



Housing For All: A Better Urban Future

Having an adequate home is now, more than ever, a matter of life and death. As COVID-19 continues to spread, people have been told to stay at home, but this simple measure is impossible for people who do not have adequate housing.

At the same time, COVID-19 has reminded us that home is much more than just a roof. To make us feel safe and enable us to continue living, working and learning, a home needs to be secure, to allow us to access basic services and infrastructure for hygiene measures and to have enough room for physical distancing. It should also be located in a place that enables residents to access public green and open spaces, employment opportunities, health-care services, schools, childcare centres and other social facilities.

An estimated 1.8 billion people were already living in slums and informal settlements, inadequate housing or in homelessness in our cities worldwide before the pandemic began. Some 3 billion people lack basic hand-washing facilities. This means millions of people worldwide are more likely to experience poor health due to the absence of basic services and exposure to multiple socio-economic and environmental hazards.

Structural inequalities have been highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, showing how people from minorities, indigenous peoples and migrants are disproportionately affected by housing precarity, overcrowding and homelessness.

COVID-19 has spread in areas where people lack adequate housing, and are faced with inequalities and poverty. Residents in these areas are also often not recognized by the authorities or protected and face the risk of being evicted and relocated, particularly in times of crisis. According to ILO, 55 per cent of the world's population – about 4 billion people – do not benefit from any form of social protection.

Housing is a human right and a catalyst for all other fundamental rights. It is the only way to ensure the **“Right to the City for All”**.

Inclusive, affordable and adequate housing is the key to the sustainable transformation of our cities and communities. Sustainable Development Goal 11 aims for resilient, inclusive, safe, diverse cities by 2030 and one of the targets is access to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services for all by 2030 and the upgrading of slums.

The COVID-19 crisis is showing how success comes from collaboration and is giving new momentum to the idea that ensuring housing rights for all is a shared responsibility.

The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated the power of communities and people's ability to adapt and find local and innovative solutions. It has also shown that it is possible to quickly address housing emergencies as local and national governments provide temporary solutions including:

- Short term and emergency accommodation for people without secure housing through underutilized spaces and repurposing of buildings.
- Moratoriums on evictions due to rental and mortgage arrears or forced evictions of informal settlements and slums along with suspension of utility costs and surcharges for the duration of the pandemic.
- Access to buildings, land and open space for essential small businesses, food security, emergency health care and other vital functions needed while people stay at home.

While these steps are timely and important, they need to become sustainable long-term changes enshrined in policy and legislation. The pandemic has demonstrated the importance of a people-centred approach as housing is as vital for the character, shape and socio-economic vibrancy of cities as it is to public health outcomes.

Housing is the building block of people's health, dignity, safety, well-being and inclusion.

Health: Adequate housing is a first line of defence against a number of health risks. It helps reduce the spread of diseases and enables people to follow sanitary protocols.

Dignity: Having an adequate house is an essential condition for living in dignity. Accessibility of housing is key particularly, for people with disabilities, older persons or people with other cultural, social or health-related needs.

Well-being: Adequate housing provides the basis for belonging and the well-being of people enabling them to grow, engage, live, work and learn together. Community spaces and shared facilities for diverse population groups, needs and cultural activities must be considered when designing houses and settlements and planning for a better urban future.

Safety: An adequate physical shelter protects people against multiple safety risks. With the increase of extreme weather events, housing for all contributes to building the resilience of communities and cities to climate change.

Inclusion: The stability of a safe home is essential to ensure social and economic inclusion as part of a neighbourhood and community and to access jobs and livelihoods. Building better homes with people ensures that neighbourhoods are vibrant and integrated with diverse housing solutions and use which meet the needs of everyone.

Housing is a shared responsibility.

Adequate housing for all will depend on strengthened and coordinated efforts including from national and local governments. Local authorities are key actors in ensuring that all citizens stay safe and protected. National governments are critical for supporting local decision-makers by empowering them to take preventative action and make effective decisions.

Other partners include civil society organizations building partnerships with residents, private sector mobilizing resources for options including rentals, housing preservation and rehabilitation and the international community mobilizing support for housing.

People must be empowered and equipped to contribute to and shape the housing where they live. We need to facilitate the right framing and incentives for unlocking long-term political commitment, creativity, investment and local ownership for housing all in our future cities.