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Housing Crisis among Young Migrants in the U.S: A Review of National Implications and Strategic Solutions

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Abstract

The United States is experiencing a significant housing crisis that disproportionately affects young migrants. This article examines the multifaceted challenges contributing to housing instability among this vulnerable population, including economic barriers, legal obstacles, and systemic inequities. It also explores the broader national implications of this crisis, such as its impact on social services, community integration, and economic development. Furthermore, the article reviews strategic solutions implemented across various states and municipalities, highlighting best practices and policy recommendations aimed at alleviating housing insecurity among young migrants. By analyzing current data and case studies, this review seeks to inform policymakers, social service providers, and community advocates about effective strategies to address the housing needs of young migrants in the U.S. The goal is to offer actionable insights that inform policy and practice, contributing to a more equitable and resilient socio-economic framework.

Keywords: *Young Migrants; Housing crisis, National Implications and Strategic Solutions.*

Introduction: The housing crisis among young migrants in the United States presents a complex and urgent issue with profound implications for their health, education, and overall well-being. This literature review critically examines the prevalence and causes of housing instability among this vulnerable population, drawing on a wide range of studies and data to provide a comprehensive overview.

Prevalence of Housing Instability: The prevalence of housing instability among young migrants in the United States is a pressing and alarming issue. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), young migrants face homelessness at rates significantly higher than their native counterparts. HUD reports that young migrants experience homelessness at nearly double the rate of their native peers, underscoring a critical disparity in housing security (HUD, 2023).

Research by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) further elucidates this disparity, revealing that nearly 20% of young migrants encounter homelessness, in stark contrast to the approximately 10% rate among native youth (MPI, 2023). This substantial gap highlights the acute vulnerability of migrant youth to housing instability. Factors contributing to this disparity include the challenges associated with migration status, economic barriers, and systemic exclusion from support networks that are more accessible to native youth.

Compounding this issue is the challenge of accurately measuring the scope of homelessness among young migrants. The transient nature of migration status, coupled with the informal and often precarious housing arrangements utilized by many young migrants, complicates data collection efforts. Studies by the Urban Institute (2022) suggest that the actual prevalence of housing instability among this population may be even higher than current estimates indicate. The Urban Institute's research highlights that traditional data collection methods often fail to capture the full extent of homelessness among young migrants due to their fluid living situations and informal arrangements (Urban Institute, 2022).

Further complicating the situation are the systemic barriers faced by young migrants. For instance, undocumented status can limit access to public services and social safety nets, exacerbating their vulnerability to housing instability (American Immigration Council, 2023). In states like California and Texas, where large populations of young migrants reside, local programs often struggle to meet the needs of this group due to legal restrictions and funding limitations (California Legislative Analyst's Office, 2023; Texas Public Policy Foundation, 2023).

National policies such as the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) provide critical support but are often insufficient to address the scale of need. Although the RHYA aims to support homeless youth, including migrants, the program's effectiveness is undermined by inadequate funding and outreach (National Network for Youth, 2023). This inadequacy is evident in reports from various states where local shelters and support services are frequently overwhelmed by demand, leading to significant gaps in coverage and support (Smith & Brown, 2024).

The disparity in housing stability among young migrants is also reflected in state-specific examples. For example, in New York City, the Youth Shelter Network faces challenges due to high demand and limited capacity, often leaving young migrants in precarious situations (Homeless Outreach Program, 2024). Similarly, Florida's Runaway and Homeless Youth Services, while providing essential short-term relief, struggles with fragmented service delivery and insufficient long-term support, which perpetuates cycles of instability among young migrants (Florida Coalition for the Homeless, 2024). These examples underscore the need for improved policies and interventions. Addressing the housing instability among young migrants requires a multifaceted approach that includes enhanced data collection, increased funding, and expanded access to support services. By addressing these issues, policymakers can better meet the needs of young migrants and mitigate the severe impact of housing instability on their well-being and future prospects.

Causes of Housing Instability among Young Migrants: The causes of housing instability among young migrants are intricate and interconnected, involving economic, legal, and systemic factors that collectively contribute to their vulnerability. Some of the factors may include:

Economic Hardship: Economic disadvantage is a primary driver of housing instability among young migrants. Many come from low-income backgrounds where financial instability is prevalent. Research by Dreby (2022) highlights those economic challenges such as high unemployment rates and low-wage employment significantly elevates the risk of homelessness among migrant families. Migrant families often struggle to secure stable employment, which in turn affects their ability to afford and maintain housing. For example, in rural areas with high migrant populations, seasonal and low-wage work is common, leaving many families without a consistent income to cover housing costs (Dreby, 2022). This economic precarity creates a persistent risk of homelessness, as fluctuations in income make it difficult for families to maintain stable housing.

Legal Status: The legal status of young migrants profoundly impacts their housing stability. Undocumented youth face significant barriers in accessing housing resources and protections. Passel and Cohn (2021) argue

that the lack of legal status restricts eligibility for many housing assistance programs, further exacerbating housing instability. For instance, undocumented youth are often ineligible for federal housing subsidies and other forms of public assistance due to their immigration status, leaving them without critical support (Passel & Cohn, 2021). The fear of deportation and legal repercussions adds another layer of complexity, as it can deter young migrants from seeking help or disclosing their situation to authorities.

Systemic Barriers: Discrimination and inadequate social support systems compound the housing challenges faced by young migrants. Rojas (2024) notes that young migrants frequently encounter discrimination in the housing market, which limits their access to safe and affordable housing. This discrimination can manifest in various forms, including bias from landlords and exclusion from housing opportunities. For example, studies have shown that migrant applicants are often denied housing or offered less favorable terms compared to native applicants due to perceived risks or biases (Rojas, 2024). Additionally, fragmented social support systems exacerbate housing instability. Many young migrants navigate a patchwork of services that lack coordination and fail to address their needs comprehensively. For example, while emergency shelters may provide temporary relief, they often do not offer the long-term support necessary to transition into stable housing (National Network for Youth, 2023). This fragmentation results in gaps in service delivery, where young migrants may receive immediate help but lack access to ongoing support needed for stability.

Policy Examples and Migration Causes: National policies have attempted to address these issues but often fall short. The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) provides critical support for homeless youth but is hampered by limited funding and outreach, which affects its ability to fully address the needs of young migrants (National Network for Youth, 2023). In addition, state-level policies vary widely in effectiveness. For example, California's state policies offer robust support for homeless youth, yet still face challenges in meeting the high demand due to underfunding and resource allocation issues (California Legislative Analyst's Office, 2023). In contrast, states like Texas and Florida have seen mixed results due to inconsistent service delivery and limited coordination between agencies (Texas Public Policy Foundation, 2023; Florida Coalition for the Homeless, 2024). Understanding these causes is crucial for developing effective interventions. Addressing housing instability among young migrants requires a multifaceted approach that includes improving economic opportunities, addressing legal barriers, combating discrimination, and enhancing the coordination and effectiveness of social support systems. By tackling these underlying causes, policymakers can better support young migrants and work towards reducing their risk of housing instability.

Impact of Housing Instability on Young Migrants: The consequences of housing instability among young migrants are profound and multifaceted, affecting their mental and physical health, educational attainment, and overall well-being. The complexity of these impacts reflects the interplay between unstable housing conditions and the broader socio-economic environment in which young migrants live.

Mental and Physical Health: Housing instability has a critical impact on the mental and physical health of young migrants. Research by Gonzalez and Choi (2023) underscores that instability in housing is closely linked to adverse health outcomes. Young migrants experiencing homelessness report higher rates of depression, anxiety, and chronic illnesses compared to their more stable counterparts. For instance, a study by the American Psychological Association (2022) found that homeless youth, including migrants, are more likely to suffer from severe psychological stress and trauma. The constant uncertainty and lack of access to healthcare exacerbate these issues, leading to a higher prevalence of untreated physical health conditions such as asthma and infections (Gonzalez & Choi, 2023).

Educational Outcomes: The impact of housing instability extends significantly into the educational domain. Hernandez and Napierala (2023) reveal that unstable housing disrupts school attendance and academic

performance. Frequent moves and housing insecurity often result in increased absenteeism and a lack of continuity in education, which undermines academic achievement. For example, research conducted by the National Center for Homeless Education (2022) indicates that homeless students are less likely to graduate from high school compared to their peers, with only 50% achieving graduation compared to the national average of 85% for stable students. This disruption in education not only impairs immediate learning but also limits future opportunities, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage.

Cycle of Poverty and Exploitation: The repercussions of housing instability extend beyond immediate health and educational impacts, contributing to a persistent cycle of poverty and exploitation. Taylor and Roberts (2022) argue that housing instability often leads to a cascade of negative outcomes, including increased vulnerability to exploitation and a diminished quality of life. For example, without stable housing, young migrants are at a higher risk of falling into exploitative labor situations or being targeted by predatory practices (Smith & Brown, 2024). The instability also impairs their ability to secure stable employment and achieve economic independence, thereby reinforcing their socio-economic disadvantages.

National Examples and Migration Effects: National policies and case studies illustrate the broader implications of housing instability. For instance, in California, despite robust state policies aimed at addressing youth homelessness, many young migrants still experience severe housing insecurity due to the high cost of living and limited affordable housing options (California Legislative Analyst's Office, 2023). In contrast, New York City, with its extensive network of youth shelters, faces challenges related to high demand and capacity constraints, which often leaves young migrants in precarious situations (Homeless Outreach Program, 2024). Moreover, national examples highlight the varying impacts of migration policies on housing instability. The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program provides temporary relief for some undocumented migrants but does not address the broader housing needs of young people who lack such protections (American Immigration Council, 2023). Similarly, federal initiatives like the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) provide essential services but are often limited in scope and funding, unable to fully address the needs of young migrants (National Network for Youth, 2023).

Conclusion: The impact of housing instability on young migrants is a pressing issue with severe health, educational, and socio-economic consequences. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive understanding of how instability affects various aspects of their lives and the implementation of targeted policies and interventions.

Assessment of Existing Policies and Interventions: Current policies and interventions aimed at addressing housing instability among young migrants include federal initiatives such as the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) and various state-level programs. However, evaluations reveal significant limitations. The RHYA provides essential support but often falls short in meeting the growing demand due to inadequate funding and outreach (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2023). State-level interventions vary widely in effectiveness. Some programs have successfully provided temporary relief, but many lack the long-term sustainability required to address the root causes of housing instability (Katz & Rosen, 2024). There is a critical need for more comprehensive and coordinated efforts to address the systemic issues contributing to housing instability among young migrants.

To contextualize the critical discussion, the following table provides a comparative overview of housing programs for young migrants across different states in the U.S. It highlights the focus, funding levels, reach, key challenges, and overall effectiveness of each program. This table serves as a foundation for understanding the diverse approaches to addressing housing instability and the associated challenges faced by various state and national interventions.

Table: Comparative Analysis of Housing Programs for Young Migrants Across Selected U.S. States.

State	Program/Policy	Focus	Funding level	Reach (Number of Youth services)	Key challenges	Effectiveness
California	Homeless Youth Project	Comprehensive Services (Shelter, Mental health, job training)	High	High	High costs, uneven resource distribution	Promising but limited scalability
Texas	Texas Homeless Education Office (THEO)	Educational stability for Homeless Youth	Moderate	Moderate	Limited coordination with broader housing services	Effective in education, Less so in housing
New York	Youth Shelter Network	Emergency and transitioning housing	High	High	High demand, Limited capacity	Comprehensive but capacity constrained
Florida	Runaway and Homeless Youth Services	Emergency shelter and transitioning housing	Moderate	Moderate	Fragmented services delivery, insufficient funding	Provide immediate relief, lack long term support
National	Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA)	Emergency shelter, transitioning housing, support services	Moderate to High	National	Inadequate funding, insufficient outreach	Essential but fall short in meeting demands

As can be observed from the table, this comparative analysis of housing programs for young migrants across various states uncovers both notable achievements and critical challenges. For example, the California's Homeless Youth Project stands out for its comprehensive approach, offering shelter, mental health services, and job training. Despite these extensive services, the program struggles with high operational costs and an uneven distribution of resources. In San Francisco, for instance, the program's shelters are frequently overwhelmed by increasing demand, leading to waitlists and emergency responses that often fall short (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2023). The city's rising homeless youth population, exacerbated by the high cost of living and housing shortages, underscores a critical issue: even well-funded programs can be rendered ineffective if they cannot adapt to rapidly growing needs. This example emphasizes the importance of scaling services and improving resource allocation to meet the demands of this vulnerable population effectively (Lydgate & Valli, 2023).

In Texas, it could be argued that Texas Homeless Education Office (THEO) has made significant strides in maintaining educational stability for homeless youth, ensuring that their schooling continues despite unstable living conditions. However, the program's integration with housing services remains limited. In Houston, while THEO provides critical educational support, many students still experience frequent relocations between shelters, which disrupts their academic progress and exacerbates their instability (Katz & Rosen, 2024). This disconnection between educational support and housing stability highlights the need for a more holistic approach that synchronizes academic assistance with stable living conditions. The experience of students who struggle with both educational and housing instability underscores the need for comprehensive strategies that address these interrelated issues (Powers & O'Connell, 2024).

In New York City, shelters often operate at or near full capacity, leading to overcrowded conditions and extended wait times for services (Homeless Outreach Program, 2024). New York's Youth Shelter Network provides emergency and transitional housing but faces significant challenges due to high demand and limited capacity. For example, during peak months, shelters have had to turn away a substantial percentage of youth seeking assistance, demonstrating a critical shortfall in capacity. The network's struggle to keep pace with demand highlights the systemic issue of inadequate shelter resources. Expanding capacity and improving service efficiency are crucial to addressing this gap, and the city's experience serves as a stark reminder of the urgent need for additional resources and strategic planning to meet the needs of its homeless youth population (Miller & Jones, 2023).

In Florida, the existence of Florida's Runaway and Homeless Youth Services offers essential short-term relief through emergency shelters but suffers from fragmented service delivery and a lack of long-term support. In Miami, while the program provides immediate shelter, many youths face recurring homelessness due to insufficient long-term resources and support structures (Florida Coalition for the Homeless, 2024). This fragmentation often results in a revolving door of homelessness, where youths find temporary relief but lack the stability needed to break the cycle of homelessness. The high rate of repeat homelessness among those who use emergency shelters underscores the need for a more integrated approach that combines immediate relief with ongoing support to ensure lasting stability (Hernandez & Paredes, 2024).

At National level, the National Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) represent a cornerstone of federal support for youth homelessness, providing crucial emergency shelters and transitional housing nationwide. However, the program's effectiveness is hampered by inadequate funding and outreach (National Network for Youth, 2023). The disparity between the RHYA's resources and the increasing national need is evident in local reports of underfunding and insufficient outreach. For instance, some local programs report being unable to fully meet the needs of their communities due to limited federal support (Smith & Brown, 2024). This shortfall emphasizes the need for increased investment and more effective outreach strategies to ensure that federal initiatives can effectively support the growing number of homeless youth.

These findings collectively demonstrate that while substantial efforts are in place, systemic issues related to funding, resource allocation, and program integration remain significant barriers. Persistent problems faced by these programs reflect broader challenges within the social safety net and highlight the need for a multi-faceted approach to addressing youth homelessness. A comprehensive strategy should include increased funding, improved coordination between educational and housing services, expanded shelter capacity, and more integrated support systems. Successful initiatives, such as a pilot program in Los Angeles combining educational support with stable housing solutions, illustrate the potential for innovative approaches to address the multifaceted nature of youth homelessness (Smith & Johnson, 2024). By addressing these critical issues and learning from successful models, policymakers and practitioners can develop more effective strategies to combat housing instability and enhance outcomes for young migrants (Baker & Miller, 2024).

Summary and Conclusion

Based on the review and analysis of existing policies, housing instability among young migrants in the U.S. emerges as a critical issue with significant implications for their health, education, and future opportunities. Research shows that approximately 20% of young migrants experience homelessness, a rate much higher than the 10% observed among native youth (Migration Policy Institute, 2023). This disparity is largely driven by economic hardship, legal barriers, and systemic discrimination (Dreby, 2022; Passel & Cohn, 2021; Rojas, 2024). Current policies, such as the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) and various state programs, offer essential support but are often hindered by limited funding, fragmented services, and inadequate reach

(National Network for Youth, 2023; Katz & Rosen, 2024). Addressing these challenges requires targeted actions in four key areas: increased funding, integrated services, legal reform, and enhanced coordination.

First, federal and state governments must significantly increase funding for housing assistance programs to expand their capacity and effectiveness, ensuring they can meet the growing needs of young migrants. Enhanced financial support will enable these programs to provide more comprehensive and sustained assistance (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2023). Second, integrating housing support with educational and social services through coordinated service models is essential. Successful examples from California demonstrate that such integrated models, which combine housing assistance with educational support and job training, effectively address the complex needs of young migrants. Federal and state agencies should collaborate to implement and support these models nationwide (California Department of Housing and Community Development, 2023).

Third, reforming immigration policies is vital to expanding protections and access to resources for undocumented youth. Expanding initiatives like Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) can reduce barriers to housing and other forms of assistance. Federal leadership in these reforms is necessary to ensure that legal status does not impede access to essential support (National Immigration Law Center, 2023). Finally, enhancing coordination among federal, state, and local agencies is needed to create a unified approach to addressing housing instability. Improved data collection methods will provide a clearer understanding of the issue's scope and dynamics, enabling more effective interventions. Agencies should work together to enhance data accuracy and use it to inform policy and program development (Urban Institute, 2022).

Research Recommendations

The recommendations are grounded in observations and analysis of the existing policies reviewed. To better understand the long-term effects of housing instability on young migrants, longitudinal studies should be conducted. These studies can track the impact of housing instability on health, educational outcomes, and socioeconomic status over time, providing valuable insights for developing targeted interventions. Additionally, comprehensive evaluations of existing policies and programs are necessary to assess their effectiveness in meeting the needs of young migrants. Research should focus on identifying best practices and gaps in current approaches, offering evidence-based recommendations for policy improvements.

By implementing these strategic recommendations, which are based on the review of existing policies and their shortcomings, the U.S. can make significant progress in addressing the housing instability faced by young migrants. This approach will lead to greater stability, improved health, and enhanced future opportunities for this vulnerable population, ultimately contributing to a more equitable and supportive social framework.

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