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**Human Rights Council**

**Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Philippines**

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**Joint Stakeholders' Submission on:**

**The Rights of Children in the Philippines**

**Submitted by:**

**IIMA - Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice delle Salesiane di Don Bosco**

**VIDES International – International Volunteerism Organization for Women, Education  
and Development**

**(NGOs in Consultative Status with ECOSOC)**

**and**

**Laura Vicuña Foundation Philippines (LVF)**

**Geneva, March 2022**

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. This stakeholders' report is a joint submission of the above-mentioned organizations. The report highlights key concerns related to **children's human rights** in the Philippines in the areas of **education, child labor, and violence against children, in particular as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic**. Each section conveys recommendations to the Government of the Philippines.

2. The data and information obtained for this submission came from various sources and includes information from youth, teachers, educators, and other civil society actors living and working in the Philippines, particularly in the National Capital Region, Region 4 in Luzon, and other areas in Regions 6, and 7 in the Visayas. The information was gathered through consultations and sensitization campaigns<sup>1</sup> run in the Philippines involving over 63,844 children aged 12 to 17, many of whom were joined by their parents, and other community stakeholders. All information concerned the period from May 2017 to March 2022.

3. IIMA is an international NGO in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. IIMA is present in 97 countries where it provides education to children, adolescents, youth and women, particularly the most disadvantaged and vulnerable.

4. VIDES International, established in 1987, is an international NGO in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council operating in 43 countries. It promotes volunteer service at the local and international levels to ensure the implementation of human rights to vulnerable groups, especially children and women.

5. Laura Vicuña Foundation, founded in 1990 by the *Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, is a leader of child protection in the Philippines and works in partnership with experts and child rights bodies. Through its community and center-based approaches, LVF empowers children and community stakeholders, in disadvantaged urban poor and rural communities, to be self-managing in protecting and advocating for their rights.

## I. GENERAL REMARKS AND COOPERATION WITH THE UPR MECHANISM

6. This NGO coalition welcomes the constructive participation of the Philippines in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The present joint submission represents the follow-up to the UPR recommendations accepted by the State in 2017.

7. The coalition acknowledges that the Covid-19 pandemic has had adverse effects on all groups of society as well as on the progress that the Philippine Government is making in implementing the UPR recommendations of 2017.

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<sup>1</sup> Campaigns and sessions on child rights, and specifically their development, participation and protection rights were held in schools and in urban and rural poor communities in LVF-assisted areas. Sessions covered gender sensitivity, child labor and education, protection against violence, human trafficking and children's participation in fulfilling their rights.

8. The implementation of recommendations is critical in order to ensure a true advancement of human rights in the State under review. Therefore, the Philippines must pay particular attention to effectively follow-up those recommendations and in consultation with Civil Society.

## **II. RIGHT TO EDUCATION**

9. This NGO coalition welcomes the acceptance by the Philippines of recommendations n. 133.223 to “Continue to enhance laws and policies of access to education for the most disadvantaged learners, as done through the Alternative Learning System (Holy See)” and 133.224 to “Given the positive strides made in public education, continue to ensure access to quality education to vulnerable and marginalized groups (Malaysia)”.<sup>2</sup>

10. The Philippines has committed itself to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 4<sup>3</sup> - by continuing to enforce basic education laws and enabling policies to ensure that no child is left out in fulfilling his/her right to education.

11. Prior to the pandemic, the Philippine government has been enacting laws and policies geared toward the improvement of the education system. In particular, the K to 12 Program, enacted into law (Republic Act 10533) seeks to improve educational outcomes for children, covering Kindergarten and 12 years of basic education. Another major effort is the alternative learning system (ALS), designed as a parallel learning system for learners who cannot access formal education in schools. The Department of Education is also implementing alternative delivery modes (ADM) that provide flexibility in accessing formal education for learners as an initiative to respond to both access and quality education challenges.

12. Moreover, the Enhanced Instructional Management by Parents, Community and Teachers (e-IMPACT) is a technology-enhanced system that addresses issues in accessibility and quality of education in schools. It allows learners who are otherwise prone to prolonged or seasonal absences to enter and exit when needed, learning from modules with the support of fellow learners, family members, and the community, and their progress/advancement measured via mastery tests taken in the school.

13. However, two educational issues, namely access to and quality of education remain the Philippines’ major challenges with regard to fulfilling Filipino children’s right to education.

### **Access to Education**

14. UNICEF’s situation analysis report on Filipino children published in 2018<sup>4</sup> noted that despite some notable progress seen in recent years, around 2.85 million children aged 5-15 years were estimated to be out of school, with the former Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) recording the highest rates of dropouts for both primary and secondary level. Education statistics points to a marked gender difference in this area, with more boys dropping out of school, and higher attendance rates by girls. Most observable issues concern the limited

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<sup>2</sup> Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of The Philippines, 28 December 2016, UN Doc. A/HRC/36/12 and its *Addendum* UN Doc. A/HRC/36/12/Add.1.

<sup>3</sup> SDG 4 - Quality Education: ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/philippines/reports/situation-analysis-children-philippines>

available infrastructure for children with disabilities and barriers to accessing early childhood care and development opportunities especially among rural poor families.

15. A new measure, the multi-poverty index that complements the Philippine government's income-based measure of poverty concluded that "Filipino families are most deprived in education" based on two indicators- school attendance and educational attainment.<sup>5</sup> The report shows that "6 out of 10 families in 2016 and 5 out of 10 families in 2017" were deprived of basic education or primary and secondary education level and had at least one family member aged 18 years old and above who did not complete basic education. It also calls attention to the prevalence of learning poverty - the inability to read and understand a simple text vital to schooling and learning<sup>6</sup>.

### **Quality of Education**

16. A report published by the Philippine News Agency on July 2021 citing a World Bank report on the state of Philippine education sparked alarm over the fact that 80 percent of Filipino students fall below the minimum proficiency levels.<sup>7</sup> This critical report reflecting the poor quality of education among the young started pre-pandemic and "have been made worse" by the current health crisis.

17. In addition, World Bank also released a study in June 2021 stating that the rate of stunting in the Philippines places it fifth among countries in the East Asia and Pacific region with the highest stunting prevalence<sup>8</sup> and it is also among the top ten countries globally. The country's Human Capital Index (HCI) of 0.52 indicates that the future productivity of a child born today will be half of what could have been achieved with complete education and full health.

18. This serious undernutrition among children below 5 years old irreversibly damages not only their physical growth but also their cognitive development and potential to learn. This has serious consequences for harnessing the Philippines' human capital, resulting in lower labor productivity and poor economic progress.

### **Education Crisis During the Pandemic**

19. The coalition is concerned by the negative impact of the pandemic on the enjoyment of the right to education by children in the Philippines. Various reports show that challenges are greater for poorer income households and younger children, with the conditions having large regional variation.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://psa.gov.ph/sites/default/files/mpi%20press%20release.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/learning-poverty>

<sup>7</sup> The report showing poor learning results among Filipino children was based on three educational assessment programs in which the Philippines participated in -- the Program for International Student (Pisa) in 2018, the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 2019, and the first cycle of the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) in 2019. Findings across these global assessments revealed that only 10 to 22 percent of Grade 4, 5, and 9 students in the Philippines posted scores "at or above minimum proficiency." [World Bank report on PH education 'disturbing, very alarming' | Philippine News Agency \(pna.gov.ph\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> [PH suffers high childhood stunting rate – Manila Bulletin \(mb.com.ph\)](#)

20. In particular, we support the data resulted from two nationwide surveys in the Philippines<sup>9</sup>, which highlight the following current key issues: Overall enrollment in formal basic education is about five percent lower than in the last year; Limited effectiveness of distance learning, due to limited access to gadgets and internet, poor quality materials, limited availability of materials in local languages; children’s inability to focus, and psychological stress; majority of students and parents support the resumption of in-person classes, but some fear it; persistence of pre-COVID structural weaknesses in education. These education issues resonated with an estimated 1,793 children and parents consulted by LVF on at least three fora in 2021.

21. Specifically, during an LVF-initiated youth forum on child rights in December 2021, an estimated 1,000 children and parents presented their challenges in meeting their right to education, and in coping with the economic impact of the pandemic. Most of the child participants expressed how their difficulties in navigating online classes (no gadgets, poor internet connection; difficulty understanding their modules) have resulted in their demotivation to continue their schooling- they have become “lazy”; “teachers were not able to explain lessons well; we did not learn anything”. Children just became more preoccupied with playing online games. Children said they are sad because they cannot go to school and see their teachers and friends. They are not able to play with and talk to their friends. They do not enjoy being children anymore.

22. Parents, especially the mothers had difficulty also supporting their children’s online classes due to pressures of work and home obligations; unfamiliarity in navigating the technology requirements, and lack of capacity to tutor their children using the modules produced for the blended learning system.

23. As a way of coping, children have had to prioritize earning for their families; beg by giving money envelopes to jeepney passengers and put placards on their bodies to ask for help; and stay home to care fulltime for their younger siblings while parents seek income-earning opportunities for the family.

***24. To address the education crisis especially for the most disadvantaged children, we recommend the Philippine Government to:***

- a. Conduct back-to-school campaigns and advocacy for education in coordination with local councils for the protection of children; using technology-enabled communication systems and existing children and parents’ groups especially in most disadvantaged areas where more children dropped out of school. Priority should be given to those already working and those unable to continue their studies during the long school closures.***
- b. Identify priority municipalities in the country’s 20 poorest provinces with the highest stunting prevalence among children and conduct a comprehensive nutrition program in every barangay, providing additional resources to be sourced from the increased revenue allotment for Local Government Units.***

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<sup>9</sup> The High Frequency Monitoring (HFM) Household Survey carried out in December 2020 and the COVID-19 Low Income Household Panel and Economic (HOPE) Survey targeting poor and near-poor households carried out in October 2020. See [Philippines-COVID-19-Monitoring-Survey-Policy-Notes Education.pdf](#)

- c. Expand coverage of the government’s poverty alleviation program/social protection program (4 Ps)<sup>10</sup> to cover families whose children have had to stop schooling. The conditional cash transfer should prioritize support to education of poor children.*
- d. Prior to school opening in 2022, ensure “catch-up learning” for those children who stopped schooling, through remedial learning modes for the most disadvantaged children and community outreach learning activities by trained learning facilitators.*
- e. Increase budget allocations to ensure children’s access to quality education, prioritizing gaps in school infrastructure; recruitment, training and adequate salaries for teachers; and provision of textbooks and educational materials.*

### III. CHILD LABOR

25. This NGO coalition welcomes the acceptance by the Philippines of recommendation n. 133.245 to “Increase efforts to combat child labour, which is very often combined with hazardous or dangerous conditions of work (Poland)” as well as recommendations no 133.240 and 244 concerning economic and sexual exploitation of children.<sup>11</sup>

26. We note with concern that efforts undertaken to combat child labor in the Philippines have not been sufficient especially during the time of the pandemic. There are three interrelated national laws on child labor – Republic Acts 7610, 7658 and 9231 which adequately safeguard children’s right to protection from economic exploitation, and particularly the worst forms of child labor.<sup>12</sup> Challenges remain in the effective enforcement of these laws at all levels of governance.

27. The health crisis brought by the current pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing challenges in enforcing these existing laws and protecting children from egregious forms of child labor. This is a critical human rights issue for children, for with the exponential rise in child labor especially during the pandemic, and insufficient capacity to address this phenomenon, children continue to be deprived of their childhood, and are prevented from achieving a normal state of well-being including their physical, intellectual and emotional psychosocial development.

28. In June 2019, based on a published newspaper report on the accomplishments of the Philippine Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) prior to the pandemic, it was reported that the Philippine government targeted to reduce cases of child labor by 30 percent or 630,000

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<sup>10</sup> The 4Ps is a poverty reduction strategy that provides grants to extremely poor households to improve their health, nutrition and education particularly of children aged 0-14. 4Ps has dual objectives: (i) Social Assistance – to provide cash assistance to the poor, to alleviate their needs (short term poverty alleviation); and (ii) Social Development – to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty through investments in human capital (nutrition, health and education).

<sup>11</sup> 133.240: Make further efforts to protect children against all risks of sexual or economic exploitation (Qatar); 133.244: Take the necessary legislative and other measures to prevent children from being engaged in child labour (Montenegro). Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of the Philippines, 28 December 2016, UN Doc. A/HRC/36/12 and its Addendum UN Doc. A/HRC/36/12/Add.1.

<sup>12</sup> Republic Act 7610- Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation, and Discrimination Act; Republic Act 7658- An Act Prohibiting the Employment of Children Below 15 Years of Age in Public and Private Undertakings, Amending for this Purpose Section 12, Article VIII of RA 7610; and Republic Act 9231- An Act Providing for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor and Affording Stronger Protection for the Working Child, Amending for this Purpose RA 7610, as amended

from the estimated 2.1 million child laborers in the country pursuant to the Philippine Development Plan 2017-2022.<sup>13</sup>

29. As of September 2021, based on a written update submitted by the DOLE to Laura Vicuna Foundation, the Department noted that it has produced a profile of 291,800 child laborers out of which 274,541 (94%) have been referred to appropriate agencies for assistance. A total of 68,629 (25%) child laborers have already been withdrawn from hazardous work. Various programs included livelihood support for parents and skills training for child laborers to increase their employment opportunities. Parents of child laborers were among the priority beneficiaries of the DOLE Integrated Livelihood and Emergency Employment Program (DILEEP). Under the Guidelines of the DILEEP, beneficiaries of livelihood programs of the DOLE should not allow their children to be engaged in child labor. From January to September 2021, a total of 3,711 parents of child laborers were provided with livelihood assistance consisting of informal trade and small food-related businesses. Most of these livelihood activities were in the informal service sector.

30. When the pandemic struck in 2020, the Philippines saw a rise in the incidence of child labor similar to the experience in many countries. A 2021 report from the International Labour Organization and UNICEF showed that the number of children in child labour has risen to 160 million worldwide – an increase of 8.4 million children in the last four years – with millions more at risk due to the impacts of COVID-19<sup>14</sup>. This figure has effectively reversed the previous reduction in child labor incidence, which recorded a fall by 94 million between 2000 and 2016.

31. Philippine child workers are among the estimated 160 million children worldwide who have been pushed into hazardous work because of the pandemic. The Philippine government, however, has not effectively tracked these children, so their true numbers are unknown, and they are beyond the reach of public services.<sup>15</sup> An account from the DOLE reports that it has yet to receive official child labor data from the Philippine Statistics Authority, which integrated a child labor rider in the regular Labor Force Survey conducted in the Philippines. There has been a general slowdown in tracking these children, and with manpower and budgetary cuts due to the priorities in addressing the public health issue posed by the pandemic, there has been serious limitations in pursuing Philippine efforts to combat child labor.

32. Many anecdotal reports show that child labor in the Philippines, as in the case of those working in mining and gold panning in Camarines Norte<sup>16</sup> has been difficult to control mainly due to the additional economic setbacks experienced by income-poor households who suffered job and income losses, and a host of other social and health shocks due to the pandemic. School closures and the difficulties associated with online learning pushed nearly three million schoolchildren out of school in school year 2020-2021 according to the Department of Education.<sup>17</sup> This situation increased the risk of children from vulnerable households to work, even in harmful conditions as a coping mechanism for family survival during the crisis.

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<sup>13</sup> [DOLE so far profiles more than 85,000 child laborers in PH | Inquirer News](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Child labour rises to 160 million – first increase in two decades \(unicef.org\)](#)

<sup>15</sup> [The gold trap: COVID-19 is pushing more Filipino children into hazardous work \(rappler.com\)](#)

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

33. In 2021, the DOLE intensified its campaign against child labor by utilizing various platforms – television, radio, print, and social media in the dissemination of information on child labor. Apart from digital platforms, the DOLE also made use of billboards and set-up exhibits on foot traffic spots, transit systems, and communities to display materials on child labor and engage the greater public on the campaign against child labor. The DOLE also conducted virtual and face-to-face orientations and seminars for child laborers, their parents/guardians, stakeholders, and the public to discuss child labor and programs to address it.

34. As a result of a virtual forum on child labor organized by the LVF in August 2021, children and youth as well as parents and other key stakeholders stressed how the worst forms of child labor can lead to slavery and sexual exploitation. In many cases, children's early and long engagement in harmful work cut them off from schooling and health care, thus affecting their life chances and potentials to develop as productive citizens.

35. Accordingly, on 5 December 2021, on the occasion of the 18<sup>th</sup> Day Campaign to End Violence Against Women, the LVF conducted a Parent-Youth Forum on Child Rights which was participated by almost one thousand (1,000) participants from the supported communities of the Foundation in Metro Manila and Luzon. Aside from challenges in accessing education (which were expounded in the discussion on II Right to Education), children and parents presented their experiences, reflecting drivers of exploitive child work especially during the pandemic.

36. The series of lockdowns caused economic dislocation for many urban poor families who relied heavily on some unstable jobs and informal small businesses. About 8 out of 10 children in the forum said they had to resort to any activity to support their parents. Some went into scavenging, begging, selling street food, and other second hand items.

37. While 80% of the participants noted that ideally parents should be the ones working, the crisis has pushed children to earn in whatever way possible to help provide for the families' needs. Children and parents were hardly able to distinguish the nature and harmful effects of their economic activity due to the urgent concern to just survive from day to day.

Another group of 36 multi-sectoral stakeholders<sup>18</sup> organized by LVF on the occasion of Human Rights Day on December 10, 2021 affirmed the children and parents' accounts showing more children having to beg on the streets; and resorting to scavenging.

38. Those living close to fish ports had to work double time, even in the evening to engage in heavy tasks as laborers in the port. Even children as young as five years old were seen working. Most participants observed the difficulty of establishing reliable figures about the increase in child labor cases during the pandemic since even the service providers and authorities monitoring the situation could not manage to oversee the rise in number of children and the harmful work activities that many of them engage in. There was a serious disruption in service providers' ability to offer options for dangerous work due to pandemic restrictions and the dearth of available options for adult jobs in the face of the socio-economic and social consequences of the national and global health crisis.

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<sup>18</sup> The participants were from Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao representing national and sub-national government agencies led by the Council for the Welfare of Children and National Council for Children's Television; non-government organizations including the Philippine Association of Social Workers, and LVF communities in Palawan and Negros Occidental; and private and government schools.



**39. We recommend the Government of the Philippines to:**

- a. Work with civil society and local councils for the protection of children to sensitize urban and rural poor communities about the nature of child work.**
- b. Convene people's councils where children are represented and based on information on child labor, develop short and medium term solutions to reduce or withdraw children from harmful work. These should be integrated in the funded programs, projects and activities of the local councils for the protection of children.**
- c. Develop a workable proactive mechanism for reporting child labor incidence to barangay and the Department of Labor and Employment.**
- d. Develop or strengthen existing parenting programs with messages and actions to stop child labor and prioritize children's education.**
- e. Strengthen network with employers as well as enforcement of existing child labor laws.**
- f. Work with children's organizations and strengthen all forms of communication to desist children from engaging in child labor and prioritize their education.**
- g. Support parents in expanding employment opportunities and strengthen existing social protection measures such as expanding cash transfer program (beyond the Pantawid Familyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) to supporting jobs, income and food security.**
- h. Enact policies to strengthen job security and support families working in the informal economy, such as providing them unemployment benefits, easy access to credit and other income support to cushion the economic impact of the pandemic.**
- i. Promote decent and safe work opportunities for children legally allowed to work such as by working with vocational and technical training institutions and the private sector to increase job skills and entrepreneurial opportunities for poor children**

#### **IV. ILL TREATMENT AND VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN**

40. It is commendable that Recommendations 133.237<sup>19</sup>, 133.240<sup>20</sup>, 133.235<sup>21</sup>, 133.186<sup>22</sup> and 133.188<sup>23</sup> enjoyed the support of The Philippines, and that the State has already institutionalized legislative and other national and local plans to implement them. The Government has enacted responsive laws to address all forms of violence against children, as supported by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations to the Government in 2007,

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<sup>19</sup> Recommendation 133.237: Strengthen measures aimed at protecting children against violence and all kinds of sexual exploitation (Algeria). Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of The Philippines, 28 December 2016, UN Doc. A/HRC/36/12 and its *Addendum* UN Doc. A/HRC/36/12/Add.1.

<sup>20</sup> Recommendation 133.240 Make further efforts to protect children against all risks of sexual or economic exploitation (Qatar). *Ibidem*.1

<sup>21</sup> Recommendation 133.235 Intensify efforts to eradicate all forms of violence against children (Spain). *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> Recommendation 133.186 Continue efforts to combat human trafficking and rehabilitate its victims (Lebanon). *Ibidem*.

<sup>23</sup> Recommendation 133.188 Continue to step up efforts in the area of combating trafficking in human beings, especially women and children (Bosnia and Herzegovina). *Ibidem*.

stating that the “Philippines has a fairly advanced legal framework for child protection, which can be found in a number of different Acts.”<sup>24</sup>

41. To support the implementation of these national laws, the Government has progressively developed national plans to concretize its vision for children’s welfare and development up to the year 2025. Significant national efforts resulted in the passage of a Comprehensive Program on the Protection of Children which envisages local government units as responsible for the delivery of child protection programs.

42. The Philippine Plan of Action to end Violence against Children (PPAeVAC) 2017-2022 is the latest plan to be published and will be integrated into the third National Plan of Action for Children. The purpose of the PPAeVAC is to provide a multi-sectoral road map designed for the progressive reduction of violence against children over the period of the Plan, and to translate the findings of the 2015 NBS-VAC into action.

43. Much progress has been made in the Government of the Philippines efforts to address all forms of violence against children but as the UNICEF 2018 situation analysis report shows, “the programme has not achieved its aims to the extent hoped”.

44. As a result, this NGO coalition observes that child abuse still occurs at the home, school, community and other settings despite its prohibition. Children exposure to such violence has further exacerbated during the past two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, a systemic approach to protecting children against all forms of violence, including sexual exploitation has not been fully adopted in the Philippines, with existing measures mainly focused on dealing with child protection issues reactively rather than proactively.<sup>25</sup>

45. As the country continues to live through the new normal, the Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) calls for protecting children’s rights and welfare amid the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>26</sup> Already in 2020, the Council for the Welfare of Children called attention to the findings of the 2015 Philippine National Baseline Study on Violence Against Children which showed that 80% of Filipino children and youth 13-24 years old were experiencing different forms of violence in all settings, whether in the home, school or community.<sup>27</sup> This situation was exacerbated by restrictions required to contain the pandemic. Prolonged lockdowns increased the vulnerability of children to abuse as families found themselves pressured to cope with economic distress, school closures and major disruption in access to social and economic services.<sup>28</sup>

46. According to the Council for the Welfare of Children’s 2020 report on “Quick Data of Children’s Situation During the COVID-19 Pandemic”, based on Bantay Bata’s data, they have accounted over 200% increase in the volume of calls received and attended during the imposition of the Enhanced Community Quarantine. Reports/calls include child abuse and other child-related concerns like custody issues, those needing psychosocial support/psychological first-aid (PSS/PFA) and counselling.

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<sup>24</sup> Situation Analysis of Children in the Philippines - Full Report (unedited).pdf

<sup>25</sup> [Situation Analysis of Children in the Philippines | UNICEF Philippines](#)

<sup>26</sup> [PIA - CWC calls for children’s rights protection amid the pandemic](#)

<sup>27</sup> According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ‘violence against children’ refers to “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.”

<sup>28</sup> [Quick Data of Children's Situation During the COVID-19 Pandemic.pdf](#)

47. For child abuse reports alone, the Bantay Bata Hotline 163 receives an average of three (3) child abuse cases daily on top of the other calls they received before the enhanced community quarantine but a notable increase in reports and counseling were recorded especially via Bantay Bata Facebook messenger during the first weeks of ECQ with a daily average of six (6) cases (100% increase).

48. The Philippine National Police – Crime Information Reporting and Analysis System and Women and Children Protection Center have recorded a total of 2,678 cases of violations against children from March 1 to May 15, 2020 and 1,384 as of June 2020. These cover cases of rape, acts of lasciviousness, and child abuse and exploitation. From the Department of the Interior and Local Government, as of July 10, 2020 there are 2,177 children or a daily average of 24 who have experienced physical, sexual, psychological/emotional abuse, neglect, and other types of violence reported to the barangays from March 16 to June 15, 2020.

49. A 2020 UNICEF published National Study on Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children in the Philippines showed that the country has emerged as the center of child sex abuse materials production in the world, with 80% of Filipino children vulnerable to online sexual abuse, some facilitated even by their own parents (UNICEF, 2016).<sup>29</sup> The report further explains that this phenomenon is facilitated by factors such as English language literacy, “availability and ease of access to technology, well-established financial transaction facilities, and absence of perceived conflict between sexual exploitation and significant social norms.

50. The CWC’s 2020 report citing an Online Child Protection survey conducted by the NGO, *End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT) Philippines*, presented information about children affected by online sexual abuse: Thirty seven per cent (37%) of 468 children and youth respondents admitted to connecting with strangers via social media; 30% received sexual materials via social media sites; 50% who got sexual content/message did not report the incidence.

51. A series of recent LVF fora cited above in connection with child rights issues and specifically child labor exposed qualitative information on the escalating challenge of various forms of violence against children.<sup>30</sup> Pre-existing inequalities in family and communities’ access to economic, health, education and social services were exacerbated by strict measures taken to contain the pandemic. Some traditional socio-cultural beliefs about childhood, parental authority and control, family dysfunction and high anxiety levels among families; coupled with over-exposure and unregulated use of social media resulted in increased incidence of physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse and exploitation of children, mostly in homes, communities and in cyberspace.

52. In summary, LVF stakeholders observed that more children were being abused sexually in their own homes due to their prolonged stay with significant adults, mostly male members of the family during the lockdowns. Many were aware of children forced to cyberpornography to bring income for the family. Online forms of sexual exploitation are now used, often in combination with offline sexual abusive acts. Many are even facilitated by family members, with majority of

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<sup>29</sup> [UNIPH-2021-NationalStudyOSAEC-FullReport.pdf \(unicef.org\)](#)

<sup>30</sup> LVF stakeholders reported that many were abused sexually because they are left at home or under the care of their neighbors or relatives.

cases unreported and invisible to authorities. Sexual misbehavior in institutions for children needs further validation.

53. With the escalating impact of all forms of violence against children, the existing system of addressing child protection rights urgently has proved to lack a holistic approach consisting of the following elements: laws and policies with regulation and oversight; protective and responsive services and coordination mechanism for an integrated child protection approach; knowledge and data on child protection issues, including data system monitoring; skilled child protection workforce; children's participation; and financial resources in support of the child protection system elements.

54. Moreover, we note the persistence of a prevailing culture of abuse, violence and exploitation through the major social institutions (family, school, church, government, economy) and the larger society.

***55. Within the framework of a post-COVID-19 healing and recovery scenario, we recommend the Government of the Philippines to:***

- a. Continue efforts to strengthen councils for the protection of children by integrating child protection-related measures that spell out concrete actions to contain violence against children in their specific action plans, monitoring and accountability systems.***
- b. Allocate sufficient local and national budgets for capacity building of all actors tasked to implement protective measures and services for healing and recovery of children affected by all forms of violence.***
- c. Work toward convergence of resources and expertise by bringing in civil society organizations who work on protection of children from violence.***
- d. Address mental health issues affecting children and adults at the community level to help increase resiliency and ability to navigate the traumatic effects of the current crisis.***
- e. Review the current case management system for handling cases of child victims of abuse, neglect and exploitation to ensure the best interest of children.***
- f. Continue to build the knowledge base and an action research agenda to better understand the nature and magnitude of child rights and their implementation as a necessary step toward developing a more responsive child protection system in the country.***