



Suggestions: Winter Plan for Persons Living in Homelessness in Delhi

November 2022 to March 2023

Introduction

It is estimated that over 250,000 persons live in homelessness across Delhi. In the absence of a safe and secure home, homeless persons face multiple challenges including extreme deprivation and destitution, violence, poor health, and malnutrition, among others. These challenges are further exacerbated by adverse weather events and harsh climatic conditions, which occur throughout the year. In particular, during the winter months from November to March, homeless persons suffer innumerable hardships and risk to their health and lives.

Delhi experiences intense winters, with very low temperatures, particularly from December to February. In 2021, various parts of northwest India, including Delhi, experienced severely low temperatures, with heavy and cold winds.¹ Cold waves, or abnormally low temperatures, adversely affect those compelled to live and work outdoors. Without adequate housing, warm clothes, food, healthcare facilities, and other amenities, people are unable to protect themselves from the bitter cold. Children, older persons, pregnant women, persons living with disabilities, those living with chronic illnesses, including long-Covid, and other vulnerable groups are disproportionately affected by the low temperatures. **Between November 2021 to March 2022, at least 790 homeless persons in Delhi died due to/in the absence of adequate shelter.**²

While Delhi has over 150 shelters for persons living in homelessness, it does not accommodate the large homeless population, leaving many people to live on the streets. Every year during winters, the Delhi Urban Improvement Board (DUSIB) takes special measures and sets up additional tents for homeless persons. However, it does not suffice the needs of the large homeless population in Delhi and its various constituencies.

¹ 'Delhi cold wave: At 3.2°C, mercury drops to season's lowest,' *India Today*, 20 December 2021. Available at: <https://www.indiatoday.in/cities/delhi/story/delhi-cold-wave-morning-temperature-drops-rain-western-disturbance-winter-chill-1889740-2021-12-20>

² Independent experts estimate that at least 65 per cent of Unidentified Dead Bodies are of homeless persons. Zonal Integrated Police Network (ZIPNET) is an online portal containing data and information on crime from seven states, including Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Chandigarh, Uttar Pradesh, and, Uttarakhand 'in real-time.' Available at: <https://zipnet.delhipolice.gov.in/index.php?page=about>
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Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) has been highlighting the need for season specific plan for the protection of homeless persons during adverse weather events, based on our work with the homeless community in Delhi. During September and October 2022, HLRN conducted Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with people living in shelters and on streets in multiple locations, including Bangla Saheb, Sarai Kale Khan, Geeta Colony, Yamuna Pushta, Kali Mandir (Rohini), and Britannia Chowk, to understand their immediate demands and needs during winter. The need to provide livelihood opportunities, social protection, and access to healthcare, and emerged very prominently during the FGD's. The economic impact of Covid-19 was also highlighted by homeless persons as a significant challenge.

We commend the work done by DUISB and the Delhi government to provide free food to the residents of shelters across the city, as it has help alleviate concerns and challenges related to food security to an extent. However, people living on the streets continue to be deprived of this benefit and must be included in this provision immediately.

This Winter Plan, which has been prepared in consultation with Delhi's homeless persons sets down important recommendations to address their specific challenges. Specific suggestions from homeless women, older persons, single men, and families have also been included in this Winter Plan.

Recommendations from Homeless Persons and Housing and Land Rights Network

A. Need for Additional Shelters before the Onset of Winter

- Carry out a **rapid assessment survey** to assess the shortfall of existing shelters if adequate distancing norms are to be followed in each shelter.
- A survey/assessment is also required of **people living on the streets** who need and want to move to temporary shelters for the winter months.
- 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.
- In case vacant permanent buildings/rooms/halls are not available close to where homeless people are concentrated, **portable (porta) cabins** could be set up on vacant public land, including in parks.
- 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.
- Tents, such as the fire-resistant tents used in Delhi last winter, should be set up in the vicinity of existing DUISB shelters, in order to accommodate all residents with adequate distancing norms in place. Take steps to **manage the extremely low temperatures** in tents by ensuring proper insulation.
- Where possible, set up adequate tents – one per family – in homeless clusters and areas where homeless people live on the streets.
- **Rental vouchers** should be provided to those who cannot be accommodated in existing shelters, so that they can afford rental housing.

B. Need for Improved Facilities and Services in Existing and New Shelters and for Persons Living on the Streets

1. Adequate Space, Hygiene, and Services in Shelters

- **Provide adequate and clean blankets, mattresses, bed sheets, quilts, and pillows** in all permanent and temporary shelters. Currently, blankets are not reserved for users but are shared by different people. This promotes the spread of infection and disease. In order to reserve use of sheets and blankets for one user, one way could be to provide beds in shelters and allocate a specific bed/mattress per person – that will be used regularly by that person.
- Ensure **regular disinfection and cleaning** of all shelters (temporary and permanent), toilets, bathrooms, bedding, common areas, and utilities.
- Ensure **adequate water supply for drinking, bathing, and washing clothes** and other personal items. During the winter months, provide facilities for warm water in each shelter.
- Provide **adequate heating facilities** through electric and gas heaters in each shelter.
- Ensure **adequate ventilation** in all shelters.
- Establish **sufficient and functional toilets with adequate water and sanitation facilities** and provide regular and sufficient cleaning. In case sanitation facilities cannot be set up near temporary tents, facilitate access of homeless persons to public toilets and sanitation facilities in other shelters.
- In family shelters, **provide privacy and safety by creating partitions** for each family and improving the design of such shelters. A large number of families in Delhi do not move into shelters because of the lack of privacy and safety and the absence of storage facilities.
- Provide information on shelters, including the location and capacity, to the homeless community **through advertisements, oral announcements, and other modes**, in local languages.

2. 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.

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

- Ensure that **Mobile Medical Health vans visit all shelters** (permanent and temporary) on a bi-weekly basis, at least.
- Ensure **comprehensive First-Aid kits** in every shelter.
- Provide **adequate vector control devices/facilities** in each shelter.
- Ensure **adequate and sufficient supply** of soap, sanitizer, disinfectant, and, masks. Provide new masks to all homeless persons at regular intervals.

- **Prioritize medical treatment** of older persons, children, pregnant/lactating women, infants and persons with chronic illnesses (including respiratory illnesses).
- **Provide mental-health services and psycho-social counselling** to all homeless persons, including those living in shelters.

4. Provision of Food and Measures to Uphold the Human Right to Food

- Continue the **provision of free food for homeless persons** living in shelters.
- **Expand the ambit of the provision of free food to homeless persons living on the streets.** To that extent, establish community kitchens in areas of high concentration of homeless people to ensure the distribution of free or subsidized nutritious food to homeless persons who do not live in shelters. This would also help build their immunity and prevent them from falling ill and losing their lives.
- **Provide free milk to homeless children and pregnant women** to ensure their adequate nutrition.
- Ensure **the provision of ration cards to homeless persons**, including those living on the streets, to enable them to access subsidized essential food grains and supplies.

5. Protecting 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.

6. Social Protection Measures

- Undertake **measures to provide social security and pensions** to homeless persons. Special care must be taken of older persons living on their own.
- **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.
- **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 could consider initiating **a pilot project to provide a Universal Basic Income** to all homeless persons. This would greatly help in preventing hunger, ill health, and destitution. It would also set a positive precedent for the rest of the country.

7. Monitoring and Information

- **Create a Monitoring Committee to supervise the functioning of shelters** and the quality of services provided. As stated before by DUSIB, this Committee could include the DUSIB Chief Executive Officer, Executive Members, representatives from Shelter Management Agencies, non-government organizations, officials from the Delhi Jal Board, Health Department, Municipal Corporations, and the Police. The Committee should undertake frequent inspections of shelters and meet regularly to discuss issues of concern and make recommendations made to the Delhi government public.

- **Ensure comprehensive protocols** to deal with emergencies, including health emergencies, are prepared in each shelter, in consultation with caretakers and Shelter Management Agencies In consultation with Shelter Management Agencies (SMAs) and organize a training workshop for shelter caretakers on the protocols.
- **Ensure that all ‘rescue’ efforts undertaken by DUISB** are carried out with the consent and participation of all persons.

Conclusion

This plan presents suggestions for the immediate winter to address the specific challenges related to housing, nutrition, livelihood, safety, and security faced by homeless persons. We would also like to urge the Delhi government to develop a long-term plan and durable plan to end homelessness in the city. This can be done only through adequate investment in housing for homeless persons using the ‘Housing First’ approach that has been adopted in many countries.

Housing and Land Rights Network is committed to working for the human rights of all those living in homelessness and also to working with the Delhi government in this endeavour. We thank the Delhi government for its consideration, efforts, and support.³

³ For more information, please contact us at: contact@hlrn.org.in