



NGO Shadow Report for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's 67th Session

Street children in Morocco

Introduction

The Consortium for Street Children (CSC)¹ is the leading international network dedicated to realising the rights of street children. We are committed to creating a better and sustainable future for some of the most disadvantaged and stigmatised children by working together to inform and inspire research and action that influences policy and best practice worldwide.

Street Children

Definitions of street children

There are various definitions of street children. The label, street child, is increasingly recognised by sociologists and anthropologists to be a socially constructed category that in reality does not form a clearly defined, homogenous population or phenomenon. Research and practice have surfaced an enormous variation in children's experiences and considerable overlap between different groups: for example some children live on the streets all the time, others only occasionally or seasonally, while others move between home, the street and welfare shelters. Some retain strong links with their families; others have broken or lost all contact. 'Runaways' in rich countries, such as the UK, include children sometimes described as 'detached' who in poorer countries would be considered street children. A recent definition to encompass the variety of experiences children have with the street focusses on the connections children make to the street and the relationships they form there: a street-connected child is a child for whom the street is a central reference point, one which plays a significant role in his/her everyday life and identity².

¹ For more information on CSC please visit www.streetchildren.org. We currently have around 80 members operating in over 130 countries worldwide.

² This definition is drawn from Dr. Sarah Thomas de Benitez's 'Global Research Paper' on street children which informed the UN OHCHR study on the *Protection and promotion of the rights of children working/and or living on the streets*, available here: <http://www.streetchildrenresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/GlobalResearchPaperbySarahThomasdeBenitez.pdf>

Numbers of street children

Estimating numbers of street children is fraught with difficulties. In 1989, UNICEF estimated 100 million children were growing up on urban streets around the world. Fourteen years later UNICEF reported: 'The latest estimates put the numbers of these children as high as 100 million'. Even more recently: 'The exact number of street children is impossible to quantify, but the figure almost certainly runs into tens of millions across the world. It is likely that the numbers are increasing.' The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' (OHCHR) report on the *Protection and promotion of the rights of children working and/or living on the street*³ highlights the difficulties in determining numbers of street children and advocates for greater combined efforts to collect data of street children.

Street Children in Morocco

In the last three decades the number of children on Morocco's streets has grown steadily. In Taroudannt, several hundred children spend the majority of their time on the street. Little is known about the history or everyday lives of the children who live or work on the street in Morocco, or in North Africa more widely⁴.

Poverty and family breakdown

Economic insecurity is an important factor contributing to family breakdown, poor housing conditions and to children entering the labour market, all of which increase children's presence on the streets⁵. In many poor households one or more parents are absent or deceased, generally fathers. The majority of households have women as the main, and often only, earner for the family⁶, in some cases biological parents are not present at all. Family breakdown is a strong push factor causing children to spend more time on the street, or leave home entirely.

Income generation

Often children have to work to support themselves. Despite the fact that between the ages of seven and fourteen attendance in school is compulsory in Morocco, many children drop out of school to earn money and support their family⁷. A large number of children do not enter the educational system at all and those who are in education have high drop-out rates.

-Right now I work to get money, like last Sunday my boss gave me 50dhs, so I just gave it to my mother' (A street boy in Morocco)⁸.

³ CSC was appointed as consultant for the study, the final report of which can be accessed here: <http://www.streetchildrenresources.org/resources/protection-and-promotion-of-the-rights-of-children-working-and-or-living-on-the-streets/>

⁴ Moroccan Children's Trust (2010), 'A different path: street and working children in Morocco', p5: <http://www.streetchildrenresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/a-different-path.pdf>

⁵ Ibid, p17

⁶ Ibid, p10

⁷ Ibid, p20

⁸ Louise Meincke, 'Children's Voices Paper', (2012), part of the UN OHCHR report, (2012) the *Protection and promotion of the rights of children working and/or living on the street*, p12: <http://www.streetchildrenresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/ChildrensVoicespaper.pdf>

Human Rights Watch has claimed that Morocco has 'one of the highest child labour rates in the Middle East and North Africa'⁹. Amongst other things, children in Morocco earn money through working in shops, acting as tour guides or collecting rubbish from the streets. Many engage in illegal activities to bolster their income, including prostitution and selling drugs. However, much of the criminal behaviour is petty theft and pick pocketing. Street children engage in criminal activities as a survival tactic; street children often steal, to purchase vital items such as clothing and food although some earnings are spent on maintaining addictions to glue¹⁰.

Challenges faced by street children

Stigmatisation and violence

Challenges present within wider society are exacerbated in street situations. The most complex challenge that street children face is the negative perceptions of them from other members of society – these perceptions lead to extreme stigmatisation and isolation. Street children have little or no access to basic services as a result of their discrimination.

Stigmatisation can also lead to violence being committed against street children. Violence is a pervasive threat that runs throughout street children's lives; a common cause for children leaving home is domestic violence, and on the street, children are persistently exposed to physical, sexual and psychological violence, from members of the public, gangs, people in positions of authority and other street children¹¹.

In Morocco, violence poses a significant challenge for street children and the areas in which children live can be dangerous. For example, in cities some children even sleep in trees to avoid violent situations¹².

Substance use

Many street children use substances to escape their everyday realities. In Morocco, glue sniffing is the most prevalent substance used by children spending time on the street. Glue is easily accessible: children of all ages can purchase it in almost any shop in central cities. Children often begin to sniff glue to escape their difficult circumstances but quickly become dependent on it. This dependence can strengthen their attachment to the street. Street children with a glue addiction can develop behaviours that are considered detrimental to society and hence exacerbates their stigmatisation within their own communities. Glue sniffing also causes the violence that street children experience; one reaction to sniffing glue is to become anxious and as a result fights are common.

Whilst the sale of alcohol in Morocco is strictly limited to a small number of tourist venues, some children describe regularly drinking alcohol, possibly due to the widely available alcohol that is

⁹ Human Rights Watch (2005), 'Inside the home, outside the law, Abuse of Child Domestic Workers in Morocco', p 6: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11491/section/1>

¹⁰ Moroccan Children's Trust (2010), 'A different path: street and working children in Morocco', p10

¹¹ OHCHR report, (2012) the *Protection and promotion of the rights of children working and/or living on the street*: <http://www.streetchildrenresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/ChildrensVoicespaper.pdf>

¹² Moroccan Children's Trust (2010) 'A different path: street and working children in Morocco', p12

distilled in people's homes¹³. This makes alcohol both easily accessible, unregulated and relatively cheap, meaning street children can develop alcohol dependencies.

These addictions not only serve to reinforce discriminatory behaviour towards street children, but can also lead to health problems. Given street children's transient lifestyles, accessing health services is particularly difficult.

Interventions to support street children in Morocco

In 2003, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern at the number of children unable to access social services and the need for specialised interventions for street children (CRC/C/15/Add.211) in its Concluding Observations on Morocco¹⁴.

One of CSC's members, the Moroccan Children's Trust (MCT)¹⁵, works with partner NGO Groupe Maroc Horizons in the Taroudannt region of South Morocco. MCT's aim is to provide sustainable development for young people in the region by working holistically with their families. MCT runs a centre which offers homework support classes to street-connected children to help them continue or get back into mainstream education, and give them a safe place to spend their spare time. A team of three social workers works with both the children and their families, conducting regular family visits and helping parents with issues such as hygiene in order to provide a safer environment for their children. They also perform outreach work, spending time on the streets of Taroudannt to monitor and connect with the children spending their time there. Services include a mentoring project for children who lack a stable adult or relationships and an identity papers project, outlined below. Other MCT projects include a preschool, which aims to prevent children whose families cannot afford private preschools from falling behind and a women's group.

Birth Registration

One of the objectives of MCT's street children project is to assist children getting into mainstream education. However, a significant obstacle faced is a lack of identity papers, which many street children do not have. The effect of having no official identity impacts on almost every aspect of the child's life and stops them from being able to access basic services and hence to claim many of their human rights. For instance, street children cannot be sufficiently protected against child labour as their age cannot be verified and many also fall victim to trafficking as they are untraceable. In later years they cannot access legal work, and many engage in illegal employment.

The psychological impact of being unregistered can exacerbate the child's vulnerability; some children have no knowledge of their place of origin or their birthday and can lack a sense of belonging, resulting in low self-esteem. It can also be a cause of children forming stronger attachments to the street.

¹³ Moroccan Children's Trust (2010), 'A different path: street and working children in Morocco', p10: <http://www.streetchildrenresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/a-different-path.pdf>

¹⁴ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's Concluding Observations on Morocco, 33rd Session, (2003), CRC/C/15/Add.211

¹⁵ For more information on Moroccan Children's Trust visit: <http://moroccanchildrenstrust.org/>

A lack of identity papers also has profound implications for the child and their future children since it is extremely difficult to register children at birth if the parents lack official identity papers. To obtain identity papers for a child, their mother and father's marriage certificate, their identity papers, and the child's birth certificate need to be produced¹⁶. Without this it can be extremely difficult for children to obtain identity papers. For street-connected children, this difficulty is pronounced as often they have little contact with their parents, or their parents are unwilling to help.

In 1989 the UN Convention on the Rights of Child established birth registration as a human right¹⁷. MCT are working to ensure this right through their identity papers project¹⁸. Their aim is to act as a catalyst for both the creation of a sustainable and accessible process of registration and also an increased demand for registration. The project has already managed to obtain identity papers for a small number of children; however, such a vast and time consuming issue needs more support and practical attention in Morocco.

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¹⁶ MCT (2010), 'A different path: street and working children in Morocco', p 9

¹⁷ Article 7, of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, (1989)

<http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

¹⁸ For more information on Moroccan Children Trust's identity papers project visit:

<http://moroccanchildrenstrust.org/2013/02/26/updates-from-our-identity-papers-project-following-the-ministry-of-education-calling-on-the-help-of-centre-afag/>