



# CLIMATE JUSTICE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT IN EUROPE





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### Authors

Emilia Oscilowicz, Doctoral Researcher  
Barcelona Lab for Urban Environmental Sustainability and Justice (BCNUEJ)

Lisa Hannuschke, Masters Researcher  
Barcelona Lab for Urban Environmental Sustainability and Justice (BCNUEJ)

Melissa García-Lamarca, Affiliated Researcher, Barcelona Lab for Urban Environmental Sustainability and Justice (BCNUEJ), Associate Senior Lecturer, Lund University.

Isabelle Anguelovski, Director, Barcelona Lab for Urban Environmental Sustainability and Justice (BCNUEJ), ICREA Research Professor.

Amalia Calderón-Angelich, Associate Researcher, Barcelona Lab for Urban Environmental Sustainability and Justice (BCNUEJ), Post-Doctoral Researcher, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya.

James J.T. Connolly, Former Co-Director, Barcelona Lab for Urban Environmental Sustainability and Justice (BCNUEJ), Associate Professor, University of British Columbia

## Coordination

Isabelle Anguelovski, Director, Barcelona Lab for Urban Environmental Sustainability and Justice (BCNUEJ)

## Research Assistance and Graphics:

Diego Borbalan  
Designer

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Barcelona  
Laboratory for Urban  
Environmental Justice  
and Sustainability



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# Executive Summary

## PURPOSE

In partnership between CNCA and BCNUEJ (the Barcelona Lab for Urban Environmental Justice and Sustainability), this report provides a practical and analytical guide for local governments, civic organizations, and community partners seeking to understand and confront the structural inequalities shaping climate outcomes in European cities.

### The objectives of this report are to:

- Identify how recent and sustained dynamics of oppression – from nation to city – embed a legacy of intersectional inequalities and exclusion within the built environment in a manner that constrains cities from addressing climate justice needs for their most vulnerable residents.
- Illustrate how structural inequalities are experienced in the built environment of different European cities and how municipal public and civic actors are working to overcome these dynamics through planning and policy, with a particular focus on Barcelona (Spain), Glasgow (UK), and Nantes (France).
- Offer conceptual pathways and concrete suggestions of tools and practices for municipal practitioners to align climate action with social justice.

In sum, the report is grounded in the belief that addressing structural inequalities is essential for building resilient, equitable, and climate-responsive cities that avoid creating new climate-related exclusion for historically marginalized groups.

## WHAT ARE STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES AND WHY FOCUS ON EUROPE?

Structural inequalities refer to the long-term, interconnected legal, economic, social, and spatial systems that advantage certain groups while systematically marginalizing others. These inequalities are sustained through institutional practices, discriminatory housing markets, uneven development patterns, and unequal access to environmental and economic resources.

In the European context, structural inequalities are shaped by the legacies of colonialism, migration regimes, welfare state restructuring, and decades of market neoliberalization. They influence everyday

life in ways that determine who is most exposed to climate risks, what environment people live in, who is pushed to urban peripheries, and who experiences barriers to mobility, safety, and economic stability. These patterns help explain why climate impacts as well as mitigation and adaptation measures do not affect all populations equally, and why addressing climate change requires confronting the structural conditions that produce vulnerability in the first place.

In global comparative terms, many European countries have offered higher levels of social security and infrastructural provision, which can mask internal forms of precarity and exclusion. However, precarity in European cities often emerges through housing insecurity, energy poverty, restricted access to welfare, and differentiated exposure to environmental risks, especially for migrants, racialized groups, and low-income households. Over recent decades, these protections have been unevenly dismantled, territorialized, or selectively applied. Housing market liberalization, austerity measures, privatization of public assets, and the financialization of urban development have progressively weakened social safety nets, particularly in large metropolitan areas. Access to welfare benefits and public housing is frequently mediated by legal status, length of residence, and administrative eligibility, producing layered forms of vulnerability that disproportionately affect marginalized groups, especially migrants.

## HOW WAS THIS REPORT DEVELOPED?

With support from the Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance (CNCA), this report was developed through a multi-method research process conducted by the [www.bcnuej.org](http://www.bcnuej.org) with practitioners from Barcelona, Glasgow, and Nantes.

The analysis draws on national housing and planning policy reviews and scientific literature on structural oppression in Europe. We combined this data with 26 new qualitative interviews (2025) that we conducted with residents, community leaders, municipal staff, and practitioners along with insights from earlier interviews (2019-2020).

## KEY FINDINGS: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES IN THREE CITIES

### Barcelona

Barcelona's transformation over the past few decades - especially since the financial crisis in 2008 - has been characterized by speculative investment and increasing tourism. This has created an uneven urban landscape, where precarious and marginalized residents are unable to profit from recent investment in green and climate resilient infrastructure.

#### • Housing Inequalities:

Tenants, especially when migrants and/or racialized individuals, face discrimination and renoviction within a speculative housing market where only 1.7% of units are socially protected. Increasing green attractiveness and tourism are putting more pressure on the housing market. Yet tenants unions are mobilizing to respond to evictions and rental abuses.

#### • Environmental & Climate Inequalities:

The city's central (e.g. Raval) and peripheral (e.g. La Prosperitat) working-class areas are exposed to dense, poorly ventilated housing during extreme heat, and do not have extensive green public space. Barcelona has also promoted greening and climate policies that have generated strong green gentrification risks.

#### • Economic Inequalities:

The strongly polarized and increasingly precarious labor market is dominated by tourism and service jobs which are often characterized by little labor protection, higher exposure to environmental conditions and higher commuting costs. Particularly migrants working in precarious seasonal jobs and the construction sector are therefore less likely to profit from green development.

### Glasgow

Glasgow's transformation, following decades of post-industrial decline, reveals a complex interplay of economic and social challenges. The city's regeneration efforts, designed to attract a creative industry, higher-income residents and tourism, have predominantly benefited affluent areas, deepening pre-existing inequalities.

#### • Housing Inequalities:

Right-to-buy and the 2002 stock transfer privatized public housing and new housing development is not meeting social needs and is not affordable. Rents have skyrocketed, and housing unions have mobilized to restore tenant protections.

#### • Environmental & Climate Inequalities:

Working-class residents, migrants and refugees continue to be exposed to environmental burdens and inequalities due to fuel poverty, poor housing quality, and adverse health outcomes. Sustainability initiatives and municipal climate action is often geographically limited to already attractive areas and tends to prioritize marketable green interventions.

#### • Economic Inequalities:

Glasgow's socio-economic landscape is marked by persistent unemployment and low-quality jobs following deindustrialization and increasing economic polarization. Especially the latter is often attributed to the city's culture-led regeneration in the early 2000s which has in recent years increasingly been integrated with green transition goals, especially after COP26 was held in Glasgow in 2021.

### Nantes

Nantes' economic and urban development has been driven by ambitious goals of promoting urban attractiveness and livability through urban greening, post-industrial regeneration, and transportation development. While a commitment to social housing has mitigated the effects of these changes for lower-income residents, affordable housing production is threatened by a national housing crisis.

#### • Housing Inequalities:

Nantes' housing system builds on a longstanding national and local tradition of social housing provision which protects residents in the face of crisis. However, urban renewal and social-mixing policies as well as national budget cuts may threaten this resilience by stalling social housing production and displacing low-income tenants

#### • Environmental and Climate Inequalities:

Due to strong political commitment and investment into public transportation and urban green spaces, residents in Nantes equally profit from green amenities. Nonetheless, green development and infrastructure often remain oriented towards leisure and middle-income users, risking the further marginalization of working-class and racialized residents, particularly the Roma community

## KEY CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

### 1. Housing as the Core Inequality Driver:

Across all case-study cities, housing emerges as the foundation for systemic and structural inequality amongst all population groups through unaffordability, quality, and climate resilience. Housing therefore fundamentally shapes the distribution of opportunity, access to services, and resilience against climate risks.

### 2. Deregulation & Uneven Development:

Decades of deregulation, privatization, and financialization have reduced public funding and management of the public good, from public housing to mass transit, to the public service workforce, and to social services. Hearing from practitioners, organizers, and activists in Barcelona, Glasgow, and Nantes, reveals how even when new policies are introduced, loopholes and contradictions stemming from this neoliberal logic undermine those most vulnerable from benefiting from new policies.

### 3. Vulnerable Groups Left Behind:

Low-income residents, migrants, women, and individuals with disabilities face barriers to accessing economic opportunities, housing, and climate resilience across all three case studies. This is on the one hand, because their needs are often not considered and because they have little political leverage to push for change.

### 4. Access to Green Space and Public Transit Access Remain Unequal:

Low-income, working-class, migrant, disabled, and women/non-binary communities often face significant mobility and accessibility barriers in terms of green infrastructure, such as parks and public transportation. Although advancements have been made, for example in Nantes, in adapting public transportation, the shift to more active and climate-friendly modes of transportation, bears the risk of leaving behind vulnerable populations who have more complex commutes due personal needs, spatial isolation and housing affordability.

## Key Policy Recommendations

**Policy recommendations made based on the research undertaken for this report can be found in Chapter 5. These policy recommendations include:**

### Tools and Strategies for Climate Justice:

- Design energy efficiency and retrofit programs as well as marketing/educational campaigns that are accessible to renters and homeowners
- Involve migrants, youth, caregivers, and marginalized groups in green infrastructure and climate adaptation planning
- And more...

### Tools and Strategies for Housing-focused Urban Climate Action:

- Support cooperative (co-op) partnerships with ethical cooperative banks for financing and

co-ownership models of non-profit housing development/renovation

- Support rent stabilization across tenancies to eliminate financial incentives for eviction
- And more...

### Tools and Strategies for Supporting a Participatory and Inclusive Economy through Urban Climate Action

- Reclaim municipal power over public transit through franchising or full public ownership models.
- Encourage networked civic groups and unions to expand beyond housing into transportation, energy, and economic justice.
- And more...

# Chapter I

## Introduction:

### Climate Change and Structural Inequalities

#### AT A GLANCE

##### **This chapter:**

- Introduces climate change as a planning emergency that intersects with longstanding structural inequalities across European cities.
- Explains how systemic oppression shapes structural inequalities and clarifies why these concepts matter for understanding climate vulnerability.
- Describes how housing, climate, and economic systems interact within the built environment.
- Outlines how multiple compounded vulnerabilities intensify exposure and limit resilience.
- Presents the overall guiding questions.
- Summarizes the report's methodology and structure.

June 2025 was one of the hottest months on record for Europe. Spain shattered records with temperatures reaching 46 °C in Huelva, Southern Spain, and the highest June average since records began in 1950 (Ali, n.d.). In France, more than 1,300 schools closed for over a week in response to extreme heat (Breedon et al. 2025). Meanwhile, major tourist landmarks, such as the Eiffel Tower, turned away visitors in order to conserve energy and protect workers from heat stroke (CBC 2025). Community members and visitors both were impacted by the heat dome, yet those most vulnerable to severe heat illness or death included low-income residents living in cramped, poorly insulated and ventilated apartments, the elderly, those in hospitals, outdoor workers, and workers dependent on (mostly non air-conditioned) public

transportation (Alderman et al. 2025). In the UK alone the June 2025 heatwaves – the warmest year on record in the country<sup>1</sup> caused close to 1,150 excess death deaths. These kinds of climate events are becoming more frequent and more intense, exacerbating the exposure risk of those already vulnerable to extreme heat.

Although widespread across population groups, exposure to climate risks is not distributed evenly; instead, such risks and their outcomes are influenced, if not determined, by “stable, interconnected societal forces that systematically advantage some social groups and disadvantage others” (Amemiya et al. 2023).

## Social and urban infrastructure



A public plaza in Cornellá, a working-class suburb of Barcelona challenged by widespread gray infrastructure, lack of green amenities, and extreme heat.

Source: Alberto Bougleux

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/news-and-media/media-centre/weather-and-climate-news/2026/2025-is-double-record-breaker-uks-warmest-and-sunniest-year-on-record>

## Structural Inequalities

Structural inequalities are embedded, embodied, and experienced within society and culture, enforced by governing bodies, policies, and regulations (Egede et al. 2024).

- The heat dome in Spain in June 2025 illuminated how lasting structural inequalities and precarity both in home and work environments hindered the ability of socioeconomically vulnerable groups to adapt to impacts. Thus, climate disaster was catalyst for housing, climate, and economic injustice.

- Based on scientific consensus, climate disasters will continue to compound in frequency, duration, and intensity (AR6 Synthesis Report, n.d.) and call for a better understanding of the factors that can support residents' resilience throughout Europe.

- A comprehensive understanding of the link between exposure to climate risk and structural inequalities – including those historic, ongoing, and newly emerging – is critical to addressing complex, multidisciplinary and wicked problems in urban policy, planning, and practice that climate change raises.

## Definition: Vulnerability to climate change

Vulnerability refers to the degree to which individuals or communities with limited capacity to cope, adapt, or recover are exposed to climate, environmental, economic, or social hazards and harms. The extent of vulnerability is usually assessed along three lines: (1) exposure (being subject to pressures from or in the path of a hazard, such as a storm), (2) sensitivity (characteristics that may increase susceptibility to a hazard, such as social-economic factors like relatively low income), and (3) adaptive capacity (the ability to respond to or mitigate hazards, like having quality and affordable housing or insurance).

## WHAT IS SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION AND HOW DOES IT RELATE TO STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES?

This report aims to examine how structural inequalities shape, constrain, or limit planning and policy efforts towards equitable climate mitigation and adaptation. In the European context, these structural inequalities are rooted in the vestiges of colonialism and decolonization failures, which manifest as unequal access to land ownership, institutional supports for White Supremacy, and continuing extractive relations with formerly colonized lands. They are also reflected in failed urban renewal and segregation policies and the rise of neoliberal fiscal austerity, the shrinking of “benevolent government”, and the corporatization

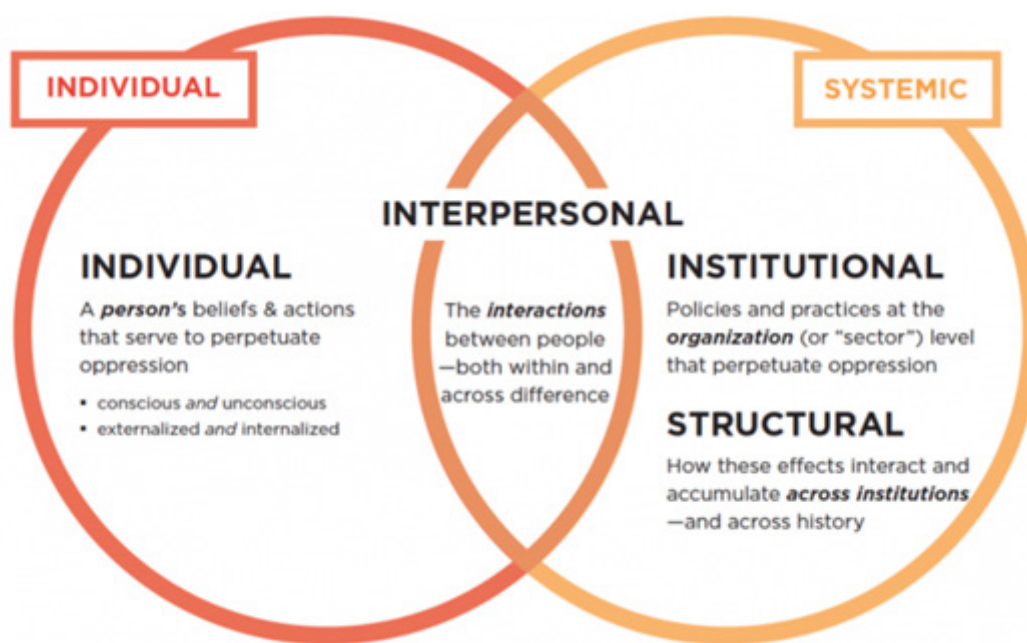
and privatization of basic rights, including the right to housing, education, and transportation.

Finally, since the 1990s and 2000s, cities have been vehicles for continued structural inequalities through globalization and accompanying migration of those from the Global South struggling against continuing extractive relations with former colonizing powers (Ferdinand 2021) and seeking both economic opportunity and climate-relief in the Global North. Taken together, such overlapping forces generate a degree of exclusion and vulnerability that drive some of those who are affected to their breaking points.

As structural inequalities are often born out of what is known as systemic oppression, it is helpful to first clarify the underlying dynamics of systemic oppression.

”” *Oppression refers to the ways in which social, political, and economic systems perpetuate “othering” marginalizing groups along lines of class, race, gender, immigration status, disability, and more.* ””

## Lenses to Study Oppression



Following the National Equity Project, oppression refers to the ways in which social, political, and economic systems perpetuate “othering”—marginalizing groups along lines of class, race, gender, immigration status, disability, and more (Natl. Equity Proj., n.d.)<sup>2</sup>. Oppression is not merely the product of individual prejudice, but is also embedded in the policies, institutions, and everyday practices that guide planning and organization of cities.

There are many lenses by which to understand oppression. This report applies the lens of systemic oppression. We aim to investigate those policies and practices that are deployed within institutions across history and society to perpetuate continued vulnerability among certain groups. These policies and practices are shaped, interpreted, or contested through interactions and power relations between people.

Source: National Equity Project  
<https://www.nationalequityproject.org/frameworks/lens-of-systemic-oppression>

<sup>2</sup> [www.nationalequityproject.org](http://www.nationalequityproject.org)

This unfolding of systemic oppression can be seen at local and national levels. For example, at national levels of government, policies on housing, immigration, and labor can magnify exclusion of the 'other' by:

- Systems of advantage and disadvantage and opportunity structures like privileging homeownership as an asset
- Biased policies and practices like restricting access to rental subsidies for migrants with irregular status
- Deregulated rental markets that benefit corporate landlords over tenants.

At the local level, planning decisions, infrastructure investments, and climate adaptation measures can reinforce these same dynamics by prioritizing affluent districts or implementing "green" projects that inadvertently displace vulnerable populations – often to more affordable neighborhoods that are nonetheless greyer and more exposed to climate risks (Shokry et al. 2021). Together, these layers of systemic oppression manifest as unequal access to housing, insecure livelihoods, and unequal exposure to climate risks, especially so for historically marginalized groups, especially migrants and other racialized groups.

## Definitions: Exclusion, intersectional inequalities and historically marginalized groups

**Exclusion** refers to the systemic processes through which individuals or groups are denied access to rights, resources, opportunities, or decision-making power.

**Intersectional inequalities** refer to the ways multiple forms of oppression—such as race, class, gender, migration status, disability, and age—interact to shape people's exposure to harm and access to resources.

**Historically marginalized groups** are populations that have been systematically disadvantaged over time through discrimination, exclusion, and unequal access to political, economic, or social power. These groups have faced persistent barriers rooted in structural forces such as racism, colonialism, class inequality, gender oppression, and migration status.

Research on the manifestation of exclusion in the European context has thus far largely emphasized the role of class and gender as primary drivers of oppression (Grasso and Giugni 2025), ascribing those areas with greater policy and practice attention than others, like race. However, recent shifts in practitioner and academic perspectives are driven by:

- Intensified immigration into European cities.
- Influence from North American racial justice movements.
- Cross-disciplinary exchange between U.S. and European scholars (Hawthorne 2022; Germain 2016).
- Impact of decolonial scholars studying European inequalities and exclusion on policy and societal debates.

Across both U.S. and European scholarship, critical work has emphasized several interrelated dynamics

of exclusion that shape the built environment across both regions. These include: spatial segregation and exclusion; redlining and other forms of historical disinvestment; struggles over citizenship and racialized belonging; the enduring legacies of slavery and colonialism in policy and planning; and the persistent failure to treat colonial histories and migration dynamics as integral to processes of urban development.

Taken together, these critiques show that earlier dominant narratives and shared urban histories often ignored or minimized how migrant populations – frequently racialized – experienced insecure housing tenure, discriminatory real-estate practices, and disproportionate concentration in low-paid and precarious employment. Building on this critical tradition, this report argues for and applies an intersectional lens to clearly identify structural inequalities embedded in the built environment in Europe.

## Explore Further

### Reparatory Justice for Africans and People of African Descent: A series of Explainers (2025)

The United Nations has made reparatory justice a major priority. The transatlantic trafficking and enslavement of more than 30 million Africans continues to shape inequities worldwide. This report brings attention to how slavery, the trade of enslaved Africans, or colonial domination has created lasting harms for descendants of this history. It further highlights how growing movements for reparatory justice across regions and institutions are building on international human rights law for advancing reparative measures.

#### Key points:

- More than 30 million Africans were forcibly displaced and enslaved, creating enduring social, economic, and political harms that remain unaddressed.
- Countries with legacies of enslavement and colonial extraction have not yet fully confronted or repaired the historical and ongoing impacts of these systems.
- Momentum for reparatory justice is increasing worldwide both at the national level and in cities.

Find more here: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/reparatory-justice-africans-and-people-african-descent-series>

## HOW DO HOUSING, CLIMATE, AND ECONOMY INTERACT IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT, AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

As demonstrated in the context of the urban heat dome of June 2025, interacting systems produce social and health impacts for individuals and communities in the built environment. Parsing

these interactions within these types of events can be an effective way of identifying how structural inequalities lead to particularly negative outcomes for the most socioeconomically vulnerable. This approach can support improved outcomes and delegitimize systemic inequality.

**“The built environment is defined as the objective and subjective characteristics of the physical context in which people spend their time (e.g., home, neighborhood), including aspects of urban design, (e.g., presence of sidewalks), traffic density and speed, distance to and design of venues for physical activity (e.g., parks), and crime and safety”.**

(Wang et al. 2023, p.4)

## Neighborhood, social and urban infrastructure



The built environment includes services provided to a community and is not thus only constituted by grey infrastructure and buildings but also encompasses green infrastructure projects that are often seen and branded as mitigating forces against climate impacts (Garcia-Lamarca et al. 2021). These services include public transportation or water sanitation.

Source: Teresa Aledo through IMBRACE



The built environment is not a uniform space, experience, or perception for all, but instead is the product of the policies and decisions made over time by those in power that generate uneven access to urban services. In Europe, the built environment is often where structural inequalities are most visible amongst historically marginalized residents, particularly on those with worse socio-economic and health outcomes (Wallace et al. 2016; Krieger 2024; Bakhtiari et al. 2018; Anguelovski et al. 2020).

Examples of how built environment and structural inequalities are connected:

- Housing conditions and past segregation practices determine who is most exposed to extreme heat or cold today and impact health outcomes for

communities.

- Transportation infrastructure shapes which neighborhoods can more easily and efficiently access places of work, and which remain disconnected.
- The placement and condition of climate mitigation infrastructure, such as flood levees or climate shelters, determine who is impacted by extreme flooding.

More examples and illustrations on climate impacts on migrant communities can be found in publications of the project IMBRACE studying immigrants' climate health vulnerability and how their situated knowledges and practices can inform both their own response capacities and urban climate adaptation more broadly.<sup>3</sup>

## The Built Environment, Health, and Climate Change in Europe

According to the World Health Organization (2019) and the Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate in Europe Report (2024):

- Every year, more than 100,000 deaths occur in the WHO European Region due to inadequate housing conditions, many of which could be prevented.
- Transport, domestic heating and industrial production generate pollution in the region's cities, making good planning a key mechanism for pollution reduction.
- Cities exhibit high levels of social and environmental inequality. Less wealthy households can be affected 5 times more by inadequate housing and indoor cold than affluent households

- Heat vulnerability increased by 9% from 1990–2022 in Europe (from 37.9% to 41.2%), with the highest absolute vulnerability observed in western Europe (Daalen et al. 2024).
- Reducing cooling load and implementing sustainable cooling (e.g., passive cooling by natural ventilation, green roofing, improved shading) can protect thermal comfort and the overall health of European populations (Daalen et al. 2024).
- Increasing greenspaces can substantially mitigate urban heat islands and climate-related health risks (Daalen et al. 2024), with a decrease of green-surface summer temperatures by 2.5–6°C (Green Policy Platform 2022).

<sup>3</sup> <https://imbrace-erc.org/publications/>

## A COMPOUNDING SYSTEM OF VULNERABILITIES

The intersection of housing, climate, and economy creates a compounding system of vulnerabilities for historically marginalized groups. Here, we acknowledge that different types of exclusion and inequalities intersect to create vulnerabilities across race, class, gender, and age determinants. While our analyses focus more specifically on how racism and class shape vulnerabilities, we also take those other dimensions into consideration.

Overall, research has demonstrated that:

- Climate change increases the frequency of negative outcomes in both incipient and acute climate disasters, including heatwaves, floods, storms,

and fires (Smith et al. 2022).

- Neoliberalized, financialized, and deregulated housing systems amplify climate risks when stock is old, poorly maintained, or treated as an asset rather than a right (Besbris et al. 2024; Hoffman et al. 2020).
- Economic pressures such as increases to cost of living, stagnant wages, and precarious work constrain households' ability to adapt (Garrison and Martinez 2024). Moreover, training and business gaps prevent marginalized groups from benefiting from green transition investments (Motoi 2020).

The vulnerabilities (re)produced reinforce one another and can compound into acute poly-crisis conditions with debilitating outcomes for socioeconomically vulnerable populations.

### Barcelona housing and heat



Barcelona tenants often face both unaffordable housing markets and summer heat that makes what affordable options there are dangerous. Passatge de Morenes, in Poble Nou is an example of a recently gentrified neighborhood.

Source: Alberto Bougleux

In Barcelona, examples of these compounding vulnerabilities are particularly visible. Due to mass tourism, working-class tenants may face “renoviction” after a greening retrofit, while also enduring dangerous summer heat in a precarious tourism-sector job that exposes her to day temperatures of over 30°C. Renoviction (Bouzarovski et al. 2018) refers to the displacement of tenants as a result of building upgrades, such as those aimed at improving energy efficiency, thermal comfort, or climate resilience. It occurs when these interventions are used to justify evictions, temporary relocations that become permanent, or sharp rent increases that prevent tenants from returning once the works are completed.

## Glasgow housing tenements



Source: wrobison, *Tenement building on Dalmarnock Road, Glasgow*, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.0

In Glasgow, recent urban planning decisions have prioritized housing demolitions over retrofits, displacing tenants, and increasing carbon costs. This displacement takes place in a context in which virtually all the historic stock of public housing has been sold off to residents through Right to Buy schemes and stock transfer to Housing Associations<sup>4</sup>, thus exposing working-class residents to rent hikes in the private market.

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.livingrent.org/glasgow\\_stock\\_transfer](https://www.livingrent.org/glasgow_stock_transfer)

## Redevelopment in Nantes



The Île de Nantes district is a prominent example of post-industrial redevelopment in Nantes, where new housing from the 2000s and 2010 has been accompanied by new public services, business development, and creative and cultural institutions.

Source: Lisa Hannuschke

In Nantes, on the other hand, despite its substantial historical and new social housing stock and a fairly equal distribution of green spaces, the current national economic slowdown and budget cuts are threatening overall affordable housing production, the continuity of social services, and bold climate adaptation of public spaces. Further, in spite of significant national funds that promote urban renewal in Nantes, these processes risk displacing social housing tenants in the name of creating more socially mixing neighborhoods, thus risking the destruction of the social fabric of historically working-class and migrant neighborhoods.



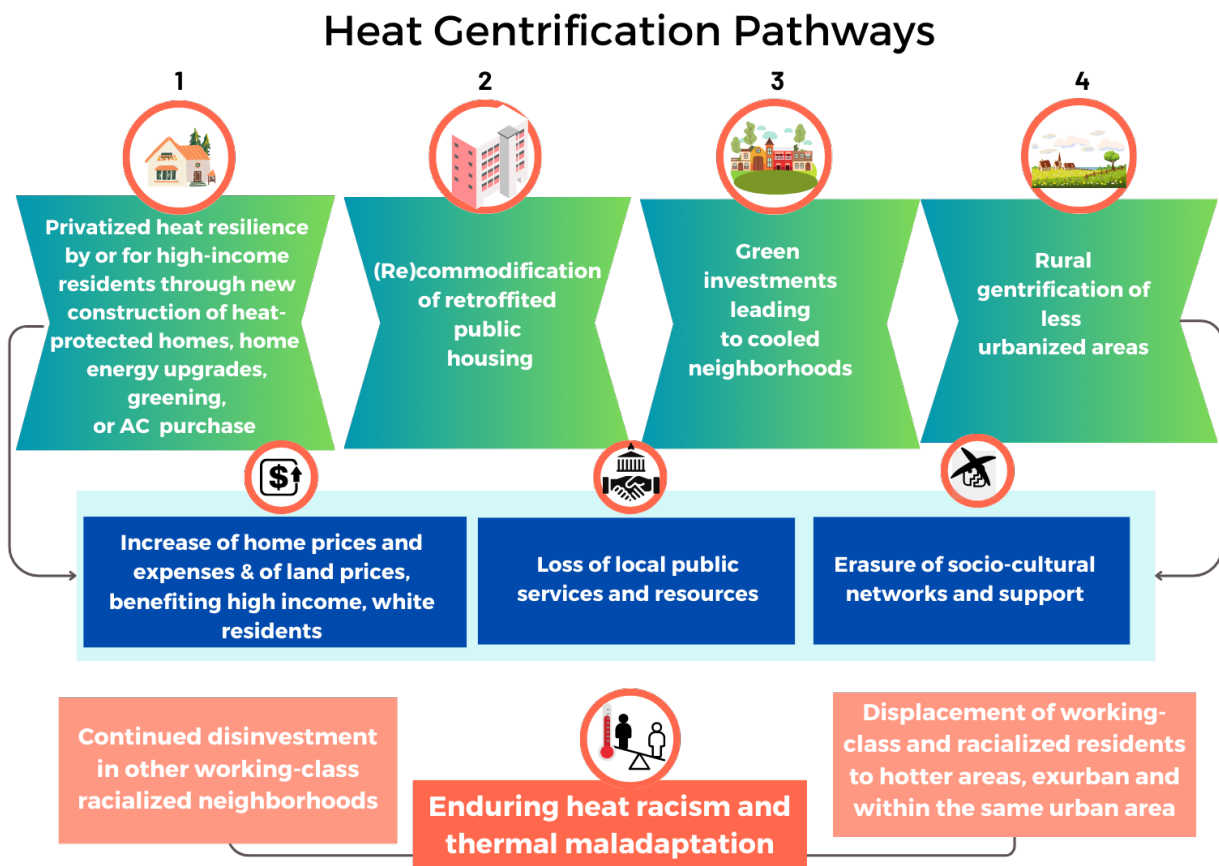
” Research finds that unhoused residents are highly susceptible to extreme heat, as they often prioritize staying in familiar locations rather than seeking access to cooler environments (Gabbe et al. 2023; Putnam et al. 2018). ”

### **Heat and Vulnerability**

To zoom in on a particular climate impact – heat – social vulnerability to heat is determined by broader contextual and structural factors, including occupational exposure, socioeconomic status, and race (Ebi et al. 2018; 2021; Vanos et al. 2023). Research finds that unhoused residents are highly susceptible to extreme heat, as they often prioritize staying in familiar locations rather than seeking access to cooler environments (Gabbe et al. 2023; Putnam et al. 2018). Their vulnerability is further compounded by pre-existing and frequently untreated health conditions. In Europe, racialized residents of all ages face the greatest

exposure to heat-related risks—race, as with other environmental injustices, remains the most powerful determinant of inequality (Clark et al. 2024; Benz and Burney 2021). These trends highlight neighborhood and built environment features—such as housing conditions—and illustrate how urban heat intensifies existing inequalities across cities and can lead to maladaptation from climate change. In addition, research shows that there is a likely risk that those residents get gentrified out if they live in attractive neighborhoods, with a cooler climate, and more green infrastructure, and little available public housing to help them stay put (Anguelovski et al. 2024).

## Heat racism and heat gentrification pathways



Heat-response strategies such as greening, grey infrastructures, and retrofitting are embedded in gentrification and displacement dynamics, illustrating "heat gentrification". Heat gentrification is a subset of "climate gentrification", involving the socio-physical displacement of marginalized residents due to climate impacts and responses related to heat that make some (cooler) homes and neighborhoods more attractive and less affordable. This process relegates working-class and racialized residents to areas with higher heat exposure, creating enduring landscapes of heat racism and thermal maladaptation.

Source: Anguelovski, I., Kotsila, P., Lees, L., Triguero-Mas, M., & Calderón-Argelich, A. (2024). From racism and to urban justice in the USA and Europe. *Nature Cities*. doi:10.1038/s44284-024-00179-6

## Ethno-racial inequalities in Europe

In the European context, the racial dimension of socio-economic inequalities and structural oppression is often minimized - if not invisibilized - in public discourse as a US-American problem (Goldberg 2006). This may be explained by the historic importance of class and economic inequalities for social movements and politics, as well as a diffuse fear of classifying residents, and a continuation of postcolonial relations of power with deep-rooted structural racism (Simon 2017).

We understand the terms race and ethnicity, not as inherent individual characteristics, but as the result of a global system of oppression which ascribes meaning to certain physical traits in order to classify humans (Ahmed 2002). Since this classification, which originates in colonial power relations and White Supremacy, is socially constructed and embodied, it is also contextual, fuzzy and non-binary. There is thus no inherent or unique scheme of characteristics according to which humans could be classified independent of their socio-cultural context. In order to describe the social construction of ethno-racial identity that results from unequal power relations and oppressions, the term racialization has been proposed by post-colonial scholars (Barot and Bird 2001).

## Public plaza in the racially diverse neighborhood of La Guillotière, Lyon



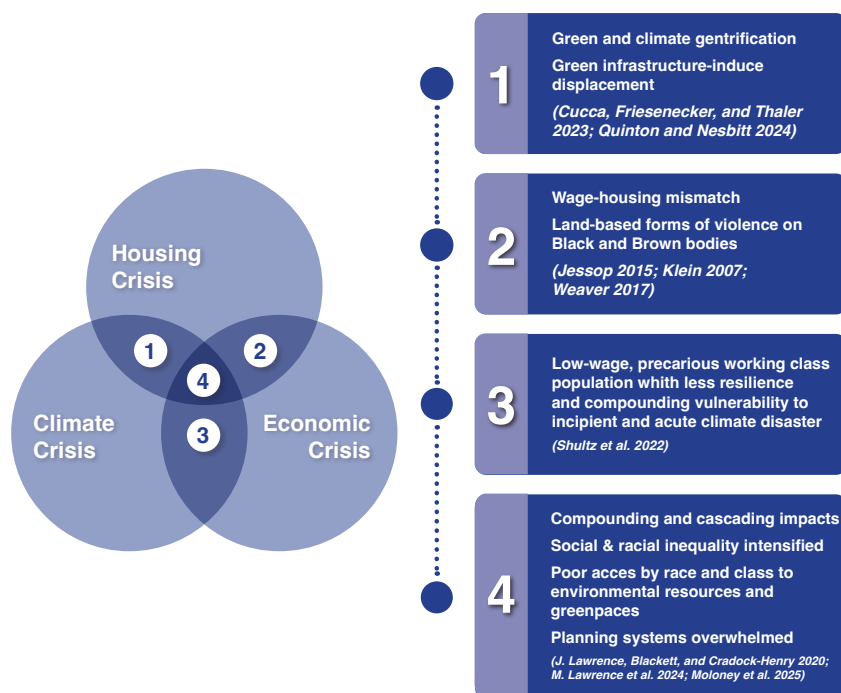
Source: Isabelle Anguelovski

“ Describing a person as racialized thus does not refer to their inherent physical characteristics, but to the way they are perceived, and their identity is constructed based on a global hierarchical system of oppression that juxtaposes White and non-White humans and is (often subconsciously) expressed in everyday social life. ”

To fight racial hierarchization and associated injustices, rather than erasing racialized identity as a unit of analysis, it is crucial to name its importance as a factor of ongoing discrimination and structural inequality (Fassin 2011). However, ongoing resistance to the recognition of racialized injustice manifests not only in a lack of targeted policies but also in the way information and data about (urban) populations is collected and treated.

In many European countries, census data is not disaggregated by ethno-racial characteristics of residents. For this reason, scholars working on racialized inequalities in the European context have often resorted to data on nationalities, countries of birth, or family migration histories to approximate ethno-racial characteristics. Yet more precise and systematic data is necessary to further identify and track the role of racialization in socio-economic and environmental inequalities.

### Climate, housing, economic, and labor dimensions in Europe



Caption: This diagram illustrates how climate, housing, economic, and labor/training crises intersect to produce compounding structural inequalities. The overlaps highlight areas where climate disasters exacerbate housing precarity, economic instability, and labor market insecurity, while insufficient access to green jobs and training deepens exclusion. At the center lies the need for integrated policy approaches that address systemic inequities across all domains simultaneously.

Source: (Oscilowicz et al. [FORTHCOMING])

**Figure 1. Map of three cities in focus in this report: Barcelona, Nantes, and Glasgow**



## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

As stated above, this report seeks to deepen understanding of the structural and intersectional inequalities shaping urban climate action across Europe and to provide actionable insights for cities working toward climate justice. It examines how historic and ongoing systems of oppression operating from the national to the neighborhood scale have produced legacies of exclusion that continue to constrain cities' abilities to deliver equitable climate action.

Drawing from a comparative analysis of selected CNCA member cities (Glasgow, UK; Barcelona, Spain; and Nantes, France, see Figure 1), the analysis situates local challenges within broader political, economic, and institutional contexts that shape access to housing, employment, and climate-resilient infrastructure.

## The report pursues three main objectives:

- 1.** To analyze how recent and sustained dynamics of oppression – from nation to city – embed a legacy of intersectional inequalities and exclusion within the built environment in a manner that prevents or constrains cities from addressing climate justice needs for their most vulnerable residents.
- 2.** To identify how municipal, public, and civic actors are confronting these barriers through planning, policy innovation, and cross-sector collaboration.
- 3.** To highlight promising practices, tools, and institutional reforms that can strengthen equity-driven climate governance and support CNCA member cities in advancing systemic change.

While the report focuses primarily on climate mitigation, it also considers intersections with adaptation and resilience planning, recognizing that equitable transitions depend on addressing both immediate and long-term climate risks.

- **Climate mitigation:** reducing or preventing greenhouse gas emissions from human activities.
- **Climate adaptation:** enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change impacts.

Ultimately, to be justice-centered, mitigation and adaptation policies must question and address structural inequalities in exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity.

Source: UN News (2025)

This report zooms in on a sample of cities facing a variety of structural inequalities, climate challenges, and urban development pathways – Barcelona, Glasgow, and Nantes – and is guided by the following research questions:

**1.** How does the link between systemic oppression, urban development, and the built environment

shape the outcomes of climate action in cities?

**2.** How are cities addressing exclusion through climate action?

**3.** What lessons can be drawn from a comparative analysis of the structural social and environmental inequalities cities face and of the promising actions they are taking to address them?

*” Ultimately, this report aims to provide a framework that connects structural analysis with actionable pathways that enable CNCA cities and their partners to dismantle systemic barriers and advance climate justice for all urban residents. ”*

## **METHODOLOGY, CASES, AND OVERVIEW**

The cases selected for this report include Nantes (France), Barcelona (Spain), and Glasgow (United Kingdom) as cities in countries with a diversity of economic development patterns, political systems, housing regimes, immigration trends, and climate challenges. Examining these cities comparatively allows the report to surface how shared structural forces across the European context such as neoliberalization, privatization, and austerity manifest differently across national contexts, while revealing common patterns through which climate mitigation and adaptation efforts can inadvertently reproduce or deepen existing social and spatial inequalities if justice – and racial justice in particular – is not placed at the core of urban climate governance.

This report draws on a mixed qualitative and comparative policy analysis approach designed to investigate how structural inequalities and systemic oppression shape climate, housing, and economic governance amongst European cities by researchers at the Barcelona Laboratory for Urban Environmental Justice and Sustainability (BCNUEJ) within the Institute of Environmental Science and Technology at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (ICTA-UAB).

### **The research integrates:**

- Review of policy and planning documents and reports
- Existing academic research and analysis
- 45+ primary interviews on green inequalities from Glasgow (2018), Nantes (2018) and Barcelona (2020-2021)
- New qualitative fieldwork conducted in 2025 resulting in 25 additional interviews

## Overview of the report research process



**1. The analysis began with a systematic review of policy documents and institutional frameworks at both the national and municipal levels. This included urban planning, housing, and climate action plans from the three selected case study cities, as well as national laws and regulatory frameworks related to housing, immigration, labor, and environmental justice. The goal of this stage was to identify the historical, structural, and contextual barriers that influence how equity and policy intersect in practice.**

**2. The research team dissected qualitative and quantitative analysis of housing inequality trends, including insights from EU-funded research projects (ReHousin), as well as key academic and policy literature on systemic oppression and intersectional inequality. This stage helped situate local urban challenges within broader national trajectories of welfare reform, neoliberalization, privatization, and austerity. This stage also included an identification and review of existing literature on racial inequalities in Europe.**

**3. To deepen this analysis, the research team incorporated new qualitative data from 25 semi-structured interviews conducted in June – October 2025 with planners, housing officials, environmental practitioners, and civic organizations in the three case study cities: Barcelona, Spain; Glasgow, UK; Nantes, France (Figure x). These interviews focused on how local actors understand and address structural exclusion in the context of housing, the built environment, and climate action. Transcripts were coded thematically to identify recurring patterns across domains such as land use, governance, and economic policy.**

**4. Findings were also informed by ongoing research and fieldwork (2018-2021) conducted within BCNUEJ's broader program on climate and housing justice in Europe. This included prior studies and interviews on urban greening, nature-based solutions, and just transition strategies for workers and small businesses.**

**5. Finally, a comparative policy analysis was conducted to synthesize insights across the three case study cities, highlighting both shared and context-specific structural barriers to equitable climate action.**

## Connecting with Practitioners

The preliminary findings of this report were presented and discussed with CNCA member city representatives during the Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance European meeting held on October 8, 2025, in Lyon, France. This session served as a key feedback opportunity to ground the analysis in the lived realities and policy priorities of participating cities. Insights from that dialogue were integrated into the report's final stage, helping to refine the policy recommendations to better reflect the challenges, needs, and innovations identified by CNCA partners.

Through this iterative approach, the report bridges academic research with practitioner knowledge, ensuring that the findings and recommendations are both evidence-based and actionable for cities working to advance climate, housing, and economic justice.

Data Type	Description	Purpose in Analysis
Policy and planning documents	National, regional, and local policy documents from Spain, France, and the United Kingdom, including housing, land use, climate, and adaptation plans; laws such as Spain's Ley por el Derecho a la Vivienda (2023), the UK Equality Act (2010), and Scotland's National Planning Framework 4 (2023) and France's Nouveau Programme National de Renouvellement Urbain (2014)	To identify structural and contextual barriers to equitable climate action embedded in legislation, institutional frameworks, and planning systems.
Academic and grey literature	Peer-reviewed studies and policy reports on systemic oppression, intersectionality, housing inequality, and urban climate governance; analysis of European 'Rehousing' and regeneration projects.	To situate local policy dynamics within broader structural trends of inequality, neoliberalization, and welfare retrenchment in Europe.
New qualitative interviews	25 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2024–2025 with planners, municipal staff, civic actors, and housing advocates in Barcelona, Glasgow, and Nantes.	To capture practitioner perspectives and lived experiences of exclusion and justice in climate and housing policy.
Recent fieldwork and lab research	Empirical work by BCNUEJ on housing, climate adaptation, and just transition initiatives, including local engagement and participatory workshops.	To contextualize current findings within ongoing research on urban environmental justice and climate transition in Europe.

Data Type	Description	Purpose in Analysis
Comparative policy analysis	Cross-case synthesis of findings from Barcelona, Glasgow, and Nantes using thematic coding and comparative policy mapping.	To identify shared structural barriers and locally specific responses, informing cross-cutting policy recommendations.
Stakeholder feedback (Lyon, 2025)	Presentation and discussion of initial findings with CNCA member cities on October 8, 2025, at the CNCA European Meeting in Lyon, France.	To validate preliminary results, gather city feedback, and refine policy recommendations based on practitioner insights.

This table summarizes the key data sources used in the report, combining document review, qualitative interviews, and comparative policy analysis. Together, these sources provide a multi-scalar perspective on how structural inequalities shape climate action outcomes in European cities. The integration of stakeholder feedback from CNCA's 2025 Lyon meeting ensures that the final recommendations reflect both empirical evidence and practitioner experience.

## OVERALL TRENDS AND TYPOLOGIES

The selection of cases and the data mobilized for this report reveals the following trends and profiles for Barcelona (Spain), Glasgow (Scotland), and Nantes (France). Although all three cities are located in the Global North and are embedded in welfare-state traditions that are often assumed to provide broad social protection, their trajectories reveal how precarity and inequality are produced through differentiated housing regimes, governance arrangements, and access to social rights.

Barcelona illustrates a case of decentralized governance with limited fiscal autonomy, a highly financialized rental market, and weak tenant protections. Those trends intersect with strong housing pressures, generating both intense displacement and sustained grassroots resistance that actively shapes policy debates. Glasgow is a case of centralized governance, long legacy of housing privatization, and constrained municipal

capacity under austerity which together have produced fragmented urban regeneration and climate-centered responses. Lasting labor and fuel poverty, refugee exclusion, poor housing quality, and uneven retrofit provision remain un- or under-addressed while civic mobilization is limited and less confrontational and influential than in Spain. Nantes presents a contrasting model in which stronger planning frameworks and a higher public housing share coexist with growing national defunding and social-mixing policies, resulting in more managed but still consequential exclusion and risks linked to climate-oriented urban renewal. Civic mobilization is much more episodic and limited and not housing-led. Across all three cities, migrants are disproportionately exposed to housing insecurity and climate vulnerability, although in France access to affordable housing is somewhat mitigated by strong social housing sector (Friesenecker et al., 2025), underscoring the point that climate justice depends not only on technical or planning capacity, but also on strong welfare legacies.

## Case summaries and typologies

Dimension	Barcelona (Spain)	Glasgow (Scotland)	Nantes (France)
General context	<p><b>National:</b> Post-dictatorship liberalization; reliance on tourism, construction, and real estate; high labor precarity.</p> <p><b>City:</b> Tourism-led growth and real estate speculation; green innovative projects coexist with low-wage, insecure and informal jobs, especially for Global South migrants.</p>	<p><b>National:</b> Long-term deindustrialization, neoliberal restructuring, and austerity; weak wage growth; structural poverty</p> <p><b>City:</b> Post-industrial economy with persistent poverty and negative health outcomes ("Glasgow Effect"; limited and uneven green job creation)</p>	<p><b>National:</b> Historically state-led economic model, increasingly fiscally constrained.</p> <p><b>City:</b> Successful post-industrial transition with diversified economy, especially with strong transit systems and renaturing projects; rising market pressures although home prices have decreased over the last 3-5 years.</p>
Political systems and governance	<p><b>National:</b> Decentralized governance with limited municipal fiscal autonomy.</p> <p><b>City:</b> Progressive climate and housing agendas constrained by insufficient national regulation and international speculative markets.</p>	<p><b>National:</b> Centralized UK system with devolved Scottish powers; legacy of austerity.</p> <p><b>City:</b> Limited municipal capacity; dependence on national frameworks and private actors.</p>	<p><b>National:</b> Centralized state with strong planning frameworks, including social housing obligations; national defunding.</p> <p><b>City:</b> Strong metropolitan planning capacity, increasingly budget-constrained.</p>
Housing regimes	<p><b>National:</b> Homeownership-oriented system; weak tenant protections; limited social housing.</p> <p><b>City:</b> Highly speculative rental market; 1.7% public housing; renovictions and green gentrification.</p>	<p><b>National:</b> Right-to-Buy and housing stock transfer; dominance of private rental and housing associations.</p> <p><b>City:</b> Hollowed-out public housing (only 1% left) but around 17.5% still live in social rentals; rising rents; poor housing quality and retrofit gaps.</p>	<p><b>National:</b> Strong social housing tradition under pressure from financialization.</p> <p><b>City:</b> High public housing share (around 25%), but social-mixing and urban renewal policies risk displacement.</p>

## Case summaries and typologies

Dimension	Barcelona (Spain)	Glasgow (Scotland)	Nantes (France)
<p>General immigration trends and migrant living conditions</p> <p>immigration trends and migrant living conditions</p>	<p><b>National:</b> High immigration since the 2000s; limited ethno-racial data.</p> <p><b>City:</b> Migrants concentrated in precarious housing and labor; rental discrimination.</p>	<p><b>National:</b> Long-standing immigration with restrictive asylum policies.</p> <p><b>City:</b> Dispersal policies and privatized refugee housing increase insecurity.</p>	<p><b>National:</b> Sustained immigration shaped by post-colonial ties and discrimination.</p> <p><b>City:</b> Migrants disproportionately affected by housing cost burdens and renewal-related displacement but no deep socio-spatial segregation as in other French cities.</p>
<p>Climate challenges (built environment)</p>	<p><b>National:</b> Rising frequency and length of heatwaves, drought, flooding, and energy poverty.</p> <p><b>City:</b> Extreme heat, energy-inefficient and poor-quality housing, uneven access to green space; displacement risks from greening.</p>	<p><b>National:</b> Flooding, cold exposure, aging housing stock.</p> <p><b>City:</b> Fuel poverty, inefficient tenements, insufficient retrofit funding for low-income residents, displacement from “sustainable” areas.</p>	<p><b>National:</b> Heatwaves, flooding, rising energy costs; large retrofit programs.</p> <p><b>City:</b> Advanced climate and green planning, but new redeveloped districts face risk of greening-driven gentrification. Strong green branding and identity.</p>

Continued on the next page

## Case summaries and typologies

Dimension	Barcelona (Spain)	Glasgow (Scotland)	Nantes (France)
Social movements and civic organizing	<p>National: Strong, sustained social movements rooted in anti-austerity, housing rights, feminism, and some around migrant solidarity and protesting against extreme right, with high levels of politicization since the 2008 financial crisis.</p> <p>City: One of Europe's strongest urban housing movements (e.g. PAH, Sindicat de Llogateres), alongside neighborhood, anti-tourism, and climate justice mobilizations that actively shape public debate.</p>	<p>National: Social movements historically strong through labor unions but weakened by deindustrialization and austerity; recent resurgence around cost-of-living, housing, and climate issues, although limited.</p> <p>City: Civic mobilization is present but less confrontational; tenant unions (e.g. Living Rent), community groups, and public health advocates play a growing role, though with limited leverage compared to Southern European cases. Overall connections and common mobilizations between housing, migrants, and climate movements remain limited.</p>	<p>National: Episodic but powerful national mobilizations (e.g. Gilets Jaunes, pension protests) reflecting territorial, class, and cost-of-living grievances rather than housing per se.</p> <p>City: Localized mobilizations around anti-racism, policing, and urban renewal impacts, including protests in working-class and peripheral neighborhoods; housing activism is more institutionalized and less movement-driven than in Spain.</p>
Climate justice implications	<p>Climate mitigation and greening intersect with increasing housing speculation, producing displacement risks for renters, migrants, and low-income households. Need for strong tenant protections and social housing expansion.</p>	<p>Climate action constrained by austerity and privatization, limiting the ability to deliver equitable retrofits and affordable housing and reinforcing socio-spatial inequalities.</p>	<p>Despite stronger planning and social housing traditions, climate investments may reproduce exclusion if social-mixing and market-oriented renewal displace low-income residents.</p>

From a racial standpoint, each country also represents a diversity of immigration trends and racial characteristics, which intersect with housing and environmental/climate vulnerability in the built environment in different ways. Barcelona combines very high, more recent (since the late 1990s) immigration with extreme housing market pressures, rendering many migrant households particularly exposed to overcrowding, displacement, and climate stressors linked to poor housing quality and stability. Glasgow, by contrast, is experiencing

a rapid diversification trajectory, with migrant populations often concentrated in older and lower-quality housing stock and a high, recent presence of refugees. Nantes remains a comparatively lower-immigration city, where population growth is still driven primarily by internal migration, and where international migration has so far played a more limited—though gradually growing—role in urban growth compared to other cities. Nantes also has a solid presence of second- or third-generation immigration descendant families.

## Comparative Immigration Trends

Dimension	Barcelona (Spain)	Glasgow (Scotland)	Nantes (France)
Key available statistics	Barcelona: ~25–30% non-Spanish-born (Barcelona Statistics Department)	Glasgow: ~19% non-UK born (Scotland's 2022 Census).	Nantes: ~8–10% born abroad with foreign nationality at birth (immigré) even if later naturalized, combined with 10–15% as “immigrant descendants,” which include Southern European (Portuguese) and North African descendants (INSEE, 2019 data)
Recent trends	Strong increase since end of the 1990s; accelerated post-COVID after a dip in the 2010s due to the housing crisis	Rapid increase since 2019; strong diversification	Gradual increase; relatively stable
Main regions of origin	Latin America, North Africa, Pakistan, China, EU	South Asia (Central & Eastern), Africa (e.g. Sudan, Eritrea), Middle East, EU	North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, EU
Dominant migration drivers	Work, family reunification, asylum	Work, study, asylum, refugee dispersal	Family reunification, work, students

Continued on the next page

## Case summaries and typologies

Dimension	Barcelona (Spain)	Glasgow (Scotland)	Nantes (France)
Settlement & housing pattern	Dense central areas and periphery; high rental precarity	Work, study, asylum, refugee dispersal Concentration in older housing and social housing	More dispersed settlement although also concentrated in “quartiers prioritaires”
Link to housing & environmental vulnerability	High exposure to climate stressors and displacement	Strong links to damp/mold and poor housing conditions and health inequalities	Lower but growing relevance in recent urban renewal policies (politique de la ville)

### REPORT STRUCTURE

This report examines how structural inequalities have shaped the built environment in three European cities: Barcelona, Glasgow, and Nantes. We investigate how these intersecting crises of climate change, housing, and economy have impacted the lived experiences of planners, policymakers, and activists in each of the studied cities.

**This report is organized into five core chapters:**

**1. Chapter 1** outlines the characteristics of the climate crisis and its unequal impacts on marginalized groups

**2. Chapter 2** follows with an overview of key historical and policy frameworks that shape the built environment in each city and country

**3. Chapter 3** turns to the interviews conducted to examine the lived experiences of exclusion and structural injustice

**4. Chapter 4** identifies shared themes across the cities and outlines how patterns of inequalities are emerging across Europe

**5. Chapter 5** highlights policy and planning recommendations that address the identified inequalities directly

### Community garden in the gentrifying neighborhood of Poblenou



Source: Alberto Bougleux

# Chapter 2

## Introduction:

### Structural Oppression and Exclusion within National Systems of Policy and Planning: Spain, the UK, and France

#### AT A GLANCE

##### **This chapter:**

- Traces Spain's, the United Kingdom's, and France's political and governance shifts and identifies their effects on structural inequality.
- Examines how Global South migrants and other racialized groups in Spain, the United Kingdom, and France experience housing injustice and structural exclusion.
- Analyzes how climate change compounds existing risks for marginalized residents.
- Analyzes structural exclusion and housing inequality in Spain, the United Kingdom, and France and how they have played out on the ground in Barcelona, Glasgow, and Nantes.
- Describes how sustainable urban development and liberalization policies may intensify inequalities.

Chapter 2 situates Barcelona, Glasgow, and Nantes within their broader national and urban political–economic contexts, tracing how historical housing regimes, welfare systems, migration patterns, and planning traditions have shaped and illustrated contemporary inequalities. It highlights how long-standing processes of segregation, racialization, and state retreat structure current housing insecurity and unequal climate risk responses, setting the contextual foundations for the in-depth city analysis of urban actors’ perceptions and perspectives that follows in Chapter 3.

## STRUCTURAL EXCLUSION AND HOUSING INEQUALITY IN SPAIN

Climate and housing inequalities in Spain are embedded within a recent history of dictatorship, followed by an era of intensive deregulation and neoliberalization. These major shifts in housing policy and systems continue to exclude renters, low-income residents, and migrants and play out acutely on the ground in Barcelona.

### Key timeline

#### Characteristics of the Franco Dictatorship (1939–1975)

- Owner-occupation of housing as a form of social control
- Homeownership promoted for “social pacification” through the Protected Housing Act (1939)
- Large-scale state-built housing developments alongside informal periphery settlements (1950s–1970s)
- VPO (Officially Protected Housing) policy which included a large-scale Rent-to-Own scheme
- Massive internal migration from rural to urban areas, which put pressure on Barcelona’s housing system

#### Characteristics Democratization & Decentralization (Post-1975)

- Increased power to Autonomous Communities (land use, housing, planning)
- National strategies operationalized through regional/municipal arrangements, but with uneven outcomes

#### Urban Transformations & Liberalization

- Rent deregulation and tax benefits for second homes (1985 Boyer Decree 1985)
- Mortgage liberalization and high loan-to-value lending
- Land liberalization and long-term speculation and sprawl (1998 Land Law)
- Expiration and declines of VPO stock from 120,000 (1986) <70,000 (1995)
- Construction of new housing, social and culture centers, parks

#### Large scale fairs & infrastructure projects (e.g. Barcelona 1992 Olympics; 2004 Cultures Forum) (1990–2000s)

- Waterfront redevelopment, public transit infrastructure, and foreign investment
- Urban renewal, working-class displacement and gentrification
- Shift toward tourism-centered economy
- Global events to attract visits

## Key timeline cont.

### Post-2008 Financial Crisis and 2010s-2020s

- Foreclosures with disproportionate hit on working- and middle-class homeowners
- Distressed units acquired by corporate landlords (Blackstone, SAREB)
- Rise of private rental tenure, temporary rentals, and intensified displacement
- New urban projects associating traffic calming, redirection, new public transit, and networks of green infrastructure

## Plaza Angel Pestaña, La Prosperitat, Barcelona



This plaza is one of the many public plazas adjacent to a social center built in the early 1980s to create new infrastructure and services in the city's many working-class neighborhoods.

Source: Pere López Brosa, Ciutat Meridiana vista de Torre Baró, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0

### From Authoritarianism to Liberalization

The Franco dictatorship (1939 - 1975) laid the foundation for compounding inequalities within housing and climate across Spain. Franco was a critical catalyst for the cultural and political prioritization of owner-occupation tenancy. During the regime, commodification of homeownership was promoted as a cultural and financial goal for residents. These policies include, first, the Protected Housing Act of 1939 which politicized homeownership as “a formula for social pacification... [through the] conservative, stable nature of the traditional home”, aiming reduce the risk of anti-authoritarian community mobilization (Bassols et al. 2022).

Franco regime policies encouraged the rapid urbanization and abandonment of rural economies

in Spain. Barcelona was a major receiver of this migration from southern and central Spain. Many migrants landed in the peripheral neighborhoods of the city in informal settlements. These waves of migration reshaped working-class neighborhoods and placed pressure on public infrastructure and housing systems. In order to neutralize mass-migration impacts to cities and de-escalate rising contempt for the authoritarian regime, the government under Franco dictatorship built hundreds of thousands of units throughout Barcelona and its metropolitan area, including in the now working-class districts of Sant Andreu and Nou Barris. A new-build homeownership housing scheme was also introduced in major metropolitan areas called Officially Protected Housing (VPO from “vivienda de protección oficial”), with the state subsidising its construction and purchase. VPO

mortgages came with limited-term price protections for 20-30 year periods, but most have since expired, with only 2% of the current housing stock still under regulation (IDRA 2025). In Barcelona, this trajectory has resulted in a general housing system characterized by significant affordability challenges, high national and foreign investor interest, and widespread displacement pressure.

**In order to neutralize mass-migration impacts on cities and de-escalate rising contempt for the authoritarian regime, the government under dictatorship built hundreds of thousands of units throughout Barcelona and its metropolitan area, including in the now working-class districts of Sant Andreu and Nou Barris.**

The Spanish homeownership project continued after authoritarianism and into the modern era of democratization. This process included the decentralization of national levels of government and the granting of authority to Spain's Autonomous Communities, including Catalonia. The powers of such Autonomous Communities include substantial authority over land use, housing, and planning. Still, the Spanish national government, largely abiding by European Union directives, also includes

national housing and climate strategies, including the National Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2021-2030 (Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica, 2020), Urban Agenda 2030 (Sánchez-Naudín and Sanchez-Asin 2025), and the National Housing Plan. Yet, these national plans largely depend on regional and municipal resources, leading to contentions over powers of government and implementation inconsistency (Paleo Mosquera and Quintiá Pastrana 2024).

### **Ciutat Meridiana in Barcelona photographed from Torre Baró neighborhood**



Large scale housing developments such as those in Ciutat Meridiana were built during the Franco dictatorship, mostly to house working-class residents and to exert social pressure and control on workers.

Source: Pere López Brosa, Ciutat Meridiana vista de Torre Baró, Wikimedia Creative Commons CC BY-SA- 3.0

Beginning in the 1980s, neoliberal reforms reshaped housing policy. The 1985 Boyer Decree at the national level deregulated rents and extended tax benefits to second homes, reinforcing owner occupancy prioritization and the rapid and mass construction of housing complexes in peri-urban, rural and coastal areas. Mortgage reforms further allowed banks to increase loan-to-value ratios, expanding access to credit amongst the Spanish population, even for those without economic viability to sustain such high mortgage limits (García-Lamarca and Kaika 2016). Further, Spain's entry into the European Economic Area in 1986 and compliance with the European Stability Pact encouraged national fiscal austerity measures and overwhelmingly reduced public investment in housing (2016). However, the 1980s and the early 1990s also saw large-scale municipal construction of sports, social, and cultural infrastructure through the city, especially in the traditional working-class districts of Nou Barris, Sant Andreu, or Horta-Guinardó.

In Barcelona, the 1992 Olympic Games was used as a tool for a global rebranding of the post-industrial city, focusing on significant public infrastructure investment particularly along the waterfront and the construction of housing in the Sant Martí district, then catalyzing speculative (re)development pressure, largely through foreign investment, throughout the city. Beginning in this period,

working-class residents living in the areas selected for revitalization were displaced, either by immediate relocation to make way for new development, or by eventual gentrification and being priced out (Camerin 2019). In this moment, Barcelona shifted toward a local economy largely oriented to global tourism, real estate development, and innovation-led urban growth. One emblematic example is the 22@ innovation district project launched in the 2000s as a large-scale urban regeneration and entrepreneurial urban policy in Europe (Charnock et al. 2025).

By the late 1990s metropolitan sprawl and housing speculation were commonplace in the urban Spanish landscape. The introduction of the 1998 Land Law permitted the liberalization of unused and underutilized land for development, an attempt to stimulate the construction and real estate economy through land and property speculation. Coupled with tax incentives for mortgage acquisition and owner-occupied properties (which were just extended in November 2025 for all property owners who purchased their unit before 2013), as well as the outright removal of deductions for rental housing, market-led housing development continued dominating Spain's built environment economy. By this time, VPO production had declined dramatically. Over 120,000 units existed in 1986, and fewer than 70,000 remained by 1995 (IDRA Inst. Recer. Urbana Barc. 2025).

**Tax incentives for mortgage acquisition and owner-occupied properties for all property owners who purchased their unit before 2013 combined with the outright removal of deductions for rental housing meant that market-led housing development continued dominating Spain's built environment economy.**

In 2008, roaring speculation on housing and excessive reliance on predatory mortgage-backed credit triggered a collapse of predatory mortgages, leading to staggering foreclosure and eviction rates that disproportionately affected working- and middle-class homeowners (Bonshoms-Guzmán 2023; García-Lamarca and Kaika 2016). Meanwhile, institutional and corporate investors such as Blackstone or the SAREB Spanish "bad bank" took advantage of such a distressed market, acquiring foreclosed properties at discounted prices, and only further fomenting a shift toward private rental tenure.



**In 2008, roaring speculation on housing and excessive reliance on predatory mortgage-backed credit triggered a collapse of predatory mortgages, leading to staggering foreclosure and eviction rates that disproportionately affected working- and middle-class homeowners (Bonshoms-Guzmán 2023; García-Lamarca and Kaika 2016).**

As of the mid-2020s, Barcelona and its housing market continue to be severely impacted by the same national policies and laws that led to the global financial crisis. Real estate remains dominated by global tourism and foreign capital investment, as demonstrated in 2023 when over 50% of housing purchases concluded without mortgages and primarily by investors (IDRA Inst. Recer: Urbana Barc. 2025). Policies such as tax reductions, public-private partnerships (PPPs), EU structural funds, 30% inclusionary zoning regulation, and rent caps have sought to curb speculative pressures, but enforcement and national level legal challenges, including the 2019 Real Estate Credit Law, have limited their reach (Hernández et al. 2025).

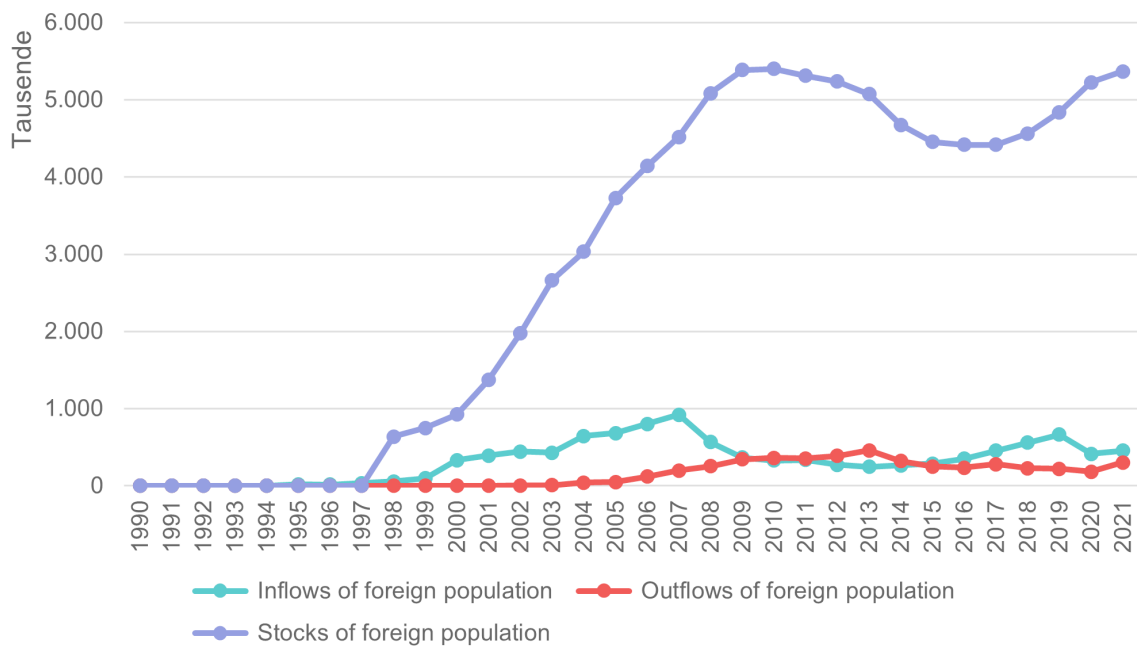
In the context of climate change, densification and retrofit policies build on the Urban Planning Law (2000), the Climate Change and Energy Transition Law (2019), and the Strategic Urban Agenda 2030 (ReHousIn: Contextualized Pathways to Reduce Housing Inequalities in the Green and Digital Transition 2025). Those have aimed to curb urban sprawl, optimize land use, improve public transit accessibility through transit-oriented developments (TODs) and compact city models, and encourage large-scale retrofits. Despite these environmental ambitions, the city continues to face chronic

shortages of social housing and rising evictions of working-class and migrant residents (Vidal et al. 2024), with the 2023 National Housing Law only partially improving rental affordability and apartment availability since it fails to regulate 1-11 month rentals (Cristeche and Anguelovski 2025).

### **Migrants and Housing Injustice**

Under Franco, Spain largely excluded newcomers (Iglesias et al. 2024). Migration from outside Spain and into major Spanish cities exponentially grew in the late 1990s with the arrival of Latin American migrants in the country's major metropolitan areas seeking work in the booming construction and hospitality sectors (Figure 2; Figure 3). In 1990, only 1% of the population was foreign-born; yet, by 2010, slightly over 12% of the population was born outside of Spain (Worden 2010). By 2015, political destabilization and ethnic genocide in Syria and countries within North Africa had driven significant in-migration of refugees across Europe, including Spain. Later that decade, refugee migrants from Venezuela and other Latin American countries also sought asylum in Spain (Eurostat 2023).

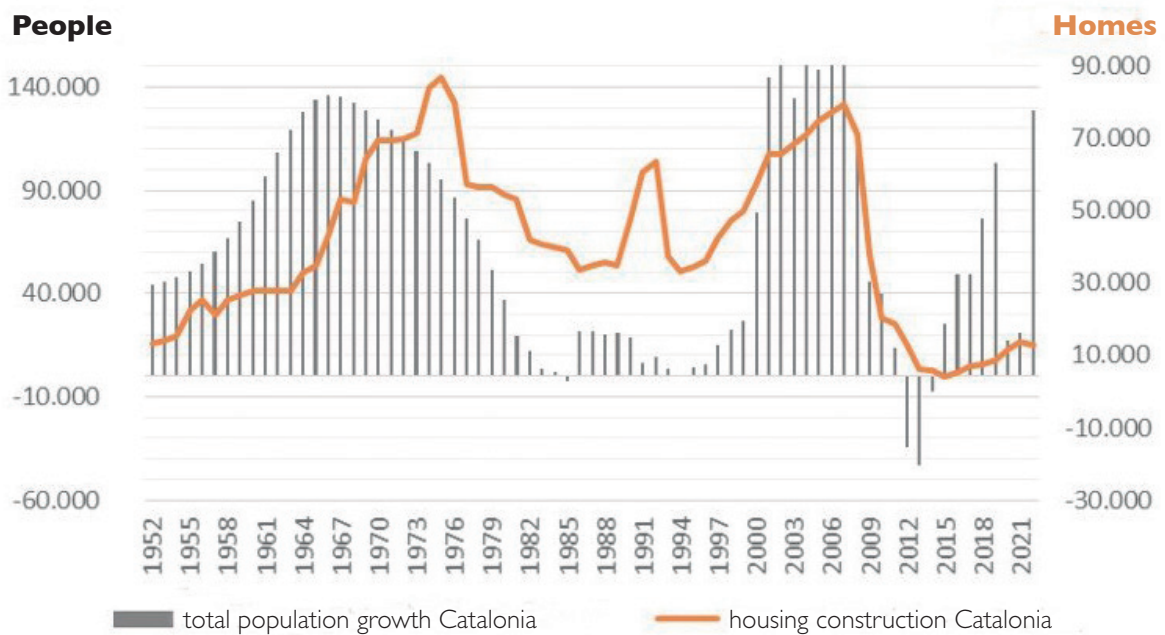
**Figure 2. Foreign born population in Spain 1990-2021**



ReHousin 2025.

**Figure 3. Population growth and housing construction in Catalonia (1952-2022)**

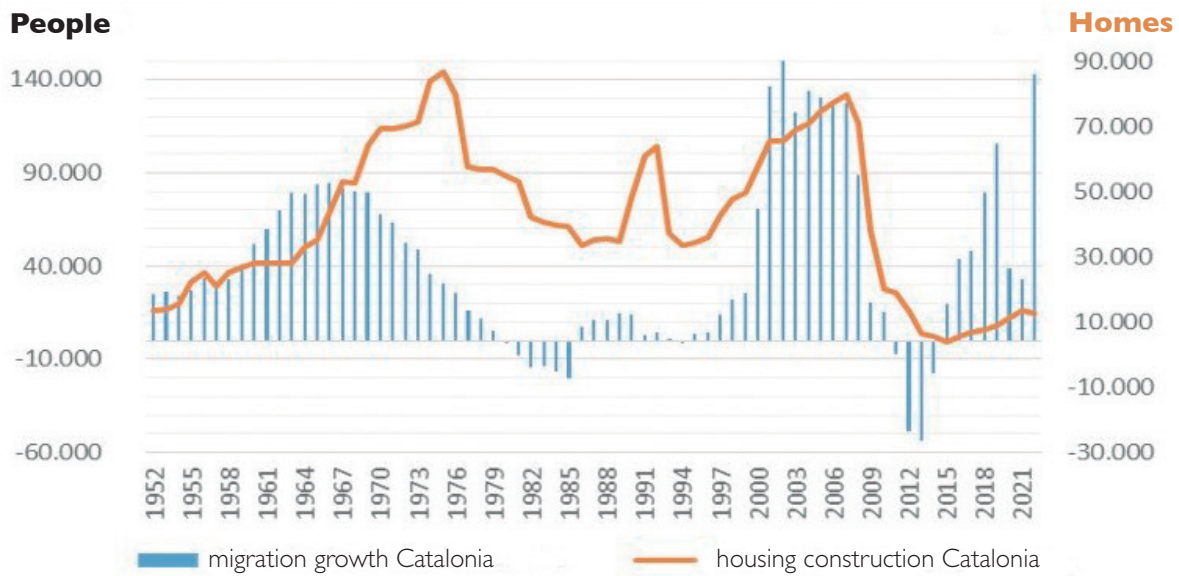
**Evolution of population growth and housing construction in Catalonia. 1952-2022. Completed homes**



Continued on the next page

Figure 3. cont.

## Evolution of population growth and housing construction in Catalonia. 1952-2022. Completed homes



Top: total population growth (bar graph) alongside total home construction (orange line). Bottom: growth of population only through migration (bar graph) alongside total home construction (orange line).

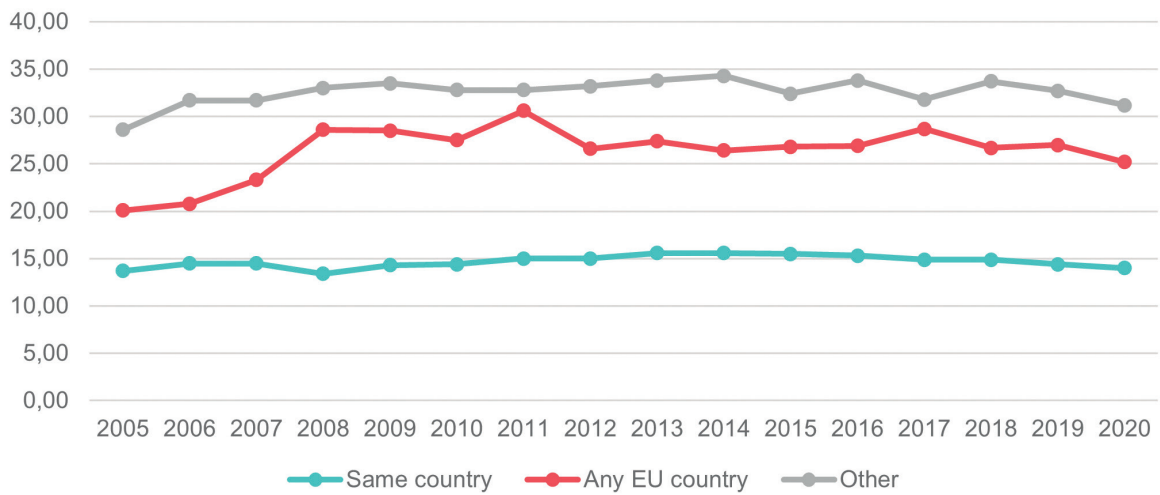
Source: Observatori Metropolità de l'Habitatge, 20 de febrer de 2023, Carme Trilla presentació La política d'habitatge com a pilar fonamental de l'Estat del benestar, p. 16.

In Barcelona, migrant households are disproportionately renters. In a revealing report on the migrant and housing crisis in Barcelona, the Barcelona Urban Research Institute (IDRA) found that 70% of migrants rent, compared to 14% of the general population (2025). According to the report, migrants further face:

- higher rates of overcrowding
- housing deficiencies
- forced displacement
- and over 50% of migrant tenants in Barcelona live in homes with major problems including leaks, poor insulation, and mold.

Moreover, housing-cost burden is highest for those born outside of Europe (ReHousIn 2025; Figure 4). Rental and work contracts (many in agricultural sectors) are a significant point of discrimination targeted at those who have a non-Spanish identifying name (IDRA Inst. Recer. Urbana Barc. 2025; Ribera-Almandoz et al. 2024). Last, recent research finds that racialized migrants were disproportionately offered abusive mortgage conditions and evicted prior and during the housing bust of the late 2000s (Garcia-Lamarca 2022).

**Figure 4. Housing cost share in total disposable income in Spain by country of birth**



Source: ReHousin elaboration on EU-SILC database, ReHousin 2025.

## Explore Further

### The Price of Prejudice from the Institute of Urban Research of Barcelona (IDRA)

The report offers unpublished data and a detailed analysis of the complexity of the living conditions of the tenant population of migrant origin in Madrid and Barcelona.

The data shows strong discrimination faced by immigrants reflected in greater exposure to residential insecurity and in the greater difficulty in accessing new housing. Immigrants tend to live in rental housing that is more disadvantaged than the local population, despite paying the same price. Furthermore, a total of 36% of Spanish renters report landlord abuse against 42% for migrant renters while 7 out of 10 migrants are obliged to live in a rented home against 14% for Spanish households. And only 13% feels able to live alone.

The analysis concludes with a series of public policy proposals to reduce discrimination in access to the housing market for reasons of origin, including regular controls and audits of real estate agencies to verify that they are not discriminating against migrant renters and the development of accessible online platforms to denounce rental abuses.

Source: <https://idrabcn.com/publicacio/prejudici/>



## **Climate Change and Compoundin Home and Labor Risk**

Migrants and tenants, and the intersectional identities within both groups, face compounded vulnerabilities in Spain as a result of this complicated housing and governance history. Compounding these risks are the incipient and acute impacts of climate change, impacting most dramatically those intersectional and vulnerable populations living in housing precarity.

At the national level, Spain's climate policy framework, including the 2021 Climate Law, Technical Building Code (CTE) and Climate Change and Energy Transition Law (2021), and the National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030, sets ambitious targets for decarbonization and energy efficiency (González-Eguino et al. 2020; Ruiz 2023). These retrofitting initiatives have further been heavily influenced by EU regulations, particularly the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) and the

Energy Efficiency Directive (EED) and implemented through programs such as the PREE (Programa de Rehabilitación Energética de Edificios) financed by EU NextGeneration funds (ReHousIn 2025).

However, disparities persist in regional implementation, with conservative, right-wing governed regions lagging substantially behind. There is also evidence that retrofitting can contribute to gentrification, making housing less affordable for lower-income residents, particularly those who are not owner-tenants (Vidal et al. 2024). This dependency on owner-occupied housing channels excludes renters, who represent a growing share of the population. Moreover, given the dominance of migrants and low-income earners in the Spanish rental market, those vulnerable groups seem to be systematically excluded from critical climate resilience efforts at the national and supra-national level.

**Overall, the strategies employed by the city most benefit already wealthier residents while migrant, long-term, lower-income owners, renters, and other vulnerable residents tend to be excluded from retrofit schemes and are also eventually displaced.**

At the municipal level, Barcelona has led efforts in green urbanism through interventions such as the Superblocks program and Pla Natura 2030, aiming to increase climate resilience in public spaces, neighborhood livability, and systematically reduce carbon emissions within the city (Nieuwenhuijsen et al. 2024; Ajunt. Barc. 2020). These projects, such as the Superblock and Green Axis program ("Programa Superilla") have either only been sited in already wealthier, educated, and primarily White neighborhoods (e.g. Eixample district) or in post-industrial, working-class and rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods (i.e. Poblenou) (Anguelovski et al. 2023).

The introduction of Superblocks has had dramatic impacts to surrounding property values and cost of living for long-term, low-income, and precarious residents, particularly those living in rental units, and are thus often perceived as only short-term assets by those residents (Planas-Carbonell et al. 2023; Oscilowicz et al. 2020). Overall, those municipal strategies most benefit wealthier residents while

migrant, long-term, lower-income owners, renters, and other vulnerable residents are both socioculturally and economically displaced. The latest city plan, the Pla Calor 2025-2035 (under the City Climate Plan "Pla Clima") shows greater sensitivity to equity concerns through the large-scale creation of climate shelters, emergency responses and preparedness, as well as school cooling, although much of its impact remains to be seen.

## The Poblenou superblock: Inaugurated in 2016 and remodeled since then.



Source: Isabelle Anguelovski

Extreme heat provides a clear example of compounding climate and housing challenges present for migrant community members in the Barcelona metropolitan region. Many migrants arrive in Barcelona without legal documents, unable to access government supported housing or work opportunities (Roccatagliata et al. 2022). As a result, they are often forced to live in overcrowded, often peripheral, rental housing. This housing is often undermaintained, with poor insulation and

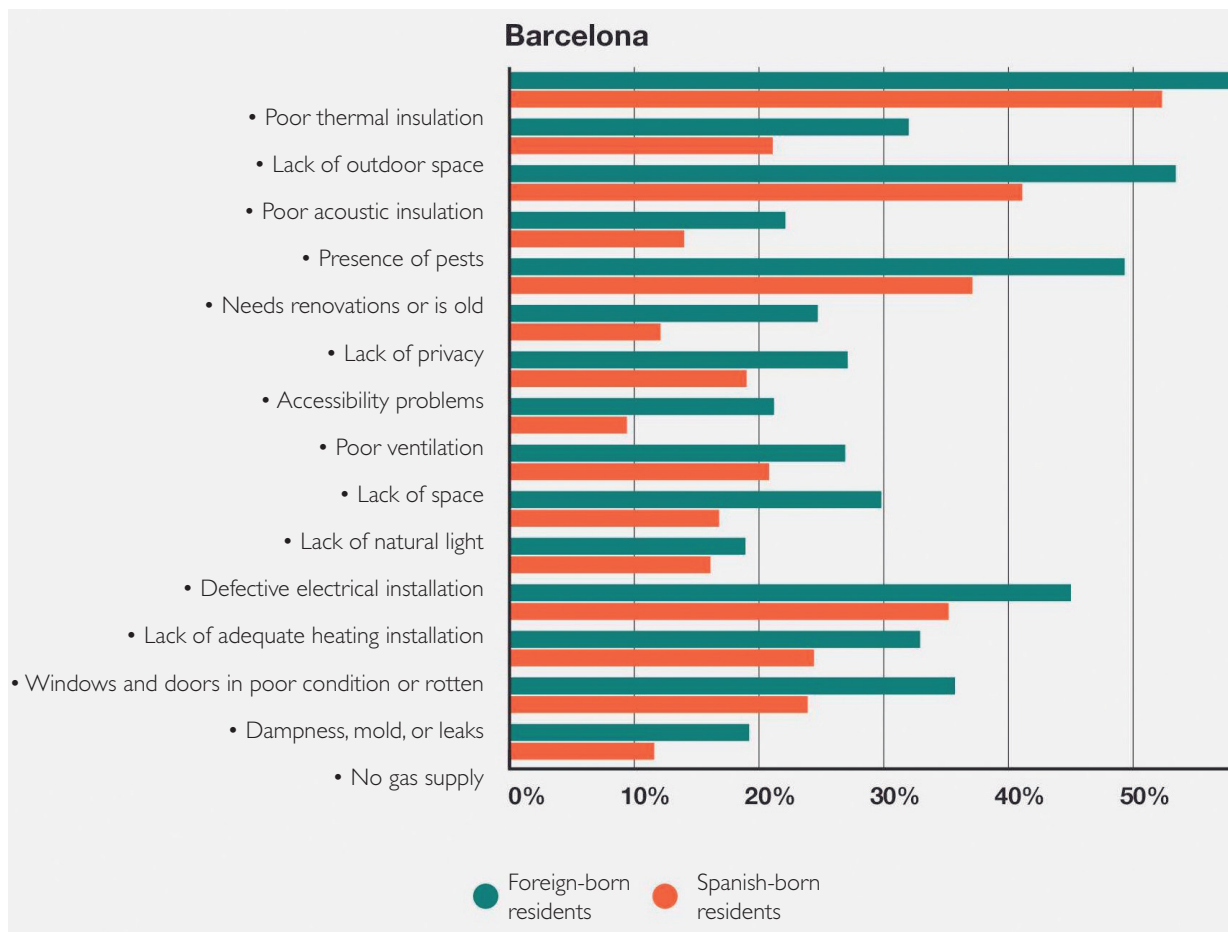
substandard living conditions (Aaserud et al. 2025, see Figure 5). As extreme heat and cold days – as well as floods – increase, migrants are more frequently and intensely exposed to further uninhabitable conditions (Kotsila et al. 2025) and climate insecurity. Moreover, as most are not homeowners and still lack national identification papers, they are systematically excluded from retrofit subsidies that would aid them in developing resiliency tools (Tirado-Herrero 2022).

## Survey insights on climate resilience inequality in Barcelona

A recent survey conducted in the Barcelona neighborhood of La Prosperitat reveals that Global South and low-income residents are half as likely to have heating systems at home (i.e., heat pumps and central heating) compared to Global North

and high-income residents. Residents originally from the Global North are seven times more likely to be aware of climate shelters than those from the Global South, although those report being more likely to use them (Amorim-Maia et al. 2023).

**Figure 5. Main housing deficiencies as reported by Spanish and non-Spanish residents**



Four out of ten foreign-born tenant households have suffered some form of abuse from their landlord, compared to one-third of Spanish tenant households. The most common abuses include refusal to make repair or refusal to attend to common spaces in buildings.

Source: “The price of prejudice” report (2025), IDRA.

Vulnerabilities for low-wage and migrant workers also exist within the labor market. Migrants are disproportionately represented in outdoor, low-wage jobs such as waiters in the tourism industry, street cleaning and agricultural labor, both of which have become more dangerous under extreme temperatures (Kotsila et al. 2025; van Selm et al. 2025). Foreign workers constitute 30% of all salaried workers but represented more than 40% of low wage workers in 2022, according to the Migration and Refuge Observatory of Barcelona. The presence in low-paid sectors, temporary employment, involuntary part-time work, and fragmented career paths all contribute to creating a situation of structural precariousness.<sup>5</sup> In 2025, the death of a street-cleaning worker in Barcelona during an intense

heatwave drew national attention to the risks faced by precarious workers in the city (Harris 2025).

Outside of the city and into the periphery and peri-urban areas of the Barcelona region, farmworkers – many of whom are undocumented migrants – are also exposed to unsafe conditions during peak summer months, often without adequate rest, water, or medical support. Moreover, many of these jobs are distant from available and affordable housing for migrants and, simultaneously, distant from the administrative offices the region requires new immigrants to attend in order to remain legal in the country. Distance from home, work, and legal obligations emerge as a critical impediment and inequality for migrant workers.

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.livingrent.org/rent\\_controls](https://www.livingrent.org/rent_controls) For more information see: [https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/dretssocials/sites/default/files/arxiu-documents/observatori\\_de\\_les\\_migracions\\_i\\_el\\_refugi\\_de\\_barcelona.\\_informe\\_2025.pdf](https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/dretssocials/sites/default/files/arxiu-documents/observatori_de_les_migracions_i_el_refugi_de_barcelona._informe_2025.pdf) and <https://provivenda.org/wp-content/uploads/Se-alquila.-Racismo-y-xenofobia-en-el-mercado-del-alquiler.pdf>

**Migrants are disproportionately represented in outdoor, low-wage jobs such as waiters in the tourism industry, street cleaning and agricultural labor, both of which have become more dangerous under extreme temperatures.**

### **Civic Resistance and Emerging Models**

Barcelona and Spain more generally have a robust history of civic and housing mobilization towards greater equity and justice. Tenancy and anti-eviction movements like Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH) and Sindicat de Llogateres have grown as powerful organizations with significant negotiation and public policy influence.

Housing movements were instrumental in the passage of the 2023 Right to Housing Law, which introduced regional rent control and obligations for institutional landlords (Deldós Gómez-Morán and Caroz-Armayones 2024). This civic movement inherited from a strong legacy of neighborhood organizing at

the end of the Franco dictatorship and into the early years of the transition to democracy and from the experience of civic leaders in public offices and city administrations (Garcia-Lamarca 2022; Anguelovski 2014).

For more information see: [https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/dretssocials/sites/default/files/arxius-documents/observatori\\_de\\_les\\_migracions\\_i\\_el\\_refugi\\_de\\_barcelona.\\_informe\\_2025.pdf](https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/dretssocials/sites/default/files/arxius-documents/observatori_de_les_migracions_i_el_refugi_de_barcelona._informe_2025.pdf) and <https://provivienda.org/wp-content/uploads/Se-alquila.-Racismo-y-xenofobia-en-el-mercado-del-alquiler.pdf>

### **A press conference of the Tenants' union, Sindicat de Llogateres in 2019**



Source: Pablo Castellano, Sindicat de Llogateres press conference, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0"

Most recently, community-organized alternative housing models have emerged in Barcelona and across Catalonia. Planning and housing tools such as housing cooperatives (e.g. Sostre Cívic; La Borda) and limited-equity schemes, are directly integrating climate mitigation goals, including passive housing standards, recycled materials, and renewable energy use (Leyva del Rio 2021; Martínez Alonso 2022).

These programs and tools are supported by municipal and EU NextGeneration COVID recovery funds, yet many of these funds are temporary and

uncertain in nature (Delclós and Vidal 2021). Further, other implementation challenges are due to poor rental regulation and fragmentation across cities, autonomous regions, and the federal level (Pareja-Eastaway and Sánchez-Martínez 2023). Finally, little directive and alignment between housing and climate policy exist amongst varying levels of government, particularly as it pertains to the intersectional vulnerability of migrant and low-income community members and the lack of visibility and recognition of migrant-specific vulnerabilities and needs in housing provision and security.

## Explore Further

### (In) Visible: The State of Racism in Catalonia 2024

SOS Racisme Catalunya has released its annual report documenting structural and everyday racism across the region.

- 647 situations of racism attended across 109 municipalities, with 316 identified as racist incidents and 105 opened for formal monitoring.
- High levels of incident underreporting where 67% of identified cases were never filed due to distrust in institutions, fear of reprisals, and limited resources.
- Interpersonal aggression and discrimination (29%)
- Barriers in access to social rights such as housing,

education, and health (22%)

- Abuse by public security forces (16%)
- Hate speech, workplace discrimination, and unequal treatment in private services, with 58% of them being minors.

The report calls for stronger institutional accountability, political commitment, and guaranteed pathways to reparation through structural transformation that can lead to a more equitable and anti-racist Catalonia.

Source: <https://sosracisme.org/in-visibility-estat-del-racisme-a-catalunya-2024/>

## STRUCTURAL EXCLUSION AND HOUSING INEQUALITY IN THE UK

Climate and housing inequalities in the UK are embedded within long-term dynamics of the mass commodification and privatization of public housing, institutionalized racism, and, since the 2008 crisis, broader austerity politics. The neoliberalization

of housing and immigration and asylum policies in particular has severely impacted low-income residents, migrants, asylum seekers, and tenants. Many deep-rooted social inequalities intersect with the compounding pressures of climate change in the UK and Glasgow, which manifest specifically through flooding, mold, and overheating.

## Key timeline

### Welfare State & Decommodified Housing (1940s–1970s)

- Post-war “One Nation” politics prioritized redistribution and social equality.
- Housing treated as a universal right, with strong public provision across tenures.
- Local authorities were central housing providers of large peripheral estates that rehoused slum populations
- By the 1960s–70s, Glasgow became Europe’s largest social housing landlord.

## Key timeline cont.

### Neoliberal Shift & Housing Commodification (1980s)

- 1979–80 marked a shift to “Two Nation” politics and welfare retrenchment.
- Right to Buy (1980) privatized social housing and reduced public stock.
- Deindustrialization hit Glasgow particularly hard.
- Housing became increasingly market-driven and unequal.

### Regeneration & Tenure Restructuring (1990s–2000s)

- 99% of Council housing transferred to housing associations.
- Private rental sector deregulated; tenant protections weakened.
- Culture-led regeneration (e.g. 1990 City of Culture) prioritized investment and image.
- Social housing further residualized.

### Mixed-Tenure Renewal & Demolition

- Estate regeneration and demolition led to net loss of social rental housing.
- Glasgow designated Transformational Regeneration Areas (TRAs).
- New housing favored mid-market rent and ownership over social rent.
- 2014 Commonwealth Games accelerated market-led redevelopment (East End)

### Intensified Housing Precarity (2020s-present)

- Rapid rent increases, especially in the private rental sector.
- Long social housing waiting lists persist.
- Help to Buy boosted prices and developer profits.
- By 2023, Glasgow's housing tenure dominated by ownership and housing associations, with limited social rent

## From a Social Democratic to a Neoliberal Welfare and Housing State

The post-World War II period in the UK was characterized by a commitment, at least rhetorically, to tackle inequality and regional divides through government action and policy, in what has been termed ‘One Nation’ politics (Hudson 2013). Housing was a central pillar in building the social democratic welfare regime. Treated as a universal right, housing was largely de-commodified and the tenure policy system was designed to be redistributive and tenure neutral (ReHousIn: Contextualized Pathways to Reduce Housing Inequalities in the Green and Digital Transition 2025). This meant that programs and subsidies were distributed across tenure categories (homeownership, private rental and social rental) and across the social spectrum. By the mid-1960s, each tenure held a significant share of the total

housing stock and local authorities played an important role in producing social rental housing. Enabling this system were heavy subsidies for construction, mortgage interest tax relief, the expansion of public land ownership and planning regulation that sought to curb land speculation (Christophers 2018). In Glasgow, as a response to political struggles and deepening social disadvantage, the local council constructed peripheral housing estates to absorb the population displaced from inner-city slums as these were being renewed in the 1930s (MacLeod et al. 2003). By the 1960s the city of Glasgow was the largest social housing landlord in Europe, with 175,000 houses built to replace older stock and tenement housing. In 1981, 63% of the city's population lived in social rental homes owned by Glasgow City Council.

**By the 1960s Glasgow City Council was the largest social housing landlord in Europe and 63% of the city's population lived in social rental homes.**

**Glasgow's Sighthill housing estate during its demolition between 2008-2016**



Source: Neil Gray.

Margaret Thatcher's rise to power as prime minister in 1979 marked a sea change in UK social and political economic policies whose legacy is still present today. The state withdrew from welfare provision as deindustrialization ravaged the northwest of the country, and what has been termed 'Two Nation' politics (Hudson 2013) unfurled neoliberal economic policy that accepted inequality as part of the inevitable natural order of capitalism and budget cuts. Glasgow, once referred to as "The Second City of the Empire" and one of the birthplaces of the industrial revolution, was hit particularly hard. Already in the 1970s Glasgow was officially recognised as Britain's most deprived locality (MacLeod et al. 2003). The decline of manufacturing-related employment from 77% in the 1980s to 7% in 2010s alongside continued disinvestment by the neoliberal state left Glasgow with high rates of poverty, intergenerational unemployment, very poor health outcomes and large swaths of contaminated vacant and derelict land, building up to what has been named the "Glasgow Effect" (García-Lamarca and Gray 2021).

Housing was fully commodified through Margaret Thatcher's famed 'Right-to-Buy'-policy in 1980, converting tenure from social rental to owner occupation to reduce the public housing stock and government involvement in housing. Right to Buy led to the loss of around 2.7 million public homes in the UK since 1980, where half a million council homes became private homes in Scotland by 2016 (Gray 2018). Public housing was further residualized by the 1989 Local Government and Housing Act. This limited local authorities' ability to spend on delivering housing with revenue from social rents and Right-to-Buy sales, significantly limiting their access to housing finance and maintenance of their housing stock. Local authorities became reliant on non-profit housing providers called housing associations (HAs) for the production and provision of social housing and delivery of affordable housing targets. Local authority protections on housing were thus removed, and rents in housing association-owned properties are often higher than those of council-owned social rental housing (Watt 2021).

In the 1980s and 1990s, much of the social housing stock owned by local authorities across the UK was transferred to HAs. In Glasgow the city sold all its public housing stock to HAs and to social rental tenants through Right-to-Buy, creating a foundational change in Glasgow’s housing tenure and culture. Housing precarity also increased for private rental sector tenants through the 1988 Housing Act, which removed rent control and security of tenure and gave landlords the right to make ‘no-fault evictions’. In the past 15 years, tenants have furthermore experienced enormous rent increases affecting especially the private rental sector where, across Scotland, rents have increased by 61% since 2010 - 81% in Glasgow - and over 240,000 tenants are stuck on social housing waiting lists (Living Rent).<sup>6</sup> Although 2013 Help to Buy

provided five-year interest-free equity loans to buy new-build properties for homebuyers, granting over 375,000 loans in ten years, experts say this program grew housebuilders’ profits and left many buyers in negative equity (ReHousIn: Contextualized Pathways to Reduce Housing Inequalities in the Green and Digital Transition 2025). Tenure trends in the UK can be seen in Figure 6 while in Glasgow, shifts in housing tenure mean that at the 2023 census, 45% of homes are owner occupied, 20% are privately rented and 34% are owned by housing associations.

**In the 1980s and 1990s, Glasgow City Council sold all its public housing stock to Housing Associations and to social rental tenants.**

**Changes in tenure in the UK 1991-2021**

Tenures	1991	2001	2011	2021
	<b>Proportion of housing stock (%)</b>			
<b>Owner occupation</b>	<b>66.2%</b>	<b>68.3%</b>	<b>64.2%</b>	<b>62.7%</b>
<b>Private rental</b>	<b>9.1%</b>	<b>11.7%</b>	<b>17.6%</b>	<b>19.8%</b>
<b>Social rental</b>	<b>24.7%</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>18.2%</b>	<b>17.5%</b>

Source: Rehousing report UK Feb 2025, using census data

Note that the growing proportion of owner occupation from the 1980s-2000s was not due to new housing production, but tenure change, through the privatization of what had been publicly owned social rental housing through Thatcher’s Right to Buy policy.

While there were efforts to rebrand and attract entrepreneurialism to Glasgow in the 1980s (MacLeod 2002), “urban regeneration” was triggered by Glasgow becoming the European City of Culture in 1990. Scholars have argued that this culture-led regeneration approach deepened structural problems, social divisions, inequality and poverty (Mooney 2004). A decade later, the 2014 Commonwealth Games brought billions of pounds of investment into Glasgow’s East End, one of the UK’s most deprived communities and the last ‘frontier’ for development in Glasgow. This has been analysed as a continuation of area-based, market-led urban renewal projects

aiming to destigmatize the East End and open it up for investment, as one part of a larger blue-green regeneration strategy along the Clyde River (Paton et al. 2012; Gray and Mooney 2011).

6 [https://www.livingrent.org/rent\\_controls](https://www.livingrent.org/rent_controls)

Mixed-tenure regeneration programs following the UK 2003 Sustainable Communities Act and 2016 Estate Regeneration programs often involved demolition of large council estates and resulted in the net loss of 270,000 social rental housing units (Appendix 2, Fig.1). Along these lines, in the 2010s, Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Housing Association and the Scottish government established eight deprived areas as Transformational Regeneration Areas (TRAs, Figure XI) due to the scale of demolition and

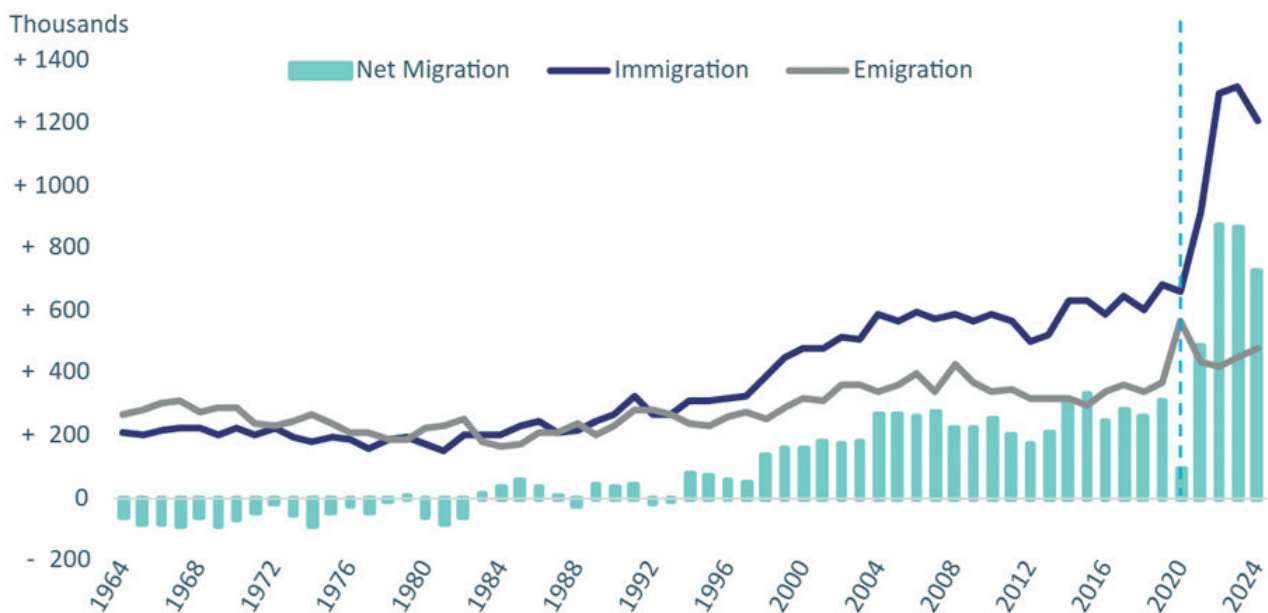
restructuring they are deemed to need. Following the 2003 Act promoting “new sustainable mixed tenure communities”, the aim of TRAs is to build 600 homes for social rent and 6500 homes for affordable sale or mid-market rent, as well as community facilities and green space. The aim to create social mix is thus questionable as there is a dramatically reduced amount of social rental housing, mid-market rent is targeted towards young professionals, and owner occupation is beyond the reach of local residents.

### Migrants and Asylum Seekers: Housing and Labor Injustices

The post-World War II period also marked the start of mass immigration especially from Commonwealth countries, fundamentally changing the composition of UK society. Immigrants' denigrating experiences with the welfare state led to their political mobilization, forcing the government to adopt the 1965 and 1968 Race Relations Acts prohibiting racial discrimination when accessing public services (Eseonu 2024). Nonetheless, researchers argue that racism was institutionalized through the development of the UK immigration control system in the 1960s and 70s (Bosworth et al. 2018), over which the UK government maintains power to this day. Figure 7 illustrates migration flows which have noticeably grown since the turn of this century. Figure 8 shows how EU net migration fell dramatically after Brexit (2020) while non-EU immigration has significantly increased since. Ethnic minorities have increased in UK's population from less than 3% in 1950 to 18% in 2021 (Office for National Statistics 2021) Growth has been slower in Scotland (13% in 2022) but Glasgow's ethnic minority population was 19% in 2022 (Glasgow City Council 2022).

<https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/article/2562/The-Partnership>

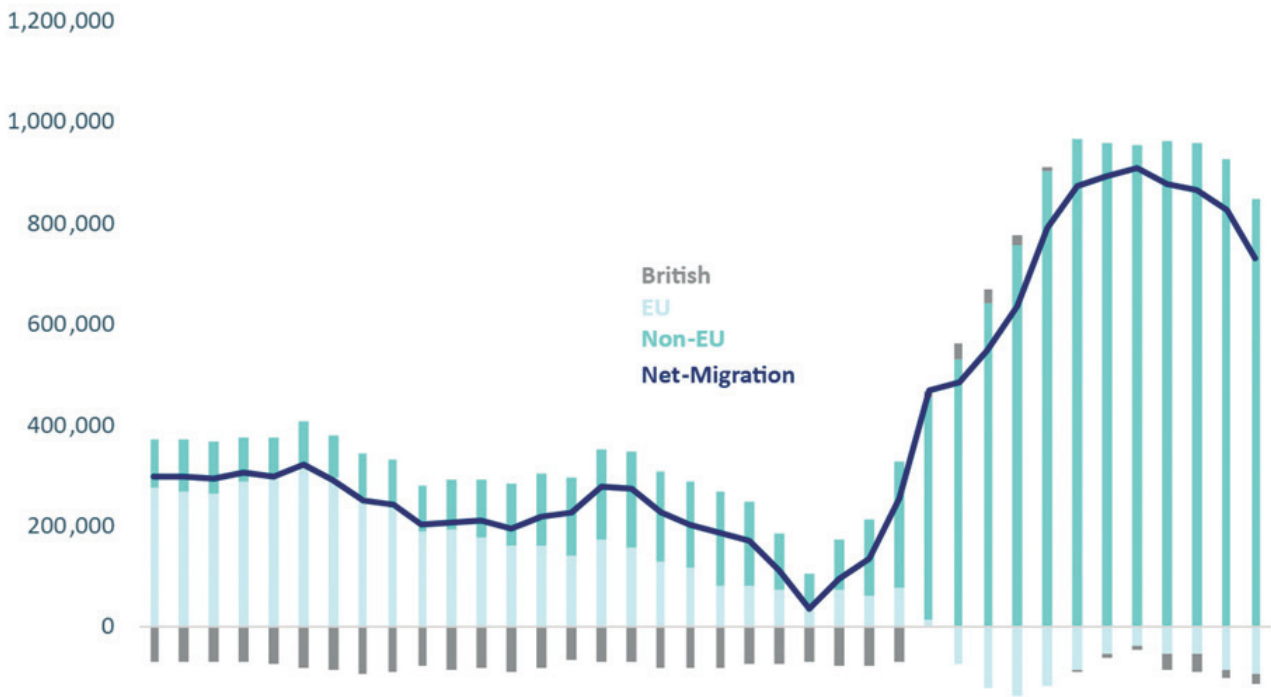
**Figure 7. Immigration, emigration and net migration in the UK, 1960s-2024**



Emigration surpassed immigration in the 1960s, while both levelled out over the following decades. The 2000s marked an increase in net migration to the UK, with a sharp uptick after the COVID pandemic.

Source: UK Migration Advisory Committee, Net Migration Report, published 13 May 2025.

**Figure 8. Net migration by nationality, 2015-2024**



The majority of migrants to the UK from 2015-2019 came from the EU. This plummeted in 2020 when Brexit came into effect, followed by emigration of EU citizens and a sharp increase in non-EU immigrations from the end of 2021 to present.

Source: UK Migration Advisory Committee, Net Migration Report, published 13 May 2025.

On 30 November 2023, Glasgow declared a housing emergency, followed by the same declaration in May 2024 by the Scottish government. Glasgow reported this as due to the cost-of-living crisis, record levels of homelessness, a severe shortage of social rented homes, the escalating cost of private rental housing, and the UK government's introduction of a streamlined asylum process. Housing injustice has indeed been compounded by the designation of Glasgow as the Scottish "no choice" dispersal site for asylum seekers as per New Labour's 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act. In 2024 people sought asylum in the UK largely from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Syria, Sudan and Vietnam, with asylum claims through time corresponding to sites of political and military conflict (Walsh and Jorgensen 2025). Managing asylum accommodation was outsourced to a private contractor who placed them in homes leased from HAs and private landlords in Glasgow's most deprived areas, where nearly three quarters of housing failed to meet the Home Office's basic standards (Santamarina 2024).

Decades of privatization and disinvestment in housing, which since the 1998 Scotland Act falls under the powers of the Scottish government and Glasgow City Council, means that housing maintenance and provision have fallen dramatically (White 2020). This translates to challenges to house over 4,000 asylum seekers today in the existing housing stock, and for Glasgow City Council to fulfill its obligation to house people presenting themselves as homeless. Glasgow's homelessness caseload is now over 6,600, with 41% of these cases being households who have been granted leave to remain (Glasgow Evidence to Parliament 2025), and most of them housed in temporary hotels or Bed & Breakfasts. At the same time budgets to build affordable housing have been reduced by the Scottish government by 25% (Glasgow's Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) 2025-2029). Furthermore, considering that less than 10% of all new housing developments in TRAs will be social housing, it is unclear how low-income and racialized residents will be meaningfully included—socially, economically and politically—in regenerated areas.

Refugee Action (2024) underlines the circumstance. The same structural racism that underpins and shapes the asylum system affects all racialized communities in the UK. Despite the illegality of discriminating on the grounds of race as per the Race Relations Act – as well as eight other characteristics as outlined in the 2010 Equality Act – research and reports over the past decade highlight “persistent and deeply ingrained racism at every layer of society” (Laurie 2018: 151). The UK government has acknowledged these problems yet only one third of recommendations from major reports commissioned to tackle endemic racism have been implemented over last 40 years (Mohdin et al. 2025).<sup>9</sup>

## Housing, work and racial injustice in the UK

### Poor quality housing:

From 2021-2023, 14% of households in England lived in a home deemed as “non-decent”, meaning it has no modern facilities, no effective insulation or heating, or was in a state of disrepair. 15% of White British households lived in a non-decent home while 24% of Mixed White and Black African households lived in a non-decent home – the highest percentage out of all ethnic groups (Runnymede Trust 2023).

### Homelessness and overcrowding:

Black people are three and a half times as likely to experience homelessness as White British people. Asian people are at highly disproportionate risk of more hidden aspects of housing precarity, such as overcrowding or ‘doubling up’ with other households (Bramley et al. 2024).

### Social housing access and quality:

Racialized residents are more likely to face additional barriers to access social housing and are often funnelled into the poorest quality and least desirable properties (Bristow 2021).

### Work:

Most immigrants to the UK experienced notable downgrading in the British labor market, leaving their children in a disadvantaged starting position. Second generation immigrants nonetheless outperform White British residents in education. But in spite of their better education, both generations of ethnic minorities have not obtained employment positions that match their level of human capital (Li 2017).

### Immigration:

The Right to Rent scheme contained in the Immigration Act 2014 forces private landlords to check the immigration status of tenants and potential tenants. According to section 22 of the Act a landlord should not authorise a private sector rental contract if the potential tenant does not have lawful immigration status. By the government’s own admission, this policy disproportionately discriminates against racialized residents, who are more likely to be asked to provide details of their immigration status than their White counterparts (Government of the UK, n.d.).

## Climate change and compounding risk for vulnerable groups

Tenants, migrants and asylum seekers, and the intersectional identities within these groups, face compounded vulnerabilities in the UK due to the legacy of public housing privatization, rent liberalization and immigration and asylum policy. Vulnerabilities of households already experiencing poverty are being compounded by climate change, particularly those in high-climate risk areas where exposure to heat strokes is greater, or where droughts and floods can affect food security (Sheng et al. 2023).

Vulnerable groups are furthermore particularly exposed to indoor humidity, building moisture loads, and flood-related water filtration. Residents living in older tenement stock and legacy high-rise/ social housing forms face increased damp and mold/ condensation issues due to inadequate maintenance, insulation, and ventilation. In addition, because many households can’t afford consistent heating, ventilation, dehumidification, or rapid repairs after leaks/flooding, mold risk increases and persists longer, leading to a worsening of respiratory conditions (Clark et al. 2023).

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/25/only-a-third-of-recommendations-to-tackle-endemic-racism-in-uk-implemented>

The UK's 2008 Climate Change Act (CCA) was the first legally binding climate change mitigation target and, due to devolved administrations, Scotland adopted similar legislation. The ambition of targets set in both UK and Scottish CCAs was increased in 2019 by committing to net zero emissions by 2050. As of 2025, actions towards implementing the CCA have placed the UK halfway towards reaching its net zero target. In Scotland, targets have been set to deliver 100,000 affordable homes by 2032 through the government's long-term national housing strategy called Housing to 2040 with at least 70% being for social rent and a vision of net zero, the eradication of fuel poverty and construction on brownfield sites. Specific climate-related urban actions like densification, nature-based solutions and housing retrofit deploy legislative and public funding mechanisms largely to trigger and enable their market delivery (ReHousIn: Contextualized Pathways to Reduce Housing Inequalities in the Green and Digital Transition 2025).

Good quality retrofits are benefiting higher income groups because demand-side schemes are expensive, resulting in increased housing prices and a lock out of lower income groups in the future (ibid.).

Similarly, while the UK 2025 Carbon Budget and Growth Delivery Plan and the Scottish 2024 Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) Act advance work to decarbonize, neither structural inequalities nor questions of justice and equity are directly addressed. This is crucial because in 2022, about 13.4% of households in England were classified as fuel poor with a concentration among ethnic minority-led and single parent-led households and elderly individuals (Silva 2025). Stark racial inequalities exist in the distribution of heat vulnerability in the UK, where ethnic minorities were found to be four times more likely to live in areas with low green space, high crime rates and poor-quality housing stock compared to White people (Ogunbode and Kidwell 2022).

**Ethnic minorities are four times more likely to live in areas with low green space, high crime rates and poor-quality housing stock compared to White people. (Ogunbode and Kidwell 2022)**

A climate and ecological emergency was declared by the Glasgow City Council's Climate Emergency Working Group in May 2019. The Glasgow Climate Plan grew from this process, aiming for the city to be climate neutral by 2030 with an implementation plan along five themes, one being just and inclusive planning. The Plan established a Just Transition Working Group (JTWG) to ensure that progress towards net zero is fair and equitable while tackling inequality and injustice, with a recommendations report and an implementation plan published in 2024 (Glasgow City Council 2024). The language of tackling inequality and its underlying causes remains broad, and it is not clear exactly how they will be addressed .

### **Tenant, Anti-Racist and Climate Organizing: Divergences and Convergences**

Reflecting the growth of tenants across the world since the 2008 financial crisis, tenant unions have emerged across Scotland (Living Rent in 2014), Ireland (Community Action Tenants Union in 2019) and England (London 2019 and Greater Manchester

2020) (Ill-Raga 2025). Black Lives Matter UK , founded in the mid 2010s, is actively running political educational programs and building an anti-racist movement. Extinction Rebellion (XR) emerged in 2019 and, similar to environmental movements historically, has been critiqued for excluding the working class and racialized residents (Bell and Bevan 2021).

## Racial Justice and Climate Justice in the UK

The Racial Justice Network's Race and Climate Justice group organized 43 learning spaces with climate movement activists from 2020-2023. This activity emerged out of frustration and disappointment of colonial legacies, activist solidarity and international perspectives lacking within climate movement practices, theory and actions. A concluding report after three years of learning spaces shared the following findings and recommendations that serve as a call to action.

### Findings

1. Climate movement lacks internationalist analysis and solidarity
2. There is a hierarchy within environmental activism
3. Extractive and exploitative nature of the systems which relate to 'climate coloniality'
4. Inability to acknowledge history or trauma
5. Siloing of issues and fear of complexity

6. Epistemic violence and 'urgency' of extinction narrative

### Recommendations

- A:** Internationalizing and decolonizing the climate justice movement
- B:** Center work and solutions to and with marginalized communities
- C:** Ensure ongoing commitment and active participation in learning, repair and healing
- D:** Commit to cognitive justice and develop a pluriversality in approach
- E:** Create means for reparative resourcing

More from the report here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1P9b4hXg-nlmjTSVIE66VFqA4DbcD95jr/view>

Glasgow has been a place where climate, anti-racist and housing movements have come together in different configurations in recent years, reflecting its long-term history of migrant and working-class community solidarities (Santamarina 2024). Living Rent led a successful direct-action campaign with migrant justice groups and civil society against a corporate landlord and UK home office to prevent mass evictions of asylum seekers in Glasgow in 2018–2019. Actions included forming anti-eviction teams prepared to prevent stealth lock changes, and the securing of non-collaboration agreements from registered social landlord and letting agents (Gray et al. 2019). This campaign was key in initiating a new phase of solidarity organizing with migrants and refugees in the working-class communities where asylum seekers are being housed.

## Thousands of protesters took the streets during in November 2021 during COP26



Source: Fraser Hamilton, COP26 - Friday's for Future (51663315935), Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.0

The COP26 international climate negotiations in Glasgow in 2021 was a key moment in bringing an anti-racist, anti-colonial agenda into the climate justice conversation, with Migrants Organizing for Rights and Empowerment (MORE), one of the leaders of one of the big climate marches in the city. Tripod, a collective of educators and facilitators, ran several free public trainings exploring the links between climate justice and racial justice, in the lead-up to COP26.

## STRUCTURAL EXCLUSION AND HOUSING INEQUALITY IN FRANCE

Existing climate and housing inequalities in France are mitigated by a traditionally strong social housing sector, providing affordable rental homes for low-income households. However, overall trends of welfare

fragmentation and financialization have also impacted France's housing system since the 1990s. Together with increasing polarization, structural racism and rising precarity, these developments have made affordable, quality and adapted housing more inaccessible.

### Key timeline

#### Post-war social housing construction (1950s–1977)

- High housing shortages due to war destruction and rising immigration
- Construction of social housing mainly through municipal social landlords in suburban, often relegated and isolated areas
- Rise in social tenure across low and lower-middle income households

#### Financial crisis and protests (1980s–1990s)

- 1970s financial crisis and deindustrialization with strong impact on industrial workers
- Austerity measures and a shift towards demand-side subsidies in housing follow
- Strong incentivization of home ownership and stalling social housing production
- Protests erupt in social housing estates, particularly by post-colonial immigrants protesting segregation and structural racism (starting 1982)
- Introduction of the Politique de la Ville (1988) to eliminate poverty and segregation and “finish off” with the social housing estates (speech by President Mitterrand in 1990)
- Adoption of the obligation of the state to assist all residents in finding housing (Loi Besson, 1990)

#### Shift towards demolition and urban renewal (2000s – 2010)

- Obligation to construct 20% social housing by law (Loi Solidarité et Renouvellement Urbain (SRU), 2000)
- New national urban renewal agency and programs (PNRU), particularly the demolition of social housing (Lois Borloo, 2003)
- Death of two teenage boys following a police control in Clichy-sous-Bois sparks national upheavals in suburban neighborhoods and public debate on urban politics
- Framing of low-income neighborhoods as spaces “of risk” and increasing securitization and surveillance

Continued on the next page

## Key timeline

### New urban renewal and rehabilitation (2010-2025)

- Renewal of public commitment to social housing construction and increase in production since 2011
- New urban renewal program to diversify housing typology and tenure, opening neighborhoods, and increasing sustainability and climate adaptation (NPRNU,2014)
- Shooting of a teenage boy by police during a control in Nanterre in 2023 sparked national protests and re-introduction of the topic of the banlieues in public debate

## Public housing in La Guillotière neighborhood, Lyon



The neighborhood la Guillotière in Lyon is an example of the large-scale development of public housing estates in France.

Source: Isabelle Anguelovski

### From public welfare provision to the state as enabler

Although France has historically been characterized by a universalist welfare system for all social classes, in line with European trends, welfare services have also been increasingly financialized and fragmented in the last 30 years (Benites-Gambirazio and Bonneval 2024). Overall political restructuring and budget cutbacks, dating back to the economic crisis of the 1970s and accelerated in the 1990s, slowly caused a shift from the state as a provider of welfare to the

state as enabler of (partly privatized) services (Blanc 2004). This has been particularly visible within the housing sector, which has been slowly financialized and social housing provision fragmented since the 1990s (Lelévrier 2023; 2023).

In France, the post-WWII period saw a major expansion of social housing, with over half of today's stock built before the 1980s. While this addressed acute housing needs, it also entrenched socio-spatial segregation and structural inequalities, including racialized ones.

To support postwar reconstruction, France recruited immigrant workers from the 1950s to the 1970s—initially from Italy and Portugal, and later from Algeria, Morocco, and other former colonies (Anwar et al. 1995). In response to housing shortages, public authorities built large, often low-quality social housing estates on urban outskirts, where immigrant populations and the growing working class became increasingly concentrated.

Starting in the late 1970s, large estate residents, and particularly post-colonial immigrants, began protesting segregation, discrimination, unequal opportunity and overall racism (M.-H. Bacqué, E. Bellanger, & H. Rey 2019). From the suburbs of Lyon where protests first erupted, protests soon spread across the country leading to a national march for equality and against racism in 1983. Those 1970s uprisings, quickly called 'riots' and 'urban violence', sparked the media and political construction of the so-called *quartiers populaires* (popular neighborhoods) as out-of-state-control spaces in need of reintegration (Kirszbaum 2008).

## **The 1970s uprisings, quickly called 'riots' and 'urban violence', sparked the media and political construction of the so-called *quartiers populaires* (popular neighborhoods) as out-of-state-control spaces in need of reintegration.**

In the context of an overall polarized debate and state liberalization, the government initiated the so-called *Politique de la ville* (Urban Policy) in the 1980s to respond to those concerns. Through social as well as planning and architectural measures the French government aimed, as President Mitterrand put it in 1990, at "finishing off" the large housing estates, by then synonymous with deprivation and precarity (Kirszbaum 2008). Programs, laws and regulations would be implemented in the following years in hopes of planning for more socio-economically egalitarian cities that would eradicate the origin of social problems, particularly criminal activities and civil unrests.

At the same time, a shift to demand-side subsidies for housing and the incentivization of homeownership led to greater housing financialization and stalling social housing production. By the early 2000s homeownership in France reached over 55% (compared to around 40% in the 1970s) - a level at which it has been relatively stable since - and public

housing expenditures stalled (Ministère de la Transition Écologique 2022). Although the French government adopted a 'right-to-housing' law in 1990, the so-called *Loi Besson* (1990) is also a symbol of this governance shift, as it defines an obligation of the state to assist residents in accessing decent housing as a "duty of solidarity for the entire nation" rather than to provide the resource itself.

While this first phase of urban politics was marked by an understanding of the QP as spaces "at risk", the early 2000s saw a shift towards framing them as spaces "of risk" to the city and state (Dikeç 2009). This was particularly the case after protests broke out following the death of Bouna Traoré and Zyed Benna, two teenagers from Clichy-sous-Bois, hiding from a police control in October 2005. Quickly spreading across the country, in many suburban, low-income neighborhoods residents soon started protesting not only police violence but also segregation, unequal opportunity and stigmatization more generally.

## **The early 2000s saw a shift towards framing the *Quartiers Populaires* as spaces "of risk" to the city and state rather than spaces "at risk".**

In this context, public policy was re-oriented towards physically changing the built environment of the QP and "socially mixing" them in order to "normalize" low-income neighborhoods and balance the territory (Kirszbaum 2008). The so-called *Borloo-laws* created the National Agency for Urban Renovation in 2003 which launched large-scale urban renovation programs, particularly the demolition of post-war social housing estates (Kipfer 2016). These policies also aimed at providing more, dispersed social housing, in particular through the 2000 SRU law which set an obligatory share of social housing for all cities.

## Loi relative à la Solidarité et au Renouvellement Urbain (SRU) (2000)

This national law attempts to increase the stock of social housing throughout the whole country by:

- Requiring all municipalities of more than 3500 inhabitants within a larger urban area of more than 50 000 inhabitants to construct at least 20% social housing
- Requiring municipalities of more than 15000 inhabitants to construct at

least 25% social housing.

- Increasing competencies in spatial planning, economic development, housing and urban policy for local authorities and requires all municipalities to create a local urban master plan

Source: Ministère Aménagement du territoire Transition écologique, 2022; Epstein and Kirszbaum 2019; Béal 2017.

Despite its ambitious construction goals, the national urban renewal program has been criticized for contributing to the fragmentation of the social housing sector and the privatization of social housing overall, effectively leading to a decrease in social housing stock in low-income neighborhoods (Lelévrier 2023). Another point of criticism is the introduction of so-called intermediary and affordable social housing options aimed at middle-class households unable to afford private rentals in tight inner-city markets. Figure 9 presents the different financing scheme for social housing production in France.

**Figure 9. Existing financing schemes for social housing production in France**

	Traditional social housing (HLM)			Intermediary social housing (does not count into SRU 20% social housing goal)
Financing scheme	<b>PLAI</b> (Prêt Locatif Aidé d'Intégration) For very low incomes/ Very low rents	<b>PLUS</b> (Prêt Locatif à Usage Social) Low- to modest-incomes/Standard social housing rents	<b>PL</b> (Prêt Locatif Social) Moderate incomes / Just below market rents	<b>IPLI</b> (Prêt Locatif Intermédiaire) Higher incomes/ Quasi market rents
Income ceiling for 3 adults/ 1 person + 1 child/ young household	21,818€ (Paris) 30,614€ (rest of France)	36,362€ (Paris) 51,052€ (rest of France)	47,217€ (Paris) 66,333€ (rest of France)	51,215€ 85,175€ depending on zone
Average rent /m2	5.11€ - 6.71€	5.76 - 7.52€	8.66€ - 14.68€	9.83€ - 18.89€
Share of total social housing	7,3	39,7	7,1	3,5

France has a diversity of schemes meant to address the housing stability and affordability means of a variety of income levels. Own elaboration based on data from the national housing ministry and national inventory of social housing. Source: INSEEd 2025 and Ministère chargé du logement 2024.

Nonetheless, and in part due to a renewed political commitment to housing since the mid-2000s, France is still a country with a strong social housing sector (Benites-Gambirazio and Bonneval 2024). While its share of social renters is comparable to other European countries with a unitary housing market, France has one of the highest public expenditures on housing and one of the largest social housing stocks in Europe (European Commission Eurostat 2024; Lévy-Vroelant et al. 2014). In fact, despite a drop in social housing construction in the late 1990s and early 2000s, production has again increased since 2005. France, therefore, is one of the few countries in Europe in which the social housing stock is still growing (Guironnet 2025; Lévy-Vroelant et al. 2014).

**France has one of the highest public expenditures on housing and one of the largest social housing stocks in Europe. (European Commission Eurostat 2024; Lévy-Vroelant et al. 2014).**

Overall, however, similar to other European countries, France has also seen an increase in real estate and rental prices in the last 30 years, particularly in the early 2000s and after the financial crisis in the early 2010s. Since 2015, the house price index has increased by about 26%, which is, however, significantly below the European average of around 53% (European Parliament 2024). A look at the development of housing cost burden confirms this, showing that for renters, both in the social and free market, the share of rental expenses within households' income in France has more than doubled from around 10% in 1970 to nearly 25% in 2020 (Friggit 2024).

Nantes' housing system shows similar patterns to the national average discussed above, with a share of owner-occupied housing of about 50%, which has slightly decreased since 2010. Several large-scale urban renewal projects have been carried out in Nantes since the early 2000s, particularly in the Malakoff neighborhood and in Nantes Nord but also the redevelopment of several post-industrial areas, particularly the Île de Nantes island.

In Nantes, with 17.8% of all primary residences being social rentals in 2021, the share of social housing is above the national average. At the same time, at the city level the share of social housing has remained stable (a little over 20%) in spite of an absolute increase in available social housing units

since the 2010s (INSEE 2025c; Garat 2023). These developments can also be attributed to the city and metropolitan governments' commitment to (social housing) production. The last local housing plan set a production goal of 6,000 new housing units per year, 41% social housing units (across PLAI, PLUS, PLS housing schemes) (Nantes, ville et métropole 2025). Low-income and social housing neighborhoods are mainly concentrated in peripheral, yet well-connected municipal areas of Nantes rather than dispersed across the urban fabric, reflecting the city's strong growth since the early 2000s. Major social housing concentrations are found in neighborhoods such as Malakoff (located next to the city center), Bellevue, Nantes Nord, Breil, Dervallières, and Doulon Bottière, as well as in parts of Saint-Herblain to the West of the city. These areas largely overlap with nationally designated priority neighborhoods targeted by urban renewal programs and have received significant public investment over the past two decades, including new parks and green infrastructure. At the same time, renewal policies have aimed to reduce social housing stock in these neighborhoods through demolition and relocation of units elsewhere in the metropolitan area.

## Large scale, mixed income housing construction in Île de Nantes



Source: Isabelle Anguelovschi

### Immigration and Racialized Injustices

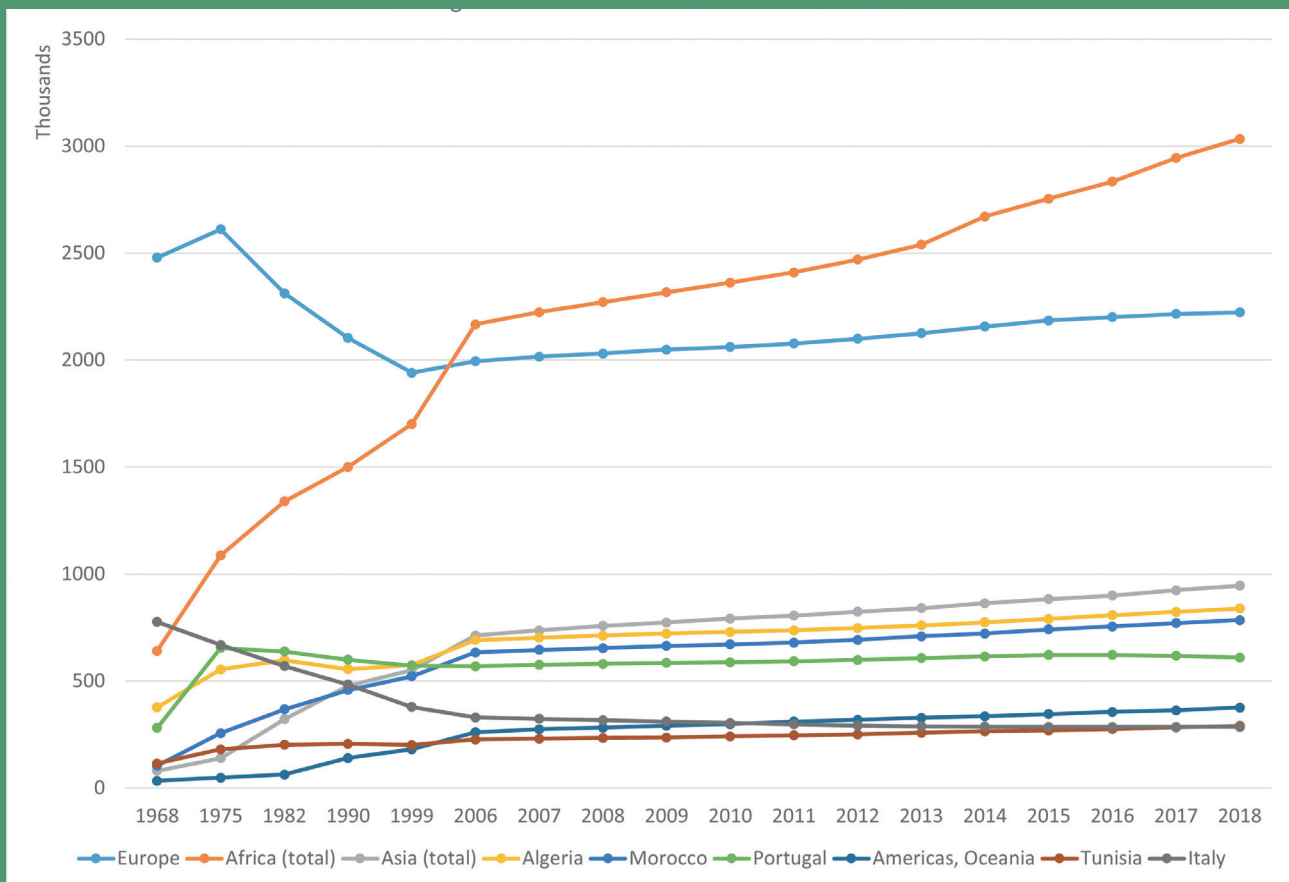
While in the 1950s and 60s the new estate buildings and neighborhoods constructed in the French city outskirts were initially considered a substantial achievement of modern urban planning and social policy, they were rapidly part of media and public policy conversations for problematic reasons. The physical and social marginalization of the banlieue is deeply intertwined with France's colonial history, immigration and ongoing structural racism (Wacquant 2014). Housing a large part of the newly arriving residents from former French colonies, those neighborhoods, dominated by social housing, were rapidly framed as dangerous "concentrations" of foreigners by public opinion and policy makers and stigmatized as hotspots of violence and crime.

This image was and is still reinforced by the media framing of protests in suburban neighborhoods as "urban violence". Beginning with the march against racism in 1982 organized by anti-racist activists from suburbs around the country, upheavals in the banlieue have often been met with violent state and police response. Crime prevention has, further, become a key objective guiding urban politics in France, mainly through increasing securitization and surveillance of

low-income neighborhoods and racialized residents (Mathews and Willson 2023). Since the 2010s this stigmatization of racialized residents, particularly teenage boys, has also increased in the face of rising immigration from West-African countries and especially the rising number of unaccompanied minors fleeing to French territory.



**Figure 10. Immigration flows of foreign born to France 1968-2018 by country of birth**



Source: Own elaboration based on data from INSEE

Regarding so-called descendants of immigrants, who hold French citizenship, racial discrimination in France often remains obscured. Since the collection of individual ethno-racial data is prohibited in official statistics, analyses of racialized inequalities are severely constrained (Escafré-Dublet et al. 2023). Figure 10 illustrates immigration flows of foreign-born people to France by country of birth. Since the late 2000s, however, some studies have used proxies such as place of birth or migration biographies to examine how ethno-racial identity shapes exposure to environmental hazards and access to services and amenities. Such research suggests that non-French-born residents and descendants of immigrants, but particularly non-French workers, tend to be more exposed to environmental and health hazards and

are significantly more likely to suffer from poor health outcomes (Deguen and Kihal-Talantikite 2022). This, in turn, is also related to the uneven urban development of the banlieues, which often have poor connection to public transportation, and tend to be poorly equipped and adapted care and educational infrastructure (el Karoui, H., & Lefebvre, I. 2022). Finally, low-income neighborhoods tend to be more exposed to traffic-related air and noise pollution and to industrial pollution of soil and water, leading to an increased incidence of cancers, asthma and increased infant mortality rate (Coolsaet and Deldrève 2024; Deguen and Kihal-Talantikite 2022). They also suffer from a poverty rate three times as high as the national average and unemployment rate 2.5 times higher (el Karoui, H., & Lefebvre, I. 2022).

**Since the late 2000s, however, some studies have used proxies such as place of birth or migration biographies to examine how ethno-racial identity shapes exposure to environmental hazards and access to services and amenities.**

As a result, the Politique de la Ville, aimed at improving living conditions in low-income areas, is highly debated both in terms of its original goal and its outcomes (Epstein and Kirszbaum 2019). Critiques of 'social mixing' (mixité) highlight that the term is used to legitimize the displacement of racialized and low-income residents and the gentrification of working-class and immigrant neighborhoods. On the other hand, the outcomes of social mixing policies in France are also debated, with many empirical studies unable to substantiate a correlation between municipal 'social mixing' efforts and desegregation, especially in terms of racial segregation (Lelévrier 2010). In fact, there is significant empirical evidence that, while class segregation has decreased in France over the past decades, there has been no significant improvement of racial segregation in terms of housing (McAvay and Safi 2018; Botton et al. 2020).

Compared to other French cities, Nantes is often not considered a typical city of immigration (Masson et al. 2013), a perception linked to its geographic position and demographic trajectory. After deindustrialization and population decline in the 1970s and 1980s, Nantes experienced strong economic and demographic growth from the 1990s onward, driven by a shift toward tertiary, specialized industrial, and administrative sectors (Masson et al. 2013). Between

1999 and 2006, the metropolitan area saw a 2.6% increase in employment and a population growth of around 20%, largely due to higher-skilled professionals and residents aged 30–44 from within the Pays de la Loire region (INSEEEa 2025). While the share of non-French-born residents in Nantes remains below the national average (9.2% vs. 11.3%), non-European immigration has increased markedly since the mid-2010s (see Figure 11).

Many new arrivals are housed in social housing within lower-income neighborhoods, reshaping migrants and political discourse around so-called priority neighborhoods. Several areas have become sites of heightened media and policy attention, including increased policing and recurrent protests. In July 2018, the death of a young man shot by police triggered protests against police violence, particularly in Breil, where national police had already been deployed in response to drug-related violence (Lambert 2018). This trend intensified in 2022 with the Ministry of the Interior's mandate for permanent national police deployment in "problematic" neighborhoods under the policy of reconquête républicaine. These dynamics reflect broader national and European trends toward intensified surveillance and policing, especially affecting migrant and racialized communities (Coleman 2004; Mathews and Willson 2023).

**Figure 11. Evolution of immigrant population in the Nantes metropolitan area**

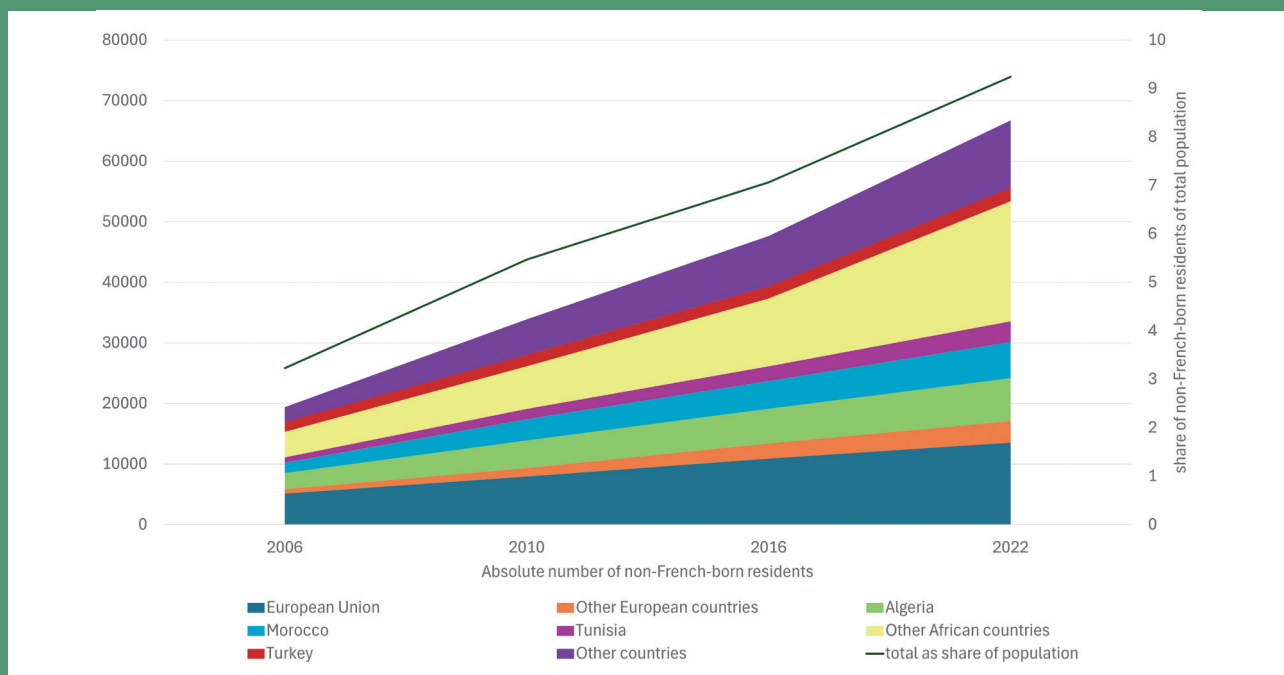


Figure illustrates immigrant population (non-French-born) in the Nantes metropolitan area from 2006 to 2022 by main countries of origin in absolute numbers (primary axis) and sum of all immigrants as a share of the total population (secondary axis). Source: Own elaboration based on data from INSEEEa (2025).

Within its metropolitan area, Nantes further houses the largest share of residents living in informal settlements in France, most of whom are Romanian Roma (Délégation interministérielle à l'hébergement et à l'accès au logement 2018). In 2021 between 2,500 and 3,000 people lived in around 60 informal settlements within the metropolitan area, some of which were authorized and partially developed (water, electricity) by public authorities (Barbe and Maillard 2021). However, most settlements lack basic amenities and are located close to industrial brownfields and the Loire river, making them particularly vulnerable to environmental and health risks. Further, many Roma residents continue to suffer from an overall stigmatization which portrays them as transitory migrants at the margins of urban life and society more generally.

## Climate Change and Urban Sustainability as Compounding Risks

The first steps towards urban climate mitigation and adaptation were introduced in 2008 through the Sustainable City Plan (Plan Ville durable) which defined sustainable urban development objectives for French cities and first mentioned the eco-neighborhood concept (EcoQuartier). In 2009, the environmental laws Lois Grenelle set the target of reducing energy consumption by 38% until 2020 and amended the urban and housing codes (Friesenecker et al. 2025). Since the mid-2010s the Energy Transition Law (Loi Transition Energétique) and the Energy and Climate Law (Loi Energie Climat) sets energy retrofitting and renovation goals that supported large-scale state investments into the building sector, especially through subsidies for private and social housing landlords and for homeowners investing into renovation and energy retrofitting.

In 2020 the Plan de relance allocated additional funds to energy retrofitting of private buildings (MaPrimeRenov – € billion), renovation of social housing (€00 billion), retrofitting of public buildings (€billion). According to the government, 40,000 social housing units were renovated by 2022 and 700,000 valid applications were filled out under the MaPrimeRenov' program by 2022 (Friesenecker et al. 2025). In 2021 the Climate and Resilience Law (Loi Climat et Resilience) further promoted the retrofitting of buildings by making an Energy Efficiency Diagnosis (DPE) obligatory for sales and new rental contracts, as well as prohibiting the rental of units classified as G or F, i.e. the two lowest energy classes.

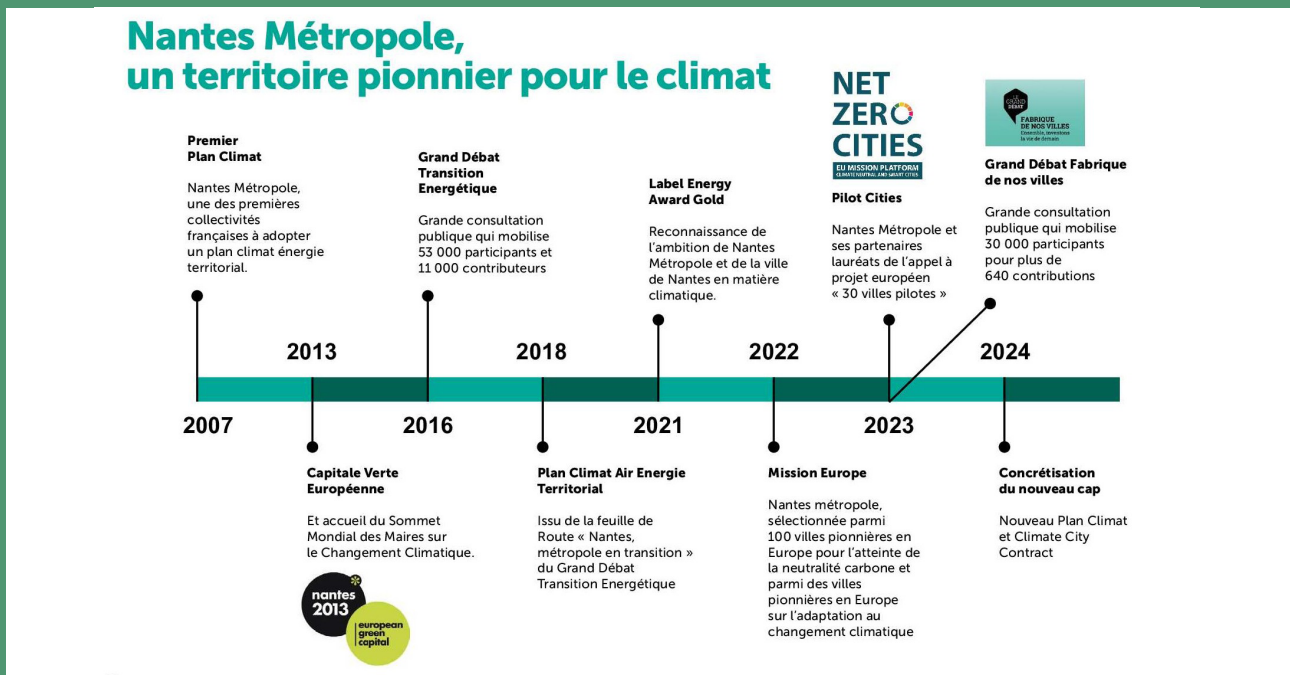
Despite these efforts, energy poverty and poor living conditions remain an important, intersectional axis of inequality in France, particularly in relation to extreme heat. Although climate change is impacting metropolitan France in different ways, poorly insulated housing, especially for low-income renters, is considered one of the key factors of vulnerability. 2018, for example, was the second hottest in metropolitan France with a temperature increase of

2°C since 1900 and caused an excess mortality of 15% across all departments (Santé publique France 2018). These impacts particularly affect elderly populations but also low-income households in non-renovated social or free-market housing, low-income owners, as well as workers exposed to heat or working outside.

Furthermore, in the face of climate change, low-income and migrant populations do not only suffer from reduced access to resilience infrastructure but often also disproportionately bear the burden of environmental protection and mitigation efforts (Coolsaet et al. 2024). A prominent example of this injustice was denounced by the yellow vest-protests (gilet jaune) in 2018, where an increase in gasoline prices caused national protests of low-income and working-class residents who were most affected by it.

Since the early 2000s, Nantes has embodied pioneering climate mitigation work, especially through public transit, ecological restoration, green infrastructure, and retrofit projects (Figure 12). However, sustainable development narratives have, in the French context, also been criticized as a way of promoting quality of life for middle and high-income urbanites (Beal 2011), a criticism often directed toward Nantes, which until the 1990s was considered a traditional working-class city known for its industries, shipbuilding, canneries, and biscuit factories, but has since developed into a city of senior executives and middle-level professionals (Masson et al. 2013). While praised by some for its socio-environmental ambition, the city's strategy has also been criticized as a neoliberal rollout strategy focused on generating territorial attractiveness and interurban competitiveness (Beal 2011). Particularly, the still ongoing (re)development of the Île de Nantes has been criticized as a top-down gentrification strategy to attract tourists, investment and 'creative' businesses, rather than valuing local industrial heritage and persisting small businesses and craftspeople (Darchen and Simon 2022).

Figure 12. Environmental and climate efforts of the Nantes local government



Source: Climate, Air and Energy Plan, Nantes metropolitan government

Since the early 2000s, particularly the former shipyards in the East of the Ile de Nantes, an island in the Loire River; have been entirely transformed with the aim of creating a technological and creative hub as well as new green and blue spaces the restored banks of the river. This is also where the Machines de l'île have been installed, a cultural, touristic project and exhibition site, launched in 2007. While the central, more mixed-use part of the island has seen some (social) housing development, the Western part has mostly been dedicated to the development of the new business district Euronantes. Another notable green development project that has attracted both visitors' attention and some skepticism for its gentrifying effect has been the construction of the Jardin Extraordinaire in 2019, an urban park in the Chantenay neighborhood (Baró and Anguelovski 2021).

## Jardin Extraordinaire



The Jardin Extraordinaire, Nantes (2019) along the Loire river banks, a flagship project of green space creation on the site of a former quarry, a symbol of Nantes' green trajectory and tourist attractiveness. Source: Diego Borbalan

## Civic Resistance and Emerging Models

Due to France's history of social housing, for a long time, housing affordability was not a prominent topic within civil society struggles for social justice. Working conditions on the other hand have long been central to public discourse with unions playing an important role in France. Concerning environmental activism, there are several groups with long traditions of opposing infrastructural megaprojects such as the new Notre-Dame-des-Landes airport close to Nantes or the large-scale water reservoirs in Sainte-Soline, such as the left-wing agricultural union Confédération paysanne or the Soulèvements de la Terre. Within these movements, the integration of social justice issues, particularly racialized injustices, with environmental struggles is rather recent and still rather fragmented. This integration has been particularly pushed by movements fighting for the rights and dignity of racialized residents in the banlieue as well as against structural racism and environmental degradation more generally, such as the Front des mères or the newly constituted Banlieues Climat. The Front des mères brings together mothers, grandmothers, and allies to take action in the face of the climate emergency, protecting the future of their children through mobilization, education, and awareness-raising, often adopting an ecological, feminist, and intersectional perspective. Overall, these movements emphasize that women and historically marginalized communities, particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, must be at the heart of solutions, advocating for climate justice and a just and feminist ecological transition. Nonetheless, despite being active, they have not yet been successful in normalizing a more intersectional lens into the French environmental discourse, particularly within national policymaking.

## Final Reflections

Together, Nantes, Barcelona, and Glasgow are situated in broader national contexts that illustrate a diversity of political economy, welfare restructuring, housing governance, and migration trends that have either compromised or initiated transformations towards racial equality, poverty uplifting, and just climate transformations.

Our analysis reveals that Barcelona represents a Southern European city shaped by a strong national emphasis on homeownership during and after the dictatorship, followed by rapid housing financialization and intense tourism-led development. In the last two decades, a highly speculative rental market, a limited social housing stock, and the arrival of large migrant populations to Spain intersect with ambitious local climate and greening policies and extensive public

space and social infrastructure transformations. This context has all together generated heightened risks of green gentrification and displacement in a highly desirable global city that faces growing housing insecurity and has only started to recognize structural racism as a reality.

Glasgow exemplifies a post-industrial UK city operating under prolonged national austerity, extensive privatization, and the long-term legacy of Right-to-Buy and public housing stock transfer, where climate ambitions coexist with weakened municipal capacity, outsourced housing and refugee services, and persistent poverty concentrated in aging, energy-inefficient housing. Overall, sustained poverty combined with private land ownership and austerity policies seem to condemn working class and migrant residents in the city to ongoing poor health conditions and to climate maladaptation.

Nantes, by contrast, is part of a French welfare-state model with a comparatively strong tradition of public land ownership, social housing provision, and metropolitan planning. It illustrates a successful conversion from a declining industrial base to a new economy centered on greening, art, culture, and emerging technologies. However, the territorial attractiveness generated through these developments has also had negative impacts on affordability and social cohesion more generally. Particularly the social housing market is, as with other French cities, increasingly strained by national defunding, housing financialization, and social-mixing policies that risk displacing low-income tenants from areas targeted for climate-oriented urban renewal.

Across all three contexts, rising immigration and continued legacies of urban renewal intersect with unequal access to secure housing, employment, and climate-resilient infrastructure, while climate risks—ranging from heat and energy poverty to flooding and environmental degradation—are unevenly distributed through the built environment. In France in particular, continued stigmatization of migrants and racialized residents combined with increased police presence in public spaces constrain the recognition of the role played by structural racism in those residents' daily lives and opportunities

Our analysis continues in Chapter 3 which zooms in on recent challenges and transformation in the built environment and planning practices in Barcelona, Glasgow, and Nantes. Next, we incorporate the perceptions, experiences, and challenges of urban planners, technicians, and activists, and analyze how these intersect with climate action, social equity-driven policies, and continued exclusion in the built environment.

# Chapter 3

## Lived Experiences of Structural Inequalities

### AT A GLANCE

**This chapter:**

- Examines experiences of environmental, climate, and economic inequalities in Barcelona, Glasgow, and Nantes.
- Shares examples of projects, practices, and areas that best exemplify them

**Chapter 3** synthesizes the qualitative data collected from 25 semi-structured interviews conducted in June – October 2025 with city planners, housing officials, environmental practitioners, and civic organizations in the three case study cities (Barcelona, Spain; Glasgow, UK; Nantes, France). We contextualize this qualitative data to analyze how structural inequalities are manifesting today in each city within the context of three thematic areas: housing injustice, environmental and climate inequalities, and economic precarity.

The analysis examines how transformations of the built environment and planning practices in the last few decades in Barcelona, Glasgow, and Nantes

intersect with climate challenges and social exclusion, while remaining deeply shaped by persistent structural inequalities. Drawing on the perspectives of planners, technicians, and activists, the chapter shows how climate mitigation and adaptation initiatives unfold within housing, mobility, and public space systems that continue to reproduce socio-spatial and racialized exclusions.

It highlights the tensions between environmental ambitions and planning practices that, in practice, may reinforce unequal exposure, displacement risks, and uneven access to climate benefits for low-income and racialized communities.

<b>LIVED EXPERIENCES OF STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES IN BARCELONA</b>	
<b>Lived Experiences of Housing Inequalities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legacy housing policies and impacts on class</li> <li>• Housing tenure insecurity and displacement throughout the Barcelona region</li> <li>• Discrimination in housing access and conditions for migrants</li> </ul>
<b>Lived Experiences of Environmental and Climate Inequalities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unequal access to and displacement from climate retrofits and green infrastructure</li> <li>• Lack of renovation incentives and bureaucratic barriers</li> <li>• Intersectional risks of heat exposure</li> </ul>
<b>Lived Experiences of Economic Inequalities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourism and economic precarity</li> <li>• Migrants and precarious labor</li> </ul>

### **Lived Experiences of Housing Inequalities**

#### **Legacy housing policies and impacts on class**

Several interviewees within the activist sector highlighted how home ownership acts as an early and sustained class marker in Spain and Barcelona more specifically. As one urban researcher summarized,

*“The position that one has within the housing system has a key impact on the social position in society... Being a homeowner or being excluded from homeownership determines social position and class position. We see that there is a privileged group that manages or manages to accumulate housing”*

*Urban researcher and housing justice advocate*

This framing was echoed across interviews, where Francoist legacies, including officially protected housing (VPOs) and mortgage deductions, alongside the financialization and neoliberalization of the housing market, have led to situating ownership as a major axis of stratification within Barcelona's built environment. As one local government official pointed out, these financial incentives were deliberate measures to restructure the financial and capitalist order of the country:

☞ *We have had legislation at the national level in Spain regarding [income] taxes for many years, with extensions granted for housing purchase... From a tax point of view, the idea of housing as an investment, a source of income was promoted [as State policy] for decades, established in the purchase of housing, making housing more of a market commodity ☞☞*

*Local government official engaged in urban policy implementation*

This marketization and class (re)structuring is further stratified along race and ethnicity boundaries, as non-Spanish and immigrant populations are those most often forced to pay more for rent, live with more insecure contracts, and in lesser maintained rooms, particularly so in Barcelona and nearby cities of the metropolitan area such as Hospitalet de Llobregat or Santa Coloma de Gramenet. As many housing advocates and organizers reiterated, migrant and racialized populations represent the majority of renters, most of them vulnerable.

☞ *[In Spain] we have about 30% of the population as tenants [and] 70% of the migrant population are tenants versus 14% of the native population. We see these dynamics [where] being brown is equal to being from a lower class, [while] being poor and being a migrant [means you are more likely to be] a tenant ☞☞*

*Urban researcher and housing justice advocate*



## Cornellá de Llobregat, Barcelona metropolitan area



A working-class city in the Barcelona metropolitan area that is challenged by wide-spread gray infrastructure, lack of green amenities, and extreme heat.

Source: Alberto Bougleux

### **Housing tenure insecurity and displacement**

Housing activists and planning practitioners all indicated insecurity of rental tenure as a major source of precarity within the housing market. At the macro-level, housing for all types of tenancies is limited within the Barcelona metropolitan region because of the hard geographic borders on all sides, with the city situated between the Mediterranean Sea and

the mountains and two surrounding rivers, making developable land a valuable commodity. Already pressured with the policy legacies of homeownership, land is further commodified and often the landscape for displacement is intensified as those with lower, precarious incomes are priced out by developers who favor home-ownership regimes. As one urban practitioner reflected:

*☞ One of the main inequalities is access to land [as] Barcelona is so limited because it is an already consolidated city... The process of acquiring new land for development, probably the most important inequalities we need to understand, is linked to socioeconomic inequalities experienced by people living in areas on the outskirts of the consolidated city of Barcelona. These are the people currently most at risk of experiencing gentrification ☞*

*Human rights and urban development specialist*

Gentrification pressures are not siloed to only local circumstances but rather compounded by an international tourism-based economy and foreign large-scale investments throughout the Barcelona region. In an attempt to reduce the prevalence of short-term housing within the province, the 12/2023 Ley de Vivienda (Housing Law) highly regulated short-term rentals. Yet housing researchers and activists we spoke to pointed to a mid-term contract loophole that allows landlords to evade rental regulations for leases of up to eleven-months in length:

*“ [Landlords are] switching as many properties as they can to the temporary market, that is leases for less than one year long, but more than 30 days. These types [temporary contracts] are not regulated by the main law that regulates rent relations [Ley de Vivienda 12/2023]. Tenants have no rights in these types of rentals... landlords can increase the rent as much as they want, they can kick out tenants easily... ”*

*Urban researcher and housing justice advocate*

### Colonia Bausili in Barcelona



Housing complex built in 1928 on the land surrounding the old Brugarolas textile factory in Prat Nou.

Source: Alberto Bougleux

### Discrimination in housing access and conditions for migrants

Activist-researchers and practitioners both discussed the compounding discrimination faced by migrants, particularly those that are tenants, in Barcelona. Significant recent research confirms what is already well known within the Spanish housing regime that migrants and racialized people, are systemically discriminated against when accessing housing. For these migrants, interviewees described the difficulty in signing secure and stable rental agreements, particularly when having a non-Spanish name often immediately disqualified them from follow-up consideration.

Moreover, interviewees also described circumstances where, when migrants are able to access housing in Barcelona, the quality of the housing is often lacking, and they have also to pay more for sub-adequate quality. As one housing advocate describes the reality of rental tenancy for migrants, they also warned that the discriminatory policies are the same policies that may be used against White, Spanish-native tenants of lower-income:

☞ *We know that racialized populations are excluded from the decent housing market... [We see that in the] same housing, same square meters, same everything, [they] pay more... [yet], the reality of the migrant population today is the reality of all of the tenant population tomorrow. ☹☹*

*Urban researcher and housing justice advocate*

Interviewees also discussed the manifestation of inequality in design and room size of available rental units for migrant families, or other lower-income families. These families often require multiple bedrooms for inter-generational family make-ups, yet many rental units available within the market do not accommodate these multi-generational and non-nuclear forms. As one Barcelona housing specialist described this discrimination in the built environment already limits where families with children and multi-generations can find accommodation, without even factoring the quality and maintenance of the housing stock that can accommodate for them:

☞ *The discrimination suffered by family types that do not fit the norm of two parents with children is reflected in the real estate market in terms of rentals [and] the types of houses for certain family types. For example, poorer families who live together... [or] when we are talking about families with a recent history of migration... the family unit is much more extended. There may be a couple who are the core of the family, but then there may also be a grandmother, grandfather, uncles, cousins, and so on. ☹☹*

*Human rights and urban development specialist*

## Vignette: Successful Initiatives to Tackle Housing Exclusions and Oppression

### Casa Orsola: Resistance, Reclamation, and the Limits of Public-Private Housing

In February 2025, tenants at Casa Orsola, a historic building in the Eixample district, successfully resisted renoventions through months of organizing with the Sindicat de Llogateres (Tenants Union) to form a public-private partnership with the City of Barcelona. Yet this victory is complex and uncertain. After massive public protest, the city government purchased the building with subsidized public funds for which critics argue the €9M buyout rewarded private profit to the previous owner of the building, while barely retaining affordable rents for the existing tenants. While the Catalan government has since acquired other such buildings, residents and researchers warn: Without structural shifts in public housing strategy and accountability for private actors, these victories risk being short-lived exceptions that still ultimately profit developers. As one interviewee shared, the landscape of affordability and public-private ownership in the city is not so clearcut:

*☺☺ When this bank built this housing, it was through a public-private partnership. So, most of the land was public, and they received a lot of subsidies from the state. We put money into this housing now being used to squeeze tenants...*

*Some of the buildings have already been bought by the Catalan government because the bank was already having this investment strategy. ☹☹*

*Urban researcher and housing justice advocate*

### The Casa Orsola social housing building in Barcelona



Source: Enric, 140 Casa Orsola, c. Calàbria 137 - c. Consell de Cent 122 (Barcelona), Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

## Lived Experiences of Environmental and Climate Inequalities

### Unequal access to climate retrofits and green infrastructure

A range of planners, practitioners, and activists report that housing precariousness has become

more complex to address in recent years as climate resiliency, adaptation, and mitigation efforts have accelerated, both in discourse and action within Barcelona. All regret that many plans are de facto excluding low-income renters even though they live in the worst building conditions:

☞ *According to reports from the Metropolitan Energy Renovation Plan (PMRH) for 2020-2030, 63% of buildings in the Barcelona metropolitan area, in just 36 municipalities, have potential for renovation. These are buildings built... 40 or 50 years ago, or even older, and are located in vertical properties with multiple neighbors. These are the buildings that most need rehabilitation and are concentrated in neighborhoods with the lowest rents, where families have the lowest incomes... [these] are the homes in the worst condition... Roughly half of all people living in rented accommodation are in a situation of overburden: They spend more than 40% or even more than half of their salary on housing. ☞*

*Municipal staff member focused on housing policy*

### A family at the green axis Cristobal de Moura in Barcelona



The new green axis at Poblenou includes a Sustainable Urban Drainage System for rainwater in Barcelona.  
Source: Alberto Bougleux

Yet, at the same time, practitioners and activists shared their fears of what retrofits may spur within the city and regional housing and rental market. The Spanish housing law Ley 12/2023 imposes rental caps and supportive tax breaks for housing vulnerable tenants, however a recent 'climate-friendly' exception has been made to the law. This exception provides incentives to homeowners and landlords to implement energy efficiency renovations through EU's NextGeneration fund by permitting rental increases by up to 10%. Interviewees indicated how this would not only be detrimental to low-income, vulnerable tenants, but, in fact, those tenants are likely disproportionately at risk of already living in a building which would benefit from retrofitting, as a local government official explained:

“ *There is a perverse state regulation, especially in terms of renovation, which could worsen renovations, or evictions in renovation processes. Although the housing law sets a rent cap, this law has an exception. It tells the owner... that when they have renovated the property in the last ten years, they can raise [the rent] up to 10% more... It is crazy that the same law is promoting rent increases after renovations, even with European funds, even with public funds. So, this policy coming from Spain, could exacerbate eviction and gentrification.* ”

*Local government official engaged in urban policy implementation*

Fears of gentrification extend to traffic pacification and green space planning. Barcelona's Superilla (Superblock) program is a globally recognized model of green infrastructure urban planning to reduce traffic, expand public space, and improve environmental health in dense urban areas of the city. While the program is often lauded internationally for its climate mitigation and livability impacts, some practitioners and public officials caution that its rollout has not always prioritized equity. As one municipal housing staff member explains, Superblocks have been implemented largely in central districts, where property values and household incomes are already high, thus only renewing the valorization of land and property for the wealthiest:

“ *The Superblock is a great example of how urban transformation can be done, but I don't think it's an urban transformation done with criteria of prioritizing the areas that needed it most. They chose the center of Barcelona, where the most expensive housing is located and where people with the highest incomes are benefiting. In terms of public investment, priority should be given to the most vulnerable areas, so that we can talk about social justice, otherwise... From my point of view, even what we are doing is creating more social inequality.* ”

*Municipal staff member focused on housing policy*

In sum, when retrofitting policies allow rent increases or lack protections for vulnerable tenants, they risk displacing the very groups they aim to support. Similarly, green infrastructure, if concentrated in already privileged areas, is already driving up housing costs and reinforcing patterns of environmental exclusion rather than addressing them.

### Barcelona's first Superblock (Superilla)



Intervention in the Poblenou neighborhood of Barcelona.  
Source: Alberto Bougleux

#### **Institutional and behavioral barriers to housing renovation**

While retrofitting is widely promoted as a strategy for improving energy efficiency and thermal comfort in aging housing stock, Barcelona faces a deeper cultural and institutional challenge: Many homeowners and landlords do not perceive housing renovation as necessary or urgent. As a housing expert pointed out,

there is no shared societal practice or norm which determines at what point renovations must occur. Moreover, the recommendations made by the EU are not specific to Barcelona's mediterranean climate. This housing expert further made clear that without these norms, there has been a lag and lack of uptake in the scaled procurement for NextGenerationEU funds:

*☞☞ We always give the example that people here are very aware of technical inspection for cars. They can be fined if they don't have a certificate saying that their car is safe and meets emissions standards. The same should apply to housing, but people don't realize that every 10 years they must have their home inspected to ensure that it meets the minimum conditions of habitability, energy efficiency, comfort, and structure. This lack of a culture of renovation, what it generates, is a non-existent demand for renovation...*

*People have not come forward to request aid from Next Generation funds because they are not aware of it or do not perceive the benefits of renovation, people do not value thermal comfort, what it means in terms of health, savings. ”*

*Human rights and urban development specialist*

### Intersectional risks of heat exposure

Climate resilience efforts in Barcelona are aiming to respond to the uneven burdens of extreme heat, with practitioners stressing that heat risk cannot be understood in isolation from intersecting vulnerabilities. Municipal programs have begun piloting participatory heat mapping and engagement strategies, particularly in low-income and migrant neighborhoods. One local government official reported about a collaborative project in one of the city's most marginalized neighborhoods, Trinitat Nova, where migrant women were asked to collect temperature data in public spaces and share their coping mechanisms and local knowledge—such as relying on beaches or rivers to cool off. By grounding adaptation in lived experiences, such efforts reveal how gender, migration status, and neighborhood context shape access to thermal comfort and inform

decisions over public health protections with a social equity focus. Other worthwhile initiatives to improve individual and community resilience to heat include Barcelona's extensive Climate Shelter Network (Figure 13), a network of 400 indoor and green public spaces with adapted facilities and some programming where community members can go to shelter from extreme heat in the summer or extreme cold in the winter (Ajuntament de Barcelona, n.d.). The city estimates that 99% of Barcelona residents have a shelter within a 10-minute walk of their home, with a goal of reducing it to five minutes within the next three years. As of Summer 2025, the municipality has also kickstarted a network of "microclimate shelters," small establishments like stores that provide a free indoor space where people can seek protection from extreme temperatures for short periods of time.

**Figure 13: Map of climate shelters in Barcelona's Ciutat Vella (Old City) neighborhood**



Ciutat Vella (Old City) neighborhood in Barcelona is one of the most climate-exposed and socially vulnerable areas of the city. Source: Ajuntament de Barcelona

## Figure 13: Climate shelters in Barcelona's Ciutat Vella (Old City) neighborhood cont.

### Climate Shelters Network to Protect from Extreme Heat and Cold

Equity in climate outreach remains an ongoing challenge in Barcelona, where language and cultural barriers often limit access to programs intended for broad public benefit. In response, the Climate Shelters Network initiative has adapted campaign materials and deployed multilingual informants to increase reach. Without deliberate, multilingual, and community-centered outreach, inclusive climate services risk excluding those most in need of them. As a local government official explains, Barcelona has made significant strides to address the climate communication barrier:

*The language issue is that the climate refuge network and campaign materials tend to be in Catalan, but at the street level, when we do a campaign with informants who go out on the street to inform people about the space they can find closest to them, their language changes. One of them who works really on the ground knows Urdu, he knows Spanish, English, other languages.*

*Local government official engaged in urban policy implementation*

### Lived Experiences of Economic Inequalities

#### Tourism and economic precarity

While tourism has generated revenue and international visibility for the entire Barcelona region, interviewees argued that this economic specialization has entrenched an extractive economy based on land rent speculation and labor precarity. Public land and

investment have fueled private profit, while housing costs have soared. Although 15% of Barcelona's GDP comes from tourism, related jobs are mostly precarious, seasonal, and below living wages. In this context, the fight against tourism is increasingly seen as a fight for a more just and resilient urban economy:

*Especially in Barcelona, you see that the economy is really specialized in the tourist sector, with clear environmental impacts. In general, it generates very bad working conditions. Most of the jobs are very badly paid with very bad working conditions, and seasonal. So, they don't even offer stability. They don't even offer a living wage that you can then pay for the housing because, of course, housing is becoming more expensive because a lot of housing is being diverted to the short-term holiday lease market. 》》*

*Urban researcher and housing justice advocate*

## Remnants of Barcelona's industrial history



These spaces create room for new construction in less dense areas of Barcelona.  
Source: Alberto Bougleux

### Migrants and precarious labor

While some migrants choose to live further from the city center to escape overcrowding and seek more affordable housing, they have to bear higher commuting costs and long commutes, often relying on the poor regional train (Rodalies) system to work in hotels, restaurants, or at the airport. These constraints cause chronic stress and exhaustion, especially during the summer season. Furthermore,

accessing government agencies for renewing work permits or seeking social support in public agencies also requires long, costly commutes, introducing new spatial barriers that reinforce inequality for already precarious workers. These compounding pressures, while not always framed as climate issues, shape residents' capacity to access and benefit from climate resilience measures, deepening their exposure to systemic vulnerabilities:

☞ *[Migrants] are living farther away from the city, because then [they] have better living conditions in terms of not being jammed in a small space, but [they] have to pay more money to get to the center of Barcelona to be able to do any paperwork [which permits them to work]. ☞*

*Community organizer with migrant populations*

### **Subcontracting, construction labor, and the just green transition**

As Barcelona pursues green retrofits and infrastructure upgrades, concerns over who will implement green transition projects are growing. As one development specialist made clear, labor violations, especially in the construction sector, pose serious challenges to the vision of a just transition. Although Spanish law limits subcontracting to two levels, enforcement is weak which leaves opportunity for unregulated and precarious work, often by

racialized migrants from Africa, Pakistan or Latin America. Moreover, despite growing demand for the green retrofitting trades, these jobs remain underpaid and, thus, unattractive. Extreme heat and working conditions are also significant barriers to entry, particularly as few lawful safeguards exist. Without stronger public oversight, including through procurement and licensing, the transition risks reinforcing labor exploitation in the name of climate “progress”.

“ *With regard to construction, I believe there is discrimination, especially in terms of home construction workers, which is essential to take into account for a just transition.*

*Licenses for new construction and renovations are granted by local councils, and there is a great deal of opacity about what actually happens in a renovation, for example. And then with heat waves, especially when working in construction, there is a lot of debate about at what temperature does a company have to ensure that its workers stop working outdoors? ”*

*Human rights and urban development specialist*

### **Tents and other makeshift shelters in Barcelona**



The consequences of an increasingly pressing lack of affordable housing are visible through the growth of tents and other makeshift shelters in Barcelona. Source: Alberto Bougeux

## LIVED EXPERIENCES OF STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES IN GLASGOW, UK

<b>Lived Experiences of Housing Inequalities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Privatization and deregulation</li> <li>• Profit over safety</li> </ul>
<b>Lived Experiences of Environmental and Climate Inequalities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenement housing and retrofitting</li> <li>• Uneven burdens of mitigation and adaptation</li> </ul>
<b>Lived Experiences of Economic Inequalities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation and Just Transition Gaps</li> <li>• Food Deserts, Health Equity, and Economic Justice</li> </ul>

### Lived Experiences of Housing Inequalities

#### Privatization and deregulation

Housing inequalities in Glasgow, and the wider United Kingdom, can be traced back to the legacy outcomes of the neoliberal, deregulatory policies of the 1980s which largely disadvantaged the poor and working-class. The 2002 stock transfer of public housing was a watershed moment. With this policy, public housing managed by the Glasgow City Council was transferred

to private, non-profit housing associations, thereby privatizing a once publicly subsidized and affordable housing system. From here, housing governance clearly shifted from social welfare provision to market logic, establishing the precedent for unaffordability and inequity in housing access. One national tenants' union organizer laid the foundation for their understanding of the manifestation of housing inequalities in Glasgow in this way:

“ There’s been a sharp turn in the last ten years because of the dependency on private investment. A big turning point was in 2002 which was the stock transfer of public housing... all of Glasgow’s public housing stock was transferred into various housing associations with shareholders and boards that were completely unaccountable to the public... That’s the knock-on effect of Right-To-Buy, Thatcher’s policies. ”

*National Tenants Union Organizer*

Recognizing the challenges of the privatization of housing, planners also reflected upon ongoing legislation which determines the spatial strategy for Scotland. The National Spatial Strategy for Scotland (2023) aims for six spatial principles with accompanying policy tools, including just transition, compact urban growth, and rebalancing of development in areas of past decline. The progressive nature of the national plan marks a shift away from the deregulatory, pro-market ethos of the 1980s, yet the power of such plans to make on-the-ground change for tenants and homeowners in Scotland is under question.

As one municipal planner in Glasgow points out, new housing development still operates within a highly privatized and financialized regime. In this development ecosystem, new development produced under private financing must operate within a profit margin that benefits the investor while also abiding to the stricter regulatory environment. As the Glasgow municipal planner describes, even well-meaning regulation such as requirements to deliver a portion of affordable housing within new development can prove antithetical to the developer's and investor's profit priority, thus making the project impossible to produce:

“ The Scottish government produces the National Planning Framework, which has planning policies embedded in it... [including] any new housing development should be delivering affordable housing. The problem we've got in Glasgow is that from a situation where the developer is unable to make any money from the development of a housing site because of issues with contamination and other things, other constraints, then we're asking them to deliver, to make sure that part of the housing stock that they're delivering is affordable. That makes it even more difficult for them to deliver it. ”

*Municipal specialist in open space strategy and green planning frameworks*



Glasgow has been a center of in-migration for refugees and asylum-seekers particularly from Middle East and North African conflicts in the 2000s and 2010s in part because it was designated a “no choice” dispersal site as per the UK 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act. These populations, already facing extreme vulnerability with precarious legal status, limited access to social services, and often few financial resources, were identified by interviewees as most disproportionately impacted in housing. As one researcher and activist for migrant

asylum rights shared, asylum accommodation was once managed within the Glasgow local council, however austerity and privatization politics has since significantly dismantled the established authority of the Council to provide critical support services. Instead, privatized provision of migrant and asylum housing and services has transformed this social service into a profit-making business. As the researcher and activist describes, the outsourcing of asylum housing contracts to private housing associations has encouraged profit over security and affordability for migrant populations:

“*The first time I came to Glasgow in 2014, a lot of people were living in housing associations’ asylum accommodation...*

*it became steadily more privatized over the years...*

*but [Council] couldn't offer it as cheaply as the government was saying it needed to be, or it didn't manage to get the bid, and it went to a few different conglomerations and outsourced, outsourced, outsourced...*

*The government would be paying [the privatized housing provider], per person, per unit of housing, and [the privatized housing provider]*

*would be paying, at that time, still quite a lot of housing associations, to actually use that space, but then also increasingly, so they were moving into the private rental sector, and finding cheap enough properties that they could make a profit on the program. ”*

*Municipal specialist in open space strategy and green planning frameworks*

## Anti-racist demonstrators in Glasgow



Anti-racist demonstrators in Glasgow confront the far-right UKIP-led “mass deportation” tour on July 26, 2025. Hundreds turned out in a powerful show of resistance, chanting “Refugees are welcome here” and blocking the rally from marching through the city.

Source: Sahaib, Stand Up to Racism in Glasgow, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0

### Profit over safety

Safety and quality of existing affordable housing have emerged as a critical issue in Glasgow as a result of a broader UK public health crisis within housing. In 2017, the Grenfell Tower in London caught fire, killing 72 residents. The Grenfell Tower was a residential building that many of whom were long-term, working-class, disabled, and migrants and asylum-seekers (Gaspar 2024). The fire investigation found that exterior improvements made to the building consisted of highly flammable cladding material. Moreover, the housing association had also not performed maintenance and updating to over 100 non-compliant

fire doors within the building (Barrat 2018). Tenant organizers and residents in Glasgow fear the replication of such negligence in the aging residential tenements that remain in the city. For vulnerable residents, including those poor- or working-class, migrants, or disabled persons, the tenements remain some of the only affordable social housing options left. Yet the conditions in which they may potentially live present a daily threat to safety and well-being. As one tenants’ union organizer explains, the follow-through of addressing the serious threat-to-life of building maintenance continues to exist a significant structural inequality, one where profit over safety is preferred:

☞ *You're aware of the Grenfell disaster and the fire in London in 2017 that killed 78 people because of the systematic deregulation of safety standards within housing...*

*It was a mandate from the Grenfell Inquiry to have all of the dangerous cladding removed from buildings across the country. 70% of that work hasn't even been done yet.*

*We have [tenants' union] members living in high-rise flats across the city that are going to bed at night thinking, "Will that be me?"*

*There is this toxic cladding, highly combustible material on the outside of the building [yet], we've got a state that's dependent on private investment and the lowest bidder, that can do the job for the cheapest amount of money, then this is what we're going to get... A lot of people who live in those flats are migrants, disabled, they couldn't get out in a fire... It's a class issue. ☹☹*

*National Tenants Union Organizer*

### Safety concerns over building cladding in the UK



A residential tower block in Sheffield has some of its exterior panels removed with the cladding exposed for inspection following the Grenfell Tower fire, July 2017. Source: DrStrauss, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.0

## Tenants Unions in Scotland win rent controls, but challenges still exist

In September 2025, following more than a decade of grassroots organizing, Scotland became the first country in the UK to reintroduce rent controls (Maloney 2025). The newly passed Housing (Scotland) Act allows local authorities to cap rent increases up to a maximum of 6% per year. The legislation aims to address soaring rents across Scottish cities, for which Glasgow has seen a 30% increase in 2025 since 2022 (Dubas-Fisher 2025). Yet, tenants' union members criticize the final version of the bill for reflecting the pressures of neoliberal governance and corporate lobbying as last-minute amendments introduced exemptions for build-to-rent and mid-market rent schemes. These loopholes allow large investors to bypass rent caps. As one union organizer interviewed flagged:

*“The developments that are popping up are these build-to-rent. So, an important part of the Housing Bill is we're going to get rent controls in the private rent sector for individual landlords with a portfolio, but those massive corporate build-to-rents are going to be exempt. So, the Scottish government is all about bringing investment for astronomically expensive households, which results in this.”*

*National Tenants Union Organizer*

### Lived Experiences of Environmental and Climate Inequalities

#### Tenement housing and retrofitting

As housing maintenance presents a significant threat-to-life for tenants, residents must also contend with more incipient disasters in the form of extreme cold or increased mold in poorly heated or ventilated buildings as a symptom of climate change. These vulnerabilities are only exacerbated by aging building

stock, building maintenance negligence, and deep energy inefficiencies. These energy inefficiencies require significant resources from tenants and homeowners, for which many supports are only available to homeowners. As one municipal climate and community coordinator explains, a significant structural inequality emerges where energy poverty, housing unaffordability, and climate exposure intersect:

*“[Tenement buildings] are the kind of apartment blocks that are quite unique to Glasgow.*

*There's a lot of tenement housing in the city.*

*It's just quite hard to heat.*

*They're probably quite drafty.*

*They're not very well insulated and they can get down.*

*It's related to, one, the money that people have to be able to pay their bills, two the quality of housing, and three, homeownership...*

*...If people don't own their homes, they're not able to [access] government support for making [their] homes more energy efficient. And if [tenants are] renting a property, there's not really any incentive for your landlord to be doing that. ””*

*Municipal climate and community coordinator*

In seeking new and more climate-friendly or -neutral housing, Glasgow developers and Council have increasingly turned to demolition and redevelopment of existing older tenement blocks on Council-owned land. One of these demolition projects is the March 2025 implosion of the Wyndford estate, a collection of three 1960 tower blocks within the Maryhill neighborhood of Glasgow once housing 600 units (BBC 2025). The Wyndford housing association claims that the towers could not have been retrofitted, yet a local resident group had argued that they could have been, perhaps even with better outcomes for the savings in embodied carbon through this process (Keane 2023). Moreover, other residents campaigned to stop the demolition, fearing their

own displacement and the gentrification of the neighborhood as only 386 units at mixed-market rates are planned in replacement (BBC 2023). The Wyndford/Maryhill project and other demolition projects have been framed in a narrative of urban renewal while seeking affordability and carbon-neutral building practices. Critics, including an organizer for a national environmental advocacy group, argue that these demolitions overlook both the short- and long-term social and environmental costs of demolition, preferring opportunity for new development that can be framed as fulfilling government goals for affordability. As this organizer describes, both the carbon footprint and the human cost of demolition must be considered:

*”” The broader picture of demolitions that have been happening over the past year of high-rise tower blocks further out [the neighborhood of] Maryhill and there being no question about the displacement around that and the carbon intensity of building new [developments] versus retrofitting [existing] blocks. ””*

*National Environmental Advocacy Group Organizer*



## Social housing for thousands of tenants in Glasgow's Maryhill neighborhood



Source: Miles Glendinning, Tower Block UK photo glw2-11 (Glenavon Maryhill 1982), Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

### Uneven burdens of mitigation and adaptation

Efforts of local and national governments to reach net-zero emissions and implement projects for adaptation and resilience are unevenly distributed and negatively impacting communities within Glasgow. These inequalities in the siting and negative external outcomes of such projects are particularly acute for low-income, migrant, and disabled populations. In the Easterhouse and the Gorbals neighborhoods, historically low-income and working-class areas of the city, climate mitigation efforts have been sited, yet for whom are the benefits intended and for whom negative impacts will primarily be impacted are unclear. In several examples heard from community-focused non-profits at the intersection of both housing and climate, climate mitigation is being perceived by local communities as green locally unwanted land uses (GreenLULUs). In one example, the designation of predominantly higher-income and luxury areas in Glasgow as low emission zones (LEZs), where tollways and parking incur extra fees, has led to

a natural rerouting of traffic into lower-income neighborhoods in search of areas without the LEZ fines. One such neighborhood is the Gorbals, where local communities are now fighting for available parking but are also seeing increased noise and air pollution.

In another example from Easterhouse, a local football pitch was converted without community discussion and ample contribution into a rewilded field that provides flood mitigation while failing to recognize the local socio-cultural value of the football field for local youth. In addition, according to one local non-profit project manager, neighbors later were made knowledgeable that the flooding mitigation only protected the downstream, more affluent neighborhoods from acute flood hazard. As this non-profit project manager describes, such projects have only clouded the perceptions of existing low-income and vulnerable neighborhoods in a deep sense of distrust in local government and national climate investments:

“ [The community in] Easterhouse used to have a set of football pitches... They were nothing fancy, but they were pitches that the kids would play on and have a kick about and all the rest of it. About five years ago it was announced that these were going to be revamped and that there was going to be a park...we would call it's more like a rewilding exercise... So this area in Easterhouse has kind of become a seawall against urban flooding and for more affluent housing closer to the city center.

The local people have lost an amenity, they've lost their football pitches... many people feel [the park is now] untidy and not kept up very well.

And there's a sort of a social justice element to it where people are seeing that, you know, that their amenities are being removed in order to protect other people. ”

*Project manager for a community-based climate-focused non-profit*

Gender is a critical indicator for structural inequality, particularly in terms of who benefits and who suffers with regard to climate mitigation and adaptation efforts. Local and national level governments have made commitments to increasing resilience to climate change through improvements to quality of everyday life. In one example, Glasgow Council had changed many of the streetlights to LED lights as both an

energy-saving and cost-saving effort. Yet these climate adaptation efforts have compromised the safety of walkers who rely upon streetlighting during darkness to move freely, securely, and safely in the city. As one advocate for women's economic justice described, they had heard from many folks they work with that these changes had changed their everyday night life:

“ The last number of years [Council has] been moving to using LED lights... [but these lights] don't have the level of illumination that the old sodium lighting had. So, [the lightbulb change has] been done on a green basis because... it uses less energy. And so, it's better for the environment [and] on a cost savings basis. But what we know is that for some people, especially women, it means that certain areas feel like they're no goes...

*...And you know, a number of people are saying, 'I don't go out at night... when it gets dark'... [and they] just don't feel safe. ””*

*Coordinator at a women-led economic justice organization*

### **Lived Experiences of Economic Inequalities**

#### **Transportation and just transition gaps**

Transportation is a critical mechanism for opening economic opportunity and providing access to economic justice, particularly for women and other vulnerable groups. A feminist approach to transportation justice not only improves economic

opportunity for women, but also for or those low-income, working-class, migrant, and asylum-seeking populations, as well. As one advocate from a women-led economic justice organization explained, Glasgow's transportation systems remain entirely built around outdated, gendered assumptions that do not support the economic agency and opportunity for those non-White, male groups:

*”” Transport always comes up as a key barrier, because our transport models are built on taking people from the outskirts into the center of town at peak hours... they're built on those predominantly male transport patterns, whereas women are more likely to do shorter trips to undertake those kind of care responsibilities, and our transport infrastructure isn't designed to allow that to happen. So when we're working with women all over Scotland that comes up as a major issue, and we're starting to see some of that replicated in the way in which active travel schemes are being developed as well. ””*

*Coordinator at a women-led economic justice organization*



Active transportation is a critical form of transportation investment currently gaining traction amongst local and national governments as it addresses both climate and economic goals. One such approach, common for many local and national level governments, improves accessibility and safety to active transportation, including cycling. As the same advocate from a women-led economic justice organization explains, while these implementations are noble and well-intentioned, assumptions are made about who the 'default user' is of climate-friendly infrastructure: White, young or middle age, men

“ For women all over Scotland [transportation inequality] comes up as a major issue, and we're starting to see some of that replicated in the way in which active travel schemes are being developed as well. The Scottish government has committed to increasing funding around active travel.

But that cycling infrastructure is still built on taking people from east to west and north to south and forget that you know that sometimes I just need to get to the school, which is a 10 min walk from my house. But the infrastructure isn't there to support that.

That lack of gender blend really creates systemic barriers and particularly blocks women's way. ”

*Coordinator at a women-led economic justice organization*



## Tenants Unions in Scotland win rent controls



Living Rent and other Scottish tenant unions demand rent control in an October 2025 protest.

In response to mobility injustices, in October 2025, the Living Rent Tenants' Union of Scotland announced it would include demands for transit and transportation justice. Recognizing the intersection of transportation inequality within economic justice and their direct correlation to housing justice, the union launched its Better Buses campaign. The campaign begins by demanding that Glasgow's forthcoming visitor tax (expected to generate £16 million annually) be invested into a publicly owned bus service, as opposed to its intended tourism infrastructure. These demands arrive under the context of the legacy privatization of bus providers, despite the progressive adoption of franchising models happening in other UK cities outside of Scotland.

### **Food deserts, health equity, and economic justice**

Low-income neighborhoods in Glasgow, such as Easterhouse and the Gorbals, are not only limited in their access to public transportation, but also in their service of grocery stores serving affordable, healthy, and nutritious grocery staples. As one interviewee shared, these low-income neighborhoods are only serviced by bodega-style, corner stores which focus on highly processed foods, alcohol, and smoking

paraphernalia. This lack of service deepens existing health and economic inequalities. In response, community-based organizations are developing creative, low-cost mobile produce markets which both provide critical nutrition options and opportunity for economic development. One such initiative will be a cargo bike "fruit barrow" that community members will be able to access as it circulates through the Gorbals:

“ A lot of the areas that we work with in Glasgow are very poorly served, even for basic fresh fruit and vegetables... So in the Gorbals, they're now going to have like a fruit barrow that tours around different parts of the [neighborhood] every week... people can just nip out and buy bits of fresh fruit and vegetables. It's one of those cargo bikes that they're going to have going round. ”

*Project manager for a community-based climate-focused non-profit*

### Glasgow harbor development in 2007



Source: Thomas Nugent, Glasgow Harbour - [geograph.org.uk](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Glasgow_Harbour.jpg) - 579708, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.0.

## LIVED EXPERIENCES OF STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES IN NANTES, FRANCE

### Lived Experiences of Housing Inequalities

- Strong social housing sector in France and Nantes particularly
- Stalling of social housing production due to national regulations and economic crisis
- Displacement of low-income social renters during urban renewal

### Lived Experiences of Environmental and Climate Inequalities

- Well-distributed green areas but some branded for visitors and investment
- Energy poverty particularly affects low-income renters in the private market
- Roma residents are particularly exposed to environmental and climate risks

### Lived Experiences of Economic Inequalities

- Increasing precarization of (migrant) workers
- Budget constraints lead to reduced funding for socio-economic integration

### Lived Experiences of Housing Inequalities

#### Displacement in urban renewal and social mixing

In its urban renewal projects, the Nantes metropolitan government, local municipalities, and social housing providers operate within the national framework set by the ANRU. Beyond these requirements, Nantes Métropole has adopted an ambitious housing renovation and construction plan (PLH), targeting the energy retrofit of 5,000 housing units—1,500 of them social housing—as well as the annual construction of 2,000 social housing units and 500 affordable units.

### The Malakoff neighborhood in Nantes



The Malakoff neighborhood south of the central train station is a prominent example of the significant investment into the regeneration of social housing estates across Nantes in the last 15 years. It involved the demolition and reconstruction of nearly 400 social housing units.

Source: Lisa Hannuschke

However, urban renewal as currently practiced in France often entails the displacement of low-income households through social-mixing strategies and risks weakening neighborhood social networks. To promote population and functional diversity, housing agencies frequently demolish social housing and relocate residents to make way for new infrastructure and mixed-tenure developments. Those goals are embedded in both national frameworks and local urban renewal policies in Nantes although programs are not created with the stated goal of evicting residents:

“ Well, making the tenants leave is not a goal at all. Except that we're in an ANRU zone, I mean, we're renovating and demolishing not only to meet a technical need, but also to rebalance the area, diversify it, free up land to build facilities needed to boost economic activity in the neighborhood. [...] So, there are these socio-economic and ecological issues that determine whether a building is demolished and, as a result, whether the tenants have to leave, which is inevitable. And in these cases, the tenants are rehoused. ”

*Project manager at social landlord*

On the ground, those most affected by relocations following demolitions or restructuring are often the residents with the least financial margins to choose other forms of (social) housing. However, it is precisely the most precarious residents, such as unemployed persons, low-income or single-parent households, who rely on neighborhood social networks for their wellbeing and livelihoods. For this reason, although potentially benefiting those who stay, urban renewal can mean displacement and a loss of social support for those who have to leave.

“ So, there's also this brutality in redevelopment, at least in urban renewal (ANRU). We also have testimonials from residents, who on paper were perhaps happy to leave, but who ultimately look back because they take the tram and cross the city to come to the neighborhood because it's where they live ”

*Community organizer working in neighborhood association*

#### **Informal settlements and access to housing for migrants**

In 2018 the French interdepartmental delegation of accommodation and housing estimated that the Nantes metropolitan area was home to the largest share of inhabitants of informal settlements, around 12% of the total population identified in their survey

(Délégation interministérielle à l'hébergement et à l'accès au logement 2018)

In 2020 this amounted to a population of around 2500 and 3000 persons, most of whom are Romanian Roma, living in around 60 settlements across the metropolitan territory (Barbe and Maillard 2021).

With first arrivals in 2005, the number of persons immigrating to the metropolitan area has slowly but steadily increased over the past two decades. However, as local activists and researchers have criticized, the local political handling of the settlements, and thus their inhabitants, has often been unwelcoming, with expulsions and displacement being commonplace reactions to settlements in many municipalities (Barbe and Maillard 2021).

Although some terrain has been “stabilized” by local authorities and with the help of community

organizations, today, most residents still suffer from a lack of access to infrastructure such as sanitation, sewage but also access to public administration, proximate schooling, social services, and public transportation. However, apart from these socio-environmental inequalities, the most significant source of precarity for Roma residents are recurring evictions and forced displacement adding to their marginalization, physically and socially.

“ I'm quoting a young woman

*I knew when she was very young in the 2000s.*

*She arrived in 2007 and went to middle school, her children are working. And she said, "I'm French, my children were born in France, at 14 they will probably have French nationality, and I live in France, so I don't want to hear any more about being put on a transitional site, a temporary integration site, or a fallback site, whatever.”*

*Community organizer and activist*

In more recent years, the metropolitan government has launched a strategy for the “reabsorption” of informal settlements with the support of the national funds and platform rolled out since 2019. On the one hand, this program is meant to produce and coordinate more safe, permanent, and healthy housing solutions but also to finance social support for residents throughout their relocation, particularly through local community organizations. However, as activists and community organizers warn, it is essential to reimagine housing and ways of living together in ways that can accommodate different personal as well as cultural preferences and traditions, for example in terms of household composition. Some activists draw a parallel to other precarious residents, such as travelers, but also homeless persons and migrants more generally, arguing that a more innovative approach to housing could not only co-benefit all but is necessary in the face of increasing diversity, pauperization, and climate change impacts.

“ And so here, I think we also need to ask ourselves what kind of housing we can offer to a population that is bound to grow, and that is bound to change our relationships with each other. All these acts of racism, homophobia, anti-Gypsyism, for example, there has been work done on all that, it's the result of a policy of inaction, and now we can clearly see the consequences, so we need to imagine other ways of living.”

*Community organizer and activist*

## Resistance to ongoing marginalization and discrimination of Roma population in Nantes

Although local activist groups have been organizing around the ill treatment and displacement of Roma residents in Nantes for many years, residents, together with local activist groups, took to the streets in May 2025 to protest not only their living conditions but ongoing ill treatment and discrimination. As one of the activists put it, this had been the first time that the Roma community members spoke for themselves and claimed their rightful position in Nantes' society under the slogan: We work here, we live here, we'll stay here!

☞☞ *So, we held a demonstration, a march.*

*The intention was precisely that it should be on the initiative of the families and not the associations, since for the past fifteen years or so we had tended to speak for them. So, obviously, the authorities don't give them a voice, but even the associations tended to speak on their behalf. It was the first time we had organized this demonstration, and it did indeed shake things up a little. ☹☹*

*Community organizer and activist*

### Lived Experiences of Environmental and Climate Inequalities

#### The cost of green attractiveness

The city of Nantes is known for its green agenda, particularly the creation of parks and gardens across the metropolitan area, but also the development of accessible public transportation and cycling paths. Although these measures of climate adaptation as well as mitigation are rather evenly distributed throughout the city and thus benefit all populations equally, they have also been part of a broader strategy towards

increasing territorial attractiveness, contributing to increasing real estate and rental prices. This effect, which has been termed green gentrification and can be observed in many cities across Europe, particularly weighs on precarious residents, workers and lower-income households unable to cope with increasing costs of living (Anguelovski and Connolly 2021). Respondents explain that this gentrification even affects the large majority of the 500 greenspace workers who build and maintain Nantes' many parks and gardens but have to move to suburban areas if they wish to purchase a home.

☞☞ *Well, that brings us to another problem that applies to all cities, which is the cost of attractiveness. In other words, the city is clearly attractive. We have worked very hard to make it attractive, particularly by developing its green image, and so on. Well, we ourselves contributed to the city becoming more expensive, to land prices skyrocketing at the same time, and as a result, there has been and still is a form of exclusion, simply from life and from housing in particular, right? That's really the key factor. ☹☹*

*Retired green space planner*

## Elephant machine at the Machines de l'île



The Machines de l'île - a cultural installation and tourist attraction including the elephant shown here - emerged as part of one of the most prominent urban green interventions in Nantes: the regeneration of the Île de Nantes, a mostly post-industrial neighborhood on an island in the Loire River.

Source: Guilhem Vellut, Les Machines de l'île @ Nantes (7936101566), Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.0

Together with a strong influx of higher-income population, particularly from the Paris region, following the Covid19 pandemic, these trends have not only compromised housing affordability in the private sector, but also added strain on the social rental sector (Baró and Anguelovski 2021). Nonetheless, over the past couple of years the local government's approach to overall development, but particularly also to environmentally branded infrastructure, has shifted away from a focus on generating attractivity to maintaining the wellbeing and quality of lives of existing residents, particularly also lower-income households. The effects of this recent paradigm shift, triggered by increasing concerns of (green) gentrification through the city, remain to be explored in the coming years.

☞ *With the arrival of the Greens in the shared government of the current socialist mayor's second term, some projects were sacrificed, which are quite symbolic. Among those that were sacrificed was the heron tree. And then the underground car park that was to be built around the city center redevelopment project was also sacrificed. [...] These examples are characteristic of a change in attitude. The focus on attractiveness, for example, has disappeared. The term no longer exists. That's not insignificant either. ☹*

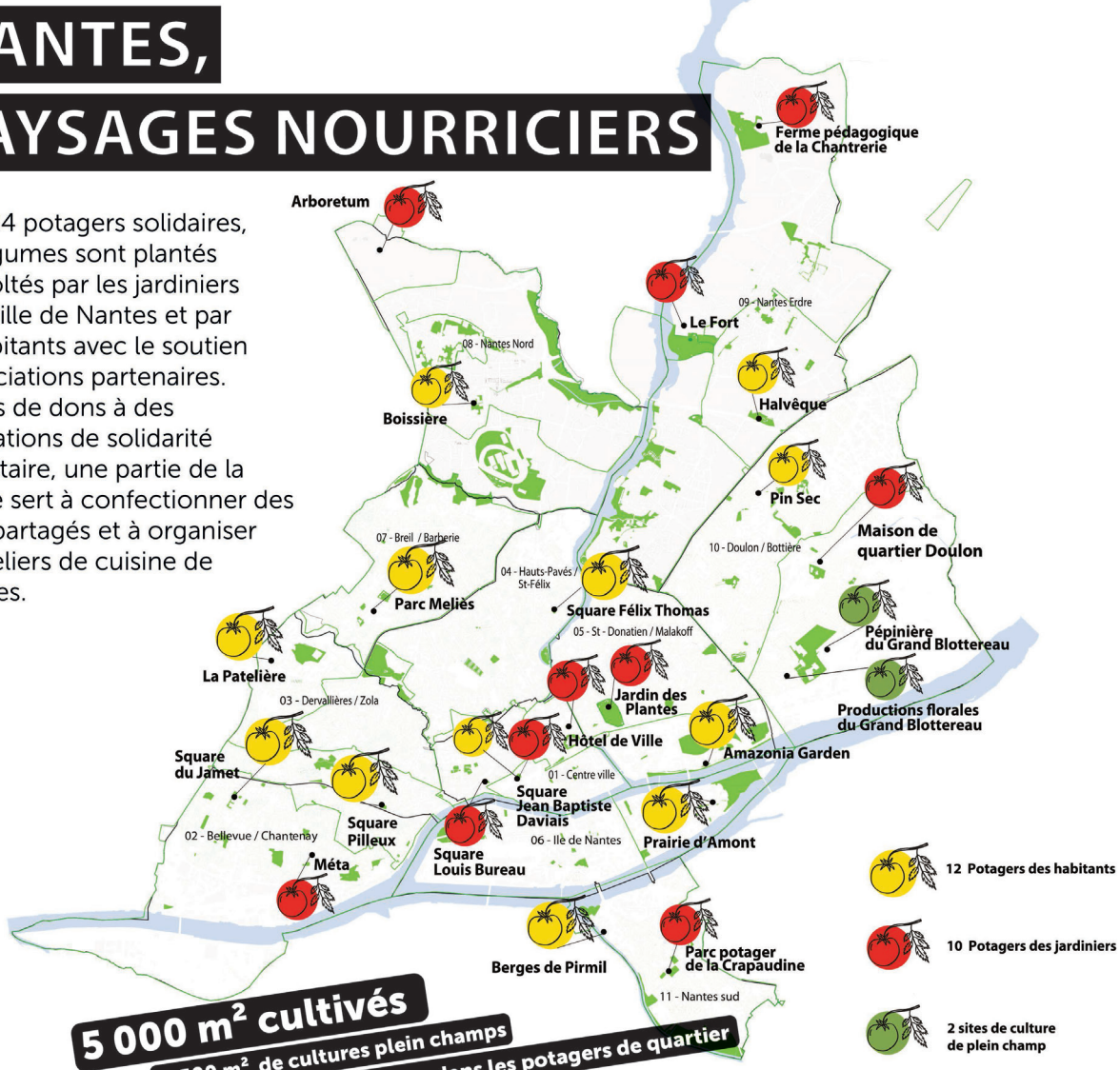
*Retired green space planner*

Figure 14. Food producing landscapes in the city of Nantes







# NANTES, PAYSAGES NOURRICIERS

Dans 24 potagers solidaires, des légumes sont plantés et récoltés par les jardiniers de la Ville de Nantes et par les habitants avec le soutien d'associations partenaires. En plus de dons à des associations de solidarité alimentaire, une partie de la récolte sert à confectionner des repas partagés et à organiser des ateliers de cuisine de légumes.



**5 000 m<sup>2</sup> cultivés**  
 2 500 m<sup>2</sup> de cultures plein champs  
 2 500 m<sup>2</sup> de cultures dans les potagers de quartier

-  22 potagers en ville
-  10 équipes de jardiniers mobilisés
-  12 collectifs d'habitants avec le soutien d'associations nantaises
-  2 lieux de production de plein champ

**LÉGUMES PLANTÉS**  
 tomates, courgettes, blettes, betteraves, choux, patate douce...  
 80 000 plantes potagères bio produites dans les serres de la Ville

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[metropole.nantes.fr](http://metropole.nantes.fr)

Map showing the distribution of the food producing landscapes implemented by the city of Nantes to provide fresh produce to low-income households. Community gardens are marked in yellow and gardens managed by the parks department are marked in red. Vegetables are distributed via local community organizations to those in need. Source: Nantes Ville & Metropole, May 13, 2025.

First implemented during the Covid19 crisis the so-called food producing landscapes (paysage nourricier) were imagined as spaces for communities to garden, as well as spaces for the public production of fresh vegetables for the most vulnerable residents, particularly in low-income neighborhoods. Today the network covers 24 sites (Figure 14): two dedicated exclusively to the production of vegetables distributed in neighborhoods throughout the season, ten vegetable gardens managed by the city's gardening teams, and 12 vegetable gardens managed by socio-cultural and urban agriculture associations. This initiative is a further illustration of a city that has at least partially moved away from more flashy green projects to initiatives grounded in the daily needs and practices of residents, especially those more vulnerable ones.

“Among the things that worked were the food-producing landscapes. These are programs for growing vegetables in the city. This is also one of the social successes of recent years, because today, it has opened us up to the public, perhaps the people we had the most trouble reaching. So, people on low incomes, but also those in socially precarious situations. In other words, people we didn't see in our parks and gardens.”

*Community organizer and activist*



## Climate adaptation of public spaces in the face of budget cuts and security politics

In light of increasingly experienced climate impacts, such as the 2025 summer heat wave, the city of Nantes—like many other cities—is seeking to improve thermal comfort in the public spaces it is transforming. The role of vegetation, particularly tree cover, in urban climate mitigation is well established, and expanding urban greenery and reducing artificial soils are central to Nantes' public policy. However, institutional inertia, budget cuts, and the growing emphasis on security and surveillance in France threaten the implementation of climate-adaptive infrastructure, even in a progressive city like Nantes. On the one

hand, tighter local budgets make it increasingly difficult for planners and local officials to envision innovative and inclusive climate adaptation in public spaces. On the other hand, security requirements—especially police demands for unrestricted visibility and camera surveillance—may undermine thermal comfort by limiting tree cover, vegetation density, and urban furniture. This risk may disproportionately affect so-called priority neighborhoods and their residents, many of whom are working-class, low-income, and racialized, as these areas experience heightened police presence and an expanding role for law enforcement in planning.

*“We're faced with some difficult choices: Do we remove a tree, or do we install three additional cameras to cover all angles, or do we put a bench? [...] That can literally affect more than just life; it can affect the urban transformation of the neighborhood, as well as its viability in the face of global warming, because we are actually mineralizing spaces and potentially making them less viable.”*

*Retired green space planner*

## Lived Experiences of Economic Inequality

### Green transportation for whom?

The city of Nantes has long been committed to developing a public transportation system that is accessible to all residents, both financially and in terms of physical access. The reintroduction of the tramway in the 1980s, the major expansion of cycling infrastructure in the 2000s, and the introduction of solidarity pricing for low-income households

on annual transport subscriptions in 2016 are just a few examples of measures taken to promote inclusive, affordable, and low-carbon mobility. By 2027, the metropolitan government plans to add two additional tramway lines and increase both the number and frequency of its busways—rapid transit buses operating in dedicated lanes. These current and planned services also cover most of Nantes' so-called priority neighborhoods, ensuring equitable access to public transportation across the city.



## New proposed tramway lines in Nantes



On top of its already well-developed transportation system, Nantes is planning the implementation of two more tramway lines until 2027 connecting the center to the North-East and Northern periphery.

Source: Lisa Hannuschke

Nonetheless, several challenges remain. Community organizations and political activists highlight gaps in public transportation access to major industrial and logistics workplaces, particularly due to schedules poorly aligned with shift work, as well as limitations in multi-modal transit options. As in many metropolitan areas, Nantes' public transportation system remains largely oriented toward the city center, making travel between peripheral areas more difficult, especially during off-hours. As a result, workers living in less central neighborhoods are often forced to adapt

by walking long stretches or relying on private cars or carpooling, creating significant financial, time, and carbon burdens. Moreover, as climate mitigation measures are implemented—raising fuel prices and reducing car infrastructure in the city center—car dependence may further intensify these challenges. In light of these inequalities, Nantes is challenged to further reflect on the role of public transportation and its primary users, and to develop solutions that make everyday mobility easier, more comfortable, and less emission-intensive for all.

“ There will be great public transportation in some places, but for logistics workers who are in Carquefou, who live in Nantes or the surrounding area, well, they have to walk 30 minutes to get to a bus. And when they leave work at 6 or 8 p.m. or, at worst, 3 a.m., There's nothing they can do, and in fact, as soon as you leave the city center, it's complicated with bikes. ”

Community organizer and activist

## A two-scale economy

While Nantes remains a fairly egalitarian territory in socio-economic terms, in comparison with other French metropolises, it has also seen an increase in income polarization over the past two decades, particularly through a strong increase of the number of top earners (Chesnel and Hamzaoui 2022). In the face of inflation and rising costs of living, planners

shared that many low-income households and other precarious residents are struggling to make ends meet. The impact of this polarization has been an increase in the number of residents relying on social aid, particularly the number of homeless persons seeking emergency accommodation (Nantes, ville et métropole 2025).

*“ Well, I think the first inequality, or the one that is most often highlighted, is simply income inequality. Income in this neighborhood is lower than the average for the Nantes metropolitan area. Of course, these things change over time, so things are tending to deteriorate a little despite the preventive measures that are in place. ”*

*Metropolitan staff working on urban renewal project*

While the regional government as well as the metropolitan government finance and support organizations working on the economic integration of long-term unemployed persons through training and work integration projects, particularly in low-income neighborhoods, recent departmental budget cuts may threaten their ability to keep projects running. Furthermore, an emphasis only on free market economic development and attracting higher-income executives and companies risks leaving behind precarious residents, workers and young residents, particularly migrants, with modest educational attainments or little professional experience.

*“ French institutions are not doing well. This is nothing new, and this year, with budget cuts in the department, many integration associations in Nantes have had their budgets cut which means that integration projects are weakened because there are fewer people to do the work, or because six people have to do the work of ten. Or projects have had to close because they were no longer profitable, or because it was no longer possible to respond to certain contracts with the city or the metropolitan area. ”*

*Staff of a priority neighborhood association*



## Collective memory and recognition

The urban renewal project "Grand Bellevue", launched jointly by the Nantes and Saint Herblain city governments in 2014, is one of the major current projects in the metropolitan area and aims at transforming large parts of the Bellevue neighborhood, made up of several priority and low-income neighborhoods in the West of the city. The program includes the renovation of around 1300 social housing units, the demolition of around 500 social housing units, and the construction of 1000 new housing units, some of which are planned as intermediary or affordable housing. Similarly, most public spaces, including several squares and public service facilities, are being or have already been constructed or transformed, including the central 'Place de Lauriers', situated in the heart of the Southern part of the neighborhood. In order to commemorate the importance of this public space, the neighborhood association Café Prod, financed by the Nantes metropolitan government and the city of Nantes, produced a documentary film in which residents and users recorded their memories of the square and its meaning to the neighborhood.

*“They also wanted to create a community memory so that when housing is destroyed, we don't forget this community memory. They made two documentaries with a local organization called Café Prod, one called "À la place des Lauriers" and the other called "On l'appelle place centrale." These two documentaries served to preserve the history of the neighborhood, to talk about urban projects, what happened in the square, how it developed, what the major historical points are, but through the memory of the inhabitants.”*

*Community organizer working in priority neighborhood association*

## Documentary on the transformation of the Bellevue neighborhood in Nantes



Realized by Karim Bouheudheur and Sophie Razavi of the CafeProd association, the documentary records the life and meaning of the Place des Lauriers square in the Bellevue neighborhood, completely transformed during the urban renewal project "Grand Bellevue".

Source: café-prod, <https://www.cafe-prod.com/galerie-videos/>



## **Final Reflections**

While Nantes remains a fairly egalitarian territory in socio-economic terms, in comparison with other French metropolises, it has also seen an increase in income polarization over the past two decades, particularly through a strong increase of the number of top earners (Chesnel and Hamzaoui 2022). In the face of inflation and rising costs of living, planners shared that many low-income households and other precarious residents are struggling to make ends meet. The impact of this polarization has been an increase in the number of residents relying on social aid, particularly the number of homeless persons seeking emergency accommodation (Nantes, ville et métropole 2025).

# Chapter 4

## Cross-Cutting Themes and Shared Challenges

### AT A GLANCE

#### **This chapter:**

- Synthesizes how housing insecurity and unaffordability function as the core driver of structural inequality across Barcelona, Glasgow, and Nantes
- Examines the contradictions created by deregulation and privatization and how they play out in urban systems
- Analyzes how increasing precarity of workers, and particularly migrant workers, and missed opportunities for shared economic development perpetuate economic exclusion
- Describes how unequal access to quality green space, exclusionary climate action, and unaddressed public transit needs shape further socio-environmental vulnerability
- Illustrates these shared dynamics across these three cities



## ANALYTICAL SYNTHESIS

Through the perspectives of planners, technicians, and activists, the analysis highlights the nuanced ways in which everyday planning practice and urban life struggle with inequalities in housing, the environment and climate. In short, work and economic conditions must be negotiated alongside and through climate actions in Barcelona, Glasgow, and Nantes. Rather than appearing as isolated challenges, housing insecurity, unequal environmental exposure, and economic precarity emerge as mutually reinforcing conditions that structure residents' daily lives and, as a consequence, their ability to benefit from urban climate transformations.

Across the three cities, the analysis reveals how interventions in housing, public space, and mobility are unevenly felt depending on residents' socio-economic position, legal status, and racialization. Improvements in thermal comfort, greening, or connectivity often coexist with persistent housing precarity, displacement pressures, or limited access to stable and well-located employment. At the same time, planning decisions related to security, land use, and infrastructure frequently privilege certain users and forms of economic activity while constraining others, particularly in low-income and racialized neighborhoods where residents face heightened surveillance, environmental stress, and employment-related mobility challenges.

In regard to climate change, Barcelona, Glasgow, and Nantes reveal how climate adaptation and mitigation are often pursued in ways that improve environmental performance but cannot adequately address existing social and especially racialized injustices embedded in the urban fabric as well as an eroding welfare system (especially in the UK). The findings underscore how climate action in the built environment is not only a spatial project, but also a social and political intervention, shaped by whose comfort and protection is prioritized, whose is rendered visible or expendable, and whose long-term wellbeing and access to climate amenities will be protected.

Our analysis illustrates three distinct yet intersecting pathways through which urban inequalities are produced, sustained, and experienced in the built environment in a climate-changed era (Figure 15). While all three cities face rising climate pressures and socio-economic polarization, they differ markedly in how housing systems, environmental interventions, and labor markets interact on the ground. Barcelona represents a context of intense market pressure and rapid urban transformation, where climate and greening initiatives collide with extreme and multiple forms of housing insecurity. Glasgow reflects a post-industrial trajectory shaped by long-term austerity, disinvestment, and poor housing quality, where environmental inequality is closely tied to health and energy poverty. Nantes occupies an intermediate position, with stronger planning and social housing frameworks, yet growing tensions linked to urban renewal, securitization, and selective displacement.

**Figure 15: Local Inequities and planning challenges in Barcelona, Glasgow and Nantes**

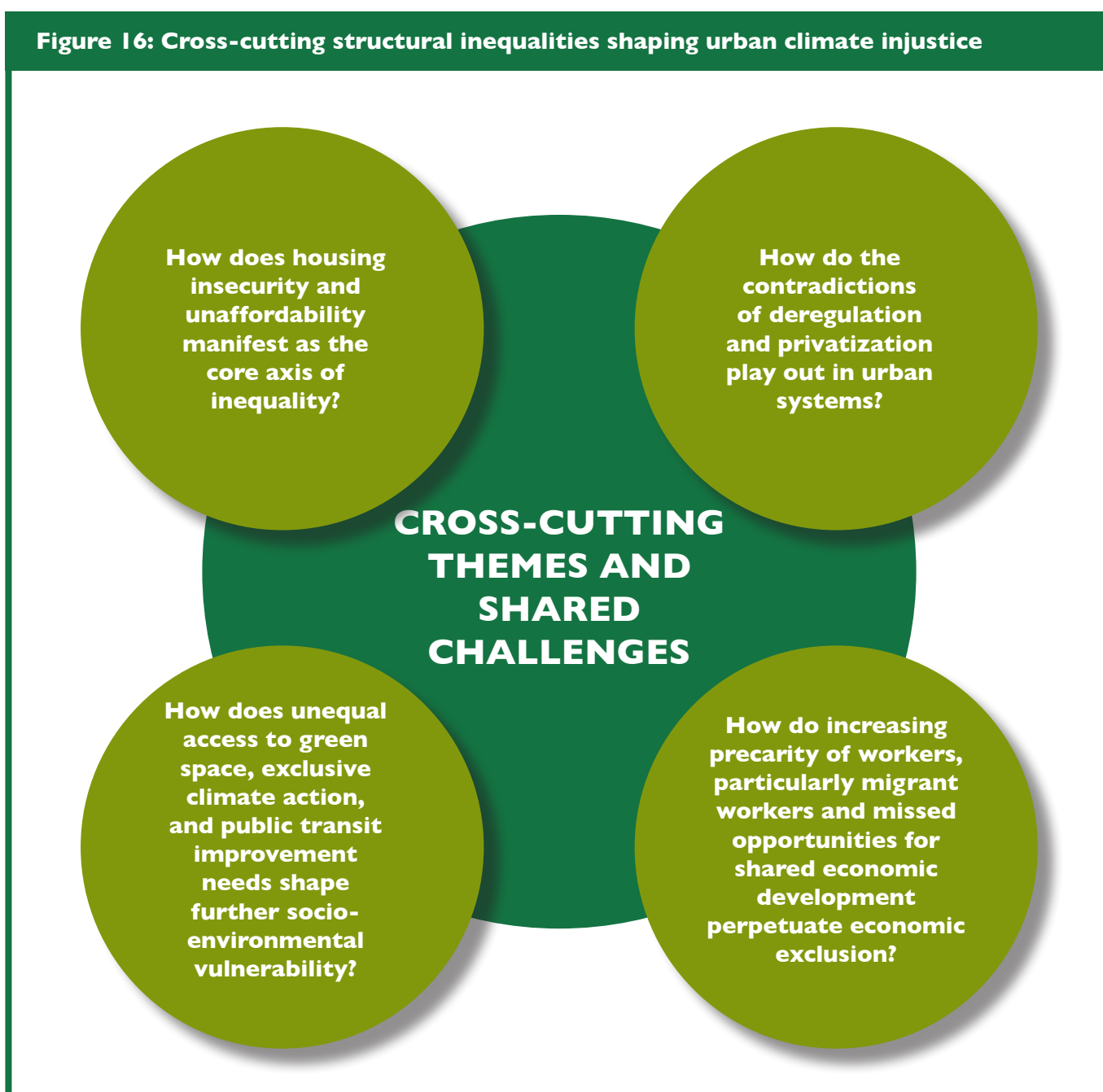
<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Barcelona (Spain)</b>	<b>Glasgow (Scotland)</b>	<b>Nantes (France)</b>
<b>Housing inequality</b>	Highly financialized rental market with growing tenant insecurity and limited social housing; strong displacement pressures linked to tourism and greening	Aging, energy-inefficient housing, affecting working-class and refugee residents; legacy of Right-to-Buy and stock transfer; inequality driven by long-term disinvestment	Stronger social housing framework; inequality shaped by urban renewal, social-mixing policies, and relocation. Emerging culturally sensitive approach for Roma populations
<b>Environmental / climate inequality</b>	High heat exposure and low adaptive capacity among renters and migrants; strong green gentrification risks	Fuel poverty and poor housing quality drive environmental and health inequalities; limited local capacity with only flagship sustainability projects benefiting gentrifying neighborhoods	High climate adaptation investments embedded in planning, but equity constrained by tighter budgets, displacement when creating new greenspaces, gentrification, and security priorities
<b>Work / economic inequality</b>	Polarized and precarized labor market dominated by tourism and services; long commutes and housing-job mismatch	Persistent unemployment and low-quality jobs following deindustrialization	More diversified labor market, but mobility constraints affect peripheral and migrant workers
<b>Role of planning and governance</b>	Ambitious climate and public space policies coexist with weak housing regulation and limited social safeguards	Climate ambitions weakened by continued austerity, fragmented governance, and service and social housing privatization	Strong metropolitan planning tools, but increasing securitization and national defunding
<b>Overall dynamic</b>	Overheating urban transformation, housing insecurity, displacement	Maladaptation through neglect and structural poverty	Managed but fragile equity with rising displacement risks

In sum, thus far, we have seen the limits of a climate planning practice not explicitly grounded in justice. Without stronger attention to structural racism, housing precarity, labor conditions, and everyday mobility constraints, climate interventions risk becoming maladaptive for those already most exposed to environmental and social harm.

In the next subsections, we delve into some specific cross-cutting findings shared across all three cities. These are derived from the synthesis of national and local policies and planning frameworks contributing to structural inequalities (Chapter 2) and the emergent lived experiences of structural inequalities we heard from planners, policymakers, and activists (Chapter 3). While each city demonstrates unique manifestations of inequalities, all remain embedded in larger common trends of precarity, exclusion and marginalization of low-income and racialized residents.

Figure 16 illustrates the four cross-cutting themes explored further below: housing, deregulation and privatization, missed shared economic development opportunities, and access to green space and public transportation. These interconnected challenges reveal how structural inequalities reinforce each other, shaping who is excluded from housing, climate, and economic justice across European urban contexts.

**Figure 16: Cross-cutting structural inequalities shaping urban climate injustice**





## HOW DOES HOUSING INSECURITY AND UNAFFORDABILITY MANIFEST AS THE CORE AXIS OF INEQUALITY?

Across all cities, housing insecurity and unaffordability emerge as the foundational element of inequality. The absence of stable, secure, and affordable housing exposes those residents already most vulnerable to compounded crisis situations wherein climate-linked conditions or economic crisis exacerbate existing struggles. Interviews in Barcelona, Glasgow, and Nantes each revealed the importance of intervention into housing inequalities in order to achieve more just, green cities.

**Stable, secure and affordable housing is an effective instrument to improve the resilience of those residents most vulnerable to compounded crisis, wherein people are simultaneously exposed to housing, climate and economic precarity.**

### How does housing manifest as the core axis of inequality?

Foreclosures with disproportionate hit on working- and middle-class homeowners

#### **Barcelona** Spain

Tenants, especially when migrants and/or racialized individuals, face discrimination and renovation within a speculative housing market where only 1.7% of units are socially protected. Tenants Unions are mobilizing to respond to evictions and rental abuses.

#### **Glasgow** UK

Right-to-buy and the 2002 stock transfer privatized public housing and new housing development is not meeting social needs and is not affordable. Rents have skyrocketed, and housing unions have mobilized to restore tenant protections.

#### **Nantes** France

Existing social housing protects residents in the face of crisis, but urban renewal and social-mixing policies may threaten this resilience by displacing low-income tenants.



## BARCELONA

Spain

**Tenancy or homeownership defines class while tenants, especially migrants, face exclusion, bank discrimination, and renoventions. Green gentrification is also growing around new parks and Superblocks, as only 1.7% of Barcelona's housing stock is socially protected.** The ownership-rental divide marks deep social stratification and indicates significant, worsening structural inequalities. Renters, particularly migrants and working-class families, face barriers in securing quality, affordable, and long-term rental contracts within a highly speculative real estate investment market shaped by mass bank foreclosures over a decade ago and the entrance of international investors. Real estate markets in Spain have been made to be more speculative through bank restructuring, creation of Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITS, SOCIMIs in Spanish) to encourage international investments. Migrants in particular face discrimination in facing disproportionate eviction, accessing housing, or mortgage lending. In short, Barcelona and Catalunya provide too few policy protections for low-income tenants, particularly recent migrants.

### Poblenou superblock in Barcelona, first implemented in 2016



Source: Alberto Bougleux

## Glasgow

UK

**Right-to-Buy and the 2002 stock transfer eliminated public housing, as austerity measures removed City Council's direct control over housing low-income residents.** . Glasgow's housing inequality is rooted in Thatcher's Right to Buy policy from the 1980s onwards and the 2002 stock transfer which ultimately shifted public housing to Housing Association control. In this act of privatization (even though HA are technically nonprofits), tenants lost rights to rent caps and an obligation to basic maintenance and retrofitting. As a consequence, the public housing system, on which 60% of Glasgow once relied, has hollowed out and in its place a system that tends to operate on profit and insecurity took its place. In response, tenants' unions like Living Rent have successfully organized for new polices on rent controls and caps in the private rental sector as well as basic maintenance and retrofitting for improved health and wellbeing.

### Glasgow's tenements and the need for retrofits



Glasgow's housing tenements are in need of retrofits, but this also puts more stress on an already unaffordable market.

Source: wrobison,tenement building on Dalmarnock Road, Glasgow,Wikimedia Creative Commons CC-BY-SA-2.0.





## Nantes France

**Despite an ongoing commitment to social housing, regulatory and budget constraints in urban renewal threaten the maintenance, renovation and production of low-income social housing.** As determined by the national urban renewal framework, urban renewal projects in Nantes are accompanied by the destruction, renovation and in some cases rededication of low-income social housing units (PLAI, PLUS) in favor of new middle-income social housing and affordable real estate for lower-middle-class first time buyers. Budget constraints and a nationally stalling housing production, further compel local authorities to resort to mid-market housing options more attractive to developers so they can meet their housing production goals. Low-income social housing tenants, on the other hand, risk being displaced from neighborhoods redeveloped for “territorial balance” and “social mixing”. Apart from a limited residential choice mostly due to economic constraints, such displacements may also entail the loss of a crucial social network, sense of local identity, and belonging for affected tenants.

### Large scale, mixed income housing construction in Île de Nantes



Source: Alberto Bougleux

## HOW DO THE CONTRADICTIONS OF DEREGULATION AND PRIVATIZATION PLAY OUT IN URBAN SYSTEMS?

The trans-national regimes towards deregulation and privatization experienced within all three cities and their relevant countries point to significant shared suffering of the poor, working-class, and minority groups in housing, climate, and economy. National and local level policies that have decimated social/public housing have left incoming migrant groups in

insecure and stressful positions where housing is not guaranteed, thus leading to instability and insecurity in economic opportunity. Moreover, the privatization and deregulation of housing have further weakened the capacity of housing and public transportation systems across all three cities to adapt to the climate crisis and improve climate resilience. Because such transformations are unlikely to generate immediate profits, climate resilience remains incompatible with neoliberal development principles and is therefore less likely to be equitable or inclusive.

**In order to transform social and housing infrastructure for climate resilience, particularly housing systems and public transportation, local governments must counteract privatization and deregulation.**

### What are the contradictions of deregulation and privatization?

Deregulation and privatization weaken protections and deepen financialization, making equitable and climate-resilient housing harder to achieve.

#### Barcelona Spain

Cases like the 2025 Casa Orsola purchase by public institutions reveal how the purchase of the building by an investment fund in 2021 generated public anxiety and growing tenant insecurity as the fund initially refused to renovate tenants' contracts.

#### Glasgow UK

Affordable housing requirements clash with profit-driven development, while outsourced refugee and housing services increase public spending and reduce quality.

#### Nantes France

Despite strong local commitments to social housing and infrastructure, national funding and regulatory constraints as well as overall welfare financialization threaten low-income housing production and social integration budgets.

## Barcelona

### Spain

**The initial buy-out of an affordable housing building by an investment fund in 2021 resulted in the mismanagement, under-maintenance, and risk of displacement of long-term residents from working-class, more affordable apartments.** Without regulation of financial actors and accountability in the purchase of housing buildings, international funds may perpetuate housing financialization and profit capture for the already wealthy. In response to the massive civic mobilization that emerged through 2024 and 2025, the City of Barcelona joined forces with Habitat 3 (a social entity) to buy the building for 9.2M Euros, below market value, in order to offer its units at social and affordable rents.

## Glasgow

### UK

**The Scottish National Planning Framework requires affordable housing construction which reduces investors' profitability, thus limiting construction. In addition, privatization of refugee and housing services is coupled with increased public spending for social services in a context of austerity finances.** Glasgow's contradictions of deregulation and privatization are two-fold: First, the National Planning Framework requires affordable housing provision within all housing developments, yet it operates in a system where development can only occur with profit. Second, refugee housing services, like public housing management, have been outsourced to private contractors, increasing public spending on services, and leaving significant questions about the quality of the service they provide. These two contradictions demonstrate how privatization and the search for profit are undermining support for affordable housing for all residents.

## Nantes

### France

**While the metropolitan government's commitment to social housing and infrastructure is still strong, the consequences of national defunding and the financialization of housing are threatening local welfare provision.** The Nantes metropolitan government has been and still is committed to the production of adapted and quality social infrastructure. Especially, the production of affordable and quality housing through different types of social housing has been a local priority in policy for more than the past decade. However, overall socio-economic trends have limited the local government's capacity to put these plans into practice. On the one hand, increasing housing financialization through national budget cuts and demand-side subsidies but also a stalling construction market and overall inflation have made the launch of new social housing production difficult. These same trends have also led to declining budgets for community organizations aiming to support vulnerable populations, for example through employment assistance. On the other hand, increasing precarity, particularly among workers and migrants, has put further pressure on social infrastructure, and most acutely social housing.



## HOW DO INCREASING PRECARIETY OF WORKERS, PARTICULARLY MIGRANT WORKERS, AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES FOR SHARED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PERPETUATE ECONOMIC EXCLUSION?

Across all three cities, the analysis reveals that limited access to stable and well-paid employment remains or grows as a key structural inequality affecting migrants, low-wage workers, and low-income residents. While municipal narratives often frame climate action as a pathway to both resilience and new employment opportunities, activists and advocates describe a

far more precarious reality, marked by complex legal barriers, labor insecurity, and heightened risks in everyday life for migrants and economically marginalized groups. In practice, green improvements in public space or retrofits tend to disproportionately benefit those who are already wealthy or well-integrated into existing urban economies and formal infrastructures. As a result, it remains uncertain whether the promised gains of green economic development will be broadly shared, or whether ongoing climate and greening interventions will instead reproduce—and potentially deepen—longstanding structural inequalities. These impacts are more likely to take place if economic benefits are channeled primarily to the urban middle class and upper middle class.

**All three cities demonstrated the limited economic opportunities available or presented to migrants, low-wage workers, and low-income residents as a major structural inequality.**

### How is economic exclusion perpetuated through increasing precarity of workers and uneven economic development?

Green economic development risks leaving behind low-income residents, particularly workers and migrants if it doesn't specifically address historic economic exclusion.

**Barcelona**  
Spain

The development of the Superblocks in the central neighborhoods of Poblenou and Sant Antoni have attracted new real estate projects or housing renovation, prompted the opening of new high-end stores, and priced out working-class and middle-class residents.

**Glasgow**  
UK

The city suffers from persistent unemployment, low-quality employment and deep poverty following de-industrialization, with many social services outsourced or reduced through austerity and few opportunities for hiring and training in the new green economy or retrofit programs.

**Nantes**  
France

In the course of its sustainable transition, Nantes has transformed into a city of white-collar, creative and administrative employees, with little economic opportunity for low-income residents and workers, particularly young, racialized residents suffering from educational inequalities and continued stigmatization.



## BARCELONA

Spain

***Economic development linked to the tourism industry (i.e. housing development, building renovations, food production) entails poor quality jobs and labor conditions.*** Migrants, informal workers, and low-income residents are largely excluded from tourism-linked economic benefits as the labor created through tourism, including the agriculture needed to feed visitors, is low-wage, seasonal, precarious, and puts workers at risk of extreme heat, without any labor or union protection. Interviews revealed that those most in need of improved employment and training opportunities, especially those linked to green transition or green space projects, are those least likely to be able to access them. Many municipal and other public jobs require advanced Catalan certification, which many migrant workers do not have.

### Heat justice in Barcelona



Extreme heat is impacting urban life in Spain, as traditional plazas expose residents, workers, and tourists alike to dangerous health conditions

Source: Alberto Bougleux

## Glasgow

UK

**The marketing of the just green economic transition in the UK (after COP) has not translated into new jobs and better wages (for all work).** The Glasgow City Council and the Scottish government have promised significant changes to urban form and policy in order to meet lofty 'just green transition' goals. Particularly following the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow in 2021, a discourse across the UK framed climate mitigation and carbon neutrality as the highest opportunity for economic growth and climate resilience. Yet, interviews revealed that few green jobs with training are available and wages for all work remain low and stagnant. Interviewees shared how, overall, they felt the promised green economy had yet to materialize and many of the implementations are instead having negative impacts on the most vulnerable.

### Glasgow as host of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP) in 2021



National interest in the green transition, especially climate mitigation, was sparked when the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP) was held in Glasgow in 2021, during which the Paris Climate Agreement was reaffirmed.

Source: President of the Republic of Armenia, Armen Sarkissian attends the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference, Wikimedia Creative Commons, CC-BY-SA-3.0





## Nantes France

**Particularly in low-income areas, there are limited economic opportunities for young, racialized residents and migrants who tend to suffer from educational inequalities and a lack of access to professional training.**

Although there are public efforts to promote the economic integration of lower-income and precarious residents in low-income neighborhoods, deep structural inequalities and decreasing national budgets are limiting the effectiveness of such efforts. Particularly the educational, income and civic injustices faced by migrants and racialized residents in France, pose a significant barrier to equal economic development. In Nantes specifically, these inequalities may be exacerbated by the promotion of green economic development in the tertiary sector, which has attracted a growing number of white-collar executives from the Paris region. This new, highly qualified workforce with a higher spending capacity has thus profited from these new economies, while opportunities for lower-income workers have become increasingly slim.

### Nantes's economic transformation: from shipyards to hi-tech



The economic transformation of Nantes from a shipyard industry to a new technology, high-education, and green economy has not translated into increased job and career growth opportunities for racialized youth, who remained stigmatized in the hiring market and suffer from lower educational conditions.

Source: Alberto Bougleux

## HOW DOES UNEQUAL ACCESS TO GREEN SPACE, EXCLUSIVE CLIMATE ACTION, AND PUBLIC TRANSIT IMPROVEMENT SHAPE FURTHER SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL VULNERABILITY?

Both access to green space as well as access to reliable, efficient, and affordable public transportation are critical markers of a more just, equitable society. Our study reveals the deeply entrenched class and spatial inequalities that emerge from the lack of

access to green space and the lack of adequate public transportation, particularly for migrants and low-income residents. All three cities demonstrate that without access to green space, vulnerable groups live without spaces to seek refuge and community bonding. Meanwhile, without reliable and well-connected regional public transit, low-income and racialized workers are forced into long and straining commutes and are banished to urban peripheries in islands of isolation as they seek out more affordable housing options. Both situations illustrate regional displacement and segregation.

### Major challenges to ensuring access to green space, climate security, and public transit

In each city, the development of green amenities, particularly green spaces and public transportation is often focused on aesthetics and leisure uses for middle-income and white-collar employees, thus leaving behind workers and marginalized residents.

#### Barcelona Spain

The city's central (e.g. Raval) and peripheral (e.g. La Prosperitat) working-class areas are exposed to dense, poorly ventilated housing during extreme heat, and do not have extensive green public space. Barcelona has also promoted greening and climate policies that have generated strong green gentrification risks.

#### Glasgow UK

Working-class residents, migrants and refugees continue to be exposed to environmental burdens and inequalities due to fuel poverty, poor housing quality, and adverse health outcomes. Sustainability initiatives and climate actions are geographically limited to attractive areas redeveloped in the context of large events.

#### Nantes France

Due to strong political commitment and investment into public transportation and urban green spaces, residents in Nantes equally profit from green amenities, although green development remains oriented towards leisure uses.



## BARCELONA

### Spain

***Access to green space is often better in the periphery, but risk of climate gentrification is increasing.***

Lower-income and otherwise vulnerable migrants are increasingly relocating to the urban periphery, where housing is relatively more affordable and some public transportation is available; however, commuting times are long and regional transit systems remain unreliable. Interviews indicate that many migrants in Barcelona are pushed out of central areas because they cannot compete in the hyper-competitive rental market, which has been shown to disadvantage residents of non-Spanish heritage. At the same time, the expansion of Superblocks and Green Axes under Barcelona's urban greening agenda has intensified gentrification and housing unaffordability near central services, further excluding vulnerable groups from the benefits of urban greening in the city itself.

These dynamics are compounded by the spatial mismatch between housing, jobs, and new mobility infrastructure. While many employment opportunities—particularly in logistics, tourism, cleaning, catering, and airport-related services—are located near the airport or in peripheral industrial areas and other suburbs, the city's active transportation plans have largely prioritized central zones. As a result, migrants and low-income residents who live in the periphery are less able to benefit from low-cost, active mobility options and suffer from unreliable commutes that increase time and financial burdens. Finally, the urban periphery is itself becoming a site of emerging climate gentrification, as greener, less dense suburbs with higher-quality housing attract new investment and higher-income residents, further reproducing patterns of exclusion in the outskirts of Barcelona.

### Green space in the Eixample district's superblocks



The green spaces created through the superblocks in the Eixample district, although increasing livability and climate adaptation for residents and passers-by, has also contributed to gentrification in the neighborhood. Thus, more pressure has been put on an already unaffordable housing market in the center of the city.

Source: Alberto Bougleux

## Glasgow

UK

***The working-class lack adequate and equitable transportation routes, forming islands of economic poverty and insularity that are compounded by the privatization of transportation systems.*** Access to transportation and green space are both directly tied to class in Glasgow. High green inequalities between wealthier and deprived neighborhoods also exist, as the removal of informal public space (sports) infrastructure demonstrates. Low-income neighborhoods exist as physical and social islands of exclusion, as their economies are isolated by poor-quality, privatized, transit systems.

Meanwhile, gender also marks an indicator of inequality alongside class as active transportation reforms and climate investments often overlook the needs of both the poor, working-class and women for more complex as well as closer; and care-focused mobility needs. Interviewees described the variety of climate interventions and transportation trends as significant barriers to achieving higher quality of life.

### Glasgow's Easterhouse neighborhood



The Easterhouse neighborhood of Glasgow – a neighborhood primarily of working class and low-income residents which suffers from isolation as a result of the islands of transportation effect.

Source: Source: Richard Webb, Arnisdale road, Wikimedia Creative Commons, CC-BY-SA-2.0



## Nantes

### France

**Despite increasing green space availability and well-developed infrastructure, green infrastructure show deficiencies particularly for low-income residents and workers.** Accessible and affordable public transportation as well as equal access to green space has been a priority of public policy and urban development in Nantes for the past two decades. For this reason, unlike in other French cities, low-income neighborhoods in Nantes are well-served in terms of public transportation and green spaces.

Nonetheless, green infrastructure development in Nantes remains dominated by concerns for leisure uses and urban attractiveness. Newly developed urban parks, for example, have been criticized for replacing working-class uses of semi-natural greenspaces, such as the “Extraordinary Gardens”.

The public transportation network, on the other hand, while serving all low-income neighborhoods, is star-shaped making commuting between peri-urban areas difficult. This particularly affects workers travelling to and from major industrial and logistics compounds, such as the logistics park in Carquefou. Further, the schedules and free-weekend pricing of public transportation point to a focus on serving white-collar and administrative employees working office hours as well as middle-class residents and tourists for leisure purposes on weekends.

### Nantes’s parks and gardens



Nantes has been characterized by the large-scale construction and regeneration of parks and gardens, increasing the green space availability throughout the metropolitan area. However, these developments have, for a long time, also been underpinned by an ambition to make the city more attractive – mostly for tourists and non-local, higher income residents – thus contributing to price increases.

Source: Lisa Hannuschke

# Chapter 5

## Calls for Policy Change to Address Structural Inequalities

### AT A GLANCE

#### **This chapter:**

- Outlines climate justice tools and strategies that cities can adopt to reduce the inequities identified in this report.
- Presents housing tools and strategies to strengthen security, affordability, and resilience as a means for reducing structural inequality's impact on climate action.
- Identifies mechanisms and paths forward for building a more participatory and inclusive urban economy.



The following recommendations, consisting of strategies and tools, emerged directly from the 25 qualitative interviews conducted with planners, community organizers, and non-profit advocates. These tools and strategies reflect the experiences of each of the interviewees and are drawn directly from the interviews conducted with them. These tools represent both existing, emerging, and ideal responses to address the housing, climate, and economic structural inequalities faced in each city.

## OTHER REFERENCES FOR POLICY INNOVATIONS, TOOLS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACHIEVING URBAN GREEN JUSTICE:

- Policy And Planning Tools For Urban Green Justice: Fighting displacement and gentrification and improving accessibility and inclusiveness to green amenities by the Barcelona Lab for Urban Environmental Justice and Sustainability (BCNUEJ) (2021)
- Sharing in the Benefits of a Greening City: CREATE Toolkit by the CREATE Lab (Derickson et al. 2021)
- The Equitable Development Toolkit (The River Network 2023)
- What's Race Got to Do With It? Climate Injustice in Europe Uncovered by Union of Justice (2024) which examines how climate policy and adaptation intersect with racial inequality in Europe.

**Across contexts, the reports converge on a common message: urban greening must be intentionally governed to prevent displacement and to redistribute environmental, social, and economic benefits toward historically marginalized communities. Core recommendations include:**

- **Pair greening with anti-displacement protections:** Green investments should never occur in isolation. They must be co-developed with strong housing protections such as rent stabilization, anti-eviction measures, community land trusts, and tax or incentive mechanisms for property and land developers in order to prevent green amenity-driven displacement.
- **Center community leadership and co-governance:** Affected residents—particularly low-income, racialized, and historically excluded groups—should be meaningfully involved from the earliest planning stages, with decision-making power in clearly defined areas rather than symbolic participation.
- **Redistribute the benefits of greening:** Cities should ensure that greening produces tangible benefits for existing residents, including local jobs with fair labor conditions, improved health and climate protection, access to everyday amenities, and cultural recognition—not only increased property values.
- **Use anticipatory and place-based planning tools:** Cities should proactively assess displacement risk and social vulnerability before greening investments occur, using tools such as vulnerability to gentrification mapping, equity impact assessments, and neighborhood-level monitoring systems.
- **Integrate housing, climate, and economic policy:** Equitable greening requires cross-sector coordination among planning, housing, transportation, labor, and climate departments, moving beyond siloed environmental interventions.



## POLICY AND PLANNING TOOLS FOR URBAN GREEN JUSTICE

Fighting displacement and gentrification and improving accessibility and inclusiveness to green amenities

April 2021



## SHARING IN THE BENEFITS OF A GREENING CITY



A POLICY TOOLKIT IN PURSUIT OF ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND RACIAL JUSTICE

An **EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT**

COMMUNITY-CENTERED SOLUTIONS FOR GREEN GENTRIFICATION AND DISPLACEMENT



## CLIMATE JUSTICE TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

**Design energy efficiency and retrofit programs as well as marketing/educational campaigns that are accessible to renters and homeowners.** Most retrofit funding and tax incentives are currently only accessible to owner-occupiers. This choice excludes renters from retrofit energy savings and the heat/cold climate resilience capabilities of housing retrofits. Designing programs that reach rental tenants can reduce energy poverty, address heat and cold vulnerabilities, and improve health equity. Moreover, designing marketing, education, and technical support campaigns to inform homeowners and residents of the benefits and necessity for upgrade, maintenance, and retrofit and to accompany them will enhance outcomes for all residents.

**Involve migrants, youth, caregivers, and marginalized groups in green infrastructure and climate adaptation planning.** Procedural justice is a cornerstone to ensure a just transition for all. This includes prioritizing representation in planning processes of vulnerable, under-represented groups, particularly migrants, youth, caregivers, and the elderly. With representation, climate planning processes, such as those that create new climate shelters, can lead

to more inclusive and effective outcomes that both reflect community identities and harness greater benefits for all.

**Enforce national mandates for retrofits and hold landlords accountable**

**for delayed or incomplete compliance.** Disasters such as the Grenfell Building Fire in 2017 reveal the dangers of weak retrofit and maintenance enforcement. Clear mandates, enforced by inspections, incentives, and penalties, are essential to improve the public health and safety of those residents living in aging, multi-unit housing.

**Conduct displacement risk assessments when implementing green infrastructure and interventions, such as traffic spillover from Low Emission Zones or gentrification from Superblock projects.** Climate interventions in pursuit of the just green transition can produce unintended harms. These unintended harms may include pricing out of residents from long-term, working-class neighborhoods, or the displacement of pollution burdens from one neighborhood to another. Including displacement risk requirements within climate-related planning processes can help prevent further marginalization, displacement, and shifts in burden.

### Glasgow's low emission zone



Low Emission Zone enforcement in Glasgow aims to reduce air pollution and protect public health, yet policy implementation can also shift traffic burdens to adjacent neighborhoods. Cities should conduct displacement and spillover risk assessments to ensure that green mobility interventions do not intensify environmental or socioeconomic inequalities.

Source: Thomas Nugent, Glasgow Low Emission Zone sign - [geograph.org.uk](https://www.geograph.org.uk) - 6062567, Wikimedia Creative Commons, CC-BY-SA-2.0.

## TOOLS AND STRATEGIES FOR HOUSING-FOCUSED URBAN CLIMATE ACTION

**Couple efforts to address green infrastructure deficits with strengthened rent control in rent-pressured areas across urban regions, including large rental buildings, and introduce inter-tenancy caps, in order to prevent eviction-enabled rent increases** While many tenants' groups and organizations have made immense progress since periods of deregulation, financialization, and economic recession across all European cities, loopholes in rent control regulations still exist and cause undue harm to residents. These loopholes include exemptions for corporate rental-only landlords, allowances for vacancy-driven price hikes, and more. These loopholes undermine protections for all residents, but in particular continue to oppress those most vulnerable

in the housing market: migrants and asylum-seekers. Expanding and deepening these regulations to eliminate loopholes can improve access to housing, stabilize tenancies, and prevent evictions.

**Within climate initiatives, support inclusion of mass-membership tenant unions and community organizing.** Tenant unions are a critical community infrastructure that builds collective power to demand regulatory change, resist displacements and evictions, and ensure equitable housing. Institutional support and alliance can help scale their efforts while also ensuring bottom-up accountability. For example, tenant and worker unions can develop essential common strategies and campaigns for combining climate, labor, and housing justice demands. Those organizations are important conduits for greater, direct, door-to-door and multi-language outreach to buildings or areas with a high proportion of racialized tenants.

### Glasgow's Living Rent



Living Rent Glasgow demonstrates how mass-membership tenant unions build collective power to resist displacement, influence regulation, and democratize the housing impacts of governance.

Source: Living Rent

### **Fund tenant safety campaigns and accelerate public oversight of hazardous housing conditions.**

Many tenants live in unsafe, unhealthy, and climate-vulnerable buildings. As climate action focuses on building upgrades, these tenants are owed both knowledge and recourse of their living conditions. Resourcing safety campaigns through tenants' unions or through public campaigns can improve frequency and quality of inspections, while also empowering residents to protect their health and their neighbors' in the face of climate-induced risks.

**Require equity and affordability guarantees in all public-private housing development partnerships that incorporate climate-focused incentives and mandates.** Many public-private partnership housing projects have demonstrated that long-term affordability is always promised but unfrequently met. Instead, urban climate actions should include support for binding guarantees that would ensure public investment would always yield long-term affordability and rental contracts. Such guarantees would limit the involvement of public tax dollars in speculative housing practices.

**Support rent stabilization across tenancies to eliminate financial incentives for eviction.** Landlords often evict tenants to increase rents between leases. Stabilizing rents in-between contracts and across tenancies eliminates this option and prevents evictions.

**Support cooperative (co-op) partnerships with ethical cooperative banks for financing and co-ownership models of non-profit housing development/renovation.** . Supplying and managing housing outside of extractive, speculative, and commodified housing markets would provide the

most security and affordability for residents. Co-ops and community land trusts are housing mechanisms by which decommodified housing can be offered. Partnerships and processes engaged in ethical financing can provide democratic, affordable, and mission-driven housing.

## **TOOLS AND STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING A PARTICIPATORY AND INCLUSIVE ECONOMY THROUGH URBAN CLIMATE ACTION**

**Invest tourism-related revenue streams (e.g., tourist taxes) into climate-resilient infrastructure like public transport and retrofitting subsidies for tenants or low-income homeowners.** Tourism-based economies across Europe have implemented a variety of tourist taxes. However, who benefits from that revenue and how this revenue is distributed is not always clear. Redirecting this revenue to provide climate resilience, improved transport, and housing affordability and upgrade interventions can address both economic and environmental inequality.

### **Barcelona's Glòries tower**



The Torre Glòries is prominent in the landscape of Barcelona, particularly from a tourism perspective, however it has garnered criticism from local residents and workers for its unconventional shape, perceived lack of fit within Barcelona's architecture, and practical issues for office tenants.

Source: Alberto Bougleux

**Reclaim municipal power over public transit through franchising or full public ownership models.**

Deregulation and privatization efforts over decades have led to unreliable, unaffordable, and inaccessible bus and other public transit systems, especially so in the UK. Public ownership and greater local control allow municipalities and regions to provide transportation that benefits the users while also working towards environmental and climate goals.

**Encourage networked civic groups and unions to expand beyond housing into transportation, energy, and economic justice.**

Civic organizations have long fought under single-issue platforms, for example only housing, only climate, only economy. Now, however, networked civic groups are broadening their demands in recognition of their recent wins and recognition of their power in solidarity. Civic groups that can bridge between issues, including affordable housing, just transportation, and a just climate transition, can demand holistic policymaking.

**Apply intersectional feminist and care-based lenses in urban climate planning, especially when focused on transit, public space, and mobility.**

Cities have historically developed to serve and benefit patriarchal economies. Feminist planning, such as many public and green space measures developed in Barcelona, would integrate more opportunity for diverse mobility patterns, every-day/night use of space, and ultimately expand access to benefits for women, caregivers, disabled groups, and other marginalized residents.

**Expand food justice strategies through mobile fresh produce markets and local food access programs in underserved neighborhoods.**

Food deserts are a common disservice in many low-income, vulnerable neighborhoods. Mobile markets and targeted food and nutritional programs can offer both affordable nutritious food, while also providing opportunities for circular economy-based businesses that provide these services to neighborhoods. Those should be coupled with sustainable local hiring and farming practices as well as new labor laws protecting the health of often outdoor migrant workers.

## The Cours Cambronne in Nantes



By growing and providing fresh produce to low-income and the most vulnerable residents through its food producing landscapes – such as the Cours Cambronne shown here - contributes to food justice in its territory. Launched during the Covid19 pandemic in 2020, the municipal program Paysages nourriciers now provides 1200 families in Nantes with locally grown fruits and vegetables, most notably through its cooperation with neighborhood and community organizations, such as the local food banks.

Source: François de Dijon, Cours Cambronne - Nantes- 02, Wikimedia Creative Commons, CC-BY-SA-4.0.

## TOOLS AND STRATEGIES FOR AN ANTI-RACIST AND INCLUSIVE CITIES

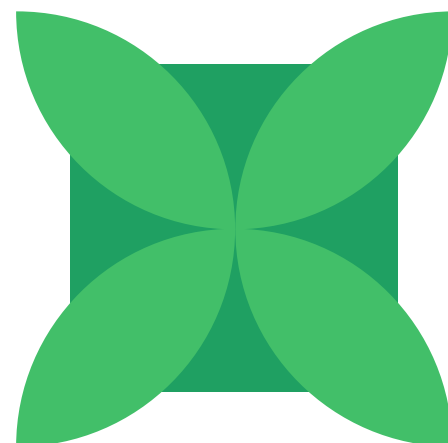
**Develop a transversal, multi-sectoral anti-racist strategy at the municipal level to support greater equality and more inclusivity in planning.** Especially with regards to climate justice, action plans with concrete goals, steps, and measurable strategies can support departments and agencies working together towards this path. Those should involve civil society actors from design to monitoring and evaluation.

### ECCAR TOOLKIT FOR EQUALITY

The ECCAR Toolkit for Equality is a practical, human-rights-based guide designed to help local governments prevent discrimination, promote equality, and foster inclusive cities. Developed collaboratively with municipalities, civil society organizations, experts, and affected communities across Europe, it offers concrete policy models, implementation guidance, and evaluation strategies covering areas such as anti-discrimination offices, monitoring and equality data, migrant participation, diversity management, access to services and housing, combating racism and hate speech, and inclusion through sports. The Toolkit translates evidence from real municipal experience into adaptable tools that support cross-departmental action, civic participation, and sustainable impact, and is available in multiple European languages.

#### The toolkit includes 13 practical tools:

- An ECCAR 10 Points Action Plan
- Monitoring Approaches
- An Antidiscrimination Office
- An Elected Migrant Council
- A Migrant Citizenship Forum
- A Door Policy Panel
- Diversity Management Tools in the City Administration
- Welcome Services for New City Inhabitants
- improving access to services for marginalized groups
- Adequate Housing Policies
- Tools for Combatting Racism and Hate Speech: Building a Non-Racist Society
- Sports-related Tools (as a tool for inclusion and anti-discrimination)
- Equality Data Collection Tools





### **Support anti-racism for stigmatized racial and ethnic groups in cities**

In European cities, some racial and ethnic groups have faced particular discrimination, exclusion and segregation, including Muslim, Black, and Latino residents. Cities should protect those residents from discrimination and safeguard their right to equal opportunities in cities and from violence and hate-speeches and practices. They should also consider that racist practices have intersectional components, with, for example, youth and men facing particularly high policing and surveillance practices. Some key resources include the ECCAR Guidebook of Local Actions against Anti-Muslim racism



# Chapter 6

## Conclusion

### AT A GLANCE

**This chapter:**

- Synthesizes key findings on structural inequalities observed across Barcelona, Glasgow, and Nantes.
- Emphasizes that creating a link between urban climate and housing efforts is essential for addressing structural inequality.
- Underscores the persistent disparities in access to green space, climate action, and transportation.
- Reflects on the potential for cities to pursue more equitable climate justice pathways.

This report aimed to consider the long and developing histories of structural inequalities and how they are now manifest in the built environment in three cities: Barcelona, Spain; Glasgow, UK; and, Nantes, France. We demonstrated how structural oppression manifests as inequalities that privilege some groups while marginalizing others. These systematic, institutionalized patterns of inequality are embedded in the legal, political, economic, and spatial systems of each of the cities studied, and reflect analogous dynamics expressed across Europe. In order to address these inequalities within the built urban form, first we must hear from those engaging in these spaces directly.

**This report largely explored how inequalities in the built environment are also compounded by the climate, housing, and economic crises; in sum, each of these crises are inextricable from the other.**

**In Chapter 1**, we illustrated how and why the urgency of the climate crisis is especially acute. We explored how climate change shows where governments and policies focusing on both housing and economy are also failing the poor, working-class, and marginalized populations.

**In Chapter 2**, we investigated the historical policy and regulatory frameworks existing in Barcelona, Glasgow, and Nantes. We explored how policies and regulatory frameworks, both historical and current, in each national government (Spain, the UK, and France) contributed to the present structuring of the built environment in each city.

**In Chapter 3**, we turned to our interviews to analyze how the policy and historical landscapes of each country and city have manifested acute and chronic structural inequalities and how planners and civic groups are working to address those, or not. Our interviews revealed structural inequalities in climate, housing, and economy, particularly impacting migrants, asylum-seekers, the poor and working-class, as well as women. The interviews are especially valuable as they expose blind spots in addressing long term exclusion.

**In Chapter 4**, we synthesized our findings from interviews to classify cross-cutting manifestations of inequalities across all cities and correlated these lived experiences to ongoing inequalities across all of Europe.

**Finally, in Chapter 5**, we drew directly from the interviews to identify policy and planning recommendations that address each of the manifestations of inequality unearthed by our interviewees. We position those within the historical and situational contexts of each city, determining what recommendations would generate the most benefit across Europe

## KEY STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES: BARCELONA, GLASGOW, AND NANTES

### Housing Is the Foundation of Structural Urban Inequality

Across all case-study cities, housing emerges as the foundation for systemic and structural inequality amongst all population groups. Housing is where exclusion, disinvestment, commodification, financialization, and speculation co-exist. Housing manifests as an inequality in unaffordable rents, unsafe and hazardous living conditions, and ability to be climate resilient while in-home. Housing markets are also a key mechanism for spatially concentrating vulnerability, which makes housing essential for any urban climate program that seeks to address.

### Deregulation and Privatization Catalyze Urban Injustices

Decades of deregulation, privatization, and financialization have reduced public funding and management of the public good, from public housing to mass transit, to the public service workforce, and to social services. These neoliberalized public good systems have prioritized profit over people, demonstrably resulting in substandard living and transportation conditions, economic disparities, and the reduced ability to be resilient to climate impacts, particularly so in the UK but also to some extent in Barcelona and Nantes. Hearing from practitioners,

organizers, and activists in Barcelona, Glasgow, and Nantes, reveals how even when new regulation is introduced, loopholes and contradiction undermine those most vulnerable from benefiting from new policies. New climate programs can link with housing transit and labor issues to reduce this trend.

### **Vulnerable Groups Are Excluded from Economic Development Advances**

Low-income residents, migrants, and women are often left behind in their ability to access economic opportunities in the cities we studied. Economic development opportunities linked with urban climate actions continue to predominantly benefit those who are already advantaged with existing accessibility and wealth. For example, tourism and real estate industry professionals are more likely to receive the bulk of the benefit from economic investment that follows newly attractive greening and resilience enhancements in certain areas of the city. The gap in economic opportunity between low-wage service jobs and concentrated corporate profit is under-explored.

### **Green Space, Climate Action, and Public Transit Access Remain Deeply Unequal**

Low-income, working-class, migrant, disabled, and women/non-binary communities often face significant mobility and accessibility barriers when compared to the able-bodied, White, male population. These groups face increased challenges in accessing safe, reliable, and dignified transportation. Moreover, with the shift to more active and climate-friendly modes of transportation, vulnerable groups face even more compounding barriers as they tend to travel longer distances and have more complex commutes due to spatial isolation and housing affordability needs. As transit systems ignore caregiving and local mobility requirements, green and climate-friendly infrastructure interventions may risk displacing existing residents altogether while leaving unmet the needs of residents living in more peripheral areas.

## **THE POTENTIAL FOR URBAN CLIMATE JUSTICE**

Urban climate justice can only be understood relative to climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience efforts. It is accomplished through deliberate efforts by multi-level governments to center vulnerable communities and provide economic and political reconciliation. It does so by linking efforts to dismantle structural inequalities with efforts to address climate risk. In the 2024 *Embodying Justice in the Built Environment: Circularity in Practice* report (Minner et al. 2024), it was argued

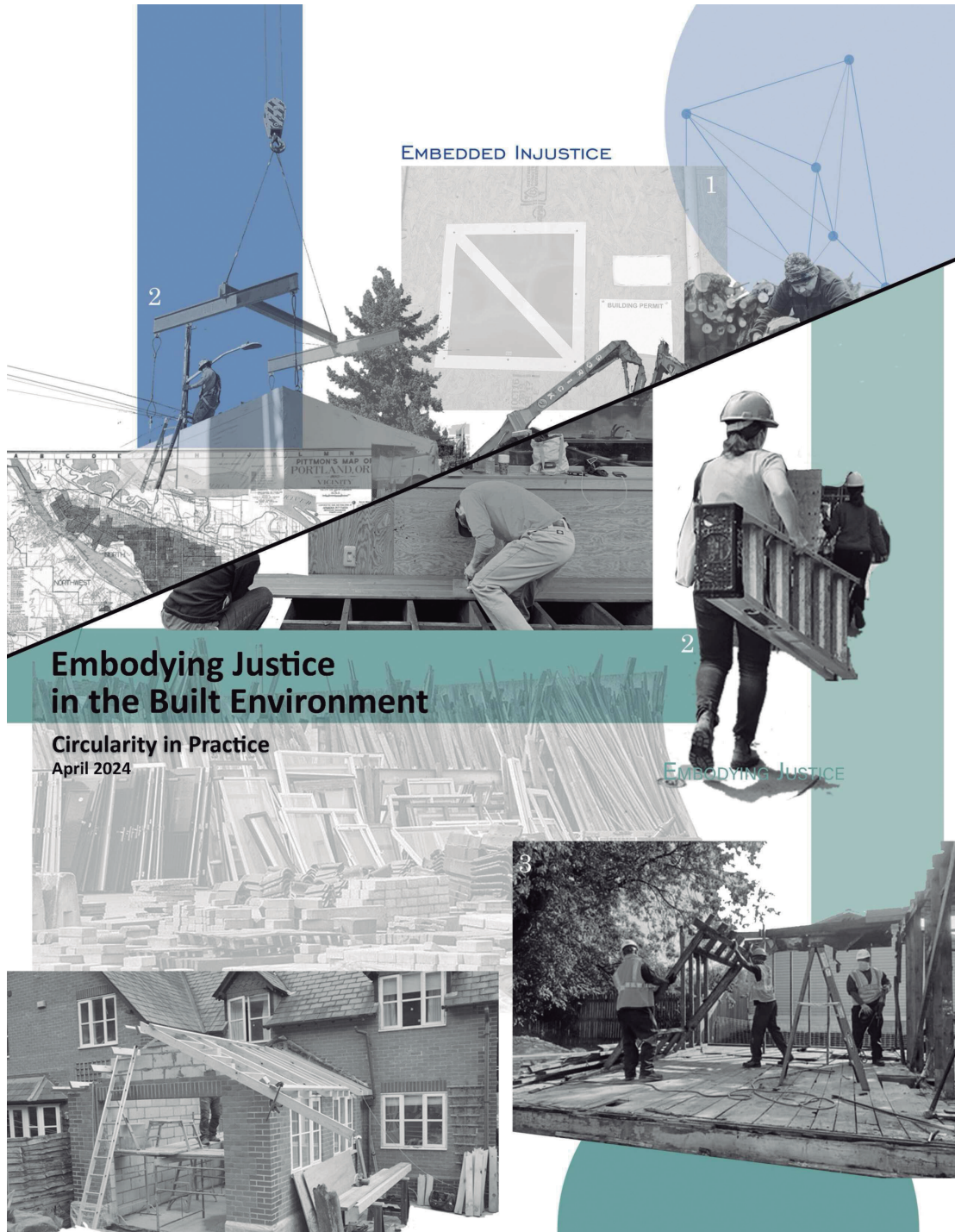
that the justice lens required linking efforts to generate circularity and less impactful waste flows with efforts to address underlying societal inequities and exclusions. We echo this approach, arguing for its relevance in the resilience and adaptation efforts of western European cities, where structural inequalities are well-documented. Our findings emphasize that resilience and adaptation solutions must go beyond technocratic measures but also address the deep social and cultural dimensions of marginalized and vulnerable groups including structural injustice, lived vulnerability, and cumulative disadvantage.



# Embodying Justice in the Built Environment: Circularity In Practice

This report, published in 2025, explores justice principles and provides a framework for centering justice in embodied carbon policies and planning. Exploratory questions, designed as a workbook, guide the user through a process which centers meaningful community engagement in considering social, economic, and labor impacts and opportunities rooted in an understanding of the local historical context. Practical examples of strategies which embody justice provide insights and inspiration.

The report can be found at: [https://carbonneutralcities.org/press\\_embodimentjustice/](https://carbonneutralcities.org/press_embodimentjustice/)



For Europe to effectively leverage urban actions as a catalyst for wider change that addresses the scale of the climate crisis, local, regional, and national governments must aim to focus not only on reducing carbon emissions in building and transport systems, but also on restructuring urban governance to support climate adaptation and resilience for those communities most impacted by structural inequalities. In the pursuit of the just green transition, shaping how cities distribute benefits and risks across space is essential for addressing the wrongs of long-term privatization, deregulation, racialized exclusion, and disinvestment. Cities are especially promising as a scale for action because efforts to address structural inequalities through climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience efforts can be scaled to local contexts.

## Flooding in Valencia, Spain in 2024



As climate disasters intensify across Europe, vulnerable communities, especially those already facing housing and economic precarity, are least equipped to withstand or recover from their impacts. Urban climate justice demands responses that integrate housing, transit infrastructure, and social resilience into both mitigation and adaptation strategies.

Source: Cotxes arrossegats per la DANA 2024 en un carrer de Catarroja amb fang i deixalles, Wikimedia Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0

# APPENDICIES

Appendix I: Glossary

**Austerity** refers to a set of fiscal and governance strategies aimed at reducing public expenditure and state investment, often implemented through cuts to social services, housing budgets, and local government capacity. Austerity often constrains the ability of public institutions to maintain, retrofit, and adapt housing and infrastructure, while deepening reliance on market-based solutions and private finance.

**Built environment:** The objective and subjective characteristics of the physical context in which people spend their time (e.g., home, neighborhood), including aspects of urban design, (e.g., presence of sidewalks), traffic density and speed, distance to and design of venues for physical activity (e.g., parks), and crime and safety.

**Climate adaptation:** Activities that enable human communities to better live and cope with the impacts of a changing climate on urban infrastructure, ecosystems, homes, and residents

**Climate mitigation:** Activities that reduce human impacts on the climate by reducing greenhouse-gas emissions and enhancing carbon sinks, aiming to limit the severity of future climate impacts by, for example, transitioning to renewable energy, improving energy efficiency, developing low-carbon transport systems, and restoring ecosystems such as forests

**Climate resilience:** The ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from climate-related hazardous events, trends, or disturbances; climate-resilient development combines adaptive and mitigation strategies to support sustainable development, and equitable resilience ensures that such strategies are socially just and inclusive

**Climate risks:** Potential adverse outcomes posed by climate change to people, communities, economies, and ecosystems—including by acute events like wildfires and floods, and slower-onset phenomena such as sea-level rise and extreme heat—all of which can damage infrastructure, disrupt livelihoods, and displace communities

**Climate urbanism:** An aspirational set of practices and actions designed to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions and risks to health and well-being that also improve a city's ecosystem and infrastructure functions

**Embodied Carbon:** As defined by the Structural Engineering Institute, it is the sum of greenhouse gas emissions released during the following life-cycle stages: raw material extraction, transportation, manufacturing, construction, maintenance, renovation, and end-of-life for a product or system.

**Equity:** The fair and just distribution of resources, opportunities, and benefits; in urban planning, equity also entails dismantling institutional barriers and power structures that exclude marginalized communities from meaningful participation and environmental and infrastructural improvements

**Exclusion:** The systemic processes through which individuals or groups are denied access to rights, resources, opportunities, or decision-making power. Exclusion is produced through laws, policies, market dynamics, and social norms that advantage some populations while marginalizing others

**Financialization:** Process by which housing, land, infrastructure, and urban services are increasingly treated as financial assets rather than social goods, prioritizing profit extraction, speculation, and investment returns over affordability, access, and use value.

**Gentrification:** The process by which historically disinvested urban neighborhoods undergo reinvestment and redevelopment that lead to rising property values, increased rents, and the in-migration of more affluent residents that often displaces existing residents and transforms neighborhood identity and culture. Variants of gentrification include green gentrification, in which the installation of green infrastructure (e.g., parks, gardens, bike lanes) raises nearby property values; environmental gentrification, where broader sustainability initiatives or environmental clean-ups attract upscale development; and climate gentrification, whereby climate-resilient neighborhoods or lower-risk areas become desirable for investment and wealthier populations, pricing out lower-income groups

**Green buildings:** Structures designed, constructed, and operated to minimize environmental impacts while maximizing resource efficiency; these buildings often include energy- and water-efficient technologies, sustainable materials, and other design elements that improve air quality and occupant well-being

**Green economy hubs:** Urban districts that promote sustainable industries and low-carbon jobs in support of the green transition

**Green infrastructure:** Systems, features, and spaces both natural and constructed that provide ecological, social, and economic benefits in cities. Such infrastructure can include rain gardens, urban forests, green roofs, and permeable surfaces that support stormwater management, improve air quality, reduce urban heat, and enhance public health and biodiversity

**Green technologies:** Innovative systems and tools designed to improve sustainability and reduce ecological footprints in urban environments, ranging from energy-efficient building systems and smart grids to electric transit and advanced recycling solutions

**Green transition:** The system-level shift from fossil-fuel dependence to use of low-carbon, sustainable alternatives; in cities, this includes promoting renewable energy, public transportation, circular economies, and decarbonizing the built environment

**Heat Gentrification:** Process whereby investments to reduce heat exposure (such as urban greening, cooling infrastructure, or climate-resilient housing) increase property values and living costs, attracting wealthier residents and displacing or excluding lower-income and marginalized populations.

**Heat racism:** Systematic and racialized production of unequal exposure to extreme heat, rooted in historical and ongoing processes of structural exclusion such as segregation, disinvestment, discriminatory planning, and environmental neglect, which all force racialized communities to be or remain in hotter, less protected environments.

**Historically marginalized groups:** Populations that have been systematically disadvantaged over time through discrimination, exclusion, and unequal access to political, economic, or social power. These groups have faced persistent barriers rooted in structural forces such as racism, colonialism, class inequality, gender oppression, and migration status

**Housing Associations (HA):** Independent, regulated, not-for-profit social landlords in the UK that provide affordable and social housing and have become central actors in the delivery and retrofitting of the housing stock following the decline of local authority provision. Operating as hybrid organizations within neoliberal housing governance, they combine social welfare responsibilities with increasing reliance on private finance, and often face tensions between affordability, tenant protection, and market-driven investment.

**Housing cooperatives:** Collectively owned and democratically governed housing models in which residents share responsibility for decision-making, management, and long-term stewardship of the housing stock. In the context of climate justice and the built environment, their capacity to deliver equitable climate outcomes is shaped by access to land, finance, and supportive public policy, and may be constrained under neoliberal and austerity-driven housing regimes.

**Intersectional inequalities:** The ways multiple forms of oppression—such as race, class, gender, migration status, disability, and age—interact to shape people's exposure to harm and access to resources. These inequalities do not operate in isolation; instead, they compound and reinforce one another, producing deeper and more persistent vulnerabilities

**Liberalization:** The restructuring of economic and regulatory systems to reduce state intervention, expand market mechanisms, privatize public assets, and deregulate labor and housing markets—often weakening social protections.

**Low Emission Zones (LEZ):** Designated areas, typically in city centers, where access is restricted for vehicles that do not meet specific emissions standards. The goal is to improve air quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by encouraging cleaner modes of transport and discouraging high-polluting vehicles.

**Maladaptation:** Actions or policies intended to reduce climate risk that unintentionally increase vulnerability, inequality, or long-term harm, often by shifting risks onto marginalized groups or by locking in unjust development pathways (e.g., climate improvements that trigger gentrification and displacement).

**Neoliberalization:** Restructuring of governance through which market logics, competition, and private-sector practices are extended into the provision and regulation of the public services and infrastructure, including the built environment. Has been prevalent since the 1980s. In the context of the built environment and housing, States tend reconfigure their role to promote services commodification, entrepreneurial urban development, and financialization of land and housing, often weakening social protections and shifting climate risks and adaptation burdens onto households and communities least able to absorb them.

**Oppression:** Ways in which social, political, and economic systems perpetuate “othering”—marginalizing groups along lines of class, race, gender, immigration status, disability, and more.

**Poly-crisis:** A convergence of multiple, interconnected problems such as climate change, housing unaffordability, health emergencies, and inequality that amplify each other

**Precariousness:** A condition of economic, housing, and social insecurity, characterized by unstable employment, insecure tenure, low income predictability, limited social protection, and heightened exposure to shocks such as rent increases, health crises, or climate impacts.

**Privatization** is the process by which ownership, management, or provision of built-environment assets and services—such as housing, infrastructure, and energy systems—is transferred from public authorities to private or quasi-private actors, including through outsourcing and public–private partnerships.

**Renoviction:** The displacement of tenants due to real or purported property renovations or the borne costs thereof, or by landowners who use upgrades to justify evicting current tenants, increase rents, or attract higher-income occupants

**Racialized persons:** Populations who are socially assigned a racial identity through processes of categorization, discrimination, and power, rather than through inherent biological differences. This labeling results in unequal treatment, reduced access to housing and services, heightened exposure to environmental and climate risks, and systemic barriers in employment, mobility, and political participation. In European cities, many migrant and minority communities are racialized in ways that shape their everyday experiences of exclusion and vulnerability

**Structural inequalities:** The entrenched and systemic disparities that arise from the way societies organize their institutions, policies, and distribution of resources.

**Urban green justice:** A state of fair access to the benefits of green infrastructure and climate action, especially for historically marginalized communities; it addresses uneven environmental burdens and prevents new forms of exclusion caused by sustainability-focused development.

**Urban greening:** The process of integrating green infrastructure into urban areas, improving quality of life and environmental health while contributing to climate mitigation, stormwater management, and other nature-based benefits; can include trees, parks, gardens, vegetated roofs, and low-carbon infrastructure such as bike lanes and solar energy

**Vulnerability:** The degree to which people, systems, or places are exposed to and unable to cope with external stressors—such as climate change, economic instability, or health crises—reflective of a mix of physical, social, and economic conditions that shape resilience capacity



# APPENDIX 2

Climate Justice and the Built Environment in Europe  
Barcelona Lab for Urban Environmental Justice  
and Sustainability Institute of Environmental Studies  
and Technology, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

## **CNCA Interview Set-up and Instrument Proposal May 2025**

**Proposal to interview a diversity of local actors  
to ensure that we get diverse views on systems of oppression:**

- Social policy staff in specific agencies
- Civic groups working on racism
- Cultural centers/Civic groups representing migrant groups or youth.

**We might reframe interview questions if needed if we notice  
a bit of discomfort or resistance.**

## Objectives to share with respondents:

To understand how local governments are engaging with historical exclusion in four broad domains (land use, housing, environmental benefits, economic development) and working to shape more inclusive urban climate transitions and climate resilience through planning, design, and economic development. We understand that not all respondents will be expert in all topics but are interested in hearing their insights and experiences as they are able and willing to.

### Introduction:

What is your name, position, and the number of years you've worked in this role?

### Historic and Contemporary Exclusion

Can you describe some of the key social or spatial inequalities and exclusions you see in your city today?

What groups, communities, or neighborhoods come to mind as those who have been most affected by these inequalities, historically and today? [have a "list" of possible neighborhoods or groups we can mention is respondent feels "shy" or a bit uncertain about responding]

Considering the most affected groups, communities, neighborhoods, can you reflect a bit more on:

#### Land Use

- Can you share an example of how past planning or land use decisions have shaped which neighborhoods received investment or attention—and which were overlooked?

#### Housing Access and Affordability

- How have past housing policies or practices (like concentration of public housing blocks in certain areas or urban regeneration) influenced who can access affordable and stable housing in your city today?

#### Environmental Benefits

- In your view, how have decisions about environmental improvements like parks or transit benefited some communities more than others?

### Economic Development

- Looking at patterns of economic development, which communities have historically most benefited or excluded from investment and opportunity—and how does that show up today? Which type of workers/businesses have had more or less opportunities than others?

### Design and Governance of the Built Environment

How have past and current national policies contributed to those exclusions (in land use, housing, environmental benefits, and/or economic development)?

How have past and current local municipal urban planning and design decisions contributed to those exclusions (in land use, housing, environmental benefits, and/or economic development)?

What is the nature of public participation or civic engagement in urban planning and design processes? —particularly among racialized, low-income, or migrant communities? Is there an example project that you were impressed with the community participation? Is there an example project that you had hoped more engagement was present?

How are national-level laws/regulations shaping the ability of these groups, communities, neighborhoods to respond to their local conditions (in the positive and negative sense, like challenges/constraints but also opportunities)?

### Climate Adaptation and Mitigation

Which projects are you familiar with in [name city] that address climate risks (e.g. extreme heat, flooding) and other risks in most vulnerable communities?

How is your city addressing green transition [for example renewable energy on buildings, building retrofits, brownfield redevelopment NBS] objectives for its most vulnerable communities

To what extent are climate priorities (or climate-related interventions) addressing historic patterns and drivers of exclusion? Is equity an explicit climate mitigation/adaptation priority?

How are decisions about where and how to invest in mitigation/adaptation infrastructure made? What institutional or governance barriers most constrain more equitable urban and climate planning? [if not addressed before]

## **Environmental Gentrification and Displacement**

To what extent have climate or sustainability-related investments (e.g. greening, retrofits, eco-districts) contributed to new housing inequalities, to displacement pressures, outpricing, or evictions, for example, or to displacement pressures?

To what extent does the word “green or environmental gentrification,” which some cities and activities are increasingly using to describe such patterns, resonate with you?

Does the city contemplate or have policies or tools in place to prevent these impacts or address anti-displacement outcomes?

## **Jobs, Workforce Development, Small/Local Businesses**

Is the city engaging in green workforce development benefiting historically excluded groups? Thinking of construction, retrofitting, and greening.

Are there supports for small, locally owned or minority/migrant-owned businesses in their green transition or resiliency efforts?

Are there specific activist groups or organized groups that are supporting green job creation and/or small business climate sustainability? How were these relationships formed?

Are there policies to ensure that marginalized groups (e.g. racialized communities, migrants, low-wage workers) benefit from these economic opportunities?

## **Promising practices**

Are there examples of tools and policies or projects that are supporting the efforts we've talked about today

What are the greatest challenges to your work?

Do you see a way for them to be overcome?

How would your organization envision a just, inclusive and climate-resilient city?

What support, alliances, or measures would help the municipality further achieve equity in climate planning and the built environment?

## **Interview Instrument for Civic Groups**

**Objectives:** To explore how exclusionary systems have historically shaped and manifest today in different domains (land use, housing, environmental benefits, economic development); how communities/relevant civic groups are impacted by and resisting these dynamics; and how climate policy and built environment change can serve community justice.

## **Historic and Contemporary Exclusion**

**Can you describe some of the key social or spatial inequalities and exclusions you see in your city today?**

What groups, communities, or neighborhoods come to mind as those who have been most affected by these inequalities, historically and today? [have a “list” of possible neighborhoods or groups we can mention is respondent feels “shy” or a bit uncertain about responding]

**Considering the most affected groups, communities, neighborhoods, can you reflect a bit more on:**

### **Land Use**

- Can you share an example of how past planning or land use decisions have shaped which neighborhoods received investment or attention—and which were overlooked?

### **Housing Access and Affordability**

- How have past housing policies or practices (like concentration of public housing blocks in certain areas or urban regeneration) influenced who can access affordable and stable housing in your city today?

### **Environmental Benefits**

- In your view, how have decisions about environmental improvements—like parks or transit—benefited some communities more than others?

### **Economic Development**

- Looking at patterns of economic development, which communities have historically most benefited or excluded from investment and opportunity—and how does that show up today?

Which type of workers/businesses have had more or less opportunities than others? How are those historical patterns still visible in your city today—particularly in the neighborhoods or populations you work with? Which neighborhoods or communities are most impacted and how?

## **Design and Governance of the Built Environment**

How have past and current national policies contributed to those exclusions (in land use, housing, environmental benefits, and/or economic development)?

How have past and current local municipal urban planning and design decisions contributed to those exclusions (in land use, housing, environmental benefits, and/or economic development)?

How meaningful is community participation in urban planning processes, particularly from racialized, low-income, or migrant communities?

How are national-level laws/regulations shaping local action (in the positive and negative sense, like challenges/constraints but also opportunities)?

## **Climate Adaptation and Mitigation**

How are the communities you work with being impacted by climate-related risks (e.g. extreme heat, flooding, energy insecurity)?

Are interventions to address climate change happening in these communities? To what extent do they account for historical patterns of exclusion?

What barriers—whether institutional, political, or structural—limit a more equitable approach to climate planning?

To what extent is your voice as an organization or the voice of your constituencies being heard or accounted for in climate planning?

## **Environmental Gentrification and Displacement**

To what extent have you seen examples of green or climate-related development (e.g. greening, building retrofits, eco-districts) that have

increased housing costs or displacement risk in your communities or beyond?

To what extent are you having to mobilize or are you considering those challenges in your work?

Are there any protections or anti-displacement measures in place? What would make them stronger or more effective?

## **Jobs, Workforce Development, and Small/Local Businesses**

Is the city engaging in green workforce development benefitting historically excluded groups? Thinking of construction, retrofitting, greening.

Are there supports for small, locally owned or minority/migrant-owned businesses in their green transition or resiliency efforts?

What would help ensure that these groups benefit from climate-related investments and green economic opportunities?

## **Promising Practices and Community Visions**

Can you share any community-led or collaborative practices or advocacy campaign that have successfully addressed exclusion or promoted justice in housing, climate adaptation, or local development?

How would your organization envision a just, inclusive and climate-resilient city?

What kinds of support, partnerships, or city actions would help advance climate equity and environmental justice in your community?

# APPENDIX 3

## List of Interview Respondents

CITY	SCOPE OF WORK	COUNT
BARCELONA	Housing	2
	Migrant and human services	2
	Climate / Environment	2
GLASGOW	Housing	2
	Migrant and human services	2
	Climate / Environment	2
	Land Use	1
NANTES	Housing	2
	Migrant and human services	5
	Climate / Environment	2
	Urban Planning	3
	Migrant and human rights	1
EU	Total interview count	26

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