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

Reply to Recommendation¹: Recommendation 2206 (2021)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers noted with interest Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 2206 \(2021\)](#) "Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children's rights" and forwarded the text to the European Committee on Social Rights (ECSR), the Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI) and the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDEF) for information and possible comments.
2. The Committee fully recognises that children have been greatly affected by the pandemic. Generally, children have suffered from social isolation, from the lack of access to education, health services, and equal opportunities, from increased economic and social pressure on their families, and from increased levels of domestic violence. Children have also suffered more from online and offline sexual abuse and exploitation. Children in particularly vulnerable situations have paid an especially high toll. Furthermore, children's participation in decisions on issues concerning them has also decreased according to the CDEF.
3. The Committee notes that the CDEF dedicated an exchange of views to this subject in July 2020. It has also compiled a collection of good practices in response to the pandemic via a dedicated [Covid-19 webpage](#) and has launched, in early 2021, a series of webinars on "Covid-19 and children's rights". The Lanzarote Committee's Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson made a statement on stepping up protection of children against sexual exploitation and abuse in times of the Covid-19 pandemic,² which called to share relevant initiatives taken following the lockdown to ensure protection of children against sexual violence which was later published on the dedicated [Covid-19 webpage](#).
4. With regard to the Assembly's specific recommendation in paragraph 4.1, the Committee is of the opinion that the Council of Europe would be unable to dedicate the resources needed for such a complex task. This would require that the recovery programmes of all Council of Europe member States be submitted to a review under not only one, but several international and European instruments. Instead, the Committee notes that the work of multiple intergovernmental committees can contribute to the national reviews of member States' post-Covid recovery programmes from a children's rights perspective. In addition, monitoring through the European Social Charter System, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and other monitoring bodies could also usefully contribute. Finally, the Committee would mention the [Guidelines on upholding equality during the Covid-19 pandemic and similar crises in the future](#), adopted on 5 May 2021.
5. As for the recommendation in paragraph 4.2, the Committee of Ministers has established a Working Party on Improving the European Social Charter System (GT-CHARTÉ). It has been tasked with looking into practical ways of improving the Charter system in light of the proposals made by the Secretary General in document [SG/Inf\(2021\)13](#), the report submitted by the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) and the position papers adopted by the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) and the Governmental Committee of the European Social Charter and the European Code of Social Security (GC). The first findings of GT-CHARTÉ are due to be submitted in time for the Ministerial Session in May 2022.

1. Adopted at the 1426th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (23 February 2022).

2. <https://rm.coe.int/covid-19-ic-statement-en-final/16809e17ae>.



6. On assessing whether the European Social Charter can be applied to protect children and families during and after pandemics, the Committee recalls the ECSR “Statement on Covid-19 and social rights”.³ This statement clarified that the Charter provides a necessary reference framework for assessing the measures taken to cope with the pandemic and any post-pandemic recovery measures, as well as for preparation for, and responses to, possible future crises of this nature. While children’s rights are a recurrent theme throughout the ECSR’s statement, a separate section assesses the impact of the pandemic on children and families specifically. Furthermore, in 2020, the ECSR provided general observations and a targeted questionnaire within the Charter’s national reporting framework.³ Questions concerned notably the responses of States to the health crisis and its effects, while also raising specific questions on children’s rights. The relevant conclusions are scheduled to be published in March 2022.

7. The Committee of Ministers encourages CDENF to examine possibilities of further extending participation of the non-member States of the Council of Europe in its co-operation programmes on the rights of the child, with a special focus on low-income countries, as recommended in paragraph 4.4.

8. Concerning the recommendation in paragraph 4.5, the Committee recalls that child rights budgeting and child rights impact assessments have been punctually addressed by the CDENF under its 2020-2021 mandate. They will be further promoted under its current mandate (2022-2025) through more specific activities in collaboration with internal and external partners, and a collaboration with the Parliamentary Assembly will be welcome in this respect.

9. Finally, with respect to paragraph 4.6, the Committee notes that the relevant Secretariats of the Council of Europe, European Parliament, and European Commission enjoy close co-operation and regularly update each other on opportunities for collaboration within their respective Strategies.

3. <https://rm.coe.int/questions-to-states-parties-of-the-resc-conclusions-2021/16809f05c1>.