HOW GOVERNMENTS CAN KEEP THEIR PROMISES TO CHILDREN IN STREET SITUATIONS

With support from:
Almost every government in the world has made promises to every child in their country. This list of promises is called the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

These promises are also called rights of children, and include things like:

- **Being treated equally**: children should be treated equally no matter who they are or where they are from.
- **Right to life, survival and development**: all children must be protected from things that can really hurt them.
- **Right to be heard**: children's opinions should be listened to.
This General Comment on children in street situations explains:

(1) how governments should help children who are already in street situations; and

(2) how to prevent children from needing to be on the streets.

To help governments keep these promises, a group of experts called the Committee on the Rights of the Child write reports to explain to governments what they should do to keep their promises. These reports are called General Comments.

Governments were not always keeping their promises to children in street situations, so the experts wrote a General Comment on children in street situations.

Children in street situations means:

- Children who live or work on the streets for most of the time, either on their own, or with other children or family members; and

- Children who spend a lot of time on the streets. They may live or work on the streets only some of the time but their time on the streets is important to them.

This General Comment on children in street situations explains:

(1) how governments should help children who are already in street situations; and

(2) how to prevent children from needing to be on the streets.
Before writing this General Comment, the Committee asked children in street situations all over the world what their advice is. This is because children must be included when plans and decisions about them are made.

Children in street situations have said:

I would like for people who have never lived on the streets to see us as human beings.

Living on the street does not mean that we cannot have rights.

We don’t want help, charity, pity. Governments should work with the community to give us rights.

Governments should not say we should not be on the streets. They should not harass us if on the streets. We should be accepted.

Give us an opportunity to change our story.

Living on the street does not mean that we cannot have rights.
What governments should do

To make sure they keep their promises to children in street situations, governments should make a plan that:

- Explains what they will do to help children in street situations.
- Shows how much money they will spend on helping children in street situations.
- Checks how their laws* can be better for children in street situations.
- Shows how children in street situations will be protected from things that can really hurt them, and how children can get help easily and quickly if they need it.
- Makes sure that children in street situations will be able to use basic services such as hospitals, schools and lawyers like everyone else.
- Makes sure that there are special services for children in street situations with social workers who understand what life is like on the streets in their communities.

* Laws are lists of rules that persons (including the government) must follow. These rules are normally made by the government. The courts and police make sure that everyone follows these rules and punish people who do not follow these rules.

Governments are the main group that is responsible for the plan. They need to help others to make sure the activities in the plan actually happen. This includes:

- parents or those caring for children in street situations;
- organisations who help children in street situations; and
- businesses.

Governments should also involve children in street situations as experts on their own lives when they are writing, using and improving the plan.
To make sure governments keep their promises to street children, the government plan needs to think about:

### Equal treatment

Governments should:

- Remove any laws and actions that treat children in street situations differently (unfairly) because of who they are.
- Explain the lives and the rights of children in street situations to different types of people so that they have a more positive view of children in street situations and a better understanding of their lives.

### Survival and development

Governments must protect the lives and the dignity\* of children in street situations.

This means they must protect children in street situations from things that can really hurt them.

No-one should be able to treat children as criminals for things they have to do to survive.

* Dignity: when a person is being taken serious and treated well

### Participation and freedom

Governments should make sure children’s opinions are listened to. To make sure children in street situations can participate and make their voices heard, governments should share information and help children form their own projects, groups or organisations.

Children in street situations need to have a safe space where they can come together as a group out in the open - so they can rest, play, make friends or organize their lives.

People who treat children badly or remove children where they peacefully come together should be punished.
Governments should make sure that children in street situations can see a doctor or a nurse when they are sick. Healthcare should be free and easy to get (without the need for parents to be there).

Governments should find special ways to take care of children with disabilities, and make sure children with disabilities can use services easily.

Governments should help children keep contact or make contact with their family if they want to.

Children should not be separated from their families just because the child’s family lives or works on the streets.

Governments should educate parents and caregivers how to be good parents and make it easier for families to get good housing and jobs.

Governments have a duty to look after children in street situations who do not live with family, for example, through ‘street workers’* and by providing shelter and social spaces. Governments should not force children to give up their friends and life on the street and force them to live elsewhere.

Children should decide (with adults) where they live, what kind of help they need, and how they visit their family.

* Street workers are adults who are trained to help children in street situations make the most of their lives.

Governments should spend as much money as they can to make sure children in street situations have housing,* clothing, food, medical care and education for their development. This should be provided through parents or carers or directly to children.

To make sure children can access these services, governments should make it very easy and free for all children of all ages to get the official papers they need to prove their identity, for example, birth certificates.

* Housing and shelters should:
• Not be taken away unless another house or shelter is given
• Have basic needs such as safe drinking water, energy for cooking, space for storing food and space for bathing.
• Have lighting and heating
• Protect from weather and diseases
• Not be too expensive

Governments should make sure that children in street situations can see a doctor or a nurse when they are sick.

Healthcare should be free and easy to get (without the need for parents to be there).
Governments should make sure children in street situations can go to a good school for free. Children who are not in school should still be able to learn how to read, write, use math and make the most out of life.

The government should also help them to get back into school. In addition to education, children in street situations should be able to rest and play in parks and playgrounds like all children.

Governments should help them be creative and practice sports.

Child protection

Governments should protect all children from all types of violence. This includes:

- Physical violence (such as being beaten as a punishment)
- Emotional violence (such as being neglected or bullied) and
- Sexual violence (such as being forced to have sex).

Violence at home can make children want to leave their homes and go to the streets.

When children are on the streets they are more likely to experience violence.

Sometimes different children in street situations have different experience with violence and they should be listened to.

Child labour

Governments should protect children from being forced to work by helping them stay in school or go back to school, and help children and families have housing, food, clothes and other basic necessities.

Children who do have to work (such as selling things on the street) should not be punished for this.

Justice for children

Governments should make sure that the police protect children, and do not punish children for being in the streets.

When police treat children in street situations badly (by stealing children’s money and belongings, arresting children for no real reason, or forcing children off the street) this should be illegal* and the police should be punished.

* illegal: an action that is forbidden by the law.

Governments will now be able to use the General Comment to think about how they can keep their promises to children in street situations.
Notes