

# WORLD HABITAT DAY 2025

## KEY MESSAGES

### URBAN CRISIS RESPONSE

- Crises driven by conflict, political instability, and climate change are increasingly unfolding in cities.
- Crises are converging in cities and increasing vulnerability – particularly for the 1.1 billion people living in informal settlements and slums.
- Displacement is worsening the global housing crisis, now affecting nearly 3 billion people worldwide.
- Of the record 123 million people forcibly displaced, more than 60 per cent are seeking refuge and opportunities in cities.
- Without inclusive urban planning, displacement will fuel the expansion of informal settlements and slums, which already house 1.1 billion people globally.
- With inclusive planning and infrastructure investment, displaced populations can contribute positively to the economy, society and culture of the host cities.
- Cities need stronger capacity, legal frameworks, and financing to protect vulnerable communities, restore essential services, and rebuild resilient housing amidst crises.
- Adequate housing, secure land tenure, and access to basic services are critical for recovery, enabling families to return, reintegrate, and rebuild their lives.
- The World Urban Forum in Baku (WUF13), under the theme “Housing the word: Safe and resilient cities and communities”, will provide a global platform to connect the challenges with actionable solutions, linking crisis response with sustainable housing strategies.
- This World Habitat Day 2025, we urge action to strengthen local leadership, build resilient urban systems, and make sure no one is left behind in times of crisis.

## THE CHALLENGE

- According to UNHCR, a record 123 million people have been forcibly displaced. More than 60 per cent of them are seeking refuge in cities.
- Conflicts, political instability, and climate change are worsening the global housing crisis, already affecting nearly 3 billion people and placing even greater strain on vulnerable communities and urban areas.
- Without inclusive urban and territorial planning, crisis-driven displacement will accelerate the expansion of informal settlements and slums, which already house 1.1 billion people globally.

## KEY FACTS

- More than 60 per cent of refugees and more than half of internally displaced people live in urban areas – often facing limited access to services, insecure housing, and heightened risks of eviction, exploitation, and exclusion. (Source: *UNHCR Global Trends Report 2019*)
- Each year, disasters damage or destroy over 92,000 critical infrastructure facilities and cause 1.6 million times disruptions to essential services – highlighting the urgent need for stronger public investment in resilient urban systems. (Source: *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025*)
- In times of crisis, essential services collapse. In conflict-affected towns in Sudan, more than 70 per cent of hospitals are non-functional, and destruction of urban infrastructure – such as water and sanitation systems – is severe. (Source: *World Bank*)
- In Gaza, 92 per cent of homes are destroyed or severely damaged, displacing over 1.9 million people and rendering entire urban areas uninhabitable. (Source: *Shelter Cluster*)
- In Syria, more than 2 million displaced people have returned, demonstrating remarkable resilience. Long-term recovery is urgently needed to rebuild cities. Housing, land and property rights need to be secured. (Source: *UNHCR Global Trends Report 2025*)
- In Afghanistan, over 3 million people returned since 2023. Many remain displaced within the country, while fragile urban areas struggle to provide housing and basic services. (Source: *UNHCR*)
- In Ukraine, 3.7 million people remain internally displaced, with 6.8 million Ukrainian refugees abroad, amounting to roughly 10.6 million displaced people overall. (Source: *UNHCR*)
- In Sudan, over 8.8 million people are internally displaced, with nearly 4 million having fled abroad – totalling approximately 12.8 million displaced individuals overall. (Source: *UNHCR*)

## HOUSING: AN OPPORTUNITY IN CRISIS RESPONSE

- In crisis, displaced people often settle in urban informal areas with poorly built housing, insecure tenure, and limited basic services.
- Integrating displacement into urban growth strategies can turn informality into sustainable and inclusive urbanization.
- Adequate housing, secure land tenure, and basic services are essential for recovery – enabling families to return and/or integrate locally.
- Housing-focused priorities include:
  - Transforming informal settlements and slums
  - Improving land and housing documentation
  - Advancing legal and policy reform
  - Expanding access to affordable housing finance.
- At the World Urban Forum in Baku (WUF13) in May 2026, we will explore and amplify innovative urban crisis response practices and how housing drives sustainable recovery.

## SUCCESSFUL URBAN RESPONSE PRACTICES

Across regions affected by conflict and displacement, UN-Habitat has supported communities to rebuild lives with dignity, security, and resilience.

- **Iraq:** From 2011 to 2019, UN-Habitat supported recovery across seven governorates – including Baghdad, Basra, Najaf, Kirkuk, Anbar, Diyala, and Nineveh. The programme combined legal reforms, community-led shelter solutions, and institutional support, helping thousands of returnees secure housing, land, and property rights.
- **Somalia:** In Mogadishu, UN-Habitat expanded fair access to land and shelter for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and marginalized groups. By addressing the mix of formal and informal land practices, the initiative reduced tensions, improved tenure security, and offered vulnerable families stability.
- **Afghanistan:** Through the SHURA Programme, UN-Habitat supported over 6,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnee households in Herat and Kabul. Families gained tenure security, improved services, and opportunities for investment. The area-based approach ensured both displaced and host communities benefitted, fostering integration.
- **Lebanon:** In Beirut, the Sabra-El Jassar Community-Led Upgrading Project engaged residents directly in planning and decision-making. The project improved housing and basic services in a marginalized neighbourhood, promoted inclusivity, and strengthened social cohesion by ensuring all community groups benefitted equally.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Placing adequate housing, secure land tenure, and access to basic services at the centre of crisis recovery is urgent to avert the worsening global housing crisis and proliferation of informal settlements and slums.
- In moments of crisis, it is important to support families to rebuild their homes, not just physically but socially, helping to restore communities whenever and wherever possible.
- Rebuilding homes and neighbourhoods needs to be central to any recovery and reconstruction strategy.
- Local governments and local communities should be central to their own recovery. Multilevel governance should enable this through building local government capacity, and establishing legal, policy, and solid financing to respond to urban crises.
- Displacement is both a humanitarian challenge and a development opportunity if fully integrated into sustainable urban development strategies.
- Enhancing public finance in cities through improved fiscal management, identification of viable revenue sources, and sustainable budgeting capacity is key for local governments to respond better.
- Supporting community-led settlement processes using participatory, area-based approaches is essential to foster social cohesion and reduce pressure on overstretched services in urban areas.
- Applying spatial and territorial profiling to map settlement patterns, drivers of mobility, and potential breakdowns in urban infrastructure and services helps make displacement and other population shifts visible and enabling more targeted crisis responses.