The United Nations’ Committee on the Rights of the Child’s General Comment on Children in Street Situations will provide definitive guidance on how States must fulfil street children’s rights. For the first time, Governments’ obligations to street children under international law will be brought together and clearly laid out. The General Comment will be a powerful tool that organisations working for street children and others will be able to use to achieve respect for street children’s rights.

In the 1990s there was a surge of international interest in street children following the Candelária Massacre in Brazil where eight children and teenagers were shot dead by police whilst sleeping on the steps of a church.

Although the massacre generated international outrage for a time, interest in and support for street children soon faded. The reality is that for the last two decades street children have been marginalised and sidelined in international development debates and national plans of action.

Yet every day millions of street-connected children suffer multiple and repeated violations of their rights. Their numbers are likely to be growing worldwide as a result of conflicts in the Middle East, recession in Europe, natural disasters in Asia and Africa and epidemics such as the recent Ebola crisis.

In 2014 the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child agreed to develop a General Comment on Children in Street Situations, a process that will happen during the next two years. This is a monumental development at the highest policy level, offering a once in a lifetime opportunity to bring street children and the challenges they face into the global spotlight, promote realistic and practical ways of supporting them and create a framework for Government accountability so that their rights can no longer be ignored.

The two year countdown to change starts now.
In 1989, Governments worldwide promised all children the same rights by adopting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). These rights describe what a child needs to survive, grow, and reach their potential in life. They apply to every child, no matter who they are or where they come from, but in reality children in street situations do not have access to most of these rights. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is the highest authority on children’s rights. It protects and upholds children’s rights worldwide by holding Governments to account for their implementation of the UNCRC. General Comments provide an authoritative interpretation of the rights contained in articles and provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The commitment to develop a General Comment on Children in Street Situations is recognition that the UNCRC alone does not protect street children’s rights: street children are a complex group to address at policy levels and need specialised interventions.

For more information on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

For more information on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRC/Pages/CRCIndex.aspx

WHAT IS A GENERAL COMMENT AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

STORIES

CARLOS
Carlos, 10, shines shoes at the local bus station in the day. At night he sleeps in a covered market with his friends where they sometimes get food in return for guarding market stalls. On Tuesdays Carlos goes to a local NGO drop-in centre where he can wash, change his clothes and get some food. Carlos is exposed to physical and psychological violence almost every day. Sometimes other older youths beat him up for his money and some travellers chase him away and scold him for being out of school. Often the police move him on from sitting outside the bus station, usually with their batons.

EVA
Eva, 14, has been living on the streets for 4 years and has been sexually exploited for 2 of them. She is HIV positive and is pregnant. She only has access to medical care when, once every two weeks, staff from the local NGO drive an ambulance to where she works. She has few friends and is paid very little by her pimp. Customers do not respect Eva, often calling her names, and she regularly experiences physical and psychological violence from customers and from her pimp when she does not make the money he demands. As a result, she feels trapped and worthless and worries about what will happen to her baby.

Neither Eva nor Carlos go to school. They have to fend for themselves to survive.
Once the General Comment is in place, Governments will be under more pressure to enforce measures to stop sexual exploitation of children and to launch public campaigns to protect children from becoming sexually exploited. There will be a growing demand for specialised services for street-connected children like Eva to access medical support, mother-baby services and safe shelters. The cost to society will be small; the effects for Eva will be life-changing: more support, less discrimination, more livelihood choices for her and her baby.

Daily access to tailored services at drop-in centres for street children would make a huge difference to children like Carlos. Such a centre could help Carlos to connect with his family, with health services and with formal education. With the help of a mentor he could make informed and realistic choices about combining school with vocational training support to improve his earnings. With a General Comment in place, Governments will be encouraged to partner with NGOs and community organisations to invest in helping children like Carlos to move from the margins to the mainstream.
The development of a General Comment can take up to 2 years, as it is an in-depth technical and consultative process, led by the independent expert members of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. **Consortium for Street Children** is the Coordinator of the Advisory Group to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the General Comment.

This is a unique window of opportunity during which the **Consortium for Street Children** will engage in global consultations with its network, NGOs, street children, academics, independent experts, businesses and Governments to support the development of the General Comment. As part of this, the International Day for Street Children will provide a current focus for awareness-raising, engagement and inclusion.

**WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?**

**MORE INFORMATION**

For more information about Consortium for Street Children and the International Day for Street Children visit:

- streetchildren.org
- streetchildrenday.org