

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

THE UNICEF PROTECTION, REHABILITATION AND PREVENTION OF STREET CHILDREN AND STREET MOTHERS PROJECT

BACKGROUND

According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs there are between 150–200,000 street children nationally, with a further one million vulnerable or at risk of streetism. UNICEF and actively engaged NGOs estimate that there are between 500–700,000 children on the street nationally, and that figure is rising as a result of drought, displacement and, increasingly, HIV/AIDS.

The rising occurrence of children and mothers living on the streets of Addis Ababa has become one of the city's most pressing social problems.

- Street children in Addis Ababa are estimated by the government to number 50,000 to 60,000. UNICEF estimates that the number is three times as high;
- Approximately 150,000 are working and living in the streets with no care and support;
- Some 45,000 children earn their living in the streets and go home to their families, relatives or friends after 12 to 14 hours on the street daily. Even more, however, remain on the streets alone at night risking rape and violence in the absence of secure shelter.
- Reports indicate that at least 25% are female.

The root cause of the problem is typically reported to be widespread poverty, rapid population growth, recurrent displacement as a result of civil war, drought and famine. An increasing number of street children have lost their parents to illnesses often associated with HIV/AIDS. Life expectancy in Ethiopia averages 42 – without taking the impact of a rapidly escalating HIV/AIDS epidemic into account. As a result, whilst children in much of Eastern and Southern Africa are cared for by grandparents, this generation simply is not available for most children, and orphans end up on the streets much more quickly as a result.

Girls who work and live in the streets are faced with extremely harsh conditions including sexual abuse by adults, rape, unwanted pregnancy and early motherhood – sometimes as young as 12. These girls are likely to join the rank of child prostitutes or street mothers and continue the vicious circle of street life and inevitable are highly at risk of being infected with HIV/AIDS, which they often pass on to their children. It is estimated that there are 10,000 street mothers in Addis Ababa.

UNICEF SUPPORT

The joint UNICEF and Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs (BOLSA) project is designed to address the needs of street children and street mothers, as well as the families of children on the streets and high-risk groups of potential street children and mothers. The project goals are to prevent children and mothers from entering street life and to protect and rehabilitate those that are already on the street.

The project covers 14 major towns in Ethiopia, including Addis Ababa. The programme focuses on the following five areas:

- Education and Sports
- Health and Nutrition
- Dwelling
- Productivity Enhancement and Skill Training
- Advocacy and Social Mobilization

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) is coordinating the implementation of the programme and is the responsible organ of the overall activities. The principal implementing partners are experienced NGOs working in the fields of the project.

Around Ethiopia, UNICEF through its Child Vulnerability Project has provided formal education and school materials for over 3000 street children and non-formal education to another 3000.

Special ID cards have given free access to health care for over 7,500 street children and mothers and more than 2000 have received health, sanitation and HIV-awareness education.

Safe motherhood initiatives, including the provision of free medical care and temporary shelter, have also been provided to hundreds of street mothers and children around the country.

In addition, a wide variety of training initiatives have been provided to over a thousand beneficiaries and dozens of apprenticeships have been funded.

The Gender and Child Protection section is also promoting the importance of birth registration, emergency protection measures including child reunification in drought-stricken areas and initiatives regarding child labour, particularly its interconnectedness with HIV/AIDS in an effort to counter the exploitation of Ethiopia's millions of vulnerable children.