

Spatial Inclusion Regional Trends



SPATIAL INCLUSION IN CITIES: REGIONAL TRENDS REPORT

Using the latest available data, the report provides a panoramic exploration of trending challenges and innovative solutions for spatial inclusion in cities across the different regions: North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, Mediterranean Regions, Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

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The Report is produced with data gathered from sources referenced in each section. Regions are divided considering the Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistical Use, commonly referred to as the M49 Standard, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) regions and the regional work coordinated by UN-Habitat's Regional Offices and the Project Coordination Office for Countries of the CIS.

All maps are produced in the Pseudo-Mercator 3857 projection.

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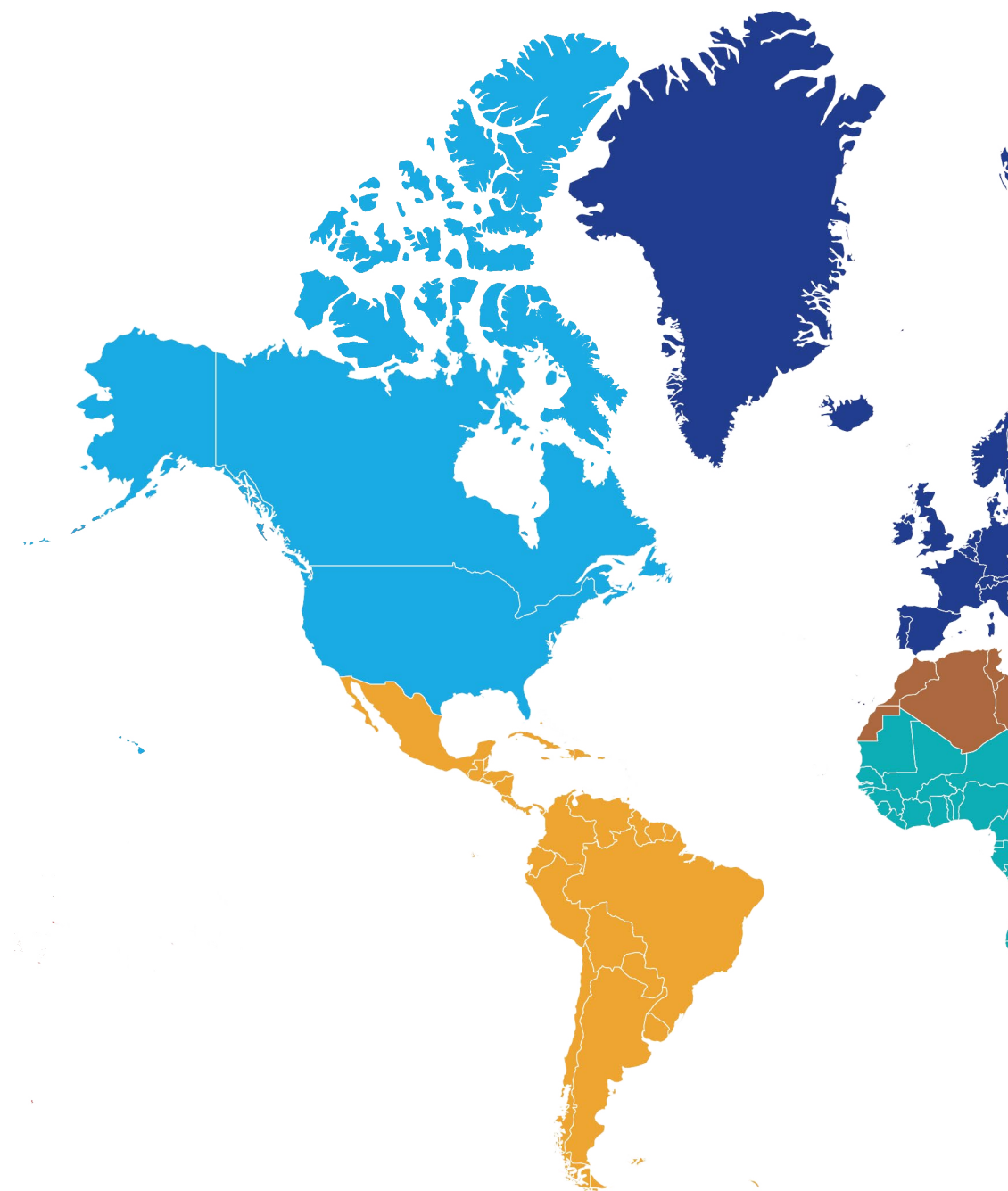
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Spatial Inclusions Captured by Region*



KEY

Asia and
Pacific Region

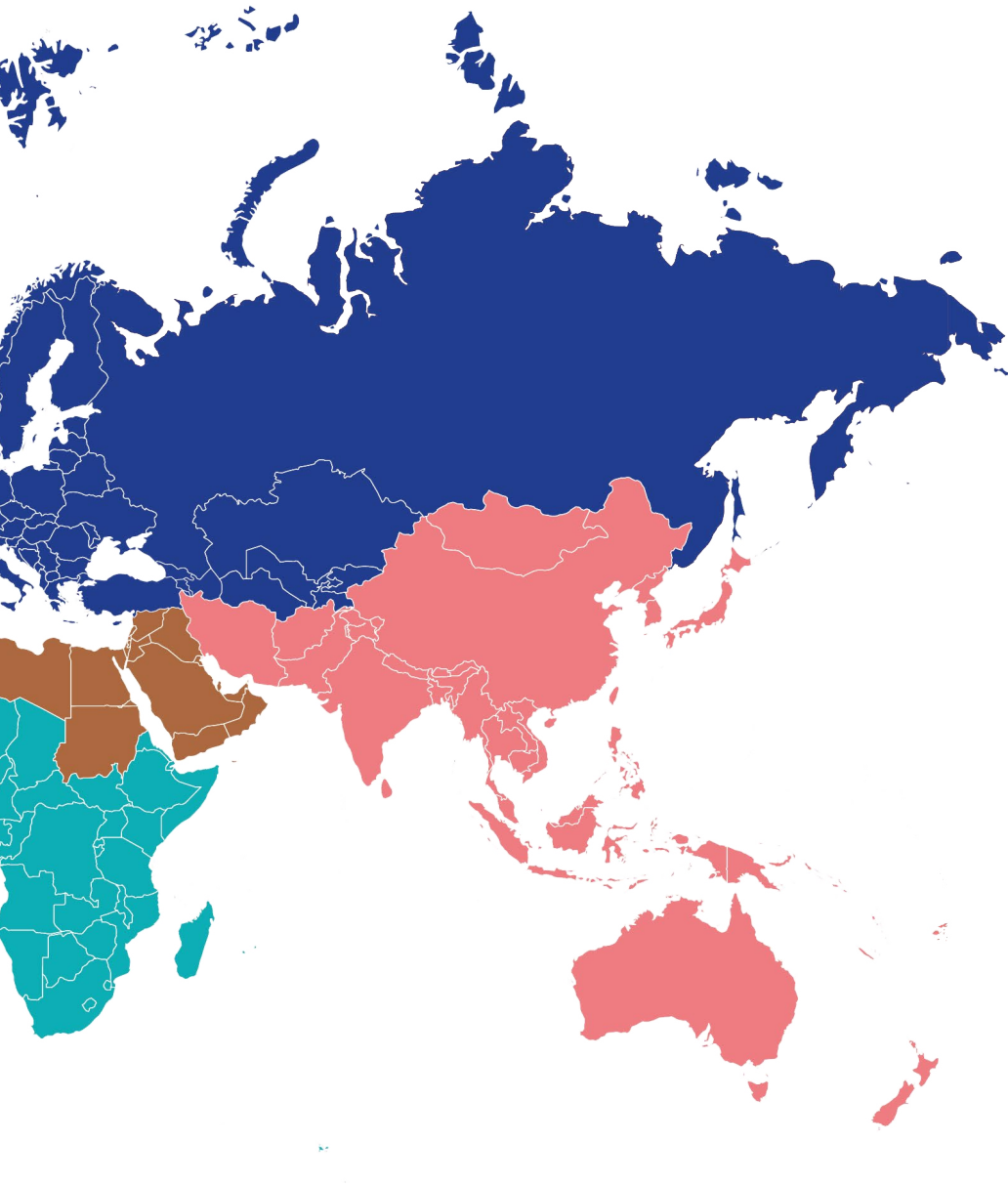
Latin America and
the Caribbean Region

North America
Region

Europe
Region

Middle East and
North Africa Region

Sub-Saharan
Africa Region



***For further details on how the regions were determined, please refer to the Appendix A, map projection is Psedo-Mercator 3857**

ABOUT UN-HABITAT

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UN-Habitat, is the United Nations Programme for sustainable towns and cities. Headquartered in Nairobi, it works in over 90 countries worldwide to promote transformative change in cities and human settlements through knowledge, policy advice, technical assistance and collaborative action. UN-Habitat is responsible for the coordination of all urban activities and relationships with local governments in the UN system and monitoring the progress of **Sustainable Development Goal 11** on sustainable cities and communities as well as the **New Urban Agenda**.

Over the last 40 years, UN-Habitat has implemented urban projects and programmes in cities all over the world. **Inclusive and integrated approaches** are inherent in UN-Habitat's modus operandi. Technical elements such as urban planning, innovation and research are always combined with capacity building and fostering value-add, inclusive partnerships and dynamic stakeholder engagement processes. As a United Nations agency, engagement, and coordination of various stakeholders - bringing together governments, research institutions, companies and citizens for dialogue is our core mandate. Alongside our focus on human rights and vulnerable groups, these factors are our 'convening power' and a core strength of the UN system.

UN-Habitat's Strategic Plan 2020 - 2025 defines four interlinked domains of change (DoC) that overlap and are mutually reinforcing to promote sustainable urbanisation. The domains of change are:

1. Reduced spatial inequality and poverty in communities across the urban-rural continuum;
2. Enhanced shared prosperity of cities and regions.
3. Strengthened climate action and improved urban environment;
4. Effective urban crisis prevention and response

To reduce spatial inequalities and eradicate poverty, planned urban growth must be accompanied by effective urban renewal through in situ upgrading and urban regeneration. Such efforts would also offer the benefit of preserving cultural heritage and helping to build a sense of identity and belonging in cities.

Five different flagship programmes have been defined in the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2020-2025. UN Habitat Flagship Programme 1 'Inclusive Communities, Thriving Cities' works to address spatial inequality and in this process, it identifies urban regeneration as a key component.



FLAGSHIP PROGRAMME 1: INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES, THRIVING CITIES

The Flagship Programme 'Inclusive Communities, Thriving Cities' is a convening platform for multistakeholder collaboration, technical assistance, and resource mobilisation to promote inclusive urban regeneration, enabling neighbourhoods and communities to become healthier, safer and more resilient. The main goal of this Flagship Programme is to promote **social and environmental value** creation globally by **supporting governments and urban actors** to build more **inclusive and climate resilient cities**, neighbourhoods and communities through **urban regeneration**.

To achieve this goal, UN-Habitat works towards three main outcomes:



Enhanced knowledge and evidence-based data on inclusive and sustainable urban regeneration to reduce spatial inequality and promote socioeconomic development and resilience.



Strengthened global and regional collaboration and capacity on inclusive and sustainable urban regeneration.



Initiatives and solutions implemented to generate social and environmental value through urban regeneration.

UN-Habitat's comprehensive approach to urban regeneration builds a strong spatial foundation and human rights-based and inclusive processes, placing people at the centre with a strong policy to avoid, mitigate and manage risks associated with urban regeneration. In view of the integrative nature of urban regeneration, the programme brings together different areas of expertise to promote inter-sectorial collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

Publication Purpose | This report presents a panoramic overview of trending challenges and solutions in advancing spatial inclusion across six regions of the world: Asia and the Pacific; Europe and Central Asia; Latin America and the Caribbean; Middle East and North Africa; North America; and Sub-Saharan Africa.¹ Leveraging the global experience of UN-Habitat, it distils key regional insights and good practices to inspire responsible initiatives aimed at enhancing spatial and social inclusion at the local level. Moreover, the report delves into the potential of urban regeneration to mitigate disparities through an integrated and inclusive approach. Highlighting regional inclusive practices, it stresses the necessity of prioritizing comprehensive policies and solutions that foster public participation and ensure equitable access to public resources and infrastructure.

The report is the outcome of collaborative efforts led by UN-Habitat's Flagship Programme 1 'Inclusive Communities, Thriving Cities', working in conjunction with Regional and Country offices. Each section provides an overview of spatial inclusion in a specific global region, featuring a visually informative fact sheet, a summary of prevailing challenges and solutions, and a case study on urban regeneration. Each case was either developed in collaboration with UN-Habitat or promoted by it.

The following chapter presents working definitions of social and spatial inequality and highlights important global trends in advancing spatial inclusion.

Socio-spatial Inequality: Key Concepts | Within the context of this report, social inequality refers to disparities in the distribution and accessibility of life-sustaining necessities and valued social goods and services, reflecting various facets of social hierarchy and exclusion.² It is marked by differential access to income and wealth, social protection, infrastructure and technology, public health and education, decision-making structures, and environmental burdens, among others.³ Social exclusion describes a state in which individuals are unable to participate fully in the economic, social, political and cultural life, as well as the process leading to and sustaining such a state.⁴ Exclusion may be based on different identity attributes and characteristics such as race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical condition, lifestyles, income, religious and political beliefs, and legal status (refugee or stateless status).⁵ Social exclusion is a more complex concept than poverty, as one can experience exclusion without being in poverty.

Inequalities linked to location, or spatial inequalities, refer to the uneven distribution of resources, services and opportunities across a specific geographic area – between countries, regions, within cities, and along the rural-urban continuum.^{6,7,8,9} The result is a tremendous variation in economic status, labour market opportunities, exposure to environmental hazards and social networks at the level of individuals, families and groups in these areas.

The notion of socio-spatial inequalities extends the above-mentioned concepts to the idea that social inequalities manifest as spatial patterns. Urban segregation defined as the spatial separation of various social groups within a city, underscores the link between social and spatial dimensions. This spatial division significantly affects the social conditions and quality of life for these groups, particularly by exacerbating existing inequalities.¹⁰

1. For the regional grouping of countries, see Appendix A.

2. C. Suter, "Social Inequalities," in *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*, ed. A. C. Michalos (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2014), pp. 6093–6097. Available at https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5_2766.

3. UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2022* (Nairobi: United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2022).

4. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Leaving No One Behind: The Imperative of Inclusive Development. Report on the World Social Situation 2016* (New York: United Nations, 2016). Valodia, I. *Inequality: Troubling trends and why economic growth in Africa is key to reducing global disparities. The Conversation* (2023).

5. A. Mela and A. Toldo, "Understanding Social Exclusion," in *Socio-Spatial Inequalities in Contemporary Cities*, eds. A. Mela and A. Toldo (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), pp. 1–7. Available at https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-17256-5_1.

6. United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), *The New Urban Agenda – Habitat III* (Quito: UN-Habitat, 2016). Available at <https://uploads.habitat3.org/hb3/NUA-English.pdf>.

7. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Social Report 2020: Inequality in a Rapidly Changing World*, chap. 4, "Urbanization: Expanding Opportunities But Deeper Divides," pp. 110–115 (New York: United Nations, 2020).

8. K. Ravi and A. J. Venables, "Spatial Inequality and Development," in *Spatial Inequality and Development*, eds. K. Ravi and A. J. Venables (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 3–12. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199278636.003.0001>.

9. G. Galster and P. Sharkey, "Spatial Foundations of Inequality: A Conceptual Model and Empirical Overview," *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, vol. 3, No. 2 (February 2017), pp. 1–4. Available at <https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2017.3.2.01>.

10. A. Mela and A. Toldo, "Understanding Social Exclusion," in *Socio-Spatial Inequalities in Contemporary Cities*, eds. A. Mela and A. Toldo (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), pp. 9–31. Available at https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-17256-5_1.

There is a growing interest and effort to bridge this divide. In the context of United Nations framework to leaving no one behind, social inclusion is defined as “the process of improving the terms of participation in society for people who are disadvantaged [...] through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights”.³ It is described as both a process and a goal. Civic engagement in decision-making processes is also a central component to spatial inclusion. Promoting it requires removing barriers to people's participation in society, as well taking active inclusionary measures to facilitate universal accessibility and engagement processes in planning and governance. For the purposes of this report, spatial inclusion refers to the process of improving access, proximity, and connectivity to services, amenities and economic opportunities for all. This involves providing equitable access to affordable housing, and basic services, while reducing environmental risks and promoting social interaction and recreational opportunities.¹²

Measuring Inequality | Measuring inequality could be a challenging task due to its multidimensional and context-dependent nature and the lack of standard data sources across territories and for all social groups. National population censuses, some internationally and regionally standardized surveys, multiple indicator cluster surveys as well as opinion polls, are available for many countries and comparable across countries.¹¹ However, typically each of these sources is designed for a specific purpose and none of them alone allows for comprehensive international assessments of inclusion. Thus, indicators of social and spatial inclusion have rarely been combined into one composite index.¹³ Assessing changes in inclusion indicators over time results in additional challenges due to one-point-in-time data collection and comparability issues.

Nonetheless, it is possible to measure key facets of inequality through widely-used indices – the Gini coefficient and the Human Development Index (HDI). The Gini coefficient measures income distribution across a population using GDP/capita as an average measure of wealth. The HDI was developed to provide a broader assessment of human well-being beyond economic factors alone. It is a composite statistic with three main dimensions – health, education and standard of living. While these indices could indicate overall level of development and inequality, they do not provide information about where specifically within a region the inequality is occurring. To provide a more accurate and specific understanding of inequality and deprivation in a given area, spatial dimensions and dependencies should be incorporated into the calculation of these indices. The Spatial Gini coefficient, for example, uses spatially explicit datasets to evaluate the distribution of a particular variable in a spatial unit.¹⁴ When combined, different measurements of socio-spatial inequality provide nuance and depth to our understanding of how disparities are distributed.

Manifestation of Inequalities in Cities | Reducing inequality continues to be a primary focus on the policy agenda for most countries worldwide. Even though global inequality has been decreasing over the past three decades, inequality within countries is rising.¹⁵ Since the 1990s, Asian nations like China, India, and Vietnam have experienced substantial per capita growth rates, surpassing those of developed nations. While population-weighted inequality between countries has decreased, internal disparities within countries have escalated. These within-country inequalities surpass the levels observed three decades ago in major nations, including the United States, China, Russia, most of continental Europe, and South Africa.^{10,16}

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) constitute a universal call for action to eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities.¹⁷ Leaving no one behind (LNOB) is one of the core principles and transformational promises in the implementation of this Agenda. However, progress over the years has not been enough, with no country on track for achieving the SDGs by 2030. The cascade of global crises of the Covid-19 pandemic, geopolitical conflicts, economic uncertainty, and climate emergency is deepening divides and widening inequalities. The pandemic wiped out four years of progress on poverty eradication and pushed 93 million more people into extreme poverty in 2020 – a number comparable to the joint population of Spain and Argentina.^{18,19}

11. D. Liang, M. de Jong, D. F. J. Schraven and L. Wang, “Mapping Key Features and Dimensions of the Inclusive City: A Systematic Bibliometric Analysis and Literature Study,” *International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology*, vol. 29, No. 1 (2021), pp. 60–79. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504509.20211911873>.

12. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Social Report 2020: Inequality in a Rapidly Changing World*, chap. 4, “Urbanization: Expanding Opportunities But Deeper Divides,” pp. 110–115 (New York: United Nations, 2020).

13. There are initiatives that aim to harmonize surveys from different sources across continents, e.g. the Spatial Inequality Databased by the World Bank: <https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/search/dataset/0064524/Spatial-Inequalities>

14. X. Wang, P. C. Sutton and B. Qi, “Global Mapping of GDP at 1 km² Using VIIRS Nighttime Satellite Imagery,” *ISPRS International Journal of Geo-Information*, vol. 8, No. 12 (2019), art. 580. Available at <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijgi8120580>.

15. T. Addison, J. Pirttilä and F. Tarp, *Is Global Inequality Rising or Falling? Policy Brief 2019/2* (Helsinki: UNU-WIDER, 2019).

16. I. Valodia, “Inequality: Troubling Trends and Why Economic Growth in Africa Is Key to Reducing Global Disparities,” *The Conversation*, 2023.

17. United Nations General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/70/1. Available at https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf.

18. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022* (New York: UN DESA, 2022). Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/>.

19. Worldometers, “World Population by Country – Data for 2023,” 2024. Available at <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/>.

In 2022, 9.2% of the global population was facing chronic hunger, 122 million more than in 2019.²⁰ Covid-19 and inequality mutually reinforced each other: while the Covid-19 outbreak has increased poverty among the most marginalized urban populations, pre-existing inequalities have also worsened the impact of this health crisis for those same groups.²¹ In parallel, the world is facing the highest number of conflicts since the establishment of the United Nations. About 2 billion people, or a quarter of the global population²², live in conflict-affected countries. As of September 2023, an unprecedented 110 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes.²³ This number is yet to be updated following the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory.

This rise in inequality has not only social but also spatial implications for urban dwellers, manifesting as socio-economic segregation. This raises concerns about the social sustainability of cities, therefore, there is a growing focus on understanding and addressing intra-urban inequalities.²⁴ These inequalities are a result of economic, social and political forces that place some groups at disadvantage or actively push people behind by securing an unfair advantage for others.²⁵ For example, inadequate planning laws and regulations leading to speculation and financialization of land push people away from formal housing. This drives urban sprawl and the proliferation of informal settlements. Residents in poorly planned urban areas face challenges and spend more time accessing services and opportunities, impacting economic costs and opportunities. The quality of their physical environment may also be compromised – its healthiness, comfort and safety, by the presence or absence of architectural barriers, the functionality of the housing typologies, and the availability of public spaces and environmental resources.²⁶ Furthermore, spatial segregation is linked to the stigmatization of urban areas increasing the discrimination of marginalized groups in accessing public services and heightening the risk of forced evictions. At the same time, spatial inequalities also have environmental and economic costs, e.g. losses due to pollution and congestion, limiting development prospects for all.²⁷

Urban areas continue to grow, driven by the pursuit of a better life. Projections indicate that by 2050, 68% of the world's population will be urban.²⁸ As global urbanization continues, inclusive and sustainable development hinges on responsible management of urban growth and regeneration, particularly in low and middle-income countries (LMIC) where the most rapid urbanization is expected by 2050.

New Urban Paradigm: Towards Inclusive Cities | Cities play a leading role on our urbanizing planet, being the centres where trends intensify, tensions arise, human creativity flourishes, and various synergies and opportunities emerge. As they stand at the forefront of several interlinked crises, there is a pressing need to expedite the transition toward a new urban paradigm.^{29,30} Subjects of SDG 11, cities possess enormous potential to lead civic efforts toward inclusive urban development. Transformative systemic actions centred around cities can radically impact humanity's future in achieving sustainable and inclusive urban futures.^{31,32}

First advocated by the United Nations in 2001, the notion of the inclusive city describes a place where individuals of varying economic status, gender, race, ethnicity, or religion are empowered to fully engage in urban life.³³ Participatory urban decision-making was recognized as one of the primary mechanisms to make inclusive cities a reality.

20. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme (WFP) and World Health Organization (WHO), *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023: Urbanization, Agrifood Systems Transformation and Healthy Diets Across the Rural-Urban Continuum* (Rome: FAO, 2023). Available at <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc3017en>.

21. UN-Habitat, *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future* (Nairobi: UN-Habitat, 2021).

22. United Nations Security Council, 9250th Meeting, SC/15184, 26 January 2023. Available at <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15184.doc.htm>.

23. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Mid-Year Trends 2023*. Data available at <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics>.

24. M. van Ham, T. Tammaru, R. Ubarevičienė and H. Janssen, "Rising Inequalities and a Changing Social Geography of Cities: An Introduction to the Global Segregation Book," in *Urban Socio-Economic Segregation and Income Inequality: A Global Perspective*, eds. M. van Ham, T. Tammaru, R. Ubarevičienė and H. Janssen (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), pp. 3–26. Available at https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64569-4_1.

25. D. Elson, "Push No One Behind," DESA CDP Background Paper No. 43, ST/ESA/2018/CDP/43 (New York: United Nations, 2018). Available at https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/publication/CDP_BP43_June_2018.pdf.

26. United Nations, Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing as a Component of the Right to an Adequate Standard of Living, and on the Right to Non-Discrimination in This Context*, A/HRC/49/48, 4 March 2022.

27. United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), *World Cities Report 2016: Urbanization and Development – Emerging Futures* (Nairobi: UN-Habitat, 2016). Available at <http://wcr.unhabitat.org/main-report/> (accessed 8 March 2022).

28. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), *World Population Prospects 2022: Summary of Results*, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.22.XIII.3 (New York: United Nations, 2022).

29. United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), *The City We Need 2.0: Towards a New Urban Paradigm* (Nairobi: UN-Habitat, 2016).

30. N. Čamprag, "Introduction: Inclusive Cities as a New Paradigm?" in *Rethinking Urban Transformations: A New Paradigm for Inclusive Cities*, eds. N. Čamprag, L. Uğur and A. Suri (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), pp. 1–14. Available at https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-37224-7_1.

31. V. Mega, *Human Sustainable Cities: Towards the SDGs and Green, Just, Smart and Inclusive Transitions* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022). Available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-04840-1>.

32. UN-Habitat, "SDG 11: Make Cities and Human Settlements Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable," 2023 HLPF Fact Sheet, July 2023. Available at https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2023/07/2023_hlpf_factsheet_sdg_11_1.pdf.

33. United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS-Habitat), *Tools to Support Participatory Urban Decision-Making*, Urban Governance Series (Nairobi: UNCHS-Habitat, 2001).

The concept has been broadened, with organizations, academia and other urban stakeholders highlighting different spatial, social, economic, political, and environmental dimensions.^{34,45} According to the World Bank and reiterated by the latest World Cities Report, building equitable and sustainable urban futures requires the consideration of interrelated spatial, social, and economic dimensions at the policy level.³⁶ The Asian Development Bank extends the concept to liveability, emphasizing the importance of creating affordable and equitable urban environments that promote optimal human capital development while respecting human dignity and equality.³⁷ Furthermore, The New Urban Agenda highlights the importance of accessible safe and green public spaces to increase social resilience and cohesion. It encourages civic participation to engender a sense of belonging and meet the needs of pluralistic societies, and in particular inhabitants in vulnerable situations.³⁸

The vision for inclusive cities will not be achieved unless governments at all levels take bold actions to address urban poverty and inequality. Studying the regional dimensions of inequality and learning from trending solutions, be it community-driven initiatives or multi-country policy frameworks, is a valuable effort in promoting the prioritization of social and spatial inclusion in cities and across the rural-urban-continuum.

TRENDING CHALLENGES IN ADVANCING SPATIAL INCLUSION (KEY FINDINGS)

Global Mega Trends

1. Rapid Urbanization

Urbanization continues to accelerate globally, with more people living in urban areas than ever before. Africa and Asia will account for 90 per cent of all urban growth between now and 2050.³⁹ In absolute numbers this means the urban population will treble from 450 million to 1.2 billion people over this period.⁴⁰ By the end of the century, Africa will be home to 13 out of the world's 20 largest megacities, while India will accommodate three. In contrast, no megacities are expected in the Americas, China, or Europe.⁴¹ While urbanization brings opportunities such as increased productivity, economies of scale, and access to medical and educational services, it also poses challenges like economic disparities, overcrowding, slum development, and environmental hazards. Integrated urban planning is essential to manage the impacts of urbanization, including rising housing prices and infrastructure demands.

2. Rising Climate-related Vulnerabilities

The global climate crisis has widespread effects on both people and nature, including extreme weather events like droughts, fires, floods, and hurricanes. As temperatures rise, climate impacts are expected to intensify, particularly affecting vulnerable urban populations, often living in informal settlements. At 1.5°C of warming, an estimated 350 million people in cities will be affected by droughts and water scarcity, and this number is expected to increase to 410 million at 2°C of warming.⁴² Building resilient cities becomes crucial to adapt to these climate stressors. Integrating measures for climate change adaptation with efforts in disaster risk reduction (DRR) can strengthen urban resilience. Cities serve as arenas for testing innovative ideas, such as the integration of nature-based solutions in urban regeneration initiatives and urban policies.

3. Expansion of Conflict

The recent and ongoing conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and a number of other countries have led to widespread displacement, destruction of infrastructure, and food insecurity, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in these regions, particularly in the Middle East and Africa. In 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine contributed to a significant rise in international conflicts, accounting for 9% of the total conflicts.⁴³ The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) issued a warning about the potential emergence of the largest global food crisis in modern history due to conflicts, climate shocks, the looming threat of a global recession, and a rise in global insecurity.⁴⁴

34. H. Robin, *Leading the Inclusive City: Place-Based Innovation for a Bounded Planet* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2014).

35. D. Liang, M. de Jong, D. F. J. Schraven and L. Wang, "Mapping Key Features and Dimensions of the Inclusive City: A Systematic Bibliometric Analysis and Literature Study," *International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology*, vol. 29, No. 1 (2022), pp. 60–79.

36. World Bank, *World Inclusive Cities Approach Paper*, Report No. AUS8539 (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2015).

37. Asian Development Bank, *Inclusive Cities: Urban Area Guidelines* (Manila: ADB, 2022).

38. United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), *The New Urban Agenda* (Quito: UN-Habitat, 2016).

39. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), *World Population Prospects 2022: Summary of Results*, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.22.XIII.3 (New York: United Nations, 2022).

40. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Policy in Focus*, vol. III, issue 3 (2016).

41. D. Hoornweg and K. Pope, "Socioeconomic Pathways and Regional Distribution of the World's 101 Largest Cities," Global Cities Institute, 2014. Available at <https://bit.ly/3q291vC>.

42. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), various reports and assessments.

43. United Nations Security Council, "With Highest Number of Violent Conflicts Since Second World War, United Nations Must Rethink Efforts to Achieve, Sustain Peace, Speakers Tell Security Council," SC/15184, 26 January 2023. Available at <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15184.doc.htm>.

44. ReliefWeb, "Alert 2023: Report on Conflicts, Human Rights and Peacebuilding." Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/alert-2023-report-conflicts-human-rights-and-peacebuilding> (accessed 23 June 2025).

Cities in conflict zones experience infrastructure damage and sudden influx of displaced populations, putting a strain on housing and basic services. Urban policies focused on post-conflict reconstruction, provision of temporary housing, emergency shelters, services for internally displaced persons (IDPs), and regeneration initiatives for economic recovery can address humanitarian crisis.

4. Ageing Societies

The global population today is the oldest it has ever been, and is growing older. At present, population aging is most advanced in Europe, Northern America, Australia, New Zealand, as well as in the majority of Eastern and South-Eastern Asia. In many countries within these regions, the percentage of older individuals (typically defined as those aged 65 years or older) surpasses 10 percent, and in certain instances, reaches as high as 30 percent of the total population.^{45,46} The global number of older persons is projected to more than double by 2050, with all regions observing an increase. This means that 1 in 6 people in the world will be over the age of 65.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the number of individuals aged 80 and above is projected to triple, reaching 426 million by 2050. Initially observed in high-income countries, population aging is now also becoming prominent in many low- and middle-income countries.⁴⁸ For Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, the share of the older people is expected to double by 2050. Sub-Saharan Africa, which currently has the youngest age distribution, is also projected to experience population ageing over the coming decades.⁴⁹ As society ages, planners are recognizing the need for a shift in focus towards age-friendly communities and multigenerational, barrier-free urban design and planning.

Ripple Effects

1. Migration Flows

In 2020, 281 million people were living outside their country of birth, marking an increase of 128 million from 1990. Europe and Asia have the most international migrants; 86.7 and 85.6 million respectively. Whereas, Oceania has the highest proportion (21.4%) of international migrants, followed by North America (15.7%).⁵⁰ The UNHCR reports a significant increase in the number of forcibly displaced people, from 51.2 million at the end of 2013 to 108.4 million by the end of 2022.⁵¹ Notably, a substantial proportion of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), 60% and 80% respectively, live in urban areas to avoid camp settings. East and Horn of Africa host a large population of IDPs, refugees, and asylum seekers due to factors such as conflicts, persecution, human rights violations, and climatic events.⁵² Various innovative migrant and refugee integration and social cohesion policies are being adopted by national and local governments to prevent segregation and spatial exclusion of foreign communities in host countries.

2. Fragmented Urban Landscapes

Residential fragmentation, a growing global trend, is associated with rising inequalities and social and spatial exclusion along the lines of race, ethnicity, and income. Gated communities contribute to this fragmentation, further diminishing the quality of life for urban residents. Initially popular in North America, these gated communities have proliferated across Latin America, Eastern Europe, MENA, and Asia.⁵³ The privatization of urban space through gates and walls, while enhancing safety, also leads to tensions over accessibility and liveability. Such enclaves are found next to pockets of poverty in the form of slums, squatter settlements, and urban villages, particularly in cities of Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and South Asia. Initiatives and policies focused on community cohesion such as integrated slum upgrading, mixed-use and inclusionary zoning, and integrated urban regeneration are being increasingly adopted to mitigate the rise of exclusionary urban spaces.

3. Affordable Housing Crisis

Cities have become increasingly unaffordable, contributing to housing challenges for various marginalized groups. Over 1.8 billion people live in informal settlements or inadequate housing, lacking access to basic services and often facing the risk of forced eviction. A large proportion, estimated at around 40% to 75%, of the rapidly growing urban population in developing countries live in informal settlements. Presently, around 881 million people live in slums in developing countries alone. Sub-Saharan Africa

45. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), World Social Report 2023 (New York: United Nations, 2023).

46. Kelly Ng, "Japan Population: One in 10 People Now Aged 80 or Older," BBC News, 19 September 2023.

47. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Population Ageing 2019: Highlights, ST/ESA/SER.A/430 (New York: United Nations, 2019).

48. World Health Organization, "Ageing and Health," 2022. Available at <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health> (accessed 23 June 2025).

49. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Population Prospects 2022: Summary of Results, UN DESA/POP/2022/TR/NO. 3 (New York: United Nations, 2022).

50. Pew Research Center, "Key Facts About Recent Trends in Global Migration," 16 December 2022. Available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/12/16/key-facts-about-recent-trends-in-global-migration/> (accessed 23 June 2025).

51. International Organization for Migration (IOM), World Migration Report 2022. Available at <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/> (accessed 23 June 2025).

52. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Regional Overview – Internally Displaced People, July–September 2023.

53. Y. Wang, D. Shaw and K. Yuan, "Gated Neighbourhoods, Privatized Amenities and Fragmented Society: Evidence from Residential Experience and Implications for Urban Planning," Sustainability, vol. 10, No. 11 (2018), art. 11.

has 59% of its urban population living in slums, while in the Asia-Pacific region, the percentage is 28%. In Latin and Caribbean countries, there has been a decrease from 30% to 21% over the past decade.⁵⁴ Moreover, homelessness has been rising in many economically advanced countries.⁵⁵ Slum upgrading, social or public housing, rent control, inclusionary zoning, government subsidies, down payment and rent assistance, and tax credits are some of the policy measures at national and local scales to address the housing crisis.

4. Crime and Violence

Crime rates in cities vary significantly based on their location and density. Cities in densely populated regions tend to have higher crime rates, often reflected in crime indices, compared to rural or suburban areas. Latin America and the Caribbean leads this trend, having some of the world's most violent cities. The top 8 most violent cities are all in Mexico.⁵⁶ Increase in crime and violence in cities are often due to various reasons such as corruption in the political and judicial systems, weak states, drug trade, cartels, increasing organized crime groups, high impunity, income inequality and poverty, unemployment, and unregulated urbanization. Urban planning can play an important role in crime prevention by enabling mixed-use zoning and compact cities. Regeneration initiatives in decaying and distressed urban areas, often rife with crime, can contribute to safer cities.

5. Infrastructure Gap

The global infrastructure financing gap is expected to reach about \$15 trillion by 2040. To ensure universal access to basic infrastructure over the next two decades, annual spending in the infrastructure sector would need to increase by just under \$1 trillion each year.⁵⁷ Nearly 800 million people do not have access to electricity and basic drinking water services. Most of these people live in low-income economies, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.⁵⁸ Investments in sustainable and resilient urban infrastructure can catalyse economic growth, generate local employment opportunities, and steer cities towards long-term prosperity. National and sub-national governments are increasingly adopting strategies to minimize risk in the initial phases of project planning. Mitigating financial and other risks in pre-development stages allows stakeholders to focus on the social, environmental, and technical aspects of project planning.⁵⁹ For instance, well-defined risk allocations that yield acceptable risk-return trade-offs to both sponsors and investors, supported by an infrastructure risk assessment as a criterion for funding.⁶⁰

54. Habitat for Humanity, "Affordable Housing," available at <https://www.habitat.org/emea/about/what-we-do/affordable-housing> (accessed 23 June 2025).

55. A. Khan, "Cities of Missed Opportunities: Improving the Lives of People in Poverty," ODI, 2020. Available at <https://odi.org/en/insights/cities-of-missed-opportunities-improving-the-lives-of-people-in-poverty> (accessed April 2024).

56. World Population Review, "Most Violent Cities in the World – 2024," available at <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-city-rankings/most-violent-cities-in-the-world> (accessed 23 June 2025).

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59. United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, "An Opportunity to Invest in Sustainable and Resilient Urban Infrastructure," available at <https://www.preventionweb.net/news/opportunity-invest-sustainable-and-resilient-urban-infrastructure-0> (accessed 23 June 2025).

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+93M people in extreme poverty in 2020

The pandemic wiped out more than four years of progress on poverty eradication¹.



in 31 countries of the globe

social cohesion erosion is a top short-term threat--including Argentina, France, Germany, Mexico, and South Africa from the G20².



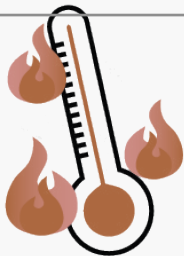
575M people in extreme poverty

is the estimation for 2030. Only about 1/3 of the countries will meet the target to halve national poverty levels⁵.



68.1% current rate of Global Gender Gap progress

North America leads all regions, having closed 76.9% of its gender gap. It is followed by Europe, which has closed 76.6% of its gap. In 3rd place is Latin America and the Caribbean, having bridged 72.6%. South Asia reports the lowest performance, having closed 62.4%⁷.



+100M people pushed into poverty

due to the disastrous effects of climate change within the next 10 years⁹.



+345M people facing high levels of food insecurity

Representing an alarming food crisis, with 783 million people unsure of where their next meal is coming from⁸.



100M of forcibly displaced people

As of May 2022, being a record in human history. 6.5M refugees had fled Ukraine alone³.



8M workers are in poverty

Working poverty rate rose for the first time in two decades⁴.



2B people living in slums

in the next 30 years. Currently, the estimation is of 1.1 billion people living in slum or slum-like conditions¹¹.



70% of the global population living in urban areas

is the projection for 2050. Currently, the estimation is of 50%⁶.



51.6% of the global population

had convenient access to public transport in urban areas in 2022, with considerable regional differences¹⁰.

World Data

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TRENDING SOLUTIONS

Urban Planning and Regeneration for Spatial Inclusion

Urban concepts and models prioritizing sustainable and inclusive planning and regeneration practices are being recognized and adopted globally. The Covid-19 pandemic and frequented extreme climate events are accelerating the popularity of the solutions that build compact, well-connected, and resilient communities and cities.

The 15-minute City

Focus: Proximity of public amenities

The 15-minute city is an urban planning concept in which residents can meet most of their daily needs within a 15-minute travel time on foot, cycle, micro-mobility or public transport from their dwellings. It envisions transforming cities into places where residences, workplaces, shops, healthcare facilities, and public amenities are located in close proximity to one another, within interconnected neighbourhoods linked by green pathways, and digitally, through online access to public services.⁶¹ Coined by the scientist Carlo Moreno, the concept is derived from historical ideas about proximity and walkability, such as Clarence Perry's neighbourhood unit⁶², D'Acci's one-mile-city⁶³ and Weng's 15-minute walkable neighbourhood.⁶⁴ The ongoing climate crisis and global COVID-19 pandemic have prompted a heightened interest in the idea of the compact city due to its focus on reducing carbon emissions and improving urban health.⁶⁵ Paris popularized the 15-minute city, while other cities, such as Melbourne, Australia, Portland, US, and Dubai, UAE, aspire to the 20-minute city.⁶⁶

The model promotes polycentric development and regeneration with pleasant density, vibrant proximity and improved and productive social ties. It advocates for improvements in the quality and density of public transport links between neighbourhoods and to poorly connected neighbourhoods. Thus, the 15-minute city contributes to spatial inclusion efforts by addressing aspects of accessibility and proximity to amenities, services and socio-economic opportunities, as well as promoting participatory planning practices to identify local community needs.

Urban planners and local governments must draw insights from past movements, such as the utopian vision of the garden city model, and implement strategic measures to prevent 15-minute neighbourhoods from becoming wealthy enclaves detached from the broader urban fabric. To mitigate gentrification effects, local governments should put in place measures and incentive to increase the ability of low-income households to access homeownership and rental opportunities in such compact and well-connected neighbourhoods.⁶⁷

Safe and Sustainable Mobility Programmes

Focus: Inclusive connectivity

The need to plan for sustainable public mobility in cities has been recognized. The increased environmental awareness and interest in active transportation driven by the Covid-19 pandemic along with advances in technologies that provide alternative mobility options such as smart bike-sharing, have shifted the focus in mobility planning away from reliance on private automobiles and towards active transportation, shared mobility, and public transit. Many cities allocated public space for people rather than for cars during the pandemic, with Milan announcing the reallocation of 35 km of streets and road space to walking and cycling⁶⁸, and Bogotá – widening sidewalks and introducing pop-up parks and pedestrian zones.⁶⁹

Sustainable urban mobility planning is a strategic approach for organizing transportation systems in cities, prioritizing the mobility requirements of both individuals and businesses. It revolves around three core principles: integration, participation, and evaluation.⁷⁰ Local governments adopt sustainable urban mobility plans (SUMP) and programmes to guide short- and long-term mobility planning and involve stakeholders in the process. Sustainable mobility plans and programmes have several key objectives: providing inclusive access to transport services; enhancing safety and security, minimizing pollution and energy usage;

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62. Clarence Perry, *The Neighbourhood Unit* (1929) (London: Routledge/Thoemmes, 1998), pp. 25–44.

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69. Marion Lucas, Valérie Gouëset, and Fernanda Demoraes, "Cycling in Bogotá During a Pandemic: The Influence of Tactical Urbanism and Perceived Insecurity on Bicycle Usage," in *Cycling Through the Pandemic*, eds. Nathalie Ortar and Pierre Rérat (Cham: Springer, 2024), The Urban Book Series. doi:10.1007/978-3-031-45308-3_9.

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optimizing the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of transportation systems; and enhancing the overall appeal and quality of urban environments. They prioritize multidisciplinary collaboration to enable broader participation of urban stakeholders in transport decision-making.⁷¹

Safe and sustainable urban mobility plans promote spatial inclusion by promoting equitable access to transportation options for all, reducing barriers to essential services and livelihood opportunities, particularly in underserved communities. By prioritizing pedestrian-friendly infrastructure and public transportation, these initiatives create more accessible and connected urban environments, reducing spatial segregation. To account for differentiated mobility needs, SUMPs should be informed by participatory scenario planning and validation processes and inclusive data on existing practices and user preferences.⁷²

Community-led Processes and Urban Commoning

Focus: Participation in sharing and building public resources

In the past decade, there has been a revived attention towards the urban commons, attracting interest from local governments, practitioners and researchers. The urban commons refer to shared resources, whether material, immaterial, or digital, within urban environments.⁷³ These shared assets contribute to individual and collective well-being, and their degradation is seen as detrimental.

The concept of commoning refers to the collaborative participatory and often self-organized process of accessing, negotiating and governing these resources.⁷⁴ It represents a type of public engagement aimed at benefiting the public good.⁷⁵ Inclusive and democratic principles stand at the core of commoning activities, often associated with a culture of innovation.⁷⁶ This community-led process encompasses a range of practices including collaborative creation, capacity and community building, innovation, artistic expression, urban agriculture, and active transportation. It enables unique experiments in diverse forms and areas such as housing, energy, mobility, education, culture, commercial activity, and manufacturing, while promoting the practices of sharing tangible and intangible resources.⁷⁷ In a neighbourhood context, the commoners may be individual residents, or community groups, cooperatives, NGOs and local authorities. It is a self-defined and organically formed group of individuals whose role is to collectively negotiate the boundaries and the rules of the management of the commons resources.

By harnessing local resources, skills, and creativity, commoning initiatives empower individuals and communities to build sustainable livelihoods and enhance their social and economic resilience in urban environments. Furthermore, it facilitates access to essential resources and services, such as affordable housing, community facilities, or green spaces – vital for the right to the city for all residents.

Nature-based Solutions with Social Benefits

Focus: Climate-adaptation and mitigation for social resilience

Current perspectives on cities and urban services are being transformed by nature-inspired methods in urban planning, governance, and design. Embracing this shift is essential in addressing spatial inequalities, as nature-based solutions present diverse, cost-effective responses to socio-environmental challenges, such as climate change, food security and public health.^{78,79}

Nature-based solutions (NbS) is an umbrella term for sustainable approaches of working with nature to increase environmental and social resilience within urban areas. The NbS concept originated from the European Commission and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) frameworks aimed at disaster risk reduction, sustainable urban development, and climate change adaptation.⁸⁰

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Through a cross-functional approach, Nbs generate multiple interlinked benefits for the wider population. They improve the capacity of ecosystems to absorb and mitigate the impacts of natural hazards and enhance biodiversity by promoting the conservation and restoration of natural habitats within urban areas. Implemented initiatives in all global regions have demonstrated positive outcomes in reducing flood risk, improving soil quality and sequestering carbon. While reducing environmental degradation, Nbs also increase the adaptive capacity of vulnerable communities, improve social welfare, health and quality of life, and create new economic opportunities.^{81,82,83} A recent study shows that ecosystem restoration creates 3.7 times as many jobs as oil and gas production per dollar.⁸⁴ Furthermore, NbS projects that incorporate indigenous knowledge systems, cultural practices, and traditional land-use patterns contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage and foster a sense of belonging among residents from different cultural backgrounds. Mainstreaming Nbs into legal frameworks requires multidisciplinary and multi-governance collaboration, as well as local action through their integration into comprehensive urban plans and regeneration initiatives.⁸⁵

81. M. Yazar and A. York, "Nature-Based Solutions through Collective Actions for Spatial Justice in Urban Green Commons," *Environmental Science and Policy*, vol. 145 (2023), pp. 228–237.

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Asia and the Pacific

TOTAL POPULATION: 4.7 billion¹

2023 GDP

Per Capita

US\$ 12,927.7²

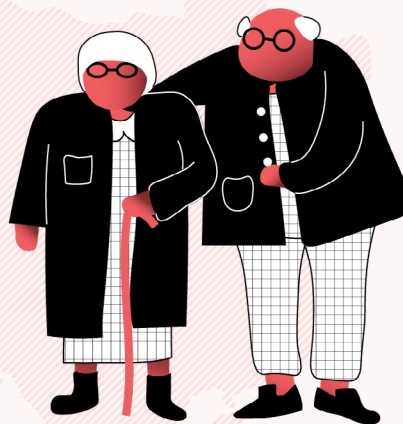
(East Asia and Pacific)

2,308.7³

(South Asia)

55%
of the world's
population
aged 65+ lives
in Asia-Pacific⁴

In 2024, the elderly population in the region will be **15.9%** and it's expected to reach **26.2%**⁵.



79%
of population
access internet

in East Asia and Pacific; whilst in South Asia the number drops to 43%⁷.



22%
of Oceania's
inhabitants
are migrants⁸

417M
people in slums
or informal
settlements

The estimation for the region accounts as the largest slum population in the world¹¹.



Unemployment

Unemployment rate of the total labour force is of 3.9% in East Asia & Pacific, and 4.2% in South Asia⁹.



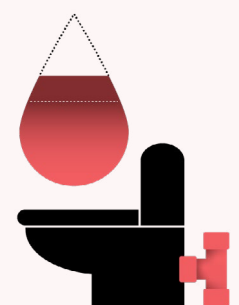
Poverty

Approximately 155.2 million people live below the US\$2.15/day poverty line in Asia and the Pacific, with urban poverty existing in both lower-middle-income and upper-middle-income countries.⁹



Water and Sanitation

36% of East Asia & Pacific and 51% of South Asia population still lack access to safely managed sanitation services¹⁰.



TRENDING CHALLENGES | The densely populated and rapidly urbanizing Asia-Pacific region, home to approximately 54% of the world's total population, is preparing for significant demographic changes, with an additional 1.2 billion new resident and a rapidly ageing population projected in 2050¹². The region covers a wide geographical area, with diverse societies, cultures, economies, religions, and climates. Although such diversity is a catalyst for prosperity, it has also introduced challenges for social inequality which manifests in cities as spatial inequalities, exclusion, and segregation. Disadvantaged groups are concentrated in urban areas that lack access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing, basic urban services, and job opportunities. All issues that are expected to be worsened by the region's extreme climate vulnerability and exacerbated by the regressing action on SDG 13¹². Moreover, top-down rehabilitation and regeneration schemes targeted towards such distressed urban areas often result in gentrification and forced displacement of residents and communities. As cities in this region continue to evolve, there is an increasing embrace of multifaceted, incremental, and people-centred solutions to shape a sustainable and inclusive urban future.

Aging Society | The Asia-Pacific population is ageing faster than any other region in the world since the turn of the century with an annual growth rate of approximately 3%.¹³ In 2023, about 55% of the global population aged 65 and older resides in the Asia-Pacific region.^{13,40} There are an estimated 450 million people aged 65+ and over across the Asia-Pacific in 2023 and this number is projected double again by 2050, reaching 1.3 billion people.⁴⁰ This age group comprise 22.6% of the population in Australia and 22.2% in New Zealand in Oceania.^{13,40} It is notable that among the elderly, 'oldest old' (people aged 80 and over) and the 'female elderly' comprise a big proportion of the group, particularly in Oceania and East Asia.¹⁵ With a rapidly ageing population and their strong desire to 'age in place',¹⁶ there is a growing demand for supportive and accessible urban environments with age-friendly infrastructure, age-prepared communities, and more optimistic language that does not stigmatize the group. However, due to the lack of participation of this group in the planning and design processes, their special needs are frequently overlooked, resulting in unsupportive urban environments, especially in many Asian cities.¹⁷ The provision of accessible and affordable housing is critical to allow safe movement within their homes without risking injuries. Many public buildings and public spaces remain inaccessible due to a lack of ramps, elevators, and handrails. These oversights exacerbate difficulties faced by older persons in their daily lives and isolate them from essential services and social opportunities.

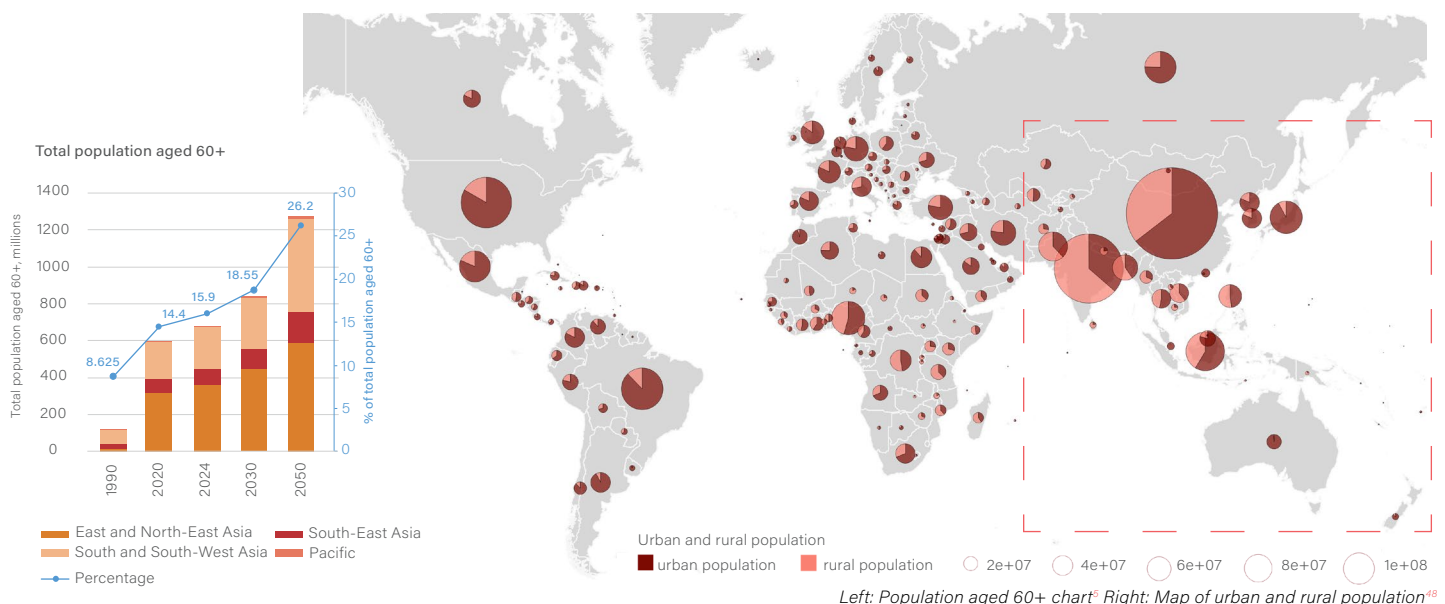
Gentrification and Displacement due to Urbanisation

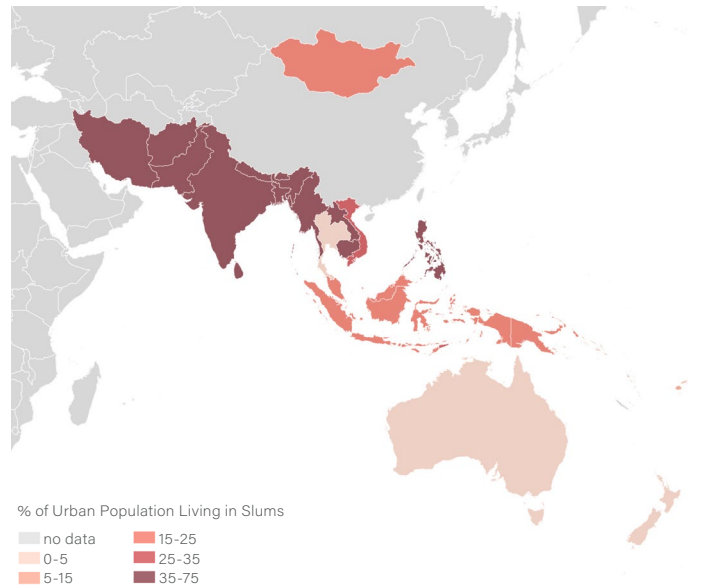
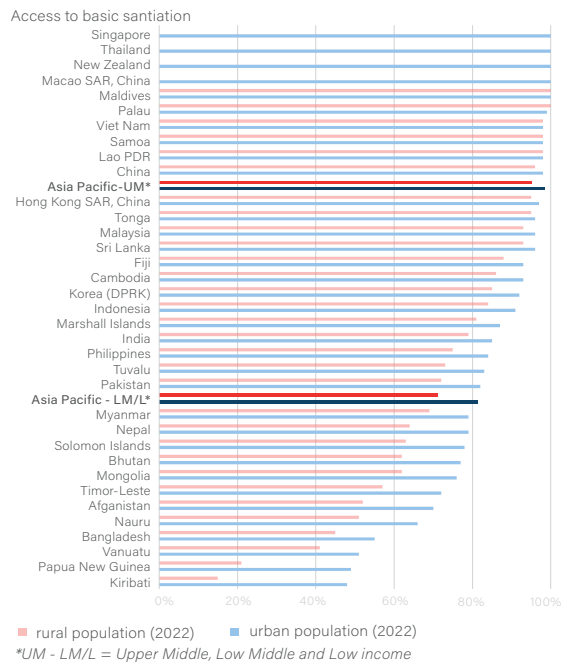
| Asia and the Pacific is the world's most rapidly urbanizing region, most of which will be concentrated in modestly

sized urban centers.⁴⁰ As they expand a focus on top-down urban development projects centre physical transformation and economic growth rather than the social benefits. Such planning strategies lead to forced displacement caused by gentrification in the redeveloped urban areas.¹⁸ In the 2000s, the large-scale property-led demolition and reconstruction projects in both rural areas and urban villages of Chinese cities resulted in the displacement of local communities, with displaced persons finding it hard to return. This trend is also identified in the re-urbanization process in Japanese cities such as Kobe, Osaka, and Kyoto.¹⁹ Tourism-led gentrification is emerging as a cross-cutting challenge for many historic districts in Australian towns and Asian old towns. Local communities are forced out of historic districts due to rising property values and an influx of tourism-related businesses and high-income residents. Such displacement often leads to spatial inequality within the city and a significant loss of community culture and identity.

Social Exclusion Confronted by Migrants and Minorities

| The presence of diverse ethnic groups and nationalities is a unique feature of some Oceania and Asian metropolitan cities, which brings about both cultural vibrancy and social inequality. Oceania is a region of migrants, comprising approximately 22% of the population, outstripping global averages.²⁰ They are often more vulnerable to discrimination in housing, education, health, work, and social security. Many of its overseas temporary workers from Asia, Africa and Middle East face the challenges of underpayment and are more likely to settle in outer suburbs, for instance, in western suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne's outer ring, which fuels spatial inequality.²¹ In Central Asia, despite migrants' critical contri-



Left: Proportion of rural and urban population with access to basic sanitation chart⁴³Right: Map of proportion of urban population living in slums⁴³

bution to the prosperity of cities, they are commonly among the most marginalized urban communities, with a disproportionate concentration in slums or dormitories with poor living conditions.²² Racial and ethnic inequality is also a major challenge in multiracial countries across the region.^{41,42} Caste-based discrimination remains widespread in India, perpetuating wealth disparities and socio-economic divisions across the country. The local-migrant divide in China following the large-scale domestic migration is starkly visible in cities, with low-income migrants residing in 'urban villages' that lack access to local welfare benefits.²³

Lack of Basic Services | The urban poor are confronted with issues of safety, affordability, and accessibility, in part because of their overlooked demands and inadequately targeted public resources. In 2021, over 90% of people in high-income countries and territories across the Asia-Pacific region had access to basic sanitation. However, in lower-middle and low-income countries and territories, only two-thirds of rural residents and around 80% of urban residents had access to basic sanitation facilities for proper waste disposal.²⁴ The shortage of affordable housing across the region leading to a large slum population is also becoming an increasing concern. Living in informal settlements presents significant challenges to accessing affordable transportation, public services, healthcare, quality education, and jobs in the formal economy.²⁵ 65 % of employment in Asia-Pacific cities are in the informal economy (excluding China). Workers in this sector are at a higher risk of impacts from external shocks such as climate change and global pandemics.^{24,41}

Intersection of Climate Change and Urban Development

| The interaction between climate and urban changes in the region create complex situations, hampering local governments ability to plan for adaptation and enhance resilience to climate impacts.²⁷ On one hand, rising sea levels pose a significant threat to the Asia-Pacific region due to its heavy reliance on coastal economies, compounded by the presence of six of the world's largest coastal mega-cities in this area.²⁷ On the other hand, the economic reliance on coastal regions exacerbates the potential impacts of coastal hazards on the economies and livelihoods of the region.²⁸ Climate migration is widespread in this region while climate change-induced disasters pose a grave threat to the most vulnerable populations, disrupting livelihoods, compromising health, and diminishing job opportunities and social capital. South Asia stands out as one of the regions most affected by tropical and monsoonal hydrological cycles, increasing their vulnerability to climate risks, such as storm surges, cloud bursts, tropical cyclones and flooding,²⁹ as seen in the cases of flooding in the Myanmar and the Philippines typhoon.^{30,31} Despite the diversity of climatic zones of Asia-Pacific, the region is expected to see significant increases in temperatures and extreme heat leading to more severe and extended droughts and wildfires.⁴³ While mean precipitation is likely to increase overall, issues of water scarcity, particularly in Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan are already contributing to public health crises for urban centres and rising political tensions in the region.^{43,44}

TRENDING SOLUTIONS FOR SPATIAL INCLUSION

Holistic and Inclusive Approaches for Urban Planning

| Asia-Pacific countries are increasingly taking a nuanced, multidimensional, and holistic approach to their urbanisation and development. Beyond focusing on current needs of infrastructure and economic performance, national and local governments are aiming to deliver urban planning that actively improves the social, environmental, economic and cultural dimensions of cities.²² In the Philippines, the National Urban Development and Housing Framework (2017-2022) as an overarching framework mainstreams climate action in its na-

tional agenda and incorporates climate resilience into all facets of planning and urban design. China, in recent decades, has adopted new urban regeneration models such as 'Organic Urban Regeneration' and 'micro-renewal', which advocate small-scale interventions for balancing modernisation and the preservation of unique social fabric.³² Such new approaches, as opposed to large-scale property-led approaches, not only improve the living environment, but also give proper recognition to the existing architectural heritage and local communities, thereby effectively avoiding the displacement of residents

and loss of social identity. These practices ensure sustainable outcomes including social cohesion, climate resilience and economic robustness in the long run.

Community Engagement in Urban Governance | Local governments, community management organizations, and professionals within the region are increasingly advocating for “bottom-up” planning strategies that are more inclusive of local population and culture. Engaging with local communities and strengthening the system of public participation in plans and projects is being widely applied across the region to actively enable citizens to shape the form and function of a city. In Shanghai, China, the Community Garden initiative is a proactive tool to help establish community self-organization and commons-based governance operated by a community-university partnership.⁴⁵ The creation, operation, and management of community gardens are effective in engaging groups such as the elderly, children and migrants in participatory planning and regeneration projects of neighbourhoods. This establishes a sense of community ownership and makes them the primary governing body.³³ This strategy showed that it was effective in supporting ‘ageing in place’ by offering opportunities for older volunteers to contribute their time to grow plants and nutritious foods and socialize with neighbours. Australia is also providing increasing support for marginalised migrants to become more integrated in the host communities by enhancing community engagement programs. For instance, National Community Hubs Program connects migrant and refugee women and young people with the local community and Fostering Integration Grants Program facilitates local community organisations towards migrant integration.³⁴

Safe, Adequate, and Affordable Housing | Proactive supply and demand-side interventions have been executed in cities to address housing unaffordability within the region. Comprehensive and inclusive upgrading informal settlements has, in certain countries, played a pivotal role in increasing housing supply, socio-economic diversity within communities and quality of life for all. Singapore’s Housing Development Board (HDB), since its establishment in 1960, has provided more than 1 million public homes in 23 towns across the nation through informal settlement upgrading, accommodating 80% of Singapore’s resident population, of which about 90% possess ownership.³⁵ These public housing projects, with sanitary living conditions in replacement of prevalent unhygienic and crowded slums, have been delivered in combination with open space, public facilities, and transport accessibility as an integral part of all development plans. Public rental housing initiatives, as seen in Fiji and the Solomon Islands, have been

proposed primarily to middle-income and public sector employees. Additionally, several countries have mandated the allocation of affordable units through vibrant real-estate markets, by involving land value capture mechanisms and inclusionary housing.³⁶ Demand-side interventions such as mortgage subsidies or down payment assistance have also been instrumental in directly reducing the cost of homeownership for economically vulnerable populations. In Philippines’s, the Affordable Housing Program (AHP) assists minimum-wage and low-income citizens with a low rate for home loans through manageable amortization with longer repayment periods.³² National-level compulsory savings program is also one of the most prevalent demand-side interventions across the region, including China, Malaysia, India, Indonesia, Singapore, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.³⁷ It is effective in supporting mortgage borrowing by sustaining a stable pool of finance for workers from their salaries.³⁸



*Punggol Northshore - HDB's First Smart and Sustainable District
Source: Housing and Development Board website*

Community Led Adaptation | Nature based solutions that acknowledge the importance of bottom-up led approaches are becoming increasingly mainstreamed in National adaptation plans and urban planning processes.⁴³ For instance, the liberty forest initiative in Lahore, Pakistan was implemented to counteract urban heat islands and loss of biodiversity.⁴⁶ Through community focused evidence-based designs the project planted endemic species with known medicinal and nutritional uses that benefit the people and ecosystem. Many of these projects still do not implicitly include local stakeholders. In Sri Lanka, tree planting is being used to reduce the increasing risk of landslides where roughly 30% of the country and major urban areas are vulnerable to slides, topples and debris flows.⁴⁷ The project however overlooks the importance of involving stakeholders in its process, limiting community support, project longevity and integration of indigenous knowledge.

CONCLUSION | In order to navigate spatial inequality challenges that emerge in the process of rapid urbanization and redevelopment programmes, the Asia-Pacific region is exploring several integrated and inclusive urban solutions. Many cities across the region are increasingly proposing and implementing people-centred and community-driven approaches for urban planning and regeneration. Subtle and incremental approaches of regeneration help in preserving community identity and mitigate displacement and spatial segregation. Bottom-up strategies, like community gardens in Shanghai, have fostered community ownership and empowerment by engaging the marginalized social groups such as the elderly, youth, migrants, and ethnic minorities into the decision-making processes. To promote adequate housing, inclusive measures such as upgrading informal settlements and mandating affordable housing units in urban development projects are being adopted in many countries. These multifaceted, people-centric approaches mark a paradigm shift in urban development, prioritizing inclusivity, community participation, and comprehensive planning for a sustainable and equitable Asia-Pacific.

CASE STUDY: THE COMMUNITY-BASED REGENERATION OF BEIJING SHUANGJING SUBDISTRICT³⁹

Shuangjing Subdistrict, covering an area of 5.08 sq. km., is one of the most densely populated communities in Beijing, China, with a population of 9,600 residents. It boasts a vibrant demographic diversity comprising many non-local residents and people of all ages. However, it is confronted with significant challenges of overcrowding, scarce public spaces, insufficient age-friendly facilities, and lack of local-migrant cohesion.

In pursuit of the 'One Community' goal, the micro-regeneration of Shuangjing Subdistrict has embarked on a comprehensive series of initiatives, encompassing public service improvements, transportation upgrades, the promotion of cultural vitality, and the rehabilitation of public spaces. The regeneration process embraces a consultative and collaborative governance approach, engaging residents in joint efforts and sharing the benefits across the community. To facilitate this, multiple community committees have been established, organizing participatory discussions on public affairs using the community service station as the activity venue. Innovative digital platforms have also been developed to enable convenient resident participation in public welfare activities. Design workshops focused on pub-

lic space regeneration, with involvement from children, the elderly, migrant residents, universities, and specialized urban planners, have led to the physical transformation of abandoned buildings and community spaces into vibrant activity centers. This approach has achieved a synergy between spatial renewal and social governance.

The regeneration process put special attention on the vulnerable groups. The renovation and provision of barrier-free facilities in buildings and community service centers, in line with the barrier-free manuals and guidebooks, have created a more accessible urban environment for vulnerable populations with disabilities. Additionally, several 'Warm Houses' have been built as service stations for disabled individuals. These stations actively collaborate with social enterprises to facilitate communication and exchange between disabled individuals and their families through training, workshops, and various legal, psychological, and emotional relief activities. Looking ahead, Shuangjing continues to strive towards becoming a model area for innovative urban governance, community-driven development, and the overall well-being of its residents.

 Beijing, China

 2021

 Neighbourhood Scale



Jingdian No. 1 public space

Source: International Sustainable Community Achievement Case Collection of Shuangjing, Beijing, China

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Europe and Central Asia

TOTAL POPULATION: 923,929,755¹

2023 GDP

Per Capita²
US\$ 29,483.4

Annual Growth³
1%



47%
increased
housing costs

between 2010 and 2022, with 10.6% of cities population dedicating more than 40% of disposable income to it⁴.

*European Union

19%
particularly
climate
vulnerable cities⁵

*Europe



18%
of Europe and
Central Asia's
population is
aged 65+,

while in the EU alone this age group accounts for **22%**.⁶



+20%
of world refugee
population living
in Europe⁷

with the number of forcibly displaced and stateless people rising to 22.5M by the end of 2023.⁸

Unemployment

Unemployment rate fell to 5.6 per cent in 2023 from 6.6 per cent in 2019.⁹



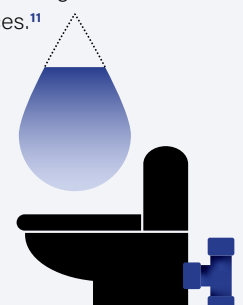
Poverty

As a result of the overlapping shocks from the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the poverty headcount at the \$6.85 (per person per day, in 2017 PPP) threshold is anticipated to be almost 20 percent higher — or 2 million people more — in the Europe and Central Asia region by 2030 relative to pre-pandemic trends.¹⁰



Water and Sanitation

78% of the population using safely managed sanitation services.¹¹

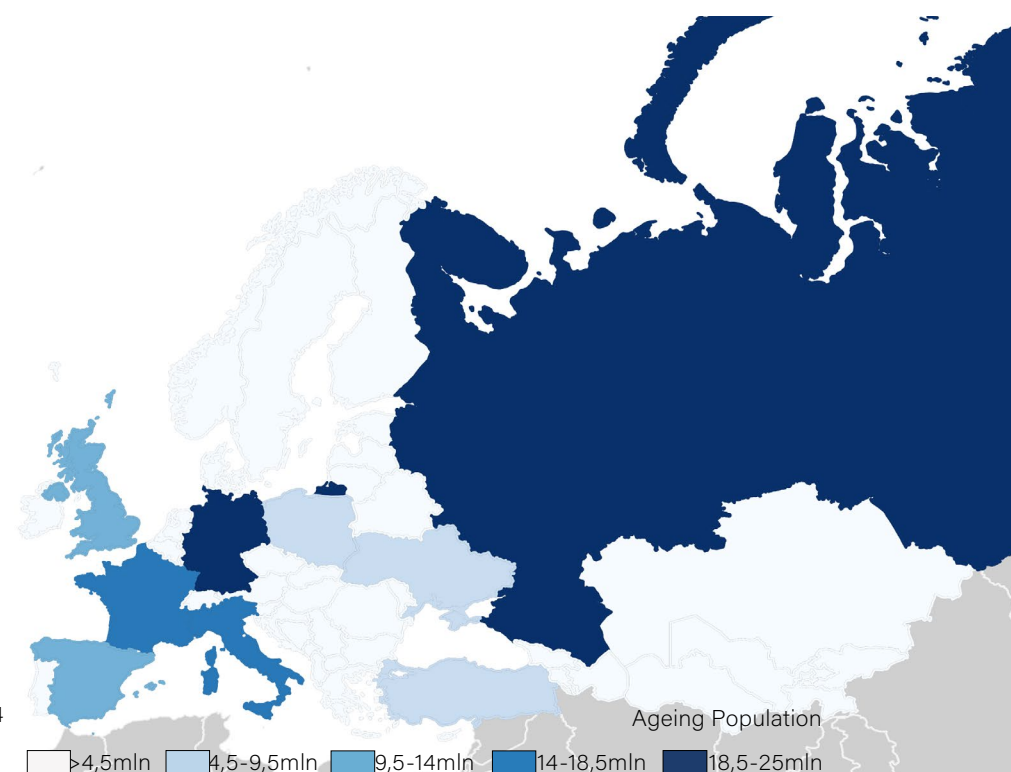
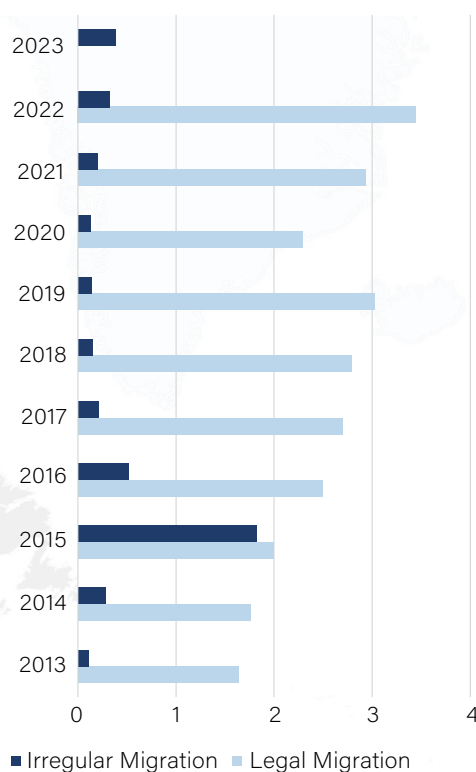


TRENDING CHALLENGES | Europe and Central Asia is highly diverse in terms of history, geography, population, politics, and socioeconomic development. Across the region, marginalized groups including low-income groups, migrants, and ethnic minorities continue to face spatial and social inequalities. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has disrupted the region's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2023, the region's economic growth plummeted to 1% from a much higher 76.4% in 2021.³ To address the multifaceted urban challenges, at the level of the European Union (EU), several policies have been adopted over the past two decades such as the Urban Agenda for the EU¹² and, more recently, the European Green Deal, which aims at achieving climate neutrality in the EU by 2050¹³. Countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia have faced specific urbanization challenges, mainly due to the economic and political repercussions of the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹⁴ In response, new approaches for inclusive, transparent, and equitable urban development have emerged across the region.

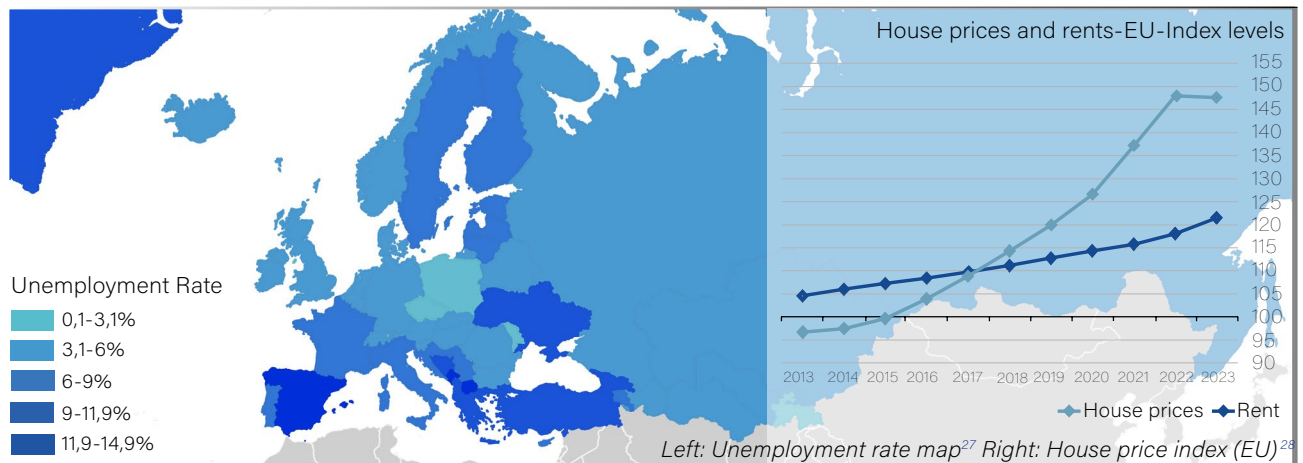
Ageing Society | The population growth within the EU has slowed down over the last decades. As of 2023, people aged 65 and above represented 21.3% of the EU population¹⁵ and the median age in the EU-27 is projected to increase by 4.5 years between 2019 and 2050.¹⁶ Similar values are reported for non-EU states, such as Serbia, with 21.3 % of the population being above 65.¹⁷ In metropolitan areas, the number of older adults increased by 24% between 2001 and 2011, with increases of over 50% in some European cities.¹⁸ The increasing share of older adults is putting pressure on labour markets and welfare states. Older populations also face heightened risks of social exclusion and spatial segregation, impacting their mental and physical well-being. Additionally, children and older residents are more vulnerable during heatwaves and pollution peaks.¹⁹ A study about heat-related mortality in Europe during the hot summer of 2022 revealed higher mortality rates among women and a significant increase linked to advancing age, with Italy showing the highest number of heat-related deaths for people aged 65 and older.²⁰ The demographic transition in urban areas underscores the need for inclusive urban planning and design for all residents and investment in building enhancements, taking into account that older adults require disability-friendly structures and new approaches that enhance their safety and well-being.

Migration Flows in Between and to European Cities |

Since the 1970s²¹, and in particular over the last 35 years, Europe has been a continent of positive net migration with a continuous increase in refugee intake since the Syrian crisis, followed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The share of refugees living in the EU increased to more than 20%^{8,22} by the end of 2022, posing significant challenges for accommodation and integration. Regarding intra-continental migration, the decline of urban centers and rural-urban migration in certain regions stem from demographic shifts coupled with low local economic development, particularly affecting remote urban areas²³. Cities in Eastern Europe have experienced population decline due to high levels of emigration and rural-to-urban migration, as citizens seek better opportunities for work and education.²² At the same time, the UK's withdrawal from the EU led to EU citizens returning to their home countries.²² The various migration flows to and within the region have increased urban diversity and have often also resulted in residential segregation. As of today, asylum policy remains the responsibility of the EU and national governments. However, local authorities, which are tasked to provide shelter, access to services and education, have often faced insufficient financial support and capacity to cope with the influx of refugees to enable their effective integration into local communities.²⁴



Left: Migration in EU chart²⁵ Right: Map of proportion of population aged 65+²⁶



Rising Housing Costs and Gentrification | Over the past years, many cities in Europe have experienced fast-growing housing prices. Between 2010 and 2022, housing costs in the EU increased by 47%, with largest increases observed in Estonia, Hungary, and Luxembourg.⁴ Some Central Asian cities such as Almaty in Kazakhstan also experienced rising housing prices.²⁹ Households in the EU generally spend from one-tenth to one-third of their disposable income on housing.³⁰ Households in capital and metropolitan regions struggle the most to afford housing. In the EU, in 2022, 10.6% of the population in cities lived in a home where total housing costs accounted for more than 40% of disposable income, placing households into situations of economic vulnerability. The situation is particularly complicated for urban households in Greece and Denmark.⁴ A multitude of factors impact housing affordability. Past policies in the region have favoured home ownership and reduced the provision of social housing.³¹ In addition, many cities experience speculative investments, driven by the proliferation of tourist accommodation platforms. Housing costs may also increase in specific areas due to urban renovation, regeneration, or rehabilitation efforts, leading to the displacement of lower-income households. Processes of urban and green gentrification have been observed in several cities, such as Paris, Barcelona, and Nantes.^{32, 33}

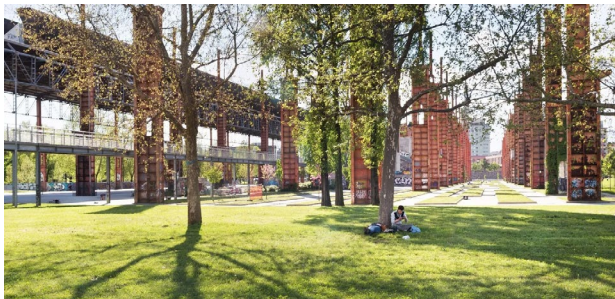
Climate Finance Gap and Rising Energy Prices | According to the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Europe is less vulnerable to climate change compared to other regions. However, climate change already impacts and will continue to impact European cities. A study looking at 517 European cities found that around 19% of the cities are particularly vulnerable to two or more climate impacts, including increased number of heatwave days, drought, and riverine flood risks.⁵ Countries in Central Asia are facing a threefold challenge of rapid urbanization, particularly in major urban centers, alongside unsustainable urban development patterns marked by dispersed, low-density urban growth, and high vulnerability to environmental hazards.³⁴ In the face of these developments, governments at all levels need to develop and implement policies and concrete actions for climate mitigation and adaptation. However, according to a survey among 92 mayors from 28 cities in Europe, there is a significant funding gap for the next five years, particularly in climate action and energy transition, with only 6.45% anticipating sufficient resources. Alongside these main challenges, other important financial gaps for cities are linked to equality and social inclusion.³⁵ In past years, events such as the Yellow Vests movement in France in 2018³⁶ and protests in Germany in 2022 under the slogan "solidarity autumn"³⁷ have highlighted the potential impact of rising fuel or energy prices on low- and middle-income households, calling attention to the need to achieve a just transition that takes account of socio-economic differences and creates better living conditions for all residents.

TRENDING SOLUTIONS FOR SPATIAL INCLUSION

Affordable and Social Housing | As households in Europe face rising housing costs, many countries have provided support for the development of affordable, improved and social housing. Between 2012 and 2023, the housing cost overburden rate in EU cities decreased from 13.3% to 10.7%.³⁸ In Eastern Europe, housing shortages have been tackled by renovating existing stock, exemplified by Slovakia's State Housing Development Fund (SHDF), which supported renovation of 25% of housing stock between 1996 and 2018.³⁹ The development of social housing is another effective solution for advancing housing affordability. Today, largest shares of social housing can be observed in Austria, Denmark, and the Netherlands.⁴⁰ In certain countries like the Netherlands and Finland, social rental housing, developed

mainly by non-profit associations, constitutes a significant portion, whereas in other countries, social and affordable housing is predominantly state-driven.⁴⁰ The overall level of public financial support for social rental housing is comparatively high in Austria and France (0.26% and 0.2% of GDP).⁴¹ In France, social housing is primarily provided by sub-national authorities. The law of 2000 on solidarity and urban renewal mandates certain municipalities to maintain a minimum number of social housing units. In addition, decentralization in France has granted local authorities more housing control. In Paris, social housing increased to 25.5% in 2023 (this included social housing that had been financed but not yet delivered).⁴² The city also enforces rent regulations and aids middle-income households in housing acquisition.

Just Sustainable Cities | Cities can play an important role in driving the Just Transition.⁴³ At EU level, the “Fit for 55” package introduced more ambitious energy efficiency standards for buildings to achieve EU-wide zero-emission buildings by 2050.⁴⁴ To ensure that the required energy improvements do not lead to excessive costs for tenants, they need to be combined with economic support programmes for low- and middle-income families.³⁹ For example, in Croatia, the Environmental Protection and Energy Efficiency Fund initiated a call for the renovation of residential dwellings to address energy poverty, specifically targeting vulnerable groups. The call offers a 100% grant rate for renovation projects and provides technical assistance to the most vulnerable households.⁴⁵ Additionally, the concept of the 15-minute city, which promotes close and equal access to essential social functions, services, amenities and green spaces⁴⁶, has gained momentum in several cities, including Barcelona, Paris and Milan. To complement efforts focusing on energy and mobility, urban greening projects can increase local climate resilience and provide socio-economic benefits.⁴⁷ To ensure that all neighbourhoods have access to green spaces, several European countries such as the UK, Germany, and Italy, have developed equal access standards which help cities keep track of the level of greenspace provision in different neighborhoods.⁴⁸ Through the regeneration of brownfields, cities can enhance green spaces provision and revitalize abandoned urban areas to promote compact and mixed-use development. As an example, the project Baltic Urban Lab focused on integrated planning and partnership models for brownfield regeneration in Norrköping, Tallinn,



Parco Dora, Turin | Source: Latz+Partner

Turku and Riga.⁴⁹

Multigenerational and Inclusive Neighbourhood Planning | Multigenerational and inclusive planning is a comprehensive approach that considers the needs of all population and age groups across every phase of urban planning.⁵⁰ Copenhagen is renowned for its child-friendly urban planning initiatives, by transforming streets and public spaces to prioritize the safety and well-being of children. One notable project is the Superkilen park, which features colorful playgrounds, sports facilities, and interactive installations

designed to engage children of all ages and backgrounds.⁵¹ Multigenerational neighborhood planning also acknowledges the demographic shift towards an aging population and aims to address the unique needs of older adults. Accessibility is crucial to ensure that all residents, regardless of age or ability, can access essential services and amenities. Barcelona has implemented a range of accessibility measures by redesigning streets and sidewalks with tactile paving, ramps, and widened crossings to improve accessibility for wheelchair users and pedestrians with mobility challenges.⁵² Sweden also champions accessibility, with cities Jönköping and Skellefteå winning the Access City Award which rewards cities that have prioritised accessibility for persons with disabilities.⁵³ Stockholm leads in age-friendly initiatives, as demonstrated by Hallstahammar municipality, which is providing improved transport services for older people.⁵⁴

Technology-enabled Participatory Governance and Co-design

| Cities play a pivotal role in developing and implementing innovative approaches that prioritize citizen engagement through interactive co-design, including via new technologies.⁵⁵ For example, the Participation Platform in Ghent, Belgium, serves as an information hub for citizens and facilitates feedback and engagement with projects initiated by the municipality.⁵⁶ In Kazakhstan, the Open Legislation portal allows citizens to access legislative documents and participate in discussions about urban development policies and initiatives.⁵⁷ Community technology making is another avenue for public engagement, where citizens create their own digital or technological solutions to address urban challenges through approaches like fixer collectives, hackatons and incubators. The concept of Urban Living Labs focuses on bringing citizens together with researchers, businesses, and policymakers to co-create and experiment new technologies, services, and policies. The European Network of Living Labs is the largest alliance of urban labs and aims to promote the Living Labs concept in order to influence EU policies and enable their implementation at a global level.⁵⁸ As an example, the gE.CO Living Lab focuses on promoting the concept of urban commons, a new framework for participatory and innovative urban planning, where public spaces are managed by communities and citizens. Through its digital platform, gE.CO maps citizen initiatives and facilitates partnerships between public institutions and local communities.⁵⁹ While technology offers immense opportunities, its effectiveness in facilitating participation depends on the appropriateness of tools and methods for specific urban contexts. Cities can play an important role in testing new technologies, to identify potential challenges and opportunities for citizen engagement, and to bring forward solutions that can be replicated by other municipalities.

CONCLUSION | The Europe and Central Asia region faces a range of urban challenges, including increasing migration, changing demographic dynamics, rising housing costs and the urgency of climate change - both in terms of mitigation and adaptation. With the support and coordination of national governments, local authorities have positioned themselves at the forefront of meeting these challenges. Inclusive and innovative approaches to urban planning and design have emerged and new concepts have been tested and implemented for sustainable development, such as the 15-minute city, and citizen engagement, for example through Urban Living Labs. Cities in Europe and Central Asia are now at the point where the solutions that have been tested need to be upscaled and replicated, with the support of national governments, to meet key challenges, such as housing needs, and key objectives for resilient and sustainable development, such as those defined by the “Fit for 55” package.

CASE STUDY: ASSEMBLEIA DE MORADORES IN BRAGA, PORTUGAL

The Assembleia de Moradores, or Residents Assembly, is an initiative by BragaHabit, a municipal housing company founded in Braga, Portugal. Established in 1999, BragaHabit is dedicated to renovating and revitalizing the city's housing stock and facilitating innovative and socially inclusive projects. It invests in processes that empower people and communities and promotes people's participation in decision-making, by offering a range of services such as the Balcão Digital platform, which enables people to apply for various housing support schemes in a simple and fast way.⁶⁰ The Assembleia de Moradores was formed in 2021 for creating social, economic, and environmental development solutions for Braga's residents. Its main objective is to establish a civic innovation process in Braga by setting up a living lab that allows the design and experimentation of new solutions for vulnerable neighbourhoods. It also promotes a positive connection between the city of Braga, BragaHabit and the beneficiaries of social housing in the city. Functioning as a bottom-up initiative, it facilitates the formulation of improved public policies and serves as a space for the sharing of opportunities and ideas and work towards improving Braga's neighborhoods. Monthly meetings at the "Human Power Hub", a social innovation center, bring together BragaHabit and representatives from 14 neighborhoods. The space also offers workshops that train resident asso-

ciations on available financing instruments to fund their activities.⁶¹ Besides the citizen empowerment actions taken during 2022, a fruitful outcome of Assembleia de Moradores was the co-designing of the municipal program of the City of Braga, called "Viva o Bairro". This one-year program exemplifies public participation, with civil society actively developing and implementing projects in neighborhoods, backed by the financial and technical support from the Braga City Council. By empowering residents across various neighborhoods, including Enguardas, Andorinhas, Santa Tecla, Picoto, Parretas, Montélios, Bracara Augusta, Nogueira da Silva, and Rua Professor Machado Vilela, it strengthens socio-territorial cohesion.⁶⁰ A noteworthy project under "Viva o Bairro" is the "Ringue da Amizade" in Rua Professor Machado Vilela, focusing on local development through community participation. The project aims to transform and revitalize a former basketball court into a vibrant and accessible public space through cost-effective impactful interventions that foster community ties and social cohesion. It engages youth, promotes multigenerational activities, and cultivates a sense of belonging. By encouraging outdoor play among children, it contributes to their overall health, combats loneliness and sedentary lifestyles among older residents, and strengthens connections within neighborhoods.⁶²

 Braga, Portugal

 2021 - ongoing

 Neighbourhood and Community Scale



Braga City's Center
Source: Shutterstock/Pierre-Olivier

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Latin America and the Caribbean

TOTAL POPULATION: 664,155,299¹

2023 GDP

Per Capita²
US\$ 10,682.7

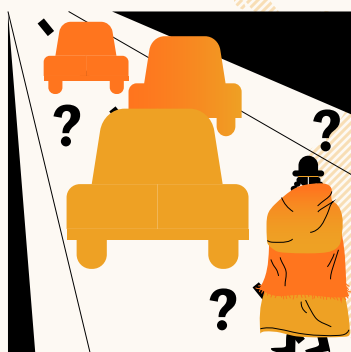
Annual Growth³
2.2%

in 2015, more than

80%

of its population resided in

CITIES⁴



in 2019,

49.7%

OF THE URBAN POPULATION

had no access to adequate public transportation⁵

in 2018,

42

OF THE 50

most violent cities in the world were located in Latin America⁶



in 2018,

20.9%

LIVING IN SLUMS,

with high levels of segregation at micro level in the bigger cities⁵

Unemployment

Unemployment rate fell to 7.2 per cent in 2022 from 8.0 per cent in 2019, but job quality problems persist as inflation impacts wage levels.⁷



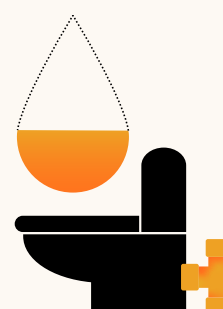
Poverty

Poverty dropped to 10%, the lowest this century, but 1 in 4 still lived on less than \$6.85/day (2017 PPP), with rates under 10% in Chile and Uruguay and over 50% in Guatemala and Honduras.⁸



Water and Sanitation

25% of the population lacks access to drinking water, while 66% have no access to safe sanitation services.⁹



TRENDING CHALLENGES | In the dynamic landscape of Latin American and the Caribbean urbanization, a myriad of challenges underscore the urgency for transformative solutions. With one-third of the world's water resources, the region grapples with access to safe and clean water, exacerbated by climate change and spatial fragmentation. Unequal urban development, violence and migration further deepen socio-economic divides, while biases towards private vehicles hinder inclusive mobility. This complex tapestry demands innovative urban and territorial management policies, and community-driven approaches that go beyond immediate fixes to address the root causes of inequality. In the face of these challenges, Latin America is witnessing the emergence of promising trends. Community-led urbanism, comprehensive neighbourhood regeneration, strengthening climate resilience, and initiatives promoting sustainable transportation signify a shift towards holistic and equitable urban development. As these trends gain momentum, they offer a glimpse into a future where inclusive and sustainable cities stand as beacons of progress in the region.

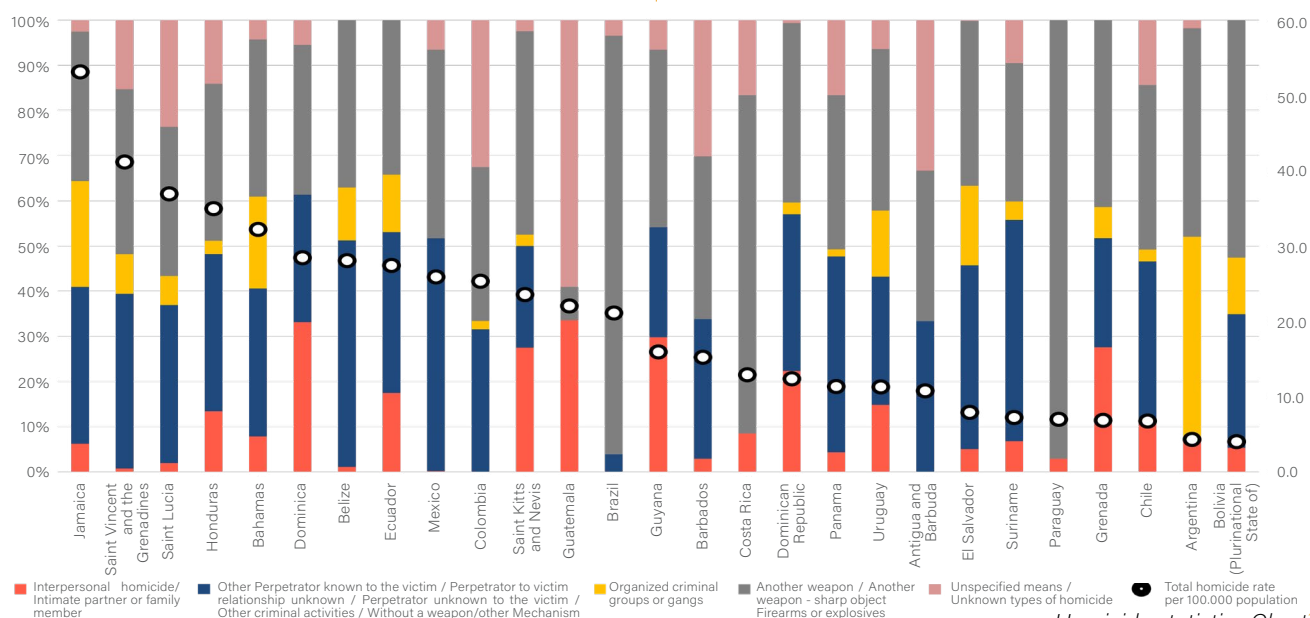
Stressed Access to Water | Although the region is home to one-third of the world's water resources, 14% of its urban population do not have access to safe drinking water services, compared to 30% in rural areas.¹⁰ Considering that 80% of Latin America's population is concentrated in urban areas, this 14% already represents a strain on water resources and water management. Water policies should go hand in hand with territorial planning.¹¹ The deficiency in the quality of water and sanitation services represents a chronic challenge in Latin America and the Caribbean, still affecting 26% of the population.¹² The obsolete nature of the infrastructure and inefficient management require the implementation of comprehensive planning. Particularly in informal settlements, the provision of basic services, such as safe drinking water and sanitation, leaves much to be desired. This not only poses public health risks but also exacerbates social inequalities, with marginalized communities bearing the brunt of inadequate clean water and sanitation facilities.

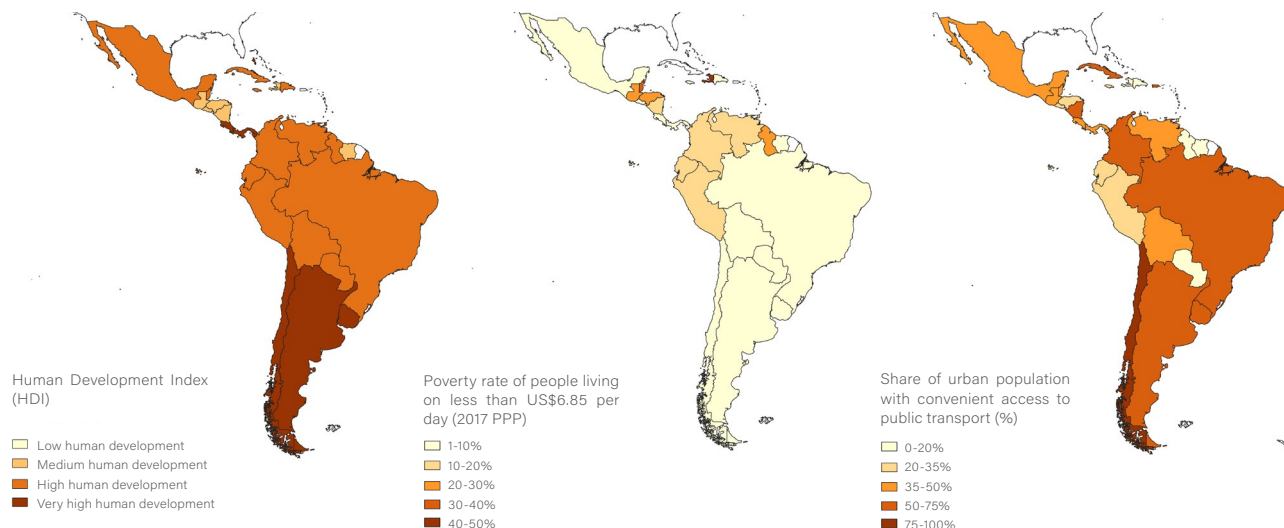
Climate change is exacerbating the water stress in the region. From Andean glaciers melting (30%-50% in the last 40 years),¹³ river levels decreasing to altered rainfall pattern and droughts, the water cycle has been affected. The extensive transboundary basins and hydrographic systems in South America (e.g., Amazon Basin, La Plata Basin and the Orinoco),¹⁴ require multi-level cooperation in water governance and water-based spatial planning.

Inequitable Urban Development and Spatial Fragmentation | Latin America, the most urbanized region in the planet,¹⁵ faces profound challenges from fragmented and inadequate planning. This has resulted in unequal development, increased spatial fragmentation within and between Latin American cities, widened the urban-rural development

gap, and been exacerbated by the weak city systems. More often than not, cities lack the services and attributes that define what is "urban". In many cases, housing is precarious, and its occupants struggle with security of tenure. An estimated 23% of Latin America and the Caribbean population reside in inadequate and informal housing,¹⁶ making them more vulnerable to climate-related hazards.¹⁷ These settlements are generally located in the urban peripheries, but they are also found in central areas whose socioeconomic level, urban quality and cultural heritage are comparable to those of developed countries. This is the case of the La Perla neighborhood in San Juan, Villa 31 in Buenos Aires or Armenta in San Pedro Sula. In contrast to the polarity between the compact European city and the dispersed North American city, urbanization in the region could be classified as compact-dispersed: the over densification of central areas and the infinite dispersion in the outskirts coexist.^{18,19}

Violence and Migration | In Latin America, large cities experience higher crime rates than rural areas. The population concentration and the wide inequality gap also correlates with violence, with cities featuring higher population density showing higher rates of violent crimes.²⁰ Latin American cities are among the most unequal, with some ranking as the deadliest in the world. In 2023, Colima, Mexico, was considered the deadliest city globally, with a homicide rate of 140.32 per 100,000 inhabitants.²¹ The relationship between socioeconomic inequality and violent crime is complex, with poverty not being a clear pattern. However, conditions of poverty and social exclusion can lead to the development of forms of violence or identities, affecting individuals or groups differently.²⁰ In general, the region's structural drivers of migration are violence and insecurity. Roughly 40% of





Left: HDI map²³ Middle: Poverty map²⁴ Right: Population with access to public transport map²⁵

those traveling to Mexico from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras were forced to flee their own countries because of persecution and violence.²⁶ Due to the armed conflict in Colombia, violence has resulted in the migration of over 8.4 million people since 1985. As a result, cities and local governments are under increased pressure, as over 9 million people still need assistance and reparations as victims of the conflict.²⁷ Although violence in the region takes different forms, it consistently drives large-scale migrations inside countries or abroad in quest of a higher standard of living. While violence and insecurity remain dominant drivers of migration, environmental factors are becoming increasingly significant. Current projections suggest that in Latin America, by 2050, 17 million people could move within their countries for climate-related reasons.¹⁷

Disconnected and Inefficient Public Transport Systems

Public transportation in megacities is often insufficient and inefficient to serve the city's population. In general, cities lack integrated and accessible systems, saturation, high fares, insecurity, and low-quality service. In Mexico City

only 40.5% of residents have access to public transportation within a 500-meter distance, limiting mobility and affecting access to education and employment.²⁸ The pandemic has worsened this issue, with a sharp drop in ridership and fare revenue negatively impacting public transport companies. In 2022, at least 49 cases of public transport services were interrupted in Brazil.²⁹ The need for integrated and efficient multi-modal transportation networks grows as cities become larger and more dispersed, making their planning and implementation more challenging. However, as private automobiles become more affordable, public investment in expanding road space has increased air pollution and congestion. In addition, it has also encouraged new, low-capacity transportation models like ridesharing, often operated informally. Consequently, low-income groups, often living far from the metropolitan core and employment opportunities, are the most affected. In Lima, Peru, 50% of the population spends one to two hours a day commuting, significantly reducing time available for family, rest, or additional income generation.³⁰

TRENDING SOLUTIONS FOR SPATIAL INCLUSION

Citizen-led Urbanism and Governance | The citizen-led urbanism and governance movements have impacted the urban landscape, environmental dynamics, ecosystems, individual needs, and collective action for the common good. These movements have not only reshaped public policies and perspectives of authorities but also transformed urban areas. From small local initiatives to large urban projects, citizens are taking the reins of development in the region's cities.

In recent years, there has been a notable rise in civic engagement focused on co-creation and participation in planning, design, and managing public areas. This trend, supported by a variety of institutions, including foundations, academic institutions, NGOs, the private sector, and multilateral cooperation organizations, aims to address the growing demand for accessible, secure, and high-quality urban environments. Civil society organizations have emerged in several Latin American cities with the goal of appropriating streets, ensuring safe housing, and enhancing public areas. In Brazil, citizen-led planning processes, known as 'Popular Plans', have gained traction since 2013. Examples include Villa Autódromo

Community in Rio de Janeiro, Vila Dique in Porto Alegre, and Serviluz in Fortaleza. These plans, jointly developed by several sectors such as community associations, universities, and architecture institutes, serve as strategic documents to facilitate dialogue with local governments. Citizens have demonstrated that they have the transformative potential to reimagine urban space and adapt it to their needs, regardless of whether they live in an affluent district or an informal



Plano Popular Vila Dique in Porto Alegre
Source: UFRGS Lume Repositorio Digital

community.^{31,32,33}

Comprehensive Neighbourhood Regeneration | Latin America's urban reality is marked by profound inequalities and marginalized neighbourhoods, making comprehensive neighbourhood improvement a fundamental pillar to mitigate spatial exclusion. Government programs and development projects have been implemented to improve basic infrastructure. The "Prosperous Neighbourhood Program" in Guatemala City aims to improve urban quality by creating pedestrian walkways, green areas, playgrounds, outdoor gyms, urban art, cultural activities, and meeting places. As a result, in 2019 criminal activities decreased by 44% in six prioritized neighbourhoods.^{34,35} In Cuba, the Neighbourhood Transformation Program supports vulnerable communities in solving daily challenges. Similarly, UN-Habitat has promoted the development of Integral Urban Operations in Central American cities, focusing on improving deprived neighbourhood, through strategic regeneration projects, regulatory and financial instruments, and participatory governance plan.³⁶ Other regeneration initiatives focus on securing climate-efficient housing for the most vulnerable, such as Half a House in Chile, which also provides property titles, and EcoCasa in Mexico, offering green mortgages.¹⁷

The success of these programs is due to an adequate participatory process, where solutions respond to the interests of the residents in the area. This practice strengthens community identity and leads to more effective and sustainable solutions. Overall, comprehensive neighbourhood improvement in Latin America has proven effective in combating spatial exclusion by addressing material, social, and economic needs, in alignment with a collective vision and long-term planning at the city scale. It is crucial to maintain adaptability and innovation in these strategies to ensure sustainable and equitable development in the region.

Safe Street Programs and Caring Cities | Latin American cities are actively promoting safer street programmes with a strong commitment to addressing the challenges associated with access to social infrastructure, urbanization, traffic congestion, and environmental sustainability. These initiatives aim to create safer, more accessible, and environmentally friendly urban environments, drawing inspiration from successful endeavours in the region. For instance, Mexico City's Integrated Program for Road Safety seeks to eliminate traffic-related fatalities and ensuring safe and inclusive streets for all road users. The initiative includes traffic calming, pedestrianization projects, and an expanded cycling infrastructure, supported by a dedicated bike lanes network to make cycling a viable and secure option for residents.³⁷ In Sao Paulo, Brazil, the Blue' Lane' experiment, a low-cost and high-impact intervention, created dedicated motorbike lanes that made motocycling 20 times safe and significantly

reduce the number of deaths.³⁸ Latin American efforts extend to gender equity and the recognition of unpaid care work. In Colombia, specifically in Bogota, Care policies and Care blocks have found differentiated approaches to mitigate spatial and gender inequalities in vulnerable territories. This pioneering achievement demonstrates the capacity of Latin American cities to lead significant changes that transcend borders and set new standards for a more inclusive and equitable society.³⁹

Historic Centre Revitalization | A large portion of the cultural wealth in Latin American nations is centered in cities with historic districts. Nevertheless, nearly all of these places have suffered from deteriorating processes that put the preservation of the historical and cultural heritage in jeopardy. As a result, cities are starting to lose a vital resource that has the potential to improve urban spaces, increase the standard of living for its residents and bring inclusive economic development opportunities. A number of municipalities have taken action to restore their historic areas with this purpose, several of them with notable success.⁴⁰



Over the past ten years, the IBD has allocated over US\$630 million to 46 operations related to the regeneration of central regions and over US\$100 million to 23 operations related to cultural tourism. The Revitalization Programs for the Historic Center of Cartagena de Indias and Downtown Bogota are initiatives aimed at revitalizing central heritage areas. They incorporate the use of a comprehensive approach that prioritizes actions necessary to curb negative processes or to that act as catalysts for other initiatives that contribute to the city's socioeconomic development. Additionally, they recognize the need to start acting in areas that are falling into disrepair on the outskirts of historic centers and the significance of setting aside land for the generation of housing that is suitable for the financial capabilities of families with varying income levels.⁴¹ In Recife, Brazil, physical interventions in the historic centre were accompanied by cultural programmes and policies, including gastronomy hubs, museums and innovation hubs.⁴² In Rio de Janeiro, the Reviver Centro initiative has generated real estate investment in housing in derelict and underutilized areas of the historic centre. In one year, the programme was able to increase real estate purchase in 118%.⁴³

CONCLUSION | Latin America faces urban challenges such as stress to water scarcity, inequitable development, and violence, requiring integrated policies to bridge socioeconomic gaps. Climate change disrupts water cycles, and inequality persists, requiring adaptive governance systems for Latin American cities' resilience. Community-led urbanism and neighbourhood upgrading can transform environments, while transportation systems and safe street programs promote inclusive, integrated and inter-modal mobility. Historic center revitalization preserves cultural wealth and promotes socio-economic upliftment. The journey towards equitable urban landscapes requires sustained efforts, recognizing the interconnected nature of these challenges. Collaboration, adaptability, and citizen engagement and empowerment can redefine urban development trajectory in Latin America. Prioritizing inclusivity and sustainability can build resilient cities that thrive in the face of evolving environmental, social, and economic dynamics.

CASE STUDY: PARQUE DE LA EQUIDAD

In recent years, due to the increase in tourism and the hotel industry, Cancun city in Mexico has experienced an accelerated urbanization that has caused deep spatial and social inequalities. The Strategic Projects Agency of the State of Quintana Roo (AGEPRO) partnered with UN-Habitat to develop Equity Park, a 16-kilometre long and 89-hectare linear park that crosses three of the main avenues of the city and aims to become an urban regeneration symbol. Its vision is to become a safe, inclusive, accessible, green, and high-quality public space that integrates the city in spatial, social, economic, and environmental dimensions towards sustainable development.⁴⁴

The project included three components: An urban regeneration masterplan, land-value capture mechanisms, and a conceptual design guide for the public space. With the aim to provide sustainability and universal access to a safe, inclusive, and accessible green area for all age groups across socio-economic conditions, this project was conceived through a comprehensive participatory planning process that integrated stakeholders from a wide range of social sectors, with a particular emphasis on local inhabitants.

There was a participatory design guide for the consolidation of a network of public spaces in

Cancun, as a toolbox approach. The participatory actions included targeted activities for specific groups such as students, women, elderly, disabled and families through itinerant modules, collective events, and social media interactions with the help of Fundacion Hogares as a partner. UN-Habitat also carried out several virtual approaches such as online workshops with diverse local stakeholders. During the conceptual design process, inputs from participatory activities including community perception, desires, and motives, expected uses, programming activities have been integrated into the zoning and design guidelines that were elaborated with a framework approach that could be replicated in other public spaces.

Land value capture mechanisms were developed to be applied in the project as a financing mechanism for urban interventions beyond existing government budget. A valuation system was established to identify growth areas of interest, followed by the identification of prices and types of housing through a market study. The developed mechanism focused on allowing an increase in the residential density (increasing the housing units in new development) in exchange of a fee.

 Cancun, Mexico

 On going

 City Scale



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Middle East and North Africa

TOTAL POPULATION: 508,311,359¹

2024 GDP

Per Capita
US\$ 8,499.8²

Annual Growth
2%³



58%
of world refugees

are originally from the
Eastern Mediterranean Region⁴

only **2%**
of the land in cities
is dedicated to
public spaces

with 90% of the population living
in 4% of the total area⁶



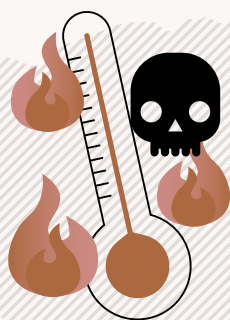
Unemployment

The rate is 10.31%. The highest value was in Djibouti 26.26% and the lowest value was in Qatar 0.13⁵



Poverty

MENA is the only region across the world where poverty (\$3.65 line) has increased over the past decade, from an estimated 12.3% in 2010 to 18.1% in 2023⁷



123
per 100,000

is the estimated number of people dying of heat-related issue in the region on the last two decades of the century⁸



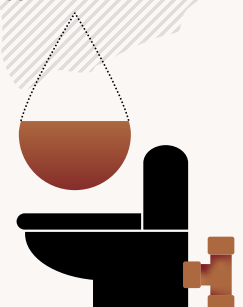
by 2050,

68%
of the population

is expected to reside in cities, with the region's total population projected to reach 646 million¹⁰

Water and Sanitation

35% of population are not using safely managed sanitation services⁹



TRENDING CHALLENGES | The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is expecting significant population growth and urbanization in the next decades. Despite the general positive correlation between urbanization and economic prosperity, the growth of cities in the region has not always been accompanied by improvements in urban life, leading to 'urbanisation without urbanism' and 'urbanisation of poverty'.¹¹ On average, around 18% of the population lives under each country's national poverty line,¹² resulting in a large vulnerable population. The uncertainty from turmoil and conflicts has produced a considerable group of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and asylum-seekers in the region, whose quality of life and access to urban opportunities are strained. Cities in the region also face escalating risks from climate change, including rising sea levels, extreme heatwaves, and severe water scarcity, which disproportionately impact vulnerable communities.¹³ In response to these challenges, cities in the MENA region are proactively applying inclusive and innovative solutions to improve settlement conditions, rebuild communities and adapt to climate change, such as smart sustainable infrastructure and anti-displacement policies.

Water Insecurity and Extreme Heat | The MENA region is the world's most climate-vulnerable region, represented by risks of water stress, warming, aridity, and sea level rise. It is the most water-scarce region globally, where 19 of the 22 Arab countries considering water scarcity a major issue. The region's water utilization rate is estimated high at 76.6% compared to a global average of 7.5%.¹⁴ This is due in part to inefficient water use,¹⁵ in part to groundwater sources drying up because of global heating. High population growth and limited water resources have led to 83% of the MENA population facing water stress.¹⁶ This stress is compounded by agriculture, which uses 80% of the region's water utilization, significantly above the global average of 70%.¹⁷ MENA region is expected to have the greatest economic losses from extremely high-water stress, estimated at 6-14% of the GDP by 2050.¹⁸ The average temperature is projected to increase by 5°C by the end of the century in parts of the region.¹⁹ The worsening conditions are likely to bring more heat-related illness and mortality and put a knock-on effect on food security. Within urban areas, public spaces make up only 2% of total area compared to the European average of 12%.¹⁴ The lack of green spaces and environmentally friendly transport systems is exacerbating the urban heat island effect and putting the ever-increasing number of city dwellers at risk from extreme heat. Inefficient transportation and mobility systems further exacerbate the climate challenges in the region. The reliance on fossil fuel-based vehicles contributes to air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, inadequate public transportation infrastructure and urban planning contribute to increased energy consumption and emissions. On another hand, inefficient solid waste management, including the management of rubble resulting from conflicts and earthquakes, is creating health and environmental hazards in countries like Palestine, Syria, Turkey, and Lebanon.¹⁸ Unfortunately, conflicts, political instability, and humanitarian disasters have led to a reprioritisation of climate actions by many local governments. This neglect, coupled with a lack of institutional mechanisms, has resulted in inadequate responses to the growing demand and the need to improve lagging urban infrastructure and services.¹⁸

Labour Migration and Forced Displacement | Migration is probably the most distinct feature affecting MENA cities today, driven primarily by employment opportunities,

conflicts and wars, and climate change. Labour migration is one of the region's main migratory patterns, with 35.6% of workforce being constituted by migrant workers.¹² Gulf Cooperation Council countries accommodate 22.7 million out of 24 millions of migrant workers within the region, main destinations for seeking jobs and higher wages.¹⁹ Among them, Saudi Arabia has recently become the third-largest country worldwide for foreign workers, with most of them originating from Asian countries, such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and the Philippines, and others from Arab countries, such as Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. In addition, a growing population of educated young people facing high unemployment in many cities are migrating in large numbers to larger capitals in search for decent work.¹⁹ Population displacement both within countries and across borders due to turmoil and wars is another distinct pattern of migration, as the MENA region is one of the most heavily conflict-affected and fragile areas in the world. 58% of world refugees originated from the region, the top contributor of displaced persons in 2020, with the highest figures from Somalia, Syria and Sudan.^{19,20,21} Despite a decreasing number of refugees and internally displaced persons in the beginning of this decade due to the de-escalating conflicts in Iraq, Libya and Syria, the recently rekindled Israel-Palestine conflict is putting internal displacement as one of the main challenges in Gaza and the West Bank. In addition, beyond the destruction of housing and the loss of lives, war-torn cities also present challenge on the preservation and recovery of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage.²² Notably, sites in Iraq, Yemen, and Syria have faced catastrophic damage, impacting not just the built heritage but also cultural identities tied to these spaces.²³ Lastly, the number of climate refugees is growing when the vulnerable groups have a heightened exposure to risks and limited safety nets. In 2019 alone, 886,000 disaster-related displacements were contributed by this region. Sea-level rise, desertification, and extreme heat events are expected to make parts of the region uninhabitable by the end of the century, with Cairo and Basra particularly at risk due to their dense populations and precarious infrastructure.²⁴ These migration patterns are creating spatial divisions along the religious and ethnic lines, and many cities are experiencing expressions of intolerance towards refugees and economic migrants due to perceived competition over already strained services and competitive job markets.



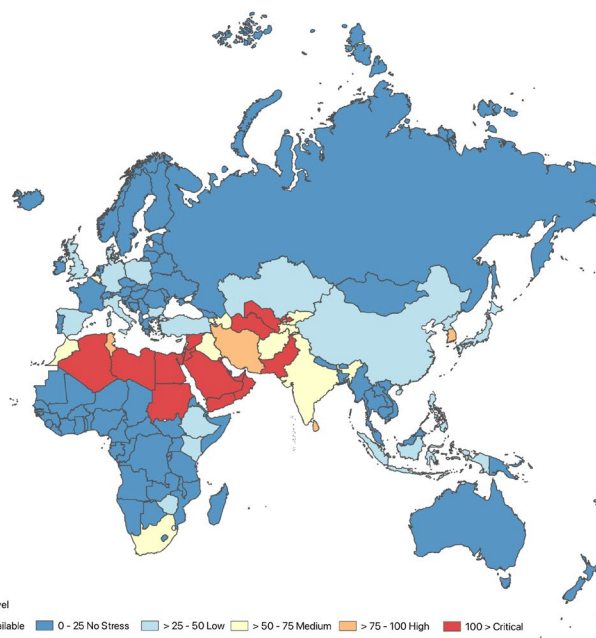
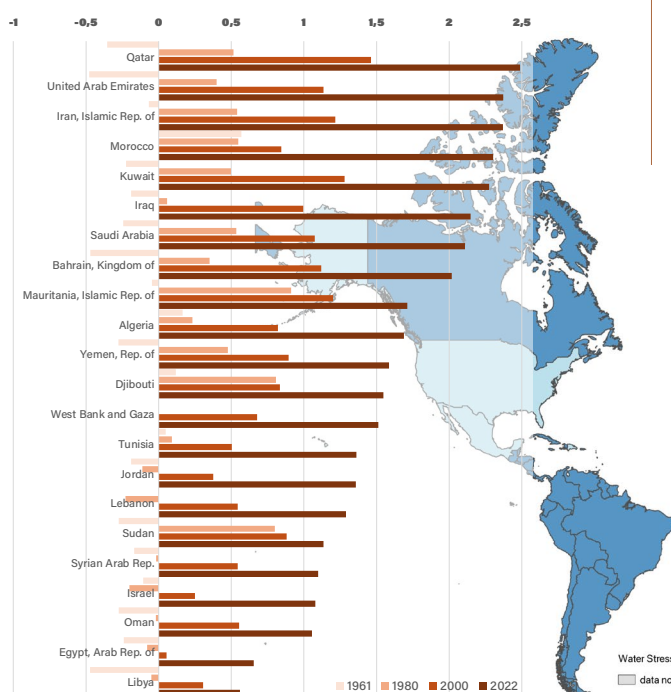
17 million forcibly displaced and stateless people | 12% of the world population ⁴¹

Exclusive Neighbourhoods and Spatial Segregation |

Market-driven development is creating new divides based on income. Many cities, such as Beirut, Amman, and Cairo, are experiencing gentrification and informal settlement growth simultaneously, creating spatial segregation with cities.²⁵ Urban governments in the region have struggled to accommodate these large influxes of people due to limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and political instability, making it challenging to provide adequate living conditions.

²⁵ Conflicts and violence have led to more than 12 million internally displaced individuals in the region, further exacerbating the growth of informal settlements.²⁶ The ensuing 'urbanization of poverty' has created large pockets of informal settlements; about a third of urban populations in the region lives in informal areas, with great variation between countries.²⁷ In poorer countries, slums and informal settlements are expected to double over the next decade.¹⁹ These unplanned areas are poorly integrated into the wider urban fabric, and their residents therefore often experience significant

spatial and social exclusion and a lack of adequate services, highlighting urban inequality and poverty. Population health and the environment are at risk due to makeshift solutions for basic utilities, which have been further undermined during the COVID-19 pandemic and by climate change. Residents of these informal settlements, mostly migrants/refugees are often vulnerable to exploitation because of their marginalization.²⁵ In Jordan, 12 years after the onset of the Syrian refugee crisis, nearly 1.3 million Syrian refugees continue to face precarious living conditions, with over 80% residing outside camps in poor housing conditions. More than half of these refugees live below the poverty line, and one in five are food insecure.²⁸ Although social segregation in the MENA cities is not a new phenomenon,²⁹ gated communities have begun to emerge as a more recent trend in the region. Many new mega developments incorporating 'smart city' principles, purported to be cost-effective and climate-friendly, are generating debates surrounding affordability and exclusivity, surveillance, and the reality of their supposedly environmentally positive credentials.



left: heat rise⁴² right: water stress level⁴³

TRENDING SOLUTIONS FOR SPATIAL INCLUSION

Post-conflict Reconstruction for Inclusion and Resilience |

In response to the negative impacts left by turmoil and wars, the MENA region is taking proactive steps towards short-term post-conflict rehabilitation and long-term resilience building of urban areas.³⁰ Inclusive and innovative approaches underpin the reconstruction, aiming to neutralise the socioeconomic disparities and avoid further exclusion and violence resulting from the unequitable institutional structure.³¹ Responsive recovery interventions primarily focus on restoring basic public infrastructure, providing safety guarantees, and delivering relief aid. Aleppo, the principal city of northern Syria, has initiated seven urban recovery projects under the national 'Urban Recovery Framework' to boost recovery works, encompassing road rehabilitation, microbus station development, solid waste management, medical waste treatment and cadastral services for returning residents.³² Similar reconstruction efforts have been observed

in other conflict-affected cities like Sana'a, Aden, and Taiz, which have experienced significant internal migration due to conflict and food insecurity.³³ A participatory approach has been adopted in cities including Darra, Aleppo, Deir Ezor and Homs, to inclusively engage marginalized groups into the consultation, planning and decision-making processes of the rehabilitation. This approach is crucial as MENA has over 12 million internally displaced people due to conflict, with many relocating to cities.³³ The government of Iraq, with international assistance, has launched 'The Housing Reconstruction Strategy' to rebuild safe settlements and low-cost housing units for conflict-affected populations and displaced families particularly in Mosul and Ramadi. Multiple mechanisms to ensure efficient reconstruction encompass offering building materials for self-rebuilding works and providing home loan schemes for families rebuilding their lives.³²

Improvement and Integration of Informal Settlements

Countries within the region have a strong commitment to improve informal settlements and promote the right to safe, adequate, and affordable housing, especially for the vulnerable populations, including the youth, female, employed, and informal habitants. Egypt has carried out a comprehensive analysis of nation-wide housing conditions, with a particular highlight on low-income groups.¹² This evidence-based approach serves as the foundation for the National Housing Strategy to benchmark current conditions and prioritize areas for intervention and investment. Beyond physical improvement of settlements, there was a common shift of policy focus from the notion of 'upgrading' to 'integration' over recent years, highlighting the comprehensive delivery of basic services, public amenities, green space, and legal support for those residing in informal settlements.³⁴ The principle of social justice to minimize the risk of 'gated community' as one of the common consequences of slum upgrading stands out as a priority in the process. To prevent more affluent residences and private landlords to take advantage of improvements and displace original communities, practical and legal measures have been initiated to safeguard the rights of vulnerable populations. For instance, responsive taxing systems applied on certain types of land have been found effective to grant property rights, tenure security and social cohesion, where new incomers are responsible for several times fold of tax than original residents. Additionally, architectural innovations in climate-resilient housing support the stability and adaptability of informal settlements. In Khartoum, Sudan, where over 50% of population lives in informal settlements, flood-resistant building technologies that utilize soil blocks help enhance the resilience to floods and other environmental hazards and avoid large-scale displacement.³²

Smart Solutions for Climate Mitigation and Adaptation

Many MENA countries have adopted green growth strategies across several sectors to proactively respond to climate change. Sustainable infrastructure projects have been initiated



ated in many countries to ensure economic, financial, social, environmental, and institutional sustainability and resilience. Considering the region's access to renewable solar energy, solar-powered desalination has become a sustainable measure to address the freshwater deficit. The solution helps to reduce a large proportion of financial budget in water and power supply sectors.³⁵ Morocco has transitioned to developing new models for water security by building nine seawater desalination plants, with an expected annual capacity of 147 million cubic metres of water. Jordan has also taken adaptive methods to secure food provision, such as vegetable plantation by applying hydroponic technology in substitution of growing vegetables in open fields, which improves yields six-fold from 5,000kg/dunum to 30,000kg/dunum and reduces the amount of water used to one-third.³⁶ Nature-based and low-cost solutions have been adopted to help local communities mitigate and adapt to climate risks and impacts. Jordan and Lebanon initiated a project to develop rainwater harvesting systems, and wastewater treat-



ment and reuse schemes to irrigate agriculture land, and to raise the awareness of displaced people and host communities regarding the operation, sustainability and replication of the various interventions.³⁷ Also, an innovative framework for urban planning which is climate change and gender mainstreamed is being promoted under the same project including the development of such plans for selected target areas in both countries and the training of local authorities on their use. Urban farming has generated environmental and socio-economic benefits to the vulnerable populations offering alternatives for income generation and enhancing food affordability. Urban green roofs is increasingly being promoted as an alternative to conventional non-living roofs to beautify the built environment, harvest rooftop rainwater, and mitigate the urban heat island effect via its vegetative surfaces. For example, a rooftop farming initiative in Cairo, Egypt grows organic vegetables and leafy crops in informal settlements of the Greater Cairo Region, which actively responds to the issues of food insecurity, high temperatures and financial burden.³⁸

CONCLUSION | While migration, conflicts and climate change amplify spatial disparities and socio-economic inequalities within the MENA region, the evolving landscape of encouraging solutions reflects a commitment to social inclusion, resilience, and sustainability. Post-conflict reconstruction highlights an approach that prioritises vulnerable population, delivers an integrated urban life, and embraces smart digital technologies. Informal settlement improvement strategies seek to integrate, rather than merely upgrade, the areas, with legal measures to protect vulnerable groups from regeneration-induced gentrification and displacement. Moreover, from solar-powered desalination to nature-based green roofs, MENA countries are investing in sustainable practices to address climate mitigation and adaptation. These efforts not only address climate challenges but also contribute to community well-being and economic stability. Overall, it showcases the necessity of collaboration between governments, communities, and international partners to work on comprehensive strategies that address the root causes of exclusion and build cities that are socially inclusive, environmentally sustainable, and economically prosperous.

CASE STUDY: POST-EXPLOSION REHABILITATION AND RECOVERY IN BEIRUT

The massive explosion at the Port of Beirut (PoB) in 2020 devastated the city, killing more than 200 people, wounding more than 6,000 and displacing around 300,000 individuals as estimated.³⁹ The neighbourhoods located within a radius of 5km from the blast epicentre were affected, and those within a radius of 2km were heavily destroyed. The building damage assessment indicates nearly 150 buildings to be structurally destroyed, and the total damages were estimated to US\$4.6 billion, with the housing and culture sectors as the most severely affected.⁴⁰ UN-Habitat in Beirut adopted a 'Building Back Better' approach for the rehabilitation and recovery works in the residential neighbourhoods affected by the PoB explosion, delivering both short-term emergency support and long-term resilience building. First and foremost, actions have been taken to support the rehabilitation of prioritised historical residential buildings. The initiative focuses on a subset of vacant residential buildings that were inhabited by households largely affected by the explosion with low tenure security who have been temporarily displaced. The project further focuses on buildings that were vacant at the time of the explosion and that will offer below-market tenure opportunities to low-to-middle income families who will, via legally secure rental agreements, potentially and conditionally occupy these housing units. A two-step prioritization procedure has been developed for the identification of damaged buildings to be rehabilitated based on i) geographic scope, ii) level of damage, iii) socio-economic vulnerability, and iv) heritage value. A key initiative in these rehabilitation and recovery efforts is the "Beirut Housing Rehabilitation and Cultural and Creative Industries Recovery Project", known as BERYT, led by UN-Habitat

and funded by the Lebanon Financing Facility. The primary objective of BERYT is to rehabilitate severely damaged residential buildings of heritage value while also providing support to creative and cultural actors in the most heavily affected areas. Beirut has increased access to safe public spaces for residents ensuring inclusion of marginalized groups through the rehabilitation of parts of the existing non-functional old railway station to accommodate an industrial heritage park that is open to the public, in addition to other municipal spaces such as stairs, pedestrian pathways, and upgrading neighbourhoods in the blast-affected areas. In the context of a sharp decline in cultural and creative industries with more than 55% of them permanently or temporarily closed, essential emergency support has been offered to sustain the livelihoods of the remaining cultural practitioners and entities and to recover the vibrancy and cultural identity of affected neighbourhoods. In collaboration with UNESCO, an extensive outreach and communication campaign has been conducted to reach out cultural practitioners and raise awareness about the project. Technical support was delivered to them for the design and implementation of cultural productions with an emphasis on entities and individuals of low capacity. The provision of grants prioritizing socio-economically vulnerable practitioners finally supported the cultural recovery and production in affected areas. In the long run, Beirut will continue strengthening the capacity of local government institutions to enhance their planning, coordination and citizen outreach capacity, to restore the liveability in affected areas, enhance its resilience to climate change, and apply a coordinated, holistic, and people-centred approach for building a socially resilient community.

 Beirut, Lebanon

 2022

 District Scale



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North America

TOTAL POPULATION: 375,076,145¹

**2023
GDP²**

Per Capita
US\$ 78,675.5

Annual Growth
2.4%

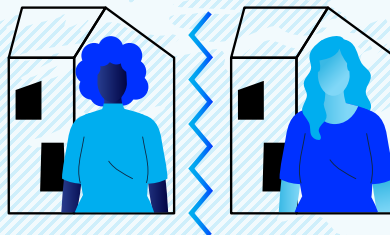


83%
**URBAN
POPULATION**

the majority of the North American territory occupation occurs in urban areas.³

**Over
80%**

of American cities are experiencing higher levels of racial segregation than in 1990.⁴



**42
million US
households**

were "cost-burdened" in 2022 due to housing expenditure and lack of social housing.⁸



**\$1.308
trillion in losses
were caused by natural
disasters in the US
from 2014-2024**

In 2017 alone, losses accounted for \$395.9 billion, marking the highest amount during this period.¹⁰

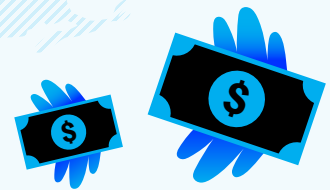
Unemployment

Unemployment rate kept relatively stable in the last years, falling to 3.8 per cent in 2023 from 3.9 per cent in 2019.⁴



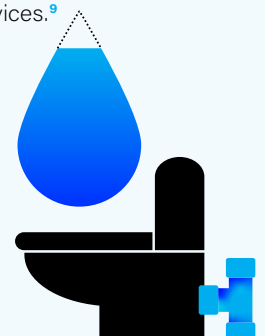
Poverty

The poverty rate in the US in 2021 was 11.6 percent, with 37.9 million people in poverty.⁶ In 2022, Canada's poverty rate was 9.9%, with 3.8 million people living in poverty, based on-poverty line.⁷



Water and Sanitation

4% of the population are not using safely managed sanitation services.⁹



TRENDING CHALLENGES | Spatial inequalities in North America are intertwined with racial inequality. Decades of systemic discrimination, racial segregation, and discriminatory zoning laws have contributed to a deeply rooted spatial divide. This has led to racial minorities being disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards, limited access to education and health-care, and restricted economic opportunities. Green gentrification and climate-driven gentrification further exacerbate these issues, displacing marginalized communities as wealthier individuals seek refuge from climate-related disasters. Moreover, the financialization of housing has created instability in the housing market, resulting in evictions and displacement and negatively impacting the human right to adequate housing. Climate action must integrate affordable housing and inclusive urban planning to prevent further displacement and ensure marginalized communities benefit equitably.

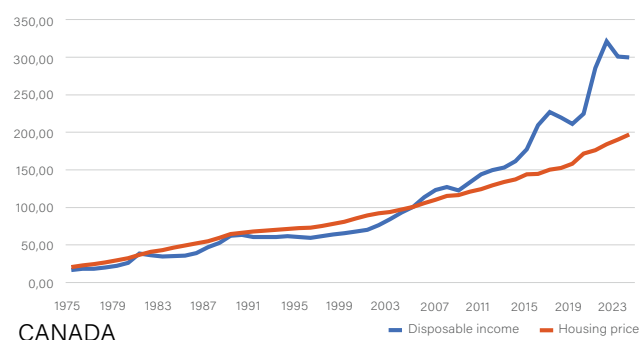
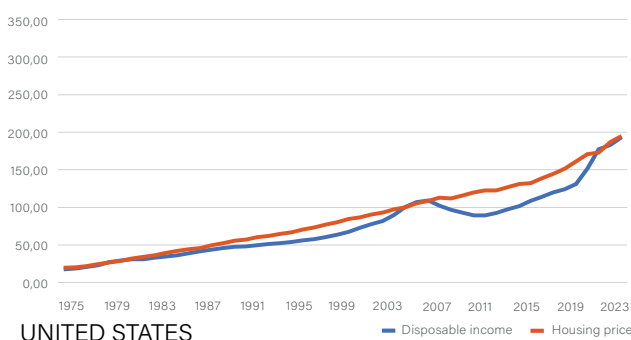
Spatial Inequality Linked to Racial Inequality | In North America, spatial inequality is closely tied to racial inequality due to systemic discrimination, colonization, racism, and marginalization.¹¹ Racial segregation shapes the socioeconomic conditions of poor minority families, particularly in black neighborhoods.¹² It plays a significant role in concentrating poverty and disadvantage within these communities, as visible in American cities such as Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Philadelphia.¹² Urban planning in North America has historically enabled division and systemic inequality in cities. For decades, zoning bylaws and restrictive covenants have kept parts of North America's cities white. Exclusionary zoning laws placed restrictions on the types of homes allowed in a neighbourhood through requirements such as minimum lot size, minimum square footage, prohibitions on multi-family housing, and building height restrictions. Such zoning and bylaws kept low-income residents out of wealthy suburban developments.¹³ Discriminatory practices such as redlining have led to the concentration of racial minority populations in neighbourhoods with lower economic opportunities and reduced access to quality education, healthcare, and public services. Racial minorities are also disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards such as pollution, toxic waste sites, and industrial facilities. More than 80% of large metropolitan areas in the US are experiencing higher levels of racial segregation than in 1990.¹⁴ Blacks and Native Americans are three times more likely than whites to reside in distressed communities.¹¹ Even successful examples of American urban sustainability such as Portland, often lack of diversity and inclusion.¹⁵

Green and Climate-driven Gentrification | Although greenspace is an essential component of climate-responsive cities, it can contribute to gentrification and exacerbate environmental and climate injustices. A recent study identifies greenspace as the standout driver of gentrification in several North American cities such as Atlanta, Austin, Louisville, Milwaukee, Montreal, and Vancouver. Specifically, the study shows a strong positive relationship for at least a decade between urban greening efforts in the 1990s-2000s and gentrification that occurred in cities during 2000-2016. Green gentrification as the study reveals, is more prevalent

in North America than in Europe.¹⁶ In addition, many North American cities are increasingly witnessing climate-driven gentrification as the severity and frequency of climate hazards and extreme events such as flooding, wildfires, and hurricanes. From 2014 to 2024, \$1.308 trillion in losses were caused by natural disasters in the US. In 2017 alone, losses accounted for \$395.9 billion, marking the highest amount during this period.¹⁰ Climate change unfolds against a historically uneven backdrop, shaped by a legacy of discriminatory practices and policies. Low-income and minority groups are facing a disproportionate financial burden, with higher utility bills due to extreme heat events. High-income groups, on the other hand, can afford to move, contributing to a pattern of climate gentrification across the region. For instance, people moving to Flagstaff from Phoenix and Tucson for cooler temperatures. Real estate properties at higher elevations experiencing rising values in greater Miami area is another example of such gentrification.¹⁷ There is growing evidence that hazards are being factored into property valuations. Properties exposed to coastal flooding or wildfires can have lower rate of price appreciation than unexposed properties.¹⁸

Housing Insecurity and Financialization of Housing |

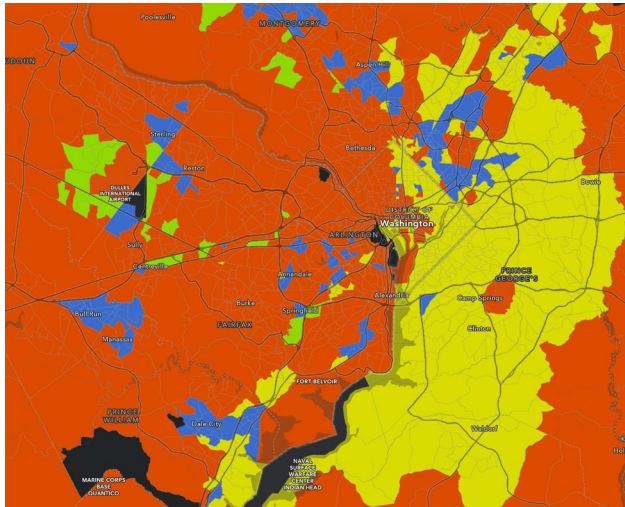
The affordability benchmark in the US stipulates that families should not spend more than 30% of their income on housing-related expenses, yet many are forced to exceed this limit. Study highlights more than 42 million households in the US were "cost burdened" in 2022.⁸ A shortage of more than seven million affordable homes is reported by the National Low-Income Housing Coalition.¹⁹ Moreover, insufficient housing construction in the US has resulted partly from local political resistance, commonly referred to as NIMBYism (Not-In-My-Backyard), as well as a shortage of appropriately zoned land.¹⁵ In Canada, homelessness and inadequate housing are linked to discriminatory budgeting and resource allocation, underfunding social housing, discriminatory zoning and urban development that facilitates evictions of racialized communities, and acquisition of land and property by the wealthy. Large financial firms now hold 20-30% of Canada's purpose-built rental housing stock and about 340,000 units in multi-residential rental buildings.²⁰ Over the past



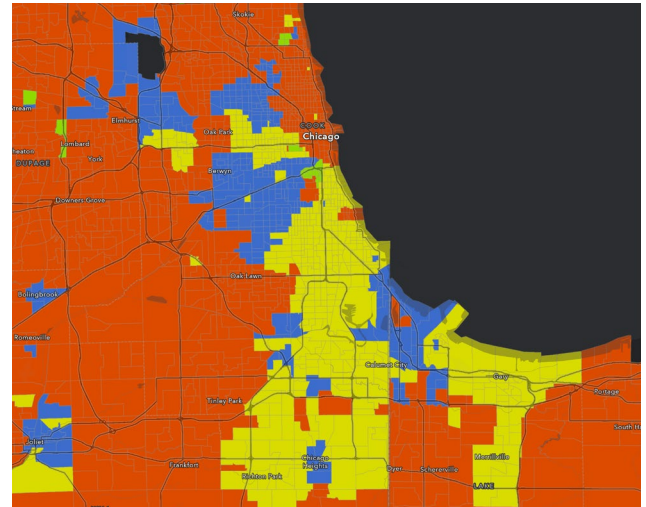
Disposable income and Housing price chart: Left:US Right: Canada²¹

decade, financialization of housing and the growing role of financial firms such as real estate investment trusts (REITs), private equity firms, and pension funds in the housing mar-

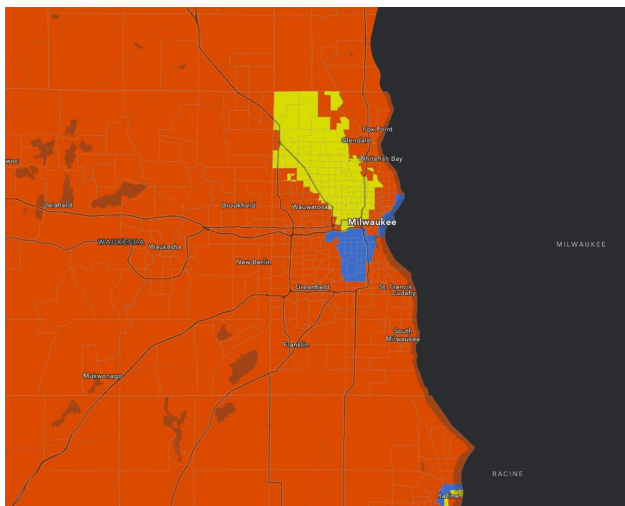
ket has also contributed to housing instability, inadequate housing supply, affordable housing crisis, displacement and eviction in North America.^{22,23}



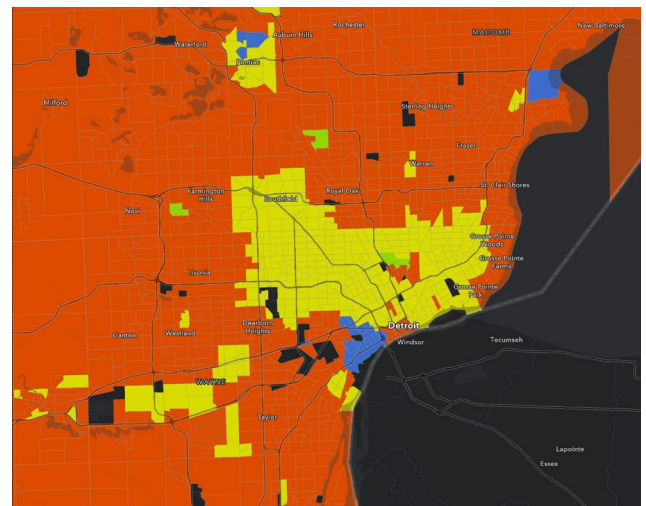
Washington DC



Chicago

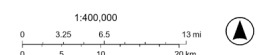


Milwaukee



Detroit

USA Census 2020 Redistricting Tracks



Race and Ethnicity in the US²⁴

TRENDING SOLUTIONS FOR SPATIAL INCLUSION

Social and Affordable Housing | A solution to housing issues involves creating a significant amount of housing stock that is permanently excluded from speculative markets by implementing policies such as land trusts, social and affordable housing programs, or government-backed housing projects. Canada recently launched a National Housing Strategy program with \$4.4 billion Housing Accelerator Fund to build 100,000 new homes that are affordable, inclusive, equitable and diverse over three years.²⁵ However, in the US, the public sector rarely builds housing directly. Instead, it aids non-profit organizations in building affordable housing through grants, loans, tax credits, and technical assistance (notably the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit or LIHTC).²⁶ Federal funding programs administered by the U.S. Department of

Housing and Urban Development (HUD) include Choice Neighbourhoods, rental assistance programs, Investment Partnerships Program (HOME), Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and National Housing Trust Fund. This has led to a small but growing social housing sector in the US.^{15,27} For instance, an Affordable Housing Loan Fund was established in Denver through measures like raising property taxes on homes valued over \$500,000 and imposing development impact fees. This generates around \$16 million yearly. The fund is utilized not only to assist non-profit developers but also to purchase upscale vacant apartments and convert them into affordable housing units. Actions such as redeveloping existing public housing through HUD schemes like the Rental Assistance Demonstration program, incentivizing landlords to rent to low-income groups, and increasing

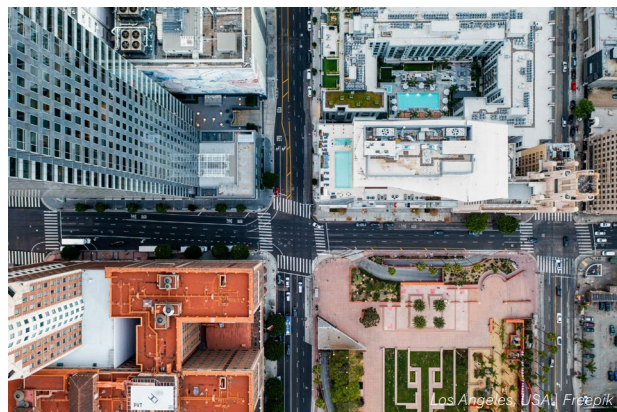
funding for HUD programs are required to address housing affordability issues in the U.S.

Rent Control, Tenant Protections, and Protecting long-time Residents from Displacement | Rent control is a legislation that regulates the rents charged by private landlords to keep living costs affordable for lower-income residents in a city. It is usually enacted by municipalities which approve yearly rent increases. Rent control is usually coupled with “vacancy control,” keeping rent restrictions in place even when a new tenant moves in. Rent regulations are more common in Canada than in the United States. According to an Urban Institute report, only 182 municipalities have rent control regulations in the U.S.²⁸ However, such regulations are starting to gain traction. The Biden administration is encouraging federal governmental agencies to help tenants find affordable housing.²⁹ Recently, Boston’s city council voted to introduce measures for stabilizing rents. Similarly, lawmakers in California, Colorado, Minnesota, and Oregon have lately considered efforts to tighten caps on rent increases.³⁰ In contrast, rent control policies in Canada have expanded as part of broader efforts to address housing affordability issues, with cities like Vancouver and Toronto implementing stricter rent controls and protections.³¹ Besides rent control to address gentrification, other strategies such as just-cause reasons for eviction, supporting low-income homeowners through home equity line of credit and property tax caps, preserving small and minority-owned businesses, Neighbourhood Plan or Specific Area Plan for guiding incremental and inclusive transformation, and preservation of historic structures may be necessary. Job expansion for current residents via local hiring requirements and training initiatives can mitigate negative impacts of regeneration projects.³²



Inclusionary Zoning (IZ) Policies | Local governments can enforce regulations mandating a specific percentage of housing units in each project zone to be sold or rented below market prices to low-income residents. This approach, commonly known as inclusionary zoning, has been embraced by numerous jurisdictions globally and is growing in popularity

in the United States and Canada. The City of Toronto has adopted inclusionary zoning policy that requires private developers to secure 5-10% to address the housing needs for low-income and moderate-income households, increasing to 8-22% by 2030.³² In the U.S., approximately 866 jurisdictions have embraced some form of inclusionary housing ordinances. In this context, affordability generally refers to households earning up to 70 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI), ensuring that they spend no more than one-third of their income on housing.^{15,33} A 2014 study on Montgomery County, MD, and Suffolk County, NY, examined whether the implementation of Inclusionary Zoning (IZ) policies led to increased racial integration. It revealed that on average, areas with IZ units became more racially integrated compared to neighbourhoods without such units.³⁵



Zoning Codes | Amending zoning codes can be a powerful strategy to accelerate investment in urban development projects that further community objectives and remove regulatory hurdles to equitable urban development. Cities can modify zoning codes to mandate diverse housing in new neighbourhoods, eliminate gated communities, and diversify neighbourhoods by ending single-family zoning. Updated zoning codes can encourage low-carbon buildings, public transit and walkability, public spaces, parks, and multifamily or mixed-use developments.³⁵ For instance, Seattle established an Equitable Development Initiative in 2016 that promotes community-led anti-displacement projects and includes zoning code changes encouraging provision of affordable housing, community centres, community farms and libraries and allowing certain accessory commercial uses in community centres. Recently, Government of Ontario proposed changes in zoning and housing development such as mandating municipalities to offer diverse housing options like ‘multigenerational housing’, permitting farmers to build up to three new houses on their existing property, requiring Ontario’s fastest-growing municipalities to devise growth plans for key transit station areas, and providing more flexibility for municipalities in expanding settlement boundaries.³⁵

CONCLUSION | Addressing spatial inclusion challenges in North America requires a multifaceted approach, as evident from the trending solutions. Housing initiatives such as the New Housing Accelerator Fund in Canada and Affordable Housing Loan Fund in Denver, showcase efforts to build affordable housing units. Rent control and tenant protection measures are gaining momentum to combat gentrification. Inclusionary zoning policies are promoting affordable housing within new developments and fostering racial integration. Zoning code changes, exemplified by cities such as Seattle and Ontario, demonstrate the significance of such regulatory changes in enabling diverse housing options and encouraging inclusive urban development.

CASE STUDY: WASHINGTON, DC'S ANACOSTIA WATERFRONT INITIATIVE

The Anacostia Waterfront in Washington, D.C., historically reflects the city's racial and socio-economic segregation. The Anacostia Waterfront Initiative (AWI) aimed to bridge the economic, social, and civic divide by transforming the waterfront into a vibrant mixed-use environment and improving the river's water quality. The river, once a commercial lifeline of the city, had deteriorated over the years. AWI's area of intervention (wards 5, 6, 7, and 8) was characterized by a concentration of poverty, public housing, and an African American population. This area stands in contrast with the west side of the city inhabited by white and better-educated populations.³⁷

In 2000, Mayor Williams established a groundbreaking partnership between the city government and federal agencies that owned significant riverfront land. AWI was formalized through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) which brought together the district and federal agencies to engage in collaborative planning, aiming to create a unified policy and development vision for the Anacostia River and its public lands. This MOU included provisions that set the DC Office of Planning (OP) as the lead agency for coordinating the vision for the river, including federal lands. Moreover, it mandated proactive engagement of citizens in the planning process, making it an unprecedented and inclusive approach to urban planning in Washington, D.C. In collaboration with city council members, the OP established 150-person citizens steering committee. Over 30 community workshops and focus group sessions in six targeted neighbourhoods were orga-

nized, drawing the participation of more than 5,000 individuals. Following extensive citizen engagement and collaboration with federal agencies, the OP developed the AWI Plan in 2003. This plan was designed to shape the redevelopment of the Anacostia River area, and outlined five planning themes, rooted in citizen concerns and public policy discussions. In addition to the Framework Plan for river-wide issues, Neighbourhood-Level Plans charted redevelopment strategies for six target areas with direct involvement of community stakeholders.³⁷

The Arthur Capper Carrollsburg public housing redevelopment project (a part of AWI), funded through the HUD's HOPE VI program, achieved a 1:1 replacement of public housing units and doubled housing density by combining 700 public housing units with 400 subsidized units and 400 market-rate units. This approach sought to mitigate gentrification effects. Originally, Capper Carrollsburg consisted of two old, barracks-style public housing complexes with 707 units. In 2001, the DC Housing Authority received a \$35 million HOPE VI grant, which, with private and public investments, grew to over \$750 million, making it one of the largest urban redevelopment projects in the country. The plan aimed to create a mixed-income community with over 1,600 new rental and home ownership units, including apartments, townhouses, and a seniors' building completed in 2007. This project is notable for replacing public housing units in the same footprint, a first in the HOPE VI program.³⁷

 Washington, DC, USA

 2000 - ongoing

 City Scale



The Wharf, Washington, DC
Source: Perkins Eastman

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Sub-Saharan Africa

TOTAL POPULATION: 1,600,000,000¹

2023 GDP

Per Capita
US\$ 1,622.8²

Annual Growth
2.8%³



3.8%
urban growth
rate

with a prediction of urban areas to increase from 44% to 60% by 2050⁴

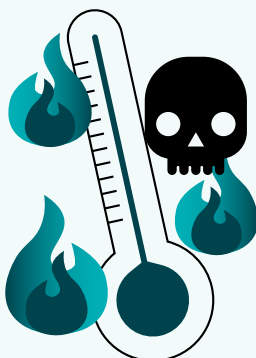
+13%
of Africans displaced
due to conflicts

reaching a total of 40.4 million forcibly displaced people in the region⁵



96%
of displaced people
stay in the continent

and 77% are Internally Displaced People, who stay within the borders of their own countries⁵

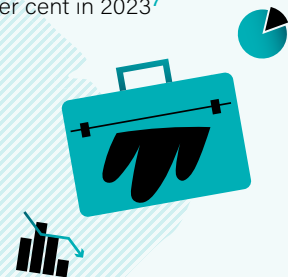


70%
of African cities

are highly vulnerable to climate shocks, although they contribute to only 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions⁶

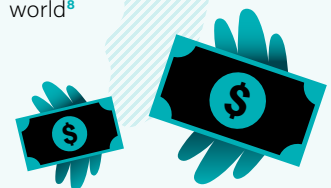
Unemployment

Unemployment decreased from 7 per cent in 2021 to 5.9 per cent in 2023⁷



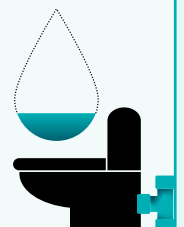
Poverty

About 30 million more Africans fell into extreme poverty (living on less than US\$1.90 a day) when COVID-19 broke out in 2020. Before the pandemic struck, over 445 million people – equivalent to 34% of Africa's population – lived below the poverty line. Even then, this figure was almost nine times the average for the rest of the world⁸



Water and Sanitation

In 2022, 69% of the population still lacked access to safely managed sanitation and 72% didn't use basic hygiene⁹



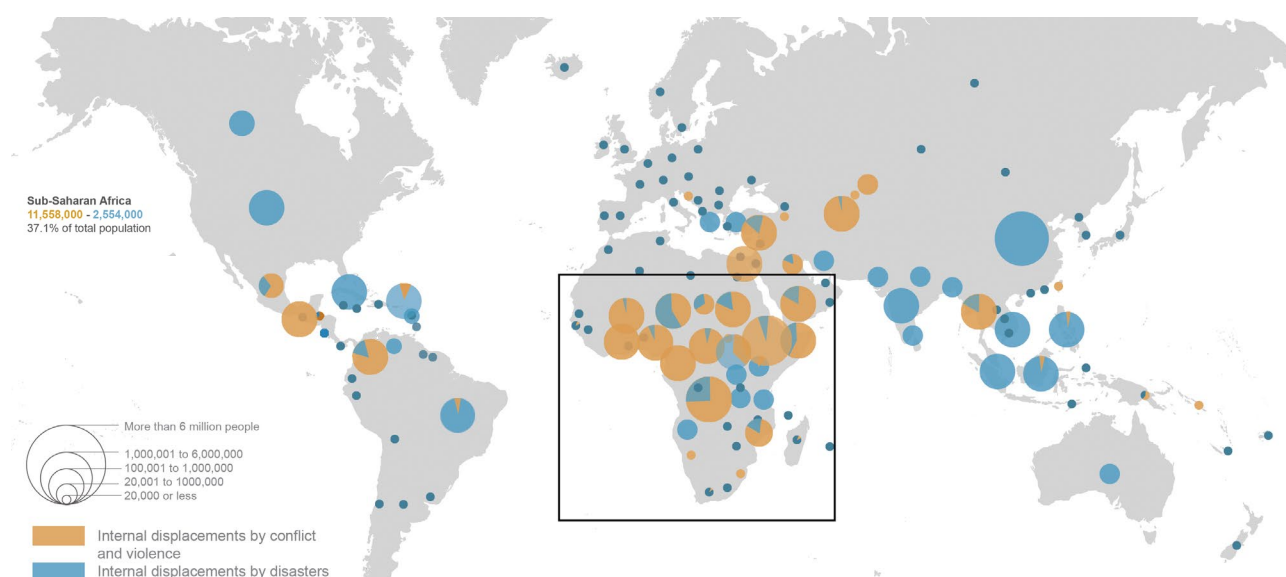
TRENDING CHALLENGES | Sub-Saharan Africa is the fastest urbanizing region, posing both challenges and opportunities for economic transformation and reduction of inequalities. It remains at the forefront of global concerns due to unstable governance systems, high poverty and unemployment rates, gender disparity and insufficient access to basic services and infrastructure. These issues are further magnified by the tangible impacts of climate change in Africa's diverse geography, including islands and coastal cities. The proliferation of informal practices for access to land and housing in the region continues to be one of the primary challenges in the pursuit of inclusive and sustainable urban futures. To address these challenges and maximize the benefits of urbanization, the region is evidencing consistent efforts to strengthen governance and urban planning practices for more equitable provision and upgrading of housing and basic services, local economic development, and climate adaptation.

Rapid Urbanization and Infrastructure Challenges

Whilst population growth rates are decelerating in other regions, Africa's has surged to 2.42 per cent annually¹⁰, projected to account for 40 per cent of the world's population by the end of the century.¹¹ In Sub-Saharan Africa, urban population is estimated to grow from 41 per cent in 2019 to 60 per cent by 2050¹². Cities in the region are growing in number and spatial extents, adding 15 million residents annually through both births and migration. Sub-Saharan Africa also hosts the world's youngest population, with over 60 per cent of its inhabitants under 25 years old¹³. This rapid urbanization is unfolding against a challenging backdrop characterized by limited income and lack of livelihood opportunities, infrastructure deficit, inadequate housing, weak governance structures, and escalating poverty rates, along with a growing population residing in informal settlements. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest global poverty rates, with 29% of the population experiencing multidimensional poverty. In 2018, more than 430 million people lived below the poverty line of \$1.90 (INT) per day.¹⁴ Furthermore, as of 2022, 69% of Africa's population still lacked access to safely managed sanitation, and 72 per cent did not have basic hygiene.⁹ Half of the urban population resides in informal settlements, accounting for one-fourth of the global population in such areas. Africa is also home to the largest informal settlements globally, including Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya; Khayelitsha in Cape Town, South Africa; and Makoko in Nigeria. The persistent urban poverty and inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa can be attributed to several factors including inadequate planning, and outdated policies rooted in the colonial period. Climate vulnerability, social conflicts, and governmental instability further exacerbate these challenges, driving migration and widening the inequality gap.

Sociopolitical Conflicts and Government Instability |

Weak governance structures in African countries contribute to inefficient urban governance systems, leading to urban sprawl, growing informal settlements and low levels of social and spatial inclusion. Africa has been consistently characterized with coup d'états, a recurring feature of regional politics, driven by political instability, corruption, economic woes, ethnic or religious tensions, and power struggles among the military and political elites.¹⁵ Such political conflicts have severely affected African cities, causing human rights violations, forced displacements, lack of and low-level planning systems and its effective implementation, and infrastructure destruction. Since 2011, there has been a 13 per cent increase in the number of Africans displaced due to conflicts, reaching a total of 40 million forcibly displaced Africans, including internally displaced persons, refugees, and asylum seekers, it has more than doubled since 2016⁵. A significant portion, 77 per cent of these displaced individuals are internally displaced within their own countries, while 96 per cent of those who cross borders choose to stay within the African continent.¹⁶ Sociopolitical conflicts in Africa are majorly linked to internal conflicts or natural resource conflict¹⁷. The migration and displacement crisis has significantly contributed to informal practices, inadequate adoption of land use and management strategies and outdated land registries, thus harbouring city planning interventions and access to basic services. This is observed in Abidjan and Congo where local population and migrants have low access to social services and reduced access to land. Notably, the region's large youth population (age<30), comprising 70 per cent of the total population, increases the risk of domestic conflicts due to factors such as youth unemployment and limited access to social services. These disparities can lead to tensions and political dispute and fuel spatial segregation

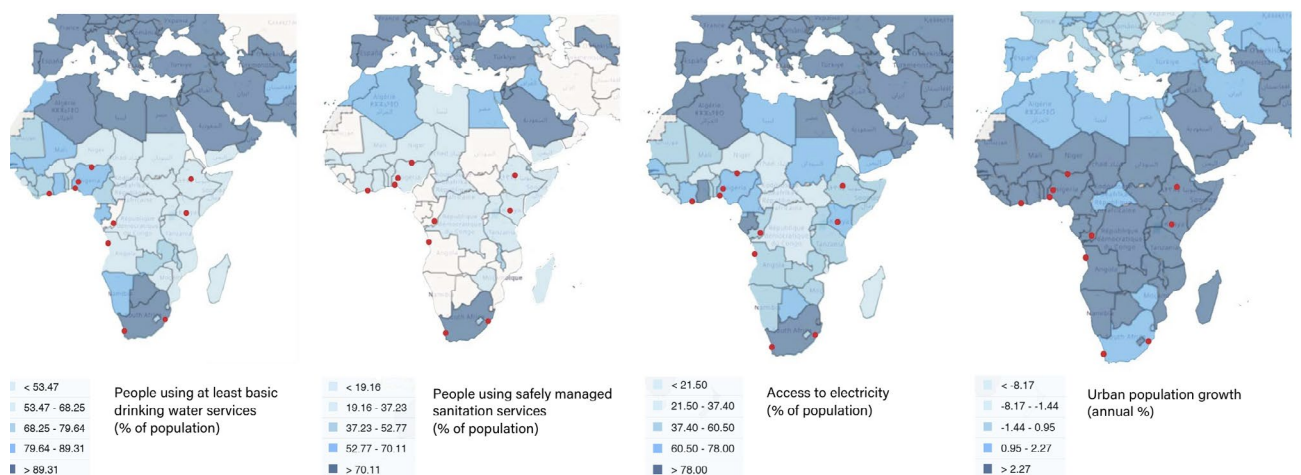


Internal displacement by conflict and disasters in 2021 map¹⁸

patterns.

Climate vulnerabilities | Sub-Saharan Africa is exceptionally vulnerable to the effects of climate change, particularly in climate scenarios where global temperatures rise by more than 1.5 degrees Celsius.¹⁹ Notably, Africa is the least to contribute to global greenhouse gas emissions, responsible for only 4 per cent of the total.⁶ At the same time, Sub-Saharan Africa bears a disproportionate burden of the consequences, while it faces the conundrum of having to provide infrastructure and promote growth without incurring in even higher emissions. Extreme climate events vary across countries: some are facing droughts; others rising sea levels, cyclones, and floods; and most are dealing with rising temperatures and rainfall anomalies. One thing sub-Saharan African countries have in common is limited climate resilience and coping mechanisms.²⁰ Seven of the 10 countries most vulnerable to climate change are in Africa. In 2015, four African countries ranked among the 10 countries most affected by climate change: Mozambique (1st), Malawi (3rd), Ghana and Madagascar (joint 8th position).²¹ Moreover, limited employment opportunities, inadequate social service distribution with-

in the cities and unaffordable housing drives low-income groups to build informal housing in less desirable city areas susceptible to climate-related hazards. This practice contributes to the concentration of poverty and places residents in situations where they face a greater likelihood of physical, health, and disaster-related hazards. Moreover, many megacities in Africa are located on the coasts and susceptible to rising sea levels such as Saint-Louis, Lagos, and Lome.²¹ Although the economic impact of extreme hydrometeorological events has mainly been felt in the region's urban areas, it is crucial to acknowledge that rural communities have also been substantially affected by these events. This has led to increased food insecurity and a diminished coping capacity of poor households and communities engaged in subsistence agricultural activities. Moreover, migration induced by climate disasters has increased in occurrence and severity over the last few decades due to the adverse effects of climate change. The West and Central Africa region accounted for 265,400 internally displaced people (IDP) due to disasters in 2021 according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.²²



Maps ^{23,24,25,26,27}

TRENDING SOLUTIONS FOR SPATIAL INCLUSION

Pro-poor Urban Policies and Adequate Infrastructure Provision

The inadequate policy response to the challenges of rapid urbanization is contributing to increasing urban poverty in major cities and towns. To address the urgent needs brought about by rapid population growth, cities are prioritizing the provision of basic services, infrastructure investments and inclusive planning. Notably, community-driven efforts have proved successful in responding to the issue of inadequate housing in Africa. Under the Rwanda's Integrated Development Programme (IDP) Model Village, the government in partnership with communities has developed 28,000 units in 222 settlements over a decade.²⁸ Kenya also launched an affordable housing scheme in 2017 with the aim of delivering 500,000 units of houses in five years. Microfinance opportunities and self-construction are potential strategies to facilitate the delivery of social housing, building local capacity and providing housing kit for incremental construction. Besides housing provision and access to land, water supply and sanitation infrastructure serve as catalysts for poverty reduction and promotion of equal opportunities. Promoting local economic development is a good strategy to generate opportunity at the community level. In Cabo Verde, UN-Habitat is supporting a slum upgrading programme, fo-

cusing on creating livelihood and local development.²⁹ Investing in basic infrastructure also serves as a foundation for various slum upgrading programs. Indeed, as Sub-Saharan African cities grow alongside deficient infrastructure, the size and challenges of informal settlements have also grown. Consequently, initiatives to upgrade slums have become essential. For example, UN-Habitat is supporting the informal settlement of Djikofé, in the Saaba Municipality, as a pilot initiative to implement the Burkina Faso National Slum Upgrading Strategy. This project includes concrete actions to regularise land tenure, allocation of plots and housing, building housings and setting up a mechanism to prevent forced relocations. Other initiatives include the launch of East Africa's first-ever local government green bond in 2024 by the Tanga Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Authority. This bond aims to expand the distribution of safe and affordable water, extending the network coverage to approximately 6,000 households currently without piped water.³⁰

Enhancing Socio-political Governance Systems | The resolution of political conflicts constitutes a multifaceted process addressing various issues such as ethnic and religious tensions, resource disputes, political rivalries, trans-

boundary relations, and economic inequalities. The recurring issue of government instability, often stemming from coups, social disintegration, and the lack of concrete decentralization, has been a persistent challenge in Sub-Saharan Africa. Many African countries have made significant progress in democratic reforms and military restructuring.³¹ Several regional, subregional, and international organizations are increasingly taking on the role of mediators for conflict resolution.³² Regional blocs like the African Union, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have played crucial roles in preventive diplomacy and mediating conflicts in countries such as South Sudan, Sudan, and Mali.³³ Various approaches are used to resolve political and social conflicts, such as transitional justice, innovative diplomatic initiatives, humanitarian aid and conflict prevention, post-conflict reconstruction, and promoting peace-building efforts through community engagement. To promote transboundary approaches and include spatial planning, contributing to integrated planning, can foster social impact. The efforts also contribute towards social cohesion and ensuring access to basic services. Humanitarian agencies are actively involved in supporting displaced people during conflicts, often by providing basic services in refugee camps such as Dadaab and Kakuma in Kenya, Um Rakuba and Kalma in Sudan, Elema Refugee Settlement in Uganda, and Lolo in Cameroon. These efforts are also geared towards integrating the displaced communities to existing communities as they build resilience within the conflict areas such as Kakuma. In the long run strong governance systems become a strong framework in which high levels of social and spatial inclusion will be achieved.

Climate Adaptation Planning | To achieve spatial inclusion in African cities through climate action, and to build infrastructure resilient and preserve ecosystems, a holistic approach to urban planning is essential. The African Green Stimulus Programme, designed to facilitate a sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, serves as a comprehensive framework for supporting environmental development efforts. It fosters collaboration among African governments, intergovernmental organizations, and the private sector, aiming to enable a green recovery in alignment with Africa's Agenda 2063 and the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (SDGs). This programme encompasses various climate action strategies such as combating land degra-



dation, desertification, and drought, revitalising ecotourism, enhancing biodiversity conservation, improving air quality, promoting circular economy, scaling up climate smart agriculture and food security systems, improving water conservation, investing in renewable energy, and promoting green urbanization.³⁴ Another example of climate action is the annual African Climate Week that brings together leaders from governments, businesses, and civil society to discuss climate change held in Nairobi, Kenya in 2023.³⁵ Ethiopia, with the support of UNEP, is setting an example by promoting active mobility, encouraging walking and cycling.³⁶ Nature-based solutions such as urban greening, expansion of parks, and implementation of green roofs prove effective in reducing heat impact in African cities.³⁷ In Southeast Africa, specifically in Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, and Union of Comoros, a comprehensive approach to climate action has been undertaken through the Adaptation Fund. This initiative involves a mix of city-level infrastructure projects, national-level capacity-building and learning from regional experiences. The pilot projects include 4-8 interventions in each city, each tailored to address specific climate challenges. For instance, the rehabilitation of mangroves in Morondava (Madagascar), the construction and rehabilitation of bridges and dams in Zomba (Malawi), building safe havens in Chokwe (Mozambique) and improving solid waste management in informal neighbourhoods of Moroni (Comoros). Moreover, in countries like Kenya, efforts are being made to align affordable housing with the requirements of Global Green Certifications.³⁸ Resilient housing initiatives exemplified by projects like Mozambique Coastal City Adaptation Project (CCAP) are taking shape across Africa to safeguard vulnerable communities from the impacts of climate-related hazards.³⁹

CONCLUSION | Sub-Saharan Africa confronts intricate challenges that demand multifaceted solutions. Tackling inequalities linked to rapid urbanization, infrastructure deficits, poverty, sociopolitical conflicts, and climate change necessitates the collective efforts of diverse stakeholders. Political instability and the lack of decentralized structures, in particular, have had detrimental effects on African cities, leading to governance disruptions, human rights violations, forced displacements, and property destruction. A collaborative approach is crucial for the development of plans and policies that can drive sustainable development. In response, African countries are placing emphasis on inclusive and integrated planning processes, supported by a growing recognition of urbanisation's impact and the increasing adoption of National Urban Policies (NUPs) along with investments in basic services, affordable housing and slum upgrading initiatives. At the same time, efforts to facilitate conflict resolution are incorporating strategies such as humanitarian aid, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding. African cities are also focusing on promoting sustainable recovery and implementing nature-based solutions. Furthermore, aligning global green certifications with housing initiatives is contributing to environmentally conscious urban development. Integrated planning strategies have tremendous potential to overcome these challenges and create more inclusive, equitable, and climate-resilient urban environments.

Achieving spatial inclusion in Sub-Saharan Africa goes beyond mere infrastructure and service provision. It requires an enabling environment with strong governance structures, well-crafted multi-sectoral policies, and strategic spatial plans that promote decentralization and place people at the center of urban planning decisions.

CASE STUDY: NAIROBI RIVER REGENERATION INITIATIVE

The city of Nairobi, Kenya, benefits from the strategic location of three main rivers: Ngong, Mathare, and Nairobi River. However, the rivers have suffered heavy pollution and severe degradation due to illegal waste disposal and discharge of industrial and household wastewater, creating toxic living conditions along the riverbanks and severe degeneration of surrounding urban areas. The condition is attributed to uncollected waste, particularly from the informal settlements that often ends up in the rivers. These informal settlements lack proper water and sanitation facilities, further contributing to the contamination. UN-Habitat in partnership with Nairobi City Country recognized the potential of Nairobi River as a driver for urban regeneration in the city and has undertaken several initiatives towards its restoration. The Nairobi River Regeneration Initiative (NRRI) aims to regenerate the riverbanks and improve the quality of life of settlements along the river. It seeks to support and guide the Government of Kenya, along with relevant ministries, specialised agencies and key stakeholders. This initiative adopted the optimization the Nairobi River system to enhance urban and environmental performance, with an emphasis river governance system and community-led initiatives to drive change. Anchored along the city's three main rivers, the initiative serves as a model for inclusive and sustainable regeneration. This ongoing project involves interventions for creating a vibrant riverfront, adequately addressing local needs and aspirations, while integrating principles of inclusivity, accessibility, safety, and connectivity.⁴⁰ The project was guided by comprehensive and integrated regeneration approaches, including the following components:

- A multi-stakeholder governance model: Nai-

robi River Commission was launched by President William Ruto in 2023, and UN-Habitat and UNEP play leading roles in the Commission as technical advisors for this initiative. In coordination with other stakeholders such as county governments, civil society organizations, private sector actors, and other development partners, the nine-member commission oversees the restoration and regeneration process and aims to unlock the socioeconomic potential of the basin of Nairobi rivers.⁴¹ The political cohesion is core in advancing the social inclusivity of all actors.

- Wide Collaboration with urban actors, such as Public Space Network (PSN), NMS, Architectural Association of Kenya (AAK), Women in Real Estate (WIRE), Planning Systems, Agence Française de Développement (AFD), Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI), and National Lands Commission (NLC).

- Community-led design and implementation of public spaces: The communities and UN-Habitat are co-creating the needs of the community collaboratively through spatial design and implementation. Under the programme, Kamukunji Grounds public space was spatially designed and implemented by the Kamukunji Environmental and Conservation Community (KECC). This group brought together 35 youth groups from the Kamukunji area to reclaim and transform the area along the river. The efforts are evident in a safe recreation park, clear river ecosystem, greening of the park, climate adaptation, social cohesion and contributing significantly to the well-being of the community living around the space. The park has enormous potential to act as a catalyst for urban regeneration and leverage community insights and mobilise bottom-up action for sustainable transformation.⁴⁰

 Nairobi, Kenya

 2021 - ongoing

 City Scale



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APPENDIX A

Regional Division

In this report, the grouping of countries and territories into regions is based on:

- Groups of countries represented by the UN-Habitat's Regional offices for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Arab States, as well as the Project Coordination Office for Commonwealth Independent States (CIS).⁸⁶
- The geographic regions and subregions defined under the Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistical Use (ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/49/Rev.3), also known as M49 Standard of the United Nations Statistics Division. M49 is prepared by the Statistics Division of the United Nations Secretariat for use in publications and databases.⁸⁷
- Regional groupings for the purposes of data collection on the progress towards the Sustainable Development.⁸⁸

Asia and the Pacific | Afghanistan, American Samoa, Australia, Bangladesh, Bermuda, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, China, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China, Macao Special Administrative Region, Christmas Island, Cocos (Keeling) Islands, Cook Islands, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Heard Island and McDonald Islands, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Japan, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Mongolia, Myanmar, Nauru, Nepal, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Norfolk Island, Northern Mariana Islands, Pakistan, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Pitcairn, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, United States minor outlying islands, Vanuatu, Viet Nam, Wallis and Futuna Islands.

Europe and Central Asia | Åland Islands, Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Channel Islands, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Faroe Islands, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Gibraltar, Greece, Greenland, Guernsey, Holy See, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Isle of Man, Italy, Jersey, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Sark, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Svalbard and Jan Mayen Islands, Sweden, Switzerland, North Macedonia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Uzbekistan.

Latin America and the Caribbean | Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba, Bouvet Island, Brazil, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Curaçao, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Falkland Islands (Malvinas), French Guiana, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Martinique, Mexico, Montserrat, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Saint Barthélemy, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Martin (French Part), Saint Pierre and Miquelon, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sint Maarten (Dutch part), South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, United States Virgin Islands, Uruguay, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

Middle East and North Africa (*matches Northern Africa and Western Asia in M49*) | Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Türkiye, United Arab Emirates, Western Sahara, Yemen.

Sub-Saharan Africa | Angola, Benin, Botswana, British Indian Ocean Territory, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, French Southern and Antarctic Territories, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mayotte, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Réunion, Rwanda, Saint Helena, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Eswatini, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

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