

A call for change

New strategies are needed to address the plight of Tehran's working children



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Social Desk

Tehran, a bustling city with millions of inhabitants, is plagued by the presence of young children who can be seen standing at intersections and even in the middle of highways. With their heads bowed down, these children persistently approach car windows, offering to clean them or sell flowers and handkerchiefs. These innocent children are victims of exploitation, brought to the smoky streets of Tehran by gangs who employ tactics such as beatings, coercion, and deception. Growing up on the streets, these boys and girls are deprived of a normal childhood and the opportunity to lead a normal life.

Child labor on the streets of Tehran has become a critical and fundamental issue. These children engage in street businesses, either supported by criminal gangs or driven by family poverty. Despite the efforts of various institutions, 32 plans aimed at addressing the

organization of street children have failed. Consequently, the number of these children continues to rise, resulting in new forms of labor.

However, a new model has emerged, focusing on involving children's families with the support of the police and the judicial system. The aim is to dismantle the exploitative networks that profit from child labor while simultaneously improving the economic situation of these families.

According to the CEO of Tehran Municipality's Social Services Organization, the implementation of this project requires a holistic approach, considering all aspects in parallel. One crucial aspect is the role of citizens, who must be educated not to contribute to the street economy that thrives on child labor. Ahmad Ahmadi Sadr stresses the importance of culture and public persuasion for the success of the plan. By incorporating expert opinions and reviewing successful initiatives

proposed by activists and dedicated groups, Tehran Municipality aims to create a well-coordinated and comprehensive short-term, medium-term, and long-term plan of action.

In the short-term planning phase, the focus will be on organizing working children to bring about tangible changes in the city's landscape. Collaboration with other institutions will be key as the project progresses from one phase to the next. Ahmadi Sadr emphasizes the need to avoid repeating past failures, stating that the approach to organizing working children must be multidimensional and distinct from previous attempts. The new plan prioritizes a family-centered and morally guided approach. Recognizing that some children have families, it aims to reunite them with their kin, away from the perils of the streets. However, it also acknowledges that many families, driven by economic hardships, need to understand that the streets are not the place for

their children. The young ones on the streets face numerous dangers and challenges, hindering their personal growth and endangering their well-being. Ahmadi Sadr further emphasizes that assisting working children, though well-intentioned, perpetuates their predicament. People's discomfort with children approaching their cars at intersections and tapping on windows stems from a larger issue – child labor. To truly help these children, a comprehensive strategy must address those who exploit them.

"Dealing with the root causes and dissuading individuals from taking advantage of these vulnerable children is crucial," he said.

Regarding Tehran Municipality's plans, Ahmadi Sadr highlights that the chosen approach is not aggressive. Rather, it aims to create an organized structure in the streets and alleys. The objective is not to simply collect children off the streets but to foster a cultural shift within

society. By discouraging citizens from providing economic support to those at intersections, where working children are backed by powerful networks, the plan seeks to prevent the allure of street income from drawing more children, both from other cities and within Tehran.

"Public cooperation will be vital in ensuring that these children are not left exposed to further harm," he said.

The plight of working children in Tehran demands urgent attention and action. By implementing a well-rounded plan that addresses the root causes and involves various stakeholders, Tehran Municipality aims to bring about lasting change.

"It is time to transform the streets of Tehran into safe spaces, where children can grow, learn, and thrive, free from exploitation and the burdens of an adult world."

Ahmadi Sadr further highlights the importance of providing attractive platforms for these

children. Free cultural, sports and recreational services are being implemented to occupy their time and divert them from the streets. Additionally, talent identification centers have been established to recognize the potential of these children.

Ahmadi Sadr emphasizes that the success of this plan depends on the collective effort of Tehran's residents. If people cooperate by refraining from buying flowers or sympathizing with working children at intersections, the presence of these children on the streets will decrease. However, if any aspect of the plan falters, there is a risk of a resurgence in the number of working children.

He acknowledges that solving social problems cannot be achieved overnight. The implementation of the plan is just the first step towards reducing the presence of working children on the streets. Over time, the goal is to create a public culture where child labor on the streets becomes obsolete.

Feeding stray dogs kiss of death for environment

Social Desk

Numerous videos circulating on the internet went viral last week, depicting the herding of stray dogs in Iran's capital city of Tehran and Karaj in Alborz Province. While some confirmed the authenticity of these videos, others denied them, stating that they have been circulating for the past six months and are not new. However, the focus should not solely be on the age of the videos; rather, the significant increase in the number of stray dogs is the main concern.

Various opinions have emerged

regarding how to address the issue. Some suggest sterilizing stray dogs as a solution. There is also a group of users who argue that these dogs should be treated similarly to owned pets. However, regardless of the differing narratives, it is clear that extremes exist. On one hand, there is an exaggeration caused by individuals who excessively feed stray dogs, seemingly out of love for the environment. On the other hand, there is an issue of mismanagement and a lack of planning, leading to mistreatment of these animals. So, what is the solution? In recent times, some individu-

als, driven by a strong love for the environment but lacking knowledge about wildlife cycles, have taken actions that have adverse effects. These actions not only fail to preserve the environment and wildlife but also cause harm.

Exploitation by fraudsters targeting environmentalists has also come to light. These individuals take advantage of the empathy of wildlife enthusiasts, requesting help by sharing bank account numbers and even providing false evidence of their actions through purchases and videos of feeding stray dogs. It is worth noting that only a

fraction of the received funds is spent. In one example, a gang member intentionally injured an animal, claiming that it needed treatment and soliciting assistance from citizens.

While dogs have been domesticated by humans over time, the uncontrolled roaming of stray dogs, often carrying dangerous diseases, is not accepted anywhere in the world and poses its risks. Even international organizations have been seeking assistance from the public to find a logical and permanent solution to this problem. Dogs, like any other living creatures, require food, but how feeding is carried out is crucial. Some individuals feed stray dogs at any time and place, which increases the risk of dogs being present everywhere.

The crisis of the increasing population of stray dogs is becoming more problematic for humans, animals, and the environment. Unfortunately, there is a lack of organized laws to address this crisis, and the absence of relevant and practical training to deal with stray dogs is acutely felt. Managing stray dogs requires the coordination and cooperation of all public and social organizations and institutions.

Feeding stray dogs, and even cats, has become a means of providing them with suste-



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nance. Consequently, these animals approach anyone holding a plastic shopping bag, assuming they are potential feeders. However, animals, following their instincts, should search for food and hunt, and the act of human feeding significantly reduces their mobility.

The problems arising from the increase of stray dogs are numerous. The interbreeding of stray dogs with wolves in the wild results in the creation of wolfdogs. These animals often possess characteristics of both dogs and wolves, inheriting the ferocity of wolves and lacking the fear of humans typically seen in dogs. In recent years, the interbreeding of stray dogs with wolves has caused a rise in these animals. Unlike wolves, they live in proximity to cities and humans, frequently attacking humans and other environmental animals such as sheep, causing significant harm.

While dogs are known for their ability to consume almost anything placed in front of them, wolfdogs are primarily carni-

vores. Driven by hunger, they are drawn to human habitats, displaying their feral nature. Their high birth rate has led to a rapid increase in their population in Iran since wolfdogs can give birth to up to 16 cubs per pregnancy.

Apart from the economic losses inflicted on humans, wolfdogs compete with other carnivores such as cheetahs, caracals, and leopards, disrupting the ecological balance at the top of the food pyramid.

It is evident that illegal groups, utilizing false arguments, hinder the implementation of measures to manage the population of stray dogs. Taking steps to regulate these dogs without considering their actions can lead to a vicious cycle. Therefore, the initial step should involve increasing awareness among all citizens to aid wildlife rather than exacerbating the crisis. A well-thought-out solution should be devised, and relevant authorities should learn from successful international approaches in this field.

