



## Voiceless and Vulnerable: Legal Protections, Challenges, and Pathways for India's Street Children

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### ABSTRACT

Street children in India represent one of the most vulnerable and marginalized sections of society, facing immense hardships such as homelessness, malnutrition, lack of education, and exposure to exploitation and violence. Despite the existence of multiple policies and legal frameworks aimed at protecting their rights, millions of these children continue to fall through systemic gaps. The failure to effectively enforce child protection laws, coupled with socio-economic inequalities and weak institutional support, exacerbates their struggles.

This paper critically examines the challenges faced by street children in India, analyzing the root causes that force them onto the streets and the structural barriers that prevent their rehabilitation. It explores national and international legal safeguards designed to protect children, highlighting the gaps in enforcement that leave many unprotected. Additionally, the study evaluates human rights violations experienced by street children, including the denial of education, healthcare, and basic dignity.

Through an in-depth analysis of policies, case studies, and statistical insights, this paper underscores the urgent need for a multi-pronged approach to address the crisis. It advocates for stronger enforcement of child protection laws, community-based rehabilitation programs, increased government funding, and public awareness campaigns to reduce the stigma against street children. By bridging the gap between policy and practice, India can work towards ensuring that no child is left behind, providing them with the opportunities and security they deserve.

**Keywords:** Street Children, Child Protection, Juvenile Justice, Child Rights, Education For Marginalized Children, Child Labor, Child Trafficking, Rehabilitation Programs, Policy Implementation, Social Welfare, Community-Based Interventions, Vocational Training, Psychosocial Support, Law Enforcement, Poverty And Children, Family Reintegration, Alternative Education, Government Initiatives, NGOs And Child Welfare, Human Rights, Child Homelessness In India.

### Executive Summary

Street children in India remain one of the most vulnerable and marginalized segments of society, often deprived of fundamental human rights such as education, healthcare, and protection from abuse. Despite a robust legal framework and multiple government and non-governmental initiatives, systemic challenges—ranging from enforcement gaps to socio-economic barriers—continue to hinder meaningful progress in their rehabilitation and welfare.

This report critically examines the plight of street children in India, identifying key drivers such as extreme poverty, family breakdowns, migration, child trafficking, and systemic neglect. It evaluates the effectiveness of existing laws, including the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009, and the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, highlighting their limitations in addressing the realities of children living on the streets.

Despite well-intended policies, the report finds that over 80% of street children remain out of school, and 67% are engaged in child labor, facing exploitation in hazardous industries, forced begging rings, and criminal syndicates. The challenges are exacerbated by inadequate enforcement, weak inter-agency coordination, and insufficient funding for rehabilitation programs. Judicial interventions, such as *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation* (1985) and *Bachpan Bachao Andolan v. Union of India* (2011), have recognized the rights of marginalized groups, yet direct safeguards for street children remain inadequate.

To bridge the gap between policy intent and ground realities, the report proposes a multi-stakeholder approach with the following key recommendations:

1. **Strengthening Law Enforcement** – Appointing dedicated child protection officers in each district, real-time data-sharing between agencies, and stringent enforcement of anti-child labor and anti-trafficking laws.

2. **Enhancing Rehabilitation & Reintegration** – Introducing alternative education models, vocational training, and psychosocial support to ensure long-term integration into society.
3. **Community-Based Interventions** – Strengthening family welfare programs, direct cash transfers, and localized child protection monitoring to prevent children from ending up on the streets.
4. **Public Awareness & Advocacy** – Implementing large-scale media campaigns, grassroots engagement, and sensitization programs to reduce social stigma and encourage civic participation in child welfare.
5. **Global Best Practices & Policy Alignment** – Learning from successful models in Brazil, the Philippines, and South Africa, India must move towards child-centric, rights-based interventions with specialized courts, foster care programs, and community-led rehabilitation initiatives.

This report underscores the urgent need for comprehensive legal, social, and economic interventions to break the cycle of poverty and exploitation for India's street children. Only through coordinated governance, sustainable funding, and inclusive social policies can India fulfill its constitutional and international commitments to child welfare, ensuring that no child is left behind.

## I. Introduction

### 1.1 Understanding the Plight of Street Children in India

Street children in India represent one of the most marginalized and overlooked groups in society. Deprived of basic human rights such as education, healthcare, and protection from exploitation, they struggle daily for survival in hostile urban environments. With no stable home, family, or guardian to support them, these children remain invisible to mainstream society, forming a hidden underclass that battles for survival through informal labor, begging, or association with street gangs. They are often seen as delinquents rather than victims, facing systemic neglect, social stigma, and institutional apathy.

### 1.2 Scope of the Problem

India has one of the highest populations of street children in the world, with estimates ranging from 1.7 to 2 million (Save the Children, 2022). These children are predominantly found in metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Bangalore, where rapid urbanization, economic disparity, and social breakdowns contribute to their increasing numbers. Without proper identification documents or family ties, many street children remain excluded from government welfare programs, leaving them without access to food, shelter, or medical care.

### 1.3 Classification of Street Children

Understanding the diverse backgrounds and circumstances of street children is essential for designing targeted intervention strategies. Generally, they can be characterised into three groups:

- **Children on the street:** These children work on the streets during the day but return home to their families at night. Their presence on the street is often driven by extreme poverty, forcing them into menial jobs such as rag picking, selling goods, or begging.
- **Children of the street:** These children have severed ties with their families and permanently live on the streets. They form transient communities, often engaging in informal work or small criminal activities to sustain themselves.
- **Abandoned children:** These are the most vulnerable group, completely devoid of any family or support system. Many have been orphaned due to parental death, abandonment, or trafficking, forcing them into a life of complete dependency on the streets.

### 1.4 Root Causes Behind the Crisis

The phenomenon of street children is not a random occurrence but rather a product of structural socio-economic failures. About of the most conjoint root origins include:

| Cause                                      | Description   |
|--|---|
| <b>Extreme Poverty</b>                     | Families living below the poverty line often force children into labor or abandon them due to financial struggles.            |
| <b>Domestic Abuse and Family Breakdown</b> | Physical and emotional abuse, alcoholism, or violence within families push children to escape and seek refuge on the streets. |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Rural-Urban Migration</b>                 | Many families migrate to cities for better opportunities but fail to find stable housing, leaving children to fend for themselves. |
| <b>Child Trafficking and Forced Labor</b>    | Many children are trafficked into bonded labor, sexual exploitation, or begging syndicates.  |
| <b>Natural Disasters and Armed Conflicts</b> | Events like floods, earthquakes, or regional conflicts displace children, leaving them vulnerable and homeless.                    |

### 1.5 Challenges Faced by Street Children

1. **Health and Nutrition:** A significant percentage of street children suffer from chronic malnutrition and preventable diseases such as tuberculosis, respiratory infections, and skin ailments due to unhygienic living conditions.
2. **Violence and Exploitation:** Without legal protection, these children become easy targets for physical and sexual abuse by criminals, traffickers, and even law enforcement agencies.
3. **Lack of Education:** Despite the Right to Education Act, the vast majority of street children remain out of school due to financial constraints, lack of documentation, or social discrimination.
4. **Substance Abuse:** Many street children resort to drugs or alcohol as a coping mechanism for trauma, further trapping them in a cycle of exploitation and neglect.

### 1.6 Objective of the Paper

This paper explores the systemic failures that perpetuate the cycle of street life for children in India, critically analyzing:

- The legal frameworks designed for child protection and their implementation challenges.
- The human rights violations faced by street children, particularly concerning access to healthcare, education, and safety.
- Potential policy solutions and intervention strategies that can help reintegrate these children into mainstream society.

By shedding light on the lived experiences of street children and the systemic barriers preventing their rehabilitation, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on child welfare, urging both policy-makers and society to take urgent, child-centered action.

## II. Literature Review

Research on street children in India highlights multiple socio-economic challenges, legal frameworks, and intervention strategies to address their needs. Several studies have examined the causes and consequences of street life, as well as the effectiveness of existing policies.

### 2.1. The Socio-Economic Factors Contributing to Street Children

Rai & Shekhar (2025), in their study *Addressing the Crisis of Street Children in South Asia: Challenges, Interventions, and Policy Recommendations*, provide a regional perspective on how urbanization, economic disparity, and migration contribute to the rising number of street children. Their research emphasizes the lack of social security and institutional support, which forces children into precarious survival mechanisms.

Similarly, UNICEF (2021) reports that India has an estimated 1.7 million street children, with the primary contributing factors being extreme poverty, family disintegration, and forced displacement. These studies stress that gender disparities also play a role, as girls are at higher risk of trafficking and sexual exploitation.

### 2.2. Legal Framework for Street Children

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 serves as the primary legal framework for protecting and rehabilitating street children. However, implementation challenges persist. According to Save the Children (2022), only a fraction of street children receive benefits due to bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of documentation, and the social stigma attached to homelessness.

Internationally, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) mandates children's rights to education, healthcare, and protection. However, India struggles to enforce these rights effectively, particularly for children without official identification.

### 2.3. Education as a Pathway to Rehabilitation

Rai & Shekhar (2023), in their study Status of Education of Street Children in India: A Study, found that 80% of street children remain out of school due to financial constraints, documentation issues, and discrimination. Their research suggests that flexible schooling models, such as night schools and vocational training, could serve as viable solutions to help reintegrate these children into society.

### 2.4. Intervention Strategies and Policy Recommendations

Various intervention models have been proposed to address the crisis of street children. Rai & Shekhar (2025) emphasize a multi-pronged approach involving:

- **Strengthening Child Protection Units:** Deploying dedicated officers to monitor and rehabilitate street children.
- **Expanding Shelter Networks:** Establishing safe spaces that provide food, healthcare, and psychological support.
- **Enhancing Vocational Training Programs:** Offering skill-based training for older children to transition into the workforce.

Their study aligns with international best practices from Brazil and the Philippines, where community-driven models have successfully reintegrated street children into society.

### 2.5. Inference

The literature consistently highlights that while India has legal frameworks to protect street children, enforcement remains weak. Studies by Rai & Shekhar (2023, 2025) underscore gaps in education, social inclusion, and child protection, emphasizing the urgent need for collaborative efforts among government agencies, NGOs, and communities. Moving forward, evidence-based policymaking, stronger law enforcement, and innovative rehabilitation models will be crucial to ensuring that street children receive the protection and opportunities they deserve.

## III. Street Children: Definition, Causes, and Problems

### 3.1 Definition of Street Children

The term "street children" lacks a singular definition but generally refers to minors who live or work on the streets without adequate parental care or supervision. These children rely on public spaces for survival, engaging in activities such as begging, scavenging, and street vending to sustain themselves. According to UNICEF, street children can be categorized into three broad groups:

- **Children on the Street:** These children work on the streets during the day but return to their families at night. They contribute to family income through labor in informal sectors like selling goods, collecting recyclables, or assisting in small businesses.
- **Children of the Street:** These children have little to no contact with their families and live permanently on the streets. They often form small groups or communities for protection and survival.
- **Abandoned or Orphaned Children:** These children lack any familial ties and are completely dependent on themselves or charitable organizations for survival.

**Example:** In Mumbai, organizations like Salaam Baalak Trust have reported that many street children are either runaways escaping abusive households or victims of forced labor who have no legal identity, making their rehabilitation extremely challenging.

### 3.2 Causes of Street Children

The phenomenon of children living on the streets is rooted in complex socio-economic and political factors. Several interconnected causes force children onto the streets, with poverty, migration, and systemic failures being primary drivers.

| Cause                   | Explanation  | Example  |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Extreme Poverty</b>  | Economic hardship forces children to contribute to household income or fend for themselves by living and working on the streets. | A survey in <b>Delhi</b> found that over <b>65% of street children</b> engage in informal labor to support their families. |
| <b>Family Breakdown</b> | Domestic violence, parental neglect, or the death of a parent can leave children without support, forcing them onto the streets. | In <b>Kolkata</b> , NGOs report that <b>1 in 4 street children</b> comes from a background of domestic abuse.              |
| <b>Migration</b> and    | Rural-to-urban migration often results in children   | A study in <b>Hyderabad</b> found that <b>30% of street children</b>   |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Displacement</b>                            | being abandoned or lost due to family disintegration.   | had migrated from rural areas.   |
| <b>Child Trafficking</b>                       | Many children are kidnapped or lured into forced labor, begging rings, or the sex trade.  | Reports indicate that traffickers use <b>railway stations</b> to transport abducted children, particularly in <b>Bihar and West Bengal</b> . |
| <b>Natural Disasters</b>                       | Disasters such as floods and earthquakes displace families, leaving children abandoned.   | The <b>2015 Nepal earthquake</b> led to a surge in child homelessness in bordering <b>Indian states</b> .                                    |
| <b>Parental Substance Abuse</b>                | Many children flee homes where their guardians suffer from drug or alcohol addiction, leading to neglect and abuse.                   | <b>Studies in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh</b> indicate that children of addicts are at a higher risk of street migration.                       |
| <b>Orphanhood due to Diseases or Pandemics</b> | The death of parents due to diseases like tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, or pandemics like COVID-19 has left thousands of children homeless. | <b>UNICEF (2021)</b> reported a surge in orphaned children post-COVID-19, with many ending up on the streets.                                |

### 3.3 Problems Faced by Street Children

Street children encounter extreme hardships that affect their physical, mental, and social well-being. The lack of a stable environment exposes them to severe risks such as exploitation, abuse, malnutrition, and exclusion from basic services.

#### 1. Economic Exploitation

- Many street children work as ragpickers, vendors, shoe shiners, and domestic helpers, often in hazardous and exploitative conditions.
- Save the Children (2022) reports that over 67% of street children engage in child labor, with many earning as little as ₹30–50 per day.
- **Example:** In Chennai, children as young as six years old work in textile and fireworks industries, exposing them to life-threatening conditions.
- **Case Study:** A 2020 report from Kolkata highlighted how entire families, including children, survive by rag-picking in the city's largest dumping grounds.

#### 2. Health and Nutrition

- Malnutrition affects more than 55% of street children (UNICEF, 2022), leading to stunted growth and weakened immunity.
- The lack of sanitation and healthcare access results in a high prevalence of respiratory infections, skin diseases, and tuberculosis.
- **Example:** A study in Mumbai found that 72% of street children suffered from untreated respiratory illnesses due to prolonged exposure to pollution.
- **Case Study:** In Delhi, outreach workers reported high drug addiction rates among homeless children, many of whom rely on inhalants like glue or whitener to suppress hunger.

#### 3. Violence and Abuse

- Many street children face police brutality, gang violence, and sexual exploitation, especially girls.
- According to Human Rights Watch (2020), nearly 30% of street children reported experiencing abuse from law enforcement officers.
- **Example:** In Delhi, reports indicate that young boys in railway stations are often coerced into child trafficking and drug peddling rings.
- **Case Study:** A 2021 report from Mumbai's red-light areas revealed that trafficked children, especially girls, were subjected to organized abuse and forced labor.

#### 4. Lack of Education

- Despite the Right to Education Act, 80% of street children remain out of school (NCPCR, 2020), due to a lack of documentation, discrimination, and the necessity to work.
- Many children drop out as they struggle to balance survival and schooling.
- **Example:** A report from Lucknow found that over 60% of street children enrolled in schools drop out within the first year due to financial constraints.

- **Case Study:** NGOs in Hyderabad are experimenting with "mobile schools," where teachers visit children on the streets to provide education, hoping to reintegrate them into mainstream schooling.

### 5. Psychological and Emotional Distress

- Continuous exposure to hardship leads to severe psychological trauma, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- Many children develop trust issues and attachment disorders due to abandonment and mistreatment.
- **Example:** A study by Childline India (2021) found that 1 in 3 street children displayed symptoms of severe emotional distress due to prolonged exposure to violence.
- **Case Study:** In Bangalore, intervention programs have found that engaging children in art therapy and sports activities has helped them regain emotional stability.

### 3.4 Inference

Street children in India are trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty, neglect, and systemic failure. Their struggles are multi-dimensional, spanning economic hardship, lack of healthcare, exposure to violence, and educational exclusion. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-sectoral approach, with stronger policy enforcement, community intervention, and sustained rehabilitation programs.

The next section will analyze the legal frameworks governing the protection of street children, identifying gaps and providing recommendations for more effective implementation.

## IV. Street Children and Legal Safeguards: National and International Perspective

Street children are one of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups globally, often falling outside the purview of state protection mechanisms. Despite numerous national and international legal safeguards aimed at their welfare, weak implementation and systemic inefficiencies continue to leave millions of children exposed to exploitation, violence, and deprivation. This section critically examines the legal frameworks governing street children in India, identifies gaps in enforcement, and highlights global best practices that can be adapted to improve child protection mechanisms in India.

### 4.1 National Legal Framework

India has enacted several laws to safeguard the rights of children, including those living on the streets. These legal provisions cover aspects such as protection from exploitation, access to education, and rehabilitation mechanisms. However, the practical implementation of these laws often falls short due to systemic loopholes, lack of accountability, and limited government outreach.

#### Key National Legislations Protecting Street Children

| Legislation   | Key Provisions  | Challenges in Implementation   |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015</b>       | Establishes a framework for child protection, rehabilitation, and reintegration into society. Mandates the setting up of Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) and Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs) to ensure the welfare of children in need of care and protection. | Many children remain unaware of legal aid provisions; insufficient funding for child care institutions; slow processing of cases by CWCs.                                    |
| <b>Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009</b> | Mandates free education for children aged 6-14 years and prohibits discrimination against disadvantaged children, including street children.  | Lack of birth certificates prevents many street children from enrolling in schools; societal stigma and economic pressures force children to prioritize work over education. |
| <b>Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986</b>                | Prohibits employment of children under 14 in hazardous occupations and regulates working conditions for adolescents aged 14-18.   | Child labor remains rampant due to weak enforcement; many children are still engaged in informal work such as ragpicking, begging, and domestic labor.                       |
| <b>Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012</b>      | Strengthens laws against child sexual abuse, establishes special courts for speedy trials, and provides child-friendly legal procedures.  | Many street children, especially girls, remain unaware of their rights and do not report crimes due to fear of retaliation.  |

### Case Studies Highlighting Implementation Gaps

- **Delhi Slum Areas:** Despite the RTE Act, a 2020 report by NCPDR found that 80% of street children in Delhi were unable to attend school due to documentation issues and economic constraints.
- **Mumbai – Abuse and Trafficking:** A 2021 study found that over 40% of street children in Mumbai had faced abuse but did not report it due to fear of police and traffickers.
- **Bihar & West Bengal – Child Labor in Informal Sectors:** The ILO (2022) highlighted that thousands of children are still engaged in hazardous labor despite legal prohibitions.

### 4.2 International Legal Framework

Globally, several legal frameworks have been established to protect the rights of children, particularly those living in vulnerable conditions. India, as a signatory to various international conventions, is obligated to implement these measures to ensure child welfare. However, enforcement remains inconsistent due to resource constraints and lack of political will.

#### Key International Legal Instruments

- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989):** Recognizes children's rights to survival, protection, development, and participation. The convention mandates that all children have the right to education, healthcare, and protection from harm.
- **ILO Conventions 138 and 182:** Focus on eliminating the worst forms of child labor and setting minimum working age standards. Despite India's commitment to these conventions, enforcement remains weak in industries such as construction, domestic labor, and informal street work.
- **Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** Goals 1 (No Poverty), 4 (Quality Education), and 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) directly impact street children by addressing poverty, education, and child labor issues.

#### Challenges in Implementing International Commitments

Despite India's participation in these global initiatives, several barriers hinder their effective implementation:

- **Lack of Coordination between Agencies:** Many policies overlap, creating confusion and inefficiencies between different departments responsible for child welfare.
- **Inadequate Monitoring Mechanisms:** Although child labor is banned, many children continue to be employed in dangerous conditions due to weak monitoring and lack of strict penalties for violators.
- **Failure to Integrate International Best Practices:** Countries like Brazil and the Philippines have implemented community-based child protection systems that have successfully reduced child homelessness, yet similar models have not been widely adopted in India.

### 4.3 Examples of Global Best Practices and Their Lessons for India

Street children are a global phenomenon, and several countries have successfully implemented child protection frameworks that have significantly reduced the number of children living on the streets. Learning from these international best practices can help India strengthen its own child welfare policies and programs.

#### 4.3.1 Brazil:

The Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA), 1990

Brazil implemented The Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA, 1990), which takes a rights-based approach to child welfare. The law prioritizes street children's access to education, healthcare, family reintegration, and social protection.

- **Key Features:**
  - **Community-based rehabilitation:** Instead of institutionalization, the focus is on family reunification and community reintegration.
  - **Specialized Courts:** Dedicated juvenile courts expedite cases related to child protection, ensuring swift legal recourse.
  - **Street Outreach Programs:** Government-funded social educators work directly with children to provide access to shelters, legal aid, and health services.
- **Impact:**
  - Brazil saw a 40% reduction in street children over 20 years by implementing rehabilitation over institutionalization.

- The country also reduced police brutality against street children by setting up human rights commissions to monitor child abuse cases.
- **Lessons for India:**
- India must prioritize family reintegration over institutional care by strengthening child support networks at the community level.
- Implementing dedicated child courts for juvenile cases could speed up legal proceedings and ensure better enforcement of child protection laws.

#### 4.3.2 The Philippines:

##### The Bahay Tuluyan Model

The Philippines has developed Bahay Tuluyan, a holistic rehabilitation model for street children that combines education, shelter, skill development, and psychosocial support.

- **Key Features:**
- **Drop-in Centers:** Safe spaces where children receive meals, education, and healthcare services without being forced into shelter homes.
- **Mobile Schools:** Bringing education to the streets, reducing barriers to formal schooling.
- **Child-led Advocacy:** Programs where street children are trained to advocate for their own rights, giving them a voice in policy decisions.
- **Impact:**
- Over 50,000 children have been rehabilitated through community-based programs.
- Child-friendly legal procedures have improved reporting of child abuse and legal aid accessibility.
- **Lessons for India:**
- Implement mobile classrooms and community centers to make education accessible to street children.
- Introduce child-led advocacy programs to empower children and reduce stigma against them.

#### 4.3.3 South Africa:

##### National Child Protection Register (NCPR)

South Africa operates a National Child Protection Register (NCPR) to track vulnerable children, ensuring that they are not repeatedly exposed to abuse and exploitation.

- **Key Features:**
- **Centralized Child Data System:** Every child at risk is registered, and their progress is monitored through multi-agency coordination.
- **Mandatory Reporting:** Schools, hospitals, and social workers are legally required to report child abuse and refer cases for intervention.
- **Foster Care over Institutionalization:** Street children are placed in state-supported foster homes instead of large institutions.
- **Impact:**
- Child protection cases are resolved 60% faster due to streamlined legal proceedings.
- Foster care placements have increased by 35%, reducing child homelessness.
- **Lessons for India:**
- Develop a National Child Tracking System to prevent children from falling through the cracks.
- Establish stronger child protection referral systems, ensuring that street children receive consistent follow-up care.

#### 4.3.4 United Kingdom:

##### The Safe Families for Children Program

The UK's Safe Families for Children Program takes a preventative approach to child homelessness by supporting families at risk of breaking down.

- **Key Features:**
- **Family Support Networks:** Volunteers provide mentorship, financial aid, and social support to struggling families.

- **Short-term Respite Care:** Temporary foster placements help children in crisis situations.
- **Parental Skill Training:** Parents receive counseling and job support to improve household stability.
- **Impact:**
  - Over 20,000 families have avoided child separation since the program's launch.
  - The approach has reduced the number of children in institutional care by 30%.
- **Lessons for India:**
  - Strengthen family-focused interventions to prevent children from becoming homeless.
  - Establish mentorship programs where social workers and volunteers provide long-term support to vulnerable families.

**Norway:** A Child-Centric Welfare System

Norway has one of the most comprehensive child protection systems globally, with an emphasis on early intervention and child-friendly legal procedures.

- **Key Features:**
  - **Universal Child Benefits:** Financial assistance is provided to all families to reduce economic stress that could lead to child homelessness.
  - **Integrated Education & Social Services:** Schools work closely with social workers to identify children at risk.
  - **Legal Representation for Children:** Every child in a legal dispute is assigned an independent legal advocate.
- **Impact:**
  - Child homelessness in Norway is nearly eliminated due to strong social policies.
  - 80% of at-risk children are placed in safe family environments before they experience homelessness.
- **Lessons for India:**
  - Strengthen financial aid programs to prevent child abandonment due to poverty.
  - Train teachers and social workers to identify and intervene in child neglect cases early.

**Canada:** The Street Youth Legal Services (SYLS) Initiative

Canada provides legal aid and protection services specifically designed for street-involved youth through its Street Youth Legal Services (SYLS) initiative.

- **Key Features:**
  - On-the-ground legal teams visit areas where street children congregate to offer direct legal support.
  - **Shelter Partnerships:** Coordination between shelters and legal aid ensures children receive immediate protection.
  - **Police Accountability Measures:** Strict regulations prevent the unlawful detention or mistreatment of street children.
- **Impact:**
  - Legal aid accessibility for street children has increased by 70% in high-risk areas.
  - Police abuse cases against children have dropped by 50% due to strict enforcement of child rights.
- **Lessons for India:**
  - Introduce mobile legal aid clinics to provide street children with immediate legal protection.
  - Strengthen laws preventing police abuse against vulnerable children.

**Tabular Overview of Global Best Practices**

| Country | Intervention Model | Key Features | Impact | Lessons for India |
|---------|--------------------|--------------|--------|-------------------|
|---------|--------------------|--------------|--------|-------------------|

|                       |  |   |   |   |
|-----------------------|--|---|---|---|
| <b>Brazil</b>         | <b>Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA), 1990</b> | Rights-based approach prioritizing education, healthcare, family reintegration, and legal protection. Community-based rehabilitation over institutionalization. | 40% reduction in street children over 20 years; reduced police brutality.                         | Strengthen <b>community-driven child support</b> systems and <b>dedicated child courts</b> for juvenile protection. |
| <b>Philippines</b>    | <b>Bahay Tuluyan Model</b>                             | Drop-in centers, mobile schools, and child-led advocacy programs providing holistic rehabilitation.   | Over 50,000 children rehabilitated, improved reporting of child abuse cases.                      | Implement <b>mobile education units</b> and <b>child empowerment programs</b> to ensure education accessibility.    |
| <b>South Africa</b>   | <b>National Child Protection Register (NCPR)</b>       | Tracks vulnerable children, ensures mandatory reporting, prioritizes foster care over institutionalization.   | 60% faster resolution of child protection cases; 35% increase in foster care placements.          | Establish a <b>National Child Tracking System</b> to prevent child trafficking and neglect.                         |
| <b>United Kingdom</b> | <b>Safe Families for Children Program</b>              | Preventative approach with family mentorship, financial aid, and short-term respite care for at-risk children.  | 20,000 families prevented from breaking apart; 30% reduction in institutional placements.         | Develop <b>family-strengthening programs</b> and <b>mentorship models</b> for at-risk children.                     |
| <b>Norway</b>         | <b>Child-Centric Welfare System</b>                    | Universal child benefits, integration of education and social services, and child-specific legal representation.  | Nearly eliminated child homelessness; 80% of at-risk children placed in safe family environments. | Strengthen <b>financial aid programs</b> and <b>train teachers and social workers</b> in child protection.          |
| <b>Canada</b>         | <b>Street Youth Legal Services (SYLS) Initiative</b>   | Mobile legal teams, shelter partnerships, and police accountability measures for street children.   | 70% increase in legal aid access; 50% reduction in police abuse cases.                            | Introduce <b>mobile legal aid clinics</b> and <b>strict laws against police abuse of street children</b> .          |

### Inference

These global models highlight effective strategies for tackling the street children crisis through community involvement, legal reforms, child-led advocacy, and multi-agency coordination. India can significantly improve its child welfare programs by adopting elements from these successful interventions, focusing on family reintegration, education access, legal empowerment, and social rehabilitation.

By learning from international best practices and strengthening domestic implementation, India can create a sustainable child protection ecosystem that ensures no child is left behind.

#### 4.4 Strengthening Legal Safeguards: The Way Forward

Despite a comprehensive legal framework, India continues to face significant challenges in protecting and rehabilitating street children. The lack of enforcement, limited public awareness, and inadequate coordination between agencies often leave children vulnerable to exploitation and neglect. Strengthening legal safeguards requires a multi-dimensional approach that focuses on policy reforms, stronger enforcement mechanisms, community engagement, and international collaboration. Below are key strategies to enhance the effectiveness of legal protections for street children in India.

##### 1. Strengthening Law Enforcement and Implementation

While India has robust child protection laws, their enforcement remains weak due to bureaucratic delays, corruption, and a lack of resources. Strengthening law enforcement requires the following measures:

| Strategy                                      | Proposed Actions   | Expected Impact   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Dedicated Child Protection Units (CPU)</b> | Establish specialized <b>district-level child protection units</b> within police departments to handle child-related cases.  | Faster response to child abuse, trafficking, and missing child cases.       |
| <b>Stronger Monitoring and Accountability</b> | Implement <b>real-time tracking</b> of rescued children and ensure they receive legal aid, shelter, and education. Introduce <b>penalties for non-compliance</b> . | Reduces re-exploitation of rescued children and strengthens accountability. |
| <b>Community Policing</b>                     | Train <b>law enforcement officers in child rights and</b>  | Improves trust between law enforcement                                      |

|                    |   |   |
|--------------------|---|---|
| <b>Initiatives</b> | <b>protection.</b> Set up <b>child-friendly police stations</b> with trained personnel. | and street children, encouraging more to seek help. |
|--------------------|---|---|

## 2. Expanding Shelter and Rehabilitation Programs

One of the major gaps in India's child protection framework is the lack of safe and well-equipped shelters. Expanding rehabilitation programs is essential to ensure sustainable recovery for street children.

- **Develop More Child-Friendly Shelters:** Establish well-equipped shelters with access to education, healthcare, and counseling.
- **Expand Foster Care Systems:** Encourage community-based foster care rather than institutionalization, following the Brazilian model of reintegration.
- **Legal Identity for Street Children:** Implement a special identification drive to ensure every rescued child receives Aadhaar cards, birth certificates, and ration cards, facilitating access to welfare schemes.

**Case Study – South Africa's Foster Care System:** South Africa prioritizes family-based care over institutional shelters, leading to higher emotional well-being and social integration of rescued children. India can adopt similar strategies by strengthening foster care networks and providing financial incentives to foster families.

## 3. Strengthening Education and Skill Development Initiatives

Street children are often denied their right to education due to financial constraints, lack of documentation, and social stigma. The government must create inclusive and flexible learning models.

| Strategy   | Proposed Actions  | Expected Impact   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Flexible and Alternative Learning Models</b>    | Introduce <b>mobile schools, night schools, and digital learning programs</b> to cater to street children.  | Increases enrollment rates and prevents child labor.                    |
| <b>Vocational Training and Employment Programs</b> | Collaborate with <b>private-sector companies</b> to provide <b>skill development courses</b> for older street children.   | Improves employability and helps children break the cycle of poverty.   |
| <b>School Inclusion Campaigns</b>                  | Mandate <b>special enrollment drives</b> for street children under the <b>Right to Education (RTE) Act</b> . Provide <b>free books, uniforms, and mid-day meals</b> . | Encourages participation in formal education and reduces dropout rates. |

**Case Study – The Philippines' Mobile Schools:** The Philippines runs mobile classrooms for street children, helping them access basic education without requiring permanent enrollment. India can replicate this approach in high-risk urban areas to reach more children.

## 4. Strengthening Legal Aid and Access to Justice

Many street children are unaware of their legal rights and have no access to legal aid. Bridging this gap requires stronger advocacy, child-friendly courts, and proactive legal assistance.

- **Set up Free Legal Aid Clinics:** Establish child-focused legal aid centers within slums and street communities.
- **Introduce Fast-Track Juvenile Courts:** Speed up case hearings related to child abuse, trafficking, and child labor violations.
- **Increase Public Awareness on Child Rights:** Conduct legal literacy campaigns to educate street children about POCSO, JJ Act, and the Child Labour Act.

**Example – Canada's Street Youth Legal Services (SYLS) Initiative:** Canada provides mobile legal aid teams that visit high-risk areas and offer direct legal assistance to street children. Implementing a similar mobile legal support model in India could increase access to justice.

## 5. Strengthening Public-Private Partnerships and Community Involvement

Tackling the issue of street children requires multi-stakeholder involvement. Governments, NGOs, private enterprises, and local communities must work together to implement sustainable interventions.

- **Encourage Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Initiatives:** Private companies should fund child rehabilitation centers, vocational training programs, and healthcare facilities.
- **Enhance NGO-Government Collaborations:** Strengthen partnerships with NGOs such as Save the Children, Prayas Juvenile Aid Centre, and Butterflies NGO to expand outreach programs.
- **Launch Community Guardianship Programs:** Involve local residents, religious institutions, and volunteers in identifying and assisting street children.

**Case Study** – The UK’s Safe Families for Children Program: The UK successfully implemented community mentorship programs, where volunteers assist at-risk children in finding shelter, education, and emotional support. India can develop mentorship initiatives involving trained community volunteers.

#### **6. Strengthening Child Trafficking and Exploitation Laws**

Child trafficking remains a significant challenge in India, with many street children becoming victims of forced labor, sexual exploitation, and organ trade. Strengthening anti-trafficking mechanisms requires:

| Strategy  | Proposed Actions   | Expected Impact   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Stronger Border Control and Surveillance</b> | Increase <b>checkpoints at railway stations, bus terminals, and border areas</b> to prevent child trafficking. | Prevents child movement across trafficking networks.    |
| <b>Special Anti-Trafficking Units</b>           | Set up <b>dedicated units in police departments</b> to investigate and dismantle trafficking rings.            | Leads to more successful rescues and convictions.       |
| <b>Stronger Punishments for Traffickers</b>     | Increase <b>mandatory prison sentences and penalties</b> for traffickers under <b>POCSO and the IPC</b> .      | Acts as a deterrent against child trafficking networks. |

**Example** – The United States’ National Human Trafficking Hotline: The U.S. runs 24/7 child trafficking helplines with immediate rescue operations. India can enhance Childline 1098 services with AI-driven tracking and reporting tools.

### Inference

Strengthening legal safeguards for street children in India requires proactive law enforcement, stronger rehabilitation programs, accessible education, legal empowerment, and community engagement. By adopting best practices from successful global models, India can build a comprehensive child protection framework that ensures every child receives protection, education, and a pathway to a better future.

A holistic, child-centered policy approach must be developed to integrate legal reforms, social welfare programs, and economic support systems to break the cycle of homelessness and exploitation. Only then can India move towards a safer, more inclusive future for its most vulnerable children.

## V. Street Children and Human Rights

Street children suffer from systematic human rights violations on a daily basis. Denied access to education, healthcare, protection, and adequate living conditions, they are often treated as criminals rather than victims. Although India has ratified numerous international human rights treaties and established legal frameworks for child protection, weak enforcement and social apathy continue to leave millions of children vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, and neglect.

### 5.1 Right to Education

Education is a fundamental right under the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 and Article 21A of the Indian Constitution. However, street children face multiple barriers to accessing education:

| Barrier                                 | Challenges Faced by Street Children  | Example  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>Lack of Documentation</b>            | Schools require <b>birth certificates and Aadhaar cards</b> , which many street children lack. | A survey in <b>Delhi slums (2021)</b> found that <b>60% of street children</b> were denied school enrollment due to missing documents. |
| <b>Economic Hardship</b>                | Many children <b>prioritize earning money</b> over attending school.                           | In <b>Mumbai</b> , <b>child vendors</b> work in local trains instead of attending school.  |
| <b>Social Stigma and Discrimination</b> | Teachers and peers often <b>ostracize street children</b> due to their background.             | A study in <b>Kolkata</b> found that <b>1 in 3 street children</b> dropped out due to bullying.  |

#### Case Study: Mobile Schools in Hyderabad

To overcome enrollment challenges, NGOs in Hyderabad have introduced mobile classrooms, bringing education directly to street children. These bus-based schools have helped over 5,000 children gain access to basic literacy and vocational training.

### 5.2 Right to Healthcare

Street children suffer from poor health and malnutrition, lacking access to even the most basic medical facilities.

- **Malnutrition:** A UNICEF (2022) report states that 55% of street children suffer from severe malnutrition.
- **Lack of Immunization:** Without legal guardians, many children miss vaccination programs, making them vulnerable to preventable diseases like polio, measles, and tuberculosis.

- **Exposure to Substance Abuse:** Many street children are addicted to inhalants, alcohol, and drugs, leading to long-term physical and psychological health issues.

| Health Issue                | Impact on Street Children  | Example  |
|-----------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Malnutrition</b>         | Leads to <b>stunted growth, weakened immunity, and cognitive impairment.</b> | A study in <b>Lucknow</b> found that <b>72% of street children</b> were underweight.             |
| <b>Infectious Diseases</b>  | High exposure to <b>HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and skin infections.</b>         | A health camp in <b>Chennai</b> detected <b>45% infection rates</b> in homeless children.        |
| <b>Mental Health Issues</b> | Suffering from <b>trauma, PTSD, and anxiety</b> due to abuse and neglect.    | NGOs in <b>Bangalore</b> reported a <b>rise in suicidal tendencies</b> among abandoned children. |

**Example:** Health Camps for Street Children in Mumbai

In Mumbai, NGOs like Pratham and Smile Foundation conduct free health check-ups and vaccination camps, helping over 10,000 children annually.

### 5.3 Right to Protection

Street children frequently face violence, sexual exploitation, and forced labor. Instead of being protected, many are criminalized and harassed by law enforcement.

#### Forms of Abuse and Exploitation

- **Police Brutality:** Many children are beaten, detained, or falsely accused of petty crimes.
- **Human Trafficking:** Street children are often kidnapped and sold into forced labor or prostitution.
- **Forced Begging Syndicates:** Criminal gangs exploit children, forcing them to beg in public places.

| Type of Exploitation              | Description   | Case Example  |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Police Harassment</b>          | Children are <b>beaten, wrongfully detained, or forced to flee public places.</b> | <b>Delhi (2019):</b> Police evicted 200 street children from railway stations without providing rehabilitation. |
| <b>Sexual Exploitation</b>        | Girls are at <b>high risk of trafficking</b> for forced prostitution.             | <b>Kolkata (2020):</b> 50 trafficked girls rescued from brothels, many of whom were former street children.     |
| <b>Bonded Labor &amp; Begging</b> | Gangs <b>mutilate children</b> to make them more “appealing” for begging.         | <b>Mumbai (2021):</b> Police busted a <b>begging racket</b> using kidnapped children.                           |

**Case Study:** Rescue and Rehabilitation in West Bengal

A 2021 operation in Kolkata led to the rescue of over 300 children from forced labor and trafficking. Special fast-track courts were set up to prosecute traffickers under the POCSO Act and IPC.

### 5.4 Right to Adequate Living Standards

Street children live in inhumane conditions, lacking access to proper shelter, food, and sanitation.

- **Homelessness:** Many sleep in railway stations, under bridges, or in parks, exposed to extreme weather and crime.
- **Lack of Sanitation:** With no toilets or clean water, street children suffer from diseases like cholera and dysentery.
- **Food Insecurity:** Many rely on leftovers from garbage bins or charity handouts.

| Basic Need        | Challenges Faced by Street Children   | Example   |
|-------------------|---|---|
| <b>Shelter</b>    | No access to <b>safe homes</b> , leaving them vulnerable to <b>abuse and trafficking.</b> | A 2020 survey found <b>1 in 5 children in Delhi</b> sleeps in public spaces.  |
| <b>Sanitation</b> | Lack of toilets leads to <b>poor hygiene and disease outbreaks.</b>                       | In <b>Varanasi</b> , only <b>3% of street children</b> had access to toilets. |

|             |  |   |
|-------------|--|---|
| <b>Food</b> | Hunger forces children to <b>beg, steal, or scavenge for food.</b> | NGOs in <b>Hyderabad</b> report that <b>60% of street children</b> eat less than two meals a day. |
|-------------|--|---|

**Example:** Night Shelters in Delhi

Delhi's government has established over 150 night shelters, offering food, sanitation, and sleeping areas for homeless children. However, many children avoid shelters due to fear of abuse.

### 5.5 Addressing Human Rights Violations: The Way Forward

To protect street children's fundamental rights, India must adopt a multi-pronged strategy:

| Intervention                                   | Proposed Action  |
|--|--|
| <b>Birth Registration &amp; Legal Identity</b> | Provide <b>Aadhaar cards and birth certificates</b> through special enrollment drives. |
| <b>Education Access</b>                        | Expand <b>mobile schools, vocational training, and bridge programs.</b>                |
| <b>Street Outreach Programs</b>                | Deploy <b>trained social workers</b> to identify and assist children at risk.          |
| <b>Healthcare Access</b>                       | Establish <b>free health clinics and vaccination drives</b> in high-risk areas.        |
| <b>Stronger Anti-Trafficking Laws</b>          | Implement <b>real-time tracking systems</b> to monitor missing children cases.         |

### Inference

Street children in India are denied their most basic human rights, living in **extreme poverty, exposed to abuse, and neglected by the system.** Addressing these violations requires a **comprehensive policy approach** that ensures **education, healthcare, protection, and legal recognition** for every child. Strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing rehabilitation programs, and ensuring community participation are crucial steps toward **restoring dignity and hope** to millions of street children.

## VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 6.1 Conclusion

Despite the existence of a robust legal framework, India's street children remain one of the most marginalized and vulnerable populations. Laws such as the Juvenile Justice Act (2015), the Right to Education Act (2009), and the POCSO Act (2012) provide a foundation for child protection. However, weak law enforcement, lack of coordination between agencies, social stigma, and insufficient resources continue to hinder meaningful progress. Without systematic intervention, millions of children will remain trapped in a cycle of poverty, exploitation, and deprivation, denied their fundamental rights to education, healthcare, and safety.

- Persistent Challenges:
  - Weak enforcement of child protection laws and inadequate monitoring.
  - High dropout rates among street children due to economic hardships.
  - Limited rehabilitation programs, leaving children vulnerable to abuse and re-exploitation.
  - Social stigma that prevents their full integration into society.

Street children in India require a holistic, multi-sectoral approach that includes government initiatives, NGO involvement, community participation, and public awareness campaigns. Only through a rights-based, child-centric approach can India break the cycle of homelessness and exploitation and create a secure and dignified future for every child.

### 6.2 Recommendations

Addressing the crisis of street children requires urgent and coordinated action from multiple stakeholders, including government bodies, law enforcement agencies, NGOs, private sectors, and communities. The following key recommendations can create a transformative impact:

### 1. Strengthen Law Enforcement and Legal Implementation

| Recommendation                                     | Proposed Action   | Expected Impact   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Appoint Dedicated Child Protection Officers</b> | Deploy <b>trained child welfare officers</b> in every district for monitoring and rescue operations.              | Improves coordination between police, CWCs, and NGOs, leading to <b>faster intervention</b> . |
| <b>Fast-Track Juvenile Justice Cases</b>           | Set up <b>specialized child courts</b> to handle cases of <b>abuse, trafficking, and child labor</b> efficiently. | Reduces <b>legal delays</b> , ensuring faster justice and rehabilitation.                     |
| <b>Stronger Monitoring Mechanisms</b>              | Implement <b>digital tracking systems</b> for rescued children to prevent re-exploitation.                        | Ensures <b>consistent follow-up care and integration</b> into rehabilitation programs.        |

### 2. Improve Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programs

| Recommendation                                      | Proposed Action  | Expected Impact  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>Prioritize Vocational Training</b>               | Introduce <b>job-oriented skill training</b> in collaboration with industries and private companies. | Helps <b>older street children</b> transition into stable employment and self-sufficiency. |
| <b>Expand Mental Health and Counseling Services</b> | Establish <b>counseling centers</b> in urban areas for emotional and psychological support.          | Addresses <b>trauma and emotional distress</b> , improving long-term reintegration.        |
| <b>Strengthen Foster Care Networks</b>              | Encourage <b>community-based foster care</b> instead of large institutions.                          | Provides a <b>more nurturing and stable environment</b> for abandoned children.            |

**Case Study** – Brazil’s Family-Based Rehabilitation Approach: Brazil shifted its focus from institutionalization to family-based rehabilitation, reducing street child numbers by 40%. India can adopt similar models by encouraging foster care and community guardianship initiatives.

### 3. Enhance Community-Based Interventions and Family Strengthening

| Recommendation                          | Proposed Action   | Expected Impact  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Implement Cash Transfer Schemes</b>  | Provide <b>direct financial aid</b> to at-risk families to reduce child labor and homelessness. | Prevents families from <b>forcing children into labor</b> due to economic hardships. |
| <b>Strengthen Local Support Systems</b> | Form <b>neighborhood watch groups</b> to monitor and report child exploitation cases.           | Improves <b>early detection and intervention</b> for at-risk children.               |
| <b>Involve Community Leaders</b>        | Conduct <b>awareness workshops</b> through local leaders, religious institutions, and schools.  | Reduces <b>social stigma</b> , encouraging more families to seek help.               |

**Example** – South Africa’s Community-Based Child Protection Model: South Africa’s neighbourhood-based child protection networks involve local communities in identifying and supporting at-risk children. India can adapt this approach by forming village and urban community task forces.

### 4. Increase Budget Allocation for Child Welfare Programs

| Recommendation                                  | Proposed Action  | Expected Impact   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Allocate Greater Funds for Shelter Homes</b> | Increase financial aid for <b>existing shelters and transit homes</b> .  | Provides <b>safer environments</b> and prevents children from returning to the streets. |
| <b>Expand Educational Grants for NGOs</b>       | Fund <b>non-formal education centers</b> for street children.  | Expands <b>alternative schooling options</b> for out-of-school children.                |
| <b>Develop Nationwide Sponsorship Programs</b>  | Encourage <b>corporate social responsibility (CSR) funding</b> for street children’s education and healthcare. | Creates <b>long-term sustainability</b> in child welfare projects.                      |

**Example** – Norway’s Universal Child Benefits: Norway’s child welfare model provides direct financial aid to vulnerable families, ensuring children stay in school. India can implement similar conditional cash transfer programs.

## 5. Public Awareness and Behavioral Change Campaigns

| Recommendation                        | Proposed Action   | Expected Impact   |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Anti-Stigma Campaigns                 | Conduct <b>national media campaigns</b> to shift negative perceptions of street children. | Encourages <b>community involvement</b> and reduces discrimination.                               |
| Legal Awareness Drives                | Educate families and children about <b>their rights under RTE, JJ Act, and POCSO</b> .    | Increases <b>legal literacy</b> , leading to <b>higher reporting of child rights violations</b> . |
| Encourage Volunteering and Mentorship | Establish mentorship programs where trained individuals <b>support street children</b> .  | Provides <b>emotional stability and guidance</b> , fostering <b>better reintegration</b> .        |

**Example** – The UK’s Safe Families for Children Initiative: The UK uses volunteer-based family mentorship programs, reducing child homelessness by 30%. India can develop similar mentorship models to assist vulnerable children.

### 6.3 A Call for Collective Action

Addressing the crisis of street children in India is not solely the responsibility of the government—it demands a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach involving multiple sectors of society. The complexity of the issue requires policy reforms, grassroots efforts, and public-private partnerships to create sustainable, long-term solutions.

#### Stakeholder Key Responsibilities Proposed Actions

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Government Agencies</b>                                       | Strengthen law enforcement, allocate funding, and oversee policy implementation.       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establish dedicated Child Protection Units (CPUs) in every district.</li> <li>- Increase funding for shelters, health programs, and education for street children.</li> <li>- Improve monitoring of child welfare schemes to ensure proper utilization of resources.</li> </ul>     |
| <b>Law Enforcement Bodies</b>                                    | Prevent exploitation, trafficking, and violence against street children.               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Train police officers to handle cases involving children with sensitivity and legal awareness.</li> <li>- Implement anti-trafficking task forces to track missing and exploited children.</li> <li>- Ensure strict enforcement of POCSO Act and JJ Act.</li> </ul>                  |
| <b>Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) &amp; Civil Society</b> | Conduct outreach, provide education, rehabilitation, and legal support.                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expand drop-in centers offering health care, education, and counseling services.</li> <li>- Strengthen street outreach programs to bring children into protective systems.</li> <li>- Collaborate with the government for advocacy and child rights awareness campaigns.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Corporate &amp; Private Sector</b>                            | Fund child welfare projects through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establish partnerships with NGOs for vocational training and employment programs.</li> <li>- Sponsor community-based rehabilitation and safe housing initiatives.</li> <li>- Support mobile education programs and alternative learning methods.</li> </ul>                         |
| <b>Communities &amp; Families</b>                                | Act as first responders in identifying and preventing child homelessness.              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthen neighbourhood watch programs to report child abuse cases.</li> <li>- Provide community-based foster care to reduce institutionalization.</li> <li>- Encourage youth mentorship programs for skill development and guidance.</li> </ul>                                   |

**Example: Brazil's Multi-Stakeholder Approach**

Brazil reduced street child numbers by 40% by implementing a coordinated approach involving government agencies, NGOs, and communities. India can replicate this by establishing community-based intervention models and strengthening legal frameworks.

**6.4 Final Thoughts**

The plight of street children in India is a humanitarian crisis that requires urgent, sustained, and targeted intervention. While the legal framework exists, enforcement gaps and systemic failures continue to leave millions of children vulnerable to poverty, exploitation, and abuse. The responsibility to protect and rehabilitate these children lies with all of society—governments, law enforcement, NGOs, businesses, and communities.

**Key Takeaways:**

- **Systemic Change is Necessary:** Piecemeal efforts are insufficient. A comprehensive, child-centric strategy integrating education, health, legal aid, and social protection is required.
- **Investment in Prevention and Rehabilitation:** Governments must allocate greater funding to preventive strategies such as family support programs, cash transfers, and early childhood education.
- **Empowerment through Education and Employment:** The cycle of homelessness can be broken by ensuring universal education access and vocational training for street children.
- **Community Participation is Crucial:** Local communities play an essential role in identifying at-risk children and facilitating social reintegration.
- **Stronger Law Enforcement:** Addressing child labor, trafficking, and abuse requires stricter monitoring and prosecution mechanisms.

**A Vision for the Future**

A nation's progress is measured by how it treats its most vulnerable. India has the potential to eliminate child homelessness and exploitation through a rights-based approach that prioritizes every child's dignity, security, and well-being. By implementing global best practices, strengthening multi-stakeholder collaborations, and ensuring consistent policy enforcement, India can create a future where no child is left behind.

With collective action, legal reforms, and sustained commitment, we can transform the lives of street children and help them reclaim their right to a safe, dignified, and hopeful future.

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## VII. Annexure

### Annexure 1: Data on Street Children in India

1. Total Estimated Population (as per Save the Children, 2022): 1.7 million.
2. Major Cities with Highest Concentration: Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore.
3. Percentage of Street Children Engaged in Labor: Approximately 67%.
4. Common Occupations:
  - Rag picking (35%)
  - Begging (22%)
  - Street vending (18%)
  - Construction work (15%)
  - Miscellaneous (10%)
5. Education Access:
  - 80% of street children are not enrolled in school.
  - 60% have never attended formal education.
6. Health Indicators:
  - 55% suffer from malnutrition.
  - 45% experience substance abuse.
  - 30% suffer from respiratory diseases due to pollution exposure.

### Annexure 2: List of Government Schemes for Street Children

1. Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS).
2. National Child Labour Project (NCLP).
3. Childline 1098 (24-hour emergency helpline).
4. Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2015.
5. Mid-Day Meal Scheme (for encouraging school participation).
6. Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme (for children of working mothers).

## Appendix A: Case Study Summaries

### Case Study 1: Salaam Baalak Trust Rehabilitation Model

- Established in 1988, it has rehabilitated over 100,000 children.
- Provides shelter, education, and vocational training.

- Success Story: Raj, a rescued child, trained in photography and became a professional photographer.

**Case Study 2: Impact of RTE Act Implementation in Delhi**

- A survey identified 500 street children eligible for school admission.
- Within a year, 60% had dropped out due to economic hardship and social discrimination.

**Appendix B: Judicial Interventions and Landmark Cases**

1. *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation* (1985): Recognized the right to livelihood for pavement dwellers.
2. *M.C. Mehta v. State of Tamil Nadu* (1996): Addressed child labor and mandated government intervention for child rehabilitation.
3. *Bachpan Bachao Andolan v. Union of India* (2011): Strengthened the implementation of anti-child trafficking laws.