

About the Webinar

‘Child Protection’ refers to prevention of and response to violence, exploitation, and abuse of children in all contexts. This includes reaching out to children who are especially vulnerable to these threats, such as those living without family care, on the streets, in situations of conflict or natural disasters (UNICEF, 2021).

Child vulnerability is a complex and interwoven issue. It is possible to list the intersections of various potential vulnerabilities related to gender, ethnicity, poverty, disability status, displacement, and the like. However, clearly, none on its own is a particular predictor; different combinations become salient in varying situations and contexts.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledges the importance of the issue and mentions several targets under different goals to ensure that every child is protected from violence, exploitation, and harmful practices. As a signatory of the resolution of the Agenda, India is committed to meeting the targets related to child protection.

India is home to more than 400 million children. The Constitution of India recognizes children as equal right holders and grants highest priority towards their protection and well-being. Therefore, successive governments have enacted and implemented various child-centric laws, child protection programmes and schemes from time to time. Yet there is a high prevalence of child marriage, child labour, and domestic violence against children, especially adolescent girls. In recent years, an increase in juvenile crime rates in India has been a matter of grave concern.

Child Protection concerns during COVID-19

More than 100 countries across the world have seen disruptions in services related to prevention and response for child protection violations, with countries in South Asia reporting maximum disruption (UNICEF, 2020). India being one of the largest South Asian countries, disruptions in child protection services here will have implications at the regional level as well. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequities and vulnerabilities. Owing to disruptions in education, health, nutrition and protection services over the last one year, the vulnerabilities of children in rural areas and marginalised communities have compounded.

The emerging discourse on climate change reveals that India is among the countries with a predominantly high risk for children. Therefore, it is imperative that child protection measures are also cognisant of emerging threats due to climate change and develop response measures accordingly. Similarly, with the internet rapidly penetrating all spheres of children’s lives, it is critical that children

are enabled to navigate the digital world safely with robust mechanisms to redress grievances as required.

In India, school closures and restrictions on mobility have already disrupted children's life. Stigma and discrimination related to Covid-19 have made children more vulnerable to violence and psychosocial distress (UNICEF, 2020). Children who are especially vulnerable to the threats, such as those living without family care, child beggars, street children, and those in situations of conflict or natural disasters became more marginalised.

The recently released ILO Global Estimates on Child Labour 2020 report states that there were 16.8 million more children aged 5 to 11 in child labour in 2020 than in 2016. It further projects that another 8.9 million children will be pushed towards child labour by the end of 2022 as a result of poverty induced by the pandemic. According to the NCRB Crime in India Report 2020, around 1,48,185 cases of crimes against children were recorded in 2019, implying a daily average of over 400 such crimes. Instances of child marriage have risen by 50 per cent and those of online abuse by 400 per cent in one year alone.

Addressing Child Protection during COVID-19 and beyond

The pre-existing shortcomings in child protection services need to be identified and resolved to address children's vulnerabilities. This can be achieved by enhancing the focus on preventive measures, increasing public provisioning and human resources, and strengthening convergence among various sectors such as education, health, and nutrition which are basic to child rights.

As a run-up to World Children's Day celebrated on 20 th November each year, Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA) and Child Rights and You (CRY) have organised a webinar on 18 th November, 2021 (2:30 pm to 5:30 pm). Against this backdrop, various dimensions of child protection during Covid-19 shall be discussed alongside reflections on some emerging concerns that need government and civil society attention. This webinar will bring together members from civil society, academia, bilateral and multilateral organisations to deliberate upon the above-mentioned issues in addition to identifying areas for joint action, generating further evidence and solutions for concerns related to child protection.