

What Human Rights can bring to SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities

Key Messages

SDG 11 aims to "*make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.*" Human rights provide both the normative foundation and legal obligations that guide how this goal should be achieved.

First, SDG 11 emphasizes inclusive cities: HUMAN RIGHTS CITIES

Local governments, as the closest level to communities, are uniquely positioned to translate international human rights standards into practical local solutions. To be human rights cities:

- Apply the **OHCHR–UCLG** Guidance Framework for Human Rights Cities, to apply human rights (including rights to development and a healthy environment) across urban governance.
- Ensure **political commitment** to embed human rights in laws, policies, and services.
- Establish **dedicated local human rights structures and accountability mechanisms**.
- Participatory decision-making of communities, civil society, academia, and local institutions.
- Promote a Human Rights Economy, ensuring that all economic, industrial and trade decisions align with human rights standards and enabling greater investment in human rights by joint efforts from governments, civil society, businesses, and international organizations.

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11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Second, SDG 11 calls for access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing and upgrading slums. This directly reflects the right to adequate housing

Housing being treated as a commodity rather than a fundamental human right is leading to several serious issues.

Housing Affordability Crisis

In many countries, housing costs have outpaced income growth, placing millions at risk of eviction, homelessness, or exclusion from adequate housing into substandard housing or informal settlements where they lack security of tenure or adequate access to public services.

- **Reframe housing as a human right—not a commodity**—and adopt inclusive, rights-based responses to end homelessness and to upgrade and regularize informal settlements.
- Develop strategies to avert the affordability crisis, by increasing supply of affordable housing and social housing, protecting renters and mortgage holders against disproportionate increases to their housing costs - selecting approaches best suited to their specific contexts.
- Integrate climate resilience into housing affordability strategies.

Homelessness

The housing affordability crisis and widespread inadequacy of housing create barriers to secure shelter, which drive homelessness and reinforce cycles of poverty.

- **End the criminalization of homelessness** and address its structural causes (i.e. poverty, inequality, unaffordable housing, gaps in social protection, lack of decent jobs, lack of access to land, credit or financing, high costs of living, and lack of financial and legal literacy).
- **Strengthen sustained public investment**, **inclusive policymaking**, **governance and data systems** for housing and support services, ensuring meaningful and accessible participation of people with lived experience in all stages of policy design and implementation.
- **Support initiatives that guarantee the effective administration of and access to justice and redress for the victims of housing rights violations**.
- **Implement integrated prevention strategies** across sectors (housing, health, education, employment, justice) for early intervention systems that identify and address homelessness risk factors while ensuring access to legal identity and essential services.
- **Prioritize permanent housing solutions** such as *Housing First*, social housing, community-led initiatives, transitional housing, and culturally appropriate models.
- **Provide person-centered support services** on health, psychosocial needs, income security, and social inclusion, with special attention to survivors of domestic violence or trafficking.

Forced Evictions, Insecure Land Tenure and Lack of Legal Protections

Forced evictions constitutes a serious violation of the right to adequate housing. **Lack of tenure security** and weak legal protections leave millions vulnerable to evictions and displacement.

- **Provide legal safeguards** by ensuring that laws and regulations governing evictions, displacement and informal settlements respect the right to adequate housing for all.
- **Protect land and inheritance rights**, particularly for women and marginalized communities.
- Provide **alternatives** to evictions.
- Ensure **affordable alternative adequate housing** where eviction cannot be avoided.
- Apply the **Guiding Principles on Resettlement** to all situations of displacement, eviction, relocation, or resettlement, regardless of cause.

LNOB and Discrimination: marginalized individuals and communities consistently face discrimination in housing access and financing.

- National housing laws must include affordability, security, and inclusivity to recognize intersectionality and design targeted responses for women, LGBTIQ+ persons, Indigenous Peoples, older persons, persons with disabilities, and others.

Disaster Risk Reduction in Informal Settlements and Urban Infrastructure Deficits

Rapid urbanization in regions like Africa and Asia-Pacific is driving growth in informal settlements with severe deficits in basic services and infrastructure. These communities are increasingly vulnerable to climate-related risks such as extreme weather, heatwaves, and water scarcity.

- In alignment with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030), **anticipate, plan for and reduce disaster risk with rights-based strategies** that ensure:
  i. Integration of risk reduction into national and local development plans.
  ii. Prioritization of resilience-building for vulnerable and marginalized communities.
  iii. Equitable access to housing and essential services before, during, and after disasters.
  iv. Strengthening accountability to monitor human rights compliance in disaster response.

CONCLUSION: Why Integrating Human Rights Matters

Human rights are not separate from SDG 11—they are **integral** to achieving inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities. Embedding human rights standards ensures that urban development serves people, protects the most vulnerable, and upholds the fundamental principle of **leaving no one behind**.

- **Ensure accountability**: Human rights obligations bind states to deliver SDG commitments.
- **Promote equity**: Prevents urban development from reinforcing inequalities.
- **Strengthen resilience**: Participation and inclusion improve disaster preparedness and social cohesion.
- **Protect vulnerable populations**: Mitigates risks of displacement, exclusion, and environmental harm.
