

Transformative Action to Accelerate Results for Children in Street Situations in the Decade of Action [2020–2030]

Technical Guidance



All children, including those in street situations,¹ irrespective of their economic status, age, race, colour, sex, language, religion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth, sexual orientation or gender identity, or any other status have the same rights and are entitled to the same protection by the State in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Children in street situations are amongst the most marginalized children. They experience severe violations of their rights before and during their time on the streets. These children are faced with multiple deprivations including lack of access to basic services, violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, as well as vulnerabilities to alcohol and substance abuse. These vulnerabilities exacerbated when children migrate, either internally or across borders. Similarly, gender and disability are known to increase these vulnerabilities. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the related containment measures, including lockdowns, are further exacerbating the vulnerabilities of children in street situations. It is essential that all responses to address the needs of children in street situations are firmly placed within a child rights-based approach in accordance with the [Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 21 on Children in Street Situations \(2017\)](#).

Transformative Action for Children in the Decade of Action

The 2030 Agenda, and the Decade of Action offer an unprecedented opportunity to make long-term gains for children left behind, including those in street situations. This will require transformative action across multiple domains, including poverty reduction, social protection, prevention of family separation, protection of children from violence and exploitation (e.g. child labour), equal access to justice, guaranteeing quality and inclusive education, and making cities safer for children.



Although the 2030 Agenda lacks specific targets related to children in street situations – further underscoring the heightened vulnerability of these children, several SDG targets directly contribute to the protection and promotion of the rights of children in street situations.

Specifically, targets relating to **education (4.1, 4.2, 4.5, 4A), gender equality (5.2), child labour and trafficking (8.7), reduced inequality (10.3), and violence against children (16.2), birth registration (16.9), access to justice (16.3)**, all contribute to addressing the situation.

¹ There are several terms and definitions in use, including 'children working and/or living on the street,' 'children in street situations' and 'children with street connections,' each having the potential to offer distinctive insights. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has adopted the term 'children in street situations,' recognizing that children engage in numerous activities on the street and that if there is a 'problem' it is not the child, but rather the situations in which she/he finds her/himself.

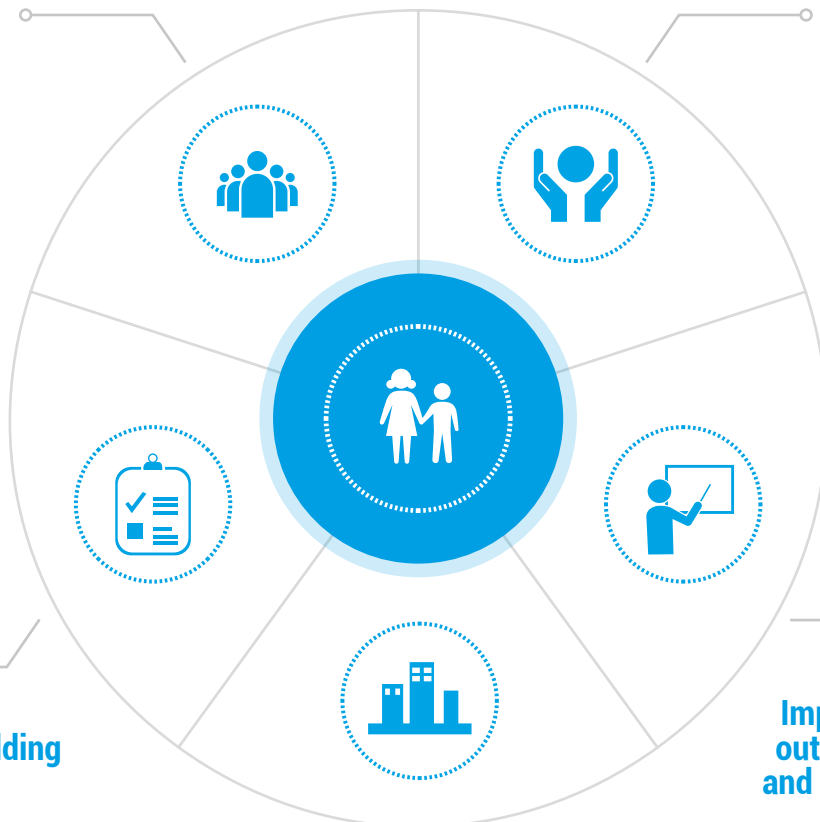


Five Action Areas to Accelerate Results for Children

In September 2019, the [Secretary-General](#) called upon all sectors of the society to mobilize for a decade of action focused on three levels of action – global, local and people – to generate a movement pushing for the required transformations and to accelerate sustainable solutions to all the world’s biggest challenges. This concept note proposes a broad framework for global, local and people action, including engagement and participation of children and young people, as well as collaborative effort on the part of several UN agencies. It aims to achieve sustainable results for children in five action areas, particularly focusing on, but not limited to, children in street situations.

Enhance social protection, end poverty and prevent family-child separation

Strengthen child protection policies, programmes and services



Invest in evidence-building

Improve educational outcomes of children and skills development

Focus on cities and local governments



ENHANCE SOCIAL PROTECTION, END POVERTY AND PREVENT FAMILY-CHILD SEPARATION

Effective social protection systems, supported by clearly defined social protection floors, play a crucial role in addressing poverty and socioeconomic vulnerabilities. Supporting families with appropriate social protection benefits and services, can help them stay together and escape poverty at the same time. In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the [UN Framework](#) for the immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19 outlines the UN's role in a comprehensive response to address health, social protection, basic services, as well as macroeconomic and long-term sustainable solutions.

The [2019 UN General Assembly Resolution on the Rights of the Child](#) calls upon Member States to strengthen national efforts to prevent the separation of children from their families. Existing programmes such as the Joint SDG Fund's Social Protection portfolio, when implemented in close collaboration with municipalities, can play a crucial role in supporting innovative solutions for social protection that is founded in a systems perspective and creates pathways for sustainable progress towards the SDGs, with the focus on the most vulnerable and marginalized populations.



STRENGTHEN CHILD PROTECTION POLICIES, PROGRAMMES AND SERVICES

Protecting children in street situations from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, and providing them access to other essential services (e.g., birth registration, shelter, health, nutrition, education and legal services) is vital to ensuring their rights. It is therefore critical to invest in strengthening child protection systems in cities, including strengthening the social service workforce for child protection.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to introduction of newer approaches to child protection, including remote case management and enhanced relevance and role of child helplines. Appropriate and quality alternative care, especially family-based alternative care and gatekeeping mechanisms, should to be put in place to ensure children are not unnecessarily separated from families.



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The 2019 UN General Assembly Resolution on the Rights of the Child offers a framework to initiate action to protect children without parental care; as do the [Key Recommendations on Children without Parental Care](#) endorsed by over 250 organizations, including UNICEF. Special attention must be provided to the mental health and psychosocial needs of children, as well as the needs of specific groups of children such as migrant children, survivors of trafficking and exploitation, those released from armed forces and armed groups.

Equally important is the need to end violence against children (e.g., sexual exploitation and abuse, gang violence) and ensure provision of life skills. Practices such as forced removal of children from street situations (e.g., rounding up children) and placing them in institutions or detention must be eliminated. The coordination between child protection systems and justice/law enforcement systems is critical. A common violation of children's rights when they are in street situations is their engagement in hazardous child labour.

The elimination of the worst forms of child labour calls for comprehensive interventions with multisectoral approaches covering child protection and social protection, as well as education and skills. Alliance 8.7, a global advocacy and collaboration platform to meet the SDG targets related to child labour and human trafficking, can play an important role in convening international and national leadership to highlight the concerns facing children in street situations.



IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES OF CHILDREN AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Access to quality, inclusive education for children in street situations will be critical, along with the learning outcomes for children. Some children in street situations may have dropped out of school, while some others may have never had the opportunity to attend school and avail an education. Given this, children in street situations must have access to both formal schools to continue education, as well as alternate and flexible non-formal education programmes that meet their needs. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that remote learning approaches can make it possible for children to access education anytime, anywhere. Such approaches must be adapted to ensure that children such as those in street situations can access



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education. Planning for education services needs to improve its cross-sectoral linkages with social welfare, health and child protection, and initiatives such as the Out of School Children's Initiative (OOSCI) must work towards integrating children in street situations into national education sector plans. Further, it is critical that the education–skills–employment continuum is strengthened by better connecting [education with the world of work](#).

Children and young people must have access to technical and vocational training and twenty-first-century [skills](#) they need for productive lives and work. This in turn will increase and improve the number of quality work opportunities available to youth, while at the same time they will stay protected from violence and exploitation. Groundbreaking partnerships such as the [ILO–Generation Unlimited partnership](#) on a global initiative for decent jobs for youth that promote immediate and long-term solutions to use technology to enhance young people's skills development, decent work and engagement will be essential.



FOCUS ON CITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

It is well known that many children in street situations live in urban areas characterized by lack of infrastructure and services, as well as exposure to violence, crime and exploitation. In the context of increasing urbanization, local governments must strengthen and prioritize child protection services and the capacities of local governments and municipalities to protect children.

Interventions relating to children in street situations must focus on reducing equity gaps in urban areas through technical support and partnerships to plan, budget, coordinate and extend quality social services to marginalized children living in urban settings and protect all children from violence, promoting a safe and sustainable urban environment for children, and strengthening the evidence base on children in urban areas, in data, policy and research.

Civil society groups play a crucial role in providing services to children, as well as holding local governments accountable to protecting children's rights by promoting active participation of children in the civic discourse.



INVEST IN EVIDENCE-BUILDING

Relatively few data are available on children in street situations. National data collection systems are often not designed to capture these children due to their not belonging to households (or institutions). The numbers of children in street situations is small compared to a country's population size, so they will not feature prominently in census results, even if captured.

Many prefer to go unnoticed and 'stay under the radar' due to fear of discrimination and reprisals by law enforcement. As such, they are almost completely excluded from data used by policy makers to plan and develop programmes. The combination of technical and political reasons for lack of measurement in national instruments points to the importance of local (i.e., municipal, local government) data collection to ensure the group is identified where programmatic action can be taken. At the same time, simply counting the number of children in street situations will not yield any results in the absence of information on the challenges they face, or the interventions required.

Further, such counting exercises can violate children's rights, with children being forced off the streets, and oftentimes into institutions. Priority therefore should be given to the development of robust baselines and routine data collection tools for enumerating children living on the streets, as well as collecting data on their well-being, for use at local level. More also needs to be done to include these children in research and data collection mechanisms in a way that they feel protected and empowered.

Reporting on the 2030 Agenda and several SDG targets, as mentioned earlier, that directly contribute to the protection and promotion of the rights of children in street situations must be strengthened. While identification of street children within the reporting of those indicators will be limited, measurements of the overall targets relating to violence against children, access to justice, birth registration, gender equality, child labour, education and reduced inequality, need to be enhanced.

Measuring the success of these actions from the perspective of how they transform the lives of children in street situations offers a unique opportunity to ensure that global and local action leaves no child behind. It is proposed that UN Agencies and civil society work together with Member States to implement comprehensive actions to deliver results in these areas.

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