



COVID 19 Children and Young People with Disabilities Global Statement and Recommendations

We are deeply concerned about the potential impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic on the protections of human rights and inclusion of children and young people with disabilities. With an estimation of between 180 and 220 million youth with disabilities worldwide, and an estimation that there are 93 million children with disabilities, of which nearly 80% live in developing countries already one of the most disadvantaged groups. Before the pandemic they experienced barriers and challenges due to limited accessibility, resources and the negative stigma and discrimination associated with disabilities and impairments.

Children and young people with disabilities and their families need to be part of efforts for disability inclusive responses and recovery to this pandemic.

Although we recognise the impact of this pandemic, measures to tackle this must respect and protect the human rights of all people. Children and young people with disabilities should not have their rights compromised, as they already have challenges to accessing the right and appropriate support and resources to give them an equal chance to thrive and reach their potential. Progress made towards disability rights and inclusion – such as access to equal and accessible care and treatment to support dignity and safety, inclusive education, lifelong learning, employment, independent living, a right to family life and social protections - should not be undone. To ensure this, the rights of children and young people with disabilities must be respected and protected.

Due to COVID-19, children and young people with disabilities are at risk of being further left without the vital support, resources and advocacy they received prior to the pandemic. We want to increase greater inclusion as there may be opportunities that arise from disability inclusive responses and recovery as well as opportunities to increase children and young people's protections on their human rights.

This COVID-19 children and young people with disabilities statement recommendations align with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Global Children and Young People's Disability Charter.

Recommendation 1: Inclusive Accessible Education and Learning Development

- a) Individual abilities and additional needs and learning styles of children and young people with disabilities should be supported to access resources and assistance available for their education and learning development. This includes accommodating and ensuring the participation of children and young people with developmental or intellectual disabilities, complex learning needs, deafblind and deaf children and young people.

- b) Teachers and education providers should be adequately equipped with accessible online resources and trained on supporting children and young people with disabilities remotely ensuring continuity of education and supporting their individual learning development. There should also be support and guidance to ensure that online and distance learning platforms are safe and accessible to children and young people with disabilities.
- c) The online learning also has challenges, as it is not accessible to all children and young people with disabilities, as educational lessons and materials online often lack accessibility. Digital and technical equipment needs to have accessibility features, be affordable and made available to children and young people with disabilities supporting their individual learning, development, communication and independence.
- d) Children and young people with disabilities living in villages, rural indigenous communities, households with no or very limited internet, or access to digital devices with affordable data are at greater risk of being left behind, Due to inaccessible remote education, learning and development support and inaccessible materials.
- e) Alternative solutions that provide quality education and effective inclusive learning and that are not tech reliant need to be sought and provided for children and young people with disabilities for whom online learning is not accessible.
- f) Children and young people with deafblindness rely on tactile communication mostly and they are missing out on their education since it has moved to online platforms. Accessible materials and resources to support their education, learning and development must be provided as alternative solutions to online learning.
- g) Parents and caregivers should be supported to have access to resources and develop skills in supporting children and young people with disabilities learning remotely. Trained teachers and education providers should provide guidance and support to the parents and caregivers of children and young people with disabilities (whom they have taught); with regards to learning and development support at home.

(Global Disability Children & Young People’s Charter: Commitment 1, Commitment 6, CRPD Article 6, CRPD Article 9, CRPD Article 21, CRPD Article 24, CRC Article 23, CRC Article 28, CRC Article 29)

Recommendation 2: Health and Social Care

Children and young people with disabilities are at a higher risk of having increased difficulties from COVID-19 due to having possible underlying health conditions.

- a) There needs to be assurance of non-discriminatory access to COVID-19 care and treatment for children and young people with disabilities.
- b) Health and social care support should continue to be available for children and young people with disabilities. There should be access to medication, equipment, adaptations, advice, accessible care and treatment.
- c) Children and young people with disabilities and their parents and caregivers to have access and support to complete COVID 19 Hospital Communication Passport. Providing vital information for hospital and medical centres regarding how to support children and young people with disabilities access needs, their communication, sensory, physical and personal care needs and their safety and dignity.

- d) Accessible information, materials and updates needs to be made available in regards to what health and social care provisions children and young people with disabilities can access during COVID-19.
- e) Accessible transport, health and social care facilities and access to treatment for COVID-19 needs to be provided to children and young people with disabilities.
- f) Protective equipment to all those providing direct health and care support to children and young people with disabilities including personal assistants and family members and caregivers to keep children and young people with disabilities safe and well. Ensuring support how to use PPE correctly and how to follow hygiene advice and protocols.
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- g) Ensure children and young people with disabilities have access to nutritious food and proper sanitation.

**(Global Disability Children & Young People’s Charter: Commitment 5, Commitment 9
CRPD Article 9, CRPD Article 25, CRPD Article 26, CRC Article 23)**

Recommendation 3: Accessible information

Accessible information and communications in various formats are essential for children and young people with disabilities and their families and caregivers to be kept informed about prevention, support available and keeping safe.

- a) Resources need to be available to support accessible information including access to sign language interpreters, braille, and access support to deafblind. Ensuring reach to the diverse needs and requirements of children and young people with disabilities.
- b) Dissemination of information on COVID-19 needs to be in local community languages, easy to read, video with text captioning, accessible web content and child friendly.
- c) Accessible information should be made available in all areas including health, social care, disability services, education, employment, social security and the business community.

**(Global Disability Children & Young People’s Charter: Commitment 5, CRPD Article 9,
CRPD Article 21, CRC Article 17)**

Recommendation 4: Social distancing, support and wellbeing

- a) Support and practical guidance must be provided to ensure as much as possible social distancing is adhered to for children and young people with disabilities, taking into account various impairments, sensory needs and intellectual disabilities.
- b) Social distancing is really hard for children and young people with deafblindness since they rely on tactile inputs so they must be supported to learn strict hygiene, Family and caregivers must supported to understand the various ways they can ensure children and young people with deafblindness are kept safe and supported for all their various needs and requirements.
- c) Deafblind interpreters, families and caregivers supporting children and young people with deafblindness and those with complex needs who need close physical support must receive adequate physical protection equipment.

- d) Additional protective measures must be taken for children and young people with deafblindness during this pandemic. Support services, personal assistance, physical and communication accessibility must be ensured including deafblind interpreters to support them with essential instructions and information.
- e) Children and young people with disabilities and their family and caregivers must be provided with accessible information regarding how to mitigate the risk of COVID-19.
- f) Effective targeted support, key essentials, financial support and material provision must be provided to children and young people with disabilities and their families.
- g) Ensure continuity of support, education, health, social care, independent living, personal assistants, equipment and adaptations, assistive technology and communication aids for children and young people with disabilities in the planning and distribution of resources and recovery.
- h) Practical, financial, mental health and wellbeing support needs to be provided to parents and carers of children and young people with disabilities. Parents and carers of children and young people with disabilities have additional challenges and demands as they are providing continuous care, experiencing disruption of essential services, providing education and learning development support for their children and young person with disabilities.

(Global Disability Children & Young People's Charter: Commitment 9, Commitment 10 CRPD Article 11, CRPD Article 23, CRPD Article 28, CRC Article 6, CRC Article 26, CRC Article 27)

Recommendation 5: Participation and Representation

- a) Children and young people with disabilities need to be consulted, included and listened to in COVID-19 responses and recovery programmes.
- b) There needs to be meaningful participation with children and young people with disabilities sharing their various experiences, what matters to them and having their human rights protected,
- c) Organisations of persons with disabilities and civil society organisations working directly with children and young people with disabilities and their families, to be supported to participate in local and national COVID-19 coordination mechanisms, responses and recovery programmes.
- d) Children and young people with disabilities to be supported to understand what is happening and have their say in the decisions that are being made in response to COVID-19.

(Global Disability Children & Young People's Charter: Commitment 2, CRPD Article 21, CRPD Article 29, CRC Article 12, CRC Article 13, CRC Article 23)

Recommendation 6: Young Women and girls with disabilities

Young women and girls with disabilities have increased risk to being disproportionately affected by COVID-19, experiencing lack of access to essential services and support, restricted movements and at risk of not returning to or accessing education and employment. Particularly young women and girls from rural villages and rural indigenous communities.

- a) Young women and girls with disabilities are at increased risk of gender-based violence. Ensure services and support to prevent and respond to gender-based violence are inclusive and accessible for young women and girls with disabilities with accessible points of contact and helplines. Ensure information and reporting processes are accessible including meeting communication needs for those with intellectual disabilities, limited mobility, deaf young women and girls.
- b) Key essential items must be provided to young women and girls with disabilities to support their menstrual health, hygiene and sexual and reproductive health.
- c) Mechanisms should be ensured to support, monitor and collate data of access and return to education of young women and girls with disabilities as they are at higher risk of being denied an education.
- d) Monitor and ensure data compiled includes the impact of COVID-19 on young women and girls with disabilities including information about the barriers and challenges they have experienced.
- e) Ensure gender-based violence data gathers essential information of abuse and violence experienced by young women and girls with disabilities and any support that has been provided.
- f) Safeguarding training must be provided for family members and caregivers in how to safeguard and reduce risk of any form of abuse on young women and girls with disabilities.

(Global Disability Children & Young People's Charter: Commitment 3, Commitment 4 CRPD Article 3, CRPD Article 6, CRC Article 19, CRC Article 34, CRC Article 36, CRC Article 37, CRC Article 39)

Recommendation 7: Safeguarding and protecting from all forms of abuse and harmful practices

- a) Must protect and safeguard children and young people with disabilities living in institutional care, group homes, residential schools and other settings ensuring in COVID-19 measures and restrictions that they are not ill-treated, given non-consensual medication, forced with restraint, and unlawful seclusion or locked away.
- b) During this pandemic there is an increase of young women and girls being forced into marriages and more cases of female genital mutilation. Young women and girls with disabilities are at increased risk and vulnerable to all forms of abuse and harmful practices. Support, prevention, safeguarding must be accessible and inclusive for young women and girls with disabilities. Data regarding forced marriages, female genital mutilation and other forms of abuse must include young women and girls with disabilities, to develop and improve disability inclusive, accessible support services, information and assistance.

- c) Children and young people with disabilities must be protected to their right of family life during the measures of Covid-19. Where the parent or main carer has been infected with COVID-19 and is not able to provide the care and support for their child(ren) or young person with disabilities; support should be provided to stay with family, continue being part of their community and not be institutionalised.
- d) Safeguarding and child protection protocols and services need to continue to be in place, associated laws must not be relaxed or diluted during this pandemic. Particularly as children and young people with disabilities have increased risk of experiencing violence and abuse in homes, institutions, group homes, especially when there is no contact from others the violence and abuse will not be detected. Safeguarding and child protection protocols and services are vital now more than ever before.

(Global Disability Children & Young People's Charter: Commitment 4, CRPD Article 15, CRPD Article 16, CRPD Article 17, CRC Article 9, CRC Article 19, CRC Article 20, CRC Article 25, CRC Article 34, CRC Article 36, CRC Article 37, CRC Article 39)

Recommendation 8: Economic Empowerment and Employment

- a) During the pandemic people have been working from home, companies and organisations have experienced that remote working and flexible working can be productive. Accessible remote working, remote recruitment and retention of young people with disabilities needs to be supported. Young people with disabilities must be protected from discrimination at work due to COVID-19 risk as persons with disabilities may have an underlying health condition; and misinformation during COVID-19 has increased stigma associated with disability.
- b) To enable young people with disabilities to continue working while reducing social contact to reduce infection risks, they need to be assured that they can work from home remotely with their access needs and requirements supported. Accessible tech and equipment, sign interpreters, personal assistants, text captioning and flexible working arrangements must be made available.
- c) Paid leave needs to be ensured for young people with disabilities whose work cannot be performed remotely with 100% of their income.
- d) Financial support measures need to be provided for young people with disabilities who are daily workers and who cannot work with social contact and whilst there is a high risk of infection.

(Global Disability Children & Young People's Charter: Commitment 6, Commitment 7, CRPD Article 9, CRPD Article 27, CRC Article 23)

Recommendation 9: Stigma and Discrimination

Social oppressions and violence might have direct impact but while talking about stigma, stereotypes and prejudices they have indirect and very long-term impact which must be addressed via collective effort, removing societal barriers, changing negative attitudes and misconceptions and taboo associated with disability, this is important.

- a) Increase disability awareness and rights to combat the stigma and discrimination against children and young people with disabilities and their families.

- b) Communications regarding children, young people and adults with disabilities responses to COVID 19 need to reduce stigma and discrimination. Communications need to ensure message that children and young people with disabilities lives do matter and their human rights are protected.

(Global Disability Children & Young People's Charter: Commitment 8, CRPD Article 4, CRPD Article 8, CRPD Article 10, CRC Article 2)

Recommendation 10: Independent Living

Independent living does not mean living alone as there are caregivers and many services people have input from to allow them to be as independent as possible, because of coronavirus lots of these services have stopped. Young people with disabilities are losing life skills due to not being able to complete day to day tasks themselves with support of caregivers as having to shield and social distance to reduce risk of infection.

- a) Independent living gives young people with disabilities control over their own lives. This includes the opportunity to make real choices and decisions regarding where to live, with whom to live and how to live. Accessible services, transport, information, technical aids, access to personal assistance and/or community-based services must be ensured to support independent living of young people with disabilities.
- b) Young people with disabilities and caregivers should be provided with Personal Protection Equipment by local authorities for care in the community and provided with support to redevelop their life skills so they can live as independently as possible.
- c) Young people with disabilities should be ensured of continuity of the support, personal assistance, equipment and technical aids to support their independent living during the COVID19 pandemic and thereafter.

(Global Disability Children & Young People's Charter: Commitment 9, CRPD Article 4, CRPD Article 19, CRPD Article 26, CRC Article 4, CRC Article 23)

Recommendation 11: Legislation and Policies

- a) All legislation and policies responses to COVID 19 must be guided by human rights standards and protect the rights of children and young people with disabilities, rights as advocated in UNCRPD, UNCRC and the Global Disability Children and Young People's Charter.
- b) Ensure that COVID-19 related medical and quarantine policies and processes are accessible and disability-inclusive.
- c) Ensure support and engagement with children and young people with disabilities and their families in the COVID 19 decision- making processes and discussions in regards to legalisation and policies; alongside Civil Society Organisations working with and supporting children and young people with disabilities and Disabled Peoples Organisations.

(Global Disability Children & Young People's Charter: Commitment 11, CRPD Article 12, CRC Article 42)

Recommendation 12: Data

Lack of adequate data on children and young people with disabilities at all levels has adversely impacted the delivery of services and deployment of an effective COVID-19 responses to their, continuity of essential support, services, care, treatment and their safety.

- a) Availability of disaggregated data results and knowledge must be expanded in order to effectively determine the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people with disabilities
- b) To ensure national budgets reflect the needs of society, data regarding children and young people with disabilities must be paramount to achieve improved outcomes.
- c) Disaggregated data is essential for preparedness for any disaster risk and humanitarian crisis and recovery, it must be ensured that children and young people with disabilities their families and caregivers are not left behind in these responses.

(Global Disability Children & Young People's Charter: Commitment 10, Commitment 12, CRPD Article 11, CRPD Article 31)

Include Me TOO promotes the social model and human rights approaches to disability and we usually use terminology such as 'disabled children and young people'. Working with young people from various international and national organisations, we used international language. This means within this statement and recommendations we have used the terminology 'children and young people with disabilities'.

This COVID 19 Children and Young People with Disabilities Statement and Recommendations is supported and endorsed by



The Commonwealth





Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)



Save the Children

