

Child Rights and The *Talibé* System: A Senegalese Perspective

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Abbreviations	Full terms
ACERWC	African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.
ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.
AEMO	Action Éducative en Milieu Ouvert
CDPE	Departmental Committees for Child Protection
CFA	West African CFA franc
CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
ECOI	European Country of Origin Information Network
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ILO	International Labour Organisation
JED	Jeunesse et Développement
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
PADEM	Programme d'Aide et de Développement destiné aux Enfants du Monde
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USD	United States Dollar

INTRODUCTION

1. HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

The *talibé* system does not exist in isolation. Across **Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Mali**, a remarkably coherent cultural, religious, and socioeconomic logic highlights the practice of sending boys to residential **Quranic schools**, known as *daara*. The common thread lies in Islam, specifically West African **Sufi Islam**, with its structures of religious authority, communal charity, and **educational tradition**, combined with the contextual **landscape of poverty**, rural **migration**, and cultural norms of child-bearing. Understanding this shared pattern is essential to any meaningful engagement with the **human rights dimensions** of the system.

1.1 Why Families Send Their Children: Causes and Motivations

The decision to send a child to *daara* is rarely reducible to a single cause. Across all four countries, there are overlapping religious, cultural, and economic motivations that together produce and sustain the practice.

For the majority of families, the primary driver is religious obligation. Learning the Quran is regarded as a moral duty, and entrusting a child to a *marabout* (Quranic teacher) is perceived as securing spiritual benefit for the child and honour for the family. Human Rights Watch (HRW) has documented that sending children to traditional Quranic boarding schools remains a strong cultural tradition across West Africa, where Quranic schools have been a key symbol of Muslim identity since at least the fourteenth century (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

Anthropological research by Donna Perry confirms that religious and moral considerations consistently outweigh economic ones in parental decision-making (Perry, 2004). Parents interviewed explicitly denied that poverty was the reason they sent their children away, and instead emphasised that the *marabout* would introduce the moral discipline and resilience necessary for adult life (Perry, 2004).

This is aggravated by the widespread West African tradition of *confiage*, the practice of entrusting a child to another adult, typically a relative or respected figure, to provide education and opportunities unavailable at home. The *marabout* is seen not merely as a teacher but as a surrogate parent capable of transmitting religious knowledge and character. Imam Mouhamed Chérif Diop, a program coordinator at the Senegalese non-governmental organisation (NGO) Tostan, explains that parents often justify sending their children to

marabouts on the assumption that parental affection may hinder proper discipline and education, leading them to entrust their children to religious teachers instead (PBS NewsHour, 2014). For families in Guinea-Bissau, where UNICEF currently estimates that approximately one-third of children at a school-going age remain outside the formal education system due to insufficient infrastructure, poverty, and a shortage of trained teachers. Quranic schools across the border in Senegal have long represented one of the few accessible forms of education (UNICEF, n.d.).

The United States (US) State Department's 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report confirms that traffickers exploit the *confiage* tradition and economic vulnerability simultaneously, and that families across Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Mali are targeted on the pretext of providing religious education (ECOI, 2025). In Matam, located in northern Senegal, 45 percent of families live in poverty, and the lack of nearby schools, unregistered birth, and economic alternatives makes *daara* the path of least resistance (PADEM, n.d.).

1.2 The Traditional Role of *Daaras* in Islamic Education

Daaras in Wolof, also called *dudal* in Fula, are among the oldest educational institutions in West Africa. Islam arrived in the Senegambia region during the eleventh century through trans-Saharan trade, and the *daara* quickly became the primary driver for its expansion. Historian Rudolph T. Ware III traces over a thousand years of this tradition, demonstrating how Quranic schooling shaped entire societies, peacefully embedding Islam across ethnic lines and becoming a central symbol of Muslim identity (Ware III, 2014).

The educational purpose of the *daara* centres on the complete memorisation of the Quran and the moral formation of the student. Teaching follows a structured timetable across multiple daily sessions (typically 5-7 AM, 9 AM-12 PM, 3-5 PM, and 9-11 PM), using *lawh*, wooden boards on which Quranic verses are written in charcoal ink, memorised, and then washed clean to begin again (Chehami and Dia, 2016). The curriculum rarely extends to Arabic comprehension, focusing instead on oral recitation and “character formation”. As economists Pierre André and Jean-Luc Demonsant note, the ultimate aim of the traditional *daara* is not academic but spiritual, “to prepare the student to become a good Muslim”, with obedience, respect, and submission as its core values (André and Demonsant, 2013).

Children typically live in the *daara* for between five and ten years. The scale of the system is enormous. By 2017, 22,000 *daaras* accommodated nearly two million learners nationwide, a number covering all Quranic students, not only those pushed to beg (Hanafi et al., 2025). In 2022, Amnesty International estimated that Dakar alone contained more than 2,000 *daaras*, housing nearly 200,000 *talibés* (Amnesty International, 2022).

1.3 The Character of the *Marabout*

Central to the *daara* system, and to West African Islam more broadly, is the *marabout*. Simultaneously Quranic teacher, spiritual guide, healer, and community authority, the *marabout* exercises an influence that extends far beyond the classroom. His authority lies on the concept of *baraka*, divine blessing, which he is believed to transmit to his students. His authority is given not by formal qualification but by popular recognition: a *marabout* is a *marabout* because the community accepts him as such (Villalon, 1995).

The *marabout's* social position is inseparable from the Sufi brotherhoods that dominate West African Islam. Over 90 percent of the population across the Senegambia region is Muslim, and the majority practises Sufism. The two most influential orders are the Tijaniyya, the largest, centred in Tivaouane and accounting for approximately half of Senegalese Muslims, and the Mouridiyya, founded in 1883 by Shaykh Ahmadou Bamba and centred in the holy city of Touba. Bamba's teaching placed spiritual progression through devotion, learning, and labour at the heart of discipline (Diallo, 2007). The *marabout-talibé* relationship is, in its original conception, one of spiritual guidance in exchange for faithful obedience.

This religious authority carries significant political weight. Several Senegalese governments have depended on *marabouts* for political stability, making meaningful regulation of their politically delicate educational institutions. Amnesty International noted in 2022 that many Quranic teachers view legislative reform as an anti-Islamic attack and have actively lobbied against the adoption of a *daara* regulatory framework, a dynamic that also holds across The Gambia and Mali (Amnesty International, 2022).

1.4 The Historical Tradition of Alms-Seeking: From Spiritual Discipline to Exploitation

The practice of *talibé* children begging, known in Wolof as *njàngaan*, has a long historical heritage rooted in Islamic spirituality. Traditionally, alms-seeking was a minor and communal practice, where children would collect food from neighbouring households as an exercise in humility and empathy, reflecting the Islamic obligations of *zakat*, obligatory charity, and *sadaqa*, voluntary giving. In rural settings, with the *daara* embedded in its home community, begging involved little hardship, and families remained in close contact with their children. The Senegalese NGO Maison de la Gare documents that in traditional settings “*all talibés, regardless of family wealth, engaged in some form of begging, not to enrich the marabout, but to teach humility*” (Maison de la Gare, n.d.).

The transformation of alms-seeking into systematic economic exploitation is largely a product of urbanisation and the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s that drove *marabouts* to relocate from rural to urban areas. In cities, the original communal and spiritual character of begging gave way to monetised quotas enforced through coercion. HRW's foundational 2010

report documented this shift clearly: “*While the traditional daara placed primary focus on mastering the Quran, the contemporary urban residential daara often focuses on maximising the marabout's wealth*” (Human Rights Watch, 2010).

The scale of this exploitation is extensively documented. HRW found that by 2010 at least 50,000 children were forced to beg in Senegal alone (Human Rights Watch, 2010) and by 2018, the estimate increased to over 100,000, with the Human Rights stressing that this figure covered only children compelled to beg, not the millions more in Quranic schools without forced begging (Human Rights Watch, 2019). In 2018, approximately 183,835 *talibé* children in the Dakar region alone, of whom nearly 28,000, approximately one in four, were engaged in forced begging (Amnesty International, 2022). The 2025 US Trafficking in Persons Report reaffirms that tens of thousands of children in residential *daaras* across Senegal continue to be pushed to beg, noting that forced begging child-trafficking networks, particularly from Guinea-Bissau, have become more sophisticated in recent years and now take on the character of an established criminal network ((ECOI, 2025).

Daily quotas imposed by *marabouts* are likewise well documented. HRW’s 2010 survey of 175 *talibés* found an average daily quota of 373 CFA francs (approximately USD 0.87), rising on Fridays (Human Rights Watch, 2010). By 2018, HRW interviews recorded quotas ranging from 100 to 1,250 CFA francs (USD 0.20-2.20) per child per day, with some children as young as six required to produce 2,000 CFA daily (Human Rights Watch, 2019). In addition to money, *marabouts* routinely demand daily quotas of uncooked rice and sugar, which they sell for profit. Approximately 43 percent of *daara* teachers believe begging teaches children humility, yet 64 percent of *talibés* under the age of 12 are sent to beg, rising to 85 percent among those aged 13 to 17, and four in ten *talibés* reported exposure to violence, abuse, and exploitation (Podieh, 2024). Children who fail to meet these demands face severe punishment, with HRW documenting 43 cases in 2017 to 2018 alone in which *talibés* were beaten for returning without the required sum, using electric cables, wooden boards, ropes, and canes (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Some children were chained or confined. Anti-Slavery International confirmed that in some countries the daily begging period averages five to nine hours, entirely displacing any meaningful Quranic instruction (Anti-Slavery International, 2011; 2020).

Physical conditions in many urban *daaras* reinforce the gravity of these findings. HRW has documented 30 children sleeping in a small room in extreme heat, living in unfinished concrete structures with no doors, windows, sanitation, or running water, and surrounded by open sewage and household refuse (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Food insecurity is common, with children routinely sent to beg for their own meals. Thirteen of the *daaras* HRW visited in 2017 and 2018 provided little to no food to the children in their care. Medical neglect is equally systemic, with Amnesty International confirming that skin diseases and untreated abscesses are common (Amnesty International, 2022). Between 2017 and 2018 alone, HRW recorded 16 *talibé* deaths attributable to abuse, neglect, or endangerment, including three from beatings, four from fires in locked *daaras*, and five from traffic accidents while begging on busy roads (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Taken together, the religious and cultural motivations of families, the deep-rooted educational tradition of the *daara*, the spiritual authority of the *marabout*, and the historical evolution of *alms-seeking*, form a coherent system whose positive original dimensions have been exploited and distorted in ways that inflict serious and systematic harm on children.

2. HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

The situation of *talibé* children involves multiple serious violations of international human rights law. Senegal has ratified the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), and International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which means the state is legally required to protect children from abuse, child labour, exploitation, and neglect. However, the conditions in many *daaras* show that these obligations are not being met.

2.1 Right to Education

The CRC and ACRWC contain provisions requiring states to ensure that education leads to the full development of the child. Senegal has the obligation to provide free and compulsory basic education without any discrimination (CRC, Art. 29). The responsibility of a state in realising the right to education entails a responsibility on the state to protect children's rights to education from being violated by third parties.

The Committee of the CRC has stated that education should be designed to empower the child by developing his or her skills, learning, and other capacities, human dignity, self-esteem, and self-confidence (CRC Committee, General Comment No. 1, 2001). However, none of the practices highlighted in this report upholds these standards. *Talibé* children are excluded from the formal education system, and many spend their day begging for money or food instead of receiving a meaningful education (Save the Children 2003). In addition, many *daaras* lack trained teachers, structured curriculum, or a safe learning environment. As a result, these children are effectively denied access to education altogether.

As a Muslim-majority country, Senegal places significant value on Islamic education, and many families prefer to send their children to *daaras* rather than to formal public schools. However, even within the broader Islamic community, the right to education is strongly protected. The 2020 Organisation of Islamic Cooperation Declaration on Human Rights affirms that every child has the right to accessible, quality education that promotes personal development, dignity, and the full growth of their abilities (OIC 2021).

2.2 Right to Health

The issue of unsanitary conditions in many *daaras* and the lack of interest in the well-being of the children shown by some Quranic teachers results in severe malnutrition and health problems (Human Rights Watch 219). All children have the right to health in line with international human rights law.

Under international human rights law, all children have the right to the highest attainable standard of health. This right is firmly protected under CRC Article 24, ACRWC Article 14, and ICESCR Article 12, all of which require states to ensure access to healthcare services, adequate nutrition, clean water, safe living conditions, and protection from practices that endanger children's physical and mental health. These provisions also oblige states to ensure that no child is deprived of essential health services, including treatment for disease and support for recovery. Senegal, therefore, has a clear duty to prevent children from being placed in harmful or unhealthy conditions and to intervene when such conditions arise.

State parties to the CRC are also required to take all effective and appropriate measures to eliminate traditional or customary practices that are harmful to the health of children (article 24 (3)). In this context, the practice of providing *talibé* children with little to no food, combined with systemic medical neglect that exposes them to illness and disease, constitutes a clear violation of Senegal's duty to guarantee access to healthcare services, adequate nutrition, clean water, safe living conditions, and protection from practices that endanger children's well-being.

2.3 Protection from Economic Exploitation & Child Labour

Under international human rights law, children must be protected from economic exploitation and from any form of work that endangers their education, health, or development. CRC Article 32(2) explicitly prohibits hazardous or harmful labour and requires states to adopt legislative, administrative, social, and educational measures to enforce this protection. This includes establishing a minimum age for employment, regulating working conditions and hours, and imposing penalties to ensure compliance.

This obligation is reinforced by Article 15 of ACRWC, which requires states to take effective measures both in the formal and informal sectors to shield children from all forms of economic exploitation and from work that threatens their physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

Additionally, the ILO Convention under Article 1 requires states to take immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour (ILO No. 182, 1999). Under Article 3, the Convention defines the worst form of child labour to include all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, including forced or compulsory labour. It also includes the exploitation of children in illicit activities and work

that, by its nature or the conditions under which it is performed, is likely to harm their health, safety or moral development. The documented treatment of *talibé* children in Senegal clearly falls within this definition.

The Minimum Age Convention No. 138 requires ratifying states to adopt a national policy aimed at the effective abolition of child labour and to establish a minimum age for admission to employment of no less than 15 years (ILO 2024). Senegal has complied with this obligation by setting the minimum working age at 15 under its domestic legislation (U.S. Department of Labour 2024).

There is no legitimate justification for children as young as six to be engaged in forced begging. The imposition of daily begging quotas, the requirement to spend long hours in traffic, and the use of physical punishment for failing to meet these demands clearly show that *talibé* children are being exploited as a source of income rather than receiving education or care. These practices endanger their health and safety, and the severe punishments, confinement, and coercion used to enforce compliance reflect conditions “similar to slavery”, reinforcing the classification of forced begging as a worst form of child labour.

2.4 Protection from Violence, Abuse, and Neglect

Article 19 CRC states that Senegal, as a state party, shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury, or abuse, neglect, or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of any person who has the care of the child. Violence does not need to be specifically inflicted on the child; the mere exposure to violence can invoke Article 19. The CRC recognises that the responsibility for the protection of children from violence falls upon the state, not only the caregivers or parents (Mesthrie, 2025). CRC Article 19(2) further requires states to adopt protective measures that include the establishment of social programmes to support children, as well as the creation of effective procedures for the prevention, identification, reporting, referral, investigation, and follow-up of cases of child maltreatment.

The UN Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (2010), which apply to all UN member states, including Senegal, sets out authoritative standards for the protection of children living in residential or institutional settings (SOS Children’s Villages International 2010). Alternative care under the guidelines is defined as formal and informal arrangements in which children live outside their family environment, as well as any non-family-based group setting where children reside under adult supervision. *Daaras*, where *talibé* children live under the authority of a *marabout*, meet these criteria and therefore constitute a form of residential alternative care (SOS Children’s Villages International 2010). Under the guidelines, Senegal is required to regulate, license, inspect, and monitor all residential care facilities to ensure children’s safety and well-being. However, the living conditions documented in many *daaras*, such as children sleeping in a single small room in extreme heat, unfinished concrete structures without doors or windows, the absence of sanitation or

running water, and exposure to open sewage, show that authorities have failed to carry out the required inspections and oversight, allowing *talibé* children to remain in environments that violate minimum international standards for residential care.

Highlighted in the previous section, another form of exploitation is of children being struck with electric cables, wooden boards, ropes, and canes, alongside documented deaths from beatings, fires in locked *daaras*, and traffic accidents, illustrating the gravity of the abuse in the *talibé* children's daily lives. It also demonstrates that the required protection mechanisms are either absent or ineffective. Combined with the widespread nature of the exploitation and neglect documented in *daaras*, it is evident that *talibé* children are being left far outside the protective framework that international human rights law requires states to uphold.

2.5 Protection Under Domestic law

In 2012, the Centre for Human Rights, jointly with *La Rencontre Africaine pour la Defense des Droits de l'Homme*, submitted a communication to the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC 2012) on the matter of *talibé*. The communication alleged multiple violations of the African Charter and the ACERWC, focusing particularly on the widespread practices of forced begging, physical abuse and exploitation within the *daaras*. The communication argued that Senegal had failed to prevent these abuses, failed to regulate and monitor *daaras*, and failed to protect *talibé* children from conditions that endangered their health, dignity, and development.

The committee found Senegal accountable for the activities of the *daaras*, even though many of them were non-state entities (Social protection and human rights, 2014). It reasoned that Senegal had an obligation to protect the rights of the child, which requires measures by the state to ensure that third parties do not deprive children of their rights. The committee noted that even though Senegal has outlawed the practice of forced begging under its domestic law, the state had not taken any measures against these schools. After Senegal was found in violation of numerous provisions of both the African Charter and the ACERWC, it was recommended to arrange for all *talibés* to be immediately taken back from the streets to their families. Organise medical and social assistance for the *talibés*, ensure that all *daaras* meet basic human rights standards relating to health, education, and accommodation and provide free and compulsory basic education.

According to HRW, there has been a slow but steady positive trend towards increased enforcement of the law against abusive Quranic teachers, but the government's efforts fall short (Human Rights Watch 219). Meaningful enforcement of laws protecting *talibé* children remains severely constrained. Governments' initiatives were often short-term, limited geographically to Dakar, and failed to address the underlying drivers of forced begging and abuse. Crucially, they rarely incorporated investigations or prosecutions of the *marabouts* responsible, allowing abusive practices to continue with little consequence (Human Rights Watch 219). Child protection services remain critically under-resourced, with limited shelter capacity, insufficient staffing, and almost no specialised police units outside Dakar. Social workers often lack the means to remove children from abusive environments or to report

cases effectively (Human Rights Watch 219). At the same time, police and judicial authorities frequently fail to investigate complaints or pursue charges, and when cases do reach court, prosecutors and judges are often subject to community and political pressure to drop or reduce charges. As a result, the overall impact remains limited.

Since then, Senegal has taken moderate steps to tackle these issues. According to the United States Department of Labour 2024 Report, Senegal incorporated 1,127 *daaras* into the national education system and allocated \$9.49 million to modernise more than 12,000 *daaras*, increasing the government's ability to address issues of forced begging. Senegal also launched the national Framework Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of Child Labour, which aims to eradicate child labour in the country by 2030 (U.S. Department of Labour 2024).

3. CASE STUDY: SENEGAL

3.1 The *Talibé* system in Senegal

Although the *talibé* system is a well-documented issue in Senegal, the exact number of children forced to beg is challenging to determine (Amnesty International, 2022). In 2022, estimates suggested there were more than 2,000 *daaras* in Dakar and nearly 200,000 *talibés* (Amnesty International, 2022). 25% of these are estimated to be forced to beg according to research conducted in 2018 (Amnesty International, 2022). Quranic schools are found across all of Senegal's regions, but there is little data on the condition and number of schools outside of Dakar (Anti-Slavery International, 2019).

Most *talibé* children originate from rural areas of Senegal or are trafficked from neighbouring countries such as Mali and Guinea-Bissau (Anti-Slavery International, 2019). *Daaras* do not form part of the formal education system in Senegal, but many parents send their children to these schools due to their inability to afford other forms of education (Anti-Slavery International, 2019). Equally, some parents are motivated by the desire for their children to receive a religious education, which is not possible in the state school system (Podieh, 2024). The vast majority of *talibés* in Senegal are boys aged between five and 15 (Anti-Slavery International, 2019).

The practice of forced begging for *talibés* in Senegal is frequently visible: young boys are often seen on the streets holding plastic begging bowls or food cans to collect coins, rice, sugar, and anything they receive while begging (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Many of these children are shoeless and poorly dressed, often with visible illness (Human Rights Watch, 2017). *Talibé* children are often found together in large groups on the streets as children from the same *daaras* often beg together (Human Rights Watch, 2017). According to UN estimates, forced begging generates an estimated \$8 million per year for Quranic teachers in Dakar (Reuters, 2017).

As well as long hours spent on the streets, conditions in Senegal's *daaras* are usually poor, exposing children to disease and health risks (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Buildings which house *daaras* are often unfinished and lack water, sanitation, electricity, or security (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Children also face harsh treatment from their teachers, who often beat them brutally if they fail to return from begging with enough money (Human Rights Watch, 2022). A study by HRW found that 16 children died in 2017 and 2018 from abuse, including beatings and untreated illness (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Some children in *daaras* in Senegal are also subject to sexual abuse (Anti-Slavery International, 2019). Many attempt to escape due to the abuse, often ending up homeless on the streets (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Those whose escape attempts are unsuccessful face punishment and are often tied up at the *daara* as a result (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

In addition to childhood exploitation, disease, and malnutrition, those ensnared in the *talibé* system face lasting repercussions throughout their adult life. The inadequate education standards in *daaras* mean that many children remain illiterate, which severely restricts their future prospects (Asha-Kiran, N.D.). This results in many survivors of the system following high risk migration routes as an attempt to escape marginalisation in Senegal (Asha-Kiran, N.D.).

In recent decades, the *talibé* system has caused tragedy in Senegal. In March 2013 nine children locked in a *daara* died after a fire tore through the building in Dakar (Macleod, 2023). Subsequent fires in *daaras* have often proved fatal due to the lack of free movement for children: *talibés'* feet are often chained and their rooms are often secured with mesh or bars on windows (Human Rights Watch, 2022). More recently, investigations uncovered that an international paedophile ring had targeted young *talibés*, who were favoured for their vulnerable and precarious circumstances (GEO, 2026). These children were subjected to appalling sexual abuse, which was sometimes filmed (GEO, 2026).

3.2 Attempts to reform the *Talibé* system in Senegal

The Senegalese government has taken concrete steps to address the exploitative practices inherent to the *talibé* system. In 2005, it adopted the Law to Combat Human Trafficking and Related Practices and on Victim Protection (Loi n° 2005–06 du 10 mai 2005 relatif à la lutte contre la traite des personnes et pratiques assimilées et à la protection des victimes) (Amnesty International, 2022). This criminalised those who organise begging “with a view to profiting therefrom” (Amnesty International, 2022). As well as these measures, Senegal has also ratified a number of international and regional conventions protecting children's rights, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Amnesty International, 2022).

In 2013, the government launched a programme attempting to modernise *daaras* by creating modern, new *daaras* and reforming old, traditional ones (Amnesty International, 2022). This project is named the “*Daara* Modernization Support Project” (Projet d'appui à la modernisation des *daaras*, PAMOD) (Human Rights Watch, 2019). This has sought to

improve living conditions, cover healthcare, and require that children in *daaras* are also educated on literacy and numeracy (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Between 2016 and 2018, the Senegalese government's "Removal of Children from the Street" project attempted to tackle the issue of forced begging amongst *talibés* in Dakar (Macleod(a), 2023). This project was enacted in two phases. During the first phase, the government used police cars to transport children away from the street (Macleod(a), 2023). *Talibés* were then returned to their original *daaras* (Macleod(a), 2023). Following criticisms of this practice, the second phase entailed the rescuing of children found begging in an unmarked car, accompanied by social workers, and taken to a state-led residential centre for processing (Macleod(a), 2023). After processing, the *talibés* were taken to *daaras* that had received approval from the state (Macleod(a), 2023).

Between the first and second phases of the project, the Senegalese police and Interpol launched an anti-trafficking operation in Dakar in 2017 (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The two-day operation picked up 54 children from the streets and arrested seven individuals, including five Quranic teachers (Human Rights Watch, 2019). These individuals were subsequently prosecuted for exploiting children through forced begging (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

There has been some successful regulation of *daaras* on a local level. In 2016, municipal by-laws banned begging within the municipalities of Medina and Gueule Tapée-Fasse-Colobane in Dakar (Human Rights Watch, 2019). This resulted in the closure of several *daaras* that failed to meet standards (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Where investigations have found *daaras* to be unsafe or unsanitary, the authorities have ordered building owners that they had 30 days to make improvements, or they would face sanctions (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Besides attempts at domestic regulation, international attention has been given to the issue, including by the ACERWC. In a landmark 2015 ruling, the Committee found that the Senegalese government was violating the rights of *talibé* children under the ACRWC (Anti-Slavery International, 2015). This included violations of Article 4 (best interests of the child), Article 5 (the right to survival and development), and Article 11 (the right to education) (Anti-Slavery International, 2015).

3.3 Implementation Gap

Despite these attempts at reform and the introduction of stringent legal measures, the practices and exploitation persist. In part, this reflects poor implementation and enforcement of legal measures. There has been only one attempt to implement the Law to Combat Human Trafficking, which occurred in 2010 under the Wade government (Macleod(a), 2023). This attempt, which included the arrest of several teachers, faced backlash and Quranic teachers received widespread support from religious leaders and the Senegalese population more broadly (Macleod(a), 2023). The government also faced political pressure as the Quranic

Teachers' Associations threatened to withdraw support from Wade in the then upcoming elections (Mbaye, 2010). This resulted in the government releasing the arrested teachers and renouncing the policy, citing spurious claims that banning begging contradicted Senegal's tradition of collecting alms (Anti-Slavery, 2011).

Projects to "modernise" *daaras* have also stalled and had limited positive effect. Although at least half of the planned modern *daaras* had been built by 2019, none of these were operational at that time (Human Rights Watch, 2019). This project was also limited in scope geographically, minimising its potential to address the *talibé* system as a systemic issue across Senegal (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Other issues include the lack of inclusion of the Ministry of Justice in this programme, which hinders the closure of *daaras* that are exploitative (Anti-Slavery International, 2019).

Likewise, the "Removal of Children from the Street" project (*le retrait des enfants de la rue*) has been widely criticised by NGO staff and state officials and is seen as ineffective (Macleod(a), 2023). The project was limited to Dakar, despite the fact that forced begging is an issue across the whole of Senegal (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Not only this, but observations from child protection activists suggest there was no overall reduction in the number of *talibés* established in Dakar since the beginning of the project (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

The project's limited effect was largely a result of design flaws and operational weaknesses. Crucially, there was minimal collaboration with NGOs who had relevant expertise, as well as between state departments (Macleod(a), 2023). For example, key parts of the justice system were not involved in the project, resulting in no judicial investigation of the crimes and violations associated with forced begging (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Practical challenges included a lack of vehicles available to transport children that the government aimed to collect, as well as inadequate resources to accommodate these children once they were removed from the street (Macleod(a), 2023). Social workers also criticised the use of force by police when collecting children from the streets (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Not only this, but criticisms have also been levelled at the project's failure to prevent repeat offences. Notably, government officials had no power to sanction Quranic teachers, which meant that the project failed to prevent these teachers from continuing their exploitative practices (Macleod(a), 2023). Furthermore, the government failed to monitor and collect statistics on the number of children rescued who then returned to the streets after the government's intervention (Macleod(a), 2023). This means that the efficacy of the project in curtailing forced begging for *talibés* is questionable. There were similar issues with the 2017 anti-trafficking operation: many of the children who were rescued by the authorities ended up back on the streets begging (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Critically, the stark reaction among *marabouts* to previous attempts at legislative change impacted the government's stance on addressing violations perpetrated by religious leaders (Macleod(a), 2023). This resulted in the government's decision not to pursue sanctions against religious leaders and to focus blame on the parents of *talibés* instead (Macleod(a), 2023).

The result of these weaknesses in attempts to address the *talibé* system is that it persists and continues to face minimal regulation, despite clear awareness of the need for reform. Although such a practice, which is both deep-rooted and closely connected with religious groups, is challenging to reform, attempts made so far have largely failed to understand the root causes of the issue and the key harms suffered by children (Macleod(a), 2023). Consequently, too many children in Senegal face threats to their health, life, and basic rights with long-reaching effects into adulthood.

4. ROLE OF NGOS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The role of NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) on the *talibé* in Senegal is twofold: on the one hand, they provide an immediate safety net for *talibé* children who are victims of exploitation and abuse; on the other, they exert constant pressure to bring national legislation into line with international conventions, such as the UN CRC.

4.1 International Organisations and Legislative Change

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)'s work in Senegal forms the cornerstone of a multi-faceted strategy aimed at bringing the phenomenon of *talibé* children within a framework of legality and the protection of fundamental rights. The UN agency acts as a catalyst for structural reforms, working in close synergy with the government in Dakar to bridge the gap between international conventions and the reality of the *daaras*, through rigorous legislative and technical support.

The aim is not to dismantle a deeply rooted traditional educational institution, but rather to evolve it towards the model of so-called “Model *Daaras*”: monitored facilities based on daytime lessons, which integrate religious education with basic skills such as literacy and numeracy, categorically banning corporal punishment and economic exploitation. In terms of immediate protection, UNICEF has introduced a significant element of technological innovation into the monitoring of abuse, such as the mobile platform *RapidPro*, a real-time reporting system, transforming the social perception of violence against children from a private matter into a monitorable public order issue. This data-driven approach is also reflected in the commitment to birth registration: the organisation is working to address the legal invisibility of thousands of undocumented *talibé*, a situation that represents the first insurmountable obstacle to accessing healthcare, justice and any path to active citizenship.

Through technical support to the Departmental Committees for Child Protection (CDPE), the agency ensures that removing children from the streets is not a purely repressive or temporary measure. On the contrary, in collaboration with strategic partners such as the NGO La Lumière, a holistic approach is prioritised, including family mediation and psychosocial support. The ultimate aim remains the safe return of minors to their communities of origin, supported by capacity-building at the local level, involving magistrates, police forces and social workers, so that the protection system is able to prevent children from returning to

urban areas and to ensure decent sanitary conditions within the remaining educational facilities.

HRW, on the other hand, plays a role of critical monitoring and external political pressure, acting as a true international civil conscience. Through field investigations, based on multi-year research missions and hundreds of direct interviews, HRW made it possible to map not only physical abuse and forced begging, but also the cross-border trafficking routes, making the invisible visible to the authorities in Dakar and the international community.

HRW's most significant contribution in recent years is the strategic *Roadmap* of December 2019, a five-pillar action plan aimed at shifting the government's approach from mere social mediation to a system based on criminal justice and structured support. At the heart of this proposal lies a radical reform of the "Retrait de la rue" programme. HRW argues that removing children from the streets cannot be an isolated operation of the Ministry of Family Affairs but must become a multi-sectoral process involving the Ministries of Justice and the Interior. In particular, the *Roadmap* demands that every intervention automatically triggers police investigations and protection protocols that prevent the child from returning to abusive teachers, prioritising instead family reunification subject to specific legal commitments on the part of the parents.

At the same time, HRW identifies the regulation of *daaras* and the strengthening of social services as the necessary step towards a lasting solution. The *Roadmap* urges the National Assembly to immediately approve the Children's Code, a drafted legislative document designed to formally incorporate the principles of the UN CRC and the ACRWC into Senegalese domestic law. This regulatory effort must be supported by massive investment in regional protection services (AEMO), providing them with the operational resources, offices, staff and vehicles, which are currently in critically short supply. Only by ending judicial impunity, establishing specialised police units and setting up a fund for free legal aid will it be possible to dismantle the system of exploitation. Ultimately, HRW's strategy acts as a bridge between the local reality and international donors, urging the latter to make financial support for Senegal conditional on the adoption of real and measurable measures, ensuring that political promises translate into effective protection for every *talibé* child.

4.2 Local Organisations and Direct Support

Whilst the international community focuses on systemic reform, Maison de la Gare, a Senegalese organisation, operates as a real safety net for minors who have been not only living but also ran away from *daaras*. They operate in the city of Saint-Louis, one of the main areas in Senegal where *daaras* are concentrated, with around 200 with a total of 15,000 *talibés*. A large proportion of the *talibé* children in the city come from the Fouta region (around 60%), whilst a significant proportion, between 15% and 20%, come from neighbouring countries such as The Gambia, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau. *Talibés* are present in every neighbourhood of the city and constitute a widespread and visible presence in the urban landscape.

In this context, Maison de la Gare does not only await beneficiaries at its centre, but also reaches out to children who have fled the *daaras*, living in the streets, and those still within the *daaras* themselves: staff members meet the children directly in their own environment to establish a relationship based on trust and assess their individual needs. One of the organisation's most sensitive pillars is the night-time intervention programme, aimed specifically at *talibés* living on the streets, who have often fled abusive situations in the *daaras*.

Maison de la Gare organises street patrols, especially at night, going to markets, stations and outlying areas where children hide to escape violence or the cold. To address this urgent need, Maison de la Gare operates an emergency shelter with limited places (around 10), reserved for the most urgent cases. Here, the child is not merely accommodated but undergoes a thorough psychological and health assessment. The centre serves as a safe haven where the child can stay for up to three days, the time needed for Maison de la Gare to coordinate with juvenile magistrates to find a long-term shelter for each child, often state-run care homes or SOS Children's Villages. This respite is essential for stabilising children who often bear the scars of devastating physical and emotional trauma.

An interview with the Executive Secretary of Maison de la Gare highlighted a more complex problematic, for which *talibés* aged between 13 and 18 develop a visceral attachment to their "newfound freedom of the streets", thus rejecting support programmes and shelters such as the one the local organisations offers, perceiving them as too rigid and possibly limiting. It is not merely a refusal stemming from a perceived loss of freedom, but also from the fact that many teenagers are now accustomed to "making easy money through begging", and therefore see admission to a care facility as a loss of income and time, which makes it difficult for them to accept more structured alternatives.

For this reason, the Maison de la Gare takes a flexible approach: the children and adolescents are free to come to the centre to wash themselves, wash their clothes, receive medical care, hot meals and educational programmes before going back on the streets. Many children attend the Maison de la Gare centre more for the recreational activities than for the educational programmes; however, the staff make a conscious decision to welcome them regardless, even if it is just to play, in order to keep them off the streets and maintain regular contact.

Once children are in contact with Maison de la Gare, the organisation contacts both their parents and the *daraas*. From the interview it emerged that 30% of children manage to return to their parents, however due to extreme poverty oftentimes it is not possible. In these cases, Maison de la Gare opts state-run care homes, SOS Children's Villages or trusted *daraas*, where *marabouts* accept constant monitoring by the NGO. In the latter case, the *talibé* continues his religious education but spends much of the day at the Maison de la Gare centre studying French, playing sport and receiving healthcare support. It is a pragmatic solution that recognises the value of tradition whilst neutralising its violent excesses, stepping in where the state and public care homes do not yet have the capacity to absorb the entire number of vulnerable children.

Maison de la Gare does not only work with homeless *talibés*, but also cooperates closely with the local *daraas*. As far as relations with *marabouts* are concerned, the Maison de la Gare stands out as a positive exception. From a constant physical presence on the ground, Maison de la Gare ultimately gained legitimacy and trust that allowed it to be perceived by the *marabouts* not as a threat, but as a logistical resource. In some cases, the *marabouts* themselves report instances of abuse or illness, or even accompany the *talibés* directly to the centre. The daily reality of the *daaras* is marked by precarious hygiene conditions, in particular scabies is identified as the most widespread affliction; the lack of clean spaces and overcrowding making infection inevitable. Hygiene teams visit the *daaras* directly two or three times a week to distribute kits and soap and to educate the *marabouts* on prevention. As pharmacological treatments are prohibitively expensive for the *daraas*, Maison de la Gare has transformed its infirmary to treat over 400 children a month, together with nutritional support programmes, providing a balanced meal.

From the interview, it emerged that the demand for formal education often does not arise in adolescence, but in young adulthood. Many young *talibés* who had refused structural support from the organisation returned spontaneously to Maison de la Gare, requesting literacy and vocational training programmes. Maison de la Gare responds with workshops in tailoring, poultry farming and agriculture. The poultry farming programme in Bango, for example, currently involves 15 young people aged between 16 and 22 in intensive training courses. It is not merely a matter of teaching a trade, but of countering the “easy money” mentality resulting from years of begging, providing young adults with a more secure job.

Working the land and managing the chicken coop teach responsibility and planning, essential tools for transforming a former *talibé* into a productive citizen. For graduates of the vocational programmes, Maison de la Gare has established a microfinance system, with interest-free loans ranging from 100,000 to 300,000 CFA. The interview highlighted a crucial aspect of risk management: in the past, some beneficiaries used these funds to finance migration journeys to Europe. Today, the organisation has implemented much stricter business monitoring criteria. The loan is tied to the creation of a genuine business (such as small agricultural cooperatives) and can be renewed up to three times to allow the enterprise to grow, thereby preventing funding of migration routes.

Whilst Maison de la Gare provides emergency support and shelter for *talibés* fleeing the system and homeless, the *Programme d'Aide et de Développement destiné aux Enfants du Monde* (PADEM) embodies a strategy of endogenous transformation. Operating with a 10-year vision (2017–2027), PADEM intervenes directly within the *daaras*, aiming to formalise the Quranic education system in a way that is sustainable and respectful of children's rights through the partner organisation *Jeunesse et Développement* (JED), based in Matam. The 10-year project, “Let's put a stop to violence against children”, has directly benefited around 70 *marabouts* and 6,400 *talibés*, most of them from the Matam region, with only a small percentage from The Gambia, Guinea and Mauritania.

The organisation is working to dismantle the exploitative tendencies of the educational system itself, through an approach based on diversifying the educational provision according to age, creating concrete alternatives to begging. For the 5–13 age group, the emphasis is on literacy; for young people aged 15 and over, the focus shifts to vocational training. An interview with JED's Office Coordinator highlighted how the organisation offers personalised support to *talibés*, who are not obliged to remain within the traditional Quranic system, but can choose technical courses, such as training in electrical engineering, or decide to continue their religious studies in a safe environment free from exploitation.

A distinctive feature of PADEM's strategy, along with its partners, is its formalised cooperation with Quranic teachers. PADEM requires the signing of cooperation agreements that bind the *marabouts* to respect children's rights, prohibiting abuse and begging. In exchange for this commitment, the organisation supports the structural rehabilitation of the *daaras*, addressing access to energy, the safety of the buildings and direct healthcare support for the children. This exchange transforms the *daara* from a place of segregation into a monitored educational space, reducing the teachers' economic dependence on the forced labour of their pupils. PADEM recognises that the issue of *talibés* cannot be resolved without involving their communities of origin, and it works intensively to raise awareness among families, mobilising rural communities to understand the risks of exploitation and actively monitor their children's progress. The aim is to create a monitoring network that starts with parents and extends to the national government, ensuring respect for children's rights inside the *daraas*.

The civil society landscape in Senegal reveals a complex yet coordinated network, in which each actor occupies a strategic niche. Whilst UNICEF provides the technical and regulatory framework at a government level and HRW maintains political pressure by exposing impunity, organisations such as Secours Islamique France, Maison de la Gare and PADEM work to provide practical support to *talibé* children and to bring about structural reform of religious institutions, seeking a synthesis between faith and human rights.

5. STRUCTURAL CAUSES

Development of informal *daaras* and the exploitation of *talibés* are an issue rooted in a complex interplay of structural factors. According to the 2025 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), 45.1% of the Senegalese population face a situation of multidimensional poverty, out of which 22.7% is considered severe, facing malnutrition, and limited access or deprived of health services, education, drinking water, electricity, and sanitation. Such a situation is aggravated in rural areas, where the rate increases to 55% (World Bank, 2024). Although poverty represents one of the major underlying causes of children exploitation in *daaras*, other demographic factors such as larger number of family members in a shared household also influence families' decision to send children away to residential schooling.

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the projected fertility rate in 2024 was 4.33, but could go up to 6.9 in the regions of Sedhiou and Kolda (UNFPA, 2024). *Talibés* in urban residential *daaras* generally originate from some of the poorest, rural regions of Senegal, often of Fulani ethnic origin, whose parents see in *daaras* an alternative to alleviate household expenditures (Perry, 2004; HRW, 2010; Jean-Matthew, 2014).

At the same time, deep-seated religious beliefs, the moral foundations under which the *daraa* system historically developed, inadequate provision of formal education or a preference for religious over secular education and the historical role of *daaras* as centers of learning, reinforce the social and cultural legitimacy of this system (Zoumanigui, 2016; Macleod S. L., 2023).

5.1 *Daaras* were not always used for exploitation

Residential Quranic schools were already common in West Africa prior to the French colonisation, particularly in rural areas where they played an important social role as places dedicated to schooling children and often became the only system of education available (Ndiaye, 2015). As such, they prevailed after the departure of the French colony (Zoumanigui, 2016).

In traditional rural *daaras*, children would help with the harvest to collect food to support their school or would engage in begging for food items local communities could provide. Parents believed that such practice, in addition to a strict confessional education and a strong engagement with religious figures, namely a *marabout*, would help their children form character and improve social status, driving families to opt for *daaras*' schooling rather than official education (Ndiaye, 2015; Macleod, 2026).

According to Perry (2004), "attending *daaras* was seen as a form of gaining social recognition due to the authority role *marabouts* played in Muslim Senegalese, particularly Wolof, societies". As a result, becoming a *marabout* emerged as an aspiration for some families, reinforcing residential *daaras* as part of a deeply rooted confessional tradition, and providing a form of cultural legitimacy to their system.

5.2 Migration to urban areas

Kielland & Kebede (2020) established a relation between environmental issues in rural areas with child migration. They particularly described the relocation of children as an effect of drought and drought-shock vulnerability in Senegalese rural households. They found that 53% of the interviewed households had at least one child living away from home for one reason or the other, and “almost half of those households, representing 25% of all households, had at least one young boy living away for Quranic studies” (Kielland & Kebede, 2020). Despite environmental conditions and limited sources of income in rural areas played a major role in driving children out to urban areas, it is not the sole cause of the displacement phenomenon.

There are various studies and reports that have analysed different causal elements interplaying on why *marabouts* and Quranic Schools displaced. However, there is no consensus. For instance, while Carr (2012) speaks that it was “after severe droughts [and] forced migration from the countryside to the cities in late 1970s, [but also in early 2000s], urban *daaras* began to replace village *daaras*”, Zoumanigui (2016: p. 186) describes that it was “the onset of urbanization in the second half of the 20th century led *marabouts* to relocate their *daaras* in the cities in search of economic opportunities”.

Despite the existence of divergent views on the matter and the possibility that it was caused by several factors, scholars agree that such change directly contributed to the introduction of an exploitative function of *daaras*: without the traditional support from rural communities in urban areas, *talibés* could no longer rely on collecting food resources. As a result, begging for money became the main source of sustaining *daaras* (Carr, 2012). However, whilst many *marabouts* remained uncorrupted and upheld the traditional system, some others began recognising the profitability of relocating into urban centers, particularly in a context where traditional collection of food was highly impacted by droughts (Zoumanigui, 2016).

Despite evidence indicating that the migration of *talibés* and *daaras* may be a multifactorial phenomenon, the premise that an economic motive to *marabouts* lies behind the exploitative function of *daaras* remains uncontested.

Today, the largest concentration of *daaras* that keep functioning at the expense of exploitation of children are in urban centers (Dia, 2024). And while a significant percentage of attendees are children from the rural populations, they are forced to remain disconnected, away from their families, perpetuating the exploitative function of *daaras*.

5.3 *Daaras'* education role in society, absence of regulation and failure to oversee

Islamic education, namely through Quranic schools, remains one of the most widely accepted learning alternatives in Senegalese societies. In 2003, Stefania Gandolfi described that Quranic schools constituted, for some communities, the only opportunity for education and literacy, particularly for populations who did not yet have access to formal schooling (Gandolfi, 2003). The situation today, however, might not have changed much.

Access to education in Senegal remains a great challenge, particularly in rural areas. According to the Education Sector Analysis (ESA) report, nearly 38% of children aged 6 to 16 are out of school, especially in rural and inland regions (UNESCO, 2025). And this disparity may be worse in terms of gender. The UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS data) reported that the primary school completion rate in the country was at 60% in 2022 for girls and 55% for boys (UNESCO, 2024).

With limited access to schooling alternatives in addition to financial constraints, some families are compelled to send children to residential *daaras* despite the poor housing conditions they are provided with. And despite open criticism against the conditions in which some *daaras* operate, the importance of Quranic schools has not diminished in Senegalese society (Chehami, 2016).

Senegal is officially administered as a secular state, despite a predominantly Muslim population, and as such, religious education is not provided by the national education system (Zoumanigui, 2016; Yassine, 2019). In a society where Quranic education remains of great interest by various communities, the government has attempted to regulate the operations of such institutions in recent years. However, the enforcement of existing regulations applicable to *daaras* remains lax, and according to HRW, thousands of *daaras* continue operating with no supervision or support from the government (HRW, 2019).

Local governments have the authority to inspect and close *daaras* that pose a danger to the health, safety, or well-being of children, and local hygiene services under the Ministry of Health and Social Action can impose fines or other penalties if health and sanitation conditions and standards of the *daaras* are not met (HRW, 2019). Despite a lack of understanding of these powers and responsibilities by local officials, CSOs have long alleged that acts of exploitation committed in *daaras* are a result of lack of specific regulations governing their activities (The New Humanitarian, 2008).

A project to regulate *daaras* was validated by the Council of Ministers in 2018, although Members of the Parliament failed to discuss further adoption owing to a lack of interest or political will to address a controversial issue (Amnesty International, 2024). However, *marabouts* have been accused by officials of resorting to lobbying to prevent the enforcement of regulations, and likely preventing the adoption of new measures, leveraging the social role and influence they have in society (HRW, 2019). Regardless of the reasons, the lack of

formality and regulation within this educational system has allowed some *marabouts* to open or use *daaras* as a source of income at the expense of children's well-being (Zoumanigui, 2016).

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing the challenges associated with the *Talibé* system in Senegal requires not only legislative changes by the government, but also coordination between religious authorities and civil society. To balance the transition of religious practices in a respective manner while upholding the rights of children will require a multi-level approach.

6.1 Government

The Government of Senegal plays a central role in preventing and deterring further abuse. In order to ensure the rights of *Talibé* children, the government must enforce laws on forced begging by children. While Article 245 of the Senegalese Penal Code criminalises begging, an exception is granted to begging in religious contexts. As such, *Talibé* children continue to be exploited under the pretext of religious teaching and education. Furthermore, as a sign of respect to the Islamic religion, the government and judicial authorities have often turned a blind eye to begging, understanding it instead as charity, an important pillar in Islam that builds faith and community. Because of this, *marabouts* can manipulate faith to sustain practices of child begging and evade responsibilities.

For these reasons, it is necessary that the government implements laws against forced begging in general and sheds its reluctance to confront religious authorities. First, not only does legislation need to be carried out properly against all actors, but prior investigation should also be immediately conducted to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable. By enforcing the law effectively against *marabouts*, a deterring effect against other *marabouts* and *daaras* continuing practices of forced begging, would be demonstrated. Moreover, the government should also focus on expanding child protection services and infrastructures. Currently, Senegal lacks special child protection units outside of Dakar, and shelters have limited capacity for children. By introducing more child-specific measurements, it can ensure that children are rescued from illegitimate *daaras* and safely returned to families, without facing further victimisation or abuse.

Second, the government should establish clear guidelines and systems to register and monitor *daaras*. Registration would enable authorities to maintain oversight of the conditions children live and learn at, filtering out illegitimate *daaras* that manipulate families. This would allow the government to set clear minimum standards to be followed, as well as plan regular inspections that could result in sanctions where violated. The registration of *daaras* and *marabouts* should be linked to government monitoring and crackdowns with preventive action. Due to the social influence of religious teachers and authorities, the government should consult and cooperate with them to ensure legitimate implementations are completed.

Third, the government should lead national campaigns aimed at educating and raising awareness on the conditions children often suffer at *daaras*. The Senegalese government has recently announced to include Quran teaching as a core subject in schools, implementing a formal curriculum. With this, children gain a formal education that incorporates Islamic heritage and modernises *daaras*. This limits the power of *marabouts* and *daaras*, and makes families less likely to blindly trust *daaras* with religious education.

6.2 Religious Authorities

Religious leaders and *marabouts* have wide influence within Senegalese society, therefore remaining important actors in reforming the *Talibé* system. Their involvement remains crucial due to societal respect and Muslim cultural sensitivities. In order to achieve sustainable change, the government must cooperate with *marabouts*.

Religious authorities should actively promote safe and regulated Quranic education together with the government. They should set out standards that ensure the well-being of the children and prohibit forced begging as a financial means. By integrating formal education with religious studies, the *marabouts* can help modernise *daaras* and shift social norms. Furthermore, religious authorities should also play a role in regulating *daaras* and *marabouts*. They should address *daaras* that commit unethical practices through a peer monitoring system, complementing state regulations to achieve the most effective transformation.

6.3 International Community

The international community's role in supporting Senegal's efforts to protect *Talibé* children take on different forms. First, they should provide financial, material and technical support for child protection programs. By funding initiatives aimed at improving the living conditions in *daaras*, children are less likely to be forced to beg as a financial means. The international community should also focus on funding child protection programs, child specific shelters, and reintegration programs after rescue. In addition, the funds should also be distributed to modernise and upgrade the infrastructure within *daaras* to improve living conditions of *Talibé* children.

Second, diplomatic engagement should encourage Senegal to change its perception of forced child begging. The international community should publicly condemn these practices and pressure Senegalese leaders to implement legislation and monitoring mechanisms to comply with their human rights obligations. Advocacy efforts should aim to assist civil societies on the ground with reform and education campaigns. In this sense, they can achieve advocacy and accountability at the same time, prioritising deterrence and encouraging child protection.

6.4 Civil Society

The role of civil society should not be undermined as they are vital in bridging the gap between governmental policy and practical implementation. CSOs should not only focus on monitoring *daaras* and *marabouts* and their treatment of children, but also continue to raise awareness of the situation of *Talibé* children.

As support for the *Talibé* system is deeply rooted in Senegalese cultural and religious history, it is key that civil societies shed light on the abuse and human rights violations suffered as it might not be considered significant to the Senegalese society. Civil society should continue to document violations that affect *Talibé* children to develop a community-based network of monitoring and reporting.

Moreover, civil society is key to expanding awareness, especially in rural areas to question harmful practices. To challenge the normalisation of forced child begging, civil society should raise awareness amongst parents and community leaders, and seek to promote formal Quranic education in other forms. They should also provide the necessary infrastructure or services that may be lacking in rural areas to disincentivise parents to send their children to *daaras*.

While most parents send their children to *daaras* because of religious factors, some choose it to lessen their financial burdens. From this perspective, civil society should also promote capacity building and community mobilisation programs that would allow women and other community members to gain financial stability. Considering some families only turn to *daaras* because of their lack of financial security, civil society initiatives can influence change or the need to address their requirements, preventing the need to resort to begging.

Most importantly, civil society should partner up with the government and international community to enhance the scale and sustainability of their initiatives. By focusing on national campaigns instead of those aimed at particular cities or regions, such efforts would reach *Talibé* children that are most in need and can slowly change the landscape of child begging in Senegal.

In summary:

Government	Increase law enforcement capacity and child protection services
	Ensure prosecutions are pursued, especially against influential religious authorities
	Establish registration systems to maintain oversight of <i>daaras</i> and <i>marabouts</i>
	Educate public to address root causes and improve access to formal Quranic education
Religious Authorities	Promote regulated Quranic education
	Regulate <i>daaras</i> and <i>marabouts</i>

International Community	Denounce forced child begging
	Assist government and civil society initiatives and funding
	Support advocacy and ensure accountability
Civil Society	Monitor and report <i>daaras</i> activities
	Expand public awareness and engage in capacity building programs

CONCLUSION

The persistence of the *talibé* system in its current, exploitative form represents a critical convergence of cultural tradition, socioeconomic vulnerability, and regulatory failure in Senegal. Historically functioning as a vital mechanism for **Islamic education** and moral socialisation, the *daara* system has undergone a detrimental transformation, particularly within the urban context. Driven by the **rural poverty**, **environmental pressures**, and **unregulated urbanisation**, the traditional reciprocal relationship between the *marabout*, the discipline, and the community, has frequently been distorted into a systematic regime of forced child labour and economic exploitation.

As this report demonstrates, a profound **dissonance** exists between **Senegal's codified commitments** to the international human rights framework, namely the UN CRC, the ACRWC, and ILO Convention No. 182, and the **empirical reality** of tens of thousands of children subjected to the *talibé*. The documented prevalence of **physical abuse**, **severe malnutrition**, **medical neglect**, and **forced begging** underscores systemic issues. While civil society and international NGOs provide essential remedial interventions and pilot viable models for **hybrid education**, these efforts are fundamentally constrained by a broader landscape of judicial impunity and insufficient state oversight.

Addressing this crisis requires moving beyond the reductive binary that positions human rights imperatives in opposition to religious preservation. The **sustainable reform** of the *talibé* system relies on the **formal institutionalisation of daaras**, structurally **integrating Quranic instruction** with standard **national curricula** and strict **child protection** protocols. The status quo necessitates an important shift in **state intervention**. The Senegalese government must exercise the political will to enforce **anti-begging legislation** and mandate regulatory frameworks for religious schools, holding exploitative actors accountable regardless of their socio-religious capital.

Ultimately, neutralising the exploitative dimensions of the *talibé* system demands a cohesive, **multi-sectoral strategy** that actively incorporates **orthodox religious** leadership to legitimise reform from within the **Islamic framework**. Safeguarding the fundamental rights of *talibé* children is a structural prerequisite for achieving **equitable socio-economic development** and upholding the integrity of child protection mechanisms in West Africa.

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