

I taken some time and have produced the below information as a basis discuss and to help discover the best viable strategy for EURAD and its members to debate regarding the subject of street children in the World today.

Brian Douglas. (Director RCHF – affiliate EURAD member.)

Street children

Current accredited estimates (including by UNICEF) show there are **over 100 million children** living rough known as street children or street kids today in the World who are the most vulnerable of all groups of children as are open to exploitation of many kinds and of a serious nature.

Sadly for many decades there has been no real strategy developed by NGO's that reduces the numbers of these children for various reasons.

Some Governments have invested public funds in shelters for these children with only very limited success. The main problem with this is that the street child itself has not accepted these centers for various reasons and this area needs to be looked at intensely so that in the future children will feel safe and attend these centers.

Categories of those that can become street children

1. A adolescent child who comes from a decent family, has material nice clothing and personal items, **but lacks in Her/His mind** family love for various reasons.
2. A child, who is of adolescent age, has a friend of the opposite sex and the parents do not accept this person.
3. A child who lives in a home were there is violence between parents, alcohol and drug abuse.
4. Children who live in outright poverty.
5. Children in state care homes or orphanages.
6. A child who has been abused sexually at home and no longer feels safe there.
7. A child who has entered into prostitution.
8. A child who is easily led by others within his/her entourage of friends.
9. A child born on the streets to Parents who live on the streets.
10. A child with personal problems who feels they cannot open up on these subjects to their parents.
11. A child who is made to work by its parents at a tender age.
12. The child who feels uncared for at home.

Who are the street children?

A child with no home and who lives on the streets without any support from family.

A child who lives on the streets without any support from the state.

A child who lives on the streets who has refused support because the support was not sufficient in its mind.

A child who lives on the streets though family poverty, but does visit home and occasionally sleeps at home as well as on the streets.

A child who has seen or has itself suffered sexual abuse at home and no longer feels safe at home.

Children who have run away from orphanages or children's institutions. Often they know each other and have been friends for some years.

Children displaced by natural disasters or Wars with no home left to go to.

A child forced onto the streets by its parents to beg for money daily for food.

Children who have become involved in organized crime- prostitution- narcotics, theft etc and who are often watched over and under the influence of a pimp. This may be an older child in some cases.

What the law states.

The UN Convention on The Rights of the Child states amongst many articles in article 27 that state parties must recognize the right of every child to a home and an adequate standard of living for a child's mental, physical, social, moral and spiritual development. In the above it is clearly recognized that street children do not fall into this category and have therefore not rights as stated in the convention.

To even start to appreciate the problem one must look at least at some Country statistics. Some 40 million street children in Latin America on the streets daily. 18 million street children, out on the streets of India daily. Closer to home and 100.000 children away from home in the UK each year on the streets. In the USA of 510.000 children in foster care every year 20.000 leave the system with no place to live and most end up in the

streets. In California 65% of those leaving foster care go onto the streets as have no home to go to. The breakdown of Eastern Europe has also seen many thousands of street children too and many of these children have had no prior access to any form of education.

Street children come from both urban and rural settings and a great many head for either Capital Cities of their Country or Holiday resorts, though street children can be found in many any towns they were born into as they know the surroundings there well.

Vulnerability

Street children are the ones who time and time again feel the effects of the Countries economic situation along with social crisis within their country as this often means further cutbacks and so less support for their needs.

I am not aware of any Country within the EU that has a special budget in its childcare department just for street children problems alone.

In 1996 the US had 5 and a half million children living in extreme poverty and less generous social programs than many EU states. The US state of California has just cut its child welfare budget by some 80 Million USD so the situation will get no better for US Californian children in the next year for certain.

Main effects of being a street child

Lack of personal safety.- open to violence from others on the streets and in some cases by authorities-even Police.

Lack of medical care.

Prone to disease and illness of a serious nature- can be life threatening.

For adolescent children involved in sexual activity a real danger of HIV infection and AIDS, plus syphilis.

No possibility of an education.

No job possibility as no one will employ if it is discovered is a street child.

Many children sniff glue in plastic bags to numb the pain of hunger.

Many are involved in and consuming dangerous substances like Heroin, Cannabis and drink medicinal spirit as is less expensive than alcohol to purchase.

Their growth in all ways mentally, emotionally and in height and weight is stunted by the harsh life on the streets.

They are often moved on from shop doorways, inside apartment foyers were they seek shelter and often with violence. In some Countries like Guatameala to name but one street child if caught by Police and other officials are often tortured and in some cases killed. No one bothers as the child has no documents and is not officially registered anywhere

In many Countries these unfortunate children are trafficked for various purposes in a market that is huge today. Some are trafficked for body parts, others for pedophile uses, and others for forced labor including prostitution.

Many street children also go missing each year as are procured and trafficked by international adoption unregistered agencies, often masked as NGO's who make huge sums of cash out of each child and care not where it goes or whom too. Before Romania rightly banned Inter Country adoptions in 2001 children were being exported for up to 30.000 Euro per child to the western country and many have never been heard of again. The same still applies to other Countries like Bulgaria, India, China and in African states to name but a few.

A limited effort to protect children on the streets.

Whilst Governments have in recent years been seen to increase their awareness of street children there have been insufficient results obtained. The same can be said for NGO's though often well meaning as well as they often work without any authority in a foreign Country and this is a huge disadvantage when projecting a series program to get children off the streets and back into mainstream life. As far back as 1992 the UN displayed open concern about the violence towards street children in many countries but it has had little effect and now we are 17 years further along the line or put it this way a street child in 1992 who was 3 year old would now be a adult with 20 years if he was lucky enough to live that long.

In Finland I know that the Government made a huge effort and has in just under 10 years cut the number of homeless children on the streets by half which is a real move in the right direction, but even they have found that a major problem with state and NGO programs is that street children themselves often reject these offers of a new life in effect and a warm home.

This to my mind is the crux of the problem faced as any help that is provided must itself appeal to the child on the streets, so they are happy to come into such a program and be in safety off the streets.

Shelters including those where I work here in Romania as in other Countries provide healthcare, counseling, some educational needs, social benefits, a hot bath, a dormitory with modern furniture and a clean bed, plus decent food, but there needs to be more than this I feel, far more to attract street children and this must be something they can relate to and something that they will warm too.

The official manner of street center staff also needs carefully looking at and addressing as this is a definite put off for children in this category who are not used to being dictated to or spoken down too. I worked in the UK in a program to re integrate long term prisoners back into society and ran a half way house for them in the late 1980s and again this group

like street children I know and work with now can be helped best if we work with them at their level and not ours. Only I feel in this way can we gain their support.

Another instance that these children do not like is to be degraded by staff once they do come to a center. In a simple medical examination if a doctor is not careful with his words he can easily humiliate a child who will leave immediately. Here we need training of staff and lots of it I feel. We also need centers run by accredited staff all of whom including any NGO volunteers must be cleared to work with children in a thorough Police criminal records check. Only recently I reported in an article on one case of a Save the Children worker who had not been checked and was found to have child abuse convictions in the past.

Food for street children.

This is a delicate issue and one that has many problems unseen.

If you feed a street child or group of street children with a sandwich and a hot drink then in my mind you are helping them stay on the streets and many international childcare experts agree with this too.

You fill their immediate need which is correct to do but don't solve their problem overall and so really do not help them. This subject as I say is a dilemma open to debate, as until there are resources with the communities that these children will accept then they will not attend them and leave the streets.

I saw a man here where I am in North East Romania recently give a half pizza portion to a woman sat on the street who is often in the same spot. Even before the man had left she had given the pizza to the street dog she has with her! He was disgusted and said some rude words to her and she in return got up and whacked him with her stick that she always has across the chest. I intervened and calmed a situation before it got any worse and sat on the ground with the woman at her level and spoke with her for a good while. I actually missed a meeting I was in town for but this was more important to me as I could maybe help here right now. After speaking on the ground for ages in the hot sun I told the woman that I was not feeling well (even though I was) and was going to get a cup of coffee in the café just up the street, plus casually asked if she would help me. She agreed and we ended up sitting in a street café having a nice cup of coffee together and her dog sat at her legs. I got up and went to the toilet and the waiter beckoned me as I returned and told me that this was not a woman of good quality! I told him to shut his mouth and added that she was in need of help and hoped one day he never was. This you see is the public attitude in many cases that prevents these people from even getting a coffee as for certain if this street woman had not been with me she would never have got served even if she had money to pay as this created a poor image for the café in their view.

3 weeks later and after several more meetings of which in the last 2 meetings on the street I introduced a friend who is a social worker and the result is this woman is now staying at the homeless shelter in Iasi City with her dog staying in the garden and she can be seen daily on a chair in the garden where she is close to her dog which is her only relative alive

so as to speak. It is too early to say if she will stay there long term but I hope so and furthermore then the question arises as to where does she go after, as these shelters are not permanent. Here again short-term care is very good but there must be long term solutions to enable these street children back into society to actually stay back in society and not feel that they have been let down again.

I myself do not have the answers to resolve the problems of street children but have certain methods that I apply and gain success with to date.

I hope that what I have written above will be useful in a debate that can help find solutions to the problems of street children and that will help reduce their numbers.

It is also worth mentioning that if you remove 1000 street children tomorrow in the present family environments of the World we live in there would be another 1,000 children to replace them on the streets within the same day! Therefore this problem is really deep rooted and needs attention at family level too by all agencies involved, plus unless poverty is addressed you will in my mind not stop the upward trends in street children and street adults as well.

With respect to all readers,

Brian..

Brian Douglas.

Stichting_rchf@yahoo.com

Brian.E.Douglas@gmail.com