

Recommendations on the Zero Draft of the Pact for the Future

Addressing Family Homelessness for present and future generations

Overview

In September 2021, the Secretary-General presented “Our Common Agenda” (OCA), a report highlighting challenges as well as opportunities to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the commitments made by Member States in the UN75 Declaration. Among other opportunities to build momentum and renew our social contract, the OCA called for the Summit of the Future to take place in September 2024. The Pact for the Future will be the culmination of many of the efforts outlined in the OCA and the outcome of the Summit of the Future, envisioned as a blueprint for a revived multilateral system capable of addressing the global challenges of the modern era. The Zero Draft was presented to Member States, Civil Society, and other Stakeholders on January 26, 2024 and “is intended to serve as a starting point for the intergovernmental deliberations this year, with the ultimate aim of adopting an ambitious, concise, action-oriented Pact for the Future, per resolution 76/307.”

If this Pact is to represent a global commitment to effective and renewed multilateralism, accelerate progress on existing commitments, and chart a path towards a better future for all of humanity, **it is crucial that it include reference to the issue of homelessness, especially as experienced by women, children, and girls**. Paragraph 7 of the Chapeau states that “eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.” The Pact also “reaffirms the commitment to leave no one behind in the pursuit of the 2030 Agenda” (para 24).

Yet despite these calls for greater inclusion of marginalized groups and commitments to eradicate poverty, many of the most vulnerable voices—particularly those from individuals and families experiencing homelessness or inadequate housing—continue to be overlooked. To truly accelerate progress on the SDGs and ensure “no one is left behind,” it is crucial that Member States address homelessness and displacement as a human rights violation, a growing manifestation of extreme poverty, and a barrier to sustainable and equitable development.

Beyond the Chapeau, poverty is only referenced once throughout the rest of the Pact, in another vague statement that “we remain resolved, between now and 2030, to end poverty in all its forms and dimensions (para 23).” Ultimately the draft fails to adequately include multidimensional poverty, or to provide a roadmap for how to address it, highlighting a critical gap in its approach to shaping a more equitable and sustainable future. The Pact claims to be action-oriented and inclusive, but it needs to outline actionable strategies that are grounded in the realities of those most affected by global shocks. We call on the facilitators to consider how different manifestations of homelessness intersect with the thematic and priority issues as outlined in the Pact. We cannot sufficiently meet the targets of Sustainable Development Goals without properly working to end homelessness across the globe.



Background on Homelessness

The issue of homelessness is more relevant now than ever as we see millions of people around the world displaced by conflict, climate, and economic conditions. At the end of 2022, the United Nations Refugee Agency estimated that 108.4 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide due to persecution, violence, or human rights violations. 1.6 billion people worldwide live in inadequate housing conditions, with about 15 million forcefully evicted every year. Perhaps displaying poverty in its most visible form, global homelessness remains one of the most extreme and growing manifestations of inequality, social exclusion, and disregard for human rights. Less visible, however, are the women, children, and girls experiencing homelessness, and the different forms that homelessness can take depending on the context. We know firsthand from our research and conversations with those at the grassroots that homelessness is often hidden, and the lack of decision-making power and agency displayed in experiences of homelessness is compounded for vulnerable women, children, girls, and families.

Some of the more invisible drivers and conditions of homelessness include unsafe or forced living conditions such as domestic violence, displacement due to conflict and climate related shocks, human trafficking, housing/rental discrimination, and being “doubled up.” Women and families living in temporary accommodations are unable to meet their basic needs, and they comprise the fastest growing part of the homelessness population.

Access to adequate quality and affordable housing is not only a human right. It is also a necessary gateway to safety and dignity across three domains: 1) social, 2) physical, and 3) security. Member States are reminded of their commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including the right to a healthy environment, the right to social protection, and the right to life. Member States are also reminded of Resolution 76/133 passed in the General Assembly in December 2021, which recognized homelessness as an affront to human dignity and recommended inclusive policies and programmes to address homelessness.

Significant to both the Global North and the Global South, the issues of homelessness and displacement underpin and can hinder the success of all Sustainable Development Goals. Homelessness and displacement transcend national borders and have far-reaching implications at every level, demanding cooperation rather than competition. There is a shared responsibility here to play an individual and collective role in taking these seemingly local issues to global levels. Thus, we must keep a multilateral focus on homelessness to encourage all political actors’ engagement with the issue. Civil society organizations, private sectors, government agencies (regional and international), and other stakeholders who sit together and design policies and plans must first and foremost support the development of the community, building ownership from the community perspective to empower and foster social justice

Definition of homelessness as clarified in resolution A/RES/76/133: “Noting that homelessness is not merely a lack of physical housing, but is often a disaffiliation process interrelated with poverty, lack of full and productive employment, decent work and access to infrastructure, as well as other socioeconomic issues that may constitute a loss of family, community and a sense of belonging, and, depending on national context, can be described as a condition where a person or household lacks safe habitable space, which may compromise their ability to enjoy social relations, and includes people living on the streets, in other open spaces or in buildings not intended for human habitation, people living in temporary accommodation or shelters for people experiencing homelessness, and, in accordance with national legislation, may include, among others, people living in severely inadequate accommodation without security of tenure and access to basic services” (Para 22).



Recommendations

The **chapeau** should include reference to the importance of addressing homelessness specifically - not just poverty in all its forms and dimensions. Addressing homelessness is crucial to break the cycle of poverty and combat inequality at every level. Homelessness is not simply a by-product of poverty; it is often a cause and a consequence of the many issues outlined in both the OCA and the Pact. Paragraph 8 of the Chapeau states that “Every commitment in this Pact is guided by principles of human rights and gender equality and will contribute to their fulfillment,” yet the experience of homelessness violates numerous human rights and principles of gender equality as defined in international law. To honor these commitments, homelessness must be addressed.

The section on **Sustainable development and financing for development** should confront the needs of vulnerable communities in the face of climate change and consider the impact of sustainable development initiatives in particular contexts. The section should include reference to climate displacement, which is both a driver and a result of lowered adaptation and resilience-building capacity among already vulnerable populations. Climate change is called a “risk multiplier” because whatever background risks people are facing (i.e., housing insecurity, extreme poverty, gender inequity, etc.) will be multiplied in the face of climate change. Women and girls experiencing homelessness have the highest risk of experiencing the negative effects of climate change and the fewest options to recover. As we seek to shrink our global carbon footprint while leaving no one behind, we must ensure the transitions are just and that renewable clean energy is accessible to all.

The section on **Youth and Future Generations** should express concern about the many systemic inequalities that make and keep people poor from birth. Today one out of two children will be born into extreme poverty globally. The Pact should reaffirm commitments to recognize the importance of intergenerational programs throughout the lifecycle, giving special attention to interventions with families, women, and children who are at risk of homelessness. The lack of decision-making power and agency displayed in experiences of homelessness is compounded for vulnerable youth, especially children and girls.

The section on Youth and Future Generations is also the only section which mentions social protection as a solution to the challenges described. It is crucial to recognize the importance of social protection floors throughout the Pact, as they are essential to address global and local inequalities, to build resilient and adaptable global communities, and to ensure the realization of human rights for all. The Pact should reaffirm the commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration along with those of the SDGs as they are inherently intertwined.

Finally, the section on **Transforming Global Governance** needs greater emphasis on a whole-of-society and holistic approach to global policy-making. As recognized in A/RES/76/133, “homelessness is a barrier to full participation in society” and “Member States need to address legal, administrative, social, economic, digital and cultural barriers, that limit people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, from full, equal and meaningful participation, representation and input at all levels.” The Pact should adopt the principle of “nothing about us without us,” and ensure that people with lived experiences of homelessness can take part in the development and implementation of policies and programs to address poverty, homelessness, inequality, and social development.