



SITUATION AND ACCESS TO SERVICES OF HOMELESS CHILDREN AND ADULTS IN ADDIS ABABA

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BRIEFING NOTE





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This briefing note summarises what is known about the scale and causes of homelessness in Addis Ababa, the characteristics of homeless children and adults, and their access to services and assistance. The information is drawn from a 2018 study on service delivery for destitute households in Addis Ababa carried out by Development Pathways on behalf of UNICEF Ethiopia and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

The research included an in-depth literature review, secondary analysis of survey datasets, and qualitative field research in the sub-cities Addis Ketema and Arada. Interviews were conducted with nearly two hundred people, including: individuals and families living on the street; officials from the federal, city, sub-city and woreda administrations; NGOs and community-based organisations; and frontline workers involved in service delivery. A narrow definition of homelessness was employed, focusing on individuals or families with no land or house and not the broader group of people in substandard accommodation.

Scale of homelessness

Data on the number of homeless households is scarce. This is true both globally and in Ethiopia and results from the challenging nature of measuring homeless populations. Conventional methods of enumerating populations, such as the census, are based upon counting people where they live. But homeless people do not have a fixed residence, and some are even very mobile. Those dedicated studies on homelessness that have been done often suffer from weaknesses: sample sizes are generally small, not representative and not systematically drawn. Definitions of homelessness are inconsistent. Moreover, homeless people are often reluctant to be interviewed and, for many, being identified by government authorities may appear threatening.

Estimates of the number of homeless people in Addis Ababa vary significantly, depending on the data source and methodology used. In the 2007 Population and Housing Census, homeless persons were enumerated in the place where they spent the night on the enumeration day. Overall, the census enumerated 5,210 homeless people in Addis Ababa and 25,020 across the entire county. Other studies indicate that the true scale of homelessness is much higher, though the lack of common definitions and methodologies means that estimates are not directly comparable:

- A 2007 study by UNICEF and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs suggested that there were about 60,000 children in street situations in the capital. This number included children working 'on the street' to earn money for themselves and their families and those 'of the street' who are homeless.
- A few years later, in 2010, in collaboration with the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs and the NGO StreetInvest, UNICEF conducted a headcount in Addis Ababa of street children, defined in the study as 'any child whose life is controlled by the street', up to the age of 22 years. Sixteen social workers, divided into teams of four, counted children at key sites in the city during the day, and sometimes at night, over a five-week period between October 2010 and January 2011. The final results of the counting in Addis showed a total of 11,830 street children. In addition, there were an estimated 9,000 children in residential care in the capital.
- A recent report by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs places the number of homeless people in Addis Ababa at around 24,000 in 2018; approximately 10,500 street children and 13,500 homeless adults. This figure is based on estimates solicited by the researchers of the report during interviews and focus groups with sub-city officials, community members, and a small number of NGOs.

Causes of homelessness

Homelessness is typically the result of the cumulative impact of a number of factors. The drivers of homelessness can be classified into three main categories: structural factors; gaps and failures in service delivery; and individual circumstances.

The main structural factors causing homelessness include poverty and the shortage of affordable housing in Addis Ababa. When asked about reasons for living on the streets, 70 percent of homeless respondents in the capital pointed to factors related to a lack of income due to job loss, unemployment or underemployment. Underpinning all other drivers of homelessness is the lack of low-cost housing. Rapid urbanisation and unprecedented population growth have created enormous pressure on the housing market. Around 80 percent of the population live in sub-standard slum dwellings, the majority of which are government-owned 'kebele' houses built with mud and wood or straw several decades ago. Moreover, the capital's inner-city slums are being demolished to make way for the development of new housing schemes, triggering important socio-economic disruptions in the affected communities. The housing shortage is expected to worsen as the capital's population size will nearly double to 8.9 million in 2035.

Gaps in service delivery are also a contributing factor to homelessness. For example, people with disabilities are over-represented among the homeless population. Available data suggest that homeless people are seven times more likely to have a severe disability than the general population. This implies that the lack of rehabilitation services and the limited supply of assistive devices are contributing causes of homelessness. Other gaps include, among others, the limited supply of mental health care services and the under-coverage of safety net programmes.

Individual and relational factors refer to circumstances that affect people or their families and can lead to homelessness. Street-connected children and youth frequently cite experiences of abuse, family conflict and loss of a parent as the reason for their street involvement. Among urban street children, more than half have lost one or both parents compared with 14 percent among the general child population. Domestic violence is an important cause of homelessness for women. Mental health and addiction challenges can be both a cause and consequence of homelessness. Moreover, because of the dynamic characteristics of urban populations, there are often more limited social networks and support mechanisms and higher levels of social exclusion than in rural areas.

Socio-demographic profile

Many homeless children and adults in Addis Ababa have a migrant background. Around 60 percent of homeless people were born in a rural area and relocated to the capital, usually in search of opportunities to escape rural poverty and earn a better income. Other, less frequently cited reasons for moving to the city include: the death of a parent; domestic violence; war or conflict; natural disasters; and trafficking. Newly arriving migrants typically do not immediately end up on the street; on average, respondents left their place of origin five and a half years ago and had been living on the street for the last four years. Reports also indicate that many homeless adolescent girls were initially engaged in domestic work but left after experiencing abuse by their employer. However, it is important to stress that migration itself is not a driver of homelessness – many people migrate but do not become homeless and many homeless people have not migrated.

The majority of homeless people engage in informal work to earn an income. Common livelihoods include petty street vending; casual day labour in the construction industry; and waste collection. Women often do activities such as washing clothes and baking injera, while adolescent boys may engage in casual day labour or shining shoes if they can afford to buy a kit. Average earnings are relatively low; around 2,000 Birr per month among those with a regular job, such as working for waste collection associations, and between 500 and 1,000 Birr per month among those engaging in activities such as street vending. An estimated 28 percent of homeless men and 44 percent of women engage in begging to supplement their income. Overall, homeless people experience very high levels of discrimination in the labour market. For mothers with children, the lack of secure accommodation or creche facilities means that they cannot move far from home to look for income opportunities. In addition, it is difficult to get a job without having a *Kebele* ID and a guarantor, requirements that are often difficult to fulfil for homeless people.

Homeless people are often victims of crime, rather than perpetrators. Life on the street is particularly dangerous for girls and single women. During interviews, many said they live in constant fear of sexual abuse, harassment and theft. Homeless people often have a conflicted relationship with the police. On the one hand, several women described receiving support from the police during insecure situations. On the other hand, single males, in particular, described having an antagonistic relationship with police officers, who frequently chase them away from their regular sleeping spots at bus stops and other public spaces.

Access to services and assistance

The main policy response to homelessness has been repatriation and reunification. This typically involves police round-ups during the night and moving homeless children and adults to centres outside of the capital, where they are given training or supported to relocate back to their place of origin to be reunited with their family. However, it is increasingly recognised that these operations are not an effective solution.

Government and NGOs operate a number of shelters and homes across Addis Ababa, but the number of beds available is insufficient to meet demand. The city government runs two homes for orphans who need permanent residential care. The charity 'Retrak' operates two shelters for boys and one for girls, offering temporary accommodation and psychosocial support, combined with efforts to reunify children with their families. The 'Sacro' shelter in Arada sub-city has 120 beds, catering mainly for women with children, many of whom have lived at the shelter for several years. In Addis Ketema, the 'Forum for Sustainable Child Empowerment' can accommodate up to 40 children at a time, while the 'Organisation for Prevention, Rehabilitation and Integration of Female Street Children manages a shelter specifically for homeless girls and victims of sexual abuse. The Mission for Community Development Programme (MCDP) focuses on returnees from the Middle East. Most NGOs run their own outreach programmes but also accept referrals from the police and BoWCA. Levels of coordination and information sharing between different actors have improved significantly in the last few years.

Access to accommodation is the number one priority for homeless people, but the provision of low-cost housing is very constrained. The Government of Ethiopia owns a significant stock of low-quality *kebele* houses that are rented out to the public at a very low price. If tenants die or move out, the sub-city housing office re-allocates *kebele* houses to people on a waiting list, compiled by woreda housing offices based on recommendation letters from *Ketena* committees. Homeless people, especially those who have been living in the same woreda for at least two years, can be included in the priority list. But, according to officials, less than one in ten applicants is given access to government housing and waiting times are very long – often five to ten years. As part of Ethiopia’s Integrated Housing Development Programme, government is also constructing ‘condominium’ houses that are sold at a subsidised rate using a lottery system. Low-income households are largely excluded from the programme though, because most cannot afford the deposit or monthly mortgage and service repayments.

General improvements in the education and health sector have benefitted vulnerable groups, including homeless people. Compared with the rest of the country, the health infrastructure in Addis Ababa is relatively well developed with a high coverage of services through a combination of Health Extension workers, woreda health centres, public hospitals and NGO-run clinics and hospitals. The health fee waiver programme provides essential support for low-income families; however, many homeless people are excluded from the programme, as they do not have a *Kebele* ID. Service delivery for people with disabilities is very limited, including access to basic assistive devices. During interviews, homeless families with children indicated that they are able to attend school, and benefit from initiatives such as the school meals programme. However, levels of dropout are high due to work commitments and other challenges resulting from the lack of stable accommodation.

Government and NGOs implement employment and livelihoods programmes, but their scope and effectiveness is limited. The Urban Productive Safety Net Programme (UPSNP) is the main income support programme available to low-income families in Addis Ababa, and efforts are ongoing to integrate support for homeless people into UPSNP. A challenge is that the programme has a fixed quota for the number of beneficiaries in each woreda, which means that many households in need of support are unable to enrol. Other initiatives – including vocational training, public employment centres, and provision of microcredit – are generally limited and not homeless-friendly.

Recommendations

Efforts are needed to remove barriers that make it difficult for homeless people to access mainstream services as well as build the supply side of more specialised support services that are currently not available. Key recommendations include the following:

- Review access to identification for homeless people, with the aim of developing a uniform process of providing an ID card that grants access to the necessary services – either by adjusting requirements for obtaining the national identification card, or by issuing a separate or temporary ID card for people who do not have proof of address.
- Increase funding of NGOs to expand the provision of shelter and childcare facilities near city centres; improve transparency and feedback mechanisms in the allocation of *kebele* rental housing; and explore options for the sub-city administrations to make land available where homeless people can legally establish shelters.
- Continue to improve access to the UPSNP for homeless people and resolve challenges in opening bank accounts; consider making petty trading on the streets legal; and explore the feasibility of incentivising and potentially subsidising *Iddirs* to provide support to the homeless.
- Ensure homeless people have easy access to the health fee waiver programme; review manuals and training packages for Health Extension workers to ensure adequate attention for interacting with and assessing the needs of homeless people; and ensure all young children, including those living on the street, are included in vaccination programmes.
- Strengthen access to protection services, including training for police officers to enhance their understanding and capacities to work with homeless people and invest in social workers to provide outreach services.

Notes

For more information and a list of references, please see: UNICEF, MOLSA and Development Pathways (2019). *Situation and access to services of people with disabilities and homeless people in two sub-cities of Addis Ababa*. Research report prepared for UNICEF Ethiopia and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

This brief is drawn from the full study report entitled: Situation and Access to Services of Persons with Disabilities in Addis Ababa. The study was commissioned by UNICEF Ethiopia under the Social Policy and Evidence for Social Inclusion (SPESI) section. It was undertaken by Development Pathways.

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