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Children from marginalised groups experience a wide range of human rights violations

New data released by the Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI) show that despite global progress on child rights, children around the world remain at risk for a wide range of human rights violations. In fact, HRMI's newest data reveal that children are at risk of violations across nearly every right HRMI measures.

Data also show that certain groups of children – especially girls, people with low socio-economic status, children in single parent families, disabled children, and homeless youth – are missing out on their basic rights.

In countries as diverse as New Zealand, India, Liberia, the United Kingdom, and Brazil, children living in single parent families were identified as missing out on their rights to food, housing, and health, as well as education.

Unsurprisingly, the Covid-19 pandemic further exacerbated these inequities and deepened long-standing problems with both access to and quality of **education** around the world. For example:

- In **India**, the pandemic affected schooling and education for almost all groups. This includes homeless and unsupervised children, children of refugees, children of sex workers, migrant children who do not speak the language of the majority, and children from low socio-economic backgrounds. Students from Dalit, Adivasi and denotified tribal (DNT) communities were also identified as being particularly at risk.
- In **Bangladesh**, children from Indigenous communities, refugees, people with low socio-economic status, and transgender people were all identified as being particularly at risk of having their right to education violated.
- In **Nepal**, historically marginalised communities such as Dalit and Chepang people, people living in poverty and rural communities, and girls are especially at risk.
- In **Mexico** and many other countries, technology issues impacted remote learning during the pandemic and many children were unable to access education.
- In the **United States**, historically marginalised individuals including migrant children, Black people, and LGBTQIA+ people were identified as being at risk of violations of this right.

HRMI data reveal that lack of access to education can also affect other rights, including the right to **work**, as financial constraints often impact decision making. For example, in **Venezuela**,

children in poverty often work from a young age. This, combined with the high cost of education, decreases enrolment. In **Mozambique**, children in rural areas are victims of child labour, particularly those in the agricultural sector, and are also impacted by the lack of infrastructure and access to public schools.

Although the number of children enrolled in primary education is generally high in high income countries, both access and quality of education is not equitable across all groups. For example, human rights experts in several countries report specific issues for **children with disabilities**. In **Taiwan** children with disabilities lack access to financial resources, and supporting materials, or are refused acceptance to some schools outright. In **Aotearoa New Zealand**, it is difficult to access appropriate support for disabled children. Further, In **Thailand**, children with disabilities are particularly at risk of having their right to education violated.

Children’s rights lead for HRMI, Dr Elizabeth Kaletski, said, “The wide range of issues that children face, both within and across countries, point directly to the need for more information. This is certainly true for historically disadvantaged groups when it comes to education, but it doesn’t end there. When it comes to children, we know relatively little about many of the rights outlined in international law – especially civil and political rights – and the way those rights interact with each other. This is exactly why we are working to set up a children’s rights workstream at HRMI that can fill the current gaps in international data.”

Parents of Vision Impaired New Zealand National Executive Officer, Dr Rebekah Graham, comments on HRMI’s findings: “Here in New Zealand we like to think that we provide equal opportunity for all, but what these results tell is that we have a very long way to go for our disabled children to make that happen for them. Education, housing, and employment are key challenges for our families. Progress is glacial.”

Given the large variation in both access and quality of education that HRMI’s data reveal, more information is still needed to hold governments accountable to their obligations under international law. Further, the differing impacts across specific groups point directly to the need for globally comparable and disaggregated data on children’s rights around the world.

One positive trend apparent in the new data is that worldwide, child health has seen significant improvements over the past two decades. More children are reaching their fifth birthday than perhaps ever before, and governments are allocating appropriate resources for the health of children. This is a hopeful sign, says Kehoe Rowden: “Nearly every country in the world has room to improve the lives of children, and improve their HRMI scores. The good news is that our scores show that countries can afford to improve, even without increasing their income. Countries have made encouraging improvements in lifting right to education scores. We hope to see similar improvements over time in other areas, such as the rights to food, health, and housing.”

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About the Rights Tracker: The Rights Tracker is a global project to track the human rights performance of countries systematically. Our 2023 dataset launched today includes annual data on eight civil and political rights for up to 44 countries from the years 2017 to 2022, with Bangladesh, Thailand, and the Maldives added this year. Our data also include inaugural scores on the right to freedom of religion and belief in a pilot set of nine countries. Annual data on five economic and social rights for 196 countries from 2007 to 2020, based on the award-winning SERF Index methodology, is also available. Please visit rightstracker.org for the freely available dataset.

About HRMI: The Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI) is an independent non-profit organisation part of a global movement building a world where all people can flourish. We track the human rights progress of countries, producing robust data that anyone can use to push for improvements in how governments treat people. What gets measured gets improved: if something isn't being systematically measured, it can be more easily overlooked and undervalued. HRMI data make it easier for decision-makers to monitor their progress, and prioritise human rights. Advocacy based on sound information is one of the key drivers of change. www.humanrightsmeasurement.org

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