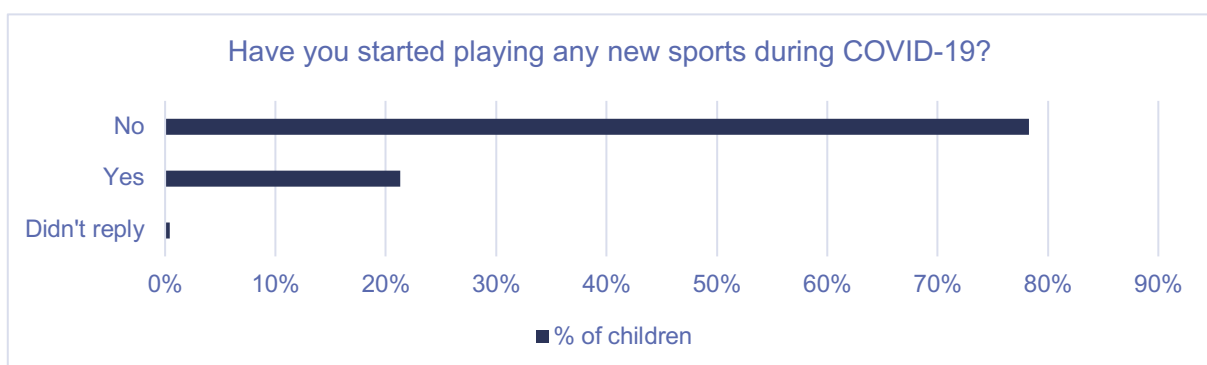
Children per continent



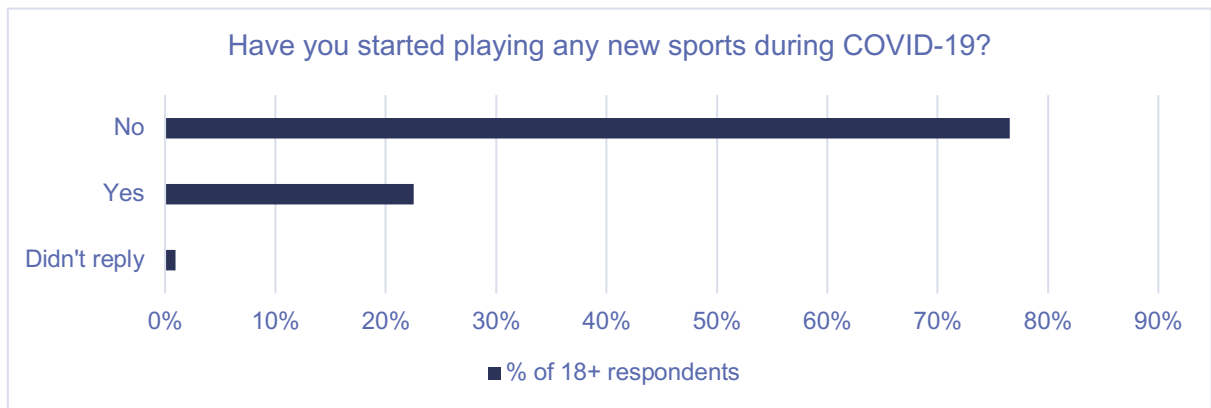
NEW SPORTS

78,3% of children and 76,5% of respondents over 18 said they had not started playing any new sport during the pandemic. Among those that did start playing new sports, the percentage of girls was slightly higher than that of boys (24% of girls versus 19,8% of boys). Per continent, children started playing new sports in Africa (30%), Americas (29,8%), Oceania (27,5%) Asia (23,4%) and Europe (15,6%).

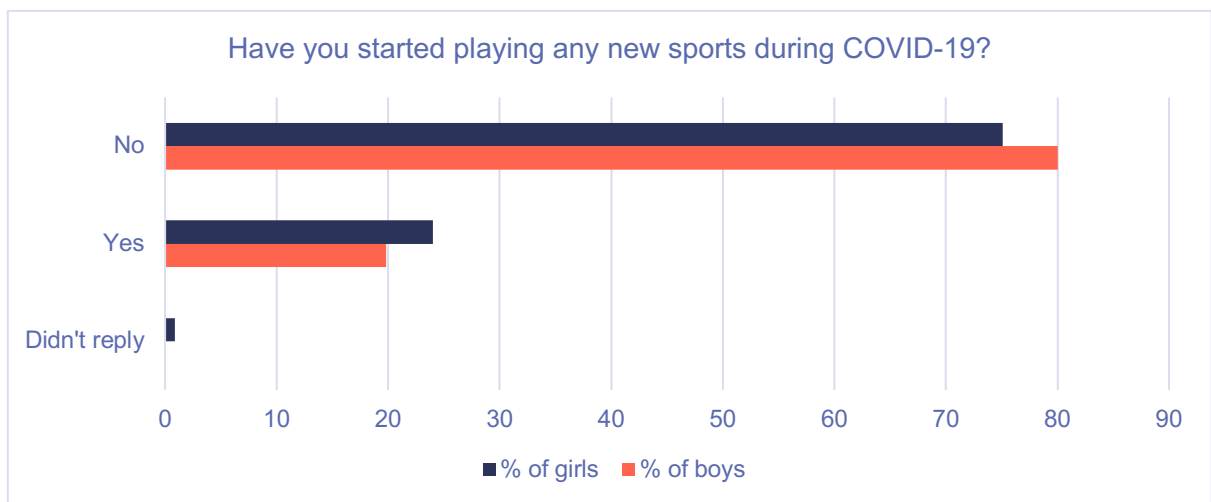
Children



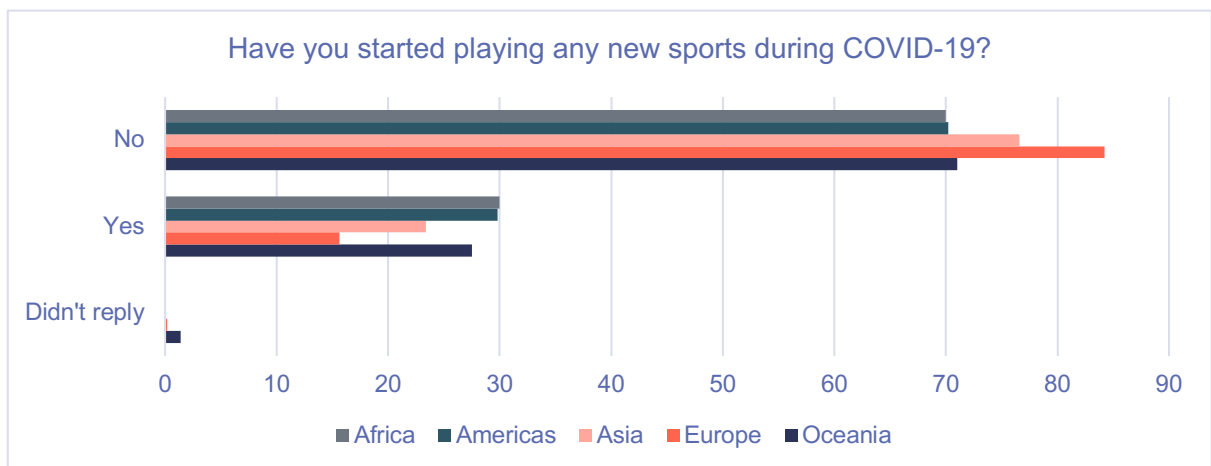
18+ years respondents



Girls and Boys



Children per continent



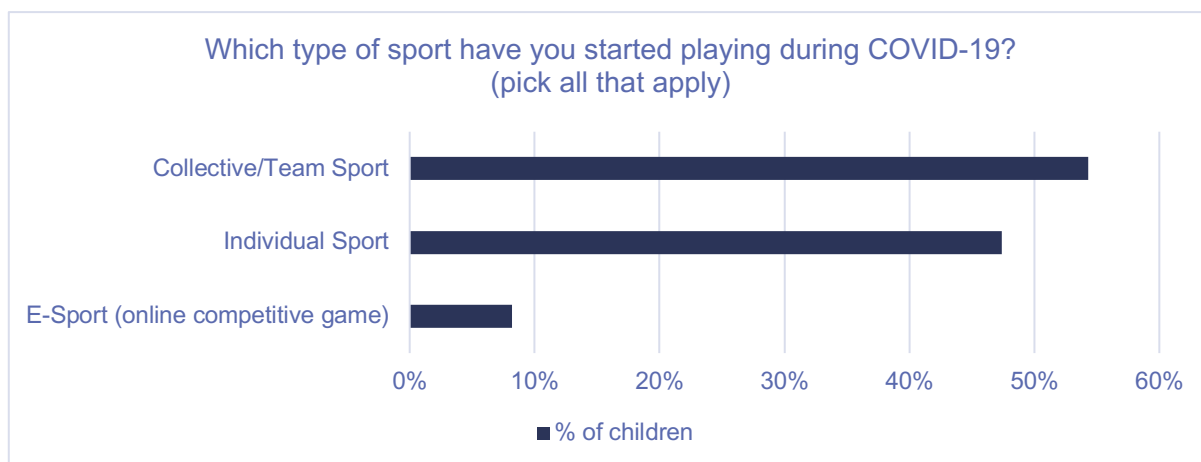
TYPE OF NEW SPORT

Among of the children who affirmed started playing sports, 54,3% started playing collective/team sport, 47,4% started playing individual sport and 8,2% e-sport. Among 18+ years respondents, the percentages were, respectively: 36,4%; 66,1%; and 1,7%.

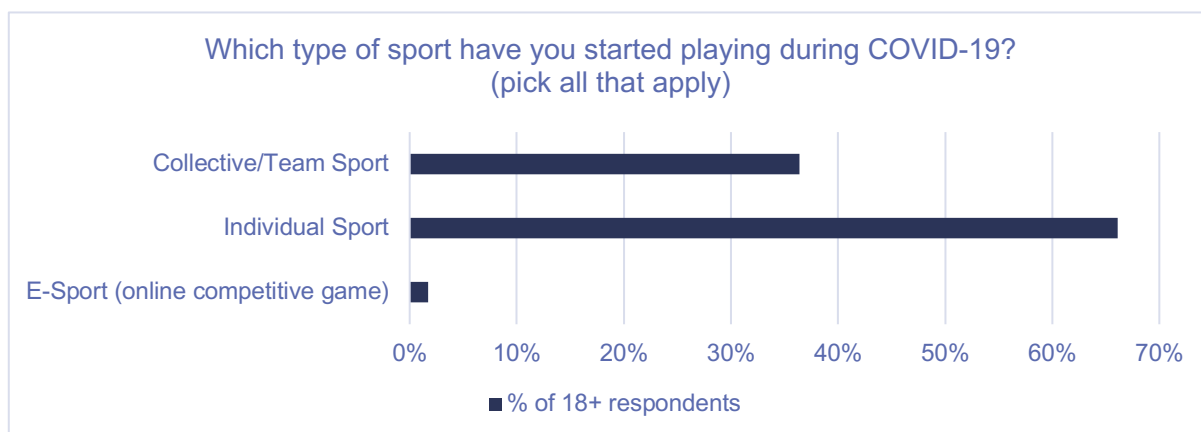
Between girls and boys who said they started playing new sports during the pandemic, girls declared playing more collective sports than boys (61,9% versus 50,3%), while boys started playing more individual sports (49,7% versus 44%) and e-sports (9,8% versus 3,6%).

In Oceania, Africa and Asia, most children who started playing new sports, started playing collective/team sport: 89,5% in Oceania, 81,8% in Asia and 50% in Africa. In the Americas and in Europe, the majority of the children who started playing new sports started playing individual sport: 55,6% in the Americas and 55,1% in Europe.

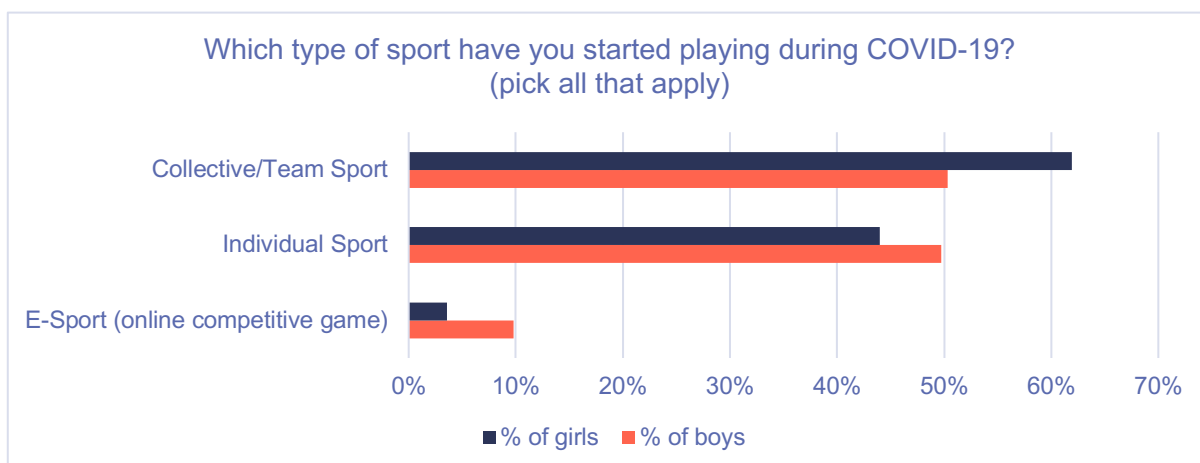
Children



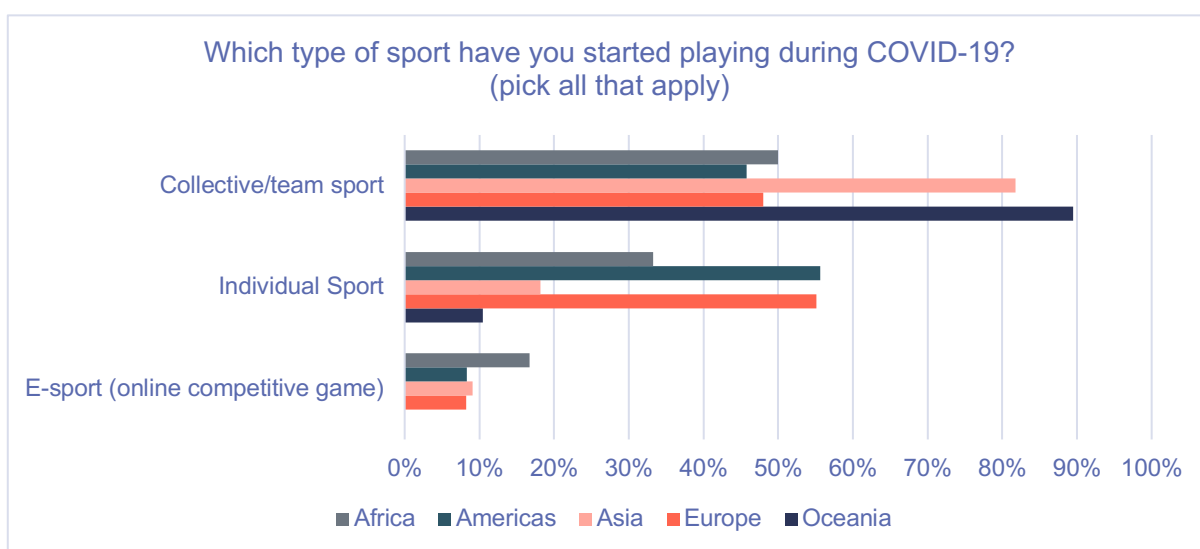
18+ years respondents



Girls and Boys



Children per continent

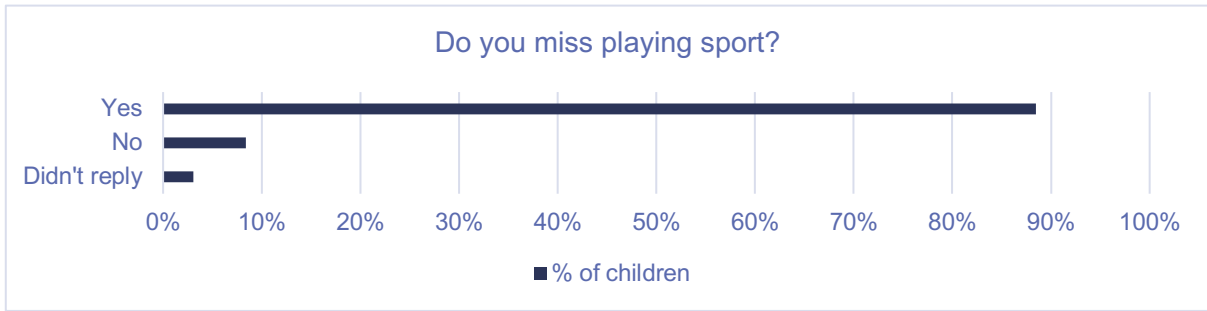


MISSING SPORT

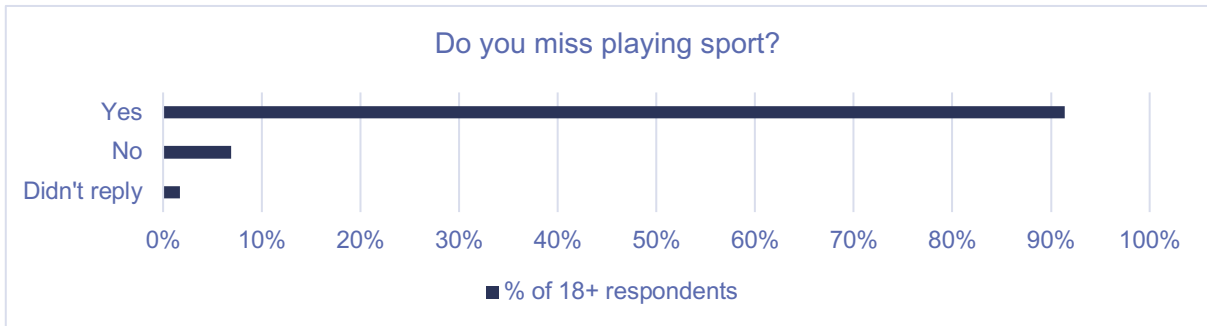
88,5% of children and 91,4% of the 18+ years respondents indicated they missed playing sport. The percentage did not change significantly between girls and boys (88,3% versus 88,6%), neither between continents, except for Oceania, where 24,6% of children didn't reply to the question.

When asked about how much they miss sport, on a scale where 1 meant "not at all" and 10 meant "I miss it more than anything else", 82,4% of the children marked between 8 and 10. Again, the percentages remained consistent across disaggregated groups per gender and continent.

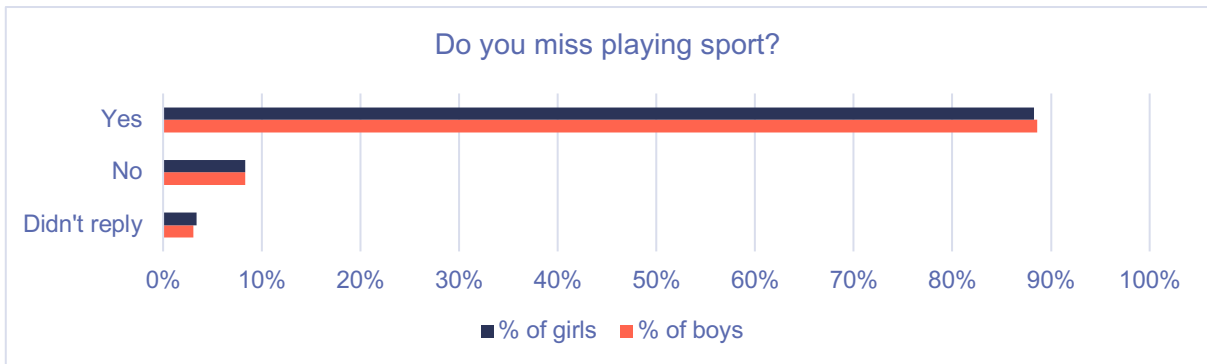
Children



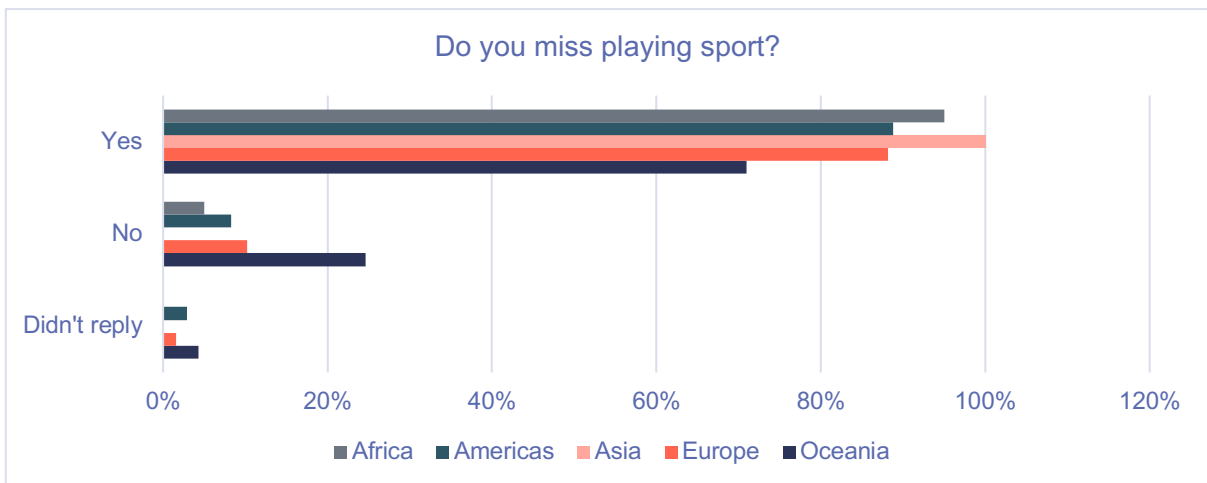
18+ years respondents



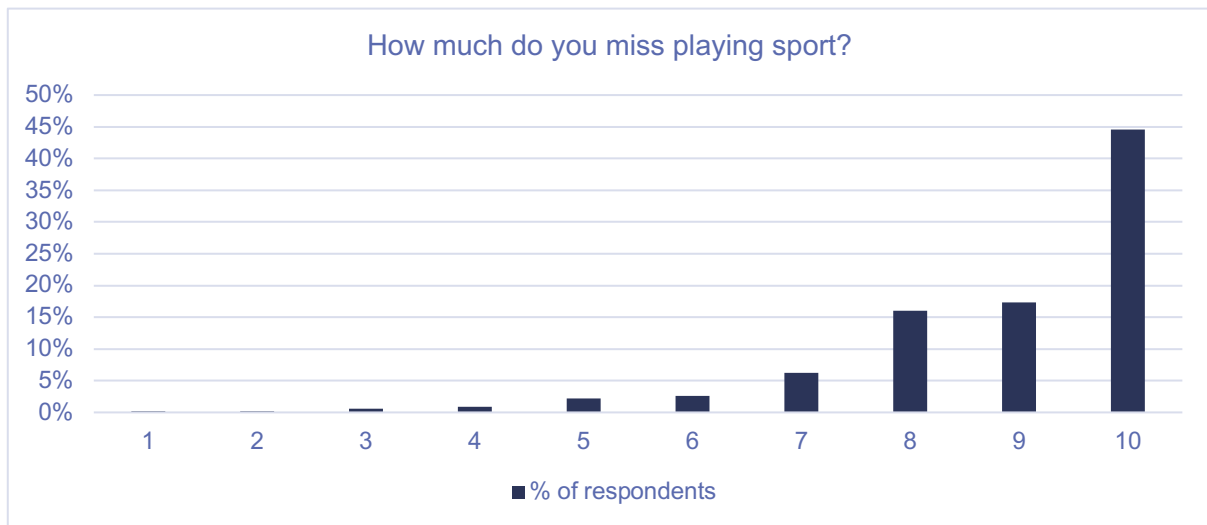
Girls and Boys



Children per continent



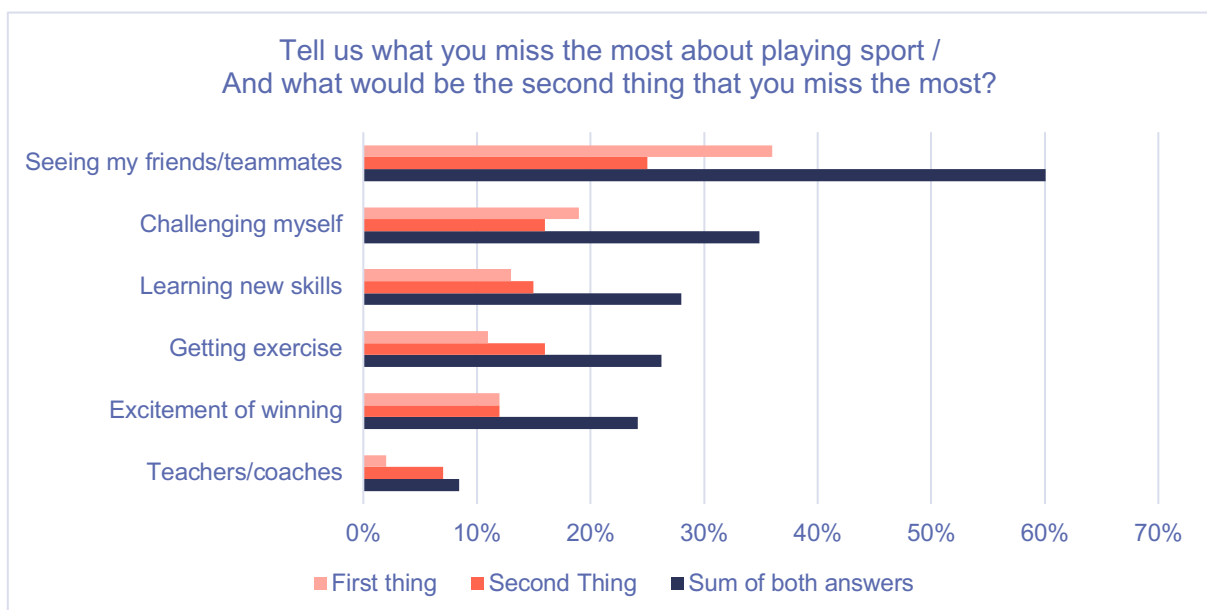
Scale 1- 10



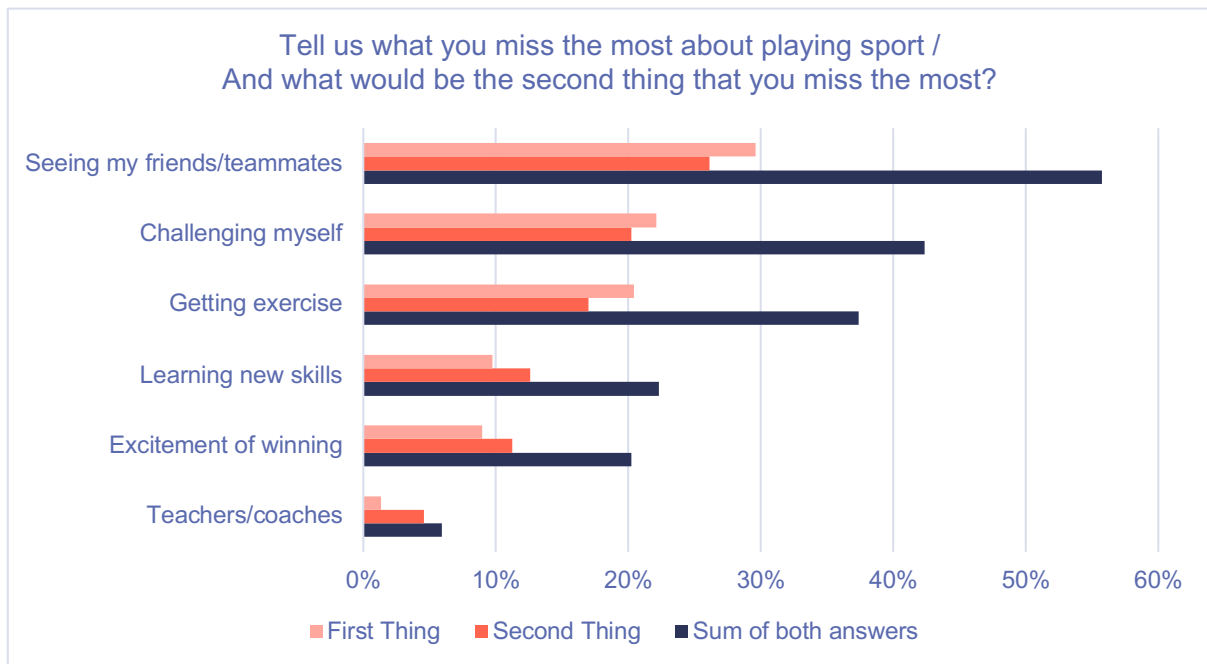
WHAT THEY MISS THE MOST

Respondents were asked to pick out of six options what was the first and the second thing they missed the most about playing sport. Friends and teammates were by far ranked number one, reinforcing the common sense that sport is really a powerful tool for social connection and the sense of belonging. Teachers and coaches got the lowest rate, being mentioned by 1,6% of children as the first thing they miss the most, and by 6,9% of children as the second. In the disaggregation per gender, a higher percentage of girls (11%) indicated they miss teachers and coaches in comparison to boys (7%). This is an issue that could be explored more carefully in the future.

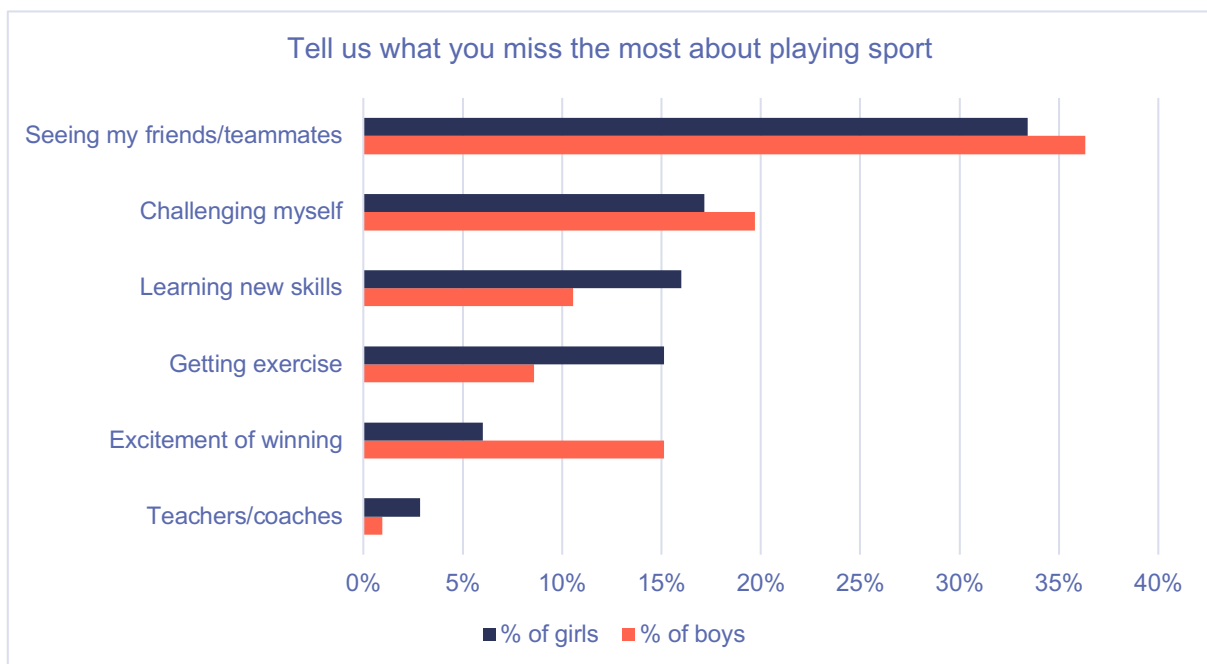
Children



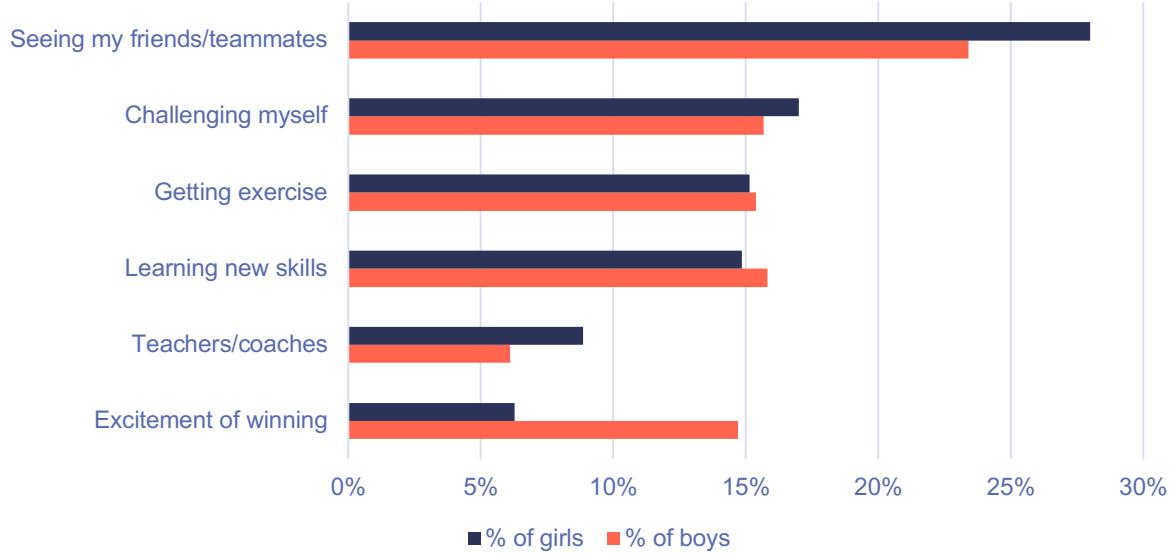
18+ years respondents



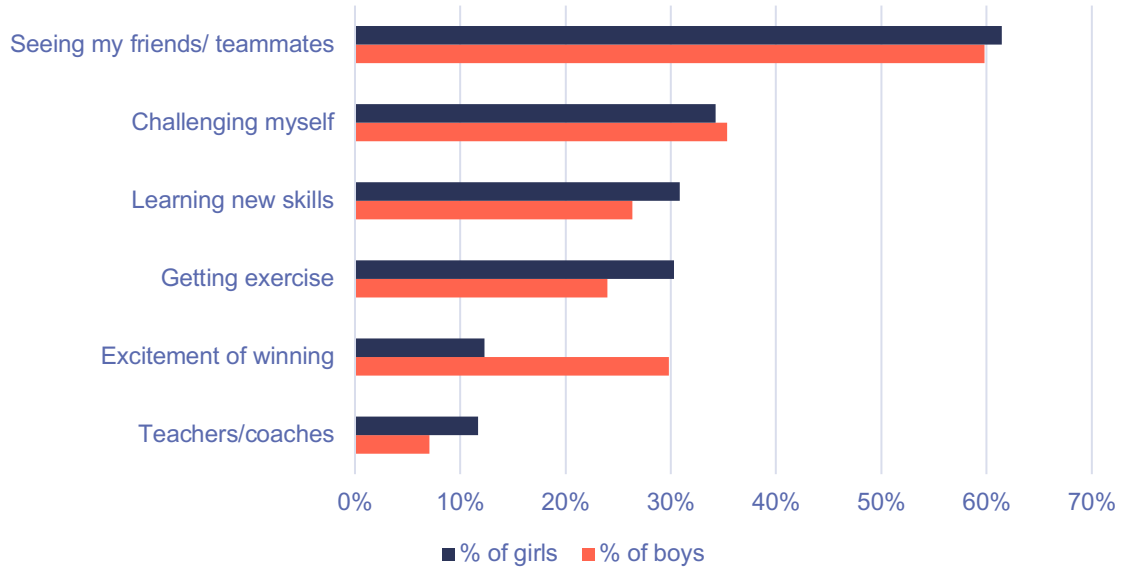
Girls and Boys



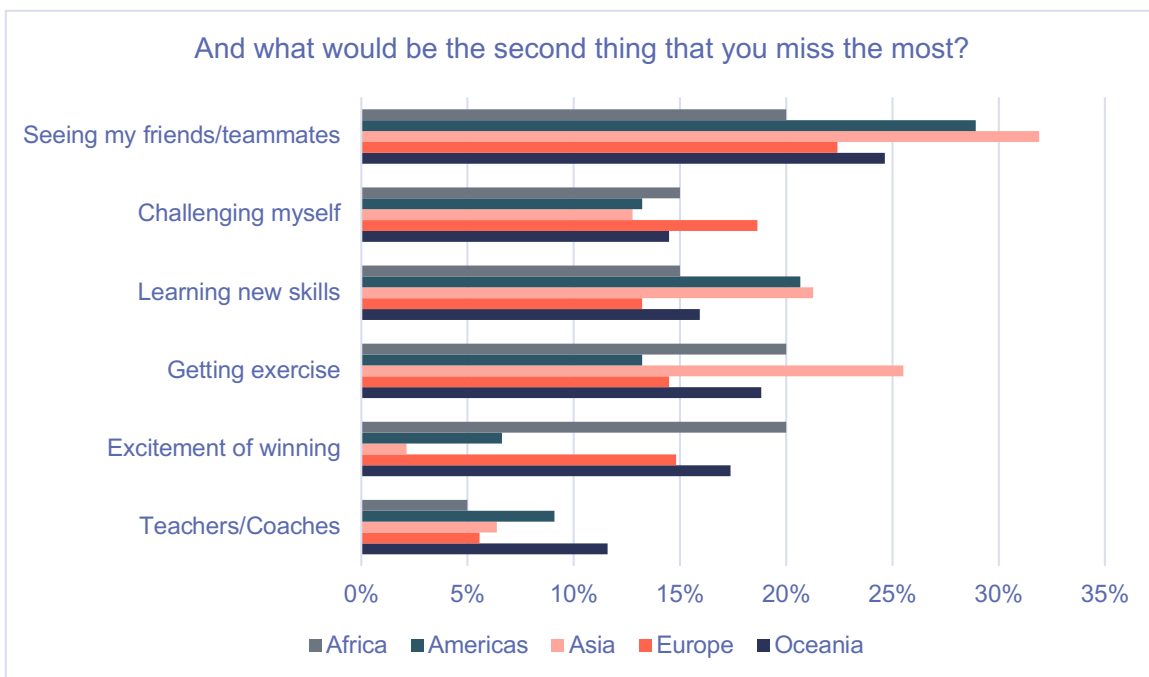
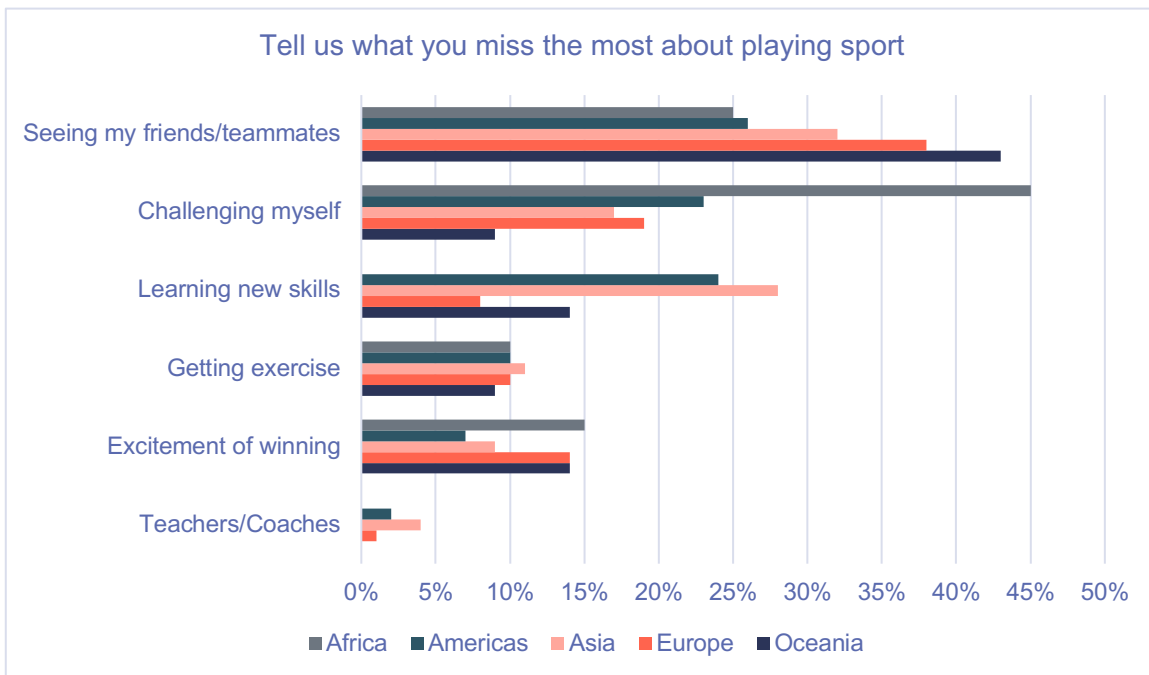
And what would be the second thing that you miss the most?

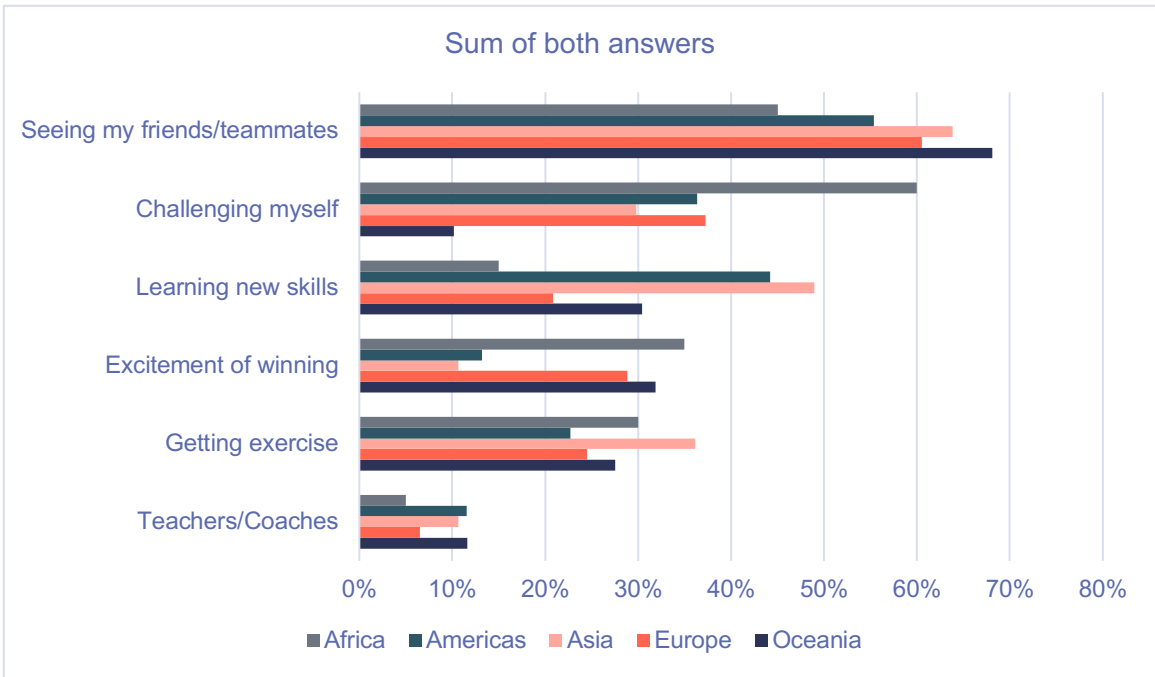


Sum of both responses



Children per continent

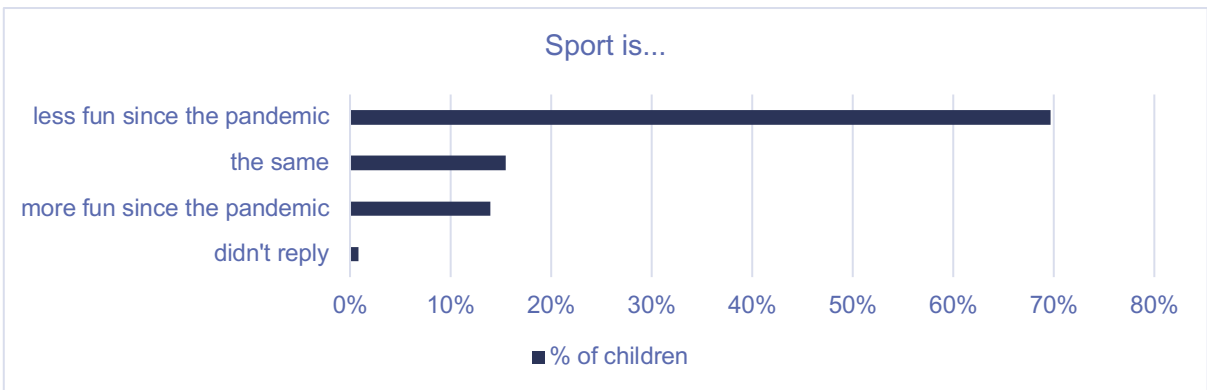




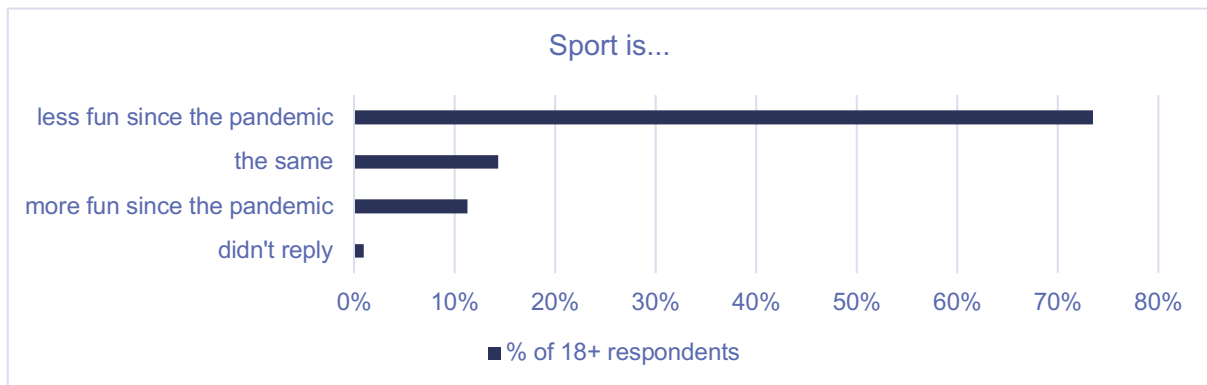
SPORT AND FUN

Sport was resported to be not as fun as before the pandemic, not for children (69,7%), neither for 18+ years respondents (73,5%). This was also the opinion of the majority of girls (68,6%) and boys (70,9%), and of children in Africa (90%); Europe (73,1%) and the Americas (70,7%). Percentages were more balanced between “more fun”, “less fun”, and “the same” in Asia and Oceania.

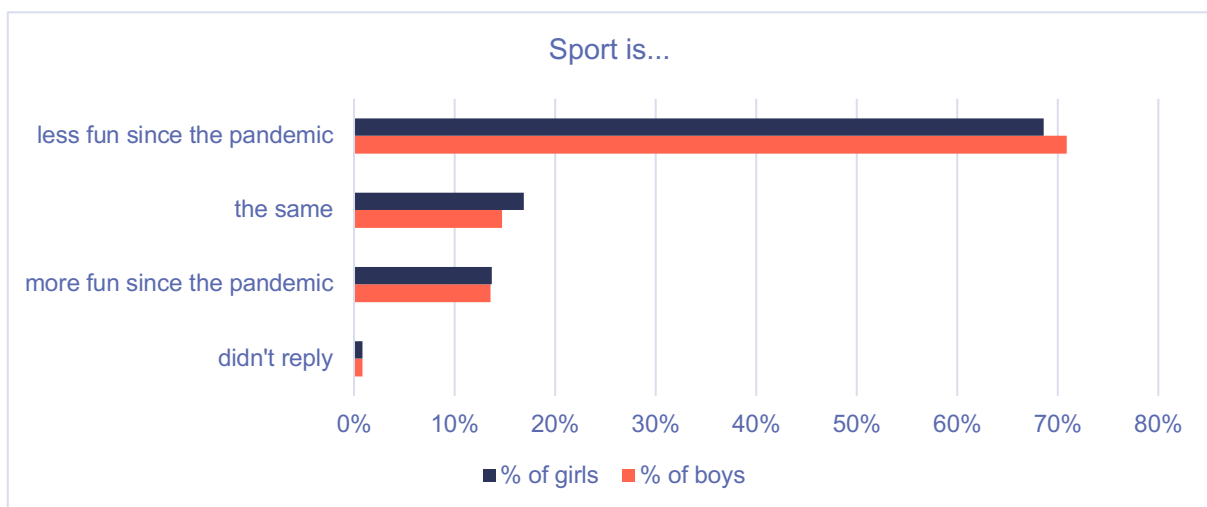
Children



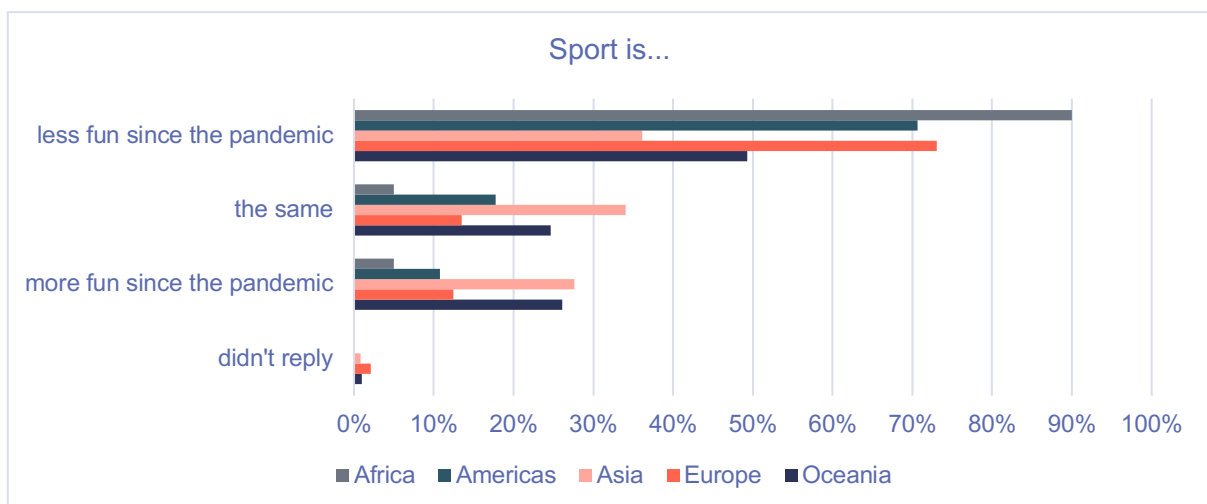
18+ years respondents



Girls and Boys



Children per continent

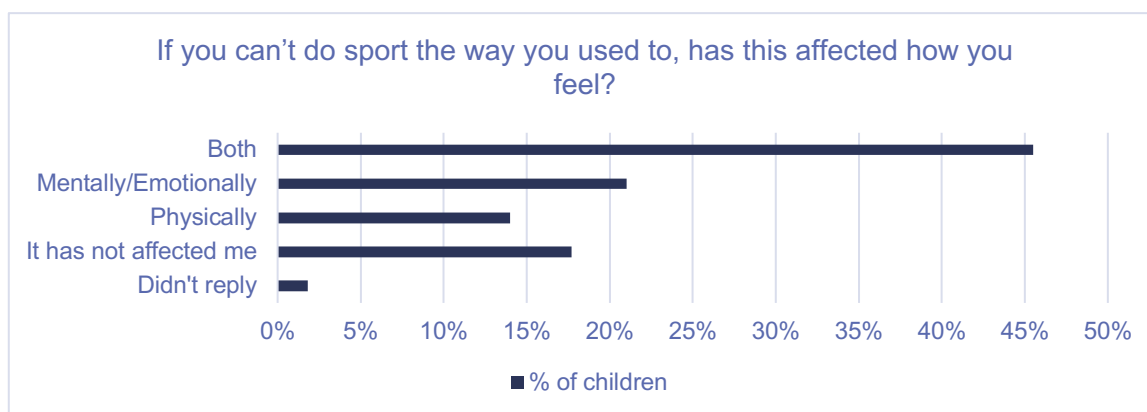


PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL IMPACT

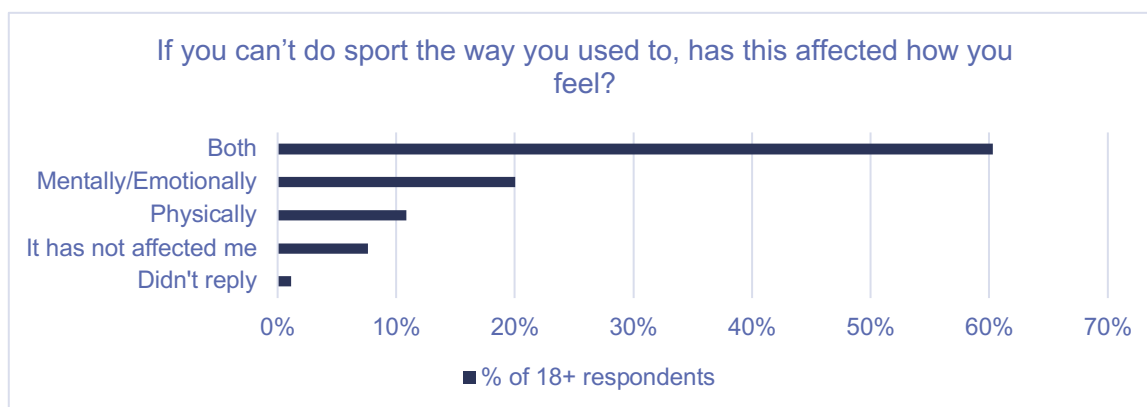
About 80% of the children reported feeling affected (physically, mentally/emotionally or both) because they couldn't do sport the way they used to. In the disaggregation of the data by gender, while 24,6% of girls responded "it has not affected me", only 14,1% of boys responded the same. The reason for this could be that girls were already impacted by other barriers before the pandemic, so they didn't perceive it as much of a change on the way they used to do sport, but to fully understand the reasons behind these differences further investigations would be necessary.

In the disaggregation per continent, Oceania had the highest percentage of children (60,9%) saying they have been both physically and mentally/emotionally affected.

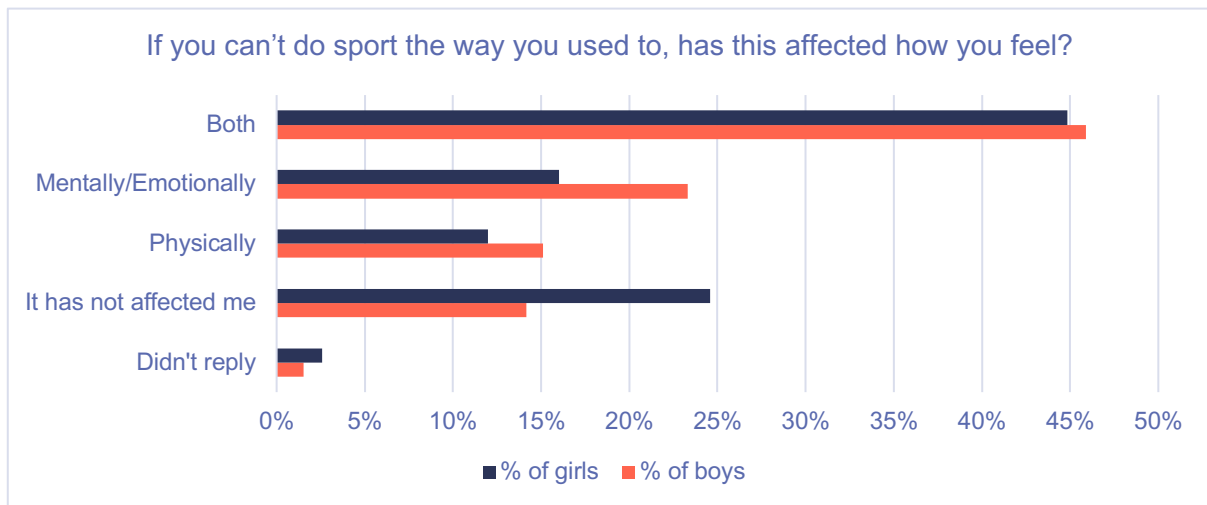
Children



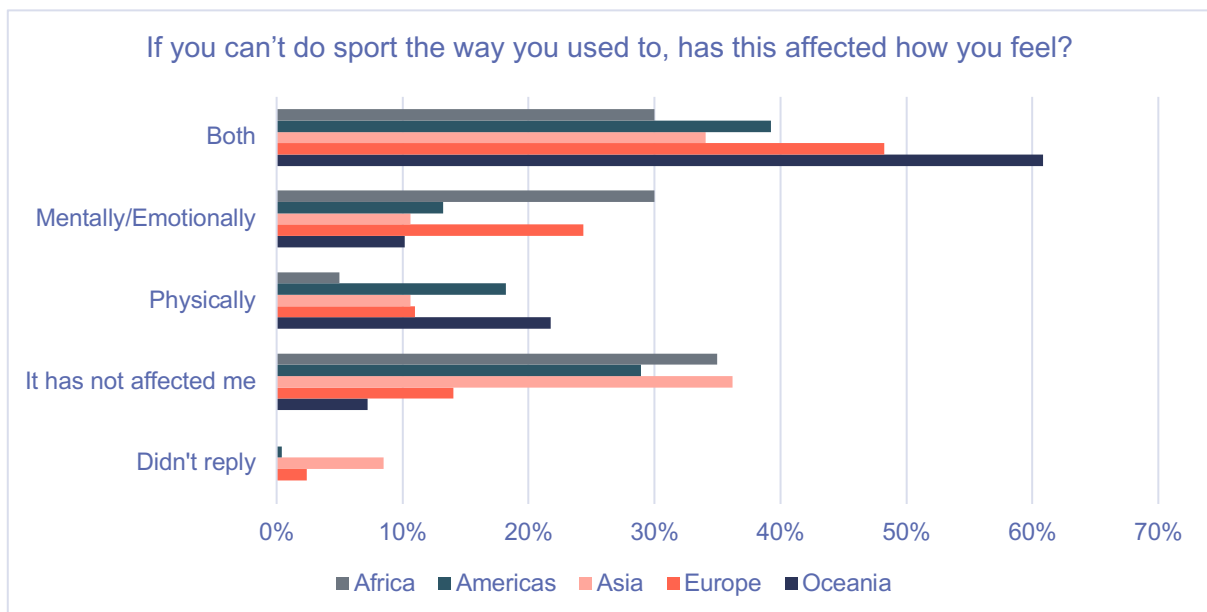
18+ years respondents



Girls and Boys



Children per continent

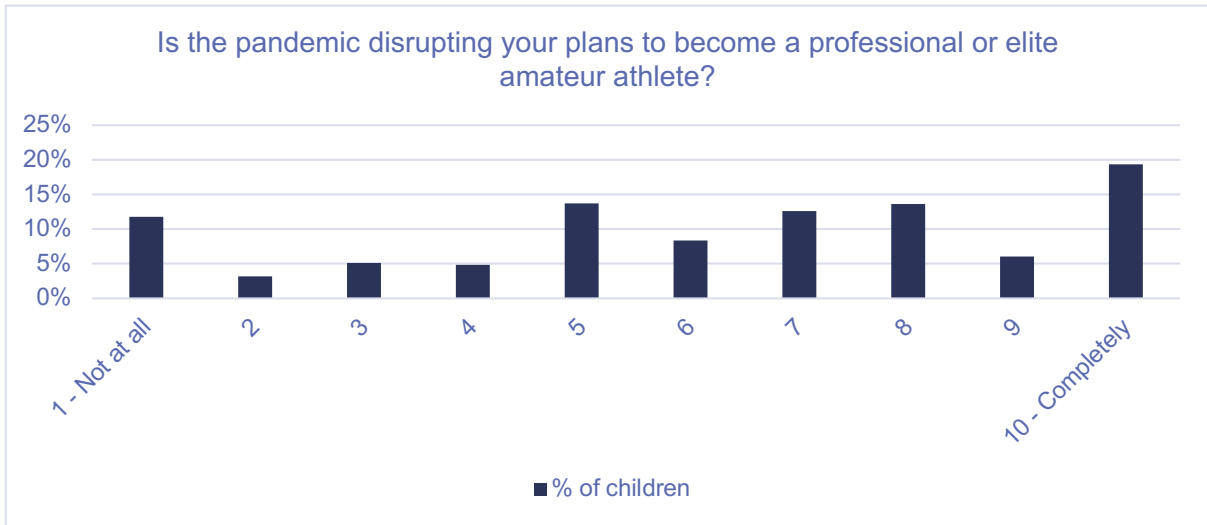


IMPACT TOWARDS THE FUTURE

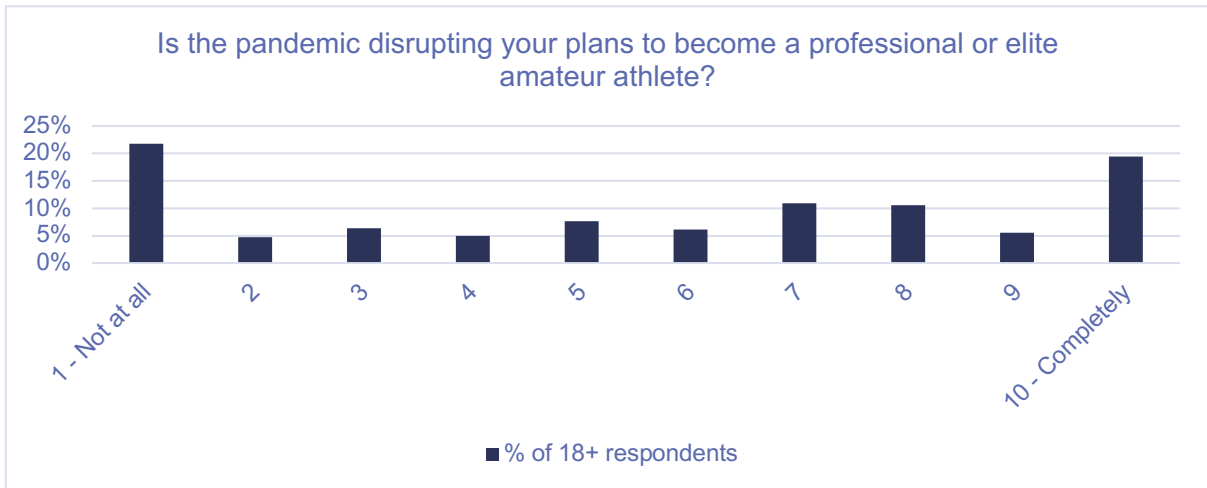
On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 represents the perception that the pandemic was not disturbing at all their plans to become a professional or elite amateur athlete, and 10 represents the perception that the pandemic was completely disturbing their plans, 51,6% of children marked 7 or higher. Respondents 18+ years marked the "not at all" option most. The percentage of respondents over 18 years of age marking 7 or higher was of 46,4%.

In the disaggregation per gender, 47,7% of girls and 53,3% of boys marked a score equals to 7 or higher. The percentage of children marking 7 or higher per continent were as follows: Americas (64%), Oceania (59,4%), Europe (46,3%), Africa (45%), Asia (40,4%).

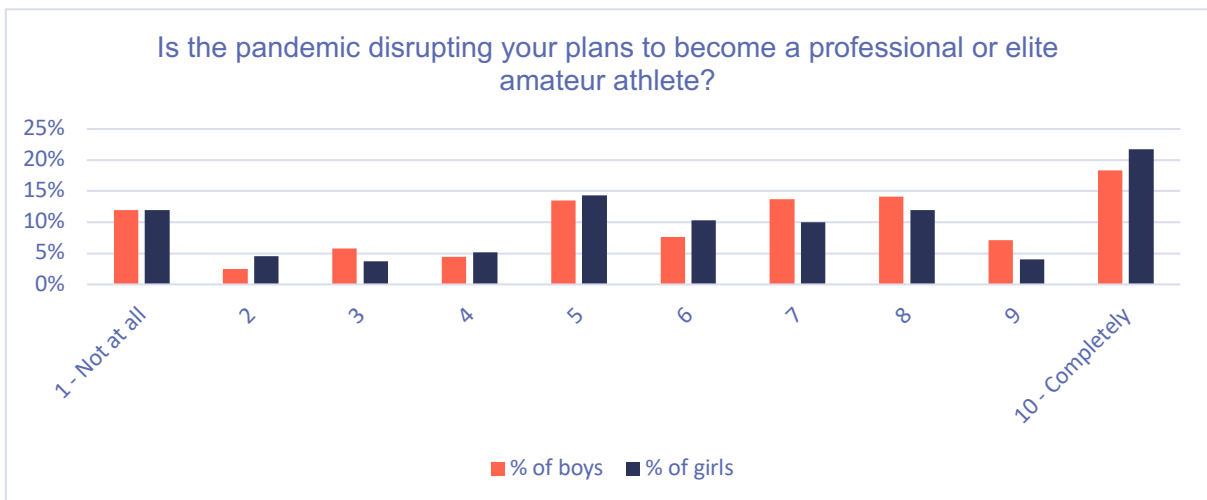
Children



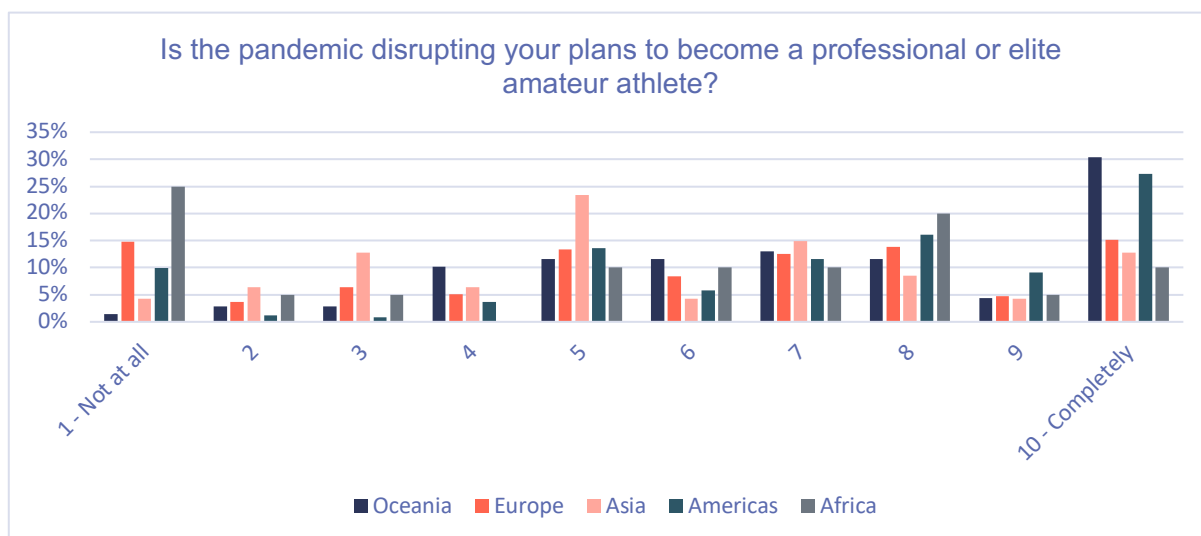
18+ years respondents



Girls and Boys



Children per continent



IMPACTS ON INCOME

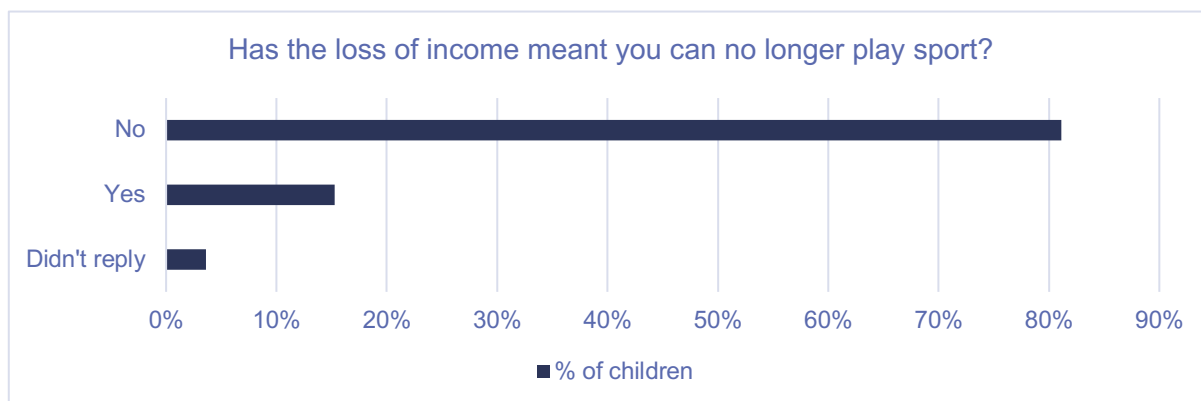
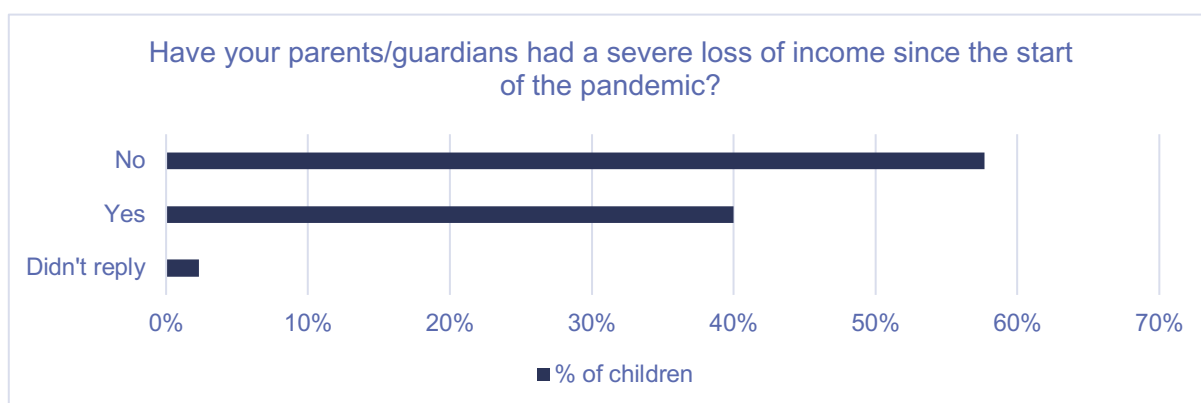
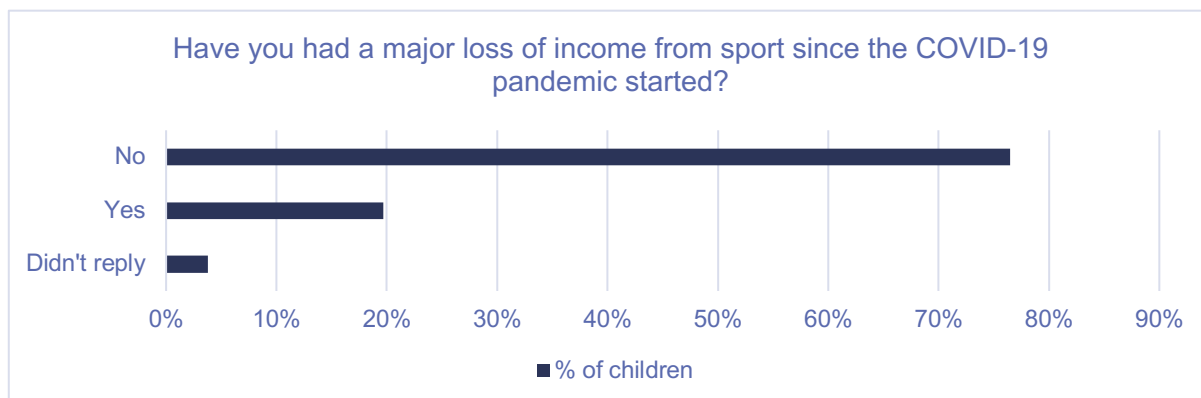
Almost 20% of children declared suffering major losses of income from sport, and 40% said their parents have had a severe loss of income since the start of the pandemic, but 81,1% answered "no" to the question "Has the loss of income meant you can no longer play sport?".

Among 18+ years respondents, 37,8% had a major loss of income from sport, 45% reported that their parents had a severe loss of income since the pandemic, but 79,6% indicated that the loss of income does not mean they could no longer play sport.

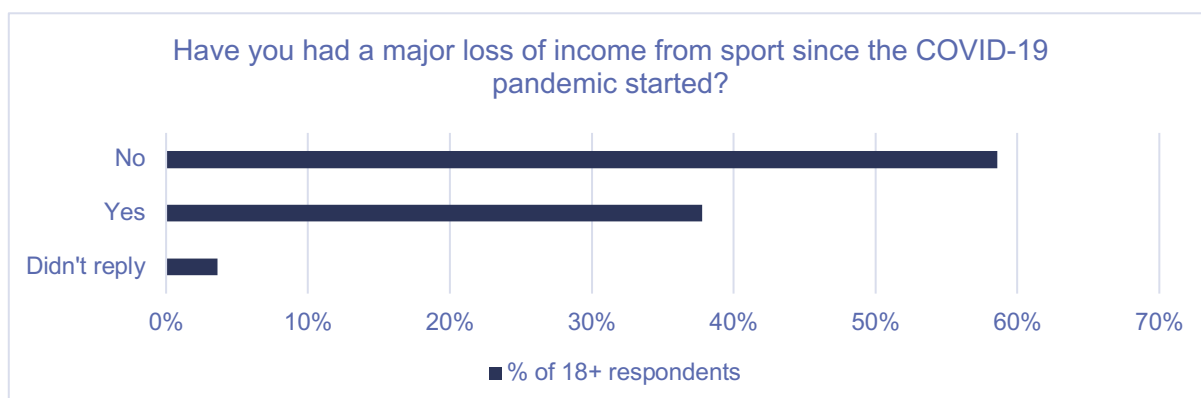
In the comparison between girls and boys, more boys affirmed having had losses of income from sport (20,5% versus 17,4%), while more girls than boys said their parents had a severe loss of income (46,6% versus 37%). In both cases, the loss of income was not perceived as an impediment for them to play sport.

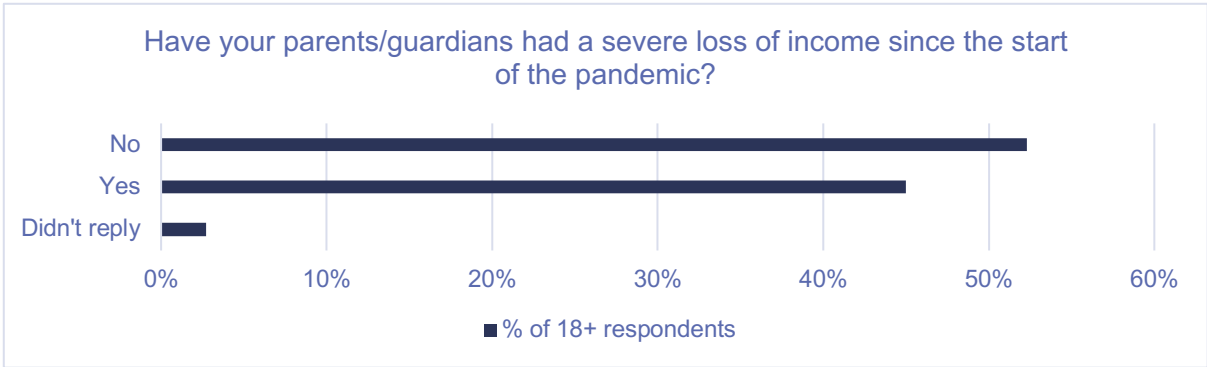
Among continents, children from Asia presented the highest percentage of those suffering major losses of income from sport. And Oceania presented the highest percentage of children reporting their parents had a severe loss of income since the pandemic. Oceania is also where the percentage of children who indicated that the loss of income did mean they no longer could play sport is the highest.

Children

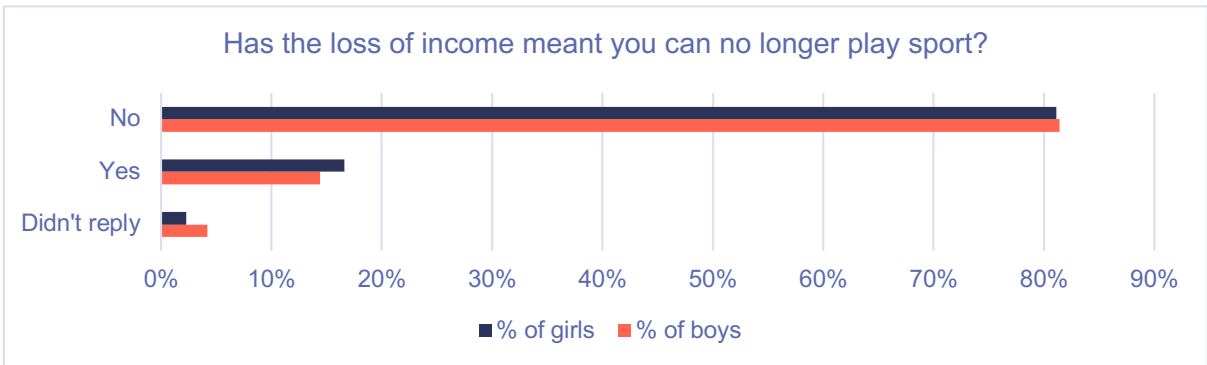
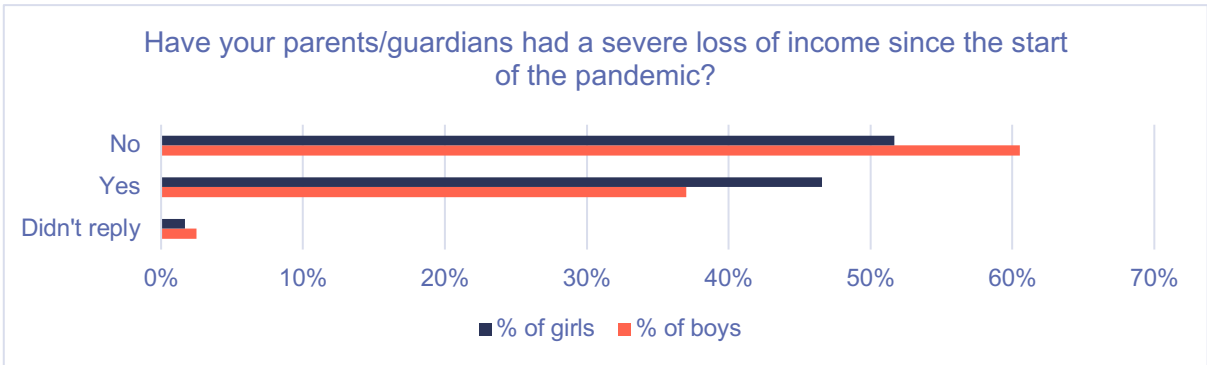
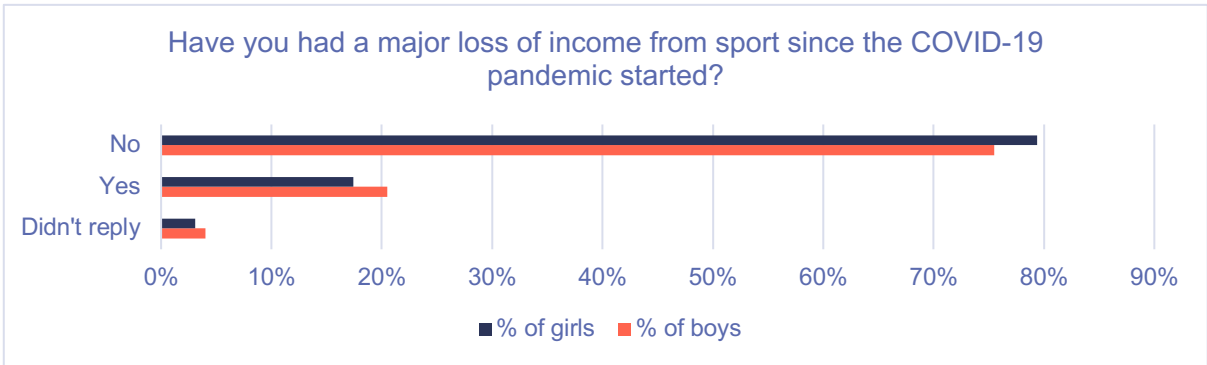


18+ years respondents

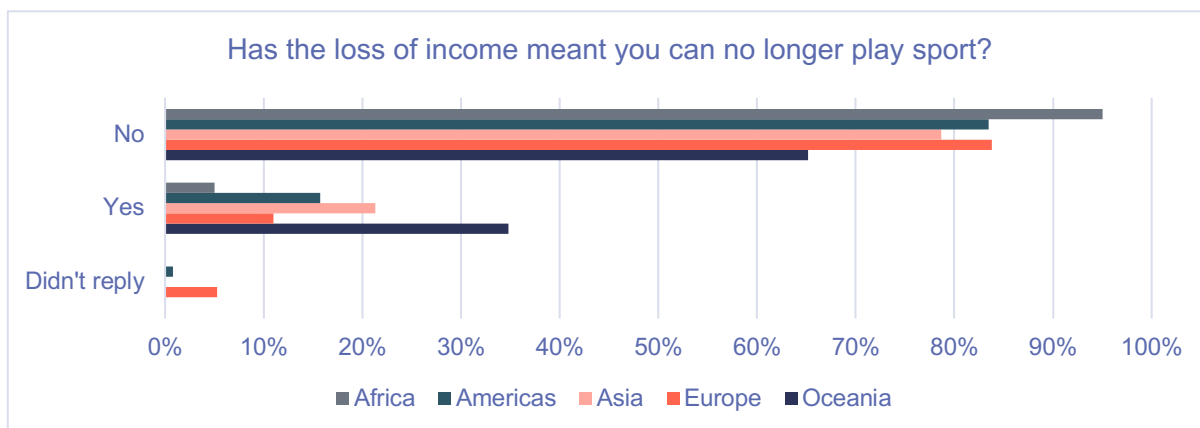
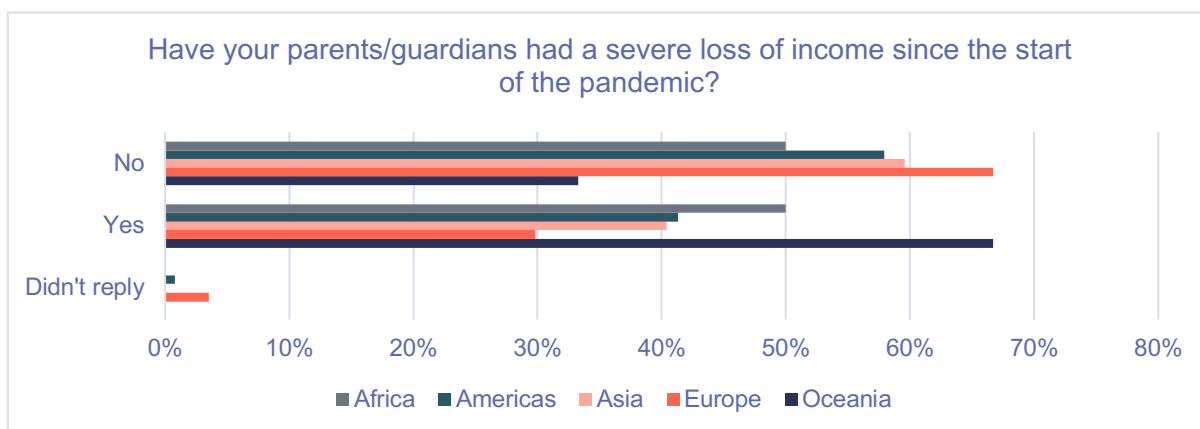
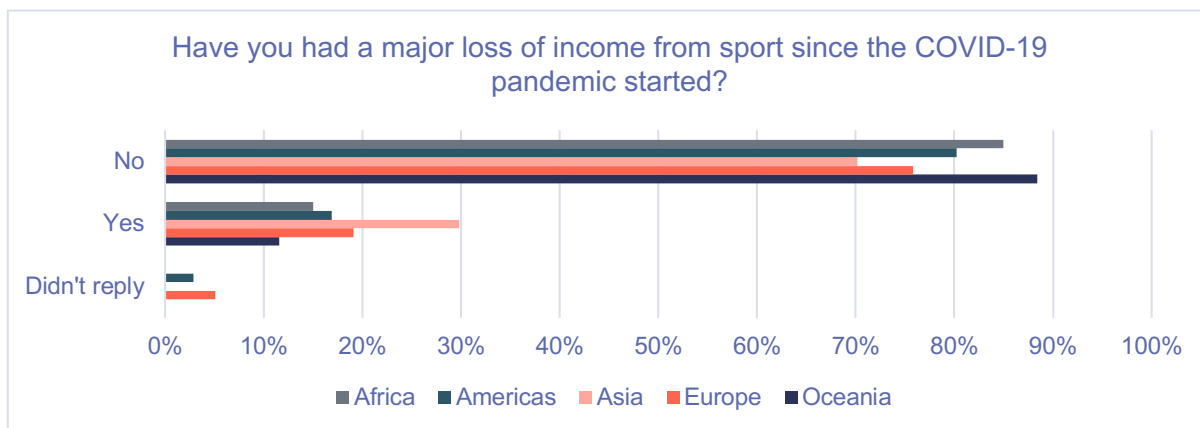




Girls and Boys



Children per continent



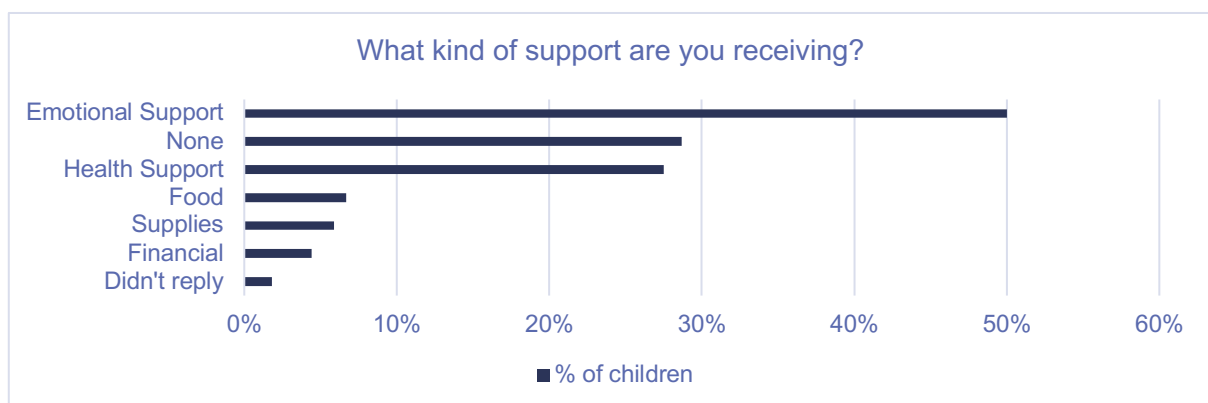
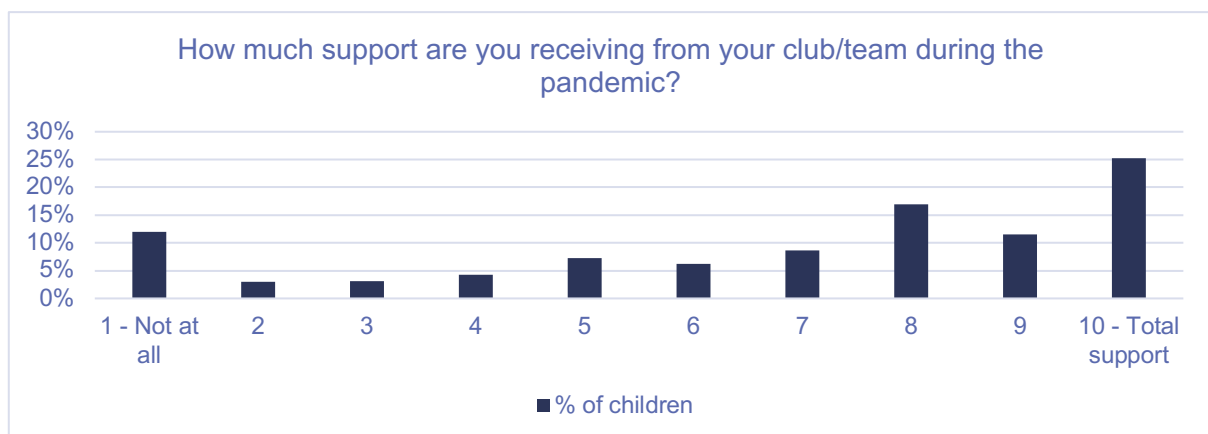
SUPPORT

Respondents were asked how much support they were receiving from their club or team during the pandemic. On a scale where 1 meant "not at all" and 10 meant "total support", 62,4% of children and 51,7% of 18+ years respondents marked a score equal to 7 or higher. In the comparison between girls and boys, 56,9% of girls and 64,9% of boys marked 7 or higher. When child respondents were disaggregated by continent, more than half of those from Africa, the Americas and Europe marked 7 or higher. In Asia, 46,8% of children marked the same. Whereas in Oceania, only 15,9% marked 7 or higher.

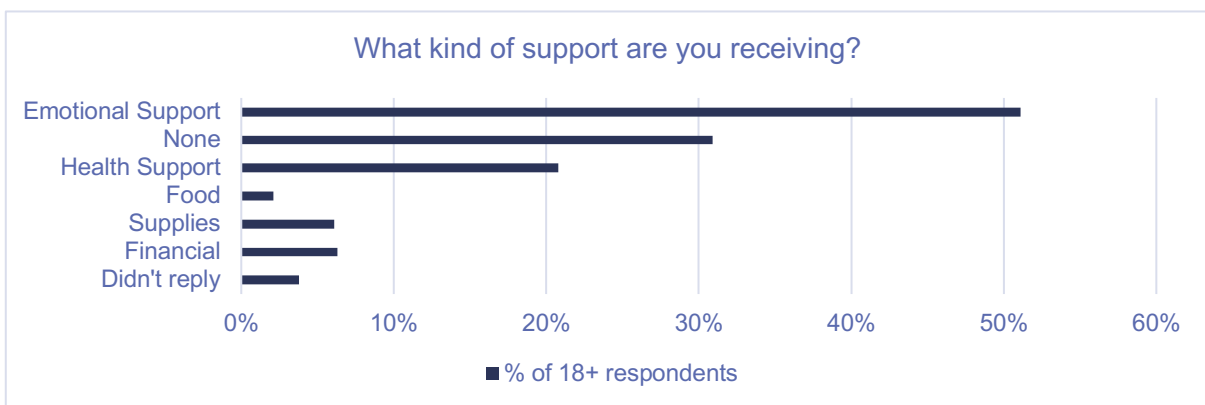
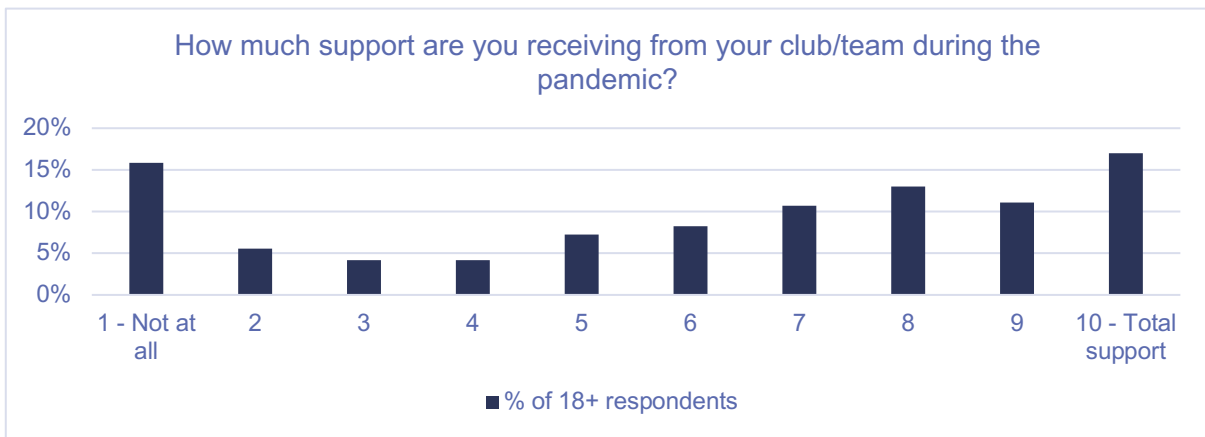
When asked about what kind of support they were receiving, 50% of children affirmed they are receiving emotional support. However, 28,7% of children indicated they are not receiving any support from their club or team. Percentages are similar among respondents 18+ years. The biggest difference was between food and financial support. While 6,7% of children reported having received food from their team or club (versus 2,1% of 18+ years respondents), 6,3% of 18+ years respondents reported they received financial support from their team and club (versus 4,4% of children).

Compared to boys, girls were receiving more financial support (4,6% versus 4,3% of boys), food (8,9% versus 5,4% of boys), supplies (7,1% versus 5,3% of boys), whereas boys were receiving more emotional support (51,9% versus 44,6% of girls), health support (28% versus 26,3% of girls). More girls (29,7%) than boys (28,7%) say they were not receiving any kind of support. In all continents, the kind of support children were receiving at the highest percentage was emotional support, except for Oceania, where children were receiving more health support.

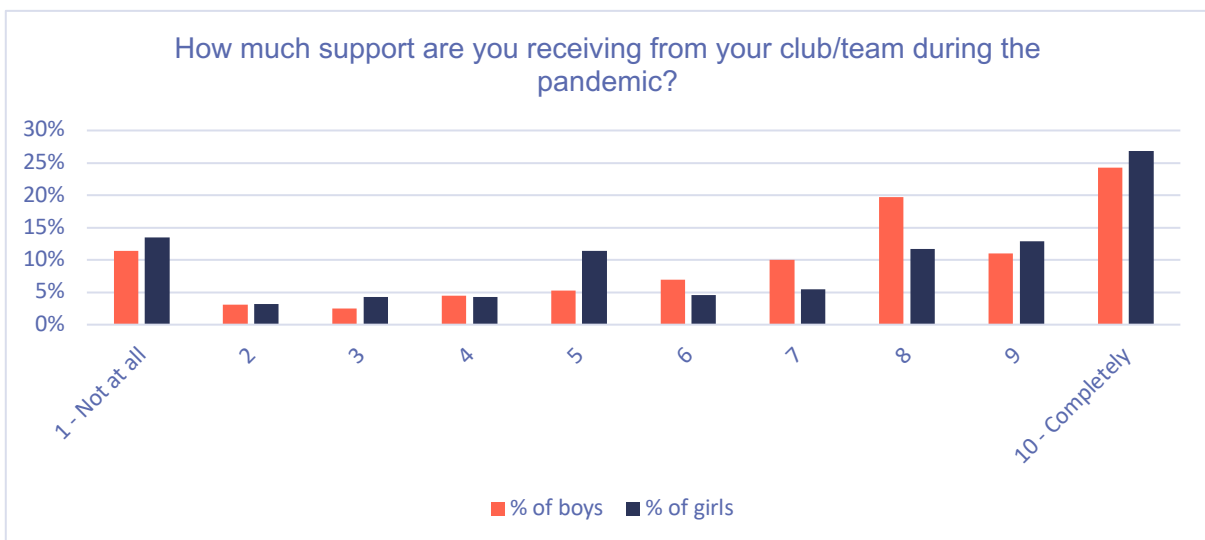
Children

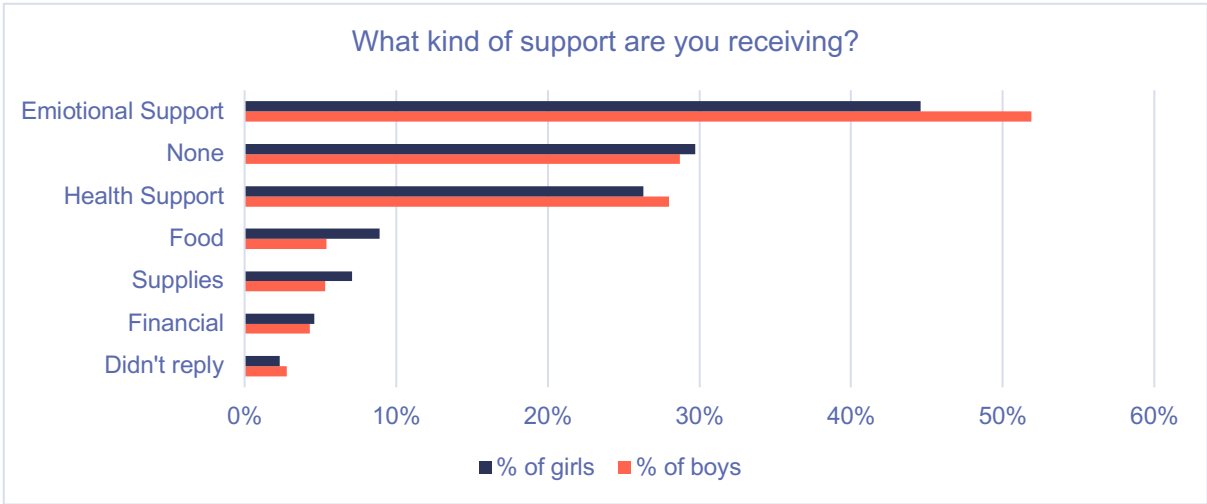


18+ years respondents

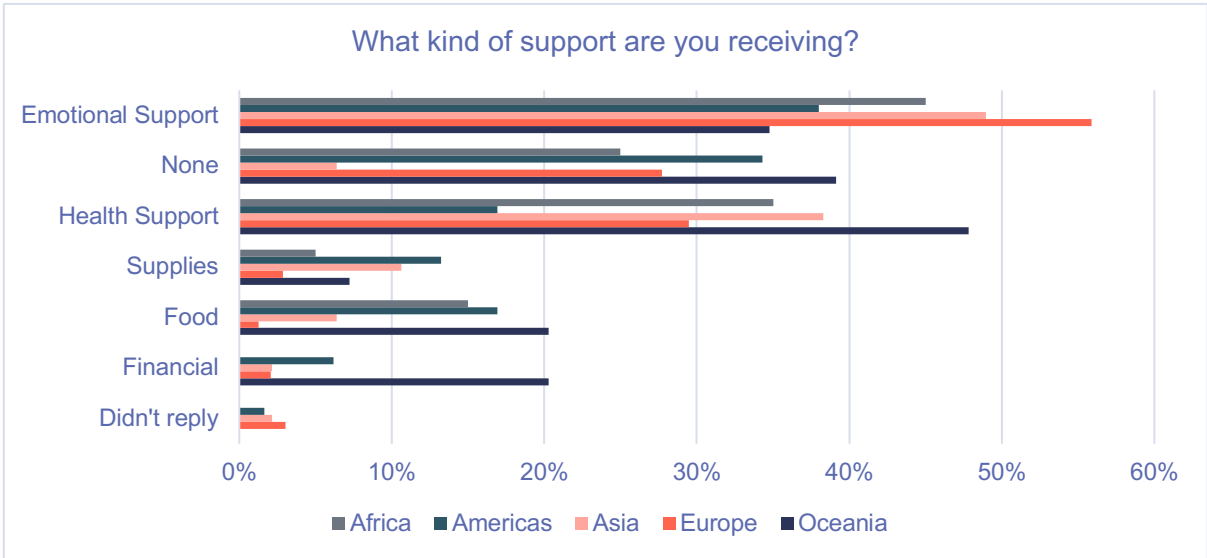
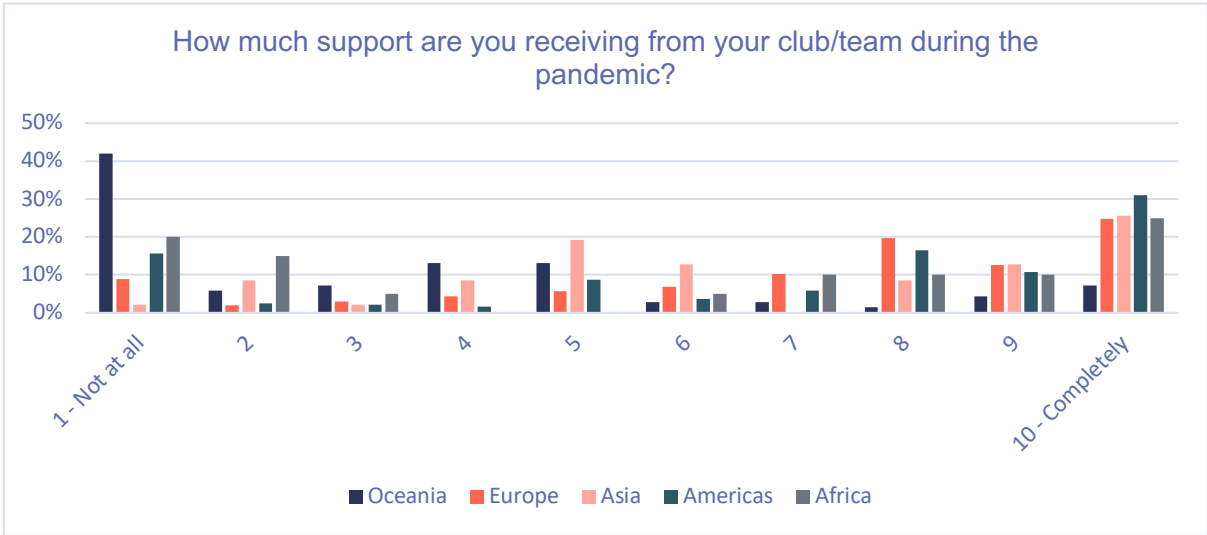


Girls and Boys





Children per continent



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This report was prepared and edited by Thays Prado, Dorothy Rozga and Sarah Stevenson.

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