

Right to Health for Migrant Children

Statement at the 22nd Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council (March 2013) - **Annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child (res. 19/37)** - submitted by Caritas Internationalis (International Confederation of Catholic Charities).

Caritas Internationalis wishes to raise urgent concern about obstacles encountered by migrant children, both those accompanied or unaccompanied by parents or guardians, especially those who find themselves in irregular situations.

Due to the global economic crisis, some countries are reducing expenditures for health services destined for their own citizens and for migrants. In some cases it has become very difficult for irregular migrants to access any medical assistance, especially when it is not for an emergency situation. In other cases, the migrants may be requested to pay the full cost for such services, even if they cannot afford to do so.

Caritas urges States to guarantee, as is assured in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, that the best interests of the child always will be accorded preference and will prevail, irrespective of the migration status of the child or of his or her parents. The lack of appropriate, accessible, and affordable healthcare, or significant limitations placed on such care, such as restricting it to emergency services only, can jeopardise the future of a child and his/her ability to become an independent adult and fully enjoy life.

Caritas Internationalis notes the exemplary policies and practices of some countries, where all minors – including in an irregular immigration status – are to be afforded access to paediatric care. In such countries, public health authorities are expected to assure that every migrant child will be entitled to receive the same health care, including paediatric services, that is provided to nationals.

It is important to note that parents and guardians of such migrant children also need appropriate health care so that they can care for their children in the best possible way. Parents or guardians accompanying children suffering from serious or otherwise disabling illnesses, whether physical or emotional, should be granted temporary residence permits to facilitate their continuing presence with the children and thus avoid the emotional stress of a sudden and shocking separation, which might have a serious impact on chances of the child's recovery. Moreover, exemplary policy and practice should grant parents the right to work during their accompaniment of sick children.

Caritas Internationalis encourages all States to consider and enact such policies and practices set in the best interests of migrant children and in respect for and promotion of their right to the highest attainable standard of health.