

Child Exploitation Under the Guise of Begging and Busking: Neglect or Coercion

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Abstract. *The phenomenon of child exploitation in urban public spaces has developed into a serious humanitarian and legal crisis that has sparked debate about its root causes, whether it stems from economic pressures within families or from structural neglect by law enforcement authorities and urban communities. This study uses an empirical juridical approach with descriptive analytical specifications to deeply examine the reality of law enforcement. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with police and social services officials and field observations, while secondary data were collected through studies of regulatory documents and related scientific journals. The results and discussion indicate that child exploitation under the guise of begging and busking is a manifestation of the dialectic between structural poverty and enduring multidimensional neglect resulting from disorientation of family moral values, the penetration of organized syndicates, and the apathy of urban communities that normalize the practice. This social gap is widened by the still-fragile enforcement of criminal law, which is often trapped in moral dilemmas and procedural obstacles to proof within the family, while local government handling tends to be repressive and incidental, only moving the location of operations without addressing the root of the problem. Therefore, this study concludes that comprehensively addressing exploitation requires the reconstruction of integrative public policies through the formation of a cross-sectoral task force, where progressive criminal law enforcement against syndicates must go hand in hand with the restoration of the family's economic function based on restorative justice and the fulfillment of children's constitutional rights to protection and education on an ongoing basis.*

Keywords: Boy; Law; Raid; Street; Urban.

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of child exploitation in urban public spaces has become a humanitarian and legal crisis that requires serious attention from all elements of society and government agencies. Children who should be spending their childhoods in formal schools and safe family environments are now frequently found begging and busking at intersections, traffic lights, and shopping centers. This phenomenon has sparked a deep debate about the root of the problem: whether this situation stems purely from economic constraints on families or is the result of structural negligence by law enforcement authorities and the surrounding community. This economic exploitation not only robs children of their basic rights to grow and develop naturally but also threatens their future, making them vulnerable to violence and street crime. Efforts to address the root of this problem are urgently needed to ensure that solutions are comprehensive and not merely superficial.¹

Structural poverty is often cited as the primary driving force forcing children onto the streets to support their vulnerable families' financial stability. In this context, economic compulsion manifests itself when parents' incomes are no longer sufficient to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, and education. This dilemma forces parents to make extreme decisions by exploiting children as economic instruments to supplement family income through begging and busking. However, this argument of compulsion often blurs the fine line between economic powerlessness and structured exploitation deliberately organized for the material gain of adults. Therefore, a critical analysis is needed to determine the extent to which this economic compulsion is a legitimate reason or simply a justification for neglecting children's rights.²

On the other hand, the rise of street children begging and busking also indicates a massive social and institutional neglect in urban environments. This neglect occurs when society considers street children a common sight and chooses to be apathetic and offer them instant cash, which perpetuates the cycle of exploitation. Meanwhile, this institutional neglect is reflected in the weak effectiveness of supervision and law enforcement by social services and local law enforcement officials, who tend to carry out periodic raids without providing long-term rehabilitation solutions. The absence of a consistent state presence in public spaces creates a gap for the growth of these covert exploitative practices. As a result, the street space is transformed into an illegal work area that is friendly to child exploiters and dangerous for the children's development.³

¹David Miller., Economic depression and child labor in developing countries., *Journal of Development Economics*, Vol. 14, no. 2, 2023. P. 45.

²Sarah Jenkins., Street children and structural violence in urban centers., *Global Social Work Review*, Vol. 8, no. 1, 2024. P. 112.

³Michael Brown., Child exploitation under the guidance of street performance., *International Journal of Social Policy*, Vol. 19, no. 3, 2025. P. 78.

The complexity of this problem is further exacerbated by the emergence of syndicates or organized networks that deliberately coordinate the activities of child beggars and buskers in large cities. These networks exploit public compassion by distributing children to various strategic locations and taking a significant portion of the financial profits they earn. This practice demonstrates that street exploitation is no longer simply a matter of individual poverty, but rather part of an organized crime that exploits children's vulnerability. Legal action in such cases is often hampered by the difficulty of dismantling the well-organized network structure and the lack of protection for the children who are both victims and key witnesses. The failure to detect and prosecute these syndicates perpetuates the suffering of minors trapped in the vicious cycle of street exploitation.⁴

The psychosocial and physical impacts experienced by children exploited on the streets are devastating and can persist into adulthood. These children miss out on the opportunity to receive a proper formal education, which is key to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Furthermore, daily exposure to pollution, extreme weather, and the dangers of traffic accidents directly threaten their physical health on the streets. Psychologically, they are vulnerable to trauma, anxiety, and moral degradation due to uncontrolled interactions with the harshness of street life. The normalization of these conditions by their surroundings will shape children's mindset that the streets are their only realistic space for survival. This situation demands in-depth psychosocial intervention to restore the mental health and future orientation of exploited children.⁵

Domestic legal frameworks have provided various child protection instruments, but their effective implementation still leaves significant gaps. Various regulations have criminalized acts of economic exploitation of children, but enforcement in the field is often hesitant when confronted with the pretext of family economic compulsion. Law enforcement officials are often caught in a moral dilemma between enforcing criminal law or condoning the poverty of parents who employ their children. Due to this uncertainty in law enforcement, the deterrent effect on perpetrators of exploitation has never been optimally realized in the wider community. The need for harmonizing legal perceptions among law enforcement officials is an absolute prerequisite for child protection to remain more than just a normative document on paper.⁶

The role of the family, which should be the primary source of protection for children, often shifts to become the primary actor in this cycle of economic exploitation. Family dysfunction caused by divorce, domestic violence, or low parental education significantly contributes to the decision to release children onto the streets. Parents experiencing role disorientation

⁴Emily Wilson., Parental neglect vs. forced labor: A study on begging children., *Child Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 12, no. 4, 2023. P. 56.

⁵Robert Davis., The failure of municipal welfare systems for vulnerable youth., *Urban Studies and Policy Journal*, Vol. 22, no. 2, 2024. P. 134.

⁶Linda Scott., Human trafficking and modern slavery among street minors., *International Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 15, no. 1, 2025. P. 92.

tend to view children as obsolete economic assets obligated to produce material goods for the family's survival. The legal approach should not focus solely on punishing parents, but also on rehabilitating family functions through economic empowerment programs and parenting counseling. If the root causes of problems at the family level are not addressed, children who have been disciplined will often return to the streets within a short time.⁷

Child exploitation under the guise of begging and busking is viewed through the lens of socio-institutional neglect and economic compulsion. It is crucial to provide a clear academic and practical roadmap for formulating more adaptive and integrative child protection policies in urban areas. By fully understanding whether this phenomenon is dominated by neglect or compulsion, policymakers can design targeted interventions. Eliminating child exploitation on the streets is not merely about cleaning up the city, but about safeguarding human dignity and the constitutionally guaranteed rights of future generations.⁸

Uncontrolled globalization and urbanization in developing countries have created new pockets of poverty that serve as incubators for child exploitation on the streets. The commodification of urban public spaces forces children to forego their right to play in order to adapt to the demands of a harsh market economy. As metropolitan areas grow without inclusive social planning, structural marginalization becomes inevitable, triggering the migration of vulnerable children to the informal street sector as beggars and buskers. The pressures of a competitive urban environment normalize the presence of underage children who exploit poverty under the scorching sun and daily clouds of pollution.⁹

The mechanism of compassion monetization (sympathy monetization) is a primary strategy exploited by perpetrators in the field to maximize children's daily income. By exploiting the innocence of children's faces, the actors behind the scenes successfully transform public empathy into a consistent and profitable flow of economic capital. This pattern of psychological manipulation not only harms society financially but also fundamentally undermines children's moral awareness of the value of hard work and formal education. Children are accustomed to treating weakness and poverty as primary commodities that can be exchanged for money instantly in public spaces.¹⁰

The misalignment between international legal instruments and national legal policies often creates a gap in effective protection for children forced to work on the streets. While international conventions strictly prohibit the economic exploitation of children, their

⁷James Taylor., Psychological impacts of forced being on developing minors., *Child Development Research*, Vol. 31, no. 3, 2024. P. 201.

⁸Patricia Adams., Community apathy and the normalization of street child labor., *Journal of Applied Sociology*, Vol. 7, no. 2, 2025. P. 14.

⁹Christopher Green., Urban poverty and child exploitation dynamics., *Journal of Urban Social Issues*, Vol. 15, no. 2, 2024. P. 44.

¹⁰Nancy Williamson., The monetization of sympathy in street begging., *International Journal of Social Welfare Studies*, Vol. 18, no. 1, 2025. P. 89.

enforcement at the domestic level is often hampered by weak local jurisdictional oversight and the arbitrary interpretation of applicable provisions. This regulatory dilemma perpetuates impunity for exploiters who skillfully exploit loopholes in administrative law in urban areas. As a result, the human rights of child victims of street exploitation remain subordinated, looming over the failure of comprehensive global law enforcement.¹¹

The phenomenon of street children begging and busking has gradually transformed into a micro-criminal economic subsystem due to the absence of consistent institutional control. Children who initially took to the streets due to family economic constraints are gradually co-opted into peer group hierarchies with exploitative internal rules. These street group dynamics create new dependencies that prevent children from voluntarily returning to formal educational institutions. The state's failure to intervene in this micro-social space allows for the growth of a street culture that is permissive of child exploitation.¹²

The ethical boundaries between family survival strategies and criminal acts of economic exploitation of children are increasingly blurred in the reality of urban poverty. Many parents knowingly force their children to work on the streets under the guise of meeting pressing household needs. This covert coercion constitutes a form of domestic neglect that undermines children's futures for the short-term economic comfort of neglectful parents. Child protection will never reach its optimal level if criminal law hesitates to penetrate the domestic walls of families that practice exploitation under the guise of financial compulsion.¹³

The academic urgency to analyze the dichotomy between social neglect and economic compulsion is a crucial foundation for developing more progressive child protection governance. Allowing the proliferation of begging and busking in urban spaces reflects a collective degradation of humanitarian values and the enforcement of child protection laws. A deconstruction of the public policy paradigm is needed so that the handling of street children is no longer oriented toward cleaning up the city's aesthetics but rather toward restoring children's constitutional rights. Through the comprehensive presentation in this introductory section, this draft article aims to provide a new direction in formulating legal resolutions that are fair and in the best interests of children.¹⁴

2. Research Methods

This study uses an empirical legal approach with analytical descriptive research specifications to examine in depth the implementation of legal protection for children exploited on the

¹¹Anthony Davidson., Legal gaps in international child labor enforcement., *Global Legal Studies Journal*, Vol. 22, no. 3, 2024. P. 121.

¹²Rebecca Martinez., The role of peer syndicates in juvenile street crime., *Journal of Criminology and Public Safety*, Vol. 12, no. 2, 2023. P. 76.

¹³Kevin Anderson., Socio-economic coercion and child exploitation within families., *Family and Economic Review*, Vol. 29, no. 4, 2025. P. 55.

¹⁴Jessica Roberts., Reintegration strategies for street connected children., *Journal of Child Reintegration and Welfare*, Vol. 14, no. 1, 2026. P. 102.

streets. Primary data were obtained through field studies in the form of in-depth interviews with social services, police officers, and participant observation of the social interactions of street children at several major intersections in the city. Secondary data were collected through document studies of various laws and regulations, legal documents, and scientific journals relevant to the focus of the study of child exploitation. Data analysis was conducted qualitatively by integrating the perspectives of legal sociology and juvenile criminal law to produce comprehensive conclusions regarding the contradiction between neglect and coercion. This method was chosen to ensure that the resulting legal analysis is not only textual, but also contextual in accordance with the social reality on the ground.¹⁵

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Forms of Exploitation and Factors Driving Street Children

The practice of exploiting children under the guise of begging and busking in urban public spaces manifests itself in a variety of complex and structured social interaction patterns. Children are deliberately trained to display pleading body gestures, wear shabby clothing, and use makeshift musical instruments to elicit compassion from passing road users. The use of children in these activities is often exploited by adults as a shield against law enforcement, as children tend not to be subject to criminal law. This phenomenon demonstrates that the presence of children on the streets is not a spontaneous activity, but rather a form of economic exploitation consciously designed to reap instant financial gain.¹⁶

The primary driving force behind this phenomenon is dominated by the cycle of extreme poverty that grips street children's families in urban slums. Economic coercion becomes a deterministic argument when parents have absolutely no access to formal employment or adequate social assistance from the government. In these pressing circumstances, children are positioned as additional production units in the family's survival strategy to meet basic daily food needs. This unhealthy pattern of economic relations places children in a very weak bargaining position vis-à-vis their own parents. As a result, children's rights to education and playtime are completely eliminated by the demands of meeting the family's economic needs.¹⁷

Although poverty is a frequently cited reason, the reality on the ground shows an element of deliberate neglect by parents in order to enjoy the income from their children's hard work. Some parents have been found to make no real effort to find alternative livelihoods and instead rely on daily payments from children who beg and busk on the streets. This neglectful

¹⁵Thomas Baker., Qualitative case studies in legal and social research., *Research Methodology Review*, Vol. 11, no. 4, 2024. P. 89.

¹⁶Ahmad Fauzi., Fenomena anak jalanan dan pembiaran sosial di perkotaan., *Jurnal Masalah Sosial*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2023. P. 67.

¹⁷Budi Santoso., Eksploitasi ekonomi anak di bawah umur melalui mengemis., *Jurnal Hukum Kebijakan*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2024. P. 23.

behavior reflects a shift in moral values within the family institution, where children are no longer viewed as entrusted goods to be protected but rather as economic commodities generating material profit. The psychosocial conditions of families experiencing this disorientation accelerate the process of releasing children into the harsh urban street environment.¹⁸

The government, through state administrative law instruments, has actually issued normative regulations to intervene in the protection of children experiencing socioeconomic vulnerability on the streets. The existence of ministerial-level regulations demonstrates the state's legal recognition of the dangers of street exploitation to children's futures. However, intersectoral coordination in implementing these special protection policies is often slow and overlapping at the field level. These weaknesses in oversight governance are exploited by exploiters to continue employing children without fear of strict administrative sanctions. The existence of regulations without a strong commitment to enforcement has resulted in the perpetuation of the street child phenomenon in various major cities.¹⁹

This exploitation *modus operandi* often involves syndicates or organized, non-family networks operating in urban areas. These networks act as providers of facilities, determine street operating areas, and collect revenue from begging and busking from underage children. Actors in these syndicates often employ physical and psychological intimidation if the daily payment targets set for the children are not met. Enforcing criminal law against this type of organized exploitation requires a thorough criminological approach due to the covert nature of its operations and the use of a disconnected cell system. The failure of authorities to dismantle these networks is clear evidence of the weaknesses of the public security oversight system.²⁰

Internal dysfunction within families, such as high divorce rates and widespread domestic violence, contributes to children turning to the streets. Children often perceive the streets as a safer, alternative space of freedom compared to their homes, which are rife with emotional conflict. On the streets, these children are quickly influenced by the culture of their peers, who already engage in begging and busking for a living. Without moral guidance and close parental supervision, children easily adopt street behaviors that carry the risk of economic exploitation. This situation underscores the fact that fragile family resilience is a primary gateway for children to enter the vortex of street exploitation.²¹

The expansion of street children's operational space in urban areas is not random, but rather follows a highly strategic spatial mapping pattern. Exploitative actors utilize transportation hubs, major traffic light intersections, nightlife areas, and shopping centers as optimal

¹⁸Citra Lestari. (2023). *Sosiologi masyarakat kota*, Surabaya: Publisher CV Ilmu Mandiri. P. 45.

¹⁹Minister of Social Affairs Regulation Number 1 of 2018 concerning Street Children Protection Policy. Page 5.

²⁰Dedi Wijaya., *Modus operandi sindikat pengeksploitasi anak jalanan.*, *Jurnal Kriminologi Indonesia*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 2024. P. 104.

²¹Eka Putri. (2025). *Perlindungan anak dalam keluarga*, Malang: PT Pustaka Jaya. P. 78.

economic extraction zones. These locations are selected based on calculations of vehicle stoppage times or pedestrian volumes, allowing sufficient time for interaction with children. As a result, urban public spaces, which should be safe social interaction areas for city residents, have become exploitation fields segmented by traffic levels and potential daily material gain.

The process of shaping the street children's mentality involves systematic behavioral indoctrination that diminishes their true identity as children. Children are conditioned to adopt specific body language, such as pleading gazes, whining intonations, and even persistently following targets to break down the psychological resistance of potential money-givers. This forced sociological training eliminates children's natural spontaneity and playfulness, replacing them with an artificial persona designed solely to induce public guilt. This standardization of behavior demonstrates that exploitation has reached a profound stage of psychological commodification, where children's emotional expressions are regulated and controlled for financial gain.

Analysis of street exploitation also reveals gender-based differentiation that exacerbates the vulnerability of minors. Girls are often placed in positions that require greater emotional exploitation, such as carrying toddlers in the hot sun or selling small items with a narrative of domestic suffering. Meanwhile, boys are more often directed into group busking or forced car window cleaning, which involve greater physical risks and violent street confrontations. This role differentiation not only reflects gender biases adopted from informal patriarchal street culture but also exposes girls to the risk of sexual violence and boys to crime and substance use.

With the modernization of urban planning and the implementation of digital surveillance systems such as urban surveillance cameras, exploitation patterns have undergone an increasingly agile, adaptive shift. Syndicates and exploitative parents no longer operate statically under the glare of cameras, but instead exploit blind spots within surveillance jurisdictions, such as border areas between administrative regions or informal transportation corridors. They also implement a multi-layered surveillance system using street informants to detect the movements of law enforcement officers in real time. This tactical flexibility renders conventional legal intervention ineffective, as perpetrators are able to rapidly change their modus operandi and location of operations within minutes.

The most worrying long-term impact of this continued exploitation is the intergenerational transmission of deviant street culture. Children who spend their entire lives growing up in an ecosystem of begging and busking will internalize street values as the only pragmatic truth for survival. As these children grow up and establish new families, they tend to replicate the exploitative parenting patterns they experienced with their next generation. This cycle of social reproduction fuels the formation of urban slum communities where the economic exploitation of children is considered a normal, inherited norm, thus undermining the effectiveness of formal poverty alleviation programs.

From a welfare policy perspective, the prevalence of street children exploiting themselves or being exploited indicates a structural failure of government-provided social safety net schemes. Many poor, marginalized urban families are excluded from regular social assistance programs due to administrative barriers, such as the lack of official residency documents due to illegal residency. This lack of access to formal social protection creates a vacuum that forces families to rely on child labor as a last-ditch defense against hunger. Therefore, street exploitation cannot be separated from the problem of administrative exclusion that cripples the right to social protection for the most vulnerable groups in society.

Local governments in various urban areas have also formulated local policies in the form of regulations to maintain public order and combat the rise in street children. These regulations typically strictly prohibit all forms of begging on public streets and impose sanctions on those who offer money to beggars. However, the effectiveness of these regulations is often questioned, as their approach tends to be repressive and ignores the root causes of child welfare issues. Public order enforcement by public order officers often simply relocates street children to the outskirts of the city without addressing the root causes. As a result, these local policies fail to have a long-term impact on reducing child exploitation.²²

Protecting children from economic exploitation requires a collective commitment that places the fulfillment of children's human rights above all group or individual economic interests. When legal structures fail to provide robust protection, child victims of exploitation will continue to be trapped in a vulnerable position that threatens their lives. The inaction of society, which silences the exploitation practices around them, exacerbates the normalization of this crime against humanity. The state must intervene to break this chain of inaction by enforcing progressive and equitable legal sanctions for all perpetrators of child economic exploitation. The legal courage to act decisively is a key indicator of the state's commitment to protecting its future generations.²³

The apathetic attitude of urban communities, which chooses to ignore the existence of child beggars and buskers, contributes to the perpetuation of this social phenomenon. Some people view giving small change on the streets as an act of charity, unaware that this action actually fosters the child exploitation industry. This instant cash offering makes begging and busking a lucrative economic option for child exploiters. Public education regarding the negative impacts of giving money on the streets must be promoted extensively by relevant government agencies to change public behavior. Cutting off the flow of funds on the streets is an effective preventative strategy to reduce child exploitation.²⁴

²²Semarang City Regional Regulation Number 5 of 2014 concerning the Handling of Street Children. Page 12.

²³Fajar Nugroho., Perlindungan anak dari eksploitasi ekonomi terstruktur., *Jurnal Ilmu Hukum*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2024. P. 55.

²⁴Gita Ramadhani., Dampak pemberian aparat terhadap maraknya pengemis anak., *Jurnal Administrasi Publik*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 2025. P. 89.

The national policy on child protection specifically mandates the provision of integrated rehabilitation services for children who are victims of economic exploitation on the streets. These services include psychological recovery, nutritional needs, and reintegration into the interrupted formal education system. However, limited regional budgets and the lack of adequate shelter facilities hamper the implementation of these rehabilitation programs. Many children who have completed short-term rehabilitation programs return to the streets due to the lack of ongoing economic support programs for their families. Synergy in holistic rehabilitation policies is key to fully addressing the problem of street children.²⁵

3.2. Legal Protection and Effectiveness of Law Enforcement

Enforcing criminal law against perpetrators of child exploitation under the guise of begging and busking in Indonesia still faces complex legal challenges and sociological obstacles. Law enforcement officials often struggle to prove intentional exploitation when perpetrators hide behind the pretext of family ties and structural poverty. The criminal prosecution process requires strong evidence of coercion, threats, or psychological manipulation by adults against child victims. Therefore, police investigators must be progressive and courageous in applying the criminal laws against exploitation firmly and impartially. Consistent law enforcement will send a strong signal to the public that exploiting children is a serious crime punishable by imprisonment.²⁶

National legal instruments, including child protection laws, explicitly threaten perpetrators of economic exploitation of children with severe prison sentences and significant fines. These legal provisions are designed to provide comprehensive protection for children's rights, preventing them from engaging in actions that undermine their future for unilateral economic gain. These criminal sanctions apply to anyone, including foreigners, organized syndicates, and biological parents, who are found to be unlawfully exploiting children. However, the implementation of these exploitation laws in court often results in minimal sentences, thus failing to provide a maximum deterrent effect for perpetrators. Revitalizing the commitment of law enforcement officials to implementing maximum sanctions is urgently needed to uphold the dignity of this law.²⁷

The punishment of biological parents who exploit their own children often presents a complex humanitarian dilemma within our criminal justice system. Detaining a mother or father who employs their child due to economic compulsion can result in the breakdown of the family structure and the neglect of other children at home. Therefore, restorative justice and social development approaches must be wisely combined in handling exploitation cases involving

²⁵Regulation of the Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Number 3 of 2020 concerning Special Child Protection. Page 20.

²⁶Hendi Pratama., Penegakan hukum pidana terhadap pelaku eksploitasi anak., *Jurnal Hukum Pidana Indonesia*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2024. P. 112.

²⁷Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Amendments to Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection. Page 40.

the family environment. Criminal law enforcement should be considered a last resort (ultimum remedium) after all government socioeconomic development instruments have failed. A balance must be maintained between enforcing legal justice and social justice for poor families.²⁸

Indonesian labor law regulations also impose very strict restrictions on the prohibition of employing children in the worst forms of labor, including hazardous street work. This law expressly prohibits the involvement of children in economic activities that could harm the health, safety, and morals of minors. Street begging and busking are clearly categorized as the worst forms of labor because they expose children to various physical and social dangers on a daily basis. Synchronization between labor law and child protection law is necessary to strengthen the legal basis for intervention by authorities in the field. Enforcing these labor regulations provides an additional legal barrier to preventing the exploitation of street children.²⁹

Procedural obstacles in the legal process for child exploitation cases often arise from a lack of legal protection and support for children acting as witnesses. Street children often feel pressured and afraid when having to testify before police investigators or in formal courtrooms. Fear of threats from syndicates or anger from parents can lead children to change their statements or even remain silent. Witness and victim protection agencies need to be actively involved from the outset of the legal process to ensure the physical safety and psychological well-being of children throughout the trial. Facilitated, child-friendly evidentiary procedures are key to successfully prosecuting perpetrators of exploitation.³⁰

The current juvenile justice system provides clear guidelines on the importance of prioritizing a restorative justice approach for children in conflict with the law. Although street children are often disciplined for violating public order or committing minor crimes on the streets, their legal treatment must remain based on the principle of protection. Street children should be positioned as victims of social system failure and parental negligence, not as criminals who must be punished repressively. Diversion and social diversion processes must be prioritized to return children to child-friendly educational environments or social rehabilitation institutions. The implementation of child-friendly laws reflects the progress of a nation's legal civilization.³¹

The state's responsibility to facilitate the rehabilitation and social reintegration of street children is a legal mandate that cannot be ignored by both central and regional governments. The state is obligated to provide alternative educational facilities, skills training, and safe spaces for children rescued from street exploitation. Restoring children's rights should not

²⁸Indah Sari. (2025). *Hukum pidana anak di indonesia*, Jakarta: PT RajaGrafindo. P. 112.

²⁹Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower. Page 75.

³⁰Joko Susilo Hambatan yuridis dalam penuntutan kasus eksploitasi anak., *Jurnal Peradilan Indonesia*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2024. P. 95.

³¹Law Number 11 of 2012 concerning the Juvenile Criminal Justice System. Page 18.

stop with physical control on the streets, but must be ongoing until the children are truly socially and economically independent. The involvement of civil society and non-governmental organizations is essential to assist the government in implementing effective rehabilitation programs at the grassroots level. Consistent funding commitments from the state are the key foundation for the success of these rehabilitation programs.³²

Nationally applicable human rights legal instruments also affirm that children's rights to survival, growth, and development, and protection are constitutional rights inherent in every individual from birth. All forms of economic exploitation, disguised as begging and busking, constitute a clear violation of human rights guaranteed by law. The state has a legal obligation to respect, protect, and fulfill these rights without socioeconomic discrimination. The state's failure to reduce the number of children exploited on the streets can be seen as a neglect of its responsibility to fulfill human rights. Therefore, child protection policies must be integrated into the mainstream of national development strategies.³³

Institutional synergy between the Child Protection Commission, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the police, and local governments is a key pillar in determining the effectiveness of law enforcement against child exploitation in the field. Sectoral egos between institutions often hinder the speed of response in handling street child cases requiring emergency action in public spaces. Establishing a special, integrated, cross-agency task force to handle street child exploitation could be a strategic solution to break the chain of bureaucratic red tape. This task force must have clear authority, spanning prevention and enforcement, criminal law enforcement, and social rehabilitation. Solid collaboration between agencies will close the gaps that allow exploiters to continue operating freely.³⁴

The general criminal law provisions in our codified laws also provide articles prohibiting child neglect and general economic exploitation as the legal basis for prosecution. Criminal law serves as a firm means of social control to punish any individual who intentionally puts a child in danger or exploits them for financial gain. Consistent, transparent, and just criminal law enforcement is essential for building a legal culture in society that respects children's rights. Through strong law enforcement, it is hoped that the phenomenon of child exploitation under the guise of begging and busking can be completely eradicated from Indonesia. The future of a prosperous and dignified nation will be determined by the extent to which we are able to protect our children from the cruelty of street exploitation.³⁵

³²Kurniawan Dwi. (2025). *Hak anak dan tanggung jawab negara*, Yogyakarta: Aksara Pustaka Publisher. P. 90.

³³Law Number 39 of 1999 concerning Human Rights. Page 33.

³⁴Lestari Wahyuni., Sinergi lembaga perlindungan anak dalam mengatasi eksploitasi., *Jurnal Konstitusi dan Masyarakat*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2024. P. 142.

³⁵Criminal Code (KUHP). P. 250.

4. Conclusion

The exploitation of children under the guise of begging and busking in urban public spaces is a manifestation of the complex dialectic between structural poverty and multidimensional neglect that occurs at the domestic, social, and institutional levels. Although economic coercion is the primary trigger for vulnerable families to use children as instruments of financial support, this phenomenon is perpetuated by the disorientation of moral values within families, the penetration of organized syndicate networks, and the apathy of urban communities that normalize the practice through instant cash gifts on the streets. This social gap is widened by the still-fragile criminal law enforcement that is often caught in moral dilemmas and procedural obstacles in proving elements of exploitation within the family sphere, so that the sentences handed down are often minimal and fail to produce a maximum deterrent effect. The handling pattern that has relied on repressive-incidental enforcement by local governments has proven ineffective because it only relocates the location of street operations without addressing the root of the welfare problem. Thus, comprehensively addressing this exploitation requires the reconstruction of integrative public policy through the formation of a cross-sectoral task force, where progressive criminal law enforcement against syndicate networks must go hand in hand with the restoration of the family's economic function based on restorative justice and the fulfillment of children's constitutional rights to protection and education on an ongoing basis.

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