

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

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TOPIC B. Guaranteeing dignified housing as a commitment to human rights

I. Introduction

Nowadays, over 1,600 million people live in the known as informal settlements across the globe. Furthermore, there is no defined statistic on how many people do not have the right to an adequate and dignified residence, thus hindering society's progress in eradicating homelessness and unworthy housing in the globe.¹ In addition, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) establishes as follows: "International human rights law recognizes everyone's right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate housing. Despite the central place of this right within the global legal system, well over a billion people are not adequately housed. Millions around the world live in life- or health-threatening conditions, in overcrowded slums and informal settlements, or in other conditions which do not uphold their human rights and their dignity [...]".² Consequently, the search for dignified housing is a current problematic that lacks the States commitment for solving it. Nevertheless, there are a variety of NGO's fighting this subject, among others, *Save the Children*, *Overseas Development Institute*, *Concern Worldwide*, *ONE*, and so forth.

¹ Noticias ONU. Millones de personas viven sin techo o en casas inadecuadas, un asalto a la dignidad y la vida. United Nations, New York, 7/11/2018. On: <https://news.un.org/es/story/2018/07/1437721> (12/13/2020).

² United Nations. The Right to Adequate Housing. United Nations. Geneva, 2014, pp. 1-46.

II. Concept definitions

- Adequate: Satisfactory in quantity, good enough in quality. Solves a specific purpose or need.
- Dignified: Demonstrating or having worth, which deserves respect in a serious manner.
- Housing: Settlements which provide people a place to live, supposedly having to comply with law requirements that guarantee it being dignified.
- Human rights: Basic rights or entitlements human beings possess for the fact of simply existing. The United Nations established them. All persons have them, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, sexual orientation, or any other status or characteristic.
- Law: Systems of rules made by a government used to regulate society's behavior.
- Poverty: Condition in which a person or community does not possess the sufficient resources needed for a minimum standard of living.

III. Current situation

Homelessness and inadequate housing are considered one of the most important problems to be solved in the future years. It is estimated that around two percent of the world's population are homeless. Nevertheless, there are around 1.6 billion people, more than 20% of the world's population, who live in inadequate housing conditions.³

There are a variety of causes regarding homelessness and inadequate housing. Shortages of affordable residences, privatization of civic services, investment speculation in housing, unplanned and rapid urbanization, and poverty are just a few of them. This being said, the last two are the most constant

³ YaleGlobal Online. As Cities Grow, So Do the Numbers of Homeless. Yale University, United States of America, 7/13/2017. On: <https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/cities-grow-so-do-numbers-homeless> (12/13/2020).

ones, as urban growth has led to poverty expanding (thus more people living in inadequate places of residence), even worsening due to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴

One of the main consequences of this sanitary crisis is the number of evictions that have arisen mainly in metropolitan areas. The lack of mortgage paying capacity in cities has led to the mass displacement. For example, in order to counteract the situation, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has issued a temporary order to stop evictions in the United States of America. This decree is valid until December 31st; however, many rights have been given to American citizens to be able to pay their rent after the due date.⁵

On the other hand, many initiatives have been proposed in recent years. The “Social Bite village”, a Scottish project, consists of housing construction for homeless people. This low-cost “villages” contain a variety of places dedicated specifically for leisure purposes.⁶

Another project seen is the “Mae Tao” chalets, which serve as refugee centers for immigrants in Thailand. Made up of huge tents, they are built mostly out of recycled materials. Furthermore, “Open Homes”, by *Airbnb*, provide temporary accommodation for the displaced, immigrants and persons who live in inadequate residences. This project has been a huge success, because at least 100,000 people across the globe have been given accommodation throughout five years.⁷

⁴ YaleGlobal Online. As Cities Grow, So Do the Numbers of Homeless. Yale University, United States of America, 7/13/2017. On: <https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/cities-grow-so-do-numbers-homeless> (12/13/2020).

⁵ Consumer information. Temporary stop COVID-19 evictions: what you need to know. Federal Trade Commission, United States of America, 10/27/2020. On: <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2020/10/temporary-stop-covid-19-evictions-what-you-need-know#:~:text=Last%20month%2C%20the%20Department%20of,to%20the%20COVID%2D19%20pandemic.&text=Right%20now%2C%20evictions%20are%20put,but%20only%20until%20December%2031> (12/13/2020).

⁶ Start Academy. 8 housing solutions for inclusive cities. Social Innovation Academy, European Union, 7/24/2019. On: <https://www.socialinnovationacademy.eu/8-housing-solutions-for-inclusive-cities/> (12/13/2020).

⁷ Start Academy. 8 housing solutions for inclusive cities. Social Innovation Academy, European Union, 7/24/2019. On: <https://www.socialinnovationacademy.eu/8-housing-solutions-for-inclusive-cities/> (12/13/2020).



Like these programs, many more have emerged due to the large effort NGO's, companies and governments have given to the situation. Despite this, there is still a big shortage of access for displaced people, thus the necessity of improving the situation, and even more due to the COVID-19 economic repercussions.

IV. International treaties and initiatives

Adequate/dignified housing was recognized as a right in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, during the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Moreover, every nation in the United Nations has ratified at least one other treaty making the compromise to protect this right. Regardless of this, inadequate housing and informal settlements have greatly increased.⁸

One of these treaties (EHCHRFF) was signed on November 4th, 1950 when the Council of Europe Housing Rights (COE) ratified an agreement, which had the purpose of securing fundamental civil and political rights to every person within the jurisdiction of the Member States of the COE. Going into force in 1953, it did not promote a right to housing by itself. However, it had the fundamental goal of developing housing rights. The respect for private life, family life, a home and protection of possessions are a few of the rights it promoted.⁹

Furthermore, according the OHCHR and UN-Habitat's 21st Brochure, the right to a dignified housing contains a variety of freedoms. These are related to the protection against forced dislocation and against demolition, right to family and privacy, and right to determine the place to live and free movement.¹⁰

As well, it must satisfy a variety of other rights. These are the security of tenure; restitution of housing, land and assets; non-discriminatory access under equal conditions to a dignified residence; and participation in councils regarding the subject at a national and community level. Besides this, it establishes that adequate housing must contain seven minimum aspects:

⁸ United Nations. The Right to Adequate Housing. United Nations. Geneve, 2014, pp. 1-46.

⁹ Kucs, A., Sedlova, Z., Pierhurovica, L. The Right to Housing: International, European and National Perspectives. University of Latvia. Riga, pp. 101-106.

¹⁰ United Nations. The Right to Adequate Housing. United Nations. Geneve, 2014, pp. 1-46.

1. Security of tenure (legal protection against forced dislocation).
2. Availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure.
3. Affordability.
4. Habitability (physical protection with enough space, as well as protection against natural disasters).
5. Accessibility (special needs for the marginalized).
6. Location (guarantees access to jobs, healthcare facilities, schools; shall not be in a polluted area).
7. Cultural adequacy.¹¹

Another treaty seen about the topic was during the World Habitat Day 2020. An opportunity was presented in it to discuss the worldwide impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in living places. In this forum, several alternatives to reconstruct societies via housing were also discussed.¹²

Last, but not least, the creation of sustainable communities is seen in the 11th Objective of Sustainable Development of the United Nations 2030 Agenda. It establishes the idea of independent institutions supervising the progress of each Nations housing development so that they comply with the objectives.

V. Guiding questions

- What does the right to a dignified home mean?
- Why is the problematic relevant? What is the necessity of taking actions against it?
- Which sector of the population is the most affected?
- What is poverty and how is it related to the topic?
- What are the main causes of extreme poverty?

¹¹ United Nations. The Right to Adequate Housing. United Nations. Geneve, 2014, pp. 1-46.

¹² UN-Habitat. Vivienda para todos: Tema del Día Mundial del Hábitat 2020. United Nations, Mexico, 8/31/2020. On: <http://onuhabitat.org.mx/vivienda-para-todos-tema-del-dia-mundial-del-habitat-2020#:~:text=Agosto%2031%2C%202020.&text=La%20vivienda%20es%20un%20derecho,cuestión%20de%20vida%20o%20muerte.&text=Para%202030%2C%20el%20número%20de,aumentar%20a%203%20mil%20millones> (12/13/2020).

- According to your delegation's standpoint, what would be the solution to the problematic in the short, medium and long term?
- Why is the OHCHR related to the problematic?
- Has the OHCHR done something in order to solve the problematic?
- What subjects will be discussed during this topic? For example: poverty, dignified housing, commitment to human rights.

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