

Habitat for Humanity International at COP26

Ensuring that climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts help close the housing gap for the most vulnerable

Commitments and recommendations to governments and global institutions

Habitat for Humanity International is driven by the vision of a world where everyone has a decent place to live. Today we are faced with an unprecedented global housing challenge, which is made worse by both the COVID-19 pandemic and the intensifying impacts of the climate crisis.

Habitat for Humanity International recognizes that the most vulnerable people, particularly those living in inadequate housing, are bearing the brunt of our changing climate. Families living in informal settlements in the Global South are often the most affected by the increasing frequency and intensity of climate disasters. They are also the least able to build back because of limited resources and savings. Across the quickly urbanizing Global South, the number of people living in hazardous locations and inadequately built housing is expected to more than double to 3 billion over the next 15 years (World Bank 2019). Without immediate and appropriate solutions, growing numbers of climate-displaced populations will add to the complexity of the global need for adequate and affordable housing.

The sixth report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, or IPCC, made clear that meaningful action to reduce carbon emissions is needed over the next two decades if we are to curb warming significantly. The building sector has a particular opportunity to reduce its carbon footprint, as it alone accounts directly and indirectly for 38% of global energy-related carbon emissions (UNEP 2020). However, efforts to mitigate carbon emissions at the household level can be cost-prohibitive, as innovations frequently increase the expense of housing. There is a dual need to reduce emissions through housing and to adapt to current and future climate threats. Urgent action is required to address the growing deficit of adequate housing globally and improve the living conditions and quality of life of vulnerable households while addressing and reducing the carbon emissions resulting from the construction and use of housing.

Habitat for Humanity International recognizes the urgency of making tangible progress at COP26. Because the COVID-19 pandemic will hinder representation from the Global South at COP26, there must be a more deliberate effort to ensure the most vulnerable are at the forefront of the discussions in Glasgow. **Habitat for Humanity International is calling on stakeholders to incorporate adequate and affordable housing into future responses to climate change in two ways, to ensure that the people most impacted by climate change are put at the center:**

- First, to ensure mitigation of carbon emissions efforts in the built environment and housing sector do not drive up costs for households and further expand the global deficit of adequate and affordable housing.
- Second, to ensure that adaptations that protect communities and natural habitat are inclusive of the needs of the most vulnerable. Adaptation in housing is integral in preparing communities for rising sea levels, drought, flood, heat waves, increasing intensity of weather events, and other climate-induced events. Community resilience to climate change cannot be realized without adequate and affordable housing that is adaptive.

Habitat for Humanity International recognizes that vulnerable populations are bearing the brunt of our changing climate.

Habitat's recommendations

Habitat for Humanity International recognizes that climate change is exacerbating the existing global housing crisis across all contexts. While mitigation and adaptation measures are required across all sectors, specific focus must be placed on improving resilience to climate-related threats for the most vulnerable populations globally. Ensuring that housing is adequate, affordable and resilient is essential to that response. This requires an understanding and review of the housing value chain beyond the construction of a house. The parallel and interconnected housing and climate crises cannot be solved without recognition that vulnerable populations have specific needs and require appropriate solutions that are inclusive and suitable to their economic, social and environmental contexts.

Specific focus must be placed on improving resilience to climate-related threats for the most vulnerable populations.

The United Nations, multilateral development banks and donor governments should:

1. Ensure that efforts to mitigate carbon emissions in the built environment and housing sector do not drive up costs for households and further expand the global deficit of adequate and affordable housing, by:
 - **Encouraging and investing in programs that focus on renovation, upgrading and retrofitting where possible and appropriate**, to support the creation of affordable and adequate housing that addresses the global housing gap while limiting carbon emissions created by new construction.
 - **Encouraging that local mitigation efforts within the built environment incorporate the needs and capacities of the most vulnerable**, especially those in informal settlements, who are least likely to contribute to carbon emissions but suffer the greatest consequences of climate change.
 - **Allocating additional funding** for the agencies providing expertise in affordable mitigation efforts that can transform the climate impact of housing, including UN-HABITAT.
 - Providing support to **fill the research and data gap of the impact of housing on carbon emissions** across socioeconomic settings for households and housing actors.
2. Ensure that adaptations to protect communities and natural habitats are inclusive of the needs of the most vulnerable, by:
 - Encouraging greater attention and investment in **adaptation of human settlements, focusing specifically on communities with greater vulnerabilities, especially informal settlements in hazard-prone areas**.
 - Recognizing the importance of adequate and affordable housing in addressing mitigation and adaptation needs, and **integrating housing into solutions for increasing resilience of human settlements** from climate change.
 - **Prioritize financing mechanisms for affordable housing, including through development finance institutions, for housing adaptation needs**. Low-income households are disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of climate change and frequently lack access to fit-for-purpose loans to improve their housing against the threats of climate change.

Governments of all levels should:

1. Ensure that efforts to mitigate carbon emissions in the built environment and housing sector do not drive up costs for households and further expand the global deficit of adequate and affordable housing, by:
 - Recognizing that housing adequacy, affordability and climate change are **inextricably linked, most acutely impacting vulnerable populations**. Without addressing each issue together through integrated policies and systems, human health and well-being will not be adequately served.
 - **Accounting for the human and financial impacts on the most vulnerable if no action is taken** to curb carbon emissions, and **prioritizing investment, subsidies and support** to reduce the cost of mitigation of carbon emissions within housing construction, use and maintenance.

- Prioritizing **efficiency in human settlements through technology, land use and spatial planning** and by supporting improved services provision; transportation; water, sanitation and stormwater management; and location of housing, with a focus on improving quality of life and reducing carbon emissions.
 - Encouraging policies and systems that **create or increase access to new and affordable technologies** that improve the sustainability and resilience of housing to the impacts of climate change.
 - Providing **subsidies and/or grants to vulnerable households or communities** seeking to upgrade housing and infrastructure systems to mitigate carbon emissions.
 - Expanding **access to reliable, renewable and clean forms of energy** for use at the household level.
 - **Ensuring empowered participation of all affected communities** in developing mitigation of carbon emissions priorities and plans.
 - **Encouraging sustainable innovation in housing markets and by housing actors** through subsidies or grants and by **supporting regulations and standards that encourage the adoption of emerging technologies** that reduce carbon emissions in the housing development or retrofitting process. This also applies to the selection, use and disposal of building materials.
2. Ensure that adaptations to protect communities and natural habitats are inclusive of the needs of the most vulnerable, by:
- Recognizing the **importance of adequate and affordable housing** that is appropriately adapted to climate threats as a means of ensuring community resilience to the impacts of climate change.
 - **Supporting the creation of an enabling policy environment** that delivers viable housing products and services and capacitated institutions to support the housing sector and housing actors in adapting to climate threats.
 - **Prioritizing informal settlement upgrading** that is focused on climate change adaptation, resilience and inclusion as a means of expanding the availability of affordable housing globally.
 - Building **capacity and awareness of financial institutions** to support access to housing finance to low-income households in a way that encourages self-driven climate adaptation through housing improvements, in addition to incentivizing insurance providers to develop products for households that appropriately mitigate risks linked to building structures and environmental risks such as flooding.
 - Providing **subsidies and/or grants to households or communities to encourage localized adaptation** efforts through the modification and improvement of affordable housing, fit for contextual needs and in amounts that can remove the cost barriers for adaptation efforts.
 - Supporting **households in improving their own housing** to suit their adaptation needs by addressing underlying barriers, including **improving tenure security policies and systems and increasing equitable access to basic services**.
 - Facilitating **empowered participation of all members of society in the development of policies and systems to prepare their homes and build climate resilience**. Communities know their needs best. Local and national governments must recognize the value added in efforts to prepare and adapt to climate change by residents of informal and formal settlements alike.
 - Where climate change impacts are life-threatening and cannot be adapted to at a reasonable cost, **developing voluntary, inclusive and gender-sensitive relocation guidelines** that support the voluntary relocation of vulnerable communities and people displaced by climate change. These guidelines should ensure community participation, protection and support in the creation of inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable human settlements.

Housing actors should:

Housing actors include the households, firms, service providers, public agencies and functionaries, civil society organizations, and others who play a role in supplying and acquiring housing. While governments of all levels are also housing actors, recommendations specifically for governments are made above.

1. Ensure that efforts to mitigate carbon emissions in the built environment and housing sector do not drive up costs for households and further expand the global deficit of adequate and affordable housing, by:

- Facilitating the expansion of adequate and affordable housing, while reducing carbon emissions, by **renovating, upgrading and retrofitting** where possible and appropriate.
 - Prioritizing the use of innovations and technologies that improve **reliable and cost-efficient access to energy sources** through electrical grid networks or renewable energy sources.
2. Ensure that adaptations to protect communities and natural habitats are inclusive of the needs of the most vulnerable, by:
- **Prioritizing adaptation of affordable housing** — including properties across the land rights continuum — and increasing adequacy while preparing households for the impacts of climate change.
 - Recognizing the important role that **incremental owner-driven construction** plays in addressing the housing deficit, and supporting incremental construction with policies, products and services that enable climate-resilient housing to flourish.
 - Facilitating adaptation at the household level by **creating financial sector products such as savings, credit and other support services for housing improvement and retrofitting** that suit the needs of low-income and vulnerable populations.
 - **Developing appropriate housing insurance products** for households that appropriately assess building structures and environmental risks such as sea-level rise and flooding.
 - Working to understand climate change impacts in the environments where housing is being developed or existing settlements are being upgraded and **adjusting design and materials to suit the evolving needs of these communities considering climate change.**

Habitat’s commitments

Habitat for Humanity’s vision of a world where everyone has a decent place to live demands that we ensure that the housing we produce and facilitate is inclusive, adequate, affordable and resilient to shocks and stressors to enable families to thrive.

Habitat for Humanity International recognizes that underlying vulnerabilities result in and are exacerbated by inadequate and unaffordable housing the world over. The global housing and climate crises are connected, and effective solutions for both need to account for the needs of the most vulnerable, ensuring that solutions are inclusive and equitable.

Habitat commits to **strengthening our technical expertise** in existing and emergent approaches, tools and processes that allow us to pursue climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies in programming, operations and our support to affiliated organizations. This commitment will allow us to **encourage mitigation of CO₂ in our programs and the housing sectors** where we operate. Additionally, our work will **facilitate greater adaptation, through housing**, to the impacts of climate change that communities experience now and those they will encounter in the future.

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Specific ways in which Habitat for Humanity is working toward our commitment:

GLOBAL EFFORTS TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGH HOUSING

- Habitat for Humanity International will be launching our **next global advocacy campaign to increase equitable access to adequate housing in informal settlements** through improved policies and systems in climate adaptation, empowered participation, land tenure and basic services.
- Habitat’s ShelterTech accelerators and Shelter Venture impact investment fund provide support and investment for **sustainable climate mitigation and adaptation innovations** for the affordable housing market. To date, 45% of the portfolio of startups feature climate mitigation and adaptation solutions, with an ambition to ensure that 100% of supported building material innovations are energy efficient, sustainable and/or climate friendly. This includes resin flooring solutions that eliminate the need for cement flooring, which

has higher carbon emissions; modular roof tiles made of packaging waste that reduce indoor temperatures and the need for cooling; and bricks made of recycled post-consumer plastic waste.

NATIONAL ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION EFFORTS THROUGH INNOVATIONS IN HOUSING AND THE HOUSING ECOSYSTEM

- In **Nepal and the Philippines**, two highly disaster-prone countries, Habitat is supporting the use of **resilient housing designs** and technologies featuring bamboo. The project uses **indigenous materials to build climate-adapted housing that mitigates carbon emissions** in the building process. In the Philippines, Habitat is building 10,000 homes with the cement bamboo frame technology to build clean, green, safe and disaster-resilient houses for displaced populations. In Nepal, Habitat is building 500 houses directly and working to facilitate market expansion via government programs and market access of bamboo products.
- Seventy percent of the residents of greater **Monrovia, Liberia**, live in informal settlements and slums that are at risk of the impacts of sea erosion, river erosion and extreme flooding due to climate change. Habitat for Humanity developed **Voluntary, Gender-Responsive Relocation Guidelines**, also known as VGRRGs, endorsed by Liberia's National Housing Authority, which were designed to provide communities living in high-risk settlements the option to relocate to safer locations while considering their needs, priorities, and social and economic networks.
- Habitat for Humanity has addressed **energy poverty** in Soviet-era Eastern European apartment blocks by working with homeowner associations to create collective measures to improve the energy efficiency of multifamily apartments. Through a partnership between Habitat for Humanity **Macedonia**, Habitat for Humanity **Armenia** and ENOVA in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the project delivered energy poverty renovations for multifamily housing that resulted in 50% lower energy bills and lower CO₂ emissions. Additionally, the project has achieved the creation of the first subsidies for residential energy efficiency investments in two countries.
- In response to severe flooding and in anticipation of future floods in **Asuncion, Paraguay**, Habitat is working in partnership with residents and community organizations in the La Chacarita neighborhood to develop a **Comprehensive Neighborhood Improvement Plan that focuses on assessing current and future climatic risks** in the area and developing protection plans that include partial relocation of families in at-risk areas.
- In the United States, Habitat is developing a **model for charting the embodied energy** of several forms of residential construction, its impact on operational emissions, and its overall contribution to built-environment emissions. The goal of this research is to identify specific actions most likely to reduce emissions quickly and in a cost-effective way. The model is focused on housing materials and their transportation and is designed to apply to diverse contexts globally and to various housing designs.