

Recommendations

Recommendations from the street workers...

The outcome of the workshops has led to the production of recommendations, which were presented to the political authorities....

Recommendation n° 1

The lives endured by street children and youth can be very different depending on the country, but all of them do require recognition of their own right to become the actors of their own existence.

The recognition of this right and dignity implies that the children and youth are neither reduced to being objects (for example of exploitation, but also objects of the policies aimed at them), nor reduced to being the targets of manipulative commercial strategies.

To recognise the right of the children and youth to become citizens requires not to approach the case of street children based on the victim/offender scheme; the reality these children face is far more complex: it is necessary to recognise this complexity within the definition of the problem and the answers that will be given.

Recommendation n° 2

The right of children and youth to become the protagonists of their own lives implies first of all the right to be considered as children: the children who are living in the street are children whose childhood has been stolen. This right implies that all countries should grant a status to children -which is not currently the case - and that the violations of these rights should be sanctioned. Common ground between the different legislations should also be guaranteed : the boundaries protecting childhood and youth tend to get mixed up in many countries.

Recommendation n° 3

We demand the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in every country, finding a balance with the voices and experiences of those concerned and taking into account the marginal situations experienced by the children and youth.

Recommendation n° 4

The reality of street children should be seen as an answer to a sequence and combination of diverse factors at different levels. We think in particular of the sequence and combination of structural factors (for example the injustices due to the dominant model of globalisation) as well as relational factors (submission on a daily basis to violence, like rejection, contempt, peer pressure, forced deviant behaviour, or a submission to the powerful attraction of these).

Recommendation n°5

One cannot become the protagonist of one's own existence without being allowed to have access to open educational and creative spaces: the comparison of the situations shows the importance, everywhere, of this factor as a trigger or vehicle of the problems linked to the experience of the street. Abusive families, the "pavements" of the French deprived estates, the Koran schools of Senegal (according to three examples mentioned among many others) are closed spaces where the development of one's own identity is not achievable or not sufficiently encouraged. The right to an open education should be granted to all.

Recommendation n°6

The professional response to these situations can only be of an educational nature that encourages emancipation (and not in terms of security measures or repression). These educational interventions cannot embody an instrumental vision, which is dominant these days (both in the field of culture and education). They also demand that the public space should be recognised in its dimensions of sociability, experience and solidarity.

Recommendation n°7

The comparison of international experiences illustrates that the development of isolated and temporary charitable initiatives can be dangerous, as their very nature contributes to maintaining the children in the street (e.g. giving help based on problematic symptoms. The limited nature of this aid contributes to the loss of confidence of the children in institutions, which is a key factor leading towards marginality).

Recommendation n°8

The NGO initiatives must therefore be supported by strongly engaged interventions by the public authorities on the condition that they themselves respect the principles of the rule of law. The State submitted to the rule of law must be committed to the resolution of problems, both the structural and relational ones and not discard its responsibilities by carrying out simple policies of compensation (food and clothes distribution, etc...).

Recommendation n°9

Help in favour of street children cannot be separated from a project on fair economic development, inspired by the concept of equal rights and opportunities. The political choices of the IMF must be reoriented in this direction.

Recommendation n° 10

Social structural policies are also necessary, for example to avoid a housing policy which creates social ghettos and consequently a system of segregation, also in regard to the access to institutions (schools for example).

Recommendation n° 11

Special attention should be paid to the health problems encountered by the street children and youth; these problems are often denied. Health issues should be dealt with in their social dimension (as the "community approach" towards mental health does), more than in its medical dimension. Healthcare isn't limited to dealing with illnesses, but also encompasses the building up of self-esteem and therefore contributes to the educational project. Health policies working at different paces, as is the case in too many countries including European countries, is unacceptable.

Taking into consideration health issues implies raising awareness amongst health professionals about the social dimension (one should particularly avoid to "psychiatricize" the social sector) and offering a healthcare training to the social workers.

Recommendation n° 12

The cultural factors should not be neglected when taking into account the situations of exclusion experienced by the children and youth; in particular, the destruction of singular cultures (and more particular of their creative freedom) by a global consumer culture must be fought against. On the other hand, making traditional cultures more rigid does not appear to be the adequate answer to this domination.

Recommendation n° 13

The representation of the reality of street children as it is most often presented in the fields of media and politics constitutes an additional stigmatisation of these children. One should fight against abusive simplifications of this reality, its useless dramatisation, and the confusion to which it is subjected. One should also oppose oneself to the exploitation of this reality, whether for media, political or commercial purposes, as it constitutes an additional violence against children and young people.

Recommendation n° 14

One recognises the important role of the numerous disruptive experiences (disintegration of ties with society, family, education) as contributing factors that lead children to choose the street as their living place. This accumulation of break

ups must be fought against by prevention policies, which relate to and connect all the educational spaces: the family, formal education, informal education, and specialised institutions. Street educators should be allowed to be the link between these different educational spaces and to make sure that these neither constitute spaces of non-recognition or rejection nor become spaces of abdication of adults, under the pressure, among others, of a consumerist interpretation of individual rights.

Recommendation n° 15

The type of prevention in social street work recommended here is a positive attitude of support towards autonomy, of development of the resources of individuals and groups; a type of prevention, which is general and not centred around specific themes defined in terms of problems (like drug abuse, prostitution and delinquency).

Recommendation n° 16

The professional interventions in favour of street children must offer these children a consistency and stability, which allows for a relationship of trust to be re-established. The recognition of the status of the street worker in his role of informal education is essential here, as well as the granting of means adapted to the complexity of this task. The street educator must be able to offer to those living in the streets activities, which are as much valued and status enhancing as those they exhibit in the lifestyle, which the street allows them to have. The importance of time and investment necessary to build a link and relationship of trust must be recognised.

Recommendation n° 17

Street work should be considered as a general mission and not approached as punctual and temporary projects.

Recommendation n° 18

An international definition of the street worker as an agent of social development should be adopted. As a consequence, coherent and sufficient statutory and financial conditions should be granted to street educators.

Recommendation n° 19

The deontological code, professional secrecy and ethics are vital. They should among other things provide a code of conduct, in particular regarding the transfer and use of information about children and young people.

Recommendation n° 20

A political capacity to question must be recognised as an integrated part of street work. The criteria and modalities for the funding of the structures doing street work must be able to guarantee this capacity for questioning.

Recommendation n° 21

Networks for the sharing of practical experience are crucial, both on the local and on the international level, and they must be supported by the public authorities. The production and distribution of publications about the know-how, the tricks of the trade, and the subtleties of street work would constitute an essential help.

Recommendation n° 22

An ambitious training policy adapted to street work must be elaborated and made accessible to street workers. It should be adapted to the profiles of the workers and to the level of their expertise: initiation modules are important, but also disciplined programmes allowing to evaluate the contexts from a distance and an understanding of the societal contexts and their evolution. A continuous in-depth training must also be accessible.

The suggested training policy should in particular help the professionals to comprehend the complexity of the situations with which they are confronted, to discover and understand the specific codes that define the relationships within the target group, to rise above the apparent meaning of the symptoms and the immediate expressions, to make use of the dynamics already present in the individuals and groups to build creative interactions. The training of social workers should include a reflection and understanding of their own value system and their personal limits, as well as on the means to negotiate a plurality of values. The programmes must include a comparative and critical analysis of prevention and the "so-called" prevention policies (those which are based on the prevention/repression scheme in particular), taking into account their multiple interpretations and contradictions, in relationship with the model of society, which they help to build.

Recommendation n° 23

It is a priority to allow workers, in connection with researchers, to build qualitative and relevant evaluation models, both for the actions undertaken, as for their consequences.

The models that have to be built will have to closely respect the realities of actions undertaken and not to deny them by imposing inappropriate reasoning. The collaboration with the world of research supposes that compartmentalisation, which isolates the researchers too often in their discourse and the workers in the expression of their feelings, can be avoided. The participation of young people in this evaluation process is essential.

