Input for the UN OHCHR Report on Child Rights and the SDGs

Introduction

Children in street situations around the world are among the most marginalised children, those who are too often left the furthest behind. They commonly experience multiple deprivations and violations of their rights before and during their time on the streets, particularly violence and discrimination, with long-lasting impact. Ensuring that tailored actions specific to children in street situations’ needs are taken is therefore crucial for achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In June 2017, the Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted its General Comment No. 21 on Children in Street Situations, providing governments with authoritative guidance on how to ensure they offer the same human rights protection to children in street situations as any other child within their jurisdiction. This is the first time that children in street situations have received this level of recognition as rights holders under the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC).

States must urgently implement this guidance to protect children in street situations from discrimination and give them access to their rights. This submission brings together the expertise of the Consortium for Street Children network and the voices of street children themselves to identify key challenges and good practices in realising children’s rights, focusing on the thematic areas of: Quality Education (SDG 4), Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10), and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16).

SDG 4: Quality Education

Target 4.1: by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

Many children in street situations are not in school and either have no formal schooling or dropped out of primary school. While overall education rates have risen around the world in recent decades, children in street situations are being left behind because education systems and interventions are not tailored to their needs. Barriers to access and discrimination in schools cause children in street situations to be left behind, inhibiting their development, limiting their employment prospects and perpetuating the cycle of poverty and rights violations.

Barriers to access: Many children in street situations are unable to enrol in school at all because they are unable to list a guardian, an address, and/or legal identity documents during the registration process (see Target 16.9 below). In addition, although the UNCRC gives all children the right to free primary schooling, hidden costs of education (ranging from the costs of school materials, mandatory uniforms and extracurricular activities to financial bribes demanded by teachers) continue to be prohibitive to children of poor families, meaning those who are already disadvantaged trail further behind. Those who try to work alongside school often struggle to cope because of a lack of time to study and frequent absences. Out-of-school children are then more likely to remain on or be pushed towards the streets: “I want the government to give jobs to our parents, to have all the children go to school freely
without paying money. We have decided to live on the street because of failing to go to school. Our parents are poor and have no means to school us.”¹ Because of this poverty, in some cultures, children are viewed as a source of income and demands are placed on them to feed their families, leading to children dropping out of school and coming to the streets to beg and feed their families. Dwelling Places has found this to be a huge barrier to education for children in Karamoja in Uganda, who sometimes end up returning to the streets even after reintegration efforts.

Discrimination in schools: Children in street situations who do attend school may face discrimination from teachers, parents and peers. This includes social exclusion: “At school, we’re told: ‘You don’t belong here.’ They always kick us out of the places where we want to play.” (Street-connected youth aged 7-10);⁶ as well as teachers’ use of violence and public shaming as methods of discipline: “Teachers admitted tying children to their chairs, hitting and humiliating them. ... Children’s main reasons for dropping out were they felt bullied by teachers who didn’t like them and didn’t want them in their classrooms”.⁹ In S.A.L.V.E. International’s experience, children who were formerly living on the streets are also often blamed for crime within the school, such as theft, due to their background without evidence of them committing any crime.

(Re)integration challenges: Entering or returning to formal school is not the most appropriate path for all children in street situations.²⁹ Having spent time on the street, they may be far older than others of the same education level and may not be permitted to be in class with younger students, and others do not want to return to the restrictive structure and supervision of a school environment after living independently.¹⁰¹¹ Although attempts at widening education beyond formal school have been made, skills training is not always seen as useful when it does not result in long-term work: “If the person completes the apprenticeship and doesn’t have anywhere to start work, the person can’t begin anything until all the things are in place. So in that case the person will perhaps decide to go and sell pure water or something.” (Street-connected youth, Accra).¹

Inclusiveness and equality in education cannot be achieved without addressing these barriers. Solutions and good practices for improving access to education for children in street situations include:

- Where children in street situations cannot attend formal school, different education options should be available including informal or ‘second-chance’ education and vocational training, as well as pathways back to formal education.¹² These initiatives should be tailored to specific groups of children in street situations, recognising their different needs. Examples include:
  - Mobile schools, which are wheeled carts with extendable blackboards that can be used on pavements, in parks, slums, or other areas where children in street situations gather. They are used to teach children literacy, numeracy, life skills, children’s rights, and entrepreneurship, among other subjects.¹³
  - Informal classes at locations where children commonly work (e.g. near dump sites, brick kilns or mines);
  - Vocational skills training through formal apprenticeships. Where vocational training is made available, it should be linked to the local labour market and long-term support for income generation.¹²

- Training is necessary to ensure that teachers can support children in street situations with their needs and deliver discipline in a manner that respects their human dignity. Teachers should receive specific training on child rights as relevant to children in street situations and in child-centred and participatory pedagogies. For example, CHETNA and Toybox’s Street to School project organised teacher training on children’s rights and child protection and displayed child-friendly murals about rights on the schools’ walls, building a creative and child-friendly environment.¹⁴ Drop-out rates and the number of children reporting feeling stigmatised at school significantly reduced after one year.¹⁵

- Better consideration for the special learning needs of children in street situations should be integrated into education programmes. For example, Chance for Childhood’s work in Kisumu, Kenya has found a significant improvement in education retention by deploying initial screening for developmental delays and communication disabilities, some of which are trauma induced. In 2018 alone, 337 children in street situations were supported by Learning Support Assistants who provide additional classroom based support to children in street situations with special educational needs.¹⁶
Further practical examples of education innovations that could be scaled up and adapted for use with other groups of excluded children can be found in the 2017 issue of Enabling Education Review on inclusive education for street-connected young people.17

Importantly, General Comment No. 21 reminds us that with respect to education services for children in street situations, “States are the primary duty bearers[,] civil society activities may complement States’ efforts in developing and delivering innovative and personalized service provision.” We therefore request that the High Commissioner emphasises in her forthcoming report that States are not merely responsible for the accessibility of formal education systems, but must also establish and sustainably fund ‘informal’ initiatives such as the civil society innovations described above in order to meet their CRC obligations and fulfil SDG 4.

**SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth**

**Target 8.7:** Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms

The role of labour in the lives of children in street situations is complex, and children often experience multiple forms of work while on the streets. Children may undertake work under duress (such as delivering for a gang or being commercially sexually exploited), or may carry out other hazardous work (such as cleaning cars in traffic) without external coercion because of the lack of safer income generation opportunities for them and their families: “I started working as a maid in two houses in Howrah to save myself from starvation. I continued my work for a year but I left my job because the landlord started scolding me and sometimes harassed me physically (...) I met a boy and I trusted him. He took me to Bihar and forced me to dance on a dance bar. Somehow I managed to run away from that place. Now I am staying in Sealdah permanently but I never got the opportunity of studying due to money problems.” (AK, aged 14, India).14

Children in street situations are particularly vulnerable to the different forms of modern slavery, such as being forced into organised begging or exploited behind closed doors as child domestic workers (see Target 16.2, below). Children in street situations who lack legal identity documents are particularly difficult to trace if they become victims of modern slavery or exploitation, making them harder to protect.24 Experiences of economic exploitation and labour often differ between (and among) street-connected boys and girls because of gender norms in particular geographical and societal contexts. For example, in Ethiopia, working street girls tend to be hidden from view engaging in domestic forms of labour, as maids in backstreet hotels or private houses, whilst street boys may engage in more visible peddling and shoe shining.13

However, actions taken to protect children from exploitative labour often take an abolitionist stance to child labour without considering the impact on children’s lives.18 Some children feel strongly that no child should work,19 whereas some children reflect that work has a positive impact on their lives, helping them to develop skills, support themselves financially and build self-confidence: “My work is teaching me a lot. I am gaining knowledge and developing my skills. ... I have customers of all sorts- students, teachers, business people, farmers- and all these share with their life time experiences … I consider my street corner café as a school where I learn many things.” (Mulunesh, aged 15, Ethiopia).20

Some methods of restricting children’s ability to work in the streets can be counterproductive and not in the best interests of children in street situations, as many of them rely on these economic activities to survive.21 Banning children from working or begging in the street can force them into the worst forms of labour and leave them vulnerable to exploitation, including sexual exploitation, illicit activities or slavery.12 Children who work in street situations may be criminalised for carrying out unlicensed economic activities or begging, or face harassment and violence from the police, including the seizing of their earnings:1 “Institutions are corrupt, police officers always ask for ‘mordidas’ [bribes] to let you work in the street”. (Street-connected youth aged 14-17, Mexico).22
Even when children in street situations reach legal working age, they often face barriers to obtaining lawful employment because they are required to provide ID documents or have a proof of address or bank account, or because they must obtain licenses to start small businesses. They are therefore excluded from opportunities later in life that could help them to become financially independent and break the cycle of poverty. They should also be accessing work that is appropriate for their age; for example, even where the legal minimum working age is below 18, children should not be engaged in work that can harm their physical development, such as handling heavy loads that can cause spinal damage.

We therefore recommend that the High Level Political Forum urges States to act to end exploitative and hazardous work without causing further harm (directly or indirectly) to working children in street situations. We identify the following steps as best practice for the achievement of SDG 8 for children in street situations:

- States should require explicit data collection on children in street situations as part of modern slavery initiatives in order to create an evidence base for efforts tackling both modern slavery and reliance on street work.
- Children who work in street situations must be meaningfully consulted in decisions that affect them, including the banning of certain forms of child labour, to ensure that their best interests are reflected.
- Laws criminalising children for performing labour (including informal activities such as begging and unlicensed trading) should be repealed, and alternative means of income generation guaranteed to children in street situations and their families;
- Children are much more likely to return to exploitative situations and street work if resettlement initiatives do not support both them and their families with sustainable income generation. For example, Save Street Children Uganda combines vocational training and education with family reintegration (including family tracing and transitioning into foster care). They work with children to identify their abilities and interests before helping them enter formal education or skills training and livelihood support programmes. Some of these training courses offer certificates which the children can use for future employment, and children are given start up kits to further boost their income generating activities.
- Saving schemes should be established to teach working children in street situations budgeting skills and safeguard their earnings.

**SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities**

**Target 10.3:** ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including through eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and actions in this regard and

**Target 16.B:** promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development (discussed here because of its close relationship with Target 10.3.)

Children in street situations around the world have spoken powerfully about their marginalisation in society: “Politicians and the media have stigmatised children and young people living in street situations for years, establishing a campaign of terror, which creates a public fear of young people.” (Male street-connected youth, 21, England). The direct and indirect discrimination children in street situations face are both a contributory factor and a consequence of being street-connected. Examples of direct discrimination include targeted violence and extortion by police, ‘round-ups’, and the refusal of social workers, teachers or health care professionals to work with children in street situations. Indirect discrimination, exemplary also of the unequal opportunities and outcomes available to them, include policies prohibiting children in street situations from accessing basic healthcare and education services, due to requirements for identity documents or payments. Children subject to discrimination are more vulnerable to violence and exploitation, their health and development are put at greater risk, and their likelihood of escaping the cycle of poverty and rights violations are reduced.

Even when interventions are tailored to children in street situations as a group, discrimination can take place between different groups of children in street situations or individual children. For example, street girls in Columbia are often defined by the general population as prostitutes and not as street children, contributing to their being...
hidden from street children incidence counts, as well as their stigmatisation.29 A study in Puebla, Mexico, found that labelling children as “vulnerable”, “antisocial” or as a “street child” resulted in differential treatment: children who were considered to be “antisocial” were unable to secure access to formal education, whereas those labelled "street children" were largely successful in gaining access.30

**Discriminatory laws, policies and practices:** Children in street situations are rarely taken into account by law- and policy-makers: “The government should consult us before they make decisions that concern us, and stop rounding us up.” (Friends of the Street Children, Zambia).37 The Legal Atlas for Street Children, an online tool which collates research on laws and policies that impact street children’s lives around the world, demonstrates that many countries have laws in place that discriminate against children in street situations.31 These discriminatory laws include status offences, which criminalise behaviours such as begging, loitering, truancy and vagrancy (activities that are realities of daily life for children in street situations); laws which penalise children for running away; and laws that criminalise children who are commercially sexually exploited. As described under Target 16.3 (below), children who have come into conflict with the law as a result of their street activities struggle to access legal assistance.

With respect to discriminatory practices, General Comment No.21 makes clear that the only acceptable approach towards supporting children in street situations is a child rights approach, which respects the child as a rights holder and makes decisions with their input. ‘Welfare’ approaches that treat children in street situations as victims or objects and ‘repressive’ approaches that view children as delinquents both result in the forcible removal of children from the streets, further violating their rights.12

The clearest example of the ‘repressive’ approach is the widespread practice of rounding up children in street situations simply because they are spending time on the street. Children in street situations are commonly stereotyped as criminals without having committed any wrongdoing: “The police stop us and start beating us for no reason. We did not even steal anything but the police beat us too much as if we were snakes or criminals, and they can even kill us that way.” (Street-connected child, Democratic Republic of the Congo);1 “They don’t see street-connected children as human beings. Whenever they do their round-ups they usually boast that they are cleaning the city by removing the rubbish out of town. They should respect us. We are also human beings.” (Street-connected male, 22, Kenya)32

Round-ups are a violation of the rights of children in street situations, and often are carried out in contravention of laws and policies aimed at the protection of children or in the absence of laws explicitly prohibiting the arbitrary arrest of children in street situations. They are most frequently carried out by the police, local-level authorities and armed forces personnel. The legal vacuum around round-ups (in part a consequence of States’ denial or reluctance to acknowledge that round-ups occur in their jurisdictions) and the absence of training for law enforcement professionals on rights-compliant practices with respect to children in street situations result in exacerbated harm to those affected.

‘Rescue’ practices involving the forced removal and institutionalisation of children in street situations are an example of the ‘welfare’ approach that, despite ostensibly good intentions, violates the rights of children in street situations and fails to take their needs into account. For example:

- The Central Child Welfare Board of the Government of Nepal formulated the Street Children’s Rescue, Protection and Management Guidelines, 2072 (Guidelines), in 2015. Though the prioritisation of children in street situations by the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare and the allocation of a budget to support them were received positively, perceived challenges included children’s resistance to ‘rescue’ efforts and high drop-out rates among the children targeted by the programme. Stakeholders attributed these difficulties to the programme’s lack of adaptation to the children’s ages, genders, length of exposure to street life and addiction issues, among other factors, as well as the decision to commit some children to rehabilitation facilities against their will.33,34
- In the Philippines, the 2012 Protocol to Reach Out to Street Children (adopted by the Department of Social Welfare and Development following efforts by non-governmental child rights organisations to raise awareness
of the impact of ‘rescue’ operations) represented a policy shift away from the ‘repressive’ strategy of removing children from the streets and towards a ‘welfare’ approach incorporating service provision and family reintegration. However, it has not been effectively implemented in practice, and civil society actors report that arbitrary police round-ups continue to take place for ‘beautification’ purposes and with little regard for the best interests of the children involved.  

General Comment No. 21 says that States must take steps to ensure “that children in street situations are equal under the law; that all discrimination on the basis of street situations is prohibited; that incitement to discriminate and harassment is addressed; that children in street situations and their families are not arbitrarily deprived of their property; and that curfews are legitimate, proportional and non-discriminatory”. As well as ensuring that laws do not discriminate children in street situations, governments need to put in place positive laws and systems to protect them and their rights, such as setting up processes for them to simply and cheaply acquire legal identity documents that will in turn enable them to access other services (see further under Target 16.9). In light of this, we recommend that the High Commissioner draws attention to the following in her report:

- To begin the process of repealing or reforming laws and policies that discriminate against children, States should carry out an assessment of their existing laws and policies with the input of civil society and children in street situations themselves. To support this process, Consortium for Street Children and Baker McKenzie developed the Legal Atlas for Street Children, an online platform that details the key laws and policies impacting street children’s lives around the world (viewable and comparable on a country-by-country basis) and helps identify where improvements can be made to be in line with General Comment No. 21.
- Temporary special measures necessary to accelerate or achieve equality of children in street situations (affirmative action) should not be considered discrimination, and all structural discrimination must be eliminated formally through legal and policy changes.
- States should work to raise the awareness of professionals, the private sector and the public regarding the experiences and rights of children in street situations, with the aim of positively transforming attitudes. Consideration must also be taking for the intersecting forms of discrimination children may face.
- Police officers, army personnel and other relevant authorities should receive specific training on how to engage with children in street situations, on their rights and the realities of their lives. For example, Dwelling Places conducted trainings with 70 Kampala Capital City Authority Enforcement Officers (who ‘clean’ the city) on how to honour the rights of children in street situations, which successfully reduced the violence and round-ups inflicted upon children in street situations by this team.

**SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**
**Target 16.2: end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children**

Children in street situations are vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and violence in many forms. For many, violence and abuse (emotional, physical, or sexual) is both a cause and a consequence of their connections to the street. However, because of widespread societal stigma and discrimination in the justice system, abuses against children in street situations are at best under-reported, ignored or not taken seriously (see Targets 16.3, below, and 16.B, above). Abuse and violent treatment is also perpetrated by those who are supposed to protect children, including police and security forces: “The police are the people who are supposed to protect you. But when you meet him on the street at night, he is the first to ask you for fucking you… If you refuse they threaten to rape you. Thus you are obliged to ‘let them have what they need’ so as not to be arrested. Then you wonder, ‘are the police for protecting people or what?’” (Street-connected youth, Bukavu.)

With respect to trafficking, vulnerable children may be trafficked within or across national borders, to or from the street, for purposes including sexual abuse and labour exploitation. Once on the street, both girls and boys are vulnerable to being subject to sexual violence and exploitation, from their peers on the streets as well as from adults. Having been sexually abused, children are often stigmatised (or fear being stigmatised), which can make them more reluctant to integrate back into their communities.
We therefore make the following recommendations in addition to those made above regarding the training and sensitisation of justice system professionals:

- Laws that facilitate the exploitation of children must be repealed or reformed. In Vietnam, Blue Dragon Children’s Foundation spearheaded a campaign to reform the law as, until January 2018, the sexual abuse of boys was not considered a crime because sex was exclusively defined as intercourse between a male and a female. There have already been successful convictions based on the amended law.39
- Gender-sensitive responses specific to the realities of street-connected girls or boys’ lives are required: programs need to consider the often differing types of activities street boys and girls are engaged with and the risks they face, as well as the different reasons for the presence of girls and boys on the streets.40

Target 16.3: Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all

Typically seen as ‘out of place’ on the streets, children in street situations are discriminated against in justice systems because of their status.23 Activities such as begging or vagrancy are often criminalised, meaning that children in street situations are routinely punished for doing what they need to do to survive, as described under Target 10.3 above.12 Many children report being rounded up and detained arbitrarily: “They don’t see street-connected children as human beings. Whenever they do their round-ups, they usually boast that they are cleaning the city by removing rubbish out of town” (Street-connected child, Mombasa)23

Once arrested, often without cause, children in street situations may not know their rights or may be unable to access legal assistance. They may not be told or understand the charges against them, or may be held for long periods of time without going to trial or being sentenced, sometimes held together with adults:23,41 “[W]hen they arrest you, they take you to the police, accuse you of something, and take you to prison. Usually they accuse you of theft, even murder, breaking into people’s houses, robbing people and taking their bags. If you refuse the charges and try and explain that you didn’t do anything, they take you for remand, and you remain here with no case against you until you are willing to accept the charges.” (Solomon, 17, Uganda, speaking to S.A.L.V.E Uganda.)37

As well as being treated as criminals, children in street situations are particularly vulnerable to being victims of crimes, particularly exploitation, violence, and sexual abuse. These abuses are at best under-reported, ignored or not taken seriously. At worst, children in street situations become subject to further abuse at the point of reporting.7 They can rarely rely on adults for protection; they are often mistrusted and mistreated by police and wider society.42–44 Societal or cultural norms and fear of stigmatisation can also contribute to children’s reluctance to report sexual abuse.45

To ensure the inclusivity of the justice system, we reiterate our above recommendations about the training and sensitisation of justice professionals in relation to children in street situations, and further add the following:

- Justice professionals who facilitate or perpetrate the abuse, exploitation or other forms of violence against children in street situations must face professional and, where appropriate, criminal sanctions;
- Street-connected children should be provided with free legal representation, guidance and advice upon coming into conflict with the law, with this being reflected in budget allocations as well as policies.46

Target 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

Children in street situations are often ‘invisible’ to the stakeholders making decisions about their lives, in part because they are often not present in households or schools, where most data about children is collected, and in part because it is in their interests to remain out of sight on the streets to avoid being targeted by those who would seek to harm them. Because typical data collection mechanisms are not adapted to the realities of the lives of these children, they are omitted from the population data that forms the basis of public policy decisions and the design of interventions around the world.53 No one knows how many children around the world or in a given country are in street situations, and biased, inaccurate estimates are replicated continuously.54
Decisions that affect the lives of children in street situations are consistently made without their participation, failing to acknowledge their competency, views and aspirations and hindering the realisation of their rights. Instead, policies and interventions are designed based on assumptions that frame children in street situations either as ‘victims’-destricted children in need of being rescued- or as ‘delinquents’ who only engage in criminal activities and antisocial behaviour. These repressive constructions have enabled non-governmental organisations, donors and policy-makers to pursue programmes or policies that can fail to recognise children in street situations’ lived experiences and prevent the fulfilment of their rights. In turn, this makes the programmes and policies less effective: for example, as discussed earlier, interventions focused on ‘rescuing’ children from the street with little participation in decision-making from the child do not provide lasting solutions as they ignore the children’s own views. “We want them to realize that freedom is our basic right and they should not send us to the institutions forcefully. Everyone including policemen should listen to us first, instead of assuming things about us.” (Male, aged 14-15, Kolkata, India, speaking to CINI Kolkata).

To ensure children in street situations are included in States’ efforts to fulfil SDG 16, we would ask the High Commissioner to highlight the following best practices in her report:

- Strategies and initiatives should adopt a child rights approach, emphasizing full respect for street children’s autonomy, increasing their agency in decision-making and empowering them as socioeconomic, political and cultural actors.
- Methodologies that are adapted to the realities of children in street situations’ lives should be developed to ensure that these children are no longer excluded from data and policy decisions based on this data. We recommend the adaptation of existing methods to be able to be used with hidden populations, as well as the development of methods specific to children in street situations to allow interventions to be tailored to them.
- States should provide or support the provision of an environment that enables children to be heard, conduct their own initiatives, and participate in all stages of policy and programme planning, implementation and evaluation. Examples of this being achieved with children in street situations include:
  - The Committee on the Rights of the Child’s General Comment No. 21 includes the views of children in street situations from countries around the world who took part in consultations organised by Consortium for Street Children and its partners.
  - Following Uruguay’s public commitment in 2017 to fully implement General Comment No.21, the National Institute for Children and Adolescents (INAU) has been working closely with street children and civil society organisations (such as Gurises Unidos) to develop a National Plan of Action on children and youth in street situations in line with the standards in the General Comment. INAU actively engaged children in street situations nationwide in the policy development process to ensure their views and experiences form the basis of the solutions in the National Plan. The National Plan is due to be launched in August 2019.
  - In Myanmar, World Vision Myanmar and World Vision Australia conducted participatory ‘empowerment’ evaluations for aspects of their Street Children & Working Children Program, providing an opportunity for the street children themselves to evaluate and improve the program.

**Target 16.9: by 2030 provide legal identity for all including free birth registrations**

Many children in street situations are unregistered, or do not have access to their legal documents such as birth certificates. In many countries, lacking legal documentation means that children cannot access crucial services such as education or healthcare as well as justice, or family reunification. In our South Asia consultation for General Comment No.21, only 11 of 38 children had some sort of identification, and others “felt doubly robbed of an identity in the lack of parents and also birth certificates and unique identification numbers. They said a lack of such papers kept them away from schools and from accessing other services: they talked of being “blind to the realities of the world as they could not read or write in the absence of valid papers.”

In research conducted by Save the Children India in Hyderabad, only 5% of street children interviewed had the birth or education certifications necessary to go to school, despite laws to prevent schools stopping children
accessing education due to lack of proof of age. A third of children and their families lacked ration cards, preventing them from accessing subsidised food grain. They faced charges when they tried to get ID: “We would also request that a ration card is made for us as we don’t have any identity papers. See for everything they want a bribe where can we get that from when we don’t have money to eat.” (Parents of Street Working Girls, Mughalsarai)\(^2\)

There is growing recognition among States of the need to ensure all children are registered from birth. To build on this positive development, we ask that the High Level Political Forum reiterates the following points in its reviews:

- Children in street situations should be proactively supported to obtain legal identity documents through a free, accessible, simple and expeditious process.
- States should devise temporary innovative and flexible solutions, such as allowing children to use addresses of civil society organisations, to allow access to services while permanent identity documents are sought.\(^1\)

Examples of innovative initiatives include those using modern technologies to expand coverage. For example, in Tanzania, assistant registrars are able to send the required information (the child’s name, sex, date of birth and family details) via SMS (text message) from their mobile phones to the central registration database in Dar Es Salaam; they then receive an automated response that enables them to issue the birth registration document a short time later.\(^5\)

**Conclusion**

This document has highlighted the challenges children in street situations face in accessing their rights that enhance the risk that they will continue to be left behind from progress made towards the SDGs for other groups of children. These challenges are often interconnected; for example, lacking legal registration documents can prevent a child from accessing schools and healthcare, and discriminatory laws banning activities that children in street situations carry out to survive can push them into the worst forms of labour or situations of exploitation, or into conflict with the law where they may find themselves unable to access legal assistance.

The trend running throughout the solutions and good practices presented in this document is that policies and interventions must be tailored specifically to children in street situations, and must be based on the views of the children themselves, and the realities of their lives. Our recommendations draw on our global network’s experience and expertise, and our consultations with children in street situations for the development of General Comment No. 21, in which children in street situations revealed that they do not want charity or pity; they want to be respected and for their rights to be upheld.\(^2\) It is only by taking action to make sure that these children are taken into account in policy making and enjoy the same rights as other children that we can ensure that they will not be left behind.

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