



Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

Volume 30, Number 4

Fall 2021

The Global Housing Crisis: Too Long Ignored by Too Many

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EXPERIENCE

Catholic sisters and other civil society activists are leading the way at the United Nations in shedding light on homelessness. For too long homelessness has been ignored in the general debate of critical concerns across countries and cultures. For the first time in its history, the United Nations is now explicitly addressing homelessness and the need for affordable housing. This was first seen at the [58th Session of the Commission for Social Development](#) in February 2020, with the inclusion of homelessness in its priority theme.

According to experts at the February 10, 2021 UN High-Level Panel, *Affordable Housing and Social Protection Systems for All to Address Homelessness*, the lack of a universally agreed definition of homelessness makes it difficult to measure the problem. What data there is, is often not comparable across countries. While data is scarce, there is evidence that

access to adequate housing is a problem that affects people with diverse economic, social, and cultural backgrounds in both developed and developing countries.

Furthermore, governments around the world are failing to meet their obligation to provide housing, and the accompanying support services such as water and sanitation that most consider basic human rights. This makes homelessness and housing inadequacy two of the most devastating and intractable cross-cutting issues facing the global community. Today, women religious and their partners are demanding that governments do better for women and children, especially girls.

Endemic homelessness has resulted from, and contributes to, the shortage of affordable housing, increased migration, and socio-economic crises across countries. It exposes children and parents to a higher risk of immediate and intergenerational trauma. We see repeated instances of families and even whole communities trapped in a cycle of homelessness.

Homelessness is an extremely complex issue, and each person's circumstances are unique. Women and girls' experience of homelessness differs dramatically from their male counterparts. Their vulnerability to homelessness and housing insecurity is highly associated with factors related to domestic violence, child marriage, and human trafficking. In short, homelessness is an intersectional and pervasive issue. It is a form of violence that affects not just those experiencing it, although that is terrible enough, but by extension

Resolutions to Action is an occasional publication of the Global Concerns Committee of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). Members of the committee are: Margaret Anderson, OP; Laura Berger, OSU; Susan Dunning, CSJ; Christine Garcia, SSND; Fran Gorsuch, CBS; Donna Marie Gribshaw, CDP; Patty Johnson, CSJ; Melinda Pellerin, SSJ; Verónica Esparza Ramírez, OP; and Ann Scholz, SSND, staff.

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to whole communities and our global society, particularly when it is ignored, misunderstood, mislabeled, normalized, and unaddressed. Homelessness will end only when we decide to end it together.

Homelessness is not just a housing problem. A home is more than bricks and mortar. The homes we envision provide security, well-being, and are places where you put down roots, and become invested in the surrounding environment. Home is within a community of family and friends and home is a place where there is access to the services and the opportunities needed to live a fulfilled life.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

The drivers of homelessness are complex. The experience of addiction, domestic violence, and mental illness which often lead to homelessness are compounded by structural forces such as a lack of affordable housing and discrimination which create inequity. Some homelessness is directly related to governments' neo-liberal economic policies, whereby all housing is transferred to the private sector leaving it to the market to provide housing for those who can afford it. The private sector has little interest in building or renting houses to people who cannot afford market rates.

In many countries housing decisions are made in board rooms or government offices very far removed from the reality of those on the ground. They know little of the experience of those who struggle to house their families and are far removed from what those seeking shelter are thinking and feeling. As a result, those with power make decisions which very often are not in the best interest of those most directly affected.

During the COVID-19 pandemic there was a ban in many countries on housing evictions by the private sector, and as a result, homelessness decreased in some jurisdictions. But this "progress" has already proven to be short-lived. Once the bans are lifted, the scourge of homelessness will return with a vengeance.

REFLECTION

"We, as a great human society, we are diminished, we lose the gift of their creativity, the gift of their curiosity, the gift of their potential when it is marooned by all downstream consequences of homelessness."

- Mary McAleese, former president of Ireland.

- When you see a person who is homeless, do you look the other way and keep on walking? Why?
- Why does homelessness generate so much debate and confusion?
- Does your city or village offer safe housing to those who are made homeless? Could your local community offer a home to a family in need of shelter? What might help or prevent that happening?

ACTION

- Plan an action or gathering to acknowledge [World Homeless Day](#), October 10.
- Educate people about homelessness, displacement and trauma.
- Advocate to end homelessness.
 - [UNANIMA International](#) advocates for the homeless and displaced at UN Headquarters, New York.
 - [The National Alliance to End Homelessness](#) provides up-to-date information on national legislation.

- Invite a guest speaker from a local coalition to end homelessness to address your community.
- Encourage your local government to form an advisory group on homelessness.

Resources:

- [UNANIMA International](#) is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) advocating on behalf of Women and Children (particularly those living in poverty), Migrants and Refugees, the Homeless and Displaced, and the Environment at the United Nations. In addition to their advocacy in New York, they provide the following resources on homelessness:
 - [Hidden Faces of Homelessness: International Research on Families Volume One and Volume Two](#)
 - [Family Homelessness through the Lens of the United Nations 2030 Agenda Volume One and Volume Two](#)
 - [The Intersections of Family Homelessness and Human Trafficking](#)
 - [Preliminary Findings on Family Homelessness, Displacement and Trauma Through COVID-19 Crisis](#)
 - [The Impact of Personal & Family Circumstances on Homelessness](#)
- The [National Alliance to End Homelessness](#), a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization whose purpose is to end homelessness in the United States. Their resources include toolkits, training materials, data, publications, videos etc.