

## **Introduction**

The Covid-19 pandemic and responses to it have brought threats to street-connected children on a scale unlike any seen before. It has also highlighted the inequalities and threats that existed pre-covid, that have been magnified. In response to the pandemic and a global wave of government-enforced lockdowns and public health measures restricting movement and access to public spaces, CSC has hosted a series of regional calls with members of our global Network to hear first-hand how the situation was impacting street-connected children around the world, and how organisations were coping with the increase in demand and shrinking budgets. While the impact of the pandemic and responses to it were very much contextually-defined, Network Members in Africa, Latin America, South Asia, South East Asia, and Europe were all reporting how street-connected children have not only been exposed to greater risk, but have also been largely forgotten in emergency preparedness and response. As the pandemic is a public health crisis but also an economic one, street connected children are disproportionately affected, as are the small organisations dedicated to working with them.

In all of our regional calls, network members told us of how this population is at increased risk of contracting Covid-19 as a result of their limited ability to follow preventative measures, such as self-isolation and ‘stay-at-home’ orders, and how their inability to comply with government directives was leaving them vulnerable to police round-ups, arrests, and violence. We heard how in many countries street-connected children are at risk of hunger and exploitation by adults, as orders to stay off the streets have left them with no source of income. Our network members also told us about the challenges they themselves have faced; in operational terms, to keep their services running, and in terms of their limited ability to access the streets and reach children who have been forced into hiding.

Collaboration and an openness to share knowledge and learnings have driven the work of the CSC Network in response to the pandemic. With the scale of the impacts, responses and consequences, and wider implications of the pandemic, as well as the collaborative energy of the CSC Network in mind, it was clear to us that the focus of our annual CSC Conference must be on the Covid-19 pandemic. Given the uncertainty about the short and long term future of the public health crisis and the travel restrictions already in place, this year’s conference will be entirely online. Although we will be disappointed not to see people face-to-face, we hope that the digital format will make our conference this year the most accessible it has ever been to our global network. Many of you have already identified that travel will be out of the question for some time — and that an online event is the best way to ensure equal participation by all.

In response to requests from network members, we will design this year’s conference to allow for as much practical information exchange and planning as possible. We want to invite insights from our Network and beyond and stimulate conversation and debate around specific themes and questions. It will not be a traditional webinar. We are a network of organisations all helping each other — and we hope that our conference format this year will reflect this. Covid-19 and its impacts are not likely to be short term. We will be discussing together our longer

term strategies and analysis as well as reflecting on how we have managed in the first wave of the emergency.

The conference will be split into 3 parts, structured in a linear form. Part 1 will be about the impacts of the pandemic and public health crisis on the lives of street-connected children and on the pre-existing vulnerabilities they experience and resilience they demonstrate. Part 2 will focus on responses and consequences – how government and non-government stakeholders have responded to the pandemic, and the impact this has had on street-connected children. Part 3 will move towards looking at longer-term consequences and wider implications of the pandemic, concentrating on the challenges and opportunities the pandemic creates for street-connected children and our work with them in the future. We will record all of the sessions, so that you can watch them all regardless of your time zone or which session you chose to join during the event.

We would like to take this opportunity to welcome your ideas and proposals for specific topics, suggestions for sessions, and what you would like to be addressed. If you would be interested in proposing a speaker or session, or running a session within the themes we have outlined (see below), we would love to hear about it. We would encourage you to think creatively about the format the session might take – a workshop, anecdotal-based presentations, a panel etc. – and how participants can engage, such as through the chat function or using an interactive whiteboard. To drive engagement we are interested in receiving visual contributions ahead of the conference, such as videos or posters answering specific questions which we will coordinate in the coming months.

If you have ideas about what you would like to cover, but are not sure how it would work remotely – please contact us and we can help you think about options. You can find out more about the current session plans below.

### **Session outlines**

There will be 6 sessions in total, running for max 1.5 hours each.

Monday 2nd November - 2 sessions in the morning and 2 in the afternoon

Tuesday 3rd November - 2 sessions in the morning, with the AGM running at 1pm BST.

***We would like to invite proposals for sessions and speakers that fall within the outlined themes below. We are open to a variety of formats; panel discussions, Q&As, Ted talks, workshops etc.***

#### **Session 1: Vulnerabilities and street-connected children during covid19**

This session will explore the impact the pandemic has had so far on the lives and rights of street-connected children and on their pre-existing vulnerabilities. This could include, for

example, looking at their vulnerability to ill-health, the economic implications of government measures such as curfews and lockdowns, and the impact on access to food and other basic needs.

We are keen that this session is approached from the perspective of street-connected children's experiences of the pandemic and how it has impacted on their rights, as well as what it means more specifically for implementation of the General Comment 21.

### **Session 2: Discrimination, street children and the pandemic**

In this session we would like to explore how the pandemic has exacerbated the ways street-connected children are already discriminated against, the ways the pandemic has exposed discrimination in their lives and what the pandemic has brought to light in terms of policy discrimination against them.

As with session 1, we are keen that this session is approached from the perspective of street-connected children's experiences of the pandemic and how it has impacted on their rights, as well as what it means more specifically for implementation of the General Comment 21.

### **Session 3: Responses and consequences: policy**

This session will explore how governmental stakeholders have responded to the pandemic, and the impact this has had – both positive and negative – on street-connected children. It will consider different policy responses; how policy makers have responded to the pandemic, what laws, policies and measures have been introduced by governments that affect the rights and lives of street-connected children and what new laws and policies have been introduced to address the needs of street children.

In particular, we would like to look at what lessons have been learnt from previous epidemics, in particular Ebola, and other crises, and how these lessons have been applied to or are featured in responses to the pandemic.

### **Session 4: Responses and consequences: practice**

We would like this session to explore how non-governmental stakeholders have responded to the pandemic, and the impact this has had – both positive and negative – on street-connected children. In particular, it will consider how NGOs and other practitioners have responded to the pandemic, what challenges practitioners have faced and what stories of challenges and success can be shared.

Child-led responses and ways in which street children have been part of the design and implementation of responses will also be a focal part of this session.

**Session 5: Looking beyond the pandemic**

Session 5 will look beyond the pandemic in terms of the challenges and opportunities it has created for street-connected children and our work with them in the future. We see this as an opportunity to change the landscape of how we work with and advocate for the rights of street-connected children, and would like this session to explore the policy and practice opportunities that have been created by the pandemic.

**Session 6: The future of the sector**

Looking forward, this last session will consider what the role is for the sector in the future, and how we can capitalise on opportunities and challenges and work together to improve things for street-connected children as we move beyond the pandemic. It will consider how we can respond to lessons learned and what is needed from research, advocacy, policy and practice?