

ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN IN STREET SITUATIONS!

2024



There are currently **244 million children in the world who do not attend school**¹. This figure is a reasonable approximation of the phenomenon of **children in street situations**^{*}. Yet these children have a right to education, and the benefits of a dedicated policy to guarantee them access are well known: education promotes socio-economic mobility and is a means of escaping poverty. Concerted action by governments and civil society would enable rapid progress to be made. These children, like all others, have the right to free, quality education.

In most countries, children in street situations are left to fend for themselves, escaping official statistics and state support. Finding food, a place to sleep, and providing for themselves and their families, takes up a great deal of their time and energy.

These children are extremely marginalised and their rights are not respected, particularly their access to education or health. They cannot go to school for a variety of reasons: they don't have identity papers or a birth certificate, they don't have the required level or certification depending on their age, they don't have the means to pay the costs of education, etc.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating effects on education, causing learning losses in **80% of countries in the world**². Poverty and inequality have increased, particularly in the poorest and most vulnerable countries³ which has contributed to an increase in school dropouts and the number of children in street situations.

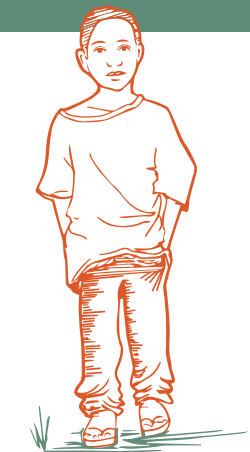
In order to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 "Ensure access to quality education for all", governments must act urgently to pay particular attention to the problems faced by children in street situations and find appropriate solutions.

KEY MESSAGES

- Education funding must be a priority for governments, with particular attention paid to children in street situations and school dropouts.
- If education is to be accessible to all children, there needs to be a government strategy for children in street situations.
- Specific, holistic support programmes for children in street situations must be developed to give them real access to education.

* Being in a street situation can mean :

- Sleeping rough and no contact with your family.
- Living on the streets with your family.
- Alternating between the street and reception centres.
- Working on the street or spending most of your time on the street and returning home at night.



ISSUES

When conditions of access to education contribute to street situations

Administrative issues

Many children cannot be enrolled in school simply because they do not have an identity document. In fact, **166 million children under the age of 5 are not registered⁴, yet having a birth certificate is often a compulsory condition for enrolling in school or taking exams.**

**IN THE WORLD,
1 in 4 children
under the age of 5
is not registered.⁴**

**IN MADAGASCAR,
56% of children
complete primary
school.**

Many families cannot afford to send their children to school. This represents a loss of income and a substantial investment for families in very precarious situations who can barely cover their basic needs. **In Madagascar, 56% of children complete primary school, and children living in extreme poverty make up only 18% of this figure.⁵**

Public education often involves costs, even when it is "supposed" to be free by law. Access to education is often subject to "hidden costs", such as enrolment fees, the purchase of uniforms and teaching materials, or even paying the salaries of so-called "community" or "volunteer" teachers, and so on.

In many countries, the low level of investment in the education system means that there are not enough schools, often in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, with a low number of classrooms, qualified teachers, and adequate teaching materials. Faced with this situation, it is the parents who must cover the costs and hire so-called "community" teachers, who have no pedagogical training.

**IN THE CONGO,
53% of teachers
are unqualified.⁶**

When street situations prevent access to education



Children in street situations often **drop out of school**. When they do want to go back to school (usually with the support of civil society actors), the education system generally has no facilities to help them catch up. A young person wishing to start or resume school has to join a class whose average age is much lower than his or her own, often resulting in the school refusing to enrol the child or the child dropping out.

To make up for this shortcoming, civil society is proposing **parallel remedial education** to enable children to re-enter public education. However, the **requirements** of many school systems are **an obstacle to the reintegration of dropouts**, particularly when it comes to enrolling in secondary education or vocational training. For example, even if young people have the required level, state schools often demand official certification, which civil society organisations are unable to provide because their educational programmes are not recognised by the state.

These children, who were already generally excluded from society, stigmatised, and unfairly perceived as "delinquents", are unable to reintegrate through state schools. And even when they do manage to get into school, the stigma unfortunately continues to be attached to them by administrative staff, teachers, other pupils, and their parents.

To ensure access to education for all children in street situations

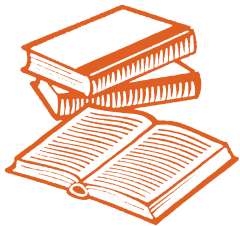
We are convinced that every society has everything to gain by enabling its young people to take their future into their own hands. We are working to ensure that all children have access to education and training tailored to the needs of those living on the streets.

Collaboration between civil society, child protection services, families and schools ensures that these children are properly cared for and can go to school.



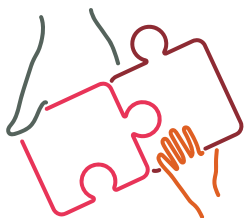
By adapting the criteria for enrolment in state schools, so that they are free and flexible, children can be enrolled in school even if they do not have, or do not yet have, their identity documents, with no waiting period.

Support for families living in precarious conditions or on the streets, assistance with birth registration procedures, school enrolment and support (logistical and financial), particularly via the canteen system and extra-curricular activities, help to get these children into school.



Flexible educational alternatives such as "second chance" schools or schemes, remedial courses and bridges to formal education, within the framework of partnerships with civil society, are all solutions for getting these children back into school. The programmes, which use teaching methods adapted to the realities of children in street situations, help to overcome the problems of children dropping out of or refusing to go to school because of their age or level of education.

Flexible learning systems combined with psychosocial support and long-term follow-up help these young people, whose learning process is sometimes more complex due to traumatic episodes and financial and family difficulties, to succeed. These young people need to be trained in an environment that understands their background.



Vocational training helps young people to integrate quickly and sustainably into society. It is essential to adapt admission conditions, relax age limits and school certification requirements, and recognise previous training provided by other bodies as well as the professional experience already acquired by these young people, to enable them to access state vocational training schemes.

Training teachers and raising schoolchildren's awareness of children's rights and the realities of children in street situations effectively combat stigmatisation and encourage their integration and success at school.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Full implementation of the right to education set out in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child requires States to pay particular attention to children in street situations and to take concrete action.

Based on our experience in the field and General Comment No. 21 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on children living on the streets, we recommend that States:

- 1** Develop, in collaboration with civil society, a comprehensive and integrated policy for children in street situations to support them in accessing their rights, particularly education.
- 2** Set education funding as a national investment priority, make education free and compulsory, increase the number of teachers, provide a canteen service, and improve basic school infrastructure.
- 3** Remove barriers for access to education by making it easier to obtain birth certificates for children who are not registered with the civil registry and by adapting state school enrolment procedures in terms of administrative requirements and age.
- 4** Setting up educational alternatives such as intermediate refresher classes with teaching methods adapted to the needs of children in street situations and working with civil society to build bridges between informal and formal education.
- 5** Encourage collaboration between the public and private education sectors and set up a private sector sponsorship system for the schooling of children in street situations.
- 6** Adapt vocational training by making access conditions more flexible, and recognise training and diplomas issued by other bodies such as civil society to encourage the integration of these young people.

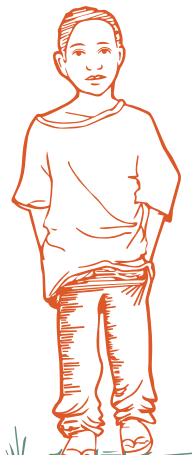


Let's take action now!



It's very important to go to school, because if you don't go to school, society won't respect you.

A young man who lived on the streets, Congo



Sources:

- UNESCO.** 244M children won't start the new school year. 2022
- UN.** Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. 2024
- The World Bank.** 2023 in nine Charts : A growing Inequality. 2023
- UNICEF.** Despite significant increase in birth registration, a quarter of the world's children remain 'invisible'. 2019
- UNICEF.** MICS Eagle Madagascar Report. 2022
- Ministry of education, Republic of the Congo.** Biometric census of teachers. 2023



Clélia Bringolf, Advocacy Manager
Fondation Apprentis d'Auteuil International
+41 79 730 55 48
Clelia.bringolf@apprentis-auteuil.org