



Exposure

Climate Change and Homelessness:

A global response framework

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Acknowledgments

Title: Climate change and homelessness: A global response framework - Exposure subsection

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Submitted on behalf of the Global Climate-Homelessness Initiative Group

Should be cited as:

Kidd, S. A., Bezgrebelna, M., Galvao, L. A., Hajat, S., Hale, M., Keevers, L., Settembrino, M., Solomon, N., Vickery, J., Wells, S., & Yamamoto, S. (2022). *Climate change and homelessness: A global response framework - Exposure subsection*.

For more information, please go to: <https://www.homelesshub.ca/climate-homelessness>

The photographs and their descriptions in this framework document were produced in Brazil by Dr. Marco Hovnanian, whose work captures the efforts to adapt to poverty and weather exposure of individuals and families who are unhoused.

Design by Chris Durand, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness ([Hub Solutions](#)).

Acronyms

APHRC - African Population and Health Research Centre

CMHC - Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

IDRC - International Development Research Centre

IOM - International Organization for Migration

OHCHR - Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

PAHO - Pan American Health Organization

SDG - Sustainable Development Goals

UNDESA - United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

UNFCCC - United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

WHO - World Health Organization

Framework Overview

This climate-homelessness response framework was developed as a guidance document that provides direction for policymakers, researchers, and practitioners based on the best available evidence and expert opinion. Specific approaches, in turn, can be informed by the general principles described here – designing for local engagement and implementation using social justice-based, culturally-situated practices. This guidance document highlights the issues and responses that attend to the broad themes of exposure and migration alongside illustrative case examples.

Issue

Exposure

Executive Summary

One of the key issues for vulnerably housed and homeless populations is exposure to climatic events. Their resilience and adaptation are further compromised by the health-related issues that are prevalent within these populations.

Climate pressures are increasing the exposure to weather extremes of homeless and marginally housed populations globally.

Direct Risks

Primary

- Heat, cold, humidity
- Water level, melt
- Rapid change, disasters

Secondary

- Food & water insecurity
- Vector, air, and water-borne disease
- Air pollution

Moderators

- Exposure, location, dwelling vulnerability
- Conflict and political turmoil
- Chronic illness & malnourishment
- Mobility, adaptation resources, education
- Social inequity
- Social/service infrastructure

Outcomes

- Illness morbidity, injury, & mortality
- Violence exposure
- Emergency service use and infrastructure burden
- Homelessness prevalence & migration

General Points:

Globally, populations lacking adequate shelter are the most exposed to the weather extremes and changes that are being driven by climate change. These risks to health, safety, and wellbeing take the form of primary risks (e.g., extreme heat) and secondary risks (e.g., food and water insecurity). The health consequences are severe, as are other impacts such as exposure to violence, prolonged and worsened homelessness conditions, and pressures on emergency services.

The pandemic has worsened social and economic inequalities and, while the full implications of the pandemic for homeless populations are not yet clear, it is likely to have contributed to increases in weather-exposed populations and further compromised health of those who are exposed.

Types of Climatic Events Linked to Increased Exposure:

- **Extreme heat** (e.g., South Asia, Australia) and **cold** (e.g., the U.S.)
- **Natural disasters**, such as flood and drought (e.g., Kenya and CAR)
- **Food and water insecurity** (e.g., Africa, the U.S.)
- **Disease** (e.g., Bangladesh)
- **Air pollution** (e.g., China, the U.S.)

Outcomes:

Increases in illness morbidity, mortality, injury, violence exposure, and mental health issues, exacerbated by exposure to traumatic events. Increases in emergency service use and infrastructure burden due to exposure to climatic events.

Challenges by Stakeholder Group

→ **Government problem:**

Weather extremes create a burden on emergency services (both stretched disaster response and emergency health services in an ongoing way) and funding pressures. There is also variable public and global perceptions of how poverty is addressed, compounded by stigma and discrimination, alongside impacts on the quality of life for all in affected environments, a loss of contributing citizens, and child protection and justice system burdens. These challenges are compounded by the nature of the climate-exposure issue which requires a cross-sectoral response in systems that are typically fragmented.

→ **Provider problem:**

Providers are typically unprepared to mitigate risks and are not properly resourced, experiencing increasing needs on the emergency/crisis end of the needs spectrum, poorer outcomes in areas of employment and housing due to increasingly compromised health of clients and provider burnout.

Responses

Prevention is Key

TARGET 1

Preventing further degradation of housing status and reducing weather exposure.

→ Government

Governments can develop a national housing strategy, facilitate cross sectoral and jurisdictional collaborations, and develop a prevention-oriented funding strategy with associated targets/indicators and focus on poverty reduction. Building standards can be established that reduce weather exposure risks. Housing development should be avoided in areas with exposure to natural and manmade disasters, including environmental contamination. Requirements may include a temporary shelter plan for crises and a permanent plan generally. Other responses that are less impactful, responsive, and permanent: slum remediation/improvement; better quality temporary street dwellings; warming and cooling centres; public water.

→ Services and systems

There is a need to facilitate access to affordable and weather resilient housing. For those with more complex physical or mental health challenges, supportive housing models may be required (e.g., Housing First).



People experiencing homelessness are excavators of discarded objects in the city of São Paulo. The image shows how the composition of different types of objects can compose an environment of intimacy. The resident of this environment is called Hippie and all of the images are his drawings.

Photo by Marco Hovnanian

TARGET 2**Disaster response strategies and remediating the immediate risks of exposure.****→ Government**

Governments can establish the expectation that policies, response plans and funding in all instances needs to account for and engage populations experiencing inadequate housing and homelessness. Organizations engaged in outreach can be resourced in the form of supplies and education. Support can be provided for public health messaging and community engagement to destigmatize the issue, recognizing and supporting grassroots community responses.

→ Services and systems

Services can participate in the design of coordinated disaster responses and implementing the responses alongside the first responders when a disaster strikes. Trainings and strategies should be tailored to local population. Providing populations experiencing homelessness with access to water, supplies, and culturally appropriate education about weather-related dangers, warning signs, and steps to be taken. Local, community-based organisations and networks need to be engaged so that local knowledge is incorporated.

TARGET 3**Developing an international response strategy.****→ Government**

Governments can establish processes and mechanisms through which aid and expertise can be quickly put in place to address weather exposure emergencies globally alongside training and support initiatives to bring up the experience and skill base of key local stakeholders.

Cross-cutting Processes: Examples

- There is a need for culturally situated trauma-informed practices informed by inclusion of lived experience (e.g. Tuvaluan migration to New Zealand) and local service provider perspective and expertise.
- Responses should index to index to local cultural, systems, socioeconomic, geographic factors, integrated through a social justice lens (e.g., Human Rights-Based Approach, Greenhouse Development Rights).
- Bring specific attention to those most at risk – Indigenous peoples (e.g., Canada, Australia), women (e.g., Indigenous, East Africa, global North), children, and others who face intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization, including identities around race, religion, country of origin, and 2SLGBTQIA+.
- Identify existing initiatives and organizations working in similar areas and aligning language, strategies, and combining efforts. This will include identifying relevant global actors (e.g., UNDESA, UNDP, UNHCR, UNECCC, WHO, IOM) and local initiatives (NAZCA). Align with existing modes of provider practice (e.g., North America, EU).
- There is a need for high-income countries to provide funding to low-income countries as the climate change related consequences borne by low-income countries tend to be direct results of actions taken by high-income countries (e.g., Africa).
- Planning needs to take into account both responding to gradual change and modelling responses to rapidly emerging crises. (e.g., Canada)
- Environmental and climate justice lenses should be applied to strategies and plans in order to prevent further migration from new locations, i.e., limit exposure to disaster, including natural disasters and man-made issues such as contaminated water, air, and soil.
- Develop data infrastructures and research funding to support risk modelling that includes homeless populations. Develop cross disciplinary institutes that will also train the next generation of scientists who will be well-equipped to work in this area.

Main issues attending exposure	Alignments
Homeless populations are more exposed to climatic events and their sequela.	SDG 13: Climate action
Pressures on healthcare attending physical and mental health impacts, exposure to illness and disease – vector, air, water, including COVID-19. Increased exposure to violence.	SDG 3: Good health and well-being ; UNHCR: Health ; WHO ; PAHO ; APHRC ; IDRC: Global health
Homelessness compounds existing inequalities. Most at risk: First Nations peoples, women, children, and others who face intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization, including identities around race, religion, country of origin, and 2SLGBTQIA+.	SDG 10: Reduced inequality ; UNFCCC: Gender ; UNFCCC: Local communities and Indigenous Peoples
Need: localized, context-specific homelessness prevention, mitigation, remediation, and intervention programs (e.g., housing first, supported housing models, employment supports and facilitation) to help reduce poverty. Support of community-led responses based on local knowledge and community networks.	SDG 1: No poverty ; UNFCCC: Capacity-building ; UNHCR: shelter ; UNDESA: Capacity building
Need: warming and cooling centres; public water; inclusive risk communication strategies; and outreach programs to provide support and educate about available services.	UNFCCC: Adaptation and Resilience
Need: infrastructure development. Disaster planning should include homeless populations. Urban planning (green spaces) needs to be inclusive and safe.	SDG 9: Industry, innovation, and infrastructure ; SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities ; UNFCCC: Land use
Planning, strategies, and policies should be done through the lenses of environmental and climate justice to limit further exposure to natural and man-made disaster and their accompanying traumas to physical and mental health and wellbeing.	SDG 3: Good health and well-being ; SDG 10: Reduced inequality ; SDG 13: Climate action ; UNHCR: Health ; WHO ; PAHO ; APHRC ; IDRC: Global health