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Working Together for a Better ICSW



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Dear ICSW members, friends, and interested readers,

Welcome to the June 2023 issue of our newsletter.

In the past months, ICSW has continued weaving alliances and working as a team to address the challenges of social welfare in a historical context marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, the invasion of Ukraine, and geopolitical conflicts in different parts of the world. On our website we present some of the initiatives and projects in which ICSW members participate, from proposals on how to move towards a more solidarity-based economy, to the analysis of different proposals to strengthen social protection systems in developing countries.

The new lines of work in the field of social welfare

promoted by the UN, and the priorities that have been established for the UN Commission on Social Development in view of its meeting in February 2024, offer us a forum for debate and lines of action to organize our collective work for the benefit of social welfare. Decent work, inclusive social policies, and support for social policies in the Global South are priorities for discussion and action over the coming years.

It is very important to give a voice to all stakeholders and to co-design social policies among all citizens. At the SWESD 2022 conference in Seoul, organized by ICSW, IASSW and KNCSW, many of these issues were the subject of interesting discussions, and good practices in the field of welfare policy, education and social work were shared. After a rigorous anonymous peer review process, Routledge will publish in 2023 the most outstanding papers presented at the conference in a book entitled *Social Welfare Programs and Social Work Education at a Crossroads: New Approaches for a Post-Pandemic Society*. I would like to thank Routledge for their confidence in our projects, and also to congratulate all the co-authors of this forthcoming book, whose publication also contributes to the visibility of ICSW and the quality of our projects.

In this issue of the newsletter, our colleagues from the North East Asia region contribute several articles on children and youth in Korea, Mongolia and Taiwan. Child and youth protection are key to the development of social welfare systems. I encourage all readers of our newsletter to stop and

read with interest the three articles. And I am very grateful to the authors for sending us their contributions on a crucial topic for social inclusion, children and youth protection.

In less than a year we will be holding the ICSW, IASSW and IFSW World Congress in Panama (<https://sbsd2024.org.pa/>). It is a great opportunity to meet, discuss and set priorities for ICSW in the coming years. I encourage you to register and participate, since 1928 the ICSW, IASSW and IFSW world congresses have contributed to the debate and improvement of welfare systems, giving voice to the concerns and projects of welfare professionals and social workers.

I hope we can meet in Panama in 2024.

Take care and stay healthy.

NEA President's Summary

Since the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the greatest health, social and economic challenges in history, has changed our lives dramatically. Global people are worried about its impacts on economy, employment and health. North East Asia countries face the same challenges though their confirmed cases were not as many as that in western countries. So far, many reports, policies and studies focus only on "adults." However, it is also important to acknowledge from the viewpoint of children and the youth. In this newsletter, there are three articles, written by scholars from Taiwan, Mongolia, and Korea, which

show the figures of children and the youth in the post-pandemic era in North-east Asia.

Article 1: The article discusses Mongolia's expanded social welfare policy and its impact on youth employment in the post-pandemic context. Despite significant investment in social welfare, the national poverty rate remains high. The article emphasizes the need for policies that promote youth employment and address the challenges faced by young people in the labor market. It examines various issues related to youth employment policies and possible solutions, such as allocating resources for skills development and revising social welfare laws. Those programs try to promote the youth to participate in the labor market.

Article 2: This article focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and adolescents in Taiwan. It highlights challenges faced by disadvantaged individuals in this age group, including increased poverty, mental health issues, and risks associated with online communities. The article discusses the disrupted life trajectories of young people and the solutions to these challenges, such as providing stable online learning platforms and addressing mental health needs. It emphasizes the importance of intensive services in the post-pandemic era and the need to be aware of increased internet usage among children and adolescents.

Article 3: The article addresses the need for the enactment of the "Framework Act on Children" in Korea to improve the implementation of children's rights. Despite ratifying the UNCRC, there are limitations to apply it on children's rights in terms of judicial decisions. The act aims to address these shortcomings and to recognize children as active

rights holders. It emphasizes the importance of incorporating children's views and highlights the need to address issues related to climate change and the digital environment. In conclusion, by emphasizing the importance of public awareness, education, and the involvement of stakeholders, enacting related laws are ongoing activities to protect children's rights.

Overall, these articles highlight the need for effective policies to address challenges faced by the youth in Mongolia, Taiwan and Korea during the COVID-19 pandemic. They emphasize the importance of promoting youth employment, addressing mental health needs, and protecting children's rights in North-east Asia.

Welfare-to-Work: Changing Pattern of Youth Employment Policies in Mongolia



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Introduction

Since April 2020, as part of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Mongolia has implemented a number of policy measures, such as bolstering people's livelihoods and enterprises, stabilizing food supplies, promoting public health, and vaccinating everyone. The coverage and scope of social welfare services have been significantly expanded, with a total of 2.5 million Mongolian citizens receiving welfare assistance. In 2012, the total number of welfare service recipients was 555.5 thousand; by 2022, it is projected to reach 2.5 million, an increase of 4.6 times.¹ As a consequence of the expansion of the welfare policy, the child money programme has been multiplied by five, and the value of food vouchers has been doubled. At least twice, all households and citizens received cash assistance. According to the annual report for 2021, Mongolia's expenditures on social welfare increased to 2 trillion MNT. 7 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) will be spent on social welfare in 2021, which is 2.5 times the average of developing countries.²

Since Mongolia spends approximately 7 percent of its annual GDP on social welfare programmes but the national poverty rate is not decreasing, the principle of social welfare efficiency has likely been lost. Due to the increase in social welfare costs in the 1990s, the United States and the United Kingdom devoted particular attention to the issue of welfare dependency, which has been referred to as the welfare-to-work policy. Today, this policy transition has become a reality in Mongolia. Some researchers conclude that "welfare dependency" has become widespread in Mongolia. The public perceives that the "willingness to receive

¹ Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Mongolia. Welfare-to-Employment Presentation, October 2022

² UN Mongolia, Common Country Analysis – 2021, 16 March 2022. Retrieved from <https://mongolia.un.org/en/174973-common-country-analysis-2021-mongolia>

care and welfare assistance" among the general population is high, and this perception is severely criticized. This article examines how the expansion of Mongolia's social welfare policy has affected youth employment and what the emerging policy patterns are in post-pandemic context.

Solutions to the problems:

The government provides 72 categories of welfare services to its citizens within the framework of 6 social welfare laws and over 40 regulations. These services include 47 welfare services for target groups and 25 financial assistance programmes for specific groups. Mongolia is considered to have a mixed model of social welfare because all targeted categories receive assistance.

Mongolia is always referred to as the country of youth and children. According to the 2020 census, 32 percent of the total population is under the age of 14, and 15 percent of the population is between the ages of 15 to 24.³ Despite the effective implementation of social welfare policies during the COVID-19 pandemic, no policies to increase employment or enhance workforce skills were implemented. The equilibrium between demand and supply in the youth labour market is deteriorating. Considering that the unemployment rate among young people aged 15 to 24 is 2.5 times above the national average, promoting youth employment has become a crucial policy challenge. The low rate of youth employment can be attributed to factors such as reliance on the welfare system, low earnings, and a dearth of decent opportunities for youth.

This article examines the changing patterns of youth employment policies in the following five scenarios:

- 1. Policies promoting youth employment**
- 2. Youth labour-force participation**
- 3. Youth employment opportunities for decent jobs**
- 4. Youth skills and job readiness**
- 5. Salary scale and livelihoods for youth groups**

Policies promoting youth employment

The government of Mongolia has incorporated employment into its social welfare policy. Numerous laws and policies, including the "Employment Promotion Law" (2011), the "Labour Law" (2021), the "National Unemployment Reduction Programme" (1992), the "National Employment Promotion Programme" (2001), and the "State Policy on Employment" (2016) have been approved and implemented by state competent authorities.

The government's short, medium, and long-term policies and programmes contain numerous objectives to promote youth development and employment and decrease unemployment and poverty. This includes such policy documents as "Vision 2050", the State Policy on Population Development, the Government Action Programme 2020-2024, and the National Programme for Youth Development, among others. The long-term development policy "Vision 2050" aims to "ensure a balance in the labour economy, build a knowledge economy, and provide every citizen with a decent job and a sufficient income, under the employment policy."⁴

³ National Statistical Office of Mongolia. Population census 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.1212.mn>

⁴ The Government of Mongolia, The Long-term Development Policy "Vision 2050", approved in 2020. Retrieved from <https://vision2050.gov.mn/eng/v2050.html>

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the government devised a "New Revival Policy" to address post-pandemic recovery efforts. The policy aims to stimulate economic stability and growth through increasing foreign and domestic investment, strengthening public-private partnerships, and implementing fiscal reforms, also building a foundation for the successful implementation of Vision 2050. The policy is expected to double Mongolia's GDP per capita, create over 285,000 jobs, and increase labour force participation to 65 percent by 2025.⁵

In accordance with this, the Law on Social Welfare and the Law on Employment Promotion are being revised, and a transition from welfare to work is being pursued as a state policy direction. It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP) to draught these revised statutes. In this context, the MLSP approved new programmes such as the National Preparation Programme for Labor, the Employment Support Programme for Youth, the Employment Support Programme for People with Disabilities, the Employment Support Programme for Elders, and Employment Support Programme for Women in 2021.⁶

Youth labour-force participation

The Mongolian population has grown by an average of 2.0 percent per year over the past decade. The percentage of children ages 0 to 14 and seniors over 65 in the total population is rising consistently. However, the proportion of labour-active individuals aged 15 to 64 tends to decline. According to statistical projections, Mongolia's population will reach 3.9 million in 2030. The proportion of the working-age population in the

total population is projected to decline from 64.3 percent in 2020 to 62.9 percent in 2030.

The youth unemployment rate is relatively high. In 2020, the national average unemployment rate was 7 percent, while the youth unemployment rate was 18.4 percent. About 36,000 young individuals actively seeking employment, representing 41 percent of the total number of unemployed. Twenty percent of all young adults are unemployed and lack any education or training. Especially, rural youth have poor education, with 42.1 percent working in paid employment, 31.8 percent in self-employment, and the rest in unpaid work.⁷ Consequently, the likelihood of youth unemployment in the labour market is considerable.

Youth employment opportunities for decent jobs

A decent job has become one of the labour market's most pressing challenges in Mongolia. Unpaid and informal work is prevalent among young individuals. Even though young people are employed, they confront numerous obstacles, including low wage scales, temporary work, and unpaid apprenticeships. According to an employment baseline survey, 54.2 percent of temporary employees are under the age of 25.⁸ Especially in comparison to the capital city of Ulaanbaatar, the youth employment rate is low due to a dearth of permanent jobs and limited opportunities for self-employment in rural areas. Even in local cities and towns, only government institutions such as local government and schools offer few employment opportunities, and due to the small population, there are few opportunities for private enterprise. Therefore, rural residents view social welfare as their primary source of income and

⁵ UN Mongolia, Common Country Analysis – 2022 Update, Oct 2022.

⁶ Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Mongolia. Decree of the National Employment Council, 11 Feb 2022. Retrieved from <https://mlsp.gov.mn/uploads/files/hutulbur2022.pdf>

⁷ UNDP Mongolia, Baseline study on "Supply and demand for self- and wage- employment, for current and future work" 2021

⁸ UNDP Mongolia, Baseline study on "Supply and demand for self- and wage- employment, for current and future work" 2021

accord it greater importance. Because young people lack the labour skills necessary to meet labour market requirements, employment obstacles arise. According to the UN Common Country Analysis 2021, the most marginalized and vulnerable group is low-skilled rural youth.⁹

Youth Skills and job readiness

As stated previously, the core of Mongolia's labour force consists of young individuals between the ages of 15 and 34, with a downward trend over the past decade. Youth employment opportunities are hindered solely by their lack of education and professional skills. Particularly, the labour force participation of young people with bachelor's degrees or technical training is increasing. Conversely, the employment rate of young individuals with secondary education or less tends to decline. In particular, nearly half of disabled youth are illiterate and lack formal education and vocational training.

According to labour specialists, the knowledge and skills of young people fall short of the professional and soft skills expected by employers. The number of young people with a college degree who are unemployed is increasing due to the graduates' lack of skills. Approximately 58 percent of college graduates are employed, while the remaining 12 percent are considered inactive members of the labour force. The imbalance between supply and demand in the labour market is exacerbated by the fact that a large number of young people pursue low-demanding careers at universities, such as lawyers, economists, social scientists, and journalists.

At the levels of vocational and higher education, the acquisition of modern techniques and technologies, foreign language skills, job-readiness practice, and counselling programmes are lacking. This will have a negative effect on the labour supply and may result in a dearth of knowledge and skills in the workplace. On the other hand, most business entities lack orientation training and internship programmes for their potential employees and young graduates.

Salary Scale and Livelihoods for youth groups

One of the most pressing issues is that youth employment does not ensure their livelihood or social standing. One in three youth employers is below the poverty line. Young people abandon their jobs or migrate to work in foreign countries because, despite the availability of some employment opportunities, wages are low and they cannot guarantee their livelihood. In recent years, the number of job openings has consistently exceeded the number of individuals seeking employment. In the fourth quarter of 2022, for instance, a total of 71,124 job orders were received at the national level, and 20,761 people were employed.¹⁰ This demonstrates that young people are disinterested in working because the value of work and wages in Mongolia is relatively low. In the absence of well-paying jobs, a significant share of well-educated and skilled Mongolians emigrates abroad for better job opportunities. This particularly concerns young people who go to study in OECD countries and try to stay there. Researchers note that Mongolia may encounter a labour shortage due to the migration of many young people to developed countries like South Korea, Japan, and the United States.

⁹ UN Mongolia, Common Country Analysis – 2021, 16 March 2022. Retrieved from <https://mongolia.un.org/en/174973-common-country-analysis-2021-mongolia>

¹⁰ National Academy of Governance. (2020). Results Analysis on Employment Support Policy. Ulaanbaatar Retrieved from <http://catalog.naog.gov.mn/cgi-bin/koha/opac-retrieve-file.pl?id=5e34ea60fc5c5299e3f5a33b0f4eabee>

At a time when Mongolia is coping with the difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic, the conditions described here present the greatest employment obstacles for young people. Due to the economic difficulties, excessive price increases, and high inflation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a risk of growing social inequality and the likelihood of economic hardship among young people. Therefore, it can be concluded that the conditions necessary for the government to alter its youth employment policy have been met.

Prospects;

To quickly prepare skilled employees for upcoming infrastructure, and industrialization projects within the framework of the "New Revival Policy", it is necessary to optimally manage the supply and demand of the labour market and to manage inter-sectorial coordination in a consistent manner.

It must devote significant resources to the preparation of competent employees, ensuring coordination and compatibility between the education and labour sectors, and enhancing wage guarantees. These goals are difficult to implement in the near term, but the government has emphasized the policy shift "Welfare-to-Work". At the initiative of the Parliament, a series of public discussions were held to determine the "Welfare-to-Work" policy. In this context, 75 proposals were received during a public discussion in October 2022 and incorporated into the development of the national budget proposal for 2023. In the national budget for 2023, it is proposed to assess the employment readiness of young people, kick off the employment support programmes based on local needs, provide financial support to entrepreneurs and business

entities, and launch the e-job platform of labour market coordination.

In this context, the newly proposed bill on social welfare is viewed as the government's main policy initiative. The proposed legislation investigates the conditions for restricting welfare services for citizens of working age and mandating participation in an employment support programme for those applying for welfare benefits. The draft law is likely to include criteria such as participation in the social welfare programme for a limited period of time, assistance and allowances that decrease as the period of time increases, and exclusion from social welfare services under certain conditions.

The "Participation" programme, which was launched in 2021, is one of the government's new policy tools. The goal of the "Participation" programme is to provide youth with professional orientation and comprehensive personal development training and then connect them with employment opportunities. In 2021, 2,389 unemployed youth between the ages of 18 and 34 participated in the programme, and 809 of them obtained permanent employment within the first year.¹¹ It is necessary to continue researching the "Participation" project's progress, best practices, and challenges for 2022 and 2023.

In this setting, it is feasible to introduce new policy instruments to support youth employment on a broad scale. It is suggested that pilot programmes such as the online employment platform (e-job), the job coaching programme, and the graduation approach be implemented in coordination with the current social welfare policies. Specifically, the establishment of student employment centres at universities can be an effective policy intervention.

¹¹ Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Mongolia. Welfare-to-Employment Presentation, October 2022

These centres can initiate activities such as counselling, employment placement, internships, and exchange programmes for young professionals. The basis for increasing the labour supply of young people will be universities' collaboration with employers to update and improve their vocational training programmes. In this way, it is feasible to collaborate with labour market stakeholders such as trade unions and employers.

Conclusion:

Youth employment has been one of Mongolia's social policy priorities. Within the scope of this article, the authors analyzed the current policies and obstacles encountered by the Mongolian government to promote youth employment and the policy shift from welfare to work.

Only one of the current 72 categories of social welfare services, food vouchers, has a special requirement for employment. It is estimated that Mongolia spent 1, 2 trillion MNT on financial assistance for social welfare services in 2020. Based on the findings of the scenario analysis, it would have been feasible to create between 26,000 and 90,000 new jobs in Mongolia if these funds had been allocated to employment opportunities. It is evident that economic and social benefits will increase if a portion of social welfare funding is allocated to youth employment support.

In the economic, social, and demographic spheres, the rational definition and efficient implementation of the social protection policy will have numerous positive effects. The transition from the "Welfare-to-Work" policy requires knowledge and skills in the workplace for effective implementation, and the disparity and compatibility

of knowledge and skills among Mongolian youth should be studied in detail. Correctly defining labour market and youth employment challenges and solutions in post-Covid-19 pandemic contexts is a prerequisite for the successful implementation of the "Welfare-to-Work" policy.

Disrupted life trajectories? Reflections on Developmental Issues for Vulnerable Children and Adolescents in Taiwan's Post-Pandemic Era



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COVID-19 spread around the world in 2020 and caused a global pandemic within a short period. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic, upgrading it from its previous classification as a public health emergency of international concern. Tension rapidly increased, and several countries implemented various pandemic prevention measures, such as social distancing, imposing quarantines, restricting travel,

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and shutting down businesses and production. Like other disasters, risks, and vulnerabilities associated with COVID-19 are not evenly distributed, as there were certain regions and groups more exposed to disadvantages than others (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2021). Children and adolescents, due to their limited understanding and autonomy, are usually more vulnerable in any disaster. Thus, this paper not only focuses on how did the COVID-19 pandemic disrupt the life trajectories of children and adolescents but also discusses the actions of disadvantaged children and adolescents in the post-COVID-19 era.

COVID-19 Pandemic in Taiwan

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was first felt in Taiwan in early 2020. In May, the government issued a Level 3 alert, mandated a variety of stringent pandemic prevention measures, and encouraged individuals to work and study from home. Most restrictions were lifted in September. In January 2022, the Omicron variant of COVID-19 was detected in Taiwan, and a surge in confirmed cases occurred. In March 2022, the BA.2, BA.2.3, and BA.2.3.7 variants emerged, and in August 2022, the BA.5 and BA.4.6 variants emerged. Corresponding surges in the number of cases were observed upon the emergence of these variants. The number of confirmed cases in April 2020 and April 2021 was less than 500, whereas, in April 2022, the number of confirmed cases was 127,115, and reached a peak in May 2022. As the pandemic situation subsided and the “coexist with the virus” policy was implemented in July 2022 in Taiwan, in-person work and educational activities resumed.

COVID-19 affected the Taiwanese significantly. From 2020 to March 2023, a total of 10,239,629

cases of COVID-19 were confirmed in Taiwan, accounting for nearly 50% of the total population. The infection rate was 39.2%, and the deathly rate was 17%.¹³ From an international comparative point of view, the infection rate in Taiwan was comparable to that of the United States and Japan; however, the number of deaths per million population was higher in Taiwan than in South Korea, Japan, and Singapore (Chen, 2023).

On the other hand, infection rates for specific age groups are worthy of attention. Globally, children account for approximately 15% of the total confirmed COVID-19 cases, and the proportion of severe cases among children is estimated to be around 0.7% (Chen, Wang & Hung, 2021). In Taiwan, the incidence of COVID-19 among children started to increase in April 2022 and as of June 2022, children aged 9 years and younger accounted for 11.1% of the total confirmed COVID-19 cases; a cumulative total of 490,000 cases for those aged 12 years and younger accounted for 13.6% of the total cases. Confirmed cases among individuals aged 19 years and younger accounted for 20.1% of the total cases, with a mortality rate of approximately 0.004% (Chiu, 2022). Although this proportion of the total confirmed COVID-19 cases is lower than the global average, it is worth exploring the specific developmental issues relating to children and adolescents in Taiwan.

This article will address the following issues: What life events have children and adolescents experienced from a life course perspective during the COVID-19 pandemic? In the case of children and adolescents who were living in low-income families or settlement areas during the COVID-19, what were the particular constraints experienced by these individuals? Particularly, as technology

¹³ The Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC), <https://www.cdc.gov.tw/Bulletin/Detail/ZbRMwVn6YuNc30ujCEXcJQ?typeid=9>

and the Internet became major media during the pandemic, are online worlds and communities posing risks to children and adolescents?

Disrupted life trajectories

1. "COVID-19 poverty"

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, people's employment prospects and incomes were adversely affected, resulting in a population and families living in poverty (Liang, 2022). The term "COVID-19 poverty" refers to poverty among low-income families caused by pandemic prevention measures that prevented individuals from earning a living. Taiwan's unemployment rate reached 3.95% in 2021, the highest in seven years. In major cities, such as Taipei City, New Taipei City, Taoyuan City, and Keelung City, the unemployment rate was 4%. Based on disposable income, the income gap between the top 20% and the bottom 20% of households was 6.13 times in 2020, an increase from 6.10 times in 2019. Comparing 2021 with 2020, this gap increased by 0.02 times. The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to worsening economic inequalities (Jiang, Lin, & Liang, 2022; Cheng, 2022).

According to a survey conducted by World Vision (2020), 68% of economically disadvantaged children and adolescents expressed concerns about the financial condition of their families, with parents losing their jobs and not receiving adequate financial assistance. During the COVID-19 pandemic, 14% of vulnerable children and adolescents faced the challenge of not having enough food to eat after school closure (Chen, 2020). In addition, the disruption of community relationships added insult to the suffering of "COVID-19 poverty" families, thereby leading to domestic violence. The number of reported cases of domestic violence was approximately 15% higher after the Level 3 alert was issued than in

the same period in the previous year (Li, 2021).

2. Mental health crisis

The mental health crisis related to COVID-19 has increased among young people, with loneliness, anxiety, and depression symptoms appearing twice as high as before (Chang, 2021). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the emotional regulation ability among adolescents with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Tsai, 2021). And compared with non-pandemic periods, a significant increase was observed in suicidal ideation and suicide attempts among adolescent psychiatric inpatients during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lin, 2021).

In addition, home isolation measures forced children and adolescents to stay at home or in their rooms, affecting their cognitive, emotional, and social development (Benner and Mistry, 2020; UNICEF, 2021). The Pandemic Prevention Regulations impose home quarantine periods ranging from one week to several weeks for children and adolescents who either have been diagnosed with COVID-19 themselves or have been in contact with those diagnosed with COVID-19, such as classmates or family members.

More importantly, Taiwan's isolation policies could affect the mental health of children and adolescents living in placement facilities to a more severe extent. According to the Chou Min Yung's practical experience, the CEO of the Guardian - National Association for Children and Family, Children and adolescents within these institutions were diagnosed with COVID-19 and placed in long-term isolation. And Taiwan government's COVID-19 prevention regulations for childcare institutions were the same as those for long-term care facilities. This meant that children and adolescents in these institutions were not allowed to go to any place besides school unless they

report to the government in advance. The effects of such abnormal living conditions could lead to symptoms of depression and anxiety during or after the isolation period (Liu, 2021).

3. "COVID-19 Generation"

The pandemic has accelerated digital transformation, creating the "COVID-19 Generation", who inevitably have exposure to Internet technology and have virtual relationships online (Technews, 2020). The prevalence of Internet usage among children and adolescents during the pandemic might lead to Internet addiction. According to the Child Welfare League Foundation, 85.2% of children in rural areas play games every day, with 23.4% playing for more than 2 hours per day. They primarily chatted or played with friends. Excessive Internet usage among children and adolescents might not only affect their eyesight but also put their safety in jeopardy, such as personal privacy breaches, sexual exploitation, and cyberbullying (Hsieh, 2022). Specifically, online sexual violence in Taiwan was primarily observed among junior and senior high school students before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, during the pandemic, younger individuals became victims, with an increase in elementary school cases. The profile of victims also shifted from those of low socioeconomic status to those of any socioeconomic status. Child victims experience greater mental trauma than adult victims do, posing long-term concerns about their mental development.

4. The "digital discrepancy"

Taiwan Internet Survey Report suggested that not only the usage rate of communication services exceeded 90% in all age groups, but there is also an inverse correlation between Internet usage and age during the COVID-19 period, of which younger age groups had higher

usage rates (Taiwan Network Information Center, 2021).

The user experience of the Internet of younger age groups varied by class. A family that originally only had one computer was forced to buy an additional three computers in the wake of the recent surge in domestic cases, because the two parents were teachers and the two children were students at different schools (elementary and senior high schools), and each person required a computer for work or school. Awkward situations frequently occurred in middle-class households.

The situations for rural and underprivileged children and adolescents were completely different. During the pandemic, many families earned less, and children living in rural areas faced more difficulties, including not having enough computers at home, and having a slow Internet connection (Child Welfare League Foundation, 2021). They could only attend classes using their parents' mobile phones and stare at small screens. Siblings may have quarreled over sharing their parents' mobile phones. For children and adolescents in placement facilities, there are usually only a few computers shared among residents. Due to the lack of space in these facilities, children and adolescents were forced to attend online classes from their bedrooms or corridors with inadequate sound insulation.

Responses to these issues

During the pandemic in Taiwan, universities, national foundations, and local governments collaborated to offer different services. At the national level, the Junyi Academy Foundation which is the largest free digital teaching platform in Taiwan provided stable and high-quality online learning services during COVID-19 and the number of weekly active users of its online platform increased from 60,000–70,000 to more

than 500,000 (Business Weekly, 2022). In addition, World Vision assisted nearly 50,000 vulnerable families in rural areas to ensure uninterrupted access to education and enough food to eat during the pandemic by conducting remote visits, providing food boxes, and connecting with several resources, such as community kitchens, restaurants, and breakfast shops (Chen, 2021).

A variety of cooperative actions were developed at the regional level in the city that was worst hit. An innovative social responsibility program of Fu Jen Catholic University in 2020-2021 in New Taipei City was implemented by teams. The author collaborated with two nonprofit organizations, the Shing Yi Charity Foundation, and the International Cultural Educational Foundation, through a community work course. The former operates a community food bank to provide various supplies for local poor families. The latter focuses on academic tutoring and family services for vulnerable children and adolescents. During the pandemic, social work students from Fu Jen Catholic University conducted home visits, assessed needs, connected resources, and developed innovative online activities to safeguard the right to play for vulnerable children and adolescents (Liu, 2023). Fu Jen Catholic University's social responsibility program was a supplement to the official one. For example, the Good Day Love Platform or Substitute Meals program implemented by the New Taipei City Government in 2020 connected thousands of restaurants with families in need, providing them with free meals (Wu, 2023). The new public and private partnerships were developed at a bad time.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, private and official organizations provided short-term basic living and education effectively. The major unresolved issues are the mental health and

social development of vulnerable children and adolescents due to social isolation and the loss of their primary caregivers.

Action Directions in the Post-pandemic Era

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted life trajectories for children and adolescents in Taiwan. Vulnerable children and adolescents have experienced multiple and accumulated disadvantages, such as the death of a primary caregiver, family economic crises and violence, improper social isolation, limited digital learning, etc. It would be crucial for their mental health and social development to have access to integrated and intensive services in the post-COVID-19 era. More importantly, the COVID-19 pandemic led to changes in generational interactions, interpersonal relationships, and intimate behaviors, shifting towards online and virtual forms. It is necessary to be aware of the consequences and effects for children and adolescents when online communities have become a main life and social domain.

Children Come as Subjects of Rights, Not Objects of Protection

***Lee Jinyoung, World Vision Global Citizenship School
& Advocacy Team Leader***

Korea has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and is responsible for guaranteeing children's rights by law. UNCRC requires countries that have ratified the convention to report on their domestic implementation status on a regular basis, and present areas for improvement through concluding observations. In the case of Korea, the 5th and 6th implementation reviews were conducted in 2019, and the 7th

National Report including information on follow-up to the 5th and 6th concluding observations has to be submitted by December 19, 2024.

In principle, UNCRC has the same effect as domestic law, but there are limitations in that it does not apply to actual judicial decisions. Therefore, the 5th and 6th concluding observations of UNCRC recommended 'taking all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures to realize the rights recognized in the Convention in Korean laws', but still, the legal basis for realizing children's rights is insufficient. Accordingly, from 2022, the movement to enact the "Framework Act on Children" is made in full swing led by the government and children's organizations. It is time to look into what the 'Framework Act on Children' is, respecting children as subjects of rights, and what the direction of its enactment should be.

What is the 'Framework Act on Children'?

The 'Framework Act on Children presents the basic ideology and goals of children's policies implemented for various policy purposes and stipulates the core rights of children and the responsibilities of the state, society, and family based on a 'child-centered' basis. In Korea, there is the 'Child Welfare Act' as a representative law on children, but domestic laws on children, including this one, recognize children as passive existence who need to be protected and cared for, rather than active subjects of rights. In addition, since the definition of children varies depending on the purpose of laws and policies in Korea and each issue is dealt with separately based on individual laws, the delivery system to guarantee children's rights is dispersed and segmented. This makes cooperation between ministries more difficult, and responsibility unclear. Considering this situation, ground law to ensure the rights of all children is necessary. The need to enact the

'Framework Act on Children' has been constantly raised, but it has not yet been enacted, and related laws have been amended fragmentarily to address social issues related to children.

In accordance with Article 7 of the Child Welfare Act, the government shall establish the goals and basic direction of five-year child policy and major promotional tasks, and establish mid-term plans to be jointly implemented and managed by central and local governments. Accordingly, in 2020, through the 2nd Basic Plan for Child Policy, the plan to enact the 'Framework Act on Children' was announced, and legislation is being pursued through research and forums. In addition to the government's efforts, children's advocacy organizations are also preparing to propose a 'Framework Act on Children proposed by children organizations'. This is to thoroughly guarantee the rights of children by reflecting the perspectives of children they witness in the field of children's organizations in the bill. For both the government and child organizations, the main purpose of the enactment of the 'Framework Act on Children' would be to strengthen the responsibility to guarantee the rights of the child for the full implementation of the Constitution of the nation and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Then, what should be included in the 'Framework Act on Children?'

What Should be Included in 'Framework Act on Children'

First, the 'Framework Act on Children should comprehensively include the basic principles and basic rights for the protection of children's rights as stipulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Based on the principles of the best interests of the child, respect for the child's opinion, and non-discrimination, provisions should be included to ensure the right to survival, protection, development, and participation. In

addition, it is necessary to establish a basis for protecting them by including provisions of rights for children who need special protection, such as those specified in UNCRC and General Comments. Children who need special protection include children with disabilities, children from migrant backgrounds, refugee children, North Korean child defectors, economically vulnerable children, out-of-school children, crime victims, children subject to juvenile justice, LGBTQ children, children under protection, and adopted children.

Second, the responsibility of all social members, including the state, parents or guardians, society, and enterprises related to children, should be clearly stated to ensure that all children are born healthy and live happily and safely. In particular, the state should strengthen the implementation system so that policies related to children can be implemented swiftly and accurately. If a child policy committee consisting of children is established and it is specified to ensure the actual operation of the implementation system of the relevant ministries from the formulation and implementation of related policies to the fact-finding investigation and impact evaluation, an effective law that children can feel the impact can be enacted.

Third, to respect the views of children, it is necessary to activate a participation system for issues that affect children and to include a system for remedies when children's rights are violated. The state and society should explain in a way that children can understand when they access the information and materials related to the children, and ensure the participation rights of children by allowing children to express their opinions directly or through their representatives or appropriate institutions in judicial and administrative procedures that affect children.

Fourth, it is necessary to prepare a bill to ensure the rights of children in various issues of child rights violations that occur due to changes in the environment. The 'climate crisis' that is currently affecting all humanity is posing a serious threat to the survival and development of children, but children are not being sufficiently considered in terms of climate and human rights. It is our society's responsibility to ensure that all children are protected from climate hazards and that their rights are respected by law, in order to ensure the survival of children who will live a longer period of time. In addition, children should be able to participate safely in the 'digital environment' without being exposed to violence. While the digital environment is being rapidly built, children have not been sufficiently protected from digital violence, educational gaps from the digital environment divide, etc. It is necessary to guarantee that all children should be able to access and engage in the digital environment without discrimination and be protected from violence, bullying, and privacy infringement.

Enactment of a Law Reflecting the 'Voice of the Child Concerned'

Above all, the most important thing to be included is the "voice of the child." In all stages of preparing and enacting the "Framework Act on Children," the opinions of children should be reflected, and stakeholders have a responsibility to inform the children of the process and results. The government held a "Meeting with Children to Discuss the Framework Act on Children" only after the bill was drafted in December. It is a welcome move to have a place to listen to the opinions of children, but, regrettably, it was carried out late in terms of time. If children had participated in the process of designing the bill, a more effective bill could have been drafted. In addition, the number of children who participated in the forum and expressed their opinions was very small, with only

12 children from six child organizations participating. To make up for this, several child organizations plan to hold a separate debate and conduct a survey this year to explore alternative ways to enact a law that represents children.

The enactment of the Framework Act on Children is of great significance in that it provides a legal basis for integrating fragmented child policies. It is also important that UNCRC, which guarantees children's rights most comprehensively, is faithfully contextualized into domestic law. However, the enactment of the Framework Act on Children is only the beginning, and the process of enacting and amending related laws and sub-statutes following the procedures is also a task left to us in the future. In addition, the process of integrating the concepts of children and adolescents into the legal system, and public relations and education to raise awareness should continue so that stakeholders and responsible entities can work together to guarantee rights with the same understanding.

Children should have the right to express their opinions on matters that affect their lives, and their opinions must be respected. The enactment of the Framework Act on Children will provide a legal basis for ensuring the meaningful participation of children, and children will be more guaranteed opportunities to express their views. The opinions of children should be faithfully reflected in the bill, and the process and results should be guided in a child-friendly language and method so that the children concerned can properly understand the legislation. If the interest of the children concerned is added to the efforts of the government and children's organizations, it is clear that the 'Framework Act on Children' will become an opportunity to change the lives of children in Korea.

More Activity at ICSW - Save the Date!



Joint World Conference on Social Work Education and Social Development 2024 will be hosted in **Panama City, Panama**, from **April 4 to 7**. The SWSD2024 will be jointly hosted by International Association of Schools of Social Work, International Federation of Social Workers and International Council on Social Welfare.

SWSD 2024 will be a **hybrid conference** with both online sessions and face-to-face sessions in Panama. If you wish to register for either online pass or in-person pass, please visit the below link for register online.

[Registration – SWSD 2024 – Panama](#)

The Early-Bird price for registration will be valid until December 31st, 2023.

The theme of SWSD 2024 is "**Respecting Diversity through Joint Social Action.**" And there are 17 sub-themes you can participate in for your presentation. The types of presentation can be 'oral paper presentation,' 'symposium(in-person only),' 'workshop(in-person only),' 'poster presentation' and 'creative performing arts.'

17 sub-themes are as follows:

- 1) Democracy, Human Rights, Peace-building and Eco-social Justice
- 2) Ethics in Social Work and Social Development
- 3) Social Movements, Social Activism and Advocacy
- 4) Poverty and social inequalities
- 5) Inclusive social policies and legislation
- 6) Climate Change, Social Work and Social Development
- 7) Postcolonial/Decolonial/Indigenous/Emancipatory approaches
- 8) Ethno-cultural, religious and national diversities
- 9) Gender and Diversity
- 10) Diversity and Psychosocial Responses in Disaster Situations
- 11) Post Pandemic Social Work and Social Development
- 12) Digital Technology/Artificial Intelligence in Social Work and Social Development
- 13) Social Media: Constraints and Opportunities to Diversities
- 14) Social Work, Social Policy and the Sustainable Development Goals
- 15) Innovation, Social Entrepreneurship and People's Economy
- 16) Social Service Workers' Working Conditions
- 17) Social Work/Social Development in Designated Fields

If you are interested in participating in presentation, please visit [Summary Guide – SWSD 2024 – Panama](#) and download 'Abstracts Presentation Guidelines' to check important information for abstract submission.

The **deadline for abstract submission** is **August 31st, 2023**. Please make sure to submit your abstract on time!

For any inquiries about the conference, you may contact the conference secretariat at info@swsd2024.org.pa

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Contributions to the newsletter are welcome!