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The Evolution of Housing Policy in Bahrain

Submitted By: Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning



Organization Profile

Organization Name: Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning

Organization Type: National government

Website: https://www.housing.gov.bh/

Practice Details

Country(ies): Bahrain

City(ies): Manama

Start Year: 1975

Ongoing: Yes

End Year: N/A

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:

- Housing Affordability & Financing
- Social Housing
- Housing Rights & Social Inclusion
- Housing Policy, Legislation & Governance

Relevant SDGs:



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Problem & Context

Bahrain's housing policy has evolved through several turning points over six decades. Initially centered on direct government provision of housing through new towns, the model came under pressure from population growth, land scarcity, and fiscal constraints. Reliance on state-built units reduced flexibility and slowed delivery, while eligibility rules unintentionally excluded many groups, such as divorced and widowed women or persons with disabilities, limiting equity. At the same time, urban planning frameworks did not fully embed sustainability, mobility, or digital innovation. These gaps underscored the need for a more inclusive, diversified, and resilient policy—one that expands access, engages the private sector, and aligns with national priorities and global sustainability goals.

Solution Developed

Bahrain's housing policy has evolved from a state-led model of building towns into a comprehensive, inclusive system. For decades, government-built cities reflected the Kingdom's commitment, but growing demand, land scarcity and fiscal pressures required reform. In 2013, the Mazaya Program introduced housing finance with private banks, giving families faster access to ownership. This was expanded by the Government Land Development Program (2019), which institutionalized PPPs and mobilized developers to build on government land at affordable prices. A new generation of financing schemes launched in 2022 gave families immediate, flexible ownership options. In parallel, eligibility reforms broadened access to previously excluded groups such as divorced and widowed women and persons with disabilities, making policy more equitable. Initiatives such as the Muharraq Development Project illustrate the policy's holistic scope, combining housing with cultural heritage preservation and urban revitalization. Together, these reforms built a resilient framework that secures dignified housing, supports family stability and aligns with long-term sustainability.

Implementation

Bahrain's housing policy was implemented through phased reforms combining state provision, partnerships, and innovation. The journey began with government-built towns such as Isa Town and Hamad Town, later expanded to five new sustainable housing cities—Salman, Khalifa, Hidd, Sitra, and Al Ramli—designed with schools, clinics, green areas, and transport links to deliver complete communities. In 2013, the Mazaya Program introduced housing finance in partnership with private banks, offering citizens faster access to ownership. This was scaled in 2019 through the Government Land Development Program, which formalized PPPs and mobilized developers to build affordable units on government land. In 2022, new schemes like Tas'heel and Enhanced Mazaya further diversified finance.

Delivery relied on a broad coalition: the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning provided policy direction and oversight; Eskan Bank developed financing tools; commercial banks supplied

competitive mortgages; real estate developers delivered housing projects; and civil society groups contributed feedback to ensure responsiveness. Legislative reforms, including revisions to Law 909, modernized eligibility and zoning. Public budgets and private investment sustained delivery, while Bahrain's model of sustainable, smart housing cities earned international recognition.

Enablers & Obstacles

The evolution of Bahrain's housing policy was enabled by strong political will and visionary leadership from His Majesty the King and HRH the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, ensuring housing remained a constitutional and national priority. The Economic Vision 2030 and ongoing revisions to Law 909 created a solid policy framework promoting inclusivity, innovation, and partnership. Public–private collaboration, digital transformation covering nearly 100% of services, and citizen engagement strengthened efficiency, transparency, and responsiveness.

Key challenges included aligning pricing with financing capacities and shifting institutions from a state-led to a partnership-driven, technology-enabled model. These were addressed through regulatory reforms, close coordination with developers and banks, and adaptive policy updates. Together, these enablers ensured the continuity, scalability, and resilience of Bahrain's evolving housing system.

Results & Impact

Bahrain's housing policy achieved measurable transformation and inclusivity. Guided by Vision 2030, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning delivered thousands of ownership services across all governorates, benefiting over 19,000 families through diverse financing schemes. The ministry digitized nearly all housing services, enabling transparent, efficient, and citizen-centered access. Revised eligibility rules expanded access for women, persons with disabilities, and low-income families, while the Government Land Development Program advanced seven PPP projects for over 4,000 new units. These reforms reduced the national housing waiting list by 17% and generated BHD 1.8 billion in economic activity, stimulating construction, banking, and real estate sectors. Beyond numbers, Bahrain's integrated towns and heritage projects—such as the Muharraq Development Project—enhance livability, sustainability, and social equity for future generations.

Replication & Scale Up

Bahrain's model is highly replicable because it rests on universal principles: strong political will, clear national housing vision, and structured PPP frameworks. By leveraging government land, mobilizing private developers, engaging commercial banks for flexible finance, and using digital platforms like Baity to link citizens with options, other regions can adapt this approach if they ensure enabling policies, cross-sector trust, and community-focused design.

Scaling up requires deepening PPPs, expanding financing options, and broadening digital platforms like Baity across regions. By standardizing eligibility policies, integrating smart technologies, and diversifying schemes such as Tas'heel+ and land development programs, the model can serve more households quickly. Regional cooperation and knowledge-sharing will enable countries to tailor the approach to their own demographic, fiscal, and land contexts.

Policy Uptake

This housing practice has been fully adopted into formal policy frameworks and legislation, and is being implemented at scale with institutional support.

Bahrain's housing policy is now fully institutionalized within national legislation and government frameworks. The revised Law 909 codifies inclusive eligibility, while programs like Mazaya, Tas'heel, and the Government Land Development Program are embedded in formal policy. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, supported by Eskan Bank and private partners, ensures large-scale delivery through integrated financing, digital systems, and continuous legislative oversight—making housing reform a permanent pillar of national policy.

Lessons & Takeaways

Bahrain's housing policy reform revealed the importance of continuous stakeholder engagement and adaptive legislation. Early stages showed that rigid eligibility criteria limited inclusivity; revising Law 909 to reflect citizens' realities was key. In hindsight, earlier integration of digital systems and clearer coordination among institutions could have accelerated reform. The main takeaway is that housing policy must remain flexible, data-driven, and responsive to social change.