“Give us the opportunity to change our story” – street-connected young people speak out

Report of the multi-country consultation event for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child’s forthcoming General Comment on children in street situations
Rio de Janeiro, 15-16 March 2016


Consultation organised by Consortium for Street Children (www.streetchildren.org) and Street Child United (www.streetchildunited.org) and sponsored by Baker & McKenzie and Merck Sharp & Dohme Corporation.
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Introduction

The forthcoming General Comment on children in street situations, drafted by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, is being developed through one of the most participatory processes to date. In February-April 2016, Consortium for Street Children, the Coordinator of the Advisory Group to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child’s Working Group on the General Comment, with partners, organised worldwide consultation events of street-connected children and adults who work with them, asking for information on specific issues which will be addressed in the General Comment.

Participants in consultation events were asked specific questions about how certain rights from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) applied to street-connected children:

- The right to freedom of assembly and association (article 15);
- The right to special protection and assistance for children deprived of a family environment (article 20);
- The right to an adequate standard of living (article 27);
- Developing rights-based, holistic, long-term strategies to prevent children developing strong street connections and to support children in street situations.

A multi-country consultation event for street-connected children was held in March 2016 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Co-organised by Consortium for Street Children and its member organisation Street Child United and sponsored by Baker & McKenzie and Merck Sharp & Dohme Corporation, the consultation event took place during the Street Child Games. The Street Child Games were organised by Street Child United ahead of the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro to provide a platform for street-connected children’s voices and to celebrate their right to play. Young people travelled from nine countries worldwide to compete in the Games and to participate in the Street Child Congress which focussed on street children’s rights.

As part of the event, a total of 37 current and former street-connected children took part in consultations on the General Comment over the course of four separate workshops – two with street-connected children from Rio de Janeiro, and two with young people who had travelled to attend the Street Child Games, the majority of whom were no longer street-connected. 26 boys and 11 girls with ages ranging from 11 to 22 years old were consulted. Young people participating in the consultation event came from Argentina, Brazil, Burundi, India, Mozambique, Pakistan, the Philippines and the United Kingdom. They were supported to attend by Street Child United partners Fundacion La Casita (Argentina), Associação Beneficente São Martinho (Brazil), O Pequeno Nazareno (Brazil), New Generation Burundi, Karunalaya Social Service Society (India), Meninos de Moçambique (Mozambique), Fairplay for All Foundation (Philippines), Azad Foundation (Pakistan) and Islington Independent Futures (UK).

This report summarises the children’s input and highlights the recommendations they made to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for inclusion in the General Comment.

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1 See the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child’s official call for submissions, available at [http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/ChildrenInStreetSituations.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/ChildrenInStreetSituations.aspx).
Background

The legal and policy context for street-connected children in Brazil

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was incorporated into Brazilian law in 1990. The Brazilian Constitution, the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (Federal Law # 8,069/90) and the Youth Statute (Law # 12.852/13) contain provisions applying to the rights of children and young people. According to this legal framework, Brazilian minors are protected by their human rights and must benefit from special protection from the Brazilian state and from their families. The Constitution and the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (SCA) in particular clearly recognise the children’s freedom of association and assembly and their right to an adequate standard of living.

In Brazilian law, the priority is given to keeping children with their families or reuniting them. Legally, other options should only be explored if reintegration is impossible. If reintegration is impossible, children deprived of a family environment can be put in institutions for a period of up to two years – with a possibility of this period being extended with permission from judicial authorities. The natural follow-up to the placement in institutions is, in Brazil, adoption.

The entities in charge of ensuring the respect of street-connected children and youth’s rights are the Guardianship Councils – municipal bodies tasked with following the child throughout its experience in the state system, the judicial authorities, and the institutions where children are accommodated. However, it is clear from the children’s comments below that these entities often fail to fulfil their mission and protect these children, sometimes becoming the abuser themselves.

Violations of street-connected children’s legally recognised rights are common, with law enforcement officers, judges, and others often refusing them the special protection that, as children, they are entitled to. In theory, an individual’s freedom of association and assembly can legitimately be restricted only if there is a risk of criminal activity. Unfortunately, this fact is quite often used by law enforcement acting on stereotypes as a pretext to conduct general street cleanses and to arrest street-connected children.

Although some legal provisions are in place in Brazil to protect and promote street-connected children’s rights, their implementation and enforcement clearly needs to be improved and monitoring mechanisms must be put in place.

The city of Rio de Janeiro was chosen for the Street Child Games event because it will host the next Olympic Games in summer 2016. As noted with concern by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in its 2015 examination of Brazil’s implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child\(^2\), the impact of the Olympics has been very negative for street-connected children in Rio de Janeiro, leading to increased violence from the police and others, children being forcibly removed from the streets and huge investments in infrastructure coupled with no investment in education and health, which might benefit the children. It is recommended that the government of Brazil take immediate measures to prevent the negative effect of the forthcoming Olympic Games on street-connected children in the city, and to provide redress for the harms already caused.

Background information provided by Baker & McKenzie along with Trench, Rossi e Watanabe Advogados, a Brazilian law firm with a cooperation agreement with Baker & McKenzie.

\(^2\) CRC/C/BRA/CO/2-4
Children’s voices

1. The right to freedom of association and assembly (CRC article 15)

Questions from the UN Committee:

Your right to choose your friends and to be on the streets with them:

- Is this right respected or is it difficult for you to be on the streets with your friends? If it is difficult, why?
- What do you think would help to make sure your right to choose your friends and be with them on the streets is respected?
- Do you have examples of times when you think street children should and shouldn’t be able to choose their friends and be on the streets with them?

The young people focused on the police, highlighting regular abuse and violations of their rights. It is particularly difficult for street-connected children to be on the streets in groups as this causes them to be harassed by the police whereas children who are clean and well-dressed do not get stopped in the streets. Children from Rio de Janeiro said that “the police think we are thieves” and “they don’t hesitate to hit us”, and explained how when they are with others in a group on the streets the police would come to “get rid of them”, often violently. One boy from Rio de Janeiro explained that if they were seen by the police on the streets they would be beaten and taken to the police station where the police would try to accuse them of an offence in order to be able to send them to the shelter. He said that the police assumed that they had done something ‘wrong’ or been ‘in trouble with the justice’ at some point – so that even if they hadn’t done anything on this occasion the police still perceived them as ‘owing’ something to the justice system and felt they had a license to take them to the police station even in the absence of suspicion of any crime. Children were clear that police harassing them simply because they are in a public place is discrimination, and wanted the police to stop harassing them for being on the streets.

Children believed that the police should be trained in working with street-connected children, taking into account their background, specific needs and rights. They wanted the police to be trained to differentiate between street-connected children and criminals, and between “those leaving home for a reason and those on the streets to hurt people”. One girl from Mozambique said that the police didn’t see the street child “as a person”, and didn’t think about why they weren’t at home, instead seeing them merely as a threat to society. She described how if a child was in a public place the police would not do anything in front of bystanders – but would later arrest them, take their things away and lock them in a cell. Despite this, she did not want to judge the police, and thought street children and the police should respect each other. A boy from Pakistan similarly thought that street children and the police need to have a dialogue to understand each other’s needs.

Generally, the young people reported that it is better to live on the streets than to be in government institutions (see section 2 below) but reported being forced to stay in government facilities after being rounded up from the streets by the police. A 17-year-old girl from Rio de Janeiro stated she had been put in

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3 Girl, 18, India.
4 Boy, 14, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
5 Girl, 14, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
6 Boy, 16, Pakistan
a rehabilitation clinic when she was 12 despite not being a drug user at the time – only becoming one after leaving the clinic.

The children discussed the difficulty of making friends on the streets, but also the strength of the bonds between them. Street-connected children often form groups, ‘gangs’, which can become their ‘families’: “kids form a family – even on the streets”. One boy from Burundi said that he made friends through sharing what they gained from stealing and through taking drugs together, but that it could be dangerous to take drugs together because he or his friends would get violent. There was ambivalence in children’s accounts of being part of groups on the streets. Some children reported very positive experiences of friendships on the streets: “the only good thing about the street is the unity”. Children also said that being in groups provided them with protection. However, children also spoke of not being able to trust anybody, even children who were part of their group, because everybody steals from each other. “We protect each other but not everyone is a friend”, said one girl from Brazil, highlighting that even though in general everyone looks out for each other you have to be careful who you trust. A girl from Mozambique explained that children on the streets were beaten and robbed on their first few nights by ‘veterans’ as a way of educating them about life on the streets. After a few months, the children would make friends on the streets and become ‘veterans’, and begin to beat and rob new children, and the cycle would continue.

The ‘groups’ spoken of in Mozambique had a ‘boss’, who decides where group members can stay and sleep, collects money from them and sometimes gives them money. By contrast, a boy from Pakistan reported that it was very difficult for street children to stay in groups on the streets due to the perception that they were a terrorist risk or were making terrorist plans. He reported an incident in which a shopkeeper reported 10 street children who were outside the shop to the police, accusing them of planning for a terrorist attack. When the police came, the street children were afraid and ran away. The police fired shots and killed two of the children. This boy also stated that although when he was alone on the streets he was in greater danger than he would be in a group, he did not want to trust others on the streets – he was “surviving 24/7”, finding food and somewhere to sleep, and was reluctant to share his scarce resources with others. If he effectively could choose his friends and to spend time with them on the streets he wasn’t sure if he would do so, due to the risk involved with making social connections.  

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7 Boy, 18, Burundi.
8 Boy, 14, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
9 Girl, 14, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
10 Boy, 16, Pakistan.
2. The right to special protection and assistance for children deprived of a family environment (article 20)

Question from the UN Committee:

Your right to special care and help if you cannot live with your parents:

- What can governments do to care for children who can’t live with their parents so they don’t have to go to live, work or spend lots of time on the streets?

The appalling conditions in government-run shelters for street-connected children were a recurrent theme. It was felt that most government shelters were holding facilities instead of a place for children to grow. Shelters were described as being like a prison, with children sometimes locked in. Children reported severe violations of their rights in government shelters, with physical and sexual abuse committed by staff and other children, poor facilities, nothing to do and inhuman living conditions.

Despite the self-evident problems with living on the street highlighted by the children (“the worst thing about the streets is the rats and the dirt”\(^1\)), boys from Rio de Janeiro stated that it was better for them to live on the streets than in government shelters, as on the streets they had more freedom and didn’t feel that they were being punished or imprisoned. Two boys separately said they felt safer on the streets than in a government shelter, with one of them reporting the he had run away from two government shelters because he was abused there. In a separate session, a 19-year-old girl from the Philippines echoed the boys’ comments that it was “better to live in the streets than some government institutions”, saying that children in government shelters were “treated like animals” and that as children were locked in and had no freedom, they decided to go to the streets to earn money to feed themselves. A 16-year-old boy from Pakistan said that shelter homes are no different from prisons, with social workers locking children up and preventing them from going outside to play or go to school.

One boy from Rio de Janeiro described life in a government shelter as follows: “At the shelter the educators hit us every day, it is Tasers, pepper spray... the food is terrible, the beans are rock hard, to go to the bathroom we have to “fight” a rat, and we have to sleep three on one mattress. Our only activity is to play ball for 30 minutes... there is a pool there but we can’t use it, once the educators threw a boy, who used a wheelchair, in the pool so he would drown, they threw him in and stood watching.” Another said that “we always have to walk with our heads down, if we walk with our heads up, they hit our heads.” These boys said that many other street children had alerted their families and the judicial authorities to the treatment they were subjected to, but no action was taken to address the issue. Knowing that other children had spoken out and nothing had happened in turn made them reluctant to speak out.

However, despite the deeply inadequate care provided by governments, children were clear that it was governments’ responsibility to provide care for them if they could not live with their families. Although they wanted governments to support their parents to care for them so that they did not need alternative care in the first place (see section 4 below), the children made it clear governments should not automatically send them back to their families if they would experience violence there; instead, alternative positive options should be offered. An 18-year-old girl from India reported that street children in cities in India were being rounded up by the police and forcibly sent ‘back’ to other states in the country. She highlighted that if

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1 Boy, 14, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
these children had originally left home because of abuse, they would have nowhere to go, and said that instead of sending them back the government should provide shelter and care.

Children from Brazil said that they needed a safe place to live, and that the shelter homes should change their approach, because if they know more how to care for children then it would be fine to live there. They wanted institutions to ‘help not just hold them’. To provide care options which respect their rights, children recommended that governments support NGOs which work with them. Children suggested that more shelters be built, even if the government would have to hand over their management to NGOs or other organisations. Boys from Burundi said there was a need for shelters in other cities as well as the capital. Children wanted carers and educators working in shelters to be properly trained, and the shelters to have better resources. They wanted the shelters to have enough budget to be modern and to provide services such as vocational training.\textsuperscript{12}

A boy from Argentina called for legal reforms to the adoption process, to make it easier and provide better opportunities for street-connected children to be adopted.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} Boy, Burundi.
\textsuperscript{13} Boy, 15, Argentina.
Questions from the UN Committee:

Your right to food, clothing, a safe place to live and to have your basic needs met:

- What are the best things governments can do to help make sure street children and children who might go to live, work or spend lots of time on the streets have their basic needs met, including helping their families or other people supporting them?

The children clearly stated that governments should improve their policies affecting children and the services they provide for street-connected children. Children highlighted the importance of social security benefits (financial assistance) to their families. When asked what the government should do for street children, a 14-year-old boy from Rio de Janeiro said that “The only good thing [they do] is the bolsa familia [family grant].”

Children said that governments should ensure there are jobs which street-connected children’s parents can do, so children can leave the streets\textsuperscript{14} and that subsidised housing should be provided for families who can’t afford homes so these families do not have to live in the streets.\textsuperscript{15}

The children said that their access to medical care should be made easier, for both emergency treatment and day-to-day health issues. A boy from Argentina said that public hospitals are “horribly run”, and wanted the government to invest in public health and education, ensuring that they are the same quality everywhere in the country and as good as private healthcare and education. The young people stated that all children should have access to free medical care.

Children wanted governments to help them get food, with boys from Pakistan saying that the government should “contribute to charities giving them free food” and an 18-year-old boy from Brazil saying that “food should be distributed to us by the state”. However, although the children thought the government should contribute to the charities supporting them, it was made clear that simply providing food was not a good enough response nor a long term solution. They were “not asking for charity”\textsuperscript{16} but for recognition and implementation of their rights. One girl from Mozambique was emphatic that governments should not give out free food on the streets, as she felt that “with rights to food, water and shelter, children would not leave the streets”. She stated that children’s most basic right was the right to a family and wanted governments to focus on reuniting children with their families.\textsuperscript{17}

The need for support to NGOs and charities working with street-connected children was a recurring theme. A 15-year-old boy from Brazil wanted projects “like Street Child United” to be supported by governments, to give street children the opportunity to meet other children from similar backgrounds. Although the children were glad of the services they received from local NGOs and called for more support to these organisations from the government, some of them stated that they knew that there are limits to what a charity can achieve, highlighting that it is the government which has the duty to ensure street-connected children’s rights are respected.\textsuperscript{18} A boy from Argentina called for better monitoring and regulation of

\textsuperscript{14} Girl, Mozambique.
\textsuperscript{15} Boy, Argentina
\textsuperscript{16} Boy, 16, Pakistan.
\textsuperscript{17} Girl, Mozambique.
\textsuperscript{18} Boy, 16, Pakistan.
private companies’ dealings with street-connected children, saying that they have “no responsibility for street children”.
4. Developing rights-based, holistic, long term strategies to prevent children developing strong street connections and to support children in street situations

Questions from the UN Committee:

What plans governments should make to make sure street children’s rights are respected and to stop children having to live, work or spend lots of time on the streets:

- What should governments do to make sure children don’t have to live, work or spend lots of time on the streets? What should governments do to make sure street children’s rights are respected?
- How can you tell when something governments or other organisations do is good for stopping children having to live, work or spend lots of time on the streets? How can you tell when something governments or other organisations do is good for street children?
- What are the most important things the Committee should tell governments to do make sure street children’s rights are respected?

Overall, the children wanted to be treated and considered with respect, as individuals with human rights. This is very far removed from street-connected children’s current experience, as a 17-year-old girl from Brazil stressed: “if governments could dispose of us, I think they would”. Young people called for governments to pay specific attention to street children, and to listen to them. A boy from Burundi stated that “every government should have a special law for street children” to “give them a chance to use their gifts and talents to achieve their dreams”. The young people wanted to be listened to by governments and their societies. A young person from Brazil suggested that councils be created within governments to work with and listen to street-connected children. They called for governments to improve awareness and understanding among the general public of the issues facing street children, so that society as a whole would listen to and understand street children better. A 15-year-old boy from Brazil believed that a shift in the way street-connected children are viewed and treated by the public and by governments would allow them to change their social status and their situations in life, stressing that “it’s not about getting them off the streets and into shelters, it’s about giving them a status” which will lead to better situations for them. “Give us the opportunity to change our story”, said one 18-year-old boy from Rio de Janeiro. “Respect is needed for everyone” said a 17-year-old girl from Rio de Janeiro.

Budgeting for street children was repeatedly raised. The children did not feel they were being taken into account enough by policy-makers compared to other social groups. To counter this, an 18-year-old girl from India suggested children from 12 years of age should have the right to vote so that politicians would “come to (them)” and would be more interested in making law and policies to benefit street-connected children.

Young people highlighted the problem of corruption, saying that funds were often siphoned off by corrupt politicians and civil servants. A 15-year-old boy from Fortaleza, Brazil, said that “politics and politicians should change”. One Brazilian boy said “(...) we steal one mobile phone and get two days in jail but the politicians steal millions and millions and nothing happens.” A 15-year-old boy from Rio de Janeiro said that “the whole country is corrupt and everyone steals, so that’s what we do as well”. He wanted the government to “stop stealing and help in hospitals, schools and daycare centres.”

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19 Girl, 19, Philippines.
20 Boy, 14, Brazil.
The children were very aware of social inequalities and thought that high-earning individuals did not give enough back to society. A boy from Argentina said that the tax system needed to change, as at the moment there was only one tax bracket but high earners should pay more.

Young people were clear that they thought governments should prevent children having to develop strong street connections. Some young people said they would “never choose to be on the streets”21. An 18-year-old boy from Rio de Janeiro said that life on the streets was lonely and full of sadness, and that he desperately wanted to change ‘his story’ but had no options – he could not choose not to be on the streets, and the only way for him to eat was to beg for food or steal. Others pointed to the reasons they had for being on the streets: young people from Rio de Janeiro said that being on the streets meant they didn’t have to be at home, where conditions were worse, that they liked the freedom on the streets – “I can do whatever I want to do”22 – and that “for me, it is easy to live on the street because then I can drink”23. A boy from Argentina similarly pointed to extreme violence at home and access to drugs as reasons to be on the street. However, overall, being street-connected was viewed as overwhelmingly negative by the young people.

Young people said that children developing strong street connections was a symptom of poverty and that governments needed to work first and foremost on reducing inequality as the underlying cause of the phenomenon. A boy from Argentina wanted the government to “enforce equality amongst all”. A 19-year-old girl from the Philippines illustrated her thoughts by describing a science experiment in which rats crowded in a cage with poor conditions were given the options of drinking plain water or water with heroin and chose the water with heroin. However, rats in a cage with good conditions, more space and more options did not use the heroin when it was offered. Using this metaphor, she stressed that street-connectedness was caused by bad situations caused by poverty and that to eliminate these problems governments first had to deal with poverty.

The metaphor also highlights that substance use is driven by poor conditions, which resonates with the accounts of street-connected children from Rio de Janeiro. Use of drugs and alcohol was frequently mentioned, with children at the same time stressing the appalling conditions on the streets and in government shelters (see section 2 above) which are a key driver to substance use for them. Young people who used drugs and alcohol on the streets stressed that they would like to stop: “I would like to stop using drugs because I know it is not right” said a 14-year-old girl from Rio de Janeiro, saying that in the future “I want to work and help my family”.

Children stated that violence at home was often the reason they developed strong street connections initially. They wanted violence at home to be prevented, and thought that parents should be educated to take better care of them. A 16-year-old boy stressed that a “child’s place is at home” and the government cannot shelter all street-connected children.

The children called for universal quality education to become a reality. A 16-year-old boy from Pakistan wanted education and training because he did “not want to become a liability” to society. Children wanted vocational training courses to be made available to them. Young people from Brazil wanted “public programmes with a range of activities that are really engaging”. “No teacher is good”, said a 14-year-old

21 Boy, Argentina  
22 Girl, 17, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil  
23 Girl, 14, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
boy from Rio de Janeiro, pointing to the need for an improvement in the quality of school staff. On a practical level, the children said that to attend school they needed financial assistance with public transportation costs, uniforms and school supplies. Boys from Burundi wanted the government to help them prepare to go to school, and to make sure there were jobs ready for when they finish school.24

An 18-year-old girl from India called for general awareness-raising of children’s rights, including street-connected children’s rights, in schools, the general media etc.

The young people wanted better protection for themselves on the streets, as children, workers, and users of public space. An 18-year-old girl from India stressed that street children should be accepted on the streets and that governments should not say that they should not be there. A boy from Burundi called for a “rule to protect kids on the streets”. The children called for more protection on the streets and suggested that parks and playgrounds be free to access so that they can play and sleep there.

The young people called for protection at work, saying that they are often exploited and subjected to abuse. They wanted to be paid well, with no ‘harsh labour’ or dangerous conditions, and thought that as much as possible children shouldn’t be made to work but should be able to go to school instead. 25

Social workers working with street-connected children on the streets were praised and the children believed that their numbers should be increased by governments.

One boy from Burundi pointed out that support should be given to street-connected children, but governments and NGOs should also think about the children who had grown up and were still on the streets, still needing support. He thought that street-connected children and young people had to create their own associations so they could work and help themselves.

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24 Boy, Burundi.
25 Boy, 16, Pakistan.
Conclusion: recommendations for the General Comment

Children’s recommendations for inclusion in the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child’s General Comment on children in street situations arising from the discussions outlined above are as follows.

1. The right to freedom of association and assembly (CRC article 15)
   Governments should:
   - Stop harassing street-connected children, in groups and individually, simply for being on the streets, as this constitutes discrimination
   - Train police on street-connected children’s rights, the realities of their lives and how to engage with them
   - Stop forcing street-connected children to stay in government facilities after they have been rounded up by the police
   - Understand the complex realities of association (friendships, groups, gangs) for children on the streets and take these realities into account in creating strategies to fulfil their rights

2. The right to special protection and assistance for children deprived of a family environment (article 20)
   Governments should:
   - Immediately end the violations of children’s rights in government shelters, ensuring that the shelters are free from violence, facilities are modern, the staff are well trained and that children are provided with nutritious food and water, have their privacy respected, are able to access education/training and healthcare, have time and space for recreation, are not locked in and are free to leave the shelters if they choose
   - Ensure there are sufficient shelters available for all street-connected children who wish to access them, in all areas of the country not only the capital city
   - Support and collaborate with civil society organisations working with street-connected children to ensure the provision of sufficient, good quality shelters
   - End the practice of forcibly returning street-connected children to their families or home villages against their will
   - Provide a range of rights-respecting care options for street-connected children, to “help not just hold them”
   - Ensure street-connected children for whom adoption is the best option can easily access it

3. The right to an adequate standard of living (article 27)
   Governments should:
   - Provide social security and financial assistance to all families in which children may be at risk of developing strong street connections
   - Ensure that rights-respecting and adequately paid employment is available for the parents/carers of street-connected children and those at risk of developing strong street connections
   - Provide subsidised housing to prevent the need for children and families to live in the streets
   - Ensure all street-connected children can access free, high quality medical care, both in emergencies and for day-to-day treatment
   - Ensure that street-connected children can access healthy and nutritious food, including through supporting and collaborating with civil society organisations working with street-connected
While recognising that only providing access to food is not in and of itself adequate to fulfil
street-connected children’s rights

- Support and collaborate with civil society organisations working with street-connected children,
  without seeking to deny governments’ role as the main duty-bearer for the fulfilment of street-
  connected children’s rights
- Monitor and regulate private companies’ dealings with street-connected children

4. Developing rights-based, holistic, long term strategies to prevent children developing strong
street connections and to support children in street situations

Governments should:

- Create laws and policies which specifically address the needs of street-connected children
- Create a body within government which is responsible for listening to street-connected children
  and ensuring their active, rights-respecting participation in the design of policies and programmes
  concerning them
- Undertake public education and awareness-raising activities to improve awareness and
  understanding of the issues facing street-connected children among the general public
- Premise all work with and for street-connected children on the idea that they are active agents in
  their own lives: “give them the opportunity to change their story”
- Create a budget specifically for work to fulfil the rights of street-connected children; ensure that
  this budget is used entirely for its intended purpose and is not lost through corruption
- Ensure a fair system of taxation, which means that high earners pay more, is in place
- Give children the vote from age 12
- Reduce inequality across society, as the underlying cause of children developing strong street-
  connections
- Understand the complex realities of drug and alcohol use for street-connected children and take
  these realities into account in work to fulfil their rights
- Prevent violence in the family home and support parents to care for their children
- Provide universal quality education, with a range of engaging activities led by high quality staff,
  which is accessible to all children including street-connected children
- Provide street-connected children with financial assistance with the costs of public transportation,
  school uniforms and school supplies
- Provide vocational training courses for street-connected children
- Raise awareness of children’s rights, including street-connected children’s rights, among children
  and adults across society, including through the school system and the media
- Provide protection for children while they are on the streets, rather than saying that they should
  not be there
- Make parks and playgrounds free for children to access so they can use them to play and sleep
- Ensure protection for street-connected children’s rights at work, including ensuring that they are
  paid well and not exposed to dangerous conditions
- Where possible, ensure that children can go to school instead of working
- Increase the number of social workers working with street-connected children on the streets
- Support street-connected children and young people to create their own associations for work and
  mutual support
- Consider the needs of street-connected young people who are over 18 but still in need of support