

## ProNATs press release on the World Day of Working Children 2020:

# *How Covid-19 and lockdowns affect the lives of working children*

**Media coverage in Germany focuses on the consequences of the pandemic and the associated lockdowns for German and European citizens. At the same time, developments are underway outside the Fortress Europe that would fill the media at "normal times". ProNATs calls for more attention to be paid to people in the Global South who are existentially affected by the pandemic. This includes working children.**

Covid-19 has serious implications for working children worldwide. Most children work informally, so they are among the first to lose their jobs. They have no legal remedies to defend themselves against this. They are often also members of the families of migrant workers or are themselves such because they have separated from their families. Most migrant workers have to return to their home villages because of the pandemic, but many of them are unable to do so because of very short-term border closures, curfews and police checks. While some are able to find new jobs, others are left with no other option but to survive on the streets. This is all the more true for children who no longer have family ties. In many countries of the Global South, state schools have been shut down completely for months. Governments pay little attention to the consequences of these closures for most children. Educational justice also falls by the wayside, as public schools remain largely open. Similarly, domestic and sexualised violence has increased sharply during the pandemic.

But in many cases the affected persons know how to help themselves, without any state support. In Latin America, many communities organise themselves and provide free food, e.g. with self-installed cooking facilities. They defy curfews by articulating their political protest through social media and documenting the corrupt activities of their governments. They are also actively fighting against the spread of the virus.

The African Movement of Working Children and Youth (MAEJT/AMWCY) developed actions in many countries very quickly. Already at the beginning of March a short film was made to inform children and young people about the right way to protect themselves against the virus (see: [https://youtu.be/Gwq\\_XV1fTI8](https://youtu.be/Gwq_XV1fTI8)). MAEJT/AMWCY then produced a handbook for working in grassroots groups to strengthen working children and adolescents in their protection against Covid-19. It not only visually presents information on hygiene measures and lists local emergency numbers in case of suspicion of Covid-19. It also provides information about fake news on the virus. Grassroots groups carry out street actions to raise awareness and educate about the most

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#### Postadresse:

ProNATs e.V.  
Ringbahnstr. 27  
12099 Berlin

#### Bankverbindung:

Institut: Berliner Sparkasse  
BIC-Code: BE LA DE BE  
IBAN: DE89 1005 0000 6603 1751 91

#### Internet:

<https://pronats.org>  
info@pronats.org

important measures against the spread of the virus in their communities. For example, the group from the 7th arrondissement of Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic, organised a workshop on Covid-19 (see photo collection). The grassroots group in Tougan (Burkina Faso) created facilities for children working in the market to wash their hands with soap (see photo collection). Both the grassroots group in Oshodi (Nigeria) and the children's movement in Niger organised workshops in which the knowledge of how to make liquid soap was taught. This is an example of the promotion of income-generating activities for children and adolescents. Sewing workshops were also held to produce mouth-nose protection masks and hand disinfectants (see photo collection).

Access to information and risk awareness have become very important in the fight against the pandemic. This is the only way to ensure a minimum level of protection and knowledge about how to act in case of illness. The Movement of Working Children and Youth in Ghana supported, for example, an awareness campaign of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in three regions of the country. They distributed posters and postcards at bus stations and other busy places where, despite "social distancing", tolerance and solidarity with the migrating children and youths is called for and thus stigmatisation is counteracted (see photo collection). The pandemic also has an impact on the forms of communication within the movements and especially on the way in which festivals are celebrated. This was evident, for example, on the Day of the African Child, which took place on 16 June. As an alternative to large gatherings, working children and young people were encouraged to spend the day in smaller groups or through discussions in social networks.

All these self-help actions do not absolve states, especially those in the Global North, from taking responsibility for the consequences of the pandemic for the most disadvantaged population groups worldwide. In order to make these consequences visible, European news coverage must be equally open to the fate of people in the Global South and in the Global North. **Children must also have a voice with their demands and approaches to solutions. They must not be treated as mere objects by governments or the media!**

For information: The World Day of Working Children and Adolescents is celebrated every year on 9 December. It was established in 2006 on the initiative of working children and adolescents, who have since used this day to draw attention to their concerns - also in the sense of criticising the international day against child labour on 12 June under the umbrella of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

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[info@pronats.org](mailto:info@pronats.org)