

II International Forum of Social Street Workers
Paroles de rue/Words from the Street
“Street work, children’s rights, poverty and social exclusion”
Brussels, 26 to 30 October 2010

INTRODUCTION

During the first International Forum of Social Street Workers held in Brussels from 25 to 28 November 2002, 23 recommendations were produced.

Please see http://www.travail-de-rue.net/files/files/forumbxl_fr.pdf

The main intentions of these recommendations were as follows:

- Ensure better recognition of street work.
- Put an end to programs for young people that stigmatize them, or that are security-based.
- Combat the growing gap between the adult world and that of young people.
- Create an international network of social street workers.

Of course, eight years on some progress has been made. But on the ground, in the street and in light of the actual situation of numerous vulnerable people, there is still much to be done. Today this network is in place, mobilizing street workers from 42 countries, and it believes it can offer a different development model for all categories of people.

To this end, we align ourselves with the recommendations issued by numerous actors in civil society, and also from national and international bodies which insist on the importance of the following:

- All individuals, irrespective of their social situation, have the right to be recognized as rights holders and in charge of their own existence. This entails respect for all the rights enshrined in the Convention on Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- All individuals, irrespective of their social situation, have the right to a minimum of financial, material and cultural resources, which are necessary for a dignified and fulfilling life. All States have the duty to provide them with a truly secure life.
- Social protection is a recognized human right (Arts 22 and 25 CHR). All States must provide a formal social security system which is accessible to all.
- The right to international mobility for all individuals should be recognized. This includes the right to travel, study and work throughout the world. Encouraging mobility produces multiple educational effects. It fosters building a more fraternal society by combating prejudices. But it is also a vector for a better distribution of wealth between North and South.
- Effort must be made by all States with a view to making primary education free and compulsory for all by allocating a substantial and realistic budget for education. Alternative approaches to education must also be explored (informal education, mobile street teams, interventions in open spaces, ...).
- Each State must earmark a minimum of 0.7% of its GNP to development cooperation, which must not be based on a will to universally apply occidental standards.
- Social street workers reaffirm their profound attachment to peace and its ideals, which is the only guarantee for sustainable development. To this end they exhort governments and international bodies (EU, UN, African Union, ...) to develop or reinforce all initiatives aiming to

resolve conflicts that are factors contributing to tension, exclusion and impoverishment of vulnerable populations.

Aside from other proposals, there is reason to consider this set of recommendations as indispensable to the lasting improvement of the living conditions and actual circumstances of the people most excluded, who are accompanied by street workers throughout the world.

The following recommendations, produced in the framework of the second International Forum of Social Street Workers in October 2010, follow similar lines.

RECOMMENDATIONS made by social street workers

- It is not enough to merely recall certain fundamental rights. We propose that political leaders and other concerned actors go beyond the formal recognition of these rights by ensuring that they are effectively implemented while showing unconditional respect for the people concerned, regardless of their gender. We also request that an end be put to the economic, sexual or physical exploitation of any person, with a special emphasis on children.

INTERNATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is asked to encourage the formal recognition of social street work in all the States by recognizing its strength of innovation and by supporting it through the support of appropriate research and educational programs.
- Street work must be recognized for its social and educational dimension which aims to see people fulfilled; at individual, group and community level alike. This recognition must take into account the fact that street work is only conceivable in the long term and must be financed as such.
- It is essential that all individuals enjoy the right to self-development throughout their lives, through education and their own experience. For those under 18, it is vital that this educational environment and experience be protected and provided for everybody.
- All individuals must have the tools to understand and experience their citizenship by availing themselves of essential information about their rights and obligations. To this end, the rights regarding participation, freedom of expression, freedom of association and the right to be freely present in public areas are of fundamental importance.
- Defending human and children's rights is not without risk or consequences in some countries. States are requested to guarantee increased protection for all those who are actively involved in defending these rights.
- Although there has been progress regarding women's rights, we request an intensification of these efforts through the targeted investment in programs specifically oriented towards young girls and women.
- Provision must be made for a family allowance granted by the State for every family with one child or more, so as to cover the children's minimum needs.

- There should be increased legislation to combat violence against children, in the form of physical punishment and humiliation, either in their family environment, in schools or other institutions.
- It is important to recognize the potential and richness which is innate in people, as well as their capacity to build their own lifestyle and/or failing that, to put together a survival process for themselves.
- It should be recalled that detaining children in detention centers runs counter to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and should be utterly prohibited.
- All measures concerning the placement of children should be geared towards a possible return to a normal environment, driven by the best interests of the child involved.

EUROPEAN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is asked to the European Union to encourage the formal recognition of social street work in all member States and to do its utmost to effectively implement the international recommendations in its own territory.
- The European Union must review the excessively technical conditions, often inspired by commercial interests, which are imposed upon associations seeking its support, particularly with regard to Cooperation and Development.
- Street work, as well as other social services, can in no way be subject to market-based logic.
- Non formal and informal education is essential for the development of individuals and in particular for young people who have few opportunities. Programs such as "Youth for Europe" should be developed and strengthened, with no minimum-age restrictions, in line with all other policies for social development. Particular attention must be paid to strengthening the network of young people and actors on the ground.
- Certain aspects of European migration policy produce exclusion and poverty. This policy must be thoroughly amended in order to tally with European will, aiming to see better social inclusion in Europe. This inclusion should be accessible for everybody living in European territory. This change will allow us to combat the phenomena of poverty, illegal immigration, unaccompanied minors, disaffiliation and human trafficking.
- We request that Europe through its member States ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.
- Low incomes and allowances must be increased above the national poverty threshold in each of the Member States. A minimum wage must be guaranteed in all European countries.
- The network supports the initiative of the Belgian Presidency of the European Union which intends to submit a resolution on youth work, focusing in particular on the poorest children and young people.

NATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Each State is requested to make provision for a legal framework recognizing street work, respecting its social, educational, emancipative approach, and a clear ethical framework that respects confidentiality principles, particularly regarding professional secrecy.
- This recognition must be accompanied by support for basic and ongoing training for street workers, through specific programs geared towards managing street work, dealing with its multi-cultural dimensions, and the evaluation of street work. These programs should lead to recognized qualifications.
- In terms of support for children and young people, priority must be given to keeping them out of legal courts and institutions and to upholding the right of children to be heard and defended. An approach favouring education and emancipation must be promoted with due respect for the articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Particular attention must be paid to combating child poverty and its consequences, such as foster care, abusive school orientation, and stigmatization.
- Regulations and programs for young people that stigmatize them, or that are security-based, tend to portray younger people as nuisances and should be avoided.
- It is proposed that in each country a Minister coordinates children's rights and an independent body defends them, such as the General Delegate for Children's Rights or the Children's Rights ombudsman.