United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Division for Inclusive Social Development

Aide-Mémoire

Expert Group Meeting on
"Affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness"

United Nations Office at Nairobi
Gigiri Compound
Conference Room 11

22 – 24 May 2019

I. Purpose of the meeting

In its resolution E/CN.5/2019/L.5, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations decided that the priority theme for the fifty-eighth session of the Commission for Social Development, which shall allow the Commission to contribute to the work of the Council, will be "Affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness". The expert group meeting is convened in the context of this resolution and in preparation for the fifty-eighth session of the Commission to be held in February 2020, which will produce a negotiated policy outcome (a resolution) on the priority theme.

The Commission, as a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council, serving as the main United Nations forum for an intensified global dialogue on social development issues and in promoting the integrated treatment of social development issues in the United Nations system, continues to have the primary responsibility to review, on a periodic basis, issues related to the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development. Furthermore, the Commission will, within its mandate, make a vital contribution to the follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by supporting the thematic reviews of the high-level political forum on sustainable development on progress on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, including cross-cutting issues.

The outcomes of the meeting will contribute to the work of the Commission by providing concrete, evidence-based recommendations on policies for addressing homelessness, with a particular focus on the roles of affordable housing and social protection for all. The meeting is expected to provide guidance and key input for the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General on the priority theme.

II. Background

By adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Member States have committed to achieve sustainable development for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. The Agenda is based on the ideals of inclusiveness and shared prosperity and Member States pledged to leave no one behind and to endeavor to reach the furthest behind first.

While considerable progress has been made in rising economic and social prosperity, such progress has been uneven. In many instances, inequality has not only persisted but increased, and considerable numbers of people within countries are left living in extreme poverty, near poverty, or excluded from full participation in economic, social and political life.

Homelessness is one of the manifestations of this inequality. Levels of homelessness have dramatically risen in most of the major cities of the world, affecting both wealthy and poor nations. At least, an estimated 150 million people or about 2 per cent of the world's population are homeless, based on national reports. Moreover, about 1.6 billion people—more than 20 per cent of the world's population—may lack adequate housing.[1]

Homelessness is a complex phenomenon that manifests in different forms depending on the context. The most common form, which is a visible one, is to be forced to openly live on the streets or in public spaces. Another form, which is invisible and more common in developing countries, is to have to live in very precarious housing conditions that lack basic services and security of tenure.

Homelessness is associated with poverty, ill-health and lower life expectancy, and lack of a safe, secure, and adequate home/housing. Homeless people face discrimination, stigmatization and even criminalization because homelessness is often considered by society as burdensome, therefore "unworthy" of respect or compassion. Although homelessness is very often attributed to personal circumstances and cultural factors, its causes are primarily structural, including socio-economic, demographic and geographic causes.

Addressing homelessness assists Member States in implementing various SDGs, including Goal 1 (End poverty in all its forms everywhere); Goal 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages); Goal 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries) and Goal 11 (Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable). More specifically, it contributes to reaching SDG target 1.3 to implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable, as well as SDG target 11.1 to ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services. Identifying the persons experiencing homelessness, determining the drivers of homelessness, and devising successful policies to combat homelessness will also contribute to the pledge to leave no one behind.

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1 Joseph Chamie (2017). "As cities grow worldwide, so do the numbers of homeless", Yale Global Online. Available at: https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/cities-grow-worldwide-so-do-numbers-homeless.

III. Objectives, Key Questions and Methodology

The expert group meeting aims to review major drivers of homelessness, identify existing gaps and priority areas for interventions, and make specific policy recommendations on effective housing and social protection policies to address homelessness in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The meeting will build on the outcomes of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission for Social Development that have discussed on how to address inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies. The meeting will focus on affordable housing policies and strategies that have proven to be successful in providing social protection for all at the national levels. The meeting also aims to deepen the understanding of the complex causes of homelessness, the challenges faced by homeless people and the effects of homelessness on individuals and societies. The meeting will also review systemic barriers that perpetuate existing inequalities and exclusion, especially for vulnerable groups and individuals who live in the margins of society, within the context of the 2030 Agenda.

All of the above will facilitate the deliberations of the Commission for Social Development at its fifty-eighth session and the 2019 High-level Political Forum under the theme of "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality". Experts will have the opportunity to engage in open and inclusive discussions through various sessions.

To accomplish these objectives, the meeting will bring together experts from academia, national and local governments, civil society, and the UN system. Presentations by the invited experts will focus on several key questions that include the following:

- What is homelessness?
- Who are the homeless?
- What are the levels and trends in homelessness?
- What are the drivers of homelessness?
- What are the challenges faced by homeless people?
- What policies and measures are effective at addressing the challenges faced by specific social groups?
- What policies and measures are effective in addressing homelessness at the national, regional and local levels?
- How to ensure access to affordable housing?
- How can social protection policies prevent/address temporary and long-term homelessness?
- How to strengthen the coordination among national, and sub-national policies and measures?

The meeting will be a two and a half-day event that will allow a robust exchange of ideas and lessons learned that contribute to identifying concrete strategies, good practices, key policies and actions and next steps to combat homelessness.

IV. Expected outputs

The meeting is expected to provide substantive input for the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General on "Affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness" to be submitted to the fifty-eight session of the Commission for Social Development.

In addition, the meeting will also produce the following outputs:

  i.   Substantive papers on the theme of the meeting, with concrete policy recommendations, prepared by experts;
  ii.   A meeting report, summarizing the deliberations of the experts and key recommendations to be included in Secretary-General's Report.

V. Organizational and administrative matters

The Expert Group Meeting will be held in collaboration with the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat) at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and is scheduled to take place on 22 – 24 May 2019 in Nairobi.

About 12 - 15 experts will be identified and invited by the Division for Inclusive Social Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, taking into consideration gender and geographical balances. The Division will meet the costs related to the participation (travel and per diem) of all the invited experts from outside the United Nations system.

The Secretariat will provide a preliminary list of substantive issues that will be described in an annotated agenda of the expert group meeting. Prior to the meeting, the invited experts will be required to submit short written papers (5-10 pages in length, in English) to the United Nations Secretariat by 13 May 2019. All papers and presentations should be sent to **Ms. Makiko Tagashira (**tagashira@un.org**) and Ms. Hantamalala Rafalimanana (**rafalimanana@un.org**),** with a copy to **Mr. Amson Sibanda (**sibanda@un.org**).** All invited experts are expected to arrive in Nairobi on 21 May 2019 and to stay throughout the duration of the meeting.

In addition to the invited experts, the following will participate:

  i.   Staff members of the Division for Inclusive Social Development as organizers of the meeting and to provide administrative/logistical support;
  ii.   Staff members of UN-Habitat as collaborators and to provide administrative/logistical support.
  iii. Representatives from the UN system; and
  iv.   Representatives from the civil society.

All sessions of the meeting will be in plenary. The invited experts will present their papers which will be followed by interactive discussions. At the conclusion of the meeting, participants will adopt the major conclusions and recommendations of the meeting. A final report will be produced after the meeting.

VI. Documentation and the Language of the meeting

The documentation of the meeting will be comprised of relevant publications, documents and materials related to the theme of the meeting, which will be made available on the web site to be created for the meeting. The expert papers will be posted on the web site.

The working language of the meeting will be English. Documentation for the meeting will be provided in English.