Pesticide pollution and children’s rights

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Why are children more vulnerable and impacted by pesticides exposure?

- **Developmental vulnerability:** children’s organs and nervous systems are still in development, both during the prenatal and after-birth stages.

- **Exceeding intake:** They may be exposed to more pesticides, with higher intake than adults, as they for instance **breath more often per minute**. Children consume more food and water relative to their weight, absorb toxics more readily, and are less able to excrete them afterwards.

- **Behavioral habits:** Children play on the ground, in watercourses, exploring the world through touch and taste. **Children are also less able to evaluate risks.**

- **Sensitive areas:** several testing campaigns and scientific studies indicate the **recurrent presence of pesticides in public areas**, such as playgrounds and public parks.
International recognition of the impacts of pesticides on children and foetus

➢ Joint report 2017 on pesticides: Special Rapporteur on the right to food and SR on toxics and human rights (A/HRC/34/48)

- “Children are most vulnerable to pesticide contamination”: higher dose per unit of body weight
- “Exposure to even low levels of pesticides, for example through wind drift or residues on food, may be very damaging to children’s health”
- “Pregnant women who are exposed to pesticides are at higher risk of miscarriage, pre-term delivery and birth defect”

➢ 2016 Report of the Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights on the theme of children’s rights (A/HRC/33/41)

- Exposure starts before birth through the mother’s own exposure: “pre-polluted” children
- “silent pandemic”
- Impacts can be irreversible and can even be passed down from one generation to the next
Children’s rights affected by exposure to pesticides

➢ UN Convention on the rights of the child

- Rights to life, to “the highest attainable standard of health” and to develop as persons “to the maximum extent possible”, right to education, to recreation and play, right to information

- Right to physical integrity: “non-consensual physical or mental intrusion against the body constitutes a human rights violation”

- Children’s right to be heard: States should “prevent childhood exposure, in recognition of the right of present and future generations to be heard”

- Obligation of States to prioritize the best interests of the child when designing environmental and public health norms, and ensure access to information and effective remedies.
Children’s rights affected by exposure to pesticides


- States must **prevent childhood toxic exposure** to protect children’s rights to life, survival, development, health and bodily integrity.

➢ 2020 Human Rights Council Resolution on “the realisation of the rights of the child through a healthy environment” (A/HRC/45/30)

- Urges States to ensure the right of the child to the enjoyment of the **highest attainable standard of physical and mental health**, by inter alia: (...) Identifying and eliminating sources of exposure of children to (...) substances of high concern, such as **endocrine disrupting chemicals**.

➢ 2022 UN General Assembly Resolution on “The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment” (A/76/L.75)

- Calls on States and businesses to **scale up efforts to ensure a healthy environment for all**.
- Unsound management of chemicals **interferes with the enjoyment** of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.”
European children’s rights framework

➢ Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

- The Charter was introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon, it binds all EU Member states, with the same legal value as the EU Treaties.

- Article 24 guarantees and protects the rights and best interest of the child, including the right to protection and care, as well as to express views. In all actions relating to children, whether taken by public authorities or private institutions, the child's best interests must be a primary consideration.

- Article 2 guarantees the right to life, and Article 37 prescribes environmental protection.
European children’s rights framework

➢ EU Strategy on the rights of the child 2021-2024

- Rights based strategy: an instrument for mainstreaming a children’s rights perspective in all relevant policies, legislation and funding programmes.

- 2\textsuperscript{nd} thematic area of EU actions aims to fight poverty, promote inclusive and child-friendly societies, health and education systems. All children have a right to a good standard of living.

- EU aims to protect children’s right to be heard in EU policies, considering children as agents of change, the Commission wants to support them in contributing to changes. No policy regarding children should be designed without their voices.
More resources available at: https://home.crin.org/issues/toxics

Art exhibition available at: https://home.crin.org/projects/environment-and-toxics

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