

MALAYSIA 2026-2029



COUNTRY PROGRAMME OVERVIEW



UN-HABITAT

UN-Habitat ROAP Country Programme Overview

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Acknowledgements: This publication was developed by UN-Habitat's Asia-Pacific country office managers with the support of the ROAP team.
Thanks are extended to national and local government partners and other urban stakeholders.

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OPENING

Malaysia stands at a pivotal moment in its urban development journey. As one of the most urbanised countries in the Asia-Pacific region, the nation continues to demonstrate strong economic performance, social progress, and a deep commitment to sustainable development. Rapid urbanisation has been central to Malaysia's growth story, yet it has also brought new complexities that require coordinated, inclusive, and future-ready urban solutions.

UN-Habitat's partnership with Malaysia has grown significantly over the past decade, grounded in shared priorities under the Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda, and Malaysia's national development frameworks. The Thirteenth Malaysia Plan (2026–2030) places renewed emphasis on strengthening urban governance, enhancing resilience, improving housing and basic services, and ensuring that development benefits are equitably shared across the urban–rural continuum. Malaysian cities have also emerged as regional leaders in SDG localisation, with multiple Voluntary Local Reviews and the country's first Voluntary Subnational Review demonstrating strong local ownership of the 2030 Agenda.

This Country Programme Overview (CPO) outlines UN-Habitat's strategic engagement in Malaysia for the period 2026–2029. It builds on ongoing collaboration with federal ministries, state governments, local authorities, civil society, academia, and development partners. The CPO highlights key urban challenges, showcases ongoing and planned interventions, and sets out priority areas where UN-Habitat will continue to support Malaysia in advancing sustainable, inclusive, and climate-resilient urban development. This CPO serves as both a strategic roadmap and a platform for collaboration. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the Government of Malaysia and all stakeholders to build a better quality of life for all in an urbanising world.



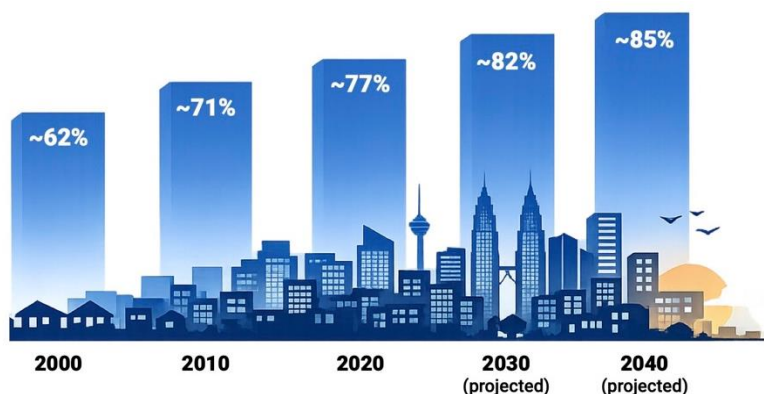
COUNTRY ANALYSIS

Malaysia is a rapidly urbanising upper-middle-income country of 34.3 million people, with 78 per cent living in cities. Urban regions, especially Greater Kuala Lumpur and the Klang Valley, generate most national GDP, making urbanisation central to economic growth. However, rapid expansion has also created spatial and social imbalances, including low-density sprawl, car-dependent development, housing shortages, congestion, waste management pressures, flood risk and declining green spaces. Housing affordability has worsened, and pockets of urban poverty persist among migrant, informal and low-income households.

Malaysia's policy frameworks increasingly address these challenges. The Thirteenth Malaysia Plan (2026–2030) and national urban and housing policies prioritise balanced territorial development, climate-resilient infrastructure, improved basic services and adequate housing. Malaysia is also a regional leader in localising the SDGs through Voluntary Local and Subnational Reviews.

Looking ahead to 2026–2029, demographic change, climate risks, decarbonisation needs and rising expectations for inclusive public services will shape Malaysia's urban transition. Addressing land management, ageing infrastructure and uneven access to quality public spaces will be essential. These dynamics highlight the need for people-centred planning, stronger local government capacity and multi-level governance, positioning Malaysia as a key regional partner in advancing sustainable urbanisation.

Malaysia's Urbanisation Rate, 2000–2040



Source: UN World Urbanization Prospects (2024); DOSM Open DOSM Data Catalogue (2025); Government of Malaysia data.gov.my (2026).

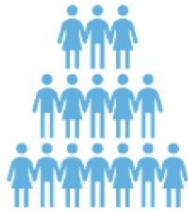
Malaysia's Urban Challenges at a Glance



Source: National Urbanisation Policy II (NUP2), Ministry of Local Government Development (KPKT), Malaysia; Malaysia SDG Voluntary National Review (2021).

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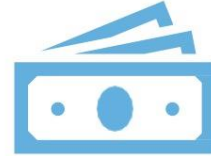
FACTSHEET



34.3 million
population



1.8%
annual urban growth rate



USD 13,380
GDP per capita



26.8 million
urban population



~77.7%
urbanization rate



**Median house prices
> 5.5× annual median
household income**
housing affordability



0.803
HDI index



**~7% of population
aged 65+**
aging rate



**95% access to
improved water and
sanitation**
access to basic
services

Data Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM); World Bank Open Data (UN World Urbanization Prospects 2024); National Property Information Centre (NAPIC); UNDP Human Development Report 2024; WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP); IMF World Economic Outlook Database 2024.

URBAN CONTEXT, CHALLENGES AND BASIC SERVICES

Malaysia's urban landscape is evolving rapidly, driven by economic growth, demographic change and spatial transformation. Urban areas generate nearly three-quarters of national GDP, with Greater Kuala Lumpur–Klang Valley as the primary growth engine. While urbanisation has improved living standards, it has also intensified pressures on housing affordability, mobility, waste management and climate resilience.

Spatial Inequality and Urban Expansion

Urban growth has been predominantly low-density and car-dependent, resulting in fragmented land use and widening disparities between metropolitan centres, secondary cities and rural regions. Peripheral areas often lack adequate infrastructure, while rural regions face depopulation and limited investment.

Housing Affordability and Livability

Malaysia has expanded access to adequate housing supported by national housing policies and maintenance frameworks. However, affordability gaps persist, with median house prices exceeding five times annual household income. Ageing public housing, informal settlements and uneven access to quality neighbourhoods highlight the need for inclusive, people-centred urban renewal.

Basic Services and Environmental Resilience

Malaysia has achieved near-universal access to improved water and sanitation, yet rapid urbanisation continues to strain waste management, drainage and mobility systems. Cities face increasing climate risks such as flooding, coastal hazards and heat stress, exacerbated by reduced green cover and ageing infrastructure. National initiatives, including the Circular Economy Blueprint, Smart City Framework and Solid Waste Management Policy, provide pathways for greener, more resilient service delivery, supported by nature-based and climate-adaptive solutions.

Governance and Local Capacity

Urban management responsibilities are distributed across multiple levels of government, creating coordination challenges. Strengthening local government capacity, digital governance and evidence-based planning through platforms such as the Malaysia Urban Observatory and the National Smart City Platform is essential for integrated, multi-level urban transformation.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Malaysia faces increasing climate risks that directly affect its cities and communities. Flooding, coastal erosion, heat stress, and water scarcity are intensifying due to rapid urbanisation and changing weather patterns. The country's tropical climate, combined with high rainfall variability, makes urban areas particularly vulnerable to flash floods and landslides. These challenges underscore the need for integrated climate adaptation and mitigation strategies across all levels of government.

CHALLENGE 1: Flooding and Water Management

Floods remain Malaysia's most frequent and costly natural hazard, affecting millions annually. Urban drainage systems are often overwhelmed by intense rainfall and unplanned development. The National Flood Mitigation Plan, River Basin Management Programme, and Integrated Urban Drainage Master Plan aim to strengthen resilience through improved infrastructure, early-warning systems, and nature-based solutions such as river restoration and urban wetlands.

CHALLENGE 2: Heat Stress and Urban Microclimates

Rising temperatures and the urban heat-island effect are increasing health risks and energy demand. Expanding green spaces, promoting reflective materials, and integrating climate-responsive design are key strategies under the Low Carbon Cities Framework and National Climate Change Policy 2023. Cities such as Putrajaya and Penang are piloting urban greening and cooling initiatives that can be scaled nationally.

CHALLENGE 3: Coastal and Ecosystem Resilience

Malaysia's long coastline and dense coastal settlements face growing threats from sea-level rise and coastal erosion. The National Coastal Zone Physical Plan and Integrated Shoreline Management Plan guide sustainable development and protection of mangroves and coastal buffers. Strengthening ecosystem-based adaptation will be critical to safeguard livelihoods and biodiversity.

CHALLENGE 4: Decarbonisation and Climate Governance

Malaysia has committed to achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, supported by a rapidly evolving policy landscape. The National Energy Transition Roadmap (NETR) and the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement outline clear pathways for reducing emissions across energy, transport, industry, and waste sectors. The Long-Term Low Emissions Development Strategy (LT-LEDS) provides a whole-of-economy framework for decarbonisation, while the forthcoming Climate Change Act is expected to strengthen institutional accountability and climate finance. Accelerating renewable energy, low-carbon mobility, and circular economy solutions will require stronger coordination across federal, state, and local levels.

HUMANITARIAN–DEVELOPMENT–PEACE NEXUS AND URBAN RESILIENCE

Malaysia is not a traditional humanitarian-response setting, yet its cities and communities face recurring climate-related shocks, localised vulnerabilities, and pressures linked to rapid urbanisation. These dynamics create important entry points for strengthening the humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) nexus, particularly in building resilience, improving preparedness, and ensuring that vulnerable groups are not left behind. Malaysia’s strong governance systems, active civil society, and regional engagement position the country as a contributor to resilience-building efforts across ASEAN.

Climate-Related Shocks and Localised Vulnerability

Annual monsoon floods, landslides, and storm events continue to affect millions of people, disrupting livelihoods and damaging infrastructure. While national disaster management systems are well established, urban areas still face gaps in preparedness, early-warning coverage, and community-level resilience. Strengthening risk-informed planning, nature-based solutions, and inclusive recovery mechanisms can help reduce the long-term impacts of these recurring hazards.

Urban Inclusion and Support for Vulnerable Groups

Malaysia hosts diverse urban populations, including low-income households, migrant workers, and refugees who often live in high-risk or underserved areas. These groups face barriers in accessing adequate housing, basic services, and social protection. Enhancing inclusive urban policies, improving access to essential services, and supporting community-based initiatives can help ensure that vulnerable populations are better protected during shocks and crises.

Strengthening Local Preparedness and Urban Resilience

Local governments play a critical role in managing risks and responding to emergencies. Continued investment in local capacity, risk-sensitive urban planning, and integrated data systems will be essential to improve preparedness. Malaysia’s experience in community-based disaster risk reduction, flood management, and resilient infrastructure offers valuable lessons for regional South–South cooperation.

Malaysia’s Regional Role in the HDP Nexus

Malaysia contributes to regional resilience efforts through ASEAN platforms, technical exchanges, and knowledge-sharing on disaster risk reduction, urban resilience, and climate adaptation. As urban risks intensify across the region, Malaysia’s leadership in promoting resilient, inclusive, and sustainable urban development can support broader humanitarian–development–peace outcomes in neighbouring countries.

RECENT AND ONGOING INTERVENTIONS



2023 – 2026

ASEAN Sustainable Urbanisation Strategy – Phase II

UN-Habitat supports secondary and intermediate Malaysian cities to implement the ASEAN Sustainable Urbanisation Strategy. The programme strengthens urban resilience, mobility, and urban safety through city level technical proposals and multi-stakeholder capacity building. Current Malaysian pilots include:

- Miri, Sarawak: Urban resilience strategy
- Iskandar Puteri, Johor: Active mobility master plan
- Shah Alam, Selangor: Urban safety and security (digital solutions)

- USD 250,000 (AUS4ASEAN Futures)
- ASEAN Secretariat; Government of Australia; Ministry of Housing and Local Government (KPKT); Ministry of Economy; Johor State Government; Iskandar Puteri City Council; Sarawak State Government; Miri City Council.



2022 – 2027

Penang Nature-Based Climate Adaptation Programme

A flagship national initiative advancing nature-based solution (NbS) to reduce climate vulnerability in George Town and Bayan Lepas. The programme integrates urban greening, stormwater management, community resilience, and institutional capacity-building. It is Malaysia's first large-scale urban NbS adaptation project, benefiting 343,736 people.

- USD 10 million (Adaptation Fund)
- Adaptation Fund; Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability; Penang State Government; Department of Irrigation and Drainage; Penang Island City Council; Think City.



2024 – 2025

Enhancing Wastewater, Nutrient Management and Sanitation Provision for Marginalised Coastal Communities in Sabah

Implemented jointly with UNEP and local implementing partner, ACT Malaysia, this project improves sanitation and reduces marine pollution in floating villages in Lok Urai. Independent sewage treatment systems have improved health, safety, school

attendance (up 65% since 2020), protect biodiversity, and establish a homestay and fish trading enterprise to sustain the new sanitation services and local livelihoods.

- USD 100,580 (Malaysia-UN SDG Trust Fund)
- UNEP; ACT Malaysia; Sabah State Sewerage Service Department; University Malaysia Sabah; local communities



2023 – 2025

Localising the SDGs and Advancing Agenda 2030

UN-Habitat supports Malaysian cities and states to strengthen SDG localisation through Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), integrated planning, and capacity-building. Malaysia is a regional leader, with VLRs completed in Penang, Seberang Perai, Shah Alam, Subang Jaya, Sepang, Alor Gajah, and Melaka; and Selangor delivering the first Voluntary Subnational Review.

- USD 100,000 secured (USD 600,000 required)
- KPKT; Urbanice Malaysia; UNESCAP; UNU-IAS; UCLG ASPAC



2020 – 2024

Innovative and Catalytic Urban Solutions

UN-Habitat provides technical support to Malaysian cities to improve urban basic services, waste management, public spaces, and circular economy practices. Key achievements include:

- Waste flow and categorisation assessment in Seremban
- Executive Course on Sustainable Housing (with KPKT & partners)
- Exploratory work on accessibility, universal design, and road safety

- **USD 3 million required**
- **KPKT; UNEP; civil society; private sector**



2024 – 2029

Malaysia as a Regional Hub for Urban Resilience and South–South Cooperation

Malaysia is emerging as a platform for regional knowledge exchange on climate adaptation, SDG localisation, digital governance, and sustainable urbanisation. UN-Habitat is expanding collaboration with Brunei, Singapore, and ASEAN partners to strengthen regional urban resilience and share Malaysia's best practices.

- Funding under development
- ASEAN partners; national ministries; regional networks

09

IMPACT STORY

Building Resilience Through Nature-Based Solutions in Penang

In George Town and Bayan Lepas, the daily lives of citizens are increasingly shaped by the twin challenges of heatwaves and floods. Rising temperatures threaten health and wellbeing, while memories of the devastating 2017 flood continue to fuel anxiety over future storms. Women, youths, and those living in poverty remain disproportionately affected, often without sufficient knowledge or access to support systems.

Through the [Penang Nature-Based Climate Adaptation Programme](#), UN-Habitat and local partners (Department of Irrigation and Drainage, Penang Island City Council, and Think City) have introduced a new paradigm of resilience: one that works with nature rather than against it. Urban greening and nature-based stormwater management now help absorb rainfall, reduce heat, and create green public spaces. Community-led vulnerability assessments and trainings empower women and youths to become agents of resilience.

More than 340,000 residents are expected to benefit from cooler neighborhoods, enhanced flood protection, and stronger awareness. Local authorities have strengthened their technical capacity to plan and maintain nature-based solutions, while community groups have taken on active roles in monitoring and stewardship. What began as a climate adaptation project has grown into a model for inclusive, people-centred urban resilience, one that other Malaysian cities can now replicate.

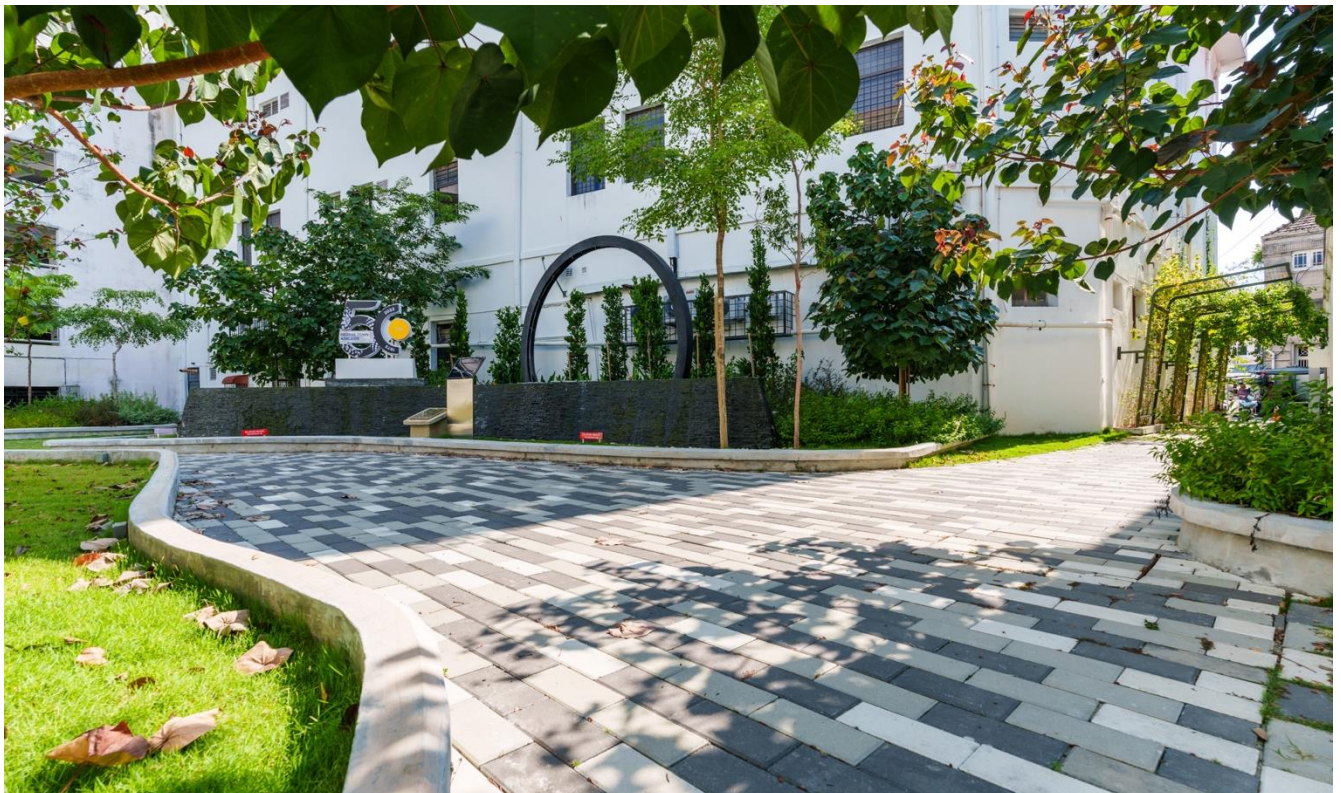


Photo Credit: City Council of Penang Island

Restoring Dignity and Safety in Lok Urai's Floating Community

In the floating village of Lok Urai, Sabah, daily life was shaped by the absence of basic sanitation. Wastewater flowed directly into the sea beneath housing, affecting health, safety, and the surrounding marine ecosystem. Children, especially girls, often missed school due to poor hygiene conditions, and families lived with constant exposure to polluted water. Despite their resilience, the community had long been underserved and overlooked.

Through the **Enhancing Wastewater, Nutrient Management and Sanitation Provision for Marginalised Coastal Communities** project, UN-Habitat, UNEP, and ACT Malaysia introduced community-designed, independent sewage treatment systems tailored to the unique needs of floating settlements. Local residents were trained to operate and maintain the systems, monitor water quality, and manage waste safely. The impact has been transformative. Cleaner facilities and safer sanitation have led to a 65% increase in school attendance among girls, while households report fewer health issues and greater confidence in their living environment.

The reduction in wastewater discharge has helped protect the fragile marine ecosystems surrounding Tunku Abdul Rahman Park, supporting biodiversity and local livelihoods. Beyond infrastructure, the project has strengthened social resilience. Community members now lead awareness programmes, manage eco-friendly enterprises, and participate actively in local decision-making.



Photo Credit: UN-Habitat

COUNTRY FOCUS

ACCELERATING NUA REPORTING THROUGH THE AP-UAP

Malaysia will play a leading role in strengthening New Urban Agenda (NUA) monitoring and reporting across the Asia Pacific through the Asia-Pacific Urban Agenda Platform (AP-UAP). UN Habitat will support Malaysia to:

1. Institutionalise NUA reporting at national and subnational levels
2. Contribute Malaysian case studies, tools, and methodologies to the regional platform
3. Convene peer learning exchanges with ASEAN and Asia-Pacific cities

This focus leverages Malaysia's strong SDG localisation ecosystem and aligns with UN Habitat's global mandate to strengthen evidence based urban monitoring.

CLIMATE-RESILIENT URBAN SERVICES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Climate impacts especially flooding, heat stress, and coastal erosion are intensifying across Malaysian cities. UN-Habitat will work with federal, state, and local authorities to:

1. Scale nature-based solutions and urban greening
2. Strengthen stormwater and flood management systems
3. Improve waste, sanitation, and circular economy practices
4. Enhance local capacity for climate adaptation and risk-informed planning

This aligns with the Penang Adaptation Fund project, Sabah sanitation initiative, ASEAN Sustainable Urbanisation Strategy and Malaysia's National Energy Transition Roadmap and Long-Term Low Emissions Development Strategy commitments.

RESILIENT HOUSING & INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

Malaysia continues to face challenges in housing affordability, ageing public housing stock, and pockets of urban vulnerability. UN-Habitat will support national and local partners to:

1. Strengthen policies for affordable and adequate housing
2. Improve living conditions in underserved and high-risk communities
3. Promote community-driven planning and social inclusion

This builds on ongoing work in Penang, Sabah, and SDG Cities localisation.

INTEGRATED & SMART URBAN GOVERNANCE

Malaysia's urban transformation requires stronger coordination across federal, state, and local levels. UN-Habitat will support:

1. Integrated spatial planning and compact, transit-oriented development
2. Digital governance and data-driven decision-making
3. SDG localisation, Voluntary Local Review, and subnational reporting
4. Regional cooperation through ASEAN and South-South platforms

UN-HABITAT'S STEPS TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS

Strengthen national partnerships

Deepen collaboration with Ministry of Local Government Development, Department of Town and Country Planning (PLANMalaysia), other line ministries, state governments, and Urbanise Malaysia to align interventions with national priorities and the 13th Malaysia Plan.

Scale flagship programmes

Expand successful models such as the Penang Nature-based Solutions programme, SDG localisation, ASEAN Sustainable Urbanisation Strategy technical support, and Sabah sanitation solutions to additional Malaysian cities.

Build local government capacity

Provide training, tools, and technical assistance to enhance planning, resilience, data systems, and service delivery at the city and municipal levels.

Accelerate NUA reporting through AP-UAP

Support Malaysia in institutionalising NUA monitoring, harmonising SDG/NUA indicators, and contributing case studies and methodologies to the Asia-Pacific Urban Agenda Platform.

Mobilise climate and urban financing

Strengthen resource mobilisation through the Adaptation Fund, Green Climate Fund, Malaysia-UN SDG Trust Fund, AUS4ASEAN Futures, and emerging climate finance opportunities.

Promote regional knowledge exchange

Position Malaysia as a hub for ASEAN cooperation on climate adaptation, SDG localisation, digital governance, and sustainable urbanisation.

COUNTRY TARGETS IN NUMBERS (2026–2029)

USD 23 million

Targeted funding to be mobilised for climate resilience, SDG localisation, sanitation, and sustainable urbanisation.

> 400,000 people

Projected beneficiaries across Penang, Sabah, and SDG Cities, focusing on vulnerable groups, women, youth, and coastal communities.

65% improvement

Targeted increase in school attendance among girls in Lok Urai through expanded community-designed sanitation systems.

PLANNED INTERVENTIONS

A Strategic Roadmap for Malaysia's Urban Transformation

Malaysia's next phase of urban development requires integrated, climate-responsive, and inclusive solutions that strengthen national systems while positioning the country as a regional leader. UN-Habitat's planned interventions for 2026–2029 are designed to deliver impact at three interconnected levels: country, institutional, and sub-regional. These initiatives build on Malaysia's strong governance ecosystem, its SDG localisation leadership, and its growing role in ASEAN's sustainable urbanisation agenda.

COUNTRY-LEVEL PRIORITIES

Delivering Malaysia's Urban Vision under the 13th Malaysia Plan

1

SCALING NATURE-BASED CLIMATE ADAPTATION ACROSS MALAYSIA

Aim: Expand the Penang nature-based solutions model to other cities.

What: City-level nature-based solutions strategic framework on:

1. Urban greening corridors
2. Stormwater and flood-resilience systems
3. Community vulnerability assessments
4. Local capacity-building for climate adaptation

Impact: A national pipeline of nature-based solutions projects aligned with the 13th Malaysia Plan.

2

STRENGTHENING HOUSING AFFORDABILITY, RESILIENCE & INCLUSION

Aim: Support Malaysia's transition toward resilient, affordable, and inclusive housing systems.

What: Policy support for affordable housing frameworks that include:

1. Upgrading of ageing public housing
2. Universal design and accessibility integration
3. Community-driven neighbourhood improvement models

Impact: Improved living conditions for low-income and vulnerable communities.

3

ENHANCING URBAN BASIC SERVICES & CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Aim: Improve waste, sanitation, and urban services through innovation and community-driven models.

What:

1. Expansion of the Sabah sanitation model to other coastal communities
2. Circular economy pilots in waste management
3. Technical support for local utilities and municipalities

Impact: Cleaner, safer, more resilient urban environments.

SUB-REGIONAL PRIORITIES

Malaysia as a Leader in ASEAN and Asia-Pacific Urban Transformation

1

ASEAN SUSTAINABLE URBANISATION STRATEGY (ASUS) – PHASE III

Aim: Expand technical support to additional Malaysian and ASEAN cities.

What:

1. Urban resilience strategy
2. Active mobility and Transit Oriented Development planning
3. Urban safety and digital governance solutions
4. Facilitating urban financing models and mechanisms

Impact: Stronger ASEAN city networks and shared urban solutions, including deeper engagement with secondary and emerging cities working alongside the existing ASEAN Smart Cities Network and ASEAN Sustainable Urbanisation Strategy Phase II cities.

2

ADVANCING SDG LOCALISATION AND INTEGRATED URBAN GOVERNANCE

Aim: Deepen Malaysia's leadership in SDG localisation and evidence-based planning.

What:

1. Next-generation VLRs and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs)
2. Integrated planning tools for local governments
3. Digital governance and urban observatory systems
4. Capacity-building for data-driven decision-making

Impact: Stronger alignment between national, state, and local urban priorities.

3

MOBILISING CLIMATE AND URBAN FINANCE FOR MALAYSIA AND THE REGION

Aim: Unlock financing for scalable, high-impact urban projects for cities.

What:

1. Resource mobilisation for nature-based solutions, housing, and urban services
2. Pipeline development for Adaptation Fund, Green Climate Fund, SDG Trust Fund, Islamic Philanthropy
3. Support for bankable project proposals in Malaysian cities

Impact: Increased investment in sustainable and resilient urban development.

REGIONAL LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES

Strengthening Malaysia's leadership in promoting sustainable urban development



ACCELERATING NUA REPORTING THROUGH THE ASIA-PACIFIC URBAN AGENDA PLATFORM (AP-UAP)

Aim: Position Malaysia as a regional hub for NUA monitoring and reporting.

What:

1. Institutionalisation of NUA reporting mechanisms
2. Harmonisation of SDG 11, VLR/VSR, and NUA indicators
3. Malaysian case studies and methodologies for AP-UAP
4. National-to-local reporting frameworks

Impact: Malaysia becomes a leading contributor to global and regional urban monitoring systems.



REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION

Aim: Strengthen Malaysia's role as a regional platform for urban innovation.

What:

1. Regional dialogues on climate adaptation, SDG localisation, and nature-based solutions
2. City-to-city exchanges with Brunei, Singapore, Indonesia, and Thailand
3. Technical partnerships with ASEAN bodies and regional universities

Impact: Malaysia becomes a recognised centre for urban learning and innovation.



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