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# **The UN NGO WORKING GROUP TO END HOMELESSNESS (WGEH)**

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## **Strategic Matrix 2020-2021**



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## Introduction

### *WGEH Current Focuses:*

1. End Street Homelessness
2. Addressing Systems and Structural Inequalities together to address Street Sleepers and Hidden Homelessness (disproportionately affecting Women, Children/Girls)  
Targets include: Addressing all structural and personal drivers of homelessness inter alia; alleviating domestic and family violence; upgrading slums; preventing evictions; increasing social protections; promoting measurement, counts, and disaggregated data regarding persons experiencing homelessness; and building communities' resources to address housing insecurity and inadequacy
3. Identifying and highlighting good practices  
Including: Support services; Leading organizations; Technological opportunities; Measurement tools
4. Reviewing Research regarding COVID-19, and framing recommendations within the current global pandemic and prospects for a "post COVID-19 world"

### *About the WGEH*

The UN NGO Working Group to End Homelessness (WGEH) is a group of Nongovernmental organizations that evidences a concern for persons experiencing poverty and vulnerability around the world through programs and advocacy. We are committed to the alleviation and eventual elimination of homelessness,

working with the United Nations, global platforms to end homelessness, and academic centers such as the Institute for Global Homelessness at De Paul University. An essential aspect of the group is its inclusion of the voice of people who have experienced homelessness and housing insecurity, both through membership and through partnerships and focuses. The Working Group is also connected to the UN NGO Committee for Social Development (CSocD).

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 and UN NGOs, our identity has evolved. Homelessness is coming to the forefront at the United Nations, thanks in large part to efforts of our working group. In 2019, after a committed and strategic advocacy campaign, the Commission for Social Development decided in its 57<sup>th</sup> session that the priority theme for the 58<sup>th</sup> session in February, 2020, would be *“Affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness.”* This allowed the Committee to contribute to the work of the Economic and Social Council.

### *Purpose*

Our Purpose is to End Homelessness Globally

### *Mission*

The Mission of the Working Group to End Homelessness is to advocate at the United Nations for persons who are vulnerable, pursuing the human right to adequate housing for all and to end homelessness, so that all people can realize their full human rights and potential, and flourish.

### *Vision*

We envision a future in which every person experiences the dignity of having a safe, habitable, affordable, secure home achieved through social protection/ advocacy at the U.N., safeguarding human rights, and supportive, sensitive policies and programs to end homelessness.

## **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. Advocacy guidance and documentation for visits to Member States will be produced for the group on the following topics:

### *Propose a Definition of “Homelessness” for Global Adoption*

Persons living with homelessness, on the street and inadequate accommodation 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.”*<sup>1</sup> The definition adopted from CSocD58 is inclusive of both the visible and hidden forms of homelessness, the latter of which disproportionately impacts women and children/girls. Necessary action items include surveying which countries have affirmed the definition, and discussion of how the Working Group can approach and implement advocacy on behalf of all the vulnerable groups within our areas of focus (found at the top of the matrix).

### *Assess and Measure the Dimensions of Homelessness Globally*

In many countries, there is little or no measurement of homelessness, making the issue and progress in addressing it 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.”*<sup>2</sup> 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.”*<sup>3</sup> We must have disaggregated data by gender, age, race, disability, and other agreed upon criteria in order to move forward demanding equitable investment to remedy the situation. We will promote data collection including measuring, tracking and estimating homelessness on the global and national levels.

### *Focus on a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA)*

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*.<sup>4</sup>

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. Similarly, the hidden homeless face Human Rights violations, such as discrimination directed to a variety of economic, social, or cultural identities, including barriers to women and children globally, whose land and territory rights, personal security, and protections through motherhood (see UNCRC and CEDAW) are being violated. We will encourage a human rights-based approach to homelessness, including through avenues such as Universal Periodic Reviews, resolutions, communications with Member States, awareness-raising, statements, research, and other opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> (Leilani Farha, Special Rapporteur for the Right to Adequate Housing)

<sup>2</sup> (VF Homeless Alliance—Campaign to measure homelessness)

<sup>3</sup> (Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights/UN Habitat, 2009)

<sup>4</sup> (<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/toolkit/Pages/RighttoAdequateHousingToolkit.aspx>)

## *Prioritize Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation 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.”* We call for the establishment of a new indicator specifically on Homelessness, which could fall under SDG 11.

The main groups that can be included under the homelessness umbrella are slum dwellers; refugees, including Internally Displaced People (IDPs); persons experiencing street homelessness, or people living in temporary shelters or “doubled up” (including women and children/girls). 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, those living in temporary accommodation and women and children/girls.

## *Broaden the Emphasis on Homelessness in the UN 2030 Agenda*

The essential framework of our advocacy is the UN 2030 Agenda. We need to establish a cross-cutting and multidimensional connection between homelessness and the SDGs. Goal 11.1 of the 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 academia, as SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals, implies.

Ending homelessness is key for achieving the UN 2030 Agenda. Housing must be acknowledged as a basic human right (intimately tied to achievement of other basic human rights including water and sanitation) and there must be an exploration of the challenges homelessness poses to meeting other UN objectives, including but not limited to the New Urban Agenda. Additionally, UN agreements that already recognize the key role of housing and shelter including the 2016 New Urban Agenda, the 1996 Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements, and ECOSOC Resolution E/RES/2020/7 must be highlighted and integrated into this advocacy.

## *Establish a Strategic Connection with Social Protection Floors (SPF)*

In recent years, advocacy on the part of civil society at the UN has centered around issues related to social protection systems and floors (SPF). Social protection systems/floors are designed to protect individuals, families and countries from shocks and other stresses by providing a basic standard of living the vulnerable populations. Our group does not want to compete with this work but rather as an element in the International Labor Organization’s definition of SPF<sup>5</sup>. In additions to ensuring 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

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<sup>5</sup> (International Labor Organization)

<sup>6</sup> (United Nations, 2016)

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.”*

### *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.”*<sup>6</sup> 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, for social, economic, and environmental reasons.

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.”* Within our advocacy we must highlight Housing First and Permanent, Supported Housing solutions for their long-term effectiveness through communal and intergenerational impacts. A further area of discussion and focus should be rural housing adequacy and security, in relation to urbanization and urban housing.

### *Co-ordinate with Member States to Establish the Friends of Ending Homelessness*

The engagement of Member States is vital in ending homelessness. Partnering with Member States in establishing a Friends of Ending Homelessness would have reciprocal benefits. Member States can assist in developing advocacy strategies such as Side Events, Promoting Policies to assure affordable Housing and to end Homelessness, assist with Drafting Documents, and sharing Best Practices. The Working Group with the support of the Institute of Global Homelessness and other members, in turn, can advise Member States about Data and Measurement, provide the voice of persons at the grassroots related to suggested means of ending homelessness in various countries, refine a definition of homelessness, and encourage implementation of strategies such as Housing First. It could also provide Research which informs policy making.

Initiating a Friends Group can dovetail with approval of a Resolution related to homelessness in the Third Committee. Member States with whom the WGEH has a current relationship can be approached first, along with those who are involved with CSOCD, engaged in promoting our Resolution to the Third Committee, members of the Statistical Commission, and others. The group would meet regularly (perhaps quarterly), with other meetings added for specific initiatives. The Institute of Global Homelessness can assist by providing a newsletter and information material for Member States.

## 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 and the planet at the center, are needed at the global, regional, national and local level.”*<sup>7</sup> This goal is a source of inspiration as we advocate to end homelessness.

In the past three years, we have established meaningful partnerships with Member States, UN agencies, 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 – some of which are described in detail below.

Collaboration with other NGOs and UN Agencies/organs, such as UN Habitat, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), UN Women, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, and the Third Committee, including through advocacy, needs to be approached with awareness of the organizations’ niches, drawing links with homelessness.

### *Member States of the United Nations*

The General Assembly is the main deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations. Comprising of 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 related to 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 for 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.

<sup>7</sup> (United Nations)

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 multiple missions. During the discussions of the methods of work for CSocD 2019, the African Group of nations promoted making homelessness the priority theme for CSocD 2020. We will continue to strengthen and expand these partnerships with member states to advance our agenda.



### *Institute for Global Homelessness (IGH) at DePaul University*

IGH plays a unique role with data and research as well as a wealth of knowledge from its 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 people experiencing homelessness 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.

### *Office of the Special Rapporteur for the Right to Adequate Housing*

WGEH uses a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) for our advocacy work. We had established a direct communication with Leilani Farha, the former Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing. We aim to continue a close working relationship and consultation with the newly appointed Special Rapporteur, Mr. Balakrishnan Rajagopal. Notably, the work of other special rapporteurs often intersects with our work on homelessness, not limited to those related to Extreme Poverty and Human Rights; therefore, we seek to maintain and develop relationships with other special rapporteurs, as well.

### *2020-2025 Collaboration with the NGO Committee on Social Development*

The NGO Committee for Social Development (CSoCD) was instrumental in carrying forth the theme of ending homelessness to the Commission for Social Development. We will continue to work with the Committee as a means of carrying through to future Commissions the theme of ending homelessness.

### *Individuals and Families with a Lived Experience*

The WGEH recognizes the distinct need and lack of self-representation at the global level on a vast range of issues including Homelessness. For this reason as a working group we invite and encourage individuals and families with a lived experience to become part of our working group and promote their participation at the international level.

### *United Nations Agencies and Departments*

Since our formation the WGEH has paid special attention to ensuring we are connected with UN Agencies and Departments inter alia UN Habitat and UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). At present our partnerships with DESA has contributed greatly to advocacy especially around the Commission for Social Development. The WGEH regularly consults with UN Habitat through our involvement in NGO Working Group of Habitat on which Co-Chair Jean



Quinn attends, further to this AdHoc meetings with Director of UN Habitat in NY. The WGEH continues to engage in networking opportunities that will allow for further connections and partnerships with various other departments.

- UN Habitat contacts: Chris Williams, Francesca De Ferrari
- UNDESA contacts: Daniella Bas, Amine Lamrabat, Makiko Tagashira

### *Potential Partners and Further Collaborations*

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

- UN Habitat, NY – Directed by Chris Williams; Programme Management Officer, New York—Francesca De Ferrari
  - Note: Co-Chair of WGEH Jean Quinn, DW represents the WGEH in the NGO working group of Habitat
- UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)
  - Points of contact include Daniela Bas, Amine Lamrabat, and Makiko Tagashira
- UN Bureau of CsocD
- International Labor Organization (ILO)
- UN Economic and Financial Committee (Second) and UN Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Issues (Third Committee)
- Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing
- UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF)
- UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)
- International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- UN General Assembly

### Social Media and Communications

A group of interns have prepared a Social Media Strategy. This document will be included in this plan as an attachment (Attachment 1). A website has been created and is being updated regularly. All the media platforms will be interconnected. We plan a biannual newsletter to connect/inform all the members of the International Coalition.

### Resources

An especially important dimension of the civil society advocacy work at the United Nations includes not only proposing issues but also providing documents that provide foundations, connections and give specific recommendations that can be reflected in UN resolutions and other official documents. Considering this, several important documents have been produced by the group:

## *Ending Homelessness Through the SDGs Guide*

This is an extensive report, accompanied by an infographic, of the cross-cutting and multidimensional approach to homelessness relevant to the SDGs' targets and indicators.

## *CSocD 58 Zero Draft Resolution on the Priority Theme*

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

## *Official Statement on Homelessness and COVID-19*

Since the COVID-19 pandemic's onset, the WGEH responded to the crisis with an Official Statement, which included recommendations to the UN, global communities, and jurisdictions at all political levels for the necessary focus and concern for people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity, both within the current global health crisis and in potential future crises.

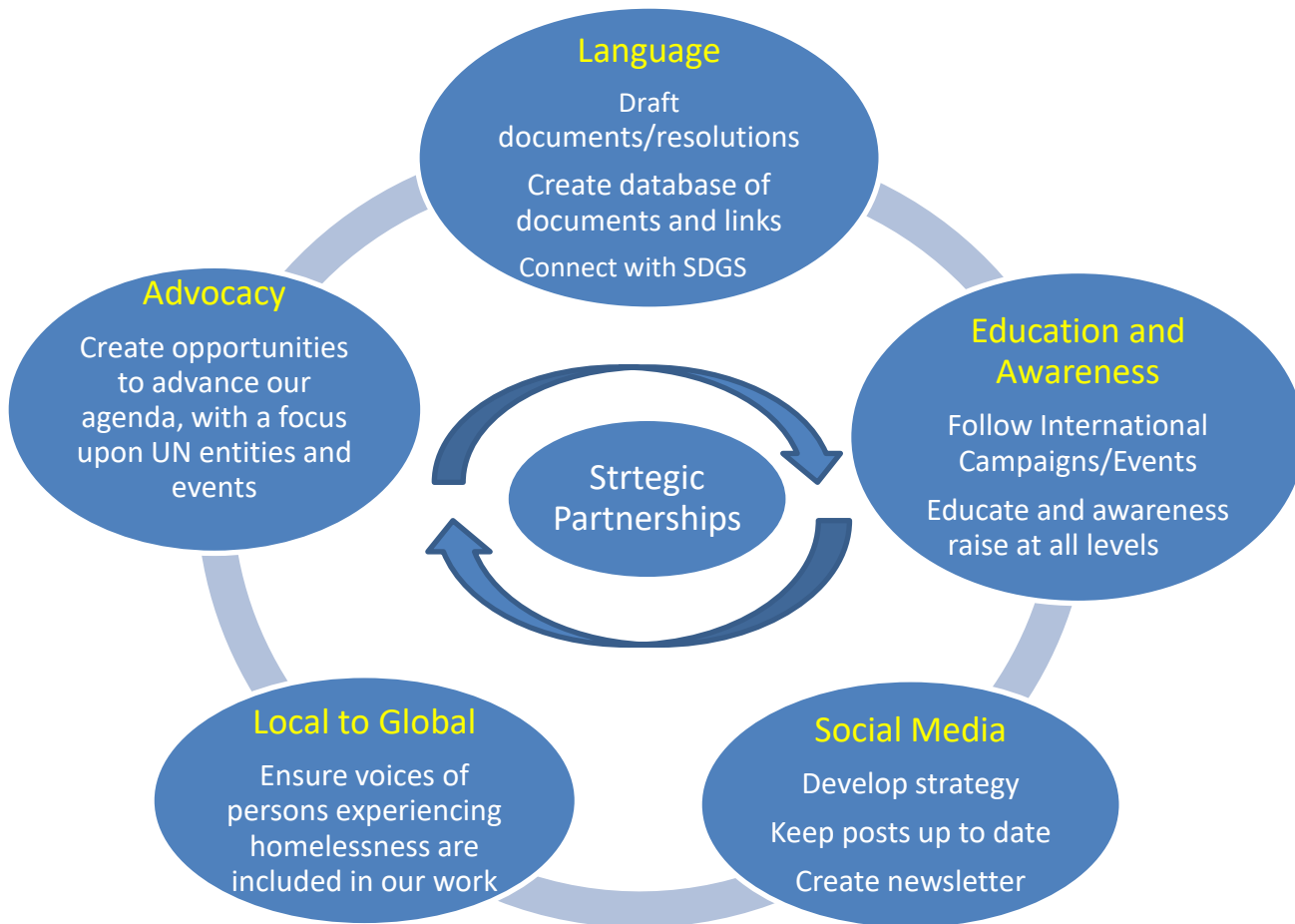
Additionally, WGEH member contributions have in the past, and will continue, to produce research, education and advocacy documents related to the groups' mission and focuses. Notably, research publications from UNANIMA International have expanded the group's focus to the niched experiences of women and children/girls, and the hidden homeless.

## **Local and International Campaigns to Educate and to Raise Awareness**

Education and awareness-raising is an essential pillar of our advocacy strategy. WGEH intends to disseminate resources and to refine advocacy skills. Our Education Sub-committee helps keep the group educated on multiples issues and topics related to homelessness as they link to UN events, COVID 19 and recovery from it, as well as brainstorms campaigns.

## **WGEH Operational Structure**

- ❖ The Executive Group will be responsible for 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.



### *Member Input and Brainstorming*

We will continue to actively encourage input and brainstorm with members to:

- Establish research priorities
- Survey our Members
- Engage persons at the Grassroots: listening to the voices of the people
- Enhance communication: internal and external – New Brochure – Webinars – Side Events
- Provide ongoing personal and Group Education: social protection, advocacy, homelessness
- Learn more about Information Technology Systems and Homelessness
- Respond to COVID-19 and Homelessness
- Advocate to the Third Committee for passage of a Resolution to address homelessness
- Prepare for CSoCD 59
- Establish a Friends of the Homeless

## *Finances*

Every member of our group contributes Thirty United States Dollars (\$30) annually at the beginning of the calendar year.

## *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 collaborative. All decisions are made with consultation to achieve consensus of the Executive Committee (EC) and membership.

The members of the EC hold the offices of Co-Chairs, Secretary, Treasurer, Member at Large. The Co-Chairs are elected for a term of two years and Executive for a 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 (US Eastern Standard Time) at 246 E 46<sup>th</sup> Street # 1F, New York, New York. 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 and meetings. In light of the COVID-19 crisis, all meetings are being held virtually until further notice.

## *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 an 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

### *NGOS with ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (ECOSOC) or DEPARTMENT OF GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS (DGC) Status*

ECOSOC is a permanent council of the United Nations responsible for economic and social matters. Consultative status is granted by ECOSOC upon recommendation of the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs, which is composed of Member States. Consultative status provides NGOs with access not only to ECOSOC, but also to its many subsidiary bodies, to the various human rights mechanisms of the United Nations, ad-hoc processes on small arms, as well as special events organized by the President of the General Assembly.

The Department of Global Communications conveys the UN story across multiple platforms, digital and traditional, to build support for the aims and work of the United Nations. Applications submitted to DGC for status, are reviewed by the Civil Society Association Committee. The Committee usually reviews applications twice a year. Those organizations associated with DGC are expected to help raise awareness about key UN priorities, collaborate in promotional activities and advocacy campaigns, and to submit reports when required by DGC, and safeguard the use of the UN name, flag, and emblem.

- ❖ Caritas Internationalis (including Caritas Internationalis Spain)
- ❖ Comboni Missionaries
- ❖ Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul
- ❖ Congregation of the Mission
- ❖ Dominican Leadership Conference
- ❖ Fondazione Proclade Internazionale - Onlus
- ❖ Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council
- ❖ Haiti Cholera Research Funding Foundation, Inc.
- ❖ Institute of Global Homelessness
- ❖ International Association of Charities
- ❖ International Confederation of the Society of St. Vincent DePaul
- ❖ Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI)\*
- ❖ New Humanity
- ❖ 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 Housing Development Corporation
- ❖ Sisters of Charity, New York
- ❖ Sisters of Mercy of the Americas aka Mercy International Association: MercyAction
- ❖ Soroptimist International
- ❖ Sure We Can, Inc.\*
- ❖ UNANIMA International
- ❖ VIVAT International
- ❖ Women in Development and Environment, Nigeria
- ❖ World Federation for Mental Health

## *Affiliates*

- ❖ Catholic Charities, NY
- ❖ Design Resources for Homelessness
- ❖ Fordham University – students
- ❖ Life Experience and Faith Sharing Associates (LEFSA)
- ❖ MenUpCampaign US, Inc.
- ❖ Outreach Grid
- ❖ Producer Just Love Radio
- ❖ Special Rapporteur’s Office
- ❖ St John’s University – students

## Activities

### *Side Events Sponsored by WGEH and partners*

2018

56<sup>th</sup> CSocD 2018 “Ending Homelessness to Eradicate Poverty”

2019

Urban October “Ending Homelessness, Floors and Roofs for All in the Sustainable Cities of the Future” October 30. Partners: IGH and UN Habitat

2019

57<sup>th</sup> CSocD 2019 “Homelessness: A Prominent Sign of Social Inequalities”

2020

The Working Group made significant contributions to the 58<sup>th</sup> Commission for Social Development and multiple members engaged in several side events during the Commission

### *Written Statements* (available on request)

2019 **57<sup>th</sup> Commission for Social Development February 2019** “*Addressing Inequalities and Challenges to Social Inclusion Through Fiscal, Wage and Social Protection Policies*”

2020: ***High Level Political Forum***

### *Conferences*

2019, February: Institute of Global Homelessness Conference, New York

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