

A protection centre for street children: in Lagos, Nigeria

In Lagos, Nigeria, in an overpopulated and growing city where more than 40 per cent of the population are young people under 18, the Salesians have opened a home for street children.

[Lagos](#) is one of the 36 states of federal [Nigeria](#). It is practically a city-state, capital of the country until 1991, when the new capital, Abuja, was officially recognised in the centre of the country. With its 16 million inhabitants, it is the second most populous urban area in Africa after Cairo, and with its metropolitan area of 21 million inhabitants, it is one of the most populous in the world. Moreover, it is continuously growing, so much so that it has become the first city in Africa and seventh in the world in terms of the speed of population growth.

With a very warm climate, lying just 6° north of the Equator, it is located on the mainland, opening onto Lake Lagoon and the Atlantic Ocean. Thanks to its location, it has always been a commercial city, so much so that, even though the capital has been relocated, it remains the commercial and economic centre of the state and one of the most important ports in West Africa.

With 230 million inhabitants, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the sixth most populous country in the world. Nigeria has the third largest youth population in the world, after India and China, with over 90 million inhabitants under the age of 18.

The youth situation in this city is comparable to Turin in Don Bosco's time. Many poor rural and urban youth flock to the city of Lagos in search of work and a better life, but they are subject to exploitation, neglect, poverty and deprivation. They are at risk of being left on the street, of being abused,

of being trafficked, of coming into conflict with the law or abusing drugs.

The Salesians have come to the aid of these children and young adults, with a [Don Bosco House](#), a protection centre for street children, approved by the Ministry of Youth and Social Development of Lagos State as a rehabilitation home for boys at risk. It is a Home that is dedicated to improving the lives of street children, vulnerable boys, by providing them with an alternative family environment, shelter, education, emotional support, protection and life skills enhancement. The starting point is the belief that every child has positive potential and that young people represent the future of the country. If the environment is good, if they receive a good education and see good examples, they too can grow to become a hope for others.



Don Bosco House includes residential and non-residential guests.

Residential children are those who live in the home, attend school within the home and participate in all the activities that will lead them to become better people and reintegrate into their families and communities. Some of the programmes run in the home, in the area of skills acquisition and empowerment, are tailoring, barbering, shoe making, while in the area of talent development there are music, theatre, dance and choreography. The children are also engaged in various therapeutic, sports and recreational activities to foster their social and physical development.

In their work with these children the Salesians have realised the potential of music, especially in the rehabilitation of

the youngest children. By helping them to get to know and use musical instruments, relief is offered from the burden of their experience, helping them to overcome various traumas, and also strengthening a good family relationship between them. The same happens with dance. The children are very attracted to choreography, they want to try and are not discouraged when they realise they have made a mistake, but try again with perseverance until they succeed, learning from their mistakes. Dance encourages the children to experiment and find different paths to forget their problems.



But the Don Bosco House does not close its doors to those who do not want to stay. Non-residential guests are those who live on the streets and often come to seek temporary shelter. The house serves as a stop-off point for them to rest, play, take a shower, change clothes, receive medication and food. On these occasions, they are also offered follow-up activities: counselling and psychological rehabilitation, family tracing and reintegration, continuation of education, acquisition of skills, complex medical and health care and job placement.

This is a valuable help, because most of these young people are aged between 14 and 24. Many of them are engaged in some kind of work, which allows them to earn something to cover their daily expenses for food, clothing and other necessities. A good number of them work in the unorganised sector, helping at weddings, on construction sites, carrying loads in bus car parks, selling bags of water and drinks on the street, doing the most menial jobs. And it is good to see this, because it means that they want to earn an honest living, but do not always find someone to help them.

As you can guess, the girls' situation is no better and this presents a challenge for the Salesians: to think of them in some way. This is also why the Salesians ask for support to improve the skills of their staff and management in general, and are open to receiving assistance to improve the quality of work. Alone they can do little, but together with others they can do a lot.



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