



Ethiopia - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 15 March 2011

Treatment of unaccompanied/orphaned children in Ethiopia; in particular, treatment of girls.

The *United States Department of States* annual report on Ethiopia, in the section titled children, states:

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimated there were between 150,000 and 200,000 street children nationally, with a further one million vulnerable or at risk of ending up on the streets. UNICEF stated the problem was exacerbated because of families' inability to support children due to parental illness and decreased household income. These children begged, sometimes as part of a gang, or worked in the informal sector. Government and privately run orphanages were unable to handle the number of street children, and older children often abused younger ones. "Handlers" sometimes maimed or blinded children to raise their earnings from begging.

There were reports during the year of recruitment of child soldiers in connection with the Somali region conflict (see section 1.g.).

There were an estimated 4.6 million orphans in the country, according to UNICEF. Government-run orphanages were overcrowded, and conditions were often unsanitary. Due to severe resource constraints, hospitals and orphanages often overlooked or neglected abandoned infants. Children did not receive adequate health care, and several infants died due to lack of adequate medical attention. (United States Department of State (11 March 2010) *Ethiopia: "Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2009"*)

A report from *the Times* states:

"Only a fraction of Ethiopia's burgeoning population of orphaned children, now put at five million, find their way to Kidane Meheret Children's Home. Even fewer leave and they are certainly the lucky ones.

A few miles away, dozens of children sleep in drains at night and beg by day at the sprawling central bus station. They face constant dangers.

"Some are forced into prostitution, some are sold by relatives after their parents die, they are kept as maids and often abused," said Dagmawi Alemayeau who runs an organisation, Forum on Street Children, which tries to fight trafficking. Most of an estimated 50,000 children on the streets of the capital, Addis Ababa, at some stage pass through the bus station where he has his office.

"Traffickers go to the rural areas ... there are places where you can even buy a baby for as little as \$1," he told *The Times*. He always keeps an eye open at the international

airport where so-called “uncles” can often be spotted boarded planes to Gulf states with teenage girls.” (Times Online (4 April 2009) *Ethiopia's orphans face life of hardship*)

A 2006 report on orphans from *UNICEF* states:

“Very few government services help orphans. The primary coping strategy for communities has therefore been the extended family. Increasingly, however, the capacity of the extended family to support the growing numbers of orphans is declining.

“As more and more parents die, the capacity of the extended family to take care of orphans becomes smaller and smaller,” says Björn Ljungqvist, UNICEF Representative in Ethiopia. “In all countries where you have a big HIV/AIDS epidemic, at first you don't see any orphans at all, as they are absorbed by the traditional systems. And then all of a sudden you seem to reach some type of breaking point and you start finding these children in the streets, you start finding them working in difficult conditions, you start finding even child-headed households.” (UNICEF (20 January 2006) *Ethiopia: Steady increase in street children orphaned by AIDS*)

References

UNICEF (20 January 2006) *Ethiopia: Steady increase in street children orphaned by AIDS*

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

Sources Consulted:

Amnesty International

European Country of Origin Information Network

Human Rights Watch

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

IRIN News

Online newspapers

Refugee Documentation Centre Library

Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database

Reuters
UNHCR Refworld
UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)
United States Department of State