



NATIONAL LAW UNIVERSITY ODISHA



CENTRE FOR  
CHILD RIGHTS

# THE BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER



October–November 2025

# Preface

We are delighted to present the current edition of our bi-monthly newsletter, continuing our mission to spotlight child rights, share critical insights, and highlight our ongoing research, advocacy, and outreach efforts. This issue covers key legal and policy updates, landmark judicial decisions, international discussions on child protection, and significant observances dedicated to children's welfare.

With each edition, we strive to foster dialogue and action on issues that impact children the most. Your engagement and feedback are invaluable in shaping this initiative and strengthening our collective commitment to child rights.

We look forward to your thoughts and collaboration as we work towards a world where every child's rights are protected and upheld.

# Disclaimer & Acknowledgement

The Centre for Child Rights (CCR) expresses its heartfelt gratitude to the National Law University Odisha (NLUO) for providing a platform to think critically and engage meaningfully with the realm of Child Rights. This endeavour would not have been possible without the unwavering support of Prof. Ved Kumari (Vice-Chancellor of NLUO), Patron-in-Chief, and Prof. Rangin Pallav Tripathy (Registrar of NLUO). Prof. Biraj Swain (Chief Minister's Chair Professor- Child Rights and Director of Centre for Child Rights, NLUO) has been instrumental in shaping this vision from its inception, and her invaluable guidance has played a pivotal role in bringing this Newsletter to fruition.

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# About Centre for Child Rights

Centre for Child Rights (CCR) is the specialized research centre of the National Law University Odisha, Cuttack (NLUO). The Centre was founded on April 12, 2015 with ceremonial inauguration by Hon'ble Justice Dipak Misra, former Chief Justice of India and Visitor, NLUO in the august presence of the Hon'ble Chief Justice and Judges of Orissa High Court, and Secretary, Department of Women and Child Development, Government of Odisha. The Centre aims at building a rights temper amongst the children and the society, strengthening law and justice for children and child wellbeing by supporting and initiating research, policy advocacy and community action on children's issues. The Centre aims to provide integrated support and consultancy to different layers of institutional governance for protection and insurance of child rights, child protection, understand and reform enabling and disabling factors to furthering child rights and the inter-sectionalities.

Headlined by the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Ved Kumari, one of the foremost chroniclers of Juvenile Justice and everything Child Rights in the world, NLUO got its first ever Chair Professorship on Child Rights with a five-member staff team sanctioned by the Hon'ble CM of Odisha in 2023. This is led by the Chief Minister's Chair Professor. This is the only fully functional chair professorship on child rights in the universe of National Law Universities across India.

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# PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM TOBACCO: A GLOBAL HEALTH PRIORITY

- ABHINANDAN



The World Health Organization (WHO) has released a new publication underscoring the harmful role of tobacco use in child stunting, a condition affecting nearly 150 million children globally. Concentrated mainly in Africa and Asia, stunting increases the risk of disease, delayed cognitive and physical development, and premature death.

According to the WHO, children exposed to tobacco smoke, whether in utero or during early childhood, are significantly more vulnerable to impaired growth. Maternal smoking during pregnancy is strongly associated with preterm birth, low birth weight, and restricted fetal growth, all of which are reliable predictors of stunting by the age of two. Evidence also shows that the negative effects intensify with higher levels of maternal tobacco use, while cessation during pregnancy improves growth outcomes.

Stunting, as defined by WHO, occurs when a child's height-for-age falls more than two standard deviations below the Child Growth Standards median. Beyond physical growth, stunting undermines cognitive development, educational attainment, and future earning potential. Long-term impacts include reduced productivity and, when paired with later excessive weight gain, increased susceptibility to chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular conditions. Tobacco smoke contains thousands of toxic chemicals that hinder both fetal and child development.

Exposure during pregnancy has been linked to congenital anomalies and long-term health issues, while postnatal exposure through second-hand smoke exacerbates respiratory infections and developmental delays. Collectively, these factors elevate the risk of growth impairment well beyond infancy.

In response, WHO has urged governments to accelerate the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) and its MPOWER strategies. These measures include protecting pregnant women and children from second-hand smoke, strengthening access to tobacco cessation services, particularly for expectant mothers, and enforcing smoke-free environments in indoor public spaces.

Recent data indicate that of the approximately 148 million children classified as stunted in 2022, 52 per cent resided in Asia and 43 per cent in Africa. The figures highlight the disproportionate impact on low- and middle-income regions, where tobacco use and weak enforcement of tobacco control policies often overlap with other determinants of poor child health.

# A LOOMING HUMANITARIAN CATASTROPHE: HUNGER CRISES IN SUDAN AND SOUTH SUDAN

- AKSHAT PRAKSH



Sudan and South Sudan are now bracing for some of the most severe hunger emergencies worldwide, with millions of Children on the brink of starvation. The situations in both countries were articulated by divergent political and social dynamics, but share striking features that require urgent global action. Almost 2.3 million Children in South Sudan, below five years of age, need treatment for acute malnutrition, with about 700,000 in need of severe levels of treatment. With emergency assistance needed by nine out of 12 citizens, the country's weak healthcare system is on the verge of collapse due to conflict, corruption, and climate shocks, among others. As donors have cut funding, aid agencies have been forced to close nutrition centres and scale back supplies of therapeutic foods that save lives, leaving families to scavenge for leaves and wild fruits to eat. In view of the magnitude of this particular crisis, the government has, however, allocated less than 1.3% of its entire budget to health, while billions have been siphoned away through corruption.

Sudan is experiencing what the United Nations has described as the largest humanitarian crisis the world has ever seen. The civil war between the Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces has displaced more than 12 million people and pushed over 30 million into dire need.

More than 635,000 already live in famine-like conditions, with children in Darfur and Al-Jazirah states facing unprecedented rates of severe malnutrition. Hospitals have been bombed, aid convoys have been looted, and warehouses have been destroyed, while 80% of health facilities in conflict zones have become non-operational. Cholera outbreaks, along with floods, have aggravated the woes, whereas surviving families are selling off their few remaining assets or have started withdrawing children from schools.

A stark picture emerges where children are paying the heaviest price in both Sudans. Hunger, disease, and displacement are stealing away the future of an entire generation. While the drivers differ, i.e., corruption and neglect in South Sudan, and civil war in Sudan, the end result is sadly similar. Millions are starving with little to no meaningful intervention from the international community. Without efforts from the global community to fund humanitarian aid, pressure warring factions, and bolster local health systems, these dual crises risk spiraling into one of the darkest humanitarian tragedies of our time.

# EDUCATION AT RISK: MILLIONS OF CHILDREN COULD MISS SCHOOL IN 2025

- AMIT SAMAL



As the 2025 academic year begins, an estimated 285 million children worldwide are at risk of not returning to school, with Africa facing the heaviest impact. Declining national spending on education and cuts in international aid have left 272 million children, 139 million boys, and 133 million girls out of primary and secondary school, while nearly 200 million are excluded from secondary education. Conflict-affected regions account for 13 million out-of-school children, and an additional 175 million preschool-aged children miss early learning opportunities, highlighting the scale of the crisis.

Africa has the highest out-of-school rates globally, with over 100 million children and adolescents affected. Factors include population growth, persistent gender gaps, the lingering effects of COVID-19 school closures, climate emergencies, and conflicts. Many children drop out due to school related gender based violence and discriminatory policies targeting pregnant girls, refugees, and children with disabilities. While a limited number of African countries have enacted legislation to guarantee free education from pre-primary through secondary levels, and only three, Morocco, Namibia, and Sierra Leone, have successfully fulfilled both the legal and funding benchmarks for universal access. Despite commitments under UNESCO, the Nouakchott Declaration, and other international agreements,

chronic underfunding severely exacerbates these challenges. Between 2013 and 2023, only one-third of African countries met education spending benchmarks. Families often bear up to 27% of education costs, limiting access and learning quality. Without sufficient investment, governments cannot provide free education, maintain schools, supply quality materials, train teachers, or adapt systems to crises.

However, solutions are emerging. At the global level, Sierra Leone, Luxembourg, and the Dominican Republic are leading a UN initiative to draft a new Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, focused on ensuring free education from pre-primary to secondary school and promoting international cooperation for funding. Nationally, Guinea Bissau's RECEB Project overhauled the primary curriculum with child-centered, competence based learning, strengthened Portuguese and math skills, incorporated citizenship education, and trained over 3,000 teachers, showing measurable improvements in teaching and learning outcomes.

Ending the education crisis requires joint action from governments, donors, international bodies, and civil society. Governments must protect education budgets, meet funding targets, and ensure equitable access to quality education.

# THE DEVASTATING RATE OF CHILD MALNUTRITION IN THE GAZA STRIP IN AUGUST SURPASSES JULY'S RECORD

- RAGINEE PANDA



With instances of acute malnutrition having crossed an extraordinarily high benchmark in July, August has witnessed a devastating rise in acute malnutrition among the children in the entire landscape of Gaza. The nutrition screening reports reveal an unprecedented rise in the number of children with acute malnutrition, with agencies reporting a double-digit increase in the already elevated rates of children during times of military operations. Both WHO and UNICEF, in July, recorded an all-time high of about 12,000 cases of acute malnutrition for children under the age of five, along with thousands of severe emergency cases reported by the aid workers.

According to operational data compiled by the humanitarian clusters, the detection rates were higher in August, with acute malnutrition cases diagnosed accounting for approximately 13.5 percent of all children screened, compared to about 8.3 percent in July. Community screening in several Gaza City districts detected that one out of every five children is suffering from acute malnutrition. These figures reflect the worsening humanitarian conditions in Gaza and a collapse of services concentrating on health and nutrition. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) determined that food insecurity exists in the Gaza Governorate. UN agencies have warned that such conditions are now spreading,

putting young children who are most at risk of rapidly compromising their health due to malnutrition in grave danger. Humanitarian workers report ongoing shortages of therapeutic food and infant formula and security barriers in the delivery of these supplies. Frontline health workers declare that clinics are overwhelmed by cases of children suffering from severe acute malnutrition and that ready-to-use therapeutic food is in short supply, thereby restricting access to stabilization centres. UNICEF and WHO are still urging for the unhindered humanitarian protection of health facilities, to the extent of scaling nutrition interventions, on behalf of the children, to avert any further unnecessary loss of life.

Since January, 42,306 children have been diagnosed with malnutrition, of which 8,141 are classed as in severe form. The numbers indicate how deprivation and displacement, along with a shrinking humanitarian space, have created an acute public-health vacuum over Gaza. As the crisis evolves, the agencies are insisting upon immediate steps to stop the unfolding trajectory that has endangered the lives of Gaza's youngest, that being the establishment of safe corridors for aid, protection for medical staff and supplies, and replenishment of therapeutic nutrition.

# SUPREME COURT DISMISSES NCPCR CHALLENGE TO HIGH COURT ORDER UPHOLDING VALIDITY OF MINOR MUSLIM GIRL'S MARRIAGE UNDER PERSONAL LAW

- ASHWANI KUMAR RAI



The Supreme Court dismissed a Special Leave Petition filed by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) challenging the Punjab and Haryana High Court's order in a writ petition, which had granted to a Muslim couple (a 16 year old girl and her 30 year old husband; and their child), protection from threat to their life and liberty from society and their own families. In the writ petition the High Court held that under Muslim personal law, if a girl has attained puberty or is at least 15 years of age, she can marry, notwithstanding the provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012. The Supreme court dismissed the SLP stating: "We fail to see how NCPCR can be aggrieved by protection granted to a minor"; further it stated that the NCPCR had no Locus Standi in this case.

The Counsel representing the NCPCR in this case had asserted a violation of the provisions of POCSO and PCMA, arguing that these laws prohibit the marriage of girls below the age of 18 years and criminalize the sexual relations with minors, irrespective of what the religious personal laws provide, and added that the POCSO and PCMA should prevail over the personal laws. In reply to the contentions raised by the NCPCR, the Court held that there is "no question of law present" in this case and asked to argue the question of law in any other "appropriate" case

because in this case, the relief has been given.

In a case similar to this, where the High Court had given relief to a Pathankot based Muslim couple, the apex Court issued notice on NCPCR's plea to consider the question of law, but later on ultimately declined to interfere with the relief granted to the couple, clarifying that the decision would not constitute a binding precedent.

In addition to this, Justice B.V. Nagarathna observed that: "where young people like each other and wish to get married, should such instances be equated with other serious criminal offences? Nowadays, students study together in co-educational institutions. Is it a crime to fall in love?" She added that the Courts must be mindful of the harsh social realities while dealing with the genuine romantic cases.



## MANDATING PROTECTION: KARNATAKA'S PUSH FOR SAFER RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS AND HOSTELS

- JYOTIRMAYA CHOUDHARY

The Karnataka government has strengthened protections for children living away from families in government-run facilities by requiring strict adherence to the Karnataka Child Protection Policy in residential schools and hostels. The circular aims to prevent sexual, physical, and mental abuse by directing staff sensitization, routine monitoring, grievance redressal, counseling, and rights awareness programs.

The Social Welfare Department's circular, which requires officials to maintain safe environments, check for drug abuse, enforce a zero-tolerance policy for bullying, and submit compliance reports with prompt action on infractions, makes policy implementation mandatory in residential schools and hostels. It addresses a request from member K.T. Thippeswamy of the Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, who pointed out that hostel compliance was lacking despite requirements for educational institutions. Operational steps like creating child rights clubs and child protection committees, getting staff and student support, and conspicuously posting the policy's "20 norms" and 1098/112 helplines are all outlined in complementary directions.

While many schools implemented protection policies, KSCPCR found that hostels fell behind, making children in institutional care relatively vulnerable in spite of the laws already in place. The action brings implementation practices into line with the

main goal of the Karnataka State Child Protection Policy, which is to protect children from exploitation, abuse, neglect, and violence in all contexts. The state is addressing a historically under-regulated risk environment for children not under parental care by enforcing standard procedures and oversight in residential settings.

While counseling and awareness programs help children identify risks and stand up for their rights in institutional settings, clear grievance procedures and reporting channels can facilitate faster responses to complaints. Frequent staff training and monitoring improve accountability and preventive awareness, lowering exposure to drugs, bullying, and other forms of exploitation in residential schools and dorms. Child rights clubs, protection committees and visible helpline information provide easily accessible channels for support and escalation, including external resources, if internal systems are ineffective. Children's rights activists welcome the directive but push for diligent implementation, urging audits, technical support to institutions, and surprise visits to make sure that safeguards are not mere paper promises. Whether or not these orders translate to measurable child safety gains for children across the state will hinge on public, ongoing compliance reporting and nationwide uniform adoption among welfare agencies. Maintaining staff sensitization and zero tolerance for bullying in all protected characteristics will be critical to ensuring long-term cultural change in residential facilities

# Centre for Child Rights in Frame



Launch event of Community-level Child Protection Committees organised by CCR and Project Kutumb



Hon'ble Justice Savitri Ratho and Hon'ble Justice M B Lokur at the Satellite Event of 5th World Congress on Justice with Children co-hosted by CCR, NLUO and CRY



Dignitaries and participants at the 10th Anniversary celebration of CCR



Inaugural event of Child Protection Mentorship Programme organised by CCR

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal black ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. In the bottom right corner, there is a small, stylized illustration of a purple book. The book has a floral design on its cover, featuring pink and yellow flowers with green leaves. The book is shown at a slight angle, giving it a three-dimensional appearance.



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