UNANIMA INTERNATIONAL

The Hidden Faces of Homelessness

Global Insights and Pathways Forward

February 2025

UNANIMA INTERNATIONAL

A vital part of our mission is to ensure that the voices and the journeys of those who have experienced homelessness – especially women and girls, children, and other marginalized groups – are **heard, valued, and better understood.**

Jean Quinn, DW

Executive Director,
UNANIMA International

FOREWORD

UNANIMA International is a coalition of 25 communities of Women Religious and friends who advocate on behalf of women and girls at the United Nations. A vital part of our mission is to ensure that the voices and the journeys of those who have experienced homelessness are heard, valued, and better understood. To date, our research on homelessness, displacement, and trauma has enabled us to present the lived experiences of people—especially women, children, and girls—directly to decision-makers, and to give them a place at the table.

Housing insecurity continues to be a global concern, with estimates that 150 million people worldwide are experiencing homelessness. The United Nations has documented around 1.6 billion people living in poor housing worldwide, with about 15 million being forcibly evicted each year. These statistics continue to be a grave concern for us that cannot be overlooked. The numbers are stark and continue to rise, painting a picture that demands not just our attention, but our action.

UNANIMA International's grassroots members have seen firsthand the faces behind the statistics, each one with their own unique stories, experiences of trauma, hopes, and dreams. Let us remember that behind every statistic is a face, a name. They are women, children, and girls with stories that matter. Having accompanied families experiencing homelessness on their journeys for many years, I know personally how extraordinary those stories are.

Women, children, and girls constitute society's most disadvantaged and at-risk populations around the world, and are therefore disproportionately vulnerable to the growing problem of homelessness globally. Homelessness, once viewed as episodic and situational, has become chronic and cyclical.

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While adequate housing is essential to ending homelessness, it is not enough on its own. Homelessness is a social issue, and families need more than decent housing to thrive and end the cycle of extreme poverty. They need social protection "floors" and access to food, education, healthcare, trauma-informed support, and childcare to successfully transition out of homelessness for the long term.

It has now been four years since UNANIMA International's publications on family homelessness were published. Since then, we have seen great success in our mission to advance the issue of homelessness as an agenda item at the UN. For the first time in the history of the UN, homelessness was discussed as part of the 58th Commission for Social Development priority theme "Affordable Housing and Social Protection Systems for all to Address Homelessness." This led to the historic passing of the first ECOSOC resolution on homelessness in February 2020. In 2021, we at UNANIMA International collaborated again with Member States on a second resolution on homelessness, titled "Affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness, including in the aftermath of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19)." This was passed by the Third Committee in November and was approved by the General Assembly in December 2021. The resolution urged member states to eliminate all forms of discrimination against those experiencing homelessness, and recognized the growing issue of homelessness during the global pandemic.

Despite the progress that has been made in recent years, there is still a long road ahead in the pursuit of a world where all people can realize their full human rights and potential. Article 25 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights states that housing is a human right, but this is a right that continues to be widely violated and misunderstood. We believe in viewing and treating homelessness as what it is: a human rights violation. We continue to call for a paradigm shift around homelessness. We continue to believe that it is time to give voice to those who are the furthest left behind.

We at UNANIMA International revisited our publications on family homelessness from 2020 and sought to update them to reflect the realities of today, leading to the creation of our third publication on "The Hidden Faces of Homelessness." This newest publication has a broadened scope to explore how homelessness is experienced by a range of marginalized groups, to highlight how homelessness intersects with other global issues like climate change, and to showcase solutions and best practices our partners are implementing at every level. We feel this information can help policymakers and other stakeholders develop pathways forward and set better standards for people experiencing homelessness. It can also provide the resources for creating trauma-informed models of support and effective services for those experiencing homelessness around the world.

We hope that this updated research will continue to contribute to a necessary paradigm shift in how we perceive the issue of homelessness and poverty, and promote a dialogue where homelessness is viewed as a human rights issue and structural failure.

Jean Quinn, DW
Executive Director, UNANIMA International
Co-Founder, Working Group to End Homelessness

UNANIMA INTERNATIONAL

MISSION

UNANIMA International is a nongovernmental organization made-up of a coalition of 25 communities of women religious in over 100 countries and with over 25,000 members. Our grassroots members are women and girls with lived experience and who provide direct service to their communities - they are health care providers, educators, social workers, development workers, childcare workers. Founded in 2002, for over 20 years our focus has been on advocating on behalf of these women and girls who are furthest left behind, and bringing their voices, perspectives, and experiences to the United Nations. We work to occupy spaces of power on behalf of those who cannot be present, in order to infuse the conversation with the perspectives, experiences, and needs that would otherwise be absent. Through advocacy, research, education, collaboration, and action, our mission is to educate and influence policymakers on the areas of gender equality, migration, and climate change through a human rights based approach.

In recent years, UNANIMA International has focused on the issue of homelessness, and what can be done to break the cycles of poverty that affect our planet's most vulnerable people. By collaborating with our members working on the ground globally, partnering with a diverse array of stakeholders, and leveraging our consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), we strive to provide a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of homelessness to inform effective policymaking and community engagement.

VISION

A future where women and girls, children, and other marginalized groups who live in extreme poverty will be empowered to achieve a better quality of life.

VALUES

Our grassroots communities are at the heart of UNANIMA International's work. They are the frontlines of our advocacy issues and provide a direct link between our team at the UN and those most affected by homelessness, migration, climate change, etc.

Our values and beliefs enable us to achieve our vision and mission


Leadership


Collaboration


Integrity


Leadership


Equality


Respect

Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
CEDAW	The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CPH	Census of Population and Housing
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
COVID-19	Coronavirus Pandemic 2019
CSocD	United Nations Commission for Social Development
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
ED	U.S. Department of Education
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
ELSTAT	Hellenic Statistical Authority
FEANTSA	European Network of National Organizations Working with the Homeless
HF	Housing First
HLRN	The Housing and Land Rights Network
HPFPI	Homeless People Federation of the Philippines, Inc.
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
IACVAWC	Inter-Agency Council on Violence Against Women and Their Children
ICPH	Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
ILO	International Labour Organization
Kadamay	**Alipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap**
KPSP	Kibera Public Space Project
MCCT-HSF	Modified Conditional Cash Transfer for Homeless Street Families
MCW	Magna Carta of Women
MLRC	Mercy Law Resource Center
MPC	Mukuru Promotion Center
MSDP	Mukuru Slum Development Project
MSP	My Sister's Place
NDHS	National Demographic and Health Survey
NHA	National Housing Authority
NUA	New Urban Agenda
NYU	New York University
PCW	Philippine Commission on Women
PHF	Pathways Housing First
PSA	Philippines Statistics Authority
SDG	(United Nations) Sustainable Development Goals
SHARP	Supporters of Social Housing Acceleration and Renovation Program
SHS	Specialist Homelessness Services
TASSC	Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition
UI	UNANIMA International
UN	United Nations
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UPDF	Urban Poor Development Fund
WGEH	NGO Working Group to End Homelessness

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PART ONE

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Introduction

Liana Almony
Deputy Director,
UNANIMA International

The issue of homelessness is more relevant now than ever as we see billions of people around the world displaced, evicted, and living in inadequate conditions. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimates that by the end of 2024 around 130.8 million people will be forcibly displaced worldwide due to conflict, climate change, and economic instability. **More than 20% of the global population live in inadequate housing, and Habitat for Humanity estimates that 1 in every 4 people will live in informal settlements (slums) by 2030.**

Perhaps displaying poverty in its most visible form, global homelessness remains one of the most extreme and growing manifestations of inequality, social exclusion, and disregard for human rights. Less visible, however, are the women and girls, children, and other marginalized groups experiencing homelessness, and the different forms that homelessness can take depending on the context. We at UNANIMA International know firsthand from our research and conversations with those at the grassroots that homelessness is often hidden, and the lack of decision-making power and agency displayed in experiences of homelessness is compounded for vulnerable women, girls, children, and families.

The roots of homelessness are deeply entrenched in structural inequalities at every level, including inadequate access to affordable housing, income disparities, and systemic discrimination. Some of the more invisible drivers and conditions of homelessness include unsafe or forced living conditions such as domestic violence, displacement due to conflict and climate related shocks, human trafficking, housing/rental discrimination, informal settlements, and being "doubled up." As urbanization continues to increase, people migrating from rural to urban areas often move directly into slums and/or inadequate housing because they lack alternative options. Women and families living in temporary accommodations are unable to meet their basic needs, and are often marginalized further through social and cultural prejudice and lack of access to appropriate resources and social protections. The consequences of these experiences, particularly on children, are profound and far-reaching. Children experiencing homelessness are at a higher risk of experiencing developmental delays, educational disruption, and emotional and psychological stress. The instability associated with homelessness can lead to chronic health problems, hinder academic and professional achievement, and perpetuate the cycle of poverty throughout the lifecycle and across generations. While each individual, family, community, country, and region experiences distinct challenges, these are the throughlines that run through each case study of homelessness.

A more nuanced understanding of the experiences of women and girls, children, and other marginalized groups in these contexts is necessary to inform effective policy making and foster sustainable and equitable social development. Homelessness and displacement should not be seen as a personal failure but rather as the structural failure and human rights violation that they are.

Significant to both the Global North and the Global South, the issues of homelessness and displacement underpin and can hinder the success of all Sustainable Development Goals. Addressing homelessness will both require and ensure progress across all the SDGs: eradication of poverty, good health and wellbeing, gender equality, decent work and economic

growth, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, climate change, and peace, justice and strong institutions. Homelessness and displacement transcend national borders and have far-reaching implications at every level, demanding cooperation rather than competition. There is a shared responsibility here to play an individual and collective role in taking these seemingly local issues to global levels and vice versa. At the United Nations, Member States and other UN agencies are uniquely positioned to mobilize resources, influence norm-setting processes, act in cooperation and proximity to other states, and set examples through national policy. Localizing the SDGs - meeting people where they are to ensure the global goals are a reality at the community level - is crucial to address the structural causes of homelessness and build community resilience.

UNANIMA International first began centering our research and advocacy efforts around the issue of homelessness back in 2016, and at the time the issue that had never been officially addressed or recognized at the UN. Eight years of advocacy, five publications, two resolutions, and one Secretary-General's report later, homelessness officially has a place on the global agenda.

However, despite the progress made, those experiencing homelessness continue to be overlooked and the number of those experiencing homelessness in its various manifestations worldwide continues to rise. To truly accelerate progress on the SDGs and ensure "no one is left behind," it is crucial that Member States, in collaboration with other stakeholders, address homelessness and displacement as a human rights violation, a growing manifestation of extreme poverty, and a barrier to sustainable and equitable development. It is also crucial that strategies to address homelessness are context-specific and community-led so that they are effective, sustainable, and inclusive. Member States made commitments to address the root causes of homelessness in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including through the right to a healthy environment, the right to social protection, the right to adequate housing, and the right to life. Member States are reminded of Resolution E/CN.5/2020/L.5, which recognized the diverse range of structural, personal, social, political, and economic drivers of homelessness and called for a response from across all sectors. Member States are also reminded of Resolution A/RES/76/133 passed in the General Assembly in December 2021, which recognized homelessness as an affront to human dignity and recommended inclusive policies and programmes to address homelessness.

The UN Secretary-General António Gutteres has called for a new era of universal social protection, where social considerations are mainstreamed into development frameworks, and more inclusive institutional arrangements are systematically integrated. UNANIMA International fervently believes that when social justice is prioritized as such, human rights are upheld and widespread systemic inequalities like poverty and homelessness are addressed.

Methodology

This publication utilizes a comprehensive research methodology combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to highlight the multifaceted nature of global homelessness. Through qualitative methods such as interviews, case studies, testimonies, and expert analysis, we provide firsthand accounts and narratives to better understand the lived experiences of those affected by homelessness. Quantitative information such as statistical data offers empirical insights into homelessness's prevalence and socio-demographic characteristics globally to provide a clearer understanding of its scope and complexity across the world. We have focused on Kenya, India, the United States, Ireland, Australia, the Philippines, Canada, and Greece to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue of homelessness and how it manifests dif-

ferently across diverse cultural, economic, and political contexts. This regional balance is necessary to highlight the global nature of homelessness and emphasize that addressing homelessness requires global discourse and intervention adapted to local contexts.

Guided by a framework that centers social justice, gender, and human rights perspectives, UNANIMA International's analysis delves into the structural factors underlying homelessness, specifically as it disproportionately impacts women and girls, children, and other marginalized groups. By incorporating perspectives from diverse stakeholders including global policymakers and advocates, researchers and academics, grassroots practitioners and experts, and those with lived experience, this publication not only identifies the challenges but also shares best practices to address this critical issue. Based on this research, we then propose actionable policy and advocacy recommendations that can help build community resilience and break the cycle of extreme poverty in order to eradicate homelessness worldwide.

Research Rationale

UNANIMA International's research aims to explore the multifaceted nature of homelessness, examining its causes, consequences, and the effectiveness of various interventions. This third publication in our series on "Hidden Faces of Homelessness" considers our previous work on the subject and broadens the scope with the inclusion of new thematic areas, updated research, and new insights to bring the publication into 2025 and beyond. Despite strides made since our initial publications, the issue of homelessness persists as a grave concern affecting millions worldwide. With an estimated 150 million people experiencing homelessness and 1.6 billion living in poor housing, the urgency for action is undeniable. As the international community scrambles to make good on the 2030 Agenda and we look ahead to the Second World Summit for Social Development in 2025, we are releasing this publication to serve as a vital resource on the many manifestations of homelessness globally for policymakers, practitioners, and advocates.

Researching the issue of homelessness is crucial to gain a deeper understanding of its underlying causes, systemic challenges, and various manifestations. This documentation not only amplifies the voices of those affected but also serves as a catalyst for informed policy-making and advocacy efforts. The lack of disaggregated data and a standardized global definition has posed an issue for policy making as well as measuring progress and developing coordinated global strategies. Moreover, examining homelessness on a global scale allows us to identify common trends, disparities, and innovative approaches in different regions, fostering cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration. Despite its prevalence, homelessness remains largely invisible, overshadowed by misconceptions and societal neglect. Shedding light on the hidden faces of homelessness - those of women and girls, children, and other marginalized groups - is crucial to address its root causes and develop comprehensive solutions that uphold the rights and dignity of all individuals. Through this third publication which takes a more broad and inclusive approach to examining the "Hidden Faces of Homelessness," UNANIMA International reaffirms our commitment to giving voice to those furthest left behind and fostering a dialogue that prioritizes their well-being and inclusion.

In Defense of the Term "Homelessness"

Language shapes how we understand social issues, and the debate over whether to use the term "homelessness" or "unhoused" has become

increasingly prominent in advocacy and policymaking, especially in the Global North. While some argue that unhoused is a more politically correct and dignified term, homelessness remains the most precise and widely recognized way to describe the crisis experienced by millions worldwide. We at UNANIMA International always use people-first language, preferring "people experiencing homelessness" over "homeless people" to emphasize the dignity and humanity of those individuals and recognize that homelessness is a temporary experience rather than a defining identity.

Homelessness is not simply about lacking a house—it reflects a broader systemic failure that deprives individuals of security, stability, and dignity. Housing is a human right, and homelessness is a violation of that right. The word itself conveys the depth of displacement, exclusion, and marginalization that people experience when they are forced to live in inadequate or unsafe conditions.

The term homelessness is deeply embedded in legal, policy, and research frameworks, including United Nations resolutions, national housing strategies, and social services programming. Decades of advocacy have revolved around the inclusion of the word "homelessness" in these documents. Shifting to unhoused risks weakening policy continuity and advocacy efforts that rely on consistent terminology. Homelessness is recognized as a distinct and measurable social issue, allowing for more effective data collection and policy responses.

Across international bodies, such as the UN and the Commission for Social Development, homelessness is the recognized term used to frame discussions and resolutions. The issue

What is "Hidden Homelessness?"

Many manifestations of homelessness can be out of sight and are therefore often overlooked or beyond our pre-conceptions of homelessness. This includes situations where people are without a secure place to call home, even if they technically have shelter, such as living in inadequate housing, doubling-up, living in informal settlements, being trafficked, and living with the abusers. Hidden homelessness reflects and contributes to compounding vulnerabilities, and is therefore gendered and racialized. The "hidden faces of homelessness" are those of women and girls, children and youth, members of the LGBTQ+ community, persons with disabilities, indigenous communities, and other marginalized groups.

Homelessness is often considered embarrassing, a personal failure and a taboo subject, and this stigma contributes to the gendered invisibility of those experiencing homelessness. "Hidden" refers to not only the physical location of those behind closed doors or in siloed areas of the cities, but also to how our global society - through governance, definitions, and even data - underestimate the issue of homelessness and lack an understanding of what such experiences look and feel like.

of homelessness was first formally recognized at the UN and centered in social development initiatives when the 58th Commission for Social Development in 2020 adopted the priority theme 'Affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness', and the Economic and Social Council adopted resolution 2020/7 on the theme. There was significant enthusiasm around this priority theme from a range of stakeholders, and further progress was made on 16th December 2021 when the General Assembly adopted resolution 76/133 on 'Inclusive policies and programs to address homelessness.'

Many individuals who have experienced homelessness use the term themselves, recognizing it as an accurate reflection of their reality. While language should always evolve with respect to dignity and inclusion, in this case the debate around terminology may obscure the scope of the issue, especially as it is understood and examined in this publication. Homelessness is not just a temporary condition where people lack a roof over their heads - it is a systemic and societal crisis that demands solutions which address the root causes of homelessness and break the cycle of extreme poverty. Efforts should prioritize holistic, context-specific, and community-based policies and programs that build social resilience: a community's ability to withstand, adapt to, and recover from the experience of homelessness.

While unhoused may aim to remove stigma, it does not fully capture the scale, complexity, and hidden manifestations of homelessness. The term homelessness continues to serve as the most effective way to define, address, and ultimately eradicate this global issue.

Definition of homelessness as clarified in resolution A/RES/76/133:

"Noting that homelessness is not merely a lack of physical housing, but is often a disaffiliation process interrelated with poverty, lack of full and productive employment, decent work and access to infrastructure, as well as other socioeconomic issues that may constitute a loss of family, community and a sense of belonging, and, depending on national context, can be described as a condition where a person or household lacks safe habitable space, which may compromise their ability to enjoy social relations, and includes people living on the streets, in other open spaces or in buildings not intended for human habitation, people living in temporary accommodation or shelters for people experiencing homelessness, and, in accordance with national legislation, may include, among others, people living in severely inadequate accommodation without security of tenure and access to basic services" (Para 22).

FIGURE 1

Homelessness Globally

The Current Realities - 2024

1

The last United Nations global survey of the homeless conducted in 2005 estimated that

100 million

people were homeless

2

The World Economic Forum reported that

150 million

people were homeless worldwide, which is 2% of the world's population

3

More than

2.8 billion

people worldwide live in inadequate housing, including 1.1 billion living in slums and informal settlements, with limited access to essential services such as water and sanitation, electricity, and are often under threat of forced eviction

4

According to UNHCR, more than

130 million

individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide by the end of December 2023. This signifies the largest single-year increase in forced displacement as propelled by war, conflict, and disasters around the world

5

Globally, at least

4.4 million

people across 95 countries are stateless or of undetermined nationality according to the UNHCR. The actual figure is believed to be significantly higher, however, stateless people are often invisible in data collection

PART TWO

THEMATIC OVERVIEW

Homelessness and Policymaking at the United Nations: Connecting Local Realities to Global Solutions

Homelessness is a global crisis that transcends borders, yet its solutions must be deeply rooted in local realities. At the United Nations, policymaking on homelessness has evolved through years of advocacy, research, and multilateral dialogue, aiming to bridge the gap between grassroots experiences and international frameworks. This chapter explores how UN mechanisms, deliberations, and policy frameworks serve as platforms for shaping global responses to homelessness, and the work done thus far in this vein. It highlights the critical role of civil society, Member States, and UN agencies in developing policies that reflect and address the lived experiences of those most affected. It also explores gaps and opportunities for progress in global policymaking to address homelessness, showcases effective interventions at the global and regional level, and proposes concrete strategies to integrate homelessness into global development frameworks. By connecting local challenges to global solutions, this chapter underscores the urgent need for a coordinated, human rights-based approach to ending homelessness worldwide and offers recommendations for policymakers and advocates.

Analysis: Michal Mlynár, UN-HABITAT

H.E. Michal Mlynár
Deputy Executive Director and Assistant-Secretary General of UN-HABITAT

Dr. Michal Mlynár (Slovakia) is a seasoned diplomat and educator with almost 30 years of experience in senior global assignments.

He was appointed by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres as Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and assumed his post in Nairobi in April 2023. From 20 January to 7 August 2024, he was designated by the Secretary-General to temporarily lead UN-Habitat as Acting Executive Director.

Until April 2023, he was Slovakia's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York. During his term, he co-chaired the Intergovernmental Negotiations on Security Council reform during the 77th session of the General Assembly, served as Vice President of the UNICEF Executive Board, Vice Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, and Chair of the Sixth Committee.

Prior to that, Dr. Mlynár served as Director General for International Organizations, Development Cooperation, and Humanitarian Aid at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic. He was also Slovakia's Ambassador in Nairobi and served as the Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UN-Habitat and the President of its Governing Council.

Since its foundation, UN-Habitat has worked to promote affordable, safe, and adequate housing for all as a universal right that is fundamental to human dignity and as one of the transformative forces that can lead the world to overcome challenges related to poverty, climate change, exclusion, and inequality. Housing, beyond four walls and a roof, is a cornerstone for economic and social inclusion, safety and healthy environments. This understanding drives our conviction that **addressing homelessness and housing exclusion is a prerequisite for fully upholding human rights, as well as achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and implementing the New Urban Agenda.**

As the agency promoting socially and environmentally sustainable cities and human settlements, UN-Habitat regards ending homelessness and housing exclusion as going beyond emergency responses. Effectively addressing homelessness demands a holistic strategy that encompasses housing, healthcare, social protection, education, and more.

We also believe that the challenge of homelessness knows no borders. It exists on every continent, often intertwined with poverty, inequality, inadequate housing, displacement, gender-based violence, substance misuse, discrimination, lack of decent employment, unbridled property speculation, privatisation of public services and gaps in healthcare and social protection systems.

The COVID-19 crisis was a turning point, revealing the harsh realities faced by people experiencing homelessness and lacking stable and safe housing, but also magnifying risks like job loss, isolation, and economic instability, particularly among marginalised groups. Urban residents in developing countries rapidly fell into severe poverty due to limited social protections, compounded by the loss of informal jobs from lockdowns and mobility restrictions. Additionally, women and children exposed to domestic and gender-based violence were forced to remain in unsafe environments, with incidents of abuse potentially escalating during lockdowns and curfews.

Since 2019, UN-Habitat has partnered with organisations such as the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the NGO Working Group to End Homelessness and UNANIMA International. Our collaborative efforts have aimed i) to establish a clear, universal and inclusive definition of homelessness that recognises its complexity, ii) to develop comprehensive global measurement methods and, iii) support the formulation of policies and regulatory frameworks prioritising equitable access to adequate housing for all, regardless of their background.

This collective effort culminated in the resolution 76/133, on inclusive policies and programmes to address homelessness, tabled by the African Group and adopted by consensus at the 76th Session of the General Assembly in 2021. The resolution requested UN-Habitat and UN DESA to support the Secretary-General in preparing a global report providing a comprehensive overview of existing interventions and critical areas for improvement.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the limitations in current methods for research and measuring of homelessness, particularly overlooking its impact on historically marginalised groups. This has strongly emerged during the preparation of the Report. The conclusions therefore stressed the need for comprehensive data collection from all corners of society and geographical regions, leaving no one behind. Homelessness encompasses a diverse spectrum of circumstances beyond street sleeping, including emergency and temporary housing, severely unsafe and inadequate conditions, and involuntary sharing of accommodations because of lack of alternatives. Recognising this diversity is critical to tailor effective strategies to end homelessness.

For instance, narrow definitions of homelessness tend to make the experiences of women and children less visible, as they are less likely to be living on the street, often concealing their gender for safety reasons and are also less likely to approach emergency shelters before all other options have been exhausted. Furthermore, while homelessness may be most visible in urban settings, rural areas are also affected.

Establishing a clear and inclusive definition of homelessness, encompassing broader aspects related to housing exclusion, would support governments in capturing the specific realities of drivers and experiences of homelessness and incorporating them into decision-making.

Investments in tools and surveys have played a crucial role in advancing understanding of homelessness. They also contributed to an emerging consensus that homelessness

encompasses a wide range of diverse circumstances, which can be experienced by long-term street dwellers, recently displaced families, people fleeing domestic violence and exploitation, and newcomers to urban settings living in informal settlements. For instance, the first census carried out in Paris by Mayor Hidalgo's office ('La Nuit Solidaire") has brought new perspectives and insights, particularly regarding homelessness among women. The first Nuit Solidaire in 2018, in fact, revealed that 12% of people sleeping rough were women. A strong difference with the previous estimation of 2%. Similarly, the first National Survey carried out in Brazil in 2008 showed that 71% of people experiencing homelessness were employed in the informal sector, with 89% lacking social benefits and 25% lacking identification documents. Almost 80% also confirmed that they were living in the city where they always lived or in a nearby municipality.

These findings help to shift public opinion and prompted the development of context-specific interventions, including specific support for women and informal workers.

To build on this kind of progress, a comprehensive and methodical approach to global data collection is essential. This approach should involve not only regular point-in-time counts or real-time data to measure street homelessness, but also the collection of disaggregated data that captures the specific needs and primary drivers of homelessness. Engaging people with lived experiences in the development of different methodologies would also ensure the data reflects the realities faced across different locations, from major cities to rural communities.

Furthermore, community-led initiatives should be supported to produce knowledge, including to monitor public attitudes toward homelessness, as well as the exposure of people experiencing homelessness to risks like hate crimes, physical assault, and exploitation. These surveys should also assess the extent of exclusion and discrimination in accessing essential services such as housing, healthcare, social security benefits, education, and employment. Incorporating qualitative evidence, such as oral testimonies, photographs, and videos, ensures that the data captures the full spectrum of homelessness, including those who might not be visible in traditional statistics.

Still, collecting data is not enough; bridging the gap between policy and reality requires involving people with lived experience of homelessness to promote inclusive policies and support systems.

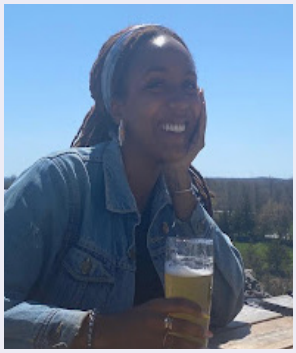
The Secretary-General's report supports the call of UN-Habitat and its partners for an approach to ending homelessness that is people-centred. **There is no single path into and out of homelessness and addressing people's needs requires a personalised, tailored response, including support for family reconnection, mental health and substance use assistance, vocational training, support in finding employment, as well as psychosocial support.**

Prevention is also a key focus, involving tailored, cross-sectoral strategies addressing both structural factors and individual risks associated with homelessness. Legislation should explicitly recognise and prioritise housing as a common good, incorporating principles of non-discrimination and progressive realisation. Governments should also develop national overarching and long-term policies that go beyond addressing housing market failures, "gaps," and crises in affordable housing, and prioritise adequate shelter for those most in need based on the basis of income level, housing status and conditions. While housing alone cannot end homelessness, addressing housing exclusion, especially for marginalised groups is critical to break the cycle of poverty and exclusion.

Analysis: Leilani Farha and Kirsten McRae, the Shift

Leilani Farha
Former Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing; Global Director, The Shift

Leilani is the Global Director of The Shift, an international movement to secure the right to housing and the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing (2014-2020). The Shift was launched in 2017 with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and United Cities and Local Government and works with multi-level stakeholders around the world including with several city governments in North America and Europe. Leilani's work is animated by the principle that housing is a social good, not a commodity. She has helped develop global human rights standards on the right to housing, including through her topical reports on homelessness, the financialization of housing, informal settlements, rights-based housing strategies, and the first UN Guidelines for the implementation of the right to housing.



Kirsten McRae
Communications Manager, The Shift

Kirsten McRae is the Communications & Marketing Manager for The Shift, where she is able to make use of her diverse background in advertising, journalism, education, and global affairs. Throughout her career, Kirsten has consistently applied her communication skills to complex international issues, bridging the gap between policy and public understanding. Kirsten's unique blend of communications prowess and specialized knowledge in government and development in East and Southeast Asia and climate change solutions positions her as a valuable asset in addressing pressing world challenges, where she continues to leverage her strategic communication skills to drive meaningful change.

Criminalizing Survival: The Paradox of Housing Policies and Climate Challenges in Family Homelessness

Families are the bedrock of society, a cornerstone of human rights law.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims that families are fundamental to society, and must be protected. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - a treaty signed by more than 170 States worldwide - extends the rights of families beyond protection to include assistance. Both documents articulate that housing is a fundamental human right.

And yet, the crisis of family homelessness grows.

Rather than doubling down on their international human rights law commitments, gathering resources and know-how to address the life threatening situation with the laser focus

required, States have pivoted toward criminal law, where homeless people are ticketed and even imprisoned for their homelessness.

In the United States, cities like San Francisco and Los Angeles have enacted ordinances making it illegal to exist in public spaces without a home. Worse yet, the US Supreme Court itself recently ruled that forcibly evicting homeless people from encampments and other public places does not amount to cruel and inhumane treatment and is perfectly legitimate and legal. Across the Atlantic, Hungary has taken an even more extreme approach, amending its constitution in 2018 to effectively ban homelessness nationwide, despite an estimated 30,000 people living in homelessness. In Nigeria, homeless people living under bridges and in other public locations are routinely rounded up and put in jail.

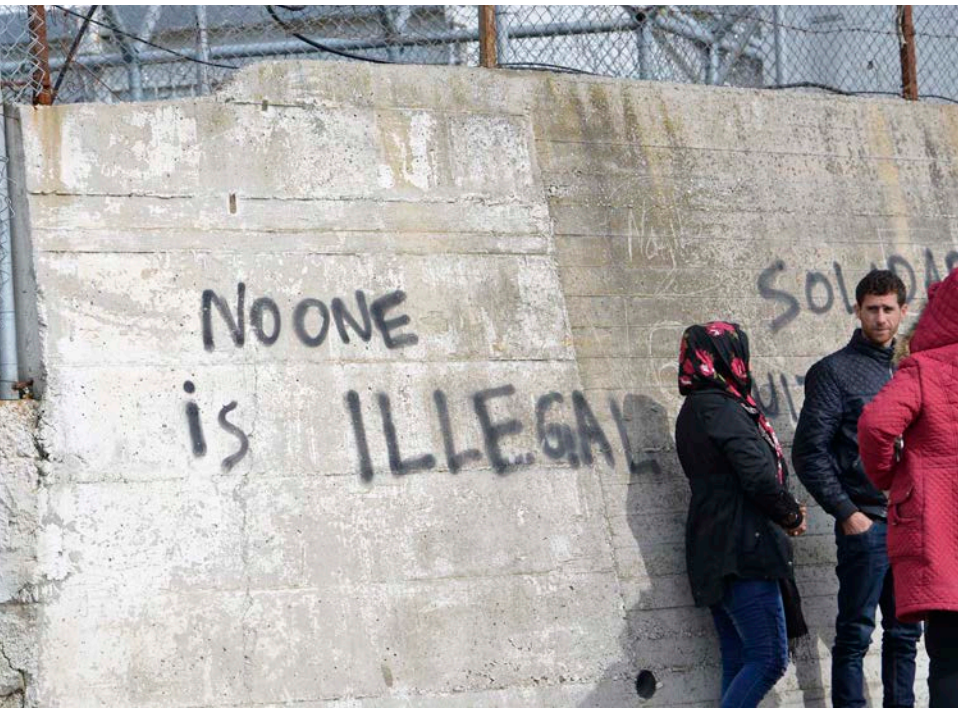
These punitive measures not only fail to address the root causes of homelessness but also exacerbate the trauma and instability experienced by homeless families. The constant threat of legal action adds another layer of stress to already vulnerable families, potentially separating parents from children and deepening the cycle of poverty and homelessness.

A recent report on the criminalization of poverty and homelessness by UN human rights experts exposes that this discriminatory approach to homelessness is rooted in how governments and financial actors regard housing and property. The ideology of "Growthism" has become dominant, prioritizing economic expansion at the expense of human well-being. This has led to a paradoxical situation whereby immense wealth is generated through housing, turning it into the most valuable business in the world, by making everyday people poorer. Referred to as the "financialization of housing", housing has increasingly been treated as a commodity for investment by financial actors like private equity and asset management firms and pension funds, rather than as a basic human right. This trend has led to skyrocketing housing costs worldwide, pushing affordable housing further out of reach for low-income families. The result is a growing number of families living in precarity and a rise in "working homeless" families – those employed but unable to afford stable housing.

Add climate change to this already volatile mix, and low-income individuals and families find themselves in an unprecedented struggle for survival. Extreme weather events, exacerbated by global warming, are displacing families from their homes with increasing frequency. Low-income families, who are often forced to live in areas more susceptible to flooding, wildfires, or other climate-related disasters, are particularly vulnerable. In the past decade, climate-fueled disasters were the primary driver of internal displacement, with 21.5 million people annually being forced from their homes due to extreme weather.

The intersection of these trends – criminalization of homelessness, unaffordable housing, and climate change – creates living conditions that have disproportionate and very particular impacts on families. Children in homeless families face disrupted education, increased health risks, and long-term psychological impacts. These effects can perpetuate cycles of poverty and homelessness across generations.

It is difficult to understand how one of the most visible and prevalent human rights violations - one with real life or death consequences - has taken a back seat to the financial interests and gains of a few already obscenely wealthy people. What is less difficult is determining what needs to be done.



The road map to a better place has already been laid by international human rights law and political commitments.

All States – and that means all levels of government – must commit to ending homelessness by 2030 in keeping with their human rights obligations and the commitments they made in the Sustainable Development Goals. This commitment must be backed by concrete actions. States must decriminalize homelessness, allocate necessary resources so that families and individuals can secure adequate housing and any necessary supports. They must adopt preventative measures, such as implement robust tenant protection laws and ensuring sufficient supply of social housing. Private actors must be compelled to find alternative investment opportunities, recognizing that housing is a fundamental human right, not a commodity.

There's also a pressing need for more comprehensive family support systems that address the multiple factors contributing to homelessness. This includes robust social protection, accessible healthcare, quality education, and employment support.

It is of course absurd to think that policy makers - most of whom have never been homeless - have the requisite insights to design effective housing and support systems. The experiences and voices of families living in homelessness must be integrated into all aspects of the policy-making process. Their insights are invaluable in developing effective, compassionate solutions that respond to the actual causes and consequences of homelessness.

The path forward requires a paradigm shift in how we view housing and homelessness. By recommitting to the principles of human rights and social protection, we can work towards a world where every family has access to safe, affordable, and stable housing. The time for action is now – the lives and futures of countless families depend on our collective resolve to address this critical human rights issue.

To get there, **it's time for the Secretary-General of the UN to appoint a Special Representative on Homelessness.** This representative could work with States across the globe to highlight the issue, address discrimination against homeless people, and help States develop action plans to combat homelessness effectively by 2030.

Analysis: Kirin Taylor, PhD Candidate, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs

Kirin Taylor
PhD Candidate, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs

Kirin R. Taylor is currently pursuing a PhD in Political Science at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, where she is a teaching associate. She is a researcher, educator, and politically engaged pacifist, who has come from both a peace and social justice education and grassroots services background. She was formerly an adjunct professor at St. John's University in the Department of Government and Politics. Taylor worked in civil society at the United Nations for over 4 years, and through her time with UNANIMA International as their Lead Researcher and Policy Advocated, focused on family homelessness, displacement, and trauma, and advancement of human rights.

Homelessness on the Global Agenda: An Overview

For the first time in 75 years, homelessness was explicitly addressed by the United Nations during the 58th session of the Economic and Social Council's (ECOSOC's) Commission for Social Development (CSocD58). This milestone came after years of coordinated advocacy and work, culminating in two groundbreaking resolutions on homelessness. These resolutions affirm a broad definition of homelessness and emphasize its intersection with various social issues, setting a foundation for more inclusive and effective policymaking.

In this piece, I celebrate the resolutions, noting the advancements in a collective understanding of homelessness they signify. I also reflect on next steps for those studying homelessness and housing rights, as we strive to maintain momentum toward socio-economic rights while acknowledging homelessness as a universal issue.

A key strength of the resolutions is their recognition of homelessness as a universal issue requiring both global and localized responses. They encourage cross-national and cross-cultural assessments, advocating shared learning and collaboration among nations while respecting unique contexts.

The significance of these resolutions lies in their acknowledgment that homelessness affects every nation, whether developed or developing—something not always broadly recognized.

The resolutions redefine homelessness as a spectrum, aligning global understanding with frameworks like the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS), which categorizes the diverse manifestations of homelessness. Such frameworks highlight the need for policies addressing root causes of housing insecurity, not just its most visible symptoms. Moving beyond narrow definitions of homelessness—typically rooflessness or houselessness—the resolutions embrace a comprehensive understanding that includes housing inadequacy and insecurity, driving policies that more accurately reflect lived experiences.

Intersectionality of Homelessness

The resolutions emphasize the intersectionality of homelessness with other social challenges,

including gender-based violence, economic inequality, and climate change. Even in countries with robust welfare systems, evidence of violence against women driving homelessness—or occurring within shelters—underscores the need for integrated solutions addressing complex factors.

A Call to Action for Academics and Advocates

Academics and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play critical roles in advancing the work outlined in the resolutions. Meaningful research, particularly peer-reviewed studies, is essential for understanding homelessness and informing policy. Surprisingly, disciplines like political science often overlook homelessness and housing rights, despite their relevance to governance, policymaking, and societal power dynamics.

Scholars must take up the resolutions' call to action, as their work is invaluable for NGOs and governments alike. Opportunities to publish are growing, including in the International Journal on Homelessness (IJOH), which launched in 2021. For instance, Rabiah-Mohammed and Oudshoorn's The Extent of Homelessness in the Middle East and North Africa Region: A Scoping Review demonstrates the value of regional analyses and highlights the disproportionate focus on Western countries in English-language research.

Challenges and Opportunities Moving Forward

Despite progress, significant challenges remain. Advanced democracies like the United States, Ireland, and France have seen constitutional court rulings hostile to economic and social rights. In the U.S., the Grants Pass v. Johnson decision overturned decades of precedent against criminalizing homelessness, highlighting the fragility of progress even in wealthy nations.

Moreover, narrow definitions of homelessness hinder effective responses. For example, in Japan, homelessness is often defined solely as sleeping on the street, creating a perception of low prevalence. Such limited frameworks fail to capture broader realities of housing insecurity and inadequacy. Convincing countries to align their definitions with the resolutions will be imperative.

Homelessness intersects with systemic issues that demand greater attention. Climate change, for instance, is predicted to exacerbate housing challenges globally, particularly for vulnerable populations. Addressing these interconnected issues requires a holistic approach integrating housing policies with broader social, economic, and environmental strategies.

The Role of Advocacy in Bridging the Gap

NGOs and civil society organizations are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between local realities and global policymaking. Their advocacy efforts shaped the UN resolutions, demonstrating the power of grassroots movements to influence international agendas. However, documenting these efforts is crucial—not for credit, but to refine strategies and bolster future work.

These organizations must continue pushing for implementation of the resolutions' principles, ensuring broad definitions and intersectional approaches are translated into actionable policies. NGOs also play a pivotal role in fostering collaboration between academics and policymakers. By amplifying research findings and advocating evidence-based solutions, they ensure that voices of those experiencing homelessness are heard and represented in policy discussions.

A Call to Action

Adopting the broad definition of homelessness affirmed in the UN resolutions is a critical step toward addressing the issue comprehensively. This definition allows policymakers to move beyond reductive frameworks and craft solutions reflecting diverse experiences. It also facilitates cross-national comparisons and collaborations, making it easier to identify best practices and adapt them to varied contexts.

For advocates and academics, the resolutions represent an opportunity to drive meaningful change. By conducting impactful research and advocating inclusive policies, we can help ensure the momentum generated by CSocD58 leads to tangible improvements in the lives of those experiencing homelessness and safeguards for future generations.

Good Practices: Ella Hancock, World Habitat

Ella Hancock
Programme Manager (Homelessness), World Habitat

Ella Hancock is currently the Programme Manager (Homelessness) at World Habitat. Prior to joining World Habitat, Ella worked for a Local Authority in the UK, managing an EU-funded programme supporting people experiencing homelessness. She also worked at Crisis, a leading UK homelessness charity, for seven years, where she managed programmes and led on best practice around youth homelessness and shared housing solutions.

Ella has a Master's degree in Children, Youth and International Development, and a PG Certificate in Leadership and Management: Homelessness and Housing. She has also been awarded a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Travel Fellowship to research the potential role of co-housing as an alternative housing option for young people experiencing homelessness.

Ending Homelessness in Europe: Lessons from a decade of progress

World Habitat is an independent charity working internationally to bring effective housing solutions to those most in need. We award, strengthen and transfer innovative ideas that address global housing challenges.

Homelessness remains one of Europe's most pressing issues, affecting nearly one million people nightly across the EU and UK. Rising living costs and a severe lack of affordable and social housing compound the crisis. The Ninth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2024 underscores the urgent need for systemic change and coordinated action.

European-wide initiatives are making strides. The European Platform for Combatting Homelessness aims to eliminate homelessness across Europe. FEANTSA's EPOCH programme focuses on uniting member states, cities, and stakeholders to drive policy alignment and impactful solutions.

Europe-wide solutions and focus are vital, but local initiatives also offer valuable lessons. In 2015 World Habitat launched the European End Street Homelessness Campaign (EESHC). Inspired by the success of World Habitat Award Winners The 100,000 Homes Campaign in the United States and the Y-Foundation in Finland, the campaign adapted the methodology of these programmes to cities across Europe that signed up to a set of principles aimed at ending homelessness.

Local organisations lead the charge, supported by World Habitat's guidance, funding, and coaching. Peer exchange programmes have fostered collaboration, inspired new approaches and partnerships, strengthened local capacity, and driven meaningful progress.

Over the past decade, World Habitat has partnered with over 40 homelessness sector organisations in 15 countries. Since 2022, the campaign has focused on Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), where resources and systemic support are limited and social

stigma against people experiencing homelessness is entrenched.

Here are three key lessons from this experience:

Evidence-Based Practice

Using evidence strengthens the case for change and ensures resources are spent where they matter most.

Robust data is an essential tool in tackling homelessness, especially where official statistics are lacking. Campaign partners have conducted street counts to track rough sleeping trends, helping them to advocate for policy change and structural reform. The most effective results came when these counts were done annually in collaboration with local authorities and other organisations. Partners have also commissioned research, in particular qualitative research into the experience of marginalised groups (for example women and Roma) experiencing homelessness which have laid the groundwork for focused interventions and stronger evidence-based policy advocacy.

Partnership Working

Collaboration is key to improved practice and systemic change.

Community engagement is vital, and campaign partners have successfully involved volunteers and the public in street counts, consultations, and strategic planning. Cross-sector networks like the Croatian Network for the Homeless, Glasgow Homelessness Alliance, Westminster Homelessness Partnership and Leicester Homelessness Charter show how shared goals and joint strategies drive effective action.

In CEE, partnerships have been crucial where political support and social housing are limited. In Bucharest, frontline NGO Carusel completed their first street count with the municipality in 2024, a move that it is hoped will encourage further joint working and ensure that statutory provision is evidence-based. In Croatia, municipal support helped fund Udruga AjA's first Housing First project, with mentorship from fellow campaign partner Portugal's NGO CRESCER, an experienced Housing First practitioner, and the Housing First Europe Hub.

These partnerships demonstrate how combining local expertise with international best practice can create innovative, sustainable solutions.

Housing-Led Approaches

Housing-led approaches have proven highly effective in ending homelessness. Over the last decade this model has become more mainstream, particularly in Western Europe, where social and political support is stronger.

Increasing affordable housing supply remains vital to delivering housing-led approaches and the campaign has seen and supported innovative models, including renovating vacant private and municipal-owned properties, leasing properties with grant funding through social finance, or using social rental agency models to bridge the gap between private landlords and low-income tenants.

While housing-led approaches are gaining traction in CEE, progress remains slow. In 2023, to accelerate the adoption of housing-led approaches World Habitat commissioned research to explore the potential of such an approach in the region. The research and associated policy briefs spurred new momentum. In Hungary, World Habitat Award winners, From Streets to Homes Association, now use their expertise and experience in delivering a social housing agency to support the local authority to implement their own. In Slovakia, the NGO STOPA runs a successful housing-led programme and won a World Habitat Award this year; while in Romania grassroots NGOs keep innovating despite systemic challenges.

In Croatia, with World Habitat's support, EESHC partners launched the country's first housing-first programme with full support from the municipality and are delivering national and regional training.

Campaign Impact

The EESHC has brought together homelessness organisations across Europe to foster learning, collaboration, and innovation. Through bespoke coaching, peer exchanges, study visits, and joint funding, partners have shared solutions and inspired new strategies, even in difficult political climates. In its first three years, the campaign engaged nearly 3,000 volunteers and helped 344 people secure housing. Since then, it has supported almost 3,000 more into permanent homes.

The Campaign's small grants programme for innovative solutions allowed partners to test and expand ideas while forging partnerships with local governments and stakeholders for sustainable change. Projects have included Ukrainian peer mentor programmes, public awareness raising campaigns and service user-led co-development initiatives.

When crises hit, the campaign's network responded effectively. When the conflict in Ukraine began, emergency funds to partners in neighbouring countries helped over 1,000 people find housing with support. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the need for rapid action and long-term thinking—sharing strategies through online events helped partners create safe, permanent solutions beyond temporary shelter.

The achievements of the European End Street Homelessness Campaign partners over the past decade illustrate that solidarity and knowledge-sharing can drive change even in challenging environments.

Social Stigmas and Compounding Vulnerabilities: Homelessness and Historically Marginalized Groups

Social stigma and systemic discrimination can both cause and exacerbate the experience of homelessness. Historically marginalized groups, including women and girls, children and youth, older persons, LGBTQ+ individuals, and Indigenous communities, face unique and compounding vulnerabilities that increase their risk of housing insecurity and make it difficult to escape the cycle of extreme poverty and homelessness. These populations often face intersecting barriers to housing, resources, and support such as gender-based violence, exploitation, discrimination, and the lasting impacts of colonialism and imperialism. This chapter examines how stigma and structural inequalities shape and inform their experiences of homelessness and highlights policies and programs that address their specific needs with dignity, equity, and justice.

Analysis: Lydia Stazen, Ruff Institute of Global Homelessness

Lydia Stazen, IGH
Executive Director, Ruff Institute of Global Homelessness; Co-Chair, NGO Working Group to End Homelessness

Lydia has dedicated her career to building a world where all people have a place to call home and a strong foundation upon which they can build the lives they envision for themselves. Lydia has held executive leadership roles in anti-poverty organizations across the Midwest, focusing on housing, employment, education, and policy advocacy.

Immediately prior to joining the Institute for Global Homelessness, she served as Vice Chancellor of Advancement and President of the City Colleges of Chicago Foundation. She also served for several years as Vice President of All Chicago Making Homelessness History, where she was instrumental in integrating homeless data with medical data to help patients experiencing homelessness access housing services. Her expertise spans systems change, collective impact, fundraising, communications and marketing, program design, outcomes and data tracking and analysis, nonprofit management, government administration, executive search, and more.

Women and Girls Experiencing Homelessness: Hidden and Underrepresented

Congratulations to UNANIMA International on the release of this publication! During its history, UNANIMA International has had an enormous positive impact on women and girls globally, particularly those who are experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness. The Ruff Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH) has been truly pleased to partner alongside UNANIMA to advocate for homelessness to be included in the United Nations agenda, through the NGO Working Group to End Homelessness.

IGH, in partnership with UNANIMA, champions a globally inclusive definition of homelessness that includes three parts. First, people living on the streets, in other open spaces or in buildings not intended for human habitation. Second, people living in temporary accommodation or shelters for the homeless. Third, people living in severely inadequate accommodation without security of tenure and access to basic services.

Women and girls experience all three types of homelessness, but are "hidden" or underrepresented in the statistics for several reasons ("Women and rough sleeping", 2018). First, and specific to street homelessness, women try to "conceal themselves to stay safe" and may be missed by outreach workers. Second, there is often a lack of gender-specific homeless services and shelters, and women and girls may not feel comfortable accessing services or staying in places that are not tailored to their unique needs. Third, women tend to rely more on social networks and alternate between street home-

lessness and staying in severely inadequate accommodation instead of engaging with services. Fourth, gender-based violence is a major driver of women's homelessness but homeless services generally run separately from domestic violence services; thus, if a woman seeks services from a domestic violence center, the center may not record her housing status as homelessness.

For all these reasons and more, IGH advocates for better homeless data collection. We believe that we must "see" the problem of homelessness in order to "solve" it. We have a particular concern for women and girls because their experiences of homelessness are often hidden. IGH works with local and national NGOs and governments to strengthen their definitions of homelessness and their homeless data collection policies and protocols in ways that ensure inclusivity.

In order to better capture the experiences of women and girls in the data, we advise agencies to create and follow client consent and data protection policies, so that women and girls understand how and why their data will be collected, and under what circumstances their data will be shared. We help cross-sector collaborations create data standards and data sharing agreements so that women and girls won't be continually traumatized by having to tell their painful stories over and over again at different service agencies. We recommend the collection of multiple disaggregated data points on age, gender, sexual orientation, household composition, etc. We also recommend the collection of data on housing outcomes, tracking data points like the length of time it takes for a woman to receive housing and whether or not she returned into homelessness after receiving housing. These data analytics can point to gaps or insufficiencies in housing and service provisions.

Along with inclusive definition and data collection, we advocate for comprehensive polices and programs to address homelessness for women and girls. We recommend first that NGOs and local and national governments listen and learn from women and girls who have experienced diverse types of homelessness. Centering diverse lived experience will surface specific challenges and needs that must be sufficiently addressed in order to successfully prevent, reduce, and end homelessness. We further advocate that housing, land rights, and inheritance laws and legislation treat women as equal to men. We recommend that a gender lens be applied to prevention efforts, street outreach and engagement, shelters and temporary / crisis housing, permanent housing, and supportive services. Supportive services should be trauma-informed and comprehensive, including employment, education, mental and physical health care, reproductive healthcare, problematic substance use treatment, therapy, family mediation, financial counseling, and legal services. Reviewing each of these areas through a gender lens will identify both small and large areas for improvement, to ensure that women and girls feel seen, safe, and supported on their journey out of homelessness.

And last but certainly not least, we advocate for each of these points within the framework of the human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an undertaking chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt (Black, 2023), and ratified by all United Nations Member States in Paris in 1948, states in Article 25 that "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including…housing and medical care and necessary social services…" And as another First Lady of the United States, Hillary Rodham Clinton, famously declared at the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, "women's rights are human rights and human rights are women's rights, once and for all." We believe that all women and girls, wherever they live in the world, are deserving of having access to homeless services and housing because they are human. With this right fully enshrined in the United Nations' earliest documents, carrying forward for more than 75 years, the time is ripe for the human right to adequate housing to now be fully delivered for women and girls.

Analysis: Dalma Fabian, FEANTSA

Dalma Fabian
Policy Advisor, European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA)

Dalma Fabian is Policy Officer at the European Federation of National Organisations Working with Homeless People, where she is responsible for health and focuses on women's homelessness and child homelessness. She holds a European Masters Degree in Human Rights and Democratisation. Before joining FEANTSA she worked on human rights in South East Europe.

Addressing Women's Homelessness in Europe: Challenges, Strategies and Way Forward

Homelessness is a pressing social issue in Europe, with a strong commitment by the EU Member States to end it by 2030, as declared in Lisbon in 2021. However, as the deadline nears, it's essential to transform political promises into tangible results. One crucial aspect of this effort is ensuring that the unique challenges faced by women experiencing homelessness are addressed. Recognizing this need, FEANTSA recently held a meeting in the European Parliament to raise awareness about women's homelessness. Below are key insights from the event (FEANTSA, 2024).

The Hidden Faces of Women's Homelessness

There are several reasons for the invisibility of women's homelessness. Firstly, it has historically been misunderstood and perceived as the domain of single men. Secondly, the current definitions and systems of measurement and enumeration used in most EU Member States fail to capture the realities of women's experiences. They focus on environments that women avoid, for instance the street or male dominated mixed services when women are more likely to sofa surf, use alternative arrangements like staying with family and friends. Recent EU SILC data ("Income and Living Conditions", n.d.), underscores this, showing that 77% of women who have experienced homelessness stayed with family and friends rather than on the streets. However, these situations are not always safer. Women sofa surfing is often exposed to exploitation and significant safety risks. The third reason for women's invisibility is that many women delay contact or avoid contact with services. This is due to the perceived shame and stigma, and fear of judgement that creates a significant barrier to accessing support and leads to further marginalisation. Such multi-

ple stigma is very strong for women, because of societal expectations of women. When women deviate from traditional gender roles and expectations for instance by using drugs or living outside traditional roles, they are labelled as failures and judged more harshly.

Women also avoid shelters that are not safe for them. To create safety, the most effective response is providing women only spaces by women for women. Yet, the availability of women only services is uneven in Europe, approximately only 10 percent of accommodation projects can offer women only provision in their services.

Inadequate Responses to the Unique Needs of Women

Invisibility leads to inadequate responses to the unique needs of women and as a result, women are often excluded from support and housing that meet their needs. The effects of this exclusion are severe: while according to EU Fundamental Rights Agency 1 in 3 women will experience in their lifetime gender-based violence and abuse (Eurostat, 2024), for women who are homeless such experiences are "near universal" (Bretherton & Mayock, 2021). Gender-based violence is the biggest difference between men's and women's homelessness and the major cause and consequence of women's homelessness.

Another effect of women's homelessness is the extreme social and health inequalities women face and the devastating impact it has on their physical and mental health. The manifestation of extreme health inequalities is that women in homelessness have a shorter life expectancy. The average age of death is just 43 years old (that's at least 30 years earlier than those who have homes) lower than any country in the world. Women experiencing homelessness die even younger than their male counterparts, which is the opposite in the housed population.

To address these challenges, the following key strategies can guide efforts to prevent and end women's homelessness:

1. **Adopt a Human Rights and Gendered Approach** An intersectional, human rights-based framework is crucial for addressing women's homelessness. Recognizing the interconnectedness of housing insecurity, poverty, GBV, and systemic discrimination, a human rights-based approach reframes homelessness as a state failure to uphold women's housing rights. Such a perspective shifts the focus from individual responsibility to structural accountability.
2. **Break the Cycle of GBV and Homelessness with Housing** Stable housing is the most effective intervention for breaking the cycle of GBV and homelessness. Housing First, an evidence-backed model, prioritizes immediate access to housing coupled with tailored support services. To be effective for women, this approach must incorporate gender-sensitive elements, addressing trauma, safety concerns, and motherhood. There are excellent examples of Housing First projects adapted to women's needs ("Women", n.d.).
3. **Integrate Gender into Broader Strategies** Women's homelessness must be systematically embedded in policy frameworks, not treated as an "add-on" or secondary issue. These efforts must be scaled and sustained to create systemic change. Countries like Spain and Germany have integrated gender perspectives into their national homelessness strategies. But we need to stress that similarly women's strategies, gender equality strategies or GBV strategies should address women's homelessness and should not 'leave no one behind'. Upcoming EU initiatives, such as the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and

the EU Affordable Housing Plan, must also integrate gendered perspectives to ensure that women experiencing homelessness are reached.

4. **Foster Collaborative Partnerships** Preventing and ending women's homelessness is not solely the responsibility of the homelessness sector. It requires collaboration across multiple sectors such as women's services, women's refuges, health care sector, child protection, criminal justice system, mental health and substance use interventions that must share a gender-sensitive, intersectional framework to ensure that comprehensive and cohesive support is tailored to women's complex needs. Such partnerships must be institutionalized and resourced to ensure long-term impact.
5. **Prioritise participation and lived experience** Women with lived experience of homelessness provide invaluable insights into gaps in policies and services. Their voices should inform policy and advocacy efforts. Grassroots organizations like SOMOS (SOMOS MULHERES, n.d.), in Portugal, led by women who have experienced homelessness, show the power of participatory advocacy. Beyond sharing their stories, such participation helps dismantle societal stigma and misconceptions about homelessness.

Conclusion

Ending women's homelessness requires sustained advocacy, and a strong commitment to gender equality at all levels of governance. Recognizing the unique challenges women face, embedding their voices in policy discussions, and using EU initiatives are critical steps toward building a more inclusive and equitable Europe.

Analysis: Valerie Bichelmeier, Make Mothers Matter

Valerie Bichelmeier
Vice-President and
Head of UN Delegation
Make Mothers Matter

Holder of a Master's Degree in IT and Telecommunications, Valerie Bichelmeier first worked as an engineer for 20 years in different countries in Europe and Asia.

She joined Make Mothers Matter (MMM) in 2010, becoming its main representative at the United Nations in Geneva. Now as a member of the Board and Vice-President of MMM she leads MMM's advocacy efforts to advance women's rights and gender equality, with a particular focus on women who are mothers, raising awareness of the specific discriminations and challenges they face. The aim of MMM's advocacy work is to change society's view and influence laws, policies and practices so that mothers are fully recognised and supported in their various roles.

The Specific Vulnerability of Lone Mothers to Poverty and Homelessness

Homelessness is not just about people living on the streets but also about those who live in shelters, unstable or inadequate housing, or who rely on the goodwill of friends or family. Lone mothers ("Solutions from across the world", 2023), represent a significant and growing population affected by such 'hidden homelessness'. Often overlooked in statistics, their struggles are less visible but no less pressing.

According to UN Women, globally, lone parent families represent 8% of all households, 84.3% being lone mother families ("Progress of the world's women", 2019). These represent 101.3 million mothers who are on their own and particularly vulnerable to poverty and homelessness.

However, these numbers do not tell the whole story as many lone mothers reside in extended households either to save on housing and get childcare support from other family members or because they have no other choice. UN women estimates reveal another 101.3 million such lone mothers who are not counted by official statistics, and whose needs, reality and vulnerability are therefore invisible to policymakers (Bhatt, 2020).

Generally speaking, women's specific vulnerability to poverty is well recognised: not only do women generally earn less than men, but their disproportionate share of unpaid domestic and care work constraints their time and ability to perform paid work, thereby limiting their income ("Special Rapporteur", n.d.).

Women who are mothers are particularly affected: caring, feeding, nurturing and educating children does require time, especially during the critical Early Childhood period or

for a child with disability – in which case motherhood responsibilities often extend into old age. Mothers also suffer specific discriminations in the Labour market: the "motherhood penalty".

This issue is indeed exacerbated in the case of lone mothers who must take sole responsibility for both unpaid domestic and care work and earning an income, and are often stigmatised for being on their own.

As a result, lone mothers are among the most at risk of falling into poverty. In France for example, 35% of the more than 1.5 million lone mothers live below the poverty line ("1 530 000 méres", 2019).

In turn, limited income makes it difficult, sometimes impossible, to find or keep adequate housing, especially in contexts where affordable housing is scarce, which is increasingly the case in many cities. For example, in the UK, almost one in three lone mothers are either in arrears with their rent or facing a constant struggle to keep their home (Savage, 2021). And all too often, the housing or child allowances that lone mothers sometimes receive are not considered as 'income' when they apply for accommodation.

Even when they have enough personal income to pay for rent, lone mothers face discrimination in accessing housing, as landlords often perceive them as risky tenants (England, 2017). The same applies to banks when lone mothers seek access to credit to buy property.

A Few Figures on Lone Mothers' Homelessness

According to estimates by Shelter Charities reported in a BBC article ("Single mothers 'hit hard", 2018), one in every 55 lone parent families became homeless in 2017-18 in the UK. In 92% of these 26,610 cases, the homeless parent was a lone mother. The same source states that homelessness has increased by 169% since 2010, and that lone parents and their children were eight times more likely to become homeless than couples with children – with again the "vast majority" being lone mothers.

Similarly, a 2018 report by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness ("Single Mother Statistics", n.d.), indicates that families in homeless situations represent one-third of the homeless population. Among these, 60% were headed by women with children, representing 21% of the total homeless population - and nearly half were African Americans (49%). Of the 184,661 homeless people accounted for, 109,719 (59%) were children.

Lone Mother Families: A Growing Phenomenon

Lone motherhood can have many causes: widowhood, divorce or separation from a partner or spouse, partner abandonment, fleeing domestic violence (Women experiencing violence", n.d.), unintended pregnancies, as well as armed conflicts, natural disasters, displacement and migration, which can separate families. Although an increasing number of women do choose to have children on their own, especially in developed countries, they remain a minority. In the majority of cases, women do not become lone mothers by choice.

The number of lone parent families is on the rise, due to increased rates of divorce and separation – especially in high-income countries. In North America and Europe, the percentage of divorced/separated women rose from 7.4% in 1980 to 13.1% in 2010. As a result, in a country like the US, 27% of children under 21 live in a lone parent family, 80.4% being lone mothers (Grall, 2018).

Impact on Children and Long-Term Costs for Society

The impact of homelessness on children cannot be overstated. With frequent school

changes and unstable living conditions children are at a greater risk of physical and mental health problems, developmental delays, poor academic achievement, dropping out, abuse, neglect, behavioural issues, socio emotional problems, etc. – with potentially huge costs for society in the longer term.

Experiencing homelessness leaves permanent scars on both mothers and children, and often leads to a pattern of violence and struggles. Many homeless adults have experienced homelessness as a child.

Preventing Lone Mothers' Homelessness

Addressing the shortage of social housing options for poor families is the first and obvious answer.

But **preventing lone mothers' homelessness is also about addressing the structural barriers to women's economic empowerment, beginning with the issue of the inequitable distribution of unpaid care work** and the challenges of combining paid and unpaid work – which are particularly acute for lone mothers.

Vital support policies include:

- Adequate social protection, beginning with a social protection floor that guarantees a minimum of income (through child and or housing allowances), as well as universal access to essential healthcare and maternity protection
- Accessible public infrastructure and services that include quality affordable childcare services
- Targeted services such as legal and financial counselling, education and professional training, as well as social and psychological support services to prevent burn-out and mental illnesses linked to being a lone mother ("Solutions from across the world", 2023)
- Decent work and Work-Life Balance policies, including the right to request flexible working arrangements and policies that address the "motherhood penalty"

In Conclusion

Lone mothers' specific vulnerability to poverty and homelessness needs an inclusive approach, both acknowledging the difficulties of their situation AND the importance of their caring work and educational responsibilities. This vital work fully justifies generous child allowances (and if needed housing allowances) and targeted public services. Lone mothers need support, not stigmatisation.

Analysis: Dr. Ify Ofong, WorldWIDE Network Nigeria

Dr. Ify Ofong
National Coordinator and Main Representative to the UN, Women in Development and Environment: WorldWIDE Network Nigeria

Dr. Ifeyinwa Ofong started her career as a lecturer at the Department of Geography and Regional Planning, University of Jos, Nigeria. She then progressed to the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Nigeria, where she held various positions, including Senior Lecturer, Head of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Senior Research Fellow, and Course Coordinator at the Institute for Development Studies.

She is the National Coordinator and Main Representative to the United Nations for Women in Development and Environment: WorldWIDE Network Nigeria. She is committed to empowering women to speak for themselves and participate in decision making and governance. She sits on the Executive Committee of the NGO Working Group to End Homelessness. She was a Board Member of Habitat International Coalition, and Convener of HIC-Women and Habitat Africa Working Group. As a Member of the Steering Committee of the African Network of Women Shelters, which is part of the Global Network of Women's Shelters, Dr. Ofong is working with other civil society groups to provide safe spaces and shelters for women survivors of violence and abuse. Dr. Ofong is also a Development Consultant, and has facilitated numerous capacity building trainings, studies, and analysis on many social issues.

The Intersection Between Gender, Land Rights, and Homelessness

Overview

Homelessness has often been described to include people living on the streets, under bridges, open or public spaces, uncompleted buildings and those living in temporary accommodation or shelters for people experiencing homelessness.

They also include people living in severely unsafe and inadequate housing without security of tenure and access to basic services, as well as those voluntarily sharing accommodation with others owing to a lack of housing alternatives.

In Africa, many women and girls have become homeless due to social exclusion, poverty, denial of rights to inheritance, land, and habitat due to customary laws and practices, The proportion of women living in unsafe and inadequate housing without security of tenure and access to basic services is high, while many are involuntarily sharing accommodation with others owing to the lack of housing alternatives.

Gender Equality, Land Rights, and Homelessness

Gender inequality exists in many communities in Africa, driving the traditional resistance to women's ownership of land and property. This is the major hindrance to women's economic advancement as well as effective participation in leadership and decision-making processes in most countries in the region.

Access to land, housing and tenure security is fundamental for women to realize their human rights. Land tenure security is crucial for women's empowerment and a prerequisite for building secure and resilient communities. It offers women a way out of insecurity, poverty and homelessness, as well as the foundation from which women can support and create better lives for themselves and their children.

The unequal access to land, housing and inheritance due to the customary laws and practices affect women and girls at two phases in their lives.

The first is inheritance from parents and the second is inheritance from husband or marital families.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which was adopted by 189 Member States, including African States, said that they were determined to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity. Member States also said that they were convinced that women's rights are human rights, and as such were determined to promote and protect all human rights of women and girls.

In 2015, Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development Goals. In doing that, they committed to achieving sustainable development for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. They pledged that no one would be left behind and to reach the furthest behind first.

In addition, Article 18 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, calls on all States Parties to eliminate every discrimination against women and to ensure the protection of the rights of women as stipulated in international declarations and conventions.

In Article 2, which talks about the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, African States committed to taking corrective and positive action in those areas where discrimination against women in law and in fact continues to exist. They also committed to supporting the local, national, regional and continental initiatives directed at eradicating all forms of discrimination against women.

Habitat II Agenda of 1996, Member states committed to "the empowerment of women and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society."

Furthermore, the New Urban Agenda, which was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), held in Quito in October 2016, Member States also committed to providing basic services for all citizens. These services include access to housing, safe drinking water and sanitation and other services.

Many African countries have constitutions, laws and even administrative mechanisms for protecting women's and girl's rights. Despite the existence of laws and policies, discrimination and denials of rights have continued due to non- adherence within communities, due to deeply entrenched traditions and customary practices.

Having a secured place to live is one of the fundamental elements for human dignity, physical and mental health and overall quality of life and development.

The right to adequate housing has been recognized in article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and in other international instruments.

In addition, Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 states that: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment."

Despite signing and ratification of these key treaties and charters concerning women's land and habitat rights, violations continue to take place throwing women and girls into homelessness.

There is an urgent need to implement and enforce all regional and global policies and instruments signed and ratified by African governments.

Ways Forward

- Aggressive and continuous advocacy campaigns with Member States, African Union, International Development Institutions and United Nations on the intersection between gender, land rights and homelessness.
- Develop and implement civil society monitoring and evaluation mechanisms on women's land rights violations and measurement of homelessness in the region.
- Activate policies and legal frameworks already in place to protect women's rights to land and housing.
- Further sensitization and enforcement of gender equality, women's rights to land and inheritance to end homelessness among women in Africa.

Analysis: Maria Pia Belloni and Jane McCall Politi, Subcommittee on Children in Migration NGO Committee on Migration

Maria Pia Belloni
Co-Chair,
Subcommittee on
Children in Migration,
NGO Committee on
Migration

Maria Pia Belloni Mignatti, Professor (retired) of European Union Law at the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Pavia (Italy) and alumna of the College of Europe (Bruges, Belgium) is United Nations representative of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP https://omepworld.org) and advisor of the Early Childhood Peace Consortium (ECPC, Yale https://ecdpeace.org).

She served as chair of the NGO Committee on Migration and presently is co-chair of the Subcommittee on Children in Migration.

Her current interests are: migrant and refugee children's right to education, mainly to Early Childhood Education and Care; the promotion of social protection for forcibly displaced children.

Jane McCall Politi
Co-Chair,
Subcommittee on
Children in Migration,
NGO Committee on
Migration

Jane McCall Politi was born in New York City, graduated with a BA from Boston University, attended Social Work School in Milan, Italy, and worked as a town social worker near Varese, Italy. She completed the advanced certificate program in clinical social work - School of Social Work – New York University and defended her doctoral dissertation on ethnic identity formation in late adolescents and young adults who are bicultural by birth in May 2012 - Silver School of Social Work – New York University.

She is a FAWCO UN-NY team representative and is Co-Chair of the Subcommittee on Children in Migration of the NGO Committee on Migration in NYC. She served as Vice-Chair of the NGO Committee on Migration NY from 2016 - 2018. Previously, she served as Member-At-Large of the Executive Board.

Bridging the Gap Between Crisis and Stability: The Critical Role of Early Childhood Development Services

Homelessness is systemic to developing and developed countries; its characteristics and causes are complex and varied. Homelessness affects people of all ages, genders, ethnicities and backgrounds; a large, growing percentage of the homeless population includes families with children.

About 1.6 billion, more than 20 percent of the world's population, may lack adequate housing and this number could rise to 3 billion by 2030 (Solf et. al., 2024).

It is challenging to quantify homelessness with accuracy due to the lack of reliable, disaggregated data and the absence of an internationally agreed upon definition, vital to the design and implementation of durable solutions (UN Report of the Secretary General, 2023).

Individuals and families can become homeless temporarily or for prolonged periods as a result of a lack of affordable housing, poverty, domestic violence, evictions (Collinson et. al., 2023), and forcible displacement. Indeed, many cities around the world are experiencing considerable increases in migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees resulting in additional stress on already stretched homeless response systems. Migrant homeless face all the challenges that the homeless population face and more, because of the lack of appropriate policies and the persistence of discriminatory attitudes.

Homelessness indicates a nation's failure to guarantee access to safe, affordable and adequate housing for all, and is a violation of other human rights: to life, decent work, health, social security, non-discrimination, access to justice, to education ("Universal", 1948; General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI), 1966; Committee on the Rights of Children, 2017), jeopardizing many of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Today 56% of the world's population live in cities (World Bank Group, 2023), accelerating the demand for affordable houses, jobs, services particularly for the poor, marginalized and vulnerable; e.g. in recent years, homelessness in New York City has reached the highest levels since the Great Depression of 1930 (Baldari & McConnell, 2021). As of June 20, 2024, 32,856 children were in NYC shelters, 15,182 of whom were in the 0-5 age range ("DHS DATA DASHBOARD", n.d.). Thousands of others live on the streets, in the subways, in hotels/motels or temporarily doubled up in the homes of others.

Experiencing homelessness is traumatizing to children, young people and families.

They live with overwhelming uncertainty about where they will sleep, if they will eat, their safety, and instability due to the lack of comforting personal belongings.

In comparison to those who live in stable homes, they are twice as likely to be sick, hungry, experience physical abuse and maltreatment, develop learning disabilities and three times as likely to suffer from emotional and behavioral problems. Moreover, they are at high risk of being recruited into gangs, trafficked into prostitution, exposure to drugs, child labor, child marriage and other forms of violence ("Child Homelessness", n.d.).

Particularly at risk are youngest children (0-3).

Infants born to mothers who experience homelessness while pregnant are more likely to have a low birth weight (Baldari & McConnell, 2021).

Prolonged and repeated adverse experiences, malnutrition, toxic stress in the earliest years of life inhibit a child's optimal brain development ("InBrief | A Cascade of Impacts", 2024)

But the science is clear: Early Childhood Development (ECD) can protect children

against the detrimental effects of early adversity.

Homeless families need basic support beyond affordable housing to thrive, including food, employment, transportation, health and mental healthcare, childcare services framed by a comprehensive human right based approach.

Indeed, quality and culturally-sensitive ECD in crisis settings must integrate preventive care, mental health and psychosocial support for caregivers, who are often traumatized by their experiences, as well as parental coaching, to strengthen the caregivers' capacity to provide care to their young children and stabilize family life.

New promising evidence is emerging of how ECD services, formal and informal, particularly in crisis settings, can result in more resilient, inclusive and cohesive societies, directly influencing economic, education, health and social outcomes for individuals, families and societies (Leckman et. al., 2014).

Children and families isolated in precarious living situations need inclusive – non-judgmental services adapted to their socio-cultural contexts which they can trust.

The Robinhood Foundation based in NYC operates with local partners to lift families with children out of poverty and to find stable housing. Investing in early childhood is a priority. One of multiple programs Champions Early Learning Opportunities to children in a variety of settings, including homeless shelters ("Early Childhood", 2024).

WIN provides safe, clean transitional housing solutions for homeless 9/10 women-led families with children, as well as childcare and other services in NYC ("Home", 2024).

Family and Schools Together (FAST) in Texas is a tested extensive variety of free holistic programs for extended families, including ECD, to facilitate inclusion, build relationships, and strengthen parenting and well-being in urban and rural areas ("Families and Schools Together (FAST)", 2024).

COLORI Playspace Express is a promising new program by Amal Alliance, Horizons for the Homeless and Neighborhood Villages, supported by the Governor of Massachusetts to fill a service gap by providing developmentally appropriate and trauma-informed care to under school-age recently arrived migrant and displaced children living in remote motel shelters ("COLORI Playspace Express", n.d.).

Cluster learning in rural communities, slums, and child friendly spaces in camps, facilitated by NGOs with refugee children in Uganda are examples of ECD practices adapted to the cultural contexts ("Early Childhood Development", n.d.; "Help Child Survivors of War", n.d.).

The Consortium for Street Children (CSC) is focused on keeping street-connected children safe, providing alternatives to child labor and exploitation and building resilience in children in Nepal, select Asian, African and South American countries ("CSC Projects", 2020).

The fight against and prevention of homelessness can start with children, their families and the transformative power of ECD multifaced and cross-sectoral services (Shonkoff, 2022).

Analysis: Hantamalala Rafalimanana, Ph.D., UN DESA

Hantamalala Rafalimanana, Ph.D.
Demographer, United Nations Economic and Social Affairs

Hantamalala Rafalimanana is a Social Affairs Officer in the Division for Inclusive Social Development of the United Nations Department for Economic and Social affairs (UNDESA), leading work on homelessness, poverty eradication and Africa's development. She previously was a Population Affairs Officer in the Population Division of UNDESA, working on the measurement and analysis of trends, determinants and long-term impacts of contraceptive use, fertility patterns and population ageing.

Prior to joining the United Nations, she was a Research Associate at the Office of Population Research of Princeton University, and a Lecturer-Researcher at the Institut de Formation et de Recherche Démographiques of the University of Yaoundé in Cameroon. Hantamalala holds a Ph. D. in Sociology-Demography and a Master of Science in Epidemiology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA.

Children in Street Situations in Africa and the United Nations General Comment No. 21 (2017)

Children in street situations are children who live or work on the streets. As such, the street plays a vital role in these children's daily lives and identities. These children include both homeless children and children who have families or homes to return to at night after they work or beg for money on the street during the day.

In Africa, an increasing number of children end up on the streets as a result of family poverty, abuse and abandonment, but also AIDS-orphanhood and armed conflict. While some children are forced on the streets to find food and shelter that they cannot get from their families, others are sent by parents or guardians to work on the streets to support their families. According to ILO and UNICEF, there were 30 million children younger than 18 years living in street situations in Africa in 2011. It is very difficult to reach and count these children because they prefer to be invisible and have a mobile and transient lifestyle. Therefore, although unknown, their current number is likely higher given the rapid population growth, increase in the number of people living in extreme poverty, and different shocks (due for instance to natural hazards and climate change) and conflicts happening in Africa.

Most people are judgemental at the sight of, and fearful and anxious when approached by, children in street situations. Yet, most of these children are among the most marginalised as they lack access to education, jobs, housing and health care, and suffer from daily violence, conflict with the law, sexual and economic exploitation, trafficking, drug and alcohol (ab)use, sexually transmitted diseases and infections, and even premature death with no justice, in the streets. They are often innocent even if they use persistence and sometimes aggressivity to seek their daily survival because they feel desperate.

The problem of children living and making their livelihood on the streets in big towns and major cities of African countries has major socio-economic, health, cultural and demographic implications for both the children (see above) and their societies and countries. Following global concern for the rights and welfare of children in street situations, the recent General Comment No. 21 (2017) on Children in Street Situations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child aims to remedy the problem by providing authoritative guidance to States on developing comprehensive, long-term national strategies on children in street situations using a holistic, child rights approach and addressing both prevention and response in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. States are urged to make the necessary budget allocations for children in street situations, and improve laws and policies to protect the right to life, right against discrimination, civil rights and freedoms of these children (for instance, avoid harassing and putting them in detention facilities, and solicit and consider their views regarding placements in homes or centres).

States are also urged to help children in street situations acquire legal identity documents and in the meantime, allow flexible solutions such as providing temporary, informal identity cards so that they can gain access to basic services and protection in the justice system; ensure that all children have a standard of living adequate for their physical, mental, spiritual and moral development, to prevent them ending up in street situations and to fulfil the rights of children already in street situations; and provide material assistance and support programmes to parents, caregivers and children in need, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and adequate housing.

Very importantly, States should take measures to address the structural causes of poverty and income inequalities to reduce pressure on and strengthen precarious families. Such measures include strengthening child-centred poverty alleviation programmes in areas known for high levels of migration; and offering adequate social security and social protection. Specific examples include cash transfer programmes widely applied in African countries.

States are also encouraged to provide health education and services, including on sexual and reproductive health, tailored to the specific needs of children in street situations; take measures to provide good quality, free education and life skills through non-formal and street education, to reach out-of-school children; and ensure that children are free from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation, including child labour.

Finally, multistakeholder cooperation that fosters continuous policy dialogues at the international, national, regional and local levels, as well as research in relation to quality, evidence-based interventions for prevention and response, including data collection on street children, are recommended.

Good Practices: Forbes Chikobvu, Rosa Care Organisation

Forbes Chikobvu
Coordinating Director, Rosa Care Organisation

Forbes Chikobvu was born on November 19, 1978 in Chikomba, Zimbabwe. From a young age, he was driven to make a positive impact on the lives of those around him. This passion led him to pursue a career in development work, with the goal of becoming a practitioner who could meaningfully touch and change people's lives. He earned a Certificate in Human Resource Management from Trust Academy in 2006 and a Diploma in Project Management from Humber College in 2014, and is currently working towards a Community Development Degree with ABMA UK.

In 2004, he joined the Rosa Care Organisation as the Coordinating Director in Chikomba District, a position he holds to this day helping to develop the community. In this role, he has had the privilege of making a tangible difference in the lives of the people he serves. His key responsibilities include conducting assessments of children in need or at risk, developing and implementing multi-agency plans to address their needs, and taking a lead professional role where appropriate.

Good Practices to Address Child Homelessness

Addressing Child Homelessness

As an organization dedicated to supporting vulnerable children and families, Rosa Care Organisation has developed a range of effective approaches to addressing the complex issue of child homelessness. Our work is guided by a deep commitment to trauma-informed care, family-centered interventions, collaborative partnerships, and the inclusion of lived experience insights.

Trauma-informed Care

Recognizing the significant impact of trauma on the lives of homeless children and families, Rosa Care Organisation has implemented specialized training for our staff and tailored our service delivery models to ensure a safe, supportive, and healing-centered environment. Our programs incorporate evidence-based therapeutic interventions, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and art therapy, to help children and their caregivers process past traumas and develop healthy coping mechanisms.

Family-centered Interventions

Rather than focusing solely on the individual child, we have found that addressing the needs of the entire family unit is crucial for sustainable change. Our programs include comprehensive case management, family counseling, and support for caregiver employment and housing stability. By strengthening the resilience and self-sufficiency of the family as a whole, we are better able to break the

cycle of homelessness and ensure long-term stability for the children in our care.

Collaborative Partnerships

Recognizing that no single organization can address the complex issue of child homelessness alone, Rosa Care Organisation has built strong collaborative partnerships with local government agencies, community organizations, and other stakeholders. This allows us to provide a more holistic suite of services, from emergency shelter and transitional housing to educational support and job training programs. Our partnerships also enable us to advocate for systemic change and influence policy decisions that impact the lives of homeless children and families.

Lived Experience Insights

At the core of our approach is a deep respect for the insights and perspectives of those with lived experiences of homelessness. We prioritize the inclusion of these voices in the design and implementation of our programs, ensuring that our interventions are truly responsive to the needs and realities of the communities we serve. By elevating the expertise of those who have navigated the challenges of homelessness firsthand, we are better able to develop sustainable and impactful solutions.

Through the integration of these best practices, Rosa Care Organisation has been able to make a meaningful difference in the lives of homeless children and families in our community. As we continue to learn and evolve, we remain committed to sharing our knowledge and collaborating with partners like UNANIMA International to drive positive change on a broader scale.

Analysis: Paul Nagle, Stonewall Community Development

Paul Nagle
Executive Director,
Stonewall Community
Development
Corporation

Stonewall Community Development Executive Director Paul Nagle has over 30 years in both nonprofit administration and LGBT activism and has been in the housing space since 2013. His specialty is critical path identification to develop new organizations from concept.

Before joining Stonewall CDC, Paul was the Founding Director of Cultural Strategies Initiative Inc. (CSI). Funded with a major grant from the Rockefeller Cultural Innovation Fund, and a supporting grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the mission of this 4-year project was to strengthen art's central role in civic life, in order to enhance cultural, community and environmental sustainability.

In 2009, Paul did the first development work for the Brooklyn Community Pride Center, creating a strategy with the founders and raising the center's first grants.

He holds a B.A. in Arts Administration and an M.A. in International Cultural Policy from New York University. He is a graduate of Coro NY Leadership XV.

Compounding Fragilities and Hidden Homelessness for LGBTQ Older Adults

Stonewall Community Development Corporation is a 501c3 whose mission is to see LGBTQ older adults in safe welcoming housing they can afford, with access to health and mental health services that meet their unique needs. As Executive Director, it is my responsibility to understand the challenges this population faces in accessing housing services and benefits, and provide navigation assistance, to help them connect and procure them. The first hurdle we face is how to find the folks who need service. There are two main reasons that this population remains invisible, self-imposed and by society's design.

Official Neglect

Most government agencies do not afford the opportunity to self-identify as LGBTQ at point of service. They will ask gender assigned at birth, gender identity and marital status, but they do not provide an option to self-identify one's sexual orientation. Without reliable data on the LGBTQ population, there are no policy or funding imperatives. This results in a lack of dependable data on trends in determinants of health within the LGBTQ population, including housing.

Self-Erasure

Baby boomers remember when a family could force "remedies" on LGBTQ children, including aversion and shock therapy, institutionalization and even lobotomies. Fear and distrust run deep for these elders, and are rekindled from time to time, as in the current political era in which we find ourselves, where providers in many states are allowed to or simply do refuse services to LGBTQ people, and violent threats against the community, including calls for "eradication" of transgendered humans, are popular political rhetoric. Is it surprising that many LGBTQ seniors do not seek services?

The Most Fragile Population

The most fragile homeless population we work with are LGBTQ older adult veterans through our Leave No Veteran Behind initiative. They still never know where they are going to land in terms of being deemed illegitimate by the military, depending on the next incoming administration. Whether they are carrying internalized guilt and stigma, or acting in self-preservation, many do not want their sexual orientation publicly identified. Ironically, this secrecy does not result in the protection of their benefits.

Service-connected benefits are awarded based on an evaluation of what percentage of a veteran's disability is related to their past military service. A monthly cash benefit that can range from $300 to $3600 per month, it does not adversely affect social security or pension benefits. And yet, almost to a person, LGBTQ older veterans we take on have not applied for it. One must not have a dishonorable or "other than honorable" discharge, the latter of which was generally assigned when someone was fired for homosexuality.

The first process an LGBTQ veteran has to navigate, if it is even available in their jurisdiction, is "restoration of honor," which will alter their discharge status to make them eligible for benefits. Then the application process for service-connected benefits is itself daunting. Almost to a person, the LGBTQ older adult veterans we house are not accessing major benefits to which they are entitled when we first encounter them, including HUD VASH Section 8 housing subsidies.

What is the Answer?

If LGBTQ older adults in crisis remain invisible, we can't serve them. To address homelessness within the LGBTQ population, we must first be able to identify the clients. And then we must work to make sure that they know we exist as an understanding, empathetic provider.

It is important that agencies working in the field with this population continue to advocate and work with policymakers to correct the dearth of data that cripples policy advances for the LGBTQ community. It must become standard for LGBTQ clients to be able to self-identify at point of service.

We can also help this population by providing empathetic navigation services. When an LGBTQ client comes to Stonewall, they know that the staff will understand what they have been going through. Navigation services are an effective way to ensure that clients don't fall through the cracks between the various agencies and bureaucrats, some of whom may be homophobic, others who may just be non-responsive. But they need to know that we exist. And the first step in that process is us knowing they exist and how to reach them.

Analysis: Henry Ramirez Soler, CMF, Claretians

Henry Ramirez Soler
Claretian Missionary and Human Rights Defender

Henry Ramirez Soler, CMF, is a Claretian missionary and human rights defender who has dedicated the last 26 years to supporting and implementing peace processes in Colombia. He has built trust with communities and all parties involved, creating bridges of communication to facilitate peace processes between the families of victims, state institutions, and armed groups. His efforts have been particularly focused on accompanying families of disappeared persons and supporting peasant communities in developing sustainable projects as a peace strategy to maintain their territories.

Henry holds a degree in Philosophy and Letters from the University of San Tomas de Bogota and a degree in Theology from the Universidad Javeriana de Bogota. He also earned a master's degree in Sociology, with an emphasis on research, from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, France.

Since 2019, he has been a member of the Claretian Team (Fondazione Internazionale Proclade) at the UN.

Conflict, Attacks and Climate Change: Landless and Homeless Indigenous Peoples

Various United Nations reports ("La Agenda", n.d.), coincide in affirming that indigenous peoples are among the groups affected by poverty. Various factors compromise their lives and survival in different regions of the world, going so far as to point out that "the 2030 Agenda leaves out many collective rights of indigenous peoples."

REPAM's third report (REPAM, n.d.), on the human rights situation presents an alarming situation for various indigenous peoples and peasant, riverine and Afro-descendant communities in the Amazon Biome. Peoples such as the Mosetene, Tsimane, Tacana, Leco, Esse Ejja, Uchupiamona and Chiquitano in Bolivia; the Maraguá, Morcego and Quilombola indigenous peoples in Brazil; the Yine-Asháninka of Madre de Dios and the Awajún in Peru; the indigenous communities of the Municipality of Atabapo in Venezuela; the peasant communities of the Department of Caquetá in Colombia; the Kichwa People in Ecuador, and the sad cases of sex trafficking in the triple border of Peru, Colombia and Brazil, demonstrate how mining conflicts, the violent and illegal expropriation of indigenous territories, and the expansion of monocultures and agribusiness are displacing these peoples, leaving them without territory, without a home.

The geostrategic location of indigenous territories, as in the case of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Colombia, and the presence of illegal armed groups have caused multiple human rights violations, according to reports from the Wiwa Yugumaiun Bunkuanarrua Tayrona Organization "OWYBT", which articulates the local traditional authorities of the Wiwa people. In the territories of the Sikuani-Cubeo, in the departments of Vichada and Meta in Colombia, the presence of armed actors seeks to control these territories to develop illegal economies, functional to the interests of landowners. The Corporación Claretiana Norman Pérez Bello, in its research "Desplazar y Despojar: Estrategia para el Desarrollo de la Orinoquía," (Misereor, 2017), describes how the appropriation of land by political, economic and armed groups, especially paramilitaries and/or drug traffickers, has had repercussions on the local population and ethnic communities in the region.

These phenomena of violence and implementation of extractive projects generate displacement and territorial uprooting. In 2022, Cecilia Jiménez Damary, UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, stated that in Mexico, 40% of indigenous peoples are displaced by drug trafficking, illegal logging, mining and some projects of the Federal State.

In the Philippines, migration and displacement to the cities is the result of the loss of their territories and the scarce or non-existent presence of the State to guarantee social services, which exacerbates tribal conflicts. For example, in Baguio City in the northern Philippines (where more than 60% of the population is composed of indigenous people from the Cordillera region), it is estimated that around 65% of indigenous migrants live in extreme poverty ("Los Pueblos", n.d.).

In Bogotá, Colombia, thousands of indigenous people, mainly Embera and others, wander the streets displaced and homeless due to violence. It is common to see indigenous women with their children, dancing and begging on the sidewalks of the city, without the Colombian State having implemented effective measures to overcome this humanitarian crisis.

In this sense, it is urgent that the States:

1. Adopt urgent measures at all levels of government to guarantee life, health, housing, food autonomy, access to drinking water and basic sanitation, social protection, education, self-determination and culture of the communities. It is vital to maintain a human rights-based approach.
2. Grant the effective participation and inclusion of community members in the decision-making process for climate adaptation projects and programs, return or relocation processes, taking into account ancestral and ecological knowledge, as well as their relationship with nature.
3. Secure means and resources in national and regional laws for the right to free, prior and informed consent, as established in Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO), for all matters related to the restitution of their rights and territories, even in extremely vulnerable communities and outside their territories.
4. Adopt national legislation where it does not exist to guarantee the right to territories, i.e., the right to remain on their lands and guarantee a decent home and housing.
5. Guarantee a gender focus in the application of state responses to overcome poverty and provide decent housing solutions for indigenous women.

Intersecting Crises: Homelessness and the Global Challenges of Today

Analysis: Jamie Harding and Adele Irving, Academic Experts on Homelessness and Trauma

Jamie Harding
Associate Professor in Criminology and Sociology, Northumbria University

Dr. Jamie Harding is an Associate Professor in Criminology and Sociology at Northumbria University. He has been researching homelessness since beginning his PhD in 1995 and has written two monographs on this topic: Making it Work: The Keys to Success Among Young People Living Independently and Post-War Homelessness Policy in the UK.

Adele Irving
Senior Lecturer in Policing, Salford University

Dr. Adele Irving is a Senior Lecturer in Policing at Salford University. She is an established researcher in the area of multiple disadvantages. She has undertaken a substantial number of research and evaluation projects, exploring the lived experience and efficacy of policy and practice responses to issues such as homelessness, substance misuse, trauma, and offending.

Homelessness and Trauma Within Oasis Community Housing Services

Research completed by Oasis Community Housing and Northumbria University (Irving & Harding, 2022) contributed to the growing evidence of a relationship between homelessness and trauma, and of the distinctive types of trauma experienced by homeless women. Data was provided through 115 questionnaires completed by Oasis' service users, 43% of whom were women. Most of the respondents (57%) were engaging with crisis support services, comprised of emergency accommodation and day centres. One third of participants (34%) were accessing accommodation-based services and 9% were engaging with employability and group support services.

The findings showed that 94.2% of service users who had been homeless, and/or at risk of homelessness, had experienced trauma. Approximately half of these respondents said they had experienced trauma more than five times or for a prolonged period: this figure consisted of 59.5% of females and 40.4% of

males. The most frequently discussed type of trauma involved violence, often sexual assault, followed by family bereavement and either the removal of children from respondents' care or separation from children for other reasons.

There were a number of impacts of trauma that women reported more frequently than men. These were: mental health/emotional difficulties, relationship difficulties, difficulties in emotional management, negative view of self, lack of self-care, limited sense of hope, lack of ability to concentrate, think or learn, and self-harm. In contrast, men were more likely to report substance misuse and offending behaviour as a result of trauma.

The research also involved identifying innovative approaches that have been developed in the UK to support homeless people who have experienced trauma. The evidence reviewed advocated:

- The use of navigators and peer mentors, who have been shown to increase access to services for people with complex needs, particularly in the areas of mental health and substance misuse. Peer mentors can also reduce the isolation felt by service users.
- The use of common assessment tools by different agencies to avoid the need for service users to have to repeat their personal histories of trauma and support needs to multiple services.
- The provision of bespoke in-house mental health services by homelessness agencies to overcome some of the barriers associated with accessing statutory services and to allow time to build trust between workers and service users.
- Non-clinical workers supporting service users to the point where they can engage with mental health professionals.
- The creation of psychologically informed environments and trauma informed services. Although the exact nature of psychologically informed environments will vary from setting to setting, there are some common principles such as psychological awareness, staff training and support, and appropriate roles, rules and responsiveness within the service (Buckley & Tickle, 2023, p.1).
- The provision of services that acknowledge that women often have particularly complex experiences of trauma, and equally complex and personal notions of safety. In the UK, services of this nature have included the use of female navigators, the setting up of a women's only drop-in and hostel, and a specialist Housing First scheme for women who had experienced domestic abuse. These services have been very positively received by beneficiaries (Moreton et al., 2018; Howe, 2017).

On the basis of the findings of our research, Oasis Community Housing have launched a campaign with four objectives:

1. The establishment of minimum standards for the delivery of trauma-informed homelessness support services.
2. The development and rollout of a national trauma-informed training programme in England, mandated for Local Authorities and providers of commissioned homelessness services.
3. A requirement to be introduced for Local Authorities to only commission homelessness services and support that are trauma-informed.
4. The development of dedicated mental health pathways for people experiencing homelessness that acknowledge and reflect the challenges posed by the chaos of homelessness and the impact of trauma.

If these objectives are achieved, there are likely to be substantial benefits to homeless people, particularly women, who have experienced trauma.

Analysis: Dr. Jeffrey Almony, Children's Hospital Colorado

Dr. Jeffrey Almony, M.D.
Child Psychiatrist, Children's Hospital Colorado; Senior Instructor, Department of Psychiatry at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus

Dr. Almony is a child psychiatrist at Children's Hospital Colorado and a Senior Instructor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. He previously was a child and adult psychiatrist and Chief Medical Officer at Mental Health Partners, a nonprofit community mental health center in Colorado committed to making community-based health and wellness care more affordable, convenient, and culturally responsive for all. Dr. Almony completed his child psychiatry fellowship in 1994 and has been a practicing psychiatrist for over 30 years.

Trapped in the Cycle: Homelessness, Mental Illness and Trauma, and Barriers to Care

Ms. G., a 39 year-old woman with a several year history of homelessness, initially presented to the community mental health center crisis clinic for help with insomnia. Ms. G noted that she has been using alcohol since the age of 13; that she has a history of physical and sexual abuse as a child, as well as domestic violence and sexual trauma as an adult that included sustaining a concussion during one recent incident of assault; that she has been unable to get a job because she has no fixed address; and that she missed her last appointment with her primary care provider for treatment of her diabetes due to lack of transportation. She also noted that she had both her medical and psychiatric medications stolen from her tent while she was gone for appointments. As she talks, it becomes clear to the mental health evaluator that she suffers from depression, PTSD, and an alcohol use disorder. She has not taken any of her diabetes medications for several weeks, and she reports an ulcer on her foot, which makes it difficult to walk.

I met many people like Ms. G. while working at a busy community mental health center. According to the 2024 annual homelessness assessment report to Congress completed by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 23 out of every 10,000 people in the United States were experiencing homelessness on a single night in 2024 (De Sousa & Henry, 2024). This included homeless adults, families with children, and children and youth. In this report, one in every five people experiencing homelessness on a single night in 2024 was age 55 or older, and people who identify as black or African-American were overrepresented. One in three individuals in this report

were experiencing chronic homelessness. People with mental health problems are overrepresented in the homeless population, as are people with a history of trauma. A 2021 study looking at the prevalence of mental disorders among homeless people in high income countries (Gutwinski, Schreiter, Deutscher, & Fazel, 2021), revealed a prevalence of alcohol use disorders in 36.7%, drug use disorders in 21.7%, schizophrenia spectrum disorders in 12.4%, and major depression in 12.6%. Other common psychiatric disorders in the homeless population are PTSD, psychotic disorders, and other substance use disorders. Trauma is distressingly common in people experiencing homelessness. In the California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness (Kushel & Moore, 2023), 72% of the people experienced physical violence in their lifetime; 24% experienced sexual violence, and 43% of cis-gender women and 74% of transgender non-binary individuals experienced sexual violence. Veterans are particularly at risk for homelessness, with a lifetime prevalence of 10% (Nichter, Tsai, & Pietrzak, 2023). One marginalized group significantly overrepresented in the homeless population are LGBTQ+ youth. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless ("Homelessness Among the LGBTQ Community", n.d.), **"LGBTQ+ youth are 120% more likely to experience homelessness than non-LGBTQ+ youth".**

In addition, mental health disorders and physical health problems greatly impact each other and are mutually reinforcing. People experiencing homelessness are more likely to experience physical health problems, including lung diseases, malnutrition, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, dental issues, and infectious diseases, among other illnesses. This list also includes traumatic brain injury (TBI), which carries its own additional mental health burdens. According to an article in The Lancet Public Health (Young & Hughes, 2019), the lifetime prevalence of TBI of any severity is between 2.5 and 4.0 times higher for homeless people than the general population, with moderate to severe TBI being almost 10 times higher than the general population.

Homelessness itself is also traumatic, (Goodman, Saxe, & Harvey, 1991), as Ms. G's story illustrates; it also causes many barriers to accessing help. In my many years of working at a community mental health center and treating psychiatric disorders in people experiencing homelessness, I saw firsthand many of the barriers that people experiencing homelessness face in trying to access care. For example, people with histories of trauma and PTSD often find it difficult to trust others, including care providers. Many homeless people are victimized, lack transportation, are socially isolated, and struggle obtaining and maintaining gainful employment. Many people experiencing homelessness have Medicaid, but there is a severe shortage of psychiatrists willing to accept Medicaid. In one study, in 2014 and 2015, only 35.4% of psychiatrists accepted Medicaid (Wen, Wilk, Druss, & Cummings, 2019). These patients tend to rely more on emergency room services. There is a movement towards trauma informed care, mobile access, and street medicine programs, which can provide access to care for people who otherwise would not have it (Kaufman, Mallick, Louis, Williams, & Oriol, 2024). Nonetheless, sufficient mental health services for people experiencing homelessness are lacking.

In many ways, Ms. G. demonstrates the multidirectional impacts of mental health and homelessness. She struggles with mental health and substance use problems as well as a substantial physical health issue. She has a history of child trauma as well as ongoing trauma. She also has had difficulty accessing services. Her story is typical of many of the homeless people who live in western countries, particularly the United States, as well as the failure of various systems to address their needs.

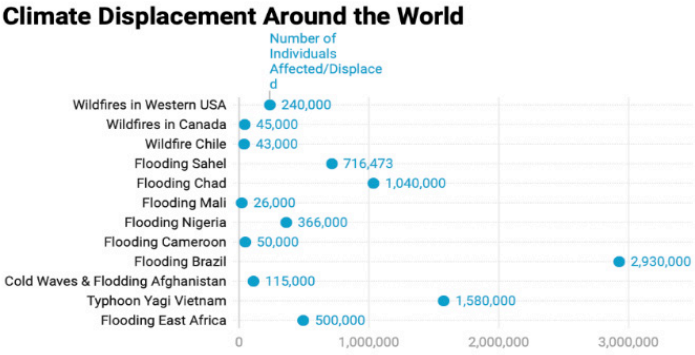
Climate Displacement: An Overview

Laila Wright and Lucy McHugh, UNANIMA International Interns

Climate change is a crucial and growing issue that affects people all over the world. Even within the United Nations and other affiliated groups, efforts to address climate change through research and policies have only recently begun. One issue that arises from climate change is climate displacement. Many writers that are contributing to climate-related literature have described relocation due to the climate as "planned relocation" or "climate adaptation" (Aycock, 2024). However, these terms don't highlight the severity of these events nor the effects they have on the individuals experiencing them. The UN is currently working to find a definition for climate displacement. For example, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) defines the experience of climate displacement as a situation in which individuals are"forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disaster" (Aycock, 2024). The UN and other affiliated groups are working to address climate displacement by creating a clear definition, solutions, and explaining why certain demographic groups are more impacted.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees highlights the reality of displaced individuals in the article, "What we do: Climate change and displacement". The article discusses how many issues that cause displacement overlap, such as areas that have high poverty levels being ill prepared for climate crises which lead to the displacement of people ("What we do", n.d.). Additionally, individuals affected by these events also struggle to become self-sufficient which introduces more stressors into their lives ("What we do", n.d.). This stems from the constant movement of people's lives, limiting their ability to establish roots in one area. At the same time, a lack of self-sufficiency exacerbates risks associated with uncertainty of livelihood. The article also discusses the UNHCR's response to the climate crisis. Some of these responses include spreading awareness to other organizations/institutions, assisting states to protect and support their citizens during these crises, and limiting their contribution to the climate crisis through greenhouse gas emissions.("What we do", n.d.).

In a press release from a United Nations meeting, the UNHCR stressed the severity of climate displacement and the need to address it. Other delegates at the meeting, such as the representative of Nigeria, also emphasized the need to find the root cause of displacement in order to combat the upstream determinant and eliminate the problem altogether. The number of people being displaced globally currently stands at 114 million people, which has increased by 4 million since the last record in May ("With Conflicts", 2023). While climate dis-



placement is a pressing global issue, it is evident that some regions are more affected by it than others considering differences in how global representatives are responding to it. For example, representatives from different African countries made a point to vocalize the struggles of their citizens and national issues that are being intensified by climate displacement, including the war in Sudan, inequity in Egypt, and a lack of global accountability for climate displacement experienced across Africa. ("With Conflicts", 2023).

The article published by the UNHCR, titled "How climate change impacts refugees and displaced communities", highlighted that people in vulnerable situations are more likely to be affected by climate crises and ultimately be forced to relocate. Isabella, a woman living in Mozambique, offers a powerful testimony in which she explains how much she and the people in her community suffered due to the unanticipated nature of Cyclone Idai ("How climate change", 2024). The article goes on to explain that vulnerable communities consistently lack essential resources, which can spark conflict due to competition ("How climate change", 2024). Additionally, the UN's research on climate displacement reveals that the demographic composition of IDPs (internally displaced persons) is dominated by women, children, and other marginalized groups. While there is awareness surrounding the gendered impacts of climate displacement, there is a lack of research being conducted on why this is occurring and what actions are being taken to address this situation. In response to this, UNANIMA International (UI) has established climate displacement, with special attention to its disproportionate impacts on women and girls, as a core pillar of their advocacy efforts. In fact, UI will be releasing a new publication specifically devoted to climate displacement later this year. Through its mission, UI aims to address the overlooked injustices that women, girls, and children face across the globe, including climate displacement, poverty, and human trafficking. In recent years, as the urgency surrounding the need for climate action grows at the UN through governing bodies such as the Conference of the Parties (COP), UNANIMA International continues to demonstrate how women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate displacement. In the article, "The secretary-general's action agenda on internal displacement", United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres outlines a set of broad goals that are needed to combat climate displacement. He describes them as durable solutions, better prevention, and effective assistance and protection ("The secretary-general's action", n.d.).

Finally, many people and organizations, such as UI, have advocated for policies and general efforts to provide highly vulnerable citizens with the proper resources and aid needed to protect themselves against the devastating impacts of climate change and potential displacement. The growing presence of climate-related literature helps to reveal which communities are most affected by these issues and broad interventions that can be implemented to address the larger issue. Ultimately, there is much more work that needs to be done to protect those affected by climate displacement and to solve the issue completely, but this reality is only achievable if combating climate change is established as a universal effort undertaken by all individuals, regardless of whether they are affected or unaffected by the impacts of climate displacement.

Good Practices: Sebaka Derrick, Habitat Defenders Africa

Sebaka Derrick
Co-Founder and Africa Regional Coordinator, Habitat Defenders Africa

Sebaka Derrick is an accomplished Urban and Regional Planner from Uganda with a Bachelor's degree in Urban and Regional Planning a Master of Science in Business Management and a Master of Science in Project Management. He is the co-founder and Africa Regional Coordinator of Habitat Defenders Africa (HDA), a network organization dedicated to protecting and defending human rights to Habitats, environment and climate across Africa.

Derrick is also a dedicated educator at Train Up International Institute, where he specializes in Business Management, Project Management, Monitoring and Evaluation, and Physical Planning. As a person with disabilities, Derrick is a passionate advocate for inclusivity and accessibility in society. With a strong commitment to improving communities and promoting sustainable development, Derrick's contributions have made significant impacts in various fields, reflecting his dedication to fostering a better future for all.

Documenting and Quantifying Climate Change Impacts: A Case Study of the Makusa-Kigungu Community Using HDA's Climate Impact Assessment Tool (CIAT)

Family homelessness is a pressing issue worldwide, exacerbated by various factors, including climate change. Habitat Defenders Africa (HDA) and Habitat International-Housing and Land Rights Network (HIC_HRLN) have developed a best practice for addressing this issue by documenting and quantifying climate change impacts, losses, and damages through the use of the Climate Impact Assessment Tool (CIAT). This approach has been effectively applied in the Makusa-Kigungu community, demonstrating its potential to drive meaningful change and reduce family homelessness.

Overview of the Climate Impact Assessment Tool (IAT)

The Climate Impact Assessment Tool (CIAT) developed by HDA and HIC_HRLN is a comprehensive framework designed to assess and document the impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities. It quantifies the extent of losses and damages, enabling targeted interventions to mitigate these effects. The tool focuses on several key areas: environmental impacts, socio-economic consequences, and the effectiveness of adaptation strategies. By providing a detailed analysis, the CIAT supports the development of policies and programs tailored to the specific needs of affected communities.

Case Study: Makusa-Kigungu Community

Makusa-Kigungu, a Lake Victoria shoreline community in Uganda, has faced significant challenges due to climate change. Rising lake water levels, increased flooding, and extreme weather events have led to severe environmental degradation, threatening livelihoods and causing displacement. The use of HDA's CIAT in this community has been instrumental

in documenting these impacts and guiding effective responses.

Quantifying Climate Change Impacts

The CIAT has enabled the systematic collection of data on climate change impacts in Makusa-Kigungu. Key findings include:

- **Environmental Degradation:** Shoreline erosion and rising water intrusion have reduced arable land, impacting food security and livelihoods. The CIAT documented a 30% reduction in cultivable land over the past decade, directly affecting the community's agricultural output.
- **Housing Damage:** Frequent flooding has damaged homes, leading to increased family homelessness and displacement. The tool recorded over 200 homes severely affected by floods annually, displacing numerous families and pushing them into homelessness.
- **Economic Losses:** Loss of agricultural productivity and fishing resources has undermined the local economy, exacerbating poverty and vulnerability. The CIAT estimated a 40% decline in income for families dependent on agriculture and fishing, pushing many below the poverty line.

Community-Driven Solutions

One of the strengths of the CIAT is its emphasis on community-driven solutions. In Makusa-Kigungu, HDA has worked closely with residents to develop and implement adaptive measures. Key initiatives include:

Community Education and Advocacy: Awareness campaigns and training programs have empowered residents with knowledge and skills to adapt to climate change impacts and to internally use the CIAT. These programs have reached over 500 community members, equipping them with practical strategies for resilience.

Innovative Approaches and Collaborations: HDA's work in Makusa-Kigungu highlights several innovative approaches and successful collaborations:

- **Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships:** Collaboration with government agencies, NGOs, and academic institutions has enhanced the effectiveness of interventions and ensured a coordinated response. These partnerships have facilitated resource sharing and expertise, amplifying the impact of the initiatives.
- **Technology Integration:** The use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and remote sensing technologies has improved data accuracy and facilitated better planning and monitoring. These technologies have allowed for precise mapping of affected areas and targeted intervention planning.
- **Inclusive Participation:** Ensuring the involvement of all community members, including women, youth, and marginalized groups, has fostered a sense of ownership and commitment to the initiatives. Inclusive decision-making processes have led to more comprehensive and accepted solutions.

Conclusion

The experience of Habitat Defenders Africa in the Makusa-Kigungu community demonstrates the potential of the Climate Impact Assessment Tool (CIAT) to address family homelessness by documenting and quantifying climate change impacts. By highlighting best practices, innovative approaches, and community-driven solutions, this case study underscores the importance of targeted, evidence-based interventions. As climate change continues to pose significant challenges globally, tools like the CIAT offer valuable frameworks for building resilience and reducing vulnerability in affected communities.

PART THREE

COUNTRY CASE STUDIES

In 2019, UNANIMA International conducted International Research on Families in conjunction with NYU, and Sophia Housing Ireland. The purpose of the publication was to highlight the issues in various regions globally - Kenya, India, the USA, Ireland, Australia, the Philippines, Canada, and Greece. We have returned to the initial case studies to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue of homelessness in these regions, highlighting both the unique manifestations of homelessness in different contexts and the cross-cutting issues that transcend borders. By examining these cases, we explore shared challenges, systemic drivers, and opportunities for transformative solutions.

UNANIMA International continues to call on world leaders to see homelessness through the eyes of compassion. Compassion impels all of us to live in ways in which words and behavior towards others embody compassion.

HOMELESSNESS IN

KENYA

COUNTRY PROFILE
Republic of Kenya (Kenya)
Swahili: Jamhuri ya Kenya

LOCATION
Kenya is a Sub-Saharan country, located in Eastern Africa; Bordering countries: Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

POPULATION
As of 2024, the total population was 55.65 million (United States Census Bureau, 2024)

HOMELESS POPULATION
An estimated 2 million people are without proper shelter (Habitat for Humanity, 2024)

POLITICAL SYSTEM
Presidential Republic

Country Definition of Homelessness & Usage

Evaluating the prevalence of homelessness in Kenya poses difficulties due to limited data availability and unclear definitions. The absence of a national definition of homelessness on the Kenyan government's official platforms, including the census, adds to the challenge.

According to the definition proposed by UNANIMA International at the Nairobi Expert Group Meeting in 2019 and adopted by Resolution A/RES/76/13, a significant portion of the urban population residing in severely inadequate housing within slums would qualify as homeless. An employee of the Mukuru Promotion Center (MPC) remarked, "all of Mukuru Slum would be considered homeless" under this definition.

Context of Homelessness

Kenya's history of homelessness is deeply intertwined with its colonial background and social stigmas. Colonial policies, including land appropriation and ethnic segregation, have shaped migration patterns and access to housing. Cultural norms, such as stigma against single motherhood, further exacerbate housing insecurity for vulnerable families. Discriminatory practices within families and communities often leave women and children without stable homes, pushing them into unsuitable living conditions or outright homelessness (Bhattar, 2023). Climate change and disasters further compound these challenges, leading to increased vulnerability and displacement among already marginalized communities. Extreme weather events and environmental degradation worsen living conditions and increase the frequency and severity of disasters, pushing more people into homelessness (UN OCHEA ROSEA, 2023).

Forced evictions, lack of social housing, and bureaucratic hurdles contribute to the prevalence of homelessness, violating constitutional rights and international human rights standards. Kenya's constitution guarantees the right to adequate housing, yet affordability remains a significant hurdle. With an annual demand for 250,000 housing units, only around 50,000 are supplied. The country's housing stock is strained by a population growth rate of approximately 2% per year, with approximately 6.4 million people residing in informal settlements. In Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya, around 60% of the urban population resides in slums, representing a substantial portion of the city's inhabitants. Slums manifest issues ranging from lack of access to safe water and sanitation to environmental degradation, lack of affordable housing, overcrowding and high risk of communicable diseases ("Kenya", 2024). In the Mukuru slum of Kenya, testimonies from NGOs and their service providers revealed how poor design and infrastructural decisions, paired with overcrowding, lead to the risk of fire. Additionally, electricity in many informal settlements' homes is "shared," and thus not properly installed. Child poverty within slums is also a pressing concern, exacerbated by unsafe living conditions and environmental hazards.

Ethnic conflicts and political instability contribute to economic instability and displacement, particularly during election periods (Odidi, 2024). Despite efforts to address these issues, homelessness in Kenya persists, requiring comprehensive strategies that address its root causes and ensure the right to shelter for all citizens. Efforts to address homelessness face challenges in implementation and coordination, with civil society organizations playing a crucial role in filling gaps in service delivery.

KENYA

Fast Facts

1. **Child poverty rates are higher** among children living in families where the household head has no education (73%), and among children with mothers who have had no education (77%) (KNBS & UNICEF, 2017)

2. According to UN OCHA, **more than half a million people have been displaced** due to flooding and heavy rains as of December 2023 (UN OCHA ROSEA, 2023)

3. **52.5% of children in Kenya are multidimensionally poor,** which means they lacked access to basic services like healthcare, sanitation, nutrition, housing and safe drinking water (Georgina, 2024)

4. **42% of children in Kenya live in monetarily poor households** (Georgina, 2024)

5. According to Homeless International, **Kenya's slum population is growing rapidly at nearly 6% each year** ("Kenya", 2007)

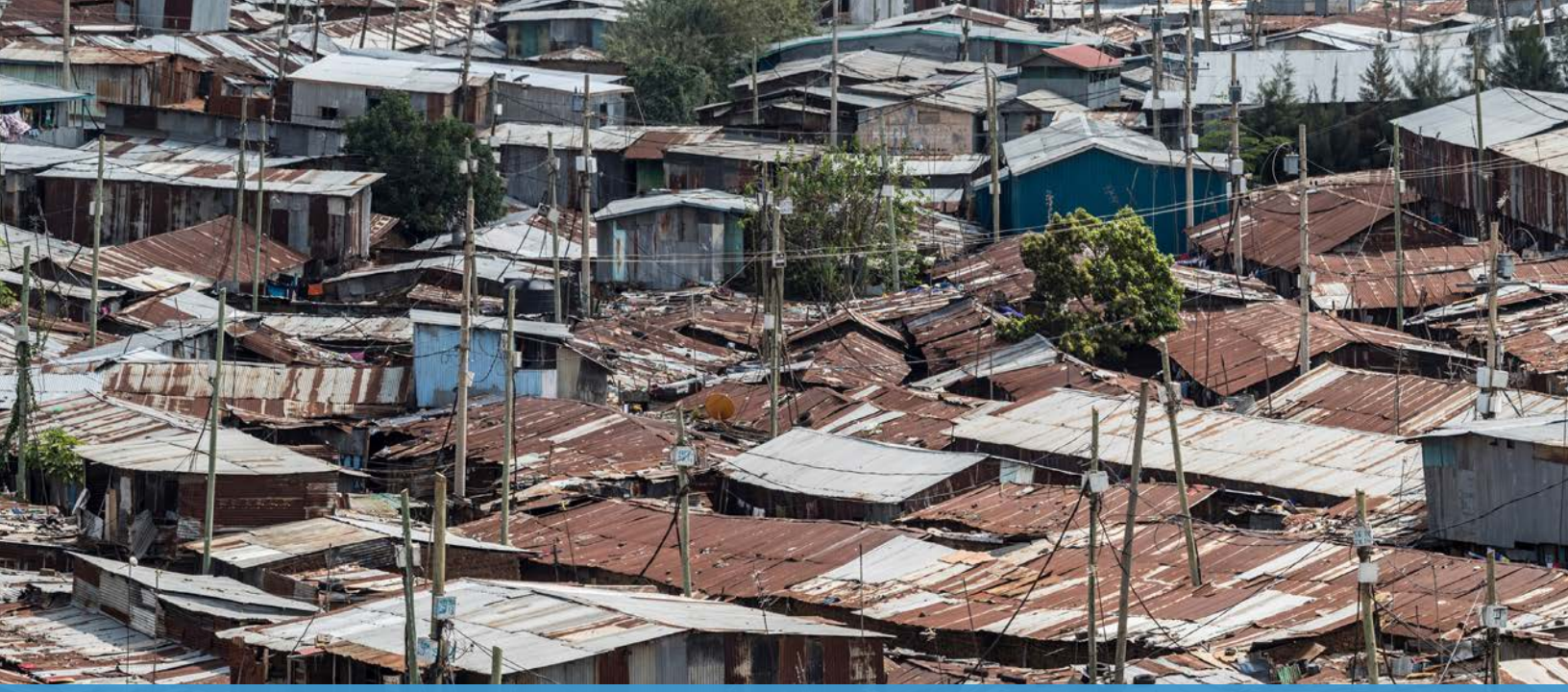


FIGURE 2

Homelessness in Kenya

The Current Realities - 2024

1

20%

of the 2 million people experiencing homelessness are children

Over 85% of the population aged 35 years and below

Median age is 19 years old

50.4% of the population is female while 49.6% of the population is male

13 million adolescents

40% of the population is below 18 years old

2

2 million

is the current housing deficit in Kenya. This number continues to grow at a rate of about 200,000 units a year

3

68%

of Kenyans lack land documentation or tenure security, which makes it difficult for them to find a home

4

According to IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), nearly

465,700

people have been identified as internally displaced in five of the most affected counties of Kenya alone due to drought and violence

5

Even though Kenya has no official figure on the number of homeless children, the number is estimated to be as high as

300,000

nationwide

Analysis: Jacqueline Kiio and Mary Kanana Murithi, Mukuru Promotion Centre

Jacqueline Kiio
Resource Mobilization Office, Mukuru Promotion Centre

Jacqueline Kiio has been working in Mukuru Promotion Centre (MPC) since April 2018. As an educationist, her first appointment was at MPC's Vocational Training Centre where she helped hundreds of youths from Mukuru slum area acquire employability skills. Jacqueline is an avid reader and enjoys exploring different genres of literature from classic novels to contemporary fiction. She also derives fulfilment in supporting and helping others particularly the less fortunate in the society. She is currently working in the Resource Mobilization Office with a team of two ladies. Her journey has been shaped by a combination of academic pursuits, personal interests and professional experience. She prepares donor reports, proposals and undertakes donor relations with the support of the Executive Development Officer. This role has allowed her to refine her writing skills while also fostering her ability to work effectively in a team-oriented environment.

Mary Kanana Murithi
Deputy Director and Executive Development Officer, Mukuru Promotion Centre

Mary Murithi has worked in MPC since the year 2021. MPC has been in existence since 1985 and runs sustainable development programs which target the critical needs of the poorest families in Mukuru slum area, Nairobi, Kenya. Mary heads the Resource Mobilization Office (R.M.O) with the support of Sr. Mary Killeen, MPC founder and Director. R.M.O undertakes the primary role of preparing proposals, donor reports and carrying out donor relations. Having a sociological professional background, Mary also supports the social welfare department which interacts directly with the vulnerable families of Mukuru slum area. This gives her a clear understanding of the 'homelessness' situation in Mukuru and she is glad to have contributed to the 2024 publication for UNANIMA International.

We hope that the article depicts a clear image of the challenges surrounding thousands of families living in the shanties and streets within the marginalized urban areas of Mukuru slum area.

Homelessness in Mukuru Slums, Kenya

Homelessness refers to the state of having no permanent residence. It remains a pressing issue in Mukuru slums-Kenya affecting families and communities across the slum. This article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of homelessness in Mukuru slums, exploring its causes, the often-unseen struggles and efforts being made by Mukuru Promotion Centre to address it.

Since independence, Kenya has been experiencing various forms of homelessness caused by extreme poverty situations or displacement of people due to either conflict or natural disasters. Rampant factors such as the street children crisis and expansion of informal settlements within urban Kenya have also uncovered the hidden faces of homelessness. In our catchment area within Mukuru slums, residents have continued to experience different types of homelessness.

Causes of Homelessness in Mukuru Slums

- **Affordable Housing Crisis:** The lack of affordable housing has led to homelessness in Mukuru slums since many of the slum dwellers are unemployed or underemployed. Rapid rise in tax and rent costs, stagnant wages, and a shortage of affordable units all contribute to the housing insecurity experienced in Mukuru and Kenya as a country.
- **Poverty and Unemployment:** Financial instability in the slums, often caused by lack of opportunities, job loss or low-paying jobs, have left many unable to afford basic housing hence end up living on the streets or in old shacks made of old iron sheets and nylon papers. This explains the growing number of street families.
- **High rural to urban migration:** As rural livelihoods have become harder to maintain due to rapid global warming, a growing number of people resort to migrate to urban areas in search of better opportunities, which unfortunately leads to proliferation of slums in urban Kenya where poverty reigns.
- **Natural Disasters/causes:** Disasters such as fire outbreaks and flooding have often resulted to homelessness. The poor housing conditions and congestion have increased fire incidences in Mukuru slums. The recent flooding and demolitions experienced in March to May 2024 was the most recent contribution to the number of displaced families where over 1,500 households were severely affected in Mukuru. Death of parents also pushes the orphaned children to join street life.
- **Health Issues:** Mental health disorders, disability conditions, substance abuse and chronic illnesses can disrupt a person's ability to maintain stable housing. This has been an issue and especially drug abuse among youths is rampant.
- **Domestic Violence:** Victims of domestic abuse often flee their homes, leading to homelessness. The hostile side of parents/guardians and caregivers who are meant to protect sometimes results in an increase in the number of street children and families in Mukuru slums.
- **Systemic Issues:** Factors like ethnic inequality, insufficient social services, and lack of political will and support for vulnerable groups including persons with disabilities have also contributed to the problem.

Key Effects of Homelessness

- **Health Risks:** Homeless individuals in Mukuru slums have continued to face higher risks of physical and mental health problems due to difficulties in accessing healthcare services leading to untreated medical conditions and a higher prevalence of chronic illnesses.

- **Barriers to Employment and Education:** Homelessness can make it difficult for people to obtain and maintain employment or access to education. Homeless people frequently experience disruptions in t of heir education due to unstable living situations.
- **Social Isolation and Family Instability:** The stigma associated with homelessness has resulted to social exclusion, isolation and separation amongst families.
- **Cycle of Poverty:** Many of the homeless people in the slum are uneducated and this has perpetuated a cycle of poverty making it harder to break free.
- **Vulnerability to Violence:** Homeless individuals are at a higher risk of experiencing violence and victimization on the streets, including physical assault, sexual abuse, and theft of personal belongings. In the streets of Nairobi several deaths are reported yearly.
- **Reduced Life Expectancy:** The combination of harsh living conditions, lack of access to healthcare, and mental health challenges results in a significantly reduced life expectancy for homeless individuals.

Addressing Homelessness in Mukuru Slums

Mukuru Promotion Centre has continued to carry out a number of initiatives to address homelessness such as provision of education and welfare services for children and youths to build a sustainable future for them, providing rehabilitation services to street children in Mukuru slums and later reintegration to their families and empowering homeless families economically through establishment of businesses. In 2023, 105 businesses for homeless people in Mukuru slums were established. Immediate relief through rent payments have also been provided to the sick and families evicted from their homes due to rent arrears. The most effective solution for homelessness in Mukuru Slums requires a multifaceted approach, including affordable housing, supportive services, prevention programs, education, and community engagement.

Analysis: Edwina Kwallah, Cara Girls Rescue Centre

Edwina Jeruto Kwallah
Regional Director,
Cara Projects

Edwina Jeruto Kwallah is a staunch advocate against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), hailing from the Maasai and Kalenjin communities in Kenya. Her efforts are focused on combating FGM within the Maasai community, providing a sanctuary for young girls at risk of FGM and early marriage. Through the establishment of CARA projects, with backing from local and international entities, Edwina spearheads a Non-Governmental Organisation dedicated to Child Protection and Gender Based Violence, with a special emphasis on aiding women and girls. The Cara team, under her guidance, encompasses five core departments: Shelter, Advocacy, Women Empowerment, Community Based Support, and Sustainable Housing Program. Over 600 children have found refuge in Cara, where they have received education, counseling (some in critical condition upon arrival), medical care, legal assistance, and successful reintegration into society. Collaborating with county and national governments, charitable organizations, child protection networks, and gender equality groups, Edwina's dedication was recognized with the prestigious Community Service of the Year Award 2022 from the Red Cross, underscoring the vital importance of concerted efforts in safeguarding and advancing the rights of girls and women.

Homelessness, gender-based violence, and violence against children in pastoralist communities in Kenya

Insights and Analysis

Insights into the underlying causes of homelessness

- **Structural:** The pastoralist communities in Kenya are still patriarchal in nature and structure where the men's voice is treated with finality while the woman settles on submission even submitting to harm and destruction. The woman's voice is never heard or is highly disregarded.
- **Systemic:** Systems highly favor the men and undermine his female counterpart. In a family or marriage set the man is allowed to have many wives and sexual partners but this does not reflect in the female expectations by the culture. Once a woman has attained the age of marriage, which could be as low as eight years old as long as she has undergone Female Genital Mutilation and there is a favorable suitor for her, she is expected to find shelter under a man. The culture has dictated this as a norm to a point that little girls look up to women who are married as co-wives with very many children even if they were being battered and ill-treated. A man is allowed by culture to beat up his wife if she did not submit to him and yield to his demands even if these demands may be contrary to the laws that govern the land. This then renders women hopeless, homeless, and internally displaced emotionally even more than physically.

- **Socio-economic factors:** Pastoralist lifestyle is highly affected by climate change and conditions. They are the worst affected economically by drought as their nature is tied to their herds. When there are droughts, they follow their animals in search of pastures. When they return, most of the time they have lost all their flock and have lost their other social resources like skills and education opportunities. Due to the semi-permanent housing plan, floods do not spare their shelters and render them homeless. The large family members' numbers also affect the housing plans negatively, mostly forcing them to share very small spaces that expose women and girls to sexual exploitation vulnerabilities and risks.

Perspectives on the intersectionality of homelessness with issues such as poverty, mental health, gender, and migration.

I firmly believe that all abnormalities in society are a result of more than one issue that contributes to a barrier. Homelessness is no exception. Among the pastoralist communities in Kenya, which is a developing country, poverty, mental health, gender, and migration are key components that lead to homelessness. Poverty, for example, is a main contributing factor leading to homelessness. Women and girls in the pastoralist community have very few formal skills. Most of them have not had access to quality formal or informal education. That means that they cannot trade skills for an income. This, therefore, renders them dependent on the males in their families. The numbers per household in the pastoralist community are very large, hence being strenuous to provide. Livelihoods are really constrained, meaning that adults cannot adequately provide for the basic needs of their children and households. Housing being part of these needs that are not sufficiently attended to.

- **Mental health:** This is a monster that has crept into the pastoralist community. Women, especially, are overwhelmed with the pressures of life within their households but

do not know what to do, where to seek help, or even where to run to. Society does not make it any better because there is no adequate awareness on mental health. A woman who is in trouble mentally is regarded as an outcast as she is mostly labeled cursed or paying for evil things she did or members of her family committed.

- **Gender:** A woman from the pastoral community is never welcome back home after a dowry by her husband's family has been paid. When her husband turns against her and treats her badly by beating her up and sexually exploiting her, she is expected to take it quietly and remain in the marriage. After all, she does not have anywhere to run to. She is ideally homeless. The government does not have shelters where such women can get support in terms of shelter, welfare, and empowerment.
- **Migration:** Pastoralists in Kenya are mostly nomads moving from one place to another in search of pastures and water for their animals. At times, women and children are left behind. This really destabilizes the housing programs and mostly renders these communities at risk of being affected by climate change such as floods that would carry away makeshifts leaving them homeless.

Best Practices

Examples of initiatives, programs, or policies that have effectively addressed and/or reduced homelessness. Innovative approaches, collaborations, and community-driven solutions.

There are a couple of solutions among them empowerment, culturally friendly aid exchange programs, policies, and laws that are gender-sensitive.

- **Empowerment:** Empowerment, especially through education, is a big contributor to ending homelessness among the pastoralist communities. They would have a positive influence on their mindset that would lead to behavior change.
- **Provision of aid that dignifies communities.** Where assistance offered, especially from the global North, would impact positively without eroding culture.
- **Programs and laws that are gender-sensitive:** It is important for all state and non-state stakeholders to formulate policies that speak to the safety and access to safe shelters for women who are at risk of different forms of violence. After the formulation of these policies, it is important that the law is effected to ensure the implementation of these policies. It is a shame to have beautiful laws and policies that are only on paper but are not being implemented.

Emerging Trends

Emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities in addressing homelessness, such as grassroots movements or shifts in government policies. Implications of these trends for future interventions.

- **Emerging trends:** There has been a lot of uproar about girl child empowerment, and that has left the boy child behind. This has caused a lot of risky behavior leading to child pregnancies that have subsequently led to homelessness.
- **Challenges:** A great challenge is faced when the duty bearers do not play their role of enforcing the law.

Policy Recommendations

Evidence-based policy recommendations aimed at preventing and alleviating homelessness, enhancing housing access, and promoting inclusive urban development. Strategies that prioritize the needs of vulnerable populations, especially women, children, and girls.

Budget allocation that favors access to shelter for women and girls would play a significant role in alleviating homelessness.

Personal Reflection: Jane Anyango, Polycom Development Project

Jane Anyango Jeruto
Polycom Development Project

Jane started organizing women from different communities over 15 years ago in response to cases of sexual manipulation and violence towards adolescent girls. She has mentored thousands of girls through her "GPende" slogan meaning, 'love yourself', currently a global woman amplifying the voices of women/girls living in slum communities locally, nationally and globally.

Jane is the Founding Director of the Polycom Development Project – she is the convener of the Kenyan Women-led Urban Thinkers Campus – World Urban Campaign process towards The City We Need, Policy Unit Expert towards Habitat III, and has contributed to the successful lobby towards engendering of the New Urban Agenda.

Reflection on the Situation in the Kibera Slums

My over 30 years stay in Kibera Slums has enabled me to interact with several people especially women and youth who are homeless, yes homeless. They retreat to any available vacant house when darkness falls. There are also so many people, especially women, who are stranded in the slums, they have nowhere to go and with the looming plan to upgrade the slums, they are completely hopeless.

Many people come into the slums from their rural communities to look for jobs just to survive. Some are educated, some have no education, completely, but they live with hope of getting jobs and surviving. The majority are women who have either been divorced and dispossessed of their properties, widows who have been evicted from their land or just some unfortunate situation that have left them homeless and with need to look for a place to take cover. It is sad that there is no definite data estimating the people's flow into and out of the slums.

The population of Kibera Slums is estimated at 350,000 according to the last census, however, most people leave their houses so early in the morning and come back so late in the night that it is very hard to know who is where. A small room in Kibera can have more than 10 occupants, so long as they can have a roof over their heads.

At one time in my small room in Kibera, I would stay with my brother, his wife, their 2 children, my own 2 children, another niece and my husband. Some call this home, but how practical is this, 2 couples and 5 children, no room for anyone to move around. Everyone must

lie down to sleep at the same time and also wake up at the same time because there is no room to move around at all. This is very common in most Kibera families, I have seen a family of 15 in such a small room.

When floods came and all floors were flooded, the situation was badly worsened for various families who were forced to share the only raised space in the house, people getting sick and a lot of frustrations and trauma. Lack of washrooms or paying for washrooms is another tough area on homelessness, making slums settlements more complicated and draining.

Polycom Girls works with women and girls, creating platforms for women and girls in distress to meet and share. The Talking Boxes which are installed in schools have given the girls in distress a space to vent, to share how frustrated they are living with their parents in the small rooms where they cannot feel free to even wear their pads during their menses. The face of poverty is demonstrated through the contents shared by these girls through the Talking Boxes.

The establishment of the survivors center in Kibera has been a safe space for these women, training them on various skills, encouraging them to save through table banking and linking them with micro finance institutions where they can get loans to rebuild their lives. These are just for survival, what the future holds for them as far as housing is concerned is not known at all.

Our latest project Adapt a Grandma focuses on making sure that homeless senior women do not go hungry, the young families are encouraged to adapt the senior ladies, give them food and shelter. The project dreams of providing food ratios to these families, while they take care of the seniors.

Our Annual event, the Urban Thinkers Campus brings the different urban actors together to discuss among others homelessness in the informal settlements. Partners discuss and plan together on how best they can collaborate to make sure that real issues affecting communities such as homelessness are tackled.

Recommendations

Advocacy Recommendations

Acknowledging the role civil society, the private sector, and citizens play in influencing national action related to social issues, we recommend:

- Supporting national laws which protect women, children, and girls including laws against domestic violence
- Encouraging governmental responsiveness to the needs of slum residences and residents; there is a need for sustainable development, particularly related to housing, to mitigate climate risks as well as infrastructural risks, such as those related to the use of open fires
- Educating for the destigmatization of single motherhood
- Directing allocation of resources and support to rural areas, including investment in climate-smart agriculture
- Promoting governmental adherence to international and human rights laws, and their progressive constitution
- Increasing access to education for homeless children to remove barriers and ensure homeless children have access to quality education

Policy Recommendations

We believe the following policy recommendations are essential to addressing and preventing homelessness, and are applicable at the local, national, and international levels. We encourage:

- Adoption of the UN Expert Group definition of homelessness
- Implementation of comprehensive urban development policies targeting slums and informal settlements
- Development of affordable housing options accessible to low-income families such as incentivizing private sector investment in affordable housing projects, providing subsidies or grants for housing construction, and implementing rent control measures to prevent housing cost escalation
- Investment in social support services such as mental health counseling and domestic abuse resources that address the root causes of homelessness and provide holistic support
- Fulfillment of requirements of international agreements such as those laid out in The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), including the implementation of laws against domestic violence

HOMELESSNESS IN

INDIA

COUNTRY PROFILE
Republic of India (India) Hindi: Bhārat Gaṇarājya

LOCATION
South Asia; Bordering countries: Myanmar, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, Bhutan, and Nepal; Bordering Ocean: Indian Ocean

POPULATION
As of 2024, India has over 1.4 billion people as one of the most populous countries in the world and accounts for 17.6% of the world's population (United States Census Bureau, 2024).

HOMELESS POPULATION
18 million people (Livemint, 2024)

POLITICAL SYSTEM
Federal Parliamentary Republic

Country Definition of Homelessness & Usage

The Indian Government's definition of homelessness categorizes individuals who reside in open spaces, such as pavements, roadsides, railway platforms, temples, or other public areas, rather than in structures with roofs termed "census houses" (Tripathi et al., 2021). This definition is pivotal for determining eligibility for programs and services, as well as shaping policy decisions.

This definition has limitations as it solely focuses on people dwelling in open and public spaces, overlooking the broader issue of inadequate housing and unsafe living conditions which violate various human rights, including the right to housing, life, nondiscrimination, health, water, sanitation, security, and freedom.

Context of Homelessness

Despite India's fast growth, culturally and ethnically diverse society, and rising living standards, it faces numerous socio-economic challenges including a growing homelessness crisis. According to the Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN), an estimated 1.77 million people are affected by homelessness and housing insecurity in India ("Press release - housing", 2023). While statistics on homelessness in India are difficult to quantify due to the transient nature of homelessness and the inadequate definitions, numerous factors contribute to the issue. The issue of homelessness is compounded by rapid population growth, urbanization, and the caste system, particularly affecting Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in rural areas.

One significant factor contributing to homelessness in India is rural-to-urban migration. Millions of individuals and families migrate from rural areas to larger cities in search of better economic opportunities, however,

inadequate urban planning and a lack of affordable housing options often leave people without shelter, resulting in homelessness. Urbanization, along with rapid population growth, strains existing infrastructure and exacerbates housing shortages. In cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Kolkata, slums and informal settlements house a significant portion of the urban population, many of whom lack access to basic amenities and live in unsafe and unsanitary conditions.

Social stigmas and systemic discrimination perpetuate homelessness, with women and children disproportionately affected. Sociocultural factors, including family dynamics and traditional gender roles, contribute significantly to homelessness, especially among women, children, and girls. These factors can result in domestic violence, lack of property rights for women, and abandonment by family members. Additionally, the lack of resources accessible to women, children, and girls for seeking assistance and support further exacerbates the cycle of poverty and housing insecurity.

INDIA

Fast Facts

1. Independent experts and civil society organizations estimate that Delhi has between 200,000 and 250,000 homeless persons ("Press release - housing", 2023)

2. According to the 2011 Census, the homeless population accounts for about .15% of India's urban population, however, it is argued that the numbers are far greater ("Press release - housing", 2023)

3. Homeless women in India are particularly vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse, and are more likely to live with their children. They are often forced to take unsafe jobs, such as prostitution and drug networks, in exchange for food and protection. Women who are abandoned by abusive partners, or female children who flee abuse, are especially vulnerable to insecurity and violence (Bhattacharya, 2022)

4. It is reported that between 2001 to 2011 families without homes increased 37% in urban areas while decreasing but fell to 26% in rural areas (Shaikh, 2017)

5. The last census report on the "houseless population" stated that, "India is home to 4.5 lakh houseless families, equalling a total population of 17.73 lakh living without any support roof cover" ("Press release - housing", 2023) *Note: "Lakh" means "a hundred thousand"*

6. A total of 2.7 lakh children with age 0-6 are also house-less in India as per primary census data of 2011" (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2011)

7. As of the end of 2022, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre reported a total of 631,000 Internally Displaced people in India ("India", 2023)

FIGURE 3

Homelessness in India

The Current Realities - 2024

1

India, one of the world's most populous countries with over

1.4 billion

people, faces a housing shortage of 18.78 million units

2

Women and children make up a significant portion of India's homeless population, which is estimated to be at least

3 million

people

3

India is understood to have the largest population of street children in the world, however, the disparity between the estimates of the government and NGOs make it difficult to quantify as estimates can range anywhere from between 20,000 and

18 million

children

4

According to a recent CREDAI-Lieases Foras report, India would need over

29 million

housing units to meet the national vision of housing for all

5

Nearly half, or about

47.9%

of Indian households that have more than five children are severely deprived of shelter and other necessities

6

The 2011 Census recorded

1.7 million

homeless individuals across the nation, with 938,348 in urban areas and 830,000 in rural regions. The accuracy of these figures, however, is debated, particularly considering that the most recent Census was conducted in 2011

Analysis/Testimony: Dr. Amita V. Joseph, Ela Gupta, and Taarini Manchanda, Business & Community Foundation (BCF)

Dr. Amita V. Joseph
Ex. Oficio, Business & Community Foundation (BCF), India

She has accumulated over three decades of experience in the corporate, legal, and development sectors. She is a lawyer with a PhD from Deakin University. She is associated with various non-profits, including the Business and Community Foundation, where she has worked on numerous case studies and research papers. Joseph has been a dedicated volunteer for the cause of homelessness since 1999 and actively engaged in public interest matters for many years. As one of the founding members of CRW, she has been analyzing Business Responsibility Reports since 2015.

Ela Gupta
Co-Director, Business and Community Foundation (BCF), India

She is the Co-Director at the Business and Community Foundation (BCF), where she drives advocacy for the homeless and spearheads initiatives that connect businesses with community support.. With over 15 years of experience as a strategic and outreach consultant, Ela specializes in leveraging cultural capital to develop impactful outreach strategies. Her expertise spans team leadership, project development, communication design, partnership building, and philanthropy. Her efforts include designing events and programs that raise awareness and drive action for the various communities.

Taarini Manchanda
Business and Community Foundation (BCF), India

As a dedicated advocate for grassroots change, Taarini Manchanda is committed to developing impactful solutions to address social inequities. Since earning her degree in sociology, she has been supporting the Business and Community Foundation in creating community-driven initiatives, conducting research, and driving advocacy efforts. Her interests lie at the intersection of public policy, gender equity, and social justice. Taarini believes in the power of community to drive meaningful change and is passionate about harnessing collective action to address social issues.

Urban Homelessness and the Dehli Experience

At the core of urban development lies the metropolis - a hub for driving economic growth and a site of socio-economic mobility; however, capital cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai are also marked by complex competing claims and deep disparities. The urban landscape is characterised by binaries of legality and illegality, of citizens and encroachers. This arises primarily from the gross housing shortage for low-income, working men and women hostels. Low political will, lack of real estate interest in this segment given low-profit margins, and absence of advocacy for the homeless are contributing factors which do not factor in the stark reality that our cities and towns would not survive without the labor of the homeless that form a core of the unorganised sector working as rickshaw pullers, headload workers, rag and waste pickers, contract workers, etc. This dichotomy is especially stark in the case of the homeless population, which remains marginalised and largely invisible despite its significant presence, which by estimates is about ten percent of every urban conglomeration.

According to the 2011 Census, Delhi's homeless population was estimated at around 46,724 individuals. Yet, the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) reported a substantially higher number of 324,375 homeless individuals in the same year. This inconsistency reflects a deeper, more fundamental problem: without an accurate count of the homeless population, how can effective policies be developed or the scale of the issue fully grasped? The invisibility and erasure of the homeless in urban policies and practices, then, is not only a result of miscalculated population estimates but also a significant barrier to effectively addressing their needs without a clear understanding of their true numbers. A recent head count in August 2024 by SAM:BKS (Shahri Adhikar Manch, Begaron ke Saath) confirmed figures at around 1.50,000 in Delhi alone – not counting the NCR (National Capital Region) of Noida, Gurgaon, etc. One does not have to look far, under flyovers, in traffic parks, and outside shops, their presence with families and children is a daily heart-rending visual that does not seem to move policymakers into action.

The Delhi Experience and the Work of Non-Profit Organisations

The homeless in Delhi face marginalisation, violence, and neglect by the State. Their existence is often anonymised by the city's development processes, rendering them peripheral to urban public policies and social protection efforts. This exclusion results in a lack of comprehensive and effective strategies to address their needs. Women and children are most vulnerable, especially single parents, widows, the elderly, trans persons, and people with disabilities. Despite Court interventions both at the High Court and Supreme Court bureaucratic and political will to address the issue and implement good orders remains weak. The shelters in Delhi, amounting to approximately 200, are run by Shelter Management Agencies (SMAs) inducted by the state grappling with late payments, inadequate infrastructure, and hygiene arrangements for less than ten percent of the homeless population.

The absence of a cohesive national policy on homelessness exacerbates the issue. While initiatives like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and the National Urban and Housing Policy have been implemented, they lack the urgency and scalability required to address the chronic nature of homelessness. These policies often fail to establish preventive mechanisms for homelessness and adequately support the homeless in transitioning to stable housing. Some state policies that focus on brutal dem-

olitions without adequate rehabilitation and no prior notice drive the urban poor into further deprivation and despair. The existing shelters are not the answer to the crisis, but a consequence of state policies.

Past efforts to address homelessness through community mobilisation and collective action have shown limited socio-political impact. For instance, a women's collectivisation effort by the Business and Community Foundation (BCF), both with a group of stakeholder men and women supported by HelpAge India from 2018 onwards highlighted several challenges. First, the lack of long-term resources, both financial and material, significantly hampered effective community action. This shortage of support made it difficult to implement and sustain initiatives. Additionally, there was a notable need for stronger capacity building to empower communities better, enabling them to effectively address challenges in their own capacity. Efforts to build social capital and foster a sense of community were also insufficient, as group members tended to prioritise immediate survival over long-term, sustainable change as they live on the edge. This focus on short-term solutions undermined the potential for creating lasting improvements and addressing the root causes of homelessness. Lessons learned are the critical need for collectivisation which requires long-term support which enables stakeholders to first overcome immediate health and other critical challenges such as safety, livelihoods, and so on, before focusing on group action. Aligning with broader networks of the marginalised remains a key area to be addressed.

To effectively address homelessness, a multi-faceted approach is essential. This includes accurate population assessments, comprehensive policy development, and innovative urban planning strategies. Central to this approach is the development of a comprehensive housing continuum, focusing on transitioning individuals voluntarily from temporary shelters to permanent, or shared housing. Key strategies involve integrated urban planning, which incorporates the needs of the homeless into broader development frameworks to ensure they are not left behind. Additionally, fostering community participation by building strong networks and social capital for collective action by the homeless themselves, is crucial for supporting long-term solutions and enhancing resilience. By prioritising prevention of homelessness and integration, and by actively engaging communities in the solution process in development practices, urban policies can be more inclusive and equitable.

Stories from shelter residents

(1) Khalida, a 25-year-old resident of a shelter home in Delhi, is the sole caregiver of her two children, Aly, and Sana.

Prior to seeking refuge at the shelter, Khalida and her family lived on the streets, relying on plastic sheets for protection during monsoon.

Her mother, a domestic maid, passed away when Khalida was still young, leaving her to navigate life alone. Khalida's father resides in a jhuggi (slum) in Bawana, and she fre-

quently visits him to provide care, especially during his periods of illness.

Life in the shelter has presented its own set of challenges. Khalida has struggled to secure employment due to her homeless status. When pregnant with her daughter, Sana, she was initially denied admission to a government hospital due to a lack of necessary paperwork. After persistent efforts, she was eventually admitted, but faced discriminatory remarks from the midwife during the delivery process.

Despite having completed nine years of schooling, Khalida was unable to continue her education. She is now determined to find suitable employment that will allow her to leave the shelter and provide a better life for her children. She prefers cleaning work, but is wary of working as a domestic maid due to past experiences with employers exhibiting harmful intentions.

Khalida dreams of seeing her children receiving quality education, particularly in English, a language she is unfamiliar with. Her ultimate hope is for Aly and Sana to become self-sufficient and compassionate individuals who can contribute positively to society, and help those in need.

(2) In a shelter home in Delhi, Muhib, a 59-year-old man, has found refuge within its walls for the past 14-15 years.

Originally from a small village in Allahabad, where his family engaged in agriculture, Muhib's youthful spirit led him to Delhi in pursuit of better opportunities. Despite having a family back in Allahabad, including a wife, a son, and a daughter, he found himself drawn to the city. He earned a living by selling mobile phone chargers and data cables. However, Muhib fell victim to drug addiction, a struggle that derailed his aspirations and plunged him into a life of hardship.

Before finding shelter, he endured hunger, insecurity, and the constant threat of losing his meagre possessions. He vividly recalls the nights spent without food or protection, making survival a daily challenge.

He shares that the place where the shelter now stands was once a park, a fact Muhib often recounted with a touch of nostalgia. He states, "मजबूरी इंसान को ला ही देती है, आना तो कोई नही चाहता | (Compulsion brings a person [here], no one wants to come [by choice])."

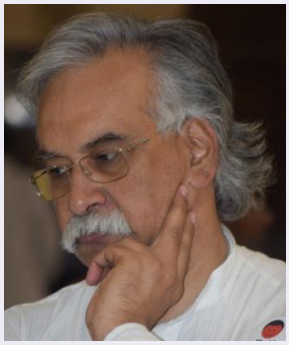
Despite the hardships, Muhib has found a sense of community and support within the shelter. His close friendship with Faiz, another resident facing his own challenges, is based on mutual support and understanding, Muhib often assisted Faiz, while Faiz safeguards Muhib's belongings.

In addition to selling electronic accessories, Muhib also has skills in tailoring, that he occasionally utilises for extra income; however, his life is not without its health challenges, including breathing problems. He fondly recalls his passions for sports in his younger days.

Muhib deeply appreciates the security that the shelter home provides, offering a place to sleep without fear of theft or violence; however, he remains concerned about the lack of lockers for families, which poses a risk to their belongings and adds an element of insecurity to their daily lives.

Grateful for the shelter and the community it offered, Muhib continues his life with a mix of gratitude and longing. He misses his family and cherishes his monthly visits, but he also understands the necessity of staying in Delhi for work and a sense of unity with other residents. His friendship with Faiz gives him the strength to face each day, despite the shadows of his past.

Personal Reflection: Dr. Indu Prakash Singh, CityMakers Mission International



Dr. Indu Prakash Singh
Facilitator, CityMakers Mission International

Indu prakash singh (DoB: 1959 - July 20th), with a 45-years of work in the development sector, is a human rights defender, socio-spiritual activist, poet, author, a feminist, a TEDX Speaker (IIM Ahmedabad on 10th Jan 2015) and a PRA practitioner & facilitator. He is currently a Consultant with large number of national and international development organisations.

Indu has been bestowed with numerous awards. He's a petitioner in the Supreme Court of India, on homeless matter: WP (C) 572 of 2003. And been working with the homeless in Delhi and the country, whom he calls CityMakers, since 1999. He's an author of seven books. And have edited over 50 publications.

Indu also spoke at the UN Hqs, New York, on 13-14th Feb., 2020 on Ending Global Homelessness. He has been supported in all this by IGH: Institute of Global Homelessness, Chicago.

Have a heart to end homelessness, not persecute the homeless!

With my team, I've been working with the homeless, since 1999, whom we started calling CityMakers (Singh, 2020), from 2010. Over the 25 years we've faced lots of adversity in our work, but we never gave up. Rather, we have become diehard optimists. And for over 45 years I've been part of the women's movement.

Right early in the day of our work, we realised that the short stay homes run by women's organisations were not open to the homeless women. On our enquiry, one of the esteemed leading women's organisation told me, "Indu ji, we can't handle homeless women. They have huge issues". And after that we approached none. One can imagine the plight of homeless women and girls, as there was no shelter for them. All of the 10 shelters (operating in the night only) that remained till 2001, none were for women. Girls surely could be moved to the children's homes, by calling 1098 (child helpline no). But women, NO! So much for the safety and security of women, in the City of Delhi, which tops in criminality in whole of India, in rape, theft, murder, kidnapping since 1993.

ActionAid India which supported this initiative, since 2000; through it we were able to put up the first shelter for women in 2001 in the YWCA premises. After the first night of their stay, 'When one resident was asked, how she felt. She said, "I can now sleep peacefully, without any fear. And for this to happen, I have waited for ages".' (Ibid). One can't imagine what sleep deprivation does to women who are homeless. Also to sleep in the night with kids, one runs the risk of sexual abuse, violence and trafficking, and

many single women and mothers would not sleep the entire night to protect themselves, and their children. Only this year an intern, Vashali Upadhyay came to me to work on Right to Sleep. Her contribution in this volume too will highlight the constraints faced by women and girls.

As a petitioner in the Supreme Court of India (WP (C) 572 of 2003, which got activated in 2013, supported by eminent Advocate Prashant Bhushan and his dedicated team), along with other friends and CityMakers, today we have 24 hours shelters for the homeless, all across the country. In Delhi we've 197 shelters, of which 153 are for men, 19 for families, 17 for women and 8 for recovery patients, residents with mental issues, for de-addiction etc. In winter months over 200 temporary shelters are created. In a way Delhi has the highest shelters, in any city, in the world, with food and medicine provided by the local government, through its own budget. Yet these shelters are not adequate. Delhi still has a shelters deficit to the tune of 87.4% as per the Master Plan for Delhi 2021 (Ibid). Thus despite all these shelters many homeless are forced to sleep on the streets. All this is even after the National Urban Livelihood Mission's Scheme for Shelter for Urban Homeless (SUH), rolled out in 2013 (Government of India - Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, n.d.).

To make matters worse the Union Govt of India, through its Lt. Governor in Delhi, demolished Nine homeless shelters in 2023, towards G20 meet, and closed Five homeless shelters on Jan 2024 (Singh, 2023). Also the Union Govt unleashed brutal demolitions of informal settlements, in Delhi and many cities of India, rendering 100s and thousands homeless. 'Over 150000 homes were arbitrarily demolished between 2022 and 2023, a recent report by Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) on forced evictions reveals. This … has led to the eviction of more than 740000 people in the country' (Patel, 2024). It was rightly called domicide, the killing of homes.

The most unfortunate part of all this was that even the courts were muted on it and in a way allowed some of the demolitions to go on. Such demolitions have exacerbated and aggravated homelessness.

The world community needs to come together to condemn such domicides and brutal evictions. We've seen that while men when turned homeless can return to their homes in the villages, but for many a woman, it's next to impossible to return to their homes, if ever they have one in the village and are not divested of it by their kin, after becoming a widow etc. Nobody comes to a city for its glitter and glamour. They are forced to come to cities, as a last resort due to destitution, poverty, caste and religious atrocities etc.

Evictions destroy the tenuous link that the poor have with the resources. Govts worldwide need to support the poor than making them hostages of their circumstances. It's sad to note that the USA has criminalised homelessness. How can any country do so?

Homelessness is a symptom of malgovernance and systemic neglect, than an individual folly.

Personal Reflection: Cynthia Mathews, Loretto International Community

Sr. Cynthia Mathews
NGO Representative to the UN, Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary – Loreto Generalate

Sr. Cynthia Mathew CJ is a member of the Congregation of Jesus, Patna Province, Bihar-India. She has worked as NGO representative to the United Nations for 6 years advocating on behalf of people and planet especially women and girls. Before moving to New York in 2017 to take up her role as NGO Representative at the United Nations, Cynthia practiced law in Patna High Court and Buxar District court, fighting the cases of women, Juveniles and those languishing in prisons. Closely connected with this aspect of her work she was a member of the NGO – Chirag Education, Culture and Health Awareness Center, working with Dalit women, children and youth in the State of Bihar. She has rendered her service in various capacities at different forums such as Prison Ministry India (PMI,), Religious Forum for Justice and Peace, India, Asian Movement of Women Religious against Human Trafficking (AMRAT)--a branch of TALITA KUM International Network of Consecrated Life against Human Trafficking. She was also a member of the committee constituted by the High court of Patna for the inspection of Remand homes and Juvenile Homes. Her work and life was featured in Global Sisters Report and UK Times magazine. Cynthia holds Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and Bachelor of Law (LLB)degrees.

Currently she is a practicing lawyer in Buxar and holds the position as the secretary of Chirag Education Culture and Health Awareness Centre, Buxar. She continues to render her service in various forums and committees mentioned above.

Dalits the 'untouchables' in India

Dalits, also known as 'untouchables' in India have been a topic of concern and criticism for many years. Despite India's independence from British rule in 1947, Dalits still face discrimination and poverty in their daily lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on Dalits in India. Dalits, who are among the most economically vulnerable communities, have been hit particularly hard by the pandemic. The sudden and widespread loss of jobs and income has resulted in increased poverty, hunger, and homelessness among Dalits.

A study conducted by the NGOs Indo-Global Social Service Society and Organisation Functioning For Eytham's Respect (Offer) shows that the caste system in India makes people economically, socially and politically deprived and pushes them to the margins and an inhuman condition.

The former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, Leilani Farha, had released a report on housing in India.

The report draws attention to the alarming state of Dalit houses and the need for Government action to improve housing and end discrimination.

The report cites Government statistics revealing that Dalits on average live in lower quality housing, made with inadequate materials compared to the general population and finds the lack of access for Dalits to latrines, at 66%, particularly alarming.

As I work among the Dalit community in Bihar, I have come across many who have no adequate housing and live in a very wretched situation. When our Organisation wanted to build latrines for the women who are part of the Self-Help Groups, we found that many could not avail the facility due to lack of adequate housing. It is sad that though the government has declared India as ODF (Open Defecation Free) most of the people in the villages do not have proper latrines. Even if some of them have the latrines they lack running water for their use.

There are various schemes such as Chief Minister Rural Housing Assistance Scheme, Indira Awas Yojna, etc to provide housing to those belong to below poverty level. However due to corruption and manipulation of funds, the poor have very less chance to avail such schemes. According to a newspaper report the amount sanctioned for the building of the house was inadequate and therefore many especially those belonging to Scheduled Caste (SC) were unable to complete the construction of the house.

Testimony: Pooja

My name is Pooja (name changed) and I am a mother of three girls and two boys. I live in Buxar, Bihar. I am working as a maid and my husband has migrated to another State for wok. With our earnings we managed to get our eldest daughter married. We had received a very small share from the ancestral property. It was just enough to make a tiny house with one room only. We sleep, cook, eat and the children study in the same room. We have no space to make a latrine and therefore we are compelled to go out to the filed for our needs. It becomes more difficult when the female members of the house get period or other members are sick. There is no privacy or space to take a proper rest. The land price is so high that we cannot afford to purchase another plot of land to make a house. Living is becoming a bit hard as the children are growing up.

Good Practices: Farheen Naaz, We The Change Trust

Farheen Naaz
Co-Founder & CEO,
WeTheChange
Director, Zeevah
Sustainable Solutions
Pvt. Ltd.

Farheen Naaz is a dynamic leader dedicated to transforming menstrual health, hygiene, and waste management in India and Africa. As the founder of WeTheChange, she has spearheaded initiatives that raise awareness, break societal taboos, and empower menstruators with essential knowledge and resources. Her work has reached thousands across India, fostering inclusivity and education.

In addition, Farheen serves as the director of Zeevah Sustainable Solutions Pvt. Ltd., a company producing bio-compostable sanitary pads, promoting environmentally sustainable products that are safe, affordable, and accessible. Zeevah's products help reduce environmental waste while empowering individuals to make eco-conscious choices.

Farheen has also led impactful projects, such as collaborating with BCF in New Delhi, where she brought dignified incomes to girls in shelter homes by training them in Old Delhi Heritage and Food tours. Her leadership in this initiative has helped provide skills and opportunities for these young women.

Farheen's expertise extends to global education, with a Menstruation in Global Context certification from Columbia University. Her relentless drive for sustainability and social change has made her a key advocate for menstrual health globally, shaping public health programs and inspiring action in menstrual hygiene and waste management.

Empowering Shelter Home Girls through Food Walks in Delhi

Homelessness in India often manifests in ways that are hidden from public view. One such hidden face is that of young girls living in shelter homes. These girls not only face poverty but also social exclusion, severely limiting their opportunities for dignified livelihoods. The Food Walk Training Project, launched in Jama Masjid, Delhi, in 2020-21, aimed to address these challenges by empowering shelter home girls with skills to lead cultural and food walks in the historic Old Delhi area. This initiative, undertaken in collaboration with the Business Community Foundation, Purani Dilli Walo Ki Baatein, and WeTheChange Trust, equipped these girls with practical skills, personal development opportunities, and a chance to rewrite their futures.

For these girls, homelessness extends beyond the absence of shelter; it also means limited access to education, jobs, and social acceptance. The Food Walk Training Project sought to break this cycle by building their confidence

and skills, offering them dignified livelihoods as cultural food tour leaders in the historic streets of Purani Dilli.

The Three-Phase Training Program

The program was structured into three key phases: orientation and skill development, practical application, and extending professional opportunities through real food walks. The batch included 10 trainees, guided by two facilitators who served as mentors throughout the training.

Phase 1: Orientation and Skill Development

The first phase focused on introducing the girls to the world of cultural tourism and storytelling—essential skills for leading engaging food walks. During this week-long training, the girls learned about the rich history of Jama Masjid and Chandni Chowk, along with fascinating anecdotes about the local food scene. They were also encouraged to share their personal stories, connecting their experiences to the cultural narratives they would later present to tourists.

Ice-breaker activities like “My Most Precious Possession” helped the girls bond with each other and the trainers, fostering a supportive environment. Their strong interest in history made the training more engaging and effective for everyone involved.

Phase 2: Practical Application

The second phase emphasized hands-on learning. The girls applied their new knowledge by conducting practice walks within the shelter home. This phase focused on building their confidence in public speaking and storytelling. A soft skills training session was incorporated, where the girls learned essential communication and presentation skills. Each participant was assigned a portion of the walk, covering historical facts about Jama Masjid and captivating stories about the local food outlets.

One of the program’s highlights was the integration of life skills training, particularly through sports. Rugby sessions were introduced as a creative way to teach conflict management, anger resolution, and teamwork. The physical activity and collaboration required in rugby provided an engaging platform to learn valuable life skills. The girls learned to handle difficult situations gracefully, manage conflicts constructively, and work effectively in a team—skills that were valuable not only for leading food walks but also for their personal growth and empowerment.

A personal grooming session led by an expert covered essential techniques for personal hygiene and self-care. The girls learned how to enhance their presentation and confidence, contributing to their professional readiness and overall self-esteem as they entered the cultural tourism field.

Phase 3: Professional Opportunities

The final phase of the program focused on real-world application. The girls conducted demo walks for guests, confidently leading groups through the streets of Jama Masjid and Chandni Chowk. They mastered

two routes—one focusing on Jama Masjid's famous food spots and the other highlighting the vegetarian food walk in Chandni Chowk. These demo walks were a huge confidence booster for the girls, who had now developed the skills to lead tours in groups or individually.

The project extended beyond training by linking the girls to government programs that provide essential social services, such as access to Aadhaar cards, pensions, and other welfare support. This holistic approach ensured the girls were trained for employment and supported on their broader journey toward stability and independence.

Impact Beyond Livelihoods

The Food Walk Training Project achieved more than providing a source of income; it helped the girls reclaim their narratives by embedding their personal stories into the cultural experience of the food walks. This initiative fostered a sense of pride in their heritage while raising awareness among locals and tourists about the challenges faced by homeless women.

By providing a platform for dignified livelihoods and essential life skills development, the project offered a pathway to personal and professional growth. The life skills training, combined with the practical experience of leading food walks, empowered the girls to step out of the shadows of their circumstances and into a brighter, more confident future.

Conclusion: A Pathway Forward

The Food Walk Training Project serves as a model for addressing hidden homelessness by equipping marginalised individuals with the skills needed for dignified livelihoods while fostering personal development. Through this initiative, these young women were able to turn their vulnerabilities into strengths, using Old Delhi's cultural heritage as a vehicle for change.

This initiative demonstrates how collaborative efforts can make a tangible difference in the lives of homeless girls, providing them with the tools to reclaim their identity and find their place in society. By offering opportunities for economic independence and personal empowerment, the project helped pave the way for a future where cities can be safer and more supportive spaces for homeless women.

Advocacy Recommendations

Acknowledging the role civil society, the private sector, and citizens play in influencing national action related to social issues, we recommend:

- Supporting societal acceptance of homelessness as a challenge specifically for children and the need for corresponding action
- Providing education to counter domestic violence, ranging from principles of respect for women to women's skills training
- Giving special attention to ending the caste system, through legal and social changes
- Encouraging allocation of national land for affordable housing
- Promoting the increasing and varying services for the homeless within cities, including shelters that meet the needs of specific populations including survivors of violence, children/girls, and the disabled

Policy Recommendations

We believe the following policy recommendations are essential to addressing and preventing Family homelessness and are applicable at the local, national, and international levels. We encourage:

- State-sanctioned building of long-term supported housing for families as an alternative to shelters and slums
- The implementation of accountability and enforcement mechanisms for existing services
- More national governmental efforts to collect disaggregated data on homelessness and housing insecurity, combined with regional efforts to network existing services, coordinate the response, and better identify gaps in services and people in need
- Allocation of funding to climate-smart agriculture and other measures to improve conditions in rural area
- Adoption of human rights based approaches to development, supported by legislative and other measures for the direction of national and local projects and strategies

HOMELESSNESS IN THE

UNITED STATES

COUNTRY PROFILE
United States of America (USA)
Spanish: Estados Unidos de América

LOCATION
North America; Bordering countries: Mexico and Canada; Coasts: Pacific and Atlantic Oceans

POPULATION
As of 2024, the USA's population was estimated to be over 341 million people (United States Census Bureau, 2024)

HOMELESS POPULATION
650,000 people (Ludden, 2023)

POLITICAL SYSTEM
Constitutional federal republic

Country Definition of Homelessness & Usage

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines homelessness through a range of circumstances. It includes individuals or families without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, such as those living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or places unsuitable for habitation.

Context of Homelessness

The history of homelessness in the United States is deeply intertwined with economic downturns and systemic inequalities. The 2008 financial crisis, for instance, saw a surge in homelessness, with over one million foreclosures completed nationally at its peak in 2010 (Ludden, 2023). Income inequality is widening, exacerbated by rising unemployment and underemployment, further hindering housing affordability and access. Concurrently, the narrative surrounding homelessness often attributes it to personal failings, such as addiction or mismanagement of resources, rather than systemic injustices.

Racial disparities persist, with minority groups disproportionately affected due to barriers to employment, education, healthcare, and housing. State governance and policies vary, reflecting diverse manifestations of extreme poverty and homelessness across the nation. Disparities also exist within territories like Puerto Rico, where federal responses to natural disasters and longstanding issues like debt and political structure are insufficient. Despite these challenges, efforts to address homelessness are underway, such as the proposed Ending Homelessness Act of 2019. The misallocation of social spending on short-term solutions calls for the need for comprehensive, systemic approaches to tackle the root causes of homelessness and provide lasting solutions for vulnerable populations.

UNITED STATES

Fast Facts

1. The total homeless population increased by about 70,000 people, or 12%, between 2022 and 2023 (Goodman-Bacon & McKay, 2024)

2. Homelessness looks different from state to state across the United States. In 2023, 78% of Los Angeles' homeless population lived unsheltered, contrasting starkly with New York City, where 92% had access to shelter due to a legal "right to shelter" policy (Goodman-Bacon & McKay, 2024)

3. Nearly 327,000 people in the United States experiencing homelessness lived in shelters (Glassman, 2024)

4. About 1 in 10 NYC students were homeless at some point in the 2022-2023 school year (Closson, 2023)

5. A record 119,300 NYC students were homeless in the 2022-2023 school year (Closson, 2023)

6. Migrant children have made up most of the increase in NYC students experiencing homelessness since more than 133,000 people fleeing economic and political turmoil have arrived and most are families with children (Closson, 2023)

7. According to the most recent HUD report in 2023 (HUD, 2023):
   - National increase in homelessness by over 12 percent between 2022 and 2023 (70,642 more people)
   - Over 17 percent of all people experiencing homelessness in the US are children under the age of 18 (111,620 children)

8. From a 2019 Voices of Youth Count, "94 of the 215 youth interviewed had foster care histories. 44% identified entrance into foster care as the beginning of their housing instability" (Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness, 2019)

9. As of 2019, in New York City, 1 out of every 100 babies were born into sheltered homelessness ("The Dynamics of Family", 2019)

FIGURE 4

Homelessness in the United States

The Current Realities - 2024

1

In 2024 the population of the USA was estimated at

334,914,895

2

In the United States, the number of homeless people on a given night in January 2023 was more than

650,000

3

Since 2022, the number of families with children experiencing homelessness has risen by more than

15%

4

From 2020 to 2022, the number of people who became homeless for the first time increased by

30%

5

High housing costs continue to be a financial stressor for disadvantaged Americans as people spend over

30-50%

of their income on rent

6

Unaccompanied people ages 24 and younger made up

22%

of all homeless young people in 2023

Personal Reflection: Maryann Broxton, ATD Fourth World

Maryann Broxton
Main Representative to the UN, International Movement ATD Fourth World

Maryann Broxton is the Main Representative to the United Nations for the International Movement ATD Fourth World. Ms. Broxton draws upon her own experience as an ATD Activist (person with direct experience of poverty) when working with NGOs, policy makers, and governmental agencies to set the conditions for equitable participation of people directly impacted by poverty in designing, implementing, and critical review of poverty solutions.

As the US coordinator for the Multidimensional Aspects of Poverty (MAP) participatory research (2016-2020), she developed and facilitated trainings on equitable participation for the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the Center for Law and Social Policy, and the Aspen Institute, along with social worker students at the New School in New York, Harvard, Columbia, and Fordham University. She has spoken about multidimensional poverty and setting the conditions for equitable participation at the OECD in Paris, the World Bank in Washington D.C., and various Commissions held at the United Nations. Maryann holds a B.A. from Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The Criminalization of Homelessness in the United States: Masking Inept Social Policy as Personal Failure

On June 28th, 2024 ("U. S. Supreme Court overturns", 2024), the Supreme Court of the United States made it permissible for municipalities to fine, arrest, and confiscate and destroy the personal belonging of any person sleeping in a public area with the 6-3 ruling in "City of Grants Pass, Oregon v. Johnson." In her dissent, Justice Sotomayor stated, "Sleep is a biological necessity, not a crime," and called the ruling, "unconscionable and unconstitutional" (Murdock, 2024). The latter ("The Eighth Amendment", 2024) being due to the fact the ruling disallows the use of any form of blanket, pillow, or protection from the elements, while simultaneously allowing for punishment, in the form of fines and arrest, for a group of people who have no place else to go when a shelter bed is unavailable.

This new version of "The Ugly Laws," (Leppälä, 2011) only serves as a means to quell the outrage of business owners, home owners, and renters' NIMBYism when it comes to who should have access to public spaces. Some lawmakers were quick to take advantage of the new ruling, with California Governor Gavin Newsom (Nguyen, 2024), using the ruling as a media photo-op where he personally cleared encampments; disposing of people's personal possessions.

Instead of admitting fault with the housing system, policy makers and society alike blame homelessness on a moral defect in the people experiencing it; citing addiction, alcoholism, laziness, or mental illness as the reasoning for homelessness. With half of the renter house-

holds cost burdened by rent (United States Census Bureau, 2024), and knowing there has been an 18% increase in homelessness (De Sousa & Henry, 2024), it is lazy policy work at best and malpractice at worse to blame homelessness on the people struggling to survive it.

During her tour of San Francisco in 2018, former UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Leilani Farha, stated, "There's a cruelty here that I don't think I've seen," ("San Francisco or Mumbai?", 2018), when witnessing the treatment and conditions people trying to survive homelessness there endured. Farha discounted the individualized reasoning for homelessness stating, "[...] when you're seeing the numbers of people who are homeless here and in every other city, you just know it's structural" ("San Francisco or Mumbai?", 2018).

No "one" thing pushes people into homelessness. If you ask people currently trying to survive it, the most prominent answer will be economic related. There is no county in the U.S. where a person can afford a market rate 2-bedroom apartment on minimum wage ("Out of Reach", 2024). Affordable housing solves homelessness.

At 12am on June 3rd, 2024, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) opened a lottery to be put on a waiting list for their Housing Choice Voucher program, commonly known as Section 8, after being closed the previous 15 years. By the afternoon, over 150,000 online applications were received (Hoogensen & Rosoff, 2024). Within 24 hours, NYCHA received 301,044 applications, a total of 633,808 by the end of the one-week deadline, and another 4, 416 applications postmarked by the deadline (New York City Housing Authority, 2024). Over a half a million people, vying for a spot on a waiting list for an affordable place to call home. As Farha stated in 2018, "The situation is unacceptable in light of the wealth of the country" ("San Francisco or Mumbai?", 2018).

The criminalization of homelessness is an inhumane policy choice that does nothing to solve the issue of homelessness. Cities, towns, and states can't fine or arrest their way out of homelessness. Homelessness is solved by housing, not punishment.

Personal Reflection: Donald Whitehead Jr., National Coalition for the Homeless

Donald Whitehead Jr.
Executive Director, National Coalition for the Homeless; Co-Founder, Racial Equity Partners

Donald Whitehead served in the U.S. Navy aboard the USS Horne-CG 30 as the ship's journalist. Following Donald's service, he struggled to readjust to society for a decade. Mr. Whitehead's struggle culminated in homelessness. On August 25, 1996, he entered a substance abuse treatment facility. After completing the program, Donald began his career as an outreach worker.

Donald now has over 29 years of experience working on the issues affecting marginalized communities. He has provided direct service and technical assistance on homeless services, Veterans' services, substance abuse services, racial equity, and poverty throughout his career. He provided direct service at various levels in his first 10 years, from outreach coordinator to Executive Director positions in several cities. From 2001-04, Mr. Whitehead served as Executive Director of the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH). During his tenure at NCH, the organization led the effort to pass the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Act. It Introduced the Bring America Home Campaign, the most comprehensive legislation to end homelessness in history. Donald also utilized his fundraising skills to set new records for fundraising NCH.

Donald left NCH in 2004 to pursue his goal of utilizing his knowledge of program development, strategic planning, and fundraising to a broader range of organizations. As a consultant, Donald has worked in communities throughout the United States and within Federal agencies, including the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Veterans Affairs, the Center for Disease Control, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, along with the States of Maryland, Minnesota, California, Oregon, Massachusetts, Florida and Arizona. Cities include Cincinnati, Baltimore, Washington (District of Columbia), Orlando and St. Cloud.

In 2020, Donald joined Jeff Olivet and Kavita Singh-Gilcrest to found Racial Equity Partners (REP). Over the last two years, REP has grown as one of the leading consultant companies working on racial equity. REP has numerous contracts with nonprofit and for-profit clients, city-state and Federal organizations, and community-based and large organizations.

Donald specializes in integrating people with lived experience into the planning and governance structures in Continuums of Care and Community-Based organizations and rethinking shelter, coordinated entry strategic planning.

Throughout his career, Mr. Whitehead has provided services to the Homeless Veteran Community. He has managed Veterans' outreach, Supportive Services for Veteran Families, Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program, transitional housing and emergency shelter programs in service to the Veteran community. Donald has also received awards for managing stand-downs in Ohio.

Mr. Whitehead has served on advisory committees for Presidents Bush, Clinton, Bush II, Obama, and Biden. In 2005, Donald received a distinguished service award for his work on homelessness from the Congressional Black Caucus. He received a second award of Special Recognition from Congress in 2008. In 2011, Donald completed the prestigious American Express Leadership Academy. Donald was appointed to the steering committee of the World Urban forum of the United Nations in October. Donald was also appointed to the Ann Arundel County Commission on Community Reinvestment in Ann Arundel County Maryland in 2024.

Currently, Mr. Whitehead resides in Millersville, Maryland.

Homelessness and Racial Inequities in the United States

I am personally familiar with the impact of Criminalization and discrimination. I will never forget the feeling of cold steel on the back of my head as a thirteen-year-old while playing football in my neighborhood. I fit the description of a crime that occurred 15 minutes earlier but 2 miles away. That incident weighed into my decision to study African American History at the University of Cincinnati. I would later find myself homeless after a United States Navy career peppered with incidents of race. Today, I know that the feelings of low self-esteem that manifested in substance abuse were a direct result of my discomfort with the skin I was in. Of course, other factors weighed in, but the discrimination did not stop at the door of abandoned buildings and shelters. I was frequently accosted for no valid reason until I took refuge in a treatment program.

My life experience is a driving force for my advocacy. I know what it's like, and I know that human beings should be singled out and discriminated against based on their color, their disability, their gender, or their economic situation.

From America's inception, structural racism and discrimination have existed in the country's governance and culture. With the Indian Removal Act and the slave codes of the 1600s, hundreds of federal policies have legalized the pattern and practice. Native Americans and African Americans were denied rights and socioeconomic opportunities. The Mexican-American War, the Chinese Exclusion Act, and Japanese Internment camps have resulted in other minority groups sharing similar histories of government-enforced discriminatory policies. The disproportionality in the population of people experiencing homelessness is a by-product of systemic inequity: the lingering effects of racism continue to perpetuate disparities in critical areas that impact rates of homelessness.

Redlining – systemic housing discrimination supported by the federal government decades ago – is a root cause of the current wealth gap between White households and households of color. Redlining discouraged economic investment, such as mortgage and business loans, in Black and Brown neighborhoods. Restrictive Covenants have existed since the early 20th century and are still in some communities today.

The repercussions are still with us today: Many people of color still live disproportionately in concentrated poverty or in neighborhoods where they are regularly exposed to environmental toxins and have limited access to quality care, services, nutritious food, and economic opportunities. This situation was responsible for the disproportionate number of deaths during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Many people of color have difficulty finding economic security and continue to live in poverty, which is a significant indicator of subsequent homelessness.

According to the 2024 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) Individuals of color, mainly Black, African American, or African and American Indian, Alaska Native, and Indigenous populations are considerably overrepresented among individuals experiencing homelessness (accounting for 69% of individuals experiencing homelessness). In 2024, 78,780 people (or 15%) identified as only Hispanic or Latina/e/o; however, an additional 9 percent of people identified as Hispanic and some other race. Black, African, or African American accounted for a higher share of the sheltered population than the unsheltered population (37% vs. 25%). Most other groups comprised a higher share of the unsheltered population than the sheltered population.

Across all people experiencing homelessness as part of a family with children, about 38 percent identified as Black, African American, or African, including four percent that identified as Black and Hispanic. More than four in every 10 people in families experiencing homelessness identified as Hispanic/Latina/e/o (any race). Three in ten identified as Hispanic only (and no other race). About one-quarter of people experiencing homelessness in families with children identified as White (any ethnicity). The race and ethnicity of people experiencing homelessness in families with children have changed considerably from last year. It is likely that the updates in the race and ethnicity reporting options—which resulted in the inclusion of three new race/ethnicity categories—affected how people identified. In 2024, 76,849 people (30%) identified as one of the newly available racial/ethnic categories.

The racial disparity in incarceration rates has continuously worsened. The rate for African Americans has tripled between 1968 and 2016 and is more than six times the rate of White incarceration. These racial disparities are no accident. Black and Brown people are at far greater risk of being targeted, profiled, and arrested for minor offenses, especially in high-poverty areas.

The implications of overcriminalization are far-reaching: A criminal history can keep people from successfully passing background checks to secure housing and employment. People exiting jails and prisons often face significant problems in accessing safe and affordable housing and their rate of homelessness is high.

Despite all this evidence, over 160 communities have initiated the same carceral approach to addressing homelessness. The Criminalization of homelessness disproportionately affects people of color and has created the same conditions in low-income communities and may in fact, be a driving factor.

Homelessness has increased by 30% over the last two years and is at its highest level in the modern history of homelessness. Although factors such as rising housing costs and the lack of affordable living wages are factors, Criminalization and systemic racism are substantial factors.

Solving homelessness will require an organized effort to address systemic issues such as the lack of affordable housing, inadequate healthcare, low-wage jobs, and the immediate end to Criminalization. At the National Coalition, we are working with our partners with lived experience to change the narrative from charity to justice. If we can raise the level of support for people experiencing homelessness to the level of need, we can truly end homelessness in the wealthiest country in the world.

Testimony: James Arbo

James Arbo
Freelance Writer
and Advocate

James Abro is a freelance writer who has published five novels, four books, and several articles. He is currently working on a memoir titled, Writing My American Life: From the Uprisings to Civil War, focusing on the rioting of Black America that took place in U.S cities during the 1960s; including Newark, New Jersey where Mr. Abro grew up. His first novel was about the same experience.

He was introduced to ATD Fourth World at an event in 2019 at The New School for Social Justice. He's worked with ATD New York as an Activist and Advocate for Poor People's Rights, including the homeless. He has been a housing and homeless Advocate for over 30 years and has written about the topic often.

His work can be viewed here: authory.com/jamesabro.

The Hidden Faces of Homelessness in New York City

When I was asked to write something about The Hidden Faces of Homelessness, two images came to mind.

If you live in a large town, or city, as I do (New York City) then you have encountered people who are street homeless. Men and women, young and old, every race and gender on earth.

Whether you are conscious of it or not, an image is being seared into your mind's eye that's a composite of all these images. When you are feeling insecure about your job, housing situation, medical care you see that image – with all its angst, despair, bewilderment and anger staring right back at you. (If you don't think you have one you can borrow Edvard Munch's The Scream.)

I'm you live in a wealthy nation, like I do, (purportedly the wealthiest) then you know that the place where you live has the resources it needs to eradicate poverty and homelessness. Does that not make you wonder, Then Why Don't They!

In an end of year World Report Survey on Happiness, it listed the 'happiest' nations in the world in 2024. It named a country in Scandinavia. The name of the country is not important; why and what makes them feel happy is!

They found by interviewing people who live there it is because they feel assured that their government-provided social services – universal health care, affordable housing, unemployment insurance and a nutritional diet – will be there for them if they experience a personal, medical, financial or housing crisis.

It is apparent to me, and many others, that the United States uses this specter of homelessness to scare its population into accepting low wages, income inequality, non-unionized employment, a lack of affordable housing, poor quality food and expensive dysfunctional health care as the price you pay to be living in the most dynamic capitalist country in the world. The message they are sending is that if you don't want to live by these purported rules, fighting with your brothers and sisters over an abundance of resources in order to

get to the top of the heap, then you can hit the streets (literally)!

The other hidden face of homelessness that comes to mind is one I am more familiar with, personally, because of the work I do (Advocate for Poor Peoples' Rights).

In 2022, when Eric Adams became mayor of New York City, he started a Task Force on Street Homelessness. They invited me to participate because of my lived experience of homelessness and personal connection with many others experiencing homelessness in NYC (or so they said).

In truth, the so-called Task Force was made up of friends of the mayor who were doing this to impress him and gain his favor. None of them had any personal experience of homelessness, though that did not stop them from thinking they were the ones who were finally going to do something about the street homelessness crisis in NYC. They called themselves SHAP (Street Homeless Advocacy Project). When I tried to point out to them that the homeless absolutely do not need any more advocacy, but that what they really need is safe, secure housing, they looked at me like a second head just popped from my shoulders.

I hung in there with them for nearly six months (it was not easy) and was able to make one significant contribution to their stated aim of doing something different about street homelessness in NYC.

On my own, before 2022 and SHAP, I created a working model for dealing with street homelessness and other crises people living in poor neighborhoods face every day by initiating what I called Pre-Crisis Resource Centers (PRCs).

I live in Times Square. On the corner of 45th Street and Broadway, there is a kiosk offering free coffee and phone charging. It was manned by members of Fountain House (a non-profit that provides non-institutional mental health services emphasizing social engagement). A light bulb went off in my head. It lit up the idea that we could use these kiosks as a model for providing on-site housing placement, enrollment in EBT (financial subsidy for those who qualify), health Insurance, peer counselling etc. I collaborated with a Commissioner for the NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS) to provide teams of outreach workers to do this work at the kiosk on Broadway.

Although I stopped working with SHAP, when I introduced the leader of SHAP to Fountain House, he set up a meeting with them and gave a speech telling them that he and the Mayor were going to end homelessness in NYC. I do feel that my concept of community-based outreach, has had an impact on new policies and programs being run by the Department of Homeless Services. The Town Hall, A Broadway theatrical venue with a storied history of championing significant social causes, produced a video about Precrisis Resource Centers (PCR) (The Public Service Media Network, 2023). One of the new programs offered by DHS is an operation called the Street Task Force. It operates 24/7 sending teams of workers, many with lived experience of poverty, to provide services to people in crisis where they are. There are also Neighborhood Navigators, operated by The Mayor's office of Criminal Justice and Neighborhood Safety. Like SHAP, its emphasis is on providing data, not solutions, but it is at least gleaning its data from people who are experiencing poverty and homelessness.

Both programs are a step in the right direction.

What I feel they lack, and PRCs provide, is direct community involvement in dealing with street-homelessness and other issues facing people living in poor neighborhoods. You could not pay anyone to act with the quality of empathy and compassion that you get from volunteers like me who are doing this to make things better for others like them in the future. There are many like us, we just need to be asked, sincerely, to help out.

Good Practices: Simon Ha, SH Community Solutions

Simon Ha, AIA, LEED AP
Founder and CEO,
SH Housing Solutions
Board Chair Emeritus,
Skid Row Housing Trust

Simon's journey in the field of architecture and urban design is marked by a steadfast commitment to housing innovation, housing policy advocacy, and community engagement. With a foundation laid at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design, where he pursued urbanization and housing studies, Simon has honed a unique perspective on creating livable, sustainable communities through design and policy. In 2024, he embarked on a new venture, founding Simon Ha Housing Solutions (SHHS), with the aim to address the housing crisis through innovative design, development, and policy solutions. This initiative underscores his dedication to making high-quality, attainable housing accessible to all, especially in response to the challenges faced in California.

Deeply embedded in the fabric of Downtown LA's community, Simon has served in pivotal roles that demonstrate his commitment to urban development and housing advocacy. These include chairing the Planning and Land Use Committee for the Downtown LA Neighborhood Council, leading the National AIA Housing and Community Development Committee, and serving as the Board Chairman for the Skid Row Housing Trust. His involvement extends to contributions on the Zoning Advisory Committee for the LA Department of City Planning and participation in other community initiatives.

Good Practices: Skid Row Housing Trust

On January 17, 2025, Skid Row Housing Trust, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to end homelessness, closed its doors after 36 years of service. The Trust was a pioneer and ardent supporter of Housing First and Permanent Supportive Housing, grounded in the belief that having a secure home is the first step toward safety, stability, and community. The Trust was among the most respected organizations in the United States for its innovative and high-quality housing design, which fostered healing and strengthened the sense of community. In total, it housed more than 10,000 chronically homeless people in Los Angeles. In memoriam, I share its history with you.

Skid Row is an area of approximately 50 square blocks located just east of downtown Los Angeles, also known as Central City East. In 2024, an estimated 3,791 people were experiencing homelessness in this neighborhood, with 2,112 living unsheltered on the streets. Across the entire city of Los Angeles, the estimate was 45,252 people experiencing homelessness in a population of 3.821 million residents—about 12 out of every 1,000 people.

The term "Skid Row" originated during the mid-19th century with the construction of railroads in the Pacific Northwest. Workers, primarily transient immigrant men, built tracks from harvested logs, and businesses catering to these men, such as brothels and taverns, soon followed. Single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels were built to house the men, creating a pattern of cheap residential areas for transient populations.

During the Great Depression, Skid Row saw an influx of men searching for work, often finding shelter in the area's cheap hotels. By the 1970s, the population shifted to include Vietnam veterans and drug users. Deinstitutionalization of hospitals for the mentally ill without adequate community support led many to Skid Row.

Founding and Early Years (1989–1990s)

The Skid Row Housing Trust was founded in 1989 in response to the growing homelessness crisis in downtown Los Angeles, particularly in the Skid Row area. At the time, affordable housing was rapidly disappearing due to the demolition and neglect of SRO hotels, which had historically provided housing for low-income individuals, including those struggling with mental illness, substance abuse, or extreme poverty.

As redevelopment and gentrification spread through downtown Los Angeles, many SROs were either demolished or fell into severe disrepair. Between 1950 and 2000, 15,000 affordable residential hotel apartments were destroyed, threatening Skid Row's community and forcing thousands of people onto the streets. This displaced a vulnerable population and exacerbated the homelessness crisis. The Trust was formed specifically to preserve and rehabilitate these SROs, recognizing them as a critical part of the community's affordable housing stock.

The organization's early work focused on acquiring and renovating dilapidated SRO hotels in Skid Row, transforming them into safe, clean, and affordable housing for individuals who were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Rather than simply building new structures, the Trust valued preserving these existing buildings, which were located near the services and resources residents needed.

Growth and Development (1990s–2000s)

As the Skid Row Housing Trust stabilized and improved many SRO buildings, its mission expanded to include the development of new supportive housing projects. It remained committed to the "Housing First" model, which emphasizes providing stable, permanent housing before addressing issues such as substance abuse or mental health challenges.

During this period, the Trust began integrating supportive services into its housing model, including mental health services, substance abuse counseling, healthcare, and job training. These partnerships enabled residents to access comprehensive support directly within their housing environment.

Architectural Innovation and National Recognition (2000s–2010s)

As the Skid Row Housing Trust continued to grow, it became known not only for its social mission but also for its architectural innovation. The organization collaborated with prominent architects to design housing that was both functional and visually appealing, aiming to challenge the stigma surrounding housing for formerly homeless individuals. Projects such as the Rainbow Apartments and the New Genesis Apartments gained national recognition for their design quality and impact.

The Trust also became a leader in the nationally recognized "Housing First" and "Harm Reduction" model, which provides permanent housing without preconditions like sobriety

or treatment compliance. Research has shown that people are more likely to succeed in treatment and recovery once they have stable housing.

Continued Expansion and Influence (2010s–Present)

By the 2010s, Skid Row Housing Trust had developed and managed 25 buildings, housing thousands of formerly homeless individuals. Its efforts extended beyond Skid Row to other areas of Los Angeles as the homelessness crisis spread citywide. Despite this expansion, the organization remained firmly dedicated to providing permanent supportive housing, along with the comprehensive services that help residents achieve stability and self-sufficiency.

The Trust's methods and successes have inspired similar initiatives across the United States, establishing it as a national model for supportive housing. The organization continued to innovate, using cutting-edge design and maintaining high standards for housing developments aimed at addressing homelessness.

Challenges and Recent Developments (2020s)

Like many nonprofits, the Skid Row Housing Trust faced a range of challenges, including skyrocketing housing costs, a worsening homelessness crisis, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which further strained resources and increased the number of people experiencing homelessness. Financial difficulties also arose, but the Trust persisted in its mission.

The organization continued to develop new housing projects and broaden its support services, adapting to the evolving needs of Los Angeles' homeless population.

Legacy and Impact

From its early days focusing on preserving and rehabilitating SRO hotels, the Skid Row Housing Trust developed into a nationally recognized leader in permanent supportive housing. It successfully housed over 10,000 individuals and provided life-changing services that addressed the root causes of homelessness. By focusing on housing stability and comprehensive support, the Trust demonstrated that secure housing is a vital component in resolving chronic homelessness.

Its work not only preserved critical housing units in the Skid Row area but also set a high standard for delivering supportive housing with dignity, innovation, and compassion.

Recommendations

Advocacy Recommendations

Acknowledging the role civil society, the private sector, and citizens play in influencing national action related to social issues, we recommend:

- Encouraging HUD's adoption of the Expert Group Meeting definition of homelessness
- Supporting social protection floor policies accompanied by more accessible, affordable and coordinated social services
- Recognizing the lasting legacy and manifestations of racism and discrimination within society
- Provision of trauma-informed care training and resources across public services, including libraries
- Creating policies and programs to help reduce inequality of income and capital

Policy Recommendations

We believe the following policy recommendations are essential to addressing and preventing homelessness, and are applicable at the local, national and international levels. We encourage:

- Enactment of legislation to prevent forced foreclosures and evictions
- Adoption of the UN Expert Group Meeting definition of homelessness across all governmental departments
- Include the USA's territories in national discussions of homelessness and federal policy and program design
- Implementation of social protection floor policies, and prioritizing social housing for the most vulnerable and marginalized groups
- Ensure that all social, economic and political measures taken to address and prevent homelessness, among other multilateral issues, are decolonizing in principle and effect

HOMELESSNESS IN

IRELAND

COUNTRY PROFILE
Republic of Ireland (Ireland) Irish: Éire

LOCATION
Northwestern Europe; Bordering country: United Kingdom (Northern Ireland); Ireland is an island in the Atlantic Ocean

POPULATION
Ireland's population is 5,083,864 people as of 2024 (United States Census Bureau, 2024)

HOMELESS POPULATION
Over 13,800 people were accessing emergency accommodation (White, 2024)

POLITICAL SYSTEM
Parliamentary Republic

Country Definition of Homelessness & Usage

Homelessness in Ireland is defined as a lack of a safe, affordable, decent and supportive place to live. Section 2 of the Housing Act of 1988 provided the first legal definition of homelessness in Ireland.

Ireland's Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage does not include people sleeping rough, people couch surfing, homeless people in hospitals and prisons, those in direct provision centers, and homeless households in domestic violence establishments because they are not accessing emergency homeless accommodation funded through Section 10 of the Housing Act.

Context of Homelessness

The homelessness crisis in Ireland is driven by structural economic factors and deeply intertwined with the broader housing crisis. The severe shortage of affordable housing is exacerbated by high rents and landlords refusing rent supplements. High levels of income poverty, unemployment, and debt further compound the problem, trapping individuals and families in a cycle of homelessness.

Ireland's housing situation follows a cyclic pattern, spanning the prosperous Celtic Tiger years (1993-2006), the subsequent crash (2007-2012), and the ongoing struggle for stability since 2013. The Celtic Tiger era, preceding the 2008 economic downturn, witnessed mounting debt, housing shortages, and soaring prices, all reflecting the influence of neoliberalism (White, 2024). Today, political and economic factors perpetuate housing issues, yet discussions on homelessness and housing lack adequate attention in electoral debates.

In the broader context of the European Union, Ireland's position highlights the potential impact of EU policies on homelessness. Despite post-crisis recovery efforts, the effects of the 2008 financial crisis linger, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities and fueling a rise in homelessness. Income inequality remains a pressing issue, particularly among minorities, young women, and people with disabilities, heightening their vulnerability to homelessness. Single-parent families, predominantly led by single mothers, face significant barriers in accessing housing and support services, emphasizing the urgent need for comprehensive policy responses. While emergency accommodations have increased, particularly since 2014, they fall short of meeting demand, leading to a surge in the number of children and women living in these temporary shelters (Sherlock, 2024).

Ireland's heavy reliance on the private rental sector also complicates the effectiveness of promising initiatives like Housing First. The government's preference for private housing over social housing, often acquired through housing vouchers, raises concerns about accountability and tenant security. Discrimination against those receiving state rent supplements persists, despite legislative efforts to address it.

IRELAND

Fast Facts

1. More than 1 in 4 of Ireland's homeless population is disabled (Browne, 2023)
2. In 2022, a study showed that 22% of Travelers surveyed could be categorized as homeless according to Ireland's definition, however, using a more inclusive definition would qualify 85.6% of Travelers as homeless (Cork & Kerry RTAWG, 2022)
3. As of 2024, 1,609 families were officially recorded as homeless and more than 80% of these families live in the Dublin area (Holland, 2024)
4. 8,323 adults in emergency accommodation, an increase of 133 (1.6 per cent) on the 8,190 in December 2023. This is the highest number of adults ever recorded accessing emergency accommodation and represents an increase of 1,736 (26.4 per cent) on the 6,587 in January 2022 (Holland, 2024)
5. The number of homeless children is 17% higher in 2024 than it was in 2022 (Holland, 2024)
6. As of March 2024, 5,807 people under the age of 24 were accessing emergency accommodations (Holland, 2024)

FIGURE 5

Homelessness in Ireland

The Current Realities - 2024

1

As of 2024,

13,866

people in Ireland were accessing emergency accommodation, including 4,147 children, surpassing 4,000 for the first time. This is a record high, and a 17% increase from 2023. For the first time, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Dublin has surpassed 10,000

2

As of November 2022, the Summary of Social Housing Assessments reveals that

57,247

households were on the social housing waitlist, despite there being 166,752 vacant homes

3

As of March 2024,

4,147

children and 9,719 adults were accessing emergency accommodation in Ireland

4

Of the adults in emergency homeless accommodation, almost

40%

or, over 3,000, are women

5

Of the over 2,000 families experiencing homelessness,

57%

of these families are single-parent families, of which over 90% of single parent families are female headed households

6

In February 2024, almost

50%

of the 1,994 families in emergency accommodation in Ireland were single-parent families. This is an increase of 18% from February 2023, with a 24% increase in children

Analysis: Ambassador Fergal Mythen, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the UN

Ambassador Fergal Mythen
Permanent Representative of Ireland to the UN

Ambassador Mythen represented Ireland on the Security Council for the final phase of our two-year term as an elected member, which concluded on 31 December 2022; in addition, together with Qatar, he co-facilitated the drafting of the High Level Political Declaration on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, which was adopted by consensus by Heads of State and Government at the SDG Summit in September 2023.

Prior to his current appointment, Fergal spent considerable periods of his career working for the Government of Ireland in support of the Northern Ireland peace process and implementation of the Good Friday Agreement – working for the International Fund for Ireland (1990-92), on Justice & Security issues (1999-2003 and 2005-07), and on Northern Ireland political affairs (2007-09).

We live in a world which is becoming ever more interconnected and interdependent. The digital revolution, a global pandemic and geopolitical tensions remind us that the local and the global are two sides of the same coin. This publication by UNANIMA International brings into focus the hidden faces from around the world of those living in homelessness. It reminds us that the challenges we face at home and abroad are interlinked; conflict, climate change, displacement and food insecurity exacerbate poverty and homelessness. It shows us that women, children, persons with disabilities and those from minorities and vulnerable groups, are often disproportionately impacted.

As Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations, my day-to-day work involves using diplomacy to build a more peaceful, just and sustainable world. With the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the 2030 Agenda provided us with an important framework to achieve this. Yet the international community has a long way to go if we are to achieve these Goals. With almost 700 million people around the world living on less than $2.15 per day, eradicating poverty and reducing inequalities remain two of our greatest global challenges. Both are closely linked to homelessness.

Addressing these challenges takes concerted policy decisions to reach those furthest behind first. We cannot do this without understanding the intersectional issues that drive poverty, inequalities and homelessness. That is why Ireland is committed to taking an inclusive and human rights based approach,

which ensures people are at the centre of our policymaking, from the local to the international level.

This publication highlights the impact and increased risk of homelessness for women and girls. Domestic and sexual and gender-based violence is one of the most hidden, yet pervasive, human rights violations globally. It occurs across all cultures and countries. Women and girls are far more likely to earn less, own fewer assets and are underrepresented in decision-making processes, increasing their vulnerability. This is not by chance. Rather, there are structural and systemic barriers at play, including negative cultural norms, and gender bias in law and policymaking. Promoting gender equality and the rights of women and girls is therefore essential to reaching those furthest behind first and these efforts remains core to our work.

We also believe that social protection is a crucial instrument to reduce poverty, mitigate homelessness, and promote resilience, equality and economic activity. Ireland currently spends approximately €20 million of our annual international development budget on social protection.

In Ireland, we know too well the complexity of addressing homelessness. We know that real change only comes if we work together at all levels, and ensure those most impacted are included in policymaking. Good policy decisions must reflect the perspectives of civil society organisations and those on the ground. It has therefore been a real pleasure to work with UNANIMA International in recent years, as they bring the voices and experiences from around the world of those seeking a better and more just world for all.

Analysis: Cara O'Donnell, Mercy Law Resource Centre

Cara O'Donnell
Paralegal, Mercy Law Resource Centre

Cara recently joined Mercy Law Resource Centre as a paralegal on secondment from law firm Arthur Cox. Cara is a recent graduate of Law and Political Science (LL.B) from Trinity College Dublin, having completed a semester at Columbia University as a component of this degree. For the past two years, Cara has been an active volunteer with Dublin Simon Community's outreach team, serving Dublin city centre's homeless population.

Family Homelessness in Ireland

Statistics: Homeless Families in Ireland

Family homelessness in Ireland has increased dramatically over recent years. Official government homelessness statistics state that 2,093 families were accessing emergency accommodation in June 2024 (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2024). These statistics record that there are a total of 4,404 homeless children within these families. The true scale of homelessness in Ireland is considered to be much greater than this, given that official homelessness figures measure only individuals who are in emergency accommodation funded by local government housing authorities. Such figures do not capture the unfortunate magnitude of 'hidden homelessness' across Ireland. The figures exclude, for instance: families who are staying with friends or relatives in situations of extreme overcrowding because they have no alternative accommodation; parents and children staying in domestic violence refuges; persons granted refugee status but who remain in asylum seeker accommodation due to a lack of available alternative housing; and children residing in hospitals because they have no suitable accommodation to be discharged to (Hearne & McSweeney, 2023). It is the view of Mercy Law Resource Centre, and many other housing commentators, that many more families are currently homeless than official statistics report.

Families in Emergency Accommodation

Homeless families in Ireland face various challenges when attempting to access emergency accommodation. Since 2015, MLRC has frequently engaged with families who have been refused access to emergency accommodation. If a family is refused emergency accommodation by a local authority, they may find themselves facing prospects such as staying in severely overcrowded/unfit conditions, sleeping in cars or staying overnight in a Garda station. MLRC has seen a huge increase in its work in challenging unlawful refusals of emergency accommodation.

Even where a family is placed in emergency homeless accommodation by a local authority, conditions in such accommodation can be

very difficult for parents and children. Local authorities continue to place large numbers of families in commercial hotel or B&B type accommodation.

A separate form of emergency accommodation called 'family hub' accommodation is only available to households with dependent children. The purpose of family hubs is to provide a form of emergency accommodation that offers greater stability for homeless families, facilitates more coordinated needs assessments, and provides appropriate family supports and surroundings (Rebuilding Ireland, n.d.). MLRC shares concerns over the suitability of family hubs as congregated settings that risk institutionalising homelessness ("No Place Like Home, 2019; Irish Human Rights Inequality Commission, 2017). Nevertheless, MLRC clients have generally regarded family hubs as a 'least worst' form of emergency accommodation and preferable to commercial hotels or B&B accommodation.

Looking Forward: a "Radical Strategic Rest of Housing Policy"?

A hugely significant development in Irish social housing policy occurred this year, when the long-awaited report of the Government-appointed Housing Commission was published, in May 2024. This report called for a "radical strategic rest of housing policy" in Ireland (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2024).

Crucially, the report recognises the important social purpose of social housing, and the Housing Commission's recommendations on this matter are welcomed by MLRC. These recommendations include the enactment of a Social Housing Act that would "specify and protect the social purpose of the social housing sector over the long term and ensure that the sector is not privatised", as well as an increase in social and cost-rental housing to 20% of the national housing stock (Ibid). Indeed, one of the fundamental causes of homelessness in Ireland is the current insufficient supply of social housing; adequate social housing supply is indispensable in meeting the housing needs of families who cannot afford to rent privately or buy their own homes. In particular, sufficient supply is crucial in assisting families to transition away from experiences of hidden homelessness, or placements in emergency accommodation, towards more permanent housing. Implementation of the Housing Commission's recommendations in respect of radically increasing the building of social housing would be an important step forward in resolving the current family homelessness crisis.

In addition to measures aimed at increasing the social housing supply, MLRC has advocated for a right to housing to be recognised in the Irish Constitution. MLRC believes that enshrining such a right in our Constitution would be an important acknowledgment by Irish society that housing is essential for the protection of human dignity and wellbeing. This aspiration was echoed in an impactful report of a sub-committee of the Housing Commission, which was tasked with making a recommendation to Government on potential wording for a constitutional amendment on housing (The Housing Commission, 2024). Significantly, the majority of this committee recommended that Government should propose an amendment to the Constitution that would explicitly recognise the importance of having a home to both individuals and society and provide for a specific guarantee of access to housing (Ibid). MLRC welcomes the new momentum which this report has brought to the question of holding a referendum on the right to housing, and we hope for further positive developments on this issue in the near-future.

Personal Reflection: Dr. Mary McAleese, Former President of Ireland

Dr. Mary McAleese
Former President
of Ireland, 1997-2011

On 11th November, 1997, Mary McAleese was inaugurated as the eighth President of Ireland. Mary McAleese was re-elected on Friday 1st October 2004 being the only validly-nominated candidate. She is a barrister and former Professor of Law. She graduated in Law from the Queen's University of Belfast in 1973 and was called to the Northern Ireland Bar in 1974. In 1975, she was appointed Reid Professor of Criminal Law, Criminology and Penology at Trinity College Dublin and in 1987, she returned to her Alma Mater, Queen's, to become Director of the Institute of Professional Legal Studies. In 1994, she became the first female Pro-Vice Chancellor of the Queen's University of Belfast. President McAleese is an experienced broadcaster, having worked as a current affairs journalist and presenter in radio and television with Radio Telefís Éireann. She has a longstanding interest in many issues concerned with justice, equality, social inclusion, anti-sectarianism and reconciliation. The theme of her Presidency was 'Building Bridges'.

It is a wonderful thing to know that Ireland, once so poor and oppressed by famine, emigration and British imperial aggression is today a wealthy confident nation, a key influencer in Europe, principled and caring, its citizens well educated, its young people tech savvy, its job market buoyant, its citizenry now a mix of many nations, cultures, faiths and languages. We have welcomed tens of thousands of migrants from across the world, tens of thousands of Ukrainian refugees, for we are generally hospitable and kindly people, compassionate and generous in the face of need. Yet one of the most distressing sights on the streets of our capital city Dublin is the rows of little thin tents occupied by asylum seekers, homeless, landless, uprooted, dependent, scared. We know what it is to be uprooted homeless and dependent on the kindness of strangers but somehow as scarcity of housing leads to house prices and rents rising to levels that push more people into homelessness and hopelessness, there are those who dare to look for scapegoats, who visit anger and frustration on the least blameworthy. Only a few years ago we had dared to hope that homelessness would be a footnote in history. We were wrong. The numbers of homeless children, homeless families have crept up and up defeating the

best efforts of the homeless charity sector and stratagems of government. It seems ridiculous that a country which has solved so many problems has not yet solved this.

I still have nightmares of the time over fifty years ago when my mother, father and their nine children of which I was the eldest, became homeless like so many others as the result of sectarian violence in our home city of Belfast. We learnt then the fragility of our seemingly stable lives. Overnight, after a machine gun attack on our house and after a campaign of intimidation, the complex relationship we have with a home, a street, a community was borne in on us when they all fell away and we couch surfed in ones and twos on relatives couches for the following weeks and months.

My parents had bought their first home twenty years earlier, moving every few years as the family grew until they seemed to have found their forever home. They made it comfortable never imagining a day when they would leave with just the clothes on their backs and never return. Shortly after they lost their business in a sectarian car bomb attack in which a young mother lost her life. No income, no home, victims of neighbors' irrational hatred, reliant on charity and unsure where it would all lead. We found a dilapidated, condemned house to rent thanks to nuns who owned it and planned to demolish it. There was no sense of safety or certainty there, just tentativeness and anxiety. It would be two years before my parents were able to buy a cramped home in a small village many miles from Belfast. The village was incredibly beautiful set among mountains, sea and forests. Its inhabitants were spontaneously warm and welcoming. How lucky we were. But we also were and remain scarred by the savage uprooting, with an unhealed, unhealable deep experience of loss. We never went

hungry, never slept on footpaths, never felt the bitter cold of life in a meager tent, never were friendless, never without the hope that comes from believing we could and would have a place of our own again.

We did. Millions do not have that hope, do not have that home. In a world where there is enough for all if only we use its resources wisely and fairly, in a world where uprooting occurs regularly though randomly through the avoidable phenomena of man-made war, poverty and climate change, I long for a generation of global problem solvers who will make it their mission to work collaboratively across all the vanities of history and geography, to feed humanity, house humanity as the most pressing priority, the most important imperative. That generation will make homelessness a footnote in the history of humanity and they will know a peace that has eluded too many for too long. It is our job to settle for nothing less.

Good Practices: Niamh Cullen, Sophia Housing Ireland

Niamh Cullen
Head of Services with Sophia Housing, Ireland

Niamh has over 20 years' experience working in homeless services in Ireland, specialising in support for both individuals and families facing homelessness. Throughout her career, she has worked in outreach services, housing development and support and childcare services, working to connect families and individuals with essential resources and support systems. With a strong focus on Trauma Informed Practice, she holds a Bachelor's degree in Social Science and postgraduate qualification in Leadership.

Her focus is creating client centred approaches to service delivery, with a focus on empowering vulnerable people to achieve long term housing stability and begin their journey of recovery.

Good Practices: Lessons from Sophia Housing Ireland

Sophia Housing is a supported housing NGO based across Ireland, which has been successfully providing support and housing for the most vulnerable in the Irish society for over twenty five years. In 2023, Sophia Housing supported 665 adults and 482 children within their housing. Before receiving supported housing services at Sophia Housing, residents had been forced or found in the position to live in hotels, family hubs, bed and breakfasts, hostels, women's refuge shelters, emergency homeless shelters, and untenured private rented spaces, among others. The following are some practices that Sophia has prioritized as core to Sophia's current strategic plan:

1. Becoming a Trauma Informed Practice Service Provider: Sophia firmly believes in a model of Trauma Informed Practice to support service users to feel safe in challenging situations. Sophia has invested in tailored training for all staff in Trauma Informed Practice to enable service users to live in psychologically informed environments. Sophia has trauma informed "champions" in the organisation who drive trauma informed organisational standards. Sophia initiated this work through leading an EU funded programme on Trauma Informed Practice. This included a seminar in the Nano Nagle Centre in Cork that was addressed by Dr Peter Cockersell and Dr Sharon Lambert.

2. Adapting Housing First: Sophia is also leading an E.U.-funded programme based at examining how the 'Housing First' model could be adapted and developed. Sophia is the lead partner and the other partners are:

- Arrels (Barcelona)
- Y Foundation (Finland)
- Housing first Berlin (Germany)

These organisations are highly respected in their own countries and across Europe.

This EU Funded programme is the main driver to implement one of Sophia's strategic objective namely that Sophia will focus on adapting the key interventions associated with "Housing First" and integrating them into the Sophia model of service delivery.

3. Seeking Safety for Women: Sophia is also an active participant in the highly progressive programme for women. The Programme works from the premise that women who have dual diagnosis of trauma and addiction are more likely to use substances (both illegal drugs and prescribed drugs); that they will have a variety of life problems; and they will have an enduring relationship with both diagnoses. Also, they are unlikely to have the life skills to create the safety they need for the impacts of trauma to reduce and substance use to decline. Too early in their life the trauma taught them that they were not important and that they didn't deserve or need to be safe. Seeking Safety begs to differ. Without ever asking about the story of her trauma, it will teach participants how to be safer in their day to day lives, so that they can be happier and reach a point where fewer (or maybe no) substances will be needed to cope with the pain of their trauma anymore.

The focus of this programme is to work with women with dual diagnosis to teach them, through psycho-educational classes, how to successfully seek safety in their world.

The Seeking Safety programme with women takes place in seven locations:

- Ballyfermot STAR (Ballyfermot)
- Saol Project (Dublin North East Inner City)
- Ballymun STAR (Ballymun)
- Ruhama (Dublin City and HSE Mid-West)
- Sophia Housing (South Inner City, Dublin and HSE South and Mid-West)
- RedDoor Project (Drogheda)
- Roscommon Women's Network (Co Roscommon)

4. Service User Engagement: Sophia is providing multiple ways to listen to and be informed by the experiences the people we support. This includes organising meaningful activities that enrich the lives of Sophia Residents but also through formal meetings such as Resident meetings where the voice of people with direct experience of homelessness is listened to.

Testimony: Lorraine Kelly, ATD Fourth World Ireland

Growing up in Dublin city centre coming from a run down area – I have not only seen socioeconomic discrimination but I have felt it. In schools, in workplaces we even are constantly run down by our own government... I grew up where mothers and fathers had to work just to provide a home for their family.

Times have changed but the world remains the same. Poverty and homelessness never left and there are more homeless in Ireland than there are homes. I've seen people in jobs being treated less than because of the way they speak, the area they come from, or a family name. I've seen family fighting, stressing depressing and also suicide because we are made to feel like there is no hope for us compared to the rich family who never knew what poverty even felt like. There are many talented, smart people in Ireland but if you're from a run down, not so well off area, you are judged before you are even seen. Even in hospitals, if you have a medical card you don't have to pay so you will be treated normal compared to those who pay or go private. If you go into A&E you could be waiting longer than those who are paying themselves. Even in your local GP you are rushed in, rushed out. But for those who pay they take their time and give proper care. They are well taken care of because all that seems to matter to our government is money. We have the money to make change but the lack of effort from our government makes it harder for us to escape socioeconomic discrimination.

I'm 35 years old an I'm a mother of two and the pressure as a mother trying to provide – even down to clothes – because we want our children to not feel this poverty and discrimination. I pray my children or anyone's children don't have to face these brick walls in time to come but I will continue to break them walls down even if it take one brick at a time we will still climb.

At ATD Ireland, we speak to practicing social workers and students in university through our poverty aware practice class. This class is about ensuring that future and current social workers understand what it is really like living in poverty. It is about creating a good, constructive relationship together and making sure families are given genuine support.

ATD Ireland and other organisations have been working on the #Addthe10th campaign to recognise socio-economic discrimination. This is so that we can feel protected in our equality law.

Recommendations

Advocacy Recommendations

Acknowledging the role civil society, the private sector, and citizens play in influencing national action related to social issues, we recommend:

- Encouraging a strong regional guidance and response to homelessness
- Supporting permanent, supported housing models, as alternatives to “mother and baby homes” and family hubs
- Educating about homelessness in primary schools
- Increasing accountability of private enterprises to the public and the government
- Directing resource allocation to rural areas, to reduce urbanization

Policy Recommendations

We believe the following policy recommendations are essential to addressing and preventing homelessness, and are applicable at the local, national and international levels. We encourage:

- Implementation of policies to support just wages
- Specification of supports for young parents in policies and program/service designs
- Creation of social housing that is not contingent on private actors and the private market
- Development of long-term, supported, and sustainable housing solutions
- Investments in public and safe spaces to strengthen communities

Photo by Marcus Wallis

HOMELESSNESS IN

AUSTRALIA

COUNTRY PROFILE
Commonwealth of Australia (Australia)

LOCATION
Australia is an Oceanic country; Australia has no bordering countries, although surrounding countries include New Zealand, Vanuatu, Indonesia, The Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, New Caledonia, Singapore; The country is between the South Pacific and Indian Oceans.

POPULATION
As of April 2024, Australia's population was over 27.1 million people (United States Census Bureau, 2024)

HOMELESS POPULATION
Over 122,000 people (Homelessness Australia, 2024)

POLITICAL SYSTEM
Federal parliamentary constitutional monarchy.

Country Definition of Homelessness & Usage

The ABS definition, “a person is homeless if they do not have suitable accommodation alternatives and their current living arrangement: is in a dwelling that is inadequate; has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or does not allow them to have control of and access to space for social relations.” (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

While the ABS definition of homelessness is comprehensive, it overlooks complexities like couch-surfing or social isolation. Additionally, challenges persist in adequately capturing homelessness among Indigenous populations in Australia due to cultural nuances, historical marginalization, and disparities in data collection.

Context of Homelessness

Homelessness in Australia presents complex challenges, varying across regions and driven by a combination of personal and structural factors. While efforts have been made to address issues like modern slavery through legislation, connections between housing insecurity and social issues like homelessness remain unaddressed. Factors such as domestic violence, youth homelessness, and aging populations contribute to the complexity of the issue, alongside economic challenges like income poverty and unemployment.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australians known to be at particular risk of homelessness include those who have experienced domestic violence, young people, children on care and protection orders, Indigenous Australians, people leaving health or social care arrangements. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) significantly acknowledges the varied drivers of homelessness additionally pointing towards “a shortage of affordable housing, unemployment, mental illness, family breakdown, and drug and alcohol abuse,” and emphasizing that homelessness is one of the most potent examples of disadvantage and social exclusion in local communities (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019).

The catastrophic impact of bushfires in Australia, devastating millions of hectares of land and displacing thousands of families, highlights the urgent need for comprehensive housing solutions amidst the intersecting challenges of climate change and urban dynamics. As climate-related disasters intensify, they exacerbate housing insecurity, leaving vulnerable populations at greater risk of homelessness. Additionally, urban dynamics, influenced by trends such as the proliferation of short-term rental platforms like Airbnb, further complicate the housing landscape by reducing the availability of long-term affordable housing options. While government policies offer some support, extensive waiting lists for social housing and reliance on temporary measures underscore the immediate necessity for sustainable solutions. Prioritizing preventative measures, including equitable access to affordable housing, is vital in addressing homelessness.

AUSTRALIA

Fast Facts

1. On ABS Census night in 2021, more than 122,000 people were estimated to be experiencing homelessness in Australia – 56% were male and 21% were aged 25–34 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023)

2. Despite being a minority of Australia's population (3.2%), 20% of all Australians who experienced homelessness at the 2021 Census were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023)

3. According to Homelessness Australia, more than 1,600 people are becoming homeless each month (Mylonas, 2024)

4. A 2022 University of New South Wales study found that more than 640,000 Australian households were homeless, living in overcrowded conditions, or facing unaffordable rent (Mylonas, 2024)

5. In the state of New South Wales, the 2024 Street Count found 2037 people rough sleeping compared to 1623 people in 2023 (Minister for Homelessness et al., 2024)

6. A 2022 University of New South Wales study found that more than 640,000 Australian households were homeless, living in overcrowded conditions, or facing unaffordable rent. This figure was expected to climb to more than 940,000 by 2041, however, experts and researchers on homelessness state that this is a severe underestimation (Mylonas, 2024)

7. Domestic and family violence was the reason why nearly 60,000 women and 40,000 children sought assistance from a specialist homelessness service in 2023 ("Homelessness and domestic", 2024)

FIGURE 6

Homelessness in Australia

The Current Realities - 2024

1

In 2024, Australia is experiencing a growing crisis of women and children fleeing domestic violence into homelessness

2

In 2023

42.9%

of low-income households renting private homes were in rental stress and at risk of being pushed into homelessness

3

In 2023 over

38,000

young people were aged 15-24 presented alone to a homeless service, close to a half experiences mental health issues, and over a third experienced family domestic violence

4

Homeless Australians are dying at age

44

on average in hidden crisis

5

According to Homelessness Australia, more than

1,600

people are becoming homeless each month

6

As of 2024, the number of households on the waiting lists for social housing across Australia is at

224,326

Analysis: Sue Mowbray, Mercy Foundation

Sue Mowbray
Chief Executive Officer,
Mercy Foundation

Sue Mowbray is the Chief Executive Officer of the Mercy Foundation. With a deep commitment to addressing poverty and disadvantage, Sue has extensive expertise in understanding the drivers of homelessness and the evidence-based solutions to ending homelessness. Sue joined the Mercy Foundation in 2009 and has experience in working directly with communities to end chronic homelessness. During her time at the Mercy Foundation she implemented initiatives to assist formerly homeless people to settle into their new homes and educate secondary students about social justice issues in Australia. In 2019, Sue was appointed CEO of the Mercy Foundation.

Family Homelessness and Housing Inadequacy in Australia

Australian families are currently facing the worst housing crisis in living memory. Housing is unaffordable and in short supply. The cost of living crisis is squeezing family budgets, while income and wealth inequality widens.

The structural drivers of homelessness are a critical shortage of affordable housing and poverty. Domestic and family violence is the key causal factor of family homelessness.

There is much concern about escalating domestic violence in Australia. Gender-based violence claimed 25 women's lives in the first quarter of 2024, an increase of 11 women compared to 2023. Australia's National Plan to End Violence against Women and Girls recognises the critical link between violence and access to safe, affordable housing.

Homelessness Statistics

The 2021 Census counted 122,000 people experiencing homelessness in Australia, increasing by 5.2% from 2016. The number of homeless females increased by 10% with similar increases in homelessness for children and youth under 18 years.

In 2022-23, homelessness services assisted 60,000 women and 38,000 children escaping domestic and family violence. Almost 28,000 women and children were experiencing homelessness, with 2,400 sleeping rough or in a car.

Poverty

Poverty is a driver and consequence of homelessness. One in eight adults and one in six children live in poverty in Australia. Australia's social benefit system is inadequate and entrenches poverty. People who are unemployed, receiving income support, sole parents and people with disability are at highest

risk of poverty. For households relying on Parenting Payments, 72% live in poverty.

Housing is Unaffordable and Scarce for Single Parent Families

In the last two years, average rents in Australia increased by almost 20%. There are few affordable rental options for single parent families with only 0.1% of rentals affordable for a single parent with two children relying on the Parenting Payment. Housing affordability has deteriorated to its worst level on record, with the share of income that spent on housing costs rising to a record high.

Many low income families live in insecure housing as they wait for an affordable home. There are approximately 112,000 households on the waiting list for social housing and waiting times are in excess of 10 years in many regions. Current tax settings incentivise speculative investment in housing, with home buyers competing with investors, which in turn inflates the cost of housing.

Family Homelessness and Family Violence

Family and domestic violence is the key cause of family homelessness. Last year, homelessness services assisted 27,975 women and children who experienced domestic violence and homelessness. Only 3.2% of women and children attending specialist homelessness services receive long-term housing solutions.

It is estimated that 9,120 women become homeless after leaving their home due to domestic and family violence. Of women who experience domestic violence, 50% have children in their care. For single mothers with children, domestic violence is a common experience, with 60% experiencing violence from a previous partner. Domestic violence has lasting health consequences and there is an associated drop in income of up to 45%, placing women at risk of homelessness. Children experiencing homelessness are more likely to develop mental and physical health problems, have poor educational and academic outcomes and behavioural issues.

Pregnancy and Homelessness

Women who are pregnant are one of the most vulnerable groups experiencing homelessness. Fearing child removal, women may hide their pregnancy, undermining access to health care, pregnancy care, risking low birth weights and maternal health. Pregnancy is also a time when women report a willingness to make significant changes, providing an opportunity for early intervention. However, this group is not counted and therefore there are few services or housing options dedicated to this vulnerable cohort.

About Us

The Mercy Foundation was established by the Sisters of Mercy North Sydney in 1990. The Mercy Foundation is committed to social justice and structural change to bring about greater social equity and inclusion in the Australian community. It addresses its social justice agenda through seed funding, advocacy, education and research. The Mercy Foundation works to end homelessness, end modern slavery and address the root causes of poverty and disadvantage in communities across Australia.

Analysis: Jocelyn Bignold, McAuley Community Services for Women

Jocelyn Bignold
CEO, McAuley Community Services for Women

Jocelyn Bignold has been the CEO of McAuley Community Services for Women since its formation in 2008. With over 30 years' experience in community services, policy development, management and advocacy, Jocelyn's work has led to an extensive collaboration with Government and non-Government organizations to improve policy responses and service systems designed to support those in need.

Jocelyn was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia in the 2020 Australia Day Honours. The Award recognises her service to the community through social welfare organizations and her leadership and commitment to making lives better for women and children who have faced family violence and homelessness.

Homelessness in Australia: Systemic, Pervasive, and Gendered

As is the case in many wealthy Western Countries, homelessness in Australia is systemic, pervasive and gendered. Whilst investment in affordable housing has been declining for decades, the number of Australians presenting at specialist homelessness services has climbed an average of 1.3 per cent each year, from 236,400 in 2011-12 to 273,600 in 2022-23 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023).

Australia's Current Climate

Australia has underinvested in housing (and divested) since the 1970's causing an affordability and supply problem in all sectors of housing: public, social, affordable, private rental and home ownership.

Housing supply in Australia is not underpinned by legal protection or by a national strategy, leaving it open to the whims of the market and of successive governments at all levels. Delays (by up to a decade) in those moving from private rental into homeownership is causing a blockage in affordable, available private rentals and 30-year mortgages are more frequently being carried into retirement, putting pressure on the aged pension and leaving those on low incomes increasingly unable to afford any form of housing. In 2023, over 169,000 households were waiting to be allocated public housing, a 14 per cent increase since 2019 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024). Currently, there is 'no accommodation in Melbourne affordable for a young person on Youth Allowance' (Northern and Western Homelessness Network, 2024).

This climate is further hampered by other systemic issues such as government welfare payments falling below the cost of living, and a failure to address issues such as mental health or the impact of family violence on women, in Australia's housing solutions.

Australia's First Nations Peoples continue to be disproportionately disadvantaged as a result of ongoing colonisation, systemic racism and dispossession of land, language, family and culture.

These issues overlay an historic foundation of Australia's responses to homelessness being geared towards 'rough sleeping' men (who today make up only six percent of Australia's homeless (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021) and rendering women's homelessness largely invisible. A gender lens and perspective of women's needs and experiences is not always reflected in the

design and delivery of services. Our current siloed sectors and systems and their ultimately segmented responses are failing to recognise housing as a human right and a 'common good'. We are failing to see that in addressing our housing crisis we can also address issues around health, crime, employment and education.

Current Trends – Family & Domestic Violence and Homelessness

In 2022-23, 23,415 adult Victorian women and 13,294 children presented at specialist homelessness services having experienced family violence (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023)[5]. During this period, the average wait time for priority housing (including people escaping family violence) was 18.1 months (Department of Families, Fairness, and Housing, 2023)

Australians are now questioning why women, babies, children and young people (the predominant victims of family and domestic violence), are forced into homelessness. Federal and State governments are prioritising policies that assist victim survivors to remain safely in their communities, homes, jobs and schools while ensuring accountability for perpetrators.

Social Housing

Australia's social housing has and continues to form one of the government's primary responses to homelessness. However, the Australian Productivity Commission recently reported that: 'Australia's social housing system is broken' (Productivity Commission, 2018). The stock of social housing – currently around 430,000 dwellings – has barely grown in 20 years, during a time when Australia's population has grown 33%.and nationwide, the numbers waiting for priority social housing have grown by 51 per cent ("Eligible social housing applicants", n.d.).

A Holistic and Policy Driven Response

There is little doubt that this is the right time for substantial national reform.

One of the most promising recent responses to homelessness in Victoria is the Homes 4 Families (H4F) program. Funded by the Victorian State Government, the program was a COVID-19 response that supported families who were homeless (many had also experienced family violence). These families were supported to move from unsuitable emergency accommodation into safe, secure, medium and long-term housing options with wrap-around personalised support. The Program provided longer support periods, smaller caseloads, brokerage for broader co-ordinated support services, suitable funding and a focus on housing first – improving the safety, health and wellbeing of the whole family in an integrated and holistic way.

Of the 16 families that were supported by McAuley as part of the H4F, 14 have transitioned into long term housing. Many of the families also received medical treatments, were supported to gain employment and education, and encouraged to engage with their local community.

Programs like H4F, supported by an overarching National Housing and Homelessness strategy that focuses on early intervention and prevention of homelessness by tackling both structural causes and systemic failings, is needed to drive the future of homelessness responses in Australia.

In July this year, a bill was put before Australia's Federal Parliament, calling for housing to be considered a fundamental human right. The bill will require the Australian Government to develop a ten-year National Housing and Homelessness Plan with measurable and ambitious targets for the eradication of homelessness. If adopted, the Bill and subsequent plan would be an excellent foundation for Australia's homelessness response.

McAuley Community Services for Women

McAuley Community Services for Women works at the intersection of family of family violence, homelessness, and mental health. McAuley has led work that researched the issue of why women so often become homeless because of family violence and we use our insights about the unique aspects of homelessness affecting women to advocate for solutions.

Testimony: Kedy Kristal, Policy Officer at Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services, Australia

"There's been a very strong issue around homelessness here in the city of Perth in recent years... because the focus has been rough sleepers. So much that homelessness is hidden. Women and children, you don't see them - not many are on the streets, some are, but not many...It will be a struggle to get people to understand that invisible homelessness is women with their children. There aren't many services... For refugees, if they had a housing stock, we'd have much better outcomes than we do now. So many women feel they have to go back to their partner because that's a better option in terms of the children being housed, rather than staying in a refugee camp for a really long time because they're not funded for ongoing support.

People need time to get back on their feet. And often the refugees become their family for that period of time, but aren't able to continue giving support."

Good Practices: Mercy Foundation's Grants to End Homelessness

The Mercy Foundation supports evidence-based, long-term solutions to homelessness, such as Housing First and Rapid Rehousing.

A grant awarded to the Pregnancy and Homelessness Coalition will help transform housing and health care support for pregnant women. Expected outcomes include improved data collection, improved access to housing and support and improved system responses by building cross-sector collaboration.

A grant to Uniting WA is supporting a pilot program for young mothers experiencing homelessness, providing housing and wrap-around supports during the first 1,000 days of a child's life.

A grant to Northern Community Legal Centre is piloting a partnership with family violence crisis accommodation centres, providing legal assistance to address debt, employment and housing challenges, to promote financial independence and stability into the future.

Policy Solutions

- Substantially increase the stock of social housing. The national shortfall of social housing properties is estimated at 604,000.
- Invest in more Housing First approaches. Viv's Place in Victoria is the first housing initiative in Australia to offer permanent housing and on-site wrap-around support to 60 women and 130 children escaping family and domestic violence, based on New York's Sugar Hill project.
- Implement the recommendations for all four domains of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women 2022-2032.
- Where appropriate, invest in Safe at Home approaches to enable women and children to stay in the home while the perpetrator of violence leaves.
- Increase income support payments to make rent affordable.
- Offer free child care to enable mothers to return to work.
- Reform tax policies to promote the right to housing.

Recommendations

Advocacy Recommendations

Acknowledging the role civil society, the private sector, and citizens play in influencing national action related to social issues, we recommend:

- Encouraging local governments to adopt policies to address homelessness relevant to their distinct geography and local issues
- Implementing education for gender equality in all public schools, including curricula on alternatives to violence
- Supporting movements to de-commodify housing
- Focusing on children's rights in campaigns to fulfill the right to adequate housing for families, acknowledging the long-term positive effects of safe, supported housing on livelihood
- Promoting further research on homelessness, including for the aging population, and minorities deemed at high risk of homelessness

Policy Recommendations

We believe the following policy recommendations are essential to addressing and preventing homelessness, and are applicable at the local, national and international levels. We encourage:

- Implementation of federal legislation that explicitly states a national right to safe, adequate housing
- Recommendation of policies and programs with preventative focuses for youth at risk of homelessness, including educational initiatives that decrease stigma towards minority groups
- Allocation funding towards child safety, including family counseling and resolution services
- Ensure that all homeless people are included in the 2021 census; collect disaggregated data, including specifically on families at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness
- Alignment of national policies with international law and agendas, including the United Nations 2030 Agenda, for which "greater gains will be made by addressing all SDGs together" (Allen, Metternicht, Pedercini, & Wiedmann, 2019)

HOMELESSNESS IN THE

PHILIPPINES

COUNTRY PROFILE
Republic of the Philippines (Philippines)
Filipino: Republika ng Pilipinas

LOCATION
The Philippines is a Southeast Asian country; No land borders are shared with other countries, but maritime borders are shared with: China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Palau, Taiwan, and Vietnam; The Philippines is an Archipelago, meaning the country is made of a series of islands, which in this case border the Pacific Ocean and seas including: Philippine Sea, Celebes Sea, South China Sea, and the Sulu Sea.

POPULATION
In 2024, the population of the Philippines was over 118.7 million people (United States Census Bureau, 2024).

HOMELESS POPULATION
4.5 million people (Ordinario, 2023)

POLITICAL SYSTEM
Presidential Republic

Country Definition of Homelessness & Usage

According to Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA): "Homeless refers to individuals or households living in the streets or public spaces [such as parks and sidewalks] and all those without any form of shelter" (Ordinario, 2023).

Homelessness in the Philippines, according to the Urban Development and Housing Act (UDHA) and social welfare programs, refers to individuals or families in urban areas with incomes below the poverty threshold who do not own housing facilities. This includes those living in makeshift dwellings without security of tenure.

The challenge in addressing homelessness in the Philippines lies in the lack of a standardized definition of who constitutes people experiencing homelessness. This issue leads to certain government programs unintentionally excluding individuals who are homeless.

While the government does have programs and policies in place to address homelessness, the OHCHR report says that most of the policies are focused on keeping the city "clean" of the homeless, rather than providing holistic support to address the root causes of the issue.

Context of Homelessness

The Philippines, with its unique geographical challenges as an archipelago, faces significant inequalities. Economic disparity, exacerbated by historical colonization and political corruption, contributes to higher rates of deprivation compared to neighboring countries. Landholding patterns, influenced by Spanish colonialism, have led to concentrated wealth and power, perpetuating poverty and inequality (Joly Homes Foundation, & Asmae-Soeur Emmanuelle Philippines, Inc., 2023).

Poverty and vulnerability to natural disasters are intertwined, particularly for families residing in rural areas prone to hazards like typhoons and landslides. Urbanization exacerbates these challenges, with overcrowded slums lacking proper sanitation and infrastructure. Discrimination, especially against women, exacerbates economic vulnerability, while factors like unemployment and informal labor contribute to family homelessness (Ordinario, 2023). Government responses, such as the Modified Conditional Cash Transfer for Homeless Street Families, aim to address poverty and homelessness, but flawed policies and inadequate resources hinder their effectiveness.

Criminalization of poverty further compounds the issue, with law enforcement actions disproportionately affecting homeless individuals (Joly Homes Foundation, & Asmae-Soeur Emmanuelle Philippines, Inc., 2023). Efforts to address homelessness must prioritize social protections, access to affordable housing, and comprehensive support services to tackle the root causes of homelessness and poverty in the Philippines.

THE PHILIPPINES

Fast Facts

1. As of the 2015 census, the population had passed 100 million people for the first time. The Philippines is the 13th most populated country in the world ("Philippines", 2020).

2. As of 2023, 22.4% of the population live under the poverty line (Gozum, 2023)

3. As of 2023, more than 6 million housing units are needed to adequately address the housing issue with the figure rising to over 12.3 million by 2030 ("Philippines", 2023)

4. As of December 2023, 26.4 million people have been displaced in the Philippines due to natural disasters. This includes people who have been displaced by earthquakes in Mindanao, which have caused damage to infrastructure, loss of life, and displacement (OCHA, 2024)

5. Families living on the street represent almost 75% of the homeless population in the Philippines (Nicolas & Gray, 2017)

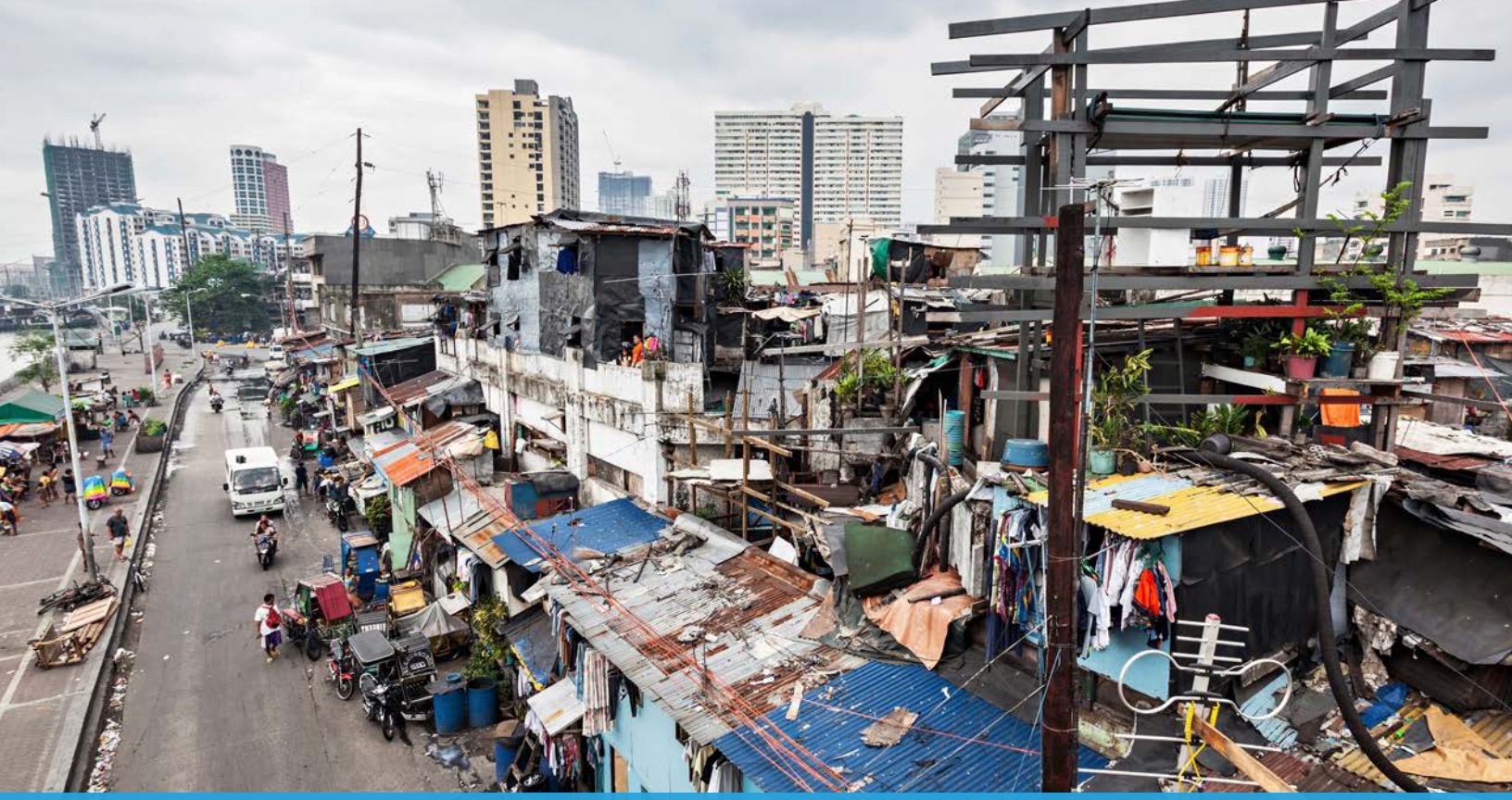


FIGURE 4

Homelessness in the Philippines

The Current Realities - 2024

1

According to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, (OHCHR) about

2/3

of this number or about three million people, are in Metro Manila, which is more than any other urban area in the world

2

Roughly

250,000

children in the Philippines are categorized as Children in Street Situations (CISS), living either on the streets, in public spaces, or in slum shanties, however, the actual number could be significantly higher, possibly reaching one million, according to the OHCHR

3

The Pambansang Pabahay Para sa Pilipino Program, also known as the 4PH Program, is the national housing program of the Philippines. It was launched in September 2022 with the goal of having zero informal settlements by 2028

Personal Reflection: Marietta Latonio

Marietta Latonio
Professor of Social Work, University of South Philippines; Recipient of UNANIMA International Woman of Courage Award 2017

Marietta is a social worker who lives and works in Cebu, Philippines. She has been the director of many welfare programs; led the implementation of community-based programs for more than 20 years; worked for many NGOs focused on the welfare of women and children; has been a lifelong advocate for children's human rights;, and more recently involved with the "I Have a Voice" research project.

She is now the monitor / evaluator of programs at Good Shepherd Welcome House in Cebu. Not only does she work with and support girls and women on the street; but she educates pimps about trafficking, and networks with bar managers in an effort to identify and help women in need. Marietta has done many international presentations, and is now getting a degree with research focused on interventions for recovery of trafficking survivors.

Homelessness in the Philippines

The specific problems that lead to homelessness in the Philippines include endemic poverty, domestic violence, human trafficking, and the challenges posed by natural disasters. The Philippines is one of the fastest-growing economies in Southeast Asia. Out of a total population of 106 million, there are at least 4.5 million people experiencing homelessness, with three out of every four of those living in the capital of Manila. About 250,000 of the country's homeless population are children and youth. There are many kinds of experiences here – people sleeping in their karitons (push carts), below the bridges and flyover, and in covered side walks and Pavements. There are also those experiencing homelessness that are seen less on the streets. They live in cemeteries, abandoned structures and shanties in the clogged waterways of the city.

Despite progress, children in the Philippines continue to face barriers to the full realization of their rights, affecting their long-term well being and development. High levels of inequality, exacerbated by armed conflict and natural disasters in parts of the country, mean that the most vulnerable children suffer disproportionately.

Long-term solutions will depend on governments understanding and addressing the issue of homelessness in a holistic way. It's not just about "homes" but a commitment to human rights and social justice which must be the cornerstone to any permanent solution to homelessness.

To be protected from the elements of the sun, air, rain, and other natural occurrences is a human right. Shelter over every head is necessary to realize one's human rights and to give all of humanity the opportunity to thrive and reach their potential. However, this is not the case for everyone. Maria (not her own name) shared that she could not ever relax while sleeping inside her 3x4 meter-rented makeshift for fear of being ejected by the owner the next day. She is a single parent of two children, a two- and four-year-old, and they depend on their daily sustenance from scavenging. This and many other stories I heard being in government services for over 30 years.

The question is what went wrong? Or a better question might be what else can be done differently?

It is my fervent hope that institutions, both government and non-governmental, will consider some "out of the box" interventions. Governments should work closely with those who are homeless and partner with them so that the needs of homeless people will be answered.

Testimony: Sr. Judith L. Padasas, CCV

Sr. Judith L. Padasas, CCV
Tahanan Vedruna Children Center

Judith Padasas, CCV, works in Tahanan Vedruna Children Center (Vedruna Home Children Center) in Tagaytay City (Philippines), and carries out at the same time an intense advocacy work worldwide to raise awareness among administrations and society about the increase in sexual violence against children. Sister Judith is dedicated to giving talks and awareness campaigns on Human Trafficking and Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (OSEC), and works with the organization Talitha Kum International.

Homeless Population in the Manila North Cemetery: Living Among the Dead

"Manila is the most densely populated city in the world. Close to a quarter of its 13 million residents are illegal tenants. The Manila North Cemetery houses over 1 million of the dead as well as thousands of the living—mostly the city's poorest" (Bhandari, 2017).

"The Manila North Cemetery is a fully functioning city. There is a method to the madness. People build relationships and create families within its four walls. It has a thriving economy. Illegal wires tap into the main electrical supply and power the homes here. Each week, unauthorized connections are taken down, and in an endless cycle, the residents find a way to access an open source of power again. Water is bought in plastic containers filled from a deep well inside the premises" (Bhandari, 2017).

"The cemetery is owned by the city and was laid out in 1904 on 130 acres of land, making it the largest and one of the oldest in the Philippines. The mausoleums range from simple painted tombs to complex and ornate reliefs and carvings" (Bhandari, 2017).

The Mañalac family have lived next to our tombs for the past six decades. Their family migrated from the provincial town of Pampanga, north of the capital, in search of a better life in the city. Carolyn's father squatted across from our family plot in the 1950s. Behind us, a decaying cement building serves as a mausoleum to a once wealthy Chinese family. The Mañalacs were permitted by the family to live on the second floor on the condition they serve as caretakers. Carolyn still shares the space with eight other siblings and their extended family (Shirin Bhandari)*

The Carmelite Sisters of Charity, Vedruna have been serving through outreach to the many 'cemetery dwellers' – especially the women and the children. During the last few years, they have spent time at the cemetery taking rice and other prepared food to share. During these times of sharing the bags of food products the sister listens to the people, most being women.

One of the most repeated conversations is about the danger of human trafficking. Because of the material poverty and often limited education possibilities, the young mothers and the daughters are easy targets with traffickers, who approach them with promises of

employment, education abroad, and more. The sisters teach the mothers and young people about the deceptive way traffickers operate, especially online.

Living Among the Dead

Manila North Cemetery is the biggest in the Philippines within Metro Manila National Capital Region with an area of 54 hectares. With the influx of more than ten thousand landless and homeless families from the provinces and remote areas of the Philippines, Manila North Cemetery becomes a refuge for many of them. They even confirmed that they are more peacefully living with the dead than those who are hooked to drugs. They feel protected living in an empty and dilapidated graveyard abandoned by the owners. Some started as caretakers of the mausoleums of the affluent families living abroad or in subdivisions with the condition to keep the exclusive family property clean. They must vacate the area from October 27 to November 5, as preparation for the Feasts of All Saints Day & All Souls Day. These days are the time for the families to go to the cemetery and bind together with their beloved departed ones, offering food, flowers, lighted candles and incense.

For the families who are earning more or less than 2 dollars a day by scavenging, begging, selling flowers and candles at the entrance of the cemetery, working as construction workers, transporting cemetery visitors with the use of TRICYCLES (a 3-seater mode of transportation), cleaning and repainting or repairing tombs or graveyards, living in the Manila North cemetery helps them save a little for their daily subsistence & sustenance.

They feel grateful to receive 5 kilos of rice, used clothing, blankets, sweaters and canned

goods during the Reach Out Program activity of the Carmelite Sisters of Charity every summer and Christmas since the year 2015 to 2023, depending on the donations received by the sisters.

The 5 kilos of rice are a one-week supply of porridge for the sick elderly. The women try to earn a little as manicurist and hairdresser, but some engage in selling drugs or prostitution.

Additional information was gathered after interviewing the 34 women, mothers of 3 or 5 children. Many confessed that they became mothers before reaching the age of 15 and never got married to their partners.

The three Sessions of Awareness Orientation on Violence Against Women and Children, Teen Pregnancy, Incest and On-Line Sexual Exploitation of Children (OSEC) were given to the groups of children, teenagers, and parents to safeguard the dignity of women and children in 5 Cemetery Areas. They were followed by the distribution of 5 kilos of rice, clothing, etc. to every family.

The Awareness & Orientation talks were given by the CCV Sister who is connected to Talitha Kum Philippines and is an Intern of UNANIMA International in the year 2014.

Analysis: Crystal Anievas, Notre Dame De Sion

Crystal Anievas
Notre Dame De Sion

Crystal Anievas is a Sister of Notre Dame de Sion currently residing in Manila, Philippines. She worked in the social enterprise and government sectors before joining NDS. She is a student of Biblical Theology at the Ateneo De Manila University. She was born and raised in the capital city Manila but has a heart that constantly yearns for the simplicity of the countryside. Her searching heart took a while to find its home and then she fell in love with Scripture and found her place in Sion.

Compounded Homelessness: Faith, Resilience, and Rebuilding in the World's Most Disaster-Prone Country

For three years in a row, the Philippines has topped the World Risk Index (WRI) making it the world's most disaster-prone country (Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft/IFHV 2024). Without reading the report, it would not be too difficult to guess that the Philippines would land at the top. Located in the Pacific Typhoon Belt, an average of 20 typhoons enter the country each year. High exposure to extreme weather coupled with high vulnerability brought about by structural problems bring about what I call a "compounded homelessness" wherein one can be rendered even more homeless than before.

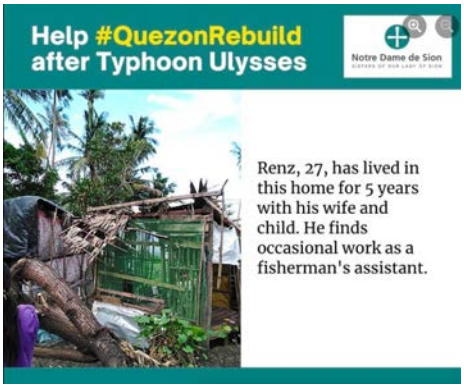
The Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion established itself in this Philippine reality, situating its first Asian foundation in the coastal town of Real, Quezon 127 km east of Manila, facing the Pacific Ocean. Since the 1990s, our community has stood witness to every weather event that has affected people's lives in the area. I was a recent witness to this as a postulant living in community during the COVID-19 pandemic. I came face-to-face with the kind of homelessness and displacement resulting from typhoons. Two supertyphoons hit the town within two weeks in November 2020: Goni and Vamco, locally known as typhoons Rolly and Ulysses.

My inexperience with typhoons by the coast led me to seek shelter in the higher grounds of the San Rafael parish church in the center of town. During the course of the day, families started streaming into the church so I found myself rearranging the pews to create cells for residents to find temporary refuge as together we waited for the storm to pass. My companions came from every possible location, usually either by the side of the mountain threatened by a landslide, or very close to the sea where rising and raging waters threatened to claim parts of their home. As the typhoon strengthened into the night, we had to make room for more families who refused to leave their homes until there was clearly no other option.

After the storms had passed, my sisters and I, together with some catechists went around the different *barangays* to assess the impact of the typhoons and to see what assistance we could offer. The light materials homes are typically constructed in were no match for the winds of a Category 5 typhoon or a fallen tree. It is one thing though to become homeless because one's physical shelter has been damaged, and another matter to become "more homeless"

because one is landless to begin with, and then loses one's temporary dwelling exacerbating the family's poverty. We met elderly people living alone or with a spouse looking for different places (like basketball courts) that could shield them from the wind and rain; An indigenous family that continued to live so close to the sea because tradition dictates that they must dwell in places facing the sun; A multigenerational household anxious that the typhoon would hasten their eviction by the property owner whose land they've occupied for years.

Our community immediately launched #QuezonRebuild a campaign to help residents rebuild their homes as they've done many times in the past. Roofing sheets, plywood, nails were distributed across the different *barangays* thanks to the generosity of the congregation, family, and friends. The residents were grateful to receive the materials and were eager to start rebuilding and repairing their homes. But how long would they last?



Just in the last year, between October and November 2024, six consecutive tropical cyclones made landfall in the country triggering the cycle of flooding, landslides, damage, displacement. It would be easy to succumb to cynicism given the reality that advances in coping and adaptive capacities are canceled out by repeated disaster shocks, corruption, and underinvestment in health, education and climate-specific interventions.

Olivia Wilkinson's *Faith and Resilience after Disaster - The Case of Typhoon Haiyan* offers a glimmer of hope by shifting the spotlight away from the material and the technical dimensions of resilience, instead focusing on the impact of faith (Wilkinson 2015). The report highlighted the role of cultural and spiritual capital as important but often overlooked building blocks of resilience. Faith is able to expand a person's internal capacity to absorb shocks and to find strength to be of service to their neighbor. Far from being merely abstract, the faith-based approach to building resilience has characteristics and a modality which I experienced in #QuezonRebuild.

Our approach to delivering assistance was highly participative. Each beneficiary defined the design and components of the new structure, and committed to a timeline to ensure accountability and to prevent the resale of materials. If funds were not sufficient for some materials required, we encouraged them to source the balance. Sweat equity was 100 percent theirs so we saw relatives and neighbors pitching in during construction. Every rebuilt home was visited after an average of two weeks. A significant level of engagement, trust, and commitment was woven into the project, key elements identified in the Typhoon Haiyan study which boosted morale and personal resilience. Of course, the project stood on the foundation of 30 years of the congregation's presence in the community. The staying power of religious institutions is a unique strength we must leverage in this context. With the right skills and partnerships, faith-based organizations can be catalysts in improving the capacities of local communities to prepare for and adapt to disasters.

Good Practices: Flaviano Antonio L. Villanueva, AJ Kalinga Foundation Inc

Flaviano Antonio L. Villanueva
Founder/President, AJ Kalinga Foundation Inc.

Fr. Flaviano Antonio L. Villanueva, SVD, also known as Flavie, is a member of the Societas Verbi Divini (Society of the Divine Word) and the Director of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC), SVD Philippine Central Province. He is also the Founder/President of the AJ Kalinga Foundation Inc., which implements two (2) major programs: a) the Arnold Janssen Kalinga Center (AJKC) and b) Program Paghilom. The KALINGA Center (Kain, Aral, LIgo, NG Ayos), an apostolate that provides the street dwellers several times a week with hot meals, showers, clean clothes, and a respite to recover their dignity. In 2016, soon after the advent of the Duterte administration, Kalinga expanded its services from meals and showers and clothes for the homeless to support services, known as Program PagHilom, for those widowed and orphaned by the killings associated with the administration's anti-drug campaign, including psychosocial trauma processing, educational assistance, livelihood training, and spiritual integration.

Ateneo de Manila University conferred upon Fr. Villanueva the prestigious Bukas Palad Award for the year 2024 for his unwavering commitment to providing dignified care and services for the poorest and most vulnerable members of society, for being a staunch advocate for human rights protection and for his dedication to extending much-needed assistance to families left behind by drug-related killings.

The Mission of Dignified, Systematic and Holistic Care: A Viable Road Towards Recreating and Empowering Lives of the Homeless

Seeing hungry people looking for food, for a cup of hope, or a safe place to rest, these were the things that surrounded me every day at the Catholic Trade Building in Tayuman, Manila, Philippines after coming back from a mission abroad. I felt strongly connected to the homeless, but we were certainly worlds apart! Seeing their plight would inspire the beginning of our work with the street dwellers in one of the most populated cities in Asia. In time, I would know their names and where they slept. But is that all that could really be done for them? As a priest, the persistent question for me was "How can they recognize the Divine Word Made Flesh and in His dwelling?"

Every day, I saw young, barefoot children and homeless families digging through trash, putting their lives in danger on the streets. It was painful to watch. What was more disconcerting to think about was that what I saw in Tayuman was just a sliver of the real situation in the country. The Philippines, the only other majority Catholic nation in Asia, aside from Timor Leste, is among the top 10 countries which has the biggest homeless populations in the world, with 4.5 million people living on the streets. About two-thirds of this number, or roughly 3 million people, are in Metro Manila, according to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). That is roughly the population of Qatar.

On the feast day of Our Lady of Carmel, July 16, 2015, we established the Arnold Janssen Kalinga Foundation Inc., which aimed to recreate and empower the homeless through dignified, systematic, and holistic care, initially by opening the Arnold Janssen Kalinga Center (AJKC) where street dwellers could enjoy free showers and home-cooked meals, which included unlimited premium rice, two viands – meat and a vegetable dish — and sometimes, even dessert. We devised a system where 250 to 300 street dwellers, who dropped by four times a week, would go through 7 stations at the Center: welcoming; profiling; clothing; bathing; grooming & affirmation; meals; sending-off where their needs—from the physical to the spiritual—would be addressed. It has been almost 10 years of helping the homeless rediscover their God-given dignity as children of God, and the learnings have been boundless. Here are some of our top insights:

1) Dignified, Systematic and Holistic Care. The casual discord and apathy the world has mirrored upon the homeless population has further pushed our dear street people, children and their families to live in the margins. There is a heartfelt need to reach out to them in a non-judgmental and authentic care that begins with the golden rule, "do to others what you want others to do to you." Another way of putting it, considering the pitiful and even the inhumane state our dear homeless are going through each day, let us offer them a CARE that is DIGNIFIED, SYSTEMATIC and HOLISTIC. What does this mean? I'm blessed to live under a roof where food is not only available, but is prepared in a balanced and healthy way. So, Arnold Janssen Kalinga Center from its day 1 of operation has been providing our dear homeless people with "dignified meals". This is composed of a buffet meal of vegetables and meat and good quality rice. And the best and favorite of Filipinos, (unli-rice!). Another expression of "dignified care" is in the "bathing section". Since I have the luxury of having showers in my room, we have likewise installed 6 shower cubicles for our beneficiaries. For me "dignified care" simply means, what I have is something that I wish my neighbor ought to experience.

Part of my hope and strategy was not only to provide a dignified manner of caring. But I aspired to offer a unique "system or stations of care" for each of the beneficiaries to be guided once inside the Center. After tireless search and research on the internet and friends, there was none. So, I had nowhere else to go but "to bring it to prayer and reflection." There and then, the 7 Stations of Arnold Janssen KALINGA Center were born. Seven (7) Stations whose objectives are: first, to guide each beneficiary in receiving the services the AJKC has to offer; second, to help instill order during the operations; third, for those beneficiaries who diligently follow each of the 7 Stations, one unconsciously imbibes a value that each "care station" offers.

- Station 1 - Welcoming - Value of Waiting Patiently
- Station 2 - Profiling - Value of Recognizing One's Worth and Value
- Station 3 - Clothing - Value of Decency
- Station 4 - Bathing - Value of Hygiene
- Station 5 - Grooming and Affirmation - Value of (the Capacity of Feeling) Renewed (Change is possible!)
- Station 6 - Meals & Bonding - Value of Nourishment and Encounter with One's Neighbor
- Station 7 - Sending-Off - Value of Doing Mission or "Paying Forward" (After patiently going through the 7 Station process, one inevitably feels he/she has been cared for, nourished and refreshed. Thus, having such an experience, we invite each beneficiary before stepping out in the street to declare a "mission statement", that is, "Kalinga Center cared for me, so, I too will care for others with joy!")

I have received several comments in the past that we might be spoiling or even offering dole-outs to the homeless people. My response would be: first, when a person patiently lines up to receive the basic care and, in the process, consciously or unconsciously imbibes life-valued skills, I don't think I can judge the process as a dole-out mainly because there is an exchange of investment and learning. Secondly, the 7 Care Station process teaches each beneficiary numerous life skill values such as order and listening, generosity and gratitude. Lastly, seeing themselves in the mirror (before and after grooming), the thought that they have once abandoned - "a hope for a better life," becomes, once again, possible. With proper guidance and their commitment, new life awaits!

2) Homelessness is rooted in traumatic experiences of rejection and loneliness, specifically in the family. Practically every homeless person who has given me the privilege of knowing about his or her life has shared stories of conflict, deep hurt, abandonment, and rejection from family members. Poverty is a compounding factor in the issue of homelessness, but it remains a secondary one. Many of the so-called "homeless" are not homeless, strictly speaking; they just found unspeakably terrible reasons to leave home—and to never look back. One example is Melvin Bobis, who practically grew up on the streets. He has vague memories of being abused by an uncle in Bicol. As a child, he was literally tied up like a dog and beaten up on a regular basis. Leaving home at a young age, Melvin never really knew the comfort of normal family life. After graduating from the KALINGA formation program, the AJKC team got in touch with some of Melvin's relatives who were willing to take him back. If people are traumatized in relationships, they are also healed in relationships. This is why we have made it part of our system to exhaust all means to reconnect and reconcile our homeless volunteers with their families after being immersed in the family culture at the Center for 90 days or more.

3) Real and lasting transformation can only happen with the spiritual. At the heart of everything that we do is a desire for our dear homeless to encounter God—at their own time and pace. The story of Andy Fajardo comes to mind. Homeless and struggling with drug dependency issues, he was one of the homeless people we took in as a resident volunteer at AJKC in 2017. Despite ongoing formation and the support to permanently leave life on the streets, Andy was suspended thrice for falling back into his old ways of drug abuse; thrice he fell. But each time he gave in to the temptation of a quick fix and a temporary high, he learned three realities that would help him get back on his feet for good: humility, acceptance, and God's forgiveness and embrace. Today, Andy works as a utility worker at the National Historical Commission of the Philippines. Truly, the most significant aspect of the holistic approach is to help the homeless heal their relationship with God. And this relationship begins with his/her experience of authentically being cared for. First, his/her re-introduction to bodily cleanliness and hygiene is the first step in helping them re-create their self-image. Second, their self-respect is reclaimed when they grab the opportunity to go back to school through the Alternative Learning System (non-formal education); and lastly, their self-worth is restored in their own eyes through rehabilitation, formation, and eventually, employment. God's presence and action are seen not only in formal prayer but permeates their entire lifestyle.

Recommendations

Advocacy Recommendations

Acknowledging the role civil society, the private sector, and citizens play in influencing national action related to social issues, we recommend:

- Targeting addressing and preventing homelessness as part of Southeast Asian regional advocacy; encouraging ASEAN to include a member response to homelessness and housing insecurity in their next Socio-cultural Community Blueprint
- Encouraging policymakers and government leaders to acknowledge and act upon the connection between housing security and adequacy and human trafficking
- Promoting attention to the need for climate change prevention, and considerable planning ahead for environment-related displacement and homelessness, including the creation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and damage to housing
- Focusing on ensuring children are not living in the streets, and that communities have access to resources, activities and services that fulfill their livelihood needs
- Continuing advocacy for United Nations Human Rights Council oversight of the human rights violations in the Philippines, ranging from danger to civil society space and the lives of journalists and advocates, to an evaluation of the right to adequate housing

Policy Recommendations

We believe the following recommendations are essential to addressing and preventing homelessness, and are applicable at the local, national and international levels. We encourage:

- Redistribution of land to increase women's access to land and security of housing tenure, while reducing poverty, and positively impacting communities and environmental health
- Ensure that human trafficking laws and subsequent programs address the intersection between housing provision and preventing human trafficking, looking to permanent, supported housing as one good practice which responds to both issues
- Having long-term oriented environmental policies and emergency responses
- Adhering to international human rights standards within national legislation, including bills regarding criminal liability
- Increased allocation of federal funds to rural areas to decrease rural to urban migration

HOMELESSNESS IN

CANADA

COUNTRY PROFILE
Canada/French: Canada

LOCATION
Canada is the Northernmost country of North America; The only land-bordering country is the United States of America, both to the South and West. It borders the Pacific, Arctic and Atlantic oceans.

POPULATION
The most recent official government estimate for the total population in 2024 was 40,769,890 (United States Census Bureau, 2024).

HOMELESS POPULATION
At least 235,000 people (Blair, 2024)

POLITICAL SYSTEM
Federal parliamentary system, under a constitutional monarchy.

Country Definition of Homelessness & Usage:

According to the Canadian Definition of Homelessness, homelessness is "the situation of an individual, family, or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect means and ability of acquiring it" (Government of Canada, 2023).

The Indigenous definition of homelessness in Canada encompasses the historical traumas inflicted by colonialism. It defines homelessness not just as lacking housing but also through Indigenous perspectives.

Similarly, youth homelessness, defined in Canada, pertains to individuals aged 13-24 lacking stable residence despite living independently from parents or caregivers.

Context of Homelessness

Indigenous homeless is not defined by lack of habitation but rather a collection of indigenous worldviews. These include individuals, families, and communities separated from their ties to nature, family, kin, culture, language, and identities. Individuals who experience this type of homelessness are unable to reconnect with their indigeneity or lost relationships (Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness, 2012).

Homelessness in Canada was not recognized as a social problem until the 1980s when a significant rise in homelessness emerged in Canada, fueled by economic shifts that led to disinvestment in affordable housing. Initially affecting primarily single men, homelessness diversified over time, affecting LGBTQ+ individuals, marginalized groups, and families. Government austerity measures in the mid-'80s, including cuts to social housing and welfare programs, exacerbated the issue. Despite a robust economy, poverty increased, incomes declined, and federal funding for social welfare dwindled.

Personal histories of homelessness often intersect with experiences of poverty and housing insecurity, particularly for women facing domestic violence. Canadian Women's Foundation estimates that, on any given night in Canada, 6,000 women, often with children, seek emergency shelter because they feel unsafe at home. Research shows that women who have experienced domestic violence often face significant discrimination from landlords when trying to find a home (Blair, 2024). Once women enter homelessness they also face unique and profound forms of violence and are regular victims of sexual assault, rape robbery, insults and threats. Studies in Canada highlight how a history of homelessness significantly increases the risk of violent victimization for women, especially those with disabilities.

Youth who have been in the Canadian child welfare system are particularly vulnerable to homelessness, a phenomenon exacerbated by systemic challenges within the welfare system itself. The lack of adequate support and resources for transitioning youth, coupled with the trauma often experienced in the foster care system, increases their susceptibility to homelessness and exploitation, including trafficking (Blair, 2024). These findings highlight the complex societal and systemic factors contributing to homelessness and emphasize the disproportionate impact on women and children.

Experiences of homelessness vary across Canada, influenced by provincial policies and urban-rural distinctions. While some urban centers implement effective models like Housing First, challenges persist due to overwhelming demand and a shortage of affordable housing. Racial and social disparities persist, disproportionately affecting Indigenous peoples, LGBTQ+ individuals, and racialized groups. In Toronto, for instance, Indigenous people and Black individuals are overrepresented among the homeless population.

Canada's homelessness landscape reflects broader global trends while also presenting unique challenges. Despite its progressive reputation, Canada grapples with systemic barriers, including difficulty accessing services for individuals outside targeted demographics. Moreover, as Canada pursues ambitious environmental goals, issues like pipeline construction raise concerns among Indigenous communities and environmentalists. Additionally, while Canada welcomes refugees, they face elevated risks of homelessness upon arrival, requiring comprehensive support beyond settlement services.

CANADA

Fast Facts

1. 12,565 Canadians stayed in shelters during the 2021 Census of Population. This point-in-time count, however, does not capture the true extent of homelessness in Canada

2. Among people who make housing decisions for their household, First Nations people living off-reserve (12%), Métis (6%), and Inuit (10%) were more likely to have experienced unsheltered homelessness than the non-Indigenous population

3. Indigenous households (29.5%) were almost three times as likely to have experienced some form of homelessness when compared with the total population, while racialized (9.5%) and immigrant (8.3%) households were below the national average

4. Among people who make housing decisions for their household, women who experienced homelessness reported worse socioeconomic and health outcomes than men in the same situation. For example, among those who experienced both unsheltered and hidden homelessness in the past, women were 23% more likely than men to report that they had difficulty in meeting their financial needs in 2023 (Uppal, 2022)

5. The 2021 Canadian Census asked Canadian households if they had ever experienced some form of homelessness in their lifetime and over one in ten Canadians, or 1,690,000 people, reported that they had

6. The Census displays factors contributing to vulnerability to homelessness or hidden homelessness, including the percent of households spending 30% or more of income on shelter costs (24.1%), the percentage of households in unsuitable housing (4.9%), and households living in need of major repairs (6.5%).169 All of these statistics are derived from the 2016 census (Government of Canada, 2023).

FIGURE 8

Homelessness in Canada

The Current Realities - 2024

1

Although a minority of Canadians experience homelessness at a certain point in their life, some groups are at an elevated risk, including Indigenous people, sexual minorities, and Black women

2

In 2024 Canada is expected to face significant challenges with homelessness and housing, with an estimated

150,000-300,000

people experiencing homelessness, and 25,000 to 35,000 on any given night

3

Toronto has the highest number of people experiencing homelessness in Canada

4

20%

of people experiencing homelessness are 13-24 years old

5

Between

30-35%

of homeless in Canada have a mental illness, and 20-25% have a mental illness and an addiction

Analysis: Margo Hilbrecht, Vanier Institute of the Family

Margo Hilbrecht
Executive Director,
The Vanier Institute
of the Family

Dr. Margo Hilbrecht is the Executive Director of the Vanier Institute of the Family, where she is responsible for activating and disseminating knowledge of family diversities and wellbeing in Canada. As a family scholar, she has written and collaborated on articles and reports about gender differences in quality of life related to time use, leisure, work-life integration, and the social and health consequences of changing employment practices. Margo holds a Ph.D. from the University of Waterloo, where she has an Adjunct appointment in the Faculty of Health.

Families and Hidden Homelessness in Canada

Having stable housing is essential to the well-being of families, yet not all families have a permanent home. According to Statistics Canada, in 2021, 11.2% of households reported that they had experienced some form of homelessness during their lifetime. On any given night, between 25,000 to 35,000 people in Canada are homeless. About 2.2% of households have experienced absolute, or "visible" homelessness, such as sleeping in a shelter, public space, or encampment. Many more (10.2%) report having experienced hidden homelessness, where they are temporarily accommodated and not immediately visible in the public sphere. Hidden homelessness involves a higher risk of abuse and exploitation, with the needs of individuals and families remaining unseen by mainstream systems and supports.

Disproportionately more women are among the hidden homeless. Women are less likely than men to use homeless shelters or public spaces and tend to share several other characteristics such as poverty, trauma, disability, a lack of affordable childcare, and limited social support. Many women are fleeing domestic violence, often with children. Since they typically rely on informal networks for accommodation, less is known about them than those who turn to shelters for victims of abuse. Yet, access to shelters can be difficult, especially for families in rural or Northern locations. Shelters may also lack culturally appropriate services for new immigrants6 or Indigenous families, highlighting the need for initiatives to better support these vulnerable groups.

To better understand families in Canada experiencing homelessness, the Family Diversities and Wellbeing Framework from the Vanier Institute of the Family offers insight into their characteristics and experiences through three lenses. This can help shape policies, programs, and services to more effectively address their needs.

The family structure lens illuminates how family members are linked together. Families experiencing homelessness in Canada are typically lone-parent and woman-led. They disproportionately live in core housing need and rely on informal networks and other survival strategies, often dangerous and exploitive, to care for themselves and their children. Even when a father is present, shelter policies can separate a family if he is not the biological father or has a criminal record.

The family work lens examines paid and unpaid work performed by family members. Homeless parents are consumed and overwhelmed by the work of daily survival. Temporary accommodation can provide some respite, but it is not always close to schools or in safe neighbourhoods. Caring for children therefore takes on an extra layer of stress, potentially impacting children's development, behaviour, and feelings of attachment. Parents may be employed, but not earning enough to cover the cost of housing. Often, mothers are unable to work or attend training programs without subsidized child care, which further limits their opportunities.

Family identity explores qualities such as ethnicity, race, and immigrant status, reflecting how families see themselves and their community of belonging. Identities can also result from how they are seen by others, often imposed in ways that exclude and marginalize. Some identity groups experience family homelessness at higher rates. Compared to the total population, almost three times as many Indigenous households (29.5%) have experienced homelessness. Canada's ongoing colonial legacy, intergenerational trauma, involvement with the child welfare system, poverty, and culturally insensitive services create and exacerbate housing challenges for these families. New immigrant families are also overrepresented, many of whom are refugees with few resources who underprepared for the costly housing market. Their families tend to be larger than Canadian-born families, which can limit housing options and incur discrimination from landlords due to their size.

Efforts to address hidden homelessness among families remain limited without adequate information to support policy initiatives. Governments at all levels and civil society organizations, such as the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, work with numerous partners to prevent and end homelessness. Housing protocols are urgently needed to help low-income and homeless families navigate the system, as well as basic income support. Beyond the National Housing Strategy, with a goal of accessible, affordable housing for all, a gender sensitive approach is needed for policies and programs that places the human rights of women and children at the forefront. Intergenerational cycles of poverty, trauma, and reduced human potential will otherwise continue.

Analysis: Ahmad Bonakdar, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness

Ahmad Bonakdar
Senior Research Director, Making the Shift, Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab, The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness

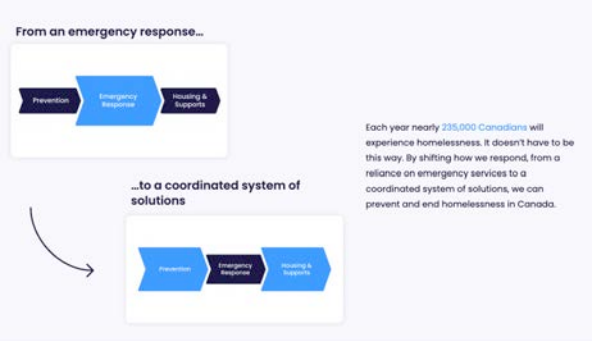
Ahmad Bonakdar is the Senior Director of Research at the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, York University. Dr. Bonakdar holds a Ph.D. in Urban Planning and Public Policy, with research interests broadly focused on the intersection of homelessness, housing, economic development, and social/geographic equity. His research has been published in leading peer-reviewed journals across the fields of planning, economics, sociology, education, and public health.

Youth Homelessness in Canada and the Urgent Need for Systemic Change

Youth homelessness has emerged as a serious and deeply entrenched social problem in Canada, with recent data demonstrating that 40% of youth who experienced homelessness initially encountered it before reaching the age of 16 (Gaetz et al., 2016). This data is important because young people experiencing homelessness often have a history of trauma, such as abuse, neglect, or exposure to violence. The findings of 2016 National Youth Homelessness Survey in Canada revealed a disturbingly high prevalence of childhood trauma and abuse among the young people studied. 63.1% reported experiencing physical abuse, and 24% reported experiencing sexual abuse, with 57.8% of youth indicated they had contact with child protection services—also referred to in some jurisdictions as Children's Aid or Child Welfare. In fact, involvement with these services often began at a very young age, with 31.5% entering the system before the age of six. The findings showed that young people who left home early, as well as those who identified as transgender, gender non-binary, or 2SLGBTQ+, were significantly more likely to be involved with child protection services compared to their peers. Furthermore, Indigenous youth were significantly more likely to have been involved with child protection services compared to both youth from racialized communities (70.5% vs. 43.5%) and White youth (70.5% vs. 55.1%). The findings of the National Survey indicated that 45% of Indigenous youth first experienced homelessness before the age of 16.

This early onset of homelessness among youth highlights a troubling pattern where homelessness becomes long-term or recurrent. For example, the National Survey found that youth who experienced homelessness before the age of 16 often underwent multiple episodes of homelessness (75.9%). They frequently faced challenges in school, including

high dropout rates, bullying, mental health issues, and learning difficulties. Some statistics were particularly striking among study participants: 41% of the sample had been tested for ADHD at some point during their time in school. Additionally, over 40% had attempted suicide at least once, and 35% had experienced drug overdoses requiring hospitalization. These factors have contributed to a more complex situation, potentially leading to disengagement from school, addiction issues, higher rates of unemployment, and chronic homelessness.



What do all these findings point to? First, they reveal a deeply rooted and systemic issue underlying youth homelessness in Canada. Specifically, the early onset of homelessness indicates that early intervention is critical. The high rates of early homelessness suggest that preventive measures need to be implemented well before these young people reach adolescence. Surveys and census data often fail to accurately reflect the extent of youth homelessness. The true scope of youth homelessness is frequently underreported because the system is not efficient at collecting data on young people experiencing housing precarity until they actively seek assistance and access the system. The findings of a recent report (Schwan et al., 2018) demonstrated that the prevalence of hidden homelessness among youth is exacerbated by the fact that these young people often avoid contact with public systems due to a lack of trust and fear of stigmatization.

Second, Indigenous youth are over-represented in the population of youth experiencing homelessness in Canada. Indigenous communities have faced a long history of systemic oppression, including cultural genocide through Residential Schools and the Sixties Scoop (Stewart, 2018; Thistle, 2017). Addressing Indigenous homelessness requires a deep understanding of how the cumulative impact of colonialism, discrimination, and social inequities has shaped their lives. By leveraging available resources, culturally appropriate interventions should focus on Indigenous youth as historically under-served populations. It has been argued that leveraging the power of arts, storytelling, and narrative can help capture, make sense of, and thoughtfully interpret the experiences of individuals who have lived through homelessness (Bonakdar, 2024). Interventions aimed at addressing Indigenous homelessness must be led by Indigenous peoples based on Indigenous ways of knowing and grounded in cultural traditions and practices. These approaches should prioritize community-driven solutions that honor and incorporate traditional knowledge, values, and methods to effectively address the needs and experiences of Indigenous youth experiencing homelessness.

Finally, early intervention should be prioritized by focusing our concerted efforts toward prevention-oriented approaches to homelessness (Gaetz, 2020). While the narrative that prevention is key has gained traction in Canada, we need to continue working to bring to the fore a new mindset that shifts the public discourse toward long term solutions that address the root causes of homelessness, particularly among marginalized youth. Interventions are most impactful when we can successfully stem the tide of homelessness while ensuring that youth have the supports needed to quickly and sustainably exit homelessness.

Good Practices: Dr. Amanda Noble

Dr. Amanda Noble
Director, Data, Research & Evaluation, Covenant House Toronto

Dr. Amanda Noble is the Director of Data, Research and Evaluation at Covenant House Toronto, where she oversees all data, research, program evaluation and quality assurance activities. Her research focuses on prevention and sustainable exits from youth homelessness and sex trafficking. Dr. Noble is a Registered Social Worker, and an Assistant Professor, Status-Only, at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto. She is a Community Scholar at MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions at St. Michael's Hospital, and has a PhD in Education and a Master in Social Work.

Increasing Connection and Inclusion to Address and Prevent Youth Homelessness

Identifying promising practices to address youth homelessness begins with defining the issue. Youth homelessness is more than the absence of housing—it is the result of multiple forms of disconnection and exclusion. For many youths, the experience of homelessness begins before they come to a shelter, as they are likely to experience 'hidden' homelessness, staying with friends and extended family until they have exhausted their options (Gaetz et. al., 2018). Youth experiencing homelessness become disconnected from their families because of conflict, abuse, the death of a caregiver, or because they have fled their war-torn home country (Gaetz et. al., 2016). Many have become disengaged from the educational system and have experienced marginalization because of their identities. In Canada, youth who experience homelessness are disproportionately Black, Indigenous, neurodivergent, or 2SLGBTQIA+, and increasingly newcomers (Gaetz et. al., 2016; Kidd et. al., 2021). Given their age, most young people do not have the education or employment experience to secure a living wage. This means they often experience poverty and remain at risk of homelessness even once housed. Promising practices to address youth homelessness, therefore, must be comprehensive and respond to social and economic elements of exclusion so that young people can transition from homelessness into a life of wellness and opportunity.

At Covenant House Toronto (CHT), we offer evidence-informed programs that address social exclusion, like our Family and Natural Supports (FNS) program. Through counselling and case management, this program aims to repair and build relationships with young people's biological and chosen families. When this is not possible, the program supports young people to form connections with communities of belonging, such as those that are gender-affirming or culturally similar. When comparing intake to discharge data, the youth who used FNS report an average increase of 4 points on a self-reported scale of 1-10 in their connection to family (Covenant House Toronto (CHT) administrative data, 2020).

Another way to reduce social exclusion is to connect young people with caring adults, such as a mentor, or emerging research is testing the impact of a life coach on youth (Thulien, 2023-24). One study found that when combined with a rent subsidy, youth who received mentor-

ship had improved self-esteem, education and employment outcomes and hope compared to the control group (Thulien et. al., 2021).

Addressing economic exclusion means ensuring youth have safe, affordable and appropriate housing and can pursue long-term access to a living wage. At CHT, we are developing a Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) model, where youth access the housing of their choice and receive continued case management and wellness support in the community. Housing options can include living with family, transitional housing that is congregate or across the community, specialized housing for specific sub-populations or private housing. One randomized control trial found that HF4Y increased housing stability and physical and psychological health compared to the control group (Bonakdar et. al., 2023). Given the relatively low earning potential of youth and the current housing markets in Canada, most youth require financial assistance to live in the community. One way this has been achieved is through a portable, multi-year rent supplement geared to income, such as the Canada Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB). At CHT, our exits from shelter increased by 50% with the introduction of the COHB, because youth could afford housing in the community (Covenant House Toronto (CHT) administrative data, 2020).

Youth may also require support to pursue post-secondary education and gain employment experience. Educational bursaries or scholarships can help with the cost. Pre-employment programs, such as CHT's Cooking for Life (CFL) program, can help young people gain the skills required to enter the workforce, and offer a subsidy for employers so that they can employ the youth with little risk. Our program has achieved great success, with 87% completing the onsite placement and 75% enrolling in school or becoming employed by the end of the program between November 2020 and February 2024 (Covenant House Toronto (CHT) administrative data, 2020).

Ultimately, the most promising practice to address youth homelessness is to prevent it from happening. Prevention efforts must include actions at the structural and systemic levels, but community agencies can also create early intervention programs that target youth at risk of homelessness. Youth Reconnect, for instance, provides case management and counselling for youth and their families through targeted outreach in high school and referrals from child welfare agencies. In CHT's program, 94% of youth have been prevented from experiencing homelessness since its inception in 2022 (Covenant House Toronto (CHT) administrative data, 2020).

Finally, how services are provided is as important as the services themselves. Most youth have experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences, which have negatively impacted their development. It is critical that agencies incorporate trauma-informed practice into their physical design, practice modality, and policies and procedures (Substance abuse and mental health services administration, 2014). Trauma-informed practice understands youth's circumstances and behaviours in light of their trauma and aims to facilitate a relationship with youth that is based on mutuality, safety and trust (Hopper et. al., 2010). Research has shown that genuine relationships between young people and service providers play a fundamental role in client retention, increased self-determination, and hope for the future (Rambaldini-Gooding et. al., 2024).

Hope for the future is precisely why we do this work at CHT. Youth deserve the opportunities and supports to make homelessness only a small part of their story as they move forward toward a bright future of their making. Addressing youth homelessness means facilitating access to what all young people need to develop into healthy adults. By working to advance these promising practices and advocate for better systems to support youth experiencing homelessness, young people can reach their full potential.

Recommendations

Advocacy Recommendations

Acknowledging the role that civil society, the private sector, and citizens play in influencing national action related to social issues, we recommend:

- Encouraging planning to end homelessness at all levels to be participatory
- Promoting adoption of trauma-informed care policies and practices beyond the healthcare system and in all public services; promoting trauma-informed care that is based in respect (Oudshoorn & Berkum, 2015)
- Acknowledging colonialism, discrimination and gender inequality as underlying drivers of homelessness as well as wealth and income inequality
- Destigmatizing immigration
- Focusing on children's human rights and livelihood needs, decreasing chances of future homelessness

Policy Recommendations

We believe the following policy recommendations are essential to addressing and preventing homelessness, and are applicable at the local, national and international levels. We encourage:

- Creation of legislation that will ensure evictions will not proceed if they will result in homelessness
- Following the suggestion in the National Framework to end homelessness, which calls for a complete review of Canadian justice system policies, "the use of a gender lens and trauma-informed model to understand how women's rights can be secured and their access to justice enhanced and how homelessness can be exited and prevented" (Aguila et al., 2015)
- Ensure that federal and provincial governments are working with municipal governments in their measurement, address and prevention of homelessness
- Reconciliation of goals and policies to be directly related to housing and land-rights policies; reframing services and policies to address the need for Indigenous housing and land security as part of the national government's self made "reconciliation" efforts (Government of Canada, 2019)
- Allocation of funds towards long-term immigrant and refugee supports, including permanent, supported housing

HOMELESSNESS IN

GREECE

COUNTRY PROFILE
The Hellenic Republic (Greece) / Greek: Ελληνική Δημοκρατία

LOCATION
South East Europe; Bordering countries: Albania, North Macedonia, Bulgaria and Turkey; Though there are many Greek Islands, the mainland is two peninsulas; It borders several seas, including the Mediterranean, Aegeansea and Ionian.

POPULATION
As of April 2024, the total population is over 10.3 million people (United States Census Bureau, 2024).

HOMELESS POPULATION
More than 40,000 people (FEANTSA, 2018)

POLITICAL SYSTEM
Parliamentary Republic

Country Definition of Homelessness & Usage:

A definition of homelessness was written into Greece's national legislation in 2012. It defines homelessness as people who are legally residing in the country but do not have access to safe, sufficient housing with electricity and basic water services. This includes people who live in temporary institutions, hostels, on the streets, or other inappropriate accommodations (Arapoglou & Gounis, 2017).

Context of Homelessness

Homelessness in Greece is deeply intertwined with the country's welfare system and economic challenges. Rooted in the concept of "familistic welfare capitalism," Greece's approach to social welfare places significant emphasis on family support, often leaving vulnerable individuals at the mercy of familial resources rather than robust government assistance. This model, prevalent in Southern European countries like Greece, failed to adequately address the fallout from the Eurozone Crisis in 2008, leaving many families vulnerable to poverty and homelessness (Athens Bureau, 2023). There has been a rapid increase of mostly "invisible homeless" as a result of the financial, economic, and social crisis.

Historically, Greece's welfare system struggled to adapt to the neoliberal pressures of the 21st century, which prioritized austerity measures over social spending. Single-parent families, particularly those led by single mothers, bore the brunt of this inadequacy, facing economic hardship and housing instability (Athens Bureau, 2023). Despite the government's attempts to provide minimal aid, many single mothers found themselves reliant on shelters, highlighting the systemic deficiencies in Greece's social safety net.

The economic collapse exacerbated existing inequalities, particularly in gender pay gaps and labor market segregation. Women, disproportionately affected by unemployment and low-wage jobs, found themselves unable to secure stable housing for themselves and their families. This vulnerability was further heightened by the influx of refugees into Greece, straining already limited resources and exacerbating housing insecurity. Greece has always been a transit country for migration due to its location, however, more recently, it has seen over 160,000 refugees (Hellenic Anti-Poverty Network, 2022).

While Greece has made efforts to address homelessness through legislative measures, such as the "National Strategic Plan for Homelessness," challenges persist. Non-governmental organizations play a crucial role in providing support and advocacy for homeless families, collaborating through networks like The Greek Network for the Right to Housing ("Greece", 2023). Despite these efforts, the situation remains dire, with many families still facing homelessness and social exclusion. Urgent action is needed to address the systemic issues contributing to homelessness in Greece and ensure that all individuals have access to safe and stable housing.

GREECE

Fast Facts

1. As a result of high housing costs, the average age at which someone in Greece manages to leave their childhood room is estimated at 30.7 years in comparison to the European figure which is 26.5 years and 7 out of 10 Greeks aged 18-34 live with their parents (Athens Bureau, 2023).

2. Greece boasts the highest rate of concealed women's labor in Europe. This encompasses migrant workers engaged in sectors characterized by unregulated, informal, and part-time employment practices, alongside ethnic women who represent 14.7% of women aged 15 and above, contributing to family businesses without financial compensation. Consequently, these women lack social security contributions crucial for pension benefits (Athens Bureau, 2023).

3. In 2021, 66,518 forced internal displacements were recorded in the country due to climate-driven disasters ("Greece", 2023).

4. Family circumstances, poverty, unemployment, homelessness, and undocumented migrant or asylum seeker status significantly heighten vulnerability to trafficking in Greece ("Greece", 2023).

FIGURE 9

Homelessness in Greece

The Current Realities - 2024

1

Nearly every

1 out of 4

children lives in households at risk of poverty, suggesting that poverty in Greece affects children and is “severe, recurrent and worsening”

2

The Poverty Watch report found that

29.5%

of the population, or 3,092,300 people, is at risk of poverty, 14.8% experience material deprivation of basic goods and 13.6% of adults (individuals aged 18 to 64 years old) live in low-employment households

3

About half of homeless Greeks live on

20 euros

or less per month

4

More than

79%

of renting households spend 40% or more of their disposable income on housing

5

According to Greece’s Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), more than

26%

of the Greek population faced the risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2023

6

The risk of poverty or social exclusion is higher among children aged 17 and younger at more than 28

Analysis: Dr. Nikos Kourachanis, Panteion University of Athens

Dr. Nikos Kourachanis
Panteion University
of Athens

Dr. Nikos Kourachanis is Assistant Professor of Social Policy and Housing at the Department of Social Policy of Panteion University. His research interests are focused on social citizenship and social integration policies for vulnerable groups, such as homeless, migrants and refugees. He has authored six books in Greek and in English: Homelessness and Social Exclusion in Crisis Greece (2017, Topos, in Greek), Housing Policies (Papazisi, 2017 in Greek), Housing and Society (Ed., Dionicos, 2019 in Greek), Refugee Housing Policies (2019, Topos in Greek) and Citizenship and Social Policy (2020, Palgrave Macmillan) Social Policy and Authoritarian Neoliberalism in the Era of the Covid-19 Pandemic (2021, Topos in Greek), Aspects of Refugee Labour Market Integration (Topos, 2022 in Greek), Housing Crisis and Housing Policy (IME GSEVEE, in Greek) and many scholarly articles in Greek and international academic journals.

The Housing Crisis and Hidden Homelessness in Greece

Housing precariousness in Greece has become an increasingly pressing social issue in recent years, reflecting broader economic and social challenges. While traditionally less visible than in other European welfare states, the problem has escalated due to structural economic weaknesses, the prolonged impact of the financial crisis, and the extensive commodification of housing. The 2008 financial crisis led to severe austerity measures, high unemployment, and cuts to social programs. Many middle-class families became unable to meet housing costs, resulting in a surge in evictions and a rise in precarious living conditions. Greece's social protection system, historically reliant on family networks rather than state intervention, struggled to cope with the increased demand for support. Over the past decade, new dimensions of housing exclusion have emerged, particularly with the rise of the working poor and hidden homelessness. Many individuals and families, although not sleeping rough, are forced into overcrowded housing, face the risk of eviction due to financial hardship, or live in temporary shelters in camps (particularly refugees). A significant number of households struggle to afford housing expenses.

The housing market has also been significantly impacted by the growing prevalence of short-term rental platforms like Airbnb, which have driven up rents and reduced the availability of affordable housing in urban centers such as Athens and Thessaloniki, as well as in tourist hotspots on Aegean, Ionian islands and Crete that are suffering from overtourism. This trend disproportionately affects vulnerable groups, including low-income individuals, pensioners, and young workers, who struggle to secure stable and affordable accommodation.

The rise in mortgage lending from the mid-1990s drove up property prices, with mortgages making up two-thirds of household borrowing by 2010. Fearing widespread loan defaults during the crisis, Greece introduced the "Katselis Law" (Law 3869/2010), banning foreclosures on primary residences for over-indebted households.

However, from 2015, pressures grew to limit this protection, restricting it to those in extreme poverty. Meanwhile, measures like electronic auctions in 2017 and the "IRAKLIS" plan in 2019—which allowed selling non-performing loans to foreign funds—sped up foreclosures. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the new "Bankruptcy Law" (Law 4738/2020) removed primary residence protections entirely, giving banks full power to foreclose on over-indebted households. These changes have worsened hidden homelessness, pushing vulnerable families into unstable living conditions without official recognition.

Energy poverty further compounds housing insecurity. Many low-income households struggle to afford basic utilities like electricity and heating. High energy costs, driven by the privatization of the Public Power Corporation (PPC) and the emergence of an oligopolistic energy market, strain already tight budgets. Coupled with stagnant wages and inadequate social benefits, these costs force families to choose between paying rent and heating their homes. Unpaid utility bills can lead to evictions, increasing the risk of hidden homelessness. Addressing energy poverty and reforming the energy market to ensure fair pricing are crucial to making housing livable and sustainable for vulnerable populations.

The refugee management crisis and the EU-Turkey deal have added another layer of complexity. As a key entry point for asylum seekers and migrants, Greece has hosted tens of thousands of displaced individuals, many of whom face significant barriers to accessing permanent housing. While refugee camps and temporary accommodation programs exist, bureaucratic obstacles, limited employment opportunities, and social exclusion often push refugees and asylum seekers into precarious living conditions. Social integration challenges further exacerbate the issue, as many struggle to navigate legal and economic barriers to securing stable housing.

The ongoing housing crisis underscores the critical importance of access to decent and secure housing, revealing persistent gaps in social housing policies. To address these issues, the creation of a Ministry of Housing Policy is proposed to coordinate and implement policies to increase housing supply and combat homelessness. A Social Housing Bank could aggregate available properties—public, social, and incentivized private assets—to meet housing needs. A Housing Inequality Observatory would systematically collect and analyze data on housing insecurity, rental prices, short-term rentals, foreclosures, and homelessness, enabling targeted policy development. Reallocating funds from the Recovery and Resilience Facility to increase Greece's housing budget, currently among the lowest in Europe, is essential to address current needs and support new social housing construction.

Other key measures include reforming rental subsidies to align with housing cost burdens, ensuring households spending over 40% of their income on housing and living near the poverty line receive support. Evictions for impoverished tenants without alternative housing options would be prohibited, with the state covering housing costs until social housing becomes available. To address the impact of short-term rentals, regulations would impose geographic caps, prohibit corporate involvement, and limit individuals to two short-term rental properties, while classifying fully dedicated short-term rentals as tourism businesses with corresponding taxation. The abolition of the Bankruptcy Law and the creation of a public entity to manage non-performing loans are proposed to protect primary residences from foreclosures. Finally, tackling energy poverty through the re-nationalization of PPC and the elimination of the Energy Exchange would reduce electricity prices, with state subsidies covering energy costs exceeding 10% of low-income households' income. These measures aim to transition from emergency housing services to a rights-based approach, firmly establishing housing as a fundamental human right.

Analysis: Despoina Afroditi Milaki, IPA

Dr. Desponia Afroditi Milaki
Representative to the UN, International Presentation Association

Dr. Despoina Afroditi Milaki is based in New York and works on our priority issues. She is involved in various NGO Committees and working groups, such as the NGO Committees on Stop Trafficking in Persons, Status of Women, Social Development, Migration, Financing for Development, Religious at the UN, Justice Coalition of Religious, and the Working Group on Girls. The IPA UN Advocacy Focus for 2024-2026 is the elimination of violence against women and children. Dr Milaki works to influence policies and decisions on behalf of people in need around the world. Her work at the UN is underpinned by our international association which gathers and reports to her on the lived experiences of the poor and marginalised at the grassroots level.

Various Aspects of Family Homelessness in Greece

Homelessness knows no barriers or borders and countries all over the world struggle to combat this dreadful problem. Greece is no exception. Affordable and adequate housing is profoundly interconnected with economic instability, poverty and persistent gaps in social protection.

Interlinkages Between Family Homelessness and Economic Recession

The strict austerity measures implemented by the Greek government in 2010 and the wider economic crisis had resulted in 5% of the population's incomes to fall below the 2009 poverty line. In addition to significant income loss and growing job insecurity, families and individuals also experienced severe reductions and cutbacks to social benefits and services. Housing benefits were also suspended. Families, often being in debt on housing and personal loans, faced an extremely challenging and uncertain reality. People with high education and no psychological or addiction problems were now unable to meet their financial responsibilities or pay their monthly bills and were forced on to the streets. As Roumpakis and Pleace emphasized *"[...] For the first time, many households faced the risk of evictions or foreclosures – a direct threat to family housing as a cornerstone of social security in Southern Europe. [...]"*. With high unemployment, household indebtedness and insufficient family support, the number of homeless sharply increased in 2010; a rise of 20%-25% compared with two years ago.

> *We were middle class* and *we were living accordingly [...] All of a sudden, we ended up on the streets. Completely in debt, without a future* (*Irene, 55 years old woman*)

Furthermore, Greece was identified as one of the countries – together with Italy, Spain and France – with large shares of non-nationals people experiencing homelessness. The large influx of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers in conjunction with the limited capability and resources of the governmental institutions to deal with such rising numbers of applicants had led to increased numbers of people sleeping on the street and using homelessness services. The above reality was further amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic and its severe economic and social impacts.

Statistical Data on Homelessness

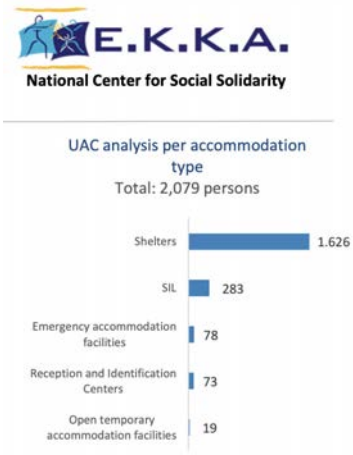
It is important to note that there is a significant lack of statistical evidence and data in Greece which does not permit examining homelessness accordingly and substantially. There is no

legal obligation for the Greek government to collect data on homelessness. However, under the most recent Presidential Decree 77/2023, all homeless structures (night shelters and hostels) must register in the respective digital registry of the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family.

According to OECD, there was no data collection efforts at national level in at least five years. In 2009 – a year for which data were available - the number of people reported as homeless (21,216) accounted for less than 1% of the population of Greece (0.19%). In 2023 available data showed that the estimated number of people experiencing homelessness in Greece was 1,387 out of which 22% were women and 78% were men. Seniors make up an important share of homeless people in Greece accounting for roughly 15% of all those experiencing homelessness (2023).

The above estimated number of homeless in 2023 appears relatively low presumably due to the limited frequency and consistency of data collection and to additional methodological constraints. This theory can be further supported by the fact that other surveys are available which focus only on specific groups or geographic areas and their results simply add to the above estimated number of people experiencing homelessness.

For instance, we must take into account certain key facts provided by the National Center for Social Solidarity on the accommodation of unaccompanied minors. The relevant chart indicates that, in March 2022, 2,079 unaccompanied children were living in precarious conditions, out of which 90% boys, 10% girls and 7% under 14 years old.



Similarly, there was a pilot project/registration of homeless people in the seven biggest urban centers of the country conducted by the Greek Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in May 2018. Under this registry, there were 691 individuals living on the street and 954 living in and supported by homeless structures; a total of 1,645 homeless people only in the municipalities of Athens, Piraeus, Thessaloniki, Heraklion, Nea Ionia, Ioannina and Trikala, with no clear data on the rest of the country.

Lack of data collection contribute to the invisibility of family homelessness, specifically that of women and children. Greece must urgently invest further in harmonizing the measurement, collection, and disaggregation of data on homelessness.* Although the homeless are a small share of the Greek population, these figures still represent human beings who deserve dignity, justice and full enjoyment of their human rights.

Examples of Policies and Strategies to Address and Prevent Homelessness

In February 2023, the Greek Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs released the National Action Plan to Prevent and Address Homelessness 2023-2027. This is a comprehensive plan structured in seven pillars and implemented by the General Secretariat for Social Solidarity and Combating Poverty. It includes actions with a total budget of 72 million euros for the next five years estimated to help around 5,700 households. The Plan focuses on interventions that, on one hand, facilitate access to decent housing for the vulnerable groups, and on the other hand, aim to prevent the phenomenon of homelessness. The long-term goal is to permanently address the housing problem in Greece, by utilizing national and European resources (ESPA, Recovery Fund).

Two important actions under this plan include:

- The "Kalipsis" Program: a social housing program through which at least 1,000 apartments will become available to young people aged 25-39, beneficiaries of the Minimum Guaranteed Income scheme, who do not own their first home. A budget of 21.5 million euros will cover the cost of renting the residence for a period of three years and any repair costs, where necessary.

- The "Housing and Work for the Homeless" program: it has been transformed from a pilot into a permanent tool of social policy and operates in 43 Municipalities throughout the country. It provides rent subsidies to beneficiaries for two years, covering basic household expenses and monthly bills, as well as subsidizing salary and employment insurance contributions for one year when finding work in private companies or starting a new business. The goal is the reintegration of 800 beneficiaries. All Municipalities implementing the Housing and Work for the Homeless program are obliged to provide relevant data to the central government.

Furthermore, the large Municipalities of the country run homeless structures for those in need. For instance, the Multipurpose Homeless Center of the Municipality of Athens (see photo) is a modern structure that provides accommodation, psychological support, food, as well as medical monitoring to the homeless. Through a holistic approach to social reintegration, they help guests to be included in programs implemented in collaboration with the central administration and other agencies. This Homeless Center is part of the mission of the City of Athens – Reception and Solidarity Center (KYADA) which provides support in general for the vulnerable populations by addressing poverty, exclusion, and social isolation. During the economic crisis "KYADA" had over 9,000 beneficiaries, a figure that accounted for about 25,000 people benefiting, of which about half were families with children.

In parallel, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Greece demonstrate a vast experience, knowhow and familiarity with the issue.

"KLIMAKA" has been among the first non-profit organizations in Greece that since 2001 has been providing important support services to homeless. Over the years, "KLIMAKA" has comprehensively developed policies on homelessness prevention, emergency intervention, counseling and reintegration of homeless, to name a few. "KLIMAKA" has been also proactive in the provision of mental health services and the promotion of social inclusion for marginalized groups. It works with people from socially excluded groups, such as those suffering from mental illness, refugees and asylum seekers.

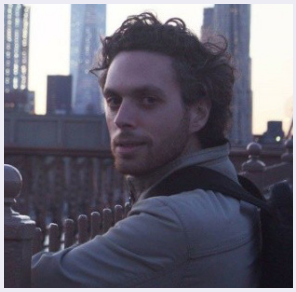
Since 2020, "KLIMAKA", together with five other partners from five different countries (including Greece) and three associated partners, has initiated the HOOD project which aims at promoting the importance of early intervention and at developing a new methodology based on Dialogical Practices and on the Enabling Co-planning Approach in the work developed with homeless people. Insights, reflections, and tools from these approaches are adopted by professionals in their daily work, exploring how can social work make homeless people regain power over their lives and their futures.

Although the NGOs are dealing with an increasing demand for their services to address homelessness, the lack of funds and resources poses a significant challenge for them. Multidimensional national and local challenges persist and threaten any progress achieved so far by people, communities and governments throughout the years. Despite positive economic indicators and increasing growth rates in Greece, the country's public services and its most vulnerable people are yet to feel the benefits. Short-term approaches are great, but long-term strategies are the best. Housing needs to be combined with psychological support, social inclusion and labor market integration policies. This is the added value that gives real hope to persons and families who experience homelessness.

Analysis: Alexandra Mourgou, York University and Spyridon-Christos Raftopoulos, European Union Agency for Asylum

Alexandra Mourgou
Postdoctoral Researcher,
York University

Alexandra Mourgou is a Postdoctoral Researcher at York University, holding the Liberal Arts and Professional Studies Postdoctoral Fellowship, working on her project 'Musical Geographies and the Greek Canadian Experience in Toronto. Places, Cultures, & Diasporic Identities'. Her research interests and publications focus mainly on urban, cultural, and historical geography, specifically on the interconnections between space and music. She received a joint Ph.D. degree in cultural geography at the National Technical University of Athens and University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne (joint degree) in February 2022 titled 'The blossoming of urban popular music and rebetiko during the Interwar period: Piraeus and its neighborhoods'. She holds a master's in architecture at the N.T.U.A. and a post-master's degree in Urbanism at the Ecole Nationale Superieure d' Architecture de Paris La Villette.



Spyridon-Christos Raftopoulos
Reception Officer,
European Union Agency for Asylum

Spyridon Christos Raftopoulos serves as a Reception Officer at the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), bringing a wealth of experience in asylum and migration management. His professional background includes significant roles with the UNHCR, the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and Mercy Corps. Spyridon holds a Master's degree (MSc) in History of Contemporary Western Societies from Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne and a Bachelor's degree in Political Sciences from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. His expertise lies in policy development, governmental advisory, and fostering international cooperation within asylum and reception systems.

Fluctuating between Homelessness and Housing: Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Greece

In this article, we are focusing on the refugee population, which has been successively arriving in the Greek (and hence European) territory since 2015 (Rozakou, 2017). As a result of the ongoing atrocities in their countries of origin and their forced and brutal displacement, those people experience a long and complicated journey. In this framework, we are paying attention to the fluctuation between housing and homelessness from a socio-spatial aspect. Therefore, we are focusing on the ESTIA accommodation program for asylum seekers and on the diverse grassroots initiatives that have emerged.

The challenges of housing and homelessness have been a topic of ongoing discourse. During the post-war period, governmental strategies failed to establish a well-defined framework of housing policies. In the 1990s and 2000s, this question was triggered - among others-

by the successive arrival of migratory waves (Kourachanis, 2019; Vaiou, 2007). Deficient and fragmented, these policies primarily addressed the visible signs of social marginalization in the city and were limited to sporadic activities by heterogeneous networks of local actors and stakeholders (i.e. municipalities, Churches, NGOs) (Arapoglou et. al., 2004). In their majority, newcomers settled by their own means, lacking appropriate housing policies and integration strategies (Papatzani, 2020; Maloutas & Economou, 1988). Homelessness has significantly intensified since the economic crisis of 2011 (Varoufakis, 2012) and has been further exacerbated by escalating rents and the touristification of urban centers (Balabanidis et. al., 2021).

From 2015 onwards, Greece became a focal point of the European refugee crisis, with over 1,294,929 refugees and migrants crossing into the country until now, primarily via the Aegean Sea from Turkey (UNHCR, n.d.). The majority were fleeing war and persecution, particularly from Syria, with smaller numbers coming from Afghanistan, Iraq, and other conflict-ridden countries. However, only less than half of this population applied for asylum in Greece (Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 2024).

The urgency for the placement and lodging of refugees and asylum seekers left no options other than immediate and temporary solutions. For the government, one criterion was the availability of open spaces far from the neighborhoods of the locals and distanced from the “good areas” thus achieving socio-spatial segregation. For this purpose, Camps (Temporary Reception and Accommodation Facilities) in abandoned industrial units and former military camps on the mainland, and Hotspots (Reception and Identification Centres) in the Eastern Aegean Islands were constructed. Nevertheless, overcrowding led to the creation of temporary encampments in the periphery of these sites.

The institutional insufficiency has sparked bottom-up responses, among other things. Despite the economic crisis experienced and the xenophobic reflexes of part of the Greek population, solidarity grassroots initiatives and social movements in support of refugees thrived in various forms. The most important among these was the collection of necessities, food, clothes, and medicines. With very limited resources, groups of volunteers have occupied and adjusted abandoned buildings, to meet the housing needs, mainly in the center of Athens. In some cases - such as the improvised encampment in the port of Piraeus

(Greece's largest port city), the coexistence of top-down institutions and self-organized bottom-up initiatives is remarkable (Belavilas, 2016).

The ESTIA (Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation) programme was launched by UNHCR in Greece in 2016 to provide dignified living conditions and facilitate the integration of asylum seekers (vulnerable persons, and their families). It focused on housing them in rented apartments all over Greece rather than camps (UNHCR, 2021). The distribution of refugee housing across neighborhoods and cities is often framed as a political decision to prevent the concentration of beneficiaries and to "avoid the dangers of ghettoization" (Papatzani, 2020). Initially, ESTIA provided access to local services, schools, and healthcare, though it only partially addressed the broader challenges. A key aspect of the programme was its focus on integration by fostering connections between refugees and local communities (i.e. inhabitants, and municipalities). Especially children would easily connect with their local peers. There was great emotion on both sides when an asylum-seeking family was granted refugee status and had to move away. However, some individuals chose to seek employment and housing in the same neighborhood to maintain existing bonds, which is one of the program's key benefits.

In 2021, the management of the ESTIA transitioned from UNHCR to the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum. By then, the programme had provided housing to thousands of refugees. Over time, the government progressively scaled back and terminated the program in 2022, opting instead for a bare minimum accommodation model that relegates asylum seekers primarily to camps (Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 2022). This change marked the end of an integration-oriented approach, replacing it with a centralized and controlled form of accommodation, solely emphasizing temporary solutions.

Even though ESTIA offered an alternative to mass accommodation in camps, its temporary duration did not lead to long-term and broad-based solutions to the housing issue. As soon as an asylum seeker receives refugee status in Greece, the material reception conditions automatically deteriorate (Article 57, Law 4636/2019). Although it opened channels towards the development of embodied networks, its fast closure often resulted in the disconnection of refugees from the local community. Without sufficient training in the Greek language or support in securing employment and housing, the likelihood of slipping into homelessness remains exceedingly high (Arapoglou et. al., 2024).

ESTIA offered a considerable legacy to the integration debate. However, its termination, disrupted this process, by normalizing socio-spatial segregation as the main practice of refugee management and by reinforcing the fluctuation between housing and homelessness. Solidarity groups and housing squats showed that, with volunteer efforts and limited resources, they could offer refugees significantly better living conditions than those in most camps. However, such initiatives cannot serve as a permanent solution to homelessness, affecting both refugee and non-refugee populations. Instead, communities of the future will be built through inclusiveness, coexistence, and solidarity.

Good Practices: Maria Karra, Emfasis Non-Profit

Maria Karra
Founder,
Emfasis Non-Profit

Maria Karra is the founder of Emfasis Non-Profit, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting individuals experiencing homelessness and social exclusion in Greece. With extensive experience in humanitarian aid and community outreach, she has been a steadfast advocate for those left behind, pioneering innovative approaches to homelessness prevention and intervention. She is also the representative of FEANTSA in Greece and a board member of the Greek Network for the Right to Housing and Accommodation.

Breaking the Cycle of Hidden Homelessness in Greece: Emfasis Non-Profit's Impact

Homelessness is often reduced to what is visible—people sleeping in public squares, on park benches, or in abandoned buildings. Yet, a more insidious form exists, hidden behind closed doors, overlooked by statistics, and masked by temporary solutions that do not provide real security. In Greece, this hidden homelessness has surged over the last decade, exacerbated by economic downturns, skyrocketing living costs, job precarity, and the recent pandemic. At Emfasis Non-Profit, we witness daily the silent suffering of those without a true home, and we have developed innovative, community-driven practices to bridge the gap where policies fall short.

Understanding the Hidden Faces of Homelessness in Greece

Homelessness encompasses more than rough sleeping. It includes:

- Families living in overcrowded single-room accommodations.
- Individuals couch-surfing with acquaintances.
- Women enduring abusive relationships due to lack of alternatives.
- Elderly individuals struggling with the rising cost of living.
- Working people unable to secure stable housing despite employment.
- Those experiencing long-term unemployment.

These individuals often remain invisible in official statistics, yet they are equally vulnerable, living in constant uncertainty without the security of a home.

Despite the existence of some governmental shelters and housing programs, access remains inconsistent. Bureaucratic obstacles, long waiting lists, and eligibility requirements often prevent those most in need from receiving timely support. Instead of waiting for solutions that may never come, community-driven organizations like Emfasis Non-Profit have stepped in, bringing direct and immediate solutions to people—where they need them most.

Emfasis Non-Profit's Mobile Approach: Meeting People Where They Are

From its inception, Emfasis Non-Profit has prioritized a proactive, street-based approach to social support. Our Streetwork Program, unlike other social outreach methods, is built on the principle that no one should have to find help—help should find them. Our dedicated team of trained and experienced social workers and vol-

unteers engage directly with people experiencing homelessness and social exclusion in their own environment. Through regular outreach, we build trust, offer tangible assistance, and create pathways to reintegration.

The relief efforts include 3 Mobile Support Units with a wide range of immediate support services, including:

- Hygiene kits and basic necessities
- Street based advisory services such as:
  - Psychosocial support and mental first aid assistance
  - Guidance on navigating social services including basic rights
  - Emergency accommodation & medical referrals

For women and children at risk of domestic violence and exploitation, we work on a referral system with trustworthy partner organisations, ensuring they receive protection and long-term support with dignity.

Emfasis Non-Profit's Mobile Approach: Meeting People Where They Are

A significant yet often overlooked segment of the homeless population comprises individuals who are employed but still unable to afford stable housing. Rising living costs, stagnant wages, and a lack of affordable housing options have boosted social inequalities. Platforms such as Airbnb have added additional strain by simultaneously increasing rental prices and decreasing affordable housing supply, in a nation where family networks find it harder to provide shelter & assistance and where social measures may be perceived by the government as obstacles in the economic reboot. As a result, many individuals are pushed into homelessness despite having jobs.

- At Emfasis Non-Profit, we support working homeless individuals by offering them essential resources that empower them to regain stability. Our initiative ensures they have access to a conducive workspace, complete with an internet connection so they complete their training. Furthermore, we provide access to electricity, enabling them to work and pursue their professional development effectively. This support is crucial as they work towards receiving their first couple of salaries, allowing them to gradually take ownership of their circumstances and transition into more permanent housing solutions.

Good Practices: Building Holistic and Sustainable Solutions

One of the most effective strategies in addressing homelessness in Greece has been community-driven intervention models. Instead of waiting for systemic reform, we focus on filling the gaps that leave people unsupported. Some of our key best practices include:

- **Mobile Street Outreach:** Engaging directly with individuals in need, building trust, and offering real-time individualised solutions.
- **Micro-Shelter & Housing Support:** providing innovative housing support going beyond traditional emergency shelters. We collaborate with local hostels to offer safe and stable accommodations, prioritizing individuals with fragile health conditions, those facing extreme weather, single parents with minor children, and individuals at risk of mental health challenges. This is

strictly on a short-term basis, however it creates a critical opportunity for our social services team to work on more permanent housing solutions, whilst the beneficiaries are sheltered from the dangers of rough sleeping.

- **Employment & Reintegration Programs:** Covering the cost of job training, focusing mainly on jobs that can potentially offer accommodation. I.e. security staff, night managers in warehouses, that come along with single bed accommodation.
- **First Aid Mental Health:** Recognizing that homelessness is about mental well-being, we integrate the principles of First Aid Mental Health practices across all of our beneficiaries.

The Role of Government & Policy Reform

While grassroots organizations can provide critical interventions, we need to stress on the fact that such services are not available at all times and rely almost exclusively on private, corporate and Foundation donations. Real solutions can only be implemented by the long-term policy commitment of the State.

The gaps in how homelessness is addressed at the national level, highlight the urgent need for systemic reforms. One major issue is the lack of accurate data collection, which hampers our ability to understand the true extent of homelessness and effectively allocate resources. Without comprehensive statistics, it becomes challenging to develop targeted interventions that meet the needs of different populations.

As long housing programmes are under-resourced, they will continue to lead to a patchwork of services unable to provide comprehensive support. According to data from the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), countries that have committed to stable funding models for homelessness have seen significant improvements in their ability to reduce homelessness rates.

Emfasis Non-Profit continues to push for meaningful policy shifts, including:

- **A National Homelessness Strategy** aligned with the Homeless Bill of Rights. A unified cohesive approach for homelessness prevention featuring integrated policies and promoting mixed living—where individuals from various socioeconomic backgrounds live in close proximity— in order to enhance social cohesion and foster community support networks. Studies have shown that mixed living arrangements not only reduce stigma but also improve access to resources and opportunities for those experiencing homelessness.
- **Improved Accessibility to Housing Solutions:** this includes models like Housing First, Social Housing etc. stirring away from shelters and emergency accommodation towards long term dignified housing options

Looking Forward: A Future Without Hidden Homelessness

We believe that a society is measured by how it treats its most vulnerable. The faces of hidden homelessness may not always be seen, but their struggles are real. By working together—civil society, policymakers, and local communities—we can break the cycle of homelessness and restore dignity, one life at a time.

Recommendations

Advocacy Recommendations

Acknowledging the role civil society, the private sector, and citizens play in influencing national action related to social issues, we recommend:

- Encouraging all European Union countries to allocate funding and land to the migration/refugee crisis, and immediate relief for the over-crowded Greek refugee reception centers
- Educating about the gender pay gap, and destigmatizing single motherhood
- Supporting economic reform and a shift from familistic welfare capitalism
- Focusing on children's and families rights and livelihood needs for shaping policies and programs that address homelessness and its drivers
- Promoting diplomacy and conflict resolution in conflict situations, increasing opportunities for stakeholder involvement and input, including from migrants, women, children, and girls

Policy Recommendations

We believe the following policy recommendations are essential to addressing and preventing homelessness, and are applicable at the local, national and international levels. We encourage:

- Adoption of homelessness-specific monitoring and evaluation processes by the European Union, and adoption of an official definition of homelessness by the Greek government
- Implementation of policies and programs opening reception places for refugees in places other than the East Aegean Islands in Greece, including elsewhere in Europe, following UNHCR recommendations (UNHCR, 2020)
- Creation of employment programs specifically for women which ensure equal and fair pay, and general increases in federal employment to address social issues and decrease the high unemployment rate
- Adherence to the European Union recommendations on "Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage," including creating positive environments for children, and preventing and addressing children's poverty and exclusion in society (The European Commission, 2013)
- Use of a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to future housing, education, health, and other policies

PART FOUR

PATHWAYS FORWARD

Universal Social Protection: An Effective Model for Addressing Homelessness

Homelessness is both a consequence and a symptom of inadequate social protection systems. Without access to essential services - such as affordable housing, healthcare, education, and employment support - individuals and families remain trapped in cycles of poverty and displacement. Universal social protection offers a transformative approach, ensuring that everyone, regardless of circumstance, has the resources and support needed to prevent and overcome homelessness. This chapter explores how comprehensive, rights-based social protection systems can serve as an effective model for addressing homelessness globally, emphasizing policies that prioritize housing as a human right and form of economic security and social inclusion.

Analysis: Ambassador Krzysztof Szczerski

Ambassador Krzysztof Szczerski
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Poland to the UN and Chair of CSocD63

Krzysztof Szczerski was born in 1973 in Kraków. In 1997 he graduated from the Jagiellonian University with a master's degree in political science, and in 2001 he obtained his PhD at this university's Institute of Political Sciences and International Relations. He completed his habilitation (postdoctoral degree) in 2010, based on a dissertation entitled Dynamics of the European System, for which he received the Prime Minister's Award. In 2018 he was awarded the title of Professor of Social Sciences.

Since 2000 he has been an affiliated scholar of the Jagiellonian University, and has twice been Deputy Director of its Institute of Political Sciences and International Relations. He lectured at the National School of Public Administration in 2008-2009 and later in Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since 2013 has been an associate professor at the Jagiellonian University. Currently he is also a member of the Board of the Polish Institute of International Affairs and the Institute for Central Europe.

In the years 2007-2008 he was Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and then at the Office of the Committee for European Integration. He has been a member of the Civil Service Council to the Prime Minister (2009-2010) and a Deputy to the Polish Sejm (2011-2015). In January 2015 he became the representative of the Polish Parliament at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. From 2015 he was Secretary of State at the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland, from 2017 he served as Chief of the Cabinet of the President of the Republic of Poland and later as Head of the International Policy Bureau in the Chancellery.

In 2021 he assumed the office of Permanent Representative of the Republic of Poland to the United Nations in New York.

In Poland, the number of persons in the homelessness crisis constitutes approximately 0.08% of the country's population, which currently stands at over 37.6 million inhabitants. The results of nationwide research on the number of homeless persons indicate that their number in Poland is approximately 31,000, out of whom 20% are women and 80% men.

Principles, forms and systems of support for homeless persons have been regulated by the provisions of the Act on Social Assistance of 2004, and are successively updated. The Act:

- provides a definition of a homeless person,
- indicates homelessness as one of the reasons for granting social assistance benefits,
- regulates forms of assistance aimed at helping homeless persons become independent,
- defines types of facilities for homeless persons, and
- stipulates tasks for each level of public administration in the field of counteracting homelessness.

Moreover, the issues of combating homelessness are included in strategic documents developed by the Polish Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy and adopted by the government, such as the National Program for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. Update 2021-2027, public policy with a perspective until 2030, and Strategy for the development of social services, public policy until 2030 (with a perspective until 2035).

According to the above-mentioned Act on Social Assistance, municipalities, the basic units of local self-government, are in the first place obliged to support the person in need. The above applies, among others, to granting and paying special targeted benefits, running and providing places in social welfare homes and municipal support centres, and referring persons requiring care to them. Municipalities may delegate some of their tasks in this respect to non-governmental organizations.

Housing for those who are already in the crisis of homelessness, regardless of gender, is delivered in a form of a temporary place in a so-called 'shelter for homeless persons' or a so-called 'shelter for homeless persons with care services'. Additionally, homeless persons can use a doss house (night shelter) and a warming house, especially during the winter. A special executive order of the Minister of Social Policy regulates the minimum standards that these places of stay must meet.

Emergency assistance points play an extremely important role in the system of supporting persons in the homelessness crisis, especially those experiencing street homelessness. These points include: eateries, bathhouses, laundries, food distribution points, clothing distribution points, community centres, consultation and information points, and medical aid points.

It is worth noting that, as a rule, a shelter provides persons experiencing homelessness who have signed a social contract with 24-hour, temporary shelter and services aimed at strengthening social activity, ending homelessness, and gaining independence in life. For this purpose, a person in the homelessness crisis may be covered by an individual program for getting out of homelessness, which involves supporting the homeless person in solving his or her life problems, in particular in the area of housing, and help in obtaining employment.

Considering the "Housing First" approach, the Act on Social Assistance states that the municipality's tasks include, among others: running and providing places in 'training apartments' or 'supporting apartments' for persons in the crisis of homelessness. These apartments are a form of social assistance that prepares, with the support of specialists, people staying there so that they can lead an independent life or support them in their daily functioning.

Both local government units and non-governmental organizations helping persons in the homelessness crisis use national funds under specially dedicated programs and European Funds intended to combat homelessness.

Poland is one of the signatories of the Lisbon Declaration on the creation of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (EPOCH). Within this platform, there is an exchange of knowledge, information and solutions to combat homelessness. There is also cooperation with international organizations in this area.

All of the above efforts lead to the overarching goal of preventing homelessness by supporting persons and families left furthest behind, as well as by providing comprehensive support to persons in the crisis of homelessness through access to shelter, housing, health care, education, work and psychological assistance.

Analysis: Raquel Tebaldi and Dr. Sarah Sabry, Save the Children International

Raquel Tebaldi
Social Protection Advisor, Save the Children UK

Raquel Tebaldi is a Social Protection Advisor at Save the Children UK and a PhD candidate at the United Nations University - Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (UNU-MERIT) in Innovation, Economics and Governance for Development. She holds a bachelor's degree in International Relations and a master's degree in Political Science from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS, Brazil). At Save the Children, she supports country offices' projects on child-sensitive social protection and contributes to research and advocacy at the global movement level. She has previously worked as a researcher at the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) in Brazil, where she had the opportunity to contribute to several research projects, particularly on child- and gender-sensitive social protection.

Dr. Sarah Sabry
Global Urban Lead, Save the Children International

Dr. Sarah Sabry is the Global Urban Lead at Save the Children and founded and leads the Global Alliance – Cities4Childrenon behalf of Save the Children. Sarah has over 20 years of experience in development practice and research. She worked and consulted for various organisations including the Ford Foundation, IIED, IDRC, the American University in Cairo, and the Arab human rights fund. Her work, research and writing has mostly addressed urban poverty, slums/informal settlements, inclusive cities, social policy, NGOs and children and youth. She holds a PhD in development studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, a BSc in Computer Science from the American University in Cairo and has taught at SOAS, the University of Zurich and the ETH.

Urbanisation and Child-Sensitive Social Protection: A Review of Policy Innovations

Today, childhood is mostly experienced in urban contexts. More than 1 billion people are now living in slums, 350 to 500 million of whom are children (UN-Habitat & UNICEF, 2023). Children will represent the majority (60%) of urban residents living in inadequate housing in developing countries by 2030 (Singh et al., 2022). Ending child poverty in all contexts, rural and urban, is crucial for ensuring future prosperity as poverty experienced in childhood has long-lasting negative impacts on children's development (Jensen et al., 2017; World Bank & UNICEF, 2016).

The urbanisation of poverty that comes with the acceleration in urbanisation requires governments to address it through child-sensitive social protection. Social protection encompasses public policies that support people in meeting adequate living standards while improving their ability to manage lifecycle

and covariate risks, thus enhancing their social inclusion. Child-sensitive social protection are those policies and programmes that address "the specific patterns of children's poverty and vulnerability, are rights-based in approach, and recognise the long-term developmental benefits of investing in children" (Save the Children, 2020).

There are different policy choices that can be considered to provide better coverage to all children, from the introduction of universal benefits to the extension of social insurance to informal workers. Thailand, for instance, has made significant progress in achieving widespread social protection coverage for children in rural and urban areas through, among other programmes, the progressive expansion of its child grant, starting with a poverty-targeted cash transfer for children aged 0 to 1 in families in 2015 and both the age group and the income threshold were progressively increased to reach children under age six (UNICEF Thailand, 2020). Extending social insurance to informal workers is another measure to improve coverage rates in urban areas. Ghana achieved success in extending health insurance coverage in both urban and rural areas is due to the establishment of its National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) in 2003 through a legislative act. In terms of innovations, it uses a model that connects community health insurance provision with national insurance. Enrollment is available to informal workers and financing relies both on workers' contributions as well as on value-added tax (VAT) levied on luxury goods, alcohol and tobacco ("Informality", 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous innovations were also deployed to expand social assistance to populations typically excluded from these programmes, including urban populations and informal workers. Where social registries were not comprehensive or updated enough, new data sources were sought, such as voter registries (combined with registration via phones) in Togo to reach around 25% of the population by 2021; or using electricity consumption data (complemented by other criteria to account for areas without regular electricity coverage) in Guatemala to identify low-income households (Pignatti et al., 2024). A new set of urban cash transfers was also introduced using innovative mechanisms such as satellite images reaching street level for the identification of eligible areas in the Democratic Republic of Congo and simplified poverty assessment questionnaires in Mauritania and Liberia.

Finally, cash is not enough to address the multidimensional vulnerabilities that children experience, which requires integrated approaches with the provision of additional support and services. The following are among the adaptations that can be considered by urban programmes: adjusting benefit levels to account for urban living conditions and inflation; providing linkages to services that encompass urban-sensitive livelihoods support and address the specific vulnerabilities that urban children face; deploying communication and outreach strategies that engage leadership structures within informal settlements (such as women's organisations and youth groups) (Devereux et al., 2018; "Leave", 2023).

The world's population is increasingly moving to cities, and comprehensively addressing urban child poverty is still a pending task for social protection systems. The speed of urbanisation calls for various forms of adapting existing social protection mechanisms to urbanisation trends. Adaptations may be needed to existing programming to ensure that children living in slums and informal settlements are not excluded. As the experience during the pandemic demonstrated, innovative mechanisms can be considered for quickly scaling up programmes as well as reaching urban areas. As cash alone is also not sufficient to sustainably reduce poverty, the specific challenges in accessing health, education and other relevant services in urban and rural areas need to be considered by policymakers, requiring a multisectoral coordinated approach.

Looking Ahead to the Second World Summit for Social Development

The Second World Summit for Social Development, taking place from November 4-6, 2025 in Qatar, offers a unique opportunity to drive progress on the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and the Sustainable Development Goals by addressing homelessness as a barrier to eradicating poverty, enhancing access to decent work, and fostering social inclusion.

The first World Summit for Social Development took place in Copenhagen in 1995 with an ambitious vision of social justice, solidarity, harmony, and equality within and among countries. Almost 30 years later, the world is a different place, but in many ways we are no closer to actualizing the commitments of the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration. There are almost 4 billion more people today than there were in 1995, along with intensifying consequences of climate change, technological disruptions, heightened geopolitical tensions, and increased local and global inequalities. The international financial architecture has proven to be no longer suitable to meet the needs of today. And vulnerable populations continue to be left behind, struggling to access basic necessities and services. While strides have been made in the past few decades, the current global landscape necessitates a reassessment of strategies, a reaffirmation of commitments, and the mobilization of resources through multilateral and cooperative efforts.

In September 2021, UN Secretary-General António Guterres unveiled the Our Common Agenda (OCA) report, which presents his recommendations on how to take forward the commitments expressed by the UN General Assembly in the UN75 Declaration. The report was intended as a wake-up call to speed implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and provide recommendations to address strategic gaps in global governance arrangements.

The Second World Summit for Social Development in 2025 was a key recommendation in the OCA to drive progress forward, with the SG stating that "now is the time to renew the social contract between Governments and their societies, so as to rebuild trust and embrace a comprehensive vision of human rights... It should include updated governance arrangements to deliver better public goods and usher in a new era of universal social protection" (OCA 4). The outcome of the Summit will be an update of the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and a recommitment to its ten Commitments on poverty eradication, reducing inequality, promoting full employment, and social inclusion.

Despite the fact that homelessness is a critical social development challenge that underpins and prevents progress on each pillar of social development, the first World Summit for Social Development and the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration did not explicitly address homelessness as a distinct global issue. In the decades since, homelessness has increasingly emerged as an urgent and growing crisis in both the Global North and Global South, exacerbated by rising inequality, climate change, migration, and housing shortages. Today, millions of individuals and families worldwide experience homelessness in its many forms, from street homelessness to inadequate and insecure housing. Those experiencing homelessness face lowered resilience and barriers to participation in society, making it impossible to break the cycle of poverty and marginalization. Homelessness and adequate housing therefore need to be explicitly included in the outcomes and declarations of the Second World Summit for Social Development in order to actualize both the commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration and the goals of the 2030 Agenda. A home for all is essential to putting people at the center of development, to eradicating extreme poverty, to promoting decent and productive employment, and to achieving inclusive societies.

In the 2021 'Our Common Agenda' report, the Secretary-General recommended the following issues to be considered during the second World Summit for Social Development: universal social protection floors, universal health coverage, adequate housing, education for all, and decent work. This Summit will therefore provide a platform to prioritize and catalyze concerted action towards addressing global homelessness by placing it at the forefront of the international agenda. After all, the structural and circumstantial drivers of homelessness include inequality, poverty, and lack of access to social protection, decent work, healthcare, education, and housing.

The issue of homelessness was first formally recognized at the UN and centered in social development initiatives when the 58th Commission for Social Development in 2020 adopted the priority theme 'Affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness', and the Economic and Social Council adopted resolution 2020/7 on the theme. There was significant enthusiasm around this priority theme from a range of stakeholders, and further progress was made on 16th December 2021 when the General Assembly adopted resolution 76/133 on 'Inclusive policies and programs to address homelessness.' However, since then the issue has been absent from key UN deliberations around sustainable and social development, including in the Pact for the Future and in preparations thus far for the Second World Summit for Social Development.

By recognizing and addressing homelessness as a stand-alone issue and a symptom of broader systemic and societal exclusion, the Summit can pave the path towards the more sustainable, equitable, and just future that the UN has long promised to create and uphold. The framework for how to address today's global challenges has already been developed, we just need the political will and effective multilateral collaboration to implement that framework and fill the gaps.

NGO WORKING GROUP TO END HOMELESSNESS

The NGO Working Group to End Homelessness (WGEH) is a group of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. We advocate at the United Nations for persons who are vulnerable, pursuing the human right to adequate housing for all and to end homelessness. We are committed to the elimination of homelessness in all its forms as described in A/Res/76/133 (2022) and E/Res/2020/7(2020), and the report of the Secretary General on homelessness A/78/236 (2023) as well as A/RES/78/172 (2023) Inclusive policies and programmes to address homelessness, including in the aftermath of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The NGO Working Group to End Homelessness collaborates with the United Nations Member States, Agencies and Commissions, global platforms to end homelessness, academic centres, and individuals who are or who have experienced homelessness to devise solutions and call for change. Learn more at www.wgehomelessness.org

NGO Working Group to End Homelessness: We Call for Homelessness to be Addressed at the Second World Summit for Social Development

Background

The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development envisioned a people-centered framework for social development and committed to ensuring that disadvantaged and vulnerable persons and groups be included in social development. As was declared 30 years ago in the Copenhagen Declaration, "We can continue to hold the trust of the people of the world, only if we make their needs our priority. We know that poverty, lack of productive employment and social disintegration are an offense to human dignity. We also know that they are negatively reinforcing and represent a waste of human resources and a manifestation of ineffectiveness in the functioning of markets and economic and social institutions and processes." (A.CONF.166.9 #23)

Homelessness has been identified as "one of the crudest manifestations of poverty, inequality and social exclusion." It affects people of all ages, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Homelessness is also a gross violation of the human rights to adequate housing, to security of persons, to health, and to protection of the home and family." (ECOSOC, E/CN.5/2020/3, 1.3). Ending homelessness is related to the achievement of all seventeen of the SDGs, which are integrated, indivisible and interlinked. Homelessness sits at the intersection of poverty, public health, housing affordability, domestic violence, mental illness, substance misuse, climate change and natural disasters, urbanization, racial and gender discrimination, social isolation, under and unemployment, political conflict, migration and land rights, to name a few of the causes and consequences of homelessness.

Moreover, the three overarching goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - end poverty, protect the planet and ensure by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity - "leaving no one behind," are core to homeless advocacy. Homelessness is not mentioned once in the 17 goals or 169 targets, yet it is critical that preventing and ending homelessness be incorporated into national and global strategies to achieve Agenda 2030. Globally, 1.6 billion people worldwide live in inadequate housing conditions, with about 15 million forcefully evicted every year, and over 100 million estimated to be homeless. Young people are the age group with the highest risk of becoming homeless and there is a growing concern about an increase in the numbers of elderly who are homeless (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs). Women's displacement caused by global migration and wars have been contributing and exacerbating these United Nations 2005 estimates. These statistics do not include the hidden homeless, for example, women with children who live in untenured situations. Conservatively we can compute that 1 in 5 people fall into one of the three categories of homelessness: people living without accommodation, people living in temporary or crisis accommodation, and people living in inadequate and insecure housing.

As representatives of civil society, we see the debilitating effects on people living in extreme poverty and note that for many, especially women-headed households with children, poverty is deepening. Hunger and food insecurity is increasing. Under and unemployment is prevalent in poor communities. We see the destructive effects of environmental disasters and economic fluctuations as they affect access to education, health care, decent work and the ability to engage in a digital world. Preventing homelessness and providing adequate, affordable housing is a critical first step to all of the above mentioned. Social development must be advanced holistically with multisectoral approaches.

According to the World Social Report 2024, "we live in a period where shocks are becoming more likely" impacting social development. More than 4 billion people still lack any social protection. It is more important than ever that we look to the United Nations which provides a unique, inclusive

and legitimate forum to build global consensus on how to address challenges in this new "crisis" environment and encourage collaboration for the common good. This consensus must support the expansion of social protection floors and include not only social protection instruments like social insurance, social assistance, and labor and economic inclusion programs that help people, especially women, find better jobs but also, but also education, housing and access to health care. We must increase investment in social protections so

that all countries can build up social resilience. For every dollar transferred to poor families, there is an estimated multiplier effect of $2.49 in the local economy. The evidence also suggests impacts on a range of outcomes—from nutrition and early childhood development to climate adaptation and mitigation to women's empowerment and livelihood diversification. (World Bank)

Call to Action

The NGO Working Group to End Homelessness (WGEH) calls for the explicit inclusion of homelessness in the outcomes and declarations of the Second World Summit for Social Development, in order to fully achieve both the goals of the Copenhagen Declaration and Platform of Action and the aims of several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the 2030 Agenda. A home for all is essential to putting people at the center of development, to eradicating extreme poverty, to promoting decent and productive employment and to achieving inclusive societies.

Member States, in these outcomes and declarations, should:

- **Safeguard the Human Right to an adequate standard of living,** addressing homelessness as an affront to human dignity and an obstacle to the enjoyment of the human rights by fulfilling commitments to provide safe, affordable, and supportive housing for all and access to land rights for all.
- **Ensure homelessness is prioritized in the discussion of poverty** at the United Nations, including in the preparations for and at the 2nd World Summit for Social Development, and in discussions across the SDGs, as ending homelessness is essential to ending poverty and achieving Agenda 2030 and its promise to "leave no one behind."
- **Recognize that homelessness takes many forms,** including people living without accommodation, people living in temporary or crisis accommodation, and people living in inadequate and insecure housing.
- **Employ improved data collection methodologies and reporting** on homelessness through the SDG framework. Encourage Member States to capture the accurate and current numbers of people experiencing homelessness along with disaggregated demographic data that can be universally applied to formulate effective national, regional, and global policy.
- **Expand the capacity of developing countries to foster social resilience and inclusive societies** by increasing and extending social protection programs especially for families and children, people with disabilities, and socially excluded persons such as people experiencing homelessness, through domestic resource mobilization and fair and progressive taxation, debt forgiveness and encouraging international cooperation.
- **Enact comprehensive policies and interventions to prevent and address homelessness** by increasing the supply of affordable, permanent housing with social supports and including Persons Experiencing Homelessness (PEH) or people at serious risk of homelessness in the design/implementation/monitoring of all policies and programs, while including Civil Society, particularly the NGO Working Group to End Homelessness, in UN activities/programs targeting homelessness.

CONCLUSION

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Homelessness is one of the most urgent human rights and social justice issues of our time. It exists at the intersection of inequality, exclusion, systemic discrimination, social stigma, and policy failures. Yet, throughout this publication, we have demonstrated that homelessness is not an inevitability, and people all around the world have developed good practices to prevent, address, and support those experiencing homelessness. We heard from those with lived experience, those providing community-based interventions, and those developing policy frameworks at every level, highlighting and exploring the hidden dimensions of homelessness and the pathways toward sustainable solutions.

The chapters in this publication have underscored several key truths. First, homelessness is not a singular experience but a deeply complex and multifaceted reality, disproportionately affecting historically marginalized groups, including women and girls, children, LGBTQ+ individuals, and Indigenous communities. Second, addressing homelessness requires a shift from reactive, temporary interventions to proactive, systemic solutions rooted in universal social protection, access to affordable housing, and human rights-based policymaking. Finally, the connection between local challenges, community-based solutions, and global frameworks highlights the importance of international cooperation and shared accountability in the fight against homelessness.

To move forward, we must recognize that eradicating homelessness is not just about providing shelter—it is about restoring dignity, ensuring social inclusion, and dismantling the structural inequalities that perpetuate extreme poverty and housing insecurity. Governments, civil society, UN agencies, and communities must work together to implement policies that prioritize housing as a fundamental right, strengthen social safety nets, and challenge the stigma that isolates those experiencing homelessness.

As we look ahead, the challenge before us is immense, but the solutions are within reach. With collective action, informed policymaking, and an unwavering commitment to justice, we can build a future where everyone has a home which respects and protects all of their fundamental human rights.

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UNANIMA International is deeply grateful to the individuals and organizations who contributed to the creation of “The Hidden Faces of Homelessness: Global Insights and Pathways Forward.” Without their support, this publication would not have been possible.

First, we wish to **express our gratitude to our esteemed partners at UN-HABITAT and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, as well as the Permanent Missions of Ireland and Poland to the UN,** whose collaboration and shared commitment to advancing solutions for homelessness have been integral to this publication's development.

We would also like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the Member State and government representatives, civil society and grassroots advocates, researchers and academics, practitioners and community-service providers, and those with lived experience from around the world, who generously shared their invaluable knowledge and experiences. The testimony, data, and case studies you shared reflect the lived realities of homelessness globally, and highlight the good practices developed at every level to support those most marginalized in our society. Your contributions provided a rich, diverse perspective on the complex and multifaceted issue of homelessness.

Special thanks to the following partner organizations who contributed to this publication:

ACRATH
AJ Kalinga Foundation
Business and Community Foundation India
Canadian Observatory on Homelessness
Covenant House Toronto
Cara Girls Rescue Centre
CityMakers Mission International
Emfasis Non-Profit
European Union Agency for Asylum
European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA)
FAWCO
Fondazione Internazionale Proclade
Habitat Defenders Africa
International Movement ATD Fourth World
International Presentation Association
Loretto International Community
Make Mothers Matter
McAuley Community Services for Women
Mercy Foundation
Mercy Law
Mukuru Promotion Centre
National Coalition for the Homeless
NGO Committee on Migration
NGO Working Group to End Homelessness
Notre Dame de Sion
Polycom Girls
Rosa Care Organisation
Ruff Institute of Global Homelessness
The Shift
Sophia Housing Ireland
Save the Children International
SH Solutions
Stonewall Community Development Corporation
Vanier Institute of the Family
We The Change Trust
World Habitat
World Organization for Early Childhood Education
WorldWIDE Network Nigeria

Finally, we acknowledge the ongoing support of UNANIMA International’s leadership and staff who have tirelessly worked to ensure this publication’s success and its alignment with our broader mission of advancing social justice and human dignity for those experiencing homelessness.

Together, we hope this publication will serve as both a call to action and a beacon of hope in advancing knowledge and solutions to address homelessness and extreme poverty globally.

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