



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
22 November 2019

English only

Commission for Social Development

Fifty-eighth session

10–19 February 2020

Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the
twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority

Theme: Affordable housing and social protection systems for all
to address homelessness

Statement submitted by Pirate Parties International Headquarters, non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Pirates assist individuals with a network of social support. Our organization wishes to emphasize in this CSocD58 statement the importance of NGOs to provide free resources to support the needy. Pirate Parties International (PPI) Headquarters represents numerous of organizations and individuals, including many who are at risk of poverty and who thus became social activists. Homelessness is pervasive and ubiquitous, but transient. Many of us are lucky enough to pull ourselves out of homelessness and merely fell on hard times. Others lack support from family and state. NGOs can fill in the void for those who lack support structures and need help the most. We (PPI) create support networks that assist those who cannot find support elsewhere. In this statement we explain the social and political issues around homelessness and connect them with technological solutions. We outline low-cost proposals for internet-based projects the international community can adopt to protect at-risk populations from homelessness.

Utilize Internet Crowdsourcing

One of the main goals of PPI is to harness technology to solve social problems, such as homelessness and its causes. Crowdsourcing solutions enable individuals from all over the world to collaborate on both the development and application of solutions to homelessness. Smartphones are commonly owned by homeless persons around the world, and future initiatives should continue to train and provide resources that are based online. Existing databases can be utilized, such as online reservation portals that many homeless shelters already use. Grassroots community activism also can benefit from crowdsourcing, such as organizing volunteers for soup kitchens. Crowdfunding can do more than just collecting donations from wealthy individuals. NGOs can organize community service projects that require limited financing, whereby the community comes together to provide services for the impoverished.

Identify Worthy Technologies

Recent ingenious endeavors to implement crowdsourcing are made by individuals and communities around the world. We call upon ECOSOC members to help us identify worthy technological enterprises, to test them on a large scale, and to support the development of virtuous NGO projects that benefit homeless populations. Aid groups can enlist volunteers through online platforms to conduct scientifically-trialed social outreach projects.

Provide Internet Services Specifically for the Homeless

Service centres can prevent homelessness. By establishing staffed computer desks in neighbourhoods frequented by homeless persons, we can facilitate their access to shelter, employment, health care, and other services. Technological solutions can be extremely low cost with vast benefits. An increasing number of online resources are designed to assist the impoverished, and centres can assist homeless to use these resources for their benefit. A common project is to create a database of open homeless shelters that anyone can list in and homeless individuals can look up on a website. Recent crowdsourcing for social workers who care for homeless individuals integrate GPS tracking. Crowdsourced knowledge pools can be combined with information provided by the end-users or those acting on their behalf, such as family members or other care providers.

Protect Rights of Homeless to Anonymity

Concern for the homeless can often infringe on their rights to privacy. We must be careful to balance our good will to assist homeless persons against pejorative efforts to track, follow, and denigrate them. Google previously admitted to collecting data of homeless people without their consent for its AI and facial recognition technologies. Homeless information systems can provide aid but also may be outlets for discrimination by profiling victims for police overreach and government spying.

Promote Affordable Housing

Social protection policies must combat the problem of rising housing prices, a common theme of social justice demonstrations that our members support. We create virtual spaces where demonstrators can campaign to reduce housing prices. In the modern landscape the internet also fuels inflation in housing prices, whereby wealthy investors, short-term rentals and limited units can increase the cost of housing beyond feasible means of even those employed full-time. We promote online-based forums that will enable those with more limited means to find options for more affordable housing. Communities must ensure all people can afford to live, including low-income residents in gentrifying communities. We believe that a society can be judged on how it cares for its weakest members. Lacking compassion and services for the homeless is akin to fascism. People must not be harassed by police and incarcerated just for existing.

Treat Expansive Types of Homelessness

Homelessness is a myriad of problems present in every country. Homelessness includes those living in rough makeshift shelters to those living in temporary housing. Many individuals come out of homelessness through supported accommodation or supported labour. Communities should be encouraged to fund NGOs that follow “housing-first” programs, as pilot programs have shown significant cost savings and long-term reintegration of homeless people. While we cannot expect every homeless person to actively participate in programs designed to assist them, we can expect that easy-to-use online crowdsourcing applications will motivate regional and community stakeholders to act on behalf of homeless people. Such programs can provide customized solutions to treat specific types of homelessness that are more prevalent. Services must be tailored to the needs of the society. A critical aspect of any initiative involves reaching out to not only homeless individuals but also the community that surrounds them.

Address Neglected Causes of Precariousness

Individuals stuck in precarious situations lack outlets for long-term security. An individual with an unwanted pregnancy, addiction problems or sudden job loss is especially at risk. Unfortunately, the neo-liberal public sector reacts with subliminal blame and neglects those who are most at risk, leading to increased risks of homelessness. We must identify those who are in precarious situations before they fall into a cycle of homelessness and social disadvantage. For example, immigrants are often disadvantaged in the local labour market. In many situations, language is an impediment for them to integrate. Apprenticeship programs can target immigrants, assisting with the local language, providing training for new craft skills, as well as community campaigns to reduce discrimination.

Provide Suitable Work Opportunities

We can encourage libraries and other venues to provide service centres that will assist homeless with work placement, as well as provides incentives for businesses to

hire those who are at-risk of homelessness. Many homeless lack the resources to navigate online search engines for jobs. Platforms such as Amazon MTurk provide an environment that could be beneficial for homeless. Unfortunately, such platforms provide exploitative wages and take a large cut of already small transactions. NGOs can work to create online employment platforms that are easy to access for homeless, while also providing fair and respectable work options.

Create Online Support Groups with Professionals

Individuals should always feel that they have someone to turn to. And yet, those who need help the most often do not know where to turn. We can provide inexpensive mental health counselling and hotlines for the homeless online. Many such programs do exist, but they are often understaffed and underfunded. Dedicated platforms that crowdsource mental health support have received scientific attention. Recent programs that utilize crowdsourcing have brought together professionals and unpaid volunteers. Aid workers are trained to assist anyone at-risk of homelessness online for free at any time, rather than forcing patients to seek direct clinical assistance they can't afford or trust. Such support networks also assist substance abuse networks, individuals suffering from domestic abuse, and others who are in need. Crowdsourcing apps are mentioned on the website of the US National Institute on Drug Abuse to induce connection between clients and care providers. Domestic abuse victims and minorities can be more vulnerable to being in a homeless situation, and they especially may benefit from anonymous online services.

Concluding Remark

We thank the organizers of CSoCD58 for establishing this worthy endeavour to provide affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness. We hope that fellow ECOSOC members will consider these general proposals for internet-based solutions and work with us to implement support services for those at risk of becoming homeless. One of the first places that we can start is by ensuring that governments will respect the homeless and those in precarious situations by collecting the opinions of all people living in communities to see what their needs are, rather than implementing top-bottom reforms that present homeless with additional challenges.
