

Federal Ombudsman approves action plan for street children of Islamabad



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ISLAMABAD, August 4: A Task Force on Street Children approved by WafaqiMohtasib Secretariat presented its study report to the Federal Ombudsman for implementation. Taking cognizance of the exploitation of children in terms of their involvement in labour / beggary, the Hon'ble Federal Ombudsman, Mr. Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi had directed a study titled "Inquiry into the Plight of Street Children in ICT – Challenges & Way Forward. The research sets out priorities and gives evidence-based recommendations to the key stakeholders. The research was conducted by Syeda Viquarun Nisa Hashmi, Advisor / Grievance Commissioner for Children and her team.

This is the first ever empirical study focusing on street children in ICT. The Task Force conducted 506 in-depth interviews including 443 street children, 44 community members including parents of street children and 19 officials of LEAs and service providers. The team devised a mechanism for the maximum utilization of the resources for the protection, welfare and development of street children. The research revealed that child labour / beggary to some extent is an outcome of extreme poverty, homelessness / abandonment of children, etc., and predominately a lucrative family business of some communities and begging rings. The compelling factors for them to work/beg include low income in 83% cases, followed by 9% illness/disability of parent(s) while in 1% case it was drug addiction of parent/guardian.

The team also reported that there is no Child Court in ICT and only one Model Police Station has a desk for children. The report stated that street children were picked up by the police, dropped at Edhi Centre and CPI but these centers have no capacity to accommodate these street children therefore, they release them in the evening. The report recommended a robust mechanism for the rescue and care of children in needs; registration of refugees on priority basis and basic facilities of health and to ensure education and health facilities regardless of their status. The report also recommended training of Police and CPI officials to rescue street children. The WafaqiMohtasib Secretariat will hold a high level meeting shortly to implement these policy recommendations.