



NGO WORKING GROUP TO END HOMELESSNESS

Strategic Matrix 2019-2021

Introduction

The UN NGO Working Group to End Homelessness (WGEH) met for the first time on November 7, 2017 in New York. Originally the initiative of a collaboration of the Vincentian Family UN NGOs, our identity has evolved. Today, we are a UN Working Group connected to the work of the UN NGO Committee for Social Development (CSocD). We are promoting, in collaboration with the Institute for Global Homelessness (IGH), our strategic partner at DePaul University-Chicago, the creation of a Global Coalition of NGOs and organizations to end homelessness.

Homelessness is coming to the forefront at the United Nations, thanks in large part to the work of our working group. In 2019, after a committed and strategic advocacy campaign, the Commission for Social Development decided in its 57th session that the priority theme for the 58th session will be “**Affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness.**” This will allow the Commission to contribute to the work of the Economic and Social Council.

This document is our strategic matrix for concerted, coordinated global political advocacy to end homelessness over the course of the next three years.

Mission

With a goal of eradicating homelessness globally, the Working Group to End Homelessness (WGEH), alongside strategic partners and individuals who experience homelessness, advocate and foster awareness with member states of the United Nations, UN Agencies and the UN Secretariat. The core goal of this advocacy is to build political will to make *preventing, assessing, measuring and systemically ending homelessness* a global priority.

Vision

The WGEH envisions a global society where no one is homeless. In this society, every person will have a safe, affordable, habitable shelter. Nothing less will be tolerated. A lack of shelter for any person will be defined as a structural and political problem that makes visible the growing inequalities in society and will not be considered a personal and a moral failing.

In this society, a small group supported by the state will not control wealth and resources while many people struggle to survive due to state policies and inaction. In this new society, a human rights framework will guarantee that people are not left without the protection of a secure, physical space. In a world that is rapidly urbanizing, we envision new urban centers in which democratic political participation will defeat socio-economic polarization resulting in significant reduction of inequalities, and full access to social protection including adequate housing. We envision a global society in which every human person has a place they can call home--a safe, affordable structure which is a “place where a human being can develop and become capable of claiming and exercising all inherent human rights.”¹

In this society no one is left behind!

Priorities for Advocacy

The following priorities are all equally important. They relate to each other, and all of them create possible themes and actions around which we will structure our working group.

1. Introduce Common Language Around Homelessness

There is no agreed language-upon homelessness in any official United Nations document, agreement or resolution that can inspire and guide global and national policy. A common language enables collaboration across countries and increases attention to issues. “Agreed language” is also important as a reference that can further the advocacy work at all levels. At the UN, “drafting and negotiation are closely related because the subject of negotiations often involves agreeing on the words that are used to describe an action that is to be taken on a particular agenda item.”² All stakeholders need to devise language with which they are comfortable and come to an agreement to engage in rich and productive conversations and policy making using common concepts and language

2. Propose a Definition of “Homelessness” for Global Adoption

Persons living in the streets and inadequate shelters constitute a structural and political problem that makes visible the growing inequalities in a society. All stakeholders need to define homelessness in all its dimensions. “There is no globally agreed definition of homelessness, and even within countries the topic can be contentious. The absence of a common definition leads to time wasted debating what homelessness means instead of getting to work solving it.”³

3. Assess and Measure the Dimensions of Homelessness Globally

¹ Leilani Fartha, Special Rapporteur for the right to adequate housing.

² (United Nations, n.d.)

³ (Busch-Geertsema, Culhane, & Fitzpatrick, 2016)

In many countries, there is little or no measurement of homelessness, making the problem invisible to policymakers. “Reliable data is the cornerstone of any national or international plan to end (street) homelessness. It is required to understand need, so solutions are targeted and gaps in provisions are identified. It is required to hold national governments and supranational bodies to account and to lobby for greater funding. Data is required for progress to be tracked and for crises to be monitored.”⁴ Even in countries where data on homelessness is collected, data criteria may vary. We call upon countries to “measure and meaningfully compare certain types of homelessness, even if overall definitions vary. A global estimate of homelessness is important for a worldwide initiative to address the problem.”⁵ We must have disaggregated data by gender, age, disability, and other agreed upon criteria in order to move forward demanding equitable investment to remedy the situation.

4. Focus on a Human Rights Approach

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.⁶ 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.

5. Prioritize Street Homelessness and Temporary Shelter in the UN AGENDA 2030

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. Within the negotiated 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 169 targets and 232 indicators, goal 11 commits the Members States of the United Nations to build Sustainable Cities and Communities. Indicator 11.1 states that “**By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services, and upgrade slums.**”

The three main groups that can be included under the homelessness umbrella are: slum dwellers; refugees including internally displaced people; and street homeless or living in temporary shelters. Because there are several organizations advocating and working to address the needs of refugees, internally displaced people, and slum dwellers, WGEH aims to focus on the specific needs of people experiencing street homelessness or living in temporary shelter. However, as per the IGH Framework, “we do not diminish the importance of other forms of homelessness; rather, we seek to fill a gap. ... we recognize that homelessness is complex and that someone experiencing street homelessness might once have been a refugee or displaced by a natural disaster.”⁷ By choosing to focus on street homelessness and persons living in temporary shelters, WGEH seeks to follow the intuition of the slogan of Agenda 2030: “no one is left behind.”

6. Broaden the Emphasis on Homelessness in the UN Agenda 2030

The essential framework of our advocacy is the UN Agenda 2030. We need to establish a cross-cutting and multidimensional connection between homelessness and the SDGs. Goal 11.1 of the

⁴ VF Homeless Alliance – Campaigns to measure homelessness

⁵ (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights/UN-Habitat, 2009)

⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/toolkit/Pages/RighttoAdequateHousingToolkit.aspx>

⁷ (Busch-Geertsema, Culhane, & Fitzpatrick, 2016)

UN to “ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing” by 2030 needs the collaborative involvement of all: governments, civil society, private sector, and academics.

Ending homelessness is key for achieving the UN 2030 Agenda. Housing must be acknowledged as a basic human right and there must be an exploration of the challenges street homelessness poses to meeting other UN objectives, including the 2030 New Urban Agenda. Additionally, UN agreements that already recognize the key role of housing and shelter including the 2016 New Urban Agenda and the 1996 Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements must be highlighted and integrated into this advocacy.

7. Establish a Strategic Connection with Social Protection Floors (SPF)

In recent years, advocacy on the part of civil society at the UN has been around issues related to social protection systems and floors (SPF). Social protection systems/floors are designed to protect individuals and countries from shocks and other stresses by providing a basic standard of living to vulnerable populations. Our group does not want to compete with this work but rather add an element in the International Labor Organization (ILO) definition of SPF.⁸ In addition to ensuring a basic income and access to education and healthcare, WGEH asserts that housing must be considered as a key component of ensuring individuals have a basic standard of living. People experiencing street homelessness or in temporary shelters 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. Without housing, the other aspects of social protection floors are inadequate. As the Institute for Global Homelessness (IGH) states, “*social protection requires a roof, not just a floor.*”

8. Address Urban Exclusion and Promote Sustainable Cities

As asserted by 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.”⁹ It is urgent that WGEH address urban exclusion. Homelessness is an existential reality that affects the sense of belonging, actualization of rights, shared responsibilities, and necessary connection with a community and social structures that ensure human dignity. Homelessness makes sustainable cities impossible.

Unsheltered homelessness affects all people, regardless of gender, age, or physical and mental ability. It occurs in nations both wealthy and poor across the globe and it has severe negative impacts on both individuals and cities. Addressing homelessness is essential for the present and the future of urban centers so that “everyone will have adequate shelter that is healthy, safe, secure, accessible, affordable and that includes basic services, facilities and amenities.”¹⁰

Partnerships

The UN 2030 Agenda closes with Goal 17: “A successful sustainable development agenda requires partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society. These inclusive partnerships built upon principles and values, a shared vision, and shared goals that place people

⁸ (International Labor Organization, 2017)

⁹ (United Nations, 2016)

¹⁰ (United Nations, 1996)

and the planet at the center, are needed at the global, regional, national and local level.”¹¹ This goal is a source of inspiration as we advocate to end homelessness.

In the past 16 months, we have established meaningful partnerships with Member States, NGOs, Committees, and Organizations. WGEH is in its essence a partnership of NGOs, all who share the goal of eradicating homelessness, and may also have additional foci and interests. WGEH is determined to keep alive and to improve all the partnerships that we have already established.

1. Institute for Global Homelessness (IGH) at DePaul University

IGH plays a unique role with the data and research as well as the wealth of knowledge from their global community of partners. With the help of IGH, we have created connections with continental and national networks of NGOs and organizations working directly with homeless people in Europe, Africa, Latin America, USA, India, and Australia. IGH is a central point of connection for many global NGOs, a source for information, references and connections for our advocacy. Strengthened by the conference held in New York on February 9-10, 2019, we are exploring new possibilities for collaboration. IGH is connected with the **Vincentian Family Homeless Alliance**. This group is developing different campaigns that we can use as part of our advocacy work.

2. Member States of the United Nations

The General Assembly is the main deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations. Comprising 193 Member States of the UN, it provides a unique forum for multilateral discussion of international issues including peace and security. Anything we want to do at this global level must be done in direct conversation and collaboration with member states. The General Assembly elects 54 members to the Economic and Social Council. The Economic and Social Council is the principal body established by the UN Charter for coordination, policy review, policy dialogue and recommendations on economic, social and environmental issues, as well as implementation of internationally agreed development goals. It serves as the central mechanism for activities of the UN system and its specialized agencies in the economic, social and environmental fields, supervising subsidiary and expert bodies. It is the United Nations’ central platform for reflection, debate, and innovative thinking on sustainable development. The Commission on Social Development (CSocD) is one of the ten functional commissions established by the Economic and Social Council and is the advisory body responsible for the social development pillar of global development.

WGEH is the youngest UN NGO working group and is already recognized by several member states and UN organizations. We have worked with the support of representatives from the following missions: Ireland, Brazil, Madagascar, South Africa, Guatemala, Paraguay, Iceland, among others. During the discussions of the methods of work of CSocD 2019, the African Group of nations decided to make our proposal their own: to make homelessness the priority theme for CSocD 2020. We will continue to strengthen and expand these partnerships with member states to advance our agenda.

3. Office of the Special Rapporteur for the Right to Adequate Housing.

¹¹ (United Nations)

WGEH uses a rights-based approach for our advocacy work. We have established a direct communication with Leilani Farha, Special Rapporteur. Her Senior Aide, Julieta Perucca, agreed to participate in thematic meetings of our working group. We have already organized two side events with the involvement of this office.

4. 2019-2020 Collaboration with the NGO Committee of Social Development

The executive group of the WGEH met with the chair of the NGO CSocD - Daniel Parrell who suggested areas to consider as opportunities to advance our agenda in collaboration with this larger group of NGOs.

- ✓ Capacity Building with NGO CSocD focus on different aspects of homelessness.
- ✓ Use the expertise of CSocD members like Monica Jahangir to draft documents.
- ✓ Meet with Amson Sibanda, Senior Social Affairs Officer, DESA regarding the zero-draft resolution.
- ✓ Take the lead on the 2020 Civil Society Declaration.
- ✓ Participate in the Experts Group Meeting.
- ✓ Meet with the Chair of the CSocD Bureau.
- ✓ Contribute to the statement at the opening of the Commission.
- ✓ Suggest panelists for the priority Theme panel.

5. Potential Partners and Collaborators

Several of these partnerships and spaces are open for us to explore and to connect our collective efforts.

- Habitat NY – Chris Williams. Jean Quinn represents the WGEH in the NGO working group of Habitat.
- Department of Economic and Social Affairs -DESA- (Daniela Bas and Amine Lambarat)
- Bureau of CsocD
- International Labor Organization (ILO)
- UN Economic and Financial Committee (Second) and UN Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Issues (Third Committee)
- High Level Political Forum
- Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)
- General Assembly

Social Media

A group of interns are working on a comprehensive social media strategy. This document will be included in this plan as an attachment. The WGEH webpage is under construction as well as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. All these platforms will be interconnected. We plan a biannual newsletter to connect/inform all the members of the international coalition.

Documents

A very important dimension of the civil society advocacy work at the United Nations includes not only proposing issues but also providing documents that provide foundations, connect and give

specific recommendations that can be reflected in UN resolutions and other official documents. Considering this, we are working on two important documents:

1. Ending Homelessness Guide through the SDGs

This is an infographic of the cross-cutting and multidimensional approach to homelessness in the SDGs' targets and indicators.

2. CSocD 58 Zero Draft Resolution on the Priority Theme.

Considering that homelessness is the priority theme for CSocD 2020, we are drafting a no-limit zero document to provide to the people responsible for drafting the resolutions. A first draft with ideas from different experts on homelessness was created by Molly Seeley from IGH. We will work with UN experts in drafting resolutions that have consistent goals and objectives. This document will include all the elements essential for the CSocD 2020 priority theme resolution.

Local and International Campaigns to Educate and to Raise Awareness

Education and awareness raising is an essential pillar of our advocacy strategy. WGEH needs to disseminate resources and to refine advocacy skills. The following two campaigns belong to the Vincentian Family Homeless Alliance. They are good examples of initiatives we may want to join in the future. As it was already mentioned, we have a strategic partnership with this group and so we can use these campaigns as part of our advocacy efforts.

Concept 1: 'A Thousand Voices'

Campaign action: hear and transcribe stories of people experiencing street homelessness

A diverse collage of voices of street homeless people gathered from communities across the world offers a "human face" and involves actors globally in supporting the Campaign. The Voices would be gathered and presented electronically and in hard form through video and photographs to key influencers targeted by the Campaign. By capturing the personal stories of rough sleepers we remind those we lobby that rough sleepers are "more than just numbers" – but that at the moment they aren't even numbers. These human beings aren't even accorded the dignity of being a statistic.

Concept 2: 'Make Them Count'

Campaign action: communities around the world go out and count *rough sleepers* in their area

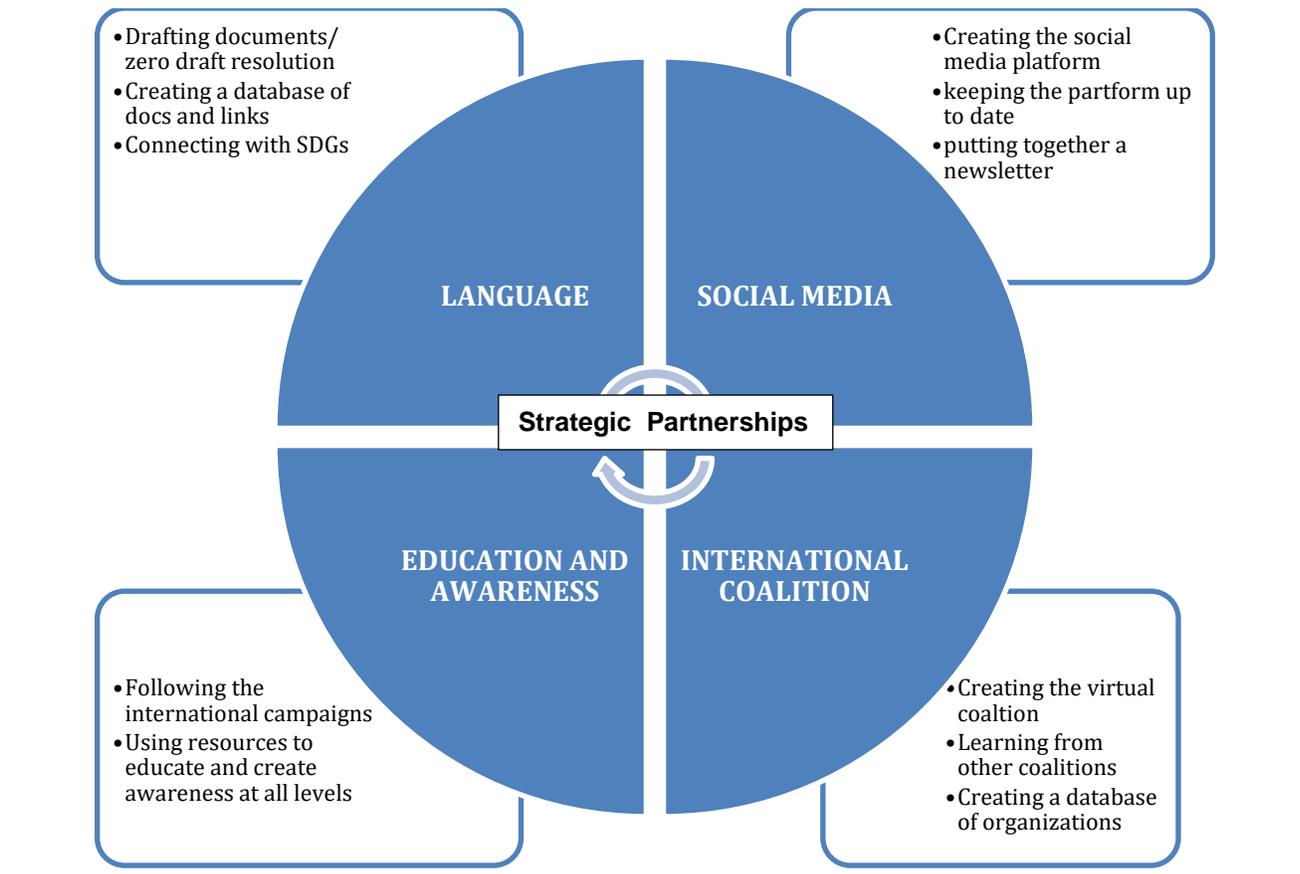
Communities would report their campaign action to their national UN representative with an accompanied "ask" to support the Campaign. We "ask" *the UN to make street homeless people count, by counting them*. It is a symbolic action which leaves scope for politicians and media to join the action itself. It shows that if communities around the world can count homeless people, so could the United Nations. It is not a scientific point in time count, but proof that measurement is both possible and wanted. Concept 1 could be incorporated, by collecting stories from *rough sleepers* met on the count.

Concept 3: Sleepout Campaign

Information of this campaign will be provided to plan a sleepout event around the UN.

WGEH Operational Structure

- ❖ The executive group will be responsible for the strategic partnerships - members of the group will be invited to different meetings to provoke the full participation of all in the process.
- ❖ The group of interns will be responsible for the Social Media Platform.
- ❖ All members will be responsible, in turns, for putting together side events and oral/written statements following the UN schedule of meetings-events.



Functional Structure of the WGEH

Finances

Every member of our group contributes thirty dollars (\$30 USD) due annually at the beginning of the calendar year. Dues are not an obligation to participate in our meetings or in the different

activities we organize together. The group may need and is open to receiving economic support from our members and our partners for specific events/activities.

Officers

The WGEH established an executive committee to facilitate operations. As a group we are servant leaders where we aim to be reflective, mindful and inclusive. Our model is collaboration. All decisions are made with consultation to achieve consensus of the EC and membership.

The members of the executive committee hold the offices of Chair, the Vice-Chair, the Secretary and the Treasurer. This group is elected for a term of two years beginning in the odd year. No member organization may hold more than one office.

The responsibility of the executive committee shall be to animate the active participation of the members and to carry on the business of the working group between meetings. The members of the WGEH shall be kept informed of the activities of the executive group through a report from one of them at each regular meeting of the WGEH.

Meetings

The WGEH meets on the third Monday of every month at 10 am at 246 E 46th Street # 1F. The date and time of these meetings can be changed for practical reasons, for instance to protect/encourage the participation of our members in UN scheduled events, meetings.

Membership

Membership in the working group is essentially open to Non-Governmental Organizations with ECOSOC and DPI status connected to the UN system. Other not for profit organizations (researchers, service providers, coalitions, etc) are welcome to join as affiliates. Individuals with a interest or expertise in homelessness may also join to receive information and be able to contribute to the work of the WGEH.

Membership of the WGEH (in formation)

NGOS with ECOSOC or DGC Status

Caritas Internationalis
Caritas Internationalis (Spain)
Congregation of the Mission
Company of the Daughters of Charity of St.
Vincent de Paul
Dominican Leadership Conference
Franciscans International
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
Institute of Global Homelessness
International Association of Charities
International Confederation of the Society of
St. Vincent DePaul
Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI)*

Fondazione Proclade Internazionale - Onlus
Pax Christi
Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary
Roundtable Association of Catholic Diocesan
Social Action Directors
Salvation Army
School Sisters of Notre Dame
Sisters of Charity Federation
Sisters of Charity, New York
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas aka Mercy
International Association: MercyAction
Sorooptimist International
Sure We Can, Inc.*

UNANIMA International
VIVAT International Comboni Missionaries

Women in Development and Environment,
Nigeria
World Federation for Mental Health

Affiliates:

ATD 4th World
Catholic Charities/NY/Producer Just Love Radio
Fordham University – students
Life Experience and Faith Sharing Associates
(LEFSA)

Special Rapporteur’s Office
St John’s University-Student
The Pont

Activities

Side Events Sponsored by WGEH and partners

2018

- 56th CSocD 2018 “Ending Homelessness to Eradicate Poverty”
- Urban October “Ending Homelessness, Floors and Roofs for All in the Sustainable Cities of the Future” October 30. Partners: IGH and UN Habitat

2019

- 57th CSocD 2019 “Homelessness: A Prominent Sign of Social Inequalities”

Written Statements (available on request)

2019 **57th Commission for Social Development February 2019** “*Addressing Inequalities and Challenges To Social Inclusion Through Fiscal, Wage And Social Protection Policies*”

Conferences

2019-02 IGH

References

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