

The Ruff Institute of Global Homelessness

Global Homelessness and the Sustainable Development Goals

A report on the 2024 and 2025 United Nations
Voluntary National Reviews



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Author

River Smith





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

Introduction

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are 17 goals that together comprise the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. These build on the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and together chart an ambitious plan to drive integrated and sustainable development across all UN Member States. The 17 SDGs are further broken down into 169 targets, which are more measurable and specific.

The SDGs are an important framework for international development. They define areas of international focus, and issues covered by the 169 SDG targets benefit from increased resource allocation, concrete definitions and measurement, and greater international collaboration. All UN member states are encouraged to publish periodic reports detailing their progress, efforts, and setbacks in achieving the SDGs.

These reports are called Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). Not every member state submits a VNR every year, with reviews from 30-40 states per year being typical. VNRs are voluntary and flexible, with member states encouraged to adapt the framework of the SDGs to their national context and priorities. Homelessness is not explicitly mentioned within any of the 17 SDGs or 169 targets and it was also entirely absent from the previous MDGs. There are SDGs that thematically align with the struggle to end homelessness, such as SDG 1 (End Poverty), SDG 10 (Reduce Inequality), and SDG 11 (Make Cities and Human Settlements Sustainable), however the lack of specific language addressing homelessness hurts the mission to end homelessness globally.

There is no globally recognized definition of homelessness, which leads to inconsistent methodologies and an inability to compare data between regions. The lack of uniformity in measurement then hinders the sector's ability to compare regional approaches and hone in on what approaches and interventions are most effective. The SDGs as they exist certainly envision a world without homelessness, but the lack of specific inclusion impacts the sector's ability to effectively address the problem. Despite the absence of homelessness within the SDGs, some Member States are making progress to prevent and end homelessness, and have chosen to reflect on this in their VNRs.



Our Approach

We reviewed every VNR submitted in 2024 or 2025. Thirty-six VNRs were submitted in 2024 and 35 were submitted in 2025, totaling 71 VNRs being part of this review. We used the find tool to search each document for instances of the word “homeless”, “homelessness”, or some variation thereof.

Alternate search terms were “rough sleeping”, “rough sleeper”, “beggar”, “squatter”, “destitute”, “vagrant”, “street sleeper”, “pavement dweller”, “roofless”, “street people”, “street dweller”, “situación de la calle”, “condición de la calle”, “sin hogar”, and “sinhogarismo”. English language VNRs were analyzed whenever they were available.

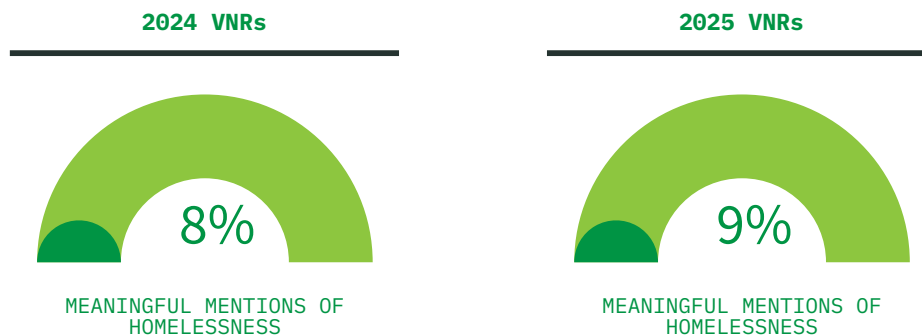
Findings

Looking at the 2024 and 2025 VNRs, we tracked mentions of homelessness, defined as simply whether the word “homeless”, “homelessness”, or a regional variation thereof appeared in the document. In 2024, only 19% of VNRs mentioned homelessness. The number in 2025 was higher, at 34% (Table 1).

Table 1. Mentions of homelessness in Voluntary National Reviews, 2024-25

Year	Total VNRs	VNRs mentioning homelessness	VNRs meaningfully reporting on homelessness
2024	36	7	3
2025	35	12	3

We also broke mentions of homelessness down into two categories: mere mentions of homelessness and meaningful reporting. We defined meaningful reporting as a mention of homelessness along with quantitative data reporting on rates of homelessness. By this definition, only 3 of the VNRs submitted in 2024 meaningfully reported on homelessness – Austria, Brazil, and Laos, making up only about 8% of VNRs in 2024. The situation was similar in 2025 with only 3 countries meaningfully reporting on homelessness in their VNRs, those being the Czech Republic, Finland and the Seychelles, making up 9% of VNRs that year.



This data shows that some member states are meaningfully reporting on homelessness, despite the absence of a target or indicator. Preventing and ending homelessness is clearly central to meeting the SDG goals, however the lack of a specific target or indicator is dissuading most countries from reporting on progress. Countries are given a substantial amount of flexibility in how they write their VNRs, with the UN’s handbook for the preparation of VNRs stating: “The guidelines make clear that each country will decide on the scope of their review and the format in which they wish to present their findings.”

Countries are not bound to present their VNRs in strict adherence to the format of the 17 goals and 169 targets, and many countries take this opportunity to emphasize the goals that are most relevant to their national context or generate their own national frameworks that only loosely correspond to the SDGs. For instance, many countries in Oceania, such as Samoa, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu center their reports around their own national development frameworks that emphasize their national concerns, such as preservation of the local culture and responsible stewardship of the environment. They include the SDGs in their review, but the SDGs are interpreted through the lens of their unique national contexts. Similarly, member states prioritizing homelessness at the national level can find areas where their priorities and the SDGs intersect. **In the following subsections we reflect on the three ways in which meaningful reporting of homelessness has been included in VNRs.**

Reporting on Homelessness Under: Leave No One Behind

One method some member states used to report on homelessness is under the heading of “Leave No One Behind”. Leave no one behind is a core principle meant to guide the implementation of the SDGs. Writing on the idea for the Joint SDG Fund, Nenad Rava and Lisa Kurbiel state: “Leave no one behind” (LNOB) is the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

It represents the unequivocal commitment of all UN Member States to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and of humanity as a whole.” Looking at the member states who have meaningfully reported on homelessness in their 2024/25 VNRs, the two reporting under the LNOB header are Brazil and the Czech Republic. Brazil uses LNOB to meaningfully look at which Brazilians are being left behind in the push for sustainable development, which includes an increasing population experiencing homelessness. The Czech Republic takes a similar strategy as Brazil, using the LNOB heading to report various statistics related to social equality, including people at risk of poverty, representation of women in various political bodies, and number of people experiencing homelessness.



Reporting on Homelessness Under: Sustainable Development Goal 11

The SDG with the strongest tie to homelessness is SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. Finland and Austria both report on homelessness under SDG 11. Austria does not tie homelessness to any particular target, but Finland connects homelessness to SDG 11.1 which states “By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums”.

This target is not generally interpreted as a call to end homelessness specifically, but the target of ensuring quality housing for all does imply a future without homelessness. Finland has long been a global leader in the mission to end homelessness and one of the countries that has most successfully implemented the Housing First approach on a national level. The data that different VNRs present and the programs they focus on when reporting on

SDG 11.1 is very heterogeneous, ranging from the proportion of the population living in slums/inadequate housing, to the proportion of the population with access to basic sanitation services, to the proportion of the population overburdened by housing costs. Finland’s choice to focus on homelessness is a reflection of Finland’s national priorities, and is still in alignment with target 11.1.



Reporting on Homelessness Under:

Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 13

In addition to SDG 11, countries have found other pathways to including homelessness in their VNRs. Laos includes homelessness reporting under SDG 1.5 and 13.1, reporting rates of homelessness in response to natural disasters. Seychelles also reports on homelessness under SDG 1, with no specific target.

Ending Homelessness

through The Sustainable Development Goals

<p>1 Ending homelessness is key in ending poverty</p> 	<p>2 The homeless are one of the most food insecure populations in the world</p> 	<p>3 Homeless individuals are more likely to be exposed to health threats</p> 	<p>4 Education prevents homelessness throughout an individual's life</p> 
<p>5 Homelessness presents unique and difficult challenges for women and gender minorities</p> 	<p>6 Without a home it is often difficult to access necessities such as clean water</p> 	<p>7 Clean energy = less climate impact = less natural disasters = less displaced people</p> 	<p>8 Without a home many struggle to obtain decent work and achieve professional goals</p> 
<p>9 Improved infrastructure includes adequate housing for all</p> 	<p>10 Homelessness is the most visible sign of the growing economic and social inequalities that must end</p> 	<p>11 Ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services, and upgrade slums</p> 	
<p>12 Responsible production means producing housing for all</p> 	<p>13 Victims of climate disasters can become homeless as a result</p> 	<p>14 Access to marine resources creates economic independence</p> 	<p>15 The Amazon is home to many indigenous communities and should be protected</p> 
<p>16 The ongoing criminalization of the homeless is a threat to our peace, justice, and strong institutions</p> 	<p>17 It will take the effort of the United Nations, Member States, Private Sector and Civil Society to end homelessness</p> 		

by Jo Padgett Herz

Conclusion

Our research on homelessness and the VNRs demonstrates that while current rates of reporting are alarmingly low, there are member states who are successfully using the VNRs and SDGs to report on homelessness. In these cases, the choice to report on homelessness is a reflection of national priorities and political will within these states. There are two main lessons from this report.

First, member States can strengthen VNR reporting on homelessness by making use of the flexibility already built into the SDG framework. While homelessness is not explicitly referenced in the SDGs, it has been reported under several targets—such as 11.1, 1.3, and 10.2—and also under Leave No One Behind. Second, there is clearly a need for homelessness to be specifically included in the post-2030 framework.

Homelessness requires a dedicated indicator for the same reason extreme poverty is tracked separately from overall poverty – it represents the most extreme form of housing exclusion.

The power of the global goals lies in how they can direct attention and resources to a specific problem, as well as how they promote international collaboration, providing all member states with a framework to work together in tackling global issues. Current international efforts to end homelessness would greatly benefit by an agreed upon definition and methodology that full inclusion in the next set of SDGs could provide.