



## **AMERICA/VENEZUELA - Ten thousand working children: exploited, drugged, sexually abused**

Barquisimeto (Agenzia Fides) - Unemployment, exploitation, alcoholism, drug addiction, absent parents, physical and sexual abuse, a school system which is lacking are the major problems that plague the lives of many young Venezuelans. The desperate economic conditions force many families to make their children work on the streets. The phenomenon applies to the majority of children who live in Latin America in general, and Venezuela in particular. Street children in the Country live by stealing, begging, are exploited, drugged and are victims of prostitution.

According to various statistics, there are about 10,000 victims, although in reality the number of children that live in critical poverty are many more. The streets of the city of Barquisimeto, capital of the Venezuelan state of Lara, for example, are full of children and adolescents at risk. According to the Fundación Instituto de Capacitación e Investigación, based in Caracas, of the nearly 1.6 million children Venezuelan workers, 300,000 are involved in a kind of formal economy, over one million in informal economy and 200 thousand in "marginal activities" such as drug trafficking and theft. These minors produce a vital income for their families. While some try to keep their job and continue to go to school, many end up dropping out of school permanently. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 02/09/2013)