



Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

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

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



## Regional overview

Progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will be decided in cities, as more than half of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have urban components. In Latin America and the Caribbean, where 8 of 10 people live in cities, this reality entails significant challenges and opportunities. Cities are the engines of economic growth, but they are also the largest emitters of greenhouse gases, and their growth is occurring amid great inequalities in the region's societies. Although there is scant information available at the regional level on Goal 11, an overview of its trend suggests that, in aggregate terms, progress has been made, although it remains limited. The population living in informal settlements (target 11.1), the growth of which is inherently linked with urban growth in the region, has decreased in relative terms. However, progress has stalled, and the future scenario is worrisome. Factors such as rising construction costs, reduced access to credit and difficulties in accessing long-term credit, as well as the loss of budgetary space, hamper access to housing for lower-income households. To this must be added the impact of lower economic activity, higher unemployment and migration, which together create a complex context for the near future. Access to sustainable, quality public transportation (target 11.2) is one of the major challenges the region faces. Wasted time and the resulting reduction in quality of life and productivity disproportionately affect lower-income households. This also includes the expansion of the urban sprawl, which forces people to travel ever-greater distances, and which, although encouraging in relation to population growth, is still far from creating the efficient patterns that could lessen urban segregation. However, the air quality improvement in the region's cities is positive (target 11.6). Although in light of recently defined thresholds, there is ample room for improvement, progress has undoubtedly been made.



## > Key messages from the region

- Latin America and the Caribbean was the first region in the developing world to undergo intense urban growth. By 2030, an estimated 86.5% of South America's population will live in cities, making it the most urban region of the developing world. In the Caribbean and Central America and Mexico, 76.2% and 78.5% of the population, respectively, live in cities, confirming that the region's problems —and solutions— are largely urban in nature.
- Cities with more than 1 million inhabitants account for 46.1% of the total urban population. Since the 1990s, however, several large cities have become substantially less attractive for migrants. This has occurred primarily in the case of megacities: cities with 10 million inhabitants or more, which mostly lose population to the rest of the country. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic may have led to temporary easing of urbanization in 2020 and 2021, slowing the momentum of large cities and strengthening medium-sized and smaller cities.
- For targets 11.2, 11.3, 11.4 and 11.7, a lack of data prevents regional analysis or projections at this time. In the case of target 11.5, because of climate change there is a risk of more climate-related hydrometeorological events and Latin America and the Caribbean must make greater efforts to reduce disaster-related economic and human losses.
- The proportion of the urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing (indicator 11.1) declined during the 2000s, but progress has come to a halt in recent years. This may be a result of various factors, including increased poverty and economic stagnation. Hence, progress is being made with respect to this target, but too slowly for it to be achieved by 2030.
- Although Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the most urban regions in the world, just 43% of the urban population had convenient access to public transport in 2020. This figure is below the world average (51.6%) and is well behind the trend in developed countries (in Europe and North America the rate is 90.6%). However, convenient access to public transport varies greatly from city to city in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Given the advantage of using privately owned transport because of the shorter travel time, as household income increases, there is a progressive substitution of public modes of transport for private ones. Persons in the first to fourth quintiles (80% of the population) spend a larger share of their income on public transport, while spending on fuel for privately owned transport is concentrated in the highest income segment of the population.
- Between 2010 and 2019, Latin America and the Caribbean achieved a gradual reduction in average annual concentrations of fine particulate matter. Air quality has tended to improve in urban areas, where concentrations fell from 18.6 to 15.3 micrograms per cubic meter ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ), and in rural areas, where they fell from 18.1 to 15.1  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ . However, the progress recorded during the decade remains insufficient to achieve adequate air quality, and, therefore, to meet the relevant target by 2030, based on a threshold recently defined by the World Health Organization (WHO).<sup>1</sup>

## > Good practices from the region

- Advancing towards the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda in cities inevitably involves addressing the urban gaps in three dimensions —social, economic and environmental— in line with the New Urban Agenda adopted in Quito in 2016 at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III). In this regard, ECLAC is supporting the decisions of national and local governments on matters such as inclusive urban development, mobility, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and urban financing measures, as well as offering governments its experience and skills with statistical data, knowledge-generation capacity and analytical tools, which are publicly available on the Urban and Cities Platform of Latin America and the Caribbean. >>>

<sup>1</sup> See World Health Organization (WHO), *WHO global air quality guidelines: particulate matter (PM 2.5 and PM 10), ozone, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide*, Geneva, 2021. WHO global guidelines were updated in 2021 on the basis of new and improved scientific evidence on the impact of air pollution on human health. The new guidelines recommend annual average PM2.5 concentrations below 5  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ , half the limit of the previous guidelines, under which only the Caribbean countries and Uruguay would have met the standard. When the update is taken into account, the overall average for the region remains far from the target, and in 2019, no country achieved a value below the new guideline.



- »»» • The “Inclusive, sustainable and smart cities in the framework of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development in Latin America and the Caribbean” programme, supported by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, produces knowledge on the productive, environmental and social development opportunities offered by the transition to sustainable mobility. The programme offers different cities, such as Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Mexico City and São Paulo with specific proposals for coordinating public policy, regulation, investment and financing to leverage various co-benefits between sustainable mobility and the technological shift to e-mobility.
- With the support of ECLAC, Cuba, Costa Rica and Ecuador are increasingly using land as a strategic asset for urban development, housing policies and economic resilience, while the cities of Guayaquil, Lima, and Santo Domingo formulated economic recovery and urban resilience schemes in the context of the pandemic.
- In partnership with the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, ECLAC developed tools to accelerate implementation of climate action plans in cities, based on the experiences of Belmopán, Guatemala City, Port-au-Prince, San Salvador and Santo Domingo.
- Argentina (Buenos Aires), Brazil (São Paulo), Chile (Santiago), Colombia (Bogotá), Costa Rica and Uruguay have made good progress on regulatory frameworks that promote electrification of transport. ECLAC has supported retrofitting of existing public transportation buses, to convert their internal combustion engines to electric power trains, resulting in more liveable, quieter, and cleaner cities.
- Since December 2020, ECLAC and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) have jointly served as the technical secretariat of the Forum of Ministers and Highest Authorities of Housing and Urbanism of Latin America and the Caribbean (MINURVI), a space for intergovernmental coordination and cooperation among the region's countries in the sustainable development of human settlements, where the two United Nations entities have fostered transformative recovery by promoting informed and evidence-based public policy decisions.

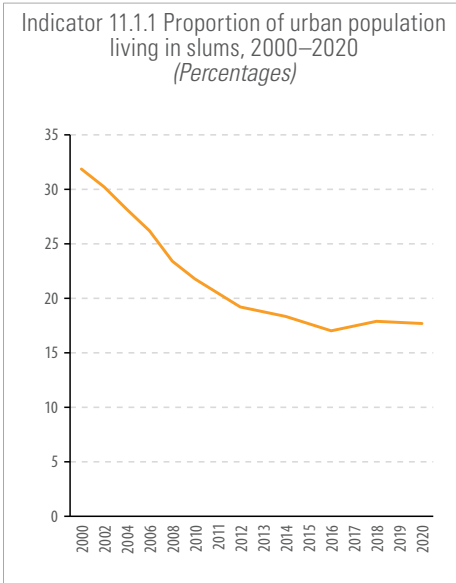
## ➤ Recommendations from ECLAC

- In the highly urban region of Latin America and the Caribbean, public transport is vital for social inclusion. A suitable public transport system improves access to opportunities in terms of employment, education and culture, while also encouraging use and enjoyment of public spaces and services, especially for the first three income quintiles of the population. Policies that reduce the cost of public transport are likely to have a significant redistributive impact. These social benefits are in addition to the environmental benefits related to better incentives for the use of public and collective modes of transport, and more rational and intensive use of urban land.
- ECLAC has estimated that a 1 percentage point increase in construction sector growth would add 0.07 percentage points to per capita GDP growth. It is feasible to rebuild the urban economy within a new scenario that would foster greater productivity, emphasizing the move towards more sustainable and more equitable urban economies that are better aligned with the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda.

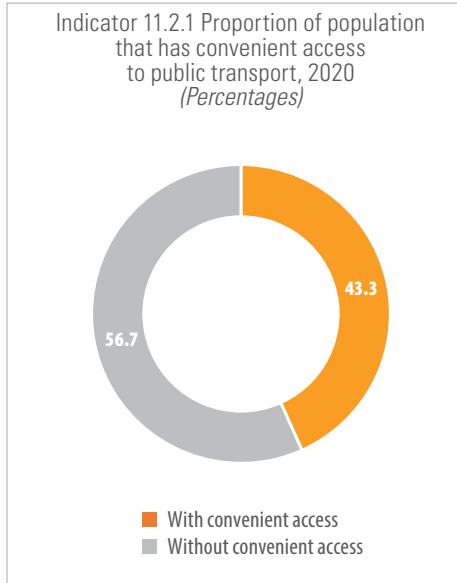


# Key regional statistics

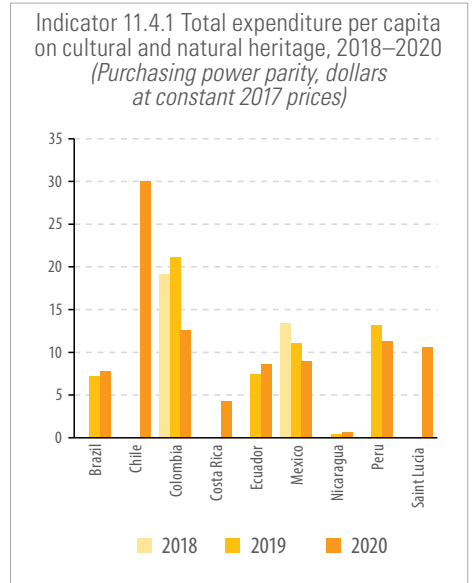
**Target 11.1 Universal access to housing and basic services**



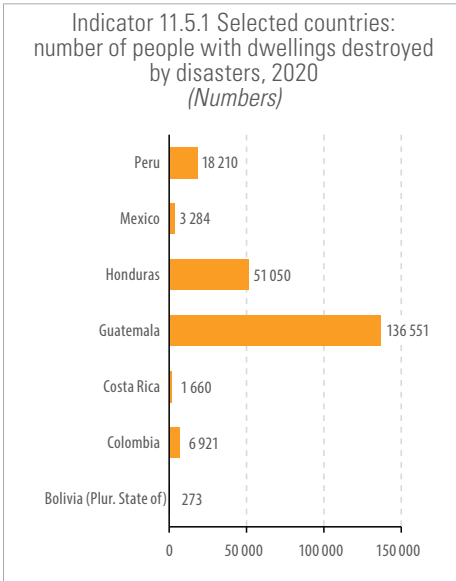
**Target 11.2 Expand access to public transportation**



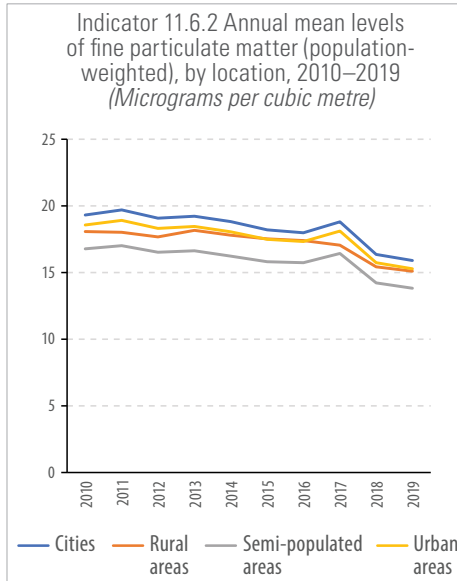
**Target 11.4 Protect cultural and natural heritage**



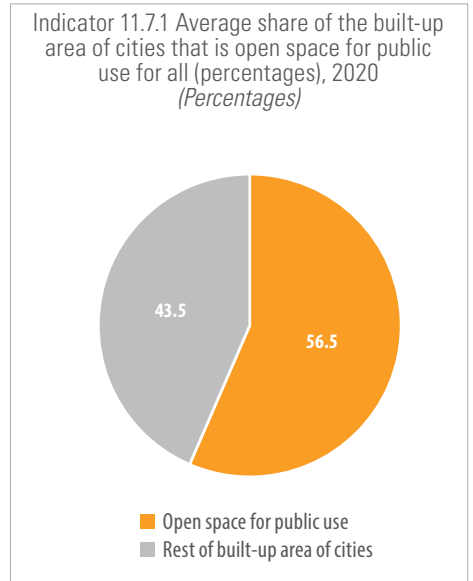
**Target 11.5 Reduce deaths and economic losses from disasters**



**Target 11.6 Improve air quality and municipal waste management**



**Target 11.7 Universal access to green spaces and public urban spaces**



- The trend 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

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

**Note:** Each indicator is comprised of 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.