



## PRESS RELEASE

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### On World Homeless Day 2020, Housing and Land Rights Network Reiterates its Call for **Adequate Housing for Homeless Persons**

On the occasion of **World Habitat Day 2020** (5 October) and **World Homeless Day** (10 October), **Housing and Land Rights Network** reiterates its call for adequate housing and social protection for all those living in homelessness and insecure conditions. Fulfilment of the human right to adequate housing has always been key to the realization of multiple human rights. The coronavirus pandemic/COVID-19 has heightened the importance of adequate housing as a key determinant of health and life, while stressing the urgency to provide adequate housing for all, especially the most marginalized, excluded, and discriminated.

Basic health directives to prevent transmission of COVID-19 – ‘stay at home, ensure adequate distancing, and wash hands frequently’ – cannot be followed by those living in extreme poverty and inadequate housing. People experiencing homelessness already suffer from high mortality rates on account of their extreme destitution, malnutrition, and precarious living conditions. During this pandemic, when “[housing has become the frontline defence](#),” they face a disproportionate risk to their lives not only from the coronavirus but also from lockdown-induced loss of livelihoods and income. Those living in shelters face increased threats from overcrowded living conditions and the lack of adequate space, sanitation, and hygiene. The approaching winter in the northern hemisphere, including in India, further compounds risks to the health and lives of homeless persons.

Independent experts and civil society organizations estimate that urban India has a homeless population of at least 4 million people, of which 150,000–200,000 live in the capital city of Delhi. Incidents of [forced eviction without rehabilitation during the pandemic](#) have added to this number. Rural homelessness is more concealed and thus not addressed. During the nationwide pandemic-induced [lockdown](#), people living in homelessness experienced food scarcity, a severe cash crunch, forced relocation to temporary shelters, loss of personal belongings, and increased police harassment. Even after the easing of lockdown restrictions, not much has changed for the homeless population that continues to struggle for basic services, housing, and the right to live with dignity.

On 2 October 2019, on the occasion of Mahatma Gandhi’s 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary and World Homeless Day 2019, Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) launched an intensified **Campaign on Adequate Housing for the Homeless**. The Campaign focused on consolidating demands of persons living in homelessness and amplifying their voices for the fulfilment of their human right to adequate housing. State response to homelessness in India has been limited to the provision of shelters, which are only a temporary solution. While shelters are required to meet the emergency needs of certain vulnerable groups, they are not a durable solution for the majority of the working homeless population. Through sustained interactions with homeless persons over the last two decades, HLRN has found that their clear demand is for **permanent and secure housing**; for a space that people can call **home**.

Over the last year, HLRN carried out over 30 public meetings, extensive consultations, and several group discussions with different constituencies of the homeless, reaching out to about 12,000 people. Through the Campaign, homeless persons submitted a charter of their demands to the Delhi government, a petition signed by over 1,000 people, and postcards—using images drawn by homeless children of their ideal ‘home’—to the Prime Minister of India, the Union Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs, and the Chief Minister and Chief Secretary of Delhi. During the pandemic-induced lockdown, HLRN helped convey urgent demands of homeless persons to the central and state governments and also assisted with direct relief in the form of dry ration and cooked meals through our community kitchens at Mori Gate and Yamuna Khadar. Our relief efforts reached over 100,000 homeless people between March and July 2020.

Given the approaching winter and the serious potential threat of the spread of the pandemic in closed and overcrowded shelter homes, HLRN in consultation with Delhi’s homeless community, has prepared and submitted suggestions for a Winter Plan to the Delhi government (*See Annexure*).

Based on continued consultations with homeless people, **on this World Homeless Day, HLRN puts forth the following recommendations** to ensure that persons living in homelessness are protected during the pandemic and are provided short-term and long-term housing options, on a priority basis:

### **Urgent – For Winter**

1. Conduct a rapid assessment of Delhi’s homeless population to understand their needs and determine the exact shelter requirements for the winter; set up additional porta-cabins, permanent shelters, and weather-proof tents accordingly. Vacant government buildings located near homeless clusters should be converted into permanent shelters. As far as possible, separate, secure tents should be provided to each family living on the streets that does not have access to permanent shelters. Utilize allocated funds under the National Urban Livelihoods Mission – Shelter for Urban Homeless scheme.
2. Ensure provision of essential amenities, including water, sanitation, sanitizers, hygiene, heating, and masks, and implement adequate distancing norms in all existing and new shelters. Beds and separate bedding should be provided to prevent the spread of infection.
3. Ensure adequate medical facilities and mobile health vans in all shelters. Create ‘recovery homes’ and ‘quarantine centres’ for people with illnesses, including COVID-19. Regularly conduct health camps in homeless clusters that do not have access to Primary Health Centres. Ensure special attention to women’s health needs, including reproductive health.
4. Respect the human rights and dignity of people living in homelessness. Ensure that no one is forced to move into shelters against their will.

### **Adequate Housing**

5. Provide adequate housing to all homeless people on a ‘**Housing First**’ basis and prioritize them for housing allotment in the Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana (Chief Minister’s Housing Scheme) and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Prime Minister’s Housing Scheme). Develop a comprehensive housing rights policy for this purpose.
6. Provide housing options along a ‘continuum of housing’ including hostels for single working men and women; short-stay homes for survivors of domestic violence; recovery homes for those with health issues, including chemical dependency; collective/group housing for persons with disabilities, older persons, single mothers, and others who do not want to live by themselves; and, access to rental and ownership housing with access to adequate finance.
7. Include homeless people’s suggestions in the development of the proposed Affordable Rental Housing Complexes and ensure they have access to them. Check private sector involvement to guarantee affordability for all.

8. Given the pandemic-induced economic crisis, facilitate free/highly subsidized access to housing options for those living in homelessness and evicted/displaced persons.
9. Impose a national moratorium on evictions and demolitions of homes of low-income communities. Continued forced evictions, including through the pandemic, have rendered thousands of people homeless across India.

**Housing First** is an approach that offers permanent, affordable housing as quickly as possible for individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and then provides the supportive services and connections to the community-based supports people need to keep their housing and avoid returning to homelessness. Several countries have succeeded in reducing the incidence of homelessness by adopting this approach.

### **Food Security**

10. Provide ration cards to all homeless people to enable them to access subsidized food grains under the Public Distribution System.
11. Establish community kitchens to provide nutritious food to persons living on the streets who are not able to access food on account of the loss of livelihoods and income.
12. Distribute free tea during the winter to homeless people living in and outside shelters.

### **Employment Guarantee and Livelihood Support**

13. Provide 300 days of guaranteed work for people living in homelessness or provide unemployment allowances to prevent destitution and hunger during this economic and public health crisis.
14. Provide interest-free loans to homeless people who want to establish small and medium enterprises.
15. Implement the National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM) in all shelters. Conduct skill-development, livelihood-training and job-placement camps.

### **Other Social Protection Measures**

16. Provide pensions to older persons, persons with disabilities, and widows living in homelessness. Ensure that homeless persons are not denied access to existing entitlements and government schemes due to the lack of a permanent residential address.
17. Ensure that homeless persons have access to community toilets free of cost and also at night.

### **Special Needs of Children in Street Situations**

18. Provide free food and milk to all children living in homelessness.
19. Ensure their protection from violence and abuse, and provide adequate counselling.
20. Assist homeless children in accessing online education by providing them with smart devices and free data/internet. Facilitate the school admission process and ensure rehabilitation of children in street situations.

The pandemic has made our collective call for adequate housing for persons living in homelessness in India, all the more urgent. While supporting the slogan of UN-HABITAT this World Habitat Day for ‘Housing for All’, HLRN would like to reiterate the need for **adequate and affordable housing for all**, especially the most marginalized communities, which include homeless persons.

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## ANNEXURE

### Suggestions for the Winter Plan for Persons Living in Homelessness in Delhi:

**November 2020 to March 2021**

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Persons living in homelessness face severe challenges resulting from the absence of a safe and secure home and from living in precarious conditions. These include violence, poor health, malnutrition, and extreme deprivation and destitution. Delhi's harsh climatic conditions further exacerbate their vulnerabilities. The summer, monsoon, and winter seasons are very difficult for them to endure. However, the winter months from November to March present unique challenges on account of Delhi's biting cold, which is insufferable for those living on the streets and presents severe risks to their lives.

While the Delhi government, in particular the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB), undertakes significant efforts to accommodate homeless persons living on the streets in additional temporary tents during the winter, these are not sufficient or adequate to cater to the unique needs and demands of the city's entire homeless population.

This year, given the unprecedented public health crisis presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the existing shelters and tents would not be able to accommodate even the population that they normally do (about 18,000 persons). In order **to protect the health of homeless persons**—who already face high vulnerability to contracting the coronavirus on account of their low levels of nutrition and immunity—and **to prevent any outbreak of the pandemic in shelters, adequate physical distancing norms and hygiene measures would need to be ensured in each permanent shelter, porta cabin, and tent.** This would require creating additional shelters and emergency housing provisions for Delhi's homeless population for the coming winter months – at least from 1 November 2020 to 31 March 2021.

Since the commencement of the pandemic in India, Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) has been highlighting the need for special measures to check the spread of COVID-19 among homeless persons and other-inadequately housed persons.<sup>1</sup> We have been communicating regularly with the Delhi government through the pandemic, providing suggestions, and alerting the government on urgent issues and concerns of homeless people. We appreciate the efforts of the Delhi government to provide free meals in shelters and the creation of hunger relief centres during the lockdown. This has helped avert the crisis of hunger for those living in shelters.

The basic global health directive to protect oneself from COVID-19 is to stay home, maintain adequate physical distancing, and wash hands frequently. However, this is impossible for persons who have no 'home' to stay in and for those who are in shelters without sufficient space and access

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<sup>1</sup> See, 'Need for Special Measures to Check Spread of COVID-19 among Homeless and Other Inadequately-housed Persons, Press Release, Housing and Land Rights Network, 13 March 2020. Available at: [https://www.hlrn.org.in/documents/Press\\_Release\\_COVID19.pdf](https://www.hlrn.org.in/documents/Press_Release_COVID19.pdf)

to water and other sanitation services. They are, thus, among the most vulnerable to contracting the coronavirus and spreading it.

Given the acute public health emergency resulting from this pandemic and the urgent need to protect the health and lives of the city's most marginalized and vulnerable population this winter, HLRN, in consultation with Delhi's homeless community, has prepared this human rights-based winter plan for immediate implementation.

**In the face of this pandemic, a lack of access to adequate housing is a potential death sentence for people living in homelessness and puts the broader population at continued risk.**

Homelessness, including during a crisis, and irrespective of nationality or legal status, is a prima facie violation of human rights. The core protections provided by the right to housing, as well as the right to health and the right to food, are so fundamental to human dignity and the preservation of life that they can never be suspended, even in a state of emergency.

~ UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, 'COVID-19 Guidance Note: Protecting those living in Homelessness,' April 2020

In a 'rapid assessment of the homeless population' conducted in 2014, DUSIB estimated the number of homeless persons in the city to be 16,760, whereas the Census of India 2011 enumerated 47,076 homeless persons in Delhi.<sup>1</sup> Independent estimates and experts working in Delhi, however, estimate that there are around 150,000–200,000 persons, including women, children, transgender persons, older persons, and persons with disabilities living in homelessness in Delhi.

Though Delhi has the largest number of shelters for homeless persons in the country, there is still an acute deficit of shelters. Even if we use Census 2011 data figures, which are a gross underestimation, shelters in Delhi currently cater to about only 36 per cent of the city's homeless population. The majority is thus forced to live out on the streets and in other precarious locales. A large number of homeless persons, especially families, are also not comfortable staying in the existing shelters because of the lack of sufficient space, safety, security, and privacy, especially for women and girls. For many people, the absence of shelters in close proximity to their sources of livelihoods forces them to live out on the streets in inadequate conditions. Interventions, including for the winter, thus, need to cater to the large and diverse homeless population of the city.

A recent study by Centre for Policy Research states that on average, DUSIB only reserves 18 square feet of space per resident, which is less than the 50 square feet requirement under the National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM) – Shelters for Urban Homeless scheme. The study further states that even during the lockdown period when the government set up additional, 'temporary' tent shelters, shelter capacity increased from 17,070 to 18,478 residents. Even with this additional capacity, 61 per cent of people (2011 Census data) were left out. It also claims that using the proposed NULM guideline of one shelter for 100 residents in each jurisdiction across the city with a total population of 100,000 residents, 30,288 people, or 64.4 per cent of Delhi's homeless population would be excluded.<sup>2</sup>

This winter plan provides recommendations for homeless people in Delhi who are already living in shelters as well as those living on the streets who do not have access to shelters.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Assessing Shelters across South Delhi's Changing Spaces and Moving People,' Centre for Policy Research, September 2020. Available at: <https://indiahousingreport.in/outputs/opinion/assessing-shelters-across-south-delhis-changing-spaces-and-moving-people/>

## A. Need for Additional Shelters before the Onset of Winter

- A rapid assessment survey is required to assess the shortfall of existing shelters if adequate distancing norms are to be followed in each shelter. We have received reports from various shelter caretakers that distancing norms are not being followed in shelters. This is imperative to prevent the spread of the coronavirus in shelters.
- A survey/assessment is also required of people living on the streets who need and want to move to temporary shelters for the winter months.
- Based on the needs assessment and mapping, vacant government buildings, including community halls and other vacant spaces, near areas of concentration of homeless persons, should be converted into shelters with adequate facilities and safety norms.
- In case vacant permanent buildings/rooms/halls are not available close to where homeless people are concentrated, portable (porta) cabins could be set up on vacant public land, including in parks.
- Consultations with land-owning agencies should be held to ascertain availability of vacant land and buildings/spaces/structures for establishing homeless shelters. Short-term lease arrangements could be considered with land-owning agencies in light of the urgent situation.
- Tents, such as the fire-resistant tents used in Delhi last winter, should be set up in the vicinity of existing DUSIB shelters, in order to accommodate all residents with adequate distancing norms in place.
- Where possible, set up adequate tents – one per family – in homeless clusters and areas where homeless people live on the streets.
- All newly-created temporary and permanent shelters must ensure adequate living conditions, proper facilities and hygiene, and implementation of health and safety guidelines to prevent overcrowding and the spread of COVID-19 [details provided below]. Each shelter should respect the right of all residents to live with dignity.

While the intention of the Delhi government during the lockdown to provide emergency/temporary shelter for homeless persons living on the streets was positive, the process by which people were forcefully rounded up—without time to collect their belongings—and taken to schools/community centres was problematic. This resulted in severe anxiety and distress among the community as well as loss of essential items, clothing, and mobile phone chargers. In some instances, families were separated without any means of communication with their members. Furthermore, the living conditions in these temporary shelters were far from adequate – people did not have adequate bedding, water, space, and access to basic services. Such ‘forced shelterization’ violates fundamental rights of homeless persons, including to information, consent, and dignity. Housing and Land Rights Network urges the Delhi government **not to forcefully move anyone into shelters**, to ensure adequate **consultation, participation, and consent** of all people. Also, all emergency/temporary shelters must be inhabitable with basic services and facilities before those willing to live in them are relocated.

The table below provides an estimate, derived by HLRN, of homeless persons in areas where shelters are required urgently and before the onset of winter.

**Estimated Number of People Living in Homelessness and Areas of Concentration<sup>3</sup>**

	<b>Name of the Area</b>	<b>Approximate Number of Persons*</b>	<b>Characteristics of the Constituency</b>
<b>I. Central Delhi</b>			
1.	Asaf Ali Road	800	Single Men
2.	Idgah	100	Single Men
3.	Kamla Market	300	Single Men
4.	Minto Road	100	Families
5.	Meena Bazaar	200	Families
6.	Rajendra Place	150	Families and Single Men
7.	Yamuna Pushta	700	Single Men
<b>II. East Delhi</b>			
8.	Anand Vihar	200	Single Men
9.	Ghazipur (Paper Market)	200	Families
10.	Jagat Puri	100	Families
11.	Jheel (Geeta Colony)	150	Families
12.	Kakoodoorma	100	Families
13.	Laxmi Nagar	150	Families
14.	Nirman Vihar	80	Families and Single Men
15.	Shahdara	150	Single Men
<b>III. North Delhi</b>			
16.	Azadpur Mandi	300	Single Men
17.	Britannia Chowk	100	Families
18.	Pul Mithai	100	Single Men
19.	Yamuna Bazaar	400	Single Men
<b>IV. Northeast Delhi</b>			
20.	Shastri Park	100	Single Men
<b>V. Northwest Delhi</b>			
21.	Kali Mandir (Rohini)	150	Families
<b>VI. South Delhi</b>			
22.	Hauz Khas	60	Families
23.	Modi Mill	300	Families
24.	Moolchand	100	Families
<b>VII. Southeast Delhi</b>			
25.	Barapullah	100	Single Men
26.	Lajpat Nagar	100	17 Families
27.	Lodhi Road	100	Families
28.	Nehru Place	150	Families
29.	Nizamuddin	350	Families and Single Men
30.	Sarai Kale Khan	100	Families and Single Men
31.	Sarita Vihar	150	Families
<b>VIII. Southwest Delhi</b>			
32.	Near All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS)	1,000	Families and Single Men

<sup>3</sup> Figures obtained from this preliminary assessment are approximate; actual figures are thus likely to be much higher.

33.	Bhikaji Cama Place	50	Families
34.	Moti Bagh	50	Families
35.	Sarojini Nagar	200	Families
<b>IX. West Delhi</b>			
36.	Dholi Pyau	100	Single Men
37.	Hari Nagar	100	Single Men
38.	Moti Nagar	150	Families and Single Men
39.	Peeragarhi	100	Single Men
40.	Raghubir Nagar	200	Families
41.	Raja Garden	50	Families
42.	Subash Mod/Mor	100	Families
43.	Uttam Nagar	100	Single Men

Source of data: Rapid assessment by Housing and Land Rights Network (September 2020)

## **B. Need for Improved Facilities and Services in Existing and New Shelters and for People Living on the Streets**

### **Adequate Space, Hygiene, and Services in Shelters**

- Provide adequate and clean blankets, mattresses, bed sheets, quilts, and pillows in all permanent and temporary shelters. Currently, blankets are not reserved for users but are shared by different people. This promotes the spread of infection and disease. In order to reserve use of sheets and blankets for one user, one way could be to provide beds in shelters and allocate a specific bed/mattress per person – that will be used regularly by that person.
- Ensure regular disinfection and cleaning of all shelters (temporary and permanent), toilets, bathrooms, bedding, common areas, and utilities.
- Ensure adequate water supply for drinking, bathing, and washing clothes and other personal items. During the winter months, provide facilities for warm water in each shelter.
- Provide adequate heating facilities through electric and gas heaters in each shelter.
- Guarantee a minimum distance of 2–3 metres between each person/bed in shelters.<sup>4</sup> If possible, persons could be requested to sleep head to toe.
- Ensure adequate ventilation in all shelters.
- Establish sufficient and functional toilets with adequate water and sanitation facilities and provide regular and sufficient cleaning. Set up clean, portable toilets close to tent shelters, so that all homeless persons have access to sanitation facilities. Maintain safety, cleanliness, and hygiene in all toilets. In case sanitation facilities cannot be set up near temporary tents, facilitate access of homeless persons to public toilets and sanitation facilities in other shelters.
- In family shelters, provide privacy and safety by creating partitions for each family and improving the design of such shelters. A large number of families in Delhi do not move into shelters because of the lack of privacy and safety and the absence of storage facilities.
- Provide information on shelters, including the location and capacity, to the homeless community through advertisements, oral announcements, and other modes, in local languages.

<sup>4</sup> See: 'People Experiencing Homelessness, People at Increased Risk,' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, August 2020. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/homelessness.html>; and, 'Actions for Consideration in the Care and Protection of Vulnerable Groups from COVID-19,' Interim Guidelines, World Health Organization, May 2020. Available at: [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/wpro---documents/emergency/covid19/iris/wpr-dse-2020-021-eng.pdf?sfvrsn=8c759a9b\\_2&download=true](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/wpro---documents/emergency/covid19/iris/wpr-dse-2020-021-eng.pdf?sfvrsn=8c759a9b_2&download=true)

## **Healthcare and Medical Services**

- Provide oximeters and thermometers in each shelter. All shelter caretakers should be given adequate training to use and interpret the diagnosis obtained from these devices.
- Ensure adequate and sufficient supply of soap, sanitizer, disinfectant, and, masks. Provide new masks to all homeless persons at regular intervals.
- Ensure comprehensive First-Aid kits in every shelter.
- Provide adequate vector control devices/facilities in each shelter.
- Ensure that Mobile Medical Health vans visit all shelters (permanent and temporary) on a bi-weekly basis, at least.

## **Health Services for Residents of Shelters and those Living on the Streets**

- Conduct regular health camps in homeless clusters, especially where people do not have access to Primary Health Centres.
- Ensure free and regular COVID-19 testing for homeless persons in shelters as well as those on the streets. Identity documents and mobile numbers must not be made mandatory for conducting COVID-19 tests of homeless persons, as many people do not have these. In the absence of government-issued identity documents accept the cards issued by shelter management agencies as valid documentation.
- Designate 'isolation wards' for homeless persons who test positive or exhibit symptoms of COVID-19. Also create separate bathrooms and toilet facilities for persons in isolation.
- Ensure health insurance for all homeless persons, including for treatment of COVID-19.
- Provide counselling and behavioural health support for people with COVID-19 as well as those with chemical dependencies or mental illnesses.
- Prioritize medical treatment of older persons, children, pregnant/lactating women, infants and persons with chronic illnesses (including respiratory illnesses).
- Provide mental-health services and psycho-social counselling to all homeless persons, including those living in shelters.

## **Provision of Food and Measures to Uphold the Human Right to Food**

We welcome the decision of the Delhi government to provide three free meals in all shelters until the end of winter. We would like to also propose the distribution of tea in shelters and also to homeless people living on the streets, especially during the winter. In addition, we would like to suggest that the government:

- Undertake efforts to also provide free meals to homeless persons living in tents/temporary shelters set up during the winter. As established in the Supreme Court judgment in PUCL v. Union of India, adequate nutrition and calorie intake is critical to saving lives of homeless persons, especially in the cold.
- Establish community kitchens in areas of high concentration of homeless people to ensure the distribution of free or subsidized nutritious food to homeless persons who do not live in shelters but cannot afford to buy food on account of the acute financial crisis resulting from the pandemic and related loss of livelihoods. This would also help build their immunity and prevent them from falling ill and losing their lives.
- Provide free milk to homeless children and pregnant women to ensure their adequate nutrition.
- Ensure the provision of ration cards to homeless persons, including those living on the streets, to enable them to access subsidized essential food grains and supplies.

## Special Needs of Homeless Children

- Collaborate with Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) and use their survey data to provide homeless children/children living in street situations with adequate shelter, education, food, water, and healthcare. Children living on their own require care and counselling on a regular basis. The pandemic has exacerbated mental health issues that need to be addressed.
- Implement the High Court of Delhi order to ensure that homeless children living in shelters and on the streets can access online education, including through the provision of free smart devices and mobile data connections/Wi-Fi.

## Emergency Protocols

- Ensure that numbers of emergency services, including ambulances and important helplines, are displayed at prominent places in shelters and are in local languages.
- Display visual material on prevention and treatment of COVID-19 in all shelters. This information should also be disseminated among the homeless population living outside shelters too including in appropriate ways for those who are not literate.
- Expand the scope of the Control Room and Helpline Number set up by DUSIB to provide emergency assistance and support around the clock.
- Ensure comprehensive protocols to deal with emergencies, including health emergencies, are prepared in each shelter, in consultation with caretakers and Shelter Management Agencies. Such protocols should include contact details of the nearest hospitals and emergency services such as ambulances and the police.

## Protecting Rights of Shelter Caretakers

- Ensure that all shelter caretakers are considered as ‘frontline workers’ and provided health insurance under the scheme announced by the Delhi government.
- Uphold the right to work of shelter caretakers, including fixing work hours, paying adequate wages, and providing them with a weekly day off. Ensure that ‘relievers’ are appointed so that regular caretakers can take a break.
- Provide adequate protection equipment including masks, sanitizer, disinfectant, and soap, in order to protect their health and safety.
- Employ only female supervisors and caretakers in shelters designated for women.
- Ensure that only women police officials/constables visit women’s shelters.
- Conduct regular training workshops and provide educational material related to COVID-19 for caretakers.

## Other Social Protection Measures

- As announced by the Delhi government during the national lockdown, measures to provide social security and pension to homeless persons should be continued. Special care must be taken of older persons living on their own.<sup>5</sup>
- Provide all residents of DUSIB shelters with ‘Shelter User Identity Cards.’ These should be recognized as a valid form of official identification. Any directives given to create and

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<sup>5</sup> For more information, see, *India’s COVID-19 Lockdown: Human Rights Assessment and Compilation of State Relief Measures*, Housing and Land Rights Network, New Delhi, May 2020. Available at: [https://hlrn.org.in/documents/HLRN\\_COVID19\\_State\\_Response\\_India.pdf](https://hlrn.org.in/documents/HLRN_COVID19_State_Response_India.pdf)

maintain databases of homeless persons, including those in shelters and temporary buildings, should not result in the violation of the right to privacy.

- Provide disability pension and insurance to persons with disabilities.
- Conduct skill-training workshops for homeless persons in shelters and take measures to link them with job portals and other livelihood opportunities, as most people have lost their livelihoods as a result of the pandemic and lockdown and are not able to find work.
- As recommended earlier by HLRN, the Delhi government could consider initiating a pilot project to provide a Universal Basic Income to all homeless persons. This would greatly help in preventing hunger, ill health, and destitution during these difficult times. It would also set a positive precedent for the rest of the country.

### **Monitoring and Information**

- Create a Monitoring Committee to supervise the functioning of shelters and the quality of services provided. As stated before by DUSIB, this Committee could include the DUSIB Chief Executive Officer, Executive Members, representatives from Shelter Management Agencies, non-government organizations, officials from the Delhi Jal Board, Health Department, Municipal Corporations, and the Police. The Committee should undertake frequent inspections of shelters and meet regularly to discuss issues of concern, especially during the pandemic.

### **C. Conclusion**

The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the critical importance of housing as a key determinant of health and life. The absence of safe and secure housing can result in the loss of life. This has also been emphasized by United Nations experts on the right to housing.<sup>6</sup> This plan presents suggestions for the immediate winter as the potential crisis of overcrowding and insufficient shelters could lead to a grave human rights emergency in the city. We would also like to urge the Delhi government to develop a long-term plan to end homelessness in the city. This can be done only through adequate investment in housing for homeless persons using the ‘Housing First’ approach that has been adopted in many countries. This is the only solution to ensure the dignity of Delhi’s working poor and to enable people to live in safety and security while protecting their fundamental right to life.

Housing and Land Rights Network is committed to working for the human rights of all those living in homelessness and also to working with the Delhi government in this endeavour. We thank the Delhi government for its consideration, efforts, and support.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> ‘COVID-19 Guidance Note: Protecting Those Living in Homelessness,’ UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, April 2020. Available at: [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Housing/SR\\_housing\\_COVID-19\\_guidance\\_homeless.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Housing/SR_housing_COVID-19_guidance_homeless.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> For more information, please contact us at: [contact@hlrn.org.in](mailto:contact@hlrn.org.in)