Migration

Climate Change and Homelessness:

A global response framework

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camh
mental health is health

Acknowledgments

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:

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 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 slow-onset climate change migration.

Despite concerns, there is no evidence of increased conflicts 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 loss of employment and of productivity due to loss of contributing citizens.
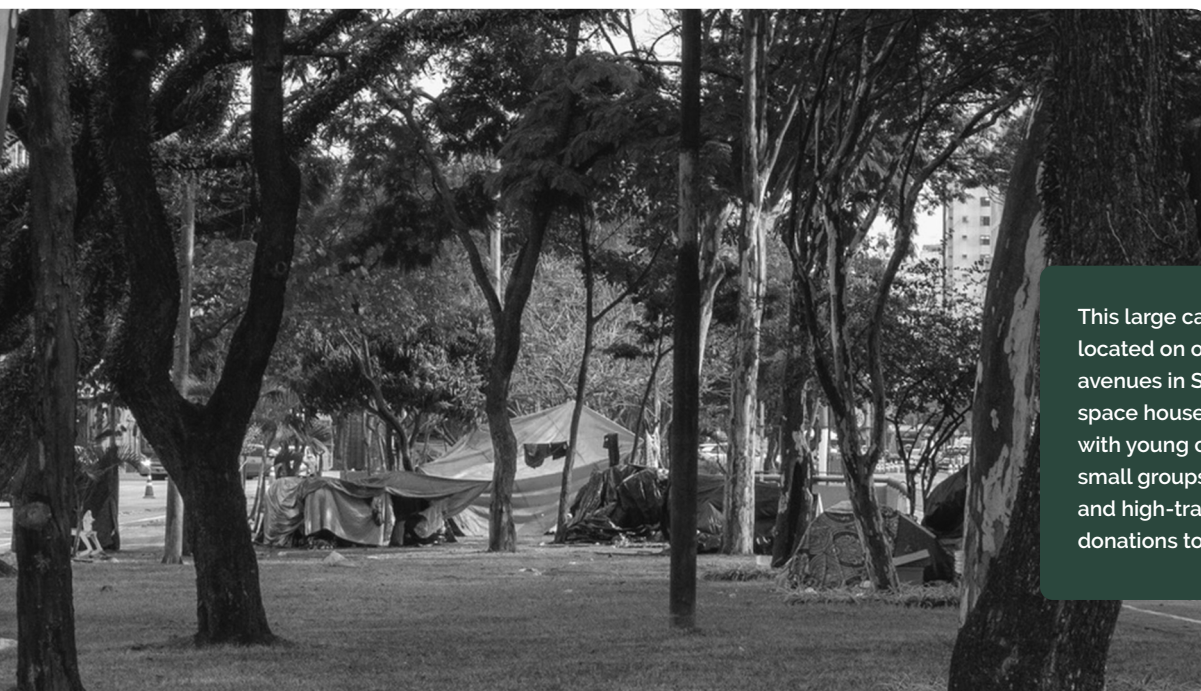
Challenges by Stakeholder Group

→ **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 for 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 increased need for aid flow; local government 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**

Mandated or subsidized 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 local context and recognize and incorporate local knowledge.

→ **Services and systems**

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

TARGET 2

Planned migration.

→ **Government**

Need to work in collaboration with communities, relying on existing connections and developing ethical and inclusive approaches. Need 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). Need 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 possibility for public debate and cooperation with government plans when they are the best course of action for local communities. Ensure that new locations are ready and provide support to recent migrants.

TARGET 3

Early homelessness intervention at migration stopping points.

→ **Government**

Need 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. Need policies that grant 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. Work on measures 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

Cross-cutting Processes:
Examples

→ 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.

→ Index to local cultural, systems, socioeconomic, geographic factors, integrated through the 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+.

→ Identifying existing initiatives and organizations working in similar areas and aligning language, strategies, and combining efforts. Need to identify global actors (e.g., UNDESA, UNDP, UNHCR, UNFCCC, WHO, IOM) and local initiatives (NAZCA). Aligning with existing modes of provider practice (e.g., North America, EU).

→ Note disproportionate attention to the issues in high-income countries vs countries who experience more impacts. 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. Need data (e.g., Canada)

→ Integrating a culturally situated trauma-informed approach.

→ Environmental and climate justice lenses should be applied to strategies and plans in order to prevent further migration from new location, i.e., limit exposure to disaster, including natural disasters and man-made issues such as contaminated water, air and soil.

→ Developing data infrastructures and research funding to support risk modelling that includes homeless populations. Development of cross disciplinary institutes that will also train the next generation of scientists who will be well-equipped to work in this area.

→ Need data on types of weather impacts, type of population, and context (geographic and otherwise) – health impacts, service utilization and economic impacts.

→ Need data on prevention, resilience, existing inclusive strategies, adaptation measures, migration patterns due to cycles of precipitation and temperature variations, projected migration, interaction between homelessness and migration, intervention implementation and effectiveness. There is also a need for funding of research and social programs focusing on marginalized populations to inform the development of relocation plans.

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 themself from rain and sun. The space is big enough for two people to shelter.

Photo by Marco Hovnanian