

# Begging for Change

Research findings and recommendations on forced child begging  
in Albania/Greece, India and Senegal

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Anti-Slavery International 2009



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## Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the research participants and do not in all cases reflect the policies of Anti-Slavery International, nor of the partner agencies which contributed to this report.

<sup>1</sup> The NGO Amaro Drom did not take part in conducting the research in Albania as originally hoped because their representatives were unable to attend training sessions on the research methodology and techniques. However, they were consulted on the documents that resulted.

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## Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
Rationale and aims of the research	3
Some definitions	3
The research methods	4
Outline of the report	5
<b>1. Types of forced child begging</b>	<b>6</b>
Third party forced child begging	
Children trafficked into begging by informal networks or organised gangs	6
Children forced to beg by religious teachers	7
Forced child begging linked to drug addiction	7
Children who are forced to beg by their parents or guardians	8
The wider problem of child begging	8
<b>2. Nature and impacts of forced child begging</b>	<b>9</b>
Which children are forced to beg?	9
Age	9
Gender	9
Ethnicity and caste	9
What rights abuses do children who are forced to beg suffer	10
Violence and coercion	10
Income and working hours	11
Access to education	12
Contact with family and living conditions	12
The wider problem of child begging	13
<b>3. Root causes of the problem</b>	<b>14</b>
Poverty	14
Migration	15
A lack of access to good quality education	15
Cultural and religious traditions	16
Moral and religious traditions of giving	17
Discrimination	17
Violence, abuse and neglect within the home	17
<b>4. Responding to forced child begging</b>	<b>19</b>
Protecting children through legal frameworks and social provisions	19

Albania	20
Delhi	21
Senegal	21
Preventing forced child begging	22
Helping children while they continue to beg	22
The wider problem of child begging	23
<b>5. Conclusions and recommendations</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Background to country research</b>	<b>27</b>
Albania and Greece	27
India	29
Senegal	30
<b>Appendix 2: Forced child begging in the international and regional legal context</b>	<b>31</b>

# Executive summary

This report is based on research conducted in Albania and Greece, India and Senegal, and looks at the phenomenon of forced child begging both in its local specifics and global commonalities. Forced child begging involves forcing boys and girls to beg through physical or psychological coercion. It falls into the category of forced labour as it is **“work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.”**<sup>2</sup>

Forced child begging offers an important focus for the struggle for children’s rights in that it represents one of the most extreme, yet troublingly commonplace, forms of exploitation of children in the world today. It is also an indicator of a general failure of states to protect their children.

Forced child begging takes on different forms. The research shows that children may be forced to beg by their parents or guardians. Others are exploited in this way by third parties, including cases of children trafficked into begging by informal networks or organised criminal gangs, forced child begging linked to drug addiction in India and, in West Africa, children forced to beg by Koranic teachers.

Children who are forced to beg are commonly beaten by those who are forcing them to work, or suffer abuse from individuals they encounter as they beg. They must work for long hours and hand over most of their income. Children who are forced to beg by third parties tend to live apart from their families, and suffer particularly poor living conditions. And as discussed in more detail below, most are denied an education.

The research indicates that, apart from those whose begging is linked to drug addiction, it is the youngest children who are typically victims of this practice. The research suggests distinct underlying attitudes towards children. On the one hand, children can be viewed as a burden, and because their vulnerability itself may stir the charity of others, they can be treated as a financial opportunity rather than a child with rights. On the other hand, there is a desire from many parents to do their best by their children even where choices are not ideal.

Poverty and its consequences and causes, such as migration and discrimination, lie at the heart of much forced child begging. One mother from Albania noted that **“When you marry young, you will have more children, so what will you do with them? You will put them on the streets.”** While all of the children who were interviewed in Albania and Greece

belonged to Roma or Egyptian<sup>3</sup> ethnic groups, who have long experienced poverty and discrimination, ethnicity did not appear to be an issue in child begging in Senegal. Caste was thought by researchers to be too sensitive an issue to raise in all but in-depth interviews with children in India, although begging castes have been identified in other studies elsewhere in South Asia (ILO, 2004).

The evidence gathered from Senegal shows that parents value Koranic teaching but it is offered in a context where the state-system is inaccessible to many. Parents would appreciate a broader education, but Koranic schools often appear to be the only viable option. In many cases, it appears that Koranic teachings of charity and humility are interpreted as sanction by teachers to coerce young children, often through violence, into begging in the streets. In these instances parents’ wish to obtain an education for their children has led them to put their children in the hands of people who exploit them.

Children without access to education appeared in some cases to be more vulnerable to being forced to beg in the first place. With the exception of the children in Koranic schools, all of the children currently being forced to beg who were interviewed for this research were prevented from attending school. Accessible and affordable quality education for all is a key state responsibility that would go a long way towards addressing the issue of all child begging including forced child begging by providing an escape route out of poverty and ultimately helping to secure the future of the country itself. Fulfilling this responsibility would also involve states ensuring proper oversight of all schools to ensure that abuses such as those found in Senegal are eradicated.

Forced child begging exists in the wider context of child begging, something that may in itself be regarded as an indictment that society fails to protect and nurture its children. Evidence from India and Albania revealed that all children who beg work long hours and are intimidated and punished by police and others rather than helped. One child in Delhi reported that that he had to pay bribes to the police to avoid prison. Stories of beatings by authorities are not unusual.

Forced child begging constitutes a gross violation of children’s rights. Children forced to beg by third parties experience particularly severe abuse, but the problem of parents forcing their children to beg should not be ignored despite the particular challenges this involves.

<sup>2</sup> ILO Convention No. 29 on Forced Labour (1930).

<sup>3</sup> The Egyptian community is an Albanian ethnic group whose roots historically may or may not be traced back to Egypt, but who are commonly described as “Egyptian” within Albania. Although commonly grouped together, the Roma and Egyptian minorities have distinct ethnic identities and perceive themselves to be very different.

Consequently, Anti-Slavery International argues that governments and others with a duty to protect children's rights should adopt the following recommendations as a matter of priority:

1. Governments must ensure that adequate **legislation** is in place to protect children who are forced to beg, and that these laws are enforced.
2. Children, who are suffering from extreme violence or exploitation through begging, must be **removed immediately from harm** and placed in a safe and caring environment with appropriate educational and rehabilitative support.
3. Governments should prioritise investing in **quality, affordable and accessible education** for all. This would go a long way towards preventing forced child begging and other forms of exploitation, rehabilitating those already involved, as well as helping all children in poverty to improve their lives and future prospects.
4. **Prevention work among families and local communities** should form a central plank of all interventions. Families will need **practical support** to help remove poverty as a major factor in decisions to send their children away or out to beg. Such interventions must include **awareness-raising** about the immediate and long-term risks to children who are forced to beg, and the rights of children to a childhood and to an education.
5. Far too often, all child beggars are treated as a problem by authorities. At worst, they are beaten and mistreated by the very authorities who should be there to protect them. A range of **training programmes** particularly for **police and social workers** are needed to help them to respond sensitively to the particular needs of these children.
6. **Raise awareness among the general public** that the money they give may be handed over to others who are exploiting these boys and girls. The public should be offered alternative ways to help those in need if strategies are in place to protect children and their families from the effects of losing this income.
7. Many shared experiences and causes mean that a number of strategies to address forced child begging should be approached within the **wider context of child begging**. Efforts to improve the lives of children begging, including support with healthcare and education, can also offer ways to help identify and remove from harm children who are forced to beg by violent or other coercive means.

# Introduction

## Rationale and aims of the research

Forced child begging involves forcing boys and girls to beg through violence, the threat of violence or other forms of physical or psychological coercion. This extreme form of abuse and exploitation, and the current lack of action by governments to tackle it sensitively and effectively, is particularly troubling because the children involved are clearly visible to everyone on the streets of cities around the world. Research suggests that children are trafficked into begging in Asia, Europe, Africa and Latin America (US Department of State, 2008; ILO, 2006; IOM, 2004a). Reports of cases range from boys made to beg in return for learning the Koran in boarding schools in many parts of West Africa (US Department of State, 2008; UNICEF, 2005; R. Surtees, 2005a) to reports of begging ‘mafias’ in South Asia and Russia (ILO, 2004; Tiurukanova, 2006).

Despite the seriousness and apparently widespread nature of this problem, there is limited existing research related to forced child begging, and no clear framework within which to address it. Moreover, factors, such as high levels of mobility amongst child beggars and links to criminal gangs and networks, make this a challenging topic to explore.

In 2007, Anti-Slavery International established a pilot study on forced child begging to find ways to overcome these challenges in researching it. The pilot aimed to develop techniques for identifying children who have been forced to beg by others, and to explore the causes and consequences with a view to improving these children’s lives. The pilot trialled the research techniques in Albania, India and Senegal to form a toolkit of research methods for use elsewhere in the world. Following initial investigations, information was also collected in Greece about Albanian children who had migrated or been trafficked there to beg.

In addition to trialling appropriate research methodologies, the study gathered a great deal of data which offers useful insights into the nature, causes and impacts of forced child begging in these very different contexts. This report presents the findings from this research.

## Some definitions

The research is based on a number of definitions. In accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), a child is defined as a boy or girl aged less than 18 years old.

Begging is defined as:

**“a range of activities whereby an individual asks a stranger for money on the basis of being poor or needing charitable donations for health or religious reasons. Beggars may also sell small items, such as dusters or flowers, in return for money that may have little to do with the value of the item for sale.” (ILO, 2004).**

All children who are forced to beg are subjected to forced labour, which is defined according to the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Convention No. 29 on Forced Labour (1930) as:

**“work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.”**

Forced child begging by third parties is slavery, servitude or a practice similar to slavery. The UN Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery (1956) defines “child servitude” as the practice of handing children over to another person, “with a view to the exploitation of the child or young person or of his labour.” General prohibitions on slavery stated in the League of Nations’ Convention on Slavery, Servitude, Forced Labour and Similar Institutions and Practices (1926) cover children who themselves decide to run away from home but get involved in forced child begging subsequently.

Forced child begging may include trafficking for the purposes of begging. This can be defined using the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking of Persons, especially Women and Children, Supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (2000):

**“... the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons... for the purpose of exploitation...”**

Under the terms of this Protocol, child trafficking does not have to involve coercion or deception; any situations involving children being moved for the purposes of exploitation are considered to be trafficking whether or not a child agrees to it.

The act of using a child for the purpose of begging can be designated a worst form of child labour in several possible ways as defined by ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999). For example, this can be as slavery or a slavery-like practice, forced labour, the end result of child trafficking, and through the child’s involvement in begging as an illicit activity. Some countries may also list begging and forced begging as “hazardous work” and so strictly prohibited for children.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 2 for more information on forced child begging in the international and regional legal context.



## The research methods

The research presented in this report was managed by Anti-Slavery International and conducted by partner agencies in Albania, Greece, India and Senegal.<sup>5</sup> The size and scope of the research varied between the countries depending on existing knowledge, ease of access to potential forced child beggars, and the capacities of partner organisations. Although initially intended as a small pilot study, the enthusiasm and commitment of these partners meant that, in the end, a great deal of data was collected:

- In Albania and Greece the research took place in four cities, and involved 162 girls and boys, 72 parents and 28 individuals, who either give to beggars or who work on issues relating to child begging. Around one third of the 53 Albanian children who took part in in-depth interviews reported being forced to beg through violence or coercion, the vast majority by their parents.
- In India, the research focused on 13 locations in the capital Delhi where children commonly beg. 86 boys and 77 girls took part in the research, along with five adults who work with child beggars. Of the 12 children who then participated in in-depth interviews, six said they were forced to beg by their parents and three were made to beg in connection with drug addiction.
- In Senegal, the research involved 107 current *talibés* (students or ‘disciples’ learning the Koran in boarding schools known as *daaras*) and a further nine boys in their communities of origin, who either had been *talibés* or were at risk of becoming *talibés*. 76 parents of *talibés*, 22 *marabouts* (Koranic teachers) and 18 adults who either give to *talibés* or work with them also took part in the research. Participants came from the city of Thiès, or from two villages in the St. Louis and Kaolack regions of the country. All of the *talibés* included in the research can be classified as having been forced to beg.

The research used a combination of five different qualitative methods:

- **Observations:** Researchers spent around one hour in a location where children commonly beg, observing their activities and taking notes on factors such as the age and sex of the children, and their relationships with those around them. These observations were repeated at different times of day/on different days of the week.
- **Rapid interviews:** Usually following observations, researchers approached children for a 10-15 minute interview covering topics such as income earned and usual working hours. These interviews provided basic information on the nature of begging, identified potential forced child beggars, and enabled the research teams to

establish a relationship with children not previously known to them.

- **In-depth interviews:** Researchers spent around one hour with children or adults, asking detailed questions about their lives. Time-lines, which provide a history of key events in the child’s life, and daily activity charts, which list key activities from the previous day, were used in these interviews.
- **Group discussions:** Common interest groups (for example, boys who beg or parents of forced child beggars), usually of eight to 10 individuals who discussed begging for one to two hours. Diagrams and games, including problem trees, were used as part of these discussions.
- **Key informant interviews:** Individuals with a particular knowledge of child begging or forced child begging, such as social workers, those who give to beggars or policy makers, were interviewed for 30 minutes to one hour.

In addition to this primary data collection, a literature review of global evidence on forced child begging was conducted. This literature review was not intended as a comprehensive review of all research relating to the different forms of forced child begging, but was instead designed to identify studies relevant to this topic.

As a pilot study, the research process placed an emphasis on learning and experimentation. Consequently there are some limitations in the data collected. These include:

- Forced child begging is an illicit activity. As such, it is notoriously difficult to estimate the numbers of children involved or even trace or identify them from among the thousands of children who beg on the streets, but are not forced by others to do so. There were problems finding children who had been forced to beg in Delhi and Albania in particular. As a result, the numbers of forced child beggars from these locations included in the research are relatively small. As discussed below, this issue raises wider questions about whether forced child begging should be explored and responded to in isolation or within the wider context of child begging. This is especially the case where those forcing the children to beg are family members.
- Insufficient data was gathered on children forced to beg by criminal gangs to be able to draw conclusions about this particular form of forced child begging. The possibility that children subjected to begging by gangs slipped through the net cannot be excluded. However, due to the thorough nature of the research and the fact that only a few cases came to light, this is thought unlikely. It is probable that there are simply a limited number of children forced to beg by criminal gangs in the

<sup>5</sup> See Acknowledgements and Appendix 1 for details.



locations examined for this research.

- There was a lack of a significant control group of children who come from backgrounds similar to those of forced child beggars, but who do not beg. Looking at this is important for examining the causes of forced child begging.
- The data was not sufficiently disaggregated in some instances, particularly by ethnicity. This, for example, made it hard to explore the differences between the Roma and Egyptian ethnic groups in Albania.
- The research was conducted before the onset of the current global economic crisis, and so does not take into account the additional economic hardship that vulnerable communities involved in the research are likely to experience as a result.

More information on the research and methods used in the four countries involved in the research can be found in Appendix 1. Anti-Slavery International has produced a toolkit for researchers wishing to carry out research on forced child begging: *Forced Child Begging: A toolkit for researchers*. It contains further details of the methodology used and lessons learned. It is available on the Anti-Slavery International website: [www.antislavery.org](http://www.antislavery.org).

## Outline of the report

Following this introduction, the report provides a global overview of forced child begging based on the research conducted in Albania/Greece, India and Senegal, and on the literature review. The report is divided into five parts: Part 1 identifies the different types of forced child begging; Part 2 examines the nature and impacts of forced child begging; Part 3 explores the roots of the problem in relation to poverty, a lack of access to quality education, cultural and religious traditions, ethnic discrimination, and violence and abuse within the home; Part 4 looks at existing responses to forced child begging; and Part 5 summarises key findings and lists recommendations for policy and practice.



A. Farris



CHETNA

Top: Child begging in Senegal.

Above: Child begging in India.

# 1. Types of forced child begging

The research suggests that forced child begging occurs across the world and takes on many forms. Forced child begging can be split into two categories:

1. **Children who are forced to beg by ‘third parties.’** This group includes boys or girls who have been forced to beg by individuals other than their parents or guardians. Such individuals may include members of criminal gangs or networks, religious teachers, extended family members, family ‘friends’ or the children’s own ‘friends.’
2. **Children who are forced to beg by their parents or guardians.** Here, children are usually forced into begging through techniques that go beyond usual or acceptable means of family discipline, including the use of violence or threats of violence and psychological coercion.

## Third party forced child begging

The research identified three different types of third party forced child begging in the areas where it was carried out:

- Children trafficked into begging by informal networks or organised gangs, commonly described as begging ‘mafias’
- Children sent to live in Koranic boarding schools and who are made to beg by their teachers
- Forced child begging linked to drug addiction.

### Children trafficked into begging by informal networks or organised gangs

Evidence suggests that children are trafficked into begging by networks or gangs all over the world. For example, it was reported that in China adults force street children to beg, and sometimes break their arms or legs to evoke more pity. It is thought that such individuals can earn US\$30-40,000 per year by forcing children to beg (US Department of State, 2008). Elsewhere in Asia, children are reported to be trafficked for begging from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, India, Burma, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand (US Department of State, 2008; IOM, 2004a). In Africa, this form of forced child begging has been noted in Sierra Leone (R. Surtees, 2005a), Chad, Mauritania and Uganda (US Department of State, 2008). In Europe, information suggests that children are trafficked for begging from a number of poorer areas of South East Europe to richer nations (IOM, 2004b; R. Surtees, 2005b, US Department of State, 2008). Children are reported to have been trafficked for begging from various countries, including Yemen and Sudan to Saudi

Arabia (US Department of State, 2008).

It is hard to determine the extent of child trafficking for begging as research does not always disaggregate by the type of exploitation into which children are trafficked. Research shows that forms of trafficking for begging vary and adapt over time. A study in Cambodia suggests a shift in recent years away from trafficking gangs recruiting children for begging towards parents using their children for this purpose themselves. This is attributed to a fear of abuse by the traffickers and to parents learning the routes commonly used by traffickers and thus no longer having to rely on third parties (IOM, 2004a). Some forms of trafficking appear to have declined in recent years owing to agreements between source and receiving countries and the better policing of borders. This was noted in relation to Albanian children travelling to Greece for begging and other purposes, though there are also suggestions of a corresponding increase in internal migration/trafficking in Albania, and of parents sending their own children out to beg (Tdh and UNICEF, 2006).

The research found limited evidence of child trafficking by networks or gangs for begging. There were two case studies of boys trafficked for begging from Albania to Greece around 10 years ago (see Box 1 on page 7). In Pakistan there are reports of criminal gangs or begging ‘mafias’ controlling child beggars and of other forms of forced begging, such as small children being ‘rented out’ to adults (see for example ILO, 2004). The reports are backed up by some key informant interviews carried out in Delhi for this research, and by evidence from one boy who participated in the research, who spoke of a man with 12 boys under his control. This evidence remains largely anecdotal in nature, however, and the vast majority of the research participants in Delhi denied the existence of such organised forced begging. Of course, this relates only to the areas in Delhi covered by the research and not India as a whole. There are also great risks involved in exploring and revealing criminal gangs, and, as a result, their existence even in areas where this research was conducted cannot be fully ruled out.

### Children forced to beg by religious teachers

The research in Senegal focused on *talibés* (Koranic students or ‘disciples’). These are boys who are sent to live in *daaras* (religious boarding schools) to learn the Koran from *marabouts* (religious teachers). Although there are no reliable estimates of the total number of *talibés* in Senegal, large numbers can clearly be seen begging on the streets of Senegal’s cities. The eight *daaras*, which formed the focus of this research, contained a total of almost 300 *talibés*, and Anti-Slavery International’s partner NGO, Tostan, calculates

<sup>6</sup> The UN estimates that the population of Thiès, Senegal’s second largest city, is approximately 320,000.

## Box 1: Examples of boys trafficked from Albania to Greece

Bledi\* was seven years old when he was trafficked to Greece. He was forced to go out every day from morning until night to beg, with a few moments to rest in the afternoon and have a sandwich. Bledi was not sure how much he ‘earned’ because he did not speak Greek or understand the currency. He slept on the floor in a cramped basement room, crammed alongside eight or nine other children, who were all forced to beg by a group of men. The men watched the boys’ every move to make sure that they did not spend any money. The boys were beaten, kicked and also whipped with a belt if they did not bring back enough money at the end of the day. After two weeks in Greece, Bledi was arrested by the police and deported back to Albania. At 17 years old, he says that he is still blighted by his time on the streets, **“I always have these experiences in my mind. I will never forget them.”**

Now 21 years old, Fatmir\* discovered his name and true age only a few years ago. He was so young when he was taken to Greece that he does not remember all of the details, but he thinks he must have been aged about four or five years at the time. Traffickers forced him into a car, and drove him to Greece, but were arrested by Greek police when they could not produce documents to prove he was their child. Fatmir’s mother and her Greek boyfriend collected him from the police station, but then handed him over to another Albanian trafficker, who took him to Athens. Fatmir was sent out to beg on the very first morning they arrived. When he came back, his mother was gone. He cried for her every day but the trafficker told him that he **“had paid some money to her, so [Fatmir] had to beg to [earn back] this money.”** After a couple of weeks, Fatmir managed to escape when his trafficker went to get something to eat. Fatmir came across a woman who took him in along with her eight children. But, like her other children, Fatmir went back out to beg. He said that he went begging because he felt indebted to the family, but he also said that the father demanded money from him and forced him to sleep outside. Now he says, **“I lost myself as a child. I won’t sell myself to anybody now.”**

\* Names have been changed.

that it has had contact with around 6000 *talibés* in Thiès<sup>6</sup> in recent years. Most *daaras* do not charge students for their studies, food and accommodation, and instead send the *talibés* out to beg. All of the *daaras* included in this research sent *talibés* out to beg on a daily basis. Boys from seven of the eight *daaras* involved spoke of being coerced into begging in some way by their *marabout*.

The phenomenon of boys living in Koranic schools and begging has also been noted in several other West African countries including the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria (J.C. Andvig et al., 2002; US Department of State, 2008). Evidence gathered on *talibés* in Senegal suggests that these boys are trafficked under international definitions as they are transported from their home villages and then exploited. The US State Department includes boys who are taken to Koranic schools in West Africa in its global reports on trafficking. Its 2008 report notes that some traffickers pose as ‘false’ Koranic teachers to recruit children, and then force them to beg for periods as long as 12 hours per day. News articles also highlight the existence of “dishonest” *marabouts*, attracted by easy money (see for example, *Le Quotidien*, 2008).

### Forced child begging linked to drug addiction

The research in Delhi suggests that a number of boys are forced into begging by drug dealers. In-depth interviews with three boys in three separate locations point towards the use of drugs to trap boys into begging (see Box 2). Drug

## Box 2: Drug addiction and forced child begging in Delhi

Javed\* is 14 years old and comes to the Purana Hanuman Mandir temple every day at six in the morning to begin begging, leaving again late in the evening to sleep in a nearby park. He earns Rs.10-20 per day (US\$0.20-0.40) from begging and is also given food by the temple’s devotees, eating only once or twice a day. He left his home near Mumbai when he was nine years old because his father was abusing him sexually. He gives most of the money he earns from begging to his ‘friend,’ who also supplies him with drugs. He says that his ‘friend’ will beat him if he doesn’t bring him money each day. Javed suffers from poor eyesight in one eye and his right hand shakes constantly. He is exhausted from lack of sleep as the park is often too noisy for him to rest.

\* Names have been changed.

dealers, often older children themselves, get boys addicted to drugs and into debt. They refuse to provide them with more drugs unless they return to the streets to beg and bring them further income. Boys in the three locations, who took part in the in-depth interviews, group discussions and rapid interviews, all suggested that drug dealers have several boys under their control at any one time.



## Children forced to beg by their parents or guardians

Children forced to beg by their parents or, in a few cases, their guardians<sup>7</sup> proved to be the most common form of forced child begging in the research in Albania and Delhi. In Albania, around one third of the 53 current child beggars who took part in in-depth interviews reported being forced to beg by their parents through violence or coercion.

Members of the Albanian research team, many of whom are social workers with in-depth knowledge of the participants' home lives, believe that this figure under-estimates the true extent of forced child begging by parents. They argue that children are likely to be reluctant to report violent abuse by parents because of a sense of loyalty or fear of reprisals. Group discussion and key informant interviews also suggest that a greater proportion of child beggars are forced to beg by parents than the one third indicated by the interviews.

In Delhi, of the 12 children who took part in the in-depth interviews, four boys and two girls spoke of being beaten by their parents if they did not bring home enough money. This issue was also raised repeatedly by children involved in the group discussions.

While it is necessary to distinguish between children being forced to beg by their parents or guardians and by third parties, particularly in order to determine appropriate responses, it is also important to remember that there can be strong links between the two forms. ARSIS, the partner NGO in Greece, for example, reported increases in parents forcing their children to beg following more stringent anti-trafficking provisions between Greece and Albania. Parents found that it was no longer 'cost-effective' to send their children to Greece with third party traffickers as the risks of them getting caught had increased. Parents also realised that they could gain a more substantial share of the profits from begging if they sent their children out to beg themselves.

It is interesting that no evidence of children being forced to beg by parents was found in the literature review conducted as part of this research. Although this could indicate that this is not a widespread phenomenon, this lack of evidence is more likely to be a reflection of a lack of attention paid to exploitation by families and a preoccupation with trafficking by third parties.

## The wider problem of child begging

Although this research was focused on forced child begging, a great deal of information was also collected on girls and boys who beg but are not forced by others to do so. This was necessary to reach the more hidden group of children who are forced to beg by others. In Albania and Delhi, it was particularly hard to identify forced child beggars, and research teams often had to speak to ten or more children who begged before potential cases could be found.

As expected, the research showed that in both of these contexts, it is far more common to find children who are pushed into begging by their circumstances and their need to survive than are forced by others through violence or coercion. Such children are vulnerable to exploitation and often suffer from a range of abuses, which should still demand the attention of policy makers and practitioners.

However, it is essential to recognise that children who are forced to beg by others commonly experience particularly severe abuse, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section. The major challenges in identifying children who have been forced to beg from amongst the vast numbers of child beggars must not be used as an excuse to avoid tackling these gross violations of children's rights.



Terre des hommes - Albania

Above: Begging on the streets in Tirana, Albania.

<sup>7</sup> One girl from Tirana spoke of being forced to beg by her aunt and grandmother while her mother was working abroad. The girl was beaten or shouted at if she did not come home with sufficient income. A 13-year-old Albanian boy in Greece was forced to beg to help his mother repay debts to her live-in boyfriend, incurred during their travel to Greece and subsequent attempts to get work permits there. The boy was beaten by his mother's boyfriend if he did not bring home enough money.

## 2. Nature and impacts of forced child begging

### Which children are forced to beg?

Unsurprisingly there is no single profile for children who are forced to beg. However, some themes did emerge in the research from the various settings, particularly around age, gender and ethnicity.

#### Age

Begging in Senegal, Albania and Delhi is primarily an activity for younger children with many starting at around the age of four or five. Numbers of children involved then appear to decline once both boys and girls reach puberty. This trend has also been noted by researchers in other countries (such as in Pakistan, see ILO, 2004; and South Eastern and Eastern Europe, see J. Kane, 2005). Begging declines at this point not only because younger children are likely to evoke more pity but also because it becomes more widely acknowledged as a shameful activity. For girls particularly, shame may be associated with reaching 'marriageable' age and a need to protect the appearance of chastity and honour whilst seeking a husband. Older, married women who beg in Albania also reported feeling embarrassed about their work. This suggests that in addition to views about propriety, begging is closely linked to power, with women and young children being assigned the most low status work, often against their own wishes.

The research indicates that the phenomenon of forced child begging adheres to these wider norms about who should beg. In Senegal, it is rare for older *talibés* to beg. These boys are either sent back to their villages, having completed their Koranic schooling, or take on a different role in the *daara* supervising the younger children.

The 19 Albanian children in the study who were forced to beg by parents or third parties were all either under the age of 14 years at the time of interview or had stopped begging before they reached puberty. However, numbers are too small to draw firm conclusions from this. In contrast, in Delhi, boys who are forced into begging by drug dealers appear to continue begging past puberty. This is perhaps because the strength of addiction and power of the dealers overrides the shame associated with begging at an older age.

#### Gender

The relationship between gender and begging varies according to the type of begging in which children are involved. In Delhi and Albania, while the data available provides no clear indication of a discernible difference in the

number of boys and girls involved in begging, it does appear that more boys than girls are affected by forced child begging by third parties. In Greece, the two Albanian children interviewed that had been trafficked into begging are both boys, and research by other organisations suggests that trafficking from and in Albania for begging and other purposes is more likely to affect boys than girls (Save the Children, 2007). In the research conducted in Delhi, begging associated with drug addiction appears to be largely, but not exclusively, a problem for boys. In Senegal, the *talibés* are almost always male, with a substantial number of boys involved in this practice suggesting that forced child begging by third parties in Senegal may affect more boys than girls. However, girls do beg on the streets in Senegal, and more evidence is needed on the nature of this begging before firm conclusions can be drawn. Nevertheless, the suggestion from this research that the most extreme forms of forced child begging primarily affect boys in a number of countries indicates that patriarchy and norms of masculinity do not always favour male members of society.

#### Ethnicity and caste

It is striking that all of the 162 child beggars, ex-child beggars and children thought to be at risk of begging who participated in the research in Albania and Greece came from the Roma or Egyptian communities. This is despite the Roma for example accounting for only 2.9-3.2 per cent of the total population in Albania (UNICEF-Serbia, 2007). The possible complex range of reasons for this, linked particularly to greater levels of poverty experienced by these communities and discrimination, are discussed in more detail in Part 3 of this report that addresses root causes.

In contrast it was not possible to draw any conclusions from the ethnicity of *talibés* in Senegal, beyond large numbers of children originating from other countries in the region. Boys travelling from places including Mali and the Gambia possibly represent up to a third or a half of the overall number of *talibés*, at least in Dakar, according to one key informant.

Begging castes have been identified elsewhere in South Asia, notably in Pakistan (ILO, 2004), but this research could not provide proof of the prevalence or not of particular ethnic groups involved in forced child begging or begging in Delhi. However, it is worth noting that the topic itself was felt by local researchers to be too sensitive to ask participants, except during in-depth interviews once a degree of trust had been established with the child concerned. Even then the information about caste is difficult to ascertain as all 12 children who took part in in-depth interviews claimed not to

know their caste when the topic was raised. This area would benefit greatly from further research in India.

## What rights abuses do children who are forced to beg suffer?

There is no doubt that children who are forced to beg suffer from gross violations of their rights. As is shown below, although these violations may be more extreme in cases where children are forced to beg by third parties, children who are forced to beg by parents also suffer many rights abuses. The research focused on the immediate impacts of forced child begging on children's well being and safety. However, many of these effects are likely to have long term ramifications for children as they enter adulthood.

### Violence and coercion

As already stated, little information was uncovered in this research about forced begging linked to criminal gangs, where the worst cases of violence or coercion might be expected. However, the research revealed that parents, 'friends' and Koranic teachers forcing children to beg commonly use violent or coercive methods to make sure children bring back expected amounts of money each day, causing these children physical and psychological harm.

Violence and coercion were features of forced child begging by third parties in all of the countries that participated in the research. The two cases of trafficking from Albania to Greece involved a high level of violence and coercion (see Box 1). In Delhi, boy drug dealers, who get younger boys addicted to drugs and into debt, reportedly use violence to coerce children into begging.

In Senegal, boys from seven of the eight *daaras* included in the research spoke of being coerced into begging in some way by their *marabouts* or, in a number of *daaras*, by older *talibés*, who are used by the *marabout* to enforce discipline. Some children are more afraid of these older boys than of the *marabouts*. Techniques include denial of food and violence. Fifteen children who were interviewed reported that they are beaten if they do not bring back enough income:

**"The *marabout* will beat us if we do not beg."**  
(10-year-old *talibé* during group discussions in Thiès, Senegal).

This was also backed up by reports from volunteers and NGO staff working to support *talibés*. One co-ordinator of a centre for street children reported that around half of the children who come to the centre for support have run away from abusive *marabouts*. Volunteers who act as surrogate mothers to the *talibés* told stories of caring for *talibés*, who repeatedly ran away from *daaras* because of violence on the part of the *marabout*. Other sources also note that cases of

*talibés* being physically abused are "widely known and discussed," for reasons such as trying to run away, not bringing in enough income, or failing to recite the Koran. These include severe beatings; one resulting in a boy dying, another committing suicide, and one boy, whose injuries of a broken arm and badly bleeding back prompted a concerned local woman to call the police (US Department of State, 2008; USAid, 2004; *Le Quotidien*, 2005).

Although two *marabouts* acknowledged that they beat *talibés* if they 'behave badly,' most of those who were interviewed claimed that they do not beat children to encourage them to beg, or even ask them to bring back fixed sums of money. Some *marabouts* even went as far as to say that children choose to go out begging themselves and enjoy the opportunity to earn money. Some *talibés* backed up these claims, saying that they were not forced to beg, and would be allowed to remain in the *daara* for the day if they were sick. However, further probing usually suggested that the degree of choice that *talibés* have over their daily lives is, in reality, very limited.

In addition to violence and coercion on the part of third parties, research participants in Albania and Delhi provided repeated reports of parents and carers using violence. In Albania, children and parents spoke of children being forced to beg by violent means in 18 of the 21 group discussions which were conducted, and many provided specific examples of friends or relatives who were the victims or perpetrators of such violence. Some children also receive threats of violence, psychological coercion or are denied food:

**"If the children don't earn this amount of money, the parents beat them or don't give them anything to eat."**  
(Comment by a mother of children who beg, made during a group discussion in Tirana, Albania).

**"She beats me ... and tells me 'I love you so much!' 'You were late!' and 'I was in trouble!' and things like that."**  
(13-year-old Albanian boy who begs in Greece, describing what his mother does if he comes home without 'enough' money).

In Delhi, of the 12 children who took part in in-depth interviews, all six of the children who were forced to beg by parents spoke of being beaten if they did not bring home enough money. This issue was raised repeatedly in group discussions and some of the rapid interviews. Two interviews with key informants also provided anecdotal evidence of parents using other techniques to manipulate their children, including the use of opium to make babies cry and engender pity from potential givers, and applying chilli pepper to a child's tongue to give the impression of a speech disability.

Abuse by parents and third party exploiters is not the only form of violence and coercion suffered by boys and girls who are forced to beg. Children in Delhi and Albania also



reported mistreatment from other beggars, those who give and members of the public they encounter on a daily basis. In Delhi, all children who beg talked of being chased or beaten by police or watchmen who did not want them to beg in the area. One reported having to pay bribes to police to avoid time in prison. In Delhi and Albania, boys discussed fights with other boys over which areas they were entitled to beg in, and both boys and girls reported abusive comments. In Albania, some girls, especially older girls, spoke of sexual harassment from boys or men in the areas in which they beg. Several boys and girls also reported being beaten, chased away from certain areas, insulted or spat at:

**“I have even been beaten. I begged and they came to hit me and I ran.”**

(Nine-year-old boy from Tirana in Albania, describing the treatment he receives from people in the street when he is begging).

Although most *talibés* said they were met with kindness and generosity from shop keepers, neighbours, people who give to them regularly and passers-by, many also recounted abusive behaviour and hurtful comments:

**“There are some that pity us and others that are against us who say that we are dirty and smell bad.”**

(12-year-old *talibé* from Thiès in Senegal).

Children who are forced to beg are also exposed to other dangers by working on the streets. Several key informants in Delhi pointed out that these children were especially vulnerable to traffickers or could be encouraged to take drugs, steal or enter commercial sexual exploitation by those around them.

Many children who had been forced to beg by third parties were deeply traumatised by violent experiences, and all children forced into begging by third parties or their parents expressed great unhappiness about their situation (see boxes 1 and 2). These negative feelings are exacerbated by the treatment that some children receive when they are on the streets.

## Income and working hours<sup>8</sup>

The research suggests that children who are forced to beg experience long working hours and low pay with little or no control over their income, regardless of whether they are exploited by parents or third parties.

In Senegal, the *talibés* included in this research, many of whom are as young as five or six years old, spend an average of five hours each day begging. This begging is on top of three to seven hours of Koranic tuition (see Box 3 for a typical day in the life of a *talibé* in Thiès). *Talibés* earn CFA250-300 (US\$0.60-0.70) per day and hand over most or all of this money to their *marabout*. Evidence from the

research suggests that few *marabouts* make vast profits from children's begging. The research does indicate, however, that some *marabouts*, who have a lot of *talibés* in their *daara*, can earn more than is needed to maintain the *daara*. For example, with a *daara* of 50 *talibés*, a *marabout* might earn CFA350,000 (US\$770) per month. Some *marabouts* live with their *talibés* in half-built houses for free, but even if rent and other costs eat into these 'profits,' a *marabout* in such a *daara* could still expect to earn well in excess of the CFA125,000 (US\$275), which matches the average monthly salary of primary school teachers in Senegal. One key informant also pointed out that this could equate to considerably more in those cases involving *marabouts* from neighbouring countries where the cost of living is lower, and who send money home to support family remaining there.

## Box 3: Day in the life of a *talibé*

Seydou\* is 15 years old and comes from Dakar where both of his parents sell snacks on the streets. He has lived in the *daara* for seven years, and recently one of his younger brothers came to the *daara* to join him. Seydou usually wakes up at 6am and spends the first hour of the day learning the Koran. Then, with an empty tin can, he goes from one house to another to beg for food for his breakfast. He returns to the *daara* at 9am, at which time the morning courses begin. At 1pm Seydou goes to neighbouring houses to beg for his lunch, coming back to the *daara* for an hour or so to rest and eat. The afternoon classes begin at 3pm. At around 5pm every day, Seydou goes to collect water for the *daara* with other *talibés*. He then studies the Koran for another three hours, before going out at 8pm to beg for his dinner. He comes back to the *daara* to study the Koran some more before bed time at around 10pm. He sleeps in a small hut with a straw roof alongside seven other children. Seydou says that if he doesn't beg, he won't eat, and if he doesn't bring back enough money on two or three occasions, the *marabout* will beat him. He misses his parents and would rather be at home with them than in the *daara*. He says that he likes learning the Koran, but would also like to know some French so that he could read road signs.

\* Names have been changed.

The three children from Delhi forced into begging by drug dealers spend nine to twelve hours each day at begging sites, and give most of the approximately Rs.50-100 (US\$1.20-2.40) they earn to their drug dealers to pay off debts and get more drugs (see Box 2).

Boys and girls included in this research who are forced to beg by their parents had similar experiences to children exploited by third parties in relation to long working hours

<sup>8</sup> The equivalent US Dollar amounts given here were calculated on the basis of currency exchange rates in December 2008.



and the lack of control over the money they earn. The four boys and two girls forced to beg by parents in Delhi commonly spend over nine hours each day at begging sites, earning Rs.50-100 (US\$1.20-2.40) per day. Again, children tend to give all or most of their earnings to parents, keeping only Rs.5-10 (US\$0.10-0.20) for snacks or transport. In Delhi, a daily income of Rs.50-100 (US\$1.20-2.40) equates to what a non-skilled worker, such as a rickshaw puller might expect to earn.

In Albania/Greece, 15 children who were forced to beg by parents took part in detailed interviews about working hours and pay. These boys and girls all spend over six hours each day begging. In Albania, earnings from child begging can make a substantial difference to family incomes. Children commonly earn between 200-500 Leke (US\$2.50-6.45) from begging, which is roughly the same as a street cleaner would earn. In the capital city, Tirana it could be as much as 2000 Leke (US\$25) per day. The boy forced to beg by parents in Greece brings home 30-70 Euros (US\$43-100) per day. All of these children give most or all of their income to their parents. Some children hold back a small portion of their earnings to buy snacks or, in the case of boys, cigarettes, although this often has to be done without parents' knowledge for fear of punishment.

The long working hours, with little rest and exposure to the dangers of the street, including car accidents and drug abuse, put these children at immediate risk as well as threatening their longer term health and development.

## Access to education

None of the boys and girls included in this research who have been forced into begging is receiving a well-rounded education, and most are receiving no education at all. Access to good quality, state-funded education is generally recognised as a key part of the escape route from poverty for children by enhancing their future prospects (see for example, ILO, 2002).

The two boys from Delhi and two boys from Albania, who were forced to beg by third parties, had no opportunity to combine their begging with schooling. In Senegal, the relationship between education and third party forced begging is more complex. Many research participants said that they valued learning the Koran, which *daaras* offer. Some also recognised that it represented a possibility to escape village poverty for the few who go on to become *marabouts* themselves in later life. However, as discussed below, forced child begging is not an inevitable or intrinsic part of Koranic schooling, and there are other ways for children to learn the Koran without being exploited in this way. Furthermore, many parents and children would prefer to combine Koranic schooling with a broader state education, arguing that this would enhance job prospects and the ability to operate in modern society:

**“We must teach the children French... Now, there are a lot of changes to our way of life. If you don't learn French, you will have problems if you go into town. If [the children] learn French ... they could help the parents.”**  
(A mother of a *talibé* from a source village in Senegal).

None of the children who were forced to beg by their parents in Delhi and Albania was able to go to school, though the research does not provide conclusive evidence about whether begging or other factors are responsible for this. Clearly, the long hours these boys and girls work hinder their ability to attend school regularly. However, interviews with children and other research participants suggest that there are other secondary factors, which also contribute to children's lack of access to school. In Albania, in particular, the costs of books and uniforms, and discrimination faced by ethnic minority groups in schools appear to be the most important determinants of these children's lack of schooling:

**“The teacher beats these [Roma] children.”**

**“We are black and others look at us differently.”**  
(Comments made by girls who beg during a group discussion in Korca, Albania).

## Contact with family and living conditions

All of the children included in this research, who are forced to beg by third parties, live away from home and are denied a family life. For some, such as the two boys forced into begging in Delhi, who left home to escape abusive parents, such separation is part of the child's initial survival strategy. In other cases, separation is forced upon the child. Most of the *talibés* included in the research live in *daaras* far away from their villages and see their parents only a few times each year. Some have been in the *daara* for many years and have no contact at all with home. Boys report missing their parents dreadfully, and mothers also express great feelings of loss for their sons:

**“It was very difficult at first for several days. For a mother, separation from your children is very difficult... Those first nights I couldn't think about anything except my child having left for the *daara*... Little by little, I grew to accept the separation.”**  
(Mother of a *talibé* from a source village in Senegal).

Children, who are forced to beg by third parties, also suffer particularly poor living conditions that are likely to impact on their health and safety. Boys in Senegal reported crowded and unhygienic living conditions in the *daaras* with no running water and electricity, limited washing facilities, and ten to 20 boys sharing one room and sleeping on thin mats on the floor. Participants in the research reported cases of stomach problems, flu and malaria. Key informants in Dakar found incidents of cholera due to poor hygiene. Crowded and unhygienic conditions also result in skin conditions, eye infections and embarrassment about “smelling bad.”

Albanian boys trafficked to Greece also reported crowded living conditions, and boys forced into begging as a result of drug addiction in Delhi may have to sleep on the streets (see Boxes 2 and 3).

Unlike children who are forced to beg by third parties, children who are forced to beg by their parents remain living with their families. The research suggests that in common with other children living in poverty, such boys and girls suffer cramped living conditions and a lack of basic amenities. However, children living with parents are at the very least likely to receive shelter and, in cases where relationships are not entirely abusive, a degree of protection.

Child protection and psychology specialists involved in the Albanian research commented that in addition to a sense of protection, children who are forced to beg by their parents may experience more positive feelings of belonging, usefulness and power from providing income needed by the family, which children forced to beg by third parties do not. However, depending on how each individual child responds to events in their lives, these can conflict with the negative feelings they also have from being mistreated by their parents. So while in the short-term many tend to feel less threatened than children who are forced to beg by third parties, the problematic relationship with their parents can lead to additional emotional difficulties in later life.

## The wider problem of child begging

The research suggests that children who beg but are not forced to do so are unlikely to suffer the same levels of exploitation, violence and coercion as those forced to beg by their parents or third parties. They also have more choice over how they spend their income from begging. However, the research shows that children who beg for their survival suffer a number of violations in common with those who are forced to beg. For example, evidence from Delhi and Albania suggests that they work comparably long hours and, in many cases, will be separated from their families. Very few are able to combine their begging with school, though as with children forced to beg by their parents, it is hard to determine whether or not this is the result of their work, or other factors, such as discrimination. They also express shame and unhappiness about their situation, which like those forced to beg, is exacerbated by the abuse and sometimes violence meted out by those around them.



CHETNA



CHETNA

Above and top: Child begging in India.

### 3. Root causes of the problem

The research identified a range of possible root causes of forced child begging. However, it is important to state from the outset of this section that, with the exception of Senegal, the small numbers of children forced to beg included in the research mean that the findings on causes from this pilot study are tentative. The research did nevertheless collect a great deal of information on the determinants of begging more broadly, which is likely to be relevant to an understanding of why boys and girls are forced to beg.

It is hoped that in the future, further, more detailed research will be carried out on causes that may be specific to forced child begging and including forms that were too few in number to examine widely in this research, notably children forced to beg by criminal gangs.

#### Poverty

The research points towards poverty as a key cause of forced child begging and the wider problem of begging in all of the settings examined. Poverty is also given as a main cause of trafficking for begging and other purposes in research elsewhere in the world (IOM, 2004a; R. Surtees, 2005b).

In Senegal, poverty is frequently claimed to be behind parents' decisions to send boys to *daaras* and the *marabouts'* justification for making *talibés* go out to beg. Many of the parents interviewed in the two village communities of origin visited for the research said that they sent their sons to *daaras* because they lack the resources to care for all of their children at home:

**“We send our children away to protect them from the crisis at home... It's a way to lessen our poverty.”**  
(Father of a *talibé* from a source village in Senegal).

The research found that poverty in the two villages is extreme with few amenities. Families live in mud and straw huts and often go without adequate food. Participants reported that the situation was especially bad at the time they were being interviewed owing to a period of prolonged drought and desertification.

**“In the past the harvest was good, now there is nothing in the village.”**  
(Mother of a *talibé* from a source village in Senegal).

High levels of poverty mean that parents are rarely able to provide any resources to *marabouts* in return for teaching the Koran to their sons. As a result, most parents included in the research believed that it was fair for *marabouts* to send their sons out to beg. *Marabouts* argue that they are no longer able to farm due to drought and loss of land, and so must make the *talibés* go out to beg to maintain the *daaras*. The *talibés* themselves repeatedly said that they needed to

beg for their survival:

**“We survive thanks to begging which is vital for us.”**  
(15-year-old *talibé* from Thiès in Senegal).

The research in Albania suggests that children who are forced to beg by others come from similarly poor backgrounds to children who beg but are not forced to do so, though numbers are too small to draw definitive conclusions. Poverty and not having enough income to meet basic needs were the most frequently mentioned causes of begging and forced child begging during the in-depth interviews and group discussions with children and parents in Albania. As stated above, most of the research participants come from the Roma or Egyptian communities, and unemployment is disproportionately high amongst these groups, with some research suggesting that 71 per cent of Roma and 67 per cent of Egyptian adults are unemployed compared with a national average of 18 per cent (Amaro Drom, 2005; H. De Soto et al, 2005; see also UNICEF, 2007).

Many parents recognised the problems associated with begging and spoke about the occupation with distaste, but felt that it was the only option available to them in the face of economic hardship:

**“If they do not want to starve, they have to go [out begging].”**  
(Mothers describing why their children beg during a group discussion in Korca, Albania).

During the in-depth interviews and some of the group discussions in Delhi, boys and girls reported that they or their families would be unable to survive without their contributions from begging. Most children interviewed spoke of living in makeshift houses made of mud and tarpaulin in slum communities with some sleeping out in the open. Many children survived on snacks or only one or two meals a day. In some cases, children were asked for the reasons behind this poverty. The causes of poverty given included: drought, especially in Rajasthan; parental unemployment or ill-health; and parents, especially fathers, spending all of their money on alcohol.

Although it clearly plays an instrumental role in children's forced begging, poverty alone cannot explain this form of exploitation. In Senegal, evidence discussed above suggests that some *marabouts* gain in excess of the income needed to maintain their *daaras* from children begging. Among those children forced to beg by their parents in Delhi, there were cases of children being sent out despite their families having sufficient income to meet basic needs. During group discussions in the Kalkaji Mandir area of Delhi, boys and girls reported parents using the money they earned



from begging to pay instalments on 'luxury' items, such as TVs, CD players and fans, and that many children living in this area have such items in their homes. The boys and girls included in the research in two areas of Delhi also complained that parents had become lazy and so reliant on their earnings from begging that they themselves were no longer working. Most children begging or being forced to beg in Albania can earn enough just to make ends meet in the family, although it has been shown that in the capital city, Tirana, children can earn considerably more. ARSIS, the NGO who collected data in Greece, found that children who are sent out for long hours every day there can earn enough for the parents to make substantial profits. They found evidence of a small number of Albanian families in Greece using money from their children's begging to buy cars or go to night clubs.

## Migration

Many children who took part in the research, be they forced to beg by others or not, did not originally come from the places where they were found begging and living. Migration and trafficking away from impoverished communities of origin towards urban areas, believed to have greater relative wealth and income-generating possibilities, were particular features of the poverty that pushed children into begging and forced begging situations. In Albania, many children had migrated with their families from villages to larger towns in search of higher incomes. Children and families had also migrated or been trafficked from Albania to Greece. As stated previously, there is evidence in recent years of a decline in cross-border trafficking by third parties.

The vast majority of the 52 child beggars spoken to during the in-depth and rapid interviews in Delhi were not born in the city, but had come from other parts of India. The largest numbers came from the states of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar. The influx of families from Rajasthan in recent years has been linked to drought in this state. Most had come with their families. Others, notably the three boys who participated in the research and had been forced to beg through drug addiction, had travelled alone, although in these three cases the decision to leave was linked primarily to abusive home lives, which is discussed in more detail below.

Boys who took part in the research in Senegal came from all over the country. However, key informant interviews suggest that children from some areas of the country are more likely to be sent away to become *talibés* than those from other areas. This depends on factors such as relative poverty and the emphasis placed on religion. Evidence from the source villages included in the research suggests that *marabouts* almost exclusively recruit children from their own communities, and that such recruitment can be extensive. The researchers noted a marked absence of boys in these villages, and several participants commented on the large proportion of boys leaving the villages to become *talibés*:

**"I can't say the number, but all of the boys are in the *daaras*."**

(Comment made by the mother of a *talibé* during a group discussion in a source village in Senegal).

The research also suggests that some of the *talibés* migrate or are trafficked from outside Senegal. Several boys came from neighbouring countries including Gambia, Mali and Guinea-Bissau. Key informants who were interviewed believed the proportion of children coming from abroad had increased over the last few years, and in Dakar at least, could represent as much as a third to half of the total number. This was attributed to Senegal's position of relative prosperity in the region.

## A lack of access to good quality education

As discussed in the previous chapter, the research revealed that being forced to beg in many cases prevents or at least restricts children's ability to attend school and therefore greatly hampers their chances to escape poverty in later life. However, the research also indicates a possible causal link between a child's lack of access to adequate and affordable education in the first place, and an increased vulnerability to being forced to beg by others or to beg for their own survival. Existing research on trafficking for begging supports this, suggesting that education could provide an alternative activity to begging and could also reduce children's exposure to forced child begging, for example, by raising awareness of the risks (Tdh and ARSIS, 2006).

In Senegal, some boys enter the *daara*, with consequent exposure to forced child begging, because there are no other options for their schooling. Several of the *talibés* in Thiès reported coming to the *daara* after having left the state school system because costs were too high or they or their parents felt that they were underachieving. Parents in both of the source villages visited for the research said that they were reluctant to send their sons to local state-run schools as they were several kilometres away and involved unaffordable costs. However, the research does not suggest that the introduction of adequate state-run schooling alone would stop children entering *daaras*. Whilst many parents and children expressed support for learning French, the language taught within the state system, most of those interviewed on this topic stressed the importance of their children learning the Koran.

**"We are for state school like we are for the Koran. Always, the Koran is necessary for our religion."**

(Mother of a *talibé* from a source village in Senegal).

None of the child research participants from Albania and Delhi, who are forced to beg, and very few of the participants, who beg but are not forced to do so, attend school. However, a lack of access to schooling was mentioned as a reason for children begging or being forced to beg in only a small number of cases, and it is hard to establish from the small numbers of children included in the

research whether non-attendance at school is a cause or an effect of forced child begging in these two countries.

## Cultural and religious traditions

Cultural and religious traditions can be deeply entrenched in societies and have great influence over community members, in this case the children forced to beg and their families. This research indicates that the cultures and traditions of some communities appear to support or at least accept child begging. The 'traditional' aspect of begging has also been noted by research on begging amongst some castes in Pakistan for example (ILO, 2004).

In Albania, all of the child beggars interviewed for this research came from the Roma or Egyptian minority communities, who as discussed above make up the vast majority of Albanian child beggars and children who are forced to beg. Parents and children from the Roma community, who participated in the research, spoke of begging as a 'traditional' activity that was almost inevitably passed on from generation to generation:

**"If the parent begged it is the same for the child... It is genetic sometimes."**

(Comment made by a mother of a child beggar during a group discussion in the city of Korca, Albania).

**"All gabel [Roma] beg."**

(Comment made by a girl beggar during a group discussion in Tirana, Albania, age unknown).

Of course, a 'tradition' of begging is different from forcing children to beg, although it is likely that widespread acceptance of begging in general will make girls and boys more vulnerable to this form of exploitation.

The research suggests that other traditions within the Roma and Egyptian communities also support child begging and forced child begging, though they play a less significant role than poverty or discrimination. Some research participants argued that early marriage is linked to marital breakdown, large family sizes and consequent poverty, and to girls' premature removal from school, all of which are connected to child begging.

**"When you marry young, you will have more children, so what will you do with them? You will put them on the streets."**

(Comment made by a mother of children who beg during a group discussion in Tirana, Albania).

The nomadic traditions of the Roma have been blamed for household poverty and increasing children's risk of being trafficked, though it can also be argued that were proper policies in place to protect children and migrant rights, the movement of the Roma would not harm children. As stated above, norms about age and gender and the powerlessness of young children are likely to contribute to forced child

begging in Albania. Of course such norms are not exclusive to the Roma and Egyptian communities and exist in wider Albanian society.

Religious culture in Senegal plays a key role in decisions to send children out to beg as well as the public's willingness to give to child beggars. The population of Senegal is 95 per cent Muslim. Learning the Koran is seen to be very important and the '*daara* system' is deeply entrenched in Senegalese society. Marabouts are highly respected figures, influential in community and political life, and are commonly sought out for support and guidance by members of the community. Although the decision to send boys to *daaras* is in large part determined by poverty, it is also shaped by respect for *marabouts* and a wish for children to learn the Koran and religious values:

**"Children become talibés to learn religion, which is life and death."**

(Mother of an ex-*talibé* from a source village in Senegal).

It is also said that a *marabout's* decision to send *talibés* out to beg is not only shaped by economic necessity, but also to teach children humility:

**"The importance [of begging] is [to learn] humility, knowledge and the hardships of life."**

(*Marabout* from the town of Thiès in Senegal).

However, whilst the evidence provided above points towards a link between forced child begging and interpretations of religion, culture and tradition, it is also important to acknowledge the limits and changing nature of this relationship. In both Albania and Senegal, it seems that the cultural and religious forces that perpetuate child begging have not always played such a strong role. In Albania, some key informants argue that the 'tradition' of begging should not be viewed as an intrinsic part of Roma or Egyptian culture as it appears to mirror the prevailing economic and political situation. NGO workers observed a marked increase in begging amongst Roma and Egyptian communities following the fall of Communism in Albania in the early 1990s. They suggest this could in part be explained by the negative impact this transition had on adults supporting their families. This indicates that for many families, begging on the streets is a relatively new means of survival, and may be a response to a decline in social security and state-sponsored job opportunities rather than to 'tradition.'

When the '*daara* system' was established in Senegal in the 1700s, begging played only a minor role in ensuring the upkeep of the *daara* and in teaching children lessons in humility. It was only with the move to urban centres in the 1960s and 70s, that begging began to take up a significant part of *talibés'* time. This move has been linked to a series of droughts and a decline in commodity prices, making it harder for *marabouts* to gain adequate income from the land (Farris, 2006). Both of these examples show that economic forces shape culture, and that traditional values and

practices should not be viewed as unchangeable features of communities.

## Moral and religious traditions of giving

Traditions and religious values also influence individuals' decisions to give to child beggars, and without such donations, forced child begging would no longer be viable. This sense of duty spans Christian, Hindu and Muslim religions, and was found in Senegal, Albania and India. In Senegal in particular, several of the research participants who give to beggars spoke of a strong sense of religious duty behind their donations to *talibés*:

**"In the religion it is clear: we must give to everyone who is in need. The *talibés* fit this."**

(Comment from a man who gives to *talibés* in Senegal).

Research participants from Delhi argued that people give to child beggars to fulfil a religious need and respondents from both Delhi and Albania attributed it to a desire to help the poorest and most needy sections of society. It should be noted that this willingness to fulfil moral or religious obligations to give does not make begging inevitable as it is possible for individuals to give in other ways. Indeed in Senegal, some of the research participants said that they gave to *talibés* because it was convenient, but would find other ways to donate to the poor if *talibés* were no longer there. Many expressed deep feelings of pity for *talibés* and said that they would rather not see such children on the streets.

## Discrimination

The strongest evidence of a link between discrimination, poverty and forced child begging came from Albania. As has already been stated, the vast majority of children in Albania who beg, whether forced to do so or not, come from the Roma and Egyptian communities. It has also been widely reported how discrimination against these ethnic groups has had a negative impact on their access to education and other basic services, and has reduced employment opportunities and household incomes compared with the majority white Albanian population (UNICEF, 2007; Amaro Drom, 2005; H. De Soto et al, 2005). This was supported by the research findings. Many participants attributed the poverty behind begging to discrimination against their ethnic group:

**"There aren't jobs for our hands [ethnic group]."**

**"There aren't jobs for the white, who are educated, imagine for us, we don't even know how to write our names."**

(Comments made by mothers during a group discussion on the causes of child begging in Tirana, Albania).

Discrimination was also one of the major factors behind the non-attendance in school of those who were interviewed.

As mentioned above, children and parents spoke of racial discrimination, of being beaten, treated differently or teased, mainly on the part of other pupils, but also by teachers, as a key reason why Roma and Egyptian children do not attend school. As also stated above, there may be a link between children's non-attendance at school and their begging and forced begging.

The research suggests that, although discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity is a major cause of the poverty that pushes children into begging, a lack of income to buy basic necessities cannot be entirely attributed to this. As shown above, some participants place a degree of blame for poverty on more traditional cultural factors, such as early marriage and large family sizes. Many of the children and women who took part in the research argue that parental drug and alcohol abuse, particularly by fathers, reduces available resources for the family, and pushes children into begging:

**"He [my husband] drinks all the money that I earn. The children feel tired during all the day and when they are back at home they can't be relaxed because of him."**

(Mother of four boys who beg from Tirana in Albania describing why she and her sons go out begging).

Of course, drug and alcohol abuse could also be linked to the frustration and stress associated with poverty and discrimination, although there is insufficient evidence from this research to back this up.

The research did not reveal any findings indicating that discrimination against particular ethnic groups were causes of children being forced to beg in Senegal and Delhi. However, this is not conclusive proof that the link does not exist in these countries. Instead, it may well be the case that participants do not feel comfortable discussing it. The research in Delhi provided only sketchy information about the caste of child participants because as noted above, it was felt too sensitive to discuss. Further research into forced child begging should explore this topic in more depth.

## Violence, abuse and neglect within the home

Violence, abuse and neglect within the home can cause children to run away and thereby make them vulnerable to exploitation, including being forced to beg by third parties. In Delhi, two of the boys who were forced to beg by drug dealers had run away from abusive family situations. One of these boys said he had been suffering sexual abuse (see box 2).

In Albania, several of the children and mothers argued that begging and forced begging are connected to parental drug and alcohol abuse, particularly by fathers. It should further be noted that all of the children who are forced to beg by parents through violent means are suffering from abusive



home environments. However, as is discussed in the next section, Responding to Forced Child Begging, it is important to consider all of the challenges faced by the parents involved, the adequacy of back-up support, and above all what is in the best interests of the children concerned, before deciding on the most appropriate action to take in these cases.

Below: A child beggar on the streets in Tirana, Albania.





## 4. Responding to forced child begging

The research points towards three possible avenues for responding to forced child begging:

1. **Protecting children through effective legal frameworks**, amending or promoting new legislation where necessary, backed up by **law enforcement** and **appropriate social welfare provision**.
2. Developing strategies to **prevent forced child begging** that deal with root causes such as poverty and discrimination.
3. In the absence of protection and prevention measures, **helping children in begging situations in the short-term**, including ensuring that children have access to school, basic healthcare, and support with issues such as drug abuse.

As with all child rights abuses, governments have the primary duty to respond to forced child begging. However, NGOs, community-based organisations, UN agencies, religious groups, ‘employers,’ families and other actors may also have a role to play.

The research suggests that, to a degree, decisions about which of the three strategies to prioritise have to be made on a case by case basis as they will be shaped by context-specific factors, such as the strength of legal systems and the degree of support for a particular form of forced child begging within the general population. For example, the Albanian legal system currently offers far more avenues for addressing forced child begging than Senegal’s legal system. However, the research does point towards some common lessons learned which can help in strategy selection. These are presented in the remainder of this report. There then follows some analysis of whether forced child begging should be considered in isolation or as part of broader strategies to address child begging.

It should be noted that as this was a pilot study, the recommendations made in this and subsequent sections are preliminary only, and further research is needed with larger numbers of children who are forced to beg to expand and refine these suggestions for specific contexts.

### Protecting children through legal frameworks and social provisions

There are comprehensive international and regional legal frameworks that set benchmarks for states’ responsibilities. These internationally agreed standards encompass minimum requirements for protecting children, including any in forced child begging situations; at national and state levels (see Appendix 2).

To protect children from forced child begging situations and fulfil their international commitments, governments must ensure that relevant legislation, be it on begging, slavery, child labour, trafficking or child protection, can be used to punish those who exploit children in this way, and that it is enforced. Governments should also protect children who may themselves come into contact with the law through being forced to beg. These legal responses should be backed up by social provisions to remove children from harm and offer appropriate rehabilitative care where it is needed.

Before considering some of the legal and social provisions available in the different countries involved in this research below, it is important to highlight some general lessons learned from the research about the appropriateness of when and how to apply such measures in the best interests of the children concerned:

- Clearly, third parties forcing children to beg for criminal profit must be brought to justice and punished. However, the case for responding to forced child begging by parents through the criminal justice system is less clear. The widespread nature of forced child begging by parents revealed by this research suggests that such strategies would be hard to enforce in practice. Criminalising parents, especially if custodial sentences are imposed, may also have harmful ramifications if the child’s subsequent care and protection is not carefully planned and closely monitored. Such problems suggest that, in all but extreme cases of abuse, it may be wiser to develop holistic rehabilitation programmes for whole families which include helping parents to find alternative sources of income that do not involve exploiting children.

- Legal responses should protect rather than punish those who have been exploited. The research suggests that children who beg and come into contact with the law are not always treated fairly by the authorities. For example, the two Albanian boys who were trafficked to Greece for begging were treated like criminals rather than children in need of help, and children in Delhi reported being beaten by the police. Similar incidences were also identified in the literature review, including “inappropriate deportations of victims of forced child begging” (US Department of State, 2008). This highlights the need for sensitisation programmes for key authority figures such as the police. The research also suggests that general anti-begging laws, which promote the removal of beggars from the streets, can simply lead to the punishment of individuals from poor backgrounds, rather than deal with root causes of begging and those who exploit beggars. As is shown in the box to the right, this happened in Delhi in relation to adult begging.
- Protective and rehabilitative care is essential to safeguard children from violence and abuse and help them to recover and rebuild their lives. As this report illustrates, there are many different forms of forced child begging and rehabilitation strategies should reflect this. For example, in some cases, children may be able to remain within their homes while assistance is offered to them and their families. In other instances, where children have suffered extreme abuse, short-term residential provision may be necessary to protect children and help them to begin to rebuild their lives. Children whose begging is linked to drug addiction will need specialist support to help address this addiction.

Evidence from all of the countries included in the research suggests that, despite the existence of relevant legislation and in some cases also social provisions, governments are not doing enough in practice to protect these children. Whether this is due to a lack of political will, capacity or resources, governments are failing to punish perpetrators, or to remove children in forced begging situations from harm and offer them rehabilitative care. Laws and penalties send out an important message about the unacceptability of forcing children to beg. Realistically, however, they will be taken seriously only if they are seen to be enforced. Given that, as the research shows, children who are forced to beg can be hard to identify among the large numbers of children who beg, only a small proportion of those affected may ever be reached. As will be discussed below, strategies which seek to prevent forced child begging may be more effective in the long-term.

## Albania

Current legal provision in Albania offers, on paper at least, a range of potential avenues for pursuing the issue of child begging, particularly in relation to forced begging. The legal framework in Albania is the most comprehensive among the countries included in this research, and Albania can point to some existing successes in reducing forced child begging through legislation. Better policing of national borders and co-ordination with Greek authorities in relation to anti-trafficking legislation have been credited with reducing third party trafficking between Albania and Greece. Despite these positive elements, challenges remain.

For example, in January 2008, the Government amended the Criminal Code to include the exploitation of children for begging as a separate criminal offence. This entails criminalising parents who exploit children for begging, labour and income-generating activities. To date, no cases have been pursued in the courts. Although many welcome this new provision, there are concerns about the degree to which parents will be criminalised, which may not be in the best interests of the children concerned.

Albanian law also enables parental responsibility to be removed if parents gravely abuse their children’s rights and makes provision for alternative care and protection for children in those circumstances. The removal of parental responsibility has not been tested in relation to forced child begging. However, in addition to concerns about whether this would act in the best interest of the child, such a strategy may not be tenable given the scale of the problem suggested by this research.

Laws referring to strategies relating to child labour in general and social services provision are in reality applied in a patchy manner. For example, social services provision tends to focus on economic aid to families, rather than applying specific measures aimed at protecting children. The creation of Child Protection Units, initiated by NGOs and UN agencies and managed by municipal government in nine cities may go some way to alleviating this problem.

## Delhi

Laws on begging in India are made at the state rather than national level. New Delhi's anti begging laws are based on the 1959 Bombay Prevention of Begging Act (the Begging Act) which defines begging as either soliciting alms or appearing to be in the process of soliciting alms. The Begging Act has been criticised for criminalising the poor, and for failing to address the roots of the problem. Beggars' homes, where adults who are apprehended under the Begging Act are sent, have also been criticised for their unhygienic conditions and lack of long-term planning for rehabilitation among other things.

Recent changes to the law have at least improved the way that children are viewed within the system. Child beggars are now covered under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000 (Juvenile Justice Act). Under this Act, anyone who employs or uses a child for the purposes of begging may be punished by a fine or imprisonment. Significantly, the Juvenile Justice Act was amended in 2006 to define a child who begs as 'in need of care and protection' rather than 'in conflict with the law.' As a result, children who are found begging are liable to be sent before a child welfare committee, a quasi-judicial body, and if deemed appropriate, they are sent to children's homes.

The exclusion of children from the Begging Act is widely seen as a step in the right direction. However, it is argued that it is too early to appreciate fully the impact of this shift in approach on the lives of children who beg. Key informants suggest that social welfare department officials and police still lack sensitivity to this issue and continue to think of child beggars as thieves, pick-pockets and drug addicts who should be punished. This is also supported by experiences with the police that children described in their research interviews.

## Senegal

The Government of Senegal is aware that something needs to be done to help *talibés* and other especially vulnerable groups of children. The President has spoken publicly of the need to address the problem, and the Ministry of Family Affairs recently conducted awareness-raising workshops about forced child begging in Dakar and other areas of the country (US Department of State, 2008). The Government also introduced legislation, which could go a long way towards tackling the issue. The Law to Combat Trafficking in Persons and Related Practices and to Protect Victims (2005) devotes a section to forced begging. It provides for fines and imprisonment for anyone found guilty of organising or pressuring another person to beg for their own benefit, with a reference to the particular vulnerability of children in this situation. However, to date it appears to represent a modest response compared with the scale and gravity of the problem. For example, a *marabout*, who beat a *talibé* to death, was sentenced to four years' imprisonment under this law in 2007. Only two *marabouts* were arrested for physical abuse in 2005 and three in 2006, despite such behaviour being "widely known and discussed" (US Department of State, 2008).

This suggests that the Government is taking some steps, but still failing to take adequate action to protect *talibés*. NGO staff, interviewed as part of the research, argued that Government inaction is linked to a lack of resources and a reliance on the political support of senior *marabouts*, which makes them wary of addressing this sensitive topic.

## Preventing forced child begging

Protecting children who are forced to beg through appropriate legal frameworks and social welfare provisions is essential, but more is needed. Attention must also be paid to preventing forced child begging to solve the problem in the long-term. Work to prevent children from entering forced child begging must be based on a proper understanding of root causes. This report suggests broadly common causes in the countries involved in the research. These relate to poverty, discrimination, tradition/culture, lack of access to education and the care and protection of children. However, the specific nature of these causes varies from country to country. For example, while the root causes of poverty in Albania can be linked to ethnic discrimination, in Senegal they relate to drought and environmental degradation.

Evidence from Albania/Greece, Delhi and Senegal provides examples of and suggestions for a range of different strategies for addressing root causes:

- Awareness-raising in all settings among parents about child rights and the risks associated with begging.
- Awareness-raising among the wider population in Albania towards greater understanding and acceptance of Roma and Egyptian communities.
- Discouraging the public in Greece from giving to beggars, which, it is argued, has reduced the number of children begging on the streets as a whole (Tdh, 2003).
- Enhancing parents' skills base and job opportunities and providing credit for income-generating activities to increase family incomes and thereby reduce poverty as a factor pushing parents into sending their children away.
- Targeting more state support to communities living in areas likely to be vulnerable to this problem. For example, providing help in drought prone areas like Rajasthan and rural Senegal, which have experienced high levels of migration into relatively wealthy cities, often for begging.

Whatever strategies are selected, it is of course important to monitor progress and impacts on children's rights carefully. For example, it is essential to ensure that children are not displaced into other occupations, which may be just as harmful for their wellbeing, in order to replace the lost income from begging. Similarly, it is important to assess the impact of preventing people from giving to beggars to ensure that this does not lead to children from poor families simply suffering greater discrimination, entering alternative forms of exploitation, or having rights to survival and development further threatened by reducing household incomes. The research also suggests that efforts to prevent forced

begging through challenging prevailing cultural norms on begging can be extremely difficult as they are often linked to deeply embedded beliefs about issues such as religion and gender. A balance often has to be made between questioning these norms and ensuring that parents and, in some cases, 'employers' support efforts to help children who beg. In Senegal, for example, it has been found that efforts to help *talibés* are likely to be successful only if they recognise widespread respect for *marabouts* and the 'daara system' within communities. Thus, rather than working to end the 'daara system,' NGOs such as Tostan advocate preventing forced child begging within this system through regulating the *daaras* and ensuring that *talibés* receive a broader education by adding additional subjects such as French into the curriculum.

In determining how to prevent forced child begging, and begging more broadly, a tension may exist between whether to focus on cultural causes through awareness raising activities, or economic causes through efforts to alleviate poverty. For example, in Albania, many NGOs have in the past focused on raising awareness and changing attitudes towards begging within Roma communities. Some NGO workers interviewed for this research argue that such efforts can only go so far in reducing child begging, and that poor families need practical support and assistance. The research supports these arguments, suggesting that, while cultural factors clearly have a role to play in decisions about begging, addressing poverty and discrimination is essential.

The high level of internal migrants among the forced child beggars in the research, as well as children being sent from Albania to Greece and from other West African countries to Senegal's urban centres, highlight the importance of working with children's communities and countries of origin in these efforts.

It seems that prevention is often the only long-term solution to the problem, but efforts to achieve this take time and should be combined with other strategies, as children already in abusive situations need more urgent help. More detailed research is also needed in some areas, for example, on responses as they relate to children forced to beg by criminal gangs.

## Helping children while they continue to beg

Children must be removed from forced child begging situations or prevented from entering them in the first place. However, government strategies designed to stop forced child begging altogether through legal avenues or preventative work either do not currently exist or take time and resources to implement. Some organisations concerned with this issue therefore have tried to offer help to children in the short-term while they continue to beg. With the exception of efforts designed to help *talibés* in Senegal,



most of these strategies are aimed at begging in general and do not specifically target forced child begging. Such strategies are generally carried out by NGOs or UN agencies, with governments providing little assistance in this area. Examples of these strategies include:

- In Albania, children who work on the streets can attend NGO run drop-in centres where they are offered leisure activities, informal education, vocational training, legal advice, life skills and support with accessing healthcare and other services. In relation to education, such centres aim eventually to integrate children into mainstream state-run schooling by providing them with catch-up classes and getting them used to the structures and formalities associated with school. Importantly, this work is combined with efforts to reduce discrimination in state-run schools and make such schools more responsive to the needs of children who have been working on the streets.
- In Senegal, NGOs have established an adoptive mothers' scheme, whereby local women agree to offer support to *talibés* living in their neighbourhoods. Such 'mothers' provide food and clothing, emotional support, and back-up when children face problems with their *marabouts*. NGOs also offer practical support to the *daaras* in the form of basic information on health and hygiene, first aid kits, washing powder and soap.
- In Delhi, children can call a telephone number if they want support. During the research, participants spoke of an eight-year-old boy who was addicted to drugs and suffered from dysentery. He called the number and was directed to a centre for narcotics abuse.

The research suggests that efforts to address the abuses suffered by boys and girls whilst they continue to beg can lead to important improvements in children's lives. However, this can only ever help to alleviate children's suffering in the short-term and is not an appropriate response in the face of extreme abuse and exploitation often suffered by children who are forced to beg. In Senegal, for example, there is a growing realisation that efforts to improve nutrition, health and hygiene to make life better for *talibés* in the *daaras* are not enough. More fundamental work is required to adapt the '*daara* system' and improve life in communities of origin so that children from poor backgrounds can stay at home with their families and receive a more rounded education to equip them better for adult life without being sent out to beg.

## The wider problem of child begging

The research suggests that careful consideration should be given to whether strategies should address forced child begging in isolation or in the wider context of child begging. On the one hand, the research shows that children who are forced to beg on the whole suffer from more extreme abuses and as a result are in more urgent need of assistance. On the other hand, child beggars are often greater in number than forced child beggars and suffer many violations of their rights that demand attention.

It is interesting to note that the forced child begging and general child begging cases uncovered in this study shared the same root causes, suggesting that there may be occasions when it is advisable to address both forms of begging simultaneously. As shown in the methods section of the introduction, in contexts such as Delhi and Albania, it can be extremely hard to identify children forced to beg by others from amongst the much larger numbers of children begging for themselves. This makes it very difficult to isolate this group for direct support. However, it is also essential that the specific needs of forced child beggars are not overlooked, especially in relation to the greater levels of violence and coercion they tend to experience. This should be borne in mind particularly for any cases where children are forced to beg by criminal gangs, as they may involve additional factors that could not be examined here.



L. Pond

Above: *Talibés*, Senegal.

# 5. Conclusions and recommendations

Forced child begging takes many forms and blights children's lives across the world. Types of forced begging identified in this research include: children forced to beg by their parents or guardians; children trafficked into begging by informal networks or organised criminal gangs; children forced into begging by Koranic teachers; and forced child begging linked to drug addiction. Forced child begging affects both boys and girls, though it seems that boys are more vulnerable to being forced to beg by individuals outside the family. With a few exceptions, it tends also to be younger children who beg on the streets, whether they have been forced by others to do so or not.

This study shows that children who are forced to beg suffer a number of human rights violations. They are exploited by traffickers, religious teachers or parents, working for long hours with limited or no control over their incomes. Children are commonly beaten by those who are forcing them to beg, and experience physical and verbal abuse, and sexual harassment from those they encounter as they go about their work. Children who are forced to beg by individuals other than their parents are likely to be separated from their families for long periods and live in poor and dangerous conditions. Forced child begging often prevents children from getting an education.

Poverty and other root causes, including discrimination, lie at the heart of much forced child begging. In some contexts, religious and traditional values are used to support begging and leave children vulnerable to forced child begging, though it seems that such beliefs are often a reflection of prevailing economic conditions rather than an intrinsic part of cultures. Other contributing factors making children vulnerable to forced child begging are a lack of access to good quality education and violence and abuse within the home.

Forced child begging constitutes a gross violation of children's rights and requires urgent action on the part of governments and others with a duty to protect children's rights. Forced child begging by third parties is especially harmful, but forced child begging by parents is also damaging and should not be ignored despite the particular challenges associated with addressing this problem. Children who beg but are not forced to do so also suffer from many violations of their rights.

The research points toward the following recommendations for policy makers and practitioners:

## 1. Ensure relevant legislation is in place and enforce it in a way that acts in the best interests of the child

Governments must ensure that adequate legislation is in place to protect children from all forms of exploitation, including through begging, and punish those individuals who exploit children for their own benefit. Laws and provisions must be enforced if they are to be taken seriously. Legal responses are likely to be more effective in addressing the clearer-cut forced child begging cases, such as those involving criminal gangs. Fining or imprisoning parents who have exploited their children is less likely to be in the best interests of the children concerned. In many of these instances, working together with families holistically in order to improve the overall situation will have better success. However, in extreme cases, children may need to be taken away from their families and into protective care for their own safety.

## 2. Identify, rescue and rehabilitate children who are forced to beg

Governments must identify children suffering from extreme violence or exploitation through begging in all its different manifestations, immediately remove them from harm and place them in a safe and caring environment. Governments should offer rehabilitative care appropriate to each child's needs and context, including for example, healthcare, bridging and/or vocational education, help with drug addiction and, where relevant and appropriate, careful support with reintegration back into their families and communities.

## 3. Prioritise investment in affordable and accessible quality education

Governments must prioritise the provision of affordable and accessible quality education for all children within their jurisdiction. This would help to prevent many children from entering forced child begging and other forms of exploitation in the first place. It is also essential for equipping children and young people with an escape route out of poverty and exploitation. Governments must ensure the proper regulation of all schools, whether state-funded or not, to eradicate any abuses and guarantee high standards across the education sector.

#### 4. Conduct prevention activities among families in vulnerable communities

Governments and other practitioners must ensure that prevention efforts at the local community-level form a central plank of all interventions to tackle forced child begging and child begging. Where possible, these should target communities that are likely to be particularly vulnerable to this form of exploitation. These include minority groups suffering discrimination or communities in areas prone to drought and the consequent push for people to migrate to wealthier, urban centres.

Awareness-raising among families about the immediate and long-term risks to children who are forced to beg is crucial. However, families also need practical support, especially through income-generating schemes, to help remove poverty as a major factor in parents' decisions to send their children away or out to beg. Awareness-raising and income-generating efforts should depend on the given context and be sensitive to specific cultural traditions.

#### 5. Conduct training for police and other officials

Far too often, child beggars are treated as a problem by authorities and not as vulnerable children in need of assistance. At worst, they are beaten and mistreated by the very authorities who should be there to protect them. A range of training programmes on child protection issues, trafficking and the different types and experiences of children forced to beg is needed. These programmes should be targeted at the various authorities and officials who may come into contact with child beggars, such as police and the legal professions. Police and social workers in particular need help to be able to identify children who may be forced to beg by others and to respond sensitively to the particular needs of these boys and girls.

#### 6. Raise awareness among the general public

Those who give to children who beg should be made aware that the money they donate is not always kept by the children they want to help, but may be handed over to others who are exploiting them. After careful analysis of the likely child rights implications, the public could be offered alternative ways to help those in need. It is probable that the numbers of children begging and therefore those among them, who are forced to beg, would fall if individuals stopped giving. However, this would not address the underlying causes of this form of exploitation and so the children concerned could simply become vulnerable to other forms of exploitation. This approach is suitable, therefore, only if strategies can be put in place to protect children and their families from potential loss of income.

#### 7. Address forced child begging in the context of the wider problem of child begging

The extreme rights violations suffered by children who are forced to beg mean that this form of exploitation should be addressed as a priority. However, it is also important to remember that child beggars who are not forced by others suffer many problems and are themselves vulnerable to forced child begging. In many cases it is not possible clearly and easily to distinguish between children who are forced to beg by others and children who beg for themselves. Therefore, many efforts to address forced child begging, such as preventive work in the children's communities of origin and awareness-raising among police, should take place within broader strategies to counter child begging. Likewise, more general efforts to improve the lives of children who are begging in the short-term, such as support with healthcare, nutrition, hygiene, access to education, drug rehabilitation and family reintegration, can provide ways to help identify and remove from harm children who are being forced to beg by violence or other coercive means.



CHETNA



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Above and top: Begging on the streets of Delhi, India.



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# Appendix 1: Background to country research

## Albania and Greece

This research was conducted by partner agencies Terre des hommes-Albania (Tdh-Albania), Association for the Social Support of Youth (ARSIS) and Children of the World and of Albania (FBSH). In Albania, the research was conducted in three towns where child begging is known to be common and/or from where children were thought to migrate to other cities in order to beg:

- Tirana, the capital city. Children are known to migrate to Tirana from all over the country for the purposes of begging.
- Elbasan: A former industrial city which contains large numbers of child beggars. Children are also known to migrate from Elbasan to other locations such as Durrës and Tirana for begging.
- Korça: A mountain town close to the border of Greece.

In Greece, the research took place in the town of Thessaloniki, a known centre for families and children migrating from Albania for the purpose of begging.

In total, in-depth interviews and group discussions were conducted with 162 children. The majority of these children are currently begging on the streets, though some are ex-beggars and others are in groups considered to be at risk of begging. Children were selected according to age and sex using 'snowball' sampling. This involved initially speaking to children known to partner agencies, and then using these children to help find other children who fitted the selection criteria. Particular efforts were made to speak with children felt to be most likely to be exposed to third party forced child begging, such as those who had migrated alone and were not living with parents.

The research involved a combination of five different qualitative methods: observations; rapid interviews; in-depth interviews; group discussions and key informant interviews. In total, the research teams in Albania and Greece completed 24 observations, 24 rapid interviews, 84 in-depth interviews with parents and children, 21 group discussions with parents and children, and 28 key informant interviews.



## Development Indicators for Albania\*

**Total population:** 13.2 million with an annual population growth of 0.3 per cent. (Roma population: 90-100,000 or 2.9-3.2 per cent of the total population).

**GNI per capita:** US\$3,290.

**Poverty levels:** 78 per cent of Roma living on less than US\$4.3 per person per day compared with 22 per cent of non-Roma Albanians in the same locality.

**Access to an improved water source:** 97% of the population.

**Life expectancy:** 76 years.

**Infant mortality:** 17 under five-year-olds per 1,000 live births. (Roma population: 18 under one-year-olds per 1,000 live births).

**Child malnutrition:** 17 % of children under five years old in 2000.

**Primary school completion rate:** 95% of the relevant age group.

**Literacy rates among 15-24 year olds:** 65 per cent for Roma compared with 100 per cent for non-Roma Albanians).

\* Latest available general statistics have been used, mainly from the World Bank Development Indicators database, 2000 or 2006-7. Information about the Roma community in Albania was taken from UNICEF-Serbia: Breaking the Cycle of Exclusion: Roma children in South East Europe. Belgrade, 2007.

## Development Indicators for Greece\*

**Total population:** 11.2 million.

**GNI per capita:** US\$29,630.

**Access to an improved water source:** 100 per cent of the population.

**Life expectancy:** 79 years.

**Infant mortality:** four under five-year-olds per 1,000 live births.

**Child malnutrition:** 44% of children under five years old.

**Primary school completion rate:** 100% of the relevant age group.

\* Latest available statistics have been used, mainly from the World Bank Development Indicators database, 2007. There was no information available on levels of child malnutrition.

## Ratification table: Albania

International Standard	Ratified	Signed but not ratified	Not signed or ratified
UN Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, 1956	✓		
ILO Convention No. 29 on Forced or Compulsory Labour, 1930	✓		
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989	✓		
ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999	✓		
UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. Supplementing the Convention on Transnational Organized Crime, 2000	✓		
<b>Regional Standard</b>			
European Convention on Human Rights, 1950	✓		
European Social Charter, 1961, revised, 1996	✓		
Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, 2005	✓		

# India

This research was conducted by partner agencies HAQ: Centre for Child Rights, and Childhood Enhancement through Training and Action (CHETNA). A decision was made to focus on the capital of India, Delhi, where partner agencies were based, and had good local knowledge and contacts. The research team mapped areas of the city where child begging is prevalent, and selected 13 locations for data collection. The areas chosen included: temples, mosques and other centres for religious worship; railway and metro stations; popular tourist sites; entertainment hubs with many bars and restaurants; and traffic lights, which enabled the children to beg from passing cars.

In India, there is very little systematic research on child begging, particularly on forced child begging. Anecdotal evidence suggests that child begging may be linked to dangerous criminal gangs, necessitating careful steps in research. Unlike partner agencies in Albania, Greece and Senegal, the NGOs conducting the research in Delhi had limited existing contacts with children most likely to be exposed to forced child begging. As a result, data collection in India was much more exploratory in nature than in the other locations, with a greater emphasis placed on gaining an idea of the breadth of the problem rather than on examining root causes and impacts. A total of 86 boys and 77 girls currently engaged in begging took part in the research in Delhi, with the number of the children spread fairly evenly between the 13 locations. As in Albania, children were selected according to age and sex using 'snowball' sampling. However, the challenges associated with the research in India meant that children's willingness to talk to the research team and their availability were often the determining factors in selecting participants. Key informant interviews were also conducted with five adults from NGOs and government departments working with child beggars.

The research involved a combination of five different qualitative methods: observations; rapid interviews; in-depth interviews; group discussions and key informant interviews. In total, the research teams in India completed 36 observations, 40 rapid interviews, 12 in-depth interviews, 13 group discussions and five key informant interviews.



## Development Indicators for India\*

**Total population: 1,123 million with an annual population growth of 1.2 per cent. 15 million in the Delhi urban agglomeration.**

**GNI per capita: US\$950.**

**Access to an improved water source: 89% of the population.**

**Life expectancy: 64 years.**

**Infant mortality: 76 under five year olds per 1,000 live births.**

**Child malnutrition: 44% of children under five years old.**

**Primary school completion rate: 86% of the relevant age group.**

\* Latest available statistics have been used, mainly from the World Bank Development Indicators database, 2006-7. The population of Delhi was calculated by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2005.

## Ratification table: India

International Standard	Ratified	Signed but not ratified	Not signed or ratified
UN Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, 1956	✓		
ILO Convention No. 29 on Forced or Compulsory Labour, 1930	✓		
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989	✓		
ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999			✓
UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. Supplementing the Convention on Transnational Organized Crime, 2000		✓	



# Senegal

The research in Senegal focused on *talibés*, boys sent to live in *daaras* (religious schools) to learn the Koran with *marabouts* (religious teachers). The research was conducted by partner NGO Tostan. The bulk of the research took place in the town of Thiès, which has attracted many *marabouts* wishing to establish *daaras*. Within Thiès, eight *daaras* were chosen as the focus for the research, with information collected from children from an additional six *daaras* during the field testing of the methods. *Daaras* were selected to explore a variety of different experiences for *talibés* in Thiès, including: *daaras* of different sizes and length of existence; some where Tostan already had an existing relationship with the *marabouts*, and others where this link did not exist; and *daaras* which had a good reputation in terms of how well *talibés* were treated by the *marabout* as well as those which were less well regarded. Following data collection in Thiès, the research team visited two village communities from where *talibés* originated. These villages are called Sinthiou Wourou Mbaya in the St. Louis region and Pakanae Demba Djide in the Kaolack region. They were chosen as they were known to have a specific link with *marabouts* in Thiès.

The research in Thiès involved 107 *talibés*. *Talibés* were selected according to their age, *daaras* and willingness to participate. Information was also gathered from eight *marabouts*, each heading a *daara* which acted as a focus for the research, and from an additional 14 *marabouts*. In the village originating communities, research was gathered among 76 parents of *talibés* and nine boys who were ex-*talibés* or at risk of becoming *talibés*. Key informant interviews were conducted with five individuals who give to *talibés*, ten staff from NGOs and UN agencies who work to assist *talibés*, and three volunteers who act as surrogate mothers to *talibés*.

The research involved a combination of three different qualitative methods: in-depth interviews; group discussions and key informant interviews. In total, the research teams in Senegal completed 51 in-depth interviews, 29 group discussions and 40 key informant interviews.

Further information on these methods can be found in the toolkit for researchers, which accompanies this report on research findings: *Forced Child Begging: A toolkit for researchers* (see Anti-Slavery International's website, [www.antislavery.org](http://www.antislavery.org)).



## Development Indicators for Senegal\*

**Total population: 12.4 million with an annual population growth of 2.8 per cent.**

**GNI per capita: US\$820.**

**Access to an improved water source: 77% of the population.**

**Life expectancy: 63 years.**

**Infant mortality: 116 under five-year-olds per 1,000 live births.**

**Child malnutrition: 15% of children under five years old.**

**Primary school completion rate: 49% of the relevant age group.**

\* Latest available statistics have been used, mainly from the World Bank Development Indicators database, 2005-7.

## Ratification table: Senegal

International Standard	Ratified	Signed but not ratified	Not signed or ratified
UN Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, 1956	✓		
ILO Convention No. 29 on Forced or Compulsory Labour, 1930	✓		
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989	✓		
ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999	✓		
UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. Supplementing the Convention on Transnational Organized Crime, 2000	✓		
<b>Regional Standard</b>			
The African Charter on Human and People's Rights	✓		
The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1990	✓		

# Appendix 2: Forced child begging in the international and regional legal context

International and regional laws, like national laws, do not themselves stop or prevent abuses. However, their existence is essential for setting standards for states to incorporate into national law, and they can be highlighted to promote better practice.

Children in forced child begging situations are protected under various international and regional legal provisions. The challenge is to ensure that states which have ratified these standards live up to their international obligations by putting them into practice.

## International framework

### Slavery, servitude and practices similar to slavery

Third party forced begging is a form of slavery, servitude or practice similar to slavery under international law. The UN Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery (1956) (the Supplementary Slavery Convention) makes specific references to practices similar to slavery such as debt bondage, forced marriage and child slavery. The Supplementary Slavery Convention defines “child servitude” as:

**“Any institution or practice whereby a child or young person under the age of 18 years, is delivered by either or both of his natural parents or by his guardian to another person, whether for reward or not, with a view to the exploitation of the child or young person or of his labour”** (Article 1(d) and 7(b)).

This includes parents or guardians handing children over to traffickers for the purposes of begging, to be employed by so called begging ‘mafias,’ or if they are exploited within educational institutions, such as the Koranic schools in West Africa. The Supplementary Slavery Convention does not encompass children who are forced to beg but are not delivered to a third party by their parents, as was found in the research in Delhi, for example, where children ran away from home but then ended up begging for drug dealers.

However, the general prohibitions on slavery stated in the League of Nations’ Convention on Slavery, Servitude, Forced Labour and Similar Institutions and Practices (1926) (Slavery Convention) apply to children just as they do to adults. The Slavery Convention considers a person to be enslaved, if they are subjected to **“any or all of the powers... of ownership”** (Article 1(1)). So, children, who drug dealers get addicted to drugs and then force to beg to be able to feed their addiction, are covered by the Slavery Convention.

### Forced labour

Forced labour is closely associated with slavery, having very similar characteristics. All forms of forced child begging fit under international definitions of forced labour. The International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Convention No.29 concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour (1930), defines forced and compulsory labour as:

**“...all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.”** (Article 2 (1)).

The labour in question does not have to be officially recognised as ‘economic activity’ for it to fall under the definition of ‘forced labour’ and the ILO expressly recognise child or adult begging under coercion as ‘forced labour.’ The term ‘under the menace of any penalty’ has been widely interpreted to include violence, denunciation to the police or authorities, economic threats, or the loss of rights or privileges. Individuals may also start work voluntarily, but be said to be forced into work if such ‘menaces of penalty’ are then inflicted upon them. It should be noted that parents forcing children to beg through violence or other means are encompassed within this Convention.

### Child labour and exploitation

ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999) defines which child labour practices must be addressed as a priority. All children who are forced into begging fit clearly within its parameters, whether their involvement in begging is as slavery, forced labour, as the end-result of trafficking by parents or others, or simply by virtue that begging is an illicit activity or the state concerned lists it as a “hazardous” form of work:

**“All forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour” (Article 3(a));**

**the “use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities” (Article 3(c));**

**and work, which is likely to “harm the health, safety or morals” of the child. (Article 3(d)).**

All forms of begging violate children’s rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Rights that are affected by begging include the right to be free from economic exploitation or performing any work which is hazardous, affects a child’s education, or harms their development (Article 32); and the right to protection from all other forms of exploitation (Article 36).

In addition, states, which have ratified the UN Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (2000), are also obliged to criminalise the sale of children for forced labour.

## Child trafficking

As shown in the research, some forced child begging involves the trafficking of children. Under the terms of the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking of Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000), children (under 18 years old) who are moved from one location to another for the purposes of exploitation are considered trafficked whether or not they agreed to it or even if the child approached the trafficker or recruiter directly. It also covers informal trafficking networks involving family members or friends, and trafficking within countries.

## Regional framework

It is important to consider standards at the regional level as they often offer a more detailed system of protection and another avenue for calling governments to account. While Asia has no regional legal framework, Africa and Europe both have regional human rights systems that include treaties which are relevant to forced child begging.

### Africa

The African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (1981) includes an article on the protection of children’s rights (article 18,3). The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) contains a number of provisions relevant to forced child begging. It prohibits all forms of exploitation of the child, and, like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, obliges states to protect children from

performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or interfere with the child’s development. Furthermore, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child specifically prohibits **‘the use of children for begging’** (Article 29). Importantly, this article encourages penalising those who exploit children for begging, and not child beggars themselves.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child contains some provisions which could relate specifically to the situation of children begging for Koranic teachers. It calls on States to:

**“... take all appropriate measures to eliminate harmful social and cultural practices affecting the welfare, dignity, normal growth and development of the child and in particular... those customs and practices prejudicial to the health and life of the child.” (Article 21).**

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child also includes a provision that the child has a responsibility to his/her family and community, including the duty to assist them in times of need (Article 31). This could be interpreted to allow for a degree of leniency in the application of other articles which relate to begging.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child does not include a full definition of trafficking but recognises that trafficking may be conducted by any person, including parents or guardians, and is not limited to organised criminal activities.

### Europe

Europe’s intergovernmental body, the Council of Europe, aims to guarantee democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the region. The European Convention on Human Rights (1950) covers children who are forced to beg by prohibiting slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour (Article 4). It also protects the rights of Roma and other minorities, which is relevant in this context, through Article 14, which states that all rights and freedoms set out in the Convention must be enjoyed without discrimination on any grounds, including race or national or social origin.

The European Social Charter (1961, revised 1966) is the main European treaty that secures children’s rights to social, legal and economic protection and obliges governments to protect children against negligence, violence and exploitation. Provisions which are particularly relevant to forced child begging and begging in general include Article 7 on child labour and Article 17, which obliges states to penalise different forms of violence against children in law and practice, which would include providing agencies and services to protect children from ill-treatment.

Particularly relevant to forced child begging is the Council of Europe’s Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005), which entered into force officially on 1





February 2008, and applies to children as well as adults and regardless of whether trafficking is internal or across borders. It is also interpreted to cover trafficking by informal networks and families as well as organised criminal groups.

Anti-Slavery International, founded in 1839, is committed to eliminating all forms of slavery throughout the world. Slavery, servitude and forced labour are violations of individual freedoms, which deny millions of people their basic dignity and fundamental human rights. Anti-Slavery International works to end these abuses by exposing current cases of slavery, campaigning for its eradication, supporting the initiatives of local organisations to release people, and pressing for more effective implementation of international laws against slavery. For further information see: [www.antislavery.org](http://www.antislavery.org)

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Emily Delap  
Anti-Slavery International 2009

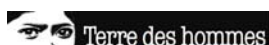
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