



ISSUE BRIEF

Towards inclusive and resilient human settlements



Adequate housing is foundational to inclusive, resilient cities and human settlements.

Adequate housing is a fundamental element of sustainable development, contributing to better health, education, and economic well-being. Large-scale improvements in housing in informal settlements can increase life expectancy by up to 4%, improve educational attainment by as much as 28% and generate economic gains of up to 10.5%¹. A core indicator of Sustainable Development Goal 11—inclusive and sustainable—housing not only supports individual wellbeing but also strengthens long-term social and economic resilience, making it essential for achieving equitable and sustainable development outcomes.

In Asia and the Pacific, home to more than 2.2 billion urban residents, and over half of the world's megacities^{2,3}, the urgency of accelerating access to adequate housing and sustainable development is especially pronounced. The region's high exposure to climate-related disasters and the rapid growth of informal settlements intensify pressure on cities to ensure safe, resilient and well serviced living environments. Yet urban areas also produce nearly 80% of the region's gross domestic product, underscoring their potential to drive poverty reduction, foster inclusion and accelerate climate action⁴. Progress toward SDG 11 is therefore vital: it provides the framework for transforming cities and settlements into inclusive, safe and resilient hubs capable of managing rapid urbanization while safeguarding communities from escalating environmental risks.

Despite its importance, progress toward the achievement of SDG 11 remains fragmented and uneven, with only one indicator (11.1.b) currently on track to be achieved by 2030⁴. Approximately 600 million people in the region lack access to adequate housing. Without decisive interventions, this figure could escalate to more than one billion by 2050⁵. The challenge is compounded by growing threats from climate and environmental hazards, including extreme heat, flooding, land subsidence, water stress and pollution. These risks disproportionately affect vulnerable groups—such as women, children, older adults, low-income households, migrants, displaced persons and persons with disabilities—who often face systemic barriers to accessing adequate housing, community infrastructure, and basic services. Conventional housing delivery models are proving insufficient to meet the surging demand in rapidly urbanizing areas.

Nevertheless, promising developments are emerging. Innovative housing solutions, policy reforms and community-led approaches across the region demonstrate the potential for sustainable and inclusive housing models. Addressing the housing crisis requires an integrated, multi-stakeholder approach that fosters partnerships, raises awareness of regional challenges and priorities and informs evidence-based policies and programs.

Progress on SDG 11 indicators

According to the Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2025 by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, just one of the SDG 11 indicators is on track to be achieved by 2030.

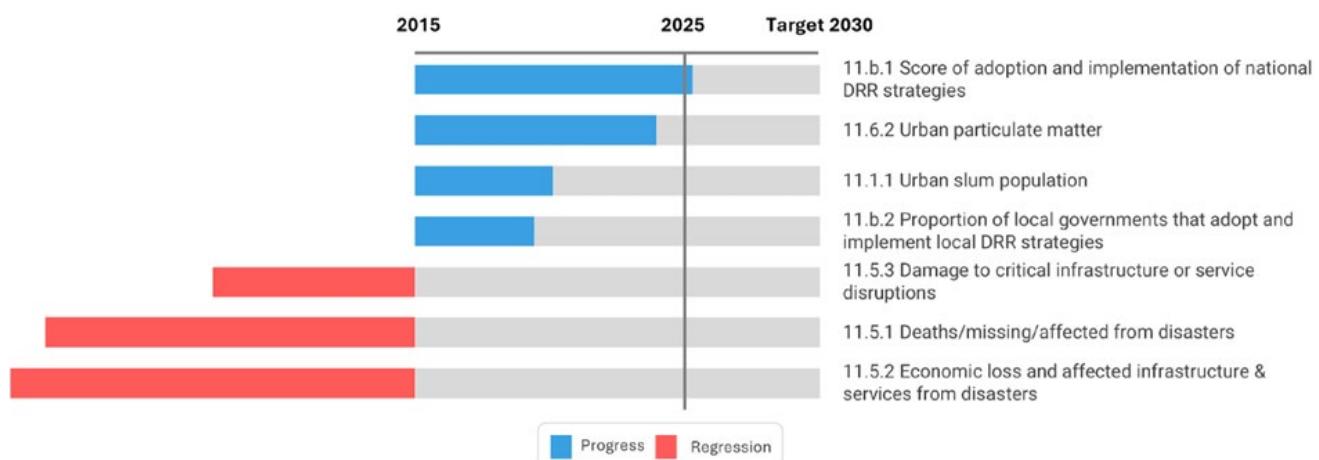


Figure 1: Progress on SDG 11 indicators toward the 2030 targets⁶

¹ Frediani, A.A.; Coccia, C.; and Roche, J.M. (2023). *Improving Housing in Informal Settlements: Assessing the Impacts in Human Development*. Habitat for Humanity International. <https://www.habitat.org/home-equals/launch-report>.

² According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, a megacity is an urban agglomeration of over 10 million people.

³ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, or ESCAP. (2025). *Urban Transformation in Asia and the Pacific. From Growth to Resilience*. <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2025/urban-transformation-asia-and-pacific-growth-resilience>.

⁴ ESCAP. (2025). *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2025: Engaging Communities to Close the Evidence Gap*. <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2025/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2025>.

⁵ The United Nations Human Settlements Programme, or UN-Habitat. (2024). *Adequate Housing for All Annual Report*. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2025/05/annual_report_2025_final.pdf.

⁶ ESCAP. (2026). *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2026*. <https://www.unescap.org/>.

Snapshot of the progress on SDG 11 indicators in relation to housing

- **11.b.1: National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategies and 11.b.2: Local Governments Adopting DRR Strategies.** Significant progress has been observed under Indicator 11.b.1, with 33 countries in the Asia-Pacific region adopting and implementing national DRR strategies in alignment with the Sendai Framework. Nevertheless, challenges persist at the implementation level due to data and resource constraints. Most climate migration flows towards informal settlements, which are already strapped by inadequate access to basic services and resilient housing. Overlooking the intersection between disaster risks and housing keeps residents of informal settlements most vulnerable⁷. Without effective operationalization of DRR strategies, loss of land, loss of property—including housing—and impact of disasters on people persist. Meanwhile, climate and disasters increase the housing need. Conversely, housing that fails to consider resilience and DRR components can create climate and hazard related vulnerabilities.
- **11.1.1: Urban Slum Population.** Policy reforms and upgrading programs have contributed to a steady decline in people living in slums in the Asia-Pacific region, yet more than 600 million people continue to live in informal settlements. With continued urbanization and climate-induced migration projected to intensify, the expansion of urban slums is anticipated, underscoring the urgent need to scale up innovative housing delivery models.
- **1.5.1: Disaster Impacts (Death/Missing Persons/Affected by Disasters).** Over the past decade, the number of people affected by disasters in the region has more than doubled—from 1,303 to 2,957 per 100,000 population. In 2024 alone, 24.1 million people were displaced by disasters, representing over half of the global total⁸. Resilient housing, community infrastructure and disaster preparedness plans at the settlement level can reduce the impact of disasters on people. Ensuring access to adequate housing is foundational for communities and cities to anticipate shocks, withstand their impacts and recover effectively while supporting long-term social, economic and environmental resilience.
- **11.5.2: Economic and Infrastructure Losses.** Over the past two decades, the Asia-Pacific region has reported 75% of global disaster-related economic losses. In many countries, these losses often exceed 6% of annual GDP resulting in debt vulnerabilities. Resilient community infrastructure can minimize the economic and infrastructure losses experienced due to disasters. There is a projected investment need of US\$26 trillion between 2016 to 2030 (US\$1.7 trillion per year) in Asia to maintain growth momentum, tackle poverty and respond to climate change. Though the housing investment needed through this period is unclear, water and sanitation costs alone are projected to be \$800 billion⁹.

Recommended actions

The following recommended actions are developed based on available data and input from regional stakeholders working in the urban and housing environment in the Asia-Pacific region. Key recommendations are derived from the “Regional Dialogue on Adequate and Environmentally Sustainable Housing in the Asia-Pacific Region” side event held at the ESCAP’s 81st session, the Regional Partners Forum and the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development’s 2026 regional SDG 11 profile. Prioritized focus and collaboration amongst stakeholders on the following four key areas can accelerate inclusive, safe and resilient human settlements in the region.

Strengthen inclusive governance and planning

Governance is the make-or-break factor in ensuring access to adequate housing, infrastructure and basic services in cities¹⁰. However, existing governance models are frequently characterized by siloed structures, reactive approaches, and limited adaptability. These models often fail to account for the complex realities of urban contexts and, in certain instances, may inadvertently exacerbate existing vulnerabilities¹¹. Housing practitioners and stakeholders have raised the lack of political will as a challenge for access to equitable housing in the region.

At the implementation level, local governments face persistent resource limitations and capacity constraints. Through partnerships, local governments can increase knowledge and capacity to strengthen inclusive governance and planning. This enables local governments to embed social inclusion, equity, resilience and circular economy principles into policy and planning, and efficiently operationalize the policies through programs with partners. Modern day solutions require comprehension of the complexity and interconnectedness of urban systems and the ability to arrive at integrated and participatory approaches.

Invest in localized data for evidence-based decision-making

UN-Habitat’s Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group on Housing identified insufficient data as a critical barrier to accessing adequate housing for all¹². Reliable and comprehensive data is essential for designing evidence-based housing solutions that respond to the complexity and interconnectedness of urban systems. However, significant knowledge gaps persist, making it challenging for policymakers to prioritize interventions and formulate informed policies and programs.

⁷ Habitat for Humanity. (2024). *Slum Blind: The overlooked links between climate migration and informal settlements*. https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/ClimateMigration_IssueBrief.pdf

⁸ ESCAP. (2025). *Outcome Report of the 2025 Regional Partners Forum on Sustainable Urban Development*, Format Edited_Regional_Partners_Forum_2025_Outcome_Report_Draft 20251024.pdf

⁹ Asian Development Bank (ADB). (2017). *Meeting Asia's Infrastructure Needs*, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/227496/special-report-infrastructure.pdf>

¹⁰ United Nations Development Programme. (2026). *Rethinking Urban Governance for Tomorrow's Cities in Asia-Pacific*. <https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/publications/rethinking-urban-governance-tomorrows-cities-asia-pacific>

¹¹ Paddison & McCollin-Norris. (2024). *Rethinking Development Through Anticipatory, Agile and Adaptive Governance*. <https://www.unescap.org/blog/rethinking-development-through-anticipatory-agile-and-adaptive-governance>

¹² UN-Habitat. (2024). *Regional Trends, Projects and Challenges on Housing in Asia and the Pacific Region*. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2024/12/_20241209_agenda_item_5_asia_regionrap-final.pdf

These gaps not only hinder the development of evidence-based approaches but also impede the ability to monitor progress and assess national performance in housing. Many SDG indicators either lack sufficient data points or have none, such as Indicator 11.3.2: Civil society participation in urban planning and management and Indicator 11.c.1: ODA to the infrastructure and project⁶.

Strengthening local and participatory data systems, harmonizing reporting from local to global levels and investing in research are foundational to ensuring equitable access to adequate housing. Innovative approaches—such as leveraging technology, incorporating marginalized voices and implementing real-time digital monitoring—offer promising pathways to close data gaps and enable evidence-based decision-making. For example, scaling up people-centered voluntary local reviews, or VLR, to strengthen local action and improve data for SDGs can enable thorough reviews of available data, identify reporting gaps and adapt existing information for localized SDG and VLR use¹³.

Advance regional cooperation and knowledge sharing

At the Urban Housing Practitioners Hub Exploratory Workshop held during the 2023 Asia-Pacific Urban Forum, regional stakeholders observed that the Asia-Pacific region has strong sector-based and thematic coalitions and networks that work in urban issues that are interconnected with housing and the built environment. Examples include alliances of community-based organizations such as the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights and networks of local governments such as United Cities and Local Governments, CityNet and ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability.

Despite best efforts from stakeholders across the region, progress toward SDG 11 remains fragmented and uneven. Advancing regional cooperation and knowledge sharing among stakeholders is therefore critical to exchange information, disseminate best practices, co-create solutions, strengthen capacities and reinforce existing networks. To strengthen collaborative governance mechanisms for inclusive housing and equitable access to basic services, stakeholders recommend the establishment of or reinforcement of existing multi-stakeholder platforms to enable integrated planning, shared accountability and inclusive participation⁸. Enhanced partnerships can facilitate resource sharing, minimize duplication of efforts and enable the scaling of successful urban interventions across the region. Championing one another's efforts can pave the way for inclusive, safe and resilient human settlements.

Expand targeted financial support and incentives for community-led interventions

Partnerships that position communities at the forefront are essential for advancing inclusive, safe and resilient human settlements. Individuals most in need of adequate housing often face barriers to participating in public consultations and are frequently overlooked, limiting opportunities to share their lived experiences. Enabling communities to lead their housing journeys—from determining location and design to construction and long-term management—can foster ownership and sustainability.

Community-led interventions offer significant benefits. For example, community-driven surveying and advocacy have resulted in informal settlements being recognized on municipal maps and included in service provision, while community-led preparedness plans have been integrated into local adaptation strategies¹⁴. To promote and replicate these community-led interventions, communities require targeted support to strengthen their knowledge and skills in housing, project management and maintenance. They also need access to networks and platforms to facilitate peer learning, share experiences and articulate needs effectively.

Key stakeholders in the region emphasize that achieving inclusive housing and equitable access to basic services will require broadening targeted financial support and incentives—such as pro-poor financing mechanisms, concessional lending and cooperative subsidies, while also promoting blended finance to scale investments in social and affordable housing¹⁴, poor financing mechanisms, concessional lending and cooperative subsidies

Institutionalize progressive, resilient policies and leverage social capital

Community-led interventions do offer significant benefits, yet the current housing challenges cannot be addressed through short-term projects alone. They require progressive and resilient policy frameworks embedded within government systems¹⁵. Efforts are required to update regulatory frameworks to reflect community-led interventions such as community land trusts, participatory upgrading and inclusive tenure systems.

Given the Asia-Pacific region's vulnerability to disasters, it is imperative to integrate climate risk assessments, nature-based solutions and adaptive building standards into housing policies¹⁴. Leveraging social capital can ensure preparedness, inclusion and accountability in the path toward resilient and inclusive housing and equitable access to basic services.

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¹³ Urbanice Malaysia and Kuala Lumpur Voluntary Local Review. (2022). *Implementing the 2030 Agenda in Kuala Lumpur*. <https://www.urbansdgplatform.org/upload/csd/FULL%20REPORT.pdf>.

¹⁴ Asian Coalition for Housing Rights. (2022). *Housing by People in Asia*. http://www.achr.net/upload/downloads/file_220517135816.pdf.

¹⁵ International Institute for Environment and Development. (2025). *Community-led Housing in the Global South Working Paper*. <https://www.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2025-05/22625iied.pdf>.