

INTRODUCTION



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In the last two years, the Covid-19 pandemic has harmed and affected all segments of population and is particularly detrimental to the most vulnerable-people living in poverty, older persons, and persons with disabilities, youth, and children. It is important to look at how the COVID-19 has affected the lives and well-being of youth and children. Many countries, including Pakistan, closed educational institutions to contain the spread of the coronavirus through social distancing. In order to control the spread of the pandemic, the Government of Pakistan closed more than 300,000 educational institutions-schools, colleges, universities and Madaris.

The COVID-19 pandemic struck as progress towards most of the Sustainable Development Goals was already off-track, fueling a global crisis that threatens progress for children, aggravating deep-rooted poverty, and increasing inequality and discrimination¹. COVID-19's harm to children largely from unintended consequences of efforts to manage the pandemic is clear. A record rise in child poverty has left an additional 100 million children facing deprivations in critical areas. Setbacks to progress in routine immunization increased the number of unvaccinated children by 3.4 million. Unprecedented disruption to education has increased learning poverty. And isolation and uncertainty are taking a serious toll on children's mental health, exacerbating a long-ignored crisis.

In Pakistan, there are many such laws implemented time to time to facilitate a life to the children, which they deserve. Question is what is the most important birth right of a child? Simple that is Education. For a living, every born child must understand the way to earn "food, clothes and shelter"

About 3.3 million of Pakistani children are trapped in child labor, depriving them of their childhood, their health and education, and condemning them to a life of poverty and want. It was estimated that almost a quarter of women aged 20-49 were married before the age of 15,

¹ [unicef.org/media/121251/file/UNICEF%20Annual%20Report%202021.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/121251/file/UNICEF%20Annual%20Report%202021.pdf)

and 31% before eighteen years of age. Only 34% of children under five are registered at birth nationally².

Pakistan has the world's second-highest number of out-of-school children where an estimated 22.8 million children between 5 to 16 years of age are not attending school representing 44pc of the total population in this age group³.

Globally, at least 1 in 3 children under 5 are not growing well due to malnutrition in its more visible forms: stunting, wasting and overweight. 149 million children under 5 are stunted, almost 50 million children under 5 are wasted and 40 million children under 5 are overweight. Globally, at least 1 in 2 children under 5 suffers from hidden hunger due to deficiencies in vitamins and other essential nutrients. In 2018, almost 200 million children under 5 suffered from stunting or wasting while at least 340 million suffered from hidden hunger. Only 2 in 5 infants under six months of age are exclusively breastfed. Breastfeeding could save the lives of 820,000 children annually worldwide⁴.

The socio-economic situation of the country is disastrous and forces families to make their children work. According to the Pakistan Labour Force Survey (2017-18), child labour between the ages of 10- 14 is 8.2%. Of this, 9.8 % are boys and 6.4% are girls. Children in the age group 15- 19: constitute 32.6% of the total child labour, of which boys are 47.6% and girls are 15.6%⁵.

Crimes against children are on the rise in Pakistan. According to data compiled by Sahil, a Pakistani non-government organization (NGO), 3852 cases have been reported from all four provinces including Islamabad

² <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/child-protection-0>

³ <https://nation.com.pk/2022/03/07/22-8m-children-between-5-16-years-of-age-not-attending-school-in-pakistan/#:~:text=ISLAMABAD%20%E2%80%93%20Pakistan%20has%20the%20world's,population%20in%20this%20age%20group.>

⁴ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/>

⁵ <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files//Labour%20Force/publications/>

Capital Territory (ICT), Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), and Gilgit Baltistan (GB). The data indicates that the total of 3852 cases includes reported cases of child sexual abuse (CSA), cases of abduction, cases of missing children, and cases of child marriages. The data shows that more than 10 children have been abused per day during the year 2021⁶.

Following on from SPARC's State of Pakistan's Children (SOPC) 2020, we observed that 2021 was again not a good year for children, as there was an increase in the reported and recorded number of Pakistani children who suffered indescribable instances of violent crimes, including kidnapping, murder rape, gang rape, sodomy, incest and other forms of sexual abuse and violence, child marriages, child labour, trafficking of children, bonded and domestic labour.

Children were continued to be denied their fundamental human rights, especially the right to life, survival, health, education, skill training, protective environment and a childhood free from exploitation. The situation is much worse of children living in remote rural areas.

National Developments

- Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Home Based Workers (Welfare and Protection) Bill, 2021
- Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Domestic Workers Bill 2021
- Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act 2021
- The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Probation and Parole Bill, 2021
- Balochistan Employment of Children Prohibition and Regulation Act, 2021
- The Criminal Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021

⁶ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-2AsTk0Jt_dFE4MIFzahH5hg_rsZVBAF/view

- The Sindh Child Protection Authority (Amendment) Act, 2021
The National Commission on the Rights of the Child (Amendment) Bill 2021
- Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Prohibition of Corporal Punishment Bill.