

THE CASE FOR ACTION ON GLOBAL HOMELESSNESS

Why homelessness can no longer be ignored in climate, health and education agendas



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Homelessness has no place

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Homelessness is a global problem which has a catastrophic impact on individuals, families and communities. Global estimates of the scale of homelessness vary widely due to the challenges that we describe in this report, but if the global population of people estimated to be living on the streets or in temporary shelter were counted as a single country, they would number in the hundreds of millions - comparable in size to the United States of America.

Yet to date, homelessness has largely been missing from international development and climate agendas. There are no goals or targets for homelessness within the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) framework, despite evidence from multiple countries which shows that providing access to decent, safe and affordable accommodation gives people the foundation needed to start achieving in all of the other areas. Other goals - whether delivering inclusive and equitable education for all (SDG 4), ensuring healthy lives and well-being for all (SDG 3) or accessing decent work (SDG 8), to name but three - will be more difficult to achieve without a decent place to live. Homelessness is also an issue that reflects and further exacerbates structural inequities, holding back progress on gender equality (SDG 5) and reducing inequalities (SDG 10). Too often, development programmes have ignored this reality and taken a siloed approach, delivering education, health or livelihood projects without recognising that without stable housing, the benefits of these interventions cannot be sustained.

The Case for Global Action on Homelessness provides evidence on the relationship between homelessness and three global development priorities: global health, climate change and education (there are

many intersections beyond these sectors which we will explore elsewhere). It finds that each of these sectors could play a key role in preventing homelessness, while people experiencing homelessness have some of the poorest health and education outcomes and they are exposed to some of the worst effects of climate change. Strategies to tackle global health and education inequalities and climate change must recognise and respond to the specific vulnerabilities of those affected by homelessness. Unless agencies leading policy and programmes in these areas target this group as vulnerable 'key populations', they will fail in their responsibility to 'leave no one behind' and miss opportunities to ensure funding and programmes have the biggest impact.

The report presents the first ever analysis of international development and philanthropic funding to tackle homelessness. It finds that homelessness is almost invisible in international development budgets. Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding that targets housing-related activities represented less than 0.09% of total ODA in 2023 and this funding has declined over the five-year period from 2019-2023. Of this housing-related ODA, we identified just three projects that explicitly mentioned homelessness in the project description. And just 9% of philanthropic funding directed to the relevant DAC codes explicitly mentions homelessness in project descriptions in the same 2019-2023 period. While some of the recorded housing-related activities will have a positive impact on reducing or preventing homelessness, these figures are a stark reflection of the lack of global attention currently given to tackling homelessness.

There are well evidenced solutions from multiple countries which show that homelessness can be ended or significantly reduced. These models consistently demonstrate that rapidly scaling up access to safe, decent and affordable housing, specifically for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, is an essential and cost-effective foundation of any sustainable strategy. There is an important role for development banks and climate finance institutions to support affordable housebuilding efforts in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), but these are not being utilised to their full potential.

The experience of other global priorities, such as women's rights and child survival, shows what becomes possible when issues are embedded across mainstream development agendas. Integrating homelessness into existing programmes would enable funders to reach some of the most marginalised populations and ensure that resources are directed toward the most sustainable, inclusive and long-term solutions.

Homelessness is a preventable and solvable challenge. Tackling it could deliver significant benefits across sectors and in advancing gender equality and reducing inequalities. As the UN Secretary-General has highlighted, an international agenda on homelessness has the potential to be transformative by effectively leveraging funding and inspiring collaboration with far-reaching, multi-sectoral impacts. Working alongside affected people and national, regional and local governments, many development actors could play a valuable role including UN agencies, bilateral and multilateral donors and development banks, philanthropies, the private sector, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), faith-based organisations (FBOs), and housing associations. Immediate action is needed to ignite momentum and create a coalition

for change. Evidence-based solutions already exist, but without coordinated effort, responses will continue to focus on short-term fixes and leave millions of vulnerable people without the support needed to live a safe and dignified life.

This report therefore calls on governments, development agencies and funders to respond to the UN Secretary-General's call and launch an ambitious global action agenda with the following strategic priorities:

- Explicit recognition of the importance of preventing and reducing homelessness in international development strategies.
- Strengthen global and national data on homelessness to ensure consistent definitions, comparable measurement, and reliable monitoring of progress.
- Restore funding to the housing sector, and direct funding towards low-cost and accessible housing solutions that meet the needs of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
- Better targeting of the needs of populations experiencing homelessness in the funding allocated to tackle issues that either cause or are significantly impacted by homelessness, including climate adaptation and resilience, global health and education.
- Align climate finance with homelessness prevention by investing in climate-resilient, affordable housing and protecting people most vulnerable to climate impacts.
- Use development finance to mobilise private capital for affordable and supportive housing solutions that reduce homelessness.

We call on decision-makers to prevent and tackle homelessness by considering the drivers and root causes that intersect with other development priorities, and by taking the following specific actions:

National and sub-national governments

- Adopt and fund a national homelessness strategy that includes evidenced-based policies, supported by efforts to improve data quality so that strategies can be informed by accurate data on the prevalence and drivers of homelessness.
- Include homelessness as a priority within national and sub-national housing, health and education strategies, prioritising prevention and targeting at-risk groups.
- Integrate a focus on preventing and tackling homelessness within Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and sub-national and local strategies to ensure that climate adaptation and mitigation plans explicitly protect the people most exposed to risks including heatwaves, floods, air pollution, and displacement.
- Pilot and scale up investments in Housing First and housing-led approaches, including developing social housing programmes that house people experiencing homelessness. Back up this work with investment in research and learning, shared with other countries and cities, to strengthen understanding of what works, the policy and financing frameworks required, and the cost-effectiveness of these approaches.
- Prioritise tackling homelessness within bids and proposals for external

donor support for health, education and climate action, recognising the key intersections that can make these investments go further and reach the most vulnerable.

Bilateral development donors

- Re-orient development strategies to include a focus on ending homelessness globally, including embedding it within investment plans on global health, education and climate action.
- Explicitly identify and prioritise populations at risk of or experiencing homelessness as key targets within development aid programmes and projects, and improve tracking of these investments through OECD DAC and other global databases.
- Promote two-way learning exchanges with other countries and regions, sharing ambitious domestic strategies for tackling homelessness.
- Use your positions as main funders of multilateral agencies and development banks to influence global action on homelessness by these agencies.

Multilateral Agencies and Development Banks

- Heed the call of the UN Secretary-General to tackle homelessness, by ensuring the needs of homeless populations are fully recognised in strategies and investments for housing, climate adaptation, global health and education.
- Scale up long term investment in preventing and tackling homelessness. For example, if all

development banks and donor agencies ring-fenced 15% of their budgets spent on the housing-related DAC codes towards projects that directly target homelessness as a core component of the project, this would leverage over USD 100 million in targeted funding within 3.5 years.

- Work alongside people with lived experience, homelessness practitioners, housing organisations and private finance initiatives to attract private sector finance for social housing and homelessness solutions. Develop innovative and blended finance models that lower investment risk and increase the amount of capital channelled to housing solutions for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
- Development banks should report on the percentage of development spending for housing-related DAC codes that targets homeless populations.

Climate finance institutions

- Provide finance to support LMICs to address the housing needs of homeless populations affected by climate change, and to plan for the anticipated housing needs created by climate-related displacement as part of climate adaptation plans and strategies.
- Explicitly identify and prioritise populations at risk of or experiencing homelessness as a result of the climate crisis as key targets within climate finance investments.
- Work with governments and service providers to identify and finance innovative approaches that protect people experiencing street homelessness specifically, given their additional vulnerabilities to climate-related risks and health impacts.

Philanthropic funders

- Leverage philanthropic investments to pilot innovative solutions to prevent and tackle homelessness. Funding should prioritise new research in LMICs to generate new evidence about the most effective solutions to addressing homelessness in these contexts.
- Invest in better data collection and research evidence so that more countries can have accurate baseline estimates of the scale and drivers of homelessness and tools to track progress.
- Finance advocacy efforts to end homelessness and build the evidence base for how tackling homelessness as an intersectional issue drives positive impacts across education, health, climate and other development priorities.

Housing and homelessness agencies

- Work with climate, health and education specialists to design and deliver integrated services to prevent and tackle homelessness which also deliver intersecting development outcomes, drawing on best practice from across sectors.
- Strengthen regional and global cross-sector coordination and advocacy for shared action on homelessness, housing, climate, health and education, leveraging existing sector initiatives such as the Institute of Global Homelessness' Vanguard Cities and Community of Impact, the International Mayor's Council on Homelessness and FEANTSA in Europe.