



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

Draft Concept Note

High-level panel discussion on the priority theme “Affordable Housing and Social Protection Systems for all to address Homelessness”

Monday, 10 February 2020, 3:00pm – 6:00 pm
Conference Room 4, UN Headquarters, New York

COMMISSION for
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

United Nations Headquarters, New York

1. Background

The Commission for Social Development will hold its fifty-eighth session from 10 to 19 February 2020 with the priority theme of “**Affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness**”. The theme was decided by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in its resolution E/RES/2019/4.

In its resolution, ECOSOC affirmed that the Commission will contribute to the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by supporting the thematic reviews of the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, including cross-cutting issues. The Council further reaffirmed that the Commission shall continue to review issues related to the follow-up and implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the World Summit for Social Development and advise the Council thereon.

The meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2020 convened under the auspices of ECOSOC, will be held from 7 – 16 July 2020 and will include a three-day ministerial segment of the forum. The theme will be “*Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development*”.

The high-level panel discussion on the priority theme: “**Affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness**” will be held on Monday, 10 February 2020 from 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm.

2. Affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness and the 2030 Agenda

By adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Member States committed to achieving sustainable development for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. They pledged that no one would be left behind, and they would endeavor to reach the furthest behind first. They agreed to make significant progress towards implementing nationally appropriate social protection systems for all, including floors, and committed to ensuring access to safe and affordable housing for all. SDG target 11.1 aims to ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services. In the New Urban Agenda, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), held in Quito from 17 to 20 October 2016, Member States committed to take positive measures to improve the living conditions of homeless people, with a view to facilitating their full participation in society, and to preventing and eliminating homelessness, as well as to combating and eliminating its criminalization.

While considerable progress has been made in economic and social development over the past decades, such progress has been uneven, and inequality has increased in many countries, with considerable numbers of people left living in or near extreme poverty. Homelessness is one of the crudest manifestations of poverty, inequality and housing affordability challenges. It affects people of all ages, genders and socioeconomic backgrounds. Homelessness is also a gross violation of the rights to adequate housing, to security of person, to health, and to protection of the home and family.

Homelessness is not simply a lack of physical housing, but is also a loss of family, community and a sense of belonging. It is a failure of multiple systems that are supposed to enable people to benefit from economic growth and lead a safe and decent life. While there is no universally agreed definition of homelessness at this moment, a description of homelessness contained in the background note¹ is used for this panel, which is “a condition where a person or household lacks habitable space with security of tenure, rights and ability to enjoy social relations, including safety”, and includes the following categories of people as those experiencing homelessness: people living on the streets or other open spaces; people living in temporary or crisis accommodation; people living in severely inadequate and insecure accommodation, such as slums or informal settlements; and people who lack access to affordable housing.

Globally, 100 million people were estimated to live in homelessness in 2005 (the latest count by the United Nations), and 1.6 billion people worldwide live in inadequate housing conditions, with about 15 million forcefully evicted every year (UN-Habitat). The number of homeless people in developing countries is large, with the majority live in severely inadequate housing, mostly in slums and informal settlements with inhumane conditions that are overcrowded, insecure and do not have safe drinking water or adequate sanitation and where they are exposed to the risk of eviction. In developed countries, while homelessness affects a relatively small share of the population (less than 1 per cent), the absolute number of homeless people is significant, and has increased at an alarming rate in the past 10 years.

In both developed and developing countries, homelessness has increasingly been affecting people with diverse economic, social and cultural backgrounds. Despite the

¹ E/CN.5/2020/3

stereotypical view, homeless people in developing countries are not necessarily the poorest, and most of them, across all social groups, work, in low-skilled and low-paid work in the informal sector, with no social protection. In developed countries, they include groups overrepresented among homeless in the past, such as single adult men, members of indigenous populations and people leaving institutional care, but also, increasingly, older persons, youth, families with children, and migrants. In addition, people become homeless temporarily or for prolonged periods as a result of conflicts, disasters and climate-induced displacement.

3. Objectives

The high-level panel discussion will highlight the importance of taking a strategic approach to address multiple causes of homelessness. Drawing on national experiences, it will seek to make policy recommendations on affordable housing and social protection policies to address homelessness in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The discussion aims to deepen the understanding of drivers of homelessness, especially structural causes, such as inequalities, poverty, a loss of housing and livelihood, a lack of decent job opportunities, lack of access to affordable housing, forced eviction, lack of social protection. The discussion shall strive to propose comprehensive strategies and specific policy interventions to effectively address each category of homelessness, in alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, on the basis of experiences at the national and regional levels.

The key objectives of the high-level panel discussion include:

- a. Share knowledge and experience on how countries can improve access to affordable housing, especially for low-income households, through integrated housing policies and measures on both the demand and the supply sides;
- b. Share knowledge and experience on how social protection plays a role in preventing people falling from homelessness.
- c. Share innovative approaches and strategies that have proven to be effective at addressing homelessness in a comprehensive manner.
- d. Based on good practices and lessons learned, discuss how countries can design and implement comprehensive strategies and appropriate policies to prevent and address homelessness, taking into consideration different categories of people living in homelessness, and their temporary/short-term, and long-term needs.

4. Structure and format of the panel discussion

The Chair of the Commission for Social Development will open the session with brief remarks and introduction of moderator and panellists. The Chair will then invite the keynote speaker to deliver an address on the topic of the session (about 20 minutes), followed by a video message by the Executive Director of UN-Habitat (about 10 minutes). After the keynote address, further policy insights will be given by high-level policymakers (5 -10 minutes presentations, addressing the guiding questions). Following their presentations, the moderator will facilitate an interactive dialogue among panellists,

then open the discussion and invite questions and comments from the floor. Invited panellists will include high-level government officials, subject experts from academia, regional organizations, as well as from civil society.

Panellists are expected to structure their presentations around concrete strategies that have proven to be successful in addressing homelessness, and to highlight innovative approaches and lessons learned at the national and sub-national level.

The outcomes of the discussions will be reflected in the Chair's summary, which will be part of the contribution of the Commission for Social Development to the ECOSOC, in particular, its high-level segment: "*Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development*".

5. Guiding questions

The Commission for Social Development may wish to consider the following questions in its deliberations on the priority theme at its fifty-eighth session:

- i. What are the main drivers and major challenges to address homelessness at global, national and sub-national levels?
- ii. How to develop comprehensive, inter-sectoral policy frameworks and housing strategies for each category of homelessness, that can address immediate needs of those temporarily experiencing homelessness, and provide long-term solutions to those living in homelessness?
- iii. How to address the mismatch between affordable housing supply and growing demand caused by an increase in the urban population, stagnated wages, the erosion of purchasing power in the housing market, rent hikes and the shortage of affordable housing? What are the roles of national government, local government, and the private sectors?
- iv. How to ensure that social protection policies and programmes/measures help prevent people falling into homelessness and support those experiencing homelessness, provided that an affordable housing policy, while essential, is not sufficient to end homelessness?
- v. What are effective policy interventions, both universal and targeted, to address challenges faced by specific social groups experiencing homelessness, such as families with children, women, adolescents, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, people living in poverty and people displaced by natural disasters and conflicts?
- vi. How to raise societal awareness of homelessness, including family homelessness, among various as well as combat discrimination and stereotypes against people experiencing homelessness?

The time allocation for the panel discussion is as follows:

Speaker	Suggested speaking time
Chair: Opening remarks and the introduction of panellists	5 minutes
Moderator: introduction/context-setting	5 – 8 minutes
Keynote speaker	20 minutes
Video message (UN-Habitat)	10 minutes
Panellists (6): Presentations	7 - 10 minutes per panellist Moderator to bring key points raised by the panellists, and pose guiding questions that have not been addressed, if any.
Moderated interactive discussion	Open dialogue with participants of the Commission (Interventions limited to 3 minutes per speaker)
Concluding remarks by moderator and Closing by the Chair	10 minutes
	Total duration: 3 hours