

Research report

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Issue: Combating the issue of forced begging as a form of human trafficking
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Introduction

Forced begging is a very widespread form of human trafficking. It can occur in many different forms which will be discussed further in this Research Report.

Almost everyone has had an encounter with forced begging. Be it on vacation or maybe closer to home, a lot of people have experienced being begged for money by children. It cannot always be clear but most of these children are begging for money due to being coerced into these kinds of situations.

Forced child begging is classified as one of the worst forms of child labour, which is why this research report will mainly focus on forced child begging. It completely violates the basic human rights protection framework of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*. You could even call forced begging one of the lesser talked about aspects of modern slavery.

Forced begging is not unusual but most of the time we simply don't notice it happening right in front of us. However, it is a form of exploitation carried out by criminal gangs who not only exploit, threaten and abuse victims but subject them to further humiliation and degradation by forcing them to beg on the streets.

Definitions of key terms

Forced begging

Forced begging means to force someone to beg for money through all forms of coercion.

Coercion

Coercion describes the practice of persuading a person to do something by using threats or force.

Human trafficking

Human Trafficking is the unlawful act of transporting or coercing people in order to benefit from their work or service, typically in the form of labour or sexual exploitation.

Child labour trafficking

Child labour trafficking is a prevalent form of human trafficking, currently affecting an estimated 168 million children around the world.

Modern slavery

Modern slavery is defined as the recruitment, movement, harbouring, or receiving of children, women, or men through the use of force, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, deception, or other means for the purpose of exploitation.

General overview

Driving factor of forced begging

The clear driving factor behind the existence of this type of trafficking is money. Such a practice can indeed be lucrative, such as most forms of exploitation are. Children that are coerced into forced begging are required to hand over all or most of the money they receive. Children are often given a quota to bring back every day, and if they don't, they most likely will become subject to beatings, isolation, or many other forms of abuse.

Human traffickers seek out the vulnerable to exploit them. This includes children, women, the elderly, and very often people with visible physical disabilities. Children who are forced to beg are often under the age of ten and even rented from their parents or guardians to beg for the day. Victims will sometimes be intentionally disfigured so that people passing by are manipulated into being more empathetic and therefore more likely to give money to the beggar. Studies have found that handicapped children bring in three times as much revenue as non-handicapped ones. This has led to forced mutilations and amputations- the cutting off of legs, or the removal of eyes- with the goal of rendering the children more profitable. Forced child beggars often work long hours, suffer mental, physical, and verbal abuse, and are of course at very high risk of being subjected to sexual abuse.

Who organises forced begging?

Children can be forced by their parents, siblings, guardians, or by a third party, including criminal gangs, distant relatives, neighbours, or family friends. Basically, anyone that has any sort of power over a child can coerce or force a child into taking part in forced begging.

There are many reports of children being kidnapped by gangs and forced to beg. Organised crime is often a big factor. Children are known to be forced to play instruments or perform tricks to entertain or evoke sympathy from passersby. Globally, it is estimated that traffickers who force disabled children beg can make up to US\$40,000 a year in illegal profits.

Indicators of forced begging

Often it is very hard to identify forced begging since a simple encounter with someone who is begging can not tell you about their background and their reasons for begging. But some indicators of forced begging include signs of abuse or physical violence. This can especially be seen in children and female victims by for example bruises. You can also identify a forced beggar if there is no obvious sign that indicates them being homeless, like being surrounded by their possessions. Another indicator can be a group of adult or child beggars using public transport, walking together up and down the length of a bus or train to beg, or groups of beggars being moved daily to different locations but returning to the same location every night. When seeing an adult in charge of a large group of child beggars there is a high probability that these children are the victims of forced begging and human trafficking.

Children that seem or act intoxicated can also be seen as an indicator of them being forced to beg since traffickers often force them to take drugs to the point that they develop an addiction. That way the criminals can ensure that the children will always return, as they are the only source that provides them with the drugs. Sometimes the victims do not even have a chance of knowing what substances they got addicted to, further strengthening the dependency on their traffickers.

Where is forced begging found most?

This form of human trafficking is found all across the globe. Victims often come from poor backgrounds. In Europe, most victims of forced begging are trafficked from Romania or Bulgaria to countries where begging is more profitable. In the United States of America, you can find people that are forced into begging from all different types of ethnicities and nationalities, although the majority does come from Latin America, especially from Mexico. Forced begging in many African states has become an immense issue within societies. The same goes for the greater part of east Asia, south-west Asia, and the Middle East. Often victims of forced begging are migrants from impoverished areas. Walking around in big cities you can find women and children on every corner trying to beg for anything they can get, just so they don't have to live through the consequences of getting beaten, sexually assaulted, or hurt in any other way, just for not fulfilling the intended quota. In Senegal, an estimated 100,000 children are forced to beg. In Mali, it is estimated that in 2010 the capital Bamako was home to 50,00 such children but since then there have been warnings that the number increased significantly.

Major parties involved

Mali

Mali is a country in west Africa, in which children are often subject to the worst forms of child labour such as, but not limited to slavery, forced begging, having to engage in armed conflicts, etc.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh is located in south Asia. In 2009 the government imposed a ban on begging, hoping to eliminate the practice. Anyone caught begging in public places would face a maximum of three months in jail.

India

India is one of the most populated countries in the world, located in southeast Asia. There have been laws implemented in terms of child begging. Section 42 of *The Children Act* says that “whoever employs a child for begging or indulges the child into begging or makes him beg will be held liable to imprisonment for a term maximum up to one year or fine or both.”

Venezuela

In Venezuela, located in Latin America, child migrants are often being trafficked into Colombia and forced to beg there.

Colombia

Colombia is located in Latin America. It is estimated that 14% of Venezuelans coming to Colombia rely entirely on begging to make a living, according to the UNHRC. Some bring their children along since children tend to get more money when begging.

UNICEF

UNICEF is an international organisation working in over 190 countries and territories to improve the lives of children and their families based on the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children*

Save the Children

Save the Children is an international organisation working to protect and improve the lives of children across the world. Their program focuses on helping children survive, learn, and be protected. *Save the Children* works through programming, emergency response, and advocacy to further the protection and rights of children in a variety of ways.

ECPAT International

ECPAT International is a children's rights organization focusing exclusively on ending the sexual exploitation of children. *ECPAT* works around the world to address issues of online child exploitation, the sale and trafficking of children, child sex tourism, child trafficking, education of children on their rights, and human rights reporting. It has a network of over 100 member organisations in 95 countries around the world helping to carry out the mission.

Children's Rights

Children's Rights investigates, exposes, and combats violations of the rights of children across the country.

The Human Rights Watch

The Human Rights Watch is an NGO with the Goal of respecting and ensuring human rights with the help of the United Nations and its operations.

International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

The International Organisation for Migration is one of the leading organisations promoting humane and orderly migration. It does so by providing services and advice to governments and migrants.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Begging should never compromise any child's health, safety, or education, there is always a chance that the child is being exploited, and this possibility must be considered at all times. There has been a previous attempt at solving the issue by the Organisation *Anti-Slavery International* which has worked since 2008 on protecting children who are forced by their schoolmasters in their school to beg on the streets of Senegal, West Africa. In January 2018 the organisation embarked on a new project to tackle this issue. Over the following three years they gathered data on the nature and prevalence of forced child begging in Mali and Niger, including the rate of trafficking involved, and identified how the lessons learned from the work in Senegal could apply to other countries in the region. The project established organisations led by children and young adults with experiences of begging in Niger, Mali, and Senegal and trained them in advocacy and communication techniques with the goal of

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shaping the national debates around forced child begging and ending it across the region. They engaged former students from similar schools to share their experiences and identify strategies to address not only forced child begging but also the root causes, such as poverty and lack of access to state education, contributing to the prevalence of this practice. They try to lobby the governments and regional international bodies to put this issue high on their agendas and draw concrete plans to eradicate forced child begging from West Africa for good.

Another attempt was made on the 30th of July 2021. To mark the World Day against Trafficking the *International Organisation for Migration (IOM)*, in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice of Georgia, United States of America, and with the support of the European Union raised public awareness about the crime of trafficking and forced child begging and highlighted the often-invisible dangers that child beggars face.

Possible solutions

As with all forms of human trafficking, solving the issue of forced begging will be difficult and very complex, but indeed necessary. An essential step towards the elimination of such issues is always education. When educating children about the dangers of the world, such as any form of human trafficking, abuse, and violence you can decrease the danger of these children falling subject to the mentioned dangers and much more. Such education can stick with children way into their adolescence and even adulthood and can protect especially women from being trafficked. Most victims of human trafficking are denied access to any form of education which of course allows the traffickers to tighten their control over the victims.

As individuals, we may feel obligated to give begging children at least a few coins, but we should not. It is very unlikely that these coins will ever be seen again by these children and instead you are supporting traffickers and making their business more lucrative.

For some people, begging is a way to make a living. However, having children beg is always at least morally questionable.

Further reading

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