UNANIMA International

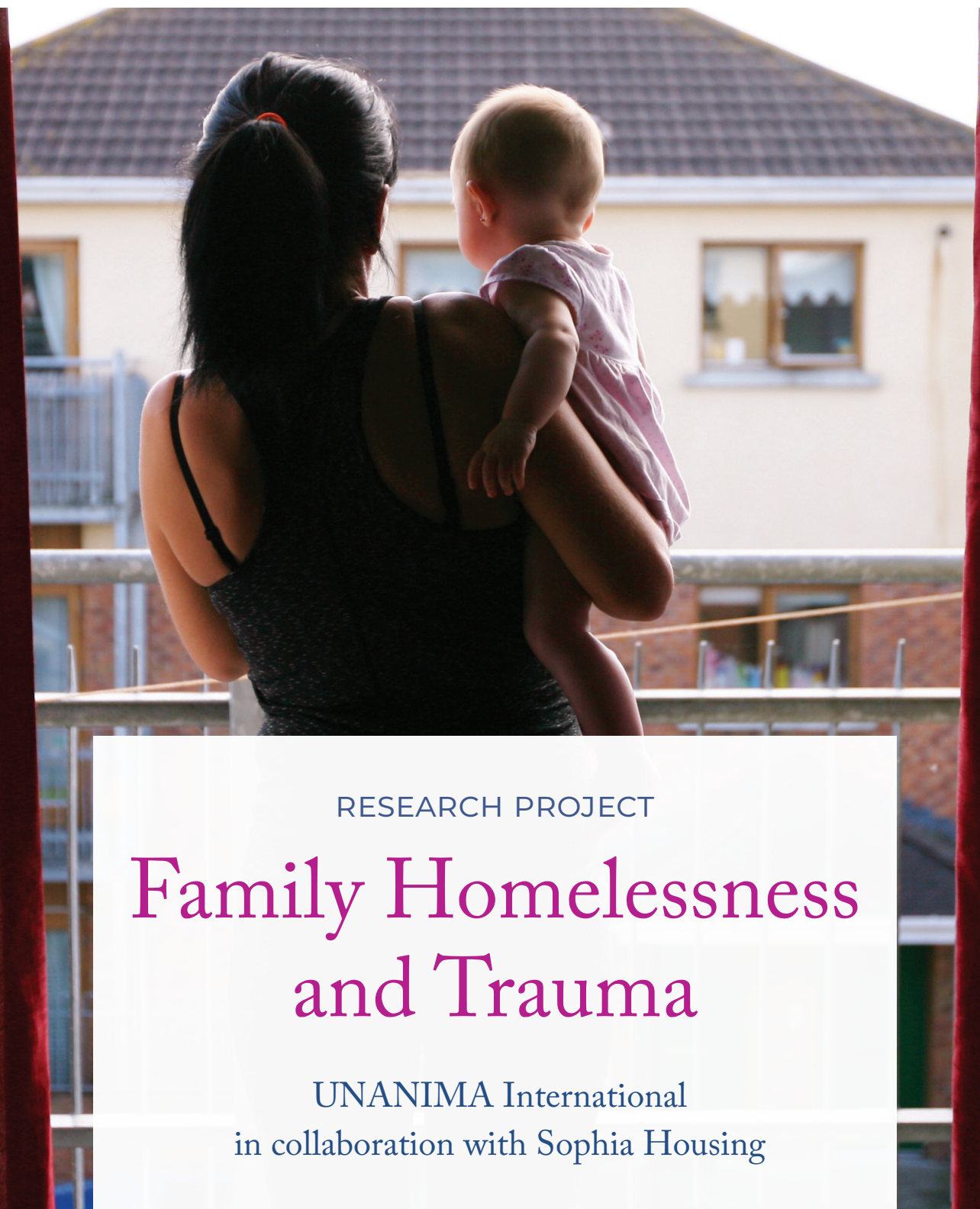**UNANIMA International**
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WE CALL FOR: Global Action to Address, Reduce, and End Family Homelessness; and for a Global Paradigm Shift where Family Homelessness is viewed as the Human Rights issue it is.

WRITTEN AND PREPARED BY

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With inputs from John Mc Evoy, Sophia Housing and Winifred Doherty

Foreword

UNANIMA International and Sophia are Non-Governmental Organizations committed to advocating, achieving and maintaining long term dignity and positive outcomes for all (especially families) experiencing or who have experienced homelessness.

Founded in 2002, UNANIMA International is a coalition of communities of religious women who bring their voices, concerns and experiences as educators, health providers, social workers, development and community builders to the United Nations (UN). Since obtaining ECOSOC special accreditation in 2005 the organisation has committed itself to working for peace and human dignity in response to the needs of our world, by service to their members, the UN and other NGO and community-based groups through advocacy, collaboration education and action. UI's continued and evolving focus on women, children and peoples who have been displaced has prompted the organisation to take a lead role, including research, in homelessness advocacy at the United Nations.

Founded in 1997, Sophia has been supporting people as they emerge from homelessness for over two decades. Through services which strive to offer a holistic, person centred model of care Sophia has been a key responder in the ever-growing needs families and individuals emerging from homelessness face. Currently Sophia Housing supports 617 adults and 169 children with another 134 people in supported outreach programmes. Sophia continues to work with people at their own pace, using key working and care planning to support them in their journey from homelessness towards greater independence for themselves. Sophia's grass roots knowledge and experience of the realities of homelessness combined with their access to SMES Europa1 will be a great asset to the project and in achieving its desired outcomes.

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Introduction

Family Homelessness is unfortunately a growing phenomenon around the world. Homelessness is often considered embarrassing, a taboo subject, and governments tend to understate the problem. In 1962 Thomas Kuhn wrote The Structure of Scientific Revolution. In it he defined and popularized the concept of "paradigm shift". Kuhn argues that scientific advancement is not evolutionary, but a series of "peaceful interludes punctuated by intellectually violent resolutions" one conceptual world view is replaced by another". We believe what is now called for is a paradigm shift in how we perceive the problems of poverty and homelessness and that it is time, for a revolution on the subject. We need urgently a paradigm shift away from the many abusive attitudes and beliefs that circulate around homelessness. We need to start this dialogue by viewing and treating homelessness as what it is: firstly a human and civil rights issues and secondly a structural and systemic issue.

Obtaining accurate numbers around homelessness is difficult, especially in developing countries. [2] In Russia for example, the most recent census report 34,000 homeless households, however political figure Sergey Mironov suggests that there may as many as 5 million people experiencing homelessness in the Russian Federation.[3] Manila, the capital of the Philippines, is reported to have the largest homeless population of any city in the world, estimates of the homeless population vary from several million to tens of thousands.[4] In the world's billion-plus populations, China and India reported numbers of 3 million and 1.77 million homeless respectively.[5] In the USA there are almost 60,000 families with children homeless on any given night, which means that 7.4 out of every 10,000 families are experiencing homelessness.[6] Although Canada is one of the most

affluent countries in the world, child and family homelessness is a serious and growing issue. More than 37% of Canadian households are having difficulty maintaining adequate housing, more and more families are relying on Emergency accommodation.[7] In South Africa the issue of homelessness has stemmed largely from the apartheid period. Growing unemployment, consistent lack of affordable housing, poor social cohesion, and economic and social policies are among the identified factors contributing to the issue. While no official number exists it is estimated that the South African homeless population is approximately 200,000.[8] Combined data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Specialist Homeless Services suggests that on any given night in 2016 there was 116,427 people homeless, this number has continued to rise.[9] While there is very little Australian research exploring mother's views on their homeless experiences, it known that domestic violence is a significant contributory factor most commonly associated with family homelessness.[10] There is a growing trend across many European Countries of an increase in family homelessness. FEANTSA (2017) study showed that homelessness once the preserve of single individuals now sees a growing percentage of families. This study also shows that in 2017 an emerging presence in the homeless population is found in Slovenia, Slovakia, and Greece. Data from France indicates a rather high proportion of families among homeless people. A total of 81,000 homeless adults were accompanied by 31,000 children. Homeless families made up 29 per cent of all homeless people (12% single parents and 17% couple with children). However, this data included both migrant populations who were homeless and those who can access emergency accommodation, therefore experience

among French Citizens maybe significantly lower.[11] Ireland has seen an unprecedented growth of family homelessness since 2014 and a growing incidence of children in emergency settings, particularly in the Dublin region. During March 2017, 815 of the 1069 families in emergency accommodation, 76% were residing in commercial hotels due to capacity limitations in homeless emergency accommodation.[12] In some European countries, family homelessness is now consistently above 20% of the total homeless population.[13] Displacement caused by war and poverty has increased the number of families seeking asylum in Europe and contributed significantly to this increase.[14]

The cause of homelessness across the globe are multifaceted, though some contributing factors consistently stand out, including: shortages of affordable housing, privatization of civic services, investment speculation in housing, unplanned and rapid urbanization, lack of social protection systems including floors, as well as poverty,

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"When you're going through homelessness, you're putting your hand out....it's all one hurdle after another ... it's constant ticking boxes, it's mental torture, to the point where I couldn't get up and do what they were asking me to do. without a drug in my system ... you're constantly looking over your shoulder, you're constantly feeling under threat. I think my mindset back then was cut it off, do yourself in before the system does you in, that type of thing. That's the mentality I was walking around with. I was 23 when I tried to end it all, I'm 29 now and when I look at it, I've come a long way, I really have" - *Sarah, 29*

unemployment and family breakdown. Lack of services and access to facilities for those experiencing mental illness, alcoholism/ substance abuse and displacement caused by conflicts and natural disasters are also contributing factors.

Family Homelessness continues to be a growing social problem affecting families around the world. Homeless mothers and their children are one of societies most disadvantaged and at-risk populations. Family Homelessness once viewed as episodic and situational, has become chronic. Adequate housing is essential to ending homelessness, but it is not sufficient. Families need basic supports beyond descent affordable housing to thrive. Food, education, employment, social protection, transport, health/ mental health care, trauma informed care, and child care services are among the significant support services needed to break the cycle of Homelessness. The impact of Homelessness on mothers is profound. Many experience anger, self-blame, sadness, stigma, fear and hopelessness. Mothers experiencing homelessness often have significant histories of domestic violence.[15] For them, the experience of becoming homeless is another stressor amidst already complicated traumatic experience.

Children also experience high rates of acute health problems while homeless. They are bombarded with stressful and traumatic experiences which has profound effects on their development and ability to learn. Violence also plays a significant role in the lives of the homeless. Children who witness violence are more likely than those who have not to exhibit frequent aggressive and anti- social behaviour, increased fearfulness, higher levels of depression and have a greater acceptance of violence as a means of resolving conflict. Furthermore, given that the scale of family homelessness is a new phenomenon, the impact of trauma on families (women and children) who are experiencing homelessness has not yet been quantified.

Trauma Informed Care

During a key note address at the internal seminar on Housing First held in the Sophia Wisdom Centre, Cork Street Dublin, Ireland in June 2016 Dr Sam Tsemberis[16] invited questions from social care practitioners supporting people experiencing homelessness. One of the Sophia staff asked him "what training he would prioritise for social care staff working with people experiencing homelessness?" Dr Tsemberis responded by stating that "being competent in Trauma Informed Care should be a requisite for all staff seeking to support people to successfully progress out of homelessness". This insight was similar to that of Jean Quinn D.W when she founded Sophia Housing in 1997. Her attempt to break away from the traditional models of service delivery, was one of the first of its time. She envisaged a radical model of practice that would be founded on compassion and care, that at all times would be professional. This was cognisant of the trauma experienced by Service Users prior to becoming homeless and from the experience of homelessness itself.

The ground-breaking work of Peter Cockersell (2018) titled "Social Exclusion, Compound Trauma and Recovery" outlines that "Compound Trauma describes a situation in which a person experiences a sequence of traumatic events usually beginning in infancy or childhood" (Cookersell P, 2018 p17). Maguire N. (2009), in a wide-ranging study highlights the prevalence of the experience of trauma in childhood in the lives of people experiencing homelessness. Williamson (2018) outlines the impact a service can make when it works from a trauma sensitive model or one that seeks to create a Psychologically Informed Environment. Williamson (2018) also outlines that a Psychologically Informed Environment recognises the experience that people have been through before and while being homeless. Services that are competent in trauma

informed care lead to substantially better outcomes for service users, especially Women and Children. In the context of Sophia Housing this remains a challenge for service providers. As, if a large percentage of families who become homeless also have experienced trauma in their lives, services must then create the environment within services that support families to successfully move out of homelessness and recover from the impact of trauma in their lives.

Could Families be the key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals?

The family is the fundamental social unit of all modern societies.[17] They are the base from which we learn to communicate, empathise, compromise and adapt within vital social structures. The importance of the family is reflected in many national public policies, these policies play an important role in national efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The former UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, in 2010 stated *"the very achievement of development goals depends on how well families are empowered to contribute to the achievement of those goals. Therefore, policies focusing on improving the well–being of families are certain to benefit development"*. Given the realities and understanding of how families contribute to social progress they are key to finding the most effective route to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Despite this, global disaggregated data on families is lacking. This prompted Ban Ki-moon in 2014 to call on governments and relevant stakeholders to support data collection and research on family issues and the impact of public policy on families. He called for investment in families, specifically through oriented policy and programme design, implementation and evaluation. This has been recognised by a number of Non-government organisations and UN agencies, so much so that a team of policy experts including Dominic Richardson, UNICEF Innocenti Education Officer, have compiled a synthesis report titled **"Key Findings on Families, Family Policy and the Sustainable Development Goals"** to analyse how these policies are being used to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

Combating the issue of homelessness is integral in achieving the 2030 agenda. Progress in achieving the eradication of Homelessness underpins and can hinder the success and achievement of various goals and their indicators. Goal 11 *"Make cites and human settlements*

Family Homelessness and Development

The issue of Family Homelessness can be understood in a diverse economic, social, cultural and even linguistic context globally. Although the term "Homelessness" is sparse throughout the vast number of Declarations, Agreements, Agendas and other documents produced by the United Nations, it continues to be identified as an emerging and growing issue globally. While the term homeless in its most basic form often refers to a lack of shelter, this, in conjunction with the implications of having no formal shelter is undeniably a Human Rights issue. The term "adequate housing" is one that can be found throughout a number of UN documents. With various definitions within the international space the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Leilani Farha, suggests "the right to adequate housing should be viewed as the right to live somewhere in peace, with

security and dignity. Such adequacy should include security of tenure, availability of services, including social protection, materials, infrastructure and facilities, affordability, habitability, accessibility, location and cultural adequacy." If adequate housing is to be achieved, then homelessness should not be occurring.

The term *Adequate Housing* is present in a number of UN documents. Among the most notable are: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966). Adequate shelter is also mentioned in the 1996 Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements.

At the Housing and Sustainable Development Conference (Habitat III) in Quito (2016), UN Members committed to ending homelessness and progressively recognising the right to adequate housing through their commitment to the New Urban Agenda (2016). This document covers varied grounds, from transportation to renewable energy and is described by the UN as "an action orientated document which will set global standards of achievement in sustainable urban development". Although the language used is not as strong as some of the above it includes perhaps the most notable mention of homelessness. Specifically, the sentence stating the following:

"We will take positive measures to improve the living conditions of homeless people with a view of facilitating their full participation in society and prevent and eliminate homelessness"

inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable", Goal 1 *"End poverty in all its forms everywhere"* and Goal 16 *"Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels"* each have targets that can be directly associated with homelessness. Perhaps the most direct reference to ending homelessness is target 11.1 *"By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums"*. This was confirmed in the Summary of the Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate Housing Ms Liliana Farha who proposed a bold international initiative to end homelessness in keeping with target 11.1 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as this commits to ensuring access for all to adequate housing.

Equally target 1.3 *"Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors"* could provide economic security for individuals and families over the lifecycle especially when encountering risk of homelessness.

The struggle to obtain food (Goal 2), attend or access educational institutions (Goal 4) and access healthcare (Goal 3) is often associated with the homeless experience. In the Habitat's Factsheet on The Right to Adequate Housing it was highlighted that poverty is a common denominator in the experience of homelessness. Often directly associated with lack of social security systems, unemployment, disaster and conflicts families experiencing homelessness are made even more vulnerable.[18] Such situations further exasperate a widening gap in inequalities, having the reverse effect of what Goal 10 *(Reduce inequalities within and among countries)* sets out to achieve. Homelessness poses a threat to the achievement of all 17 goals which are inherently intertwined. Such findings and interlinkages further demonstrate the need for a paradigm shift surrounding homelessness causality and poverty.

As seen below Article 21 of the Declaration of Human Rights (1948) explicitly states everyone has the right to adequate housing.

"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, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control." This set of rights are given a new impetus towards implementation within the SDG's in the commitment to implement social protection systems and measures for all, including floors and elaborated in ILO Recommendation 202.[19]

As well as denying this basic Human Right homelessness, or a lack of adequate shelter, actively promotes social exclusion and the enjoyment of basic Human Rights. Furthermore, without proof of residency, homeless persons and families often face adversities in obtaining or are excluded completely from the ability to vote, access to health care or the enjoyment or social services.[20] This also has the potential to impede on the obtaining of rights set out in Articles 12, 17, 21, 22, 23.

When focusing on Family Homeless the Convention on the Right of the Child (1989) must also be considered. Lack of adequate housing forced evictions and homelessness often cultivates a profound negative impact on a child's life. Due to their specific needs, such events frequently lead to stunted growth and development in all cases. It creates a barrier to the enjoyment of various Human Rights including health, education and personal security. Therefore, when Family Homelessness occurs Articles 9, 16, 19, 20, 24, 26, 27, 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) are subject to being breached. In its *State of the World's Children 2005* report, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) found that over one in every three children in the developing world does not live in adequate housing. Given the pervasiveness and the impact of Family Homelessness and lack of adequate housing on children, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has since stressed the universal character of the right to adequate housing putting emphasis on the fact that this should apply to every child without distinction or restriction of any kind.[21]

As well as the basic denial of Human Rights that homelessness allows, laws that criminalize homelessness and promote street cleaning operations to eliminate them from the streets directly affects the physical and psychological integrity of the population. While current international law does not explicitly prohibit such practices, allowing them encourages further vulnerability. Such laws act as an obstruction to the individuals and their families to enjoying their rights and the 2030 agenda from being achieved.

Research Rationale

UNANIMA International in collaboration with Sophia Housing Ireland/ Europe will seek to address the emergent phenomenon of Family Homelessness. Our particular interest lies in providing a voice to Women and Children experiencing Homelessness. While Family Homelessness is a global issue faced by many nations, no global definition has been agreed upon. In the context of this project, Family Homelessness has been defined by the working definition as: *Families who do not have consistent residency or the support needed to maintain a residency of their own who live episodically, temporarily or chronically in temporary housing, including shelters, locations not intended for human habitat or settlement.*

We will seek to adopt a holistic approach in researching the structural causes and factors of family homelessness as well as the frequently associated compound trauma experienced by the affected adults and children. Through this multifaceted approach we will also explore Family Homelessness and trauma caused by displacement affecting migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, taking into account the distinct legal framework upon which those groups are governed. This research will include some quantitative data by providing statistical data from governments and civil societies, taking into account the absence of definition and the subsequent discrepancies and peripheral nature of the data. As this research seeks to address the emergent phenomenon from a human rights perspective, it was established that conducting qualitative research would be best suited in documenting the human experience of the families. The research has been designed to contain questions and the conduct of semi-structured interviews of small sample size population across several regions, namely North America, Europe, Australia, Asia, and Africa.

The UNANIMA International pilot is intended to assess demonstration projects in Sophia Housing, located in Ireland, as well as other international projects and will seek to implement a trauma informed model and record the impact from grass roots services as well as significantly contribute to a dialogue where Homelessness is viewed as the Human Rights issue that it is.

What is unique about this intervention?

The issue of Homelessness is not adequately being discussed at the international level. The majority of studies thus far have focused on homeless individuals rather than on families as a unit. This study would focus exclusively on families, the causes of Family Homelessness and the profiles of people affected. Furthermore, it has the capacity to contribute significantly to a new and emerging international dialogue.

Methodology

The initial research will focus around five diverse geographic regions and case studies within them. We will be a using a mix of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to achieve a holistic overview of the topic and ensure outcomes that are not limited to particular economic and social contexts. The proposed pilot regions/countries include:

• North America (USA, Canada)
• Europe (Ireland, Greece)
• Australia
• Asia (India, Philippines)
• Africa (Kenya)

Qualitative Methodology

As this project on Family Homelessness and trauma intends to research the issue of Family Homelessness from a human rights perspective, it was established that conducting qualitative research was the style of research best suited to documenting the human experience of families and address the emergent phenomenon from a Human Rights perspective. Such methods will enable us to gain an understanding of the underlying reasons, motivations and give quantifiable insights into the issue of Family Homelessness. The research has been designed to contain questions that enables disaggregated data collection through semi-structured interviews of small sample size populations across the named regions. This framework will allow the interviewers to conduct the interviews with open-ended questions and provide a two-way conversational communication with the respondents. Interviewees and focus groups attendees will include service users as well as professionals working with families experiencing homelessness and policy makers.

The information and data will be collected via the following methods:

• Demographic Survey/questionnaire (paper-based and/or computer-based)
• Semi-structured interviews to be conducted preferably in person. Interviews will be recorded.
• Focus groups
• Observation methods

Data collection procedures will be adapted and heavily monitored and involve the following:

• In respect of the involvement of human participants in the research project, ethical approval procedures and considerations will be established by the Board of the research project

• A literature review will be conducted in order to gather information on the research characteristics. The research will seek to identify knowledge gaps and create a consequential series of questions to achieve further understanding

• Sampling strategies: Purposeful sampling will be selected to represent a small percentage of the target population across the countries mentioned in the above rationale and in accordance with the established research working definition of family homelessness. Focus groups will be established and the focus of the discussion will be defined dependant on the group participants.

• Confidentiality of participants will be ensured by creating an alias during the course of the data analysis by panel members.

• The obtained data from semi-structured interviews will be transcribed before the data analysis. The data could be coded, potentially with the use of software and analyzed with the view of identifying themes, patterns and trends. The study will look into families notwithstanding their age, marital status, ethnicity or level of education. The participants' criteria will be established by the research project internal panel.

Quantitative Methodology

This research will include some quantitative data by providing statistical data from governments and civil societies, taking into account the absence of definition and the subsequent discrepancies and peripheral nature of the data. Quantitative methodology was chosen as it allows for measurable data to be collected and significant trends to be identified and documented. It will be used to analysis economic, social and behavioural trends evident in the research associated with the root causes, experience and outcomes of Family Homelessness, Trauma sensitive care and policy surrounding them. Such data is also expected to contribute significantly to advocacy efforts an intended outcome of the research.

Research Partners

UNANIMA International and Sophia Housing Ireland will be partnering with a number of organizations and individuals to ensure the outcomes of this research are holistic and informed. Such partners will include organisations participating in international advocacy, grassroots organizations working with Family homelessness, individuals with a lived experience, academic institutions and thematic experts.

Co-ordinator of the Project- Jean Quinn, DW (UNANIMA International)

The list of organization below is subject to change and grow as the research progresses.

• UNANIMA International
• Sophia Housing Ireland/Europe
• Individuals from each region with a lived experience of Homelessness
• New York University (NYU)
• Mercy Global Action
• Religious Sister of the Sacred Heart
• Housing First Expert/ Trauma Expert
• United Nations Special Rapporteurs
• Thematic Experts
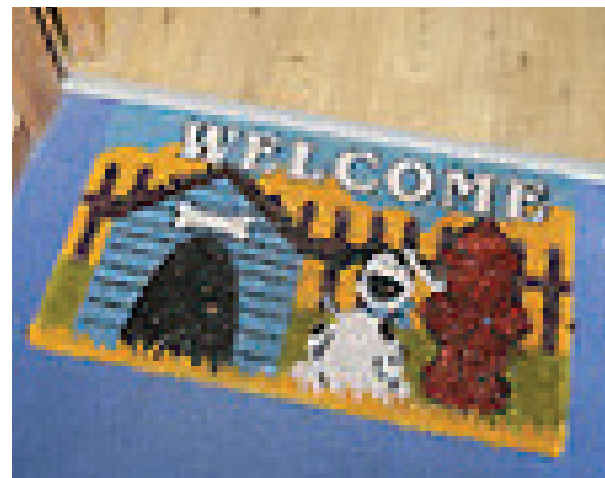
Conclusion

Family Homelessness is a growing social problem affecting families around the world. It is understood and manifesting itself in a diverse economic, social, cultural and even linguistic context globally. By exploring the issue through this holistic approach, the completion of this research has a vast range of possibilities, including but not limited to contributing to the documentation of such an important and emerging issue.

By studying the root causes, the experiences and the outcomes through a range of facets, this project has the potential to provide detailed and informative outcomes appropriate at the regional and international level. Exploring both the challenges, good practices and wider issue this research project could play an important role in documenting the trauma experienced by families who experience homelessness. It also has the potential to recommend the core elements of what would constitute a service that would support families by using a trauma informed model. Such outcomes of could inform service providers and policy makers such as national government departments to set a standard and provide the resources for creating a trauma informed model and an effective service for homeless families. It is hoped that these outcomes will contribute to a paradigm shift in how we perceive the problems of poverty and homelessness, that is so badly needed and promote a dialogue where homelessness is finally viewed as a Human Rights issue.

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