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MEDIA STATEMENT

IDEAS and UNICEF: Refugee and asylum-seeking children's rights to education and healthcare must be protected now

Kuala Lumpur, 29 September 2022 - The Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS) Malaysia and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Malaysia, supported by the European Union, launched the report titled "Left Far Behind: The Impact of COVID-19 on Access to Education and Healthcare for Refugee and Asylum-seeking Children in Peninsular Malaysia." This report assesses the impacts of COVID-19 on refugee and asylum-seeking children's access to education and healthcare in Malaysia and identifies evidence-based solutions to address them, based on quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with teachers, parents, adolescents, and healthcare workers from various states across Peninsular Malaysia.

More than 25% of refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR in Malaysia are children below the age of 18. This means that some 47,200 children have limited or no access to formal education, healthcare and other essential services due to their lack of legal status, making them one of the most vulnerable groups to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The right to education and healthcare are two of the most fundamental rights of a child under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child," said Ms. Saskia Blume, Chief of Child Protection, UNICEF Malaysia. "While Malaysia begins to recover from the pandemic, the situation of refugee and asylum-seeking children has only deteriorated. The impacts of COVID-19, if not addressed urgently, are likely to continue bringing long-term harm to their lives."

"Now more than ever, a child's status should not be a barrier to accessing essential services. All children deserve opportunities to learn and grow," said Ms. Virpi Kukkasniemi-Leino, Counsellor, Delegation of the European Union to Malaysia. "The European Union is proud to support this important and timely publication as part of our cross-regional *Protecting children affected by migration in Southeast, South and Central Asia*, co-funded by the European Union and UNICEF."

Even before the pandemic, refugee and asylum-seeking children had no access to formal education, leaving them with access only to informal education through alternative learning centres (ALCs), which itself comes with various challenges. According to UNHCR, only 44% of refugee children in Malaysia are enrolled in primary education, and 16% of refugee youth are enrolled in secondary education.

This report highlighted that many pre-existing barriers to education faced by refugee and asylum-seeking children had worsened during the pandemic. These barriers include poverty, lack of awareness of the importance of education, geographical barriers, and limited financial resources faced by ALCs. Refugees and asylum-seekers do not have the legal right to work and poverty was identified as the most significant barrier, reflecting the loss of livelihood opportunities during COVID-19. The lack of legal protection and rise of xenophobia experienced by the refugee community also further impacted access to education during the pandemic. The lack of legal documentation, financial needs and certification issues also limited opportunities for academic progression to higher education.

Refugees and asylum-seekers also faced significant barriers in accessing affordable healthcare prior to the pandemic. While refugees and asylum-seekers have access to NGO health facilities for primary healthcare, their complex social and healthcare needs as well as the lack of legal framework on asylum issues pose barriers to accessing affordable secondary healthcare and emergency care.

This report highlighted that poor hygiene conditions, low parental health literacy, malnutrition, and delayed presentation to healthcare services were the main causes of morbidity that have significantly worsened during the pandemic. Health needs related to mental health, child protection, and sexual and gender-based violence also increased after the lifting of the Movement Control Order. The lack of an enabling environment and socio-cultural barriers such as lack of inclusive policies, rise in xenophobia, fear of arrest and detention, and lack of state support services for child protection all hindered access to health care during COVID-19. The loss of employment during the pandemic further exacerbated cost-related barriers in accessing healthcare.

While the study highlighted that many barriers to education and healthcare were exacerbated by the pandemic, it also noted new opportunities that emerged for refugee and asylum-seeking children to access education and healthcare services through online modalities, digital tools and new partnerships and engagement. The report lists concrete recommendations to address the identified barriers and leverage on new opportunities, drawn from refugees and asylum-seekers themselves, as well as teachers and healthcare workers that support them.

Dr Tricia Yeoh, Chief Executive Officer of IDEAS Malaysia stated, “As we move out of the COVID-19 pandemic, the fundamental human rights issues faced by refugees and asylum-seekers, such as accessing formal education and healthcare, remain critical and urgent. In order for long-term systemic change to occur, we need to start including refugee and asylum-seeking children in national policies that protect and uphold their rights to education and healthcare.”

IDEAS and UNICEF would like to thank the refugee community, specifically the children, parents, teachers as well as healthcare workers for sharing their stories, challenges and opinions in this research. IDEAS and UNICEF welcomes the support of various government, non-government and private stakeholders in taking forward the report’s recommendations and in future collaborative research.



The report as well as an audiobook of the key findings in Rohingya language can be found on the IDEAS [website](#).

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About IDEAS

The Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS) is a nonprofit research institute, dedicated to promoting solutions to public policy challenges, focussing on three overarching missions – advancing a competitive economy, ensuring trust in institutions and promoting an inclusive Malaysia. IDEAS is Malaysia's first independent think tank, free of personal interests and partisan influences. For more information, visit www.ideas.org.my.

About UNICEF

UNICEF works in some of the world's toughest places, to reach the world's most disadvantaged children. Across 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone. For more information about UNICEF and its work for children visit <https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/>. Follow UNICEF on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).

PROTECTING CHILDREN AFFECTED BY MIGRATION

IN SOUTHEAST, SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA



A project implemented by UNICEF
and co-funded by the European Union and UNICEF

Untuk siaran segera

KENYATAAN MEDIA

IDEAS dan UNICEF: Hak kanak-kanak pelarian dan pencari suaka mendapatkan pendidikan dan penjagaan kesihatan kini perlu dilindungi

Kuala Lumpur, 29 September 2022 - Institut Demokrasi dan Hal Ehwal Ekonomi (IDEAS) dan Tabung Kecemasan Kanak-kanak Antarabangsa Pertubuhan Bangsa-bangsa Bersatu (UNICEF), disokong oleh Kesatuan Eropah (EU), telah melancarkan satu laporan bertajuk "*Left Far Behind: The Impact of COVID-19 on Access to Education and Healthcare for Refugee and Asylum-seeking Children in Peninsular Malaysia.*" Laporan ini menilai kesan COVID-19 terhadap kanak-kanak pelarian dan pencari suaka mendapatkan pendidikan dan penjagaan kesihatan di Malaysia dan mengenal pasti penyelesaian berasaskan bukti dalam menangani masalah ini, berdasarkan kepada kajian-kajian kuantitatif serta temu bual kualitatif bersama guru, ibu bapa, remaja, dan pekerja penjagaan kesihatan daripada pelbagai negeri di Semenanjung Malaysia.

Lebih daripada 25% daripada pelarian dan pencari suaka yang berdaftar dengan Suruhanjaya Tinggi Bangsa-Bangsa Bersatu mengenai Pelarian (UNCHR) di Malaysia adalah kanak-kanak di bawah usia 18 tahun. Hal ini bermakna terdapat 47,200 orang kanak-kanak mempunyai capaian terhad atau tiada capaian langsung kepada pendidikan formal, penjagaan kesihatan dan perkhidmatan penting lain disebabkan tiada status sah, menjadikan mereka salah satu daripada golongan paling terjejas kepada kesan pandemik COVID-19.

"Hak mendapat pendidikan dan penjagaan kesihatan adalah antara dua hak asasi kanak-kanak di bawah Konvensyen Pertubuhan Bangsa-bangsa Bersatu mengenai Hak Kanak-kanak," kata Saskia Blume, Ketua Perlindungan Kanak-kanak, UNICEF Malaysia. "Ketika Malaysia mula pulih daripada pandemik, situasi kanak-kanak pelarian dan pencari suaka menjadi semakin teruk. Jika tidak ditangani segera, kesan COVID-19 berkemungkinan akan berterusan membawa kemudaratan jangka panjang kepada kehidupan mereka."

Malah sebelum pandemik melanda, kanak-kanak pelarian dan pencari suaka tiada capaian untuk mendapatkan pendidikan formal, hanya mempunyai capaian mendapatkan pendidikan tidak formal melalui pusat pembelajaran alternatif (ALC) yang turut menghadapi pelbagai cabaran. Menurut UNCHR, hanya 44% kanak-kanak pelarian di Malaysia yang memasuki sekolah rendah, dan 16% pelarian remaja yang memasuki sekolah menengah.

Laporan ini menggariskan banyak halangan sedia ada kepada pendidikan yang dihadapi oleh kanak-kanak pelarian dan pencari suaka menjadi semakin teruk ketika pandemik. Halangan-halangan ini termasuk kemiskinan, kurang kesedaran akan kepentingan pendidikan, halangan geografi, dan sumber kewangan terhad yang dihadapi oleh pusat-pusat pembelajaran alternatif. Para pelarian dan pencari suaka tidak mempunyai hak secara undang-undang untuk bekerja dan kemiskinan telah dikenal pasti sebagai halangan paling utama, mencerminkan kehilangan peluang mata pencarian sewaktu COVID-19. Kekurangan perlindungan undang-undang serta peningkatan xenofobia yang dialami oleh komuniti pelarian juga seterusnya telah memberi kesan terhadap capaian kepada pendidikan ketika pandemik. Kekurangan dokumentasi undang-undang, keperluan kewangan dan permasalahan sijil turut mengehadkan peluang kemajuan akademik ke tahap pendidikan tinggi.

Para pelarian dan pencari suaka juga menghadapi halangan yang ketara untuk mendapatkan penjagaan kesihatan yang berpatutan sebelum pandemik melanda. Walaupun pelarian dan pencari suaka mempunyai capaian kepada prasarana kesihatan badan bukan kerajaan (NGO) untuk penjagaan kesihatan prima, keperluan sosial dan penjagaan kesihatan mereka yang kompleks dan juga ketiadaan kerangka kerja perundangan mengenai masalah suaka menimbulkan halangan kepada capaian mendapatkan penjagaan kesihatan menengah dan rawatan kecemasan yang berpatutan.

Laporan ini mengetengahkan bahawa keadaan kebersihan yang teruk, kadar celik kesihatan yang rendah dalam kalangan ibu bapa, pemakanan tidak seimbang, dan lambat mendapatkan perkhidmatan penjagaan kesihatan adalah antara sebab utama morbiditi yang menjadi semakin teruk ketika pandemik. Keperluan kesihatan berkaitan kesihatan mental, perlindungan kanak-kanak, serta keganasan seksual dan keganasan berdasarkan jantina juga telah meningkat setelah tamat Perintah Kawalan Pergerakan (PKP). Kekurangan persekitaran yang membolehkan dan halangan sosiobudaya seperti kekurangan dasar yang terangkum, peningkatan xenofobia, rasa takut ditangkap dan ditahan, dan kurang perkhidmatan sokongan negara untuk perlindungan kanak-kanak telah menghalang capaian kepada penjagaan kesihatan semasa COVID-19. Kehilangan pekerjaan sewaktu pandemik juga memburukkan lagi halangan berkaitan kos dalam mendapatkan penjagaan kesihatan.

Walaupun kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa banyak halangan kepada pendidikan dan penjagaan kesihatan menjadi bertambah buruk disebabkan pandemik, terdapat juga peluang baharu yang muncul untuk kanak-kanak pelarian dan pencari suaka untuk mendapatkan pendidikan dan perkhidmatan penjagaan kesihatan melalui modus dalam talian, alatan digital dan perkongsian serta penglibatan baharu. Laporan ini menyenaraikan cadangan yang konkrit untuk menangani halangan yang telah dikenal pasti dan memanfaatkan peluang baharu, diambil daripada pelarian dan pencari suaka sendiri, serta guru dan pekerja penjagaan kesihatan yang menyokong mereka.

Dr Tricia Yeoh, Ketua Pegawai Eksekutif IDEAS Malaysia berkata, “Ketika kita keluar daripada pandemik COVID-19, isu hak asasi manusia asas yang dihadapi oleh pelarian dan pencari suaka, seperti mendapatkan pendidikan formal dan penjagaan kesihatan, kekal kritikal dan mendesak. Untuk membolehkan perubahan sistemik jangka panjang berlaku, kita perlu mula memasukkan kanak-kanak pelarian dan pencari suaka dalam dasar-dasar negara yang melindungi dan menegakkan hak mereka mendapatkan pendidikan dan penjagaan kesihatan.”

IDEAS dan UNICEF ingin mengucapkan terima kasih kepada komuniti pelarian, terutamanya kanak-kanak, ibu bapa, para guru serta pekerja penjagaan kesihatan kerana telah berkongsi cerita, cabaran dan pandangan mereka dalam kajian ini. IDEAS dan UNICEF mengalu-alukan sokongan pelbagai pihak pemegang taruh kerajaan, bukan kerajaan dan swasta dalam memajukan cadangan laporan ini dan dalam kerjasama kajian pada masa hadapan.

Laporan ini dan juga buku audio tentang dapatan utama kajian dalam bahasa Rohingya boleh didapati di [laman sesawang](#) IDEAS.

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Tentang IDEAS

Institut Demokrasi dan Hal Ehwal Ekonomi (IDEAS) merupakan sebuah institut penyelidikan bukan berasaskan keuntungan, mengkhususkan kepada mempromosikan penyelesaian terhadap cabaran dasar awam, menumpukan kepada tiga misi menyeluruh - memajukan sebuah ekonomi yang berdaya saing, memastikan keyakinan dalam institusi, dan mempromosikan sebuah negara Malaysia yang merangkumi semua. IDEAS merupakan badan pemikir bebas pertama Malaysia, tanpa kepentingan peribadi serta pengaruh berpihak. Untuk maklumat lanjut, lawati www.ideas.org.my.

Tentang UNICEF

UNICEF bekerja di beberapa tempat paling sukar di dunia, untuk mencapai kanak-kanak paling kurang bernasib baik di dunia. Di 190 buah negara dan wilayah, kami berusaha untuk setiap kanak-kanak, di mana-mana sahaja, untuk membina dunia yang lebih baik untuk semua orang. Untuk maklumat lanjut tentang UNICEF dan kerja kami untuk kanak-kanak, layari <https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/>. Ikuti UNICEF di [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) dan [Facebook](#).

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