

Study shows Los Angeles homelessness rises sharply amid deepening housing crisis



Los Angeles, June 6 (RHC)-- The homeless population around Los Angeles, California, has risen sharply during the past year due to a lack of affordable housing in and around the second-largest city in the United States, pushing more people into poverty.

According to new a study, homelessness in the metropolitan area of Los Angeles jumped by 16 percent, while the homeless population in the suburbs swelled by 12 percent, according to the latest annual census by the Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority (LAHSA).

The Authority says that on any given night in Los Angeles County, nearly 60,000 people were sleeping on sidewalks, in abandoned vehicles, in makeshift tents, in shelters and government-subsidized housing. That is the highest number documented since the agency began conducting its homeless survey 10 years ago.

The number in the city of Los Angeles alone, including the notorious downtown Skid Row district that ranks among the greatest concentrations of homeless in the United States, reached 36,300, the study said. "Only New York [America's most populous city] has more people experiencing homelessness on

any given night," LAHSA Executive Director Peter Lynn said in releasing the report.

Still, the 12 percent homelessness rise in Los Angeles County was modest compared with corresponding increases in less populous neighboring counties -- up 28 percent in Ventura, 43 percent in Orange and 50 percent in Kern county.

The report cited the rising cost of housing and wage stagnation at the lower end of the income spectrum for deepening the housing affordability crisis across Southern California. The state of California, the wealthiest and most populous in the U.S., already has more people living in poverty than any other state, and Los Angeles County has the state's highest poverty rate, at 24.3 percent, the study said.

"Skyrocketing rents statewide and federal disinvestment in affordable housing, combined with an epidemic of untreated trauma and mental illness, is pushing people into homelessness faster than they can be lifted out," Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti told Reuters.

Tenant rights activists blame gentrification and real estate policies favoring high-end commercial and residential developments that are squeezing out low-income housing. Critics also accuse local officials of doing too little to develop thousands of vacant units that could be reconditioned and turned into affordable apartments.

"L.A.'s homeless crisis is a failure of imagination and will built on a foundation of corruption at City Hall," said Michael Weinstein, president of the AIDS Healthcare Foundation, the parent nonprofit of the groups Healthy Housing Foundation and Housing is a Human Right. He added: "It's not accidental that LA County is the homeless capital of America."

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