

Home at What Cost?

Financial pressure is weakening housing security
and putting homeownership further out of reach

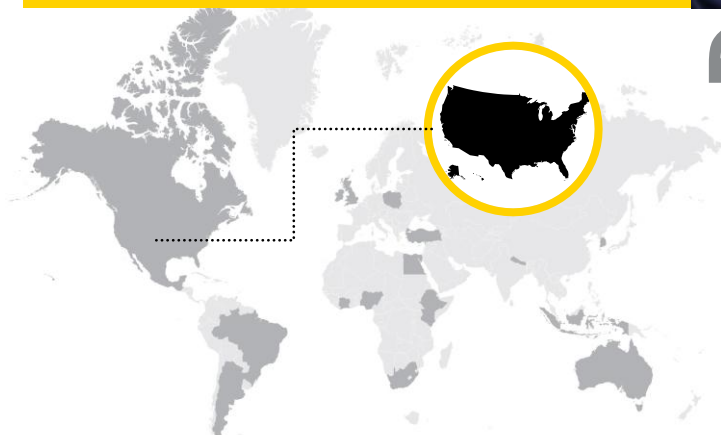
United States at a glance

68% of respondents in the U.S.
cut back on at least one
expense to afford housing
costs in the past year.

76% agree that rising housing
costs make becoming a
homeowner more difficult.

59% believe the U.S. housing
system is broken or does
not work.

● ■ ● Global Housing Research 2026



“

The word 'home' means to me a place where we have all the necessities we need; it is a place where family and friends can bond together and create special memories, and it is somewhere you can be comfortable and safe without any problems and stress.”

– A woman from the U.S. with a low income who rents her home, aged 25-34.

4.9 million

housing units needed

12%

of households face high
housing costs

65.9%

of households own their home

Source: World Cities Report

Habitat for Humanity International contracted Edelman Intelligence to conduct an approximately 20-minute survey between **April 10 and June 30, 2026**.

- The United States was one of 22 countries surveyed globally, with 30,758 respondents in total.
- **National sample: 1,000 U.S. adults** were surveyed online, with quotas for age, gender, region and income to reflect the national adult population. Results were weighted against relevant demographic benchmarks.
- **Low-income boost:** An additional **300 low-income respondents** were surveyed online to strengthen subgroup analysis; in the U.S., “low income” was defined as household income below **\$2,000 per month before tax**.
- **Informal arrangements boost: 100 additional respondents** experiencing informal housing arrangements were interviewed face-to-face in **New York City, Phoenix and Los Angeles**. This refers to respondents who reported living without formal housing documentation, in temporary accommodation, or in other non-formal housing arrangements.
- **Total U.S. sample: N=1,400.** Targeted boost samples are not independently nationally representative, and results specific to this subpopulation are descriptive.
- Responses underwent data-quality checks, and significance testing used a **95% confidence level**.
- Differences between demographic subgroups discussed are statistically significant at the **95% confidence level**.

Housing stability isn't shared equally

The United States appears more stable than many of the 21 countries included in Habitat's global survey, yet the findings reveal that housing security is increasingly fragile for a substantial share of households, particularly renters and those aspiring to become homeowners. Nearly half of U.S. respondents (**46%**) worry that a single unexpected setback could threaten their ability to remain housed, comparable to the global average of **48%**. While not a majority, it represents nearly 1 in 2 households with limited financial resilience. A job loss, unexpected medical expense, rent increase, insurance premium hike or major home repair could quickly destabilize households that have little financial cushion, suggesting that many Americans are facing growing financial vulnerability even as they maintain housing stability.

Other survey findings reinforce this vulnerability. More than one-third of respondents (**37%**) identify housing as one of the biggest sources of stress in their lives. To afford housing costs, **68%** cut back on at least one household expense during the past year, including **37%** who reduced spending on food. These findings suggest many households are managing rising housing costs through difficult trade-offs elsewhere in their lives.

The pressure is particularly evident among renters. Although housing affordability affects households across tenure types, renters face greater exposure to rising housing costs, displacement risks and barriers to future homeownership. More than half of renters (**58%**) worry that one unexpected problem could threaten their ability to remain housed, compared with

38% of homeowners. Renters are also more likely to report cutting household expenses to afford housing (**81%**, compared with **59%** of homeowners) and to describe housing as a major source of stress (**41%**, compared with **32%** of homeowners).

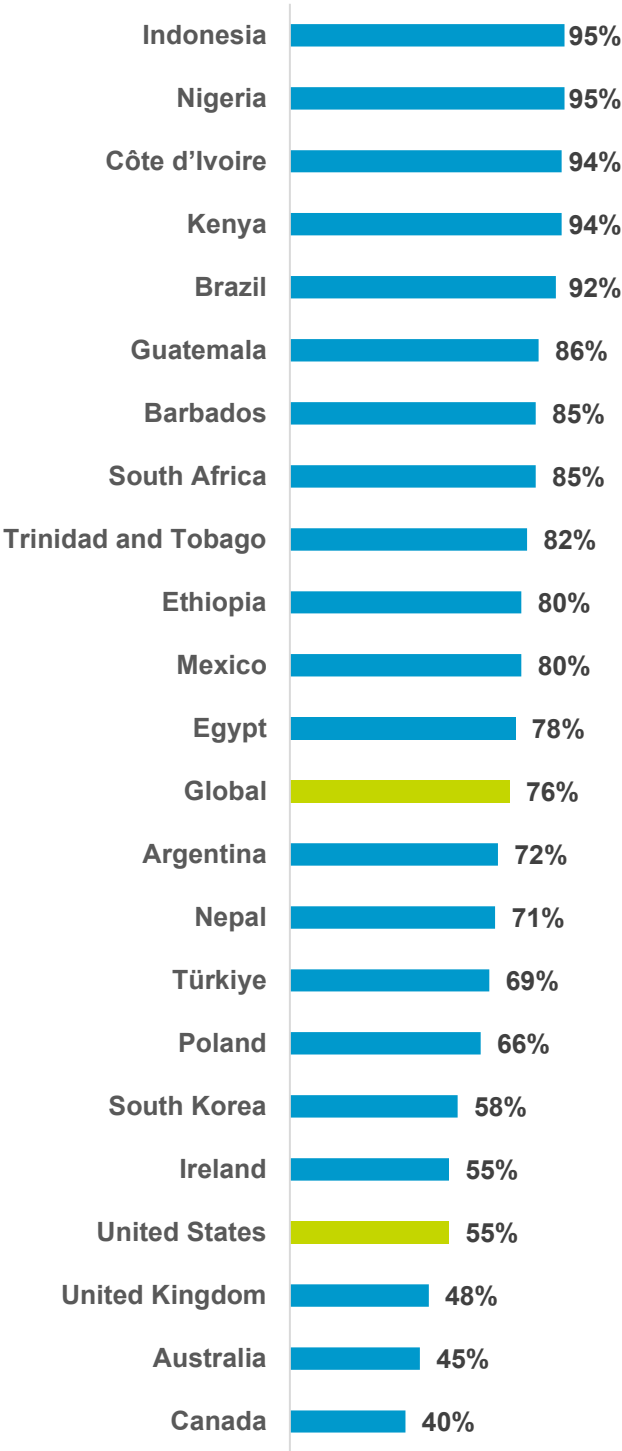
These experiences reflect broader housing market conditions. According to the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies, 43.5 million U.S. households were cost-burdened in 2024, spending more than 30% of their income on housing, while 21.6 million were severely cost-burdened, spending more than half of their income on housing. Renters face especially acute challenges: in 2024, a record 22.7 million renter households (49% of all renters) were cost-burdened.¹

Homeownership has long provided a pathway to stability and wealth building in the United States, but many Americans increasingly question whether it remains within reach. Fully **76%** of respondents agree that rising housing costs make it difficult to become a homeowner. Among renters, only **52%** expect to own a home in the future, less than the global average of **76%**. This suggests growing skepticism that homeownership remains attainable for many households.



1. <https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/blog/housing-unaffordability-soared-new-highs-2024>

Percentage of non-homeowners who expect to own a home at some point in their life



Among renters who do not expect to purchase a home, the leading barriers are overwhelmingly financial. More than half (**51%**) say homes are too expensive, **51%** report that their incomes are not high enough, and **48%** lack sufficient savings for a down payment. Together, these findings suggest affordability is the primary barrier to homeownership.

External housing market indicators reinforce these perceptions. National estimates suggest the United States faces a housing supply shortfall of several million homes, contributing to elevated prices and reduced affordability. This affordability challenge is reflected in the median age of first-time homebuyers, now 40, compared with 28 in 1991.²

The consequences extend beyond housing itself, shaping major life decisions. Nearly half of respondents (**49%**) say housing costs make it difficult to consider starting a family, while **53%** of parents worry that housing costs limit opportunities available to their children. Among Gen Z and Millennials, **63%** report that housing costs make starting a family more difficult, compared with **37%** of older generations.

Against this backdrop, confidence in the housing system is weakening. A majority of respondents (**59%**) agree that the housing system is broken or does not work. Only **38%** believe housing is treated as a serious national priority, and **35%** think existing policies effectively address housing challenges. At the same time, the findings indicate support for solutions: **70%** of respondents would welcome more affordable or social housing in their community. These findings suggest many Americans view housing challenges not simply as the result of individual circumstances, but as systemic problems requiring collective action.

The findings ultimately point to a growing gap between remaining housed and feeling secure in one's housing. While most Americans report satisfaction with their current housing situation, many are navigating rising costs, making financial sacrifices, and questioning whether stable housing and homeownership will remain attainable in the future. Ensuring that renters can achieve greater housing stability and that aspiring homeowners have a viable pathway to ownership may therefore be central to strengthening housing security and opportunity in the United States.

“ For me, home is place where I can go after a long and stressful day of work. It’s a place where I can get to see my children and spend time with them and be myself with my loved ones.”

– A man from the U.S. with a high income who owns his home, aged 18-24.

2. <https://www.nar.realtor/press-releases/first-time-home-buyer-share-falls-to-historic-low-of-21-median-age-rises-to-40>

Promising practice

For generations, systemic barriers have limited access to homeownership for many Black families in the United States, restricting opportunities to build wealth, stability and security across generations. Habitat for Humanity's **Advancing Black Homeownership** initiative responds to this challenge by pairing affordable homeownership opportunities with efforts to address the structural barriers that have historically excluded many households from the housing market. The initiative works to evolve policies and practices that expand access to Habitat homeownership for Black homebuyers and others facing barriers to homeownership.

Across the country, local Habitat organizations are adapting the initiative to meet the needs of their community. In Massachusetts, neighborhood partnerships expanded outreach, connected residents to housing opportunities and strengthened revitalization efforts. In South Carolina, facilitated gatherings known as Common Ground bring together local organizations, elected officials and

community members to develop shared solutions to housing and community challenges. In Missouri, collaborations between employers, local governments and Habitat organizations have combined financial coaching, homebuyer education and down payment assistance to help workers access stable housing. Other efforts have focused on preserving generational wealth, including culturally responsive estate-planning clinics in Louisiana that help homeowners protect and pass on housing assets to future generations.

The initiative recognizes that expanding homeownership requires more than building homes. By strengthening partnerships, expanding financial education, supporting wealth preservation and advancing more equitable housing systems, the initiative addresses both immediate needs and longer-term inequities. Advancing Black Homeownership demonstrates how collaboration, trust and sustained investment can create more inclusive pathways to homeownership, housing security, and opportunity.

Recommendations for action

Meeting this moment requires sustained public will, bold policy leadership and broad civic engagement. Through Habitat Voices in Action, advocates across the country are demonstrating that meaningful change happens when community members, volunteers, housing leaders and policymakers work together to advance solutions. To create lasting impact, leaders at every level of government must pursue a comprehensive housing agenda that increases the supply of affordable homes, particularly for homeownership, broadens homeownership access, and bolsters resilience. These priorities reflect a simple reality: a home is a platform for opportunity. A safe, stable and affordable home supports health, educational attainment, economic mobility, financial resilience, and stronger communities.

Everyone has a role to play. Individuals can learn about housing challenges in their communities, connect with local housing and community organizations, and share their experiences and perspectives with decision-makers. Advocates can help build support for housing solutions by participating in public meetings, engaging elected officials, joining coalitions, and encouraging others to take action. Employers, faith communities, businesses, and civic organizations can also contribute by supporting local housing efforts and elevating housing as a community priority. Now is the time to strengthen our collective commitment to ensuring everyone has a safe, decent and affordable place to call home.

Learn more at [Habitat Voices in Action](#)



The numbers behind the story

Survey question	U.S.	Global	Homeowners	Renters
In the past 12 months, to help afford housing costs, have you had to do any of the following for yourself or for those you support? (percentage reporting at least one action)	68%	75%	59%	81%
I worry that one unexpected problem could threaten my ability to stay housed. (percentage agreeing)	46%	48%	38%	58%
My housing situation is one of the biggest sources of stress in my life. (percentage agreeing)	37%	35%	32%	41%
Housing costs make it difficult to consider starting a family. (percentage agreeing)	49%	56%	46%	50%
Rising housing costs make it difficult for people to become homeowners. (percentage agreeing)	76%	81%	74%	79%
I expect to own a home at some point in my life. (percentage agreeing)	55%	76%	N/A	52%
I worry that housing costs are limiting the opportunities I can give the children under my care. (percentage agreeing)	53%	58%	51%	62%
I expect extreme weather to make living where I am harder (for example, more extreme heat, storms or flooding). (percentage agreeing)	30%	30%	31%	25%
The housing system in my country is broken or does not work. (percentage agreeing)	59%	56%	52%	65%
Safe and decent housing is a basic human right. (percentage agreeing)	81%	89%	79%	84%
I would welcome more affordable or social housing in the area I live. (percentage agreeing)	70%	77%	63%	80%
Housing policies in my country are effective in addressing housing problems. (percentage agreeing)	24%	34%	24%	32%

