

The Case for Action on Global Homelessness: Why homelessness can no longer be ignored in climate, health and education agendas

Study overview

This issue of Evidence Bits draws on *The Case for Action on Global Homelessness* (Depaul International, January 2026), which examines the scale, drivers and consequences of homelessness worldwide and its significance for global development priorities. The report brings together global data and policy analysis to highlight the structural drivers of homelessness and its cross-sector implications.

Globally, an estimated 1.6 to 3 billion people lack adequate housing, and at least 330 million people experience absolute homelessness. Despite its scale and wide-ranging impacts, homelessness receives limited attention within international development frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals.

The study presents homelessness as a multi-dimensional phenomenon encompassing both visible and hidden forms of housing insecurity. It is shaped by structural factors such as housing markets, poverty and social protection systems, alongside intersecting inequalities related to gender, migration and social exclusion. Addressing homelessness is therefore closely linked to progress across key development sectors.

The current 'Evidence Bits' is based on the publication: Depaul International (2026) *The Case for Action on Global Homelessness*. <https://int.depaulcharity.org/policies/the-case-for-action-on-global-homelessness/>.

Depaul International oversees a group of leading homelessness charities, working across the world since 1989 with a mission to end homelessness, supporting the most marginalised and improving the lives of those affected by homelessness.

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Key Findings

Point 1

Homelessness and climate change

- Extreme weather events displace more than 20 million people annually, while climate change could force up to 216 million people to move within their countries by 2050.
- People experiencing homelessness are particularly exposed to climate-related risks, including heatwaves, floods and air pollution.

Point 2

Homelessness and health

- People experiencing homelessness face a shorter life expectancy than the general population by up to 17.5 years and have elevated risks of tuberculosis, HIV, substance misuse and suicide.
- Evidence from the UK shows that housing interventions can reduce unplanned healthcare costs, generating savings of £2.43 for every £1 invested.

Point 3

Homelessness and education

- Children experiencing homelessness are more likely to miss school, achieve lower academic outcomes and face increased risks of exploitation and violence, contributing to long-term disadvantage.
- Displacement due to conflict and climate-related disasters further disrupts access to education. Refugees and migrants often face barriers to stable housing and public services, increasing vulnerability to homelessness and educational exclusion.

Point 4

Gender and inequality

- Domestic abuse is a leading cause of homelessness among women and children, while women experiencing homelessness and LGBTQ+ people face heightened risks of violence and exploitation.
- Homelessness is frequently undercounted due to limitations in data collection, particularly among women, young people, LGBTQ+ individuals, ethnic and racial minorities, refugees and migrants with insecure status, obscuring its relationship to wider patterns of inequality.

Key Policy and Practice Implications

Homelessness receives limited attention in international development policy and funding. Housing-related Official Development Assistance (ODA) accounted for less than 0.09 per cent of total ODA in 2023, with only three projects explicitly referencing homelessness. Only 9 per cent of philanthropic funding in relevant sectors mentioned homelessness in project descriptions.

Depaul International's study argues that homelessness is a structural global development challenge and calls for coordinated action by governments, development agencies and funders to strengthen global responses and investment in housing security:

1. Recognition

- Recognise homelessness as a cross-sector development challenge by integrating housing security into climate, health and education strategies.

2. Measurement

- Improve data and measurement to capture hidden forms of homelessness and marginalised populations and strengthen policy design and accountability.

3. Investment

- Scale up investment in affordable and climate-resilient housing as a cost-effective and preventive response to structural drivers of homelessness.

4. Alignment

- Align development and climate finance with homelessness prevention by embedding housing security within funding frameworks.

Further Related Reading

[Institute of Global Homelessness](#)
[Depaul Group Strategy 2024-2029](#)

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