



Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary

NGO with special consultative status in the **Economic and Social Council** of the United Nations since 2013 and with the **Department of Public Information** since 2006.

News from the UN # 108

RSHM at the UN

February 2020



February 19th was a historic day! It marked the end of CSOCD 58, and with it, the first-ever resolution explicitly addressing global homelessness. The resolution passed by consensus at the closing session of the 58th **Commission on Social Development (Csoc58)**. We were happy to be there and to have been able to register 10 RSHM and collaborators to participate in varying parts of the Commission. In this issue of **News from the UN** we share some highlights of the experience.

The fight to have homelessness recognized and addressed by the UN was driven in part the advocacy initiatives taken by the **Working Group to End Homelessness** who worked tirelessly over the last two years to bring it to the global agenda. As RSHM we were delighted to be involved in these initiatives, together with many other faith-based NGOs. The **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** are all intrinsically inter-connected, but we cannot achieve them without acknowledging that vulnerable populations, including those experiencing homelessness, are in danger of being left behind. We need definitions and standardized measurements of homelessness to address this global issue. The fact that this is now formally recognized by the UN system today is an important milestone on the journey to ending homelessness.



[➔ Watch the short video](#)

Homelessness - Virginia Dorgan RSHM



“Homelessness is a world-wide problem that is growing. Refugees from wars, climate changes and failing & corrupt economies are crossing borders and regions. Housing is increasingly expensive and seen as a commodity rather than a human right. Patriarchy leaves women particularly vulnerable to homelessness; racial and ethnic discrimination make refugees and migrants unwelcome. Interestingly, homelessness is named in only one of the Sustainable Development Goals but the underlying factors are mentioned in many of the others which address poverty and human rights. Many groups are addressing the problems and many examples given came from Catholic missionaries.”

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Hidden faces of Homelessness

UNANIMA International hosted an event titled **“The Hidden Faces of Family Homelessness from the perspective of Women and Children/Girls”**. The event explored the vulnerability of homeless populations. Even as progress is made in implementation of the SDGs, homelessness seems to be increasing rather than decreasing. In some areas it results from increasing climate change related displacement and in others, it is a consequence of growing wealth inequality.

Historically women have systematically been excluded in the context of social protection measures and these misogynistic tendencies still permeate some social protection policies today. Women and children also remain hidden in a lot of the statistics that we do have about homelessness, as they are often hidden on and from the streets, **“couch hopping”** and **“rough sleeping”** in places that are out of sight, so as to escape sexual and physical abuse on the streets and even within shelters. Organizations like **“Sophia Housing Association”**, based in Ireland, are developing wholly new and innovative models to provide long term solutions to homelessness. Sophia’s trauma care model has almost a 100% success rate, providing hope and best practices in the journey to a world that has completely eradicated homelessness. The panel also identified an important dimension of the broader problem that has been largely ignored, namely the lack of a globally accepted definition of homelessness in the UN system and the resulting lack of measurement.

Did you know that

- According to **UN-Habitat**, globally, **1.6 billion people** live in inadequate housing conditions, with about 15 million forcefully evicted every year.
- Although men predominate in the counts of street homelessness, estimates suggest that **female-headed households** constitute **70 %** of the world’s homeless population when those in inadequate housing are included.
- **UN Habitat** estimates that around **70% of the urban population in Zambia** live in informal settlements and about half a million young children live on the streets. (*SOS Children’s Villages*).
- In **Zimbabwe** the national housing shortage is estimated at more than **1 million**, with more than **1.2 million people** on the government’s **national housing waiting list**.
- A national survey on the homeless population in **Brazil** found that 71% of homeless people worked in the informal sector, 89 % did not receive any social benefits and 25% had no identification.
- According to the latest **“point in time” count report to the US Congress**, at least **568,000 people** were experiencing homelessness in the **United States** in January 2019.



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Reflections from Sr. Ellen O’Leary RSHM (NEP)



“It was my privilege to receive an invitation from Sr. Veronica Brand – our Institute NGO representative at the UN, to attend the 58th Session of the Commission on Social Development. The theme chosen for the Commission this year was: **Affordable Housing and Social Protection Systems for all to address Homelessness.** This

was a theme close to my own heart having worked in the field of “Homelessness” for over 20 years.

Part of the UN’s commitment when adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for all nations and people and for all segments of society was access to safe and affordable housing for all. Now 5 years on from 2015 when the SDGs were launched, homelessness continues to be an issue as was re-iterated for me by the reports from many countries including China, Africa, Brazil, and from the situation in my own country, Ireland.

Participating in the Commission highlighted for me the importance of involving homeless people in being part of the

How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. (Pope Francis – Evangelii gaudium 21)

solution to the crisis as was demonstrated by many groups – in particular by a recycling project in a Brazilian community. Using video clips created on a visit to Brazil, Sr. Veronica presented information about the **ASMARE** recycling project that was enabling former street dwellers to form a co-operative, resulting in benefits to the community to be self-supporting and live independently.



My participation in the Commission and my study of the Secretary General’s Report on **Affordable Housing for All** has convinced me of the need (and I quote) “to build a broad-based partnership between State and non-State actors at all levels to prevent people from falling into homelessness, support those experiencing homelessness and develop long-term sustainable solutions to end homelessness.” Let’s hope the outcome of this Commission will have gone some way to achieving this aim. **➡ Read more...**



CSOCD 58 Glimpses

★ During CSocD the **Architectural and Design Film Festival** presented a selection of films focusing on **Affordable Housing, Homelessness and social inclusion** in partnership with UN Habitat which is supporting a program for socially and environmentally sustainable shelter for all. A key message from this event reminded all that a roof over one’s head does not make a home. A home requires a place where people can live affordably, peacefully and securely and ideally help build a loving and thriving neighborhood community. We are experiencing a global crisis of growing inequality, affordability to housing and many are becoming increasingly affected and homeless and impoverished.



★ “Being homeless is not the same as being hopeless”. Listen to the inspiring message of **Chris Gardner (author of “The Pursuit of Happiness” memoir)** and the reflection of **Mary McAleese** (former President of Ireland)...

➡ Watch the short video ➡ Read more.....

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★ A very inspiring film entitled **PUSH** was shown and recounted the work of **Leilana Farha** the UN Special Rapporteur in Housing. She has started **the Shift** movement and is very effectively coalescing government and non-government actors to fight the commodification of housing and recognize housing as a Human Right. Government partners are starting to buy back housing and land from institutional investors. These great tactics are working ! It’s time to make the shift. **➡ Watch the video**



★ One of the most resounding personal testimonies came from **Elizabeth Madden**, an Irish woman who experienced homelessness and was assisted by **Sophia Housing Association** in Ireland. Madden, who became homeless as a teenager and a single mother, lauded the importance of providing support systems and community to those experiencing homelessness. She also emphasized the importance of employment, education, and jobs training as means to empower the homeless. According to Madden, life after trauma requires just as much support as during it, providing a best practice to all involved in the fight to end homelessness going forward



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