

Introduction

The Consortium for Street Children (CSC)¹ is the leading international network dedicated to realising the rights of street children. We are committed to creating a better and sustainable future for some of the most disadvantaged and stigmatised children by working together to inform and inspire research and action that influences policy and best practice worldwide.

CSC also acts as the Secretariat to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Street Children which is chaired by Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer, Russell Brown MP and Craig Whittaker MP and currently has sixty members.

Street children

Definition of street children

There are various definitions of street children. The label, street child, is increasingly recognised by sociologists and anthropologists to be a socially constructed category that in reality does not form a clearly defined, homogeneous population or phenomenon. Research and practice have surfaced an enormous variation in children's experiences and considerable overlap between different groups: for example some children live on the streets all the time, others only occasionally or seasonally, while others move between home, the street and welfare shelters. Some retain strong links with their families; others have broken or lost all contact. 'Runaways' in rich countries, such as the UK and USA, include children sometimes described as 'detached' who in poorer countries would be considered street children. A recent definition to encompass the variety of experiences children have with the street focuses on the connections children make to the street and relationships formed there: a street-connected child is a child for whom the street is a central reference point – one which plays a significant role in his/her everyday life and identity.²

Numbers of street children

Estimating numbers of street children is fraught with difficulties. In 1989, UNICEF estimated 100 million children were growing up on urban streets around the world. Fourteen years later UNICEF reported: 'The latest estimates put the numbers of these children as high as 100 million'. Even more recently: 'The exact number of street children is impossible to quantify, but the figure almost certainly runs into tens of millions across the world. It is likely that the numbers are increasing'. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' (OHCHR) study on *The protection and promotion of the rights of children working and/or living on the street*³ highlights the difficulties in determining numbers of street children and advocates for greater combined efforts to collect data of street children.

Street children in Ecuador

Violence

One of the biggest challenges that street children face is their persistent exposure to and direct experiences of violence, both physical and psychological. This violence underlies other challenges that street children face and has serious and long-lasting health and personal development consequences. Violence often

¹ For more information on CSC, please visit, www.streetchildren.org.uk

² This definition is informed by Dr. Sarah Thomas de Benitez's Global Research Paper on street children which informed the UN OHCHR study on *The protection and promotion of the rights of children working and/or living on the street*

³ CSC was appointed as lead consultant for the study, the final report of which can be accessed here:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Children/Study/Pages/childrenonthestreet.aspx>

impacts on a child's relationship with his/her family and, conversely, violence in families is often a cause of children making connections with the street.⁴

In 2010, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (the UN Committee) expressed concern at the violence that street children in Ecuador face. The UN Committee recommended that the State of Ecuador address the root causes of children forming strong connections to the street, with a view to ensuring that children have a caring and protective family environment:

72. While welcoming measures taken by the State party to eradicate children begging in the streets at Christmas time, the Committee is concerned at the high number of children in street situations, who are exposed to violence, sexual and economic exploitation and discrimination.

*73. The Committee recommends that the root causes of children in street situations be addressed with a view to ensuring their return to a caring and protective family environment and exercise their rights as children. In doing this, children should be duly heard.*⁵

NGOs have been working towards this in Ecuador. In 2011, the Safe Families, Safe Children Coalition⁶ (SFSC) developed a framework for working with children from violent families. A child who experiences a violent home life can develop dysfunctional coping behaviours and is at greater risk of exclusion from society and dropping out of community services due to this behaviour. *Breaking the Cycle of Violence – Building a Future for the Most Excluded* serves as a concept note, detailing the thinking behind SFSC's framework. The framework emphasises the importance of intensive family- and home-based support for children and their families to reduce the prevalence and impact of violence with a strong emphasis on psychosocial support and positive thinking.⁷

Education

Violence extends into schools and is a significant factor in the number of street children who are excluded or drop out of school. Through focus group discussions, JUCONI Ecuador⁸ and International Children's Trust⁹ (ICT) identified that high exclusion rates among street children are due to bad behaviour and inability to learn, bullying by the teachers and schooling costs. Since 2004, JUCONI and ICT have provided training and support to teachers that focuses on how children affected by violence learn, and have encouraged the use of non-violent and inclusive teaching methods. As a result of this training, the high levels of exclusion amongst street children have dramatically reduced and perceptions of street children have improved.¹⁰

Working children

Many street children in Ecuador live with their families but work on the streets during the day. Due to extreme poverty and the financial difficulties that many families face, parents often send their children out to work during the day, either together with them, or on their own, for example, selling food, performing or

⁴ UN OHCHR study, paragraphs 25-28

⁵ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations: Ecuador, 2010 (CRC/C/ECU/CO/4), paragraphs 72-73 This report can be accessed here: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/co/CRC-C-ECU-CO-4.pdf>

⁶ The Safe Families, Safe Children Coalition is an international group of renowned organisations working globally to research, develop and implement effective methodologies to enable the most excluded children to gain sustainable access to their rights and have their developmental needs met appropriately, including those emotional and relational needs which most affect their future resilience and life outcomes

⁷ This report can be accessed here: <http://www.streetchildrenresources.org/resources/breaking-the-cycle-of-violence-building-a-future-for-the-most-excluded-2/>

⁸ For more information, please visit, <http://www.juconi.org.ec/>

⁹ For more information, please visit, <http://www.theict.org/>

¹⁰ Dr. Sarah Thomas de Benitez, *State of the World's Street Children: Violence*, Consortium for Street Children, (2007), pp.25-26. This report can also be accessed here: <http://www.streetchildrenresources.org/resources/state-of-the-worlds-street-children-violence/>

begging. Some children independently make the decision to work on the street. This is a survival tactic – under the extreme adversity that children in poverty face, the decision to work is often made when there are very few other options available.¹¹ This choice will often then mean that street children do not access education.

Street children demonstrate great resourcefulness and enterprise. Street Kids International¹² (SKI) has developed a series of Toolkits that support street children to develop their business skills; for instance, how to attract customers, understanding demand and competition and the creation of a business plan.¹³ In Ecuador, SKI has delivered business training programmes for unemployed youth in Quito.¹⁴

Stigmatisation and Discrimination

The stigma and discrimination which street children face perpetuates and exacerbate the challenges outlined above. The UN Committee, in its report to Ecuador in 2010, highlighted the need for the State of Ecuador to confront the stigma and discrimination that street children face by raising awareness of the realities of street children's lives:

*The Committee recommends that the State party raise public awareness of the situation of children living in the streets and combat misconceptions and prejudices.*¹⁵

CSC works to challenge misconceptions of street children through its advocacy work and CSC members are actively encouraged to get involved at national levels through the International Day for Street Children.¹⁶ The Day serves as a platform for the millions of street children around the world – and their champions – to speak out so that their rights cannot be ignored. Last year, JUCONI Ecuador facilitated an event for street children to come together and share their ideas to address the issue of children working on the street. As a result of this event, a working group was formed between government agencies and NGOs to discuss further steps that could be taken in the light of what the street children themselves had identified.

CSC Network Members working in Ecuador

- International Children's Trust: <http://www.theict.org/>
- International HIV/AIDS Alliance: <http://www.aidsalliance.org/>
- JUCONI Ecuador: <http://www.juconi.org.ec/>
- Plan UK: <http://www.plan-uk.org/>
- Save the Children: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/>
- SOS Children's Villages: <http://www.soschildren.org/>
- Students Supporting Street Kids: <http://www.ssk.org.uk/>
- Via Ninos: <http://www.vianinos.org/>

¹¹ Dr. Sarah Thomas de Benitez, *State of the World's Street Children: Research*, Consortium for Street Children (2011), p.29 This report can also be accessed here: <http://www.streetchildrenresources.org/resources/state-of-the-worlds-street-children-research/>

¹² For more information, please visit, <http://uk.streetkids.org/>

¹³ For more information, please visit, <http://uk.streetkids.org/toolkits>

¹⁴ Dr. Sarah Thomas de Benitez, *State of the World's Street Children: Research*, Consortium for Street Children (2011), p.61. This report can also be accessed here: <http://www.streetchildrenresources.org/resources/state-of-the-worlds-street-children-research/>

¹⁵ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations: Ecuador, 2010, (CRC/C/ECU/CO/4), paragraph 73. This report can be accessed here: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/co/CRC-C-ECU-CO-4.pdf>

¹⁶ For more information, please visit, www.streetchildrenday.org