

The Child Rights NGO Coalition wrote a letter to Katalin Novák, the Minister of State for Family, Youth and International Affairs , Dr Zoltán Maruzsa, the Minister of State for Public Education and Attila Fülöp, the Minister of State for Social Affairs and Social Inclusion. Hungary's government issued school closures and curfews along with visit bans in child protection institutions to stop the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. Like the entire country, children's educational and social welfare systems are facing unprecedented challenges, too. The members of the Child Rights NGO Coalition wish to take part in the joint effort by offering constructive suggestions, while stressing the importance of guarantees assuring the protection of child rights, which they see as a facilitator of cooperation between parents, children and society as a whole. Based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (also ratified by Hungary), they wish to highlight the following with respect to the one million students in the country:

1. Adequate communication with regard to child participation:

Every child has the right to understand what is going on around them. It has to be clearly communicated to them what happens in case of a hospital quarantine if the child gets infected (but the parent doesn't) and vice versa. The child has to be included as fully as possible in handling the situation.

2. Access to education:

Each student has to have access to some form of distance learning. Equal access is only possible as long as children in even the poorest households are given consideration.

3. Nutrition:

School closures may not mean suspending child food programs, which have to be continued by the local governments.

4. Child protection systems, alerts and endangerment:

The new situation is expected to increase the occurrences of domestic abuse and violence. Therefore, it is essential to spread relevant information to a broad audience and expand the capacity of phone and chat hotlines. It is necessary to strengthen local child protection systems, as well.

5. Vulnerable groups:

Protected children need a higher level of attention. It is necessary to issue a professional protocol including methodological guidelines in consideration with international crisis management. Children in single-parent families must receive additional support. It is essential that children suffering from handicaps and chronic illnesses receive their treatments. Professionals working with children and families must receive all the protection and support that they need. An action plan must be put in place to deal with situations in which parents fall ill and the children remain without supervision.

The members of the Coalition keep working toward finding increasingly effective solutions in all of the areas above. They will be glad to share their first-hand experience with the designated government experts.

The initiative was supported by Eurochild.