

# Research Report

**Forum:** Special conference

**Issue:** ensure all have access to quality, safe housing and basic services

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**Position:** chair

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## Introduction

Everyone has a fundamental human right to basic services and housing, which ensures access to a safe, habitable, secure, and affordable home. The government has the obligation to guarantee that everybody has access to the basic services and safe housing in order to live in peace, security and dignity. This right must be provided to all persons irrespective of income or access to economic resources. We also need to ensure that groups or individuals are not treated differently on the basis of their gender, race or religion.

## General Overview

Multiple studies have shown that a person's health is influenced by his or her economic and social situation. Access to affordable and quality housing is one such determinant of health. Housing that poses a risk to the physical wellbeing of its occupants and visitors is a big public health issue. It led to 13.5 million non-fatal injuries in and around the home. 2900 people also died in house fires because of the substandard housing. The quality of someone's environment and home can impact his or her health both in the future and present. Good and safe housing gives families a base to build the foundations of society. The right to affordable housing is promised in the laws and constitutions of more than 100 countries, but these rights are often inadequately implemented. There is at the moment a worldwide shortage of affordable housing. Most of the people that live in low-income neighbourhoods and have poor housing conditions come from minority and immigrant backgrounds. We need to improve the access to affordable and quality housing. Some programs target the homeless and seek to educate people about indoor environmental quality and eliminating toxins from the home.



Informal urban housing, like this in Mumbai, is all that many new city-dwellers can afford.

The United Nations together with businesses and governments has started to mobilize efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Agenda by 2030. The Agenda calls for action by all countries to improve the lives of people everywhere. The Sustainable Development Goals are a call to action to ensure all people enjoy peace and prosperity. These 17 Goals build on the successes of the Millennium Development Goals, while including new areas such as economic inequality and sustainable consumption. Local governments are responsible for the provision of water, electricity and sanitation services to households. The governments must act reasonably, using a development plan, to extend basic water and basic electricity services to everyone. This means that local governments have an obligation to move forward, step-by-step, to make sure the poor have improved access to adequate water, electricity and sanitation. Governments are not entitled to unfairly discriminate in delivering water, electricity or sanitation services based on race, gender, disability or any other protected ground. The local governments also have a duty to discuss with communities what kind of water, electricity and sanitation is appropriate in each case. Governments should attempt to continually improve access to water (from river access, to communal taps, to yard taps, to in-house provision) and should try to electrify all areas and provide sanitation. Poor and vulnerable households need basic services such as electricity, water, sanitation, health and education, to enable economic development. Despite significant improvements in Latin America and the Caribbean in recent decades, 110 million people in the region still lack sanitation services, 24% of rural population doesn't have electricity, and roughly 50% of waste is not adequately treated. Quality, affordability, and sustainability are major challenges, even in those areas where services are available. Studies have even shown that physical violence is directly linked to the delivery of – or lack of access to – basic services. In four cities in India, for example, researchers have found a pattern of increased violence in areas where residents go short of clean water, electricity, and public toilets, and where public spaces are not lit. Confrontations can turn violent when residents compete for limited resources or find informal ways of accessing basic services that are not being provided by the state or private firms. In extreme cases, governments have forcibly removed people who have found alternative ways to gain services and housing. Cities become even more insecure when residents are forced to rely on unofficial brokers, gangs, or corrupt officials to meet their needs.

The value of equality can seem to demand uniformity that seems dystopian. For instance, if everyone were forced to wear the same clothes and have the same number of children, we would think this was intolerable. However, we should be careful not to reject equality

entirely on this basis. Equality is still attractive if we limit its scope to some areas. Evidence suggests that if we halved inequality, the murder rates could halve, mental illness could reduce by two thirds, obesity could halve and teen births could reduce by 80%. Hundreds of millions of people suffer from discrimination in the world of work. This not only violates a most basic human right, but also has wider social and economic consequences. Discrimination stifles opportunities, wasting the human talent needed for economic progress. Combating discrimination is an essential part of promoting decent work, and success on this front is felt well beyond the workplace.

## Timeline of key events

2015                      countries adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

## Possible Solutions

People face three critical challenges in finding affordable and good housing:

### 1. Need for support for housing rental markets

Policies that set eligibility requirements for formal renting or homeownership often lock out the poor, as they require extensive documentation – such as proof of employment and wages – that is unavailable to those who work in the informal economy. A healthy housing market includes a range of options and arrangements. Emphasis on one type of housing arrangement leads to shortages for important segments of the city’s population, especially for the poor and lower middle class, who often then end up in informal and less secure living arrangements.

### 2. Lack of basic services in slums and informal settlements

In many rapidly urbanizing areas, large segments of the population live in substandard housing with uncertain property rights, with limited access to basic services such as clean water, toilets, electricity and garbage collection. More than 828 million people were living in informal settlements in the global South in 2010 -- one-third of its urban population – and the challenge is expected to get worse as urbanization intensifies in Asia and Africa. UN Habitat estimates there will be 889 million living in slums by 2020. The global affordable housing gap will grow from 330 million urban households now to 440 million by 2025, which means over 1.6 billion people living without affordable legal housing worldwide.

### 3. Underutilized land in city centres

Creating secure, affordable housing in and around cities — rather than in distant areas -- is essential to ensure economic productivity, environmental sustainability and equity for the whole metropolis. If there isn’t enough affordable housing in the city, more poor and lower middle class residents will be pushed to the outskirts, far from infrastructure, social networks and existing jobs, creating long travel times and additional expenses.

Access to safe water and sanitation is essential for health, security, livelihood, and quality of life. Building large-scale infrastructure will be an important part of the long-term solution. However, new infrastructure may not always be affordable or cost-effective for public service needs of many cities in developing countries. We can improve access to basic services quickly, efficiently, and cheaply, either by improving access to existing (or newly planned) large-scale infrastructure or by providing smaller scale investment at the individual or the community level. To assess the problem of achieving greater coverage, a first step is to identify the barriers to innovation and implementation of improved water and sanitation. The first one is clearly insufficient supply. Building water and sanitation infrastructure is costly and may involve numerous technical, bureaucratic, and legal constraints—particularly in the developing world. Even in places where the water and sanitation network exists and it is technically feasible to connect to it, there may be demand constraints that limit people's access to these services. The third type of constraints is institutional. For example, centralized supply solutions may not be sustainable or even work at all if regional and local levels of government are not involved to adapt the solutions to the local context.