2026 REPORT

VANGUARD CITIES CASE STUDIES:
INITIATIVES TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS

igh Ruff Institute of Global Homelessness

VANGUARD CITIES CASE STUDIES: INITIATIVES TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS

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VANGUARD PROGRAM

A GLOBAL MOVEMENT TO END HOMELESSNESS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CONTRIBUTING VANGUARD PARTNERS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH) works to accelerate progress toward ending homelessness worldwide by supporting cities and countries to develop data-driven, person-centered, and housing-led solutions. This case study report captures initiatives of 11 cities across six continents that participate in the Vanguard Program, documenting how governments and local actors have translated global frameworks into practical change.

Each case study describes the processes, partnerships, challenges, and innovations that communities have developed, demonstrating that homelessness should be addressed through coordinated and sustained efforts. Based on these initiatives, the final section presents key approaches to end homelessness.

Across the Vanguard Cities studied, several approaches and lessons emerged:
- Cities across the Vanguard Program are integrating prevention programs into their homeless response. In this report, we spotlight how Greater Manchester's focus on young people demonstrates the potential of upstream prevention.
- Implementing housing-led approaches with support at scale remains a global challenge. We highlight Housing First programs (Santiago and Lisbon) and housing for families (São Paulo).
- The importance of centering people with living and lived experience in program design and implementation is essential for effective and truly person-centered systems. We spotlight programs in two countries: Uruguay and Mongolia.
- Five cities highlight their city-wide systems, underscoring elements such as adaptability, stakeholder engagement, and thorough initial assessments, to support data-informed and needs-driven interventions.
- Mongolia demonstrates the importance of assertive street outreach, while Glasgow reinforces the need to ensure program quality.

Key challenges were also identified:
- The wide variation in definitions and data on homelessness limits the ability to compare progress across the Vanguard Program.
- Limited availability of affordable and social housing, combined with competitive housing markets and rising living costs, hinders long-term stability.
- Uncertain funding creates instability for programs, staff, and participants.
- Communities continue to face persistent stigma toward people experiencing homelessness and work to shift public and institutional narratives through awareness and inclusive language.
- Designing adaptable programs to meet diverse and evolving needs is challenging in most cities.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE OF GLOBAL HOMELESSNESS

The Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH) drives a global movement to end homelessness. Our vision is a world where everyone has a home that offers security, safety, autonomy, and opportunity.

Founded in 2014, IGH is the first organization to focus on homelessness as a global phenomenon. It is a partnership between DePaul University (Chicago, USA), and Depaul International (London, UK).

IGH collaborates with UN-Habitat to bring evidence-based best practice and policy to the forefront of the international conversation on ending homelessness to achieve sustainable and equitable cities.

VANGUARD PROGRAM

Created in 2017, the Vanguard Program collaborates with 18 cities, states, and countries across six continents, all committed to significantly reducing or ending homelessness. IGH provides targeted technical assistance to support leaders in each city. Additionally, this partnership further elevates each community's work by supporting strategy development and data collection, engaging stakeholders in coalition building, and sharing lessons learned with an international network. The ultimate goal is to have a meaningful impact on homelessness worldwide.

Our network also includes the International Mayors Council on Homelessness, co-led with UN-Habitat, which brings together city leaders committed to ending street homelessness and offers a platform to exchange strategies for sustainable, city-wide responses, discuss the most pressing challenges, and advocate for change at the global level.

IGH's Experts by Experience Forum connects people with lived experience of homelessness, providing a space to share insights and ensure programs and decisions reflect real-life perspectives.

INTRODUCTION

Vanguard Country
Vanguard State
Vanguard City
Mayor City
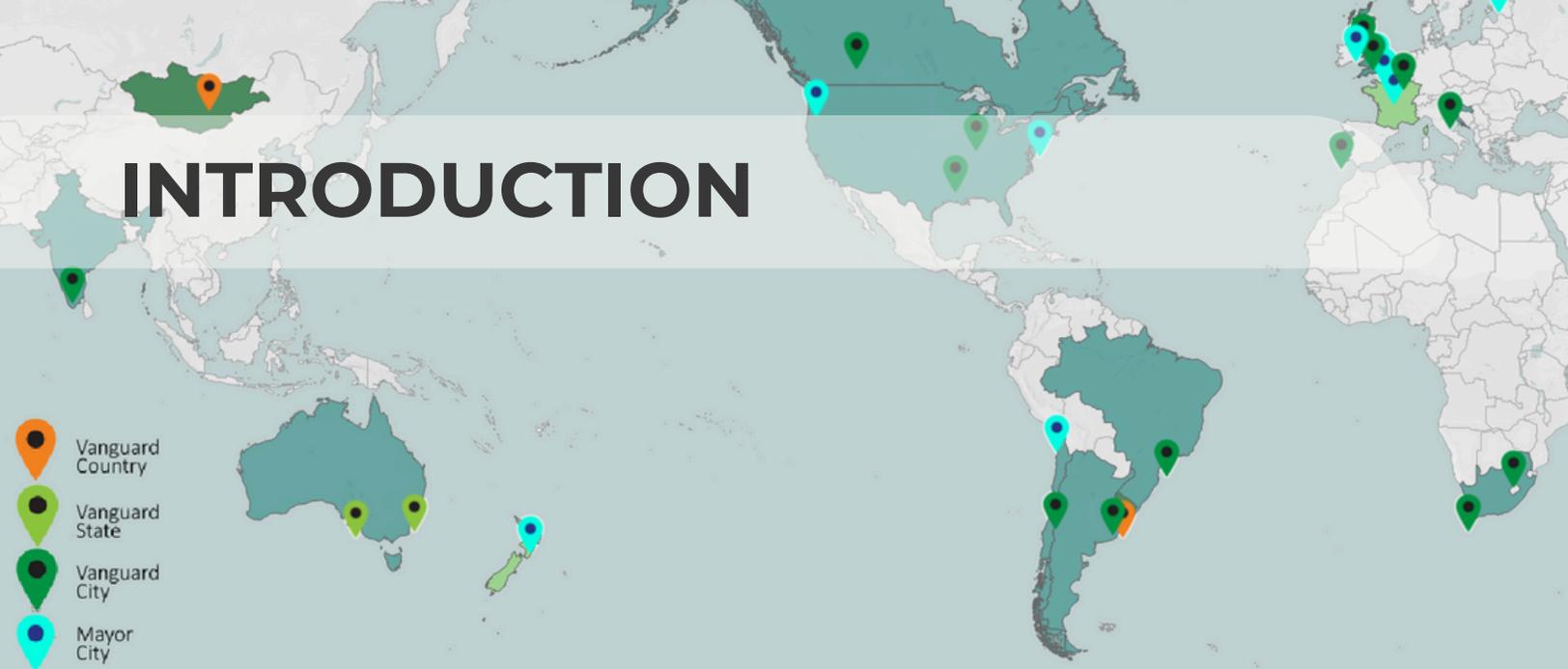
Homelessness is a global phenomenon rooted in the intersection of public health, housing affordability, domestic violence, mental health conditions, substance use, rapid urbanization, racial and gender discrimination, inadequate infrastructure, unemployment, conflict, and migration. The absence of safe and stable housing, as acknowledged by the United Nations, constitutes a violation of the human right to adequate housing. Yet data about this issue remains insufficient, with only 78 countries reporting official statistics, according to IGH's Global Homeless Data Map.

Despite growing attention in international discussions, homelessness is not included in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, and it is often portrayed as an "individual failure" rather than as a failure of systems. At the Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH), we are guided by the vision of a world where everyone has a safe place to call home. To make this a reality, IGH connects communities worldwide to share best practices, improve systems, and accelerate progress toward reducing and ending homelessness.

In the context of our Vanguard Program, this case study report highlights programs and approaches implemented by eleven of our Vanguard Cities to prevent and end homelessness. We aim to analyze what works, identify remaining challenges, and explore lessons that can be applied globally. The case studies are presented as examples of real-life adaptations. Often, translating recommended best practices into feasible solutions presents multiple challenges, but these eleven locations demonstrate that enacting change is possible.

The following pages include a summary of data on homelessness across geographies, an overview of how best practices are reflected in the featured programs, while also acknowledging challenges and lessons learned. The report outlines the core strategies for homelessness as we look ahead to the next steps for the Vanguard Cities. These approaches include prevention, the Housing First model, the integration of lived experience, innovative housing interventions, and city-wide systems. The report concludes with final considerations.

2022 VANGUARD CITIES EVALUATION

Since its launch in 2017, the Vanguard Program has sought to improve its support to partners. In 2022, the first assessment of this program was developed by Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Professor Volker Busch-Geertsema, Dr. Beth Watts, Dr. Jenny Wood, Marie-Therese Haj Ahmad, and Jill McIntyre. The research was supported by I-SPHERE (Heriot-Watt University) and GISS (Bremen).

The 2022 International Comparative Study analyzed the first cohort of 13 Vanguard Cities, aiming to monitor progress toward each city's commitment to end or reduce homelessness by 2020. The report also highlighted key elements that could be adapted to other contexts, the added value of IGH's involvement, and the effects of COVID-19.

Among its findings, the research showed that more than half of the Vanguard Cities achieved reductions in specific areas of street homelessness, with Glasgow and

Sydney fully reaching their targets, and Greater Manchester reporting progress toward its "exceptionally ambitious goal of ending all rough sleeping" (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). In some locations, limited enumeration processes due to the COVID-19 Pandemic did not allow a comparison with the baseline.

Resources and institutional structures vary widely across the cities and funding was, and remains, a major obstacle to achieving progress toward ending homelessness. However, researchers noted that political commitment and affordable housing policies can significantly drive progress.

In that first cohort, IGH was recognized as an enabler of local visibility and initiatives, but further progress remains necessary. The report aimed to identify learnings from the cities, including enablers and barriers across contexts, highlighting promising practices.

KEY FINDINGS

The 2022 Evaluation identified strengths and areas for improvement across the cities, which informed **recommendations** for cities working to reduce and end homelessness.

WHAT WORKS: EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS

- Presence of a lead agency / political will with coordinated approach
- Prevention
- Assertive Street Outreach
- Temporary Self-Contained Accommodation
- Permanent Supportive Housing / "Housing First"
- Individualized Case Management/ Supportive Services
- Affordable Housing
- Access to income

WHAT DOES NOT WORK: BARRIERS/CHALLENGES

- Reliance on Large-scale Communal Shelters
- Heavy dependence on faith groups for service provision
- Aggressive enforcement by police and city authorities unaccompanied by offers of support and housing
- Access to assistance restricted to those with particular forms of IDs, citizenship status or "local connection"
- Lack of prevention focus across cities

An English and Spanish version of this report is available.

VANGUARD CITIES in this report

Greater Manchester, England
Youth Homelessness Prevention

Santiago, Chile
Vivienda Primero (Housing First)

Lisbon, Portugal
É Uma Casa
É Um Restaurante

Uruguay
Colectivo NITEP
Casa de Sueños

Mongolia
Ulziit-Asar NGO
Rapid Needs Assessment

São Paulo, Brazil
Vila Reencontro

Glasgow, Scotland
Quality Assurance Process

Buenos Aires, Argentina
Red de Atención (Care Network)

Chicago, United States
Five-Year Blueprint

Tshwane, South Africa
Ending Older Homelessness
Spatial Methods for Urban Sustainability

Sydney, Australia
Sydney Zero

GREATER MANCHESTER

PREVENTING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Greater Manchester is a city region that encompasses ten local authorities: Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, and Wigan. Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) is a devolved English Mayoral Combined Authority that works collaboratively with its ten constituent local authorities to support in preventing homelessness across the city region.

In English devolution, Mayoral Combined Authorities have no statutory duty to provide homelessness advice or assistance to people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness. Local authorities retain the responsibility for homelessness advice and assistance under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996.

As part of GMCA's collaborative approach to addressing homelessness, a prevention plan to end "rough sleeping" with a "long-term vision to reduce the number of people finding themselves at risk of homelessness" was developed for the city region in 2021. The plan was co-created with different stakeholders and people with lived experience of homelessness.

Greater Manchester joined as a Vanguard City in March 2018, and Mayor Andy Burnham acts as chair of our International Mayors Council on Homelessness.

THE "PATHFINDER" SERVICE

The Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2021-2026 promotes a person–centered and trauma-informed approach. One of the missions is that "everyone can access and sustain a home that is safe, decent, accessible and affordable." Other active programs in Greater Manchester are A Bed Every Night (ABEN) and Housing First.

Mayor Andy Burnham was elected as the first Mayor of Greater Manchester in 2017 on a platform of tackling homelessness. Since that time, the city region's response has supported a reduction in rough sleeping of 42% from the peak of 2017 to 2024, as evidenced by the Ministry for Housing, Communities, and Local Government Annual Snapshot Count.

Building upon its work on prevention, the Greater Manchester Better Outcomes Partnership (GMBOP) implemented the Young Persons' Homelessness Prevention Pathfinder Service, often referred to as "the Pathfinder." With a one-year pilot in 2021, the official service has been operational since 2022, targeting young people between the ages of 18 and 25 at risk of homelessness, given the vulnerabilities and risks associated with this age group.

<u>Centrepoint</u>'s findings highlight the urgent need for tailored support, since young people experiencing homelessness often face multiple vulnerabilities in the UK:

- Over half (58%) left home due to family or relationship breakdown.
- More than a third (38%) have been in care with "poor" transition support.
- Around one in five (20%) are seeking asylum, many as unaccompanied minors.

Intervening in the pathways of young people is essential to prevent future experiences of homelessness. The Pathfinder focuses on providing stable housing and specialized assistance, including for care leavers and LGBTQ+ youth, using a person-centered approach. Each young person works with a coach to set personal goals, ranging from improved financial, employment, and housing outcomes. The support offered aligned with the service's core aims:

- Reducing homelessness risk.
- Strengthening support networks.
- Improving financial stability.
- Encouraging engagement in meaningful activities.

GMCA commissioned the GMBOP to deliver this service; thus, this coalition holds the contract and operates the programs, with individual service-providers managing Pathfinder in each local authority area. The service employs an outcomes-based approach, where GMCA compensates providers upon achieving agreed-upon results.

A steering group composed of diverse stakeholders, such as local authority representatives, key delivery partners, the Department for Work and Pensions, employment and skills teams, and care leaver teams, initially identified barriers to preventing youth homelessness. This group was essential during the design, which also involved mapping existing services, recognizing effective practices, and recruiting and engaging delivery partners. Additionally, the teams used qualitative information from young service users in ABEN services to identify activities that could prevent homelessness.

Young people using the services also contributed through co-production of the program. Priority groups, such as neurodiverse young people, were consulted to ensure that service delivery meets specific needs; therefore, the Pathfinder is shaped by lived experiences of homelessness.

AS OF DECEMBER 2024:

1,711 young people have completed an Initial Support Plan.

72% of these young people achieved at least one housing outcome, demonstrating homelessness prevention in practice.

59% of individuals achieved at least one self-determined outcome.

28% achieved three or more self-determined outcomes.

ENABLERS TO SUCCEED

Greater Manchester's Pathfinder shows that when outcomes-based commissioning is combined with strong collaboration and the voices of young people themselves, support can be truly tailored and adaptable, helping to meet their needs and prevent homelessness.

In this sense, the program's strengths are:

- A person-centered and holistic approach ensures tailored support.
- Ongoing reviews allow the program to keep improving and adapting, using a solutions-focused approach and high accountability.
- The strong partnership between GMBOP, GMCA, local authorities, and delivery partners aligns values and goals and enables best-practice sharing.
- An outcomes-based contract allows flexible delivery.
- Young people's voices shape services to reflect their needs.

The 2024 evaluation identified diverse levels of homelessness risk experienced by those supported on the Pathfinder, which is expected in an upstream service. This makes it fundamental to encourage participants to actively and consistently engage with the full range of support offered, wherever it is relevant to their situation. In general, the report indicated strong engagement and meaningful progress for young people.

MONITORING THE RESULTS

The Pathfinder is also guided by an important principle: data should inform homeless strategies. Not only does the service use a shared, real-time system to monitor the progress and identify emerging problems, but outcome indicators are also utilized to restructure the strategy. This allows providers to make informed decisions, adjust elements that are not working correctly, and keep the focus on supporting young people and preventing homelessness.

The program classifies the outcomes on activities engagement, support networks, financial, employment, and housing indicators. With this in mind, teams collect data about:

- Demographic and referral information as an initial context to improve support.
- People's journey (from entry to exit) throughout the program to capture progress; this includes up-to-date casework records and documentation of all meetings and services provided.
- Outcome indicators based on individuals' self-determined priorities and goals.
- A 12-month check to identify best-practices, successes, and areas of improvement.
- Co-produced sessions with participants, who offer qualitative insights to enhance service delivery. This feedback is shared with involved stakeholders.

According to the 2024 evaluation, there were previous "missed opportunities" by other services to identify homelessness risks, which delayed interventions. Although all candidates could benefit from the Pathfinder's preventive strategies, some individuals were at higher risk and required further support from local authorities.

In this context, some achieved outcomes related to housing referrals, especially social housing properties, support networks and financial stability, were maintained after participants' disengagement from Pathfinder. Nevertheless, there were challenges when young people were not aware of housing or other service options they could access.

The 2024 evaluation identified initial signs of long-term homelessness reduction with Pathfinder. However, participants' stories also exhibited earlier **"missed opportunities"** that would have avoided negative experiences for young people. Such narratives are common in prevention discussions, highlighting that timely action is critical to avoiding homelessness; Upstream prevention focuses on providing support to at-risk groups (Mackie, 2023).

LESSONS LEARNED

The teams working at Pathfinder acknowledged that some modifications were needed to improve this preventive strategy in Greater Manchester. First, most participants sought to secure housing, which was not offered in the original design.

Accordingly, Pathfinder shifted its approach to address this prevalent necessity. A high level of mental health needs evidenced the urgency for specialists, who were required for areas such as employment, care leavers, and LGBTQ+ communities, broadening the program's scope. Having a consistent coach throughout the entire program also showed a positive impact.

At the administrative level, the influx of referrals from social care and similar services was overloaded, creating an extra demand that pressure the service's capacity and forced it to adapt quickly. The nature of funding contracts generated uncertainty and contributed to higher staff turnover and recruitment challenges.

Based on its work with Pathfinder, Greater Manchester highlights key elements of a preventive-focused program: aligning support with known drivers of homelessness, ensuring systems act as early as possible, identifying and referring people before a crisis, and collaborating with grass-roots organizations as delivery-partners.

Preventing homelessness means intervening before a crisis occurs. Therefore, Greater Manchester aims to expand Pathfinder's reach and impact, while working with government and system leaders to promote a more flexible, prevention-focused approach. They are also trying to shift the narrative around prevention so that the approach extends beyond the scope of the Homelessness Reduction Act, intervening upstream as far as possible for young people where a homelessness risk has been identified.

SANTIAGO

ADAPTING HOUSING FIRST

Santiago, the capital of Chile, is a city with more than 7,4 million people (2024 Census). For the first time, the 2024 National Housing and Population Census included a special operation to enumerate homelessness This process registered 21,750 individuals in "street situations" (situación de calle) between people living on the streets and in temporary accommodations; of these, 8,458 were in the Santiago Metropolitan Region.

Since 2018, the national policy *Barrios Calle Cero* has aimed to reduce homelessness and promote community-level strategies. This plan brings together the National Street Office ("Oficina Nacional de Calle") of the Ministry of Social Development and Family, civil society organizations, researchers, and international experts. In 2019, Santiago joined the IGH Vanguard Program to strengthen and align its approach with global efforts.

VIVIENDA PRIMERO (2018)

A transformative step in addressing homelessness took place in 2018, when Chile launched Vivienda Primero (Housing First), a national public program targeting people over 50 years old who have been living on the streets for more than five years and are capable of living independently.

The Housing First model is internationally acknowledged for its impact on reducing homelessness but its implementation in Latin America is limited. Chile is one of the three countries that have adopted this approach in the region. Recognizing its value, the government aligned a strategy with the model's principles: no entry requirements and no participation conditions on substance use or employment programs should be mandatory for accessing long-term housing.

Developed and managed by the Ministry of Social Development and Family (MDSF), the program is executed by 15 non-governmental organizations, foundations, and municipalities, including Hogar de Cristo, Corporación Nuestra Casa, Corporación Moviliza, NGO Las Viñas, Fundación EDUCERE, NGO CIDETS, Municipalidad de Los Ángeles, Fundación Luxemburgo, Arzobispado de Puerto Montt, and Corporación CATIM.

In practice, Vivienda Primero allows one or two participants to share a home for up to three years, with possible extensions. Priority is given to individuals living in public spaces and without access to any form of accommodation. Participants gradually take on the full or partial cost of housing, typically contributing 30% of their income.

AS OF JUNE 2025:

The program operates in six regions, housing 741 individuals in 374 accommodations. More available spaces are opening to reach 797 housed individuals.

7 to 8 out of every 10 participants have not returned to street homelessness.

WHAT WORKS IN VIVIENDA PRIMERO?

Among the most noteworthy aspects of the program are five key elements that reflect its strategic design, evidence-based foundation, and collaborative implementation.

- **Expert collaboration and evidence-based design:** The Housing First adaptation incorporated inputs from national and international experts and created the technical infrastructure to scale the program across the country. During the design phase, the Institute of Global Homelessness provided support under the Vanguard Program.

- **Inter-ministerial cooperation:** The Ministry of Social Development and Family (MDSF) partnered with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (MINVU), the agency responsible for supplying public housing -whether through construction, leasing, or acquisition- for the allocation of units. Other government agencies, particularly those within the public health system, are also actively involved.

- **Holistic support:** In parallel to housing, individuals receive assistance from a team of coordinators, psychologists, and occupational therapists, with a ratio of 3 professionals per 20 participants. Areas of support include health, substance misuse, education, employment, and family relationships. In total, 120 specialists work across 36 municipalities.

- **Monitoring indicators:** The program measures housing retention rate, physical and mental health through the Barthel Index, FIM, SF-36, RAS, and EQ5D. Social and community integration is evaluated using tools like the MOS Social Support Survey and professional assessment scales. Adaptation to housing is assessed through tests that examine ontological security and the individual's adjustment to their living environment.

- **Coordinated effort with civic society:** 15 NGOs are implementing the Housing First model, taking the lead in on-the-ground operations.

NGOs PARTICIPATION

Corporación Nuestra Casa, one of 15 NGOs collaborating in the program, values that Vivienda Primero prioritizes specific populations, including women and elderly people and individuals who have spent several years living on the streets, with admission decisions made by multiple staff and the referring team. However, they recognize barriers for LGBTQ+ individuals, broad and inconsistently applied criteria, unclear program duration, and limited collaboration with health services.

For the implementation, Nuestra Casa applies a social intervention model, grounded in Housing First principles, to guide activities and identify mechanisms that generate the expected changes over time. The intervention framework is structured as observed in the table:

Component	Description
Necessities / Problems	Understand lack of housing, drivers of homelessness, and multi-dimensional processes of exclusion and vulnerability.
Activities	Assist people find and keep housing, get access to health care, connect with their community, and build local support networks.
Outcomes	Connect people to stable housing, disrupt their experience on the streets, and provide access to necessary services.
Short-term Goals	Support individuals in maintaining their homes, improving health, accessing treatments for long-term illnesses, strengthening relationships, participating socially, and joining the workforce.
Medium-term Goals	Reduce time spent on the streets and prevent returns to homelessness through improved quality of life and well-being.
Long-term Goals	Prevent future homelessness and reduce the number of people living on the streets.

According to the OECD (2024), the Housing First model, which was designed for people with complex needs, has been shown to lead to better long-term housing stability for those experiencing chronic homelessness, compared to traditional treatment approaches. Therefore, Chile's targeted group aligns with the existing evidence.

FACTORS TO ADDRESS

The 1980 Constitution does not recognize the right to housing in Chile, operating as a legislative barrier to structural reforms in housing provision. Combined with a competitive private market and limited investment in affordable and social housing, the increasing rent prices, high living costs, and dependence on restrictive subsidies have affected the population's living conditions, deepening poverty and homelessness in the country. In this context, implementing the Housing First model in Chile required efforts to shift the perspective on how housing access and homelessness were approached. Before its implementation, the Ministry had to work with landlords to reduce their prejudices against people experiencing homelessness, as well as training teams in harm-reduction and person-centered approaches. Still, allocating resources, establishing professional teams, and associating with on-ground partners was a difficult task for the MDSF.

Government representatives emphasized that neighborhoods and communities should be involved in the project from the beginning. They also highlighted the importance of a dedicated budget for housing maintenance, including but not limited to enacting resources for repairs, basic setup, and occasional replacement of furniture in the provided houses. Above all, the effectiveness and sustainability of Housing First depend on a strong institutional and economic commitment, including the guarantee of long-term funding through legislation.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Chile is actively working on expanding the program. A crucial step and learning have been the inter-ministerial agreement that enabled a dedicated budget from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development for the construction of housing specifically for the initiative. Additionally, the Ministry of Social Development is focusing on amplifying the geographical coverage and improving the data tracking system to enable more efficient program management.

Key remaining tasks include expanding the targeted group to encompass other subpopulations and enhancing the involvement of private and civic actors, as well as academic institutions. At a general level, it is crucial to strengthen Chile's social safety net to enhance access to health, education, employment, and community participation. Furthermore, the main current challenge is ensuring the program's continuity and long-term political support, and securing its standing as a permanent, evidence-based public policy. With Housing First, Chile is aligning its efforts with international best practices by prioritizing stable housing, the most direct solution to ending homelessness.

Learn more about Vivienda Primero
- Resolución Externa N° 0297 (2024).
- Moviliza Chile (2025). Webinar Estudio de Fidelidad del Programa Vivienda Primero en Chile
- IGH Webinar (2021): Housing First in International Contexts. Featuring the National Street Office of Chile.

LISBON

COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES

Lisbon, capital of Portugal, has 545,796 inhabitants (INE, 2024), with 3,378 people experiencing homelessness or *pessoas em situação de sem-abrigo* registered in 2023. In its definition, Portugal includes individuals living in public spaces, emergency shelters, temporary accommodations, and in "precarious locations." Across the country, the National Strategy for the Integration of People Experiencing Homelessness (ENIPSSA) seeks to prevent and end homelessness through person-centered approaches, standardized indicators, and the expansion of housing and social support services. Portugal also signed the Lisbon Declaration to end homelessness by 2030.

With administrative and financial autonomy, yet supervised by the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, the Instituto da Segurança Social (ISS) plays a central role in the National Homelessness Plan. In Lisbon, this responsibility unfolds in close collaboration with the Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, the city's main administrative authority. The Municipal Plan 2024–2030 emphasizes the need for coordinated multidisciplinary action and encompasses a range from temporary and transitional accommodations to a Housing First program, alongside initiatives that promote training, employment, and autonomy.

Deepening their international resolve, Lisbon signed as an IGH Vanguard City in July 2025

É UMA CASA:
LISBON HOUSING FIRST (2013)

With Housing First, the City of Lisbon sought a housing solution that provides immediate access to individualized houses with a holistic approach.

The program is a collaboration between the Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, the Instituto da Segurança Social (ISS), and CRESCER. The Câmara finances the units and services, the ISS finances the technical support, and CRESCER provides the specialized technical team with full autonomy to identify individuals and integrate them into the project. There are no entry requirements based on nationality, gender, or other factors.

The Housing First program's implementation began with a needs assessment that mapped Lisbon's homelessness landscape, revealing a shortage of long-term housing for people experiencing chronic homelessness. Based on these findings, the project launched with seven housing units in the area of greatest need.

Landlords' cooperation proved vital for maintaining housing, resolving day-to-day challenges, and sustaining long-term collaboration. Additionally, a multidisciplinary technical team was recruited, bringing together expertise in social work, psychology, harm reduction, lived experience, and the principles of the Housing First model. Finally, tenants were identified in collaboration with outreach teams, prioritizing individuals with long histories of sleeping on the streets, social exclusion, and complex support needs.

Photo provided by CRESCER

KEYS TO SUCCEED

- Strong political and institutional support.
- Cross-sector collaboration.
- Integration into broader strategies: The program aligns with the City Municipal Plan and the National Strategy for People Experiencing Homelessness.
- International, evidence-based approach: Design incorporated research on Housing First's cost-effectiveness and harm reduction.
- Ongoing capacity-building and reflective practice among teams.
- Respectful relationships with participants, ensuring their inclusion in decision-making.

BARRIERS TO OVERCOME

Changing stakeholders' perceptions to recognize that people experiencing homelessness can live independently and reintegrate into society.
- Strategy: Invitations to visit the project and speak with the people involved.

Retaining qualified professionals amid uncertainty and competitive remuneration.
- Solution: Seek to improve financial conditions, ensure adequate rest time, and offer daily support for both personal and professional development.

Securing affordable, long-term rental options remains an ongoing challenge due to limited availability of housing at prices compatible with available funding.

The program collects information about participants before and after they move into housing, with a focus on health, documentation, and social support. Program adjustments are also informed by participants' feedback through questionnaires and informal conversations.

É UMA CASA OUTCOMES
BY JULY 2025

172 people were housed

Engagement with the national health system grew from 17% to 71%

Use of social services increased from 38% to 89%

Family contact strengthened from 19% to 47%

Substance use dropped from 90% to 45% during the program

Possession of ID documents rose from 40% to 80%

Medication adherence improved from 10% to 96%

The results demonstrate progress in access to a wide range of services, including mental health care, primary and specialized care, social support networks and benefits, as well as improvements in personal relationships and social reintegration. Building on the success of the Lisbon project, CRESCER has already expanded the Housing First model to two additional municipalities.

É UM RESTAURANTE (2019)

Accessing a job with a living wage is a frequent challenge for people experiencing homelessness, although it can play a vital role in their social and economic reintegration into society. Recognizing that employability is a key pathway, the Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, the Instituto da Segurança Social (ISS), and CRESCER formed an alliance to implement the É Um Restaurante program. This initiative provides an employment opportunity in a restaurant with certified training for people with lived experience of homelessness. The key objectives are to enhance people's skills, confidence, autonomy, and dignity.

A crucial element of the project has been the commitment and shared vision of inclusion and innovation among all stakeholders. The Lisbon City Council (Câmara Municipal de Lisboa) facilitated a space for the first restaurant, while the Institute of Social Security (ISS) financed the technical support. For its part, CRESCER administers the restaurants, provides certified training, technical assistance, psychosocial support, skills development, and employment transition for all participants. Other key partners include the Employment and Vocational Training Institute (IEFP) and the Lisbon School of Hospitality and Tourism (Escola de Hotelaria e Turismo de Lisboa).

Photo by Lucas Fita
Provided by CRESCER

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Implementation Highlights: The initial steps focused on developing a training and support model tailored to the needs and employment barriers faced by the target group. Additionally, the process involved establishing strategic partnerships with public and private stakeholders and co-designing the training curriculum in alliance with the IEFP.

Inclusive Participation: While preparations were made in the physical space of the restaurant, outreach teams worked to identify and connect individuals who expressed interest in the initiative. The selection process consisted of:

- Semi-structured interview with CRESCER psychologists, which allowed the assessment of motivational factors, social skills, and relational skills, and served as an initial step in establishing a rapport with the interviewees.
- Interview with the consulting chef to assess motivation and skills.
- Interview with the CRESCER psychiatrist to assess emotional and psychological competencies.
- Interview with the resident chef and head waiter to assess motivation and specific technical competencies.

The application process constitutes a crucial first step in gathering the necessary information to characterize the beneficiaries. This characterization was subsequently refined through technical monitoring carried out with the project psychologist, where the needs of trainees in various areas (social, housing, health, among others) were assessed.

All trainees benefit from continuous psychosocial support at different stages of the training path, which aims to work on the needs identified at the level of the different dimensions of life of each person integrated into the Project (physical and mental health, housing, financial sustainability, social support, resolution of different day-to-day problems), as well as mediating the socio-professional integration process. In contrast to the job market, this project has no requirements, giving people with complex needs the space to engage on their own terms.

Wraparound Support to Succeed: A multidisciplinary team with expertise in social work, psychology, harm reduction, and employment support was recruited to accompany trainees and ensure a holistic support approach. The areas overseen by case managers are housing, health, mental health, substance use, and legal documentation. This work is also supported by Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa, Social Security, Health and Hospital Centers, DICAD Treatment Teams, and different NGOs.

Real-Work Experience: The restaurants focus on offering high-quality service to customers and a supportive environment, battling prejudices and stereotypes about people with lived experience of homelessness while training on how to perform in a professional setting.

The project É Um Restaurante measures its effectiveness using both qualitative and quantitative indicators, including reports on commercial activity, professional evaluations of participants' health, housing, and socioeconomic conditions, as well as trainees' self-assessments. Although achieving integration for the homeless population requires systemic changes, the coalition of stakeholders in Lisbon is advancing on innovative solutions that empower participants in a more balanced aid relationship.

É UM RESTAURANTE OUTCOMES

Four new locations.
Catering services added.

In 2022:
62,222 meals were prepared.

68% of participants were integrated into the job market.

366 referrals were made to health, social, housing, and training entities.

Looking ahead, key priorities include ensuring the program's sustainability and diversifying its funding strategy to maintain these spaces that are dismantling stigma around homelessness. Additionally, CRESCER aims to open new restaurants in other regions and formalize other partnerships at local, national, and international levels.

PARTNERSHIPS DRIVING PROGRESS

Coordinated action and effective implementation are essential components of Lisbon's response to homelessness. Working in alliance, the main stakeholders are tackling challenges such as bureaucratic barriers to accessing social benefits, long wait times for medical appointments, and a broader housing context marked by a lack of affordable options, restrictive requirements, and high rental prices.

Lisbon's adoption of Housing First and its focus on socioeconomic integration, as seen through initiatives like É Um Restaurante, reflect a holistic, rights-based shift based on international best practices in housing and in the participation of people with lived experience in decision-making processes and advocacy efforts. Though there is still work to be done and changes needed to make housing solutions more accessible, the city's commitment signals a shift toward long-term, rights-based approaches that prioritize stability and dignity for people experiencing homelessness.

URUGUAY

"NOTHING WITHOUT THE STREET"

Uruguay has a population of 3.5 million people (Census 2023), nearly half of whom live in the capital, Montevideo. In 2020, a total of 3,917 people were identified as experiencing homelessness, either living on the streets or in shelters. In 2023, 2,756 individuals were experiencing homelessness in Montevideo.

Since 2005, Uruguay has addressed homelessness through the Program for Assistance to People in a Street Situation (PASC). Additionally, the Street Program ("Programa Calle"), created in 2014, provides shelter and psychosocial support, while the Supported Housing Program ("Programa Viviendas con Apoyo"), introduced in 2021, offers long-term housing for people who repeatedly use the shelter system. Other programs focus on children, adolescents, and women with dependents.

In 2025, in response to the winter crisis, the government announced a new plan to tackle homelessness and strengthen services. IGH has collaborated with the government of Uruguay since 2018.

Photo provided by NITEP - Casa de Sueños

VOICES OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

The Collective NITEP, or Ni Todo Está Perdido (Not Everything Is Lost), was funded by people living on the streets and individuals using the shelter system in Uruguay, as an organized response to claim their human rights. Since its inception in 2018, the collective has promoted comprehensive, long-term solutions to address homelessness in the country and has also expanded its relationships to other lived-experience communities, creating and being part of the Latin American Network of People Experiencing Homelessness and Civil Society Organizations.

The members of the collective meet weekly to discuss relevant issues and make decisions through open assemblies. NITEP has a broad agenda that includes projects with state institutions, academia, and civil society, seeking to offer opportunities to its members and to all people experiencing homelessness. Notably, it has worked with the University of the Republic, municipalities, and ministries. Since its founding, NITEP has given more than 500 media interviews, establishing itself as a respected voice. It currently works across networks to promote legislative and policy frameworks that address homelessness.

A significant milestone was the "Public Bathrooms Program," carried out in collaboration with the Montevideo City Council and Municipality B. The project fulfilled the long-standing demand of people experiencing homelessness for access to hygienic bathrooms in the city, while also representing the first successful employment initiative aimed at this population. The outcomes in labor inclusion from this project can be seen in NITEP's Avanzar Cooperative, which aims to promote access to formal employment.

Another milestone to highlight was the launch of a collective housing project called "Llegar a Casa" (Coming Home). This initiative was fully drafted by NITEP with the support of the university team, Trayectorias Integrales. It was implemented in December 2024 in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development (MIDES), managing two houses, each accommodating nine people experiencing homelessness. The objective was to provide smaller, private housing to promote people's autonomy. While MIDES offered food and programs to access the job market, NITEP incorporated their lived experience and knowledge of practices that can fulfill people's needs. Residents decide how to organize house responsibilities in a community-based, participatory, and self-managed model.

Photo provided by NITEP - Casa de Sueños

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF A MOVEMENT

Casa de Sueños ("House of Dreams"), established in 2023, represents the institutionalization of years of social organizing and struggles. The program brings together the main contributions of Uruguay's collectives of people with lived experience of homelessness. Developed through a partnership between a Teachers' Cooperative for Comprehensive Training and the Ministry of Social Development (MIDES), the initiative is designed for people experiencing homelessness who belong to groups facing systemic inequality and discrimination, including:

- Afro-descendant and LGBTQI+ populations, older adults, and women;
- individuals recently released from prison, currently incarcerated, or serving alternative sentences;
- people with diverse mental health support needs;
- those who have not completed formal education;
- and others who, due to any of these intersecting factors, are at risk of homelessness.

Building on the work of the NITEP Collective, the Latin American Network of People Living on the Street (2018) and the Urban Program (2012), Casa de Sueños was launched with support from the Ministry of Social Development's 2023 Social Innovation initiative and received dedicated funding for its implementation.

The overall objective of Casa de Sueños is to create spaces for training, practice, and artistic and cultural experimentation that generate new approaches for relationships, education, health, and enjoyment of life for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless. Believing in the value of art, culture, and communication, the program assists people in reaching an autonomous and sustainable life and developing strategies to address homelessness using their own knowledge and experiences.

BY JULY 2025:

83 individuals participate across 16 active projects.

6 people in street situations receive remuneration for their work.

1,200 individuals engage with the program every year, considering all the activities, seminars, and workshops.

Casa de Sueños is a community project inspired by other Latin American experiences, such as Proyecto7 (Argentina), No Tan Distintes (Argentina), and the National Movement of Homeless Population (MNPR, Brazil). From its inception, the program incorporated inputs from people with lived experience, Afro-Uruguayan cultural leaders with experience in the streets and prisons, mental health activists, LGBTQ+ organizations, the Occupied Lands Network ("Red de Tierras Ocupadas"), neighbors, community cultural networks, local artists, universities, and labor unions.

Although these diverse stakeholders worked together with the government, the program still faced challenges during its design and implementation, mainly connected with:

- The consolidation of a sociocultural proposal that promotes new forms of coexistence and democratic participation.
- Change perspectives and language around homelessness across teams, participants, and society in general. Casa de Sueños promotes alternative ways of understanding these experiences by integrating other knowledge, disciplines, and structures.

INTERSECTIONALITY AND HOMELESSNESS

With its targeted populations, Casa de Sueños recognizes the complex, intersecting forms of discrimination that shape the lives of people experiencing homelessness. This global problem is intrinsically related to racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, transphobia, criminalization, mental health stigma, and educational exclusion.

Photo provided by NITEP - Casa de Sueños

Participants have created musical projects, communication campaigns, and political proposals to address homelessness and other social problems. The program includes a variety of artistic and cultural workshops, such as screen printing, a publishing collective, textile arts, a songwriting workshop, and artisanal metalwork; all designed to foster creative expression, skill-building, and collective identity.

Additionally, the participants gather in monthly assemblies to share updates, perspectives, and projects. The management team also meets monthly to discuss progress and creates quarterly reports. On a regular basis, outreach teams visit shelters and centers to bring more participants into the Casa.

Photo provided by NITEP - Casa de Sueños

LEARNINGS AND FURTHER STEPS

The Lived Experience Collectives in Uruguay have made crucial contributions to strategies on homelessness. It is necessary to transform policies and structures, incorporating the voices of people who experience and are fighting to address t,his global problem. In particular, there is an urgent need to develop legislative frameworks, integrate these actions into the state's agenda, and expand its geographical scope to other locations.

The NITEP Collective and Casa de Sueños are noteworthy examples of how the leadership and participation of people with lived experience have been meaningfully integrated into project design and implementation. According to a representative, the lesson learned is "not to talk about the street without the street."

Art, culture, and co-creation are valuable elements that can enhance people's lives and help them achieve their goals, not only at an individual level but also at a collective level. All with the final goal of ending homelessness.

Artistic and cultural expressions from Casa de Sueños:
- Song: "La casa de los sueños y Horneo Migratorio."
- Film and Acting: "El cuento del tío Julio"
- Store: Samaras.
- Learn more about the program on Casadesuenos.uy | Linktree

MONGOLIA

CENTERING LIVED EXPERIENCES

Photo provided by Ulziit-Asar NGO

Homelessness in Mongolia is shaped by a high internal migration rate from rural to urban areas. Climate change has created almost insurmountable barriers for farmers and herding families in rural areas, pushing them to seek new livelihoods in urban areas. On the national level, the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Protection is looking to advance efforts to reduce homelessness; however, the absence of a national strategy and up-to-date data impedes effective coordination and progress. In the capital Ulaanbaatar, most people experiencing homelessness are men between 25 and 49 years old; 75.3% stayed in temporary shelters operated by the government or NGOs, which cover basic needs but often struggle with limited staff and infrastructure (Cognos International LLC, 2022).

Mongolia signed as an IGH Vanguard Country in 2023. Since the beginning of this formal alliance, the Ministry Family, Labour and Social Protection has collaborated with IGH to gather information about recommended, evidence-based practices that could be adapted to the sociopolitical and cultural context of Mongolia.

Construction at the Ulziit-Asar Shelter
Photo provided by Ulziit-Asar NGO

ULZIIT-ASAR NGO

The Ulziit-Asar NGO is a shelter founded and operated by people with lived experience of homelessness. This housing initiative was established in 2017 and targets people with alcohol use disorder who reside and sleep on the streets and other public places. Assertive outreach teams approach people on-site, offering immediate support and information about available services. The goal is not only to address their most urgent needs but also to build trust and encourage them to move into the shelter.

Ulziit-Asar aims to provide a safe, inclusive, and welcoming living environment for people. Once at the shelter, individuals learn essential life skills, gain work training, and participate in educational sessions focused on communal living, ethics, and psychological well-being.

A notable aspect is the full integration of people with lived experience, who manage the shelter and guide participants as peers. Many individuals have fractured family relationships, so the NGO helps them rebuild these connections or form new supportive ones, ensuring that everyone who visits feels at home. By training and empowering people with similar experiences, the program fosters mutual understanding and solidarity while supporting social reintegration through access to ID documents, health services, pensions, and employment.

LEARNINGS FROM EXPERIENCE

Implementing the Ulziit-Asar NGO shelter implied a long but timely planning process that also required tailoring services to the characteristics and needs of people experiencing homelessness in Mongolia. The NGO used data to inform its assistance approach, including knowledge of the drivers of homelessness, the time spent in the shelter system, and lessons from lived experiences of homelessness.

In general, people experience homelessness for an average of nearly 10 years and, despite the availability of 72 welfare services, most individuals living on the streets encounter significant barriers to accessing these benefits, with only 18.2% receiving government support in Ulaanbaatar (Tadevosyan and Ulziisuren, 2024). Facing this reality, the Ulziit-Asar NGO adopted a respectful, non-discriminatory approach that engages people experiencing homelessness through empathy and open dialogue, ensuring that no one is left behind.

An additional challenge was securing funding for the project. To overcome this problem, the NGO established auxiliary farms, cultivated vegetables, produced various goods, and organized labor teams with the participants. By doing so, it ensures both the project's sustainability and a sense of collaboration among those involved.

Construction at the Ulziit-Asar Shelter
Photo provided by Ulziit-Asar NGO

Peer Support improves the quality and effectiveness, strengthens community, belonging, and engagement, builds mutual responsibility, promotes dignity and empowerment (helping clients reframe their experience from a new perspective), and has the power to improve programs through co-design, with policies grounded in lived experience.

Read more about the importance of peer support in FEANTSA Policy Paper and Miler et al. (2020).

NEXT OBJECTIVES

Looking toward the future, Ulziit-Asar is working to open similar shelters in different districts across the city, establish express service points to receive and assist people, implement an open-door program to provide guidance, and create a dedicated office to support the population experiencing homelessness. This expansion also involves partnerships with government agencies, legal and training organizations, and international partners.

At the national level, this organization aims to incorporate international best practices into Mongolia's homelessness response, including long-term affordable rental services, and job opportunities that support the social reintegration of people experiencing homelessness.

RAPID NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF HOMELESS POPULATION IN ULAANBAATAR

In 2022, Cognos International LLC and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) assessed the population experiencing homelessness in Ulaanbaatar, the capital city of Mongolia.

The research examined the situation of individuals living on the streets and in places not intended for human habitation, such as building basements and entrances. This latter subpopulation was included at the request of stakeholders and in alignment with international definitions of homelessness. The IGH Definitional Framework on Homelessness was identified as a useful research resource during the research design.

The Rapid Needs Assessment was a pioneering work that explored homelessness in Ulaanbaatar and brought together the voices of people with lived experience of homelessness, government and non-governmental service providers, and policy-makers. Recognizing the value of lived experience, one of the stakeholders involved was the founder and CEO of Ulziit-Asar homeless shelter, who participated in the project from the initial stages and helped shape the survey, focus group questions, and interview guides so that every question was relevant to the experiences of people facing homelessness in Mongolia, while also respecting their dignity.

THE MIXED-METHOD RESEARCH COLLECTED DATA FROM:

405 people experiencing homelessness in the streets.

200 people living in a place not intended for habitation.

26 key informants' interviews, including representatives of government, public and NGO shelters and families of street homeless population.
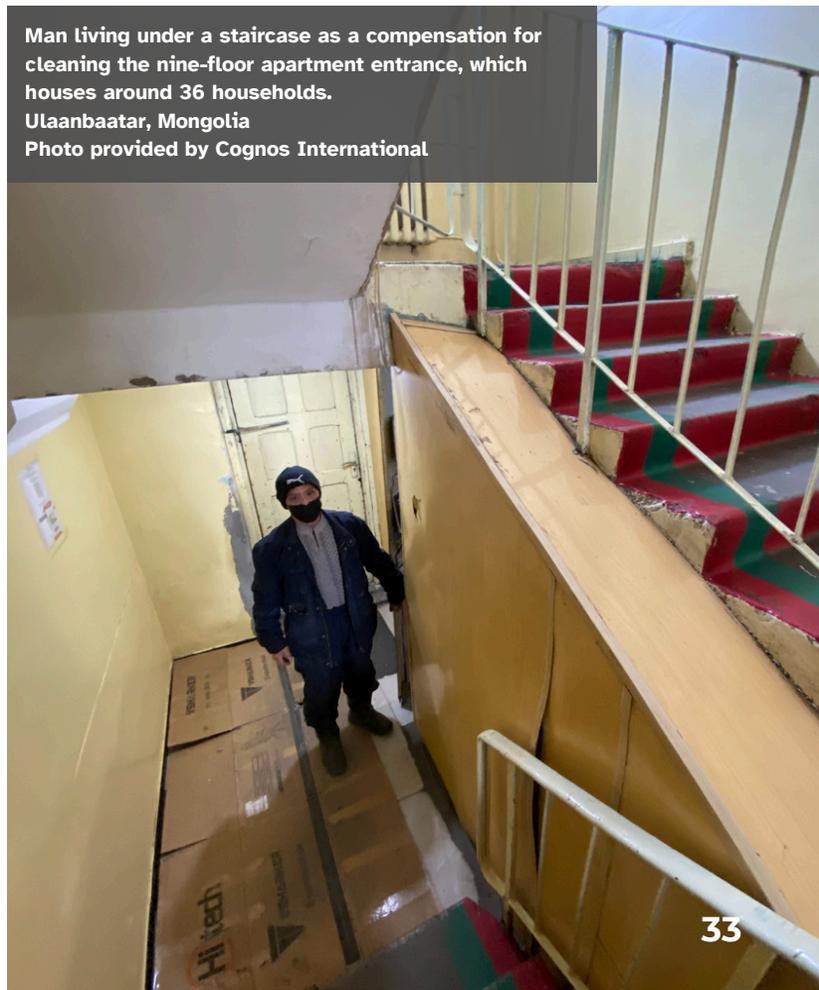
7 focus groups with 37 people and 29 in-depth interviews with street homeless people.

Man living under a staircase as a compensation for cleaning the nine-floor apartment entrance, which houses around 36 households.
Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
Photo provided by Cognos International

FACTORS IN THE DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

- **Lived experience leadership:** Involving the founder of Ulziit-Asar NGO strengthened the quality, validity, and acceptance of the work. His role ensured that the research framework and tools were contextually relevant and credible to national stakeholders.

- **ADB leadership and investment:** The Asian Development Bank funded this initiative, and their collaboration with key ministries, including the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and the Ministry of Health, signaled the importance of the issue.

- **Commitment of the research team:** The team's shared mission enabled them to overcome challenges, such as COVID-related constraints, severe winter conditions, and difficult field environments.

Field data collection with population experiencing street homelessness
March 2022, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
Photo provided by Cognos International

LESSONS LEARNED

- There is a lack of an official and comprehensive definition and data on homelessness in Mongolia. Although challenging, the research team reviewed and utilized IGH and ETHOS frameworks to foster stakeholders' understanding of homelessness beyond the population living on the street.

- Integrating people with lived experience should be an essential element in the design, implementation, and presentation of projects.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE HOMELESS RESPONSE

The Rapid Needs Assessment research had a direct impact on Mongolia's homeless response. During its implementation, the research team leader contacted IGH and expressed their interest in joining the Vanguard Program. Through this connection, IGH engaged with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Mongolia and formalized its partnership.

The Ministry was also invited to the findings presentation and included some of the research's recommendations in the Vanguard goals, exhibiting commitment to advancing actions and addressing homelessness at the national level.

COLLABORATING FOR IMPROVEMENTS

Cognos International has emphasized the urgent need for a comprehensive national definition of homelessness, an issue deeply intertwined with broader challenges like poverty, unemployment, internal migration, and limited social protection systems in Mongolia. Additionally, prevention strategies face additional barriers, including restricted budgets and levels of socioeconomic development. However, while significant challenges and gaps remain, current efforts have the potential to leverage existing service strengths, including the integration of lived experience, and ongoing improvements in data systems.

The Ulziit-Asar NGO demonstrates the power of centering lived experiences in improving homeless responses. In parallel, Cognos International continues to support the Mongolian government and provide evidence-based foundations to policymakers, advocates, and international and national development partners. Together, these efforts provide a foundation for designing more responsive, inclusive, and effective interventions to better support people experiencing homelessness.

Further Readings about Mongolia

- 2024 IGH Mongolia Report - Institute of Global Homelessness

- Cognos International LLC. (2022). Supporting the Operational Priority 1 Agenda - Strengthening Poverty and Social Analysis: Rapid Needs Assessment of Homeless Population in Ulaanbaatar Consultant's Report. Asian Development Bank. The full report is also available in Mongolian.

- Tadevosyan, Gohar & Ulziisuren, Erdenechimeg (2024). Homelessness in Ulaanbaatar: Evidence and Policy Recommendations. ADB Sustainable Development Working Paper Series.

- Ulziisuren, Erdenechimeg, Battsengel, Munkhjargal & Tumur, Navch (2024). Homelessness and Its Causes: A Case Study of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Mongolian Journal of Population.

Ulziit-Asar Shelter - Exterior
Photo provided by Ulziit-Asar NGO
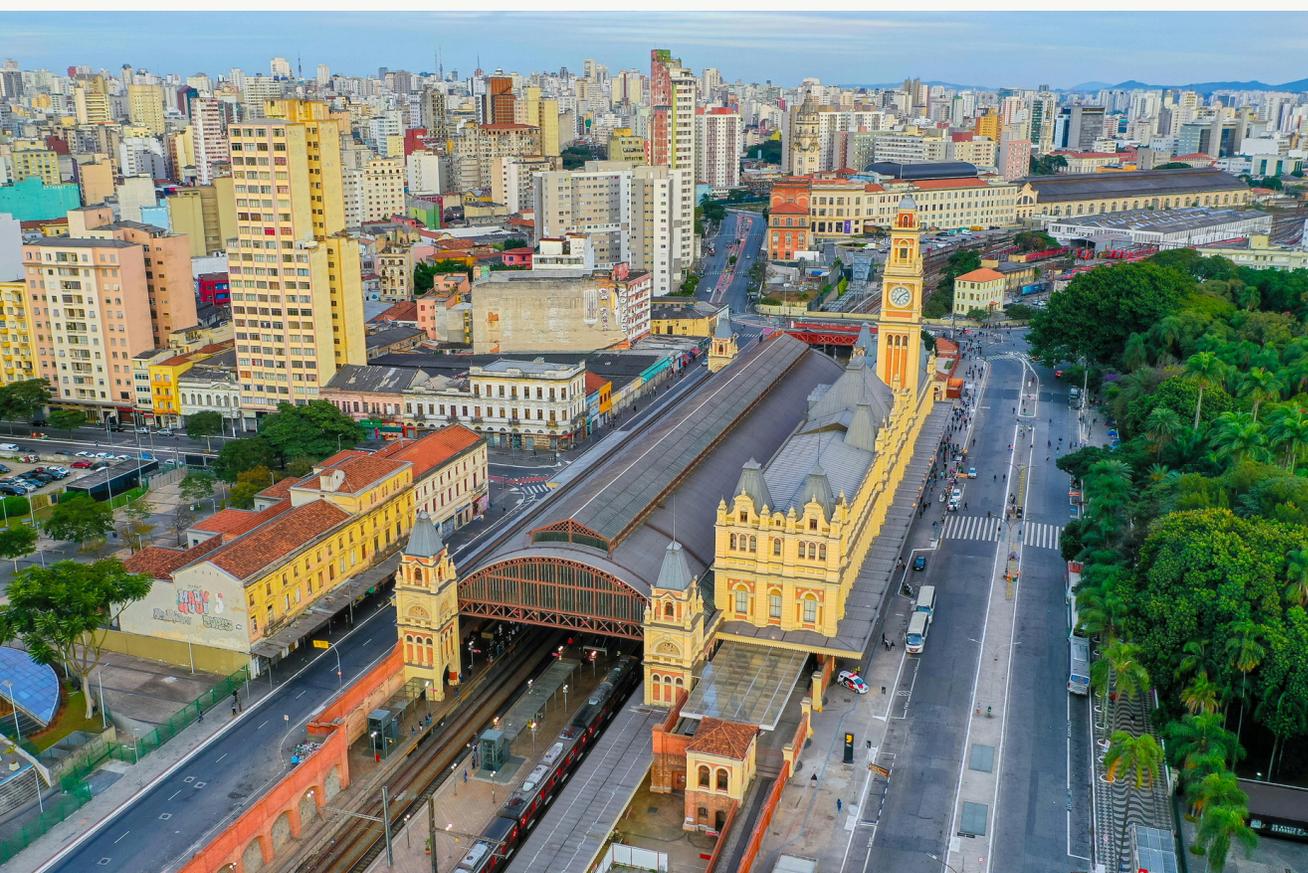
SÃO PAULO

VILAS REENCONTRO

Photo provided by SMADS

São Paulo is the capital of the State of São Paulo and one of the biggest cities in Brazil and Latin America, with a population of almost 11.5 million people (Cidades e Estados, 2022). In recent decades, the city has experienced a significant rise in homelessness, closely connected with urban inequality, rising living costs, a lack of affordable housing, unemployment rates, substance abuse issues, and barriers to accessing social benefits in Brazil. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the crisis, driving more families with children onto the streets, a phenomenon that was less prevalent in the past.

By 2021, 31,889 people were in street situations (or "situação de rua") in the Municipality of São Paulo, including 12,675 individuals staying in shelters and 19,209 living on the streets.

Photo provided by SMADS

A COMMUNITY IN VILA REENCONTRO

In response to rising homelessness, the City of São Paulo created the Reencontro Program, which was founded on the 2019 Municipal Policy for People in Street Situations ("Política Municipal para a População em Situação de Rua"). The Reencontro Program aims to achieve "a qualified exit from the social assistance network by fostering autonomy." The program assists families on the streets and people in regular shelters and includes elements like the Vila Reencontro and Auxilio Reencontro. The Vila Reencontro offers temporary modular housing for families, providing privacy with an individual unit for each family. Each unit has 18 or 36 square meters, furniture, and a private bedroom.

The program houses people coming from the city's shelter system and families who lived on the streets. According to city representatives, families who moved directly from the streets to a village face more challenges, so they might temporarily stay in a shelter before the transition. Vila Reencontro is designed so that families live two years in the villa, without paying rent and receiving four meals a day, and another two years in external rental housing with financial assistance and professional social support. However, there is the flexibility to extend the families' stay in the villa if the participants do not feel ready to rent a home.
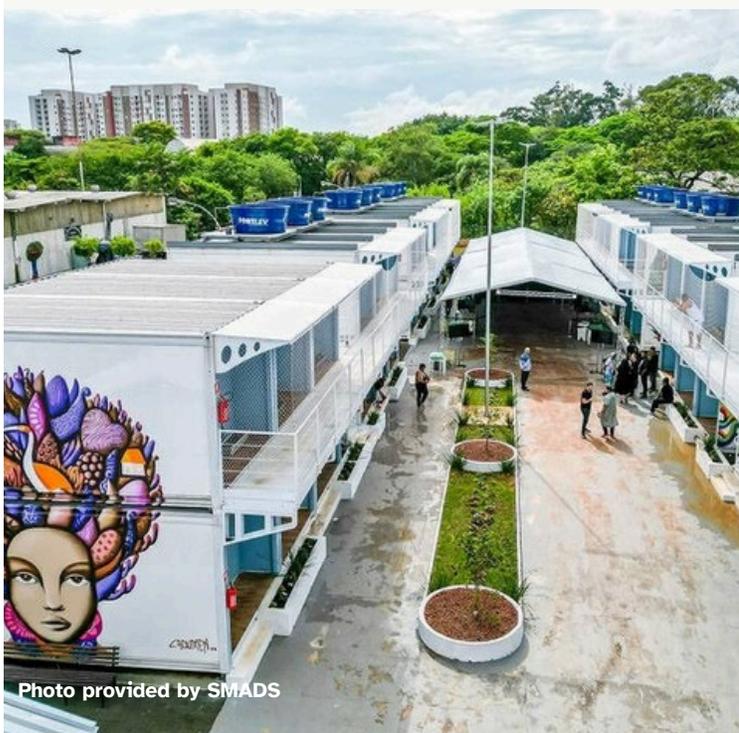
Among the program's key features are the diverse professional teams that support families in the villages. It is particularly crucial that, when possible, a specialist works with the same families during their entire participation in Vila Reencontro, strengthening the bond and ensuring that people experiencing homelessness feel comfortable and supported. Additionally, each villa has a conflict resolution specialist to manage interpersonal and community disputes, as well as an educator who supports school attendance. Social teams work closely with families to build routines that support stability and integration.

CITY-MANAGED VILLAGES
APRIL 2025

10
Villages

658
Individual Units

1,692
Residents

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

Developing this initiative was not an easy process for the city of São Paulo. Before the implementation, it was necessary to create a legal framework, including a law, a decree, and internal ordinances. Having supportive legislation, however, is a key element to ensure sustainability in the future.

After instituting the legal structure, the city selected locations according to transportation, proximity to schools, and access to primary health care services. Efforts also included adapting the infrastructure, acquiring modular units and furniture, and hiring social teams to assist with family reception.

A key element is the collaboration between various city departments and teams, including coordination with the mayor's office, which facilitates the guidance and implementation of Vila Reencontro. Another central actor is the Municipal Secretariat for Social Development and Assistance, responsible for identifying the families who will participate in the program and aligning the action plans. External stakeholders encompass public companies responsible for the architectural design. This collaborative work has contributed to the program's expansion, as well as the political will and commitment from the city.

The program also encountered social challenges. The city has faced protests and prejudice from the neighborhoods, though the resistance decreased once the village was installed in the area. Some strategies to reduce resistance include presenting the program to neighbors, organizing visits to existing villages, and inviting people to volunteer or work in the program.

Family Unit - Interior
Photo provided by SMADS
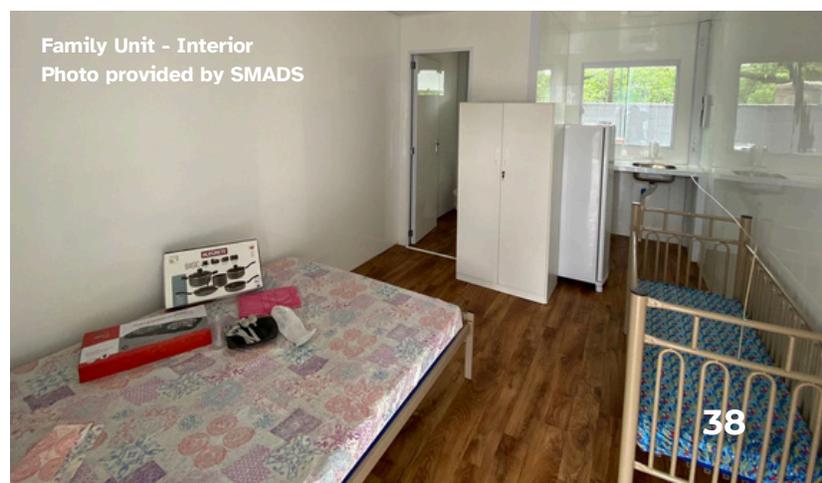
FUTURE STEPS AND CONSIDERATIONS

The program measures indicators, such as qualified exits, occupancy rates, school attendance, and employment. At a general level, school attendance is mandatory for all families with children and is monitored daily, while most adults work in informal jobs or participate in a governmental program ("Work Operation").

A qualified exit considers the number of people who transferred to a rented house or moved back with relatives who are not in a homeless situation. There is a vast range of factors that can be classified as non-qualified exits, such as people who returned to shelters or left the program for reasons that could not be documented. This group currently totals around 700–800 people, and the teams are working to reduce this number.

After individuals exit the Reencontro villages, the Individual Follow-Up Plan (PIA) allows the teams to track people for up to six months. This subsequent engagement, however, is voluntary, and participants can refuse. If individuals move to another state or municipality, technical teams refer information to social assistance centers in the new location. These outcomes cannot be examined in isolation, as some elements are not mandatory and data may not represent actual progress. Nevertheless, detailed and comprehensive indicators are currently under development, as introducing more monitoring measures and feedback mechanisms could further enhance the program's ability to make adjustments and analyze impact.

CURRENT VILLAGES
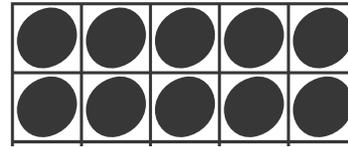
658
modular accommodations

EXPANSION PLAN
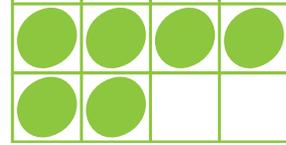
554
new modular accommodations

Expanding Brazil's homeless response will also require housing options for other populations and a city-wide coordinated strategy to prevent homelessness, including addressing the lack of affordable housing and investing in sustainable long-term solutions. Despite the remaining challenges related to site availability for new units and long-term housing strategies, the planned expansion demonstrates the city's ongoing commitment to improving the Vila Reencontro program, which can grow and adapt, continuing to provide dignified pathways out of homelessness for individuals and families in São Paulo.

Photo provided by SMADS

GLASGOW

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Scotland's history of legal protections for people experiencing homelessness includes the 2003 Homelessness Act, which requires that anyone identified as needing housing has a place to stay until accommodation is secured, and the 1987 Housing Act establishes that councils have a statutory duty to provide services to people experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing it. As defined by the 1987 Act, homelessness includes people without accommodation, who do not have a legal right or permission to stay in a particular place, or are only staying temporarily without proper security. In 2020, Scotland updated its action plan, Ending Homelessness Together, with an emphasis on prevention, including legislation to minimize the risk of evictions into homelessness and proposals to end the use of night shelters in the future.

In November 2023, Glasgow City Council declared a housing emergency "amid mounting pressures on homelessness services," which, as of October 2025, had over 6,000 applications awaiting housing and over 4,200 households in temporary accommodations. The government of Scotland declared a country-wide housing emergency in May 2024. Glasgow is working on expanding its Housing First Program, promoting a person-centered approach in its services, developing accommodations for victims of domestic violence, and tailoring services to individuals leaving prisons, veterans, people discharged from hospitals, and young care leavers.

ENSURING SERVICE QUALITY

The city of Glasgow has developed multiple initiatives to address homelessness, adapting international best practices. The Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) integrated the perspectives of more than 400 people with lived experience in its 2018 report, which acknowledged that the lack of affordable housing, poverty, migration, and inequalities are significant risk factors for homelessness in Scotland. The city also created a Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (2018), instructing local authorities to plan how they will implement a housing-led approach to ending homelessness, and the Local Housing Strategy 2023-2028, which establishes the priorities and goals to prevent and end homelessness.

Maintaining high-quality services should be an essential part of homelessness services. Taking this into account, Glasgow's ongoing Quality Assurance Process evaluates and monitors residential services to ensure that users receive high-quality, effective, and person-centered assistance. This program is coordinated by the Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP), which brings together the Glasgow City Council and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to plan and deliver all community health and social care services across the city, including services for children, adults, and older adults, as well as support related to homelessness and the criminal justice system.

Ensuring that standards are met and continuously seeking improvement allows Glasgow to consistently deliver the highest standard of care and support. For achieving this goal, it is fundamental to evaluate and adapt to the particular needs of the participants. On the ground, the most important stakeholders to involve are the managers of each residential service, as they have direct insight into daily operations, staff needs, and the experiences of service users.

USING DATA TO INFORM PRACTICE

The Quality Assurance Process aims to promote self-confidence, participation, and independence among participants, staff, and stakeholders. Teams ensure the process is accessible to all users, with staff available 24/7 to address service users' concerns, particularly for those who have difficulty communicating or understanding information. When necessary, feedback is documented or shared with other relevant professionals or agencies, and complaints are responded to within five days.

Glasgow gathers feedback through six-month surveys, questionnaires for participants, exiting users, and stakeholders, and an open comments box. Managers regularly review this data, publishing inspection reports to inform decisions and guide service improvements. Additionally, the Care Inspectorate inspections are accessible to all stakeholders, and users are encouraged to participate in meetings mediated by staff. Overall, regular monitoring of key indicators and feedback mechanisms helps identify challenges early, strengthen accountability, and ensure interventions remain effective and responsive over time.

KEY INDICATORS

- **Quality of care and support:** Glasgow follows a clear pathway to deliver timely, high-quality support leading to suitable housing. Partnerships with health providers and staff trained in trauma-informed, strengths-based practices help address health-related needs and make tailored adaptations, such as vibrating fire alarms for people with hearing impairments.
- **Quality of staffing and leadership:** Staff and leadership go through a robust recruitment process, induction, and ongoing online and in-person training. Team Leaders oversee case management, and regular supervision supports staff development, reflection, and safeguarding practices, with frequency tracked through performance indicators to ensure accountability.
- **Quality of accommodation:** The city shares monthly survey results with its Property and Revenue Team, covering areas such as location, furniture, and appliances. Feedback from these surveys informed the 2023 property upgrades, including new kitchens with integrated appliances, windows, and bathrooms.

The city identified that engagement was most effective through an action plan that identified strengths, set priorities, and addressed areas for development. As a result, documents like the "You Said, We Did" shared progress transparently with both service users and staff, fostering accountability and ongoing dialogue. This document includes examples of user requests and the resulting improvements,

such as: more cultural activities and walking groups; newly installed kitchens and appliances; painting and addition of soft furnishings; new flooring; and an improved way to communicate with staff from rooms through the installation of phones in all service user rooms.

ENABLING CONDITIONS

- Collaborative design and maintenance of quality among managers, staff, service users, and other key stakeholders.
- Information from ongoing questionnaires is complemented with formal and informal discussion spaces, aiming to actively listen to the different perspectives and experiences of people using the services.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Ensure agreement with service management, while balancing service-users' expectations.
- Tailor a quality assurance process to individual and organizational needs and circumstances.
- Respect the privacy, dignity, and rights of individuals using the services.
- Guaranteeing anonymity is essential to promote participation and elicit honest responses.

LESSONS FOR SERVICE-PROVISION

Glasgow's Quality Assurance Process faces difficulties when engaging with the services' participants and trying to balance their expectations with limited resources, particularly regarding the transition from emergency accommodation to appropriate permanent housing.

When using questionnaires or engaging in direct conversations with individuals, it is equally important to create safe spaces where people can openly express their perspectives and share what they consider to be areas of improvement. This approach leads to more accurate information and better outcomes for everyone involved in the service. To strengthen meaningful engagement with service users, Glasgow recently updated its six-monthly questionnaires to incorporate trauma-informed principles, ensuring that feedback processes are both sensitive and inclusive.

Across city systems, an ongoing commitment to quality assurance is essential for achieving positive outcomes and ensuring that all services offered remain effective, responsive, and centered on the needs of those they support. In this sense, Glasgow has worked to strengthen the quality of its services by actively incorporating users' insights and adapting to better meet the needs of individuals.

BUENOS AIRES

CARE NETWORK

The Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA) is the capital of Argentina, and it has its own government, legislation, and judicial system. Argentina defined homelessness in 2021 with its first national legislation and policy on the issue, which included those who live temporarily or permanently on the streets or in public places. In 2022, the homeless population nationwide was 5,705 people; 2,396 (42%) resided in Buenos Aires. In a context marked by recovery from a national economic crisis and a shortfall of affordable housing, Buenos Aires faces challenges mirrored by the rest of the country.

In 2024, the Ministry of Human Development and Habitat of Buenos Aires reported that 4,049 people were experiencing homelessness in the city: 2,813 were living in a shelter and 1,236 in public spaces. That year, Buenos Aires joined the Vanguard Cities Program.

A RENEWED SYSTEM

Homelessness is a complex problem that requires ongoing evaluation of the strategies used and their effectiveness. Accordingly, the Ministry of Human Development and Habitat of Buenos Aires decided to redesign its response to homelessness. Created in 2008 under the name Buenos Aires Presente (BAP), the current Care Network ("Red de Atención") centralizes services for adults and families experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless, individuals facing housing emergencies due to evictions or other contingencies, and highly socially vulnerable individuals requiring shelter and comprehensive assistance.

The Network includes immediate assistance programs and transitions to stable housing. In addition, it operates the Social Inclusion Centers (CIS), or "*paradores*" (the city's shelters), which offer temporary housing, food, and professional support. Furthermore, with its creation in 2024, the Network classified the 47 CIS according to subpopulations of homeless people: families, older adults, and single women, among other groups.

Among the objectives of the system are addressing housing needs, promoting social reintegration, and implementing strategies for social and community reconnection to facilitate exits from homelessness.

In a collaborative implementation, the Ministry of Buenos Aires has signed agreements with civil society organizations to manage the Social Inclusion Centers, alongside partnerships with other public agencies in health, education, and social development, as well as with local governments surrounding the city. Some practices for coordination among these stakeholders include inter-institutional coordination spaces and unified protocols to facilitate referral procedures.

Coordination among key stakeholders allows for more comprehensive and timely responses to people experiencing homelessness.

Institutions involved:
- City technical teams.
- Social organizations responsible for managing the CIS.
- Health and substance use treatment services.
- Emergency, security, and transportation departments involved in street outreach.

ELEMENTS OF THE NETWORK

The coordination of immediate response measures alongside transitional initiatives aims to promote the sustainable integration of people experiencing homelessness in Buenos Aires. Grounded in an intersectoral approach, the Care Network is structured around the use of censuses to assess the street population, immediate support through mobile operations, temporary housing, comprehensive and personalized assistance, and long-term housing solutions.

CARE SERVICES

Multidisciplinary teams tailor intervention plans according to each person's needs:
- Physical and mental health care through coordination with the health system.
- Harm reduction approaches and substance use treatment.
- Access to educational programs through inter-institutional cooperation.
- Connection with employment integration initiatives to promote economic autonomy.
- Reconnection and strengthening of family and community ties to expand support networks.

HOUSING PROGRAMS

- Housing subsidies for families.
- Social rental alternatives and collective housing as transitional options from shelters to long-term housing.
- Preventive programs addressing evictions and emergency situations.

MONITOR INDICATORS

An important element is the low-barrier admission protocols and non-exclusion criteria that guide services; the goal is to ensure that no one is denied assistance and that individuals are supported throughout the entire process. Consequently, the program admits those who have exited from other services, people requiring specific mental health or substance use support, and spaces have been adapted for individuals with disabilities. At the same time, priority is given to keeping families together and avoiding their separation in housing facilities.

The city monitors the program through statistics on occupancy, exits, and user satisfaction at the Social Inclusion Centers, censuses on the number of people experiencing homelessness, and the Single Beneficiaries Registry ("Registro Único de Beneficiarios" or RUB) to track individuals who benefit from the social protection system.

30% increase in the number of spaces in Social Inclusion Centers (CIS) over the past 8 months

30% decrease in the response time for calls to the 108 hotline

Increase in street operations proactivity: The number of cases addressed rose from **161 to 820 per week.**

LOOKING AHEAD

The reformulation of Buenos Aires' strategy was not without challenges. The high number of people seeking shelter during the winter season prompted adjustments to the Cold Operation ("Operativo Frío") to strengthen services, streamline referral protocols, and improve the infrastructure of shelter centers. The city also acknowledges the complexity of homelessness, largely due to mental health and substance use issues. Social inclusion centers face challenges including low retention rates. As a result, harm reduction perspectives were incorporated to ensure a comprehensive approach. Nevertheless, one ongoing challenge remains: fostering collaboration and joint work among different levels of government within the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (AMBA).

The work in Buenos Aires demonstrates that addressing homelessness requires a sustained, intersectoral approach, in which the participation of diverse institutions strengthens the effectiveness of systems while allowing interventions to be adjusted and lessons learned from practice. Looking ahead, the city aims to expand collective housing models, improve metropolitan coordination, and incorporate stable employment opportunities. Additionally, plans include consolidating an integrated data system in collaboration with IGH and strengthening partnerships, thereby ensuring the long-term sustainability and impact of the Care Network.
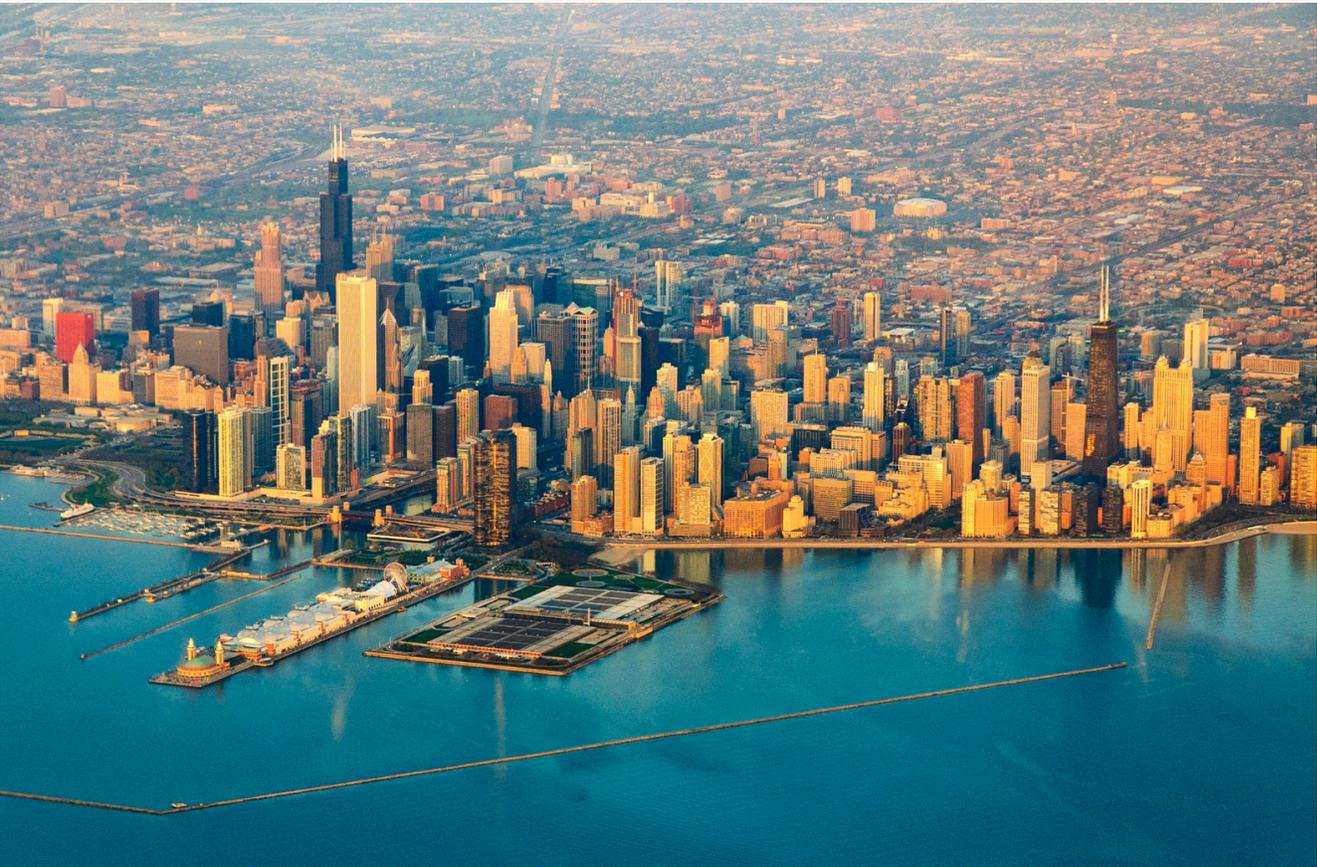
CHICAGO

CITY-LEVEL STRATEGIES

The city of Chicago is located in the State of Illinois, United States, with more than 2,7 million residents across 50 wards, 77 community areas, and over 100 neighborhoods.

Each January, the city conducts a Point-in-Time (PIT) Count as part of the U.S. Housing and Urban Development requirement to assess the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness in shelter, transitional housing, Safe Havens, and public encampment locations.

Chicago has seen an increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness brought about by the post-pandemic housing and economic crisis. In addition, a high number of new migrant arrivals, most of them bused by the Texas government between 2022 and 2024, pressured the homeless shelter system to expand at a pace surpassing resources. The new migrant arrivals decreased significantly in 2025. That year, the PIT registered 7,452 homeless people, 6,136 were in shelters or other temporary accommodations, and 1,316 were living on the streets. Since 2019, homelessness has increased by 41%.

Point-In-Time Homeless Count (2020)
Photo provided by the City of Chicago

BUILDING A NEW CITY PLAN

In 2024, Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson announced a new citywide strategy to prevent and end homelessness. The city's main objective is to create a Five-Year Blueprint through broad collaboration, including a 30-member Strategic Advisory Committee, government leaders at multiple levels, the city's interagency task force and community consultants.

Other partners include the Civic Consulting Alliance, Rudd Resources, Illinois Public Health Institute, and Smart Policy Works. The recommendations that will be published also incorporate input from people with lived experience of homelessness.

Designed to serve the city's residents, the Five-Year Blueprint seeks to be Chicago's strategic roadmap to address homelessness and other forms of housing insecurities affecting people and families by understanding the scale and root causes of homelessness in Chicago, raising public awareness on this issue, and challenging biases with equity-driven recommendations.

The plan is guided by the principles of ACCTion: Awareness, Curiosity, Connection, and Transformation.

A notable aspect of this project is its extensive stakeholder engagement process. To inform the Five-Year Blueprint, the City of Chicago actively sought input from a broad range of voices, including people with lived experience of homelessness, frontline workers, service providers, city agencies, civic organizations, and public-private partners. The process included focus groups, interviews, and public meetings, with a crucial element being a public survey that gathered community input or feedback from all 50 wards, hearing from more than 4,000 of its residents. In addition, the plan draws from county, state, and national datasets using a racial equity perspective. This approach ensures that the final recommendations are grounded in real-world experiences and fosters community-informed solutions.

From the beginning, Chicago established a Public Sector Roundtable that was crucial in aligning different jurisdictions across the city, county, state, and federal levels. This early coordination was key to securing shared support and ensuring initiatives were collaboratively shaped before moving too far along. Another important element was creating a strategic advisory committee to coordinate cross-sector cooperation.

Strategies to Enable Public Engagement
- Focus groups and interviews with community members and populations most impacted by homelessness.
- Community and media outreach.
- Public survey at Chicago Public Libraries.
- Landscape analysis of all city agencies involved in addressing homelessness.

FUTURE WORK AND LESSONS

As of October 2025, the city office was in the final stages of completing the report, which will outline key recommendations and strategies to end and prevent homelessness in Chicago. Persisting in its commitment to collaborative design, this phase consists of a "Kitchen Cabinet" composed of city leaders, Mayor's Office staff, consultants, and partners. Representatives from the Institute of Global Homelessness were also invited.

One of the key challenges in scaling up Chicago's homelessness initiative is finalizing the comprehensive report with clear implementation strategies that align policy, budget, and program goals to drive sustainable change. To address this, the City is focused on establishing effective mechanisms to monitor progress and evaluate systemic outcomes.

Moving forward, the plan expects to establish a policy campaign to look at a dedicated revenue fund for stability in services and projects advancement; create a People with Lived Experience work group to actively contribute to and co-sign key initiatives; strengthening the Chicago Homeless Interagency Collaborative (CHI Collaborative) to foster a coordinated full-government response; and deepening partnerships with advocacy, philanthropic, and private organizations. These efforts are building momentum toward a more unified and inclusive approach, laying the foundation for long-term solutions that ensure every person in Chicago has a place to call home.

PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH IN ENCAMPMENTS

Homelessness affects people's physical and mental health, including their safety, hygiene, and access to food and medication. Additionally, people experiencing homelessness face significant barriers to accessing healthcare, which results in higher rates of chronic and rare diseases, mortality, and traumatic injuries caused by violence. On average, homeless people in the United States have a life expectancy 20 to 30 years shorter than those who have stable housing. In this context, it is essential to provide medical assistance to this population, which is the goal of Chicago's Encampment Network Project.

Launched in May 2025, the City-led program brings together a coalition of stakeholders to direct resources toward encampments, provide mental health assistance, and reduce the levels of medical emergencies and substance use within those communities. Homelessness and substance use are often related but not directly causal. However, harm-reduction approaches have highlighted the benefits of assisting people within their environments, which prompted Chicago's program.

During the planning, the city sought insights from homeless services providers to better understand the unique needs of each encampment. Biweekly, outreach teams visit three preselected encampments and offer a wide range of services, including wound care, medication-assisted treatment, mental health support, peer recovery services, and overdose education with naloxone distribution.

The alliance for this program includes:
- Chicago Department of Public Health
- Department of Family and Support Services
- Inc & Community Outreach Intervention Project, University of Illinois Chicago
- Family Guidance Centers
- Chicago Recovery Alliance
- Above and Beyond Family Recovery Center
- Chi-Care

To foster support and trust, the stakeholders visited the encampments to meet with residents. Continuous meetings are scheduled to maintain engagement, accountability and evaluate progress.

BY AUGUST 2025, SOME OUTCOMES WERE:

10% of residents across all three encampments (about 100 individuals) have received medications for opioid use.

In four months, outreach teams have conducted nearly 600 encounters, providing wound care to 54 people and broader medical care to 71.

329 units of intranasal naloxone have been distributed to prevent fatal overdoses.

The teams use REDCap, an online survey and database tool, where they report on the type of service provided, receipt of medication-assisted treatment or substance use checking, and any care referrals. Peer recovery agents also survey encampment residents during their first three visits to collect information on health, safety, substance use, and other key indicators. These surveys are repeated every three months to monitor progress, and participants receive a three-day bus pass.

The program is still facing challenges, including the difficulties of coordinating several organizations and city departments to avoid duplication of efforts and fragmentation. Because of this, ensuring communication between stakeholders through regular meetings and informal conversations during the outreach process is essential to the effective delivery of services and building trust with the communities.

In the future, the city of Chicago aims to overcome funding restrictions to implement this project in other encampments.

SYSTEMS AND FUNDING CHANGES

The City of Chicago merged the crisis shelters established during the migrant crisis with its existing shelter network in 2025, creating the One System Initiative (OSI). In partnership with the State of Illinois, OSI is expanding the city's capacity to accommodate single adults and, for the first time in over a decade, ensuring that every unsheltered family with children has access to shelter. The only delays families may face are related to transportation.

Recent modifications to funding and policy priorities by the United States federal government have shifted the structures and reduced resources, moving the system towards emergency responses, which will likely lead to an increase in homelessness.

The projects featured in this report receive funding through the City's Corporate Fund that is facing increased challenges in being balanced without major cuts across the board. The City of Chicago is actively working to keep programs like the Chicago Encampment Network Project strong and to expand their impact.

Read more about Chicago
- Department of Family and Support Services & Department of Housing. 2024 Annual Report on Homelessness.
- City of Chicago (2025). Point-in-Time Count & Survey Report of People Experiencing Homelessness.

Point-In-Time Homeless Count (2020)
Photo provided by the City of Chicago

TSHWANE

COMMUNITY AND MUNICIPAL RESPONSE

Tshwane is a metropolitan municipality in Gauteng Province, South Africa that comprises the city of Pretoria and its surrounding areas. It functions as the administrative capital of the country with 4.04 million inhabitants (2022 Count). The Tshwane Homeless Forum and Unit for Street Homelessness at the University of Pretoria (UP) have been collaborating to advance homelessness policies and programs across the city. They proposed a city-wide homelessness policy, which was adopted by the Tshwane City Council in 2019.

In October 2022, the City of Pretoria, the University of Pretoria, and the Tshwane Homelessness Forum collaborated on an enumeration process across seven regions of Tshwane, aiming to enhance the available data. The study, documented in a report on homelessness survey, identified 4,177 people experiencing homelessness, including those living on the streets, in shelters, and in abandoned buildings. Among the 3,408 individuals who participated in the survey, unemployment was identified as the primary driver of homelessness (41%).

Tshwane joined the Vanguard Program in March 2018, in a partnership between IGH, the Tshwane Leadership Foundation, Tshwane Homelessness Forum, and the City of Tshwane.

A MANIFESTO ON ELDERLY HOMELESSNESS

The Tshwane Homeless Count recorded 230 individuals aged 55 and above living on the streets. A closer look at the data reveals that 70% of these older adults have experienced homelessness for between 4 and 10 years, 73% do not receive social benefits, and only 65% have identity documentation.

The Inn, a supportive housing initiative led by the Tshwane Leadership Foundation, is a prototype that has been studied and well-documented by the Unit for Street Homelessness in the published Manifesto with recommendations "to end older homelessness," seeking to influence city and provincial strategies and enhance Pretoria's resources and capacity.

Established in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Inn serves older individuals who were homeless or were at risk of becoming homeless; hence, the institution offers valuable insights into the challenges faced by this group. Targeting policymakers, service-providers, and senior residents, the document advocates for a collaborative campaign to develop a holistic approach.

The Manifesto's key action points are:

- Defend older adults' housing rights.
- Call for implementing housing-led solutions, including the Housing First model.
- Ensure appropriate psychosocial, health, and nutritional support of all older persons coming from homelessness, either living independently or in supportive accommodations.
- Implement preventive measures when people are at imminent risk of losing shelter or housing.
- Enhance the overall quality of life of this population.
- Increase visibility of elderly homelessness, as well as their participation in decision-making processes, policy design, and research projects.

Tshwane Homeless Count (2022)
Photo provided by the Unit for Street Homelessness, University of Pretoria

An important element of this declaration was its collective design, incorporating perspectives from people with lived experience, a case study developed by The Inn, comparative literature, and insights from conversations held in 2023 with 41 participants at the University of Pretoria. Additionally, the process included focus group discussions with individuals at The Inn, highlighting the lived experiences of older adults as a central part of the dialogue.

Translating the manifesto's vision and recommendations into practical actions can strengthen strategies to address homelessness among older people. As demonstrated by the available data, long-term solutions are essential, as many in this population have experienced extended periods of street homelessness and need support to access social benefits, health care, and documentation services. Establishing alliances between elder care facilities and services-providers can also enhance the system's capacity to address the current problem.

ACCORDING TO THE 2022 TSHWANE HOMELESS COUNT:

230 individuals aged 55 and above were living on the streets.

70% of these older adults experienced homelessness for 4 - 10 years.

73% did not receive social benefits.

Only 65% have ID documentation

A LOCALIZED SPATIAL INTERVENTION

Launched in August 2025, the project "From Hot Spots to Safe Spaces: Socio-Spatial Interventions to Integrate Homeless Individuals Well" seeks to transform "hot spots" into "safe spaces" that provide access to basic services, health and psychosocial support, vocational opportunities, and long-term housing solutions for individuals and families experiencing street homelessness. The initiative is a partnership between the Department of Town and Regional Planning and the Department of Geography of the University of Pretoria and the Tshwane Homeless Forum, with support from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and funded by the Global Centre for Spatial Methods for Urban Sustainability.

A positive aspect of these interventions is that they build upon a prior multisectoral collaboration[1] that collected qualitative ethnographic data in Tshwane. That statistical effort identified "hot spots," spaces where homeless people congregate, across all seven regions and characterized them through interviews, focus group discussions, geographic assets, and perception maps. Actors involved in the initiative emphasize the importance of building trust and consistently interacting with the community to facilitate participation, identify challenges, and co-create solutions.

[1] The collaboration included the Centre for Faith and Community (CFC) and the Department of Town and Regional Planning of the University of Pretoria (UP), and the Tshwane Homeless Forum. It received support from the DAAD and funds from the Global Centre for Spatial Methods for Urban Sustainability.

LIMITATIONS FOR THE PRACTICAL WORK

In Tshwane, some challenges have been the lack of comprehensive data about homeless individuals' movement, the need for employing different analysis techniques, and limited resources and time to integrate multidimensional information.

Until now, the project has succeeded in mapping areas, pilot site planning, and altering social perception from hot spots as "problem areas" to "potential solutions." However, no other indicators can be provided at the moment, and the implementation of this initiative is pending.

The lead stakeholders will draft a proposal to the City of Tshwane to work on two pilot sites with the objective of refining the proposed strategy and generating more data. In parallel, there are plans to engage other stakeholders from the private sector.

With a focus on practical impact, this initiative aims to disseminate successful outcomes to local policy-makers and government officials working on homelessness, as well as to partners across South Africa through the National Homelessness Network. It also intends to contribute to progress on Social Development Goal 11: To "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable".

WHAT WORKS IN TSHWANE?

Both projects exhibited a collaborative approach that is always encouraged in policies on homelessness given the need of coordinating all the relevant agents that could influence the strategies' success and effectiveness.

While the Manifesto advocates for a participatory design that positions older people as active contributors, key factors in the socio-spatial interventions include a collaborative design with stakeholders (the City of Tshwane, provincial authorities, individuals with lived experience, NGOs, researchers, businesses, and residents) and a respectful engagement with the homeless community at the "hot spots."

Additionally, the strategy and manifesto integrated a rights-based perspective prioritizing protection for vulnerable populations, people living on the streets, and older adults, respectively. In particular, the Manifesto aligns with internationally recognized, effective strategies when recommending that Tshwane adopt housing-led solutions, including Housing First, and develop preventive measures to reduce the number of older adults experiencing homelessness.

CHALLENGES AND THE PATHWAYS FORWARD

One major obstacle in this Vanguard City is the lack of funding. While the city's homelessness policy was adopted in 2019, critical funding constraints mean that most of the policy remains unfunded and unimplemented. The majority of programs are implemented by local nonprofits and faith-based organizations. These programs have been improved through coordination and collaboration across the sector, but a state response to homelessness is needed to scale solutions and reduce homelessness city-wide.

While practical outcomes are still emerging in the two featured projects, these early efforts offer valuable opportunities to refine approaches and strengthen the foundations for long-term, impactful solutions. The collaborative efforts underway in Tshwane represent a promising step toward more inclusive and rights-based approaches to homelessness among vulnerable populations by strengthening partnerships and centering the voices of those with lived experience.
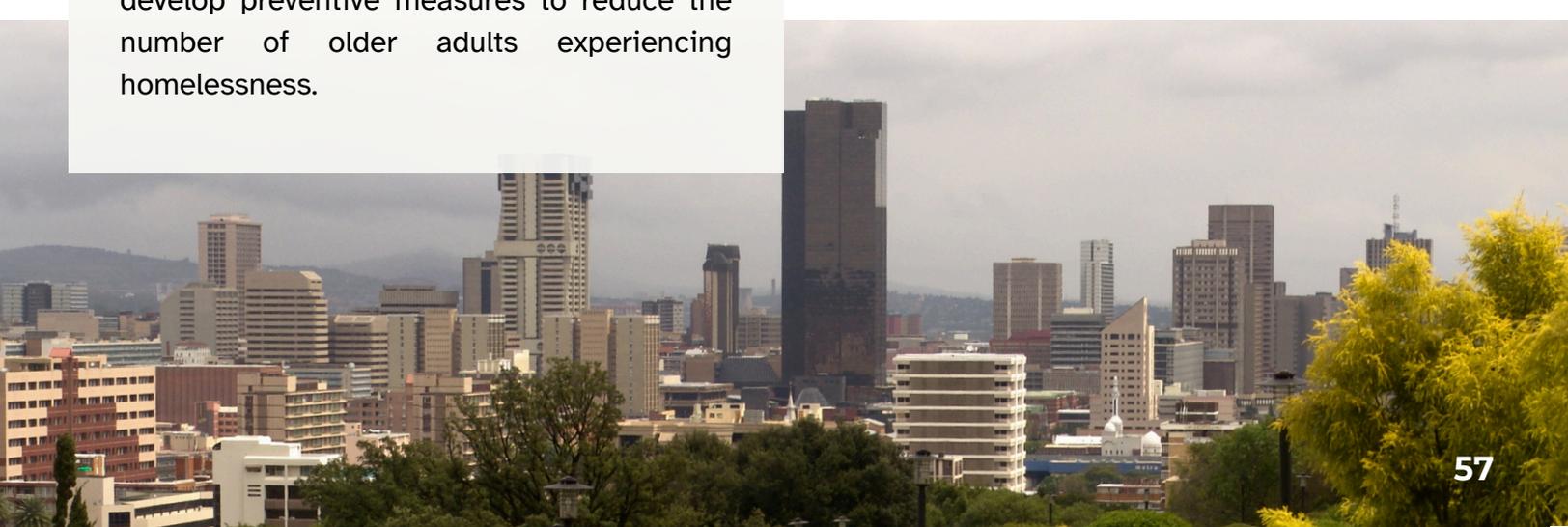
SYDNEY

SYDNEY ZERO PROGRAM

Photo provided by End Street Sleeping Collaboration

In Sydney, the capital of the State of New South Wales, people experiencing homelessness can have a wide range of outcomes, depending on their personal situation and the variability of the response from the system. Some people, in the order of 20%, remain on the streets for periods longer than 5 years and sometimes up to 20 years or longer. The majority of them require support for complex mental health issues, substance use, and chronic health conditions. On average, their life expectancy is 30 years less than that of housed individuals in Australia. In addition, homeless people can often feel disengaged from the communities they live in and face difficulties while navigating the services; in general, it is estimated that 1 in 5 individuals receive the required support.

Across Australia, cities and regions have adopted approaches to preventing homelessness that have been built on international evidence. This evidence has come from a variety of sources, including the Built for Zero campaign created by Community Solutions and supported in Australia by the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness' Advance to Zero (AtoZ) campaign. These approaches to preventing and ending homelessness focus on using By-name data to coordinate services and support individuals experiencing homelessness. In Sydney, the ultimate goal is to achieve a state where homelessness rarely occurs and, when it does, it is brief.

Sydney joined the Vanguard Program as a Vanguard State in 2019, following the signing of an agreement between the State of New South Wales and IGH.

SYDNEY ZERO

Framed in the AtoZ strategy and launched in 2023, the Sydney Zero program is a collaboration between the City of Sydney, the Government of New South Wales, the End Street Sleeping Collaboration, more than twenty homelessness, housing service providers, and NGOs, and the three local hospitals. Together, the stakeholders seek to assist people over 18 years old who are sleeping on the streets, in crisis and temporary accommodation, and people who are at risk of experiencing homelessness.

In the Sydney Zero program, three key measurable goals are making homelessness:
- **Rare:** People sleeping rough, or in crisis or temporary accommodation, on a single night.
- **Brief:** Time from first identified as rough sleeping to move into tenured housing
- **Non-recurring:** People returning to rough sleeping or temporary/crisis accommodation after receiving housing.

The program builds upon the By-Name-List (BNL) system operating in the city. This shared register of information is used to refer people to accommodation and other services; therefore, it requires a strong network of agencies and organizations, as well as a high level of engagement with housing and homelessness services to fulfill people's needs.

Following this premise for an effective use of the BNL, Sydney Zero is guided by five practices:

- **Governance:** Oversight of Sydney Zero by a Local Leadership Group; backbone support from <u>End Street Sleeping Collaboration</u>.
- **BNL Use:** Embedding the By-Name List across participating organizations.
- **Case Coordination:** Using the BNL for assertive outreach and coordination meetings.
- **Escalation:** Finding solutions for unmet needs and tracking barriers to drive system improvements.
- **Improvement Projects:** Led by the Sydney Zero Action Group, which includes representatives from involved stakeholders and oversees initiatives to improve outcomes.

Photo provided by End Street Sleeping Collaboration

OPTIMIZING DATA

The By-Name-List (BNL) collects data about a person, regarding their biographical information (location, vulnerability indicators, drivers to homelessness), and housing, support, and health needs. The information is regularly updated to track a person's journey through the systems. Before the BNL was implemented, service providers did not share information about individuals experiencing homelessness, which hindered the coordination of support and delivery of assistance.

In the past, Sydney and the State of New South Wales faced challenges supporting people living on the streets because of disconnections between the BNL and the services, which increased the length of time that it took to house individuals and provide them with the necessary assistance so that they could exit homelessness. Intending to improve the system, Sydney Zero established its three objectives: making rough sleeping rare, brief, and non-recurring, to address and mitigate the negative impacts of homelessness.

Building upon this previous experience, the main steps while developing the Sydney Zero project were:

- Secure funding for the backbone organization.
- Convene the sector to establish goals and components.
- Create the Local Leadership Group together.
- Redesign the By-Name List (BNL), which has a better user experience and was adapted to be a tool for service coordination.

- Train stakeholders on the new BNL.
- Institute an Action Group focused on improvement projects.
- Secure the support of the State Government, aiming to incorporate this program into its homelessness strategy.

The By-Name List (BNL) was not widely used across the state, so the program introduced a new version to some collaborators, a transition that was not without challenges. Sydney Zero now uses the BNL to understand homelessness in the city, inform policy decisions, and enhance the effectiveness of the service network.

BRINGING STAKEHOLDERS TOGETHER

Creating collaborative steering groups to implement strategies for homelessness is a recommended practice, since it allows for a multisectoral approach and mobilization of resources. In Sydney Zero, engaging stakeholders was a crucial step, which was achieved by applying three principles: recognizing that this is a major change management effort, ensuring effective communication and consultation, and clearly demonstrating the benefits of participation.

The practices used to build relationships and ensure participation have not been the same for every type of partner. For the State Government, it was essential to engage across multiple departments and agencies. However, limited capacity has so far prevented a whole-of-government response. In the case of NGOs, success has depended on involving people at different levels within the organization (from front-line staff to senior management). Sydney Zero also follows best practice by integrating the

voices and perspectives of people with lived experience of homelessness. They participate on the board of End Street Sleeping Collaboration, the Sydney Zero Leadership Group, the Action Group, and in key projects.

Members of the participating agencies and organizations formed the Local Leadership Group (LLG), the coalition responsible for overseeing the program's implementation, evaluating its performance, collecting information on current challenges, and identifying improvement opportunities.

Stakeholders involved in Sydney Zero:
- New South Wales State Government
- Sydney Council
- Non-government organizations from housing, homelessness and health sectors
- People with lived experience
- Aboriginal organizations
- Philanthropists
- Businesses

Belongings of people sleeping rough near to Central Train Station in Sydney. Photo provided by End Street Sleeping Collaboration

NAVIGATING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Early estimates indicate shorter periods of case coordination before individuals are housed. While reductions in the number of people sleeping rough have not yet shown significant results, the project's leaders are working to strengthen partnerships and expand connections with the health and housing sectors, while navigating contextual challenges such as limited dedicated resources, resistance to change from some stakeholders, preexisting contractual agreements, and a widespread housing shortage across the city and state.

A key lesson from Sydney is that the program requires transformations across the entire sector, including how people approach collaboration, how organizations operate, and how policies are applied. Changing systems and approaches, however, is a difficult challenge to tackle. In response, leaders have advocated and adjusted proposals, seeking the stakeholders' support. Because the project relies on collaboration and voluntary participation, it succeeds when capable, flexible, and experienced people are guiding change in a collaborative but sometimes uncertain environment.

Sydney Zero has been driven by the commitment of collaborators who actively seek opportunities and resources to strengthen homelessness initiatives, as well as by the inclusion of people with lived experience at multiple levels of the project and consultations with Aboriginal groups. Insights from international experience and consultations have also informed its development.

In brief, the program reflects a commitment to learning from experience and a continuous effort to leverage existing data, strategies, and policies to improve homelessness responses and support individuals as they navigate the system.

DATA IN THE VANGUARD CITIES

STATE OF HOMELESSNESS DATA

Accurate, inclusive, and timely data is critical to understanding the scope of homelessness and designing effective policies. Yet, IGH's Global Homeless Data Map reveals wide variations in how homelessness is defined and measured globally.

The table below includes information about how the Vanguard cities and countries across the program have enumerated homelessness, offering insights into the strengths and gaps of current measurement systems.

City / Country	IGH Category	People experiencing homelessness	Year	Methodology
Buenos Aires, Argentina	I & II	4,049 people living in shelters and public spaces in the city.	2024	Street Count / PIT
Chicago, USA	I & II	7,452 homeless people in shelters, other temporary accommodations, and on the streets.	2025	Point-in-Time (PIT)
Santiago, Chile	I & II	8,458 people living on the streets and temporary accommodations	2024	National Census
Sao Paulo, Brazil	I & II	31,889 people in shelters and living on the streets.	2021	Municipal Census
Sydney, Australia	I & II	Varies according to the method - 726 people in last city street count.	2025	By-Name-List Street Counts National Census (2021)
Tshwane, South Africa	I & II	4,177 people living on the streets, in shelters, and abandoned buildings.	2022	Street Count / PIT
Uruguay	I & II	3,917 people living on the streets or in shelters across the country	2020	Point-in-Time
Glasgow, Scotland	I, II, & III	34,067 households assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness	2024- 2025	Homeless Household Applications
Greater Manchester, England	I, II, & III	149 rough sleepers. The city's definition also includes people in shelters, or at risk of homelessness.	2024	Street Count / PIT (every year) Homeless Household Applications
Lisbon, Portugal	I, II, & III	3,378 people living in public spaces, emergency shelters, temporary accommodations, and in "precarious locations."	2023	Questionnaire
Mongolia		No Official Data on Homelessness		

The Vanguard Countries and Cities have adopted diverse approaches to measuring homelessness, shaped by local definitions, administrative structures, and data capacities, which do not allow for comparison of the scale of homelessness across the program. Data on homelessness plays a key role for cities in informing effective policies and targeted interventions, as well as guiding program design, strategic planning, and the allocation of resources. It also supports program evaluation and a comprehensive understanding of the scale and drivers of homelessness.

The majority of the cities enumerate the first two categories of IGH's Framework: people without accommodation and in temporary or crisis accommodations, but they exclude migrants and refugee camps. In Greater Manchester and Lisbon, the definition incorporates, to some extent, the third category: people in insecure accommodation, represented as people at risk of experiencing homelessness and in "precarious situations" respectively.

The most used methodology is the Street Counts or Point-in-Time Counts, utilized by Chicago, Tshwane, Greater Manchester, Uruguay, and Sydney. Three cities took part in censuses: Santiago and Sydney in the national enumeration, and São Paulo employed this method at the municipal level. Although recent research helps provide insights into the population experiencing homelessness, the lack of official data in

Mongolia is a significant gap, limiting policy development and planning. Additionally, Lisbon's methodology is questionnaire-based and integrated into national systems, while Sydney possesses data from a By-Name-List, national census data, and annual city-level PIT counts. Even though all cities and countries have published statistics in the last five years, city-wide enumeration is not conducted on a routine or yearly basis in five locations: Lisbon, Santiago, São Paulo, Tshwane, and Uruguay.

Cities are working to improve data to understand population characteristics and service utilization, and to enhance their systems. Additionally, efforts are underway to enhance the consistency of the data. This includes strengthening the use of administrative data, collected through public systems and services. Chile recently incorporated a special homelessness operative into its National Population and Housing Census, while Tshwane conducted its first homeless count in collaboration with multiple stakeholders. Strengthening data quality will enable more evidence-based policymaking and help track progress toward ending homelessness.

Learn about methods for collecting data on homelessness with IGH's Methodologies Guide.

Explore the state of homelessness data worldwide in our Global Homeless Data Map.

LEARNINGS FROM THE CASE STUDIES

INITIATIVES TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS

When analyzing the initiatives and programs of the Vanguard Countries and Cities, it is essential to examine best practices that have been translated from theory to practice. Greater Manchester's prevention work with young people demonstrates the power that strategies can have when supported by data, tailored to individual needs, and combined with housing and other service referrals.

Additionally, this report documented the development of Housing First programs in Santiago and Lisbon. Both cities align their initiatives with the model's principles and provide long-term housing without entry requirements or participation conditions, while supporting individuals with multidisciplinary teams. Equally valuable is that the programs' execution is made in collaboration with NGOs and civil society, with Chile's alliance between ministries as a key highlight.

Cross-sector collaboration is part of the homeless responses in Glasgow, Greater Manchester, Santiago, Lisbon, Chicago, Tshwane, and Sydney. Due to the complexities and intersections of homelessness, multi-sectoral coordination is crucial, and it cannot be solved in isolation. The Vanguard Cities align with this perspective by including multiple stakeholders across housing, health, education, and carceral systems, and working together to achieve meaningful progress.

Collaboration remains incomplete without the lived experiences of homelessness. In Uruguay, the Collective NITEP has made significant progress in ensuring that people with lived experience are not only heard but also actively contribute to the design and implementation of programs. Casa de Sueños in Uruguay and the Ulziit-Asar Shelter in Mongolia exemplify initiatives shaped and led by those most affected by homelessness. Equally important are the employment opportunities created by É Um Restaurante in Lisbon and the prevention plan co-developed in Greater Manchester. Together, these initiatives center the voices of experts by experience at every level, resulting in more inclusive and effective programs.

Other notable examples include the ongoing system reviews undertaken by Buenos Aires, Glasgow, and Sydney, which adjust key elements as needed, and the innovative Vila Reencontro initiative in Brazil, which moves beyond large-capacity shelters to provide private accommodation for families.

Finally, four cities offered support to particular subpopulations, such as young people (Greater Manchester), older adults (Santiago and Tshwane), and individuals living in encampments (Chicago), demonstrating how tailored approaches can address the distinct needs of different groups within the population experiencing homelessness.

VANGUARD PROGRAM: CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

Across the Vanguard Cities, one of the primary challenges lies in structural barriers to affordable housing availability. These challenges are compounded by a competitive market due to housing shortages and limited investment in affordable and social housing. Additionally, rising rent prices and high living costs make securing affordable, long-term rental options an ongoing struggle. International research consistently shows that homelessness is fundamentally a housing problem, with higher rates of homelessness closely linked to housing shortages, rising rents, and difficulty accessing affordable housing.

Another key challenge involved addressing biases and prejudices among communities and society in general. Changing perceptions and practice from programs based solely on crisis responses with restrictive conditions requiring clients to "earn" access to services, towards systems aligned with global evidence by placing prevention and housing at the center of the city-wide response is an active and ongoing process for many communities. This involves shifting approaches to expand housing access, redesigning programs from siloed efforts to coordinated prevention-focused systems through coproduction and embedding data and equity across teams.

In the initiatives, funding insecurity was a significant challenge, creating uncertainty for both staff and participants and raising concerns about potential interruptions to the received assistance.

Finally, the lack of comprehensive data and definitions of homelessness complicates efforts to design effective programs. The integration of best practices, particularly prevention, also remains a work in progress.

While overcoming the challenges, several important lessons emerged from the Vanguard initiatives documented in this report. First, engaging with a wide range of stakeholders proved to be critical. Involving grassroots organizations as delivery partners and including communities from the outset helps ensure programs are relevant and reduces resistance. Following the principle of "not talking about the street without the street," strategies integrating lived experience and inviting community members to participate or volunteer proved effective in building local support.

In the exploratory stages of the initiatives, conducting thorough initial assessments contributed to designing programs grounded in data and responsive to the real needs of people experiencing homelessness. Additionally, establishing a dedicated budget and diversifying funding sources were also highlighted as key elements to ensuring program continuity and long-term impact. During the implementation, programs needed to remain flexible, as some individuals required support beyond what the original design anticipated. Across all initiatives, tracking progress and monitoring indicators was important to measure effectiveness and inform adjustments.

KEY APROACHES TO HOMELESSNESS

PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS BEFORE IT OCCURS

Prevention is a core component of effective solutions to homelessness. Understanding the causes and drivers of homelessness is a crucial component in designing strategies that support people when they are at risk, before they experience homelessness.

Fitzpatrick, Mackie, and Wood (2021) advanced a **typology** that frames homelessness prevention according to critical moments for intervention and includes details on the specific populations at risk at these points. It recognizes that preventive strategies can intervene at structural or individual levels, targeting the general population (Universal prevention), groups at higher risk (Upstream prevention), and including interventions during crisis and emergency stages, as well as to prevent return to homelessness.

Some preventive measures include, but are not limited to, ending discharges into homelessness from public institutions, preventing evictions into homelessness, offering alternative accommodation or financial rent assistance, ensuring access to housing and to mental and physical health support services, and implementing Housing First and housing-led programs (Pleace, 2019). A crucial preventive strategy worldwide is the expansion of affordable housing stock.

Cities and countries have developed strategies and plans to prevent homelessness. For crisis prevention, the United Kingdom has instituted a legal duty on local authorities to support people "who are threatened with homelessness within 56 days." Denmark and Finland have made progress in upstream interventions among individuals leaving institutions such as health facilities and prisons (Mackie, 2023).

In the Vanguard Cities, Greater Manchester's Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2021–2026 was co-created with people with lived experience, government agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders, and it was framed around the five-stage typology. Glasgow is piloting the "Ask and Act," which are new duties proposed in the Housing (Scotland) Bill. Informed by the five-stage typology, this pilot aims to support strategies to "Ask" about people's housing situation early and "Act" to prevent homelessness.

A five-stage typology of homelessness prevention

1. UNIVERSAL PREVENTION
Preventing or minimising homelessness across the population at large

2. UPSTREAM PREVENTION
Early-stage prevention focused on high-risk groups, such as vulnerable young people and risky transitions, such as leaving prison

3. CRISIS PREVENTION
Preventing homelessness likely to occur within a foreseeable time period

4. EMERGENCY PREVENTION
Support for those at immediate risk of homelessness, especially rough sleeping

5. REPEAT PREVENTION
Prevention of repeat homelessness, especially rough sleeping

Fitzpatrick et al., 2021

HOUSING FIRST:
A RECOMMENDED BEST-PRACTICE

WHAT IS THE HOUSING FIRST MODEL?

In 1992, Dr. Sam Tsemberis founded Pathways to Housing in New York City, introducing the idea that people "should not have to prove" themselves to access housing. This principle became the foundation of the Housing First model.

Seeking to end homelessness, this approach prioritizes providing stable housing without requiring people to meet specific conditions, as housing should be the first step. Accordingly, Housing First programs focus on combining permanent accommodation with flexible, tailored, and person-centered support services.

Typically, Housing First includes rental assistance based on household circumstances, with some programs requiring program participants to pay 30 percent of their income. This builds autonomy, financial responsibility, and planning, and helps with overall program costs.

Some initiatives fall short by offering only housing without additional assistance, thus not fully aligning with the model's principles. Effective programs emphasize both stability and choice through person-centered supportive services, working to have a high amount of fidelity to the core principles of Housing First.

INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS

The model has been widely implemented worldwide, with local adaptations in countries such as Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Housing retention rates are very high compared to other interventions, with 80–90% of participants remaining housed for at least one year, and a focus on people experiencing chronic homelessness and with complex needs. A USA study found that Housing First programs can save up to $23,000 per participant annually compared with traditional shelter programs.

With differences from the New York example, Finland adapted this model with its Housing First policy (2008), which has helped reduce homelessness by recognizing people's rights to housing, choices, autonomy, safe relationships, and social inclusion. Data exhibited that from 2008 to 2022, long-term homelessness decreased by 68% in the country.

Read more about this model on:
- Institute of Global Homelessness. IGH HUB: Housing.
- Housing First: Europe Hub. Housing First.
- OECD (2024). OECD Affordable Housing Database - Indicator HC 3.2. National strategies for combatting homelessness.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRATING LIVED EXPERIENCE

BUILDING CHANGE TOGETHER

Ending homelessness is not just about programs and policies; it is about people. Therefore, creating effective and sustainable solutions calls for meaningful collaboration with people who have firsthand experience at every level of the homelessness system.

People with lived experience of homelessness offer unique perspectives to help identify gaps, strengthen services, and shape programs that respond to real needs. By involving this population in leadership, advisory, peer support, research, and program design roles, stakeholders can develop more inclusive and effective support systems.

The result can be powerful. For example, evidence suggests that individuals with lived experience can facilitate participants' adjustment to services, assist in navigating recovery processes, and serve as a vital link between program staff and participants.

Regardless of the approach, governments, organizations, and society in general must eliminate barriers such as stigma, discrimination, power imbalances, and practical challenges to make these collaborations successful.

EMPOWERING PARTICIPATION

A genuine partnership goes beyond symbolic gestures; it means sharing power and ensuring that populations with lived experience are active decision-makers, that they are equals in the process of seeking solutions to homelessness.

Homeless Link developed a framework on the matter that goes from informing people to co-producing with them, which implies an "equal partnership to design and deliver services," guided by principles such as trust, respect, clear communication, and openness.

More on Collaborating with People with Lived Experience:
- IGH Blog. Partnering with People of Lived Experience: What We've Learned
- IGH Community of Impact: Partnering with People with Lived Experience. Watch the recording here.
- IGH Webinar: Lessons from Lived Experience: Building Solidarity and Community Knowledge for Housing Justice. Watch the video.
- Homeless Link. Co-Production Toolkit.
- Lived Experience Advisory Council (2016). Nothing about us without us. The Homeless Hub Press.

INNOVATIVE HOUSING APPROACHES

The Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH) developed the Global Framework on Homelessness, which includes people living on the streets, in open spaces, in buildings not intended for human habitation, in temporary shelters, or in severely inadequate housing. IGH's three categories helped inform the United Nations' 2021 description of homelessness, which emphasizes that homelessness is more than the absence of physical housing.

This broader understanding of homelessness is essential to discuss and explore housing solutions that move beyond emergency shelters. As stated in the Vanguard Cities Evaluation, relying on often unsafe and communal shelters emphasizes addressing immediate physical needs rather than tackling systemic and structural issues.

Despite financial and infrastructural challenges, cities and countries are increasingly adopting creative housing solutions, demonstrating that effective interventions are possible even within constrained resources. Research shows that

housing solutions frequently cost less per person and produce longer-term benefits compared with shelter-based approaches.

To effectively address homelessness, a range of housing solutions can be pursued, including upgrading existing accommodation, building social and community housing, refurbishing buildings, identifying vacant properties, and providing rental vouchers.

Modular units can enable rapid housing deployment and adaptability, while co-living or shared housing models reduce costs and foster social networks. Collectively, these approaches aim to move beyond temporary shelters and create sustainable pathways out of homelessness.

Tailored to local contexts and communities, governments and stakeholders should maximize their use of different housing solutions. In this process, learning from international experiences can play a vital role in identifying feasible alternatives.

The United Nations (2022):

"*Welcomes the implementation of inclusive, social and public housing programmes, and encourages Member States to continue to enable all persons in vulnerable situations to access adequate housing by constructing, maintaining and managing housing programmes at affordable prices and costs, as well as providing income subsidies, as a means to prevent homelessness and informal housing*" (p. 5).

TRANSFORMING CITY-WIDE SYSTEMS

Global and national changes are necessary to promote inclusive and effective policies on homelessness, but cities must be central actors in any strategy. These are the structures and systems that face the complexity of the problem on a daily basis, whether through their services or their engagement with local communities. Because of their importance, the International Mayors Council on Homelessness called city governments to prioritize a coordinated response and implement data-informed and housing-led approaches.

Some key components of city-wide frameworks to end homelessness are:
- Analyzing the communities' housing needs.
- Developing preventive and supporting policies.
- Providing comprehensive services.
- Utilizing data to inform strategies, allocate resources, and monitor progress.
- Fostering cross-sector collaboration.

The transformations that cities can undertake are powerful, especially when done in collaboration with other stakeholders. Kania et al. (2022) referred to the idea of Collective Impact as a "network of community members, organizations, and institutions" advancing systemic change through integrated actions. This group requires a shared agenda, measurement, and activities, as well as clear communication and a central coordination team.

In the homeless response, this can operate as a cross-sector collaboration involving city leaders, government agencies, service providers, NGOs, businesses, and other key stakeholders.

The Vanguard Cities Evaluation found there are key approaches on what works to end homelessness across contexts. Political will and a lead agency are critical components, setting ambitious goals, bringing urgency to the issue, and coordinating efforts. Equally important is moving away from a one size fits all approach to focus on assertive street outreach, integrated social services, and individualized case management. Cities are able to reduce homelessness through prevention and expansion of housing options, including temporary self-contained accommodation, Housing First, and affordable housing stock.

Finally, effective solutions to homelessness require a shift away from criminalization, going beyond emergency responses, and developing interventions in partnership with people of lived experience.

> *We recognize the transformational power that mayors and city leaders have to end homelessness in cities across the world and we call for more global coordinated action on homelessness*
>
> - Declaration of the International Mayors Council on Homelessness

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The initiatives of the Vanguard Cities demonstrate both the challenges and opportunities that communities face when working to prevent and end homelessness. Through the Vanguard Program, it is clear that homelessness can be addressed effectively when strategies are evidence-informed, tailored, and collaborative. Central to this work should be inclusive data and definitions, housing-led strategies, leadership and coordination, the integration of lived experience, and a focus on prevention.

Data is collected in ten of the eleven cities included in this report, with Mongolia being the only exception. However, definitions vary both between and within countries, and methodologies and scope differ widely, preventing comparisons. However, communities require a shared understanding of homelessness to gather reliable data and monitor progress toward measurable goals. Taking this into account, IGH is working to advance an international definition of homelessness.

Evidence has shown that housing is the solution to homelessness. In parallel to addressing the root cause of the lack of stable housing, tailored, wrap-around support, leads to better outcomes for individuals. Access to housing must be fast, flexible, and equitable.

Leadership is essential for creating policies and implementing programs in a coordinated manner. The cross-sector partnerships observed in multiple Vanguard Cities highlight that ending homelessness is a shared responsibility. Although progress has been made, governments and key stakeholders can further strengthen their role, particularly in securing funding, to ensure programs are sustainable and that people do not fear that effective initiatives will be discontinued. In the coalitions, people with lived experience should be central agents.

Across the program, prevention should be further incorporated and prioritized into the responses to homelessness. Promoting affordable housing, eviction protection, and targeted support for at-risk populations are the most effective ways to end homelessness, by doing so before it occurs.

As the Vanguard Program moves forward, future work will focus on strengthening data-driven strategies, fostering collaboration across systems, and integrating lived experience to ensure homelessness is addressed holistically with sustainable, person-centered solutions. Homelessness is often a matter of life and death, and IGH is committed to advancing initiatives that protect human rights and ensure everyone has a safe place to call home.

Ruff Institute of Global Homelessness

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