



INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS

THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION OF CHILDREN ESTRANGED FROM THEIR FAMILY AND SOCIALLY EXCLUDED (PARIS, 23-25 MAY 2011)

SUMMARY

OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE EXPERT GROUP ON

THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION OF CHILDREN IN STREET SITUATION

SCOPE OF THE ISSUE

The expression « children in street situation » encompasses a wide range of realities and experiences (children working/and or living on the street on a temporary or permanent basis, with or without their families, and other similar situations). In all those situations, the street always appears as a critical reference point for those children who regularly have to put up with discrimination and exclusion. Whether the child was placed (by push factors) or placed him/her (due to pull factors) into such situations, the issue remains of great concern for in the street children and their rights are jeopardized in many ways. Their right to education is particularly likely to be subjected to violations.

Living on the street profoundly damages children's integral development. They indeed can turn unable to plan for their own future, often forget their personal past history and culture; suffer from diverse physical or psychological traumas due to aggressions committed by peers, adults, families, institutions...They can eventually internalize all the prejudices manifested against them and voluntarily act in a violent or antisocial way.

IMPACT ON THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Children in street situation often have huge difficulties when it comes to join formal education institutions and systems. It deeply challenges them to comply with instructions such as not being late, respecting authorities, remaining at the same place...

They can thus be stigmatized by classmates and teachers, be abusively or repeatedly punished, and then led to fail or even drop school. Institutions are often reluctant, if not openly opposed to welcome those children deemed as troublemakers, lazy or unskilled beings. Cases of abuse have even been reported among those institutions, without any reaction from judicial and other authorities. It is then of utmost importance to urgently and jointly take actions that

are more efficient so that those children regain their rights and dignity.

KEYS TOWARDS REINSERTION

When accompanying those children, it is necessary to first listen to their views, and rely on their own resources to help them build a new life. Education should not be limited to the formal sector, but also comprise informal teaching and promote learning. The numerous competencies that children have acquired throughout their experience on the street would thus not be ignored or despised any longer, but adequately taken into account, developed and officially recognized.

One should pay special attention to welcome those children in a warm and respectful manner with due regard to their dignity. The aim is also to accustom them to respectfully interact with others and assume for their own responsibilities. The impacts of the diverse traumatic experiences those children have been through should be handled with care through creative means such as theatre, support groups, or games like the “memory box” that aim at linking the child back to his/her history.

The group insists on the need to focus on the cultural dimension of the reintegration process for those children. We therefore recommend using some traditional rituals coming from the children’s original cultural background to help them progressively find new references.

It is of utmost importance to pay special attention to girls in a street situation. They are indeed doubly stigmatized as female and because they live on the street. They are victims of specific attacks and should then be cared for adequately with regard to their additional traumas.

All those measures aim at developing the resilience of children in street situation so that they do not identify themselves or remain labelled by society neither as

victims nor as offenders. Their right to education should therefore not be limited to a degree, but should instead lead them to build their own lives and become influential actors in the societies they live in.

This will only be fulfilled when public authorities and the international community show real involvement on the issue through actions such as increasing the means and resources as well as raising awareness among professionals, experts, and training educators.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is also necessary to advocate for a true conceptual revolution so that children in street situation are primarily regarded as children. This implies to give more space to all the voices coming from the field. Consequently, one should not only advocate among international political authorities, but also develop advocacy at the regional and national level, and focus on all the existing regional instruments and mechanisms to enable the children in street situation to enjoy fully their right to education.

States are called to set up an effective legal framework that would enhance the protection of children and efficiently fight impunity for perpetrators of serious violations against children in street situation.

The group thus appeals the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to elaborate a General Comment on “the rights of children in street situation” so as to enhance the reflection on the issue and define better means of action. It is also urgent that States truly comply with their obligation to ensure free and compulsory primary education for all, that education remains inclusive, and econdary education progressively becomes compulsory.