

Open Letter from International Civil Society Organizations and Child-Focused Agencies

COVID-19 AND THE IMPACT OF PANDEMIC RESPONSE PLANS THREATEN IMMEDIATE AND LONG-TERM RISKS TO PUBLIC HEALTH AND CHILD PROTECTION

The [statement](#) from U.N. Secretary General António Guterres and a [letter from the Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs](#), endorsed by more than 160 member states highlight the importance of holistic COVID-19 response plans that ensure well-being and healthy development of children.

The following groups of children face increased risks as a result of the pandemic and related containment measures:

- [Children, particularly girls, confined to abusive homes](#) where they are likely to experience or witness domestic and gender-based violence without recourse to any child protection services or supports in their communities;
- [Children whose well-being and survival depend on social services and a strong social service workforce](#), which may now be disrupted;
- The [millions of children without parental care](#), living in alternative care settings (including residential care) or children in street situations, many of whom are in situations of higher vulnerability due to COVID-19, as highlighted in a recent [correspondence](#) to the Lancet;
- Children with health issues or disabilities, many immunocompromised and vulnerable to COVID-19;
- The reportedly [large numbers of children being sent “home” from residential or other alternative care settings](#) without any proper support or monitoring to ensure their safety and wellbeing;
- [Children deprived of their liberty](#) and those residing in quarantine centers or migrant detention centers; and
- [Refugee, internally displaced, migrant, and stateless children, in informal settlements, and in areas affected by humanitarian crises](#), all of whom are at heightened risk of abuse and deteriorating health.

The pandemic also creates serious long-term risks to children’s well-being and healthy development. High numbers of COVID-19 deaths may leave thousands of children without parents or caregivers and put alternative care systems under great strain. Economic recessions may contribute to notable increases in child abuse and exploitation, including gender-based violence, child marriage and [child labor](#). Xenophobic discrimination against children living on the streets, child refugees and immigrants will increase risks of violence and stigmatization.

We call on national governments and multilateral institutions to work immediately to strengthen ‘child protection in COVID-19’ response frameworks and to provide sufficient donor support to implement these responses effectively. These frameworks should follow inter-agency technical guidance, such as that [endorsed](#) by the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and should:

- Ensure that emergency response measures are ethical, time-bound, gender-, age- and disability- inclusive, and fully protective of children’s rights, addressing the multiple ways confinement measures may lead to an increase in [abuse, neglect, exploitation](#), and [violence against children](#).
- Prepare plans immediately to protect children in [residential or other alternative care](#), as well as those in quarantine and detention centers, and other [children deprived of their liberty](#).
- Designate members of the [social service workforce \(SSW\) as essential](#) to prevent and respond to child protection risks. Provide them with appropriate Infection Prevention and Control training, and equip them with personal protective equipment in accordance with [World Health Organization \(WHO\) guidance](#) and national laws.
- Strengthen the capacity of child helplines and facilitate [remote case management](#) to monitor and support vulnerable children where in-person support may not be safe or appropriate.
- Direct national governments to adopt immediate and medium-term child-sensitive social protection as recommended in UNICEF’s [Social Protection Response to COVID-19 Technical Note](#).
- Ensure that resources are available for national governments and humanitarian actors to fully implement these responses, recognizing the traditional [gaps in child protection funding in past humanitarian aid expenditures](#).

This open letter has been endorsed by the following organizations:

The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action
Better Care Network
Changing the Way We Care
ChildFund Alliance
International Rescue Committee
Maestral International
Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children
Plan International
Save the Children
SOS Children's Villages International
Terre des Hommes
UNICEF
World Vision

