



# Brazil

## Capacity Overview

Habitat for Humanity began operating in Brazil in 1992, partnering with about 197,000 people in urban and rural areas to improve the place they call home.

Habitat has projects in 24 of Brazil's 26 states and in the Federal District. We collaborate with a wide range of partners, including local entrepreneurs, grassroots organizations, social movements, civil society organizations, social enterprises, and national and international organizations. Habitat helps to realize housing as a basic human right in Brazil through home construction and improvements; housing policy advocacy; improved access to water, sanitation and hygiene services; land tenure security; and community capacity building through trainings.

Habitat's programs in Brazil focus on inclusive housing; water, sanitation and hygiene, or WASH; and advocacy. Adequate and affordable housing leads to improvements in health, education and economic opportunities while reducing inequality and building resilience against disasters and economic crises. A catalyst for 13 of the United

Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals, housing will be particularly important in a post-COVID-19 pandemic world as an essential component of any comprehensive approach to recovery and development in emerging economies, including Brazil.

In Brazil, Habitat supports the "right to the city" for vulnerable people. This is the right of all members of society to the quality use of and benefit from urban space and life. It requires the collective efforts of all stakeholders to transform urbanization processes and benefit society as a whole. Together with other civil society organizations, Habitat works to influence policies in Brazil so that residents of informal settlements can have equal access to cities' basic services and urban infrastructure.

At the local level, we partner with Votorantim Cimentos, Gerdau, Vedacit, Fundação Oswaldo Cruz and Fundação Banco do Brasil, among others. Our international partners include the European Union, Bank of America, Cisco, PepsiCo, MISEREOR and the Oak Foundation.



### Country context

Despite being the world's 13th largest economy, Brazil remains one of the most unequal countries globally. Poverty and social inequality increased almost 20% in Brazil during 2020, according to the Institute of Applied Economic Research, a government-led research organization. Brazil did not make any progress in the Sustainable Development Goals, based on a 2021 report by the Civil Society Working

Group. In the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, 27 million people fell into extreme poverty and more than 14 million people became unemployed.

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics and João Pinheiro Foundation, over 30 million people do not have a decent place to live and almost 125 million people are living in inadequate houses. More than 80% of Brazil's population live in the cities, around 48 million people do not have access to potable water, and more than 150 million people do not have access to basic sanitation. It is estimated that up to half of the urban population lives in self-built housing or illegal subdivisions.

Amid the lack of affordable housing, thousands of families move into abandoned buildings, many of which are fire hazards, or build homes on vacant land without secure tenure. According to data from the International Alliance of Inhabitants' Zero Evictions Campaign, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, more than 14,000 Brazilian families were evicted from their homes.

# Inclusive housing

Housing is a fundamental right in Brazil's Federal Constitution. All inhabitants of a city also have the right to the city as defined in Brazil's 2001 City Statute. The right includes access to a city's services, such as education, employment, health care and space for recreation. The law also covers the "social function of property," whereby land should not sit vacant if it can serve a public purpose.

Habitat Brazil supports the right to the city, particularly for informal settlement residents and vulnerable groups, by working to ensure equal access to adequate housing, basic services and infrastructure.

We multiply our efforts through advocacy, working with coalitions and social movements in all regions of the country. We monitor government actions related to housing and propose public policies<sup>1</sup> to help increase vulnerable families' access to adequate housing and city services. Together with partners such as the National Forum for Urban Reform, the Zero Eviction Campaign, the Brazilian Institute of Urban Rights (Instituto Brasileiro de Direito Urbanístico) and the Observatory of Evictions (Observatório das Remoções), Habitat Brazil spoke up against evictions and displacement of impoverished families living in slums and informal settlements, advocating for basic rights within the scope of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

We work within national regulatory frameworks such as the Federal Constitution, the National Statute for Children and Youths, and the City Statute. At the international level, we are part of the 36-member Dhesca Brazil Platform that promotes economic, social, cultural and environmental human rights, and we support the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the human rights-related international pacts of which Brazil is a participant.

In addition, we equip communities with knowledge of sustainable housing practices and strengthen their ability to participate more actively in governance. The latter

involves calling on authorities to support housing policies and investments, along with access to water and sanitation.

We reached more than 20,000 people from 2011 to 2021 through workshops and trainings in topics such as healthy housing, sustainable solutions, financial literacy, water resource management, gender equality, human rights, and urban services and infrastructure.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Habitat Brazil led workshops and local, regional and national meetings in partnership with social movements and other nongovernmental organizations. In 2020, for example, we held a meeting with the U.N. special rapporteur on adequate housing, Balakrishnan Rajagopal, to address the growing threats of evictions during the pandemic. This meeting resulted in an official request for the Brazilian government to cease all eviction orders. Several entities participated along with Habitat Brazil.

Additionally, we developed a collaborative methodology for monitoring the impacts of the pandemic on vulnerable communities and groups to understand what the authorities were doing to protect them and to report human rights violations. To this end, we interviewed leaders from 195 communities in 30 Brazilian cities. The interviews focused on eight priority themes: humanitarian support; access to information; access to basic services; housing and shelter conditions; mobility; access to health care and social assistance; militarization in communities; and gender-based violence.

Based on these priority issues, we strengthened the vulnerable communities and groups through grants to conduct family training workshops, awareness-raising activities, and mobilization actions in the communities, along with dialogue circles for community empowerment. These trainings include topics such as gender, the right to housing, the right to the city and human rights.

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1. Federal Law 14.216/2021 – Lei Despejo Zero (Zero Evictions Law – protects poor families in urban areas against evictions during the pandemic in Brazil). / State Law 17.400/2021 – protects poor families in both rural and urban areas against evictions in the state of Pernambuco during the pandemic. / 2005 – Participation in the proposition and policy building of the National Fund for Social Interest Housing, or FNHIS, a program to support housing improvements and social housing construction.





## Water, sanitation and hygiene

Water, sanitation and hygiene, or WASH, services, combined with safe treatment and disposal or use of wastewater, amplify health gains by reducing the burden of disease and associated loss of productivity and health care costs, particularly among vulnerable members of society, thus reducing poverty. Since 2007, Habitat has been helping families harvest and store rainwater in the drought-prone Agreste and Sertão regions of the state of Pernambuco. Habitat has built more than 690 cisterns to date, serving about 3,500 people.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, we broadened the scope of our projects to support those in greatest need. We began emergency renovations with the goal of serving

families in urban and peri-urban areas vulnerable to disease transmission. This work ranged from installing water tanks and renovating bathrooms to modifying homes with improved air circulation. During 2021 and 2022, we partnered with more than 400 families (nearly 2,000 people) to secure adequate access to clean water and safe sanitation.

We also partnered with community associations to install more than 400 hand-washing stations in informal settlements known as favelas and peri-urban areas all over the country. Community leaders helped us identify key places such as bus stations to ensure maximum use of the hand-washing stations, allowing more than 120,000 people each day to practice good hygiene during the pandemic.



# Land tenure and vacant property

Habitat Brazil's advocacy efforts for adequate housing began in 2005, with an initial focus on promoting tenure security and comprehensive upgrading of informal settlements. Because of the volatile political environment, it was challenging to ensure civil society participation in urban decision-making and resource allocation for construction and improvements. The idea of promoting adequate housing in existing vacant property emerged as Habitat Brazil's innovative approach toward building more compact cities.

A baseline study was conducted in 2018, focusing on Recife city where Habitat Brazil's national office is located. Working with a network of partners and volunteers, the study included a field assessment in the neighborhood with the highest concentration of vacant property. A desk review was conducted of local legislation and policies, national and international experiences, and best practices. Findings showed that in Recife's Santo Antonio alone, at least 40 multistory buildings were vacant, in reasonable condition, and owing millions of Brazilian reals in property taxes to the municipality. In only one neighborhood in one city, there was enough building area to house 2,000 families.

By disseminating the study findings through a workshop and inviting various stakeholders and media channels, Habitat triggered informed dialogues with government representatives, raised media attention and started to build public support for the cause. A series of meetings were conducted with local government representatives, and Habitat Brazil organized field visits so that government authorities could see the vacant property for themselves.

Habitat Brazil and partners also started to draft policy proposals, taking advantage of the moment when the City Master Plan and the Social Housing Policy were being reviewed. In partnership with the regional area office, Habitat Brazil organized Action LABS, a methodology developed by Habitat's Latin America and Caribbean area office to promote peer exchanges and informed dialogues so that policy proposals were designed collaboratively, based on lessons and evidence. Experts from across the country gathered with Habitat Brazil and partners from NGOs, social movements, academia and local government to discuss the challenges and opportunities for action. As a result of this effort, a series of policy recommendations was drafted, disseminated and mutually supported by coalition members to ensure a commitment to convert vacant property into affordable, adequate housing units for the most vulnerable groups in the city and metropolitan region.

In parallel, Habitat Brazil built public support through a communication strategy that included the dissemination of both technical information and human-interest stories through social media, mail, TV, radio and newspapers. The advocacy efforts led by Habitat Brazil have contributed to advancing the policy dialogue and practice around the social function of land, a key concept of the global frameworks toward sustainable development, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda.

Since then, we have helped more than 2,400 families gain secure land tenure and have helped change policies that contribute to the mediation of land conflicts, benefiting more than 4 million people.



# The Habitat network

Habitat's work in Brazil is supported by Habitat for Humanity International, an acclaimed global development organization that partners with a full range of stakeholders in more than 70 countries, implementing appropriate solutions for more than 5 million people per year in urban, peri-urban and rural areas. Habitat advocates for policies that bring adequate housing within reach for the estimated 1.6 billion people worldwide who currently lack decent shelter, and helps make housing market systems more responsive to their needs.

Habitat for Humanity International maintains its Latin America and Caribbean area office in Costa Rica, which allows Habitat to multiply impact through regionally centralized programmatic support. The resources and expertise from that office can be flexed into Latin American and Caribbean countries such as Brazil to support programming and other services.



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## Accountability

Habitat has a strong commitment to being accountable to the families and communities we work with in Brazil, and to donors and other partners. We have developed systems for demonstrating our impact and ensuring we live up to our values, including financial responsibility; diversity and

inclusion; and safeguarding our employees and partners – and the people we work with every day.

All staff members, board members and service providers sign Habitat's safeguarding and conflict of interest policies. Habitat's ethics policy protects communities it serves from abuse and exploitation, and volunteers, vendors, donors and the public have a platform to confidentially report any suspected malpractice or unethical activity. According to our global reporting policy, we forbid any type of retaliation against those who report abuse or raise questions on improper conduct.

Habitat employs a robust monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning, or MEAL, system in all our programs, including Brazil. This has been set up to continually track and, if needed, modify and refine approaches. MEAL is used as an instrument not only for program quality assurance but also for continuous organizational learning.



# everyone

## needs a place to call home

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