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Social development

Inclusive policies and programmes to address homelessness

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [78/172](#), provides an overview of global developments in policies and programmes addressing homelessness within the reporting period of July 2023 to June 2025. It contains an examination of structural drivers and emerging policy trends and an overview of both persistent challenges to and promising practices in prevention, data systems and inclusive governance.

In the report, the Secretary-General underscores that, while attention to homelessness has increased, significant gaps remain in definitions, data, legal protections and long-term housing solutions. He calls for coordinated national strategies, improved data systems and recognition of the distinct experiences of groups facing systemic exclusion. In his recommendations, he promotes inclusive, rights-based responses that reflect the lived realities of those affected and that enable global progress towards ending homelessness.

* [A/80/150](#).

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I. Introduction

1. Homelessness is a universal issue rooted in systemic gaps within housing systems, poverty reduction strategies, health systems and social protection mechanisms. Despite growing recognition of its structural drivers, homelessness continues to be shaped by persistent stigma and misconceptions that frame it as a result of individual failure or behaviour. These prejudices not only obscure the real drivers of homelessness, but also hinder public support for transformative solutions.

2. Having no access to a place to live in safety and with security violates the right to adequate housing, as recognized in international law and as affirmed by the General Assembly in its resolutions [76/133](#) and [78/172](#), for example. Homelessness also intersects with major global challenges, such as poverty, inequality, a lack of basic services, gender inequality and social exclusion. Ending and addressing homelessness has been the subject of over 600 recommendations to States made by United Nations human rights mechanisms, as indicated by the Universal Human Rights Index. It is related to achieving target 11.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals, on ensuring access to adequate housing for everyone by 2030, and strongly related to ending poverty (Goal 1), reducing structural inequality (Goal 10), ensuring access to justice (Goal 16), promoting good health and well-being (Goal 3) and achieving gender equality (Goal 5).

3. While those intersections are increasingly acknowledged, there is opportunity to integrate homelessness more systematically and explicitly across international development agendas. The focus by the World Summit for Social Development on social inclusion and protection and the regular review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on gender equality, for instance, provide important entry points that could be further strengthened to advance holistic, inclusive and rights-based development outcomes.

4. The present report builds on the findings of the 2023 report of the Secretary-General¹ on the same topic. Drawing on 38 written contributions received from national and local governments, civil society and other stakeholders, it contains an examination of both the advances made in addressing homelessness and the challenges that persisted within the reporting period of July 2023 to June 2025.

II. Understanding homelessness: definition, dimensions and misconceptions

5. In the absence of an internationally agreed definition of homelessness, definitions employed by governments and other stakeholders depend on language, socioeconomic conditions, cultural norms and the purpose for which homelessness is being defined. In the present report, in line with resolutions [76/133](#) and [78/172](#), a broad and inclusive understanding is considered, covering:

(a) People without shelter, such as people living on the street, in open or public spaces or sleeping in vehicles, parks, railway and bus stations, riverbanks or makeshift structures;

(b) People in temporary or crisis accommodation, such as people living in night shelters, refuges for women and children or camps for internally displaced persons, as well as migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, when stays are prolonged and institutionalized and when there is no prospect of permanent housing;

¹ [A/78/236](#).

(c) People in severely inadequate or insecure housing, including those living in structures not intended for permanent habitation or in severely overcrowded conditions;

(d) People without any alternative access to affordable, adequate or secure housing, including people staying temporarily with neighbours, friends or extended family because they have no other options or those relying on low-cost, short-term accommodation without stability. This category also includes people obliged to remain in institutional settings for a lack of alternatives, as well as those denied housing access due to legal, cultural or systemic discrimination.

6. As emphasized by the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context, a human rights definition of homelessness should be focused on people in the most vulnerable situations, while ensuring that people can define their own needs and are recognized as actors in shaping their own path towards adequate housing. The social dimension of homelessness is also central to that understanding.² Homelessness cannot be fully understood solely as the deprivation of physical shelter. The experience also entails the loss of security, stability and social connection, which many people experiencing homelessness describe as central to their situation.

7. It is also important to avoid equating all forms of inadequate housing with homelessness. While more than 1 billion people are estimated to be living in informal settlements with critical needs that should be addressed as a matter of priority, most do not consider themselves to be homeless and have worked to establish a home, despite the absence of formal tenure or basic services. However, within these contexts, some are living in particularly unsafe, overcrowded or precarious conditions, without alternatives, and may reasonably be understood to be, or self-identify as, experiencing homelessness.

8. Through the recognition provided of the diverse manifestations and lived realities of homelessness across regions and contexts, the report underscores that it is a universally relevant issue requiring a coordinated, inclusive and rights-based response.

9. Persistent misconceptions also affect public understanding and policy responses. Rather than being focused on individual circumstances or crises, a sustainable approach to ending homelessness would be focused on systemic failures and would demand not only the integration of housing policies with broader social protection systems, but also attention to tenure security and the social dimensions of exclusion.

III. Progress and remaining challenges for data collection and measurement gaps

10. Four core challenges persist in global efforts to measure and monitor homelessness. First, there is a significant lack of reliable and comprehensive data. According to the Ruff Institute of Global Homelessness,³ official government statistics on homelessness are available in 78 countries. While this reflects progress as compared with the 44 countries recorded in the 2023 report, only 24 countries report on categories beyond people sleeping rough and using emergency shelters, thus limiting the understanding of the full scale and diversity of homelessness.

² See A/HRC/31/54.

³ See <https://ighomelessness.org/global-homeless-data/>.

11. Second, data collection methods vary widely and often lack a rights-based or inclusive approach. Standard methodologies relying on street counts, administrative records and survey-based approaches often undercount certain groups, particularly women, children and young people, LGBTIQ+ persons, Indigenous Peoples, older persons, ethnic minorities and migrants. These groups are more likely to rely on informal networks or avoid services due to concerns about safety, discrimination or past negative experiences, and their specific housing situations are often not fully captured in traditional data systems. In addition, the structural drivers that lead different populations to experiencing homelessness, such as gender-based violence, discrimination or systemic poverty, are rarely documented in data collection efforts, limiting the ability to understand and respond to the full range of pathways into homelessness.

12. Third, the absence of a shared definition and of a harmonized framework that enables cross-country comparability continues to impede systemic progress. Without agreed typologies that capture both visible and hidden forms of housing deprivation, data remain fragmented, and comparisons across contexts are unreliable. Efforts to address these issues include such initiatives as the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS), developed by the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless,⁴ and the Global Framework for Understanding Homelessness developed by the Ruff Institute of Global Homelessness,⁵ both aimed at defining and categorizing different forms of homelessness, including hidden and insecure living situations.

13. Fourth, certain contexts remain particularly undercounted. Rural homelessness, for example, is rarely captured, due to the limitations of urban-focused tools such as street counts or service-based data. Rural drivers, such as land loss, environmental degradation and informal labour, remain poorly measured.

14. Still, several promising efforts are under way. In Chile,⁶ a national census of people experiencing homelessness, developed in collaboration with civil society, was launched in May 2024, covering 185 municipalities and supported by over 770 enumerators. Latvia⁷ also reported improvements to its methodology since 2022, with a focus on better capturing the diversity of lived situations.

15. Data must serve not only to measure, but to include. Monitoring frameworks need to go beyond raw numbers that can distort understanding of homelessness. For example, a decline in shelter use may reflect punitive policies, not improved conditions. Disaggregated, qualitative and longitudinal data (the latter of which serves to follow people's long-term trajectories), collected in partnership with affected communities, are essential for developing effective policies. For example, in Colombia, a regionally implemented, street-based census of street dwellers⁸ is conducted every five years. Through the census, extensive information is collected on the living conditions, histories and needs of people experiencing homelessness, including demographic indicators, detailed housing histories, income sources, family networks and awareness and use of services, as well as information on physical and mental health, substance use and exposure to violence. The broad and disaggregated

⁴ See www.feantsa.org/download/ethos2484215748748239888.pdf.

⁵ See <https://ighomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/globalframeworkforundertanding.pdf>.

⁶ See www.ine.gob.cl/sala-de-prensa/prensa/general/noticia/2024/05/13/censo-2024-inicia-operativo-para-personas-en-situaci%C3%B3n-de-calle.

⁷ Submission by Latvia.

⁸ See https://webfs.oecd.org/Els-com/Affordable_Housing_Database/Country%20notes/Homelessness-COL.pdf.

evidence gathered is used to guide the country's public social policy for street dwellers, informing targeted prevention, support and inclusion measures.

16. Participatory data collection, led or co-led by people with lived experience, ensures that metrics reflect real needs and avoid reinforcing stigma or invisibility. A notable example is the 2008 national survey on the homeless population in Brazil,⁹ which was developed in close collaboration with the Movimento Nacional da População em Situação de Rua (National Homeless Movement). People with lived experience played a central role in planning and guiding fieldwork, helping to ensure respectful engagement and accurate representation.

IV. Criminalization of homelessness

17. The criminalization of homelessness and poverty is a critical issue affecting people across all regions. In a joint report,¹⁰ the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights and the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing highlighted that criminalizing life-sustaining activities (such as sleeping, eating or sitting in public spaces) not only violated human rights, but also perpetuated cycles of poverty and exclusion and was often counterproductive.

18. Rather than addressing structural causes or providing support, a law enforcement-based approach to poverty and homelessness reinforces marginalization. Whether through forced relocations to city outskirts or increased surveillance in public spaces, such approaches isolate people from livelihoods, services and social networks.

19. Progress made in addressing the criminalization of homelessness has been mixed since the previous report. Some countries have made positive strides. For example, the announcement¹¹ of the formal repeal, in 2026, of the 200-year-old Vagrancy Act of 1824, which criminalized rough sleeping in England and Wales, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, is a welcome development. However, many countries and cities continue to enforce laws that criminalize homelessness.

20. Beyond legal frameworks, addressing stigma and harmful public narratives is critical. Public messaging and visible leadership from policymakers are important levers for promoting inclusive and non-discriminatory responses. For example, while stigmatization remains a deep concern, through national schemes like the National Urban Livelihoods Mission and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana in India, from 2013 to 2020, the contributions of people experiencing homelessness to the economy of cities were acknowledged.

V. Systemic drivers: housing exclusion, poverty and governance

A. Housing systems and evictions

21. Inequality, unplanned urban expansion, insecure tenure and discriminatory land policies continue to drive housing precarity, rising costs and social exclusion worldwide.

⁹ See www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2019/05/CORTIZO_Roberta_Paper.pdf.

¹⁰ A/HRC/56/61/Add.3 and A/HRC/56/61/Add.3/Corr.1.

¹¹ See www.gov.uk/government/news/rough-sleeping-to-be-decriminalised-after-200-years.

22. Weak tenure security, particularly for women and marginalized groups, exacerbates the risk of homelessness due to evictions and displacement. In response, some governments have begun integrating gender-sensitive frameworks into national housing programmes. In Brazil, the Government's updated national strategy,¹² for example, includes gender-sensitive priorities in housing provision, with explicit emphasis on supporting women experiencing street homelessness through social housing and coordinated services.

23. Rising housing costs and evictions due to arrears, particularly in contexts without social housing or safeguards that protect low-income households, are among the most immediate triggers of homelessness. According to data collected,¹³ more than 2.4 million eviction proceedings are initiated annually across countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and evictions are on the rise in many other regions.

24. Legal protections remain limited, especially for tenants in informal housing or in rental arrears. While some countries offer legal aid, few have comprehensive eviction prevention frameworks in place. Evictions are often treated as private disputes, with limited enforcement of protections. Where safeguards do exist, they are frequently limited to debt rescheduling or temporary suspension orders.

25. The Universal Human Rights Index also reflects widespread concerns about the way forced evictions are treated, especially in informal settlements. Displacement often involves a broad range of negative impacts, from the loss of social capital and property, to psychological stress and the disruption of livelihoods. These actions contribute to the loss of security, stability and social connection. They also disproportionately affect women, Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities.

B. Shifting from emergency to long-term solutions

26. While emergency shelters and humanitarian aid play a vital role in crisis situations, they are not sustainable long-term solutions. Instead, long-term policies must prioritize affordability, habitability and security of tenure.

27. Moving beyond emergency responses requires addressing the structural weaknesses of housing systems. Even well-designed programmes face limitations when housing is inaccessible. In some contexts, rising costs and limited social or accessible housing have undermined the "housing first" principle and other housing-led approaches. Ensuring the availability of adequate, well-located housing requires proactive policy and legal frameworks. This includes measures to unlock land, as well as support for non-market housing models, including public, cooperative or community-led options that provide secure tenure and are designed with direct involvement from affected communities, particularly in informal settlements.

28. Furthermore, rental mediation programmes have emerged as tools for mobilizing private housing stock. The Solibail programme¹⁴ in France enables non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to lease properties from private landlords and sub-let them to people experiencing homelessness, offering landlords guaranteed rent and property management support in exchange for below-market rates. Similarly,

¹² Brazil, Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship, article on the Plano Ruas Visíveis (Visible Streets Plan), 11 December 2023, available at www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/2023/dezembro/governo-federal-lanca-201cplano-ruas-visiveis-pelo-direito-ao-futuro-da-populacao-em-situacao-de-rua201d-com-investimento-de-cerca-de-r-1-bilhao.

¹³ See https://webfs.oecd.org/Els-com/Affordable_Housing_Database/HC3-3-Evictions.pdf.

¹⁴ See www.drihl.ile-de-france.developpement-durable.gouv.fr/solibail-a325.html?lang=fr.

in Spain, the Provivienda rental mediation programme¹⁵ facilitates agreements between landlords and low-income tenants, providing insurance, legal support and tenant training to reduce perceived risks.

29. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic highlighted the critical importance of resilient housing systems and, in some cases, accelerated housing policy reforms. Countries that had integrated housing with social protection were able to reduce and prevent homelessness more effectively during the crisis. For instance, Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy,¹⁶ which provides community-based support to reduce homelessness, was able to rapidly reallocate resources to accommodate people affected by the pandemic. On the other hand, in countries without pre-existing social housing frameworks, COVID-19 responses were more fragmented and emergency-focused. For example, expanded emergency shelters during lockdown were often temporary and disconnected from long-term planning.

30. Several countries have also made progress in integrating social protection with housing systems. For example, in Viet Nam,¹⁷ housing initiatives not only provide shelter, but also support informal workers (especially women and older persons) through access to small business opportunities and learning spaces. In Spain, through an integrated housing strategy,¹⁸ the city of Barcelona combined social housing with healthcare and employment services, ensuring that people transitioning from homelessness have continued support.

C. Governance and inclusive spatial planning

31. Public governance is essential to preventing and addressing homelessness. This includes recognition of housing rights to ensure security of tenure, improving the legal protection of tenants against evictions, coordination across institutions, sustained public investment and mechanisms for transparency and accountability. Effective governance also enables fair taxation, a redistribution of the benefits of urbanization and improved monitoring.

32. Nevertheless, in many contexts, the commodification of land and housing has contributed to escalating land prices and deepened housing inequalities. Planning and zoning laws are sometimes used to restrict shelter developments or social housing projects, reinforcing sociospatial segregation. Financial speculation in real estate is a significant factor contributing to rising prices and ownership concentration. These dynamics may be further influenced by expansionary monetary policies, such as low interest rates and quantitative easing, particularly when not complemented by appropriate safeguards, including progressive taxation, regulation of large-scale investors and tenant protections.

33. Addressing the root causes of housing informality and improving living conditions requires recognition of the social function of land and a radical rethink of how land is allocated and used. Housing for lowest income groups should be made available in central locations at a truly affordable cost, through diverse types of tenure and projects designed to improve the standard of living of residents. Homelessness and extreme housing inadequacy are often driven by economic need and a lack of support for people facing destitution. Effective prevention in developing countries

¹⁵ See <https://world-habitat.org/world-habitat-awards/winners-and-finalists/rental-mediation-programme>.

¹⁶ See www.canada.ca/en/housing-infrastructure-communities/news/2022/08/overview-reaching-home.html.

¹⁷ Submission by the Famvin Homelessness Alliance.

¹⁸ See <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/barcelona-right-housing-plan-2016-2025>.

must address economic inequalities (particularly those affecting women, children and young people, as well as marginalized populations), provide tailored support and ensure that housing solutions do not exacerbate poverty.

34. Submissions consistently identified fragmentation and underfunding as key barriers, including a lack of dedicated resources for impact evaluations and long-term research on homelessness. While many countries have piloted promising interventions, few have institutionalized ways to assess their effectiveness over time or across diverse groups. Integrating evaluation into programme design and funding independent research are crucial for evidence-based and accountable policies, areas that are well suited for multilateral cooperation.

35. Furthermore, in several contexts, responsibilities are divided across government ministries, such as urban development, social affairs and infrastructure, with limited coordination or shared data. Governments that designate a single ministry or specialized agency to coordinate efforts across sectoral areas and among diverse stakeholders have experienced better outcomes. Such coordination minimizes duplication, ensures cross-sectoral interventions and enables more effective use of public resources.

36. Civil society and academic contributions described promising approaches, such as integrating tenure security into urban planning frameworks, linking housing with social protection and participatory budgeting and developing specialized homelessness prevention mechanisms. The value of co-produced housing solutions and community-led land governance is highlighted through examples from cities, including the following: Kandhamal, India; Chiclayo, Peru; Lisbon; and Lusaka.¹⁹

D. Displacement linked to conflict and climate change

37. While displacement does not automatically equate to homelessness, it frequently involves the loss of a home and can lead to homelessness, depending on the adequacy and timeliness of the response. In recent reports on voluntary national reviews and the New Urban Agenda disaster-induced homelessness has been increasingly highlighted, particularly in small island developing States and disaster-prone countries. Although few nations have historically tracked these drivers systematically, recognition of the links between environmental shocks, conflict-related displacement and homelessness is growing.

38. The average displacement cycle for refugees is now estimated at around 20 years, underscoring the need for early investment in durable, rights-based alternatives to long-term camp or crisis accommodation.²⁰ Similarly, internal displacement, whether due to conflict or climate-related events, often results in rapid movement from rural to urban areas, contributing to increased pressure on urban housing systems.

VI. Progress and challenges in homelessness policy

A. Evolving national and subnational strategies

39. Recent years have seen an increasing number of national and subnational governments developing targeted strategies to prevent and address homelessness. For

¹⁹ Submissions by the Famvin Homelessness Alliance and Crescer.

²⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2017* (2018).

example, in a joint study on national urban policy by OECD and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat),²¹ covering 78 countries, it was found that 43 countries (55.1 per cent) acknowledged homelessness as a concern affecting urban areas, which indicates growing political awareness. Moreover, 24 countries reported that their national urban policies addressed homelessness through the provision of housing.

40. Furthermore, according to the OECD Affordable Housing Database, 26 out of 43 responding countries reported having an active homelessness strategy.²² These strategies are implemented both at national and subnational levels, reflecting diverse governance structures and policy priorities. Strategies typically emphasize housing-led approaches and are designed to move away from emergency and crisis responses towards long-term stability and housing security. Notably, countries such as Finland have made significant progress by prioritizing the “housing first” model, while Australia and New Zealand have focused on integrating community-based housing initiatives. In Scotland, recent legislation removed the requirement for households experiencing homelessness to have a “local connection” to the area in which they sought assistance, enabling people to apply for support anywhere in the nation.

41. Beyond OECD, progress has been documented. Jamaica adopted a national homelessness policy supported by its Ministry of Local Government and Community Development.²³ In Mongolia,²⁴ the Way Home programme supports prevention and early intervention to prevent chronic homelessness, through a partnership involving the Ulaanbaatar Mayor’s Office, Governor’s Office and Social Welfare Department, police, labour departments at the city and district levels, educational and training institutions, healthcare providers, the private sector and NGOs. In 2023, Brazil launched its Plano Ruas Visíveis (Visible Streets Plan),²⁵ coordinated among 11 ministries to address housing, health and legal services for people living on the streets.

B. Regional commitments: the European Union platform to end homelessness

42. In the European Union, regional-level coordination has gained momentum through the establishment of the European Platform on Combating Homelessness, launched in 2021. The Platform brings together European Union institutions, member States, local authorities, civil society and people with lived experiences. It operates as a collaborative forum to monitor progress on and support the implementation of the Lisbon Declaration on the Platform, in which members committed to ending homelessness by 2030.

²¹ See <https://urbanpolicyplatform.org/download/global-state-of-national-urban-policy-2024/>.

²² See https://webfs.oecd.org/Els-com/Affordable_Housing_Database/HC3-2-Homeless-strategies.pdf.

²³ See <https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2022/VNR%202022%20Jamaica%20Report.pdf>.

²⁴ See www.adb.org/publications/homelessness-ulaanbaatar-evidence-policy-recommendations.

²⁵ Brazil, Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship, article on the Plano Ruas Visíveis.

C. Local commitments: the International Mayors Council on Homelessness

43. Established in 2023, the International Mayors Council on Homelessness²⁶ provides a global forum for municipal leaders to drive progress on homelessness through shared learning, coordinated advocacy and practical collaboration. In a joint declaration,²⁷ adopted in June 2024, Council members set out a common agenda and road map for its implementation, structured around key priorities, which include expanding prevention and housing-led strategies; embedding multilevel governance and collaboration across sectors; integrating the voices of people with lived experience; and addressing stigma.

VII. Social groups facing hidden and heightened risks of homelessness

44. Homelessness drivers and experiences are shaped not only by economic pressures, but also by forms of structural inequality and exclusion. Despite increasing recognition of these disparities, policy frameworks often lack the data and targeted interventions needed to address the distinct needs of these groups.

A. Women and women-headed households

45. Gender-based inequalities are a persistent driver of homelessness. The Universal Human Rights Index includes 99 entries containing references to women's housing rights, with concerns ranging from discriminatory inheritance and marital property laws, to barriers in gaining access to emergency shelter and risks of eviction. These entries serve to highlight how structural and legal inequalities increase women's vulnerability to homelessness, particularly in contexts of family separation, violence, displacement or economic insecurity.

46. In at least 43 countries,²⁸ women do not enjoy equal rights to inherit property from spouses and other family members. Even when laws comply with international standards, informal norms and practices often deny women secure tenure. This undermines housing security for widows, single mothers and women-headed households. Furthermore, women hold only 24 per cent of legally documented land and property rights globally.²⁹

47. Women in displacement settings face additional barriers due to a lack of documentation, which limits their access to services, housing and legal protections. Women also face obstacles in gaining access to shelter, either because of safety concerns or because of exclusionary rules regarding children and family composition.

²⁶ Facilitated by UN-Habitat and the Ruff Institute of Global Homelessness, the Council brings together mayors and mayors' offices of the following cities: Buenos Aires; São Paulo, Brazil; Edmonton, Canada; Helsinki; Paris; Tauranga, New Zealand; Belfast, Glasgow, Lambeth, London, Manchester and Sheffield, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; and Newark and Orting, United States of America.

²⁷ See <https://ighomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/International-Mayors-Council-on-Homelessness-2024-Joint-Declaration.pdf>.

²⁸ Jeni Klugman and Beatrice Duncan, *Shaping the Law for Women and Girls: Experiences and Lessons from UN-Women's Interventions (2015–2020)* (New York, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2022).

²⁹ Data reported under indicator 1.4.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

B. Older persons

48. Older persons are increasingly vulnerable to homelessness, due to rising housing and utility costs, a lack of income security and limited physical mobility. Older women and older persons who have faced intersectional discrimination most of their lives, including based on race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, are at particular risk, as they are less likely to have access to safety nets and have lower or no pensions (e.g. after working in domestic settings or informally their entire lives).

49. While some countries provide social assistance for older persons, housing solutions tailored to their complex health, social and accessibility needs remain rare.³⁰ In addition, shelters often lack accessibility or operate on assumptions (e.g. daytime absence) that exclude people with health conditions or mobility limitations.

C. Persons with disabilities

50. The Universal Human Rights Index includes 107 entries identifying persons with disabilities among the groups affected by homelessness, referencing institutionalization, lack of accessibility and denial of adequate housing. Disability-specific access measures are rare in national housing strategies: while some accessible housing is available through public housing systems, these efforts are generally limited in scale and lack coordinated outreach.

51. Persons with psychosocial disabilities are particularly vulnerable to long-term exclusion, often facing barriers in proving eligibility for housing assistance or navigating institutional systems. Institutionalization remains a default response in some contexts, despite international calls for community-based living and integrated services.

52. The Banyan's Home Again³¹ model in India and Sri Lanka offers a community-based housing solution that includes supportive services for people with psychosocial disabilities. It emphasizes autonomy, peer support through the establishment of small affinity groups, and support for reintegration into their community through on-site clinical care and assistance.

D. Children and youth, including LGBTIQ+

53. Children and young people experiencing homelessness are often viewed primarily through the lens of child protection or juvenile justice, rather than recognized within housing or social policy frameworks. Few countries collect disaggregated data on youth homelessness, and most do not track children in street situations unless they are accompanied by a parent.

54. The Universal Human Rights Index includes 203 entries where children and youth are explicitly listed as being affected by homelessness-related concerns. Many entries raise concerns about institutional placement, unsafe shelter conditions or the criminalization of young people in public spaces, often in contexts where housing policy fails to provide adequate protection. Youth-specific shelter options were noted in some responses, but capacity is limited. LGBTIQ+ youth face distinct risks due to family rejection, discrimination in shelters and a lack of targeted services.

³⁰ See [A/77/239](#).

³¹ See <https://thebanyan.org/home-again/>.

55. A critical gap is the lack of structured housing and support for young people transitioning out of institutional care and the silos between different types of support programmes, as well as age barriers for receiving support. Without access to stable housing, income support or mentorship, young people ageing out of care are at heightened risk of experiencing chronic homelessness, or long-term or repeated episodes of homelessness, due to unmet support needs.

E. Indigenous Peoples and ethnic minorities

56. The Universal Human Rights Index returns 77 tagged entries referencing Indigenous Peoples as being affected by homelessness. Inadequate infrastructure, exclusion from land governance and historic displacement continue to affect Indigenous communities' housing access. The Special Rapporteur on adequate housing found that "Indigenous Peoples face significant barriers to their enjoyment of the right to housing compared with non-Indigenous Peoples.... They have disproportionately high rates of homelessness and they are extremely vulnerable to forced evictions, land-grabbing and the effects of climate change. When they defend their rights, they are often the targets of extreme violence."³² National housing programmes also rarely reflect Indigenous perspectives on family, land or home.

57. Racial and ethnic minorities, including Roma, Afrodescendent, Dalit and other marginalized communities, also face structural barriers to obtaining access to housing, including discrimination in public and private rental markets, overpolicing and heightened risk of eviction. In Europe,³³ Roma communities often live without formal tenancy, face repeated evictions and encounter obstacles linked to fragmented jurisdictional responsibilities, particularly for mobile groups. These issues are compounded by a lack of culturally responsive services.

F. Migrants, refugees, stateless persons and people experiencing displacement

58. Migrants, refugees, and displaced and stateless persons experience some of the highest rates of homelessness and are overrepresented in street homelessness. The Universal Human Rights Index lists at least 123 entries identifying these populations in connection with homelessness.

59. In his report,³⁴ the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing noted that migrants, particularly in irregular or undocumented situations, often lacked access to shelters, were excluded from formal rental or ownership rights and social housing lists and were disproportionately targeted by enforcement measures such as encampment sweeps. Refugees likewise face systemic and intersectional housing discrimination based on, for example, country of origin, skin colour and sex.³⁵ Stateless persons face specific and often extreme challenges. Without recognized legal identity, they are excluded from civil documentation systems, which are commonly required to own or rent a house legally and to gain access to public housing and social protection.

60. In many contexts, the housing options provided to displaced and undocumented persons, whether within or outside their country of nationality, engender exclusion. Temporary camps, shelters or informal encampments often fall short of human rights standards and do not provide long-term solutions. UN-Habitat has developed

³² See [A/74/183](#).

³³ See www.feantsa.org/public/user/PDFs/concept_notes/rom/ROMA_Concept_Note.pdf.

³⁴ See [A/HRC/58/50](#).

³⁵ See [A/76/408](#).

guidance³⁶ on alternative housing models to prevent and address this gap, such as incremental housing, retrofitted public buildings, community-led initiatives, social housing, rental assistance, slum upgrading and improved access to housing, land and property rights. These options offer flexible, culturally grounded and scalable alternatives to short-term shelter.

G. People in informal employment and without social protection

61. Informal workers are often excluded from housing support due to a lack of formal contracts, income proof or social security enrolment. In submissions by and on countries across all regions, it was noted that informal workers were among the most affected during COVID-19 lockdowns, yet most emergency responses targeted formal sector households. Few countries allow for informal income recognition or flexible registration processes, which limits the access of the most precariously housed populations to social assistance.

62. Living arrangements of informal workers who sleep at or near their place of employment (often waste pickers, street traders or drivers) for lack of other options, to protect their livelihoods or due to long commutes typically fall outside official monitoring and are not reflected in most housing or social protection frameworks.

VIII. Policy pathways and long-term solutions

63. Crisis- or first response-based strategies, while essential in emergencies, risk institutionalizing homelessness when they are not backed by exit pathways leading to adequate housing. Emergency shelters, often designed for temporary or rotating use, frequently lack the stability, privacy, and support services required for long-term reintegration.

64. On the other hand, trauma- and psychologically informed approaches respond to the reality that many people experiencing homelessness have also faced trauma, violence, displacement or institutional harm. These approaches emphasize safety, trust, participation and emotional well-being as core elements of service delivery. Evidence³⁷ demonstrates that embedding trauma-informed care principles in shelter and housing systems improves user engagement, retention and long-term stability. This involves staff training, consistent care relationships and flexibility in how services are offered. It also includes creating spaces where people feel seen, respected and safe, particularly for women, young people and others who may avoid traditional services due to stigma or fear.

A. Proactive legislation and cross-sectoral approaches

65. Countries and cities increasingly recognize the importance and effectiveness of preventing homelessness before it occurs. The United States of America formally adopted the first-ever federal homelessness prevention framework³⁸ in September 2024, organized around three main categories of prevention: promoting stable housing; supporting people to avoid homelessness; and supporting people to quickly move into housing and promoting stability once they are housed. While this

³⁶ Available at <https://unhabitat.org/policy-directions-housing-land-and-property-solutions-to-resolve-and-prevent-displacement>.

³⁷ See www.sophia.ie/traumainformedcare.

³⁸ See www.usich.gov/sites/default/files/document/Federal%20Homelessness%20Prevention%20Framework_2.pdf.

framework represents an important policy innovation, recent institutional changes may affect its implementation and institutional support. In Ireland,³⁹ national frameworks focus on upstream prevention, with targeted interventions for youth and people exiting institutions.

66. Equally critical are cross-sectoral strategies that connect housing to social protection, basic social services, healthcare, employment, education, and justice systems. Mainstream institutions such as schools, child protection agencies, primary healthcare providers and courts are often the first to encounter people at risk of homelessness but rarely have the mandates or tools to intervene. Incorporating prevention responsibilities into these systems enables earlier, more targeted support. In Wales, the statutory duty to prevent homelessness is implemented through front-line workers in youth services and social assistance programmes, with support tailored to individual circumstances.

67. Several cities have also piloted integrated service hubs or “one-stop shops” to support people in vulnerable situations more holistically. In India,⁴⁰ for example, some shelters function as convergence hubs, linking residents to legal aid, identity documentation, pensions and health services. This integrated approach improves access to entitlements and supports long-term reintegration, although institutional fragmentation remains a common barrier. In Glasgow,⁴¹ a hub-based model brings together housing providers, NGOs and social services to identify people at risk of eviction and to coordinate outreach and support.

B. Local action and multilevel governance

68. Local governments are central to the homelessness response, managing shelters, coordinating support services and engaging directly with communities. However, effective local action requires an enabling national framework. In many countries, national Governments retain control over legislation, budgets and data systems, while local authorities are expected to deliver services with limited autonomy and support. The division of responsibilities across national, regional and municipal levels is sometimes unclear, and coordination mechanisms are weak or missing. Local and regional governments have called for stronger, more coherent multilevel governance, based on clear mandates, stable funding arrangements, greater autonomy in shaping local housing policies and meaningful inclusion in national housing strategies. Without this, they remain structurally constrained in their efforts to address homelessness sustainably.

C. Enhancing tenure security, reducing evictions and supporting in situ upgrading of informal settlements as central homelessness strategies

69. Eviction remains a significant driver of homelessness. While the patterns of evictions vary across regions, their impacts are similar: displacement, disruption of livelihoods, psychological stress and deepening housing insecurity. Slum clearance is also often accompanied by violence that may result in loss of life.

³⁹ See www.gov.ie/en/department-of-housing-local-government-and-heritage/publications/youth-homelessness-strategy/.

⁴⁰ Submission by CityMakers Mission International.

⁴¹ Submission by the Glasgow City Council.

70. The principles on housing and property restitution for refugees and displaced persons (Pinheiro principles),⁴² adopted more than two decades ago, remain partially implemented. A significant number of countries have standards or institutions in place for housing restitutions or provision of compensation or alternative housing if return is impossible. In practice, however, many evictions are still carried out without consent or due process and without adequate and timely compensation, resulting in homelessness.

71. In some cases, communities are labelled as “unlawful” and framed as “obstructing urban development”, due to the absence of formal tenure despite long-standing residence or social ties. These classifications are generally the result of systemic discrimination or exclusion and can result in evictions without due process, especially in areas targeted for redevelopment. Importantly, formal recognition of informal settlements should not be a prerequisite to the recognition and realization of human rights.

72. In situ slum upgrading and the promotion of the continuum of land tenure, implemented with community participation, are effective ways to reduce tenure insecurity without engendering exclusion and evictions. Long-term adequate housing policies at a scale proportionate to needs are the only fully effective approach; however, rather than removing or relocating slum communities, upgrading initiatives aim to improve access to an adequate standard of living in place, through participatory design, infrastructure investment and secure tenure.

73. Upgrading informal settlements and slums should be framed as a national investment priority, not a marginal intervention. It delivers gains in public health, safety, education, housing rights and gender equality and prevents future homelessness by reducing precarity at its source.

D. Culturally adequate and community-led models

74. Homelessness solutions must also reflect local context and cultural realities, particularly for those communities whose concept of “home” may diverge from mainstream frameworks. For Indigenous Peoples, land and housing are deeply tied to identity, governance and continuity. MAIHI Ka Ora, the national Māori housing strategy,⁴³ offers a case of a culturally grounded policy. It links housing delivery with land stewardship, health and well-being and is co-designed with Māori communities. The strategy includes recognition of the intergenerational impacts of discrimination and housing exclusion and supports self-determined housing solutions that reflect Māori values, governance and family structures. It also includes dedicated funding streams and monitoring mechanisms to ensure accountability and progress.

75. Similarly, where nomadic or semi-nomadic traditions are prevalent, definitions and policy responses to homelessness must account for culturally specific understandings of home, shelter and land use. Imposing static, formalized housing models may not only be inappropriate but also risk undermining social and cultural systems. A human rights-based approach requires that such communities be meaningfully consulted and that solutions respect their right to cultural adequacy and self-determination under international law.

76. Likewise, community-led housing (such as cooperatives and community land trusts) can generate flexible and locally adapted solutions. These approaches allow

⁴² E/CN.4/Sub.2/2005/17.

⁴³ Available at www.hud.govt.nz/our-work/maihi-ka-ora-the-national-maori-housing-strategy.

residents to participate in design and management, increase accountability and address local priorities.

E. Coordinating with social protection systems

77. Income insecurity, illness, unemployment, disability and ageing are common pathways into homelessness. Each of these can be addressed by well-designed social protection systems.

78. Three dimensions of effective social protection are particularly relevant:

(a) Universal coverage: ensuring that everyone (including informal workers, migrants, refugees and displaced persons) can gain access to support when needed;

(b) Comprehensive protection: addressing life risks, such as unemployment, disability and illness, which often lead to housing insecurity;

(c) Adequacy of support: providing benefits and services that uphold dignity, reduce dependency on emergency shelters and facilitate transitions to stable housing.

79. International Labour Organization (ILO) standards, including the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), provide a normative framework for linking housing with inclusive, non-discriminatory and needs-based support. The most recent data for Sustainable Development Goal indicator 1.3.1 show that 52.4 per cent of the global population is covered by at least one social protection benefit. Regional disparities are stark: coverage is highest in Northern, Southern and Central Europe (93 per cent) and lowest in sub-Saharan Africa (15 per cent) and Arab States (30 per cent).⁴⁴

80. A growing number of low- and middle-income countries have made significant strides towards universal protection in at least one area of their system, including Argentina, Cabo Verde, China, Georgia, Lesotho, Mongolia, Namibia, Nepal, South Africa and Uruguay.⁴⁵

81. Family homelessness, especially among single-parent households, remains underrecognized in data and policy responses. Effective responses must include tailored social protection floors, ensuring access not only to housing but also to integrated services such as trauma-informed support, childcare, healthcare and education. These are essential for long-term stability and for breaking intergenerational cycles of homelessness.

82. A robust safety net is essential to prevent housing loss and support reintegration, with provisions that include legal aid, rent supplements, energy assistance and disability benefits, as well as re-entry support for people leaving institutions, assistance for care leavers and comprehensive services for survivors of domestic violence. Support provisions should be accessible, adequately funded and responsive to crisis situations.

F. A rights-based definition and measurement of homelessness

83. A unified and inclusive definition of homelessness is essential to support consistent policymaking, resource allocation and progress monitoring. The absence of a shared definition, particularly one that accounts for hidden forms of

⁴⁴ ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2024–26: Universal Social Protection for Climate Action and A Just Transition* (Geneva, 2024).

⁴⁵ ILO, ILO Social Protection Platform.

homelessness, has hindered efforts to compare data across contexts or to track long-term impact.

84. In 2024, the open-ended intergovernmental expert working group on adequate housing for all, for which UN-Habitat acts as secretariat, identified the development of a comprehensive definition of homelessness, and one on informal settlements, as part of its strategic priorities for the biennium 2025–2026.

85. A human rights-based approach to monitoring should:

- (a) Combine quantitative and qualitative data (e.g. testimonies, visual documentation);
- (b) Use trajectory-based indicators to track how people enter, exit or remain in homelessness, including displacement;
- (c) Recognize both visible and invisible forms of housing deprivation;
- (d) Ensure that those affected co-lead measurement approaches.

IX. Conclusion and recommendations

86. Homelessness remains one of the most visible yet least addressed manifestations of inequality, inadequate housing systems and the persistent failure to redistribute land and resources fairly. It is a consequence of systemic imbalances, whereby housing is treated primarily as a commodity, often subject to speculation and unregulated market forces, rather than upheld as a human right that governments are obliged to progressively realize for all as being inherent to the social contract.

87. International human rights law requires States to take all appropriate measures to eliminate extreme poverty and to prevent and end homelessness. When people are left without adequate housing, this reflects a failure to meet core obligations of a Government to ensure that its citizens lead a life with dignity. Punitive measures that criminalize survival behaviours do not resolve this failure. Instead, they further entrench exclusion and insecurity, making it more difficult for people to gain access to the services, support or pathways that could enable them to secure housing. These practices also contribute to erasing homelessness in public spaces and reduce societal awareness of its scale and impact, undermining opportunities for collective engagement and social cohesion.

88. Homelessness poses a major obstacle to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, undermining progress across multiple Sustainable Development Goals, including poverty, health, education, gender equality and sustainable cities. Addressing it requires urgent, coordinated and rights-based action, recognizing that homelessness extends beyond housing to reflect deeper issues of systemic exclusion, inequality and governance failure. Comprehensive strategies must account for its diverse forms across regions, cultures and social groups and must be integrated into all efforts to advance the Goals.

89. The present report includes key priorities for advancing a rights-based response to homelessness: developing a shared, inclusive definition and protection systems for people in hidden and informal living situations, ending criminalization and reconnecting homelessness policy to broader housing systems and strategies to reduce extreme poverty.

90. The recommendations that follow are grounded in the voices of those most affected, in the experiences of civil society and in evidence submitted by Member

States and local authorities. They serve to support a shift from managing homelessness to resolving it, through prevention, rights-based policies and regional and international cooperation.

91. To this end, it is recommended that Member States:

(a) Uphold international obligations and human rights standards related to homelessness and housing. Policies should be compatible with international human rights law, including the right to adequate housing, and relevant standards aimed at preventing forced evictions or ensuring housing and property restitutions for persons who have been displaced from their homes. This includes ensuring that actions, laws and regulations governing evictions, displacement, land access or informal settlements uphold the right to adequate housing for all;

(b) Adopt universal, inclusive and rights-based definitions of homelessness and informal settlements, recognizing them as structural challenges rooted in inequality, governance gaps, discrimination, poverty and exclusion, rather than individual failures. Such definitions are essential to enable data comparability and ensure that hidden homelessness, precarious housing and systemic exclusion are covered. Member States should actively engage in multilateral processes, such as the open-ended intergovernmental expert working group on adequate housing for all, to develop and endorse these definitions. Advancing shared, rights-based and inclusive definitions should guide global coordination efforts through the Statistical Commission, inform national and local policy frameworks and shape the formulation of multilaterally agreed development goals beyond 2030, in which homelessness should be explicitly addressed;

(c) Develop inclusive, gender-, age- and disability-disaggregated and participatory data systems on homelessness. Governments should institutionalize regular data collection on homelessness using harmonized indicators that reflect the lived experiences and intersecting exclusions of affected populations. Data systems should be designed with the meaningful participation of people experiencing homelessness. National focal points should be established to coordinate and assess data, while ensuring that data use promotes dignity and accountability;

(d) End the criminalization of homelessness and ensure the existence and implementation of legal protection against forced evictions. This includes stepping up efforts to provide alternatives to evictions, legal safeguards, adequate resettlement and respect for human rights; decriminalize homelessness and repeal laws that punish people for being in public spaces or informal housing; and protect and enable land and inheritance rights, particularly for women and marginalized communities;

(e) Prioritize permanent housing through affordable, adequate housing options linked to basic support services. States should invest in a continuum of housing options that includes “housing first”, community-led housing, transitional and supportive housing, culturally appropriate solutions and the adequate provision of social housing. These should be integrated with person-centred services addressing health, psychosocial support, income security and community inclusion. Emergency shelters, where used, should meet agreed quality standards, operate round the clock and provide safety and tailored support, particularly for women, young people, older persons, Indigenous Peoples, LGBTIQ+ persons and persons with disabilities, particularly persons with psychosocial disabilities. Furthermore, shelters and temporary accommodation should be designed and operated in ways that meet people’s

physical and psychological needs (e.g. safety, dignity, the ability to remain with family members or pets, and access to health and nutrition services) in order to be effective and accessible. There should be systems in place to facilitate a smooth transition between housing alternatives as needs evolve. Housing should be understood and governed as a human right, not a commodity. Special attention should also be given to people suffering from domestic violence, which can be a cause of homelessness;

(f) Ensure sustained public investment, inclusive governance and institutional capacity to prevent and address homelessness. Member States should commit to adequate, predictable and flexible funding for housing and support services, including long-term investment in civil society organizations, community-led responses and tailored employment initiatives. National authorities should designate dedicated coordinating bodies and provide the mandate and resources to implement, monitor and evaluate homelessness strategies. This should be complemented by robust local capacity-building and inclusive planning processes that ensure the meaningful participation of people experiencing homelessness and those at risk. Essential to this strategy is strengthening partnerships with local civil society organizations;

(g) Adopt integrated prevention strategies through cross-sectoral cooperation. Governments should implement comprehensive prevention systems that identify and address risk factors early, with strong coordination across the housing, health, education, employment, social protection and justice sectors. This includes ensuring access to legal identity, documentation, and essential public services for people in informal, undocumented or transitional situations. Prevention efforts should prioritize early interventions and outreach strategies tailored to local contexts, implemented through inclusive, community-based approaches;

(h) Recognize intersectionality and design targeted responses. Policies should account for the specific experiences of women, LGBTIQ+ persons, Indigenous Peoples, older persons, persons with disabilities, young people and others disproportionately affected by homelessness. Tailored strategies should be supported by disaggregated data and informed by community participation;

(i) Amplify the voices of people with lived experience. People experiencing or having experienced homelessness and marginalization should be meaningfully involved in all stages of policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This includes ensuring that people with lived experiences have real decision-making power in initiatives that affect them; providing financial support and capacity-building for peer-led initiatives and organizations led by people with lived experiences; and ensuring that participation mechanisms are accessible and safe for all, taking into account barriers such as stigma, trauma, mental health challenges and logistical obstacles.