

A city for everyone: Not just a dream

The challenge of building inclusive and equitable housing in Kuala Lumpur

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Kuala Lumpur is more than just a bustling metropolis. It is a city defined by its diversity. From the old to the young, the wealthy to the less fortunate, women, men and people of all backgrounds make up the vibrant fabric of this city.

Yet, as Kuala Lumpur grows, so does the responsibility to ensure that everyone, regardless of background or means, has a place to call home. In line with this vision, Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) has embarked on an ambitious journey to create a city that offers equitable housing for all—where affordability, accessibility and inclusivity are at the forefront of urban planning.

Creating equitable housing options

DBKL has set a clear and ambitious goal to create housing that caters to all segments of society. This mission centres on providing a wide range of affordable housing options to accommodate the unique needs of the urban poor, middle-class families, first-time homebuyers and those in other diverse groups.

By 2040, the city will require around 783,333 housing units to ensure that every household in Kuala Lumpur has the opportunity to own a home. This represents a crucial increase from today's available units, particularly for the lowest 40 percent of income earners—the B40 group, informed Kuala Lumpur mayor Datuk Seri Maimunah Mohd Sharif.

In 2020, Kuala Lumpur had only 40,022 affordable housing units, accounting for a small fraction of the total housing stock. The target, however, is for affordable housing to constitute at least 40% of the city's housing by 2040, bridging the current gap and ensuring that every household, especially those in the B40 group, has access to homeownership.

To achieve this, DBKL's strategy goes beyond just increasing the number of homes. It also focuses on building quality and diverse housing that meets the varied needs of the city's residents.

Addressing the diverse demographics' needs

As cities grow, housing needs evolve, often reflecting the varied lifestyles and circumstances of different demographic groups. For Kuala Lumpur, this means designing homes that accommodate the needs of not only local families but also senior citizens, young professionals, youth, expatriates and other vulnerable communities. Housing diversity will encompass different unit sizes, layouts and facilities to create living spaces that suit a broad array of requirements.

One key demographic includes young families and first-time homebuyers, who often face difficulty in affording their own homes due to rising urban property prices. Affordable housing will be structured with these groups in mind, providing cost-effective units within accessible areas of the city.

For the growing elderly population, DBKL's housing strategy will prioritise accessibility and senior-friendly amenities, enabling these residents to live comfortably and independently. This approach acknowledges the varying lifestyles within the city and aims to foster a balanced urban environment where every resident feels supported.



DBKL has embarked on an ambitious journey to transform Kuala Lumpur into a city that offers equitable housing for all. - Photo by Joerg Hartmann. Courtesy of Far Capital.

Aiming for a sustainable and inclusive future

Maimunah advocates for an approach that not only addresses the needs of the present but also anticipates the demands of future generations. "The growth of any city is closely linked to the availability and quality of its housing. Kuala Lumpur, a city that thrives on diversity, must offer housing that reflects the needs of all who call it home," she said. "Whether it's affordable housing for young professionals or modern, sustainable living spaces for growing families, it is our responsibility to ensure that Kuala Lumpur remains a place for everyone, or as I often say: A City for All."

Sustainability is a core component of this vision. Building homes that meet environmental standards, conserve resources and reduce carbon footprints will help ensure that Kuala Lumpur's growth is sustainable. Furthermore, DBKL's plan includes green spaces, public transportation access and community amenities that not only benefit the residents but also contribute to the city's overall ecological health. Through sustainable urban development, Kuala Lumpur is setting a course that prioritises long-term benefits for both residents and the environment.

Ensuring access for the B40

At the heart of Kuala Lumpur's inclusive housing mission is the commitment to the B40 group, representing the lowest 40% of household incomes. Increasing access to affordable housing for these families is essential for reducing the housing ownership gap.

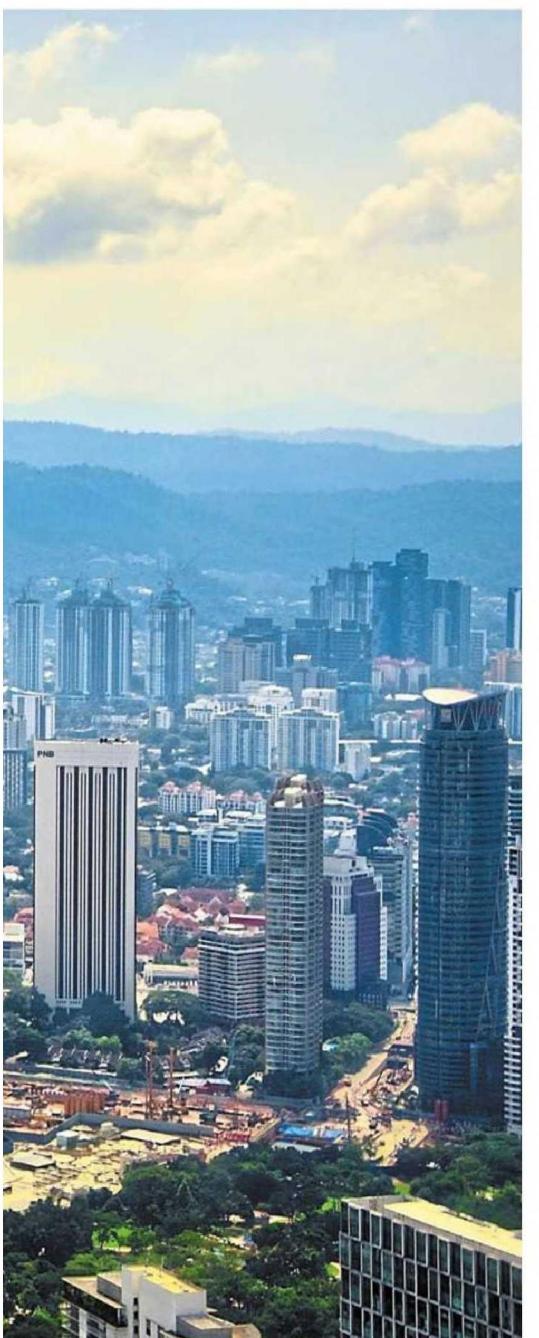
As of now, this group faces significant challenges in securing stable and adequate housing. DBKL's efforts are therefore focused on developing accessible housing that will provide every B40 household with a path to

homeownership, strengthening the social and economic fabric of the city.

"Policies that support affordable, sustainable and inclusive housing are vital to building a city that serves all its residents," said Maimunah. "As a local government, we are committed to ensuring that Kuala Lumpur's development is both people-centred and future-focused." This people-centred approach aligns with a vision of a balanced urban environment where all income levels can thrive, contributing to a socially cohesive and vibrant Kuala Lumpur.

The road ahead

As DBKL works toward the ambitious target of 783,333 housing units by 2040, the journey will involve collaboration with government agencies, private developers, and community organisations. This collaborative model is crucial for ensuring that housing projects meet a wide range of needs and are designed



"Our partnership with DBKL, one of the city's key local authorities, is vital as we work together to address industry needs within Kuala Lumpur," Ho said.

Kuala Lumpur and we at Rehda are eager to support DBKL in bringing this vision to life for the benefit of all city residents," he said.

Nevertheless, the road to equitable housing will entail modernising infrastructure, expanding public transportation, and integrating neighbourhoods to enhance access to work, education, healthcare and recreational spaces.

DBKL's vision extends beyond simply building homes. It means creating communities where people can live, work and connect meaningfully with one another. Initiatives such as incorporating parks, playgrounds and pedestrian-friendly pathways into housing developments will foster a sense of community and improve the quality of life for residents of all ages.

Embracing the spirit of diversity

Kuala Lumpur's identity is grounded in its diversity and creating housing that reflects this diversity is essential for its future growth. DBKL's inclusive approach to urban development acknowledges the city's multifaceted needs, aiming to create homes that resonate with every segment of society.

Real Estate and Housing Developers' Association (Rehda) president Datuk Ho Hon Sang assured that the association is also committed to DBKL's aspirations. "Rehda remains committed to collaborating on initiatives that enhance the lives of Malaysians and drive meaningful growth in the property industry. We actively engage with various organisations, private entities and especially all levels of government to create sustainable and inclusive communities."

"Our partnership with DBKL, one of the city's key local authorities, is vital as we work together to address industry needs within Kuala Lumpur. I am encouraged by Datuk Seri's vision for a more inclusive and sustainable

Building inclusive cities across Malaysia

Even as Kuala Lumpur makes strides toward becoming a more inclusive city, other major urban centres across Malaysia are also adopting initiatives to foster communities that serve residents across various social and economic backgrounds.

Johor Bahru

This fast-growing urban centre at Malaysia's southern tip has prioritised affordable housing while integrating green spaces into its development plans. Under the Johor Affordable Housing Scheme (RMMJ), the state government aims to build more than 60,000 units of affordable housing by 2025. These homes are designed for the B40 income group, providing essential amenities within easy reach, such as parks, schools and medical facilities.

In addition to housing, Johor Bahru has invested in public parks and green spaces, with projects like Hutan Bandar and Tanjung Piai National Park, ensuring residents have access to nature, regardless of income level.

George Town, Penang

Penang's capital is a city rich in history and culture, with a commitment to preserving its heritage while expanding affordable housing options. With the rise in property values due to the city's UNESCO World Heritage status, Penang has undertaken efforts to prevent the displacement of local residents by focusing on Community-Based Housing Initiatives. These initiatives aim to provide affordable housing within the heart of George Town, allowing residents to stay in areas where they have deep community ties. Moreover, the Penang Transport Master Plan aims to improve mobility with pedestrian-friendly zones, cycling lanes and improved public transportation options, making it easier for residents from all backgrounds to navigate the city safely and efficiently.

Kota Kinabalu, Sabah

In East Malaysia, Kota Kinabalu has embraced a community-centred development model that prioritises the environment. The city's housing strategy emphasises sustainable development to minimise ecological impact, given the importance of Sabah's biodiversity. Initiatives such as the Kota Kinabalu Smart City Project are laying the foundation for sustainable growth, integrating green spaces, solar energy and waste management solutions into new housing projects. Kota Kinabalu is also focused on inclusive public spaces. The Kota Kinabalu Waterfront Project, for instance, is being developed to attract both locals and tourists with pedestrian-friendly pathways, community parks and open areas for local events and gatherings.

Ipoh, Perak

Ipoh, known for its beautiful limestone hills and rich history, is taking an inclusive approach to urban development by investing in community-driven projects and affordable housing. Initiatives such as the MyHome Programme aim to provide more housing options for low-income families, with a focus on integrating these homes into existing neighbourhoods rather than on the city's outskirts.

The city is also transforming abandoned or underutilised spaces into community hubs, like the popular Ipoh Heritage Trail, which draws locals and tourists alike. These revitalised spaces not only preserve Ipoh's unique history but also foster a sense of community and inclusivity.

Melaka

In Melaka, a city celebrated for its rich cultural heritage, urban planners face the challenge of balancing historical preservation with the housing needs of a growing population. Melaka's State Housing Policy includes strategies for affordable housing to ensure that even as the city attracts more tourists, locals can find homes at reasonable prices.

To preserve its iconic architecture and heritage, Melaka has implemented guidelines to ensure new developments in historic areas respect traditional aesthetics.



"Kuala Lumpur, a city that thrives on diversity, must offer housing that reflects the needs of all who call it home," said Maimunah.