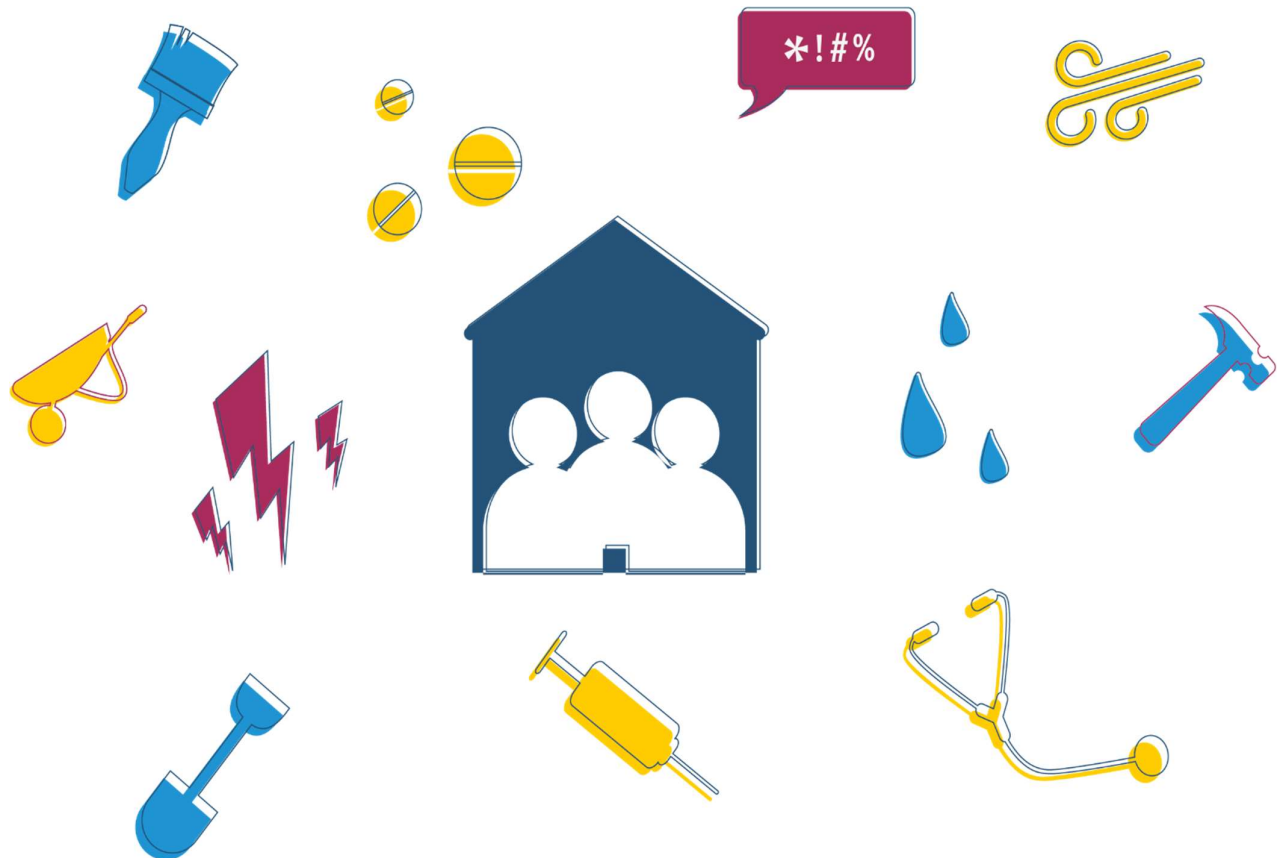


THE WIDER IMPACTS OF HUMANITARIAN SHELTER AND SETTLEMENTS ASSISTANCE

Key findings report





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This project was managed by **Mohamed Hilmi**, with the support of InterAction Humanitarian Policy and Practice and Communication Units. Infographics, Videos, and detailed ranking of evidence are available upon request. Please contact mhilmi@interaction.org.

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1. Executive Summary

Humanitarian shelter and settlements assistance strives to meet one of the most essential and often lifesaving needs of conflict- and disaster-affected communities. Even the most basic shelter and settlements assistance can contribute to a sense of normalcy, provide physical and legal protection, improve psychological and socio-economic conditions, contribute to disaster risk reduction (DRR) and increase access to essential services such as health, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and education. However, the overarching contributions of shelter and settlements assistance, and its impacts on other sectors are often less understood or overlooked.

This review and subsequent infographics aim to increase awareness of the wider impacts, contribute to improved inter-sectoral understanding, and encourage collaboration in emergency response and recovery processes.

From a review of over 190 documents of multiple sources and varying quality, the research explored the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of shelter and settlements assistance. Researched sectors/themes include physical and mental health, child development, well-being, education, livelihoods, employment, economic development, poverty reduction, food security, nutrition, gender, family life, crime, social cohesion, social capital, governance, disaster risk reduction, resilience, and the environment.

This publication is divided into three parts as described below:

- i. Key findings and recommendations.
- ii. Annex A: Full list of findings and references.
- iii. Annex B: Methodology, including the quantity and type of information found.

A set of infographics and a series of video clips capturing community perspectives on shelter impacts are also available for use by the humanitarian community.

Impacts

The direct impacts of effective shelter and settlements assistance primarily include climate protection, immediate safety and security, privacy and dignity, and facilitating access to additional services. This report focuses on the majority of impacts outside of these immediate gains that are indirect or cumulative.

- The strongest evidences for impacts were found on health, including improved **physical and mental health**— particularly for children— and enhanced well-being and morale. However, due to limitations in the quality of data available, the evidence is not robust.
- Several specific impacts have been reported across the sectors of **livelihoods**, **DRR**, and **society**, including the provision of the basis for livelihoods as well as **economic stimulation** and **skills training**; cost-savings that allow redirection of income to other key needs; reducing underlying **risks and vulnerability** and stress on natural resources; and encouraging **civic engagement** and improving **social relations**.
- To a lesser extent, impacts have also been reported in **education**, **food and nutrition**, and **gender**, including providing a more conducive and stable environment that can support educational outcomes; facilitating access to more varied nutrition; and reducing vulnerability to **sexual exploitation or abuse** (SEA).

- Other important issues to come out of the research were the **centrality of participation** and the synergistic effects that can be created when **integrated multi-sectoral assistance** (across sectors, disciplines and themes) is provided to meet the multifarious needs of vulnerable populations.

Additionally, the research found that across humanitarian, housing, and development interventions, to varying extents, the links between shelter/housing and its impacts on other sectors are **under-researched**. There are multiple challenges in gathering reliable evidence not only on the correlations but particularly on the impacts that improvements to housing conditions make. As a result of how the majority of studies were conducted and reported, there is **limited generalizability and transferability** of the data. However, the potential for these impacts to be attainable more widely suggests that:

- Humanitarian shelter and settlements assistance has an important role to play as a **supporter and enabler of non-shelter outcomes**.
- A key finding of this research is the need to **improve systems to monitor impact** and **increase the evidence base**.
- The recommendations aim to assist in increasing the research capacity and the likelihood of future availability of evidence. To accomplish this, there is a pressing need to build capacity within the system, as well as **strengthen partnerships** between humanitarian agencies, donors, and research institutions.

2. Introduction

InterAction commissioned this research project with the objective of increasing the understanding and awareness of the wider impacts of humanitarian shelter and settlements, through evidence-based infographics, animations, video, and social media tools. The findings along with the information and communications materials are made available for InterAction Members and humanitarian stakeholders, aimed to be used in advocacy efforts, increase inter-sectoral understanding and enhance collaboration, both during emergency response and recovery processes.

Report aims and definitions

The report aims to provide an initial review of information that exists on the evidence of the impact of providing shelter and settlements assistance. To establish the impacts of shelter and settlements assistance, the following research questions were asked:

- What information exists that shelter and settlements assistance has an impact on other sectors/themes?
- What correlations are there between this sector/theme and shelter?
- How has the provision of shelter/housing assistance had an impact on this sector/theme (both positive and negative)?

Researched sectors/themes included health, mental health, child development, well-being, education, livelihoods, employment, economic development, poverty reduction, food security, nutrition, gender, family life, crime, social cohesion, social capital, governance, disaster risk reduction, resilience, and the environment.

What do we mean by ‘impact’?

There is no standard definition of impact, which has been a contributing factor to the lack of impact evaluations carried out within the humanitarian sector.⁷² With the increase in demand-led evidence, there has been an increased focus within the donors, United Nations Agencies (U.N.) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to have more robust monitoring and evaluation, with clearer descriptions of outputs, outcomes, and impacts. Nevertheless, there continues to be confusion over the use of these terms, particularly outside of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) units. Within this research, no distinction has been made between outcome and impact in terms of the change seen by recipients of assistance.

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions have been used:

- Direct impact: effect(s) caused by an action and occurring at the same time and place.
- Indirect impact: effect(s) caused by an action that is later in time or farther removed in distance, or as a result of a pathway of effects.
- Cumulative impact: effect(s) as a result of incremental changes caused by an action together with other actions.

Humanitarian shelter and settlements assistance

Shelter and settlements assistance facilitates a process of sheltering and associated neighbourhood and community interventions.¹⁸⁶ Traditional shelter responses typically involve non-food items (NFIs), plastic sheeting or tents, shelter kits of materials and tools, temporary or transitional shelters (t-shelters), technical support (information and guidance), rental and hosting support, and construction training.

They can also include repairs, provision of a core shelter, and, in some cases, retrofitting or upgrading of existing buildings through either in-kind or cash assistance, as well as measures to increase tenure security.

Settlements assistance addresses the setting of shelter, including site improvements and support services where needed, or the improvement of existing neighborhoods, including informal settlements, to facilitate the provision of shelter and basic services while reducing hazard risks. These Settlements approaches and interventions can also serve as platforms for DRR, as well as subsequent recovery and reconstruction.¹⁸⁶

The shelter-housing continuum

The scope of this review includes data from housing development and slum upgrading programs, as well as from housing assistance in more developed contexts, to provide an overall view of existing evidence. This addresses the fact that there is minimal studies and evidence available within the humanitarian sector. While, both financially and programmatically, interventions continue to be divided along humanitarian, development (including slum upgrading), or social housing terms, there has long been a recognition of the continuum between initial disaster response and longer-term housing and city development. It is also important to acknowledge the incremental nature of the housing process (common outside the global north) as well as the long-term consequences of short-term assistance.

In light of the above, this report recognizes that there are clear links, if not broad similarities, in the types of assistance provided across humanitarian, development, and housing programs, despite the different contexts in which these interventions are taking place. As seen in the reviewed literature, the result of providing cash for rent in humanitarian contexts is not dissimilar to rental subsidies or housing vouchers in developed contexts in that both allow income to be redirected towards food and education. Likewise, some repair work carried out in humanitarian response or upgrading work in development interventions is similar—in terms of health benefits—to municipal retrofitting of poor-quality housing in the U.K., Europe, and Australia. This research, therefore, assumes that, notwithstanding the broader differences in climate, context and the challenge of the transferability of findings more generally, gains made in housing in development interventions can shed light on the potential impact in humanitarian settings, where such effects have been studied less. In doing so, it inherently recognizes the shelter-housing continuum and the place of shelter and settlements programming as part of the ‘humanitarian-development nexus.’

Limitations

This section of the report provides a summary of some of the recorded impacts of shelter and settlements assistance from the available literature. Due to the overall quality and methodological limitations of the documents reviewed, the transferability of its findings is limited. With the information available it is not possible to predict that any particular finding may be replicated across locations, contexts, or between humanitarian, development and other housing interventions. **Any individuals or agencies wishing to cite any of these impacts are encouraged to return to the source document to understand the specific context, limitations and transferability of the findings.**

An expanded list of findings along with references are provided in Annex A. For a full discussion on the challenges of data reliability and limitations, as well as a breakdown of included documents, please refer to Annex B: Methodology.

3. Key findings

The key findings summarized here reflect the findings of several different authors across a range of contexts; further details of specific impacts, relevant statistics and full references can be found in Annex A. Given the varying quality of sources available, reports should be read in full to understand the context and limitations.

Direct impacts of shelter and settlements assistance

The objective of shelter assistance is to provide a safe, secure and dignified living environment for people affected by disasters or conflict. From the reviewed material, the direct impacts of shelter and settlements assistance can be summarized as:^{110, 142}

- Climate protection.
- Immediate safety and security.
- Privacy and dignity.
- Facilitating access to additional services.

Indirect/cumulative impacts of shelter and settlements assistance

This report focuses on the majority of impacts of shelter and settlements assistance outside of these immediate gains that are indirect or cumulative. In sectors such as health, the change in living circumstances may take time to become apparent and wield benefits. In all sectors, any change in housing conditions may interact with other factors to either contribute toward or prevent a positive outcome.

The following table summarizes the strength of evidence for the identified sectors from the reviewed literature, according to the number of documents found cross-referenced with a weighted average ranking of the reliability of documents per sector (see Annex B for further explanation). An overview of the information available per sector, correlations between it and housing, and the range of impacts recorded are summarized below (see Annex A for detailed examples and sources).

		Strong	Fair	Weak	Very weak
		Reliability (ranking of sources)			
		Good	Fair	Poor	Very poor
Frequency (number of sources)	High	Health			
	Medium			Livelihoods	
	Low		Society	DRR/ Environment	
	Very low		Education Food		Gender

Table 1: Matrix of strength of evidence

Health

Overall, the evidence of the impacts of shelter and settlements assistance on health is STRONG.

The vast majority of evidence on health comes from the housing sector, supplemented by development interventions. Certain aspects of housing are well known to have significant health effects (e.g. damp, mold, pest infestation, toxins). In one meta-analysis the connection between poor housing and poor health is considered to be so well-established, it is said to be “unarguable”.¹⁶⁸

Despite having the highest volume of documents, many studies highlighted that the impact of housing improvements was hard to discern. Some meta-studies reported no discernible impacts—around 40% of examined reports revealed no association between housing assistance and health.¹⁵⁸ They also found that the higher the level of need, the more the assistance helped. Nevertheless, the direction of causality in many studies remains unclear, as health problems created by poor housing may be more indicative of social inequality. However, many sources attributed the significant gains in public health in developed contexts to improved shelter conditions in the 19th and 20th centuries. Information from humanitarian sources focuses more on self-reported mental health and well-being aspects. Below are the primary ways housing impacts health.

- Poor quality or inadequate housing has a substantial impact on the risk of ill health and life expectancy, especially as a result of poor air quality and thermal stress.
- Overcrowded housing increases the risk of infectious disease and child mortality.
- Good housing can reduce the entry and spread of air- and water-borne vectors.
- Providing access to green space has multiple health benefits.
- Housing is central to family life—children spend more time in the home and are more affected by negative health impacts as a result of poor housing.
- Poor housing conditions have negative effects later in life and contribute to developmental delays.
- The availability of affordable housing improves health outcomes for children.
- Poor quality housing and overcrowding causes mental distress and increases the likelihood of poor mental health.
- Tenure impacts health by either creating housing instability and reduced mobility or by creating a sense of ontological security.

The rate of under-five mortality in adequate housing was 40% lower than for those living in inadequate housing in Nigeria.

(Adebowale et al., 2017: 11)

Provision of a cement floor led to 78% reduction in parasitic infections and a 49% reduction in diarrhea in children in Mexico.

(Cattaneo, 2009: 3-4)

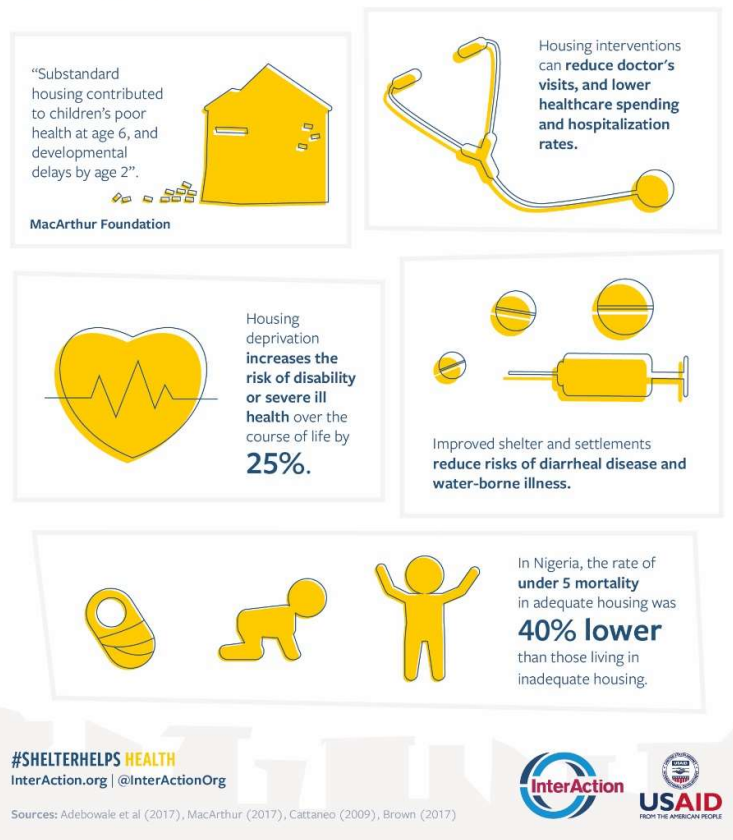
The impacts of shelter and settlements assistance on health include:

- Limited measurements of improvements in physical health.
- Self-reported improvements in health.

- Lower healthcare spending and hospitalization rates.
- Reduced incidence of diarrheal disease and water-borne illness.
- Positive health effects as a result of reductions in overcrowding.
- Improved housing conditions, including reducing dampness and cold, have prevented deterioration in child health, reduced asthma symptoms, lowered healthcare visits and improved mental health.
- An increase in a feeling of control and reduction in stress, contributing to increased stability and improved overall wellbeing.
- Improved mental health and reduced intimate partner violence.
- Gains in morale, satisfaction, reduced stress, motivation, pride, self-worth, and hospitality.

HOW DOES SHELTER AFFECT HEALTH?

The strongest impacts of shelter were found to be on health, including **improved physical and mental health**, particularly for children, as well as **enhanced well-being** and morale. Poor quality housing has a substantial impact on the **risk of ill health and life expectancy**, especially on women and children who spend more time in the home.



Livelihoods

The evidence of the impacts of shelter and settlements assistance on livelihoods is WEAK.

Research on livelihoods constitute the second-highest number among referenced documents. The majority of these were from humanitarian evaluations, which are of lower quality and reliability and more open to bias. Nevertheless, livelihoods was recognized as a key factor in ensuring the success of shelter

projects, particularly during relocation. In addition, there is a need for wider recognition of the economic impacts of housing construction. In the research, livelihoods was disaggregated into: impacts on employment opportunities, wider contributions to the economy, and poverty reduction.

Housing primarily impacts livelihoods through:

- Providing more than shelter—it is a place in which employment and home-based enterprises occur, providing direct income as well as income for those it employs.
- The relationship between location and employment opportunities and how tenure or assistance to relocate/upgrade can have positive or negative effects.
- Contributing to overall production activity, particularly through forward and backward linkages.
- Providing a way to accumulate assets/wealth for the future.
- Increases disposable income for other needs through affordable housing.
- Providing additional income through receiving rent.

Home-based enterprises are often the most important way that shelter can support economic development in post-disaster contexts.

(Sheppard and Hill, 2005: 8)

The impacts of shelter and settlements assistance on livelihoods include:

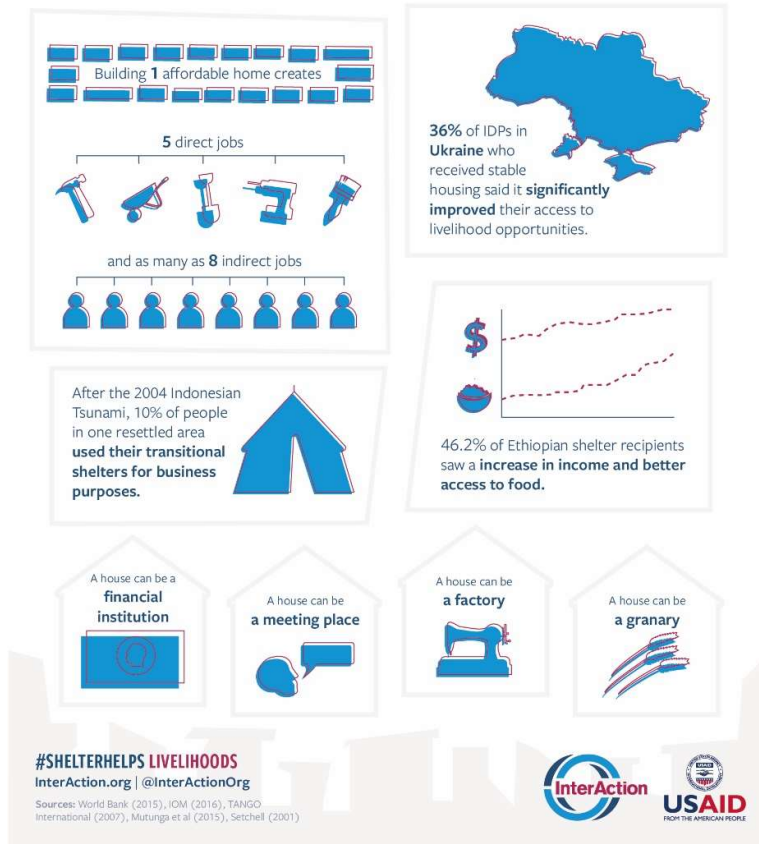
- Creation of employment opportunities through shelter construction.
- Improved livelihood opportunities through new or increased skills and training.
- Generation or maintenance of livelihoods through assets and assistance received (tools or physical space).
- Providing a crucial labor market entry point for young or lower-skilled workers.
- In developed contexts, there is conflicting evidence on the impact of housing assistance: some families report working more consistently, while other studies have shown a negative impact on labor force participation.
- Contributing to the development of local businesses by investing in small and mid-sized businesses, promoting the rapid economic recovery of affected communities.
- Creation of additional upstream and downstream jobs.
- Contributing to the overall housing supply and market availability.
- Providing an environment that stimulates or encourages increased market activity through settlement upgrading.
- Significantly higher increase in income for those who have received post-disaster shelter than those who have not.
- Reduced expenditure on housing or maintenance costs, freeing up income for other needs.
- Preventing the most severe forms of negative coping strategies.
- Can reduce absolute poverty but not have an impact on the ability to maintain a livelihood.
- Impacts on poverty reduction are often limited to households that can mobilize further resources, with less impact on the most vulnerable cases.

The construction of one affordable home creates 5 direct jobs and as many as 8 jobs indirectly.

(World Bank, 2015: 1)

HOW DOES SHELTER AFFECT LIVELIHOODS?

Affordable and stable shelter can **provide opportunities for financial stability and employment**. Ongoing construction and maintenance of shelter and settlements can be an opportunity for **employment and skills growth**. Transitional shelters can be **used for small businesses** and income saved from affordable shelter can be redirected and spent on food and education.



Society

The evidence of the impact of shelter and settlements assistance on society is WEAK.

Society encompasses crime and safety, social cohesion, social capital, and governance. The evidence comes from across humanitarian, development and housing sources. There is a strong case to establish the links between settlement design and social interactions, safety, and crime made in the work of Jane Jacobs and Oscar Newman. There is less evidence on the impacts of particular interventions or the provision of assistance.

Housing impacts social cohesion, social capital, and governance by:

- Encouraging open spaces that can foster social inclusion and community development.
- Securing tenure to increase stability and investment in the local community.
- Encouraging participation in addressing local issues and establishing representative bodies.
- Building stronger communities and stimulating civic activism.

- Creating safe homes and neighborhoods that help build social stability and security.

Impacts of shelter and settlements assistance on society have been:

- An increase in the perception of safety at a household and settlement level, particularly among women.
- Some settlement interventions have led to a downward trend in crime and homicide rates.
- Reduced social tension and improved integration of refugees/displaced and host communities or different racial groups
- Positive contributions towards peacebuilding efforts.
- Improved social relations and empowerment.
- Securing tenure that enabled the building of relationships to facilitate recovery.
- Facilitating better engagement with local government to promote the needs and priorities of the community and increase accountability in meeting them.
- Reduced power inequality and more localized control of space.
- Increased contributions to local taxes and share of resources allocated to poor communities.

75% of respondents reported that social infrastructure rehabilitation had positive effects on relationship between internally displaced people (IDPs) and host communities.

(Triangle, 2019: 75)

HOW CAN SHELTER HELP SOCIAL COHESION?

Shelter and settlements can **improve social cohesion and community engagement**. Improved public spaces foster social inclusion. Livelihoods benefit refugee and host communities to **recover and prosper**.



In Syria, **75%** of people said restored social services and infrastructure after conflict had a **positive effect on relationships** between IDPs and host communities.

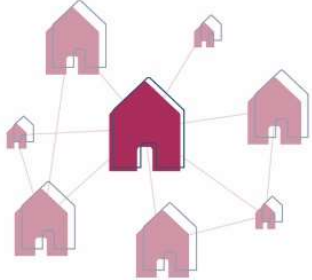
46% of residents in Lebanon, who benefited from housing upgrading, reported



reduced community tensions



increased empathy and trust



Shelter and the larger concept of settlement are **inextricably linked** and should be addressed as a whole rather than separately.

“ We have good relationships with the hosts, we feel at home. ”

Male shelter recipient, Ethiopia

Affordable housing and settlement upgrading can increase

- involvement in neighborhood activities
- community leadership roles
- community connectedness



DRR / Environment

The evidence of the impact of shelter and settlements assistance on DRR and the environment is WEAK.

The strongest evidence comes through the humanitarian sector, but the reliability of documents is lower.

Housing impacts DRR and the environment through:

- An opportunity to reduce underlying risks by building back better/safer.
- Reducing loss of life and level of damage in future disasters.
- Acting as a tool for local development planning.
- Avoiding or causing damage to land and resources that might contribute to exacerbating the impact of a disaster or place stress on natural resources.
- Leveraging household investments in shelter.
- Reducing the negative effects of climate change.

Impacts of shelter and settlements assistance on DRR and the environment have been:

- Incorporating proper building techniques that make homes better able to withstand shocks.
- Reducing the costs of periodic repairs.
- Reducing stress on local resources.
- People feeling safer and more self-reliant.
- Encouraging uptake in the broader population.
- Reducing the impact of recurrent shocks on settlements and infrastructure.

In addition, humanitarian studies reported a positive impact on resilience through catalyzing recovery, diversifying livelihoods, facilitating access to services, and increasing disaster preparedness.

Many households are willing to contribute financially in order to mitigate the impact of future shocks. (Norton and Chantry, 2010: 43)

The BHP program in Pakistan reduced the extent of damaged shelter by two times than those that were not improved. (Avdeenko and Fröhlich, 2019: 41)

HOW CAN SHELTER HELP REDUCE RISK FROM HAZARDS?

Improving shelter and settlements can **reduce vulnerability and build resilience**. It can **reduce the cost** of shelter repairs and stress on local economy and can make people **more self-reliant**.



“
Our new home is definitely an upgrade in terms of security when there is a typhoon. And because this property is ours, we can put our effort into making it more resilient.
Survivor of Typhoon Haiyan, Philippines”



#SHELTERHELPS DRR
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Sources: Avdeenko and Fröhlich (2019), Norton and Chantry (2010), Levers (2016), Murtaza and Nadi (2012), CARE (2015), Interaction (2019), Sarmiento (2018)



Education

The evidence of the impacts of shelter and settlements assistance on education is VERY WEAK.

All the information on education comes from the housing sector, mainly from North America. There is no clear evidence of direct correlations, and the data on links that exist all come from research reports, which may be subject to bias or policy agendas. The evidence of impacts of assistance is minimal, but does include controlled groups or case studies and is of more reliable quality.

The literature recognizes the difficulties in finding evidence or even estimating the impacts of quality housing on education. Often, this is due to the intermediate variable of poverty—where socioeconomic status may have more of an impact on education than housing conditions (such as quality of school, parental involvement, or peer support). However, housing is recognized to play a key role in providing a stable environment in which policies targeting educational attainment are effective, e.g. it is an enabler for other interventions.

In the humanitarian sector, the link between shelter and education mainly relates to school construction, rather than household level shelter assistance. There is only anecdotal evidence that the provision of

shelter has allowed resources to be redirected to education, or that children have been able to remain in school as a result of a more stable housing situation.⁶⁰

Housing primarily impacts education as a result of:

- Instability resulting in frequent home moves and the ability to perform.
- Poor quality of housing having an impact on health and, therefore, school absences.
- Lack of study space, or space which is overcrowded, loud, and lacking privacy.
- Location affecting the quality of school attended.

A housing assistance program in Ecuador saw a 19% decrease in drop-outs from post-compulsory education and 21% decline in working children in the corresponding age range.

(Rosero et al., 2012: 30)

Impacts of assistance have been:

- Upgrading resulting in increased school attendance and lower dropout rates.
- Improved space to study and improve study habits.
- Lowering stress for parents, who are subsequently able to provide more support.
- Assistance did not necessarily translate into improved attainment/test scores—highlighting the complicated relationship between environment and education.

Food Security / Nutrition

The evidence of the impacts of shelter and settlements assistance on nutrition is VERY WEAK.

There is minimal data on food security, as only 5% of the total number of documents reviewed mention it. Information comes primarily from housing studies in the U.S. and U.K., although it also appears in some humanitarian reports. More research is required in this area.

Housing impacts food (in)security and nutrition through affordability:

- Excessive housing costs can mean insufficient funds to meet other—especially nutritional—needs, creating a link between poor housing conditions and malnutrition.
- Overcrowding or moving to poorer quality (cheaper) shelter may be a result of attempts to reduce housing costs to meet other needs.
- Strong correlations between debt and food insecurity.
- Potential for shelter providers to be a conduit to provide access to healthy foods and foster nutritional needs.
- In more developed contexts, food security is likely to suffer more to meet housing costs, where social security nets (e.g. food banks) may be more available to meet food needs. In developing or humanitarian contexts, housing may be more likely

Beneficiaries of a post-conflict shelter assistance program in Pakistan were able to afford two meat meals a week compared to less than one for non-beneficiary households. *(van*

Dijk and van Leersum, 2009)

to be compromised to meet food needs. The correlation between poor shelter and food insecurity remains in both cases.

Impacts of assistance have been:

- Housing subsidies have resulted in improved child health, where the provision of housing assistance has led to lower rates of undernourishment.
- The provision of shelter has allowed beneficiaries to spend more on food and diversify diets (e.g. more meat and vegetables).

Gender

The evidence on shelter and settlements assistance on gender is VERY WEAK.

There is surprisingly little data available on gender, and that which exists is of generally low quality. Although specific searches were carried out, little information was found on the specific impacts of shelter or settlements assistance on gender-based violence (GBV) or intimate partner violence (IPV). Information gathered comes from housing, development and humanitarian sources, highlighting the need to adequately consider differential gender needs at all scales (household, settlement, society). It also highlights the need to acknowledge that a lack of housing can impede the ability to access other rights, particularly the right to family life.

Housing impacts gender and family through:

- Vulnerability to sexual exploitation and abuse in accessing adequate shelter, this can be seen across humanitarian, development, and housing.
- Generally, poor quality conditions have a higher impact on women and children, particularly WASH and lack of privacy.
- Poverty has a more dramatic impact on female headed-households.

Women who own land are up to 8 times less likely to experience domestic violence.

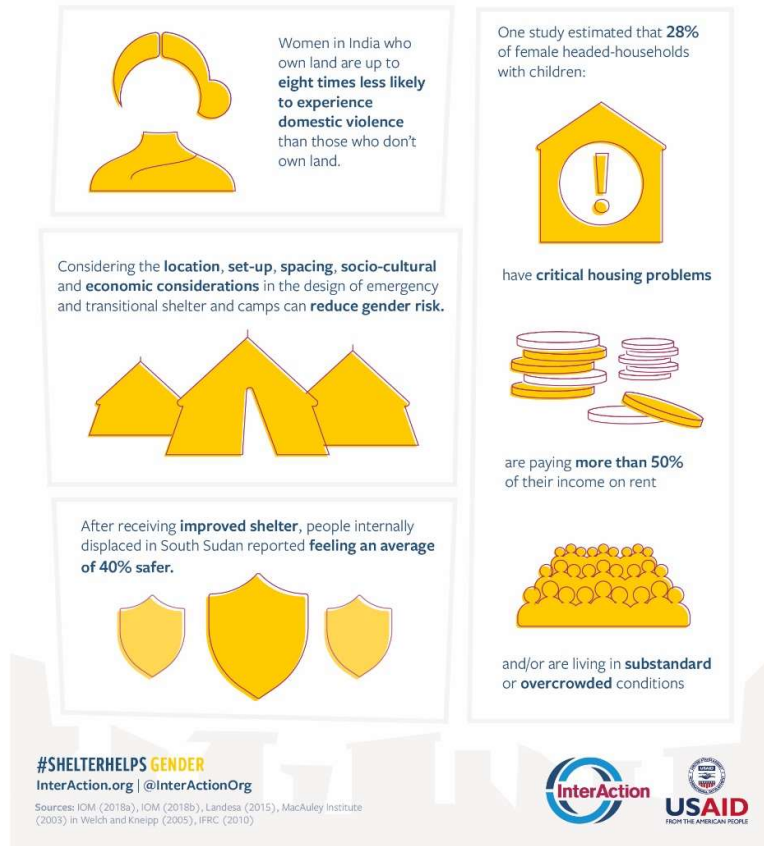
(Landesa, 2015)

Impacts of shelter assistance have been:

- Shelter and settlement design can reduce gender-based risk and vulnerability, leading to improved feelings of safety.
- Shelter improvements can relieve the burden on women, particularly regarding household chores and access to services.
- Improving land ownership has subsequent benefits on education, resilience, health, safety, and nutrition.
- Increasing the skills base and position of women in the community.

WHAT IMPACT DOES SHELTER HAVE ON GENDER AND SOCIETY?

People **feel, and are, safer** when given shelter assistance - **especially women**. Housing vulnerability increases risk of sexual and physical abuse and domestic violence, and **female-headed households** are more likely to be **affected by poor housing** conditions.



WASH

Despite, or as a result of, the close relationship between shelter and WASH, it has not been possible to determine WASH outcomes as a result of shelter and settlement assistance. More often than not, shelter assistance included the provision of household-level water and sanitation—in fact, the findings highlight that where this is not included in shelter programs, the likelihood of the overall success of the project and both direct and indirect impacts is low.⁹¹ European Civil Protection And Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) guidelines state there should be no shelter program without WASH components included,⁵⁰ and more organizations are moving towards combined shelter-WASH teams.

While some of the direct outcomes of shelter and WASH programs may differ, the indirect and cumulative effects merge in other sectors. Integrated shelter-wash assistance can be seen to make a major contribution to health outcomes, particularly related to hygiene and water-borne diseases and impacts on women and girls, which can go on to affect livelihoods capacity and education. Recent campaigns have highlighted the role that access to WASH plays in addressing antibiotic resistance, which is also relevant to facilitating access to WASH services through shelter projects.⁴⁴ Conversely, where shelter projects have not adequately addressed WASH needs, it can pose a risk to public health and

hygiene. Key Informants highlighted the problems that can be caused when shelter assistance does not adequately consult WASH experts.

Non-sectoral findings and impacts

In addition to impacts on specific sectors, following additional key themes emerged from the research.

The importance of participation

At all levels and across interventions, participation was highlighted time and again as a key part of any shelter and settlements response across humanitarian, development, and housing interventions. This was noted to have a positive impact on well-being, particularly mental health, as well as contributing to a sense of ownership and positive engagement with local authorities, social cohesion, and contributing to increased resilience and sustainable outcomes. Frühling⁵⁷ (2010) highlights that the impacts of poverty reduction and good local governance seen through slum upgrading are not caused through the technical components of physical infrastructure upgrading, but rather through the process: the set of methods and procedures based around long-term engagement timeframes and deep participation of community members.

The importance of context

Another important finding was the need to respond to the specific context or needs of heterogeneous groups. Even in housing studies, there was a need to acknowledge the differences between different groups and maintain the ability to provide different forms of assistance in response.¹² Similarly, particularly in humanitarian contexts, there was recognition of the interplay of different factors on the results of outcomes, for example, the timing of assistance relative to other assistance programs, the method of delivery in supporting the local economy and contributing to risk reduction, and the choice of assistance itself in affecting the vulnerability, dependency, isolation and recovery of populations.¹⁵ This highlights the need to adequately consider context and its influence on the findings in any particular study: ‘We always say context matters, but what is remarkable is how little effort has been spent studying contexts.’¹³⁷

The effects of multi-sectoral or integrated assistance

Numerous studies also mentioned the need for shelter assistance or housing improvements to take place alongside other interventions in order to be effective. This highlights that, even though shelter assistance may contribute to impacts on other sectors, the most effective support addresses the diverse and interlinked needs of vulnerable populations. Positive effects of individual house upgrading are undermined if the neighborhood and surroundings remain in decline.^{17, 66, 70, 50, 186} In other cases, treating issues as related problems and initiating an integrated response and building relationships between service providers was cited as key to the program’s success.⁶⁴

In some circumstances, assistance was only recognized to be effective if additional support was provided—this was especially important in the link between shelter and livelihoods.¹⁴⁷ Additionally, housing was more likely to generate a more powerful set of non-shelter benefits when other causes of disadvantage—such as low incomes associated with the presence of a disability—are less acute.¹³ By assisting in parallel, a project may advance on the achievements of other interventions and initiatives to achieve a synergistic effect that accomplishes more than the sum of the individual parts. This recognizes and builds on the recognition of the need for coordination, collaboration and inter-sectoral assessment

and response and the efforts made in recent years to better integrate sectors due to the linkages between sectoral results.

Need for a holistic approach

Such an approach recognizes that the lives of people affected by disasters or poverty are a complex web of interactions, in which all sectors combine to create the lived experience.⁹⁵ However, responding to this reality continues to be a challenge for a sector-based industry. The siloing effect often bemoaned in humanitarian response can also be seen in other sectors or areas as well. One key informant interviewee (KII) mentioned how health researchers also need to reach out across internal boundaries and look at issues comprehensively. Another KII noted the challenge within the sector to do this as a result of competition for limited resources, alongside the lack of real incentive to produce evidence of impact when agencies were more interested in generating funds to help people, rather than the actual help of people (and therefore ensuring that the assistance they are providing has the intended or anticipated impact). At a system, organization, and individual level, work should continue to break down silos and understand the interdependencies between sectors to increase effectiveness. Creating linkages across sectors, disciplines, and themes would be to the advantage of the system as a whole, but notwithstanding other barriers. Doing so will only be possible when increasing the efficiency, effectiveness, and overall impact of assistance is genuinely at the heart of the motivation for its provision.

Need for a stronger evidence base

Faced with increasing need and decreasing resources, there has been an ‘increasingly urgent need to generate knowledge about what works, both to inform decision making and demonstrate the effectiveness of interventions’.¹¹⁰ The drive toward evidence-based programming and accountability has increased attention on outcome-monitoring, however, despite a wealth of tools and methods, there is a recognized lack of individual and organizational capacity to carry out proper impact assessment within the humanitarian sector, complicated further by high staff turnover, lack of a ‘learning culture’ and inadequate resources.¹³⁷

Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP) states, ‘Most organisations that claim to do impact assessments do not really appreciate what the terminology means—rather they feel that any measurement of results is a measurement of impact’.¹³⁷ Given the limited quality of information available, particularly in the humanitarian sector, a finding of this research is, therefore, the need for humanitarian practitioners to engage with how evaluations are designed and carried out, and reflect more deeply on the information being sought, in order to address the weaknesses and gaps that currently exist. This is not to diminish the challenges facing impact evaluation in the humanitarian sector or fall into the trap of valuing quantitative over qualitative data. It is also not to suggest that humanitarians become impact evaluation experts or academics, or that a randomized controlled trial is the only form of reliable evidence. Rather, it is to highlight the need to understand what constitutes good evidence and how to achieve it. This raises the question of organizational incentive and addressing the ‘risk aversion’ inherent in many organizations.

There is also reflection required over the most appropriate timeframes and how to facilitate this in changing contexts and mobile populations. While in some circumstances, timeframes may need to be shorter to capture effects,¹³⁷ in general, across the humanitarian and development and housing studies, timeframes were often mentioned as needing to be longer in order to measure impact adequately. However, the ability to demonstrate impact and production of good evidence will not emerge until there is a greater investment in the required skills and capacities: “It would not be helpful to expect over-

burdened programme managers to rigorously analyse impact without equipping them with the capacity and resources to do so.”⁷²



4. Conclusion

This research was carried out as an initial exploration into the range of impacts that shelter and settlements assistance has, and identification of areas where information is particularly weak, in order to inform selected infographic communications and to direct further research efforts. This report provides a summary of a range of examples of the wider impacts of shelter and settlements assistance, drawing on information from over 190 documents from humanitarian assistance, development/slum upgrading, and social housing interventions.

The strongest impacts were found to be on health, including improved physical and mental health, particularly for children, as well as enhanced well-being and morale. Although, due to limitations in the quality of data available, the evidence cannot be said to be robust, a number of specific impacts have also

been reported across the sectors of livelihoods, DRR, and society, including the provision of the basis for livelihoods, economic stimulation and skills training, and cost-savings that allow redirection of income to other key needs; reducing underlying risks and vulnerability and stress on natural resources; and encouraging civic engagement and improving social relations. To a lesser extent, impacts have also been reported in education, food, and gender, including providing a more conducive and stable environment that can support educational outcomes; facilitating access to more varied nutrition; and reducing vulnerability to sexual exploitation or abuse. Other important issues to come out of the research were the centrality of participation, the synergistic effects that can be created when multi-sectoral or integrated assistance is provided that responds to the multifarious needs of vulnerable populations, and the need for a holistic approach that works across sectors, disciplines and themes.

Specific examples and references can be found in Annex A, while an overall picture of the quantity and type of information found are included in Annex B.

Based on the studies found, the potential impact of shelter and settlements assistance can range from contributing to the economy to improved sleep to reducing the likelihood of future damage to shelters. However, due to the limited generalisability and transferability of the data, and as a result of the way in which the majority of studies were conducted and reported, the findings represent a range of examples of impacts in particular circumstances, rather than any conclusive statement about the overarching impact of shelter and settlements assistance more broadly.

The potential for these impacts to be attainable more widely suggests that shelter has an important role to play as a supporter and enabler of non-shelter outcomes. As such, a key finding of this research is also the imperative to generate stronger first-hand research, if we are to be able to better assess the wider contributions of shelter and settlements assistance.

In carrying out a review on the impacts of housing improvements, Bell¹⁷ noted the “tendency to publish and republish simple, convenient numbers as universal rules of thumb when the original source research was...based on a very few or specific cases that were hard to disentangle or generalise about.” While a useful summary of the potential impacts of providing assistance, to accept the examples collated in this report without engaging with the need to generate better evidence runs the risk of perpetuating the lack of information available and delaying the required investment in generating better data.

Implementing agencies and donors commissioning or producing evaluation reports are the key contributors to knowledge about the effects of humanitarian shelter and settlement interventions. While this can create a risk of bias, it also provides an opportunity for collaboration and sharing to improve the quantity and quality of evidence available in the sector. Partnerships between humanitarian agencies, donors and research institutions would increase the relevance and applicability of academic research. Given the lack of capacity, particularly within the humanitarian sector, and skills available elsewhere, the future seems to lie in identifying and establishing partnerships that introduce new actors and perspectives. In addition, partnership analysis can be carried out independently by institutions that are not directly invested in the implementation of programs. Success will require clear commitment from donors and implementing agencies alike, and likely require going beyond the usual M&E set up to establish a flexible learning system that sits half in and half out of project implementation structures.⁴⁵

It is clear that the potential that shelter and settlements assistance holds makes this investment both important and beneficial. The findings collated in this report provide insights into the value that shelter

and settlements assistance provides, however, substantial, reliable evidence on the wider impacts will require a significant commitment to partnership and further research and analysis.

5. Recommendations

Given the limitations noted above, further primary research and meta-analysis are necessary to verify and extrapolate the wider impacts of shelter and settlements assistance. The recommendations below aim to assist in increasing the likelihood of future availability of evidence:

For humanitarian shelter providers and academics

- Systematically upload evaluations to shared knowledge repositories (ALNAP, Humanitarian Library, etc.) to contribute to the available knowledge base.
- Conceive evaluation designs at the same time as project planning and consider the availability of baseline data or need to collect it.
- Clearly define your theory of change and objectives of assistance to support evaluation.
- Invest in expanding the skills and capacities required to carry out impact evaluations by providing guidance and training on applying appropriate study designs, research methods, evaluation frameworks, and indicators.
- Weave efforts to document project impact into monitoring and surveillance activities, in order to reduce costs while improving program quality.
- Engage in dialogue on the priorities and feasibility of impact evaluations to remove myths.
- Seek to establish long-term partnerships between academics, donors, governments, practitioners, and recipients.

For donors

- Fund research to help answer the necessary questions to carry out efficient and effective programs, including longitudinal studies.
- Clearly earmark resources to contribute to a critical body of evidence on impact.
- Do not expect already over-burdened M&E teams or managers to be able to analyze impact without equipping them with the capacity and resources to do so.
- Invest in partnerships between academics, governments, practitioners, and recipients.
- Refocusing humanitarian M&E to produce more meaningful data has to be linked to a re-think of the incentives of providing such data.

For future research

- Further research should focus on improving the quality of primary research and evaluations undertaken in the humanitarian shelter and settlement sector.
- Narrow the scope and do a more in-depth meta-analysis of specific sectors, including primary research where possible.
- Pilot impact evaluations in specific topics to help demonstrate feasibility and practice.
- Build relationships with other organizations carrying out similar research and share findings.
- Ensure context is adequately accounted for and analyzed in evaluations and assessments.

Please refer to Annex A and B for detailed findings, bibliography, and methodology.

Contact us: shelter@interaction.org

HOW DOES SHELTER AFFECT HEALTH?

The strongest impacts of shelter were found to be on health, including **improved physical and mental health**, particularly for children, as well as **enhanced well-being and morale**. Poor quality housing has a substantial impact on the **risk of ill health and life expectancy**, especially on women and children who spend more time in the home.

"Substandard housing contributed to children's poor health at ages 6, and developmental delays by age 2".
MacArthur Foundation

Housing interventions can reduce doctor's visits, and lower healthcare spending and hospitalization rates.

Losing their home in a disaster or conflict had a profound psychological impact on people over 80.

By improving shelter, people reported their mental health returning to similar levels as before the crisis.

After receiving shelter, people feel more in control and have better decision-making capacities.

Housing interventions increase the risk of disability or severe ill health over the course of life by 25%.

Improved shelter and settlements reduce risks of diarrheal disease and water-borne illness.

In Nigeria, the rate of under-5 mortality in adequate housing was 40% lower than those living in inadequate housing.

#SHELTERHELPS HEALTH
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Sources: Azevedo et al (2017), MacArthur (2017), Coker (2020), Brown (2017)

HOW DOES SHELTER AFFECT MENTAL HEALTH?

Affordable and adequate housing assistance can lead to:

- Fewer doctor's visits
- Reduced emotional stress
- Increased happiness

After receiving shelter, people feel more in control and have better decision-making capacities.

We had no security before, we had lived for 2 years with a broken main door, my psychological state improved so much after the renovation, I am happier and more at ease.
Syrian recipient of shelter assistance in Jordan

#SHELTERHELPS MENTALHEALTH
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Sources: Brown (2017), MacArthur (2017), Coker (2020), Brown (2017)

HOW DOES SHELTER AFFECT LIVELIHOODS?

Affordable and stable shelter can provide opportunities for financial stability and employment. Ongoing construction and maintenance of shelter and settlements can be an opportunity for **employment and skills growth**. Transitional shelters can be used for **small businesses** and income saved from affordable shelter can be redirected and spent on food and education.

Building 1 affordable home creates 5 direct jobs and as many as 8 indirect jobs.

36% of IDPs in Ukraine who received stable housing said it significantly improved their access to livelihood opportunities.

After the 2004 Indonesian Tsunami, 10% of people in one resettled area used their transitional shelters for business purposes.

46.2% of IDPs in shelter recipients saw a increase in income and better access to food.

A house can be a financial institution
A house can be a meeting place
A house can be a factory
A house can be a granary

#SHELTERHELPS LIVELIHOODS
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Sources: MacArthur (2017), UN (2015), UNHCR (2015), UNHCR (2015), UNHCR (2015), UNHCR (2015)

HOW CAN SHELTER HELP REDUCE RISK FROM HAZARDS?

Improving shelter and settlements can reduce vulnerability and build resilience. It can reduce the cost of shelter repairs and stress on local economy and can make people more self-reliant.

New and improved shelters in Pakistan experienced 50% less damage than older ones that were not improved when faced with extreme weather conditions.

Improving settlement level infrastructure in Haiti reduced the intensity of impacts and duration of emergency after Hurricane Irma 2017.

None of the shelters built for a project in Vietnam collapsed over a ten year period, including during extreme weather events... whereas other houses in the community did.

People with shelter assistance are safer and more self-reliant when faced with future extreme weather events.

#SHELTERHELPS DRR
InterAction.org | @InterActionOrg

Sources: Brown (2017), UN (2015), UNHCR (2015), UNHCR (2015), UNHCR (2015), UNHCR (2015)

HOW CAN SHELTER HELP SOCIAL COHESION?

Shelter and settlements can improve social cohesion and community engagement. Improved public spaces foster social inclusion. Livelihoods benefits refugee and host communities to recover and prosper.

46% of residents in Lebanon, who benefited from housing upgrading, reported:

- reduced community tensions
- increased empathy and trust

In Syria, 75% of people said restored social services and infrastructure after conflict had a positive effect on relationships between IDPs and host communities.

We have good relationships with the hosts, we feel at home.
Male shelter recipient, Ethiopia

Affordable housing and settlement upgrading can increase:

- involvement in neighborhood activities
- community leadership roles
- community connectedness

#SHELTERHELPS SOCIALCOHESION
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Sources: Brown (2017), UN (2015), UNHCR (2015), UNHCR (2015), UNHCR (2015)

WHAT IMPACT DOES SHELTER HAVE ON GENDER AND SOCIETY?

People feel, and are, safer when given shelter assistance - especially women. Housing vulnerability increases risk of sexual and physical abuse and domestic violence, and female-headed households are more likely to be affected by poor housing conditions.

Women in India who own land are up to eight times less likely to experience domestic violence than those who don't own land.

One study estimated that 28% of female-headed households with children have critical housing problems.

are paying more than 50% of their income on rent and/or are living in substandard or overcrowded conditions.

After receiving improved shelter, people internally displaced in South Sudan reported feeling an average of 40% safer.

#SHELTERHELPS GENDER
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Sources: UN (2015), UN (2015), UNHCR (2015), UNHCR (2015), UNHCR (2015)