



2021 Economic and Social Committee Humanitarian Affairs Segment

Impacts of COVID-19 on the Protection of Displaced Children

Date & Time: Tuesday, 22nd June, 8:30 - 10:00 (Geneva time), virtual (link to join is below)

Sponsors & Organizers:

Permanent Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations Office
and other international organizations in Geneva,
Permanent Mission of Belgium to the United Nations Office and specialized institutions in Geneva,
UNICEF, and World Vision International

This is one of the virtual side events convened on the margins of the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment (HAS), which builds on this year's HAS theme: *"Strengthening humanitarian assistance to face the challenges of 2021 and beyond: mobilizing respect for international humanitarian law, inclusion, gender, innovation and partnerships"*.

Background and objectives of event

Following last year's ECOSOC HAS side event on strengthening the protection of children during COVID-19 (led by UNICEF, Save the Children, World Vision International, and the Missions of Niger, Sweden and the Dominican Republic), the situation for millions of children around the world, especially the most vulnerable, has worsened. In March 2021, UNICEF warned that progress is in reverse "across virtually every key measure of childhood."¹ Children living in conflict and displacement have been especially affected by the impacts of the pandemic, further stripping away their limited access to protection.

New research from World Vision looks into the devastating impacts of COVID-19 on forcibly displaced children and their families across eight countries. The findings indicate that children are dropping out of school or educational projects, violence against children is on the rise, there is a growing lack of safe shelter, communities are becoming less safe for children, and there is an increase in child marriage as families have lost livelihoods across the surveyed countries. These findings amplify data from previous World Vision International reports in 2020 on the 'aftershocks' of the pandemic.

While children are not the most vulnerable population to COVID-19 infection, they can still be infected and transmit the virus to each other and adults.² This is especially the case when children are living in

¹ UNICEF, "Across virtually every key measure of childhood, progress has gone backward, UNICEF says as pandemic declaration hits one-year mark," 11 March 2021. <https://www.unicef.org/india/press-releases/across-virtually-every-key-measure-childhood-progress-has-gone-backward-unicef-says>

² CDC, "Science Brief: Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in K-12 schools," 19 March 2021. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/transmission_k_12_schools.html#covid-19-children-adolescents; Medical Express, "Kids highly likely to transmit coronavirus to others: study," 21 January 2021. <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-01-kids-highly-transmit-coronavirus.html>

already unsafe, conflict-affected contexts, and overcrowded settings, with poor access to water and sanitation, where practicing social distancing is impossible.

Additional research also shows that the mental health and well-being of children living in conflict-affected countries is dangerously deteriorating as they struggle to cope with the socio-economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. Having survived life-threatening, life-altering conflicts, children's ongoing fear, trauma and chronic stress is compounded by the daily anxiety, uncertainty and hardship produced by the pandemic. Almost 70% of all displaced children across six countries surveyed by World Vision shared that they urgently need psychosocial support—more than three times the 22% of children in conflict-affected countries in need, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.³

The UN has recognized the uneven impact of COVID-19 on displaced children, and called for their protection to warrant “special attention.”⁴ This event will explore how the pandemic has disproportionately affected the protection needs of children in conflict and displacement settings, their unique vulnerabilities and why they are among the most at-risk populations from the impacts of COVID-19. It will call on Member States, practitioners and decision makers to urgently increase investment in child protection and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), but also argue that no one is safe from the pandemic until everyone is safe, highlighting the importance of ensuring equitable distribution and access of forcibly displaced populations to COVID-19 vaccines, prevention and response services.

Discussion points

This event will address the needs and effective approaches to prevent and respond to the protection of forcibly displaced and conflict-affected children in the face of the additional burden of COVID-19. The session will:

1. Discuss evidence of child protection concerns among conflict-affected and forcibly displaced children arising from COVID-19 in several country contexts;
2. Hear from children and youth about their own experiences and ideas for solutions to the protection problems they face;
3. Propose and agree a set of core recommendations to help address the unprecedented rise in child protection concerns as a result of conflict, displacement and now COVID-19, including as a result of continued and deep inequity of access to COVID-19 vaccines, prevention and response services.

Key concrete action points and recommendations/take away messages

- **Increase investment commensurate with the impact of humanitarian crises including COVID-19 on children and their protection concerns in situations of conflict and displacement.** Adopt policies and fund COVID-19 response and recovery plans that holistically address the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on forcibly displaced people, especially children, and particularly with respect to child protection and education.
- **Ensure a dedicated sub-section on MHPSS in all UN humanitarian appeals** (Humanitarian Response Plans, Refugee Response Plans) with set targets for beneficiaries, funding and reporting in light of the rapid rise of MHPSS needs of children affected by conflict, displacement and now COVID-19, and track allocated funding and gaps.

³ World Vision, “The Silent Pandemic: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mental Health and Psychosocial Wellbeing of Children in Conflict-Affected Countries,” 27 April 2021. <https://www.wvi.org/emergencies/coronavirus-health-crisis/silent-pandemic>

⁴ UN, “Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on children,” April 2020, p11. https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/160420_Covid_Children_Policy_Brief.pdf
Committee on the Rights of the Child, “Written Statement, Committee on the Rights of the Child warned of the grave physical, emotional and psychological effect of the pandemic on children and called on States to protect the rights of children,” 8 April 2020. “In April 2020, the Committee on the Rights of the Child warned of the grave physical, emotional and psychological effect of the pandemic on children and called on States to protect the rights of children. It recognized the need to protect children whose vulnerability is further increased by exceptional circumstances caused by COVID-19, including migrant, asylum seeking, refugee and internally displaced children. It called on States to respect the rights of the child in taking measures to tackle the public health threat posed by the pandemic”

- **Explicitly include all forcibly displaced people, including children, regardless of their legal and residence status, in COVID-19 response plans** and national health systems, providing equitable access to COVID-19 testing, treatment and vaccinations, and disaggregate data to include forcibly displaced people as part of the regular monitoring of the vaccination plan's implementation including vaccine uptake.

Format of the side event

A panel discussion that includes:

- A review of the state of play for children's rights and protection in conflict and displacement contexts as a result of the impact of COVID-19
- A presentation of the latest findings from World Vision and UNICEF reports on the impact of COVID-19 on children (with a focus on conflict and displacement)
- Hearing from children about their experiences

To be followed by an interactive question, answer and discussion period.

Remarks

H.E. Mr. Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Belgium to the United Nations Office and specialized institutions in Geneva

Mr. Andreas Papaconstantinou, Director for Neighborhood & Middle East, Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, European Commission.

Moderator

Greta Zeender, Head of Research & Outcomes, UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement

Panel Composition

Fatimah, young Syrian living in Jordan

Job, young South Sudanese Journalist and Activist living in Uganda

Amanda Bissex, Child Protection Regional Advisor for South Asia, UNICEF

Amanda Rives, Sr Director for External Engagement, Disaster Management, World Vision International
Rikke Fredberg, Policy Officer for Gender & Age, Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, European Commission.

Background Material

- *World Vision: HIGH RISK-LOW PRIORITY: Why unlocking COVID-19 vaccine access for refugees and internally displaced communities is critical for children (link available after release)*
- *World Vision: The Silent Pandemic: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mental Health and Psychosocial Wellbeing of Children in Conflict-Affected Countries*
<https://www.wvi.org/emergencies/coronavirus-health-crisis/silent-pandemic>
- *World Vision: COVID-19 Aftershocks – A Perfect Storm: Millions more children at risk of violence under lockdown and into the 'new normal'*
<https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/coronavirus-health-crisis/covid-19-aftershocks-perfect-storm>
- [Migrant and displaced children | UNICEF](#)

Connection details to join the event

https://unicef.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_p1v6mKv5RTekvRrLIEqF6A

Contact(s)

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