



Resolution 2385 (2021)¹

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children's rights

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly is deeply concerned about the devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children (any person under the age of 18), who have faced family bereavement, isolation, the spread of poverty and reduced access to public services (including health, education and social protection). Children's physical and mental health, as well as equal opportunities for learning and development, have been affected. Violence against children has increased, including domestic and sexual violence. The impact of the pandemic in poorer countries has raised serious concerns with respect to child and infant mortality, child labour, child marriage and child trafficking. The current generation of children, which is sometimes referred to as "Generation Covid", will face the consequences of this public health crisis for many years to come unless adequate measures are taken.

2. The Assembly is convinced that, to improve the situation of children, parents and other carers need to be supported first and foremost, so that they, in turn, can help children. Children themselves also need to be listened to. The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing problems with respect to social exclusion, inequality and inadequate social protection systems. In many countries, the downsizing of public services over the past decades has resulted in a situation where resources are so thinly stretched that there is hardly any margin to meet the growing need for support created by the pandemic. Building robust public services for children and their families, ensuring that these services are well co-ordinated and that they will not fall short in the face of major risk situations, should be a priority in post-pandemic recovery strategies. Child poverty must be tackled with determination.

3. The gravity of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children's rights varies considerably between and within countries, with the poorest groups in society and lower-income countries being affected the most. Solidarity should be the guiding principle for addressing this public health crisis and its consequences. It is only by meeting the basic needs of all children, ensuring children's safety and supporting families that we can achieve high levels of well-being and prosperity in our societies.

4. The Council of Europe member States should take urgent action to address the impact of the pandemic on the rights of the child and to ensure that all children are protected in accordance with existing international standards, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the relevant Council of Europe instruments, such as the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163), the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210, "Istanbul Convention"), the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201, "Lanzarote Convention"), the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (ETS No. 108), the Convention on Cybercrime (ETS No. 185, "Budapest Convention") and the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197).

1. *Assembly debate* on 22 June 2021 (18th sitting) (see [Doc. 15311](#), report of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, rapporteur: Baroness Doreen Massey). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 22 June 2021 (18th sitting).

See also [Recommendation 2206 \(2021\)](#).



5. The Assembly thus urges the member States of the Council of Europe to take the following measures:
 - 5.1. with respect to building resilient social protection systems for children and their carers, to:
 - 5.1.1. ensure a minimum level of income for parents and carers, regardless of their status and background, for example in the form of a basic income (sufficient to meet their needs); such income should be easily accessible and relevant information should be disseminated to the public;
 - 5.1.2. ensure that relevant resources are made available on a sustainable basis to the public services dealing with children, including social protection, health and education services; ensure that professionals dealing with children receive an adequate salary, have a stable professional situation and opportunities for professional development;
 - 5.1.3. pay special attention to children in vulnerable situations, including children living in poverty, children belonging to minorities, migrant and refugee children, children of labour migrants left behind in their countries of origin, children with disabilities, children with long-term or chronic illnesses, children deprived of liberty, children in care, young carers and street children;
 - 5.2. with respect to ensuring effective protection of children's rights in times of crisis and while respecting the appropriate public health measures in place, to:
 - 5.2.1. ensure that emergency and recovery plans, strategies and legislation undergo a child-impact assessment, and promote budgeting mechanisms for child rights;
 - 5.2.2. reduce the level of stress within families by addressing socio-economic difficulties, supporting flexible working arrangements for parents and other carers, including the possibility of taking special leave on the ground of having a "child in distress", and ensuring that the mental and physical well-being of children is as important as their academic achievement;
 - 5.2.3. maintain functioning public services for children, including health, education and social protection services, by providing guidance and health and safety protocols, including instructions for smooth interservice co-operation and communication, and monitoring their implementation; raising awareness and building support for such measures; making full use of information and communication technologies when appropriate; ensuring that public officials are duly supported when dealing with critical situations, such as when children are affected by family bereavement, incidents of intra-family violence, a drastic decrease in family income, mental health issues or conflict with the law;
 - 5.2.4. prioritise prevention of violence against children; strengthen mechanisms for reporting by professionals; set up helplines and organise awareness-raising campaigns on violence against children, in particular sexual violence (including in the digital realm);
 - 5.2.5. support research on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children's rights and well-being, including longitudinal studies on educational attainment and well-being, longer-term educational and career outcomes and inequalities in life chances;
 - 5.2.6. ensure access to education programmes for all children, for example using television channels and radio stations or through the provision of necessary equipment to families with socio-economic difficulties, and by introducing catch-up programmes; ensure that children have access to outdoor and indoor play and sport whenever possible; ensure that the arts and culture are accessible to all children; ensure support for innovative approaches to socialisation, safe social networking and identity building for children;
 - 5.2.7. raise awareness of the importance of regular vaccination programmes for children;
 - 5.2.8. ensure that the principles of child-friendly and restorative justice are applied in the context of the pandemic, for example in the case of a breach of lockdown regulations;
 - 5.3. with respect to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the rights of children in low-income countries, to:
 - 5.3.1. provide emergency assistance and ensure that global development programmes address the situation of children, especially those from vulnerable groups; and build public support for development programmes and humanitarian assistance by highlighting the human implications of the crisis and its potential consequences in an interconnected world;

5.3.2. with respect to the vaccination of children against Covid-19, implement the recommendations made in [Resolution 2361 \(2021\)](#) "Covid-19 vaccines: ethical, legal and practical considerations".

6. The Assembly welcomes the adoption of the European Union's Strategy on the Rights of the Child and its strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse. It calls on the European institutions to ensure well-co-ordinated support to their member States in the framework of the European Union and Council of Europe strategies, making full use of the existing expertise and instruments such as the Lanzarote Convention. Keeping in mind that the experience gained during the Covid-19 pandemic will be crucial to being prepared to provide flexible policy responses to future crisis situations, for example in the framework of the upcoming Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027), which is currently being prepared.

7. Furthermore, the Assembly welcomes the launch of the proposed European Child Guarantee by the European Union and urges the European Union bodies to take account, in its roll-out and implementation, of the revised European Social Charter and the findings of the European Committee of Social Rights. The European Union and the Council of Europe should work closely together to support member States in putting the European Child Guarantee into practice.

8. The Assembly calls on national parliaments, the European Parliament and the Inter-Parliamentary Union to join their efforts in building parliamentary support for addressing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the rights of the child.

9. The Assembly calls on the national parliaments of member States to support the World Health Organization and institutions delivering aid programmes for children in order to guarantee their financial stability so that they are able to provide practical support for children.