
A Homeless Christmas for About 150m Children Across the World in 2019

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Hard-hit regions like Asia, Africa or Latin America - although the latter saw a decline in street children in the last decade - have become accustomed to the urban imagery of children living on the streets.

As people across the world celebrate the holidays gathering at home for celebratory dinners with family and friends, while putting together their toy and goodies wish lists; for about 150 million children, according to the United Nations, this will not be such a merry Christmas as they will spend the season in the streets.

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Although homelessness oftentimes conjures up the idea of a single adult living in the streets, in a park bench or under a bridge, the number of families and children, growing up in the streets is an increasing unaddressed problem and it is the holidays that are especially difficult for homeless children, as Barbara Duffield a specialist on homelessness, told CNN.

“There is the psychological aspect of not having the same experience as fellow classmates, who get to decorate their homes, receive presents and celebrate,” the specialist from an organization focused on the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness added.

And these street children - a definition adopted by United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (Unicef) for any child below the age of 18 years for whom the streets or a

deficient dwelling have become their habitual residence - are found both in the developed and underdeveloped world alike.

For instance, according to the British housing charity Shelter, at least 135,000 children will be homeless and living in temporary accommodation across Britain on Christmas day, the highest number in 12 years.

"They are being uprooted from friends, living in cold, cramped B&Bs and going to bed at night scared by the sound of strangers outside," the shelter's Chief Executive Polly Neate told The Guardian.

While in the world's largest economy, the United States, the latest available [data](#) from the Department of Education shows that over 1.3 million students experienced homelessness in the 2016-17 school year, the highest number ever registered, and the number estimated for children living under this condition is around 2.5 million in the U.S. alone.

The multidimensional causes of homelessness make it a complex issue that is mostly attributed to economic inequality and poverty, but it can also range from disease resulting in the death of parents, lack of proper housing options or violent conflicts displacing millions across the world.

"The drivers of homelessness are mainly structural rather than a result of an individual's agency", [explained](#) Dr. Suzanne Speak, an expert on the state of homelessness in developing countries from Newcastle University.

For the expert, child homelessness is also increasing and in many countries, it is quite common to find households with children living on the street, which can sometimes be very long term, leading to generations of children being born and raised on the streets.

A common misconception regarding homeless people is that they are the visibly destitute beggars as within developing countries they also include rough sleepers or those in inadequate housing. Such is the case of a family from Australia helped by the NGO [Mission](#) Australia.

Craig, his wife Laura and their nine-year-old daughter Sophie couldn't afford groceries, rent or bills and were forced to spend weeks moving between friends' homes, but wore out all their welcomes in the days before Christmas. They ended up spending the holiday last year in a tent in an inner-city park.

Like Craig's family, according to the NGO, more than 116,000 Australians are homeless on any given night. While there is no data about the exact number of homeless people across the European Union, similar cases are more common especially in countries affected by the economic crisis and the migrant influx.

"The European Commission should collect data on homelessness. It is challenging but it is not impossible and it could already do a lot more with the national data that exists. Hidden homelessness, rough sleeping (situations) and people staying in emergency accommodation is really the tip of the iceberg," Policy Coordinator for the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (Feantsa) Ruth Owen said.

Other hard-hit regions like Asia, Africa or Latin America - although the latter saw a decline in street children in the last decade - have become accustomed to the urban imagery of children living on the streets.

[Argentina](#) saw an overwhelming increase in poverty and homelessness under former right-wing President Mauricio Macri, whose neoliberal policies pushed millions to the streets, including one million children as one in every two children in Argentina lives in poverty.

In Haiti's biggest slums an estimated 80,000 people, many of whom lost their houses after the 2010 earthquake, live in inhabitable conditions.

In Western Africa, according to a peer-reviewed academic [article](#) from the Universities of Jos and Abuja in Nigeria, concluded that children in Africa are endangered and facing dire psychosocial circumstances as millions, around nine million in Nigeria specifically, live in the streets and face dangers such substance abuse and recruitment for criminal gangs or terrorist organizations.

Yet other places are even far worse such as [Yemen](#) dubbed by Unicef one of the worst places to be a child as around 12 million children, a number representing almost all the country's children, need urgent humanitarian assistance.

Although poverty has been the main driving factor behind children's homelessness in these regions, it is now migration, due to war and internal displacement, a major reason more street children are flooding the U.S., North Africa, and Europe's cities.

About 28 million children are homeless globally due to violent conflict. Almost the same number have had to abandon their homes in search of a better life, according to a 2016 Unicef report.

"Homelessness is touching young people, that are particularly at risk, migrants in different situations, and women and children, all families, are increasingly affected by homelessness in Europe", Feantsa's official added.

As millions of children will endure Christmas on the streets, the world celebrated on Nov. 20 the 30th anniversary of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the most widely and rapidly adopted international treaty in history. However, as Unicef noted last month, it is the poorest children that have the most disadvantage still at risk due to poverty, discrimination, and marginalization.

So as presents are unwrapped, families feast and glasses clink on Dec. 24, millions will face a homeless Christmas in a trend that seems will only keep growing due to increasing inequality, conflicts, massive migration, and climate change.
