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## About us

The Understanding Children's Work (UCW) project is an inter-agency research cooperation initiative involving the International Labour Organisation (ILO), UNICEF and the World Bank.

The Project is guided by the Agenda for Action adopted at the 1997 Oslo International Conference on Child Labour. The Oslo Agenda identified the need to improve data and information on child labour, and called for stronger international co-operation in efforts towards child labour elimination.

UCW research activities are designed to inform policies that impact upon the lives of child labourers in countries where they are prominent. Research efforts help provide a common understanding of child labour in specific national contexts, and a common basis for action against it. For further information on UCW, see the Project website at [www.ucw-project.org](http://www.ucw-project.org).

## Featured research

### Special feature: Study of children involved in begging in the Dakar region of Senegal

The UCW-supported study, the first of its kind to be undertaken in Senegal, was released in French in November 2007 (UCW, 2007). This edition of the UCW Newsletter is used to provide a brief English-language summary of the study - its rationale and objectives, the research methodology employed, and main findings and their implications for policy. For further information, readers are referred to the full French-language study report, available for download at the UCW Project website.

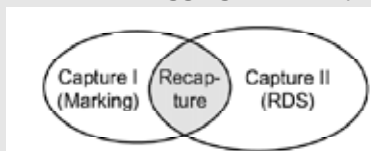
**Study rationale.** Destitute children begging on the street are a common sight in most urban centres in Senegal, but estimates of their total numbers vary widely, and are rarely based on reliable data. The government is committed to stop the exploitation of begging children in the streets and in this context launched the Street Children Campaign Partnership in Dakar in October 2006. But national efforts are hampered by the lack of systematic information on the total extent and nature of the begging children phenomenon. In order to effectively address the needs of begging children, additional reliable information on the size and characteristics of this hard-to-reach population is indispensable.

**Study objectives and coverage.** The Dakar study forms part of a broader effort to fill this information gap on begging children. It was designed to generate baseline quantitative and qualitative information on the population of begging children in the Dakar region needed for the design and targeting of intervention policies, through the Street Children Campaign Partnership and other action frameworks. It employed a research methodology that can be replicated to generate similar information on begging children populations in other urban centres in the country, and one such follow-up study is already underway in Thies.

Of particular interest was the sub-group of begging children that are Koranic students, or "*talibés*" who live with a Koranic teacher, or "*marabout*". Following a traditional practice in West Africa, many parents from the countryside entrust their children to the *marabout* for them to learn the Koran at a Koranic school, or "*daara*"). The survey was designed in a way that clearly differentiated between *talibés* and other begging children, so that the unique nature of each group was reflected in the study results.

Finally, it is worth underlying that while this study is representative of the situation of begging children in the region of Dakar, it is not representative of the general living conditions of *talibés* children living in the *daara* (i.e., while almost all of the begging children are from the *daara*, not all children from the *daara* are begging children).

**Research methodology.** Begging children are an example of what statisticians term a “rare” and “elusive” population. They are “rare” in the statistical sense because they only make up a small part of the total population of children. But they are also “elusive” because they are difficult to observe. Two sampling techniques were used to collect information on this rare and elusive population: Capture-Recapture (CR), to estimate the size of target group of children, and Respondent-Driven Sampling (RDS), to provide a characterization of the begging children population.



The CR estimation was based on two counts of the target population at specific identified spots and a comparison of the lists derived from the two registrations. The RDS method was based on a dual incentive structure, in which respondents were rewarded for being interviewed and for recruiting new respondents. As such, the latter method also provided insight into the social network connecting the population of begging children. Taken together, the two methods enabled a unique combined quantitative and qualitative picture of the population of children involved in begging.

**Main findings:** The study findings underscore the urgent need for action in addressing the begging children phenomenon in the country: in the region of Dakar alone, about 8,000 children regularly beg in the streets. The study findings also show that begging children are forced to spend large amounts of time on the street each day – over six hours on average – despite the fact that they are typically also ostensibly students in Quranic schools. Most are from other parts of the country or from abroad, and therefore far from the safety of a family environment. For the worst off, the street constitutes their only home. The precarious living conditions of begging children – *talibés* and non-*talibés* alike – leave them exposed to the elements and vulnerable to disease. Living in abject poverty, they are almost all under-nourished, reliant on a diet composed primarily of rice and bread, and many suffer from malnutrition. Their meagre proceeds from begging typically go almost entirely to the *marabouts*.

The following are among the specific study findings:

- the overwhelming majority of begging children (90 percent) are *talibés*, of whom almost all (98 percent) indicate being sent to beg by their *marabout*, underscoring the central importance of involving the religious sector in efforts against child begging;
- begging children are typically very young (over half are aged less than 10 years) and are virtually all male;
- almost all (95 percent) of the begging children in Dakar originate from elsewhere, and prevention efforts therefore must also target “source” communities outside Dakar;
- nearly half of the begging children found in Dakar are from neighbouring countries (principally Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Mali and Gambia), highlighting the need to strengthen sub-regional cooperation mechanisms for stemming the cross-border movement of children;
- the Peuhl and Wolof ethnic groups account for the largest proportion of the child begging population, 66 and 25 percent respectively, and prevention efforts should therefore be targeted accordingly;
- begging is a full-time “job” for most of the concerned children; they must spend an average of six hours each day on the street begging;
- the 300 francs CFA gained on average from begging each day goes almost entirely to the *marabouts*, ostensibly to maintain the children and supply their *daaras*;

- the lodging conditions of the begging children are extremely poor, particularly among the non-*talibé*, more than half of whom reported spending the night prior to their interview on the street; among the *talibé* children, less than one-third reported having blankets and only six percent mosquito nets;
- reported illness is very high among the begging children, with diarrhoea, abdominal pain, fever, skin problems and malaria among the ailments commonly cited; and
- very few begging children (seven percent of *talibés* and 12 percent of non-*talibés*) benefit from any form of social assistance programme.

**Policy implications:** The policy implications of these findings are clear. Short-term "protection" measures are urgently needed to ameliorate the harsh conditions of this large population of begging children, and to facilitate their recovery and reintegration into society. These measures are critical to ensuring the immediate safety and well-being of the concerned children, as well as to avoiding large numbers of children entering adulthood in a disadvantaged position, permanently harmed by their early experience on the street, and at much greater risk of joining the ranks of the unemployed and the poor. If left alone, these children and youth are likely to be in need of other (more costly) remediation policies at a later stage of their lives. Despite the efforts of numerous NGOs and other development actors, most Dakar begging children currently benefit from no external sources of assistance or protection.

But the main burden for combating child begging rests on prevention. Clearly, sustainable reductions in child begging cannot be attained without addressing the economic, socio-cultural and religious factors causing children to enter begging in the first place. The results of the survey show that virtually all Dakar begging children originate from outside the city, and about half of them comes from neighbouring countries (Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Mali, and Gambia). Therefore prevention efforts must focus not on Dakar but on "source" communities, both inside and outside Senegal. The close relationship between child begging and Koranic schooling emerging from the survey underscores the necessity of mobilising the religious sector in efforts designed to prevent children from involvement in begging. There is growing consensus in the country that sending young children to an unfamiliar urban environment for religious education is undesirable, and that there is a need for a renewed emphasis on the traditional community-based system of *daaras*, and specifically for supporting the *daaras* in children's home communities.

The identification of specific prevention strategies requires better information on the various factors underlying household decisions to send their children away to urban *daaras*. This information was beyond the scope of the present survey. Further research is needed regarding possible parental motivations (e.g., poverty, community/social pressure, "sacrifice" to obtain a positive outcome), possible precipitating events (e.g., death/illness of breadwinner, visit of *marabout*, loss of household's source of livelihood) and possible contributing circumstances (e.g., lack of school or *daara* in the village, high schooling costs, poor school quality).

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## Project news and events

**1. Building capacity in child labour data collection and analysis (Lusaka, 3-7 March 2008).** The five-day training programme for counterparts from the Central Statistical Office focused on the analysis and application of child labour data. The training formed part of the broader programme of research cooperation in Zambia. The field mission for the training also provided an occasion to observe part of the community school network in the country; the network is playing an important role in expanding school access for vulnerable groups of children.

**2. Third Conference on Employment and Development** (*Rabat, 5-6 May 2008*). The Conference, jointly organized by IZA and the World Bank, aimed not only at presenting recent research on employment and development, but also at making this research and discussion forum more accessible to networks in developing countries, and especially in the region of North Africa and the Middle East. UCW presented two papers for discussion at the conference: (1) *Child labour as a response to shocks: evidence from Cambodian villages*, and (2) *Industrial structure and child labour: evidence from Brazil*.

**3. Seminar on child labour** (*Washington, 9 April 2008*). The seminar was an occasion to present UCW research results and findings from research financed by the Italian Consultant Trust Fund to the Italian Executive Director at the World Bank. The seminar focussed in particular on the implications of these findings for World Bank efforts in the area of child labour. The Italian government is an important contributor to Human Development Network Social Protection (HDNSP) in the area of child labour, and it has specifically supported UCW activities.

**4. First national seminar on child labour in memory of Iqbal Masih** (*Rome, 16 April 2007*). The roundtable was aimed at promoting good practices among child labour stakeholders. Representatives from international organizations, including UCW, Italian NGOs, and children contributed to the seminar organized by *Per i diritti dell'infanzia e dell'adolescenza* (PIDIDA) and held at UNICEF-Italy headquarters.

**5. UCW website revision.** The revised Project website went on-line at the beginning of April 2008. The changes to the website are aimed at further enhancing the site's ease of use and the accessibility of main Project research outputs. Newly posted reports and statistics are now featured prominently on the front page where they can be quickly accessed and downloaded.

**6. Upcoming seminar on child labour, education and youth employment: call for papers** (*Madrid, 11-12 September 2008*). The third UCW seminar, to be organised jointly with the *Instituto Figuerola (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid)*, will present recent research on child labour and its linkages with educational and youth employment outcomes. The seminar will also aim at identifying key information gaps relating to these themes, thereby helping to guide future research efforts. We are currently calling for papers to be presented at the seminar; papers with a geographical focus on Latin America are particularly encouraged. Additional information on the seminar can be found on the Project website.

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## References

UCW Project, *Enfants mendiants dans la région de Dakar*, UCW Project Working Paper Series, Rome, November 2007.

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