

STREET CHILDREN AND CHILD LABOR IN TBILISI

Coming from the Streets Project

World Vision Georgia

This document represents a final report of the Coming from the Streets project implemented by World Vision Georgia. The research was carried out by the members of the mobile group of the project. Field work was carried out throughout the lifetime of the project, from June 2006 to March 2007.

Main findings of the research are briefly summarized below:

- Main reason for children ending up on the streets is the difficult social-economic situation they live in. Majority of these children are hired workers and are not allowed to manage funds they earn.
- Main activities of so called street children are begging, physical labor and minor theft.
- Usual gathering places for street children are those around trade objects and metro stations
- There are two categories of these children: those permanently living in Tbilisi and those temporarily coming from the regions with or without parents
- Most of the children of this category have no identification documents and this makes the process of their registration difficult
- Roma children are under the most difficult category due to their lifestyle, since in this case we are dealing with so called organized begging institute.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Main purpose of the research was to study the situation of child labor in Tbilisi, identification of lifestyle of street children and problems that drive them to streets. At the same time we have studied the registration issue of children as much as it was possible.

DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH

Main information was found as a result of the field (participatory) observation. Thus, information on each of the children is collected in relevant documents.

In parallel to participatory observation we used interviews that assisted with effective verification of the information and collection of additional information. Structured questionnaire was used as a research tool.

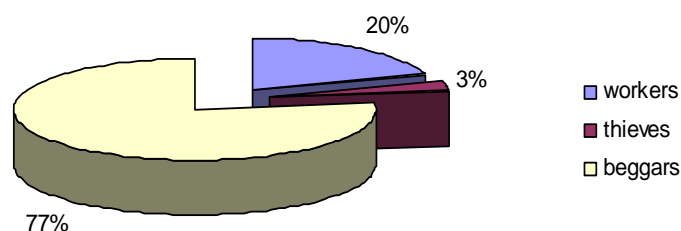
As a result of the work implemented we have identified and registered **285 children** living in Tbilisi. Cases of **88 children** were studied in detail.

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH, ANALYSES

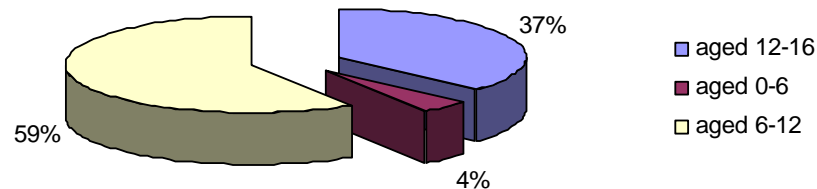
Results of the research once again provide support to the opinion that one of the main, but not the only reason for children ending up on the streets is the difficult social-economic conditions of the families.

Observations during the lifetime of the project have shown districts and places of Tbilisi that usually bring together street children. As a rule, these kinds of children usually hang out around big trade objects and subway stations. These are: Navtlugi market area, railway station, Akhmeteli and Sarajishvili subway stations, Chavchavadze avenue and area around 9th hospital, Pekin street, Marjanishvili subway station, Freedom square and its underground path, Rustaveli subway station and Rustaveli avenue, Didube subway station and its bus station, so called "Desertire" market and its are, Tsereteli avenue.

Main activities of children in these areas are begging and physical labor, while several of them have also been noticed of minor theft and crime.

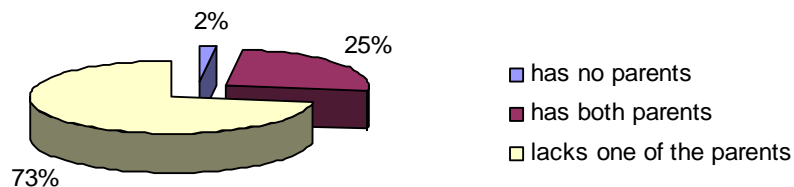


There were three main age categories identified, although there is not a significant difference between the numbers of children under each category.

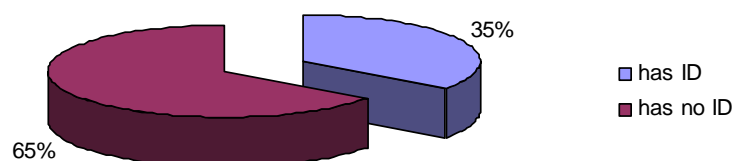


It should be noted that the significant part of 0-6 age group consists of babies, often infants that are mainly seen among Roma people. There is also a significant gender imbalance among the children living in the streets, as it is shown on the chart, where 75% of the total number is male and 25% is female.

As for the family conditions, we have once again ascertained hypothesis, according to which the number of orphan children on the streets exceed the number of those with both parents. It is also noticeable that only 7 children of the registered ones are orphans.



There is alarming data in relation to school-age children. Only 37 (18%) of 202 school-age children are registered in schools, although they often miss classes because of the "street" activities and improper care of parents. Although there is another hindering factor – we revealed that 186 (65%) of 285 registered children have no identification documents and this naturally excludes them from schools.



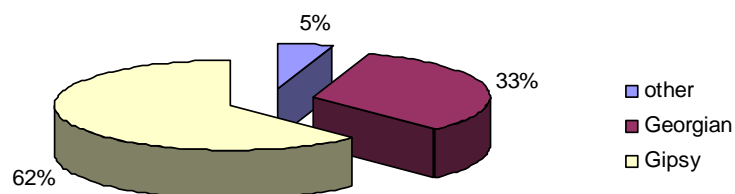
According to the place of residence there were two categories identified: children temporarily coming from other regions and those living in Tbilisi.

Children under the first category usually come to Tbilisi from other regions and villages of Georgia during summer holidays. They work physically (transporting heavy load with trucks) or trade with agricultural products. This category could be divided into two sub-categories: (1) children coming to Tbilisi together with their parents and (2) children that come and work individually. As a rule, these kinds of children come to Tbilisi to find their place in life and earn money, although most of them cannot get used to specifics of city life and are obliged to return home. They cannot afford renting apartments in Tbilisi and often have to stay on the streets or in cheap hotels (costing 1 Lari) that also represent certain threat to them in terms of pressure and labor exploitation.

As for the children under sub-category 1, they live in better conditions since they are constantly under parental supervision and live in rented apartments. Although, unlike children under the second sub-category that have flexible work schedule, they are often exploited by their parents for 10-12 hours a day and sometimes even for 22 hours (there were 2 cases when children only slept for 2-3 hours on their carriages).

Children of the 2nd category permanently live in the capital and also belong to vulnerable and orphan children as well as those deprived of parental care. They work on carriages; they collect metal, trade with various small items, regularly miss classes and spend most of their time on the streets.

From the point of ethnical belonging, number of Roma children is especially big. Percentages of various ethnicities are as follows:



In this case we are dealing not only with several families in difficult social and material conditions, but according to our observations, it is a well organized begging institute. This is

characteristic because of the lifestyle and traditions Roma people¹ have and this is the main hindering factor while working with this category of people. It is very difficult to register or get any information from them as well as making any reactions as they avoid any personal contact. In spite of that, we have conducted 150 "interviews" with Roma children and their parents. Information shows that most of them do not like what they are forced to do. Some of them say they want to go to school or be involved in various sports or cultural activities (15 children). It is also interesting that every Roma children we have personally contacted say their last name is Bukavadze and all of them give the same address. Considering these conditions it is only possible to register and count them through daily contact and it has revealed that their number (especially those of Roma origin) increase each day.

We would like to point out one fact that the project came across during its field work. On July 15, 2006 (Saturday) social workers of the project were notified by the employer of the Police Patrol that he saw how two children were brought to the park on Tsereteli avenue. When our staff came to the part, children were not there any more, as when the Policeman tried to see what was happening, "guardian" women of children started shouting and hid children away. During the investigation process it was suspected that these women specially rent small children from their parents and force them to beg. Our team members have observed the territory and have noticed that children with these women changed every day. This was communicated to the police for further action.

LEGAL ASSESSMENT

So called street children, just like any other children and people have their political, civic, economic, social and cultural rights and freedoms that are, unfortunately, violated on a daily basis.

Right to personal individuality is the most important. Convention on the Rights of a Child states that the child is to be registered as soon as it is born and the right for having a name and citizenship arises at the moment of birth. Unfortunately, our field observations show that most of the street children as well as their parents have no identification documents and place of

¹ During the project we prepared and sent a letter to the Public Defender of Georgia where we raised the above problematic issue related to this ethnical group in Georgia. The response received shows willingness to work together on this problem.

registration. In frequent cases neither child, nor parent realize the importance of this right, although at certain stage of life they face serious problems on any social level. Besides, as already mentioned, these children and their families represent the most vulnerable and impoverished segment of the population and even though the state may not fully meet their requirements, it still has certain protection mechanisms through federal and municipal social programs that are completely inaccessible without having personal identification documents and registration.

The right to personal individuality is also important when we are trying to identify parents or legal guardians of the child and implementing certain civic rights in favor of the child. These kinds of problems are most frequent in Roma groups, as, according to our observations they hardly ever refer to maternity houses or registration agencies.

As for social, economic and cultural rights, we should point out the right of a child to be brought up in family environment, have proper education and work on a voluntary basis. Even though the Labor Code of Georgia fortifies labor rights of minors, it is difficult to imagine a street child that carries out work that does not contradict with his interests, does not harm moral, physical and mental development and does not limit the right and possibilities of compulsory primary and basic education.

Being in family environment together with other positive sides has another benefit – protection of children from harmful influence. In addition to families, Georgia also has legal mechanisms for protecting minors from harmful influence – this is the law of Georgia with the same name, although this law is just as fictional for the street children as the laws on education and labor. Unfortunately, due to the lack of control and social neglect, children have easy access to alcoholic drinks, tobacco, toxic substances as well as slot clubs and the responsibility for this lack of control and neglect is only of civic or administrative character.

Issue of violence towards children and neglect from their parents should also be discussed. These cases usually take place in relation to street children. Just like in many other cases discussed above, this is the situation when legislation does regulate certain relationships, although there are no specific mechanisms for implementing them in real life. For example, Georgian Civic Code regulates relationships of children and their parents and sets protection mechanisms for minors – in cases of torture or failure to undertake parental responsibilities,

parents could have their parental right deprived or limited. Deprivation of parental right is the extreme measure of penalty that could only be applied as a result of court decision and in case if the parent systematically avoids fulfillment of his/her responsibility to take care of children or abuses this right, abuses children and has negative influence over children due to his/her immoral behavior. In spite of this, there are still very many cases of violence towards street children in Georgia, especially when violators are parents or guardians.

This way we can conclude that rights of children will not be fully protected, unless there is a strict monitoring from the side of the state organizations towards parents implementing their parental responsibilities.

PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED

Problems with legislation system. As legal assessment has shown, the main problem is that even though there are many articles in various parts of legislation that partially ensure protection of the rights of children, there are no specific mechanisms that would serve as the guarantee for fulfillment of the existing legislation.

Material assistance to the families. As already mentioned above, one of the reasons for children ending up on the streets is the difficult material and social conditions their families face. Thus it would be incorrect to review the issue of children separately from their families. Identification, registration and evaluation of the conditions of these families and provision of permanent assistance should become one of the most important tasks while trying to solve this problem. Field observations held within the framework of our project have shown that parents of children that we assisted with some in-kind gifts (four families were given firewood during the holiday season) did not force their children to streets as they had a choice of either taking children to the street (in cold weather) or leaving at home (in warm houses). They did not have this choice before, as they had similar conditions both in the streets and at home. That's why it is important to provide these families with permanent (and not one-time) assistance, as children kept out of streets temporarily may still be under the risk of returning to the streets.

Short-term and non-permanent activities. We believe it is important to have more systematic (daily) work of the mobile groups that will study children of this category and ensure care and advocacy for their interests. Only long-term observations as opposed to the general

short-term ones will make it possible to evaluate activities implemented and dynamics of the received reactions, and this should identify ways and directions of solving the problem. We should also mention the problem that hinders full-scale work of the international and local organizations in the field of advocacy and child care. There are frequent cases when there are representation problems, often towards state structures. There are cases when protection and implementation of certain rights of a child requires immediate action and at that moment international organizations may possess necessary means, but because of the limitations with the right of representation and complexity of this process in general, these actions cannot be taken in a timely manner.

Priority. At the moment one of the most important priorities of the Child Welfare Reform of the government is deinstitutionalization that means returning children from institutions to their biological or foster families. This priority is absolutely acceptable and reasonable, although it should be mentioned that deinstitutionalization process is mainly for children in institutions that, one way or another, are away from the streets and have certain level of care. In comparison to this process, life of children on the streets is somehow in the shade and provision of assistance to their families is further down on the priority list. Although, it is a fact that children of families with poor economic and social conditions are under the threat of entering institutions.

Lack of rehabilitation centers. These kinds of establishments usually exist within the framework of the projects implemented by local and international organizations and unfortunately disappear as soon as the funding is over, since the state still cannot afford to provide support for their functioning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to solve problems revealed through the research carried out within the framework of our project and to improve conditions of street children, we propose the following:

- Undertaking analyses of the existing legislation and making appropriate amendments to the law of Georgia, also adopting new laws in compliance with international standards and responsibilities taken. Most importantly, realistic mechanisms of implementing adopted legislation should be introduced.

- Introduction of stricter measures for violation of labor rights of minors as well as exposing them to harmful influences (alcohol consumption, tobacco use and trade as well as gambling) and coming up with viable protection mechanisms.
- Legal prohibition of using minors and especially infants for begging and establishing strict monitoring.
- Implementation of projects by international organizations as well as the state that would raise public awareness on the issue (preparation of relevant social wide materials and its broadcast, special television programs, etc).
- Creation of permanent psycho-social service network for social integration of street children as well as creation of special transitional institution that will be in charge of caring for children after taking them out of the streets. This would assist children with social adaptation and gaining independent lifeskills as well as various professional skills. It is also recommended to create special educational programs for this purpose.
- Creation of unified statistics with the assistance of international and local organizations that have conducted researches for street children within the frameworks of various projects.
- Designing new social programs based on results of the researches and created statistics that would bring beneficiaries and include them in the programs based on specific data.
- Simplifying procedures for obtaining identification and registration documents for street and at-risk youth and their family members (based on the conclusion of the social worker) to assist them with involvement in various federal and municipal social programs.
- To avoid fragmented nature of the researches carried out and losing effects gained as a result of carrying out extremely difficult work, existence and work of the mobile groups should be supported at most. At the same time, it is also recommended to bring the interest of international donors.
- For the representatives (mobile groups) of international and local organizations that work with street children (advocacy, research, care) it would be good to grant specific (at least temporary) status that would provide them with authority to represent beneficiaries in certain situations. (Urgent cases should also be defined here).