



Migration and Exposure

Climate Change and Homelessness:

A global response framework

Sean Kidd | Mariya Bezgrebelna

Acknowledgments

Title: Climate change and homelessness: A global response framework

Drafted and Edited by: Kidd, S. A., Bezgrebelna, M.

Contributing Authors:

Galvao, L. A. (Brazil), Hajat, S. (U.K.), Hale, M. (U.S.A.), Keevers, L. (Australia), Settembrino, M. (U.S.A.), Solomon, N. (Kenya), Vickery, J. (U.S.A.), Wells, S. (Canada), Yamamoto, S. (Canada)

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*.

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

Migration

Executive Summary

Climate-driven migration is increasing globally and is directly associated with homelessness and compromised housing. This challenge has the greatest impacts in low-income countries (e.g., rural-urban slum migration in Africa). While many migrate, the poorest are in many instances unable to migrate and forced to subsist in profoundly degraded environments.

Climate pressures are increasing with complex direct and indirect impacts.

Direct Risks

Primary

- Loss of housing
- Compromised housing

Secondary

- Overcrowding
- Food & water insecurity
- Energy insecurity
- Exposure risks

Moderators

- Temporary vs permanent migration
- Type of migration (rural-urban, urban-urban, country-country)
- Refugee planning and management
- Resource availability (housing, employment, health, social)
- Aid flow
- Social inequity and racism
- Infrastructure capacity

Outcomes

- Increase in poverty, homelessness, vulnerability
- Physical and mental health problems and mortality
- Loss of productivity & employment
- Exposure to physical and sexual violence

General Points:

The migration challenge represents a vicious cycle - once housing insecurity and loss start, the costs and difficulties associated with responding and remediating compound. This cycle is exacerbated by social inequalities, trauma, and violence. Globally, there is considerable variability in the types and scales of the risks involved depending on the pertinent climate impacts, infrastructures, health risks, inequities, type of migration (planned vs unplanned), and risks of violence.

Current economic challenges intensified by Covid-19 and the growing inaccessibility of housing markets are worsening this situation, with migrants facing substandard living conditions and with international migration complicated by border closures.

Types of Climate Driven Migration Pressures Leading to Homelessness:

→ Rural-urban

Increases when climate shocks influence agriculture (e.g., Mexico). Lack of education and training can render rural-urban migrants homeless (e.g., Bangladesh).

→ Urban-urban

There is some indication that this type of migration may occur in response to prolonged heat periods that interfere with labour productivity (e.g., Mexico).

→ External migration (country-country)

There are difficulties with attributing international migration to climate change-related events due to the lack of consistent data gathering, and due to the difficulties in tracking and attributing migration to slow-onset climate change.

Despite concerns, there is no evidence of increased conflict in areas receiving international climate migrants.

Outcomes:

Climate-driven migration is associated with increases in poverty, homelessness, violence exposure, and inequality. Migration is also linked with physical and mental health problems and mortality, along with a loss of employment and of productivity due to the loss of contributing citizens.

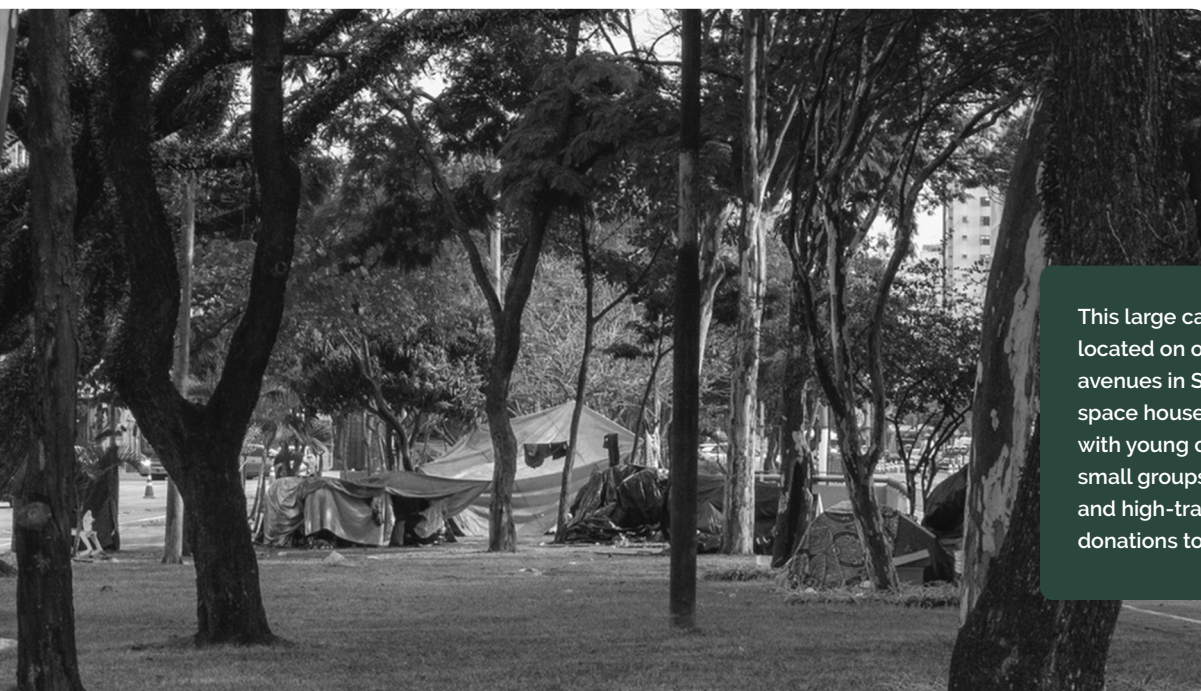
Challenges by Stakeholder Group

→ Government problem:

The problems related to migration and associated homelessness faced by governments are difficult to plan for, remediate, fund, and respond to without adequate data and prevention efforts. These factors are especially prevalent in low-income countries, which frequently rely on financial support from high-income countries.

→ Provider problem:

Country-country – The migration-housing pressures faced by providers are compounded by poverty, poor management practices in host countries, as well as discriminatory policies and practices. Similarly, within-country migration is challenged by a lack of resources and an increased need for aid flow; local governments unwilling to engage with issues related to marginalized populations; and a lack of affordable housing options.



This large campground is located on one of the main avenues in Sao Paulo. The space houses mostly families with young children. These small groups seek out wooded and high-traffic areas to ask for donations to survive.

Photo by Marco Hovnanian

Responses

Prevention is Key

TARGET 1

Risk remediation to facilitate staying in place.

→ Government

Governments can mandate or subsidize improvements to low-quality housing. On the broader scale, governments also need to implement risk reduction and remediation plans that incorporate specific disaster response strategies, and climate action and adaptation plans that prioritize the most vulnerable. Development plans need to consider the local context and recognize and incorporate local knowledge.

→ Services and systems

Local organizations should help with connecting community members to existing services. There is a need to train and raise awareness among the affected communities on the impacts of climate change, ways to respond, and their inherent capacity to adapt to the climate crisis.

TARGET 2

Planned migration.

→ Government

There is a need to: (i) to work in collaboration with communities, relying on existing connections and developing ethical and inclusive approaches, (ii) to establish communication with and support for community members who are unwilling or unable to relocate (e.g., due to poverty, loss of property, cultural beliefs), and (iii) to prepare housing, infrastructure, livelihoods, public services, public schooling, etc. For country-to-country migration, international cooperation and planning are needed with shared responsibilities.

→ Services and systems

Local organizations can play a pivotal role in ensuring public understanding, providing opportunities for public debate, and cooperation with government plans. Organizations can ensure that new locations are ready and provide support to recent migrants.

TARGET 3

Early homelessness intervention at migration stopping points.→ **Government**

Governments can provide funding for permanent and temporary housing and supports aimed at homelessness prevention, such as housing first, supported housing and other context-specific approaches and models. There is a need for policies that facilitate access to healthcare and create opportunities for employment.

→ **Services and systems**

Need to ensure availability and accessibility of shelters, food, water, basic healthcare, and proper sanitary conditions. Outreach programs can be beneficial to address issues prominent among migrant populations, such as language barriers or lack of knowledge about local support infrastructures. Interventions are needed to reduce violence and trauma.

This image seeks to represent how people experiencing homelessness take advantage of the tree's branches to protect themselves from the heat and create a structure for their housing.



Photo by Marco Hovnanian

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, UNFCCC, 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 displacement and migration

Alignments

Housing insecurity, loss of housing and loss of livelihoods exacerbate poverty.

SDG 1: No poverty ; Habitat for Humanity ; OHCHR ; UNHCR: shelter

Pressures on healthcare, increased vulnerability to health conditions, spread of illness, exacerbated existing health conditions, and mental health issues – with trauma prominent (exacerbated by Covid-19).

SDG 3: Good health and well-being; UNHCR: Health ; WHO ; PAHO ; APHRC ; IDRC: Global health ; IOM

Pressures on infrastructure, food, water, sanitation, parks, etc. Compounded by a lack of governance/established response frameworks.

UNFCCC: Climate Finance ; UNFCCC: Land use ; UNDP ; UNDESA: Intergovernmental support ; SDG 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Exacerbated inequalities. Most at risk: Indigenous 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 for planned migration, service availability, affordable housing, settlement support, and slum expansion/upgrade

SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities ; IOM ; CMHC and National Housing Council (Canada)



This refuge combines different lighter materials, such as plastics and thinner fabrics, and uses the structure of an overpass to protect themselves from rain and sun. The space is big enough for two people to shelter.

Photo by Marco Hovnanian

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