On the front line:
Libraries contribute to a sustainable future supporting people experiencing homelessness

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Abstract:
Scientific literature regarding the relationship between climate, sustainability and poverty suggests that the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 1 (SDG1), End poverty in all its forms everywhere, *need to be at the center of all other targets. This goal is directly and indirectly related to all other SDGs.*

Homelessness is an extreme form of poverty and a fact of life in all countries of the world, regardless of the level of development of their economic or governance systems. Libraries are an important part of the organization network that can empower people experiencing homelessness and provide them equal access to information, skills, and knowledge. Librarians who work with people who are homeless need extra education and support.

Therefore, IFLA Section for Library Services to People with Special Needs is developing the Guidelines for Library Services to People who are Experiencing Homelessness. The Guidelines will help libraries plan and organize quality and adequate services for this vulnerable social group.

An important step in developing the Guidelines is collecting examples of library services to people who are experiencing homelessness worldwide. In this paper, a few representative examples of best practices from around the world will be presented.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, library services for people experiencing homelessness, examples of best practices, Guidelines for Library Services to People who are Experiencing Homelessness

Homelessness as a global human rights crisis

In her latest report to the UN General Assembly's Third Committee (2015) – the Organization's main body dealing with social, humanitarian and cultural issues, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to housing, Leilani Farha, recognized homelessness as a human rights crisis.

It is occurring in all socioeconomic contexts – in developed, emerging and developing economies, in prosperity as well as in austerity. She pointed to the social stigma, discrimination, violence and criminalization experienced by those who are experiencing homelessness.

The report offers an overview of the most important facts on the homeless population worldwide, including recommendations on further steps needed in the resolution of this growing social phenomenon.

A three-dimensional human rights definition of homelessness

Definitions of homelessness adopted by international agencies, governments, researchers or civil society vary widely, depending on language, socioeconomic conditions, cultural norms, the groups affected and the purpose for which homelessness is being defined.

The Special Rapporteur proposes the following three-dimensional approach anchored in human rights:

    (a) The first dimension addresses the absence of home – both the absence of the material aspect of minimally adequate housing and of the social aspect of a secure place to establish a family or social relationships and participate in community life;

    (b) The second dimension considers homelessness as a form of systemic discrimination and social exclusion, recognizing that being deprived of a home gives rise to a social identity through which "the homeless" is constituted as a social group subject to discrimination and stigmatization;

    (c) The third dimension recognizes those who are homeless as rights holders who are resilient in the struggle for survival and dignity. With a unique understanding of the systems that deny them their rights, homeless people must be recognized as central agents of the social transformation necessary for the realization of the right to adequate housing.

Interconnected causes of homelessness

Homelessness is caused by the interplay between individual circumstances and broader systemic factors. A human rights response to homelessness addresses both. It understands that homelessness may be linked to individual dynamics such as psychosocial disabilities, unexpected job loss, addictions or complex choices to become street–connected.

A major cause of homelessness is the failure of governments to respond to unique individual circumstances with compassion and respect for individual dignity. A human rights approach must also, however, address the overarching structural and institutional causes of homelessness – the cumulative effect of domestic policies, programmes and legislation, as well as international financial and development agreements that contribute to and create homelessness.

In her consultations, the Special Rapporteur found that inequality and the conditions that breed it are the most consistently identified causes of homelessness.

Homelessness and marginalized groups

Discrimination is both a cause and a consequence of homelessness. Some social groups are particularly exposed to the risk of homelessness.

Women – when women are widowed, separated or divorced, need to leave violent households or flee situations of armed conflict or natural disasters, or are evicted from their homes, they face significant risks of becoming homeless. Once homeless, women's experiences are acute. They are exposed to high rates of violence, including rape.

Children – homelessness among children and young people has reached critical proportions. Factors that push children into leaving home include parents' unemployment and poverty; family disintegration and parental abuse; parental drug and alcohol addictions; and being orphaned owing to HIV/AIDS, Ebola, armed conflict or natural disaster. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex young people are overrepresented in homeless populations in some countries and face additional stigmatization and social exclusion from their families and communities, and are more vulnerable to violence and more likely to be turned away from shelters.

Families with children –- they are at an increasing risk of homelessness as parents are deprived of income necessary for housing, and supply of affordable housing is depleted. Those families risk losing their children to public authorities for failing to provide adequate housing.

People on the move – especially international migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, are also at a significant risk of homelessness. Those groups suffer multiple discrimination and numerous obstacles in securing temporary or permanent housing. Migrants are consequently forced to settle in slums, shacks and derelict or unfinished buildings.

Indigenous peoples – homelessness amongst indigenous peoples caused by displacement from land and resources and the destruction of cultural identity.

Persons with disabilities – they are particularly vulnerable to homelessness. In all parts of the world, psychosocial disability can make it impossible for people to secure employment and earn a living to pay for housing. At the same time, many states do not ensure access to the community-based support that people with disabilities need.

Metrics of homelessness

States have an obligation to measure the extent of homelessness, disaggregated by gender, race, disability and other relevant characteristics, and to establish effective means of monitoring progress. As the world has not agreed on a single definition of homelessness, measurement methods are not uniform, which prevents the comparison of data from different states and obtaining precise numbers on the homeless population worldwide. A number of challenges exist with regards to measuring homelessness, including the risk of excluding marginalized groups that are not 'visibly' homeless.

The Rapporteur underlines the critical importance of qualitative evidence including for example, oral testimony, photographs, or videos. The focus of human rights-based measurement of homelessness should be on prevention and on addressing underlying causes, and qualitative information capturing actual experiences often reveals more about how to prevent or solve homelessness than do numbers alone.

In her recommendations, the UN Special Rapporteur emphasizes that homelessness is a phenomenon requiring urgent and immediate action by the international community and by all states. Homelessness strategies must be cross-sectoral, clearly allocate and coordinate responsibilities of all levels of government and address the structural causes of homelessness, including those that are particular to the needs of marginalized or vulnerable groups.

Homelessness and Sustainable Development Goals

Unfortunately, homelessness is absent from Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and has been rarely mentioned in the preparatory work for the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III). Habitat III will be the first global summit of the 21st century where housing and urban challenges will be in the spotlight. The Summit will be held in September 2016.

The report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to housing is of great significance because it has drawn the attention of the international community to the issue of homelessness and the obligation to eliminate homelessness by 2030 or earlier in a manner that upholds international human rights and target 11.1 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Although homelessness is primarily associated with target 11.1, the Special Rapporteur stresses that rapid global urbanization has resulted in an astonishing accumulation of wealth for a few, accompanied by increasing poverty for many. Homelessness is one of the least examined consequences of unabated inequality, unfair distribution of land and property and poverty occurring on a global scale.

The report Review of Targets for the Sustainable Development Goals: The Science Perspective (ICSU, ISSC, 2015) highlights that scientific literature regarding the relationship between climate, sustainability and poverty suggests that the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 1 (SDG1), *End poverty in all its forms everywhere,* need to be at the centre of all other targets. This goal is directly and indirectly related to all other SDGs, and in particular to increasingly important linkages between affordable housing and poverty.

SDG1 is a fundamental goal; the meeting of its targets is dependent on the meeting of most of the other SDGs. It is recommended that there is wording added in all other SDGs to express the need to prevent and avoid trade-offs between poverty and sustainability. Thus, this goal is directly and indirectly related to all other SDGs, but is especially dependent on immediate and substantial progress towards Goals 2 - *Zero hunger*, 3 - *Good health and well-being*, 4 - *Quality education*, 5 - *Gender equality*, 6 - *Clean water and sanitation*, 8 - *Decent work and economic growth*, 10 - *Reduced inequalities*, 13 - *Climate action*, 16 - *Peace, justice and strong institutions* and 17 - *Partnerships for the goals*.

The implementation of all these goals and ensuring that people experiencing homelessness are included in their implementation represent concrete steps towards eliminating homelessness by 2030 or earlier. Revitalizing global partnership is fundamental in the process

of meeting these goals. Libraries hold a significant place in this global partnership, as evidenced by examples of good practice of library services to people who are experiencing homelessnes*s* worldwide.

How libraries in the world contribute to sustainable future by supporting people experiencing homelessness

International context behind the Guidelines for Library Services to People who are Experiencing Homelessnes*s*

Lately, numerous important events have occurred that speak in favour of the awareness of the international community regarding the complexity of the issue of homelessness, and of its concrete steps taken towards the resolution of this problem. The 2015 *Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context* has already been mentioned. The obligation to implement SDGs, assumed by political leaders worldwide, commenced on the first day of 2016.

It is important to mention that the Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH) http://www.ighomelessness.org/ was established in 2014. IGH seeks to serve as a central hub to help support international efforts to address homelessness, guided by policy- and practice-focused research. One key aim of IGH is to build the 'infrastructure' required for key stakeholders across the globe to communicate effectively about the nature, causes and impacts of homelessness in their world regions, and to share promising approaches and interventions that may be transferable beyond their original sites (Busch-Geertsemaa,V., Culhaneb, D., Fitzpatrickc, S., 2016).

Since 2012, when it organised a satellite meeting in Tallinn, Estonia – *The Homeless and the Libraries - The Right to Information and Knowledge For All* http://www.ifla.org/node/6939*,* IFLA's Section for Library Services to People with Special Needs (LSN) has made numerous steps towards the compilation of *Guidelines for Library Services to People who are Experiencing Homelessness* http://www.ifla.org/node/9764*.* In February 2015, IFLA's Professional Committee gave a formal response to the proposal sent at the end of 2015 in which the Committee stated that the project is definitely in line with IFLA's goals and that they are encouraging further work.

The Guidelines are the library community's contribution to the resolution of the complex issue of homelessness worldwide, since this is the process requiring cross-sectoral, international, national and local co-operation based on different policies, laws and strategies. The Guidelines will help libraries gain an insight into the complexity of homelessness and to plan and organize quality and adequate services for this vulnerable social group.

An important step in developing the Guidelines was collecting examples of library services to people who are experiencing homelessness worldwide.

Overview of library services to people who are experiencing homelessness worldwide

In order to successfully resolve the issue of homelessness, it is necessary to establish a support network where libraries also have their place. Unfortunately, as the definitions of homelessness differ from country to country, so do the approaches to resolving the issue of

homelessness, and the support network is more or less developed, depending on the country (Bunic, S., 2015.).

To obtain a more complete picture of services provided to people who are experiencing homelessness worldwide, LSN designed a questionnaire which covered different aspects of service implementation: basic library information, information on the library type, programmes and services for people who are experiencing homelessness, targeted audience, policies, effects of policies, staff, professional support, collaboration, challenges, outcomes, communication and advocacy. The questionnaire was available for download on LSN's web-site http://www.ifla.org/node/9764, and could be submitted over a period of 5 months, from the beginning of November 2015 to the end of March 2016. It was available in English, Spanish and Russian. The call to participate in the collection of examples was sent through the wide network of professional contacts of LSN's members, and was also addressed to members of other IFLA sections related to this topic.

Examples from 49 libraries worldwide were collected: EU - 19, USA - 17, Australia - 4, Canada - 2, Chile – 2, Ecuador 1, India – 1, Japan – 1, Uganda – 1, Russia – 1 .

Figure 1. Collected examples of library services to people experiencing homelessness by countries

■	19
■	17
■	4
■	2
■	1
■	0
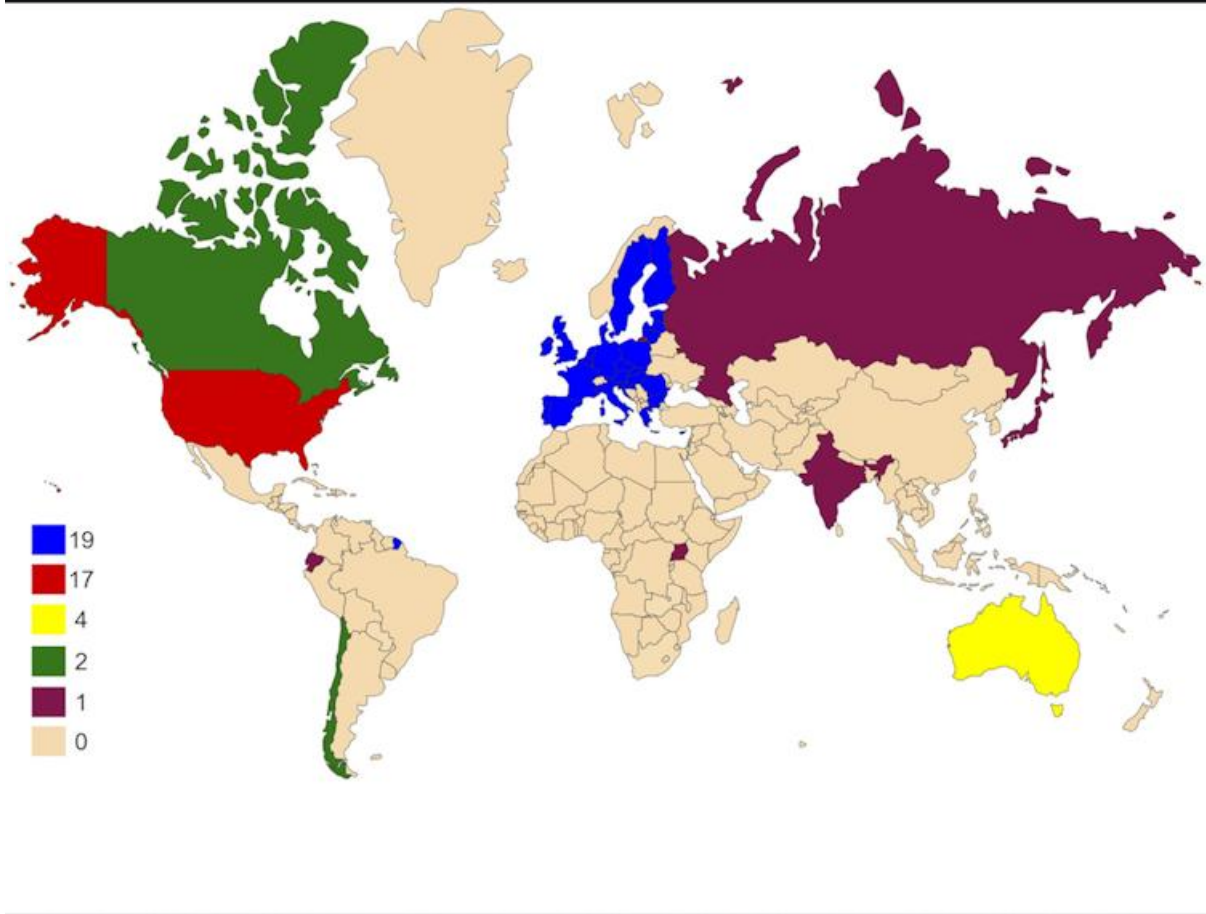
It is interesting to note that Figure 1 demonstrates conclusions similar to those reached by experts from the Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH), i.e. the availability of data on the issue of homelessness worldwide differs in the sense that more data on homelessness are available in the majority of Global North countries as opposed to in Global South countries. Moreover, one could also argue parallel paths in the resolution of the issue of homelessness in the Global South and the Global North (Busch-Geertsemaa,V., Culhaneb, D., Fitzpatrickc, S., 2016).

Additional efforts were made to collect examples from Global South countries, and calls were sent to different international and national library association and librarians. The translation of the questionnaire into Spanish enabled the collection of 3 examples from South America. Global South countries showed similarities in the organisation of library services for people experiencing homelessness. The primary goals of services to people who are experiencing homelessness were raising the level of literacy and co-operating with the scarce number of community organisations to enable people experiencing homelessness to meet their basic needs (food, care products, health).

Among examples received from Global North countries, US libraries stand out in terms of their diversity in meeting different needs, services adapted to specific groups, target audience, number of users, results and professional co-operation with numerous community organisations in providing services to people experiencing homelessness. The public recognized that libraries became the front line of America's homelessness crisis (Gunderman, R., Stevens, D. C., 2015). Most of the credit for this goes to the American Library Association that has long had policies on serving the homeless (Bolt, N., 2015.).

However, regardless of whether they come from developed or developing countries, libraries' contribution to SDG implementation in terms of the issue of homelessness is evident in the implementation of SDG1 - *End poverty in all its forms everywhere*, which is inseparably linked to SDG10 - *Reduced inequalities.* This is clearly illustrated by librarian **Linda Barron,** State Library of Queensland, South Brisbane, Australia, when she says: "*Our visitors and members benefit from our approach by being able to access a safe and welcoming place and by being included in the community without being singled out due to their housing or socio-economic status"***.**

Examples of diverse library services and programmes for people experiencing homelessness worldwide attest to the contribution that libraries have in the implementation of Goals 2 - *Zero hunge*r, 3 - *Good health and well-being*, 4 - *Quality education,* 5 - *Gender equality,* 6 - *Clean water and sanitation,* 8 - *Decent work and economic growth.* To achieve these goals, libraries inevitably have to co-operate with different community organisations and experts.

This is further attested by Mile Mrvalja, a user of services to people experiencing homelessness provided by Zagreb City Libraries, Zagreb, Croatia: "*There are a number of reasons why I attend programs for the homeless in the library. First of all, to become more computer literate, and second of all, and the most important reason for me, that I feel like a person who is welcomed with respect and acceptance. In addition to IT knowledge, I also receive information about all the government institutions that I can go to for help, as well as NGOs and other organisations"*.

What is emerging as the main conclusion is that **there is a correlation between the development and outreach of the influence of library services to people experiencing**

homelessness on targeted audience, and the extent and strength of the network of connections and collaboration within the community aimed at solving this issue.

Three inspiring good practice examples that illustrate this conclusion are described below.

Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado, USA

A survey conducted in 2015 identified 6,130 individuals experiencing homelessness in the seven county metro Denver area – metro area of about 2.3 million people. Many of the people who were homeless used the Denver Public Library so it was to the library's and community's advantage to cooperate in dealing with this issue (Bolt, N., 2015).

Library services to people experiencing homelessness provided by the Denver Public Library show the extent to which services can develop out of the initial engagement of several employees who established the Homeless Services Action Committee. They received support from the director and the mayor who provided resources used to hire a professional Community Resource Specialist (CRS) and later on, in 2016, a second CRS. The position of CRS requires a Master Degree in Social Work.

CRS's contribution to library services to people experiencing homelessness is exceptionally valuable. This position was created to:
- help decrease barriers people experiencing homelessness face when accessing resources;
- partner with other community social workers to provide more education regarding homelessness in the community;
- provides training and support to staff in the areas of Trauma Informed Services, Mental Health, Homelessness and Self Care;
- provide support to security staff in crisis situations;
- assist in connecting individuals to mental health, homeless or other resources as appropriate;
- meet with library customers to build relationships and trust to assist in connecting them to resources in the community to help them meet their goals.

Denver Public Library provides a welcoming and compassionate environment for all people including people experiencing homelessness:
- allowing limited checkouts as well as a computer user card to customers without mailing addresses;
- showing movies with subtitles during all of their open hours for folks who spend their days at the library; Sunrise Program series for local musicians to play outside of the library to the morning crowd that waits for doors to open;
- coffee and conversations for people to share and find solutions to their experiences
- weekly Monday morning meditation class
- weekly creative writing workshop for people in recovery from substance use, mental health issues and homelessness.

Outcomes and benefits for users:
- The Community Resource Specialist had a total of 434 customer contacts in 2015
- 63 individuals experiencing homelessness were connected to housing resources
- 51 to mental health services

- 22 Veterans were connected to services including housing options, and many more were connected to health benefits, public benefits, substance treatment, emergency shelter, etc.
- collaborations with agencies serving those experiencing homelessness were made to provide continuation of care and direct referrals
- a community group was developed with the initiative to increase empathy and compassion for those experiencing homelessness in our community
- training was developed for library staff to understand the effects of trauma on individuals, society and themselves.

However, challenges exist even in this stimulating environment. "*One of the biggest challenges is helping some staff understand the needs of the homeless population, also the community understands of homelessness and Denver Public Library's role in serving this population. Creating public dialogues to increase awareness, understanding, empathy and compassion for the homeless community is being designed to help address this issue,*" said Elissa Hardy**,** CRS in this library.

In a community where a large number of people experience homelessness, of which many spend time in the library, hiring a CRS proved extremely efficient. CRS is a professional educated to work with the homeless and figures say volumes of the success that the implementation of homelessness-related SDGs has had in terms of improving the quality of life of the homeless. On the other hand, CRS is crucial for developing more quality connections and collaboration between the staff and the users, the library and the community, as well as for making the community more aware of the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

Waverley Library, Bondi Junction, New South Wales (NSW), Australia

Bondi Junction is an eastern suburb of Sidney. The results of the 2011 census, released in June 2012, showed that the official population of Sydney was 4,391,674. The Report of the Inner City Sidney Registry Week gathered responses from 516 people experiencing homelessness across the City of Sidney. The survey was conducted using the Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool (Inner City Sydney, 2016). When comparing the number of people experiencing homelessness in Denver and Sidney, a great disproportion is clearly visible, suggesting that the measurement methods are not uniform, which prevents the comparison of data from different countries, including models for working with people experiencing homelessness.

A large number of people experiencing homelessness spend their day in the Denver Public Library, and the mayor is aware of the libraries' role in the network of organisations that provide support to people experiencing homelessness. On the other hand, librarian Heather Davis from the Waverly Library states: "*We have had to do a lot of this work ourselves, and with government cuts to services it is sometimes difficult to have a long lasting relationship with a service provider.*"

Such specific conditions and connections lead the library to develop the following programmes and services for people experiencing homelessness:
- membership to people experiencing homelessness through specific policies allowing those without a fixed address to join;

- the staff are trained in mental health awareness and de-escalation and are committed to the NSW Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places (2013), which has been translated to a library specific setting;
- the library runs a special element to library book sales following the 'suspended coffee' model where customers can purchase a book to be donated to local charity The Footpath Library;
- in 2016, plan is to extend the Pop Up library outreach program to the local homeless shelter;
- the library is regularly represented at the Sydney Homeless Connect Day, in partnership with The Footpath Library, handing out free books and information about the library including membership forms.

Insufficient collaboration with service providers in the community prompted the librarian to co-operate with a number of local libraries, which gave rise to the toolkit *Libraries are for everyone: providing quality services to people who are homeless.* The aim of collaborations between libraries is to find ways to better support the disadvantaged in the community. Regardless of the significance of the collaborations and connections between different service providers within the community, the Waverley Library example shows that co-operation and support within the professional community, as well as individuals' initiatives, are equally important.

Riga Central Library, Riga, Latvia, EU

The document *Life in 2015: the Latvia MDG Report* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme Latvia, 2005.) states that although there are no accurate figures, the number of homeless people in Latvia, especially in Riga, is growing. It is estimated that approximately 5,000 people in Riga were homeless in 2004. The total number of inhabitants in Riga in August 2015 was 696,593 people. The results of the 2011 censuses in different European nations showed that some countries, including Latvia, reported no data on homelessness (Busch-Geertsemaa,V., Culhaneb, D., Fitzpatrickc, S., 2016). The resulting data are confusing and a confirmation that measurement methods are not uniform even within one country, which further prevents data comparison.

The Day Centre for Homeless and Underprivileged Inhabitants of Riga is an interesting example of a community response to the needs of people experiencing homelessness. The library has a prominent position in this example. The Day Centre is the result of the cooperation of the following Riga City Council structural units: Social Committee, Management of Latgale Suburb, and Welfare Department.

The Centre is situated in a 3-storey building constructed and equipped for this purpose. A. Maslow's principle of necessity pyramid was taken as the basis for the building's structure. The first floor of the building is occupied by medical and sanitary facilities where users can take a shower, hand their clothes in for disinfection and washing, put on clean humanitarian aid clothes, have hot food from the soup kitchen as well as receive consultations from doctors, psychologists and social workers. Facilities for relaxation and studies are situated on the second floor. All facilities are wheelchair accessible. The Library occupies most of the third floor. It is an external lending point of Riga Central Library, visited only by users without fixed abode. Unlike here, at the Riga Central Library and its 26 branches people experiencing homelessness have to fit in with the overall flow of users.

Users of the library in the Centre can:
- read books and magazines on site;
- watch TV and use computers, including Office and internet;
- those with ID documents (passports) can check out books.

Librarians help individually with email, CVs, internet searches, and provide social services information, offer events: book reviews, meetings with specialists, concerts, holiday celebrations.

Ilze Apine, a librarian at the Riga Central Library, sums up the results of services for people experiencing homelessness provided at the external lending point located in the Centre: *"People experiencing homelessness spend time in an environment that encourages altering their way of life (participation in events, communication opportunities). Statistical data show that approx. 40% of homeless people manage to change their status largely due to information accessibility".*

These exceptional results show how important it is for people experiencing homeless to meet their diverse needs, and how liberating it is to have a one-stop location for this. Thus, they are rewarded with a renewed sense of dignity, and empowered to get out of their present situation. Interestingly, the challenges faced by librarians at the Riga Central Library and its 26 branches, but also by librarians worldwide who work with people experiencing homelessness – spoiling materials and library equipment, odours from clothing or other belongings, eating and sleeping in library facilities, washing in restrooms – are completely absent at the external lending point located in the Centre.

The above fact speaks in favour of SDG1 being a fundamental goal; the meeting of its targets is dependent on the meeting of most of the other SDGs. Therefore, it is crucial for libraries to have good connections and collaborations with other community organisations and experts in order to efficiently address the diverse needs of people experiencing homelessness.

Conclusion

Homelessness is a growing social problem worldwide. It is occurring in all socioeconomic contexts. By implementing SDGs and some other measures, the international community has mobilized governments and institutions from different areas of social life to put co-ordinated efforts into *ending poverty in all its forms everywhere.* Homelessness is an extreme form of poverty, and people experiencing homelessness are stigmatized, discriminated and exposed to violence and criminalization. Their needs are complex because the reasons leading them to such a situation are complex and interconnected. Working to provide support to this vulnerable social group is full of challenges, but also a pledge to sustainable development and a just future for the world we live in.

The *Guidelines for Library Services to People who are Experiencing Homelessness* are the library community's contribution to the resolution of the complex issue of homelessness worldwide because this is a process requiring cross-sectoral, international, national and local co-operation based on different policies, laws and strategies. The Guidelines will help libraries gain an insight into the complexity of the issue of homelessness and plan and organize quality and adequate services for this vulnerable social group.

The good practice examples collected worldwide show that librarians and libraries around the world are making numerous and diverse steps to reach people experiencing poverty and homelessness. The best results are achieved when librarians show initiative and sensitivity regarding this topic, library management offers support as well as local authorities and the government, and finally when community organisations are connected in a network. The uneven distribution of collected good practice examples in Global SouthI and Global North countries begs the question: Does the international library community have processes to reach librarians and libraries from developing countries and involve them equally in sustainable development? The equality and availability principle valid for library users should also be valid for the librarians themselves.

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