

## Consortium for Street Children Conference 2019

### 30 years on from the Child Rights Convention: where are we on street children's rights?



On 11 November 2019, Consortium for Street Children held its Annual Conference at Baker McKenzie's offices in London.

#### **Annual Conference – panels and breakout session summaries**

To commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN Child Rights Convention, CSC's annual conference focused on the implementation of the CRC for street children thirty years after it was drafted, and the General Comment No. 21 on Children in Street-Situations two years after it was created. The conference brought together all aspects of our network's work: Advocacy, Research, Communications, and Campaigning.

It was attended by over 140 delegates from all around the world, including representatives from Malawi, Uruguay, the Philippines, Nepal, India, France, Belgium, and the United Kingdom.

There were two panel discussions and a series of breakout sessions and workshops, all of which produced insightful and in-depth discussions on the rights of street-connected children, and how these can be better realised.

## Opening remarks

Speakers:

- Daniel Edozie, *CSC Ambassador*
- Vartan Melkonian, *CSC Ambassador*

The conference opened with remarks from Daniel Edozie and Vartan Melkonian, two of CSC's Ambassadors. Daniel and Vartan shared their stories and their experiences of living on the streets in LA and Beirut respectively, and their reasons for supporting CSC's work.



## Maggie Eales Memorial Lecture

Keynote speaker:

- Nima Elbagir, *Senior International Correspondent for CNN*

Roger Hayes, Chair of CSC's Development Board, initiated the first Maggie Eales Memorial Lecture in memory of his late wife, a well-loved CNN staff member and child rights advocate. We hope this will become a regular feature at our annual conference in order to recognise the vital work of journalists in reporting issues relating to children's rights. This year we were thrilled to have Nima Elbagir, Senior International Correspondent for CNN, speak about her ground-breaking reporting on child rights abuses in Africa, in particular her investigative reports on the use of child labour in cobalt mines in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, child marriage, and child trafficking.

Nima said that she had not initially thought that she was well placed to speak at a conference devoted to discussing street-connected children, as she has not reported specifically on children in street situations. However, she admitted that when preparing for



Maggie Eales Memorial Lecture  
Nima Elbagir

the conference and reflecting on her work, street-connected children were implicated in the majority of her reports to some degree – whether relating to child labour, child trafficking, or gender-based violence. Nima noted that in her experiences, one thing which united children's experiences was that they wanted the right to speak for themselves, and the right to be heard – a theme which was discussed at length throughout the day.

[Watch Nima's video presentation](#)

## Special Address

- Philip Alston, *UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights*



We received a special address from Philip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. Philip began by noting that issues relating to children in street situations have presented themselves throughout his career, across a host of different organisations with differing mandates. As the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions, he attended several missions during which he came across grave abuses of street children's rights. For example, during a mission to

Guatemala police were implicated in the killing of street children who were considered as "undesirables", under a campaign of social cleansing.

In his position as Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip highlighted that street-connected children are one of the visible faces of poverty, yet among the least able to defend themselves. With this in mind, he urged governments and NGOs to move towards a rights-based approach which emphasises the dignity of street children.

[Watch the address here](#)

## **Morning panel discussion: How far have governments gone to implement the CRC for street children after 30 years?**

Panellists:

- Moderator: Caroline Ford, *CSC Chief Executive*
- Ann Skelton, *Member of the UN Child Rights Committee*
- Michael Bochenek, *Senior Counsel, Human Rights Watch Children's Division*
- Silvana Lesca Barolin, *Minister Counsellor, Embassy of Uruguay to the United Kingdom*

Ann Skelton of the UN Child Rights Committee explained the UNCRC is asking more direct questions with respect to street children, highlighting their recent recommendations to Mozambique which explicitly referred to street-connected children in its concluding observations. It was stressed that at present, states are not collecting enough data and are not giving enough information to the Committee in order to better inform its recommendations. She concluded by highlighting the importance of advocacy and civil society when it comes to holding governments to account following on from the Committee's recommendations.



## CONSORTIUM FOR STREET CHILDREN

Michael Bochenek, Senior Counsel in the Human Rights Watch Children's Division, expressed his concerns about the implementation of the CRC in some of the most developed states, citing recent regressions in the context of the immigration crises. He noted that many policies surrounding asylum seekers are in fact creating situations in which more people are living on the streets, and in which children's rights are overlooked.

In contrast to these concerns, Silvana Lesca Barolin, Minister Counsellor at the Uruguayan Embassy in London, spoke about the recent launch of Uruguay's pioneering and comprehensive National Plan for Street Children – the first of its kind in the world. The National Plan deals directly with street-connected children, and is a ground-breaking example of how collaboration between governments and NGOs can lead to real change for street-connected children.

[View Ann Skelton's presentation](#)

### Breakout Session 1: Working with governments to achieve change for street children

Speakers:



- Moderator: Lizet Vlamings, *Head of Advocacy and Research, CSC*
- Gonzalo Salles, *Director, Gurises Unidos*
- Catherine Scerri, *Deputy Director, Bahay Tuluyan*
- Bishnu Paudel, *Programme Officer, Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN)*
- Laura Hendricksen, *International Advocacy Officer, Apprentis d'Auteuil*

This session looked at what can be learnt from organisations who have worked with local government officials in order to achieve positive change for street children at the local level.

#### *Uruguay*

Gonzalo Salles from Gurises Unidos presented on how NGOs and civil society worked together with the Uruguayan Government to launch the National Action Plan for Street Children. Several consultations were carried out with the State, civil society, and organisations working with street children, from which five general lines of action, presented in terms of rights, were used to structure the Plan. The Plan contains the main agreements to which state agencies and ministries are committed, as well as proposals to count the numbers of children in street situations. In order to monitor the Plan, Gurises Unidos and the NGOs Network are considering bringing together a Consultative Council with representatives of children from different organisations.

[View the case study here](#)

#### *Philippines*

Catherine Scerri from Bahay Tuluyan presented on her experiences from the Philippines, where issues of forced removals of street-connected children and "cleaning the streets" have been real challenges. While there has been some progress towards a National Action Plan on children in street situations, including a street child's congress, in many ways the government has been disengaging with these issues. She talked about the importance of relationship management with the government, crucially being careful to ensure that government does not feel that you are criticising them, and instead managing the



relationship as a partnership, which might often require you to allow them to take credit for what you are doing.

[View the case study here](#)

### *Nepal*

Bishnu Paudel from Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN) presented on how CWIN have worked with the Nepalese Government to campaign for the protection of children. The government launched a campaign in 2015 and selected key organisations throughout Nepal to collaborate with. While the government is now talking about putting street-connected children on the agenda, it is still limiting the way in which organisations can work with this group. While the government is on the right path CWIN is advocating that the government focus more on protection and the structures which accommodate for the needs and well-being of street children.

### *Republic of the Congo*

Laura Hendricksen from Apprentis d'Auteuil presented the case of the Republic of the Congo, in which they partnered with REIPER, a network of 21 organisations, to develop a proposal for a national strategy on street children at the request of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Laura highlighted the importance of bringing different stakeholders together – from civil society, government ministries, and institutions such as the police – as well as the need for good data, and of holding consultations with street children to inform this data.

[View case study](#)

## **Breakout Session 2: Using strategic litigation to achieve change for street children**

Speakers:

- Moderator: John Leadley, *Partner in the Dispute Resolution team, Baker McKenzie LLP*
- Ann Skelton, *Member of the UN Child Rights Committee*
- Michael Bochenek, *Senior Counsel, Human Rights Watch Children's Division*
- Michael Brosowski, *Founder and Chief Executive, Blue Dragon Children's Foundation Vietnam (remote)*
- Rose Kagoro, *Advocacy Manager, Railway Children Africa*

This session aimed to give participants an opportunity to hear first-hand examples of how organisations have used strategic litigation in their work, through planning and preparing to the outcome, in order to protect the rights of the child.

Ann Skelton began by highlighting how strategic litigation should be used when all domestic remedy mechanisms have been exhausted, however she highlighted that in Africa in particular more cases could be brought to the African Committee. She cited the example of a Communication which was brought against the Government of Senegal in 2012 by the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria and *Rencontre Africain pour la Défense de Droits de l'Homme* – a Senegalese NGO. The case addressed the plight of Senegalese children in Qur'anic schools who are forced to beg. In this case the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child found the *government* accountable for the activities of these schools even though they are non-state entities, and issued several recommendations.



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Michael Brosowski of Blue Dragon spoke about the organisation's legal department, which deals with over 200 cases each year of trafficking, abuse and exploitation. Prior to Blue Dragon's involvement, no person had ever been charged with sexually abusing a boy child, and Vietnamese law made no provision for males being victims of sexual crimes. Blue Dragon's approach was to start at the grassroots level, as well as collaborating with the police, justice officials, local leaders, and the local media. Blue Dragon's work led to a revision of the criminal code, meaning that half of Vietnam's population previously unprotected from sexual abuse in law, are now afforded legal protection.

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Michael Bochenek said that while litigation takes a long time and the outcomes may not seem immediately impactful, they can result in systematic change. He spoke about the "Case of the Street Children" (Villagrán-Morales et al. v. Guatemala) in which interpretation of the American Convention was based on the CRC, and it was ruled that the interpretation of the right to life includes the minimum conditions for a dignified life. He spoke of how cases such as these are important in creating legal momentum. He also spoke about how 'new uses' can be created out of 'old' agreements, citing the case of Flores v. Reno (1997), an agreement which limits the length of time and the conditions under which US officials can detain immigrant children. In 2015, a US District Judge ruled that the requirements of the Flores agreement apply to both unaccompanied minors and children apprehended with their parents. Therefore it is important to think about how existing agreements and rulings can be applied in different contexts.

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Rose Kagoro from Railway Children Africa discussed how the organisation supports street-connected children to obtain legal aid and representation, partnering with Tanganyika Law Society for pro bono legal support. She spoke of a case in Tanzania challenging the Law of Marriage Act (1971) on the grounds that it allowed a girl child to get married with parental consent. She highlighted that embracing collaboration, garnering support from the media and a group of influencers (such as MPs), and drawing from the experiences of other countries and organisations aided the case.

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### **Breakout Session 3: Transformative story-work with children and young people**

*Thea Shahrokh, Researcher at the Centre for Trust Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University*

This workshop focused on the power of sharing personal stories and how to centre the voices of young people as we reflect on the 30<sup>th</sup> year of the CRC.

It started by looking at the everyday political and public narratives which are constructed about children and young people, which shape their lived experiences and constrain how they are understood by policymakers, service providers, and even young people themselves. She spoke of the power of personal stories, told creatively by young people, which can provide counter-narratives and create space for children and young people to claim their own place in the world: if street children's rights are to be realised, taking control of their own stories and how they are told is essential.



The group then took part in a 1-hour interactive workshop which created a space for sharing and reflecting on the role of stories in how we understand young people's sense of themselves and their rights. The 'Transformative Story-work' methodology was discussed, followed by a discussion on how a participatory approach supports personal and collective learning for social change, the ethical implications of different forms of story-work, and how the participants could incorporate stories and storytelling into their own work.

[View the presentation here](#)

## Afternoon Breakout Sessions

### **Breakout Session 1: Promoting street children's voices in large-scale data collection**

Speakers:

- Lizet Vlamings, *Head of Advocacy and Research, CSC*
- Sian Wynne, *Director of Programmes, StreetInvest*
- Dr Claudia Cappa, *Senior Advisor, Statistics, UNICEF (remote)*
- Dr Ruth Edmonds, *Founder, Keep Your Shoes Dirty*

This session aimed to look at the data needs for realising street children's rights by bringing together different perspectives on standardising methods of collecting data about street-connected children.

Claudia Cappa from UNICEF introduced the session by highlighting that data and research on street-connected children have been inadequate. She said that rigorous and standardised methods of collecting data on children living on the streets are critical to responding to the vulnerability of these children.

*"A standard approach to enumerating children living on the streets needs to be based on a comprehensive understanding of the current data landscape and to address the complex and varied data needs across contexts is needed to support countries in fulfilling their obligations towards children"*

Following on from this, the session gave attendees the opportunity to discuss the opportunities and risks of large-scale standardised data collection. The opportunities discussed included: (1) Consistent data allows for comparison between countries and tracking of trends, which can support global advocacy and national policy implementation; (2) Building data collection capacity among organisations and children, notably how participatory methods could be used globally as ways for children to collect and analyse data; (3) Mobilising evidence for advocacy – standardised data creates evidence for policy development and change, and for global advocacy, making street-connected children visible globally, and; (4) Knowledge sharing and learning.

The participants also discussed the risks of large-scale standardised data collection, and possible ways of mitigating these. The risks discussed included: (1) Difficulties of data collection process and ethics, for example being identified as a street child could have negative implications; (2) Inadequate capacity for data collection; (3) Lack of focus on deep locally and socio-culturally relevant or individual level data – importantly, standardised measures have the potential to turn children into numbers rather than individuals, and masks context and cultural specific factors, and; (4) Inappropriate use of data, for example drawing false assumptions from data and perpetuating stigmatisation. The mitigations discussed



included customising the living document, analysing the wider context and alongside qualitative data, and finally having a validation process



## Breakout Session 2: Using international advocacy mechanisms to achieve change for street children

Speakers:

- Moderator: Caroline Ford, *Chief Executive, CSC*
- Ann Skelton, *Member of the UN Child Rights Committee*
- Laura Hendricksen, *International Advocacy Officer, Apprentis d'Auteuil*
- Bishnu Paudel, *Programme Officer, Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN)*
- Francisco Quesney, *Programme Management Officer, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children*



This session aimed to give participants an opportunity to hear first-hand examples of how different mechanisms work, where they have been successful and the change they have achieved, and how this can be incorporated into their own work.

Laura Hendricksen spoke of the importance of local and national advocacy, and of building an advocacy plan with local partners in order to know what to bring to the national level. She emphasised the

importance of UN Periodic Reviews (UPR) to reinforce the work done locally and nationally. Although UPR seems far from the work of local CSOs, it can reinforce the credibility of local CSOs in the eyes of the government. In Republic of the Congo, the request for a national strategy on street-connected children was likely facilitated by the UPR engagement.



## CONSORTIUM FOR STREET CHILDREN

Bishnu Paudel spoke about child-led reporting to the UNCRC; CWIN partnered with 630 child clubs, 718 youth groups and 75 adolescent girls groups, and filed a petition to the Supreme Court of Nepal which allowed for the registration of the first child-led organisation in the world, which allowed children to carry out consultations with other children. Bishnu stressed the importance of bringing children's voices to the international level through advocacy.

Ann Skelton of the UN Child Rights Committee highlighted two important elements of international advocacy and engaging with the CRC. Firstly, the importance of alternative reports and participating in pre-sessions when a country is under review. Secondly, comparative information produced by regional and international NGOs in order to give reliable and updated information - she believes that lack of data is the missing part in street child rights advocacy. She ended by noting that NGOs are stronger if they are grounded in social movements at the local level.

Francisco Quesney from the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children spoke of the importance of leaving no one behind and ensuring that neglected forms of violence against street children are brought into international advocacy. Francisco mentioned the possibility of bringing key messages to UN member states through the reports presented in October to the General Assembly, and March to the Human Rights Council – for example, Mexico used these mechanisms to raise the issue of bullying.

### Panel Discussion 2: Exploring what meaningful participation looks like

Panellists:

- Moderator: David Schofield, *CSC Board of Trustees*
- Bishnu Paudel, Programme Officer, *Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN)*
- Vicky Ferguson, *Chief Executive, Glad's House*
- Babu Dey, *Programme Coordinator Street & Platform Children Programme, CINI, and StreetInvest Global Trainer & Facilitator (remote)*
- Thea Shahrokh, *Researcher at the Centre for Trust Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University*
- Victor Sande-Aneiros, *Writer and Editor, CRIN*
- Francisco Quesney, *Programme Management Officer, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children*

Thea Shahrokh spoke about the importance of participation throughout the research cycle, noting that often children are only included during certain phases of the research process. In particular, child participation rarely extends to the analysis of research, meaning children are often excluded from sense-making which is often where the power lies. She highlighted that the research process is a social process affected by power dynamics and concluded by saying that no form of child participation is perfect, but that there must always be an ethical framework guiding participation and mechanisms for accountability.

Vicky Ferguson also spoke of the power dynamics which are inherent in child participation, noting the importance of having 'safe adults' and offering holistic care both on and off the streets when it comes to child participation, and of shifting and sharing the power with children and young people. She mentioned the General Comment consultations as an example of effective child participation of which we should all be proud.



## CONSORTIUM FOR STREET CHILDREN

Victor Sande-Aneiros said that child participation is flawed, but that we should be reflexive and ask *why* child participation is important in order to avoid being tokenistic, and question whether the term ‘child participation’ in and of itself does justice to the advancement of children’s rights. He said that in order to identify best practices, you need to trial practices and acknowledge when it doesn’t work, learn from these mistakes, and incorporate these lessons into building better practices around child participation.

Babu Dey spoke of the reluctance to include children in the conversation on issues that concern them, posing the question “*How much does it cost to listen to a child?*”. Babu highlighted that in the context of limited funding, learning and sharing good practices from each other is an important step to realising meaningful child participation.

Francisco Quesney spoke of the challenges around participation at the international level, particularly concerning language barriers, and the challenges of having too few voices which do not represent those of all children. However, he stressed that participation is contextually and culturally defined, and is an “*empowering and protective tool*” and that its power lies in the fact that it empowers rights holders. He concluded by saying that our role is about becoming a conduit between children’s views and how they can be taken into account in social and political processes.



Thanks to everyone who joined us in person and remotely, it was great to see so many of you from overseas and the UK and we really hope that you enjoyed the sessions, took something away that you can apply to your own work and made good connections on the day.

This was our most successful conference to date, with more attendees from all over the world taking part and influential speakers who provided insights and encouragement to continue our work.

Thank you to everyone who contributed; the speakers, attendees and Baker McKenzie who generously provided the venue. We really hope that you will join us for our 2020 conference which will build on the success of this years and continue the conversation on how we can work together to secure rights for street-connected children.

### List of attendees

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Siani Abrahams	London Metropolitan University	Courtney Hagen	Walou
Maiya Ahmed	Walou	Clare Hanbury	Children for Health
Madeeha Ansari	Cities for Children	Lilla Haris	
Georgina Awoonor-Gordnon	Chance for Childhood	Barney Harker	StreetInvest
Siale Bain-Vete	Commonwealth Foundation	William Harris	Keeping Children Safe
Jamie Balfour-Paul	Magic for Smiles	Roger Hayes	CSC Development Board
Sandra Beeton	AOPM	Nour Hegazy	Cities for Children
Cassandra Bennett		Laura Hendricksen	Apprentis d'Auteuil
Michael Bochenek	Human Rights Watch	Vicky Johnson	University of Sussex
Chloe Borland	ChildHope	Karin Joseph	Amos Trust
Mariah Cannon	IDS	Rose Kagoro	Railway Children Africa
Dora Castillo	Amnesty International	Mukhtar Karim	
Hannah Caswell	Street Child	Pete Kent	Railway Children
Christina Chale	Astellas	Golam Kibria	Ek Ronga Ek-Ghuri
Tichafara Chisaka	Sight Savers	Judy Larkin	Risk Principals Limited
Minal Chouhan	UCL	Silvana Lesca Barolin	Embassy of Uruguay
Noelle Chuks-Eboka	Education 4 Purpose Initiative	David Maidment	CSC Honorary Member
Hassatou Conde	Amnesty International	Emily Malcom	Toybox
Su Corcoran	Manchester Metropolitan University	Vartan Melkonian	CSC Ambassador
Gordon Couch	Students Supporting Street Kids	MacBain	YONECO
		Mkandawire	
Renata de Souza	Amnesty International	Stephanie Mooney	SCWA Coalition
Sander Degeling	Mobile School	Mary Myaya	Comic Relief
Iain Disley	ChildHope UK	Daniela Palou Bonitto	ChildHope UK
Sunday Dogo	ChildHope	Bishnu Paudel	Child Workers in Nepal
		Francisco Quesney	Office of the Special Representative of SGVAC
Gulsah Dost	Kings College London	Nicola Reynolds	
Jean Dzene	Jean Dzene	Kate Richards	Inclusive Data Charter
Ruth Edmonds	Keep Your Shoes Dirty	Irene Rizzini	PUC-Rio
Daniel Edozie	CSC Ambassador	Caroline Rose	Lumos
Nima Elbagir	CNN	David Rosselli	Chemin Neuf UK
Tushar Erafat	EREG	Jean-Cristophe Ryckmans	CPCS-International
Nicolas Fenton	CSC	Ilyas Said	
Vicky Ferguson	Glad's House	Nicola Sansom	S.A.L.V.E. International



# CONSORTIUM FOR STREET CHILDREN

Manuel Galán González-  
Pardo

Matumaini Association

Linda Savage

Catherine Scerri

Bahay Tuluyan

Caroline Taylor

Happy Child  
International

David Schofield

CSC Board

Natalie Turgut-  
Thompson

Street Rights

Thea Shahrokh

Centre for Trust, Peace  
and Social Relations

Ntwatwa Twaha

Ntwatwa Foundation for  
Education Services

Ann Skelton

UN Child Rights  
Committee

Lucy Wilson

Students Supporting  
Street Kids

Pablo Stockley

SCWA Coalition

Jacqueline Wolfson

Shule Foundation

Huizi Tang

UCL

John Wroe

Street Child United

Victor Sande-Aneiros

CRIN

Sian Wynn

Street Invest

Gonzalo Salles

Gurises Unidos