CAPSTONE PROJECT:
UNANIMA INTERNATIONAL IN COLLABORATION WITH SOPHIA HOUSING ON FAMILY HOMELESSNESS AND TRAUMA
POLICY BRIEF

Summary

Family homelessness is a global epidemic resulted from shortages of affordable housing, increasing migration and socio-economic crises across countries. It exposes children and parents to a high risk of traumatic issues. This paper examines the evolution of global family homelessness through evaluating the causes and experiences of family homelessness in three countries: Greece, the U.S. and India, and provides possible policy responses for UNANIMA International.

Definition of Family Homelessness

Family homelessness is defined as families; such as both single parents and coupled parents with dependent children living in public spaces or in inadequate housing. Inadequate housing is defined as emergency accommodation, including temporary accommodation, homeless hostels, women's shelters, refugee accommodation and institutions, such as health or penal institutions without the provision of housing facilities. Family homelessness includes individuals living temporarily in conventional housing with friends and family due to a lack of affordable or adequate housing.

Characteristics of Family Homelessness

Greece

Families who experience homelessness face the risk of extreme poverty and social exclusion due to the economic collapse of the country. Shelters are more willing to host family units as opposed to lone adults, therefore families are mostly guaranteed different types of temporary housing.[1] Two types of familial homelessness exist within Greece: a) single mothers with two dependent children on social benefits after long-term unemployment, who are widowed or have been divorced or have experienced domestic abuse; and b) families comprised of both parents and dependent children, who lost their low-income jobs after the aftermath of the economic crisis.[2] Emergency social and housing services are available to families in both situations; however, parents with dependent children who face substance or mental problems are not qualified for the same service.

---

[1] National Coalition for the Homeless

[2] European Observatory on Homelessness, Family Homelessness in Europe, 64.

The U.S.

The U.S. has higher rates of family homelessness than any other developed nations in the world.[3] The majority of family homelessness disproportionately affects single mothers with one or more children—most commonly two—without any additional socioeconomic support.[4] The racial component of family homelessness in the United States is critical; minority groups are overrepresented in shelters when compared to white families due to prejudice and substantial access barriers to decent employment, education, health care, and housing. The nature and expression of bias vary by racial and ethnic group, but the effects are similar; generational poverty, high unemployment, low educational attainment and earned income, considerable gaps in wealth accumulation, and homelessness.[5]

India

As per Census survey 2011, there are 1.82 million homeless people in India, which is a definite underestimation when the problem of homelessness is far more dire. In India family homelessness in rural parts is very different from family homelessness in urban areas. Rural areas of India experience 'hidden homelessness', which is people tending to cope with the problem of homelessness through temporary arrangements that render homelessness more hidden. From 2001 to 2011, families without homes increased 37 percent in cities, fell 26 percent in villages.[6]

Causes of Family Homelessness

The causes of homelessness are rooted in different factors, depending on social and geographical means.

Greece

- Shortcomings of the Familistic Welfare Capitalist System

- Migration Crisis

- Social Exclusion of Romani People

- Social/Demographic Changes

The U.S.

- Shortage of affordable housing

[3] Doorways, "The Facts About Family Homelessness," Doorways for Women and Families.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] American Almanac of Family Homelessness 2015.
[6] The Indian Express, "From 2001 to 2011, families without homes increased 37% in cities, fell 26% in villages."

- Domestic abuse

- Socioeconomic issues including economic inequity, racial discrimination, and unemployment.

India

- Imbalanced urbanization -- lack of jobs and education

- Displacement due to compulsory land acquisition by the government

- Social division and exclusion from society due to the caste system.

Current Policy Shortfalls

Greece

- Inadequate government response prior to 2018 due to the economic collapse of the country.

- No current data on the number of homelessness/family homelessness available apart from the pilot data collection program that was implemented in 7 boroughs in May 2018.

- NGOs and Solidarity centers provide ad hoc response services, without long-term solutions.

- Uncertainty over homeless refugee and Romani numbers.

The U.S.

- Conflicting definition of family homelessness among federal agencies creates logistical and bureaucratic challenges in providing services.

- Current data collection methods lead to underestimation.

- Inadequate programs targeting family homelessness prior to 2016 and housing-first remedies overlooking education, healthcare, and inequity fail to mitigate chronic family homelessness.

India

- Lack of holistic definition of homelessness and proper segregation and classification of data on homelessness.

- Underestimation of the number of homeless families, children and single people.

- Ignorance of the need for targeted strategies to handle family homelessness and trauma linked to homelessness.

- Lack of proper budget allocation for family homelessness.

Policy Recommendations for UNANIMA International

Greece

The policy recommendations for UNANIMA in Greece should be a model for the rest of the southern European countries, since the structural causes of family homelessness are very similar across the region.

- Collaborate with United Nations agencies and the Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing for the creation of a capacity building grant from the UN, to provide specific assistance for proper data collection and services addressed to families.

- Regulate the services in Greece bi-annually through partnerships with local NGOs, to ensure the proper allocation of resources and funds.

- Advocate for a Celebrity Ambassador for homelessness to raise awareness and also involve social media and Greek celebrities to attract public attention for the issue.

The U.S.

The initiative will focus on a combination of childcare, healthcare, temporary free or subsidized housing leading to sustainable long-term affordable housing, job placement, education, and communal library involvement as a means of creating a powerful system. UNANIMA should employ a multi-stakeholder approach to help address this chronic issue.

- Work with other NGOs and federal agencies to promote homelessness preventive and supportive services, identification and outreach efforts, and policy formation being consistent, inclusive, culturally sensitive and informed of the inequalities leading to greater vulnerability for each racial or ethnic minority group.

- Advice government to create widely available temporary housing and develop *affordable* long-term housing.

- Partner with public libraries to promote the implementation of communal centers, which can serve as hubs of communal support, education, caretaking, and resource accumulation.

India

Here are some strategies specific to India which UNANIMA can use to tackle the issue of family, women and children homelessness:

- Explore and address structural causes of homelessness/landlessness in urban/rural areas and aim for creation of adequate shelters, short-stay homes, and recovery facilities for the homeless, especially women, children, and older persons.

- Partner with NGOs which work at a local level to identify people going through such ordeal and ensure proper allocation of houses to homeless families and persons with mental illness at risk of homelessness.

- Run programs to create awareness for protection and implementation of women's rights to housing/land/property/inheritance.