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The Shift – case for support

#maketheshift

Our Challenge

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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

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Housing should not be treated as just another commodity nor should it be used as a main driver of economic growth; it is a basic human right, a social good, and frontline defense against increasingly volatile weather patterns and health crises. Essential to a life of dignity and security, the broken system must be fixed. A new approach to housing and housing systems is required.

Our housing systems are fuelling rather than solving the global pandemic housing and climate crises. National Economies rely on the construction, renovation, and sale of housing for GDP growth without mitigating their potential negative impacts on people and climate change.¹ Governments often enact policies that favor the interests of finance, large investors and industry actors, allowing them to control and skew markets. Housing systems are structured so that powerful private actors, like real estate investment trusts, pension funds, asset management and private equity firms can leverage capital and maximize profits through their investments in residential real estate.

Housing systems that favor investor interests not only result in insecurity and housing precarity for disadvantaged groups, as well as renters and many homeowners, but also create unstable economies producing wealth for a few and indebtedness for many.

¹The construction, operation and demolition of the built environment accounts for 36% of Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions and 40% of total energy use worldwide. Housing accounts for the largest portion of these emissions.

Our Impact

Having been established by two international experts on the right to housing, The Shift has deep knowledge and vast networks. We have access to and are comfortable working with grassroots movements, domestic organizations, media, private actors, and high-ranking government officials alike.

The Shift prioritizes impact. We use the human rights imperative to engage and hold governments and industry accountable. Leveraging our reputation, we use a variety of strategies to create new conversations and convenings that promote and result in innovative approaches and solutions to the housing crisis across our areas of focus.



Our Approach

The Shift is the only international organization focused on ensuring that everyone has a home that is adequate, affordable, and sustainable, providing security and dignity, in line with human rights. To this end, The Shift exposes the policies and practices at the heart of the housing crisis, and uses the human rights framework to ensure accountability, to transform government policies and industry practices, support communities and local advocacy groups, and to effect systems change to produce better outcomes for people in need.

Our work moves well beyond bricks and mortar and understands that housing is about:

01 **Economics**

Housing construction and housing finance is used to build and buoy national economies around the world.

02 **Tax Policy**

Preferential tax treatment for investors and homeowners fuels the use of housing as an asset class and contributes to inequality and unaffordability.

03 **Climate**

Housing is a driver of climate change, accounting for 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions across the world, and a frontline defense against climate change-induced disasters.

04 **Finance**

Residential real estate is now an instrument of finance and the biggest business in the world, valued at \$258.5 trillion USD in 2020, or almost four times global GDP.

05 **(In)equality & (Non)discrimination**

Housing is both a manifestation and driver of (in)equality.

06 **Health**

Housing adequacy and security is a key determinant of health outcomes.

The Shift monitors patterns and emerging trends across these areas to identify potential impacts on the enjoyment of human rights, including the right to adequate housing. The Shift's approach to addressing the global housing crisis is innovative in its willingness to explore all entry points and identify interconnections with other global challenges.



Influencing Policymakers

Using human rights standards and tools, we build the capacity of policymakers to better understand the intersections between housing, finance, homelessness, and climate change and to harness the practical benefits of using human rights in policymaking.

The Shift has extensive experience working with lawmakers and elected officials, including mayors, city councilors and national and regional representatives, encouraging them to review, reform and adopt new policies that enhance the lives of individuals and communities. To date, we have contributed to the adoption of housing legislation and accountability mechanisms at national level (eg: [Canada](#), Portugal and [Spain](#)), regionally (eg: amendment to [California's Constitution](#)), and at city level (eg: [San Diego](#), [Toronto](#), [Kitchener](#), and [Hamilton](#)). We have developed [standards regarding homeless encampments](#) that are poised to be adopted across Canada by city governments providing homeless people with greater security and basic needs. We have raised the profile of the right to housing through the [Cities for Adequate Housing Declaration](#) which has been committed to by London, New York, Paris, Barcelona and Amsterdam.

Our partnership with the World Green Building Council signifies our forward-looking approach to housing and climate change, as we aim to integrate human rights principles into National Resilience Strategies, ensuring climate equity and a just transition

What does success look like?

By 2030, an increasing number of city and national governments are actively transforming their housing policies to incorporate and implement the right to housing in all of its dimensions in a manner that is consistent with the right to a healthy environment. More governments establish mechanisms to hold themselves and industry accountable to these standards.

Engaging Industry

We build relationships with investors in housing to develop their understanding of the impact of their business practices on the enjoyment of housing as a human right. The Shift regularly meets with industry to offer training and guidance to shape industry practice, including the largest Real Estate Investment Trusts in Canada, the UN Principles for Responsible Investment, BSR - Business and Social Responsibility and IKEA.

The Shift has also developed a working partnership with a number of organizations representing investors with a view to influencing the stewardship of assets to contribute to the implementation of the right to housing. These organizations worked closely with us to develop [The Shift Directives - From Financialized to Human Rights-Based Housing](#) — the first human rights guidance providing governments and industry with a systems change road map to return housing to its social function. The Directives are currently being socialized with institutional investors in residential real estate.

What does success look like?

By 2030, industry actors view themselves as co-responsible for solving the housing and climate crises, and commence the transformation of business practices so that they contribute to the enjoyment of human rights and the fight against climate change. ESG practices are strengthened so as to reflect these standards and ambitions.





Narrative Building

Through our extensive use of diverse media, The Shift has been instrumental in socializing key messages about housing as a fundamental right. Our media reach has been extensive. Highlights include:

[PUSH - The Film](#) - a feature length documentary film that continues to be screened across the world. Leilani Farha, The Shift's Global Director, is the central character

[PUSHBACK Talks](#) - a podcast co-hosted by Leilani Farha focused on cities, housing, finance and human rights, with listeners in over 150 countries. It features changemakers and thought leaders from around the world focused on solving the various dimensions of the housing crisis. Guests have included, author Anand Giridharadas, journalists Peter S. Goodman (NYT) and Patrick Butler (The Guardian), Members of European Parliament, Kim Van Spaartaken (Green Party, Netherlands) and Frans Timmerman (Vice-President of the European Commission), and activist Pete White from Skid Row, Los Angeles.

[Op-Eds and Articles](#) - The Shift has authored many opinion pieces and been the subject of articles in notable newspapers and platforms including the [Washington Post](#), [The Guardian](#), [The New York Times](#), [The Economist](#), and [The Green European Journal](#).

What does success look like?

By 2030, mainstream narratives commonly reflect housing as home, and a human right, rather than a commodity. There is also an expanded understanding of housing as both a contributor to climate change and as a frontline defense against it.

By the Numbers

62

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

15

letters of concern issued to hold government and industry accountable

4

local government networks working on the right to housing, supported by The Shift

67

keynotes, lectures, & speaking engagements averaged per year

11

reports & publications published in the last two years.

5

legislative achievements that advanced the right to housing internationally

16

industry actors engaged with The Shift

71

institutional, academic and non-governmental partners

159

countries have downloaded & streamed PUSHBACK Talks

17

articles & op-eds recently published in media outlets

Geographies we work in:



Our Future

A contribution to The Shift will support our work to provide leaders and vision. We use our unique understanding of the twin housing and climate crises to motivate and inspire new action to transform the housing system and its financial underpinnings. Concretely, your support will contribute to influencing policy makers, engaging industry, strengthening social movements, and building a new narrative where housing is valued for its social function over its ability to make profit. This will be carried out in the following areas of work:

- 01 Transforming financial systems in relation to housing, climate and their intersections.

- 02 Addressing and preventing homelessness using the human rights frame work.

- 03 Formulating rights based housing strategies for local and national level governments.

- 04 Working with governments and industry to identify and implement their human rights obligations and responsibilities, with respect to housing, climate and their intersection.

- 05 Developing or strengthening accountability mechanisms to enhance the performance of government and industry in the area of housing.

- 06 Communicate and illustrate the practical application of the right to housing and its transformative nature for individuals and communities.

The Shift's aims to grow our budget by 30% over the next 18 to 24 months. The Shift is currently supported by major donors including the Laudes Foundation, ClimateWorks, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Our Advisory Board



Francis Mukora

Programs Manager at
Community Alliance for
Human Settlements in
Zimbabwe (CAHSZ)



Dr. Joanna Kusiak

Sociologist & Urban
Researcher, University of
Cambridge



Lorena Zarate

Founding member of
the Global Platform for
the Right to the City,
former president of the
Habitat International
Coalition



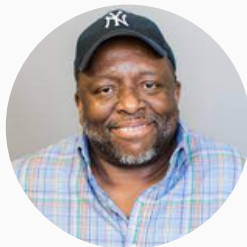
Kristy Mortham

Director of Operations,
Efficiency Canada



Andres de la Peña

Independent journalist
on the right to housing
based in Mexico,
working with "Quinto
Elemento Lab" and
"ZonaDocs"



Rob Robinson

Co-founder of the Take
Back the Land
Movement, Special
Advisor at Partners for
Dignity and Rights



David Ireland

Chief Executive of World
Habitat



Annabel Short

Principal, It's
Material;
Research
Fellow, IHRB



Dr. Jayne Engel

Urbanist, Strategist,
Author, Adjunct Professor
at McGill University

Thank you!



Thank you for taking the time to read this. If you have any questions or would like to discuss our work, please don't hesitate to reach out to us.

📍 67 Sunnymede Ave., Ottawa, ON K1Y 2L5

☎ 613-983-0071

✉ finance@maketheshift.org

👉 make-the-shift.org