

Resilience starts at home. But what if home isn't safe?

The consequences of conventional
household assumptions for inclusive DRR

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Introduction

The 2026 International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction (IDDRR) theme, “Resilience starts at home”, draws attention to the importance of safer housing, household preparedness and investment in reducing disaster risk (UNDRR, 2026). However, it also raises a fundamental question: what happens when home is not safe, stable, accessible or within an individual's control?

For many people, conventional understandings of home do not reflect their circumstances. Some have no permanent accommodation, others experience violence or discrimination where they live, while some cannot independently make decisions about their safety. For others, home is not defined by one fixed location, but through mobility, cultural identity and relationships with people and places (Blanchard, 2024a; Seglah and Blanchard, 2023; Young et al., 2016).

These differences have direct implications for how disaster risk is assessed, how warnings are communicated, who can access emergency assistance and whose safety is prioritised (Blanchard et al., 2023; Vickery, 2018).

Inclusive disaster risk reduction must recognise that home is not the same for everyone. Resilience cannot depend on assumptions about where people live, who they live with or their ability to make independent decisions about their safety.

Rethinking what home means in DRR

Homes and households have an important role in disaster preparedness, response and recovery. Safer buildings, accessible early warning systems and household preparedness measures can reduce disaster losses and support community resilience (UNDRR, 2015).

The 2026 IDDRR theme rightly highlights the importance of these measures, particularly the need for investment in safer and more affordable housing (UNDRR, 2026). However, household-focused approaches often rely on assumptions that do not apply equally across society.

These include the expectation that individuals have a relatively permanent place to live, can exercise some control over their living environment, have access to resources needed for preparedness and can rely on household members for assistance (Blanchard, 2024a; Vickery, 2018).

Yet home is more than a physical structure. It can represent security, privacy, identity, social relationships, cultural belonging and access to essential services.

Research exploring LGBTQIA+ experiences of disasters has demonstrated how losing a home can involve not only the loss of physical shelter, but also the disruption of social networks, personal identity and spaces where individuals feel safe to express themselves (Gorman-Murray et al., 2014; Seglah and Blanchard, 2023).

The concept of queer domicile, explored by Gorman-Murray et al. (2014), draws attention to how disasters can disrupt or destroy the homes and domestic environments of LGBTQIA+ people, with recovery processes sometimes failing to recognise their distinct social and household arrangements.

This broader understanding also reflects international human rights principles. The right to adequate housing extends beyond the provision of a building to encompass security of tenure, habitability, accessibility, affordability, location and cultural adequacy, as discussed in the context of disaster risk reduction by Seglah and Blanchard (2023).

Consequently, strengthening housing resilience should not be understood solely as making physical structures more resistant to hazards. It also requires consideration of the circumstances in which people live and whether their housing arrangements provide safety, dignity and security.

Whose home, and whose safety?

Disaster risk is influenced by social, economic, cultural and institutional conditions. These can determine whether individuals have somewhere safe to live, whether they can access warnings and assistance, and whether they have the independence or resources to protect themselves (Blanchard, 2024a; Blanchard et al., 2023; Vickery, 2018).

Several population groups demonstrate why a broader understanding of home is necessary.

People experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity

People experiencing homelessness may have no permanent or secure accommodation and can face direct exposure to extreme heat, flooding, cold weather and other hazards. Their access to early warnings, emergency supplies, transportation and recovery assistance may be limited (Gin et al., 2022; Vickery, 2018).

Research also identifies administrative barriers, including requirements for proof of residence, identification or household registration, which can prevent people from accessing assistance (Blanchard, 2024a; Gin et al., 2022).

However, people experiencing homelessness should not simply be viewed as passive recipients of support. Their knowledge of local environments, informal support networks and experience navigating insecure living conditions can contribute to preparedness and response when appropriately recognised and supported (Blanchard, 2024a).

Survivors of gender-based violence

For people experiencing domestic or gender-based violence, home may be the place where they face the greatest threat to their safety.

Household preparedness measures that presume cooperation between family members may be inappropriate or dangerous when relationships involve coercion, abuse or controlling behaviour. Similarly, instructions to remain at home, evacuate together or return to previous accommodation may expose individuals to further harm. International guidance on protection from sexual and gender-based violence in disasters highlights the need to recognise and address these risks throughout preparedness, response and recovery (IFRC, 2017; IFRC, 2018).

Disaster planning must therefore distinguish between physical safety from hazards and personal safety from violence, recognising that the two are not necessarily experienced in the same place.

LGBTQIA+ people and non-traditional households

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and all other non cis-gender and non heterosexual (LGBTQIA+) people may experience family rejection, discrimination, housing insecurity or violence linked to their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. For some, particularly young people dependent on unsupportive families, home may offer little protection or independence (Goldsmith et al., 2022; Seglah and Blanchard, 2023).

These risks can continue during displacement and recovery. Research has documented experiences of harassment, discrimination and exclusion in emergency shelters, alongside barriers to healthcare and assistance arising from assumptions about gender and family structures (Blanchard et al., 2023; Seglah and Blanchard, 2021).

Following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, for example, members of the Aravani community in Tamil Nadu experienced exclusion from government assistance when administrative systems failed to recognise their gender identity (Seglah and Blanchard, 2021).

LGBTQIA+ people may also depend on chosen families, partners and informal care networks that are not recognised by conventional household registration or next-of-

kin arrangements. This can create barriers to shelter, relief distribution, medical decision-making and recovery assistance (Aronsson-Storrier et al., 2025; Blanchard, 2024b).

Importantly, existing research also demonstrates the capacities and knowledge of LGBTQIA+ communities, including their use of mutual aid, trusted organisations and informal support networks (Goldsmith et al., 2022; Seglah and Blanchard, 2021). These contributions should be recognised without allowing community resilience to become a substitute for institutional responsibility.

People in prisons, detention and other controlled settings

People in prisons, detention facilities and some residential institutions may have little control over their living environments or decisions concerning evacuation, shelter and access to emergency services.

Unlike individuals who can independently prepare emergency supplies or move to safer locations, people in detention are dependent on institutional arrangements and decisions made by the authorities responsible for them. Penal Reform International (2021) identifies how restrictions on individual freedom and institutional conditions can complicate disaster preparedness and emergency response.

Research by Penal Reform International (2021) also identifies how disasters and extreme weather can affect prison infrastructure, healthcare, staffing and essential services, particularly where overcrowding or inadequate emergency planning already exist.

These circumstances illustrate why resilience cannot always be framed around individual or household responsibility. Institutional accountability is essential when people cannot independently protect themselves.

Nomadic and mobile communities

For nomadic and mobile communities, home may be understood through relationships with land, livestock, seasonal movement, cultural identity and customary practices rather than one permanent location.

Research into pastoralist mobility in Sudan demonstrates how movement between locations can be an established strategy for managing environmental conditions and sustaining livelihoods. Such practices challenge assumptions that stability and resilience necessarily depend on permanent settlement (Young et al., 2016).

These findings are context-specific and should not be generalised to every nomadic population. Nevertheless, they demonstrate the importance of understanding locally established approaches to managing risk.

Disaster risk policies that rely on fixed addresses, permanent settlement or conventional household registration may overlook mobile populations or fail to recognise their existing capacities (Young et al., 2016).

When assumptions about home create additional disaster risk

These experiences are not isolated exceptions to otherwise universal approaches. They demonstrate how policy and programme design can unintentionally reproduce the inequalities that contribute to disaster risk (Blanchard, 2024a; Vickery, 2018).

Risk assessments and disaster data

Risk assessments frequently rely on household surveys, population registers, geographic boundaries and formally recognised accommodation. These approaches may overlook people without permanent addresses, those living in informal arrangements, mobile populations or individuals who cannot safely disclose their circumstances (Blanchard, 2024a; Gin et al., 2022).

The absence of information can contribute to exclusion from preparedness planning and resource allocation. However, collecting more detailed information is not automatically the solution. For marginalised or criminalised groups, inappropriate collection or disclosure of sensitive personal information can create additional risks, highlighting the importance of community-led and protective approaches to disaster data (Aronsson-Storrier et al., 2025; Seglah and Blanchard, 2021).

Early warning and preparedness

Receiving an early warning does not necessarily mean someone can act on it.

Preparedness messages may assume that individuals have a telephone, internet connection, transport, money, emergency supplies or permission to leave their accommodation. They may also assume that family members are willing and able to assist one another (Blanchard, 2024a; Gin et al., 2022).

For people experiencing controlling relationships, those without secure housing and individuals in institutional settings, these assumptions can make otherwise accessible warnings ineffective (IFRC, 2018; Penal Reform International, 2021).

Emergency shelter and evacuation

Emergency accommodation may provide physical protection from a hazard while creating other safety concerns.

Discrimination, harassment, inadequate privacy, inaccessible facilities or the failure to recognise diverse household arrangements can discourage people from seeking assistance (IFRC, 2018; Seglah and Blanchard, 2021; Seglah and Blanchard, 2023).

Shelter arrangements must therefore consider safety, dignity and accessibility alongside their capacity to protect people from hazards.

Recovery and reconstruction

Recovery policies often focus on rebuilding damaged housing or enabling people to return to their previous accommodation.

However, returning home may not represent recovery for someone who previously lived in an unsafe or abusive environment. Similarly, reconstruction assistance based on property ownership, legal documentation or formally recognised household structures may exclude people who were already experiencing housing insecurity (Blanchard, 2024a; Gorman-Murray et al., 2014; Seglah and Blanchard, 2023).

Recovery should not simply restore the conditions that contributed to disaster risk before an event.

Six policy priorities for inclusive resilience

The following recommendations provide practical opportunities for governments, disaster management authorities, humanitarian organisations and development partners to strengthen inclusive disaster risk reduction. They draw on the evidence presented above, existing international commitments and recommendations developed through research on marginalised populations and disaster risk (Aronsson-Storrier et al., 2025; Blanchard, 2024a; UNDRR, 2015).

Priority 1: Recognise different understandings and experiences of home

National and local disaster risk reduction policies should recognise that people live in different circumstances and that these circumstances influence disaster risk.

Risk assessments and preparedness planning should explicitly consider homelessness, insecure and informal housing, communal and institutional living arrangements, and nomadic or mobile ways of life (Gin et al., 2022; Penal Reform International, 2021; Young et al., 2016).

Housing resilience programmes should also reflect the wider right to adequate housing, including security, accessibility, affordability and cultural adequacy (Seglah and Blanchard, 2023).

This requires collaboration across disaster management, housing, health, social protection and justice institutions, alongside engagement with the communities concerned.

Priority 2: Design early warning and assistance systems around people's actual circumstances

Early warning and emergency assistance should not depend on individuals having a

permanent address, private communication devices, recognised household registration or access to conventional family support.

Authorities should use multiple communication channels, support trusted community outreach and provide accessible information through organisations already working with populations that may be excluded from mainstream systems (Blanchard, 2024a; Gin et al., 2022).

Emergency registration and assistance procedures should be flexible enough to accommodate people without standard identification or proof of residence, while maintaining appropriate safeguards (Blanchard, 2024a; Seglah and Blanchard, 2021).

Data collection should be proportionate and developed with affected communities. Where information about identity, living circumstances or relationships could expose individuals to discrimination or violence, privacy, anonymity and informed consent must be prioritised (Aronsson-Storrier et al., 2025).

Priority 3: Make personal safety central to housing, shelter and evacuation policy.

Disaster preparedness and emergency accommodation arrangements must recognise that home and household relationships are not always safe.

Evacuation planning should include confidential and accessible alternatives for people experiencing domestic abuse, family rejection or other forms of violence. Emergency accommodation should provide appropriate privacy, protection and access to essential services without exposing individuals to further discrimination or harm (IFRC, 2017; IFRC, 2018).

Housing and shelter assessments should consider the risks of gender-based violence, discrimination and harassment alongside structural safety and hazard exposure (IFRC, 2018; Seglah and Blanchard, 2023).

Recovery planning should also recognise that returning to previous accommodation may not always be safe, appropriate or desirable.

Priority 4: Recognise diverse households, care networks and relationships

Household registration, emergency assistance and recovery arrangements should recognise the diversity of family and care structures, including chosen families, unmarried partners and informal support networks.

This is particularly important for LGBTQIA+ people who may be estranged from their biological families or whose relationships are not legally recognised (Aronsson-Storrier et al., 2025; Goldsmith et al., 2022).

The absence of appropriate recognition can also affect emergency medical

decisions, access to information and next-of-kin arrangements. Where legal frameworks permit, emergency procedures should respect individuals' nominated contacts and decision-makers. Wider legal barriers to recognising relationships and care responsibilities should also be reviewed (Blanchard, 2024b).

Preparedness and response planning must avoid automatically treating biological or legally recognised family relationships as the only legitimate sources of support (Aronsson-Storrier et al., 2025).

Priority 5: Strengthen accountability where individuals have limited control over their safety

Disaster preparedness systems should clearly establish responsibilities for protecting people who cannot independently make decisions about evacuation, shelter or access to essential services.

This includes prisons, detention facilities, residential institutions and other settings where individual freedom of movement or decision-making may be restricted.

Relevant authorities should ensure that emergency plans address evacuation, continuity of healthcare, accessible warnings, essential supplies, communication with support networks and appropriate independent oversight (Penal Reform International, 2021).

People living in these settings should also have opportunities to contribute to preparedness planning, with safeguards that reflect their circumstances.

Institutional responsibility must remain clear and should not be transferred to individuals who lack the authority or resources to act independently.

Priority 6: Address structural inequalities and ensure meaningful participation

Inclusive resilience requires action on the conditions that increase disaster risk, including poverty, insecure housing, discrimination, violence, criminalisation and unequal access to services (Aronsson-Storrier et al., 2025; Blanchard, 2024a).

These issues cannot be addressed through household preparedness campaigns alone.

Governments and disaster management institutions should provide meaningful, safe and resourced opportunities for marginalised communities and their representative organisations to participate in risk assessment, planning, implementation and monitoring (Blanchard et al., 2023; UNDRR, 2015).

Participation must extend beyond consultation. Community knowledge and lived experience should help determine policy priorities, resource allocation and the measures used to assess success (Aronsson-Storrier et al., 2025).

This should include recognition of locally established coping strategies, informal support networks and culturally specific understandings of safety, home and resilience.

Linking the 2026 IDDRR theme to existing international commitments

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 establishes a people-centred approach to understanding disaster risk, strengthening governance, investing in resilience and improving preparedness (UNDRR, 2015).

Its guiding principles recognise the importance of inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory participation, including the engagement of groups disproportionately affected by disasters (UNDRR, 2015).

The Gender Action Plan to support implementation of the Sendai Framework, launched in 2024, further strengthens the emphasis on gender-responsive and intersectional approaches to disaster risk reduction (UNDRR, UNFPA and UN Women, 2024).

In August 2025, a DRR Dynamics led addendum to the Gender Action Plan proposed additional measures to strengthen the recognition and inclusion of gender and sexual minorities (Aronsson-Storrier et al., 2025).

Developed following the Inclusive by Design conference in June 2025, the addendum proposed action on recognising chosen families and informal care networks, protecting sensitive personal data, addressing structural discrimination and criminalisation, strengthening community participation and improving inclusive risk communication (Aronsson-Storrier et al., 2025).

These proposals were developed by stakeholders as a contribution to the implementation of the Gender Action Plan. They should not be interpreted as formally adopted UNDRR policy.

Nevertheless, they provide practical examples of how existing international commitments could be strengthened through more explicit recognition of diverse household arrangements, experiences of discrimination and community capacities.

The 2026 IDDRR theme creates an opportunity to connect these wider commitments to housing and household resilience (UNDRR, 2026). This means recognising that safer buildings, stronger infrastructure and greater household preparedness are necessary but insufficient on their own.

Disaster risk reduction policies must also consider whether individuals can exercise meaningful control over their safety, whether assistance reaches those outside conventional household structures, and whether existing social and institutional arrangements contribute to risk (Blanchard, 2024a; Seglah and Blanchard, 2023).

These considerations are equally relevant to discussions about international disaster risk reduction commitments beyond 2030.

Conclusion: resilience must start with people, not assumptions

The message that “Resilience starts at home” is an important reminder that housing, households and local action have a central role in reducing disaster risk (UNDRR, 2026).

However, home is not necessarily a place of safety. A household is not necessarily a source of support, and individuals do not always have the freedom, independence or resources to make decisions about their own protection.

Research on marginalised populations demonstrates how conventional assumptions about housing, family structures and individual preparedness can result in people being overlooked by risk assessments, excluded from assistance or exposed to further harm during emergencies (Blanchard, 2024a; Goldsmith et al., 2022; Gorman-Murray et al., 2014; Vickery, 2018).

At the same time, these communities often possess valuable knowledge, capacities and support networks that can strengthen disaster preparedness and resilience. Their experiences should inform policy rather than remain peripheral to it (Blanchard et al., 2023; Goldsmith et al., 2022).

The challenge for policymakers and practitioners is therefore not simply to make more homes resilient. It is to ensure that disaster risk reduction policies and systems protect people regardless of where they live, how they define home, who they live with or whether they have a home at all.

If resilience starts at home, we must first ask whose home, how safe it is, who has control over it and who is being left out.

Inclusive disaster risk reduction begins by asking those questions and ensuring that the answers lead to meaningful changes in policy, investment and practice.

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