



# Global Village Volunteer Learning Guide



## Foreword

Established in 1989, Habitat for Humanity's Global Village program is a transformative, short-term international volunteer experience with opportunities across five continents. Volunteer groups partner with local communities, building or improving homes as part of Habitat's vision where everyone has a decent place to live. We are grateful for your interest in joining Habitat's global mission.

As the world becomes more complex and interconnected and with only several years left until the world is due to achieve the United Nations' [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#), Habitat for Humanity International is consistently updating its work based on the needs identified and prioritized by communities, while also working to make volunteering more effective for greater influence on global housing systems. The Global Village program must continue to evolve and adapt to global development changes.

We are excited to announce the resumption of the program after a four-year pause. During the COVID-19 pandemic, housing needs persisted — and increased in many regions. We want to share emerging trends and drivers of the complex housing situations in communities worldwide. The goal of the learning guide is to expand the breadth and depth of volunteers' understanding of Habitat's work internationally and bring forward our evolving understanding of how to address inadequate housing worldwide through a sustainable development lens.

**Housing is not only about having a safe place to live, but also is a prerequisite to accessing employment, education, health and social services and sits at the very heart of the Sustainable Development Goals.**

You are about to begin a special journey. We hope your experience through the Global Village program will serve as the beginning of a lifetime journey for you to becoming a strong advocate for adequate shelter worldwide.

Please join us in making Habitat's vision of a world where everyone has a decent place to live a reality.

In partnership,

Boram Kim

Senior Director, Volunteer and Institutional Engagement Division

Habitat for Humanity International

## Why this learning guide?

As you begin your volunteer journey with Habitat, it is important to gain an increased understanding of the global housing crisis and how volunteering with Habitat could address these issues. This learning guide draws together current research and debates on the global housing situation, the drivers of housing needs, and key development trends in response to such crises.

While limited access to housing is a global issue, it also manifests locally, so it is important to take the ideas presented in this guide as a starting point to further understanding how these issues play out in the country and communities where you will serve. To facilitate such reflective practice, you will find questions at various sections of this guide. Consider these questions during your volunteering engagement with Habitat and reflect on them as you interact with housing partners, community members, local volunteers, community leaders and other Habitat staff members.

## The global housing situation

The need for housing around the world is enormous. According to the U.N., 1.6 billion people around the world lack adequate housing and basic services. By 2030, this is expected to double. Substandard housing also impacts other aspects of people's lives, such as health and education. The [World Health Organization](#) stresses that poor housing conditions present multiple health risks, from lack of access to clean water to overcrowding to pollution and sanitation issues, leading to diseases and even deaths. A [UNICEF report](#) highlights the importance of a healthy home environment in supporting children's learning, stating that the absence of such a home can further widen educational inequalities.

By 2030, [UN-HABITAT](#) estimates that 3 billion people — about 40% of the world's population — will need access to adequate housing. This translates into a demand for 96,000 new affordable and accessible housing units every day. If we truly want to help bring about a world where everyone has access to decent shelter, we must continue to address the barriers families face to accessing affordable and adequate housing. Habitat is continually listening, learning and engaging the global community, including Global Village volunteers, as we mobilize to change the trajectory of this reality.

Your volunteer engagement with us will help Habitat achieve this mission. You will be on a learning journey with us to understand how inadequate housing impacts the places where you will be working, and you will reflect with us about potential solutions. As you begin this journey, we invite you to reflect on the following questions:

- What kind of inadequate housing issues have you observed in your own community? Do you see the global issues discussed above manifest locally? What other housing issues are you seeing?
- How do you perceive the links between housing insecurity and other issues such as educational inequalities, health and well-being, and poverty?
- In what ways do you think volunteering will allow you to understand global housing issues, including those in other countries and communities?

## Drivers of the housing need

Many factors drive the global housing need. Each country where Habitat is present aims to co-design activities and solutions with community members to address their specific needs. As Global Village volunteers, it is important that you become familiar with some of the key drivers. These trends or short-term disruptions worsen the need in places where the housing supply falls well short of demand. You will also read examples of solutions from Habitat national organizations that mitigate the impact of some of these drivers.





## Humanitarian crises

A humanitarian crisis is defined as a singular event or a series of events that threaten the health, safety or well-being of a community or a large group of people. It may be due to conflict (internal or external) or catastrophe, and it usually occurs throughout a large land area. According to 2023 estimates by [UNHCR](#), the United Nations' refugee agency, 62.2 million people were displaced within their own country because of conflict and violence, with many locked in a state of continued internal displacement. The global refugee population was at 36.4 million in 2023, having doubled within the past seven years. In addition, severe weather and natural disasters are increasing the insecurity of vulnerable people and are also accelerating because of climate change.

[Habitat El Salvador](#) has provided humanitarian assistance to more than 56,000 families affected by various disasters since 1998, including tropical storms Amanda and Cristóbal and hurricanes Eta and Iota in 2020. In partnership with local governments, private companies and humanitarian networks, Habitat helped families rebuild their houses. The team also provided emergency supplies and shelter to bridge the gap until homes were livable again.

In another example, Habitat El Salvador and its local partners provided a comprehensive humanitarian response for 47,000 vulnerable families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many received hygiene kits and information about how to prevent the spread of the virus, while others partnered with Habitat to improve their homes, including upgraded water supplies. Habitat El Salvador coordinated with community leaders, civil protection agents and local health officials, among others, to ensure solutions are integrated and led by the community.

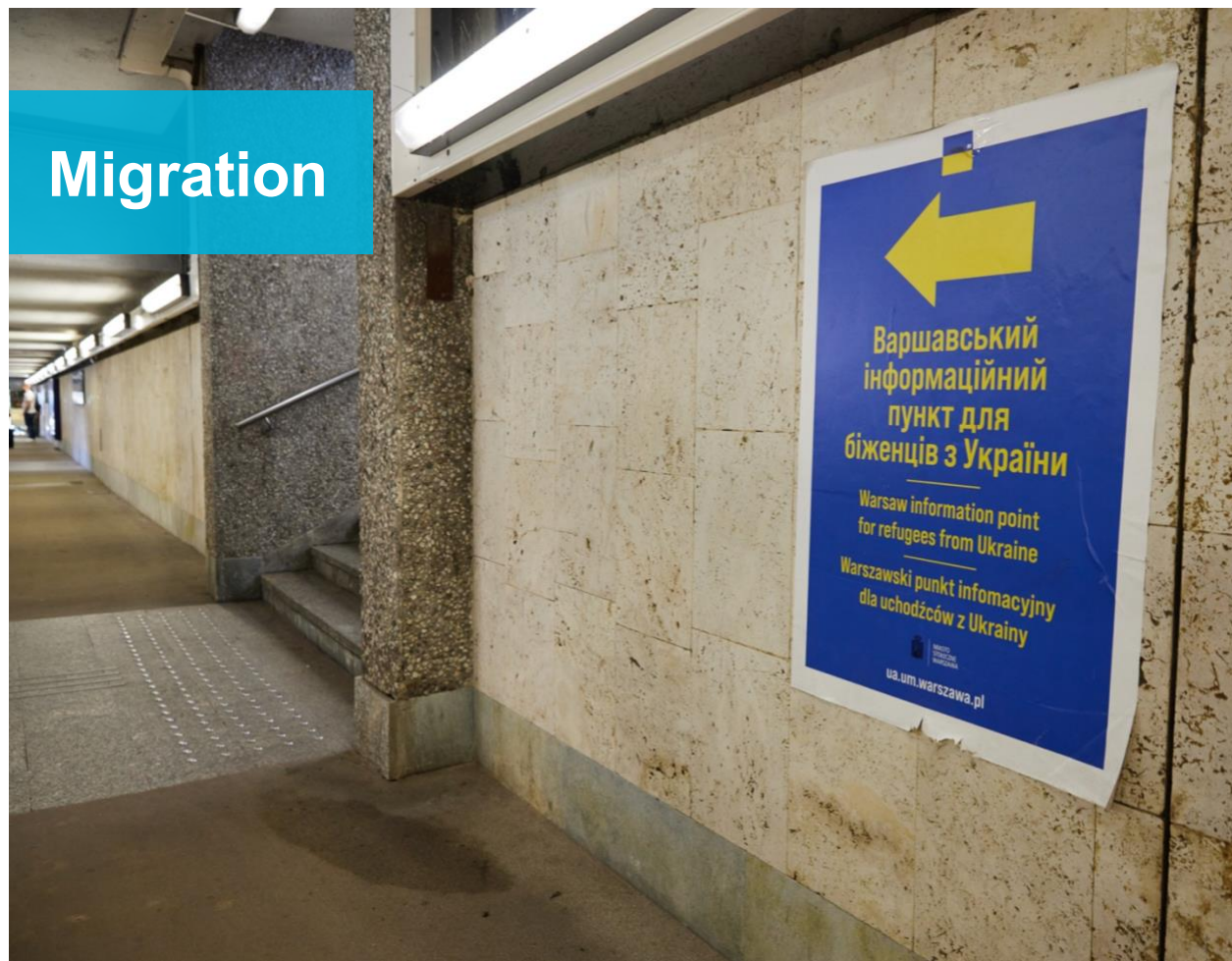


## Climate emergency

Households living in substandard housing are already suffering the most from the effects of climate change. According to the [U.N.](#), “The climate crisis poses a fundamental threat to the enjoyment of the right to adequate housing.” Hurricanes and floods wash away people’s houses, and wildfires burn them down. As temperatures rise, people’s livelihoods, agriculture and access to clean water are all impacted. The climate emergency is also an issue of climate justice. Carbon emission is caused by the world’s richest countries, but the impact is felt most in poorer countries, disproportionately impacting those who are already vulnerable. In Central America, climate change is making life even more difficult for rural communities in the Dry Corridor, which stretches from Mexico to Panama, by causing more frequent and intense extreme weather events, land degradation and pest infestations.

**Habitat** commits to putting people at the center of our work by educating ourselves and our affiliated organizations about the effects of climate change on the lives of the people we seek to serve through housing. As a global housing organization, we further commit 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 of affiliated organizations. Encompassed in this are homebuilding and renovation efforts, disaster preparedness and resilience, disaster response and recovery, volunteer engagement, community education, advocacy, and development of more responsive housing markets.





Migration is often understood as a process of an individual moving away from their place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. At the end of 2020, there were **281 million international migrants globally**, representing 3.6% of the world's population. Many of those who move have been displaced by war, famine, climate impacts and conflicts. The number of refugees increased to 26.4 million, with an additional 55 million internally displaced people, or IDPs — 48 million due to conflict and violence and 7 million due to disasters. Migration within and between countries has a critical impact on the capacity of the housing sector to deliver adequate and affordable housing for all.

UNCHR records that nearly 8.1 million refugees from Ukraine have spread across Europe since February 2022 as a direct result of Russia's war on Ukraine. Habitat for Humanity has been responding in neighboring Poland, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia to help meet the shelter needs of families on the move to other destinations and those seeking a place to live for at least the next few months. Habitat for Humanity Romania secured hotel accommodations and distributed kits at two border crossings. Habitat for Humanity Poland is operating a housing help kiosk at one of Warsaw's main train stations through a partnership with the city, helping match refugees with temporary accommodations.

# Urbanization



Urbanization is the increase in the proportion of a population living in urban areas. Most of the world's population, some **4.4 billion inhabitants, live in cities**. A study by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy has found that **90% of 200 cities surveyed were considered unaffordable to live in**, and the U.N. estimates that over 100 million people worldwide are homeless. With rapid urbanization, available housing could not keep up with the demand. This has led to overcrowding, inequality and substandard housing across cities. Urbanization also leads to rapidly expanding informal settlements.

In Bangladesh, the number of communities living in slums is increasing by 2.7% annually. Given the demand for adequate and affordable housing in these communities, **Habitat for Humanity Bangladesh** has been working to address issues of safe and decent housing, inadequate water and sanitation facilities, and disaster risk in slums since 2012. Activities include building houses, community toilets with shared shower facilities, community water points, and drainage systems. As a result of this work, families can move into new homes with access to improved sanitation and safe drinking water. More than 14,000 individuals have been served through Habitat Bangladesh's Dhaka slum-upgrading project.





## Systemic inequity

Systemic inequity could be understood as the discrimination or marginalization of particular people or communities because of power imbalances within a particular system or society. It is a situation where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Inequalities often impact the most marginalized in communities, and one's gender, race and socioeconomic status impact their experience of inequalities. Biases that cause inequalities often manifest in traditions, customs, policies, regulations and standards that dictate access to public goods such as education, public spaces, markets and housing.

Habitat for Humanity Nepal works with indigenous people and marginalized Dalits, who are considered the lowest social class under the traditional caste system. This includes members of landless communities such as Suntals, Haliyas, Kamaiyas, Badis and Musahar, along with other disaster-affected groups. These groups of people continue to endure historical and systemic discrimination. Examples of this caste-based discrimination against Dalits include lower-class occupations, weak exercise of political rights, and inability to access financial resources. Helping to uphold Nepal's 2015 Constitution, Habitat Nepal is partnering with the government to secure land rights and housing for these vulnerable groups.

### Questions for reflection

Overall, decent housing remains a significant challenge because of these multiple and intersecting root causes. Whether because of humanitarian crises, the climate emergency, migration, urbanization, and systemic inequity, it is important to be aware of the drivers of inadequate housing issues in the places where we volunteer. Reading through this section, you might want to consider:

- What are the most significant drivers of housing needs that you have observed in your own community? How about in spaces where you volunteer?
- Are there drivers that you think are significant but were not listed above?
- How do unique socioeconomic factors such as race, gender, poverty and educational status impact individuals' access to decent housing?
- In what way can access to housing be more socially just?



# Habitat's response:

## People-centered development

For Habitat, solutions to housing challenges need to follow a people-centered approach. People-centered development means that community members are at the center of development responses, especially on issues that concern them. People themselves drive the solutions. Within this approach, it is important that all people have equitable opportunities to enjoy their rights as human beings and full members of society, able to live their lives in dignity, justice and peace.

Habitat for Humanity Zambia uses the Participatory Approach for Safe Shelter Awareness, or PASSA, to bring local communities into the center of disaster risk reduction work. In Zambia, communities living in slums are disproportionately affected by climate change, as their housing units are often built with cheap materials such as mud and are unable to withstand the heavy rains and winds that are increasing in intensity. To support these communities, Habitat Zambia is using PASSA to foster locally appropriate safe shelter and settlement practices. Local communities can now identify their own solutions and realistic comprehensive strategies for addressing spatial and environmental planning, local building cultures, and construction techniques. This approach also fosters partnerships among local authorities, communities and supporting organizations to prepare for, cope with and recover from disasters.

The people-centered approach focuses on improving local communities' self-reliance, social justice and participatory decision-making. As a volunteer, you are not seen as a "giver," with the communities as the "beneficiaries." Instead, you are partners, sharing in mutual learning to develop and support community-led solutions to housing issues.

Consider the following questions:

- In your opinion, how can volunteering help facilitate people-centered development?
- How can we ensure that your volunteering experience prioritizes the dignity and agency of the local communities where Habitat works?
- In what ways can a volunteering experience facilitate mutual learning and exchange?

## Closing

Habitat for Humanity addresses drivers of the housing need and other essential housing solutions in more than 70 countries worldwide. We recognize, however, that we need to do more than build to fully reverse these adverse housing realities. That is why Habitat also engages in advocacy at every level of government and society at large to influence housing-related policies and systems to lower barriers to affordable housing access and reduce threats to housing security.

Habitat's global policy and advocacy agenda includes:

- Ensuring access to adequate housing options for all.
- Expanding affordability through housing finance options.
- Promoting secure tenure rights and equitable access to land for shelter.
- Enabling stakeholder engagement and community participation.
- Fostering resilient and responsive communities through housing.

We encourage you to actively engage in the ways Habitat is addressing inadequate housing, learn about the impact through volunteering, and be an advocate for adequate and affordable housing. Thanks to your passion and commitment, we will continue to see lives improved and communities transformed around the world.

every  
hand  
makes a difference



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