

# PuneMirror

## Pune Rlys authorities begin implementing children's rights SOP

By Mubarak Ansari, Pune Mirror | May 8, 2014, 02:30 AM IST



*7-yr-old Raja (name changed) is one of the million kids in the country who works for a living on a railway station. Pics: Manoj Bidkar*

### **ON THE RIGHT TRACK**

*Following Indian Railways programme in association with NCPCR, Pune Rlys beings survey of city locations to set up Child Assistance Centres*

As thundershowers cooled the city down on Wednesday, residents and visitors alike were thrilled to find some respite from the relentless summer. Yet, as trains rolled into the platforms at Pune Railway Station, the pleasant weather changed nothing for seven-year-old snack-seller Raja (name changed) as he went on unflaggingly with the tedium of daily labour.

Raja is one among the over a million children in the country who have fled from poverty, violence and abuse, or simply been attracted by big city lights. Many of these children go on to make railway stations their homes. Acting on the directions of the Delhi High Court issued in February 2013, Indian Railways, in association with the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), recently came out with a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the protection of child rights at railway stations — a move the Pune Railway Station has already begun implementing.

The SOP defines roles for passengers, vendors, railway officials, including ticket checkers, TC, the Railway Protection Force (RPF) and Government Railway Police (GRP). It also calls for the setting up of a Child Protection Committee (CPC), Railways, and Child Assistance Centre (CAC) at major stations.

The CPC will comprise of an RPF inspector, a GRP station house officer, Station Master/Manager, section engineer and travelling ticket examiner (TTE) — i.e. function as an apex body for the provision of all child protection issues at the railwaystation level. CACs are to house separate dormitories as temporary shelters for boys and girls before they are produced before the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) for further action.

The dormitories shall be equipped with like clothes, food, beds, toilets, medicines and will also display helpline numbers and have a complaint- cum-suggestion box. Speaking to Mirror, Pune Divisional Security Commissioner, RPF, Ashok Rai said, "We began work after receiving orders for the implementation of the SOP from the Railway higher command.

We have surveyed three places for the setting up of CAC, including Khadki. We shall soon finalise the location after all norms are maintained. Every month, 30-40 children, who are in need of protection, arrive at Pune Railway Station. We have also united many of them with their families." Rai added, "Presently, whenever a child is found, we inform the GRP and a local NGO, to take of him or her and complete formalities."

The NCPCR report states, "With India having the second-largest rail network in the world, with around 7,000-8,000 railway stations, millions of homeless children are known to travel daily through these stations. NGOs report that a majority reach the streets of cities and towns through the railway network, as boarding trains is not only a novelty but ensures anonymity and easy and fast transportation."

P N Mishra, a member of Salaam Baalak Trust, which works for the rehabilitation of street children, said, "The implementation of the SOP is more important than its creation. The roles of NGOs and allied systems like police, CWC and hospitals are also needed."

On the safety and welfare of these children, Mishra added, "Safe spaces and 24-hour service for children arriving at major stations is needed. An easy restoration process and medical services from hospitals is also required. Runaway children like freedom, however, when they come in contact with the police, CWC or NGOs, most of them want to go home. However, it depends on the assessment on the situation in their families."

