



Interactive dialogue with senior officials of the UN Systems on the priority theme

"Affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness"

Wednesday, 12 February 2020, 3:00 – 6:00pm

Chair's Summary

The Commission for Social Development held a high-level dialogue with senior officials of the UN system on the priority theme, "Affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness". The panellists were **Mr. Srinivas Tata**, Director, Social Development Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), **Ms. Christina Behrendt**, Head, Social Policy Unit, Social Protection Department, International Labour Organization (ILO), **Mr. Marco Toscano-Rivalta**, Chief, NY Liaison Office of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, and **Ms. Francesca De Ferrari**, New York Office of the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat). The panel was moderated by **Ms. Maria-Francesca Spatolisano**, Assistant-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs in the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).

Housing as a multidimensional problem

Housing is not just a roof over one's head or a piece of property; it is a fundamental human right. Access to housing is a pre-requisite to individual socioeconomic development and sustainable development. Affordable and quality housing can help break intergenerational transmission of poverty and marginalization, and thus addresses several SDGs. It is fundamental to adopt a multisectoral approach and to acknowledge that inclusion and accessibility are building blocks of affordability. Homelessness has myriad causes, including unemployment, mental health issues, substance abuse problems, and lack of property rights. There is a close link between the lack of affordable housing (partly due to financialization of the housing market) and increased homelessness. This situation pushes the poor out of the economic centres of cities into the periphery areas.

The issue of homelessness disproportionately affects those who are already vulnerable, such as women, young people, children, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees, and the working poor. Street children are a particularly pressing issue in the Asia Pacific region, with millions of them living in cities.

Moreover, there is a link between disaster risk and the risk of homelessness, with even relatively "minor" disasters having large impacts on communities and their homes, particularly for poor and marginalized groups. There are strong connections between the drivers of homelessness and the drivers of disaster risk. A common element is systemic failures. Disaster risk fundamentally boils down to exposure, vulnerability, and hazard and is often the result of unintended consequences of social and economic

policies. To address this risk, it is necessary to look at it through a complex system perspective and see how different policy elements interact.

Almost a fourth of world's urban population lives in slums (over 1 billion people). In slums, there is a clear lack of adequate housing in both the material and social sense. Systemic discrimination and exclusion, little to no rights and a lack of participation are key issues. Importantly, developing countries are likely to face rapid urbanization due mainly to rural-urban migration. Climate change and increased risk of natural disasters will, in fact, exert increasing pressure on rural livelihoods, particularly in the Asia and the Pacific regions. Poor people bear the largest burden of climate related disasters, with housing being significantly affected. From 2008-2017, about 50 to 100 million people have been displaced due to weather related disasters in the region.

Universal social protection

Preventing homelessness is the best way to combat it. Poorly planned urbanization pushes the most vulnerable out of the cities while making the centre unaffordable for most. Sustainable cities must be inclusive and leave no one behind. This includes ending forced eviction practices. However, it is not just about housing policies. Policymakers should also look at, for example, minimum wage policies, investment policies, and labour market policies. Coordination between different policy fields is required to achieve a holistic and inclusive approach towards ending homelessness.

Universal social protection is key to ending homelessness and inadequate housing conditions. Supporting those who are older, in poor health, and unemployed can directly affect homelessness. Social security and an adequate standard of living are human rights, but not the reality for most people. Social protection floors, which require appropriate budgetary and political commitment, can offer basic access to essential health care and guarantee basic income security that help prevent homelessness. Coverage is one of the most important elements of universal social protection by ensuring the most vulnerable are included in the system. However, social protection is not just for the most vulnerable. The most stable systems cover the entire population. There is a need to cover all aspects of the life cycle, ensure services are of high quality, and are gender sensitive. Systems should also be socially and financially sustainable and be adaptable to changing circumstances.

However, currently, only 45% of the world population is covered by at least one social protection mechanism. In effect, this leaves 4 billion people unprotected. Social protection cuts across the 2030 Agenda, with connections to ending poverty, promoting health, gender equality, decent work, reducing inequalities, and more. The observed coverage gaps are related to underinvestment in social protection. This is a direct result of austerity measures and narrowly targeted programmes that fail to protect those most in need. An estimated USD 527 billion would be required to finance basic social protection floors in developing countries. Accelerating progress towards universal social protection should be a priority action.

Multilateral system

The decade of action requires a coordinated approach within the UN system to address homelessness. The UN system should have a uniform message and continuous engagement since solving the homelessness problem cannot be achieved overnight. An inclusive global dialogue should be initiated that includes civil society and those who directly experience homelessness. A global forum also provides an opportunity to broadly exchange technical knowledge and move dialogue into an international setting.

Additionally, UN entities, such as the ILO, are providing direct technical support to Member States on implementing national social protection frameworks. It is crucial to achieve national policy coherence considering the systemic nature of the problem of homelessness. All stakeholders should be brought in to ensure a sustainable push towards ending homelessness. Another vital aspect includes the expansion of the fiscal space available for social protection.