



Strengthening the protection of children during COVID-19:

Launching the Child Protection Minimum Standards

Sponsors and Organizers:

Permanent Missions of the Dominican Republic, Niger, Norway and Sweden;

UNICEF; Save the Children; World Vision International

Date and Time:

June 10, 2020; 1300 - 1430 EDT

This is one of the side-events to be convened during the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment (HAS), which builds on this year's HAS theme: *"Reinforcing humanitarian assistance in the context of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations: taking action for people-centred solutions, strengthening effectiveness, respecting international humanitarian law and promoting the humanitarian principles"*.

Background and objectives

Crises exacerbate existing inequalities and affect most those already deprived and marginalised. COVID-19 and its containment measures will lead to millions of children around the world facing the heightened risk of malnutrition, abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence. The impact will be the most devastating for children living in existing humanitarian crises, who already face the greatest risks to their safety and barriers to essential services.

[Recent research](#) shows for example that COVID-19 global lockdowns could result in violence against 85 million more children *in just the first three months* of the pandemic. The socioeconomic impact of the pandemic will push many poor households to turn to desperate measures just to survive. In many humanitarian contexts, children could face increased risk of child labour, sexual exploitation and abuse, and child marriage, as families struggle to afford basic provisions.

Since its initial release in 2012, the Child Protection Minimum Standards (CPMS) has provided guidance to all humanitarian actors and programmes seeking to protect and safeguard children, underpinned by child rights,

humanitarian law, and principles. The CPMS have contributed significantly to the professionalization of child protection in humanitarian action and supports strengthening nexus opportunities by building on existing capacities and systems. Used by over 74,000 child protection professionals and other humanitarian actors in more than 50 contexts, they have clearly improved the quality of our work. As part of the Humanitarian Standards Partnership, they have strengthened our accountability to those we serve. The 2019 revised edition advances those efforts and further supports the professionalization of the child protection sector, including with additional guidance on infectious disease outbreaks and refugee situations.

In line with the UN Secretary General's recommendation to "*continue to place protection at the centre of humanitarian action*," this event will explore how the 2019 CPMS edition is being used to strengthen protection of children in COVID-19 outbreaks, grounding its applicability in children's own experience of COVID-19. It will outline why Member States and decision makers need to urgently increase investment in child protection to address a dramatic rise in violence against children as a result of global lockdowns, as well as make key recommendations of how to strengthen child protection services in the face of this global pandemic.

Discussion points

As highlighted in the Secretary-General's Policy Brief on the impacts of COVID-19 on children, the pandemic has created and exacerbated threats to children's protection and wellbeing, including heightened risks of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). These acute and long-lasting impacts do not receive as much attention as the direct impact of the virus. However, we learned from past outbreaks, such as Ebola, the toll of these indirect consequences of the pandemic are far greater for children. The Child Protection Minimum Standards is an important tool to address these challenges and the latest edition just released includes important updates for governments and practitioners.

To put children and protection at the centre of the response, this event will address the needs and effective approaches to prevent and respond to children's protection concerns in the pandemic, including their participation and agency. The session will:

1. Discuss evidence of child protection concerns arising from COVID-19 in several country contexts, including humanitarian and armed conflict settings;
2. Hear from children and youth about their own experiences and ideas for solutions to the protection problems they face;
3. Show how CPMS can be used & adapted by governments and practitioners, including civil society groups, to prevent, mitigate and respond to children's protection needs in the context of COVID-19, including protection from sexual exploitation and abuse;
4. Jointly agree a set of core recommendations to help address the unprecedented rise in child protection concerns across the globe.

Remote access, isolation of children, and movement restrictions are huge challenges to preventing and responding to violence against children in an emergency like this one, and to ensuring continuity of life-saving child protection systems and services in place in humanitarian contexts prior to the pandemic. School closures combined with economic shocks increase the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse. Typical spaces for reporting and referral including schools and peers

are no longer accessible. Yet, despite the lockdown and isolation, children have agency and wish to enjoy their right to participate. In just [a short consultation](#), carried out by World Vision, with 101 children and young people (58 girls and 43 boys) between the ages of 8 and 18 from 13 countries, children said that COVID-19 is changing their lives in three key areas through: (a) school disruption, (b) emotional distress due to social distancing, and (c) increasing poverty. The session will include the voices and views of children and young people.

Beyond COVID-19, girls and boys continue to be disproportionately impacted by existing humanitarian crises; one in five, or 450 million children have been affected by conflict, while over 31 million children have experienced displacement. Last year the UN Secretary-General's report on Children and Armed Conflict noted that the reporting year marked the highest number of child casualties since UN monitoring and reporting began. Children continue to be under attack, including in contexts affected by COVID-19. Ensuring access to and continuation of humanitarian child protection has never been more urgent.

Key concrete action points and recommendations/take away messages

- **The protection of children from violence must be a top priority in humanitarian action**, including in the response to COVID-19, across all contexts. Authorities must designate child protection, MHPSS, education and gender-based violence activities as essential services and ensure continuity of services and systems.
- **Support the Child Protection Minimum Standards: 2019 Edition.** The CPMS is foundational for preventing and responding to all forms of violence and protection concerns children experience. Governments, practitioners and partners should demonstrate political and financial support to realise the rollout and implementation of the CPMS, and empower frontline capacity building, recognising these standards as integral to protecting children from violence during COVID-19, and beyond for children affected by conflict and displacement.
- **Increase investment commensurate with the impact of humanitarian crises including COVID-19 on children and their protection concerns.** Child protection remains the second least funded humanitarian sector, globally and historically, yet girls and boys are disproportionately affected by conflict, displacement and disaster. Up to 85 million more children may be exposed to physical, sexual or emotional abuse due to the indirect impacts of COVID-19. Adequate resources are essential to ensuring the 2019 Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action are realised. This investment would ensure robust child protection systems are in place, and comprehensive, age and gender-appropriate services are available to prevent, mitigate and respond to children's protection concerns.
- **Ensure comprehensive child protection systems and services continue to be accessible and available**, even in the midst of a debilitating pandemic and economic fall-out. Child protection case management, reporting and referral mechanisms, including psychosocial support, alternative care and specialised support for child survivors of GBV, children existing armed forces or groups, children with disabilities, and unaccompanied or separated minors, must continue. This includes safe and accessible reporting mechanisms for children who experience sexual exploitation and abuse. To achieve this, it will be critical to work with existing community-based child protection mechanisms, supporting local actors and partners to adapt to new realities.
- **All actors and every aspect of humanitarian action has a responsibility to protect children and mitigate harm.** The 2019 CPMS provides a new and more robust roadmap for mainstreaming child protection, including PSEA, into every technical sector of intervention, at each stage of humanitarian planning, action, monitoring and evaluation. It is essential that all actors - including government, humanitarian actors, faith communities, media, private sector and broader civil society engage to prevent and reduce children's exposure to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

- **Children's voices must be heard.** We cannot assume or presume to know their lived experiences. Only children can tell us what it is like to be a child under COVID-19. If we want to help children be safer, then we need to recognise their own contributions to protection and include them in our efforts.

Format

A panel discussion featuring:

- a review of the state of play for children's rights and protection in humanitarian contexts, including the impact of COVID-19, featuring
 - Carlos Hollis Vales - Adolescent speaker from Venezuela, part of "Armonia Musical", an adolescent and youth group that helps young people express themselves through music.
 - Halimatou Hima - Counsellor, Security Council Affairs WPS / YPS / CAAC, Permanent Mission of Niger to the United Nations
- a presentation of the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: 2019 Edition (2019 CPMS), with remarks from
 - Ola Sohlström - Minister Counsellor, The Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations
 - Cornelius Williams, Associate Director, Programme Division - Child Protection, UNICEF on what's new in the CPMS, including PSEA
- Short video presentation of the 2019 CPMS
- a presentation on the practical application of the 2019 CPMS in humanitarian contexts, highlighting emerging examples of best practices and learning from
 - Alison Suttton - Save the Children, Global Director Child Protection, Programme Quality & Impact
 - Amanda Rives - World Vision International, Disaster Management - Senior Director

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

Planned interventions from the floor: The Permanent Mission of Norway; Watchlist on Children & Armed Conflict.

Chair

Wellington Bencosme - The Permanent Mission of Dominican Republic

Moderator

Tasha Gill – Senior Advisor, Child Protection in Emergencies, UNICEF

Panel composition

- Carlos Hollis Vales - Adolescent speaker
- Halimatou Hima - Counsellor, Security Council Affairs WPS / YPS / CAAC, Permanent Mission of Niger to the United Nations
- Ola Sohlström – Minister Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations
- Cornelius Williams - UNICEF - Associate Director
- Alison Suttton - Save the Children, Global Director Child Protection, Programme Quality & Impact
- Amanda Rives - World Vision International, Disaster Management - Senior Director

Background Material

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. "Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action: 2019 Edition."

https://alliancecpha.org/en/system/tdf/library/attachments/cpms_2019_final_en.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=35094

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. "Technical Note: Protection of Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic, Version 2"

<https://alliancecpha.org/en/series-of-child-protection-materials/protection-children-during-covid-19-pandemic>

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Save the Children. "Unprotected: Crisis in humanitarian funding for child protection." <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/unprotected-crisis-humanitarian-funding-child-protection>

World Vision International. 'Aftershocks: A Perfect Storm, millions more children at risk of violence under lockdown and into the 'new normal'.' https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Aftershocks%20FINAL%20VERSION_0.pdf

World Vision International. "COVID-19 & Child Protection in Fragile and Humanitarian Contexts."

<https://www.wvi.org/publications/policy-briefing/covid-19-child-protection-fragile-and-humanitarian-contexts>

Connection details to join the event

Please RSVP by clicking the link [here](#). Call-in details for joining will be emailed prior to the event.

Contact

For more information, please contact:

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