



Suggestions:

Summer Plan for Persons Living in Homelessness in Delhi

Update: April 2023

Introduction

In the absence of a safe and secure home, persons living in homelessness face severe challenges, which are further exacerbated by extreme climatic conditions. Adverse weather events, such as heat waves, heavy rain, floods, and drought, compound challenges faced by homeless persons, especially older persons, persons with disabilities, children, and women.

Delhi experiences intense heat, with very high temperatures, during the summer months, particularly from April to July. Having recorded the warmest February since 1901¹, the summer season has not only begun much earlier this year, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has also forewarned that in 2023 the summer season will be much drier, hotter, and longer in various parts of the country, with warnings for frequent heat waves from March to May, especially in northern, central, and eastern parts of the country.²

Heat waves, or periods of abnormally high temperatures, primarily affect those compelled to live or work outdoors, including informal workers, people living in homelessness, and those without adequate housing. Homeless people lack access to adequate potable and clean water, food and nutrition, and healthcare, all of which are necessary for the protection from the intense heat. High temperatures and mosquitoes also make it challenging for people to sleep outdoors and increases health risks from food spoilage and contamination. In the last few decades, the mortality rate as a direct result of heat waves in India has been nearly twice the mortality rate due to cold waves.³

The recent increase in the number of COVID-19 cases⁴ has introduced additional challenges for vulnerable communities and compounded their risks from the rising heat.⁵ Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, persons living in homelessness continue to be disproportionately affected by the resultant and ongoing public health, economic, and social crises.

¹ 'Water Crisis Deepens in Delhi, Situation To Get Worse as City Braces for Harsh Summer,' *Times Now News*, 7 March 2023. Available at: <https://www.timesnownews.com/delhi/water-crisis-deepens-in-delhi-situation-to-get-worse-as-city-braces-for-harsh-summer-article-98480447>

² 'After hottest February in over 100 years, heatwaves are coming: How deadly will be the Indian summer?,' *Firstpost*, 1 March 2023. Available at: <https://www.firstpost.com/explainers/india-hottest-february-heatwave-predictions-2023-summer-wheat-energy-12224642.html>

³ See Ray, K. et al, 'An Assessment of Long-term Changes in Mortalities Due to Extreme Weather Events in India: A Study of 50 Years' Data,' 1970–2019, *Weather and Climate Extremes*, Volume 32, 2021. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S221209472100013X>

⁴ 'Delhi sees surge in COVID-19 cases with 430% jump in active cases in just under 3 weeks: Data,' *The Economic Times*, 18 April 2023. Available at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/delhi-sees-surge-in-covid-19-cases-with-a-430-jump-in-active-cases-in-just-under-3-weeks-data/articleshow/99586820.cms>

⁵ See Golechha, M. and R. K. Panigrahy, 'COVID-19 and Heatwaves: A Double Whammy for Indian Cities,' *Lancet*, Volume 4, 2020. Available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanplh/PIIS2542-5196\(20\)30170-4.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanplh/PIIS2542-5196(20)30170-4.pdf)

Despite the severe impact of high temperatures on the health and lives of those living in homelessness, there is a lack of adequate state intervention to protect vulnerable people from the extreme heat. The Delhi government, in particular the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB), undertakes significant measures to protect homeless persons during the winter, including setting up of temporary tents. However, these tents are usually removed by the end of March, leaving people without shelter and associated facilities, including water, meals, and toilets, for the rest of the year.

Given the serious threat posed by heat waves and high temperatures and the urgent need to protect the health and lives of the city's most marginalized and vulnerable population, HLRN, in consultation with Delhi's homeless community, has prepared this human rights-based summer plan for immediate implementation. This summer plan provides recommendations for homeless people in Delhi who are already living in shelters as well as those living on the streets who do not have access to shelters.

Recommendations from Homeless Persons and Housing and Land Rights Network

1. Need for Improved Facilities and Services in Existing Shelters

- Ensure that all shelters have functional water dispensers and coolers.
- Ensure **adequate and regular supply of potable water for drinking**, and clean water for bathing, washing clothes, and for other personal needs in all shelters.
- Provide **functional air coolers and fans in all shelters**, including in porta cabins and the reinforced concrete cement buildings. Ensure that non-functioning fans and air coolers in shelters are repaired or replaced immediately.
- Take urgent steps to **manage the extreme heat in porta cabins** caused by metal sheets used as roofs, as this often renders them unusable during the peak summer months.
- Ensure **regular pest and vector-control measures in all shelters**. Provide mosquito nets and mosquito repellents in all shelters. Where devices to check against mosquitoes/other pests in shelters are installed, ensure that they are functional and well-maintained. Install them in shelters where they are missing.
- In order to **improve ventilation** and protect against mosquitoes, install additional doors with netting (*jaali*) in all shelters. Ensure that windows have netting to prevent entry of mosquitoes.
- Ensure a distance of at least 2–3 metres between each person/bed in all shelters.
- Continue the **provision of two daily free meals in all shelters**. The distribution of free meals has been very helpful in preventing a hunger crisis among the homeless community in Delhi.

2. Essential Services for People Living on the Streets

- Identify high-risk areas where high concentrations of homeless persons live or work, and may be more prone to heat strokes and other heat related illnesses.
- Create water distribution points across the city where homeless people live – either through the installation of new municipal taps or Delhi Jal Board drinking water tankers. This is essential to prevent dehydration and deaths during the summer. Coordinate with Shelter Management Agencies (SMAs). These agencies can be delegated the responsibilities and maintaining these distribution points.
- Promote improved coordination between the Delhi Jal Board and municipal corporations to ensure that all public water taps are functional, as persons living on the streets are heavily dependent on them.

- Establish ‘**cooling areas**’ in high-risk areas with provision of water, food, toilets, and first-aid to counter the impact of the heat.
- Ensure that all public toilets/ ‘**Sulabh Shauchalayas**’ are made free, and user-charges are not mandatory to use the facilities.

Lack of access to sanitation facilities most severely impacts women, increasing incidents of gender-based violence against them. To ensure that these facilities reach homeless communities, make oral announcements, and use other means of information dissemination, in local languages, for those who are not literate. Sign boards in local languages should be displayed in front of all public toilets and all caretakers/workers should be sensitized to the needs of the homeless community.

- Ensure regular **pest and vector-control measures** across the city, especially in areas with high concentrations of people living in homelessness. Regular fumigation is required to control the menace of mosquitoes.
- Homeless families living on the streets should be allowed to set up makeshift dwelling units, made of tarpaulin and sticks on the streets, as a means to provide **temporary and immediate respite from the heat**. Work with officials from the Municipal Corporations and the Delhi Police to **ensure that these dwelling units are not arbitrarily demolished or destroyed**.
- **Extend the ongoing provision of free meals for homeless persons to include persons and families living on the streets**. Expand the scope of collaboration with Akshaya Patra, work with SMAs to ensure that homeless persons on the streets are given meals twice a day, with the provision of milk for infants, children, pregnant and lactating women, and older persons. Families living on the streets should also be provided with ration cards to ensure their access to ration/food grains being distributed under the Public Distribution System (PDS).

3. Urgent Need for New Permanent and Climate/Weather-resistant Shelters

- A **rapid assessment survey of people living on the streets** is required to assess the shortfall of existing shelters for people who need and want to move to shelters.
- Consultations with land-owning agencies should be held to ascertain availability of vacant land and buildings/spaces/structures for establishing homeless shelters. Short-term lease arrangements could be considered with land-owning agencies in light of the urgent situation.
- Based on the needs assessment and mapping, **vacant government buildings, including community halls and other vacant spaces**, near areas of concentration of homeless persons, should be converted into shelters with adequate facilities and safety norms.
- All newly-created permanent shelters must **ensure adequate living conditions, proper facilities and hygiene, and implementation of health and safety guidelines** to prevent overcrowding and the spread of COVID-19. Each shelter should respect the right of all residents to live with dignity.
- **Rental vouchers** should be provided to those who cannot be accommodated in existing shelters, so that they can afford rental housing.

4. Health Services and Medical Facilities for Residents of Shelters and those Living on the Streets

- **Recognize and declare** heat waves as an ‘emergency’ and ensure adequate response mechanisms.

- Establish **emergency medical services** and ambulances for people suffering from heat-related illnesses such as heat exhaustion, heat strokes, dehydration, and heat cramps.
- Ensure that **Mobile Medical Health Vans visit all shelters on a regular basis**. Organize **monthly health camps** in all areas to provide medical check-ups and health-related information to people.
- Distribute **Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS) packets and refillable water bottles** free of cost—in shelters and on the streets—to prevent dehydration caused by extreme heat.
- **Train shelter caretakers** to identify signs of heat stroke and exhaustion, and prepare contingency plans to deal with health emergencies.

5. COVID-19 Protection and Treatment

- **Ensure that homeless persons of all ages** are provided all doses of the vaccination, including the booster dose, free of cost, with their prior and informed consent, and without the requirement of identity documents. In the absence of Aadhaar cards/proof of date of birth no one should be denied the vaccine. Conduct regular camps in collaboration with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and SMAs to follow-up with homeless persons who have received the first dose to ensure that they receive the second dose and the booster shot and are completely inoculated against the virus.
- Ensure **free testing and treatment** for COVID-19.
- Create **adequate quarantine centres and care facilities** for homeless persons who test positive for COVID-19.

6. Special Needs of Homeless Children

- Collaborate with the Delhi Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) and use their data **to address the specific challenges of children in street situations**, including access to adequate shelter, food, water, healthcare, and education.
- In collaboration with the DCPCR, undertake efforts to map out and identify homeless children who have dropped out of school during the pandemic, **counsel and support them** to re-enrol in schools, with the consent of their parents/guardians.
- Create crèches and childcare centres with adequate facilities in vacant buildings and *anganwadi* centres, to protect homeless children who are highly susceptible to heat.
- Provide **universal coverage** for all homeless children under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme and ensure that they can access *anganwadis* and related facilities, including for nutrition and healthcare.
- Distribute **free milk and meals** to children living on the streets to ensure their access to adequate and nutritious food.

7. Rights of Shelter Caretakers

- Uphold the **right to work of shelter caretakers**, including fixing work hours, paying adequate wages, and providing them with a weekly day off. Ensure that ‘relievers’ are appointed so that regular caretakers can take a break.

8. Other Social Protection Measures for Persons Living in Homelessness

- Make all **welfare schemes** of the Delhi government accessible to homeless persons, irrespective of their documentation and proof of address/residence.
- Conduct **special camps** to provide homeless persons with ration, election, and Aadhaar cards.
- Introduce the provision of **unemployment allowances** in Delhi for all those who have lost their livelihoods, including as a result of the pandemic.
- Provide all residents of DUSIB shelters with **‘Shelter User Identity Cards.’** These should be recognized as a valid form of official identification. Any directives given to create and maintain databases of homeless persons, including those in shelters and temporary buildings, should not result in the violation of the right to privacy.
- Provide **disability pension and insurance** to persons with disabilities.
- Conduct **skill-training workshops** for homeless persons in shelters and take measures to link them with job portals and other livelihood opportunities.
- As recommended earlier by HLRN, the Delhi government should consider initiating a pilot project to provide a Universal Basic Income for marginalized communities/economically weaker sections in the city, including homeless persons. This would greatly help in preventing hunger, ill health, and destitution during these difficult times. It would also set a positive precedent for the rest of the country.

9. Policy-level Interventions

- Every year Delhi bears the brunt of extreme heat conditions during the summer. With the summer season getting warmer, drier, and more prolonged in the city, and with increasing severity and frequency of heat waves, the city’s large homeless and daily-wage working populations are facing increasing levels of unprecedented heat stress. Such circumstances make the creation of annual **Heat Action Plans** (HAPs) at the state and district levels an imperative of the government.⁶ These HAPs are not only crucial in preventing heat-related illnesses and deaths, they also ensure the preparedness of various government departments to prevent the exacerbation of the impacts of heat waves, especially on vulnerable groups.
- Homeless persons should be explicitly recognised as a **separate category of vulnerable people** in policy documents like the HAPs because they are disproportionately affected by extreme weather conditions.

10. Investment in Adequate Housing Options along a Continuum

- While shelters are required to meet the emergency needs of certain vulnerable groups, they are not a permanent solution for the majority of the working homeless population. The government, thus, should develop housing options along a **‘continuum of housing’** – including hostels for single working men and women; short-stay homes for survivors of domestic violence; recovery homes for those with health issues, including chemical dependency; collective/group housing for persons with disabilities, older persons, single mothers, and others who do not want to live by themselves; and, access to subsidized rental and ownership housing with access to adequate finance.

⁶ ‘Heat Action Plans: What They Are, Why We Need Them,’ *The Wire*, 18 April 2023. Available at: <https://thewire.in/environment/heat-action-plans-explained>

- While welcoming the Delhi government's announcement to focus on implementing the Affordable Rental Housing Complexes scheme, we would like to recommend that housing is provided **close to people's places of work and study**; that it is developed with their active participation; and that it is subsidized/free and based on their ability to pay.
- The policy of '**Housing First**' that prioritizes homeless people for housing in all government schemes should be adopted in Delhi, with the aim of ending homelessness by 2030.
- The Delhi government should also **introduce a moratorium on all forced evictions**, including for the inability of low-income groups to pay rent, as these contribute to an increase in homelessness.

Conclusion

People living without housing constitute one of the most marginalized and vulnerable groups in the country. Without the protection of a 'home', the community faces innumerable challenges which are worsened by extreme weather events. Particularly, during the summer, children, women, older persons, and others, who live and work outdoors face grave risk to their lives from heat waves.

We greatly appreciate the initiatives of the Delhi government for homeless persons during winter. However, we urge the government to also formulate a focused plan to protect people living without housing from the intense heat.

Towards the long term goal of reducing homelessness in the city, we also urge the Delhi government to focus on developing a comprehensive long-term plan that would enable everyone living on the streets and in shelters to move into secure housing and increase public investment in adequate housing for all, including the most marginalized and vulnerable communities.

Housing and Land Rights Network is committed to working for the human rights of all those living in homelessness and to working with the Delhi government in this endeavour. We thank the Delhi government for its consideration, efforts, and support.⁷

⁷ For more information, please write to us at: contact@hlrn.org.in