**Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing to the   
52nd session of the Human Rights Council**

**The right to adequate housing and climate change**

**Questionnaire**

Name of submitting entity, organization or individual: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Contact e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (contact e-mail will be deleted when published)

**In your country, what have been the main effects of the climate crisis, on the enjoyment of the right to adequate housing? Please specify whether there have been any climate-induced impacts on the security of tenure, availability, affordability, accessibility, habitability, location and cultural adequacy of housing, including climate crisis related displacement.[[1]](#footnote-1)**

It is not the severity of change to Canadian climate systems, but rather the rate of change and the lack of infrastructure to facilitate adaptation to these changes, that position the country to experience extreme climate change-induced devastation.[[2]](#footnote-2) Nowhere has this been more apparent than in British Columbia.[[3]](#footnote-3) Homeless populations in British Columbia face increased exposure to the effects of climate change. This is due to British Columbia experiencing extreme weather events and temperature rise at a faster rate than anywhere else in the country.[[4]](#footnote-4) The past few years in British Columbia have been marked by an increase in wildfires, flooding, poor air quality, landslides, heavy rains, and temperature rise.[[5]](#footnote-5) Over the past century, the average temperatures across British Columbia have risen by 1.1 C in the summer and have nearly doubled in the winter.[[6]](#footnote-6) This rise in temperature is what has led and will continue to lead to an increased incidence of extreme weather events. This is due to exceedingly dry summers creating prime conditions for wildfires, and warmer winters lead to erosion and flooding.[[7]](#footnote-7) The climate crisis is establishing ideal conditions for a new normal on the west coast: a future of forest fires, floods, and erosion.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The Pacific Northwest heatwave of 2021 is an omen of what the future may hold, and the harms that will come if governments do not strengthen the climate resilience of cities and people. The temperatures experienced across the Pacific North-West this summer were so extreme they were outside the range of historically observed temperatures, with weather attribution scientists noting that such extremes would have been virtually impossible in the absence of anthropogenic climate change. [[9]](#footnote-9) A new B.C. Coroners Service report examining last year's heat dome found that 619 deaths reported June 25-July 1, 2021, now deemed heat related; most were elderly with compromised health.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The world watched as British Columbia grappled with extreme heat and fires precipitated by dry conditions.[[11]](#footnote-11) Heatwaves are the deadliest natural hazard, and this hazard is made deadlier when it affects a population that is unaccustomed and unprepared for it. The oppressive heat in British Columbia led to spikes in deaths, and a sharp increase in hospital heat-related visits and emergency calls.[[12]](#footnote-12) The sheer damage to infrastructure, loss of life, and harm caused by the heatwave was an unprecedented experience for British Columbians. Everyone across the province was affected, but the harmful effects were not distributed equally across social demographics. As has been established, vulnerable populations suffer a disproportionate burden of harm caused by climate hazards. This was true in British Columbia this past summer, where vulnerable populations experienced more heat-related health effects than the rest of the population.

Weather events like the Pacific Northwest heatwave are rare, but the adverse social effects that flow from them are a microcosm of the bigger issue that will be discussed throughout this report. Climate impacts highlight holes in the fabric of society, populations do not experience climate change equally. Some are more equipped to adapt and experience significantly fewer consequences on their health, well-being, and livelihoods. In particular, it is clear that much of the loss of life that resulted from the British Columbia heatwave was due to a lack of preparedness for such extreme temperatures.[[13]](#footnote-13) Many people did not have access to air conditioning or cooling centers.[[14]](#footnote-14) Not only do many people lack air conditioning, but many also lack access to secure shelter or homes. The kind of heat experienced is extremely dangerous to people who do not have access to resources such as shelter and water.[[15]](#footnote-15) Homeless populations in British Columbia experience multi-factorial disadvantages and are uniquely positioned to suffer disproportionately severe consequences from climate change.[[16]](#footnote-16) The application of a climate lens to evaluating and designing interventions to the homelessness crisis will help ensure that remedies are effective and sustainable. The vulnerabilities unhoused individuals are exposed to (for various reasons but primarily because of lack of access to shelter) are compounded by the intense effects of climate change that are occurring in British Columbia. This climate-driven exacerbation of inequities necessitates further exploration of the nexus between climate change and homelessness.

Financialization explicitly impedes the implementation and realization of any rights-based approach to housing. The housing needs of those who are low-income are not favourable to the market dictated model of housing that is now prevalent, and therefore they are increasingly finding themselves barred from access to adequate housing.[[17]](#footnote-17) This is resulted in low-income individuals facing significant access to housing challenges across Canada.[[18]](#footnote-18) Therefore, the financialization of housing has played a critical contributory role in the inequality of access to affordable housing.[[19]](#footnote-19)

According to Statistics Canada, as of 2019, the median income in Canada is for families and unattached individuals was 62,000 dollars.119 The average house price is 617,000 dollars.120 The disproportionality is stark. One impetus behind this is low supply. It merits reiterating that Canada has the lowest amount of housing units per 1000 people out of any G7 country.121 Currently, it is at about 424 units per 1000 people.122 Additionally, social and affordable housing comprises approximately 6% of Canada’s housing market.123 Social housing is that which is subsidized by governments, and housing is considered affordable if less than 30 % of the residing household’s income before taxes goes to rent.124 However, it is not just the cost of purchasing a home that is growing disproportionately to income, but renting is rising as well.[[20]](#footnote-20) It is estimated that in Canada approximately 40% of those who rent spend more than 30% of their income sheltering themselves.[[21]](#footnote-21) Approximately 1 in 5 renters in British Columbia and Ontario are spending more than 50% of their income sheltering themselves.[[22]](#footnote-22) Those living in unaffordable housing qualify as being precariously housed, meaning that they are one of the most at-risk groups in terms of the likelihood of becoming unhoused.[[23]](#footnote-23) Another significant issue contributing to housing unaffordability is the changing perception of housing.[[24]](#footnote-24) It is the position of this report that housing is a fundamental human right from which the realization of all other rights flows. Therefore, housing should rightfully be viewed as a means of securely and reliably sheltering oneself.

**Are there groups distinctly affected in the enjoyment of their right to adequate housing as a result of the climate crisis? Please describe in what way.**

Climate change has a disproportionate effect on unhoused individuals for a variety of reasons. There are multiple interacting reasons one who is unhoused faces increased socio-economic vulnerability, as well as increased vulnerability to the effects of climate change.[[25]](#footnote-25) Gender, sex, indigeneity, race, and other factors all play a contributing role in the extent to which an individual experiences such vulnerability. It is beyond the scope of this report to facilitate an in-depth discussion of how various social factors affect unhoused individuals differently.[[26]](#footnote-26) All of Canada is experiencing a housing crisis.[[27]](#footnote-27) However, Vancouver has consistently been named one of the most unaffordable housing markets in North America and British Columbia has the highest rent in the country, which continues to climb. In 2021 alone, rent increased by 14.2% in British Columbia.[[28]](#footnote-28) This rise in rent is paralleled by the rise of homelessness in British Columbia due to increasingly unaffordable housing.[[29]](#footnote-29) Climate change will exacerbate this situation, as there is a direct link between housing unaffordability, unavailability, and climate change.[[30]](#footnote-30) Climate change is a threat multiplier and without adequate government intervention, and attention to the intricate relationship between housing precarity, homelessness, and climate change the situation will worsen. Vulnerable individuals are at increased exposure to climate hazards and face increased susceptibility todamage, yet they have a decreased ability to cope with and recover from damage because of significant constraints to resources. Climate change aggravates existing socio-economic inequities, and this relationship is best conceptualized as an inequality aggravating cycle.[[31]](#footnote-31) Initial inequality results in disadvantaged groups suffering more significantly from the effects of climate change, resulting in greater inequality. In turn, this aggravation of inequality will have negative impacts on the success of climate change mitigation interventions. A response to homelessness that conceptualizes housing as a human right, and which is attuned to the effects of climate change (acknowledging its disproportionate effects on the unhoused) is crucial. It is the only way to effectively break this cycle. British Columbia provides a good opportunity to study the nexus of climate change and homelessness and explain why this cycle exists and offer recommendations on how to intervene.

Aside from climate change disproportionately undermining the rights of the unhoused through these various risk factors, climate change is also a driver of homelessness.[[32]](#footnote-32) In the global south, this will manifest as climate change driven displacement and migration, due to increasingly inhospitable environmental changes such as the emergence of hotspots where there is a lack of resources to adapt to living in such areas, as well as increasing incidence of natural disasters.[[33]](#footnote-33) In May of 2020 Cyclone Amphan resulted in two million damaged homes and almost 3 million evacuees across three countries, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka.[[34]](#footnote-34) It is important to remain cognizant of the global implications of climate change when discussing climate change driven homelessness and deprivation of rights within Canada, because incidences of mass displacement world-wide have the potential to impact Canada.[[35]](#footnote-35) It is expected Canada will see an influx of climate evacuees which may further increase housing precarity and insufficiencies in Canada’s ability to house individuals.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Another example of homelessness precipitated by disaster is the aftermath of 2017’s Hurricane Harvey in Houston, Texas. Following Hurricane Harvey, Houston experienced a 13 percent increase in unhoused individuals.[[37]](#footnote-37) This was primarily due to economic reasons, with lowincome individuals lacking the resources to rebuild and the city lacking the social infrastructure to offer adequate assistance.[[38]](#footnote-38) 18% of those who had newly become homeless identified Harvey as the impetus.[[39]](#footnote-39) These examples are demonstrative of how these groups, who are already marginalized, are at the greatest risk of having integral rights compromised by climate change.

Therefore, climate change not only aggravates rights abuses, it has the concurrent effect of being a causative factor of initial rights impingement.[[40]](#footnote-40) This is particularly evident in homeless populations.[[41]](#footnote-41) As the climate crisis worsens it will have a directly exacerbating effect on increasing rates of homelessness.[[42]](#footnote-42) Climate change preparedness and mitigation are crucial to upholding human rights, including the right to housing.[[43]](#footnote-43) Conversely, mitigating the homelessness crisis is in turn necessary to reduce the human cost incurred due to climate change.[[44]](#footnote-44) Instances such as the recent British Columbia heatwave are stark demonstrations of Canada’s failure to uphold human rights on this front. Canada has a large subset of the population who lack adequate housing and they face the most imminent risk of becoming unhoused, the consequences of which would be socially devastating due to the significant detrimental effect homelessness has on human rights.104 Barriers to adequate housing accessibility must be remedied and social infrastructure needs to be in place that can deal with an increasingly adverse climate.[[45]](#footnote-45)

**Submission instructions**

**Email subject line:** Input for SR housing - report on climate change

**Accepted File formats:** Word only (supporting documents may as well be submitted in PDF)

**Accepted languages:** English, French and Spanish

Please include references to reports, academic articles, policy documents, text of legislation and, judgements, statistical information with hyperlinks to their full text or source or attach them to your submission (please respect total file size limit of 20 MB to ensure that it can be received)

**Potential confidentiality:** Please indicate on top of this questionnaire and in your e-mail if you want to have this submission or any particular attachment not to be published on the website of the Special Rapporteur and treated as confidential.

1. Under international law, the right to adequate housing is more than having four walls and a roof. It is essentially the right to live in a place in peace, security and dignity. Housing adequacy covers the following seven essential elements: legal security of tenure; availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure; affordability; habitability; accessibility; location; and cultural adequacy. For organizations and stakeholders that may not be as familiar with the right to adequate housing in international human rights law, please consult General Comment No. 4 of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, available [here](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCESCR%2fGEC%2f4759&Lang=en). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Ibid* at 3-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. West Coast Environmental Law, “What did 2020 mean for climate change, globally and in BC?” (January 21 2021) at para 3 online: *West Coast Environmental Law* [< https://www.wcel.org/blog/what-did-2020-mean-climate-changeglobally-and-in-bc>](https://www.wcel.org/blog/what-did-2020-mean-climate-change-globally-and-in-bc). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Kathryn Baum and Matthew McClearn, "From fire to ‘atmospheric river’: Why B.C. is trapped in a world of climate extremes" (November 28 2021) at para 9 online: *The Globe and Mail* <

   [https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-first-fire-now-floods-why-bc-is-trapped-in-a-world-of-climateextremes/>](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-first-fire-now-floods-why-bc-is-trapped-in-a-world-of-climate-extremes/). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Ibid* at 1-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Ibid* at 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. IPCC Climate Change 2014, *supra* note 3 at 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Fredi Otte, "Western North American extreme heat virtually impossible without human-caused climate change" (July 7 2021)at para 5 online: World Weather Attribution < [https://www.worldweatherattribution.org/western-northamerican-extreme-heat-virtually-impossible-without-human-caused-climate-change/>](https://www.worldweatherattribution.org/western-north-american-extreme-heat-virtually-impossible-without-human-caused-climate-change/). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. https://www.cbc.ca/amp/1.6480026 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Ibid* at 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Ibid* at 4, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Cheryl Chan, "Heat wave linked to massive spike in sudden deaths across Lower Mainland" (June 29 2021) at para 4 online: *Vancouver Sun* < [https://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/more-than-25-people-have-died-suddenly-inburnaby-mostly-due-to-the-heat>](https://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/more-than-25-people-have-died-suddenly-in-burnaby-mostly-due-to-the-heat). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *Supra* note 32 at 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Sean Kidd, "Climate change is exacerbating the homelessness crisis and we are not ready" (August 9 2021) at para 5 online: *Toronto Star* < [https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2021/08/09/climate-change-is-exacerbatingthe-homelessness-crisis-and-we-are-not-ready.html>](https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2021/08/09/climate-change-is-exacerbating-the-homelessness-crisis-and-we-are-not-ready.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *Ibid* at para 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Ibid* at para 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *Ibid* paras 1-8; *Supra* note 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Advocacy Center for Tenants Ontario, ”Four Affordable Housing Priorities for Ontario Renters Ahead of the Election” (1 Septemver 2021) at para 1 online: *Advocacy Center for Tenants Ontario* < [https://www.acto.ca/fouraffordable-housing-priorities-for-ontario-renters-ahead-of-the-election/>](https://www.acto.ca/four-affordable-housing-priorities-for-ontario-renters-ahead-of-the-election/). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Emily Mathieu,” How much do Canadians spend on rent? Ontario 'hit harder than anywhere else,' says new housing tool” (2 March 2020) at para 9 online: *Hamilton Spectator* < [https://www.thespec.com/news/ontario/2019/09/18/how-much-do-canadians-spend-on-rent-ontario-hit-harder-thananywhere-else-says-new-housing-tool.html>](https://www.thespec.com/news/ontario/2019/09/18/how-much-do-canadians-spend-on-rent-ontario-hit-harder-than-anywhere-else-says-new-housing-tool.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *Ibid*; Kendra Mangione, ” 1-in-5 B.C. renters spending more than half of income on housing” (8 May 2018) at para 1 online: CTV News < https://bc.ctvnews.ca/1-in-5-b-c-renters-spending-more-than-half-of-income-onhousing-1.3921087>. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. *Supra* note 63 [*Wellesley Institute*]; *Supra* note 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Leilani Farha,” Financialization of Housing” (2022) at para 1 online: *United Nations:* < https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-housing/financialization-housing>. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. *Ibid* at para 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Vijay Mago et al "Analyzing the impact of social factors on homelessness: a Fuzzy Cognitive Map approach" (2013) 13:94 BMC medical informatics and decision making, at 13, 94 DOI [https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6947.](https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6947) [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ipek Tureli, "Canada’s housing crisis will not be solved by building more of the same, (February 23 2021) at para 2 online: *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/canadas-housing-crisis-will-not-be-solved-by-buildingmore-of-the-same-175221>. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. CBC News "Vancouver and Victoria rents jump 20% in 6 months as thousands move to B.C." (March 19 2022) at para 4 online: *CBC News* <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/priced-out-rental-crisis-victoria1.6390095>. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. CTV News, "B.C. provincial data shows 23,000 people experienced homelessness in 2019" (March 16 2022) at para 9 online: CTV News [https://vancouverisland.ctvnews.ca/b-c-provincial-data-shows-23-000-people-experiencedhomelessness-in-2019-1.5822260.](https://vancouverisland.ctvnews.ca/b-c-provincial-data-shows-23-000-people-experienced-homelessness-in-2019-1.5822260) [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. *Supra* note 8 at 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Islam and Winkel, *supra* note 12 at 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Sean Kidd, “Climate Change and Homelessness: Generating a Response Framework Final Report – Year 1” (17

    March 2021) at 16-17 online(pdf): *Homeless Hub* < https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Climate%20Change%20and%20Homelessness%20Final %20Report%20-%20Tri-Council%20March%202021.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. *Ibid* at 21; Michael Kugelman, ” Climate-Induced Displacement: South Asia’s Clear and Present Danger” (30 September 2020) at paras 1-3, 7-11 online: *Wilson Center* [< https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/climate-induceddisplacement-south-asias-clear-and-present-danger>](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/climate-induced-displacement-south-asias-clear-and-present-danger) *[Wilson Center]*.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. *Ibid* at para 1 [*Wilson Center*]. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. CBC News, ”Why Canada needs to think about accepting climate change refugees” (21 May 2021) at paras 1-6. online: *CBC* [<what-on-earth-trees-climate-refugees-1.6034396>](https://www.cbc.ca/news/science/what-on-earth-trees-climate-refugees-1.6034396). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *Ibid.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. The Climate Reality Project, ”Homelessness and the Climate Crisis” (16 October 2019) at para 22 online: *The Climate Reality Project* < https://www.climaterealityproject.org/blog/homelessness-and-climate-crisis>. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. *Ibid* at paras 15-18, 21-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. *Ibid* at para 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. *Supra* note 5 at 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. *Supra* note 5 at 13-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. *Ibid* at 14-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. *Ibid.* 104 Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, ”Canadian Definition of Homelessness” (2012 ) at 4 online(pdf):

    *Homeless Hub* < [https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/COHhomelessdefinition.pdf>](https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/COHhomelessdefinition.pdf); United Nations,

    Adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living” (8 August 2016) at 6-7 online(pdf): *United Nations* < https://documents-ddsny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N16/253/02/PDF/N1625302.pdf?OpenElement>. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. IPCC, ”Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis” (2021) at 10 online(pdf): *IPCC* < https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC\_AR6\_WGI\_SPM\_final.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)