

UNANIMA International at WUF12

Overview

Held every two years, the World Urban Forum is the premier global conference convened by UN-Habitat to address rapid urbanization and its impact on communities, cities, economies, climate change, and policies. The 12th Session of the WUF is taking place in Cairo, Egypt from November 4-8, 2024. The theme is **“It all Starts at Home: Local Actions for Sustainable Cities and Communities.”** WUF12 “will focus on localizing the Sustainable Development Goals, shedding light on the local actions and initiatives required to curb the current global challenges affecting the daily life of people, including unaffordable housing, rising living costs, climate change, the lack of basic services, and ongoing conflicts.” UNANIMA International will be attending the WUF12 to uplift our work on homelessness and ensure the nuances of the issue are better understood and included in the proceedings. We will also be highlighting our new publication on "The Hidden Faces of Homelessness: Global Insights and Pathways Forward," and engaging with a broader audience to share key takeaways, policy recommendations, and best practices. We will be collaborating at the Forum with partners like the Working Group to End Homelessness, Polycom Girls, Habitat Defenders Africa, the Habitat International Coalition, and the Institute for Global Homelessness.

Advocacy Priorities

We at UNANIMA International welcome the theme of this year’s World Urban Forum, as this will be an important platform to uplift the realities of those at the grassroots and share recommendations with global policymakers based on lived experiences. Grassroots communities are best positioned to craft informed, sustainable, and effective solutions to the challenge they face. Global policies, therefore, must be grounded in local action and insight to drive meaningful, lasting change. At WUF12, our advocacy efforts will be focused on:

- **Uplifting the gendered and often “hidden” manifestations of homelessness shared with us by our grassroots networks**
- **Providing insights on the gendered intersections of homelessness with other global challenges like climate change, human trafficking, and mental health**
- **Sharing holistic, intersectional, and community-based approaches to address the root causes of homelessness and empower those experiencing homelessness**
- **Promoting a paradigm shift where homelessness is destigmatized and seen not as a personal failure but rather as a structural failure and human rights violation**

¹<https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/10/1155701>

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For the first time in the UN's 75 year history, we are beginning to talk about homelessness - yet too often we think only of the visible image of individuals living unsheltered on city streets. A more nuanced understanding of the experiences of women and girls, children, and other marginalized groups in these contexts is necessary to inform effective policy making and foster sustainable and equitable social development. Policymakers need to consider the various manifestations of homelessness which are gendered, out of sight, and often overlooked, including: living in inadequate housing which is unsafe and non-inclusive of other human rights such as sanitation, living with too many people under one roof, living in informal settlements, living with abusers such as in situations of family and domestic violence, and being trafficked or living in a forced marriage. Homelessness is often considered embarrassing, a taboo subject, and this stigma contributes to the gendered invisibility of those experiencing homelessness. Systemic and societal biases act as barriers to quality care and resources for those experiencing homelessness, driving insecurity and contributing to the cycle of extreme poverty and homelessness. We need a new approach which exposes not just the individual injustices of homelessness, but also the broader systems which engender, foster, and profit from the unequal and unsustainable status quo in both the Global North and the Global South.

A lack of social protection coverage and inadequate access to gender-responsive services across the globe also remains a major obstacle for addressing the root causes and gendered manifestations of homelessness. Despite increasing efforts and commitments to expand social protection programs since 2015, a new report released by UN Women reveals that two billion women and girls are without access to any form of social protection.¹ Furthermore, the lack of gender-responsive services for women experiencing homelessness including reproductive health care, financing, and avenues for legal recourse can leave displaced women and girls even more vulnerable and unable to access secure housing and escape the cycle of poverty. Policymakers at all levels should prioritize increasing and extending gender-responsive social protection systems and financing mechanisms that meet women and girls where they are.

Addressing homelessness requires cooperation and solidarity across sectors and borders. The complex, multifaceted, and increasingly interconnected forces that contribute to global homelessness means that governments cannot address these issues on their own. Member States, local governments, civil society organizations, private sectors, and other stakeholders must sit together to design policies and plans which first and foremost support the development of the community, building ownership from the community perspective to empower and foster social inclusion. It is crucial that women and girls who have experienced homelessness participate in decision-making processes and are empowered to share their lived experiences, and this should not take place only during the WUF12. Grassroots insights and perspectives are invaluable to creating policies and programs that are informed, effective, and sustainable.

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As such, Member States and other stakeholders should use the learnings from the WUF12 to inform and enact the following actions:

- 1. Develop Global and National Action Plans to Address Homelessness**
Every country should be encouraged to adopt and implement national action plans to address homelessness, set measurable targets, allocate sufficient resources, and hold themselves accountable for progress. Additionally, establishing a global framework that supports these national efforts will enable shared learning and progress on a global scale. Programs at every level should establish actionable, solution-oriented, and gender-responsive mechanisms which integrate universal social protection frameworks
- 2. Commit to Accurate Data Collection and Reporting**
The absence of accurate, comprehensive data on homelessness is one of the greatest obstacles to effective policy-making. Governments and the international community must commit to developing systems for gathering and reporting data on homelessness, with attention to those experiencing the more hidden forms of homelessness. This data will allow for evidence-based interventions and ensure that homelessness remains a visible and urgent issue in need of solutions.
- 3. Incorporate Homelessness into Reporting and Reviews**
Homelessness must be integrated into SDG reporting frameworks at national and international levels. By including homelessness reduction as an indicator of social development, we can ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable are always considered in evaluations of progress toward the 2030 Agenda.

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