

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Progress in Latin America and the Caribbean up to 2026

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 and human rights

The human rights focus of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development stems from an explicit grounding in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights treaties, in addition to other instruments, such as the Declaration on the Right to Development (art. 10).

The SDGs are universal in scope, seeking to “realize the human rights of all” in developed and developing countries alike. The recognition of the need to fight poverty and inequalities in the 2030 Agenda is evident in its focus on reaching the furthest behind first and ensuring that no one is left behind —a principle which underpins the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs.

Although the SDGs are not specifically framed in human rights terms, many of their targets align with international standards. Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) is directly linked to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and also has links to other human rights instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

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The targets include ensuring access for all to adequate housing and basic services and to public transport systems; enhancing participatory human settlement planning; safeguarding the world’s cultural and natural heritage; and significantly reducing the number of deaths caused by disasters and the number of people affected.

- **The right to adequate housing, including land and resources:** Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 25); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art.11).
- **The right to take part in cultural life:** Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 27); International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art. 15); International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (arts. 5 and 7); Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (art 30); and Convention on the Rights of the Child (art. 31).
- **Access to transport, facilities and services:** Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (art. 9.1), for persons with disabilities, in particular; Convention on the Rights of the Child (art. 23), for children; and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (art. 14.2), for women living in rural areas.
- **Protection from disasters:** Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (art. 11).

The mechanisms that comprise the human rights protection system, namely the universal periodic review, human rights treaty bodies and special procedures, make recommendations to each Member State (see Universal Human Rights Index <https://uhri.ohchr.org/en>).

Source: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

> Regional overview

Latin America and the Caribbean is the world's second most urbanized region, after North Africa and West Africa. This offers important opportunities for the region's cities, as they are the drivers of economic growth, but also entails major challenges, since they are the largest greenhouse gas emitters and primary determinants of social inequality. While urban growth has remained relatively stable overall in Latin America and the Caribbean, some cities and regions have grown rapidly. Owing to the rising cost of housing, there has been no decline in the urban population living in slums. Although access to public transport has gradually improved, it remains insufficient because of a lack of proper infrastructure and long travel times. Some subregions are highly exposed to disasters, with major negative human and economic impacts. The region faces challenges such as a lack of financing for sustainable construction, weak regulatory frameworks and limited adoption of low-carbon technologies.

> Key facts on the region

- In 2025, 54% of the region's population lived in cities (above the global average of 44.8%).
- Between 2000 and 2020, the per capita built-up area in the region's cities increased, on average, from 127 m² to 129 m², and expanded considerably in the Caribbean subregion in particular.
- The proportion of the region's population living in informal settlements has remained relatively stable since 2016, against a backdrop of persistent urban informality and the rising cost of housing and urban land.
- In nine of the region's countries, the number of residential construction permits began declining in 2016, a situation that worsened in 2020.
- Between 2010 and 2023, the total length of the region's subway systems, which are present in 20 Latin American cities, grew from 745 km to 1,080 km.
- Bus rapid transit systems have expanded to 64 cities and have a combined length of 2,199 km, or more than one third of global bus rapid transit infrastructure.
- It is estimated that the nearly 19 million daily trips recorded in the region's bus rapid transit systems account for around 60% of the global demand for this means of transport.
- In November 2025, 7,273 electric buses were in operation; this technology was scarcely present in the region in 2017. Much of this growth is concentrated in a few large cities, including Bogotá, São Paulo and Santiago.
- In Buenos Aires, Montevideo and São Paulo, the average commute by public transport takes more than an hour, double the time in a private vehicle. Longer travel times affect mainly those in the lowest income strata.
- Between 2010 and 2019, there was a gradual and steady decline in air pollution in urban areas in Central America and South America, from 23.1 µg/m³ to 18.6 µg/m³ in the former and from 16.9 µg/m³ to 13.8 µg/m³ in the latter. Over the same period, levels in the Caribbean remained stable at around 10 µg/m³.



- No Latin American or Caribbean country meets the updated air quality guidelines of the World Health Organization, which establishes an annual level of $5 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ of fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) as a desirable threshold to protect public health.
- In 2020, the proportion of the urban population of Latin America and the Caribbean with convenient access to open public spaces averaged 57.6%. The available data reflect stark differences between cities.
- In 2020, 18 countries and territories in Latin America and the Caribbean had national urban policies or regional development plans. The addition of another country in 2023 brought the total to 19.
- By 2025, 22 Latin American and Caribbean countries had adopted and implemented national disaster risk reduction strategies in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.
- By 2023, 5,601 local governments in the region had adopted and implemented local disaster risk reduction strategies, in accordance with national strategies.

➤ **Good practices in the region**

- The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has the Urban and Cities Platform of Latin America and the Caribbean, which compiles a set of tools to support inclusive urban development, mobility, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and urban financing measures.
- Since the mid-2010s, several local governments in the region have been advancing in the adoption of local disaster risk reduction strategies, given that national frameworks can accelerate local adoption.
- ECLAC has pioneered a damage and loss assessment methodology, which is already available to countries and quantifies the economic and social impact of disasters on infrastructure, the population, productive sectors and the environment.
- ECLAC and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) jointly serve as the technical secretariat of the Forum of Ministers and High-level Authorities of Housing and Urban Development of Latin America and the Caribbean (MINURVI), a forum for intergovernmental coordination and cooperation for the sustainable development of human settlements.
- The agreement between Mercociudades and ECLAC, reached in 2024, offers a cooperation framework to strengthen public policies for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and for urban planning.

➤ **ECLAC recommendations**

- Informal urban expansion must be controlled and managed by ensuring compliance with minimum standards for public spaces, protecting areas of environmental interest and setting aside sufficient land for infrastructure and basic services.
- An adequate public transportation system is essential for improving access to employment, educational and cultural opportunities, especially for the three lowest income quintiles.
- Recommendations in this regard include adoption of stricter vehicle emissions standards, improvement of fuel quality and gradual replacement of vehicle fleets.
- Reducing the use of firewood and other solid fuels and enforcing stricter industrial emissions regulations is key.
- Air quality monitoring and management networks must be expanded to facilitate the design and implementation of more targeted urban decontamination plans.

Key regional statistics

Goal 11 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

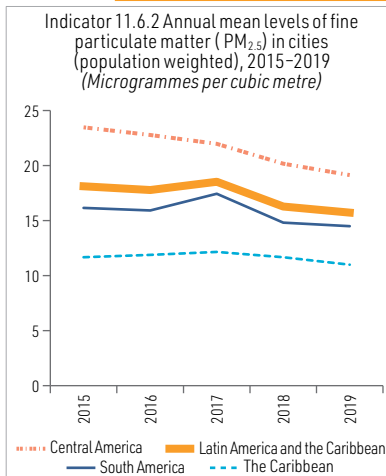
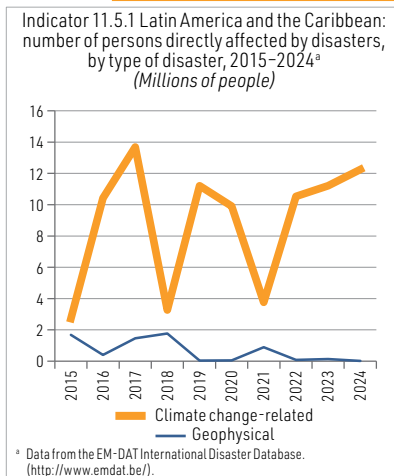
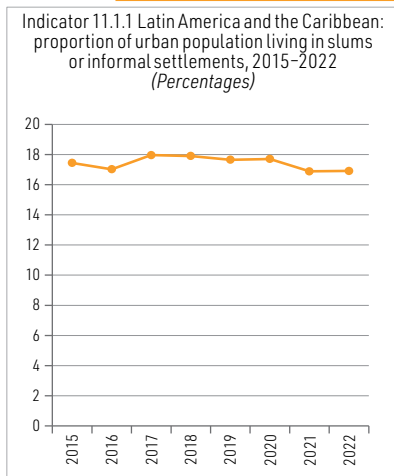
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Progress in Latin America and the Caribbean

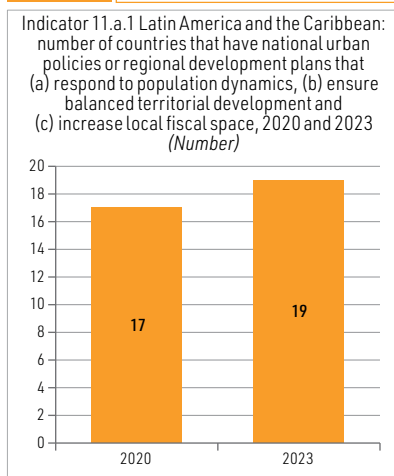
Target 11.1
Housing and basic services

Target 11.5
Disaster resilience

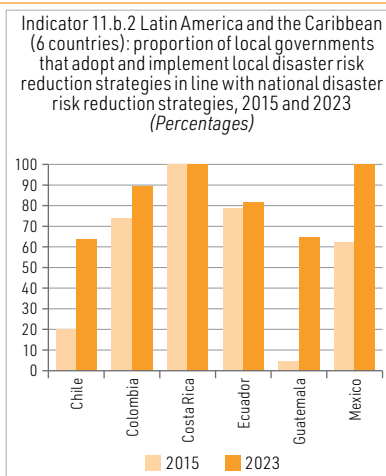
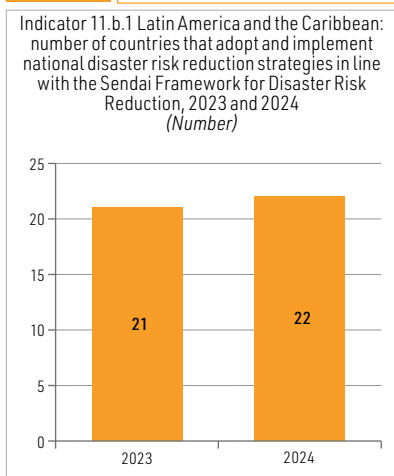
Target 11.6
Air quality and urban waste management



Target 11.a
Urban planning



Target 11.b
Disaster management policies



11.1 11.5 11.6 11.b 11.a 11.2 11.3 11.4 11.7 11.c

- The trend has stalled or is moving away from the target
- The trend is in the right direction, but progress is too slow for the target to be met
- Target already reached or likely to be reached on the current trend
- Insufficient data

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, on the basis of United Nations. (n.d.). *SDGs in Latin America and the Caribbean: statistical knowledge management hub*. Regional Knowledge Management Platform for the Sustainable Development Goals in Latin America and the Caribbean. <https://agenda2030lac.org/estadisticas/index.html>.

Note: Each indicator comprises one or more statistical series, which partially or fully cover the corresponding indicator. In the figures presented here, one or more statistical series were used for the respective indicator.

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