



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nearly half of humanity may be affected by a global crisis in housing, according to a new UN report

Study shows shortages of adequate and affordable housing have risen by 30 per cent in just over a decade to more than 268 million units, with 1.1 billion people living in slums or informal settlements.

Baku, 19 May 2026 – 3 billion people – close to 40 per cent of the world’s population – are caught up in an adequate housing crisis which entails unaffordable prices, housing shortages, poor-quality accommodation, and lack of access to adequate urban services like water and sanitation, according to a new United Nations report. Cities are expected to absorb 2 billion additional residents by 2050, intensifying pressure on housing systems already strained by rapid urbanization, rising land values, widening inequality, and climate impacts. Climate-related hazards are projected to destroy 167 million homes by 2040. In 2023, natural catastrophes caused USD 280 billion in losses, most of which were uninsured.

By the end of 2024, 123.2 million people were forcibly displaced – double the figure of the previous decade. An additional 64 million people were displaced from informal settlements over the past two decades. Many forcibly displaced people move to cities as refugees or displaced persons camps, often settling in insecure or substandard housing where they face further displacement risks. Informal housing represents up to 80 per cent of residential construction in developing countries.

Housing prices have risen faster than incomes in most regions: globally, price-to-income ratios increased from 9.3 in 2010 to 11.2 in 2023, reaching 16.8 in Central and Southern Asia. In 2023, only 25.5 per cent of applicants successfully obtained a housing loan globally, with access falling as low as 1 per cent in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, where the housing mortgage markets are in early stage of development. Human rights violations are deeply intertwined with the global housing crisis, as many states fail to prevent displacements, forced evictions, insecure tenure, homelessness, and precarious living conditions.

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Globally, 44 per cent of households spend over 30 per cent of income on housing, with rental unaffordability most severe in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 55 per cent of renters are overburdened. Domestic finance, across governance levels at the national, regional and local levels need to better target effective demand and supply side subsidies to bridge these affordability gaps.

UN-Habitat, the UN agency for sustainable housing and urban development, in its [*World Cities Report 2026, Global Housing Crisis: Pathways to Action*](#) released today finds that the global housing crisis is multidimensional and underpinned by structural drivers. This report shows that the manifestation of the crisis is compounded further by demographic change, environmental pressures, and evolving economic conditions, further exacerbating broader human development gaps, including inequality, poverty, and vulnerability to climate shocks.

The *World Cities Report 2026: Global Housing Crisis: Pathways to Action* however also finds that the housing crisis can be solved. It urges that it is time to stop treating slums and informal settlements as an insolvable problem as informality has been the norm rather than the exception across cities. Policy responses must therefore shift from eradication and exclusion to leveraging informality to improve livelihoods and address the housing crisis. It also highlights that domestic finance, across governance levels at the national, regional and local levels needs to be scaled up and better targeted with effective demand and supply side subsidies to bridge affordability gaps. The report therefore urges a substantial expansion of domestic public investment in social and affordable housing, while also incentivizing private housing investment that increases housing supply, especially in the affordable housing segment. Community participation and co-production, with special attention to the inclusion of marginalized groups, are central to adequate housing at the policy formulation stage, as well as in projects that must be co-designed and implemented alongside residents, ensuring that communities are involved in both the pre- and post-occupation phases.

“A new social contract for adequate and affordable housing is required – a sense of shared responsibility among governments, the private sector and communities to mobilize investment and align the social and economic functions of housing,” said Anacláudia Rossbach, Executive Director of UN-Habitat.

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The report is published to coincide with the thirteenth session of the World Urban Forum (WUF13), the premier global conference on sustainable urban development, which opened in Baku on 17 May.

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About the World Urban Forum

Established by the UN General Assembly in 2001 and convened by UN-Habitat, the World Urban Forum (WUF) is the premier global conference on sustainable urbanization. Held every two years, it examines the impacts of rapid urbanization on cities, communities, economies and climate change. Since its inception, WUF has been hosted in cities around the world, with the first session held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2002.

About UN-Habitat

UN-Habitat is the United Nations entity responsible for sustainable urbanization. With programmes in over 90 countries, it supports policymakers and communities in creating socially and environmentally sustainable cities and towns. UN-Habitat promotes transformative changes in cities through knowledge, policy advice, technical assistance and collaborative action. To learn more, visit unhabitat.org or follow us on social media @UNHABITAT.