

## **The Committee on the Rights of the Child warns of the grave physical, emotional and psychological effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and calls on States to protect the rights of children**

The Committee on the Rights of the Child expresses concern about the situation of children globally, particularly those in situations of vulnerability, due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many children are gravely affected physically, emotionally and psychologically, especially in countries that have declared states of emergencies and mandatory lockdowns.

In addition to the [declaration of ten human rights treaty bodies](#), the Committee further urges States to respect the rights of the child in taking measures to tackle the public health threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, the Committee calls on States to:

- 1. Consider the health, social, educational, economic and recreational impacts of the pandemic on the rights of the child.** Although initially declared for short terms, it becomes clear that declarations of States of emergencies and/or disaster may be maintained for longer periods, leading to longer periods of restrictions on the enjoyment of human rights. The Committee recognizes that in crisis situations, international human rights law exceptionally permits measures that may restrict the enjoyment of certain human rights in order to protect public health. However, such restrictions must be imposed only when necessary, be proportionate and kept to an absolute minimum. Additionally, while acknowledging that the COVID-19 pandemic may have a significant and adverse impact on the availability of financial resources, these difficulties should not be regarded as an impediment to the implementation of the Convention. Nevertheless, States should ensure that responses to the pandemic, including restrictions and decisions on allocation of resources, reflect the principle of the best interests of the child.
- 2. Explore alternative and creative solutions for children to enjoy their rights to rest, leisure, recreation and cultural and artistic activities.** Such solutions should include supervised outdoor activities at least once a day which respect physical distance protocols and other hygiene standards, and child-friendly cultural and artistic activities on TV, radio and online.
- 3. Ensure that online learning does not exacerbate existing inequalities or replace student-teacher interaction.** Online learning is a creative alternative to classroom learning but poses challenges for children who have limited or no access to technology or the Internet or do not have adequate parental support. Alternative solutions should be available for such children to benefit from the guidance and support provided by teachers.
- 4. Activate immediate measures to ensure that children are fed nutritious food** during the period of emergency, disaster or lockdown, as many children receive their only nutritious meal through school feeding schemes.
- 5. Maintain the provision of basic services for children including healthcare, water, sanitation and birth registration.** Despite the increasing pressure on health systems and the scarcity of resources, children should not be denied

access to health care, including to testing and a potential future vaccine, to COVID-19 – related and COVID-19 – unrelated medical treatment, mental health services and treatment for pre-existing conditions. Children should also have access to clean water and sanitation facilities during the period of emergency, disaster or lockdown. Birth registration services should not be suspended.

6. **Define core child protection services as essential and ensure that they remain functioning and available, including home visits when necessary, and provide professional mental health services for children living in lockdown.** Confinement may expose children to increased physical and psychological violence at home, or force children to stay in homes that are overcrowded and lack the minimum conditions of habitability. Children with disabilities and behavioural problems, as well as their families, may face additional difficulties behind closed doors. States should strengthen phone and online reporting and referral systems as well as sensitization and awareness activities through TV, radio and online channels. Strategies to mitigate the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic should also include specific measures to protect children, particularly those living in poverty and lacking access to adequate housing.
7. **Protect children whose vulnerability is further increased by the exceptional circumstances caused by the pandemic.** These include children with disabilities; children living in poverty; children in street situations; migrant, asylum-seeking, refugee and internally displaced children; minority and indigenous children; children with underlying health conditions including HIV/AIDS; children deprived of their liberty or confined in police lock-up facilities, prisons, secure care centres, migrant detention centres or camps; and children living in institutions. States should respect the right of every child to non-discrimination in its measures to address the COVID-19 pandemic as well as take targeted measures to protect children in vulnerable situations.
8. **Release children in all forms of detention, whenever possible, and provide children who cannot be released with the means to maintain regular contact with their families.** Many States have adopted measures to restrict visits and contact opportunities for children living in institutions or deprived of their liberty, including children confined in police institutions, prisons, secure centres, migration detention centres or camps. While these restrictive measures can be seen as necessary in the short term, over long periods they will have a marked negative effect on children. Children should at all times be allowed to maintain regular contact with their families, and if not in person, through electronic communication or telephone. If the period of emergency, disaster or State-ordered confinement is extended, consideration should be given to reassessing the measures that prohibit such visits. Children in migration situations should not be detained nor separated from their parents if accompanied.
9. **Prevent the arrest or detention of children for violating State guidance and directives relating to COVID-19,** and ensure that any child who was arrested or detained is immediately returned to his or her family.

10. **Disseminate accurate information about COVID-19 and how to prevent infection in languages and formats that are child-friendly and accessible to all children including** children with disabilities, migrant children and children with limited access to the Internet.
11. **Provide opportunities for children's views to be heard and taken into account in decision-making processes on the pandemic.** Children should understand what is happening and feel that they are taking part in the decisions that are being made in response to the pandemic.

8 April 2020