

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Republic of Korea Fifth Periodic Review

Thematic Report on List of Issues

Children behind Closed Doors

A Report on Child Abuse

June 26, 2025



Save the Children

About Save the Children

Save the Children, the world's first child rights organization, leads the transformation of children's lives and futures based on more than 100 years of expertise.

Vision We envision a world where every child thoroughly enjoys their rights to survival, protection, development, and participation.

Mission We seek to bring about breakthrough changes in how the world treats children and to achieve immediate and lasting changes in children's lives.

Core Values Accountability, Ambition, Collaboration, Creativity, Integrity

Save the Children Korea, along with 30 member countries, operates programs in approximately 120 regions worldwide to help children dream of a better future with a variety of initiatives in child rights, education, humanitarian assistance, health and nutrition, and other areas.

Domestic Programs

Support for abused children, foster care support, creating child-safe institutions, support for children from low-income families, child meal support, refugee child support, healthcare support, children's participation committees, climate crisis response for community child centers, play environment assessment, child-friendly playground improvement, play for children with disabilities, humanitarian assistance, and others.

International Programs

Early childhood education, maternal and child health, infectious disease response, basic healthcare, child marriage prevention/elimination, strengthening family economic resilience, youth self-reliance capacity building, child protection in conflict situations, refugee and displaced person support, climate crisis response, earthquake disaster response, climate change mitigation projects, and others.

Rights Advocacy

Rights education for children with developmental disabilities and slow learners, child rights education, child participation guidelines, participation of children with disabilities, climate crisis and child rights education, child abuse prevention programs, universal birth registration, UN human rights system-based advocacy, research on children's quality of life, and others.

Civil Society Comments on the State Report

Key Point

1. Although the Korean government has expanded mandatory reporters of child abuse by the 4th CESCRC recommendations, the reporting rate by mandatory reporters is decreasing. The ultimate goal of increasing the proportion of abused children who are identified and protected is still far from being achieved. This highlights the need for proactive detection and early intervention strategies beyond the current reporting-based system.

Violations

2. SDGs 16.2¹, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Article 10, Republic of Korea 4th CESCRC Concluding Observations 49(a)(2017)², Republic of Korea 5th-6th CRC Concluding Observations 27(b)(2019)³, Romania 4th CRC Concluding Observations 65(2009)⁴, Honduras 6th-7th CRC Concluding Observations 23(b)(2025)⁵

Evidence

3. The government stated in paragraph 75 of its State Party report that it has steadily expanded the categories of mandatory reporters and that reports from these professionals are increasing. However, this is misleading, as it reflects only part of the data. In reality, the proportion of child abuse reports made by mandatory reporters has declined—from 44.9% in 2021 to 36.3% in 2022, and further to 27.4% in 2023, returning to levels similar to those in 2018⁶. Reports from school staff have also dropped to 11.6% in 2023, a 2.7%p decrease from the previous year. Reports from medical professionals have remained extremely low, decreasing slightly from 1.1% in 2021 to 1.0% in 2023⁷.

4. The “victimization rate” has also continued to decrease from 5‰ in 2021 to 3.9‰ in 2022 and 3.64‰ in 2023, failing to meet even the government’s targets⁸.

5. According to an OECD report, approximately 4-16% of children in high-income countries experience physical abuse annually, and about 10% suffer emotional abuse or neglect⁹. This means that at least one in ten children is exposed to the risk of abuse. However, the Republic of Korea’s official victimization rate of abused children in 2023 was only 3.64‰, representing merely 1/25th to 1/30th of the actual incidence rate. This demonstrates that the majority of abuse cases are being concealed or left in blind spots.

Suggested Questions

- Measures taken to prevent abuse and identify abused children fail to reach those left in the blind spots of the system
- Plans to develop policies for proactive child abuse prevention through universal early childhood home visit services and other measures

Key Point

6. Following the fourth CESC recommendations, the Korean government introduced an “Immediate Separation System” in 2021 to promptly remove children from suspected abusers. However, the system still requires improvements, such as setting a clear maximum duration for separation. More importantly, since most children subject to immediate separation are placed in institutional care, comprehensive protective measures must also be developed to safeguard their well-being.

Violations

7. SDGs 16.2, SDGs 16.3¹⁰, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Article 10, Republic of Korea 4th CESC Concluding Observations 49(b),(c) (2017)¹¹, Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 9, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Article 19, Republic of Korea 2nd-3rd CRPD Concluding Observations 42(b)¹²

Evidence

8. The government explained measures for the separation of abused children in paragraphs 77-78 of the state report. Over the past four years, an average of 12% of abused children became subjects of separation¹³. However, Korea’s immediate separation system was introduced as an administrative discretionary measure that replaced the existing judicial decision system, which required various institutional improvements. In particular, rigid criteria such as “separation after two reports per year” and the absence of limit on the maximum duration of separation violate the child’s fundamental rights¹⁴.

9. Most importantly, the majority of children removed from their homes due to abuse are placed in institutions. In 2023, 82% of children subject to emergency removal were placed in institutional care. The proportion of children placed in foster care — which provides family-like environments — declined further from 1.7% in 2022 to 1.5% in 2023¹⁵.

Suggested Questions

- Plans to improve the current immediate separation system to avoid violations of children’s fundamental rights
- Plans to expand foster care protection for abused children and to expand legal, policy, material infrastructure, and budget to protect abused children, including those subject to separation measures

Newly Raised Issues

Key Point

10. The Republic of Korea's child protection system relies heavily on a reporting-based approach, which inherently limits its ability to detect and prevent abuse in high-risk families at an early stage. Even the government's child abuse prevention and early support pilot program, launched in 2024, is limited to families that have already been reported for suspected abuse. As a result, early intervention remains insufficient for families with infants, toddlers, or children with disabilities who may be at risk. This highlights the urgent need for proactive and universal approaches, such as "Early Childhood Home Visiting Services" that reach all families immediately after a child's birth.

Violations

11. SDGs 16.2, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Articles 10 and 12, Republic of Korea 5th-6th CRC Concluding Observations 27(b)(2019)¹⁶, Romania 4th CRC Concluding Observations 65(2009)¹⁷, Honduras 6th-7th CRC Concluding Observations 23(b)(2025)¹⁸

Evidence and Background

12. In child abuse cases, 85.9% of perpetrators are parents as of 2023, and among all child abuse cases, approximately 20% involve children under six years old, with caregiver abuse rates exceeding 96-97%.¹⁹ The main characteristics of parents who commit child abuse include a lack of parenting attitudes and methods, social and economic stress, and isolation.²⁰

13. Younger children are more vulnerable to abuse and have fewer opportunities to be seen by others outside the home. To address this, universal early childhood home visiting services should be implemented. These services can reduce parental stress through coaching and access to social services, raise awareness of child abuse risk, assess home safety, and connect families with the support they need during the critical early years of a child's life.

14. The Korean government operates the "Early Life Health Management Program," which provides home visits to newborn families. However, only 30% of the 226 municipal governments participate, and the program is limited to families who apply²¹. Due to the lack of a legal foundation, nationwide implementation is not possible, and service quality varies widely depending on local government capacity. Other visiting programs like the "e-Child Happiness Support System" and "Dream Start" also target only low-income or vulnerable families. Given that these families often lack information and may avoid stigmatized services, universal home visiting for all newborn families is essential.

Suggested Questions

- Legal and policy measures taken to prevent abuse by parents during early childhood
- Plans to develop child abuse prevention policies focused on early family-based interventions, including universal home visiting services, and to ensure adequate staffing and funding

Key Point

15. Although government statistics report a steady number of child deaths from domestic abuse each year, expert studies estimate the actual toll to be two to four times higher. A “Child Death Review (CDR)” system is urgently needed to identify underlying risk factors and prevent further tragedies.

Violations

16. SDGs 16.2, SDGs 3.2²², International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Article 10, Finland 5th-6th CRC Concluding Observations 18(2023)²³, Sweden 6th-7th Concluding Observations 19(2023)²⁴

Evidence and Background

17. Approximately 40 children died from child abuse annually from 2018 to 2023²⁵. However, research analyzing forensic autopsy data from 341 children who underwent autopsies in 2016 estimated the number of deaths from child abuse to be between a minimum of 84 and a maximum of 148²⁶. This represents up to four times the 36 child abuse deaths reported in the same year. This highlights the need for a comprehensive review of all child deaths, not only those formally identified as child abuse.

19. The National Human Rights Commission recommended that the Minister of Health and Welfare establish an institutional framework to review all unnatural child deaths. It emphasized the importance of analyzing not only suspected child abuse deaths, but also sudden infant deaths, accidents, homicides, suicides, and preventable natural deaths to detect overlooked abuse. In response, the Ministry announced review plans in 2023, but is currently limiting the scope to confirmed child abuse cases²⁷.

Suggested Questions

- Plans to introduce a child death review system that conducts fundamental investigations into all children's causes of death, in line with the National Human Rights Commission's recommendations

Key Point

20. In Korea, cases of filicide-suicide—where parents kill their children and then take their own lives, often due to economic hardship, caregiving burdens, or other factors—occur repeatedly each year. To prevent such tragedies, it is essential to strengthen the social safety net, raise public awareness, and establish comprehensive support systems for at-risk families and surviving children.

Violations

21. SDGs 3.2, SDGs 16.2, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Articles 9, 10, and 11

Evidence and Background

22. According to the Ministry of Health and Welfare, at least 62 children have died in filicide-suicide cases over the past five years. However, when perpetrators die after killing or attempting to kill their children, the cases are excluded from official police statistics as they are classified as 'not subject to prosecution.' A Save the Children analysis of 102 court rulings from 2014 to 2023 identified 147 child deaths in filicide-suicide cases over the past decade. Among them, 73% were aged 9 or younger, and 76% occurred at home. The actual number is likely higher, as cases involving deceased perpetrators are often omitted from crime data.

23. Until recently, Korea referred to parental filicide-suicide incidents as 'accompanied suicide,' reflecting a distorted perception that a child's life is an extension of the parent's. These incidents have often been framed as private family tragedies rather than as failures of the social safety net, leading to a lack of meaningful policy debate on prevention. Support measures for children and families who survive such attempts are also scarce. Despite the need for comprehensive support addressing economic hardship, psychological trauma, and caregiving burdens from the child's perspective, the government has yet to introduce any institutional response—largely due to the absence of public recognition that this is a problem requiring state intervention.

24. Filicide-suicide incidents increased in 2022 due to the COVID-19 aftermath. The National Human Rights Commission recommended that social service provision criteria for at-risk families should be based on child abuse occurrence factors rather than income to prevent filicide-suicide incidents, but there has been no government action.

Suggested Questions

- Government efforts to define and respond to filicide-suicide as a criminal form of child abuse
- Plans to expand child abuse statistics to include filicide-suicide cases excluded from prosecution
- Plans for preventing filicide-suicide
- Plans for supporting surviving children and families

Key Point

25. In Korea, fragmented response systems for child abuse and for abuse of persons with disabilities have left children with disabilities who are abused without adequate protection. Strengthening interagency coordination is essential to ensure their safety and support.

Violations

26. SDGs 16.2, SDGs 16.3, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Article 10, Republic of Korea 2nd-3rd CRPD Concluding Observations 36(b)(2022)²⁸, Republic of Korea 5th-6th CRC Concluding Observations 27(g)(2019)²⁹

Evidence and Background

27. Children with disabilities who experience abuse face heightened vulnerability due to intersecting discrimination as both children and persons with disabilities. Insufficient social support for caregivers often leads to isolation and stress, increasing the risk of violence against these children. Studies indicate that children with disabilities are up to 4.4 times more likely to experience abuse relative to their proportion in the child population, and seven times more likely than adults with disabilities³⁰. However, in the Republic of Korea, fragmented response systems for child protection and for addressing abuse of persons with disabilities have resulted in inadequate protection for this group.

28. First, the Ministry of Health and Welfare's statistics on abused children with disabilities are incomplete and unreliable. This is largely due to the fragmented responsibilities within the Ministry, where separate departments are tasked with child protection and with responding to abuse of persons with disabilities. As a result, data sharing between these departments is insufficient. Since 2018, the Ministry has excluded data on children with disabilities from its official child abuse statistics, without providing a clear explanation.

30. Infrastructure for children with disabilities who are subject to separation measures is severely lacking. Shelters for abused children often deny admission on the basis of disability, and specialized shelters for abused children with disabilities currently exist in only five regions, including Seoul. Some of these facilities face operational difficulties due to local government budget constraints, making it difficult to expand infrastructure³¹. Nevertheless, the national budget for establishing such shelters saw no increase in 2024.

31. As a result, abused children with disabilities who have no placement options after separation are sometimes housed in residential institutions for adults with disabilities. In such cases, the Special Act on the Punishment of Child Abuse Crimes is not applied, making it difficult to monitor their safety or provide services tailored to their needs. In practice, they are often excluded from child-centered victim support such as family function reinforcement and psychological treatment services, which are available to children without disabilities.

Suggested Questions

- The number of abused children with disabilities currently placed in residential facilities for persons with disabilities, and the status of related support services
- Measures to improve coordination between child protection and disability abuse response systems, including revisions to guidelines and integrated statistical management
- Plans to protect abused children with disabilities, including the expansion of accessible, family-based care options, specialized shelters, and dedicated support personnel

¹ Protect children from abuse, exploitation trafficking and violence

² E/C.12/KOR/CO/4

49.(a) Ensure that professionals who are in contact with children are designated as mandatory reporters and consider introducing a duty to report for any individual who suspects child abuse;

³ CRC/C/KOR/CO/5-6

27.(b) Formulate a comprehensive strategy and an action plan for **preventing**, combating and monitoring **all forms of violence and abuse against children**, including online violence;

⁴ CRC/C/ROM/CO/4

65. The Committee further recommends that the State party increase efforts to improve the health of infants and young children, particularly through paying more attention to pre-natal and postnatal care, increasing the number of baby-friendly hospitals and specially trained social workers in hospitals, setting up of **a home visitation service aiming to prevent abandonment, neglect and abuse**, as well as the promotion and awareness raising on the benefits of breastfeeding and the adoption of the International Code for Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes.

⁵ CRC/C/HND/CO/6-7

23.(b) To adopt **preventive measures at the family and community levels for the early detection of cases of violence, abuse, neglect, sexual abuse and exploitation**;

⁶

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Child abuse reports	33,532	38,380	38,929	52,083	44,531	45,771
Mandatory reporters	9,151 (27.2)	8,836 (23.0)	10,973 (28.2)	23,372 (44.9)	16,149 (36.3)	12,533 (27.4)
Non-mandatory reporters	24,381 (72.7)	29,544 (76.9)	27,956 (71.8)	28,711 (55.1)	28,382 (63.7)	33,218 (72.6)

<Table 01 – Number of child abuse reports and reports from mandatory/non-mandatory reporter, Ministry of Health and Welfare “Child Abuse & Neglect Korea” > (cases (%))

⁷ Ministry of Health and Welfare. (2022, 2023). “Child Abuse & Neglect Korea” 2022, 2023

⁸

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Victimization rate of abused children (Government target)	4.0 (N/A)	5.0 (N/A)	3.9 (4.3)	3.64 (3.8)

<Table 02 – Victimization rate of abused children, Ministry of Health and Welfare “Child Abuse & Neglect Korea”> (‰)

⁹ [OECD \(2019\). Changing the Odds for Vulnerable Children](#)

¹⁰ Promote the rule of law and ensure equal access to justice

¹¹ E/C.12/LOR/CO/4

49.(b) Ensure that legal provisions and infrastructure are in place to ensure that children victims of abuse are separated from abusers;

(c) Promote family-type alternative care for children who are victims of abuse.

¹² CRPD/C/KOR/CO/2-3

42.(b) Strengthen the implementation of the deinstitutionalization strategy for the process of deinstitutionalization of those adults and children with disabilities who are still in a residential setting and increase the availability of community-based services aimed at enabling persons to live independently and participate in the community.

¹³

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Protection in original family	25,916 (83.9)	31,804 (84.6)	25,028 (89.5)	23,214 (90.2)
Family reunification	798 (2.6)	-	-	-
Separation from family	3,926 (12.7)	5,437 (14.5)	2,787 (10.0)	2,393 (9.3)

Death	90 (0.3)	44 (0.1)	52 (0.2)	44 (0.2)
Other	175 (0.6)	320 (0.9)	104 (0.4)	132 (0.5)
Total	30,905 (100)	37,605 (100)	27,971 (100)	25,783 (100)

<Table 03 – Number(Proportion) of abused children under protection measure, Ministry of Health and Welfare
“Child Abuse & Neglect Korea”> (cases (%))

¹⁴ [Need for reconsideration of “immediate separation of victim children” in child abuse cases](#)

	2021	2022	2023
Kinship care	1,332 (24.5)	344 (12.3)	371 (15.5)
Foster care	70 (1.3)	47 (1.7)	35 (1.5)
Institutional placement	3,960 (72.8)	2,361 (84.7)	1,962 (82.0)
Medical institution or nursing home placement	73 (1.3)	35 (1.3)	25 (1.0)
Other	2 (0.0)	-	-
Total	5,437 (100)	2,787 (100)	2,393 (100)

<Table 04 – Number(Proportion) of abused children under separation measure, Ministry of Health and Welfare
“Child Abuse & Neglect Korea”> (cases (%))

¹⁶ CRC/C/KOR/CO/5-6

27. (b) Formulate a comprehensive strategy and an action plan for **preventing**, combating and monitoring **all forms of violence and abuse against children**, including online violence;

¹⁷ CRC/C/ROM/CO/4

65. The Committee further recommends that the State party increase efforts to improve the health of infants and young children, particularly through paying more attention to pre-natal and postnatal care, increasing the number of baby-friendly hospitals and specially trained social workers in hospitals, setting up of **a home visitation service aiming to prevent abandonment, neglect and abuse**, as well as the promotion and awareness raising on the benefits of breastfeeding and the adoption of the International Code for Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes.

¹⁸ CRC/C/HND/CO/6-7

23. (b) To adopt **preventive measures at the family and community levels for the early detection of cases of violence, abuse, neglect, sexual abuse and exploitation**;

	Proportion of child abuse victims under 6 years old	Proportion of caregiver abuse
2021	20	97.4
2022	17.3	96.7
2023	18	96.1

<Table 05 - Proportion of abused children under 6 years old and caregiver abuse, National Assembly Health and Welfare Committee report> (%)

²⁰ Ministry of Health and Welfare, “Child Abuse & Neglect Korea,” 2017, 2025.06.16, Characteristics of perpetrators

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of cities/counties operating the “Early Life Health Management Program”	21 (9.3)	29 (12.8)	39 (17.3)	68 (30.0)
Number of subjects checked for “abuse and violence” in parents’ psychosocial status	-	-	921	425

<Table 06 – Number of cities/counties operating Early Life Health Management Program and utilization rate, Ministry of Health and Welfare> (cases (%))

²² Reduce avoidable death in newborns and children under the age of five

²³ CRC/C/FIN/CO/5-6

18. The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen its efforts to prevent suicide among children, including children with disabilities, children who do not identify with the gender assigned to them at birth, transgender children

and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and **set up inter-agency child death review teams with the aim of strengthening preventive measures**. The Committee also recommends that the State party continue to act with a sense of urgency to repatriate all children of Finnish nationals in armed conflict areas.

²⁴ CRC/C/SWE/CO/6-7

19. The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen its efforts to prevent suicide among children, including children with disabilities, children who do not identify with the gender assigned to them at birth, transgender children and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and **set up inter-agency child death review teams with the aim of strengthening preventive measures**.

²⁵

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Child abuse death cases	43	40	50	44

<Table 07 – Number of child abuse death cases, Ministry of Health and Welfare “Status of Protection for Abused Children”> (cases)

²⁶ Kim Hee-song et al. (2016). Current status and types of child abuse deaths based on forensic autopsy data. Criminal Policy Research

²⁷ [Ministry of Health and Welfare \(April 2023\). Yoon Suk-yeol Administration’s Child Policy Implementation Plan to Guarantee Fair Development, Growth, and Opportunities for All Children](#)

²⁸ CRPD/C/KOR/CO/2-3

36.(b) Develop and implement a plan of action to eliminate all forms of violence and abuse against children with disabilities within and outside of institutions and collect disaggregated data in order to ensure effective implementation and monitoring;

²⁹ CRC/C/KOR/CO/5-6

27.(g) Ensure the development of programmes and policies for the prevention, recovery and social reintegration of child victims of abuse, including by further increasing the number of local child protection agencies and shelters, counsellors, clinical psychologists and lawyers dealing with child abuse cases, by providing free legal representatives for child victims and by ensuring that migrant children and children with disabilities have access to shelters;

³⁰ Won Hye-wook et al. (2022). Research on the child abuse response system for children with disabilities. Save the Children and Inha University Industry-Academic Cooperation Foundation

³¹ [Busan shelter for abused children with disabilities faces operational difficulties...”Budget support needs to increase” | Yonhap News](#)