

THE SH/FT

CASE FOR SUPPORT

As of today

**1.8 BILLION
PEOPLE**

around the world are living
without access to adequate housing.

This is more than the entire
population of China.

Makoko, a floating informal settlement threatened
with eviction in Lagos, Nigeria. Courtesy Flickr.



In the United States, evictions led to 433,700 cases of Covid-19 and 10,700 coronavirus deaths between March and September 2020.

80,000,000 people across Europe currently experience housing unaffordability.

Buenos Aires saw a 20% increase in the number of individuals living in homelessness during Covid-19, including hundreds of children.

In Seoul, property prices have surged more than 50% since 2017. An average property currently costs 14 times the average annual income of a Korean household.

In Lagos, Nigeria's largest city, 66% of the population – approximately 11.2 million people – live in informal settlements.

While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians account for only 3% of the population, they are 15 times more likely to experience homelessness and make up 23% of those living in homelessness or shelters.

Never before in our lifetime has access to an adequate and affordable home been such a stark matter of life or death.

Covid-19 has exacerbated the housing crisis and revealed it for what it truly is: a human rights calamity, decades in the making.

Everyone is entitled to live in peace, security, and dignity. No one should have to live without access to clean water or a toilet, in relentless precarity, or under perpetual threat of harm, illness, or death. This is what it means to understand housing as a fundamental human right.

We are in the midst of a grave crisis of global scale that will only continue to escalate unless we take bold and deliberate action.

The Shift is in a unique position to make a difference. Led by former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing, Leilani Farha, The Shift exists to ignite responsibility and expose the practices at the heart of the housing crisis. We are committed to mobilizing our international experience, knowledge, and networks to tackle this world-wide emergency through advocacy, policy, provocation, and collaboration.

By championing our movement, you can join us in charting a path out of this human rights catastrophe and helping the world recover from the intersecting effects of inadequate housing, Covid-19, climate change, and the financialization of housing.



When the pandemic struck South Africa, the government rounded up more than 1,000 people living in homelessness and relocated them to a cramped soccer stadium in Pretoria. April 2020. Courtesy CNN.



In Oakland, US, an encampment known as “The Village” was involved in a battle to secure permission from the City to remain on the land beneath the 23rd Ave bridge, until they were permanently evicted to make way for construction. Courtesy Lucky Thomas.

MISSION

Housing is a human right, not a privilege for the few or a financial instrument for maximizing investor profits.

The Shift is a global initiative working at the intersection of human rights, housing, cities, and financialization in an effort to bring an end to unaffordability, homelessness, and evictions across the world. Our international housing crisis continues to surge under the exacerbating effects of Covid-19, growing inequality, climate change, and the financialization of housing. The lack of access to affordable, secure, and adequate housing is compromising the vitality of our cities and imperiling human life and dignity.

It's time to make the shift.

Our goals are ambitious: to compel governments to implement and uphold human rights commitments and confront the financialization of housing, an insidious speculative trend that is undermining the health of cities and households worldwide.

Our tactics are practical: to work collaboratively and amplify the participation of everyone with a stake – from governments and investors, to people experiencing homelessness and grassroots organizers – to forge unexpected allies and realistic solutions.

The Shift was inaugurated in 2017 by Leilani Farha in her role as UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing, with founding support from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and United Cities and Local Governments. She officially launched The Shift as a global organization with fellow human rights advocate Julieta Perucca in 2020.

“The residential real estate sector has become an extractive industry that is making our cities unliveable. The Shift is the only organization in the world investigating the connections between finance, housing, human rights law, and cities. Their work was urgent and timely before the pandemic; it has become even more indispensable now.”

– Saskia Sassen, Robert S. Lynd Professor of Sociology, Columbia University



Through public-private partnerships, officials and real estate developers in Mumbai carry out a process called 'slum rehabilitation,' clearing the way for new developments. Courtesy ArchDaily.

COVID CONTEXT

How can you pay rent if you've lost your job? How can you wash your hands regularly without access to water? How can you physically distance if you share your room with 10 other people? How can you "stay home" if you don't have one?

Covid-19 is exposing society's already at-risk individuals to even greater human rights harms, in developing and developed economies alike. People living in abandoned buildings in Tbilisi, under plastic sheets beside highways in Delhi, on the heavily policed streets of Los Angeles, in tents behind subway stations in Seoul. Forty million people at risk of eviction once the US lifts its eviction moratorium. Spikes in domestic violence everywhere, with countries like China reporting a threefold increase since the onset of Covid-19 and Argentina reporting one death every 36 hours as a result of pandemic confinement.

Add widespread pandemic-wrought job loss to an existing global housing crisis characterized by glaringly deficient housing and skyrocketing rents and property prices, and you have a worldwide human rights catastrophe.

Covid-19 has taught us the life-and-death value of adopting a public health lens. To combat this novel coronavirus, societies are taking measures that prioritize the health of the many – mask wearing, physical distancing, and segmented grocery store hours – to protect the more vulnerable among us: the elderly, people with underlying health conditions, and frontline workers.

We are asking governments and private sector actors to abide by the same logic and adopt a human rights lens to likewise protect the world's most vulnerable – the 1.8 billion people currently living in grossly inadequate housing and homelessness globally, and the countless millions more who are on the brink of mass evictions, job loss, debilitating physical and mental illness, and death.

Covid's effects will be with us for years, if not decades, and will continue to strain the socioeconomic and legislative systems that already fail to uphold and implement the most basic human rights, and the right to housing in particular.

**It's hard to imagine, but the worst is yet to come.
Which is why we need your help.**



Police evicted 2,000 asylum-seekers from an encampment at the foot of the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, France. November 2020. Courtesy Christophe Petit Tesson.

“Cities are on the frontline of the housing crisis. The Shift works effectively with local governments to advise and help build capacity with respect to a human rights-based approach to housing, which is more vital than ever if we want our cities to emerge from the pandemic more equitable, sustainable, and resilient.”

– Ada Colau, Mayor of Barcelona

THE FINANCIALIZATION OF HOUSING

Covid-19 has laid bare the cracks in our systems and made it an ethical and legal imperative to take urgent action to eliminate homelessness and implement measures to secure adequate housing for all. Yet, there is another virulent threat that remains relatively invisible to most people, but has infected our real estate markets the world over: the financialization of housing.

This extractive phenomenon is one of the chief reasons cities have become unaffordable and ultimately unliveable for so many. Housing financialization is the speculative purchase of “undervalued” housing and land in cities – often en masse – by investment banks, private equity firms, pension funds, and ultra-wealthy individuals for the purposes of parking and hiding money, leveraging capital, and accumulating wealth. It often leads to evictions, as these private actors employ various tactics, such as building “improvements” and cosmetic upgrades, to expel low-income tenants and justify rent increases.

The effects of financialization are eviscerating affordability, living standards, and housing security while producing obscene corporate margins: as of 2018, global residential real estate was valued at US\$220 trillion, more than three-and-a-half times the world’s total GDP.

As an attractive instrument for investment that yields outsize profits and skirts corporate income taxation, the financialization of housing has become increasingly institutionalized. The normalization of a practice that treats housing like an asset rather than a human dwelling is not only a significant driver of inequality within our cities, but also stands as one of the single greatest threats to securing and implementing the right to adequate housing.

When left unchecked and unregulated, the financialization of housing often conflicts with governments’ international human rights obligations to secure access to safe and affordable housing for all.

The Shift’s mandate includes compelling governments to confront financialization by assisting with the development of legislation and human rights-based housing strategies to curb this phenomenon and its effects.



The award-winning documentary film *PUSH* follows Leilani on her quest to gain a deeper understanding of the financialization of housing and its impact on human rights. Pictured: The New York headquarters for Blackstone, one of the world’s largest private equity firms and global real estate investors.

“I am proud that my film *PUSH*, featuring Leilani, is being watched by people around the world to better understand and challenge the financialization of housing. Access to a safe and affordable home is one of our generation’s biggest crises. Leilani’s drive and her experience as former UN Special Rapporteur is critical to The Shift’s ability to hold governments accountable.”

– Fredrik Gertten, Director of *PUSH*

WHY SUPPORT THE SHIFT

Launched as an organization in May 2020, The Shift came into being at a singular time in history alongside Covid-19, racial uprisings, as well as civic unrest and political turmoil in many parts of the world. Housing injustices are deeply intertwined with the pandemic and systemic oppression, making human rights work more urgent than ever.

Our cause – to secure the right to housing globally – is part of the answer to healing the long-broken systems that perpetuate inequality.

Our strengths – to hold governments accountable using international human rights law; convene countries and diverse stakeholders; draw big-picture policy connections; and share best practices from around the world – inform a unique and concrete approach to rehabilitating these systems and forging more equitable societies.

As we build our movement, we ask for your help to carry out our mission.

Human rights are not a trend; they are not selective or earned. They are immanent and represent the core contract we've made as a society to treat each other with equality, dignity, and respect, and without discrimination. By investing in The Shift, you are investing in humanity and the promise that we can do better by each other.

We are a young organization with deep knowledge and vast networks, working at a unique intersection of issues – human rights, housing, urbanism, climate change, and financialization. We have the relevant expertise, experience, and energy required to fight effectively and strategically for safe, adequate, and affordable housing for all in the context of a pandemic and a world hungry for justice.

Please join us by pledging support that will tangibly improve the lives of people – many of them facing life and death circumstances – and bolster a worldwide initiative committed to radical yet practical change.



Police violently evict the residents of Guernica, a settlement in the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. October 2020. Courtesy *La Capital*.



Leilani and Julieta meet with residents facing the effects of gentrification in an historic tourist neighbourhood in Cairo, Egypt. January 2018. Courtesy The Shift.

VISION & PRINCIPLES

The Shift aspires to build a worldwide movement in which people embrace a new paradigm and treat housing for what it is: a human right.

Working collaboratively with all stakeholders – governments, private actors, scholars, organizers, and others – we will develop practical protocols and policy so that governments can implement and uphold the right to adequate housing.

Securing safe and adequate housing also requires a separate but related action: regulating the financialization of housing. We cannot allow speculative investors to continue to treat homes like “assets,” diminish housing stock, and inflate real estate values to exponentially multiply their profits. We will advocate and agitate to end the reign of this unchecked industry, which is entrenching financialization and disfiguring urban real estate markets around the world.

To achieve our vision, we adhere to these five guiding principles:

Activate: We exist to ignite global responsibility and spur government and public action to secure housing as a human right, curb financialization, and help build sustainable cities that thrive.

Agitate: We use our voice to provoke conversation, incite global outrage, and inspire local change to address homelessness, evictions, unaffordability, inequality, and climate change.

Advocate: We advise and engage governments around the world, urging them to uphold their obligations under international human rights law and support them in developing and adopting practical rights-based housing strategies.

Educate: We promote a deeper and more accessible understanding of housing as a human right and the effects of financialization through the dissemination of research, reports, and resources.

Elevate: We collaborate with international and regional governing bodies and domestic governments of all levels to raise the bar for setting and implementing legal standards for the right to housing.



Protestors on the streets of Berlin call on governments to impose rent controls and bring forward a referendum to expropriate empty buildings owned by corporate landlords. April 2019. Courtesy Axel Schmidt.



Leilani first advocated for a global “shift” to secure the right to housing at Habitat III: The United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development. October 2016. Courtesy The Shift.

OUR NETWORK

Institutional Partners

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
UN-Habitat
United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)
Canadian Urban Institute

National Human Rights Institutions

Canadian Human Rights Commission
South African Human Rights Commission

Government & Public Bodies

City of Barcelona
City of Kitchener
City of Malmö
City of Toronto
City of Victoria
City of Yellowknife
European Parliamentarians
Government of Canada
Government of Catalonia
Government of Germany
Norwegian Parliamentarians
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

Foundations

The Bertha Foundation
Commonwealth Foundation
The Ford Foundation

McConnell Foundation
Open Society Justice Initiative

Non-Governmental Organizations

Amnesty International
Asociación Civil por la Igualdad y la Justicia
Caritas España
Center for Equality Rights in Accommodation
Centre for Social and Economic Rights
Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales
Centro de Estudios y Acción por la Igualdad
CHICOCO Radio FM - Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Cities Alliance
Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH)
Fair Finance Sweden
FEANTSA: European Federation of National
Organisations Working with the Homeless
The Global Initiative for Economic, Social, and
Cultural Rights (GI-ESCR)
Habitat for Humanity - New Zealand
Habitat for Humanity - Toronto
Habitat Norway
Habitat International Coalition
Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) - India
International Alliance of Inhabitants
International Network for Economic, Social and
Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net)
Los Angeles Community Action Network (LACAN)
National Human Rights City Alliance
Personas Afectadas por las Hipotecas (PAH)

The Leap
Right to Housing Network Toronto
RUJAK - Indonesia
Shareholder Association for Research & Education
(SHARE) Canada
Un Techo para mi País (TECHO)
WeEffect
Western Regional Advocacy Project
World Habitat

Academic

London School of Economics: LSE Cities
Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy
University of Ottawa, Future Cities Centre
University of Ottawa, Law Faculty and Human
Rights Clinic
University of Toronto, Law Faculty

City Building & Culture

AL_A (Amanda Levete Architects)
Munich Modern Architecture Museum
The Urban Front
We.Make.The.City
WG Film
White Arkitekter
Witte Sundell Architects

THE SHIFT

BY THE NUMBERS

34

countries & governments from around the world actively engaged on the right to housing

46

institutional, academic & non-governmental partners

30

cities committed to the Cities for Adequate Housing Declaration

5

legislative achievements that advanced the right to housing internationally

14

municipal governments in Canada formed the Right to Home working group

4

Letters of Concern issued to Australia, Buenos Aires, Canada & Greece

8

reports & publications published in 2020

98

keynotes, lectures & speaking engagements in 2020

11

op-eds published in international media outlets in 2020

108

countries have downloaded & streamed *PUSHBACK Talks*

8

awards given to *PUSH* since its release in 2019

77

countries have screened *PUSH* since its release in 2019

OUR HISTORY

The idea for The Shift started to gain traction in 2016 when, at an international convening, Leilani proposed launching a global movement dedicated to the right to housing. Everyone in the room – members of government, NGOs, human rights institutions, grass roots movements, universities, and foundations – enthusiastically agreed that the time had come to establish an international entity focused on shifting the paradigm towards a human rights-based approach to housing.

Leilani’s vision edged closer to reality a year later when Ada Colau – the Mayor of Barcelona and host of the first Cities for Adequate Housing summit – implored municipal leaders from around the world to “Join The Shift!” (The call was heeded by cities like Berlin, Paris, Amsterdam, New York, London, Buenos Aires, Montreal, and Seoul, all of whom have since committed to realizing the right to housing in consultation with The Shift.)

Building on this momentum, Leilani inaugurated The Shift with founding support from the [UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) and [United Cities and Local Governments \(UCLG\)](#). In May 2020, with the housing crisis only intensifying as a result of the pandemic, she officially launched The Shift as a global human rights organization with fellow advocate Julieta Perucca.

Today, The Shift is a rising global authority and resource on the right to adequate housing with a focus on financialization. We work hand-in-glove with private and public actors from all regions of the world in pursuit of a singular cause: to hold governments and the real estate sector accountable for upholding their human rights obligations and compel them to confront the eviscerating effects of financialization on the well-being of our cities and the ability for people to live in safety and dignity.

“Our partnership with Leilani Farha and The Shift has been instrumental in putting the right to housing on the global agenda. They have helped foster the policy transformations required for governments to tackle the growing influence of multinationals on real estate markets and realize the right to housing. Together, we are working to embolden international action while enhancing the vibrancy of our cities.”

– Emilia Saiz, Secretary General of United Cities and Local Governments



Leilani spoke alongside Mayor Ada Colau (Barcelona) and former Mayor Parks Tao (Johannesburg) at the first Cities for Adequate Housing summit in Barcelona, Spain. November 2017. Courtesy UCLG and Mark Schardan.

OUR TEAM

Leilani Farha, Global Director

Leilani Farha is the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing (2014-2020). As one of the leading experts in this field, she pursues work that is animated by the principle that housing is a social good, not a commodity. Leilani has shaped global human rights standards on the right to housing through topical reports on homelessness, the financialization of housing, informal settlements, rights-based housing strategies, and the first UN Guidelines for the implementation of the right to housing, among other initiatives. She is the central character in the award-winning documentary *PUSH*, directed by the Swedish filmmaker Fredrik Gertten, which explores the financialization of housing. Leilani inaugurated The Shift with founding support from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and United Cities and Local Governments, and launched it in 2020 with fellow human rights advocate Julieta Perucca.

Julieta Perucca, Deputy Director

An International and European Law graduate from the University of Maastricht, with a Political Science degree from the University of Ottawa, Julieta is an experienced researcher and human rights advocate. She started working alongside Leilani at the UN in 2016, assisting with the production of thematic and country reports and conducting missions around the world. As Deputy Director of The Shift, which she helped launch in 2020, Julieta oversees daily operations, strategic initiatives, and the management and development of the organization's partnerships and larger network. She also leads the organization's Spanish-speaking work as well as all activities on housing and climate change.

Dr. Kaitlin Schwan

Director of Research

Sam Freeman

Lead Legal Researcher

Keith González

Administrative & Finance Officer

Kirsten McRae

Marketing & Communications Manager



For more information on how to support, please contact:

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