

Street Children



Youth Advocate Program International
4545 42nd Street, NW, Suite 209
Washington, DC 20016 U.S.A

Street Children

Teacher Resource

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Contacts

Youth Advocate Program
International

4545 42nd Street, NW

Suite 209

Washington, DC 20016

202.244.1986

202.244.6396 (fax)

www.yapi.org

yapi@yapi.org

Street Children

Basic Facts

-100-150 million children are estimated to live and/or work on the streets. 40% are homeless and 60% are working to support their families on the street.¹

-There are an estimated 40 million street children in Latin America, 25 million in Asia, 10 million in Africa, 500,000 in Europe,² and over 1 million in the U.S.³

-In general, there are fewer girls than boys actually living on the streets (studies indicate between 3% and 30% depending on the country). Street children are largely boys between the ages of 10-14.⁴

-There are street children in every country of the world.⁵

Note: There are many definitions of street children; this poses a problem with statistics. In addition, most statistics are only estimates because street children are constantly moving within and between cities.⁶

Sources:

¹ <http://portal.unesco.org>

² www.unicef.org

³ www.standupforkids.org

⁴ www.amnestyusa.org/children

⁵ www.streetchildren.org/uk

⁶ Ibid



Street Children

Issue Background

Definition:

A street child is any boy or girl who has not reached adulthood, and for whom the street and unoccupied dwellings have become his/her home and/or source of livelihood. These children are neither protected, directed, nor supervised by adults.



The Categories of Homeless Children:

Children on the street – Children who visit their families regularly and might even return every night to sleep at home, but spend most days and some nights on the street because of poverty, overcrowding, and/or sexual or physical abuse at home.

Children of the street – Children who have no home but the streets, and no family support. They move from place to place, living in shelters and abandoned buildings.

Children of a street family – A family that lives on the street. Children live with their families on sidewalks or city squares. Children in this case often work on the streets with other members of their families. They may be displaced due to poverty, wars, or natural disasters. These families often live a nomadic life, carrying their possessions with them.

Courtesy of USAID

Why are there Street/Homeless Children?

One of the most common reasons for child homelessness is extreme poverty. Children living in poverty often live with their families or are separated from them because the family can no longer support them. Most street children are not abandoned; they are sent to the streets to provide income to their family. They beg, sell trinkets, shine shoes and wash cars to for livelihood and survival. These children rarely receive a primary education. In addition, abuse within the home, breakdown of the family unit, and failure of the social welfare of a nation increases the child homelessness rate.

Who is Affected?

Children marginalized by society are the most prone to homelessness. Examples of marginalized children are ethnic minorities. Also, disabled youth, sometimes abandoned, can only find their livelihoods while living on the street. Much of the street child population is also from children who are abandoned, or abused sexually and emotionally by their families or within orphanages.

Not all street children are homeless children. Street children can have homes and families they go back to after spending most of their time on the streets. Homeless children are almost always street children (except those living in state-run institutions) because the street becomes their home.

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Issue Background



Problems that Street/Homeless Children Face:

Addiction

Street children are particularly vulnerable to drug addiction. UNICEF reports that Latin America alone has 40 million street children; 20 million of them inhale solvent based glues. Products such as shoe glue and solvent based narcotics are easily available and cheap. Street children often rely on these drugs to forget the cold, their hunger, and their daily despair. In the process, they damage their liver, lungs, and brain. Once addicted, these children become slaves to the vapors, and therefore, aggressive. These substances are everywhere, and their highly addictive nature contributes to why these children can rarely escape the streets.

Prostitution

Street children may prostitute themselves in order to survive—often to pay for their addictions. A great deal of the exploitation is clandestine. It occurs through contacts in nightclubs or bars, or through high-end escort services where the abuse takes place in privately rented apartments.

HIV/AIDS

Children who live on the streets are vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, because they are exposed to HIV and AIDS through many activities of their daily lives. Rape, commercial sexual exploitation, unsafe sex, drug use, and unsanitary conditions are a few. Many children who have HIV or AIDS have been abandoned by their parents.

Trafficking

Trafficking consists of all acts of recruitment or transportation of persons within or across borders, involving deception, coercion or force, debt bondage or fraud, for the purpose of placing persons in situations of abuse or exploitation, such as forced prostitution, slavery practices, battering or extreme cruelty, sweatshop labor or exploitative domestic service. Trafficking victims usually believe they are travelling legally or being smuggled to a place that will offer them greater opportunities. However, they are sold, tricked, forced, or otherwise coerced into situations from which they cannot escape. Many are forced to work as prostitutes or in the pornography industry; others are coerced into marriage contracts. Street children are particularly vulnerable, and are often given false hopes about an education or jobs in foreign countries. These children trust their traffickers because they want to believe in a world that is anything but the one in which they live.

Lack of Medicinal Care

Since street children are exposed to many detrimental conditions as a result of living on the street, their immunity is lessened and they become more vulnerable to many diseases such as tuberculosis, ear infections, respiratory infections, and sexually transmitted diseases. Many governments have apathetic attitudes regarding street children, which often leads to little or no care. Hospitals turn away street children because they lack official records. Fortunately, some street children find aid through humanitarian organizations and good samaritans.

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Issue Background



Street Children and the Police

Detention and Arrest

Street children are often seen by police as anti-social and criminal elements of society. Many people think they are a burden on society. As a result of this mentality, street children are vulnerable to routine arrests for petty crimes, vagrancy, and loitering. Some of these street children are involved in more serious crimes such as theft, drug trafficking, and prostitution. Police will often use them as scapegoats for larger crimes. They often “sweep” the streets, arresting large numbers of street children, hauling them off to jail where they are kept in extremely poor conditions. These children may have to find ways to bribe police in order to be released, and girls are forced to engage in sexual relations with these police officers.

“Few advocates, let alone lawyers or prosecutors, speak up for these children, and street children rarely have family members or other concerned adults able to intervene on their behalf”

~Human Rights Watch

Death Squads

Death squads are clandestine organizations often consisting of police and/or members of the national guard who are working to “cleanse” the society of its criminal elements, usually relating to populations that are discriminated against as a result of ethnicity, etc. Street children are overwhelmingly seen as criminal, and are often the target of death squads.

Although murder is the objective, many of these crimes are never investigated because they are committed by or through public officials. Countries with a reputation for death squads include: Guatemala, India, Brazil, Bulgaria, and many others countries that have a high rate of crime related to either ethnic, religious, and racial conflict.

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Issue Background



Street Children and the CRC

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is an international document that lays out standards that all ratifying governments must adhere to for the protection of children. It has been ratified by every nation, except for two: Somalia and the United States. Street children may be the children most in danger of experiencing violations of the CRC because they live outside of an institutional framework, and therefore they have no means to ensure that these protections are provided to them.

The CRC purposely and explicitly sets out a framework that emphasizes the responsibility and role of the family and the community in the protection of all children. Unfortunately, the negative attitudes of most governments towards street children, as well as low priority and corruption, often results in a lack of monitoring of CRC violations and enforcement of human rights laws. Non-governmental organizations are often the ones that are taking the majority of steps to ensure the protection of street children.

Articles of the CRC that would Benefit Street Children if Enforced:

Article 2-Non-Discrimination

Article 6- Survival and development (prevention of arbitrary execution)

Article 7- Name and nationality(right to identity documents)

Article 19-Protection from abuse and neglect

Article 33-Drug abuse (protection from the use of narcotics)

Article 34-Protection from sexual exploitation

Article 35-prevention from sale, trafficking, and abduction

Article 20 of the CRC

Protection of Children without Families

“The State’s obligation to provide special protection for children deprived of their family environment and to ensure that appropriate alternative family care or institutional placement is made available to them, taking into account the child’s cultural background”

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Hitting Home: Homeless and Street Children in the United States



- National statistics report the number of homeless children (including “runaways”) in the United States is approximately 1.3 million.
- At least 27% of the U.S. homeless population is made up of children.
- Approximately 4,745 homeless children die on U.S. streets each year.
- Predominant causes of their deaths include assault, disease, and suicide.
- Many of the children who take to the streets will eventually be involved in prostitution; often within 48 hours of leaving home.
- In some states, it is illegal to feed street children. It is considered to be contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

Teenager “J.R.” of New York City entered his first homeless shelter at age 4 when his father and mother became ill. In the years since, he has been to many others, yet sees daily shelter life as a “prison” because of the lack of privacy, safety, and security. He feels robbed of his childhood, and continues to face emotional distress every day as a result. He has often contemplated suicide. Unfortunately, many children have a similar story.

Street Children

Case Study



South Asia

Street Child's story - Madras, India

Firos is a 17 year old street child in Madras who lives with his uncle and his brother. Since his family lives in the slums, he spends most of his days and nights on the streets. He explains his case of mistreatment to the non-governmental organization, Human Rights Watch.

He was accused by four adults of stealing auto parts; Firos said he did not steal the parts. Nonetheless, they beat him. These adults then took Firos to the police station and told the police the boy was a thief and should be punished. The police officers threw him into a cell and started beating and kicking him. As they "punished" Firos, they screamed at him to admit to stealing the items. He was kept in the cell for three days, without food or water, while getting continuous beatings from the police officers. Firos finally falsely admitted to stealing the auto parts to escape the beatings. He was later bailed out by his brother, only because he paid the amount the police requested. The charges against him were eventually dropped, but at the physical, mental, and emotional expense of Firo.

There are at least 18 million street children in India, yet the term "street child" was not officially recognized by the Indian government before 1993.

Pressure from NGOs eventually led to the creation of a governmental welfare program called "Scheme for Assistance to Street Children".

Meetings were held between governmental officials and NGOs, but the lack of actual implementation deterred efforts to protect street children. Many NGOs not focusing on street children, continued to receive funding because of their specific political stances, preventing many quality NGOs from taking part in the program.

According to Indian Law, children over the age of 12 are considered adults within their society. In addition, the Government of India does not differentiate between abandoned children and delinquent children.

Sources: SKCV: <http://www.skcv.org>

Human Rights Watch: <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1996/India4.htm>

Street Children

Case Study



Eastern Europe

Street Child's story - Bucharest, Romania

Eight year old Gabby was found by a volunteer in a Bucharest train station. She was wearing only a sweater in the dead of winter, and she was eating a discarded ice cream cone that she had found in the garbage. Her parents abandoned her because she had a twisted leg and it would have been too expensive and difficult to care for her.

Street Child's story - Bucharest, Romania

Laurentiu, a 15 year old boy in Bucharest has had a long life. Ever since he started living on the streets he has been living in a world filled with poverty, drugs, depression, trafficking, and prostitution. He, like other street children in Bucharest, takes refuge in railway stations, abandoned buildings, and even cardboard boxes. He said the first time he prostituted himself was when he was 12 years old. Afterward, he felt so miserable that he tried to end his life by setting himself on fire. He tries to escape his daily problems with fellow street children by sniffing solvents, which often make him more aggressive.

Sources:

<http://www.chron.com/content/interactive/special/romania/story2.html>

CNN Presents: "Easy Prey" <http://www.cnn.com/CNN/Programs/presents/index.easy.prey>

Consortium for Street Children: <http://www.streetchildren.org/uk/reports/Romania>

Since the fall of the communist dictatorship of Romania in 1989, the country has become one of the most corrupt European nations. Prior to 1989, communist policies required Romanian families to have as many children as possible to feed the nation's work force. Today, this social policy has left thousands of children homeless or under the care of state institutions. The government estimates that there are an estimated 1,500 street children in Romania, while various NGOs and organizations say the number is much higher.

The transition from a communist to a market economy continues to take its toll on the people. As a result, many people in Romania are poor, almost half are under the poverty line. Many children who live on the streets are abandoned by their parents, have run away from home, or have escaped from state orphanages where they are treated poorly by other children or abused by staff. Many of these children take refuge in railway or subway stations in Bucharest.

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Discussion Questions

1.) Why do you think there are so many homeless children in the United States, when it is one of the richest countries in the world?

2.) What are the challenges that street children face?

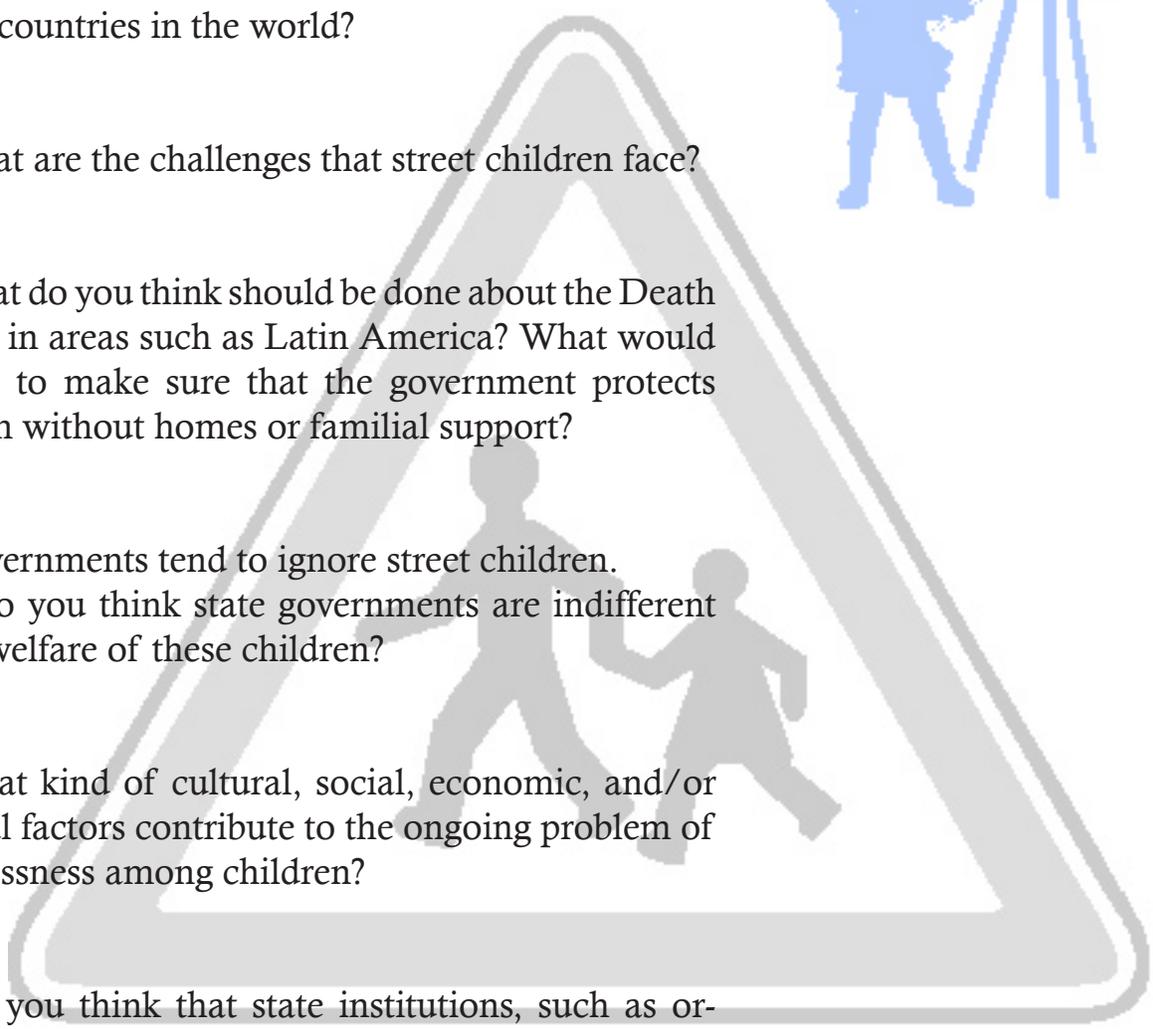
3.) What do you think should be done about the Death Squads in areas such as Latin America? What would you do to make sure that the government protects children without homes or familial support?

4.) Governments tend to ignore street children. Why do you think state governments are indifferent to the welfare of these children?

5.) What kind of cultural, social, economic, and/or political factors contribute to the ongoing problem of homelessness among children?

6.) Do you think that state institutions, such as orphanages, are sufficient to house abandoned children? Why or why not?

7.) What is the impact of street life on children?



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In the Classroom

Classroom Activities

1.) Break the class into three groups, and assign each a classification of homelessness provided by USAID. Have them discuss the reasons why these groups are marginalized by society as well as discussing the everyday struggles these children face to survive.

2.) Ask students to write a story about how they have or have thought of running away from home. Tell them to include reasons for why the thought of running away came up in their minds. Ask them to include a paragraph that discusses if they have changed their minds as a result of learning more about the issues of street children and homelessness throughout the world.

3.) Ask students to imagine that they are in charge of creating an organization that seeks to combat child homelessness. Have them come up with an outline of the goals they would like to see achieved in the first few years of their new organization. Ask them to answer questions:

- What would be your first course of action as an organization striving to promote and prevent child homelessness?

- Would you focus on a specific area of the world? If so, which area and why?

- What type of programs would you create to educate and provide services to homeless and street children?

4.) Have students come up with a rehabilitation plan that caters to former street children and let them discuss which areas are important, such as:

- Education
- Safety and Security
- Job Training
- Housing and Shelter

Homework

- Find organizations that are dedicated to combating child homelessness and write a summary of what they do.

- Write a paper about how students can be involved in helping homeless children.

- Write to your representatives and senators regarding the situation of street children throughout the world.

- Write a paper about why street children are present in every country in the world.

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Beyond the Classroom

If you are interested in doing more...

- Start a human rights club at your school.
- Volunteer at an organization working to help the situations of homelessness and street children.
- Participate in local food, clothing, and/or toy drives that help homeless and street children.
- Educate your friends and family about what you have learned about street children and homelessness.

For more information...

Youth Advocate International
www.yapi.org

Casa Alianza
www.casa-alianza.org

Stand Up for Kids
www.standupforkids.net

ECPAT International
www.ecpat.net

Consortium for Street Children
www.stretchildren.org.uk

White House
www.whitehouse.gov

US House of Representatives
www.house.gov

US Senate
www.senate.gov