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MEASURING AND ENDING STREET HOMELESSNESS WORLDWIDE

Despite its significant impact on both individuals and cities, street homelessness has been left behind in global debate. This global challenge is at the heart of current issues, including social protection floors, and is especially important as street homelessness is the clearest evidence that states are failing to meet their obligation to provide housing as a basic human right.

The United Nations NGO Working Group to End Homelessness (WGEH), the Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH), and the International Coalition to End Homelessness propose a renewed focus on measuring and ending street homelessness worldwide.

STREET HOMELESSNESS IS AN URGENT CHALLENGE THAT AFFECTS ALL NATIONS.

Street homelessness affects us all—men and women, families with children, youth, the elderly, and people with disabilities. It occurs in nearly all nations and has severe negative impacts on both individuals and on cities. Housing is the foundation for dignified, decent and rewarding lives. Evidence across the world demonstrates that street homelessness dramatically affects health and makes it more difficult to access employment or to exit extreme poverty. Street homelessness is growing in many parts of the world, and people who experience it are in danger of “being left behind” in the 2030 Agenda and in the wider effort to eradicate poverty.

Because most countries do not accurately measure street homelessness, and those that do use different methods, we cannot at this stage generate an accurate estimate of the global extent of homelessness. However, the most recent approximations make clear that this is a challenge at a global scale. For example, in 2005 the Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing as a Component of the Right to an Adequate Standard of Living reported that “United Nations estimates indicate that approximately 100 million people worldwide are without a place to live. Over 1 billion people are inadequately housed.”

SEVERAL UNITED NATIONS AGREEMENTS ALREADY ACKNOWLEDGE THE KEY ROLE OF HOUSING AND SHELTER.

- **Sustainable Development Goal 11, indicator 11.1:** “By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums.”
- **The 2016 New Urban Agenda:** “We will take positive measures to improve the living conditions of homeless people with a view of facilitating their full participation in society and to prevent and eliminate homelessness.”
- **The 1996 Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements:** “... everyone will have adequate shelter that is healthy, safe, secure, accessible and affordable and that includes basic services, facilities and amenities.”

Despite clear recognition that housing and shelter are central to meeting human potential, existing goals and declarations either do not specifically mention street homelessness or do not have clear goals to prompt action and enable accountability. A renewed focus on this issue across forums and agreements would play a key role in remedying this to ensure no one is left behind as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development moves forward.

ADEQUATE HOUSING IS A CORE COMPONENT OF SOCIAL PROTECTION.

Social protection floors are designed to protect individuals and countries from shocks and other stresses by providing an adequate, basic standard of living to vulnerable populations. In addition to ensuring a basic income and access to healthcare, housing must be considered as a key component of ensuring

individuals have a basic standard of living. According to “Social Protection: A Coherent Strategy for Shared Prosperity,” the CSocD56 Civil Society Declaration, “it is patently clear that people cannot make meaningful contributions to societal development if they are... fighting simply for basic survival.” People experiencing street homelessness in every corner of the globe face negative outcomes related to mortality, health, ability to earn a basic income and other basic elements of survival.

In fact, housing is already part of the debate on social protection. For example, housing is a measure of social protection expenditure according to the IMF, Eurostat, OECD, and the UN ECLAC. The ILO’s *World Social Protection Report 2017 – 2019** references income security as dependent on access to social services, including housing. As the most visible manifestation that a state has failed to provide a basic level of social protection around housing, street homelessness must be part of this discussion.

Ensuring social protection requires a roof, not just a floor.

HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes housing as a human right. According to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the human right to adequate housing consists of seven elements: (1) security of tenure; (2) availability of services, materials, and infrastructure; (3) affordability; (4) accessibility; (5) habitability; (6) location; and (7) cultural adequacy. People experiencing street homelessness do not have access to housing or shelter that meets these criteria, and sometimes are in situations in which not even one of these criteria is met.

A DEEPER FOCUS ON STREET HOMELESSNESS IS NECESSARY.

WGEH and IGH urge member states to take initial steps to remedy the exclusion of street homelessness in global debate by situating the issue within the broader conversation around social protection floors, and exploring the challenges street homelessness poses to meeting the objectives of the 2030 Agenda. To make real progress, it is critical to identify opportunities to resolve those challenges through clear, global measurement; developing shared goals around reducing or ending unsheltered homelessness; and supporting a global movement to spread the most effective strategies across Member States.

* International Labour Organization’s *World Social Protection Report 2017–2019*, page 203. (<http://www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/RessourcePDF.action?ressource.ressourceId=54887>)

WE CALL FOR CLEAR, GLOBAL MEASUREMENT OF STREET HOMELESSNESS; A SHARED GOAL TO REDUCE AND ULTIMATELY END STREET HOMELESSNESS; AND SUPPORT FOR A GLOBAL MOVEMENT TO SPREAD EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES ACROSS MEMBER STATES.