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FOCUS

PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE GROUPS DURING COVID-19

EDITOR'S NOTE

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While the COVID-19 pandemic has hit the world with a huge impact on the economic, social, and cultural life of almost everyone, it affects certain groups more than others. This *Focus* looks at the situations of three vulnerable groups in the pandemic: victims of domestic violence, persons with disabilities, and workers in the informal economy. There are six articles examining some specific issues concerning these groups and discussing how law should deal with them.

The first article focuses on the worsened situation of domestic violence during the pandemic and the Chinese experience in tackling it. It examines the causes of the increase; the types and features of domestic violence during COVID-19; and what makes it more difficult to combat domestic violence at this particular time. The article also presents good practices in some local areas of China, and it concludes with some recommendations for the future in tackling domestic violence during public health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

The second article examines how China has responded to the impact of COVID-19 on the access to information by persons with disabilities. It reviews social regulatory and redistributive policies in China that aim at fostering digital inclusion of persons with disabilities. It examines the emerging Chinese policies and how China has responded to the impact of the pandemic on digital inclusion in terms of redistribution, market regulation, the involvement of persons with disabilities and their organizations, and awareness-raising campaigns.

The third article also looks at the access to information by persons with disabilities, but focuses on the role of social actors. After the outbreak of COVID-19, there was an information gap due to a lack of legal norms on information accessibility and the lack of a widespread popular concept of such accessibility. Social forces in China responded quickly, however. Sign language videos have been widely circulated, and online

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accessible miniprograms have bridged the information gap during the pandemic. The article gives suggestions on how the government should further improve information accessibility from various aspects.

The fourth article looks at the situation of workers in the informal economy, who are affected by the pandemic much more than those in the formal economy. While the Chinese government acted quickly and took special measures to protect workers' rights after the outbreak of COVID-19, the informal-economy workers in general lacked legal protection and benefited less from the special measures. To tackle this issue, the State Council has issued an official document supporting flexible employment, which indicates the direction towards developing better legal protection for workers in the informal economy. The article suggests a comprehensive legal protection plan for such workers.

The fifth article discusses the substantive equal treatment of vulnerable groups during the pandemic from the perspectives of public service, social inclusion, accessible environment, gender equality, and right to health. It suggests that the government should employ intersectional methodology to highlight the rights logic of the socialist rule-of-law system and the key role of the leadership of the Communist Party of China in balancing individual and community rights, enhancing the governance capability for multiple social agents' participation, ensuring equal protection for disadvantaged groups, promoting inclusive and sustainable development, and realizing common prosperity for all people.

The last article sums up the extensive discussions on the application of the principle of proportionality to virus control measures at The 6th International Conference on Human Rights Protection under Pandemic Prevention and Control. Focusing on pandemic-related human rights conditions and rule-of-law challenges in global contexts, this article cogently summarizes participating scholars' opinions through the integrated lens of both human rights and health law jurisprudence in COVID-19 containment. The article divides the discussions into six topic areas: normative utility, governance logic, reasonable limits, constitutional criteria, viable approaches, and the post-pandemic challenges of the principle of proportionality.