
News release

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More details: Report and summary is available for download on
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Building child-friendly cities and commitment to children's rights is top priority for Indian urban development agenda

Report on urban children by PwC India and Save the Children

New Delhi, 17 July: Urban children, especially those from disadvantaged sections, are susceptible to ill-health, poor access to water and sanitation, insufficient education, urban disasters and lack of protection. Indian cities need to have a system of local governance that is committed to fulfil children's rights. The focus of the major urban development schemes need to be on smaller urban centres where 68 percent of the urban population is concentrated.

Every fourth child in India (27.4 percent of total children) lives in urban areas. Also, in comparison to 2001, the number of children (0-6) in urban areas has increased by 10.3 percent while in rural areas it has decreased by 7 percent. This makes urban children and youth a very important segment, deserving focused attention.

The ***Forgotten Voices: the world of urban children in India*** report compiled by PwC India and Save the Children does a reality check on the situation of urban children as varying patterns of migration to cities across India make them increasingly vulnerable to a variety of risks.

"Though many child protection legislations have been brought by various governments, incidents of child abuse pose serious questions before policy makers," pointed out **Shri Kiren Rijju, Minister of State for Home Affairs, Government of India** upon releasing the report. "I am confident that the numerous suggestions brought out in the report will help both Central and State governments in addressing this and other important concerns emphatically and decisively."

Deepak Kapoor, PwC India Chairman stated, "Despite India's rapidly changing social and economic milieu, approximately eight million children under the age six still live in slums. These children are important stakeholders in the country's development agenda and the issues they face call for urgent attention from authorities and these should be redressed on a war footing." He added, "Urban schemes should be designed to address the specific needs of children and sufficient budgets should be allocated for this. There is also a need to replicate child-friendly programmes through child participation and redesigning of long term urban development plans through a child's lens. We hope that this report will play a key role in highlighting the importance of including the needs of children in India's urban development plan."

“There’s absolutely no time left to bring focus sharply on children as unabated urban migration worsens their condition,” said **Harpal Singh, Chairman of Save the Children** and added, “Our report clearly shows how urban children across India are becoming increasingly vulnerable as populations in cities explode to bursting point with different challenges being thrown up. The solution lies in making our cities child-friendly. We urge policy makers to duly take these suggestions while they plan 100 smart cities in the country

According to the report, India’s demographic dividend can only be realised if our cities improve their performance in areas such as urban governance, health, nutrition, water and sanitation, education, child protection, and urban resilience. Of the 377 million urban Indians, 32 percent are children below 18 years of age.

The report indicated that while tremendous progress has been made on the ‘hardware’ front in terms of developing city infrastructure, not enough attention has been paid to the ‘software’, i.e. the quality of service delivery.

In health matters, although we have witnessed an improvement in mortality rates from the previous decade, data indicates that all childhood mortality indicators among the urban poor (under-5 mortality rate, infant mortality rate, and neonatal mortality rate) are higher as compared to the overall urban averages. Immunisation coverage has improved in urban areas but the birth order continues to be a hindrance. Children living in slums are 1.3 times more likely to suffer from diarrhoea than in non-slum areas.

Though the urban population in India has better access to sanitation, coverage is failing to keep up with the population growth -- one in five households in India do not have a household toilet.

Proper nutrition is essential for the development of any city as children form the future workforce which will stimulate economic growth. In urban India, over 32 percent children under five years of age are underweight and 39.6 percent are stunted. Wealth-related inequity is evident as six out of 10 children under five years are stunted in the lowest wealth index as compared to 2.5 out of 10 children in the highest index. Also, 21.5 percent new-borns have low birth weight. Another emerging problem is the rising prevalence of child obesity, especially in the middle and upper middle classes. Research shows that in the private schools of Delhi, 29 to 32 percent of children (14-18 years) are overweight.

While approximately 27.4 percent children in the age group of seven to 18 years reside here, only 17 percent schools are located in urban areas. The Census 2011 shows that child population (0 to 18 years) increased by 12.8 percent in urban areas during the preceding decade, but neither the corresponding enrolment at the school stage nor the number of education facilities and teachers increased proportionally. Hopefully, the introduction of the RTE Act which has earmarked 25 percent seats for underprivileged children, a clause particularly relevant for slum children, will change things for the better.

There was a 24 percent increase in crimes against children between 2010 and 2011 and a further 52.5 percent increase from 2012 to 2013. The million+ cities are major contributors to crimes against children such as trafficking, kidnapping, rape and infanticide. The girl child is especially affected due to the proliferation of sex work in cities. Highly urbanised states such as Delhi and Maharashtra are third and fourth in the list of states where most of these crimes take place. A higher-than-average crime rate clearly means that children in the cities are not only victims to such violence but are in the danger of becoming a part of organised crime rackets, especially when faced with disruption in schooling and lack of parental care.



In India, where it is lucrative for employers to employ child workers since it is a cheaper option and labour laws are poorly implemented, the number of urban child workers in small and medium-scale hazardous industries, service establishments, and informal businesses is huge. A large number of children work as domestic helps. A study of this segment indicates that almost 70 percent children reported physical abuse, slapping, kicking, burns, etc and 32.2 percent reported sexual abuse. Further, these children tend to get involved in prostitution and bonded labour.

The Disaster Management Act does not make any references to vulnerable groups, such as children. District disaster management plans do not provide age-disaggregated data.

In compiling this report, numerous areas of intervention for policymakers and NGOs emerged.

Urban governance: For inclusive cities, a child-led planning process is essential since it allows children to provide solutions to the challenges that they encounter.

Health, nutrition and WASH: Data on urban child health is both limited as well as difficult to analyse for useful information. There is a need to generate evidence on indicators of child health, specifically looking at poor versus non-poor and slum versus non-slum.

Urban resilience: Considering the increasing threat of natural disasters, the integration of flood and climate change mitigation and adaptation measures into day-to-day urban development and service delivery is recommended.

The vision of Smart Cities is driving the urban development policy of the government. This is a brave, new vision which will require huge financial investment and technological upgrade of public systems. However, a smart city must be an equitable city too. As the report points out, the share of the urban poor in the total number of poor in India is growing and now stands at 27percent. Every 8th urban child (0-6 years) lives in slums, often situated next to high-rises and swanky malls. Keeping this in mind, a smart city cannot be a city meant for investors, tax-paying classes and gadget users only. It has to be a 'city with a heart', a city that is inclusive and just.

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Notes to the Editor

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