Homelessness

Homelessness is a complex and pervasive issue that affects individuals and communities across the country. In recent years, the number of people experiencing homelessness has risen, highlighting the urgent need for action and compassion.

Quotations from Catholic Social Teaching

"The Church, "sharing the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially those who are poor or affected in any way," feels it has a serious obligation to join with those who are working, without self-interest and with dedication, to find concrete and urgent solutions to the housing problem and to see that the homeless receive the necessary attention and concern on the part of public authorities".

John Paul II, Letter to Pontifical Commission Justitia et Pax, 1987

"Lack of housing is a grave problem in many parts of the world, both in rural areas and in large cities, since state budgets usually cover only a small portion of the demand. Not only the poor, but many other members of society as well, find it difficult to own a home. Having a home has much to do with a sense of personal dignity and the growth of families."

Pope Francis, Laudato Si (152), 2015

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WHAT IS THE STORY OF HOMELESSNESS IN THE UK?

For the last five years, 'core' homelessness (rough sleeping, people living in sheds, garages and other unconventional buildings, sofa surfing, hostels and unsuitable temporary accommodation such as B&Bs) has been rising each year in England. Homelessness reached a peak in 2019, when the numbers of homeless households jumped from 207,600 in 2018 to over 219,000 at the end of 2019. [1]

Homelessness in the UK is a multifaceted issue with several underlying causes and challenges. Some of the key issues include:

Lack of Affordable Housing: A shortage of affordable housing is a significant factor contributing to homelessness. High housing costs, coupled with stagnant wages and limited social housing availability, make it difficult for many individuals and families to secure stable housing.[2] National Housing Federation analysis of the latest affordable housing figures and homelessness statistics, has found that for **every new social home built** in England in 2022/2023, **six households were accepted as homeless** by their local council.[3]

Economic Inequality: Poverty and economic inequality play a major role in homelessness in the UK. People living on **low incomes or facing unemployment are at greater risk** of homelessness, as they may struggle to afford housing, utilities, and other necessities.

Family Breakdown: Family breakdown, including relationship breakdown, domestic violence, and family disputes, can lead to individuals becoming homeless. Some young people also **experience homelessness after leaving care** or being estranged from their families.[4]

Mental Health and Substance Abuse: Mental health issues and substance abuse can both contribute to homelessness and be exacerbated by it. Individuals experiencing mental health challenges or addiction may struggle to maintain stable housing and access the support they need, **26% of people who are homeless in the UK cite mental health as a reason for being homeless.** Furthermore, these health issues are exacerbated by the experience of homelessness.[5]

Rough Sleeping and Hidden Homelessness: Rough sleeping, or street homelessness, is the most visible form of homelessness, but many people experiencing homelessness are "hidden" and may be staying in temporary accommodation, sofa-surfing, or living in overcrowded or inadequate housing situations. There is limited data on this due to the complexities of reaching this population, however, there is evidence to suggest some population groups, such as women, young people and ethnic minority groups, are more likely to experience "hidden" homelessness than others. [6]

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO A NEW GOVERNMENT

Ensuring preventative measures are made a priority: where there are high levels of risk for an individual to end up homeless (such as leaving the military, the care system, prison, experiencing poverty, family breakdown or mental health issues) on going support should be given to keep individuals in safe and secure shelter.

Ensuring everyone has access to help: including abolishing priority need in England & Wales, which means often people are the end of long waiting lists.

Ensuring that a lack of a local connection is never a barrier to support: Local authorities can make inquiries into whether a person has a local connection to the local authority area they have applied for support, however, in many cases this local connection becomes a barrier for an individual to settle where is best for them.

Housing Benefit that truly covers the cost of housing and reflects projected rent rises and a new standard private rented tenancy in England and Wales with limits on annual rent increases.

Access to specialist employment and housing support for homeless people: to give the best possible opportunity to those who are homeless to rebuild their lives.

Policy reccomendations have been inspired by Crisis UK

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WHAT CAN YOU DO?

A CALL TO TACKLE HOMELESSNESS IN YOUR LOCAL AREA

1 - SEE AND ACT ON THE IMMEDIATE NEEDS OF THOSE WHO ARE HOMELESS

Are there immediate needs of those who experience homelessness in your local area that you can help meet? Perhaps this is ensuring there are foodbanks or soup kitchens that are running, or emergency kits are given out that provide toiletries or a spare blankets and warm extra layers.

2 - ASSESS THE ROOT CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS IN YOUR LOCAL AREA

Listen and be present to those who you meet - what are their stories, are there common links as to the reason people are experiencing homelessness in your locality? What can you identify as the root causes of homelessness and rough sleeping?

3 - TACKLE THESE NEEDS WITH CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

Question how these root causes can be tackled - does there need to be better mental health provisions in your community? Do those leaving prison need ministering to and to be better journeyed with? Do those leaving care need more support from the community?

"We can find no social or moral justification, no justification whatsoever, for lack of housing. The Son of God came into this world as a homeless person. The Son of God knew what it was to start life without a roof over his head."

Pope Francis, St. Patrick's Church in Washington, D.C, 2015

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WHAT IS THE CSAN NETWORK DOING?

Cardinal Hume Centre: The Cardinal Hume Centre, based in Westminster, London, enables people to gain the skills and support they need to overcome poverty and homelessness. The Centre was founded by Cardinal Basil Hume in 1986 as a direct response to the high numbers of homeless young people sleeping on the streets and families living in inadequate bed and breakfast accommodation.

Depaul UK: Depaul UK helps young people who are homeless, vulnerable and disadvantaged. They have 38 varied and complimentary projects based around the UK that work with young people to tackle homelessness at every level. Depaul UK also run Depaul Nightstop UK, the affiliated body for over 45 Nightstop schemes across the UK.

NOAH Enterprise: NOAH (New Opportunities and Horizons) is a Luton-based charity, working across Bedfordshire to offer hope and support to people struggling against homelessness and exclusion. NOAH works with the whole person to find permanent and individually tailored pathways out of homelessness and destitution.

The Passage: The Passage runs London's largest voluntary sector day centre for homeless and vulnerable people, each day helping more than 200 men and women. Their team of outreach workers make contact, often late at night and early in the morning, with those sleeping rough in Victoria as they are bedding down or getting up. The Passage has a 40-bed hostel, Passage House, and also engages in homelessness prevention, outreach, hospitality, assessment and advice, health, primary services, employment, training and welfare advice, faith and community based projects, and chaplaincy.

Your Place: Your Place (formerly Caritas Anchor House) is a residential/life skills centre in East London for single homeless people. The centre helps homeless and vulnerable people to turn their lives around through addressing the root causes of their issues through training, education and personal rehabilitation.

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