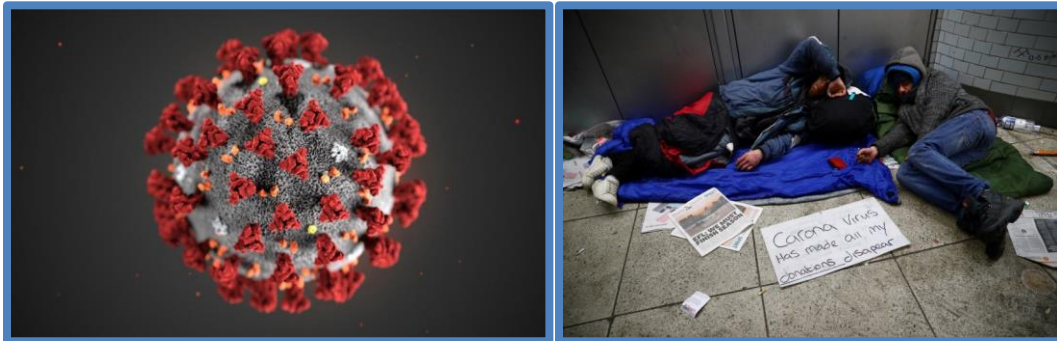


**Niagara University Report on  
COVID-19 and Global Homelessness –  
Executive Summary, 23 October 2020**



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Within any individual country, the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to exacerbate the existing conditions that lead to homelessness. Homelessness has the potential to become a global catastrophe. SDGs (sustainable development goals) are intended to build capacity and resilience and to mitigate against conditions that would lead to homelessness. The pandemic undermines the United Nation's ability to implement its agenda. The global community needs to be prepared to mitigate future pandemics and catastrophes because this may not be an isolated incident. What are the preconditions for global homelessness? How will global homelessness be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Homelessness will be conceptualized according to the UN Habitat definition as "living in severely inadequate housing due to a lack of access to minimal acceptable housing." The base competing arguments are: COVID-19 will increase homelessness and exacerbate systemic failures both within and across states; COVID-19 will allow us to learn from this experience to better prepare and respond to future pandemics; COVID-19 won't have a meaningful impact on homelessness because the populations that are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless are not going to be displaced to a greater extent than they already are. We project that homelessness will be exacerbated in Africa and the Middle East because of economic downturns and migratory patterns and that COVID-19 is being used as a justification for denying access to migratory populations. Migrations from China and India to Australia to New Zealand have been blocked for the same reasons.

Pre-COVID, homelessness focuses on the United Nations sustainable development goal one which calls for an end to poverty, eight which calls for good jobs and economic growth, ten which calls for reduced inequalities, and eleven which calls for sustainable cities and communities.

The preconditions for homelessness will be assigned specific definitions. Natural disasters are defined as a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society at any scale due to naturally occurring events. Gender inequality uses the UN Women definition as the lack of equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of men and women, boys, and girls. Migration uses the UN IOM definition as a large population of people who are moving or have moved across an international border or within a state away from his/her habitual place of residence. Affordable housing is defined as yearly housing costs exceed 30% of the nation's median household income. Population density is defined as the number of people per square kilometer. Overall poverty is defined as living below the international poverty line of 1.90 USD per day. Economic shocks used the NASDAQ definition of events that impact the economy which originate from the outside; they are unexpected and unpredictable. Government intervention has two different definitions: definition A is the government does not have adequate policies to mitigate homelessness; definition B is the government does not provide appropriate measures in the wake of COVID such as PPE, housing, and stimulus.

Preconditions and precursors to homelessness will be identified from a regional perspective. These regions are North America, Central America and the Caribbean, South

America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa, Southern Africa, the Middle East, South and East Asia, Pacific Island, and Australia. The North America region includes the nations of Canada, the United States, and Mexico. The Central America and the Caribbean region includes all nations in Central America from Guatemala to Panama, and the Caribbean including the U.S. territories within the Caribbean islands. The South America region includes all nations on the continent of South America from Colombia to Argentina. The Western Europe region includes the nordic nations and all nations west of and including Germany, Austria, and Italy. The Eastern Europe region includes all nations east of and including Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, excluding Turkey, and including Russia. The Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa region includes all nations north of not including Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The Southern Africa region includes all nations south of and including Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Middle East comprises the African nations of Libya, Egypt, and Sudan along with Turkey, the Persian Gulf states, Iran, and Afghanistan. The South and East Asia region comprises all Asian nations excluding those comprising the Middle East region, Russia, and the Pacific Island nations. The Pacific Islands do not include Japan and Taiwan. The Pacific Islands region includes the countries of Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. The Australia region includes the nations of Australia and New Zealand.



**Figure 1: Regional Breakdown Map Visualization**

In North America, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, regionally, broadly speaking, the preconditions of migration, economic shocks, and government intervention (A) contributed to homelessness. The preconditions of natural disasters, gender inequality, affordable

housing, population density, and overall poverty do not contribute to homelessness. Post-COVID, the preconditions of migration, population density, and economic shocks contribute to homelessness. The preconditions of natural disasters, gender inequality, affordable housing, overall poverty, and government intervention do not contribute to homelessness. For North America, unemployment is a driving factor of homelessness. The virus has accentuated homelessness in North America mainly by causing governments to force businesses to shut down, run on lower staffing capacity, and/or lay off workers.

In Central America and the Caribbean before COVID-19, the preconditions of natural disasters, gender inequality, overall poverty, economic shocks, and government intervention (A) did contribute to homelessness. The preconditions of migration, affordable housing, and population density did not contribute to homelessness. Post-COVID, the preconditions of natural disasters, gender inequality, overall poverty, economic shocks, and government intervention (B) contribute to homelessness. The preconditions of migration, affordable housing, and population density do not contribute to homelessness. In this region, natural disasters have a major impact. Natural disasters are often unpredictable and very expensive as it often causes major damages to housing. The lack of housing has caused COVID-19 to run rampant in this region as individuals are left without a home due to them not being able to afford one or it being destroyed due to a natural disaster.

In the South America region, before COVID, the preconditions of natural disasters, gender inequality, migration, affordable housing, population density, overall poverty, economic shocks, and government intervention (A) did contribute to homelessness. Post-COVID, the preconditions of gender inequality, migration, affordable housing, population density, overall poverty, economic shocks, and government intervention (B) contributed to homelessness. The precondition of natural disasters did not contribute to homelessness. In South America, the key to attacking the homelessness issue is to raise awareness of the hardships endured by the homeless/poor population through social platforms. Governing bodies of large countries such as Brazil should then feel obligated to reallocate its resources to create legitimate working solutions to the issue, especially during a global pandemic.

In the Western Europe region, before COVID, the preconditions of migration, affordable housing, population density, overall poverty, and economic shocks did contribute to homelessness. The preconditions of natural disasters and gender inequality did not contribute to homelessness. Post-COVID, the preconditions of migration, affordable housing, population density, overall poverty, economic shocks, and government intervention (B) did contribute to homelessness. Natural disasters and gender inequality did not contribute to homelessness. In Western Europe, COVID-19 has disrupted the already recovering European economy from 2008. The economic shocks caused by COVID have drastically increased the unemployment rate in numerous European countries.

In the Eastern Europe region, before COVID, the preconditions of natural disasters, gender inequality, migration, affordable housing, population density, overall poverty, and economic shocks all contributed to homelessness. The precondition of government intervention

(A) did not contribute to homelessness. Post-COVID, the preconditions of natural disasters, gender inequality, migration, affordable housing, population density, overall poverty, economic shocks, and government intervention (B) all contributed to homelessness. In Eastern Europe, overall, the biggest impact the coronavirus has had on the region is the migration issue. People were moving through many Eastern European countries to other countries where they had a situation set up to deal with migrants. However, the coronavirus led to the closure of many borders, and therefore, people became homeless in the country.

In the Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa region, the preconditions of migration, economic shocks, and government intervention (A) do contribute to homelessness. The preconditions of natural disasters, gender inequality, affordable housing, population density, and overall poverty did not contribute to homelessness. Post-COVID, the preconditions of natural disasters, gender inequality, migration, affordable housing, population density, overall poverty, economic shocks, and government intervention (B) all contributed to homelessness.

In the Southern Africa region, the preconditions of natural disasters, gender inequality, migration, affordable housing, population density, overall poverty, and government intervention (A) did not contribute to homelessness. The precondition of economic shocks does not contribute to homelessness. The precondition of economic shocks does not contribute to homelessness. Post-COVID, the preconditions of migration, affordable housing, population density, overall poverty, and economic shocks contributed to homelessness. The preconditions of natural disasters, gender inequality, and government intervention (B) did not contribute to homelessness. In Southern Africa, the pandemic increased the homelessness rate, even though migration was essentially halted. One of the long-term trends that will affect homelessness in Southern Africa after the pandemic is migration. The government officials and several countries have used the pandemic to push their agendas in preventing immigration, claiming it would spike the number of cases. This inevitably will have drastic changes on the makeup of a nation for years to come. Another trend is how governments created tent cities for the homeless, attempting to give them shelter and nutrition during the pandemic, at the same time getting them off the streets to avoid contact with other citizens.

In the Middle East region, before COVID, the preconditions of natural disasters, gender inequality, migration, population density, overall poverty, economic shocks, and government intervention (A) did contribute to homelessness. The precondition of affordable housing did not contribute to homelessness. Post-COVID, the preconditions of gender inequality, migration, affordable housing, population density, overall poverty, and economic shocks contribute to homelessness. Natural disasters do not contribute to homelessness. In the Middle East, homelessness will not be resolved fully until all preconditions are reformed. Strategies such as refugee camps and a chance for migration give those in the Middle East an opportunity for peace and stability, however, this does not allow families and individuals to reside in their previous way of life. The detriments of COVID-19 has made homelessness a larger issue and will continue if not addressed. Solutions for homelessness are linked to refugee status and relocation.



In the South and East Asia region, before COVID, the preconditions of natural disasters, gender inequality, migration, affordable housing, population density, overall poverty, economic shocks, and government intervention (A) did contribute to homelessness. Post-COVID, the preconditions of natural disasters, gender inequality, migration, affordable housing, population density, overall poverty, economic shocks, and government intervention (B) all contributed to homelessness. In South and East Asia, the emergence of COVID-19 has added to the realized and historical risks that prevail in the Asia-Pacific region with frequently occurring natural hazards. In order to effectively combat homelessness in Asia, countries will have to invest more in the measures appropriate to their own circumstances in addition to working more closely together to unlock the potential of regional cooperation.

In the Pacific Islands region, pre-COVID, the preconditions of natural disasters, gender inequality, affordable housing, population density, overall poverty, and government intervention (A) did contribute to homelessness. The preconditions of migration and economic shocks did not contribute to homelessness. Post-COVID, the preconditions of natural disasters, gender inequality, affordable housing, population density, overall poverty, and economic shocks did contribute to homelessness. Migration and government intervention (B) do not contribute to homelessness. Pre-COVID the Pacific Islands region was making strides towards reducing overall poverty, and subsequently homelessness. In the wake of the pandemic, the Pacific Islands have seen an exacerbation of gender inequalities that contribute to women's homelessness and an enormous increase in poverty levels that can be expected to increase homelessness in the region.

“Note that data in this region is not unified, varying in which nations are included from study to study, and ‘[datasets] are difficult to collect and maintain in Oceania and the relative populations are tiny compared to populations centers in the rest of the world’” (UTexas).

The Pacific Islands region is identified as being one of the most vulnerable to natural disasters both due to the lack of disaster preparedness infrastructure and policies as well as the location and size of these islands. The displacement of people after major natural disasters leads to homelessness across the region and the establishment of informal settlements as opposed to planned cities or permanent structures.

Gender inequality is prevalent in this region, with young girls at risk of child marriage and early pregnancy in some communities, a high rate of domestic violence against women and girls, and the expectation for women and girls to be primary caregivers and carry domestic workloads. Women are at a much greater risk of homelessness in this region because there is severe discrimination against women's rights to own, control, and use land as well as non-land assets in over 2/3 of the countries in the EAP. The COVID crisis exacerbated these issues, and quarantines required by the pandemic can reduce the economic and livelihood activities that women have – one can expect that poverty rates among women will increase and food insecurity rates will rise in accordance.

There is both inner-state and inter-state migration in this region as people are displaced by natural disasters and other humanitarian crises. Migrants are more exposed to the coronavirus, the associated health risks, and are more vulnerable to the social and economic impacts caused by lockdowns. The growing cities in this region have rising housing costs, and the urban poor have very few housing options. Population density data for the EAP is almost non-existent.

Across the region, the poverty level was estimated to be around 20% in 2018. With respect to COVID, the number of people in this region living in poverty is expected to increase by as many as 38 million this year with direct causes related to the pandemic. The economic contractions that are forcing people into poverty are responsible for the first increase in the poverty level of this region in 20 years.

While specific homelessness rates are sporadic at best, most of the countries in this region are identified as being at medium to high risk for needing international assistance/intervention as a result of the coronavirus.

In the Australia region, before COVID, the preconditions of natural disasters, affordable housing, and population density did contribute to homelessness. The preconditions of gender inequality, overall poverty, economic shocks, and government intervention (A) do not contribute to homelessness. Post-COVID, natural disasters, gender inequality, migration, affordable housing, population density, and economic shocks contributed to homelessness. The preconditions of overall poverty and government intervention (B) do not contribute to homelessness. In Australia, homelessness before COVID was largely concentrated in epicenters around major cities, especially with high migrant populations settling in urban areas. Post-COVID homelessness in this region will disproportionately affect women and those who were previously displaced as a result of natural disasters and migration.

Australia faced devastating effects of natural disasters in 2019 prior to the coronavirus outbreak, most notably, the extreme bushfires from September on. The bushfires left many homeless and were expected to also lead to an increase in domestic/family violence, similar to the aftermath of large-scale bushfires in 2008. New Zealand faces volcanic threats and flooding regularly.

Regarding gender inequality, some sources claimed that the gender pay gap was still a prevalent issue in New Zealand, though there was no concrete data to support said claim. Australia's biggest issue before COVID-19 was the increased prospect of domestic violence in the wake of last year's bushfires, especially with respect to the fact that domestic violence is the leading cause of women's homelessness. On a global scale, COVID has exacerbated gender inequality issues, and women are disproportionately at risk for contracting coronavirus. Women make up 70% of the health sector workforce, are more likely to be front-line health workers and are the majority of health service staff (janitors, cleaners, etc), so they are more likely to be exposed to the virus than men.

Migration rates were high for both Australia and New Zealand pre-COVID, which drove up homelessness rates, especially in urban areas. The largest demographic of migrants is Asian, with the biggest populations coming from China and India. The pandemic has mitigated the flow

of migration into Australia and New Zealand as governments use the virus as a justification to tighten their borders. The pandemic has “accelerated a range of existing trends so rapidly that the world has already sunk into the migration equivalent of an economic recession.” There was little data overall about affordable housing, although Australia estimated a deficit of over half a million rental units for low-income renters and New Zealand projected that the amount of available housing would continue to decrease due to high housing costs. Population density is unsurprisingly concentrated in urban areas, leading to higher homelessness rates around the most populated cities. Australia identified 13.6% of people living below the international poverty line according to the most recent available data for SDG 1. New Zealand’s poverty rates were more elusive for a country-wide perspective, but it was estimated that 27% of children live in poverty. Economic shocks were not a pressing issue before the pandemic for either country, but both nations felt the economic strains of COVID, and Australia faces its first recession in three decades. Homelessness rates were 0.48% for Australia and 0.94% for New Zealand.

The most prevalent pre-conditions before COVID were ranked. The preconditions of migration, natural disasters, and inadequate government intervention were the most prevalent with a 9:2 ratio. All the other preconditions were less prevalent with an 8:3 ratio. Based on the prevalence of these preconditions per region, the most vulnerable regions were identified. The regions of South America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South and East Asia were ranked the most vulnerable regions followed by the regions of Eastern Europe, South Africa, and the Middle East. The regions of Western Europe and the Pacific Islands were identified as the least vulnerable.

When comparing the pre-COVID preconditions with the post-COVID preconditions, many trends were identified. Post-COVID, Eastern Europe became one of the most vulnerable regions as a result of the pandemic. Regions that decreased their weighted vulnerability are South America and Southern Africa. The most prevalent preconditions pre-COVID were migration, government intervention, economic shocks, overall poverty, and high population density. The most prevalent preconditions post-COVID were economic shocks, high population density, migration, overall poverty, affordable housing, and gender inequality.

The most vulnerable regions pre-COVID were South and East Asia, South America, and Sub-Saharan Africa followed by Eastern Europe, Southern Africa, and the Middle East followed by Western Europe and the Pacific Islands followed by Central America and the Caribbean followed by Australia and then North America. Post-COVID, the most vulnerable regions were identified as Eastern Europe, South and East Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa followed by South America and the Middle East followed by the Pacific Islands, Australia, and Western Europe followed by Central America and the Caribbean along with Southern Africa and then North America. Economic shocks have been felt globally by every region. High population density became an important precondition for homelessness during COVID due to the difficulty of social distancing and lack of PPE and in densely populated areas the overall effects of the pandemic are exacerbated.



The introduction of COVID-19 will call upon the sustainable development goals to include components to gain effectiveness in the midst of these circumstances. The recognition that fighting a pandemic requires adequate health care for all should be included in sustainable development goal three. The recognition of the need for single-export nations to diversify their economy to better withstand downturns should be included in sustainable development goal eight. The recognition that minority groups will be disproportionately affected should be included in sustainable development goal ten. The recognition of the need for cities to have available multi-functioning housing for people who have been displaced due to disasters should be included in sustainable development goal eleven. The statement that future infrastructure projects should be built with consideration for potential health crises should be included in sustainable development goals nine and eleven.

The COVID-19 pandemic will have many short-term impacts on homelessness and the sustainable development goals. Expect winter to exacerbate the shortcomings of existing social protection programs. Recognize the need for more temporary housing accommodations to keep social distance such as hotels and dormitories. Recognize the need to change the layout of homeless shelters to accommodate social distancing measures. Expect an increase in COVID cases in refugee camps and slums due to the density of people and lack of PPE and social distancing. Recognize that homelessness will disproportionately affect already vulnerable minority groups such as women, people of color, LGBTQ+ youth, survivors of family/domestic violence, young adults aging out of foster care, and people getting out of jail/long-term health care facilities. In terms of evictions, once the eviction ban is up, thousands of people will become homeless which has the potential to spread coronavirus due to the lack of sanitation and protection services around the world.

The COVID-19 pandemic will have many long-term impacts on homelessness and the sustainable development goals. Special attention to North Africa, the Middle East, and essential crossings into Europe. Expect increased European Union border restrictions post-COVID. A general pattern of nations restricting migration and immigration globally. States are using COVID to push political agendas. Evictions will lead to a cycle of poverty. Many people will not recover or will take a long time to recover from eviction due to the difficulty of keeping, or finding, a job while homeless. It is often necessary to have a permanent address in order to have a job and if the person has no permanent address they will have difficulty finding employment and therefore getting enough money to once again have a permanent address. In terms of tourism, nations that rely on it will be disproportionately affected. 197.5 million jobs could be at risk if coronavirus-related travel restrictions and quarantines remain in place according to the World Travel and Tourism Council. International tourism could fall by 60%-80% in 2020.

These findings lead to two conclusions. The first conclusion is that COVID-19 will increase homelessness and exacerbate systemic failures both within and across states. The second conclusion is that COVID-19 will allow us to learn from this experience to better prepare and respond to future pandemics. In addition, we have identified several strategies for limiting homelessness. One successful strategy is that governments have been repurposing unused

buildings. Governments in the Southern Africa region constructed these in sports stadiums or blocked off areas to help those who were living on the streets. Finland is the first country to adopt a national housing first initiative. Homes are given without condition and do not require people to solve their issues before receiving housing. Housing is viewed as a human right and political consensus has been built in acknowledging that solving homelessness requires the cooperation of all. The cost of housing a homeless person saves on average 15,000 Euros per person. It is especially important in developing countries where existing institutions are weak to offer humanitarian aid and promote political dialogue.

Based on our findings, we have several recommendations for the United Nations. First, the creation of a universal framework for how states should gather data on homelessness. The adoption of the UN Habitat Inclusive definition of homelessness. Governments need to focus on primary prevention strategies to combat homelessness in the long-run. Immediate action solutions are most useful in disaster situations. Recognition of the need for a comprehensive view of homelessness through the media, education, and political consensus. COVID presents an opportunity to revise social welfare systems. For the homeless, a post-COVID citation does not mean life pre-COVID. Provide a universal definition for affordable housing and consider housing as a human right.

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