2026

BEING PROTECTED FROM VIOLENCE IS A RIGHT, EVEN ON THE STREETS!

Policy Brief on violence against children in street situations

Children in street situations are among the most marginalised and most exposed to multiple, interconnected risks of violence. Yet their realities and needs are still not adequately reflected in public policy, child protection systems or States funding decisions. Between 120 and 150 million children are estimated to be in street situations worldwide.[1] However, there has been no official global count for more than 20 years, making it difficult to accurately assess the scale of the situation. This lack of reliable data contributes to their invisibility and hinders the development of responses tailored to their needs.

More than half of all children worldwide experience at least one form of violence every year.[2]

Violence is both a major cause and a consequence of being in a street situation. Abuse, neglect or exploitation can drive some children to leave their homes or living environments. Once on the streets, children are exposed to further violence, which perpetuates or exacerbates the violence they have already experienced.

The need to find food, shelter and ways to survive on the streets can leave them dependent on others, which abusers and exploiters take advantage of.

- The lack of emotional support and safe spaces deprives them of a protective environment and limits their ability to seek help.
- The lack of identity documents, difficulties in accessing essential services and stigmatisation hinder their social integration and protection.

The growing number of conflicts, forced displacements, climate-related disasters and economic shocks underscores the urgent need for action.

In 2025, official development assistance from members and associates of the OECD Development Assistance Committee fell by 23.1%,[3] a historic decline. Children in street situations are likely to be among the first to feel the effects: these cuts reduce the resources allocated to their protection and reintegration, while weakening the local organisations that support them.

CHILDREN IN STREET SITUATIONS

- **Sleeping on the streets and no longer being in contact with their family;**
- **Living on the streets with their family;**
- **Moving between the streets and shelters or drop-in centres;**
- **Working on the streets or spending most of their time there before returning home in the evening.**

CONTACT

Emanuela Abe
Senior Advocacy and Communications Officer, FAAI (Fondation Apprentis d'Auteuil International)
emanuela.abe@apprentis-auteuil.org

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE FAAI



THE MAIN FORMS OF VIOLENCE

PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

Insults, humiliation, threats and rejection can cause lasting trauma, undermine self-esteem and affect the mental health of children in street situations. Often perceived as delinquents, thieves or criminals, they face discrimination and social exclusion. In some Central African contexts, accusations of witchcraft portray them as responsible for family difficulties.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Children in street situations are forced to seek shelter in insecure and unsafe environments, where they are particularly exposed to physical assaults, acts of torture and other forms of physical violence perpetrated by adults, other children or public officials. Such violence also occurs during police operations involving the excessive use of force.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Individuals and criminal networks exploit these children's vulnerability to manipulate them. Access to protection may be made conditional on engaging in survival sex.[4] Girls are particularly at risk, with serious consequences, including early pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and psychological trauma. Sexual abuse against boys is often minimised and underreported due to persistent prejudice.

Approximately 133 million children worldwide experienced at least one form of sexual violence in 2024.[5]

> **« We are mistreated at home, and we are mistreated on the streets too. We are unwanted everywhere. »**
>
> Daniel, child in street situations, Republic of the Congo

ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION

To meet their basic needs, children in street situations engage in informal activities, such as street vending, waste collection or begging. Their precarious circumstances expose them to hazardous or abusive working conditions. Some are also forced to steal or commit other unlawful acts for the benefit of others.[6]

INSTITUTIONAL AND SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE

Public authorities responsible for protecting children in street situations sometimes become perpetrators of violence themselves, particularly when penalising survival activities such as begging or street vending. Round-ups, arbitrary detention and forced placements further undermine their safety. The lack of identity documents limits or prevents their access to education, healthcare and protection services. Inadequate institutional responses to violence and fear of reprisals discourage them from seeking justice.[7]

OUR SOLUTIONS

REACHING OUT TO CHILDREN

Through street outreach activities, local organisations build trust with children, identify cases of violence and refer victims to care centres providing a safe environment, a listening ear and appropriate support.

SUPPORTING VULNERABLE FAMILIES

Families and communities should provide a protective environment for children. We support vulnerable parents to prevent violence and family breakdown.

FACILITATING ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Given their lack of trust in the authorities, children must be able to report violence safely through emergency helplines and with the support of local organisations.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN

A holistic approach combines safe accommodation, healthcare, psychosocial support and access to education or vocational training, tailored to each child's needs, to helpchildren recover from violence and rebuild their lives.

RAISING AWARENESS OF VIOLENCE

We work to change perceptions of children in street situations and highlight the violence they experience.



« Protecting means listening, respecting, supporting and ensuring that no child ever has to face violence alone. »

Luis, child in street situations, Peru

CHILDREN'S STRATEGIES to protect themselves on the streets :



- Staying together and helping one another
- Seeking shelter in public spaces perceived as safe
- Regularly changing where they spend time or sleep
- Relying on street outreach workers and trusted adults
- Accessing shelters and care centres

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure that children in street situations are effectively protected from violence, States must act urgently. We recommend that they:

1. **Systematically take into account the realities and needs of children in street situations who have experienced violence** in public policies, and ensure they receive comprehensive, tailored support.

2. **Increase funding for violence prevention and protection** and ensure long-term financial support for local organisations, recognising their role as strategic partners of public authorities.

3. **Develop community-based child protection mechanisms** by establishing local contact points where children can be heard, feel safe and receive immediate support when at risk, and be referred to protection services tailored to their needs.

4. **Train security forces and child protection professionals and raise their awareness**, strenghtening their skills in children's rights, identifying violence, and providing care and support to children who have experienced violence.

5. **End the criminalisation of survival activities and ensure access to justice** through safe and confidential reporting mechanisms, access to legal assistance and effective remedies for violence committed by public or private actors.

> **We are not problems to be contained. We are potential to be nurtured.**
>
> Amadou, child formerly in street situation, Cameroon



The FAAI (Fondation Apprentis d'Auteuil International) is committed, both in Switzerland and internationally, to the protection, education and social integration of young people in difficulty, in partnership with local organisations. In Geneva, it carries out advocacy work with the United Nations in support of the rights of children in street situations.

SOURCES

1. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. They are not disposable – UN experts remind States that street children have rights too, 2015.
2. UNICEF. Global Annual Results Report 2024 – Goal Area 3, 2025.
3. OECD. International aid fell sharply in 2025, according to the OECD, 2026.
4. Mama Fatima Singhateh. Report A/80/113, United Nations, 2025.
5. Fang, X. et al. A systematic review of the global and regional estimates of the prevalence of sexual violence against children, 2026.
6. Apprentis d'Auteuil and its local partners. Children in Street Situations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: A Socio-Anthropological Study, 2026.
7. Mama Fatima Singhateh. Report A/80/113, United Nations, 2025.