Children in detention are at heightened risk of contracting COVID-19 and should be released

Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore

NEW YORK, 13 April 2020 – “Hundreds of thousands of children currently detained in countries around the world are at grave risk of contracting COVID-19.

“Many are being held in confined and overcrowded spaces with inadequate access to nutrition, healthcare and hygiene services – conditions that are highly conducive to the spread of diseases like COVID-19. An outbreak in one of these facilities could happen at any moment.

“Detained children are also more vulnerable to neglect, abuse and gender-based violence, especially if staffing levels or care are negatively impacted by the pandemic or containment measures.

“Across the globe, children are in the juvenile justice system including in pre-trial custody, held in immigration detention or on other administrative grounds, detained in relation to armed conflict, national security or activism, or living with parents in detention. These children and those at risk of contracting the virus due to underlying physical and mental health conditions should be released.

“We call on governments and other detaining authorities to urgently release all children who can safely return to their families or an appropriate alternative. Such alternatives include extended families, other family- or community-based care.
“UNICEF also calls for an immediate moratorium on new admissions of children to detention facilities.

“UNICEF and the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, along with leading child rights organizations, academics and UN agencies have released guidance on key actions authorities can take to protect children deprived of their liberty during the pandemic. UNICEF stands ready to assist authorities in preparing to release children, including through identifying safe conditions.

“The rights of children to protection, safety and wellbeing must be upheld at all times, even and especially during crises like the one the world faces today. The best way to uphold the rights of detained children amidst a dangerous pandemic is their safe release.”

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About UNICEF
UNICEF works in some of the world’s toughest places, to reach the world’s most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone. 
Follow UNICEF on Twitter and Facebook. For more information about COVID-19 and guidance on how to protect children and families, visit www.unicef.org/coronavirus

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UN Women
PRESS RELEASE

‘Gender inequalities likely to worsen by Covid-19 in Pakistan’

Policy paper on gendered impact and implications of Covid-19 released

ISLAMABAD: As COVID-19 continues to be the global health crisis, the risk of worsening of the already existing social and gender inequalities in Pakistan has increased manifold. The pandemic is likely to have adverse impact on the

The paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the specific vulnerabilities that women and girls face because of the coronavirus with a focus on six key thematic areas including education, health, labor force participation, time use and mobility, financial empowerment, and gender-based violence (GBV), and presents broad policy recommendations to mitigate immediate risks and prevent the exacerbation of existing gender gaps.

Underscoring the fear of exacerbation of gender inequalities in educational attainment due to closure of schools, the brief stresses reducing the impact on girls’ education through ‘tele-school initiatives’ and increased public and private partnerships for development and broader dissemination of learning content with the use of technology.

Policy brief also calls for continuity of basic, reproductive and pre and postnatal health services for women and awareness about prevention protocols. “Since women’s access to healthcare services is not easy, and they also likely to have increased risk of exposure to virus due to care responsibilities, the Covid-19 response must take the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women into consideration.”

The publication citing that most women in Pakistan are part of the informal low-wage labor market and thus suffer from low income security and a lack of access to safety nets and social protection during crisis, suggested certain measures including building women's economic resilience, targeted cash and loan programs as well as access to financial services. Such efforts are already underway through the Ehsaas Programme and the PM Covid Relief Fund.

Considering strong evidence that suggests that emergency measures instituted to cope with epidemics increase the risk of domestic abuse, the brief recommends integration of GBV services into response efforts as essential services. Restriction on mobility warrant adapted solutions to GBV service provision i.e. a shift towards remote and technology-based support.

“Women’s vulnerability increases with a lockdown as they often have to live with abusers and may find it difficult to even call for help. Access to GBV services must not be interrupted during crisis. The Ministry of Human Rights
has ensured that our helpline and women crisis shelters remain operational during the crisis, with specific protocols in place to prevent the spread of the virus. We are also working towards ensuring that the police, health workers, and social workers are responding to the specific and critical needs of women during this time,” Says Federal Minister for Human Rights, Shireen Mazari.

Federal Secretary Human Rights, Rabiya Javeri Agha urges stakeholders to adopt a gender integrated approach to the Covid-19 response at multiple levels. “This policy brief and gender analysis should serve as an essential resource document to guide stakeholders to effectively address gender inequalities emerging in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic in Pakistan.”

It is important to including female leadership in policy making and response efforts. Representation from women commissions and women development departments should be ensured in decision-making bodies and gender parity should be promoted in recruitment of staff and volunteers for COVID-19 response teams.

Notably, the policy document reminds stakeholders of the dire need to generate sex disaggregated data and primary micro-level research required for effective policy making. The lack of disaggregated data hinders targeted and effective relief response in times of crisis and humanitarian emergency.

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