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## Street Children Handling Strategies Based on Regional Policies: A Qualitative Study in Ambon City

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**Abstract:** The phenomenon of street children reflects structural inequality, urban poverty, and weaknesses in the child protection system. In Ambon City, although official data indicate a decline in the number of street children between 2022 and 2025, recurring cases and contradictory practices on the ground suggest persistent implementation gaps in policy execution. This study analyses the strategies employed by the Ambon City Social Service in addressing street children within the framework of local regulations using a child rights approach and a social policy analysis perspective. A qualitative case study design was employed. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with Social Service officials and street children, field observations in major public spaces in Ambon City, and analysis of relevant policy documents. The findings show that current strategies combine short-term outreach operations, fulfilment of basic needs, and family reintegration with longer-term rehabilitation, alternative education, and skills training programmes. However, testimonies from street children reveal the persistence of coercive practices during field operations, indicating inconsistencies between policy commitments to child-friendly governance and implementation practices. This study contributes to the literature on social policy and child protection by critically examining the paradox between quantitative policy success and the qualitative experiences of children as policy subjects. The novelty of this research lies in highlighting the gap between statistical reduction of street children and the actual quality of rights-based protection in a medium-sized city context in Eastern Indonesia. Strengthening rights-based implementation, institutional capacity, and participatory approaches is therefore essential to ensure sustainable child protection.

**Keywords:** street children, local policies, child protection.

### INTRODUCTION

The issue of street children is a global social phenomenon that reflects structural inequality, urban poverty, and weaknesses in the child protection system (Utama & Gorda, 2024). Global data from UNICEF and the International Labour Organisation show that more than 150 million children are working worldwide, many of whom live or work in urban

public spaces and are exposed to violence, exploitation, and neglect of their basic rights and neglect of their basic rights (Novitz, 2020). In developing countries, rapid urbanisation that is not matched by the provision of jobs and social services increases children's vulnerability to street life, particularly in medium- and small-sized urban areas. Indonesia continues to face serious challenges in addressing the issue of street children (Oppong Asante, 2019). Data from the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia indicate that during 2022–2024, street children were still found in almost every province, with high concentrations in urban areas (Hasanbasri et al., 2024). Although the government has adopted various policies, including Law Number 35 of 2014 on Child Protection and family- and community-based social rehabilitation programs, the issue of street children has not been fully resolved (Noya et al., 2021). A decrease in numbers is often not accompanied by sustainable improvements in the quality of child protection, as indicated by the high rate of children returning to the streets (relapse rate).

In Maluku Province, the issues have distinct characteristics. Sectoral data from the regional government and the Social Services Office show that throughout 2022–2025, urban poverty, limited availability of decent informal employment, and weak family resilience were the dominant factors driving children's street activity (Muzzakar et al., 2023). As the centre of economic activity and provincial administration, Ambon City attracts internal urbanisation from surrounding districts in Maluku Province. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) indicate that Ambon has the province's highest population density, at more than 3,000 people per km<sup>2</sup>. In contrast, the city population increased from approximately 347,000 in 2020 to more than 360,000 in 2024. This urban concentration increases social vulnerability, including the risk of children engaging in street-based activities (Nurwati et al., 2022). Previous studies on street children in Indonesia have generally focused on program evaluation, policy implementation, and causal-factor analysis. These studies indicate that strategies adopted by Social Services still face persistent obstacles, including budget constraints, limited trained human resources, and weak cross-sectoral coordination (Fauzy & Isnawan, 2024; Haris, 2021; Lestari, 2017; Mohamad et al., 2024; Setyowati, 2021; Stiawati & Indriyany, 2022; Utama & Gorda, 2024). Nevertheless, most research continues to assess policy success through quantitative indicators, such as reductions in the number of street children, without critically examining the quality of policy implementation and children's experiences as subjects of policy.

The research gap lies in the limited analysis of the policy paradox, where the number of street children decreases while field practices still violate child protection principles, such as coercive approaches, weak psychosocial assistance, and minimal child participation in the intervention process. In addition, studies of street children in Eastern Indonesia, particularly in Maluku, remain relatively scarce compared with those in Java and Sumatra; consequently, the local context is often overlooked in national policy discourse. The novelty of this research lies in its critical analysis of the gap between the quantitative success of regional policies and the qualitative aspects of child protection. This study assesses the strategies of the Ambon City Social Services and examines how they are implemented and experienced directly by street children. Thus, this research contributes to the development of social policy studies by positioning children as subjects of protection rather than merely objects of enforcement, and enriches the literature on the management of street children in the archipelagic and eastern regions of Indonesia.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative case study approach. The case study method was chosen because it enables researchers to describe and explain a social phenomenon in its real-world context. According to Qolamani (2023) and Vameghi et al. (2019), a case study is a

research method that aims to present a comprehensive description of various aspects of individuals, groups, organisations, programs, or specific social situations within a given context. In line with Mulyana's perspective, a case study does not merely depict events descriptively but also holistically interprets their meaning and social dynamics. The qualitative approach was selected because the study focuses on policy implementation, social meaning, and the experiences of policy subjects rather than statistical measurement. As Powell et al. (2013) and Ursin & Rizzini (2021) stated, qualitative research emphasises an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon by focusing on a single setting, object, or specific social situation.

This study examines the strategies employed by the Ambon City Social Service to address street children as a social policy practice within complex social, economic, and institutional contexts. The research was conducted in Ambon City, Maluku Province, with the main research site at the Office of the Social Services of Ambon City, the local government institution responsible for handling Individuals with Social Welfare Problems (PMKS). In addition, research was conducted in several public spaces in Ambon City that serve as sites for street children's activities, including the Taman Jembatan Merah Putih (JMP) area and other busy locations. The selection of these locations was based on the premise that they constitute the primary arenas for policy implementation and for interactions between government officials and street children in Ambon City.

Research informants were purposively selected based on their involvement, knowledge, and relevance to the research focus. The informants consisted of officials and staff of the Ambon City Social Service who were directly involved in the planning and implementation of street children-handling programs, serving as key informants, and street children who were still actively engaging in activities in the public spaces of Ambon City, serving as main informants. Street children were included as informants to capture their perspectives, ensuring the analysis reflects both institutional views and the experiences of the targeted group.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document review. In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner so that the researcher could obtain information flexibly, yet with a clear direction, especially regarding policy strategies, implementation processes, field constraints, and the impact of the policy on street children (Banda et al., 2024; Chand, 2025; Knauth et al., 2025; Oppong Asante, 2019). Field observations were conducted to directly examine outreach practices, interactions between officials and street children, and social conditions at the research sites. A document study was conducted by reviewing local regulations, program reports, statistical data, and other official documents related to the handling of street children in Ambon City to strengthen the policy context and the empirical findings. This study adhered to the principles of research ethics, particularly the protection of children as a vulnerable group. Informant identities were anonymised, interviews were conducted voluntarily, and no pressure or coercion was involved in the data collection process.

Data were analysed using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data obtained from various sources were first selected and categorised according to the research focus, and then analysed to identify patterns, relationships, and meanings related to strategies for handling street children. The analytical process was conducted simultaneously from data collection through to conclusion, enabling the researcher to make ongoing adjustments and explore the data in greater depth (Chand, 2025).

To ensure data validity, this study employed both source and method triangulation. Source triangulation was achieved by comparing information obtained from Social Service officials and street children, while method triangulation was achieved by comparing the

results of interviews, observations, and documentation. Triangulation was employed to enhance the credibility, consistency, and reliability of the research findings and to minimise researcher subjectivity bias (Hui & Min, 2021).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Overview of Street Children in Ambon City**

Street children are a vulnerable group occupying a marginal position in social structures and child protection systems. Their presence in public spaces reflects the failure of both the state and families to fulfil children's basic rights. Fitzgerald et al. (2024) state that the phenomenon of street children in various cities across Indonesia, including medium-sized urban areas such as Ambon City, represents social inequality, weak family resilience, and limited access to basic services, particularly education and social protection. In this context, street children are seen not only as participants in informal economic activities but also as victims of structural conditions and imbalanced social relationships.

In Ambon City, street children are typically found in areas with high public activity, such as the Red and White Bridge Park (JMP), the Tantui Underpass, and the Talake area. Based on field observations and interviews, these children engage in various informal economic activities, including busking, selling small items, and begging road users and visitors in public spaces. An important characteristic identified is that most street children in Ambon are not completely detached from their families. They still have a place to live, but spend most of their time on the street due to economic pressures, lack of parental supervision, and an unsupportive family environment.

The factors that lead to children becoming street children are complex and interrelated. Endris & Sitota (2019) explain that structural poverty, limited access to education, domestic violence, and peer influence are the main drivers pushing children onto the streets. These findings align with statements from local officials at the Ambon City Social Service, who believe that psychological factors and family conditions are the predominant triggers for the emergence of street children in this area. One informant stated:

(Informant MD, Staff Member of the Ambon City Social Service)

“The factors I often encounter are children following others, as well as other factors like the child’s psychological condition, when the child often experiences violence at home, whether verbal or nonverbal, from their parents. This causes the child to feel uncomfortable at home and live on the streets. There are also parents who, indirectly, exploit their children by making them beg on the street, which is caused by the family’s economic situation.”

However, this institutional perspective does not completely align with the recognition of street children as policy subjects in the literature. Interviews with street children revealed that they view their street activities as a personal choice rather than as a result of family coercion. The children stated that their parents were aware of their activities, but neither explicitly ordered nor forbade them. The following statements from street children O and R illustrate how they interpreted this decision:

(Child O)

“No, we are not told to do it; we come on our own. My mother knows, but she is not angry.”

(Child R)

“I go because I have friends who invite me, I have been like this for a long time, and no one forbids it.”

This difference in perspective has direct implications for the design and effectiveness of intervention strategies. If street children are understood solely as victims of family exploitation, then a family-based approach and enforcement of regulations against parents become priorities for intervention. However, when children view themselves as actors with

autonomy in choosing their social space, intervention approaches should be more personal and participatory, focusing on character development, strengthening internal motivation, skills training, and ongoing psychological support.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of street children in Ambon City reflects the weakness of the local child protection system in bridging normative policies with social realities. The local government, through the Ambon City Social Service, has made various preventive and curative efforts to address this problem. However, as discussed in the next section, these interventions still face a range of internal and external obstacles, so that care for street children has not yet been implemented comprehensively and sustainably.

### **Legal Basis and Policy Framework for the Management of Street Children**

The management of street children in Ambon City refers to an integrated social welfare management approach implemented by the Social Affairs Office. This approach combines policy implementation, program management, and case-based interventions aimed at prevention, outreach, rehabilitation, and family reintegration. Such management is conducted within a clear, tiered legal framework at both the local and national levels. This framework serves not only as a normative foundation but also as an operational guideline for program implementation, determining intervention modalities and enabling cross-sectoral coordination among government agencies and community institutions.

The existence of a strong legal foundation is essential to ensure that all actions taken in addressing the issue of street children are administratively legitimate, transparent, and aligned with the principles of child rights protection. Without an adequate legal basis, interventions risk being perceived as arbitrary and may potentially violate children's rights. Therefore, the regulatory framework functions as an instrument to guide policy implementation and ensure accountability in the management of street children.

The primary regulation cited by the Ambon City Social Affairs Office is Ambon City Regional Regulation No. 23 of 2007 on the Handling of Persons with Social Welfare Problems (PMKS). Within this regulation, street children are classified as a group requiring special and integrated intervention. The regulation mandates the local government to implement preventive, curative, and rehabilitative measures for vulnerable populations. Consequently, the management of street children is not merely understood as a matter of controlling public spaces but as part of a broader process of social recovery aimed at improving children's welfare and long-term social integration (Oppong Asante, 2019).

In addition to the PMKS Regulation, another key policy is Ambon City Regional Regulation No. 1 of 2019 concerning the Implementation of a Child-Friendly City. This regulation reflects the local government's commitment to creating a supportive and protective environment for children. In the context of street children management, the Child-Friendly City policy requires all local government institutions to integrate the best interests of the child principle into every program and policy, including ensuring children's access to protection, education, and basic social services even when they are present in public spaces (Ayana, 2020; Turner et al., 2018).

Another legal basis is Ambon City Regional Regulation No. 3 of 2017 concerning the Implementation of Child Protection, which emphasises humane treatment of children and the importance of collaboration among government institutions, families, and communities. This regulation strengthens the child protection dimension of managing street children by discouraging repressive approaches and promoting preventive and rehabilitative strategies (Foust et al., 2019; Oppong Asante, 2019).

This regulatory framework functions as a practical guideline for the Social Affairs Office in managing street children programs. This was confirmed by Social Affairs officials during an interview:

We work based on Regional Regulation No. 23 of 2007 as the general framework for handling street children, and also refer to Regional Regulation No. 3 of 2017 and the most recent program from the Acting Mayor, namely the Child-Friendly City Regulation No. 1 of 2019. All the steps we take, from outreach patrols, returning children to their families, to providing guidance, must comply with these regulations to ensure the protection of children's rights.”

This statement indicates that regulations are not only understood as formal legal documents but also serve as an operational basis for field practices, including outreach activities, family reunification, and follow-up social guidance. However, the use of the term “patrol” in practice suggests a potential tension between public order approaches and child protection principles, which remains an important issue in evaluating policy implementation.

At the national level, these local policies are reinforced by Law No. 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection, which guarantees that every child has the right to protection from violence, exploitation, and discrimination. This national legal framework ensures that the management of street children is not solely focused on reducing their visibility in public spaces but also on fulfilling children's rights comprehensively and sustainably.

Overall, this multi-level regulatory framework provides a strong institutional foundation for the Social Affairs Office of Ambon City to implement integrated interventions, strengthen cross-sector collaboration, and ensure that the management of street children prioritises both social welfare and the protection of children's rights.

## **Factors Hindering the Management of Street Children**

### **Internal Factors**

The management of street children in Ambon City is hindered by various internal obstacles that directly affect program effectiveness. One of the main challenges is the limited operational budget, which has become more pronounced since the implementation of regional spending efficiency policies. This limitation has resulted in the postponement of several planned programs in the country's health sector. “The challenges we often encounter internally are the limited budget, especially since budget efficiency measures were implemented. Many programs that have been prepared cannot be implemented. We have to choose which ones are priorities, and even then, many are still hampered.”

Another obstacle is the shortage of trained human resources, particularly young male social workers who can connect with street children in ways that align with their character and needs. This shortage has prompted the Social Service Department to involve the Public Order Police (Satpol PP), not all of whom possess the required competencies for child protection. “There is still a serious lack of young male officers; we need people who can approach children in a better way. Because of this shortage, we often involve Satpol PP, but they are not social workers.”

In addition, limited facilities and infrastructure pose serious constraints, particularly the lack of a permanent government-run shelter and the city's geography, which makes access to the outskirts difficult. “We still do not have a permanent shelter managed directly by the Social Service Department, as I mentioned earlier. Moreover, the road infrastructure to reach the children's homes in remote areas far from the city centre is often inaccessible to vehicles, so we often have to walk a long distance from the main road.”

### **External Factors**

External obstacles include low public awareness, uncooperative parental attitudes, the influence of street socialisation, and social stigma. The lack of public awareness of not giving money directly to street children strengthens their dependence on street life. “The hardest part is public awareness. We have provided education, but many people still give money to their

children. As a result, these children remain on the streets because they feel there is always someone to help them.”

In addition, some parents refuse to participate in their children’s street activities. In contrast, the children often feel more comfortable with the camaraderie of their peers on the street than with their parents. “We prefer to be on the street because we have many friends there, and we can ask for money while playing. At home, we feel bored.”

### **Short-Term Strategies for Addressing Street Children**

Short-term strategies involve rapid actions by the Ambon City Social Services to manage children in public spaces. These strategies aim to rapidly reduce street children’s activities while ensuring that their basic needs are met before implementing longer-term rehabilitative and sustainable interventions. In terms of social policy, short-term strategies play a crucial role as an initial entry point that determines the success of subsequent interventions. In line with the perspective of Banda et al. (2024), Hariyanto et al., 2024 Aburas et al. (2018), short-term strategies for managing street children should ideally be oriented toward a humanitarian approach that includes rescue efforts, the fulfillment of basic needs, and measures to prevent children from returning to the streets. These principles also serve as a reference for Ambon City Social Services when formulating operational steps in child protection. This approach positions street children as subjects in need of protection, rather than merely as objects of the enforcement of public order.

The first step is conducting outreach and field operations in collaboration with the Civil Service Police Unit (Satpol PP). These activities focus on strategic locations with high concentrations of street children, such as the Taman Jembatan Merah Putih (JMP) area and the Tantui Underpass. Although the term “razia” is used, the approach is intended to be persuasive and non-repressive. Field outreach serves as an initial mechanism for identifying children’s conditions and a means of building trust, thereby encouraging their participation in subsequent assistance processes.

After being contacted, the children are taken to the Social Services office to have their basic needs met. The assistance provided included food, clean clothing, and temporary shelter. This step aims to restore children’s sense of security and dignity while reducing their vulnerability while living on the streets. Fulfilling basic needs is considered essential before children are referred for social guidance and rehabilitation.

The next strategy is to return children to their homes or places of origin. For street children who still have families in Ambon City, the Social Services return them to their families and provide parents with education on childcare and parental responsibility. Meanwhile, children from outside the area are also facilitated in returning to their hometowns. This measure is intended to restore the family’s function as the primary environment for children’s growth and development and to prevent them from returning to the streets in the short term.

In certain situations, when children lack a place to stay or families willing to receive them, Social Services implements a temporary placement strategy in partnership with foundations. Children are entrusted to social institutions that cooperate with the local government, where they receive temporary shelter, access to necessities, and opportunities for guidance and training. This placement is temporary and intended as an interim measure while awaiting more comprehensive interventions.

The implementation of these short-term strategies is described directly by officers of the Ambon City Social Services as follows: “The first step we usually take is to conduct raids, but we approach the children properly. After bringing them to the office, we provided food and clean clothes and recorded their information. If they have a home, we take them

back; if not, we entrust them to a partner organisation. We do all this in a short period so that they will not return to the streets.”

This statement indicates that short-term strategies focus on rapid response and handling efficiency, with the primary aim of temporarily disrupting children’s attachment to life on the streets. Although these measures are temporary, they play a crucial role in the overall management cycle of street children, as they form the basis for determining more targeted follow-up interventions.

Nonetheless, in practice, short-term strategies still face various challenges, such as limited personnel, resistance from the street children themselves, and differing perceptions between government officials and children as policy subjects. Therefore, even though actions are taken quickly, the approach must still uphold the principle of the best interests of the child, as mandated by Law Number 35 of 2014 on Child Protection, with empathy, participation, and the protection of children’s rights as fundamental principles (Hariyanto et al., 2024).

### **Long-term Strategies for Addressing Street Children**

Long-term strategies are designed to address the social, economic, and psychological causes that drive children to live and work on the streets. These strategies go beyond mere supervision or temporary repatriation, focusing instead on rehabilitation, empowerment, and capacity building to enable children to build more stable and independent lives. (Eden et al., 2024; Oppong Asante, 2019) asserts that, ideally, long-term strategies for dealing with street children should include ongoing protection, access to education and skills, and the provision of a decent, supportive environment so that children do not return to street life.

In Ambon City, the Social Affairs Office has developed long-term strategies that emphasise social rehabilitation, alternative education, and children’s skill empowerment. These strategies are designed to sustain short-term interventions, ensure that children who have been reached do not return to the streets, and improve their prospects. Efforts toward social rehabilitation and mental recovery are the initial steps in a long-term strategy. Children who previously lived on the streets are referred to rehabilitation programs through partner foundations or Social Welfare Institutions (LKS) in Ambon City. These rehabilitation programs focus on character development, restoring self-confidence, and strengthening social values, thereby enabling children to re-adapt to their families and communities. Social rehabilitation is considered essential for preparing children to participate in subsequent educational and training programs (Foust et al., 2019).

In addition to social rehabilitation, long-term strategies are realised through the provision of alternative education for street children who have dropped out of school. The Ambon City Social Affairs Office collaborates with the Education Office to facilitate children’s access to non-formal education programs, such as Packages A and C, which enable them to complete basic and secondary education. This alternative form of education plays a crucial role in breaking the cycle of social exclusion and expanding children’s future access to formal employment. This is emphasised by a Social Affairs Office official in the following interview: “We also cooperate with the Education Office to provide the opportunity to get packages A and C for children who are no longer in school, so that they have a foothold to later apply for jobs.”

Furthermore, long-term strategies include skills training and children’s empowerment. Children who have participated in coaching and rehabilitation programs are supported in participating in various skills training programs aligned with their interests and potential. These training sessions are conducted in collaboration with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and with programs organised by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Skill empowerment is considered a strategic approach to enhance children’s economic independence and reduce

their dependence on street activities. One informant stated, “In addition, we also cooperate with NGOs and the Ministry of Social Affairs. We have sent several children to participate in training programs from the Ministry of Social Affairs.”

Overall, these strategies reflect a shift from reactive handling to rehabilitative and empowering approaches. However, the effectiveness of these strategies greatly depends on program continuity, resource availability, and cross-sectoral support. Without strong institutional support and long-term commitment, the risk of children returning to the streets remains a serious challenge to the sustainable management of street children (Hariyanto et al., 2024; Oppong Asante, 2019).

### **Patterns of Approaches and Methods for Handling Street Children**

The handling of street children requires an approach that is not merely administrative or repressive but is based on an understanding of the child’s social, psychological, and cultural context. Banda et al. (2024) and Hariyanto et al. (2024) emphasise that effective handling of street children must be humanistic and participatory, taking into account the children's emotional aspects and social relationships. Repressive approaches, such as forced raids, tend to be unsustainable if not accompanied by psychosocial recovery and educational dialogue. In this context, the Ambon City Social Service Department endeavours to implement handling methods and approaches that prioritise the principles of child protection and humanity. However, in practice, gaps still exist between policy and implementation in the field.

#### **Child-Friendly Approach**

The child-friendly approach serves as the fundamental principle for handling street children by the Ambon City Social Service. This approach emphasises empathetic, non-violent, and persuasive interaction, giving children space to express their experiences and the conditions they face. Field officers are instructed to use polite language and avoid actions that may provoke fear or trauma. This approach is intended to ensure that children do not see the state as a threat but rather as a party that protects and accompanies them in their development. Social Service officials affirm this principle through the following statement: “We cannot just catch and send them home; there has to be a proper approach. We greet them, invite them to talk, and listen. Sometimes, they share many things, and from there, we know which approach is suitable for them. We also often engage with foundations and, on several occasions, have provided counselling and outreach to the community and academia, including on university campuses. Most importantly, we also approach the parents.” This statement indicates that, normatively, the Social Service recognises the importance of dialogue and empathy-based approaches in addressing street children.

#### **Family and Social Environment Approach**

In addition to focusing on the child, the Ambon City Social Services Department implements a family- and community-based approach. This approach involves returning the child home while also providing brief education and counselling to parents or guardians on the family's role in preventing the child from returning to the streets. The family is positioned as the primary environment shaping the sustainability of intervention outcomes, with weak supervision and family resilience often driving children onto the streets. However, this approach often encounters obstacles when parents are uncooperative or refuse to take responsibility for their child's condition, resulting in limited effectiveness of reintegration and an increased risk of the child returning to the streets.

### **Collaborative and Participatory Approach**

Another approach implemented is a collaborative, participatory model involving various actors outside the Social Services Office, such as teachers, healthcare workers, foundations, and NGOs that have established relationships with street children. The involvement of these actors aims to broaden the scope of intervention while increasing children's trust in the intervention process. The collaborative approach also aims to integrate aspects of education, healthcare, and social guidance.

### **Advocacy and Social Education Methods**

Advocacy and social education methods are implemented through counselling street children, their families, and the general public. This education aims to raise awareness about the importance of education, the dangers of child exploitation, and the rights of children that must be protected. In addition, educating the public is intended to reduce the practice of giving money directly to street children, which reinforces their dependence on street life.

### **The Gap between the Ideal Approach and Field Practice**

Although the Ambon City Social Service has normatively formulated child-friendly approaches and humane handling methods, the reality on the ground does not always reflect these principles. Several street children reported experiencing harsh treatment during enforcement, which contradicts the institution's claim of a persuasive approach. The following testimonies from the children reveal traumatic experiences in practice: "They caught us, then shaved our heads bald, and then beat us. After that, we were given food and a change of clothes and sent home, he said. Some were taken all the way home, while others were left to make their way home on their own. However, none ever asked us to learn." "If we see the Civil Service Police Unit or the cars they usually use for enforcement, we run away immediately. Sometimes, they get angry, and some even grab us roughly. We feel very scared." These testimonies indicate the potential for handling practices that do not comply with child protection protocols, whether due to limited human resources, lack of officer training, or weak internal supervision. This situation risks exacerbating children's trauma and eroding their trust in state institutions.

### **Evaluation and Follow-up of Strategies for Handling Street Children**

Evaluation is an integral component of the strategy for addressing the issues faced by street children. The Ambon City Social Service conducts routine monitoring two to three times a week and holds internal evaluation meetings with field teams, social workers, and social welfare personnel. "Within a week, we will definitely conduct monitoring two to three times at the locations where street children gather to see whether they have returned to the streets. We evaluate every outreach or major activity. We gather with the field team, social workers, and welfare staff to discuss what worked, what did not work, and what needs to be changed. That is usually where new and more suitable approaches emerge." Evaluation also involves cross-sectoral partners and utilises public criticism conveyed via social media as material for reflection and policy improvement. "We receive some criticism from the public through social media, such as TikTok. We view it as input. We review it and then bring it to the internal meeting to improve it. If there are complaints about violence or children returning to the streets, we go down again for clarification." In general, the evaluations and follow-ups conducted demonstrate a reflective and adaptive effort by the Ambon City Social Service. However, ongoing monitoring and strengthening of institutional capacity are still needed so that children who have already been helped do not return to the streets and their rights are truly and sustainably protected.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that street children management in Ambon City is supported by a comprehensive legal and policy framework. However, the findings reveal a significant implementation gap between policy commitments to child protection and on-the-ground practices. Current interventions remain largely focused on short-term control measures, such as outreach patrols and returning children to their families, rather than on sustained social rehabilitation and prevention.

The study identifies several key barriers that limit the effectiveness of street children management. Internally, institutional constraints such as limited human resources, insufficient funding, and the absence of specialised case management reduce the Social Affairs Office's capacity to provide long-term support for vulnerable children. Externally, structural factors, including family poverty, weak parental supervision, and public practices that indirectly sustain street-based activities, contribute to the persistence of street children in public spaces.

The main scientific contribution of this research lies in demonstrating that the challenge of street children management in Ambon is not primarily a regulatory deficiency, but rather the mismatch between a child-rights-based policy framework and control-oriented implementation practices. These findings highlight the need for an integrated, child-rights-based social welfare approach that prioritises prevention, family strengthening, and sustainable rehabilitation.

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