Committee: Youth Assembly

Issue: Action paper on homelessness and economic and social rights

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INTRODUCTION

As the most representative inter-governmental organization of the world today, the United Nations' role in world affairs is irreplaceable by any other international or regional organizations. The United Nations has made enormous positive contributions in maintaining international peace and security, promoting cooperation among states and international development. Today, people of the world still face the two major issues of peace and development. Only by international cooperation can mankind meet the challenges of the global and regional issues. The United Nations can play a pivotal and positive role in this regard. Strengthening the role of the United Nations and promoting the establishment of a just and reasonable international political and economic order goes along with the trend of history and is in the interest of all nations.

In the last decades, infringement of the socioeconomic rights and the lack of housing have worsened. In the context of rapid economic, technological and social changes in the last decades, poverty and homelessness are phenomena that have taken particularly worrying dimensions in modern societies, being in the center of interest of many organizations, carriers and even individual people who contribute to the efforts to fight homelessness and violation of socioeconomic rights.

Despite the fact that more people are getting homeless every day, the efforts that are made to solve the problem are not always effective. Homeless people can exhibit a serious range of illnesses compared to the rest of the population; However, just treating ill health is not enough to help get people off the streets. Many times, people are led to homelessness because their socio-

economic rights are being violated, as it will be explained further down. Nevertheless, it is pleasing to see that more and more countries are activated on the matter and homelessness is on the list of priorities of issues that require urgent treatment, as well as equality among people on socio-economic rights since, with more and more organizations spreading awareness.

This study guide aims to provide you with all the needed information in order to get an elaborated overview of the matter. The reasons that lead to homelessness and obstacles to affordable housing will be examined, as well as elaborating on the different approaches taken by Member States and international organizations. Lastly, possible solutions to end homelessness and ways to mollify economic inequality are proposed.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Homelessness

"Is the condition of people without a permanent dwelling, such as a house or apartment. The legal definition of *homeless* varies from country to country, or among different jurisdictions in the same country or region"[1]

Homeless

A homeless individual is defined as "an individual who lacks housing, including an individual whose primary residence during the night is a supervised public or private facility (e.g., shelters) that provides temporary living accommodations, and an individual who is a resident in transitional housing." [2]

1"Homelessness." Wikipedia. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 June 2017.

2 "What Is the Official Definition of Homelessness?" National Health Care for the Homeless Council. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 June 2017.

Transitionally homeless

The term refers to individuals that generally move quickly through the homeless assistance system, once they are able to access it. Their principal need is for housing. Income supports, including employment that pays a living wage is critical to keeping these families housed. The "transitionally homeless" include people that work in entry-level jobs as well as those living on fixed incomes (the elderly, for example, or persons with disabilities that are living on SSI), who earn barely enough to pay for their housing costs and other necessities.

Chronically homeless

The term refers to people who often experience long-term homelessness, frequently rotating through and among a community's various shelter facilities and the streets. They typically have health or substance abuse problems in addition to extreme poverty. This population is best served by permanent supportive housing, which combines housing with intensive rehabilitation, treatment, and other social services[3].
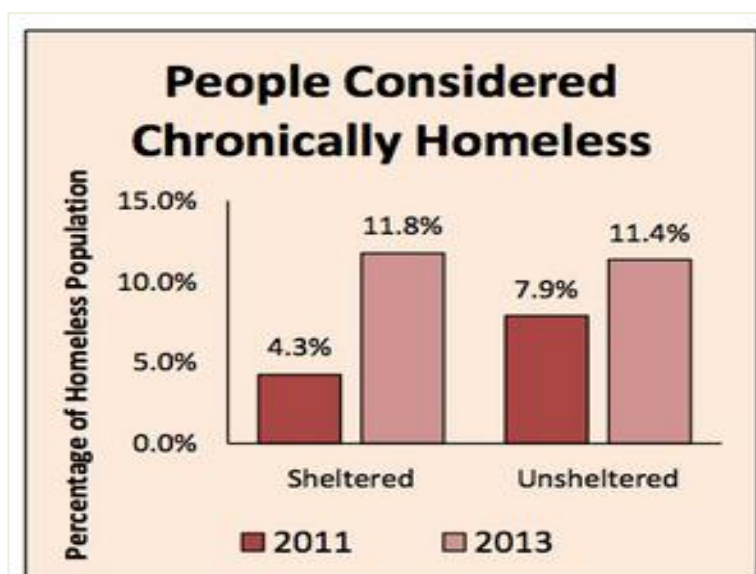

Figure 1; statistics of chronically homeless people (years 2011,2013)
Source: http://www.annarbor.com/news/report-washtenaw-countys-chronically-homeless-population-doubled-in-last-two-years/

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[3] "42 U.S. Code § 11301 - Findings and Purpose." *LII / Legal Information Institute*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 June 2017.

Economic Rights - Social Rights

According to the UNHRC, prime examples of economic and social rights are "the rights to adequate food, to adequate housing, to education, to health, to social security, ... to water and sanitation, and to work".[4] The responsibility of the States towards the fulfillment of such rights vary from treaty to treaty, but within the international arena there is consensus that states ought to take the best possible steps – according to their resources- to ensure that so these rights are progressively fully realized.

Economic Inequality

Economic inequality is most clearly reflected in people's different positions within the economic distribution –income, pay and wealth. However, people's economic positions are also related to other characteristics, such as whether or not they have a disability, their ethnic background and their sex. Economic inequality varies between societies, historical periods, economic structures, and systems.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Homelessness and being forcibly evicted from one's home are major human rights problems all over the world. Some countries are facing an immense problem, whereas others are facing a minor one. However, there is no country that doesn't have to deal with this phenomenon. Back in 2005, the UN undertook a global survey, which revealed that an estimated 100 million people were homeless worldwide, with 1.6 billion being deprived of adequate housing.

Causes of homelessness

Sadly, many people view homelessness as the result of personal failings, and consider that if the economy is going well, there is no excuse for not getting on. However, homelessness is proven

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[4] "Economic, Social and Cultural Rights." *OHCHR | Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.* Web.24 June 2017.

to be caused by a complex interplay between a person's individual circumstances, as well as adverse 'structural' factors outside their direc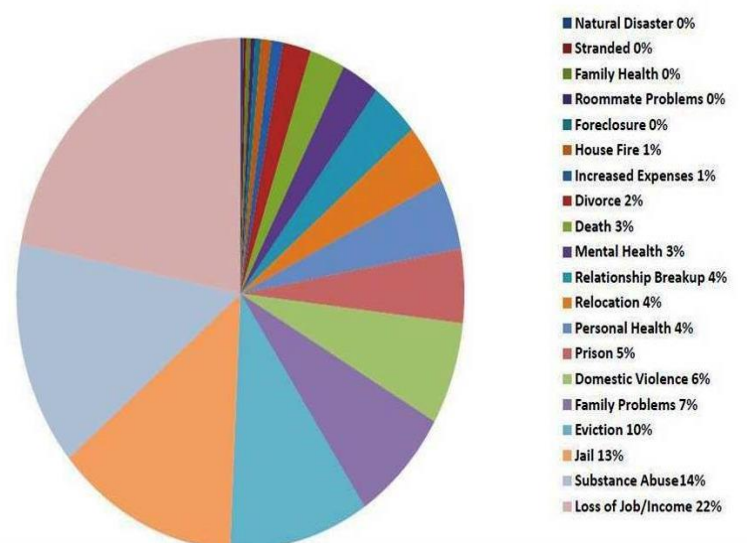t control, belying the abovementioned misconceptions. Individual circumstances that are often linked to homelessness, are the following:

- Individual factors including lack of qualifications, lack of social support, debts - especially mortgage or rent arrears, poor physical and mental health, relationship breakdown, and getting involved in crime at an early age.

- Family background including family breakdown and disputes, sexual and physical abuse in childhood or adolescence, having parents with drug or alcohol problems, and previous experience of family homelessness.

- An institutional background including having been in care, the armed forces, or in prison.

Structural causes of homelessness are social and economic in nature, and are often outside the control of the individual or family concerned. These may include:

- Unemployment

- Poverty

- Lack of affordable housing

- Housing policies

- The structure and administration of housing benefits

Figure 2: Causes of homelessness for households; Source: http://homelessresourcenetwork.org/?page_id=1086

- Natural Disaster 0%
- Stranded 0%
- Family Health 0%
- Roommate Problems 0%
- Foreclosure 0%
- House Fire 1%
- Increased Expenses 1%
- Divorce 2%
- Death 3%
- Mental Health 3%
- Relationship Breakup 4%
- Relocation 4%
- Personal Health 4%
- Prison 5%
- Domestic Violence 6%
- Family Problems 7%
- Eviction 10%
- Jail 13%
- Substance Abuse 14%
- Loss of Job/Income 22%

These problems require long-term policy solutions such as changes in the housing benefit system, the building of more affordable homes, and ensuring that a wider cross-section of society benefits from the fruits of economic growth.

Moreover, additional factors that lead to homelessness are war, conflicts and terrorism. Especially in the last five years, the number of people losing their homes because of these coefficients has increased dramatically. People who live in countries, which are affected by the aforementioned magnates, are forced to immigrate to places where usually they are not welcomed and are obliged to cope with conditions that put in danger their safety and health. An excellent illustration is the situation in Syria and the subsequent wave of immigration. In recent years, great turmoil has been caused within the European Union regarding the final destination country for immigrants, which has also led to number political crises.

Obstacles to affordable and supportive housing

A question that is often raised in connection to homelessness concerns the lack of adequate –in number- facilities to house homeless in a viable way. Research has identified different reasons that explain the different obstacles to affordable and supportive housing. More specifically, there is often opposition to supportive housing, which often leads to increased development costs for projects, making all the less financially attractive. Additionally, development regulations, which impose unrealistic parking requirements and unnecessary transportation impact fees, may create financial burdens for developers of supportive housing, undercutting the importance of such facilities. Lastly, spacing requirements for group homes can present obstruction to the development of new permanent supportive housing for the homeless.

Poverty vs. inequality

Inequality and poverty are complex international phenomena. They are determined by economic factors (such as unequal distribution of wealth), by politicians (such as inequality in taxation), by society (such as racism, prejudice, lack of solidarity, discrimination, social exclusion). But what is poverty? Poverty is divided in two categories, namely

a) <u>Absolute poverty</u> is a person's inability to meet his or her basic needs (eg food, clothing, housing and health). People who are not well fed, living in unhealthy conditions and their income are bellow the minimum acceptable threshold,

b) <u>Relative poverty</u> characterizes the household with an income of less than 60% of households' equivalent income. Poverty rates are particularly high in single parent and large households.

Inequality, by contrast is always a relative term that refers to the difference between levels of living standards, income etc. across the economic distribution. Economic inequality can be high in a society without high levels of poverty due to the large difference between the peak, middle and low ends of the income spectrum.
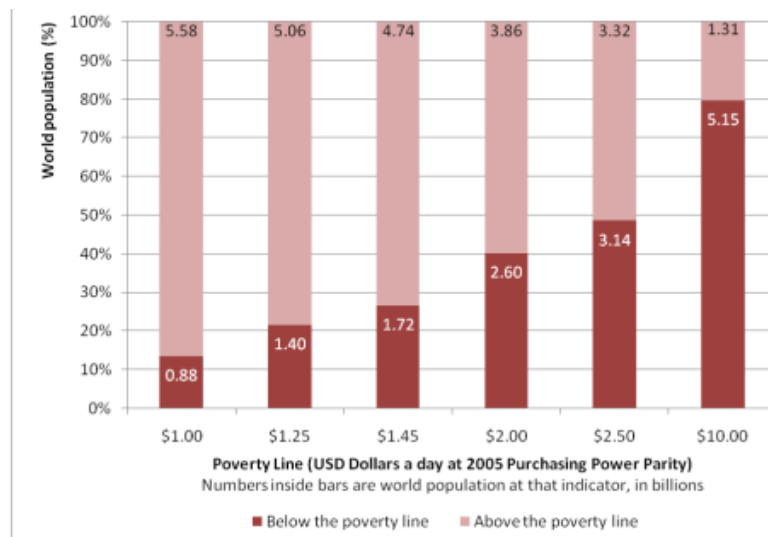

Figure 3: Percent of people in the world at different poverty levels in 2005
Source: http://www.sahibhaq.com/percent-of-people-in-the-world-at-different-poverty-levels-2005/

Consequences of poverty and inequality

Inequality and poverty are considered very important social problems because they can affect the social, educational, and professional careers of people.

People who are considered poor may be forced into immigration. It has also been observed that poverty is accompanied by increased rates of alcoholism, crime, and other social phenomena,

such as xenophobia, racism and outbreak of violence. These phenomena are not totally identical to inequality but the combination of unemployment with other factors (e.g. problematic socialization, etc.) increases the chances of these phenomena occurring.

Poverty, and to smaller extent inequality, also result to the gradual depreciation of the knowledge, skills and work experience of the unemployed, which necessitates their re-training programs.

Measures of economic inequality

- "The Gini coefficient represent the wealth distribution of country's residents, reflecting the levels of inequality across the whole of society.

- Ratio measures compare how much people at one level of the income distribution have compared to people at another. For instance, the 20:20 ratio compares how much richer the top 20% of people are, compared to the bottom 20%.

- The Palma ratio is the ratio of the income share of the top 10% richest in the country's Gross National Income (GNI) to that of the bottom 40%. In more equal societies this ratio will be one or below, meaning that the top 10% does not receive a larger share of national income than the bottom 40%. In very unequal societies, the ratio may be as large as 7."[5]

Therefore, one's socioeconomic status is combined with the possibility of becoming homeless. Homeless people often find themselves at the outermost margins of society and are highly vulnerable to ill health, spread of disease, harassment, abuse, malnutrition, dehydration, sleep deprivation and life threatening weather.

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[5] "Measures of Economic Inequality." *Www.equalitytrust.org.uk/how-economic-inequality-difined.* N.p., n.d. Web. 5 July 2017.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Australia

The Australian Government recognises that homelessness and economic inequality are complex issues that affect many Australians. It requires a long-term and systematic effort across agencies, sectors, and the community in order to solve the matter. Australia's policy is focusing on tackling the issues with funds that are being used on services that help those in need.

Brazil

Brazil is one of the countries that are facing an extremely big problem with homelessness. It is estimated that in the most populous city of Brazil, Sao Paolo more than 15,000 people are homeless. Life on these streets as a homeless person is excruciating. Approximately 50% of the homeless people in Sao Paulo are housed in emergency camps, but the other half, sleeps on the streets. In theory, the former Brazilian president, Lula Da Silva, had set up a homelessness protection program, but the program has never been implement. Only 25% of cities have a specific policy of coping with the phenomenon. The rest are left to their fate, forced to face harsh treatment from Brazilian authorities. Many actions were taken in 2014 before the World Cup, to remove homeless people from the streets. However, those actions often caused the life of many persons. These figures caused great concern at the Brazilian National Human Rights Center, which raised awareness and concerns about the "social welfare" of the homeless on the occasion of the World Cup. The mistreatment of the homeless was repeated in the summer of 2016, when the Olympic Games took place in Rio de Janeiro.

Canada

Addressing homelessness in all regions of Canada is challenging. But the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) aims to prevent and reduce homelessness in the country and to fight socioeconomic rights violation by providing direct support and funding to communities and organizations across Canada to help combat the issue.

Greece

In previous years, state intervention on housing issues was mainly imposed through loan or rent subsidies, and structured intervention for access to all housing. However, policies of prevention and rehabilitation targeting in particular vulnerable groups, such as homeless people, migrants, and mental sufferers, have remained inadequate. In recent years, Greece has been facing an even bigger problem with both increased levels of immigration and the aftermath of the financial crisis, making it even harder for the government to effectively tackle the issue. Homeless people are also deprived of the freedom to walk, eat, wash and sleep in public places. The places where local authorities allow homeless people access is under the authority of the criminal justice system, thus putting people under direct control.

Hungary

According to measures that the government has taken to combat the problem, it is illegal to be homeless. The parliament of Hungary introduced this law to forcefully to move an increasing number of homeless people into shelters. The law also grants the police the right to arrest those who are "caught" sleeping on the road twice in six months, whilst also supporting the imposition of fines.

India

The Special Rapporteur on adequate housing Leilani Farha made some substantial recommendations on how India should proceed to tackle the issue of homeless people. First, identification of the structural causes of homelessness should be made. Second, a national moratorium on forced evictions and demolitions should be introduced. Third, enhancement of the policy coherence and convergence between housing schemes in urban and rural areas and schemes for the provision of water and sanitation need to be taken into consideration. Fourth, the central and state governments should put in place effective and timely mechanisms to collect data on

evictions, including with disaggregation of the persons who are evicted by age, gender, disability, caste and religion.[6]

South Africa

In the early 2000s, homeless people were commonly moved by private security vehicles and taken to other areas. More recently, several NGOs have worked with the local government to keep street people out of City Improvement Districts (CIDs) (which are privately funded areas that receive additional security among other benefits in an effort to promote economic growth) zones in a less forceful manner that involves working with street people to find an alternative location to reside in.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights(OHCHR)

Housing rights legislation: this report examines and analyses housing rights within a broad spectrum – from international human rights principles and standards to how those principles and standards are recognised and implemented at the regional, national and local levels.

European Union (E.U.)

A range of policy initiatives have been developed at EU level that support and complement Member State actions. EU funds are also available for Member States to reduce homelessness and improve housing outcomes. The article 153 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) states that the EU shall support and complement the activities of the Member States in combating social exclusion. EU funds, such as the European Social Fund (ESF), the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) can finance targeted actions for the benefit of homeless people in the Member States.

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[6] Times, KumKum Dasgupta Hindustan. "India Must Ensure That Homeless People Have Access to Housing Options." *Http://www.hindustantimes.com/.* N.p., 20 Aug. 2016. Web. 7 July 2017.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1929	After the collapse of stock markets, many people lose their jobs and property.
1930	New York charities and businessmen create the privately funded Emergency Work Bureau to provide work relief for the unemployed.
1933	Franklin Delano Roosevelt creates the Federal Emergency Relief Administration.
1940	World war II breaks out causing many socioeconomic problems.
1948	Robert Moose is appointed head of the Slum Clearance Committee, the primary organizer of urban renewal in New York City. His will oversee extensive development projects that will often result in the dislocation of poor and working-class residents.
1996	President Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act - also known as welfare reform. This made it harder for poor Americans to receive government assistance if they could not prove they were looking for work or didn't become employed within the first
2002	President George Bush re-established the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, first created in the 1980s. The council was an effort to centralize anti-homelessness efforts. Philip Mangano, the first director under Bush, made encouraging and supporting local 10-year plans the centerpiece of the council's work.
2016	United Nations expert on the Right to Adequate Housing, Leilani Farha challenges governments to end homelessness and improve living conditions for all.

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

The UN system works in a variety of ways to promote economic and social goals. The UN cooperates with many organisations and together they try to cover all areas of economic and social

efforts. The agencies provide technical assistance and other forms of practical help to countries around the world. In cooperation with the UN, they help formulate policies, set standards and guidelines, foster support and mobilize funds. The UN programmes and funds work under the authority of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council to carry out the UN's economic and social mandate. To enhance overall cooperation, the Secretary-General in 1997 set up the UN Development Group, comprising the UN operational programmes and funds. The UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN's largest provider of grants for sustainable human development worldwide, is actively involved in attaining the millennium development goals.

In 2016, the United Nations took action particularly on homelessness. In the 3rd Committee Leilani Farha [United Nations special rapporteur on adequate housing] presented her latest report, challenging governments to end homelessness and improve living conditions for all, as well as to eliminate infringement of Socioeconomic Rights. She described how urban centres are facing a future where vast inequalities are growing separating those who are rich from those who aren't. The UN Human Rights Committee is now drafting a new general comment (No. 36) on the right to life, providing an important opportunity to reaffirm a commitment to a more inclusive understanding of the right to life. But despite some promising changes in the language, the initial draft persists with a bifurcation of the right to life into two categories relegating long-term obligations to address homelessness and poverty to the category of unenforceable policy aspirations.

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

- A/HRC /31/L, 11 (23 March 2016)

Adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and the right to non-discrimination in this context.

- A/HRC/31/L.8/Rev.1 (23 March 2016)

Question of the realization in all countries of economic, social and cultural rights.

- A/HRC/31/54 (3 March 2016)

Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

In June 2004, the Mayor of New York city, Michael Bloomberg, announced a 10- year plan to end homelessness that was to being together the business, public and non-profit sector to end homelessness within a decade announced a five–year plan named "Unity for solutions Beyond Shelter". Unfortunately, Bloomberg's lofty goals have not materialized, but remain important in the debate regarding the benefits of cooperation between the private and public sphere.

Moreover, the World Food Programme (WFP) is the world's largest international food aid organization for both emergency relief and development aiming to assist everyone in need. The WFP has been key in offering temporary assistance to the ones made homeless by emergencies and natural disasters.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

For a large time and especially in the first post-war decades, states often considered poverty as a "remnant of the past" that would disappear with progress and development. This perception was reinforced by the improvements made by the social policy towards the general well being of the population. This image changed in the late 1970s with economic, technological and social changes that have taken place and led to the emergence of new forms of poverty combined that have led to marginalization, and "Social Exclusion". This term emphasizes the multidimensional nature of the mechanisms that prevent people and groups from being involved in social practices, hurting their ability for social inclusion and identity forming.

With regard to possible solutions, tackling homelessness with respect to the individuals' rights requires that firstly space is taken into account. The number of shelters available to the homeless should be increased. Also, other methods should be found to give homeless people special

access to permanent homes. That would be better in terms of lasting success, boosting their chances of landing and keeping a job, and maybe helping those who struggle with addiction to stay sober.

Additionally, it is imperative that steps be taken to address –whether temporarily or permanently- the lack of access to food, sanitation and in the long run education and health for the homeless. This is particularly important for states which provide expensive access to education and health, leaving the homeless marginalized and neglected. Amongst others, the introduction of more formal and institutionalized channels to food and education, such as sponsored schools could be a first step.

On the other hand, as far as measures to eliminate poverty and economic inequalities are concerned, it is important that the social welfare system of every state is re-examined based on the new data reflecting the needs and problems of the country. However, besides resources that are needed for the exercise of social policy, institutions are also required that will support and help people acknowledge their socio-economic rights so as to avoid their violation. Thus, an increase of the minimum wage, an expansion of the earned income tax and making the tax code more progressive could be additional ways to address the issue longterm.

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