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FROM Roof TO Resilience

A Social Assessment of Malaysia's Public Housing





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B40	Bottom 40% income group
CBOs	Community-based organisations
CIDB	Construction Industry Development Board
DBKL	Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur <i>(Kuala Lumpur City Hall)</i>
DOSM	Department of Statistics Malaysia
DTR	Desa Tun Razak
Forkom	Forum Komuniti
HLTF	High-Level Task Force
IPI	Intestinal parasitic infections
JMB	Joint management body
K2K	Kita-untuk-Kita
KDS	K2K Diagnostic Study
KPKT	Kementerian Perumahan dan Kerajaan Tempatan <i>(Housing and Local Government Ministry)</i>
KRT	Kejiranan Rukun Tetangga <i>(Neighbourhood Watch)</i>
MC	Management corporation
PA	Perumahan Awam <i>(Public Housing)</i>
PHSSB	Perumahan dan Hartanah Selangor Sdn Bhd
PPR	Program Perumahan Rakyat <i>(People's Housing Programme)</i>
PWD	Person with disability
RA	Residents' association
RM	Ringgit Malaysia
RTO	Rent-to-Own
Unicef	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

List of Abbreviations

Foreword by
**Dato' Seri Dr Maimunah
Mohd Sharif**

Property Advisor, Petronas

Mayor of Kuala Lumpur 2024–2025

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations

& Executive Director of UN-Habitat (2018–2024)

Mayor of Penang Island (2017–2018)

President of Seberang Perai City Council (2010–2017)

Kuala Lumpur is expanding at a remarkable pace. Once a compact tin-mining town, our city has grown into a dynamic urban centre and is well on its way to becoming one of the world's great global cities. Yet, to be truly global, a city must be more than a skyline of impressive buildings or a hub for commerce and innovation. It must be a place where every resident feels a sense of belonging, pride, and possibility — an inclusive city rooted in liveability, resilience and opportunity for all.

A great city is not defined by its tallest towers, but by the strength of its communities. It is one that nurtures happy and healthy families, that enhances both lives and livelihoods, and that recognises its greatest asset is not its infrastructure but its people. Public housing plays a pivotal role in this vision. It represents not merely shelter, but the foundation of family life, social connection and upward mobility—the heart from which resilient communities grow.

In the 1970s, Kuala Lumpur's population was barely half a million. Today, the Greater KL region is home to nearly nine million people. This remarkable transformation is a story of progress and perseverance - but it also calls upon us to renew our commitment to inclusion. Our public housing programme stands as one of Malaysia's great social achievements. It has given countless families roofs over their heads and ensured that our city avoided the widespread slum conditions that have troubled many rapidly growing cities.

However, time brings new challenges. Many of our earliest housing projects are now over 50 years old, and their communities face a new generation of issues—from maintenance and infrastructure to employment, education and social cohesion. To meet these challenges, we must understand them deeply. That is why *From Roof to Resilience: A Social Assessment of Public Housing in Malaysia* is such an important and timely contribution.

I commend Think City for publishing this pioneering study. Its innovative social assessment approach offers fresh insights into the lived realities of our residents. By combining data with the voices and stories of the people themselves, it helps us see housing not as static infrastructure, but as a living ecosystem—one shaped by human connection, aspiration, and care.

As a former executive director of UN-Habitat, I have learned that cities flourish when they listen to their people. KL City Hall (DBKL) is embracing this spirit through a new framework we call top-down, bottom-up convergence —an approach that brings together government leadership and community participation in true partnership. When people are empowered to shape their own environments, they do not just maintain their neighbourhoods, they strengthen the social fabric of the city itself.

Our vision is to build a city guided by the principles of Madani: compassion, respect, responsibility and shared prosperity. We aspire to create not only a modern city, but a humane one—a city that uplifts everyone, including those at the heart of our public housing communities.

From Roof to Resilience reminds us that every home tells a story, and every community holds within it the power to renew our city. Let us continue this journey together—building a KL that stands tall not only in its skyline, but in the spirit and strength of its people.

Foreword by Nurul Izzah Anwar

Co-chairperson, Secretariat of the Special
Advisory Board to the Ministry of Finance

It was just a little more than two years ago that I heard the following critical question fielded over the term “Projek Perumahan Rakyat Miskin”.

“Why the need to mention *miskin* (poor)?”

Indeed, Dr Suraya Ismail of Khazanah Research Institute had then raised a valid point. It was, and still is a powerful reminder that language shapes perception.

Even when policy intentions are noble, aimed at lifting communities out of poverty, the terminology we use can inadvertently reinforce stigma.

This disconnect between intention and perception reflects a deeper truth: how we define and address poverty differs starkly across our social and economic strata.

This gap in understanding is strikingly articulated in *Poor Economics* by 2019 Nobel laureates Abhijit Vinayak Banerjee and Esther Duflo.

In their study of poverty, they write: “The poor are no less rational than anyone else—quite the contrary. Precisely because they have so little, we often find them putting much careful thought into their choices: They have to be sophisticated economists just to survive.”

This is not a failure of logic. It is a failure of the system. And in such a system, where structural mobility feels impossibly out of reach, people seek solace where they

can. They prefer to lose themselves in the Bollywood drama—since they know that they could never reach the status of the T20, or top 20% of income levels, within even three lifetimes.

To govern effectively, we must meet people where they are, not where we assume they should be. That means embedding empathy into every layer of policymaking. It means moving beyond the technocratic language of units built and GDP growth, and instead asking: How do our policies restore dignity, expand agency and enable mobility?

In the first quarter of the 21st century, Malaysia’s development challenge is no longer just about accelerating growth; it is about ensuring that growth does not deepen inequality. How do we dismantle the structural barriers that trap families in cycles of poverty? How do we move beyond access to services and towards genuine inclusion in decision-making?

Much of our policymaking remains stuck in outdated binaries—rural vs urban, rich vs poor, public vs private. Yet poverty today is multi-dimensional. It is shaped not just by income, but also by gender, age, geography, physical infrastructure and even the way cities are designed. Unless we adapt our frameworks, we risk reproducing the very inequalities we aim to eliminate.

This is why *From Roof to Resilience* is so vital. It provides an unflinching look at a policy once celebrated—Malaysia’s public housing programme—and how it

has, over time, evolved into a space where social exclusion is reproduced. The book lays bare the lived realities of urban poor communities trapped in poorly maintained, high-density housing, where systemic neglect and fragmented management have bred insecurity, demoralisation and decay.

The social assessment approach used in this book is both timely and innovative. It offers rare, ground-level insights into the lived realities of public housing residents—revealing how these spaces, rather than serving as springboards for social mobility, can become entrenched sites of poverty reproduction. Residents and officials alike often find themselves demoralised, caught in the machinery of a system that no longer delivers on its promises.

I commend Think City for supporting this important work, and for its bold commitment under Program K2K to reimagine policy through action learning, data-driven insight and empowerment-centric interventions. By placing dignity at the heart of its approach, it sets a compelling example of how policy can be made not just for people—but with them.

If we are to build a civilised and compassionate society, we must begin by addressing the struggles of those who are too often overlooked. Let this publication be both a mirror and a call to action. May it remind us that for some, escaping into a three-hour drama is not escapism, it is survival. And may our policies evolve to break this cycle, restoring not only roofs over heads but dignity in every corner of the home.

Executive Summary



Kuala Lumpur city is rapidly growing vertically. Public housing in Bandar Tun Razak can be seen in the foreground, with skyscrapers like the Merdeka 118, TRX and Petronas Twin Towers looming in the background.

1 Housing is essential not simply as a shelter but as a home. It provides stability, security and a foundation for personal and family well-being. It supports the creation of a healthy society by fostering community ties, reducing inequality and enabling individuals to thrive. Safe, stable housing is a cornerstone of both individual dignity and broader social progress. It lays the groundwork for better health, education and economic outcomes. Therefore, it plays a key role in the building of a prosperous and resilient nation.

2 What happens when housing cannot provide the security and stability so essential for individual and social well-being? In this report, we shine the light on a particular community facing such a challenge —the urban poor in public housing. It offers a comprehensive and urgent examination of Malaysia's public housing system, focusing on the Klang Valley's public housing complexes. Framed as a social assessment based on surveys of 2,884 households across 10 sites in 2023 in the Klang Valley, complemented by ethnographic research, spatial mapping, and

community-based assessments, the findings expose a housing sector experiencing serious systemic decline.

3 It reveals a critical juncture in Malaysia's development history, where the initial successes of public housing in alleviating urban poverty and improving living standards are now being undermined by systemic social, spatial and governance challenges. **This report is a call to action for policymakers to urgently overhaul the public housing framework,** emphasising that without decisive intervention, the social fabric and physical infrastructure of these communities risk further deterioration.

4 Early policy success— Malaysia's public housing, historically a beacon of social progress, has provided shelter and improved living conditions for millions of low-income urban residents, particularly those displaced from informal settlements. The transformation from squatter settlements to structured housing with basic amenities was a major achievement that contributed significantly to reducing urban

poverty from nearly 50% in 1970 to under 10% by 2020. This success was largely driven by coordinated public and private sector efforts, including policies mandating low-cost housing quotas in private developments and large-scale squatter relocation programmes that virtually eradicated slums in urban centres like Kuala Lumpur.

5 However, development dividends are backsliding. The report highlights a troubling shift in development outcomes over the past two decades. Despite the physical provision of housing, a "second generation" of issues has emerged, deeply affecting the quality of life and social cohesion within public housing communities. These issues reveal that the challenges are not merely infrastructural but fundamentally social and institutional in nature. The public housing system is undermined by a combination of fragmented policies, bureaucratic inertia, insufficient maintenance funding and a lack of integrated support for sustainable community development. The outcome has been the creation of public housing with declining liveability and the risk of ghettoisation in the city.

6 Public housing is about people and communal living. The report situates these challenges within a complex social anthropology of vertical living, where residents are united by geography rather than community bonds. Shared spaces, and spaces of circulation and social interaction play critical roles in the overall well-being of residents. Lack of understanding about this spatial reality, combined with ineffective management and governance structures, has led to a breakdown in social order and collective responsibility.

7 The “broken window syndrome” provides an explanation for the visible signs of neglect, such as vandalised public property, graffiti and litter, which are prominent in many public housing sites. This refers to the sociological phenomenon in which problems that are left unresolved and allowed to fester create an environment that fosters further disorder and anti-social behaviour. Consequently, a vicious cycle is perpetuated, where small signs of disorder snowball into larger issues, such as the constant breakdown of lifts, higher crime rates, and a decline in overall liveability. However, the broken window syndrome is only part of the explanation, and this study points to the **lack of public investments in social development and local governance** that has undermined the management effectiveness of public housing.

8 Public housing communities are heterogeneous. Even though Malays form the dominant ethnic group at 74.9%, the population

is highly heterogeneous when viewed from other indicators. More than a third are school-going children, about 21% are categorised as youths aged between 13 and 24, and 8.7% of the community are from the elderly generation of over 65 years. More than a third of households are women-led households, while 15% of households have members with diverse types of disabilities.

9 Built originally as transit housing, public housing has de-facto become permanent housing for many families. The study found that only 22.8% had lived less than 10 years in their respective public housing units. More than half of households (61%) had lived between 10 and 30 years, with the longest being 55 years. This stands at odds with the original policy intent of serving as a temporary accommodation of not more than five years.

10 Declining liveability— Over 60% of surveyed residents reported that their quality of life had either deteriorated or had not improved since the Covid-19 pandemic. In one site, over a quarter of households reported that their circumstances had actually worsened since the pandemic. Cramped spaces and overcrowding are common themes in these housing complexes. Residents live in apartments that are about 40% smaller than the national floor space average. However, their average family size is 10% higher than the national average of 3.8 persons per household. Almost 50% of households surveyed had family sizes of more than five people.

11 Systemic littering and poor waste management has created rat and other pest infestations that impact upon public health. Communities in all 10 sites ranked cleanliness and public safety as their top two issues. Preliminary studies conducted by Universiti Malaya on public housing sites had found elevated levels of intestinal parasitic infection (IPI), leptospirosis and toxoplasmosis in these communities.

12 Frequent breakdowns in critical services such as lifts, waste disposal and drainage systems foster an environment rife with hazards. Residents, particularly the elderly, women, and people with disabilities (PWDs), are disproportionately impacted by these failures. More than 70% of respondents perceived that their physical health had either declined or remained unchanged since the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, almost 1 in 5 households (18.7%) reported feeling that their physical health was in actual decline.

13 An alarming three quarters of respondents reported their stress levels had either not improved or worsened since the Covid-19 pandemic. Malnutrition and stress-related illnesses are common. The prevalence of low birth weight in two surveyed sites—12.7% and 16.7%, respectively—exceeded the national average of 10.9%, suggesting worsening maternal and child health conditions. Coupled with high levels of stress, social isolation and limited access to mental health services, the findings painted a troubling picture of daily life for many public

housing residents. The suicide rate in the study area was **three times** the national average.

14 Vandalism and crime have impacted on public safety and eroded the quality of public spaces. Residents reported feeling increasingly unsafe, with incidents of assault, attempted kidnapping and theft commonly cited. In some sites, unsafe zones were so well known they were used to identify non-residents. Across all 10 study sites, more than half of the households (54.3%) reported that their safety had not improved over the year before, and 13% reported that their safety had actually declined. In one site, almost one-third or 28.7% of households reported a decline in their sense of safety over the previous year. Aggregating for the population of all 10 sites, **violent crime was seven times higher** than the national average.

15 Economic insecurity and livelihood vulnerability— Household incomes were low and unstable. Nearly 40% of families relied on a single income earner. More than half (56%) of households had savings that could only sustain them for 1–3 months, while 17% had no savings at all. Many were unable to weather even minor financial shocks. Alarming, 9% of households reported having no breadwinner, many of whom also lived with disabilities. Household responsibilities such as child and elderly care prevented women from joining the labour workforce, further restricting the growth of household income. The high incidence of theft and breakdown of lifts, coupled

with territorial stigmatisation, had resulted in higher cost of living for some communities as the cost of goods and services increased in these geographies.

16 Public housing risks becoming poverty traps as restricted opportunities for upward social mobility result in concentrations of low-income and economically-deprived families. Multigenerational households constituted an average of 7.5% of the sample population, with 11.6% being the highest share in one site in Bandar Tun Razak. Poor nutrition and unhealthy surroundings have affected early childhood development with negative impacts on education outcomes. Unhealthy public spaces

and absence of mentoring promote deviant behaviour amongst youths, including drug addiction and criminal activity. Women are unable to contribute to household incomes, while cost of living is more acute because of frequent lift breakdowns. The share of ageing population is increasing without adequate support services and accessibility features, increasing vulnerability. In six out of the 10 sites, the share of the elderly generation was higher than the national average of 7.3%, with one site in Bandar Tun Razak constituting 15.3% of the population. The lack of upward mobility means families are stuck in cycles of deprivation, unable to escape the constraints of substandard housing.

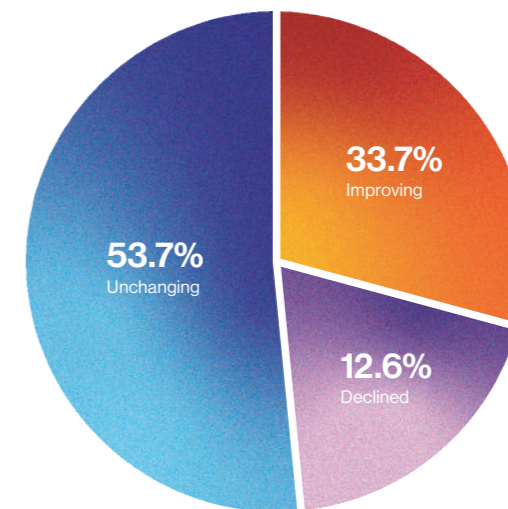
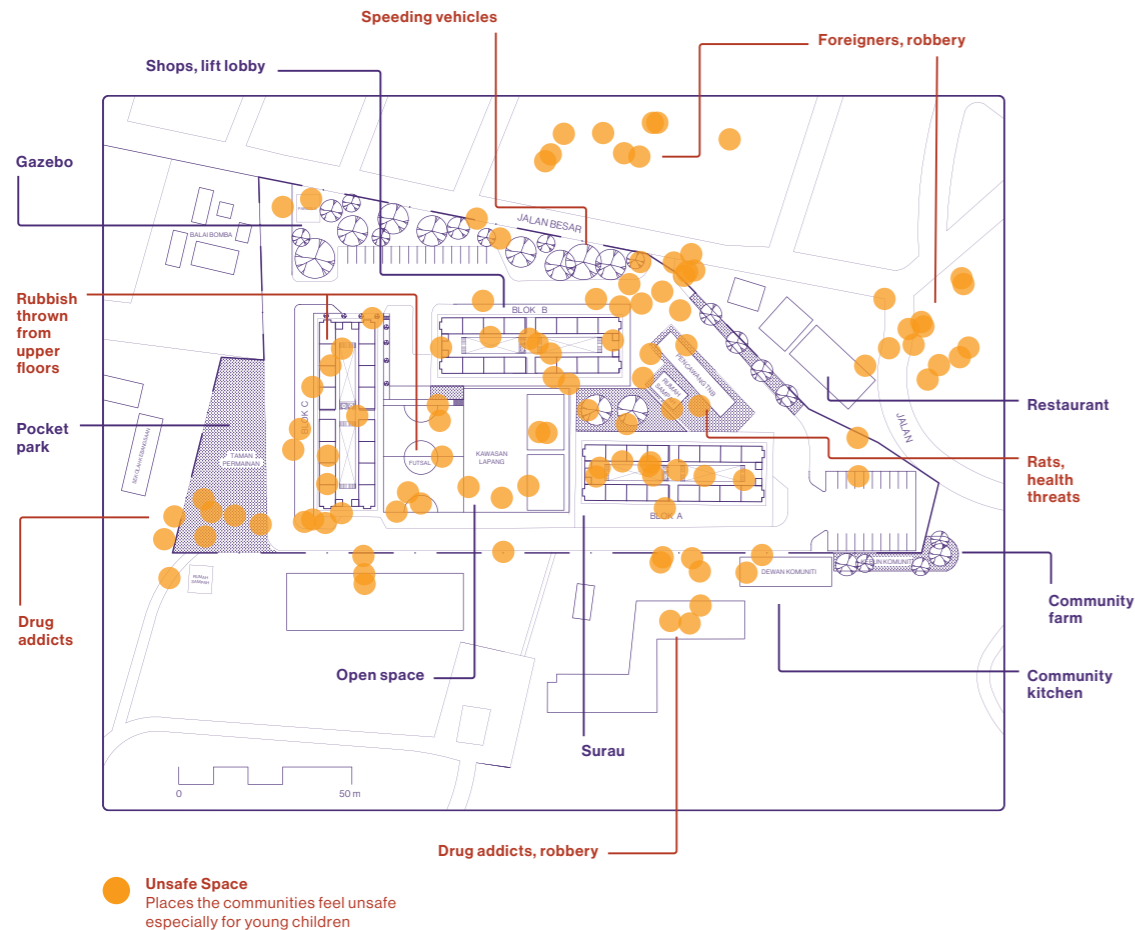


Figure 1 Stress level perception since Covid-19 pandemic across 10 sites

Illustration 1 An example of unsafe space identified by residents in a public housing complex



17 Spatial analysis of individual sites revealed multiple zones of hazard

that constrained community interaction, social circulation and mobility within the complexes. Female children were discouraged from “going downstairs” to public spaces, while certain areas were avoided for hygiene and safety reasons. Poorly maintained facilities, neglected playgrounds, inadequate lift services and unsafe communal areas contributed to a sense of

insecurity and neglect. Almost half the respondents (46.7%) had never used the public facilities available. Spatial design that fails to foster positive social interactions further alienates residents, creating pockets of isolation within dense urban blocks. The report’s detailed spatial and social analyses underscore how the interplay between urban design and social dynamics shapes residents’ lived experiences and constrain their ability to build community resilience.

18 Problems are systemic.

The issues faced by communities are complex, multifaceted and systemic in a sense that each issue is related to and affects each other and the entire system. They stem from a combination of structural issues, management neglect, poor service delivery, unresolved conflicts, deviant behaviour and public apathy. For example, indiscriminate littering not only creates unhygienic and unsafe community spaces,

it also impacts on public health and child development issues—with knock-on effects on education and employment outcomes. Similarly, unresolved parking space issues not only create obstacles for fire and waste disposal trucks to enter the complex, it also produces unsafe zones in newly built multi-storey car parks. Collectively, the issues in public housing interact in complex ways, through negative feedback loops, to impact upon the ability of residents, communities and authorities in addressing and resolving the spectrum of problems that contribute to the decline in the standard of living.

19 Inadequate public investment in social development has led to communities with weak social cohesion.

In areas shaped by complex histories of migration and resettlement, trust does not emerge organically. Poor urban design further compounds this, contributing to environments where low levels of interpersonal trust prevail. Persistent issues of crime and insecurity, left unresolved over time, deepen this sense of vulnerability and erode confidence among residents. These dynamics are intensified by the emergence of competing social groups, often organised around limited access to state resources, which fosters a climate of suspicion and rivalry. In the absence of strong social bonds, the enforcement of basic regulations becomes difficult, and informal mechanisms like “eyes on the street”—typically effective in cohesive communities—have little impact in such fragmented settings.

20 Governance is deficient and adherence to the rule of law is alarmingly weak.

Everyday transgressions—such as traffic violations, littering and vandalism—occur openly and without consequence, creating an environment of impunity. The absence of effective conflict resolution mechanisms means that disputes remain unresolved, festering beneath the surface of daily life and compounding resident stress. Regulatory enforcement is minimal, and the lines of accountability among officials are opaque and poorly defined. When things break down, as they often do, residents are unable to obtain timely resolution. The poor responsiveness of management erodes trust in the governance system, fostering frustration and resentment among residents. In such an environment, a culture of apathy takes hold, pushing residents to bypass formal systems altogether—often resorting to informal power brokers, including gangsters and political intermediaries—to address their grievances.

21 Empowered residents can transform their living environments through collaboration and initiative.

Despite the challenges outlined in this report, it recognises the resilience and agency of public housing communities. Residents regularly demonstrate resourcefulness through coping strategies and grassroots initiatives that reflect a strong spirit of collective action. The traditional concept of *gotong-royong* is an effective tool in mobilising communities for collective action. Informal arrangements and local problem-solving, often facilitated through social networks, offer short-term relief and help manage daily stresses. However, these efforts can only be sustained within an enabling environment supported by coherent and responsive policies. The report emphasises that relying solely on residents’ goodwill, in the absence of systemic reform, is inadequate and risks further deepening both social fragmentation and the physical deterioration of public housing.



22 Weak public policy and a flawed management system lie at the heart

of this failure. Decades of policy ambiguity have left the sector mired in inconsistency, with no clear direction on whether public housing should be self-governed, centrally managed, or eventually privatised. Likewise, there is a lack of consensus on whether these developments are meant to house short-term tenants or support long-term community building. The management system itself suffers from chronic underfunding and is anchored to an unsustainable financial model. Legal inconsistencies and external interference—from political actors and other interest groups—further erode managerial authority. Housing managers are constrained by outdated command-and-control operational models and often lack the skills required to navigate the social complexity of urban community co-management. There is also an absence of accountability to the residents of public housing. In this opaque governance landscape, inefficiency, incompetence and misuse of power are allowed to take root. Unsurprisingly, the study found that many managers themselves expressed deep frustration, feeling undermined by a system that stifled both their effectiveness and sense of professional purpose.

23 The policy implications are stark.

Malaysia's public housing sector is not healthy, and is positioned on a dangerous trajectory of systemic decline and crisis. The similarities in deprivation across geographically and administratively diverse communities point to institutional,

not just local failures. Without urgent intervention, the compounding effects of policy ambiguity, governance breakdowns and social stratification will push these neighbourhoods into irreversible ghettoisation—trapping the urban poor in cycles of poverty and eroding the liveability of our cities.

24 Key recommendation

—The report argues that Malaysia's public housing system is at a tipping point and requires an **urgent, comprehensive overhaul**. It calls for the creation of a **High-Level Task Force** to lead a transformative 3R approach: Rebuild the community, Reframe the management system and Reform the policy framework:

- **Rebuild the community** by fostering social cohesion through inclusive community engagement, supporting grassroots initiatives and designing spaces that encourage interaction and collective ownership.
- **Reframe the management system** to establish clear, accountable governance structures with adequate resources, professional management and mechanisms for resident participation and conflict resolution.
- **Reform the policy framework** to eliminate fragmentation, clarify roles and responsibilities across agencies, ensure sustainable funding for maintenance and social programmes, and integrate public housing within broader urban development strategies.



25 Conclusion—

This report is an important and timely complement to the goals of the 13th Malaysia Plan to reform housing for the poor. It warns that without swift and coordinated action, the gains of past decades risk being undone, leading to entrenched poverty, social exclusion, and physical decay that will be far more costly to reverse. It calls on policymakers to recognise that public housing is not merely about providing shelter, but about nurturing vibrant, inclusive communities that contribute to Malaysia's social and economic fabric. *From Roof to Resilience* is a compelling and urgent call to reimagine the future of public housing. It reveals both the cracks and the strengths within our existing systems, showing that while our achievements are significant, the journey is far from complete. The next chapter lies in transforming housing provision into community resilience to ensure that every roof built also shelters opportunity, dignity and hope.



Part A: FRAMING THE ISSUES



Lift lobby transformed by the community (see Box Story 1, page 32).

1

Introduction

In September 2024, social media platforms lit up with surprising and heart-warming stories from PPR (Program Perumahan Rakyat) Lembah Subang 1, a public housing complex once known for its deteriorating facilities and bleak atmosphere. Images and videos showcased a striking transformation in the lift lobbies, all 132 floors of them across eight blocks, which had been revamped from grimy transit spaces into vibrant community hubs. The once-neglected lobbies, where residents hurriedly passed by, were now filled with colour and life, offering a place for neighbours to gather, chat and share moments together. This revitalised space became a symbol of hope and unity, turning the lift lobbies into a nexus of community spirit and social cohesion, where residents of all ages could meet in a warm and convivial atmosphere.

Not only did this shift enhance the physical appearance of the complex, but it also rekindled a sense of community, breathing new energy into a place that had once felt abandoned. For development practitioners, the real gem of this story lay in the fact that a modest grant allocation was all it took to catalyse the community to mobilise amongst themselves to raise up to 20 times the grant amount to beautify their lift lobby space. And in the process, they created a new momentum for strengthening social cohesion and building a strong community identity.

The challenge, however, lies in the sustainability of this momentum for change. Despite the residents' initiative and resourcefulness in transforming their living spaces, they remain subject to a public housing system that has long struggled with fragmented policies, demoralising bureaucracy, inadequate maintenance funding and a lack of cohesive support for sustainable improvements. While the community has demonstrated that small investments can yield significant social and physical dividends, the dysfunctional nature of the current public housing system risks sidelining or even undermining these grassroots efforts.

It has not always been like this. Malaysia's public housing was once celebrated as a development success story after the 1990s when the country undertook bold initiatives to relocate squatters and the urban poor into modern housing equipped with essential amenities like water and electricity. These efforts represented a transformative leap in living standards, turning informal settlements into structured, safe and habitable environments. Malaysia had been largely successful in addressing urban poverty through public housing programmes, offering thousands of low-income families a foothold into better living conditions and improved access to urban infrastructure.

However, over the last two decades, there has emerged a troubling trend of issues that threaten to undermine the development dividends of past policies. Despite the shelter and universal access to services offered by public housing projects, a set of second-generation issues have begun to emerge that impact upon the quality of life of public housing residents.

Recent studies conducted by Think City, Unicef and Khazanah Research Institute have started to shed light on the existence of a community living under stress and susceptible to poverty in our public housing schemes. In this study, we conduct a deeper analysis to understand the dynamics of these issues and to frame them within the context of the management and governance of public housing. These issues are further understood not simply as the performance of infrastructure,



but, more significantly, as the communal nature of living in public housing. It concerns the human dynamics that circulate, interact and shape the experience of living together in shared spaces. It involves a social anthropology of vertical living by families united not by ties of community but of geography. And consequently, it is manifested in a management system rendered ineffective by the absence of both a functional level of social cohesion necessary for collective action, and the enforcement of regulations needed for order and safety to prevail.

It is to this discordance that this study attempts to engage with through our detailed engagement with public housing complexes in the Klang Valley, focusing on the mismatch between spatial relationships, personal responsibilities, and professional accountabilities that are meant to govern social behaviour and produce development outcomes. This book, *From Roof to Resilience*, reflects a journey of understanding—from the physical structures that provide shelter to the social systems and relationships that sustain community life. It explores how, beyond the concrete roofs that protect, true resilience emerges from the everyday acts of care, cooperation, and adaptation that allow residents to build meaningful lives within shared spaces.

The title captures the spirit of this work: the need to move beyond viewing public housing merely as a solution to shelter, towards seeing it as a foundation for building resilient communities. In doing so, it recognises that the future of Malaysia's public housing lies not only in better buildings or improved infrastructure, but in strengthening the social fabric that holds these communities together. *From Roof to Resilience* is therefore not an account of failure, but an inquiry into renewal—how Malaysia can transform its public housing into spaces that promote dignity, inclusion and shared responsibility. It seeks to understand both the limitations and the possibilities within the current system, offering insights into how policies, management practices and community participation can converge to create more sustainable and compassionate urban living environments.

The social assessment is a systematic analysis utilising both objective and subjective information about a community's social dynamics—to develop an understanding about the determinants that influence and shape individual and community outcomes. The social assessment framework opens new avenues towards understanding the complex dynamics in public housing. It provides a structured approach to analysing the interplay between residents, their environment and institutional policies. Public housing is not just about physical infrastructure, but also the social systems that sustain a healthy, inclusive community. Through this approach, we can evaluate the lived experiences of residents, uncovering patterns of social cohesion, exclusion or conflict. This is crucial for identifying root causes of systemic issues such as low community engagement, rising delinquency or the deterioration of shared spaces, which might otherwise remain obscured in traditional evaluations focused solely on physical maintenance.

This report is the product of the Program Kita-untuk-Kita (K2K), an 18-month community empowerment initiative focused on 10 public housing projects in the Klang Valley and funded

by the Ministry of Finance (see Annexe 1 for more information). The programme incorporates the K2K Diagnostic Study (KDS), a mixed method approach to develop empirically-based insights on the subject. This includes a household survey of 2,884 respondents from 10 different public housing communities in the Klang Valley, qualitative surveys such as cultural mapping, focus-group discussions, expert interviews, ethnographic studies on two public housing communities and spatial mapping analyses. It is also complemented by desktop research of secondary sources.

The 10 public housing complexes were selected for the study because of their diverse demographic profiles, unique social dynamics, and varying physical and environmental conditions, offering a broad representation of challenges and opportunities within public housing communities. Additionally, some of these sites were chosen based on existing relationships with the communities, while others were newly engaged to broaden the scope and inclusivity of the study. Below is a table of the 10 sites with their basic information. A detailed description of the methodology employed in this study is provided in Annexe 2, and a detailed profile of the 10 sites is provided in Annexe 3.



	PA Seri Selangor	PA Seri Sarawak	PA Hang Tuah	PA Seri Cempaka	PA Seri Kota	PPR Taman Mulia	PPR Desa Tun Razak	PA Seri Sabah 3A	PPR Lembah Subang 1	PPR Kg Baru Hicom
State	Kuala Lumpur								Selangor	
Parliamentary area	Cheras		Bukit Bintang	Lembah Pantai		Bandar Tun Razak			Petaling Jaya	Shah Alam
City council	Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL)								Majlis Bandaraya Petaling Jaya	Majlis Bandaraya Shah Alam
Property owner	DBKL								Housing and Local Government Ministry	Lembaga Perumahan dan Hartanah Selangor
Building manager	DBKL		Joint management body (JMB)				JMB	Management corporation	Nuzi Global Sdn Bhd	Perumahan dan Hartanah Selangor Sdn Bhd
Building occupancy year	1975	1984	1969	2009	1985	2000	1998	1981	2000	2005
No. of blocks	6	3	2	2	6	2	4	4	8	3
No. of floors	16	16	16	17	17	21	21	17	17	16 and 17
No. of units	1,588	776	783	632	1,224	912	1,824	816	3,004	980

Table 1 Profile of 10 public housing sites under Program K2K

This report is organised into two parts. Part A provides a summary of key insights shaped by quantitative and qualitative data obtained during the Program K2K. It begins, in *Section 2: People and Public Housing*, with a snapshot of features characteristic of public housing residents as reported in the household survey. The emphasis here is on the social differentiation in these housing complexes and their socio-economic aspects. *Section 3: A Declining Trend in Living Standards* then tackles the question of declining liveability and the key issues impacting the communities. Following that, we explore the spatial dimension of public housing by describing the relationship between social dynamics and urban design in *Section 4: Communal Living Space*. The complex and multidimensional nature of problems faced by residents cannot be reduced to simple factors, and we convey this through a selection of case studies in *Section 5: Problems are Systemic*.

Against the background of these issues, we discuss the challenges of management and their limitations in *Section 6: Management Challenges*. The fragmentation of social cohesion in the community and how it impacts upon liveability is described in *Section 7: Social Dynamics*. Section A concludes with a description in *Section 8: Coping Strategies*, about the resilience of this community and their positive spirit in overcoming adversity.

Part B of the report synthesises the core findings and insights from the preceding section into five key policy considerations. These address critical issues such as persistent policy ambiguity, the deteriorating development trajectory of public housing, the disproportionate impact of the rising cost of living on public housing communities, systemic governance failures and the untapped potential of social assets. The report raises a clear warning: Malaysia's public housing sector is in



an unhealthy state and risks entering a phase of systemic decline. Without urgent and coordinated intervention, the compounding effects of unclear policy direction, weak governance and deepening social inequality will accelerate the ghettoisation of these communities—trapping the urban poor in cycles of poverty and undermining the liveability and resilience of Malaysia's cities. To support early detection and strategic response, the report introduces a ghettoisation framework built around nine key indicators as a diagnostic tool to assess the health of individual public housing complexes. This framework is intended to help policymakers anticipate and address emerging risks before they become entrenched.

At the heart of the report's conclusion is the argument that Malaysia's public housing system stands at a critical tipping point and requires an urgent, comprehensive overhaul. The study calls for the establishment of a High-Level Task Force to lead a transformative 3R approach: Rebuild the community, Reframe the management system and Reform the policy framework.

From Roof to Resilience is both a diagnosis and a call to action. It reveals the fault lines beneath what was once considered a national success story and challenges policymakers to move beyond incremental fixes. It calls for bold, systemic reforms that empower residents, strengthen governance and reimagine public housing as a cornerstone of inclusive and sustainable urban development.

BOX STORY

1

From Dingy Transit Spaces to Thriving Social Hubs



Before

When the Program K2K first began working with residents in public housing (PPR), the problems were clear: littering, poor waste management, and a sense of insecurity in shared spaces. In PPR Kg Baru Hicom and PPR Lembah Subang 1—home to almost 19,000 people—more than 60% of households reported their liveability had not improved or had even declined since Covid-19. The lift lobbies—meant to be a neutral communal space—had become grimy, poorly lit transit zones that residents hurried across without stopping.

K2K, however, chose to see these spaces differently. Through a combination of investments in social and physical assets, and a deep commitment to community mobilisation, the programme helped residents reclaim their lift lobbies. Central to this was the Forum Komuniti (Forkom)—a resident-driven platform designed to mobilise entire communities and organise collective action.



After

One of K2K's most successful initiatives was the "Pertandingan Keceeriaan dan Kebersihan" (Cleanliness and Cheerfulness Competition). Implemented across two major public housing complexes—PPR Kg Baru Hicom (three blocks, 980 households, 49 floors) and PPR Lembah Subang 1 (eight blocks, 2,800 households, 124 floors)—the competition gave each participating floor RM500 to improve their lift lobbies. What happened next exceeded everyone's expectations.

Residents began to talk to each other, plan together, and pool resources—raising as much as 20 times the seed funds. Neighbours who had never exchanged greetings started to collaborate on shared visions for their floors. Some planted greenery, others painted murals, and many brightened their spaces with better lighting and décor. "Even though this is a competition," one participant reflected, "in actual fact we are all winners."

The transformation was not just physical—it was social. Lift lobbies once seen as dirty and unsafe became vibrant hubs of interaction. Residents

began holding tuition classes, Quran recitation groups, dance lessons, birthday celebrations, and even a wedding in their newly transformed spaces. Several floors pooled additional resources to install CCTV cameras, not just to protect their improvements but to ensure the safety and sustainability of their shared space.

The positive outcomes have been far-reaching:

- Significant reduction in littering and improved waste disposal practices
- Brighter, cleaner lift lobbies that feel welcoming and safe
- A noticeable drop in petty crime and safety concerns
- The emergence of new community leaders and floor coordinators, sustaining the initiative beyond its initial phase

What began as a small-scale competition became a powerful community-led placemaking process. The Forkom model showed that when residents are empowered to co-create solutions, even modest investments can spark transformational change. The lift lobbies now stand as symbols of ownership, pride and social cohesion.

Recognition soon followed. Prime Minister Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim highlighted the project's success during a visit to PPR Lembah Subang 1 in February 2025, and PPR Kg Baru Hicom won the Sapphire Winner (Public Indoor Space) award at the MyPLACE Awards 2025.

Above all, the K2K initiative proved a simple but powerful point: community spaces thrive when communities themselves are in charge. By treating lift lobbies not as leftover spaces but as shared assets, residents turned dingy corridors into vibrant social hubs—demonstrating how small investments, collective action, and social trust can dramatically improve the quality of life in public housing.

2 People and Public Housing

Public housing provides shelter to people from the marginalised economic class, typically referred to as the B40 category in official policy. These are often communities who have histories of migration into Malaysia's fast expanding cities and who had originally lived in informal or "squatter" settlements. As the urban fabric transformed with growing demand for land and development, these communities have been resettled into public housing projects. In this section we describe the policy context for public housing and highlight the socio-economic character of the residents of these housing projects.

Public housing in Malaysia is a broad category encompassing housing that is fully funded by different entities in the federal and state governments, and private housing that is subsidised by the government. In this study, we focus largely on the Perumahan Awam (PA) and PPR which are fully funded by the federal government but managed by different entities. We will refer to these sites as "public housing complexes".

2.1 Public housing has played an important role in supporting Malaysia's impressive economic development and industrial transformation. Malaysia urbanised rapidly from less than 30% in 1970 to 75% in 2020¹, where it was able to ensure the housing of the urban poor for more than an estimated three million people². In the 1970s, almost a third of KL dwellings were classified as "squatters". However, today there is hardly any squatter or informal housing in any of Malaysia's urban centres. This achievement no doubt played a vital role in the dramatic reduction of poverty from 49.3% in 1970 to 8.4% in 2020³.

¹ King, R. (2008). *Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya: Negotiating Urban Space in Malaysia*. ASAA Southeast Asia Publication Series.

² Ling, O. G. (2003). *Housing in Southeast Asian Capital Cities*. ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute.

³ Faiez, S. and Rajni, B. (2022). *Urban Poverty and Communities in High Rise Strata Public Housing: A Preliminary Survey of Issues*. Think City Sdn Bhd

Phases of Housing in Malaysia⁴⁵

1957 1969 Pre- & Post-independence Housing Phase



Pre-independence

- Housing Trust Foundation (1956–1965)
- Public housing initiatives implemented by the British but with limited results
- 7,431 housing units built

Post-independence

- Local Government and Housing Ministry (later renamed Housing and Local Government Ministry) established
- Focus on providing low-cost, small-size public housing funded by the government

Key housing programmes

- 1964: Housing Crash Programme

1970 1985 Housing for the Poor

- To eradicate poverty and restructure society
- Implementation of human resettlement concepts in national development
- High rate of rural-urban migration
- 121,855 public housing units built across the nation
- 1981: Beginning of private sector involvement in low-cost property development

1986 1997 Market Reform

- To ensure that all people live in decent houses regardless of their income
- Development of low-medium and low-cost public housing
- Greater emphasis on private housing companies in the development of low- to medium- cost public housing

2012 Present State Affordable Housing

- Policy focused more on building affordable and quality housing for all income groups

1998 2011 Slum Clearance

- Housing for the urban poor, focusing on slum communities in urban areas
- “Zero Squatter” programmes introduced by state governments to ensure that everyone within the respective states owns a house
- 1997: National Economic Action Council (MTEN) formed in response to the Asian Financial Crisis

Key housing programmes

- 1998: Program Perumahan Rakyat (PPR) replaced PAKR
- Rumah Mesra Rakyat (RMR)

Key housing programmes:

1. Perumahan Rakyat 1Malaysia (PR1MA)
2. Residensi Wilayah (Rumawip)
3. Perumahan Penjawat Awam 1Malaysia (PPA1M)
4. Skim Perumahan Mampu Milik Swasta (MyHome)
5. Rumah Selangorku
6. Rumah Idaman Rakyat
7. Rumah Mampu Milik Pulau Pinang, Johor, Terengganu, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan
8. Projek Rumah Makmur (Pahang)
9. Rumah Perakku
10. Rumah Transit 1Malaysia

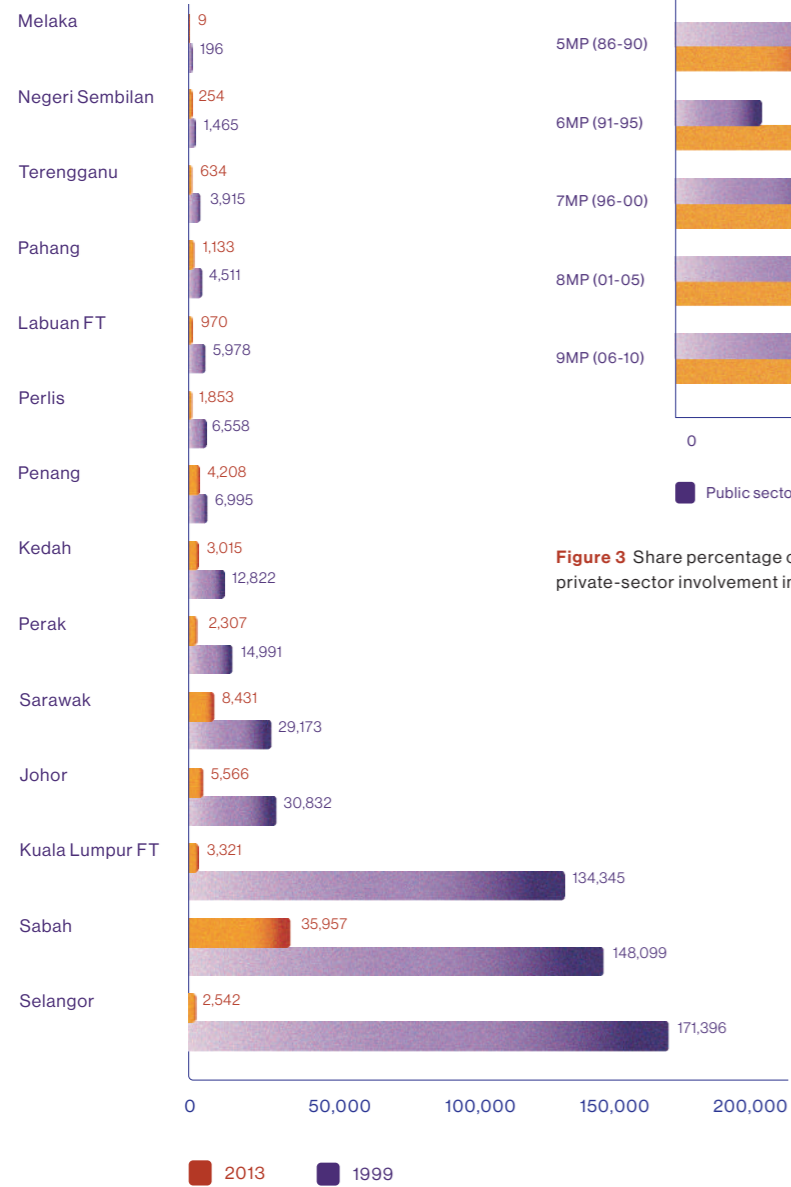


Figure 2 Changes in households living in slums according to state, 1999–2013

6 Shuid, S. (2015). *The housing provision system in Malaysia*. Habitat International, 49, 11–19
 7 Estimation is based on 4.2 household members per unit.
 8 PA and PPR listed in the open data by KPKT and DBKL
 9 Data from KPKT and DBKL derived in 2022
 10 National Housing Department (2018). *National Housing Policy 2018–2025*. Putrajaya: Ministry of Housing and Local Government

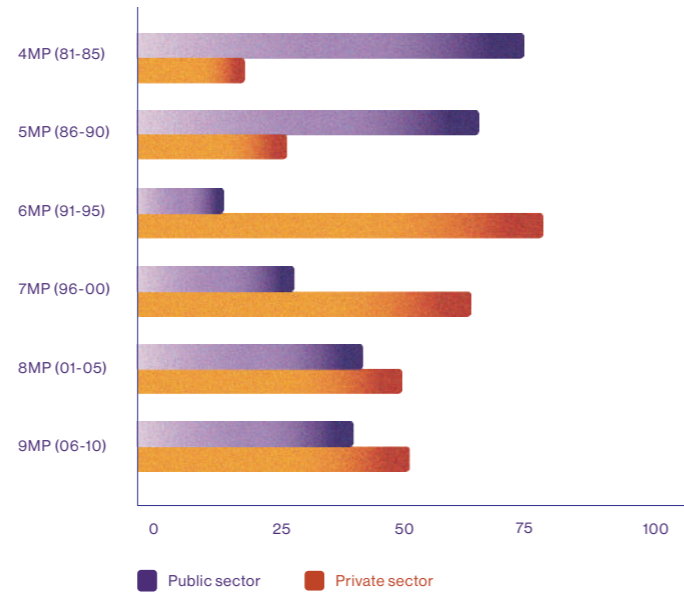


Figure 3 Share percentage of public- and private-sector involvement in low-cost housing

State	No. of projects	Total units	Estimated residents ⁷
Johor	29	17,389	73,034
Kedah	19	6,968	29,266
Kelantan	5	2,804	11,177
KL FT	99	76,129	319,142
Melaka	16	3,958	16,624
Negeri Sembilan	12	2,662	11,176
Pahang	48	7,961	33,436
Penang	20	10,308	43,294
Perak	27	4,918	20,656
Perlis	3	1,428	5,998
Sabah	44	29,795	125,139
Sarawak	27	17,720	74,424
Selangor	9	7,316	30,727
Terengganu	22	5,339	22,424
Total	387	194,694	817,715

Table 3 Estimated number of public housing⁸ occupants by state, retrieved in 2022



2.2 The big push in public housing happened following the Asian Financial Crisis (1997) and the implementation of zero squatter programmes jointly by federal and state governments. Between 1999 and 2013, the number of squatter settlements nationally dropped by more than 90% (Figure 1). States like Selangor and KL experienced the most dramatic slum drops with falls of 98.5% and 97.5% respectively⁶. These drops related to the relocation of slum dwellers into newly-built public housing.

2.3 The rapid expansion of public housing was powered by the involvement of the private sector. By 2021⁹, more than a million public housing units had been developed, out of which almost 400 projects were funded by the public sector and 2,400 were funded by the private sector across the country. The increase began from the 5th Malaysia Plan and peaked in the early 90s (Figure 2). This was achieved through the policy instituting a 30% quota of low cost-housing for housing projects developed by private companies, starting with a controlled selling price of RM25,000 per unit. To make this financially viable, developers have adopted a cross-subsidisation model, where profits from mid- and high-end housing have been used to offset the lower margins or losses incurred from the construction and sale of low-cost units. While this policy has increased the overall stock of public housing, it has also marked a shift in public housing provision from being solely a government responsibility to a shared public-private undertaking¹⁰.

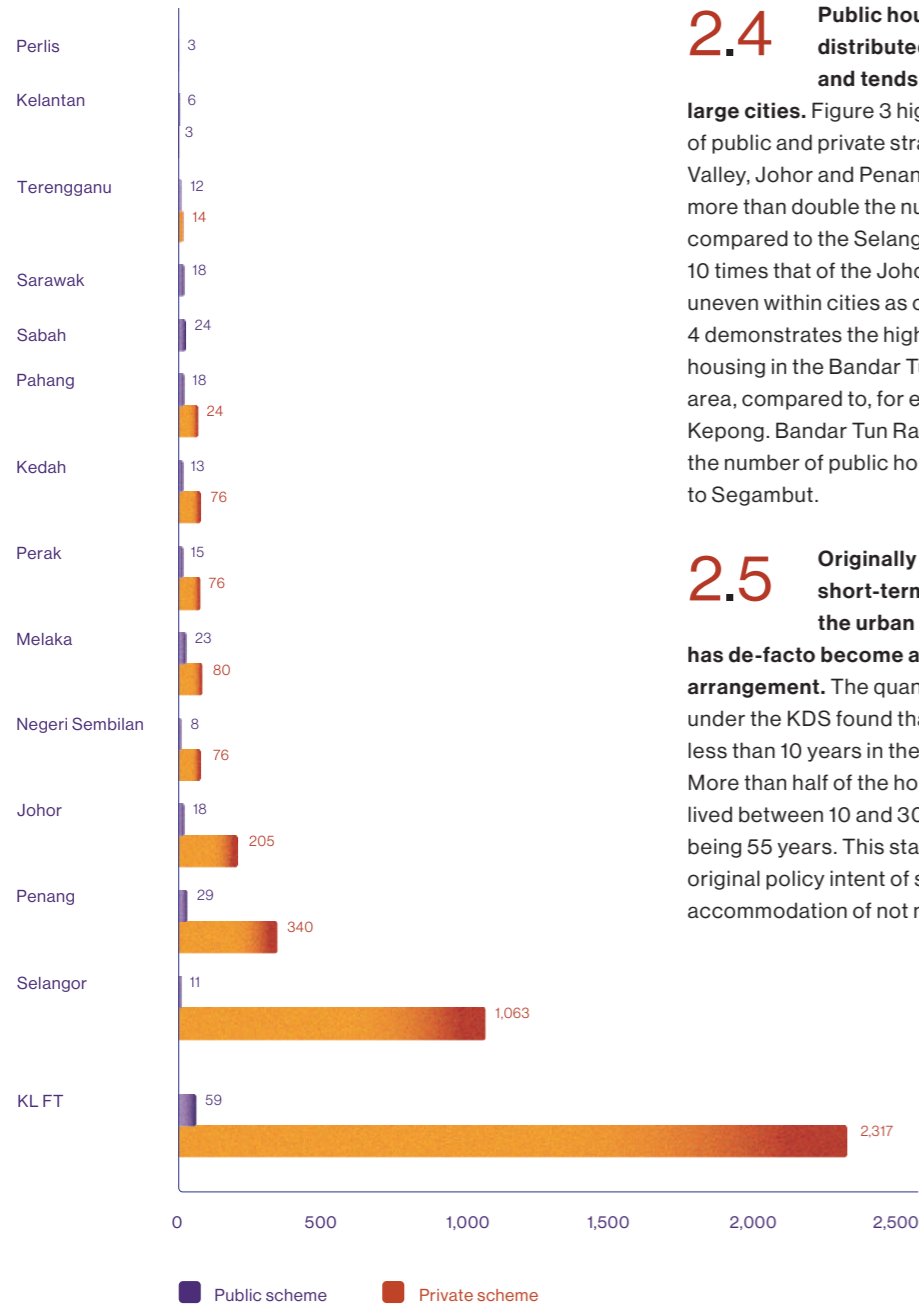


Figure 4 Distribution of public and private housing schemes across the country

2.4 Public housing is not evenly distributed across the country and tends to be concentrated in large cities. Figure 3 highlights the concentration of public and private strata housing in the Klang Valley, Johor and Penang. Kuala Lumpur city has more than double the number of public housing compared to the Selangor state, and more than 10 times that of the Johor state. Distribution is also uneven within cities as observed in KL FT. Figure 4 demonstrates the high concentration of public housing in the Bandar Tun Razak parliamentary area, compared to, for example, Segambut and Kepong. Bandar Tun Razak has more than 10 times the number of public housing schemes compared to Segambut.

2.5 Originally planned and built as short-term transit housing for the urban poor, public housing has de-facto become a permanent housing arrangement. The quantitative survey conducted under the KDS found that only 22.8% had lived less than 10 years in their public housing units. More than half of the households (61%) had lived between 10 and 30 years, with the longest being 55 years. This stands at odds with the original policy intent of serving as a temporary accommodation of not more than five years.¹¹

¹¹ Khazanah Research Institute. (2023). *Decent Shelter for the Urban Poor: A Study of Program Perumahan Rakyat (PPR)*. Kuala Lumpur: Khazanah Research Institute
¹² Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur. "Data terbuka." Portal Rasmi Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur—DBKL, 2024. <https://www.dbkl.gov.my/data-statistik/data-terbuka>
¹³ Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2020). *Key findings: Population and housing census 2020. Malaysia Census*. Putrajaya: Department of Statistics Malaysia



More than 40% of households sampled had a family size above the national average.

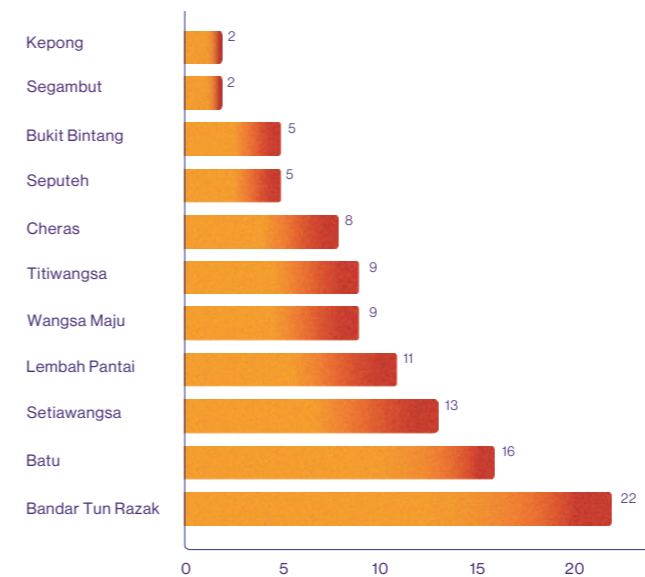


Figure 5 Distribution of public housing across parliamentary areas in Kuala Lumpur FT in 2023¹²

2.6 Even though the survey found a predominance of Malays living in public housing, at 74.9% on average, we found the communities to be highly heterogeneous when viewed from non-ethnic social categories. For example, more than a third were school-going children, about 21% were categorised as youths aged between 13 and 24, and 8.7% of the community were from the golden generation of over 65 years. More than a third of households were women-led households, while 15% of households had members with diverse types of disabilities.



About one third of the population in the sample were school going children.

2.7 The average household size across the 10 public housing complexes was 4.19 persons, which was higher than the national average, while close to half the surveyed households had a larger household size of more than five people. About a fifth or 20.1% of the surveyed households had a family size of five to six, while 21.9% had a family size of more than six persons. In contrast, Malaysia's average household size is 3.8 persons¹³.

2.8 Household overcrowding is a significant issue as unit built-up sizes are up to 41% below current national standards. The house sizes surveyed range from 400 to 650 square feet per unit and had between one and two bedrooms. This size is below the standard recommended by the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) at minimum 678 square feet per unit with a minimum of three bedrooms¹⁴. Furthermore, the distribution of unit sizes does not meet the minimum floor space requirement of occupants. Malaysia's national average of floor space is 239.9 square feet per person. In contrast, the sample public housing sites offer only 125 to 145¹⁵ square feet per person.

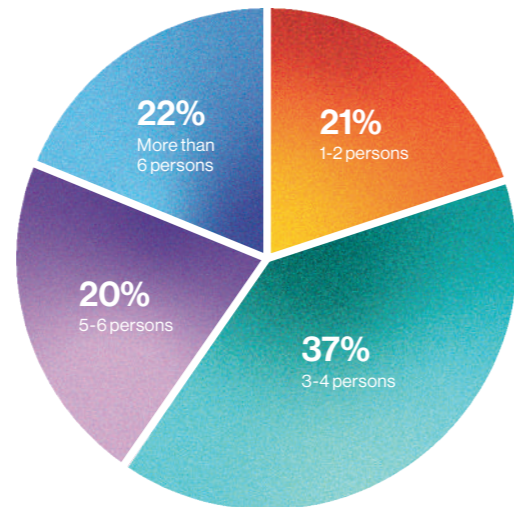


Figure 6 Household size in KDS

2.9 Around 40% of the households relied only on a single-income earner, slightly above the KL FT at 37.3% in 2022¹⁶. These findings put into stark contrast the economic vulnerability of the low-income community who are earning low wages, insecure jobs and high household commitments¹⁷. Single breadwinners face immense pressure to meet all financial needs—from rent and utilities to food and education. This dependency on a single breadwinner makes families highly susceptible to financial instability if the sole breadwinner faces job loss, illness or other disruptions. Further, women outside the labour force cite housework and caregiving responsibilities as the reasons excluding them from employment^{18 19}.

2.10 Close to 1 in 10 households (9%), reported having no breadwinner. This is a concerning finding as it points to significant pools of poverty that exist within the community. The study also found out, of the households having no breadwinner, 9% had members with disabilities (PWDs). Targeting and ensuring access to social assistance for these households becomes an important policy priority.

2.11 Almost three quarters of households were vulnerable to economic shocks. More than half (56%) of households had savings that could only sustain them 1–3 months. More concerning, 17.4% of households had no funds or savings at all (detailed breakdown in Table 4). These findings point to an economically-insecure community—where incidences like ill-health, breakdown of vehicles or loss of income can cause severe negative impact to the household. The primary source of emergency funds for these households is personal or family savings, or resorting to pawn shops, highlighting limited alternatives and deepening their precarious existence.

2.12 A significant share of the population had lived in public housing for more than 30 years, suggesting that they were unable or unwilling to leave for better quality private housing. The survey found that in older complexes such



Household overcrowding is a significant issue as apartment floor space provides only 125 to 145 square feet per person, more than 60% below the national standard.

as PA Seri Sabah 3A, PA Seri Sarawak and PA Seri Selangor, around 35% of residents had lived there for more than 30 years (Table 5). The findings echo other existing reports²⁰, revealing restricted opportunities for upward social mobility within the housing system.

2.13 The existence of multigenerational households is a cause for concern, as it suggests a poverty trap for certain segments of the community. Across all 10 sites, multigenerational households averaged 7.5% of the sample. This refers to the cohabitation of grandparents, parents and children in these small, cramped apartments. It also suggests that the next generation who have grown up in public housing are unable to achieve social mobility and remain stuck where they are. Table 6 shows that the incidence of multigenerational households varies across all sample sites with the highest in PPR Seri Sabah 3A at 11.6% and the lowest in PPR Kg Baru Hicom at 3.7%. Of concern is the fact that eight out of the 10 sites had multigenerational households of more than 5%, suggesting that 1 in 20 households were stuck in a poverty trap in these geographies.

PPR/PA	More than 6 months	4–6 months	1–3 months	1–4 weeks	Less than 1 week	Unsure	We do not have savings
Desa Tun Razak	9.2%	8.3%	17.3%	25.0%	14.3%	9.5%	16.4%
Hang Tuah	8.2%	8.3%	34.3%	14.9%	6.1%	6.1%	22.1%
Kg Baru Hicom	5.4%	4.7%	24.8%	28.5%	14.4%	7.1%	15.1%
Lembah Subang 1	5.1%	5.1%	20.5%	29.5%	15.1%	7.4%	17.3%
Seri Cempaka	7.9%	14.7%	35.3%	10.7%	4.4%	8.3%	18.7%
Seri Kota	14.9%	10.1%	25.0%	19.5%	11.4%	9.0%	10.1%
Seri Sabah 3A	14.2%	6.5%	21.2%	17.8%	9.5%	15.3%	15.6%
Seri Sarawak	8.1%	11.5%	31.3%	14.8%	6.3%	5.6%	22.6%
Seri Selangor	4.5%	11.7%	26.4%	16.6%	9.5%	4.9%	26.4%
Taman Mulia	12.6%	9.8%	21.7%	21.0%	10.8%	12.6%	11.5%

Table 4 Duration in which household savings can last in emergency

¹⁴ Construction Industry Development Board. (2019). *Standard Perumahan Kebangsaan*. Construction Industry Development Board
¹⁵ Internal calculations
¹⁶ Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2023). *Household Income Survey Report—Wilayah Persekutuan 2022*. Putrajaya: Department of Statistics Malaysia
¹⁷ Unicef and UNFPA (2021). *Families on the Edge report series*. Putrajaya: United Nations Children's Fund, Malaysia and the United Nations Population Fund. <https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/families-edge>
¹⁸ Khazanah Research Institute. (2019). *Time to Care: Gender Inequality, Unpaid Care Work and Time Use Survey*. Kuala Lumpur: Khazanah Research Institute
¹⁹ Think City–World Bank joint study. *Towards Better Economic Opportunities for Women in Malaysia: A Focus on Enhancing Household Income for B20 Women*. 2022 unpublished
²⁰ Khazanah Research Institute. (2023). *Decent Shelter for the Urban Poor: A Study of Program Perumahan Rakyat (PPR)*. Kuala Lumpur: Khazanah Research Institute

PPR/PA	Built year	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51+
Desa Tun Razak	1998	17.6%	27.4%	53.6%	0.9%	0.6%	0.0%
Hang Tuah	1969	44.8%	12.7%	8.8%	14.4%	16.6%	2.8%
Kg Baru Hicom	2005	54.0%	44.6%	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Lembah Subang 1	2000	26.7%	58.0%	15.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Seri Cempaka	2009	38.1%	61.5%	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Seri Kota	1985	15.3%	18.5%	38.0%	27.6%	0.6%	0.0%
Seri Sabah 3A	1981	17.1%	16.4%	26.9%	28.0%	11.3%	0.4%
Seri Sarawak	1984	23.7%	22.6%	19.6%	18.9%	15.2%	0.0%
Seri Selangor	1975	25.5%	23.6%	16.6%	14.7%	19.6%	0.0%
Taman Mulia	2000	19.6%	41.3%	38.8%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 5 Range of years living in public housing

PPR/PA	Years since occupancy	Households with 0-17 & 65+	Total households surveyed	Multigenerational households
Desa Tun Razak	25	26	336	7.7%
Hang Tuah	54	8	181	4.4%
Kg Baru Hicom	18	11	298	3.7%
Lembah Subang 1	23	22	352	6.3%
Seri Cempaka	14	21	252	8.3%
Seri Kota	38	29	308	9.4%
Seri Sabah 3A	42	32	275	11.6%
Seri Sarawak	39	21	270	7.8%
Seri Selangor	48	25	326	7.7%
Taman Mulia	23	24	286	8.4%

Table 6 Incidence of multigenerational household that includes 0-17 and 65-years-and-above age groups

An average of 7% of the sample surveyed constitute multigenerational households, with three or more generations living in the same apartment.



3

A Declining Trend in Living Standard



Children do their homework near the window where there is more light.

For the generation that had been relocated from squatter settlements to public housing, there was a significant improvement in the standard of living as residents gained access to potable water, electricity, health services, schooling and transportation. The older complexes tend to be located in strategic urban geographies with improved access to job opportunities and services following the rapid economic growth of cities. However, over the decades and against the background of outdated and declining living conditions and increasing economic stress, a second-generation set of issues has emerged that threatens to reverse the development dividends of public housing. In this section and the sections that follow, we describe the multidimensional and complex nature of issues, cross-cutting economic, social and physical factors, and how they interact with one another to collectively produce negative outcomes affecting liveability.

3.1 During the Covid-19 pandemic, public housing communities were badly impacted. Think City conducted a survey in three public housing sites in 2021 in the Klang Valley. The study found a community badly affected economically with almost 86% of households sampled reporting loss of income. It also found that 17.2% of households sampled reported not having enough food for their children for two days or more in a row and 65% of households reported buying less or cheaper food²¹. This is echoed in similar studies that show about 52% of children from public housing eating less than three meals per day²².

3.2 For a majority of the public housing residents surveyed in this study, their living standards had either declined or not improved since the Covid-19 pandemic ended. More than 60% of the survey respondents reported that their liveability had either declined or not improved since the pandemic. In some public housing such as PPR Lembah Subang 1, the percentage was even higher at 77.3%, with almost a third (27%) reporting a decline.

²¹ Kumar, A. K., & Dietrich, U. C. (2022). *K2K Indah analysis report*. Think City Sdn Bhd

²² Unicef and UNFPA. (2021). *Families on the Edge report series*. Putrajaya: United Nations Children's Fund, Malaysia and the United Nations Population Fund. <https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/families-edge>.

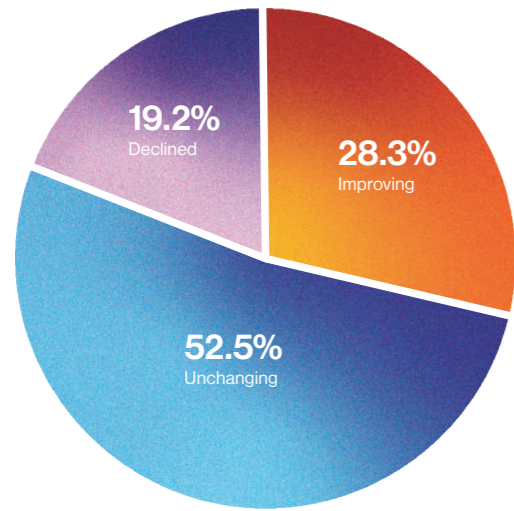


Figure 7 Liveability perception since Covid-19

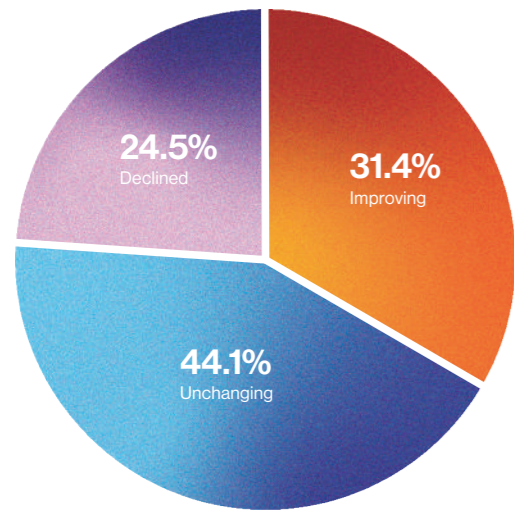


Figure 8 Cleanliness within public housing complexes

3.3 A major factor affecting liveability is the deterioration of cleanliness that has festered for an exceptionally long period. A majority of the population perceived no improvement in the cleanliness of public housing after the pandemic. Across the 10 public housing complexes surveyed, an average 69.3% reported no improvement or decline in cleanliness. When disaggregated, the issue was particularly severe in certain public housing sites compared to others. In one site in the state of Selangor, for instance, an alarming 54% reported a decline in cleanliness since the end of the pandemic.

3.4 Cleanliness issues include indiscriminate littering, poor waste disposal practices, animal droppings and human waste. Qualitative survey data²³ from the KDS showed that between 40% and 50% of participants across all 10 PAs/PPRs identified “people throwing garbage and food waste everywhere” as their main cleanliness issue. Waste is thrown out of apartment windows into the courtyards and public spaces. Waste is frequently disposed of in corridors, stairwells and even improperly within designated waste collection centres. Hygiene in public housing is further impacted by issues such as rat infestations, cat faeces and bird droppings. Human excreta, including urine and stool—stemming from deviant behaviour and a lack of public toilets—have also been reported at the survey sites. As a male resident from PA Seri Sabah lamented, “We used to have frequent *gotong-royong* to clean up our PPR, but then halfway through, we realised that the cleanliness at our place was not improving, so we decided to just give up and we now depend entirely on our cleaners.”



Indiscriminate littering and poor waste management attracts all manner of vermin. Rat infestation is a chronic problem in many public housing complexes, creating a public health risk.



The practice of utilising corridors for personal storage and waste disposal results in physical barriers to circulation and degraded environmental quality.

3.5 Recent studies have identified strong links between cleanliness and public health outcomes in public housing, particularly concerning the prevalence of IPI, leptospirosis and toxoplasmosis. Malaysia has made substantial progress in public sanitation, with national IPI prevalence dropping from 95% in 1970 to 20.6% by 2014. Among the urban poor, however, infection rates have historically remained high. In 1983, for example, 35.2% of squatters were found to be affected by IPI. The transition from informal squatter settlements to public housing led to a marked improvement, with some studies reporting infection rates as low as 5.5% by 2013—underscoring the significant public health benefits of improved sanitation and housing infrastructure in the early decades of the programme²⁴.

3.6 However, more recent surveys suggest that these gains may be reversing. A 2019 study by Universiti Malaya found a troubling resurgence of IPI within public housing communities in the Klang Valley, with prevalence rising to 22.5%²⁵. Equally concerning was the discovery of high toxoplasmosis rates, detected in 69.9% of the studied population, indicating widespread exposure—likely due to environmental contamination from infected cat faeces or the consumption of undercooked food²⁶. These health risks are exacerbated by poor waste management and indiscriminate garbage disposal, as well as inadequate maintenance services causing lift breakdowns, clogged-up drainage and leaky plumbing. Together, these factors contribute to an environment conducive to the spread of disease, reinforcing the urgent need for robust sanitation systems and effective waste management practices in public housing. Improving these conditions is essential to safeguard the health and well-being of residents and to prevent a reversal of the developmental gains once achieved through public housing policy.

²³ See Annexe 2 for more details.
²⁴ Sinniah, B., Hassan, A.K.R., Sabaridah, I., Soe, M.M., Ibrahim, Z. and Ali, O. (2014). Prevalence of intestinal parasitic infections among communities living in different habitats and its comparison with one hundred and one studies conducted over the past 42 years (1970 to 2013) in Malaysia. *Tropical Biomedicine*, 31(2): 190–206.
²⁵ Sahimin, N., Abd Khalil, K.S., Lewish, J.W. and Mohd Zain, S.N. (2020). Post-era mass drug administration: an update on intestinal parasitic infections in urban poor communities in Peninsular Malaysia. *Tropical Biomedicine* 37(2): 363–371. <https://msptm.org/files/Vol37No2/363-371-Mohd-Zain-SN.pdf>
²⁶ Sahimin, N., Mohd Hanapi, I.R., Nurikhan, Z.A. et al. (2021). Seroprevalence and Associated Risk Factors for *Toxoplasma gondii* Infections Among Urban Poor Communities in Peninsular Malaysia. *Acta Parasit.* 66, 524–534



Parents consider the corridor outside their apartment to be safe spaces for their children to play.

3.7 A community mapping under the KDS on maternal and child health in two public housing sites revealed

a higher prevalence of low birth weight, lower than the national average. In PPR Desa Tun Razak, 12.7% of infants were identified with low birth weight, and in PPR Lembah Subang 1, the figure was 16.7%. This contrasts with the national standard, which is 10.9%. These findings highlight significant health concerns regarding child development in these communities, as low birth weight increases the risk of infant health complications and suggests potential maternal health issues or inadequate prenatal care. Mothers in such low-resource settings are often faced with impossible choices—based not on what is best for their child but what is available. Poor access to health services imposes high time and financial cost to mothers which forces them to prioritise income generation, for example, over healthy diet (see Box Story 2).

3.8 An alarming three quarters of respondents reported their stress levels had either not improved or worsened since the Covid-19 pandemic.

In some public housing such as PA Seri Kota, the incidence was even higher at more than 80%. Many respondents reported that they did not have anyone to talk to when stressed, with PA Seri Sabah 3A and PA Seri Kota showing the highest percentages at 59.6% and 50%, respectively. The high stress levels in the community not only impacts on mental health and physical health, but also becomes a constraint for building social capital and strengthening social cohesion.

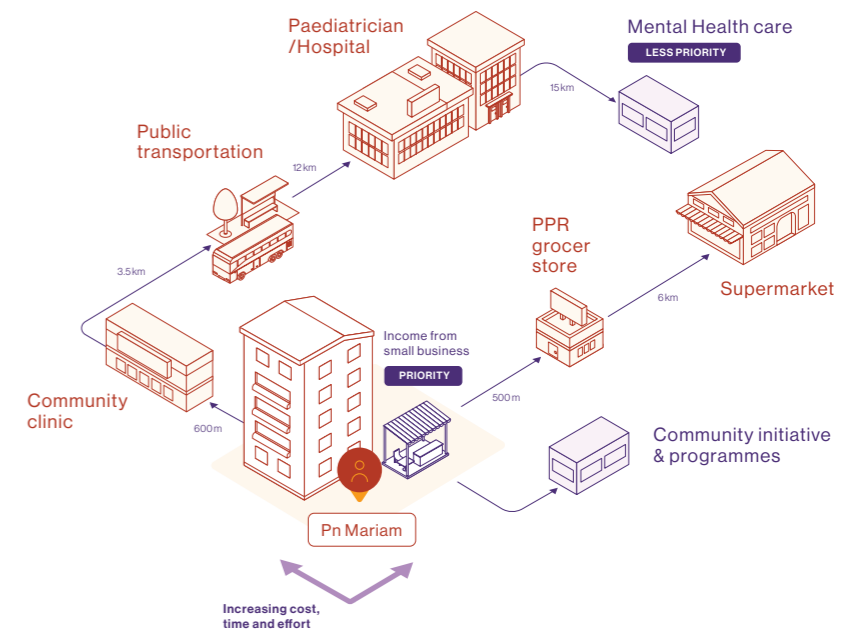
BOX STORY

2

Puan Mariam sells nasi lemak outside her PPR block to support her family. Her husband works long days as a lorry driver. During a recent check-up, a nurse recommended that her baby be assessed by a paediatrician for possible developmental delay. Community clinics do not provide these services, hence Puan Mariam needed to take a trip to the hospital. But on that same day, she also had to restock groceries, and she only had RM100 to cover both.

Public transport is time-consuming and exhausting with a baby. A Grab ride would cost nearly half her daily budget. Meanwhile, the nearest grocer in the PPR offers mostly eggs, rice and processed items, not fresh fruit or protein. To go to the supermarket, she would need to spend on transportation, and nutritious food items cost more.

Or she could simply focus on her stall so she could generate income for the day, postpone the paediatric visit and make a quick trip to the PPR grocery store in the evening; which was what she did in the end.



Impossible Choices

3.9 **Suicide is a recurring issue in eight of the 10 sample public housing sites.** Residents reported that the stressful environment, which included overcrowding, financial strain and social isolation, contributes to the significant incidence of suicides in their public housing complexes. In two out of the 10 sites, suicides occurred at least twice annually, while in the six other sites, residents reported witnessing one to two cases over the past five years. These numbers suggest that suicides happen at a much higher rate in the study sites—about 20 cases for every 100,000 people annually, not including attempts. This is more than three times higher than the national average of approximately six cases per 100,000 people²⁷. These findings highlight the urgent need for interventions that address both the social and environmental stressors affecting public housing residents.

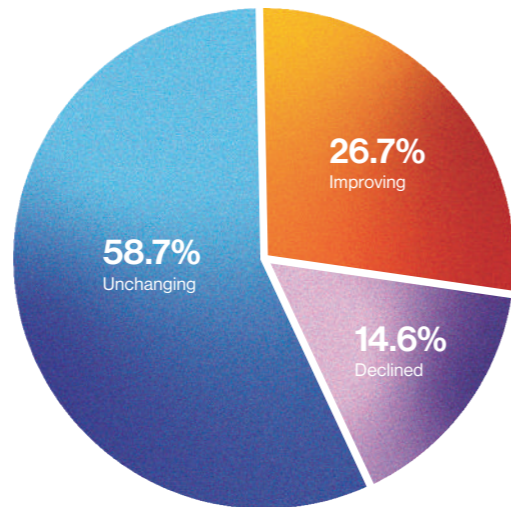


Figure 9 Stress level perception since Covid-19 pandemic across 10 sites

3.10 **Environmental factors such as excessive heat and noise within the public housing complex significantly disrupt residents' sleep quality, potentially exacerbating mental health conditions.** In nine out of 10 surveyed complexes, at least 28.0% of respondents reported that excessive night-time heat impeded their ability to sleep, while noise levels emerged as another critical factor affecting sleep quality. Particularly concerning was the finding from PPR Lembah Subang 1, where the highest percentage of respondents, 45.2%, reported being unable to sleep because of noise disturbances.

3.11 **Households exhibit a low awareness of nutritious diets in their meals.** As high as 37.8% of households were not aware of the government nutrition awareness programme called "Suku-Suku-Separuh", while 35.7% were aware of the initiative but did not implement it. The reluctance to adopt this initiative was attributed to several factors, including the availability, affordability, and accessibility of fresh, nutritious food, as well as the lack of storage space in their compact living units. Further, the community's

inability to purchase enough food for their households was also highlighted in Unicef's study in 2021²⁸, whereby 60% said the Movement Control Order impacted their lives in this manner.

3.12 **The proportion of elderly (65 years and above) residents in the sample public housing was higher than the national average.** In our quantitative survey from KDS, an average 8.6% of residents were reported as elderly, with some areas like the Pudu (11.9%) and Bandar Tun Razak (10.7%) clusters having higher concentrations. For example, the proportion of elderly in PA Seri Sabah 3A was 15.3%. as per Figure 10. This is more than double the national average, which is 7.3% of the population²⁹. The KDS found significant accessibility issues at public housing sites, impacting upon mobility, and making the environment uncondusive for the ageing population.

²⁷ Lew, B., Kölves, K., Lester, D., Chen, W. S., Ibrahim, N. B., Khamal, N. R. B., & Chan, L. F. (2022). *Looking into recent suicide rates and trends in Malaysia: A comparative analysis*. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 12, 770252

²⁸ Unicef and UNFPA. (2021). *Families on the Edge report series*. Putrajaya: United Nations Children's Fund, Malaysia and the United Nations Population Fund

²⁹ Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2020). *Key findings: Population and housing census 2020*. Malaysia Census. Putrajaya: Department of Statistics Malaysia



Poor lighting at home and in the complex creates a gloomy and depressing atmosphere.



In 6 of the 10 sites sampled, the share of elderly residents was higher than the national average of 7.3%, with one site registering more than double that number.



As key circulation pathways, corridors, staircases, lifts and lift lobbies promote movement and social interaction among residents. However, inadequate lighting in these spaces often creates a dim and unwelcoming environment, undermining their potential as community hubs.

3.13 Of grave concern is the high level of insecurity experienced by public housing residents.

Respondents in our quantitative survey under KDS reported general unhappiness about the security of their homes and surroundings. Across all public housing complexes studied, 12.9% of households felt that their safety was declining, while 54.3% felt that their safety had not improved during the previous year. In Lembah Subang 1, for example, almost one-third or 28.7% of households reported a decline in their sense of safety over the previous year.

3.14 The incidence of violent crimes in public housing is seven times higher than the national average.

Respondents from the quantitative survey under KDS reported a significant number of crime incidents affecting at least a member of their households, ranging from physical assault to attempted kidnapping. Vehicle theft was a regular occurrence with 215 incidents that year—including theft of vehicle parts, petrol or the whole vehicle. However, the presence of even a small number of serious offences, such as attempted kidnapping (37 incidents) and fire-related incidents (31 incidents), is deeply concerning. Table 8 provides the range of safety issues and their incidence across the 10 public housing sites. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) in 2024, the national rate of violent crime, a similar category to physical assault in the survey, was 3.2 per 10,000 people. In contrast, the 123 cases of physical assault reported across the 10 public

housing sites—home to an estimated 50,000 residents—reflected a rate of 24.6 per 10,000, more than seven times the national average.

3.15 The top two issues impacting upon liveability are cleanliness and safety.

When asked to prioritise, in findings from the qualitative surveys in all the 10 sites, the residents identified cleanliness and safety as the top and second priority issues, respectively. Residents associated the failure to maintain cleanliness and safety as a marker for overall management dysfunctionality.

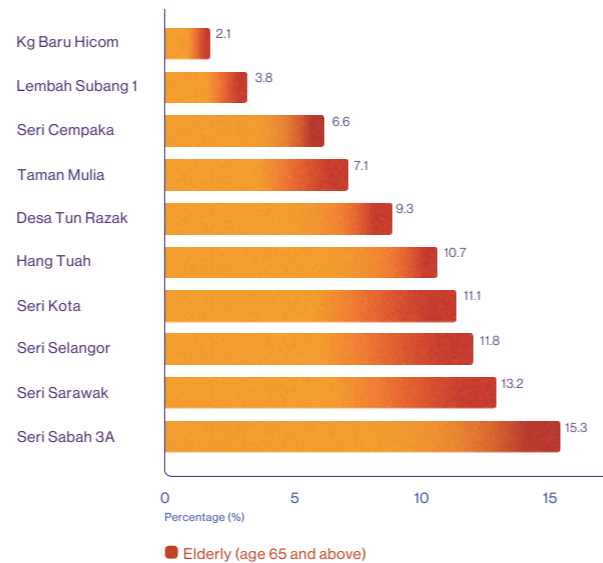


Figure 10 Percentage of elderly at 10 public housing complexes compared to national average

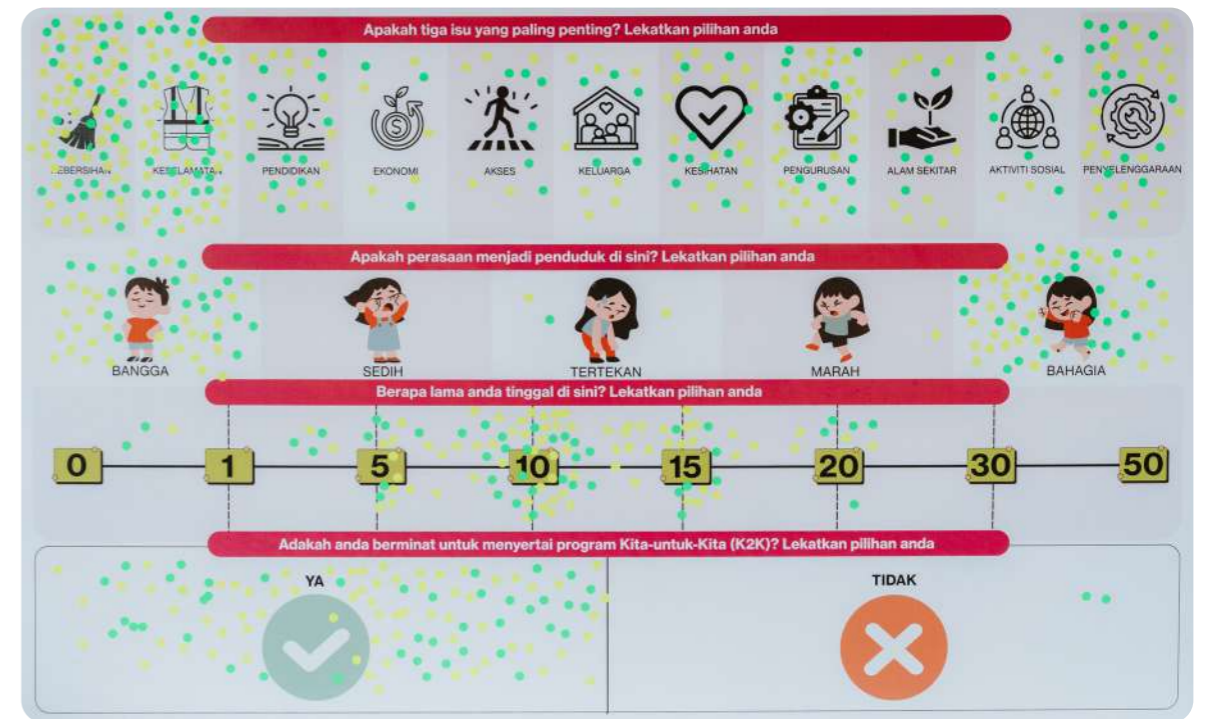


Image 1 Prioritisation activity (exhibition board) during the K2K open day. Residents engaged in a dot-voting exercise, marking issues they identified as most problematic and relating to the emotions they most identified with. This activity was conducted across all the 10 sites, and the image showcases one site, representing findings observed across other locations.

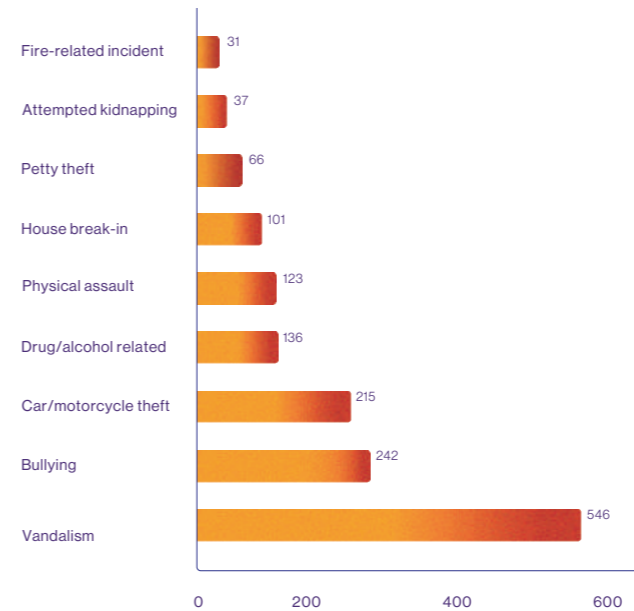


Figure 11 Crime incidents experienced by household members, between January 2023–November 2023



4 Communal Living Space



In public housing, each household has its own private living space while sharing common amenities and infrastructure.

Public housing by definition is communal living. While individual apartment units may be treated as private space, large aspects of the property represent shared spaces requiring shared responsibilities and civic-mindedness amongst residents. The proximity and shared facilities necessitate frequent interaction among residents. Hence, the intensity of social relations, how residents interact with space, and the sense of ownership over place have an impact upon the quality of life in public housing. In this section, we highlight the spatial dimension of public housing and how social dynamics and urban design are implicated in the production of liveability.

Living Space

4.1 In the dense public housing structure, individuals are often thrust together, presenting opportunities for positive encounters that nurture a sense of community, but also increasing the risk of friction and conflict. The close proximity of people from diverse backgrounds creates a dynamic environment where interactions can lead to meaningful connections and shared experiences, contributing to a sense of belonging and camaraderie. However, this same proximity can also amplify differences and tensions, potentially leading to conflicts arising from varying values, beliefs and lifestyles.

4.2 Common spaces and facilities within public housing complexes, such as lifts, corridors and walkways, serve as vital arteries that ensure the smooth functioning of residents' daily lives. These communal areas act as connectors of the community, akin to roads and pathways, facilitating movement, connectivity and interaction among residents. As indispensable components of the built environment, these spaces play a pivotal role in enhancing residents' quality of life and must be diligently maintained and cared for to sustain the vitality and functionality of the public housing ecosystem.

4.3 Common spaces, however, have become unsanitary and unhygienic spaces posing public health concerns. Think City conducted a qualitative assessment of common spaces as part of the KDS. In all the sample public housing sites, common spaces such as lift lobbies, corridors, courtyards,



Space constraints force residents to use the corridors for laundry.

recreation grounds, and play areas were observed to be degraded to different degrees by indiscriminate littering and waste disposal issues. Visually, they appeared unsightly, often with pervasive rodent infestations, marked by droppings and evidence of nesting, by the built-up of dirt, damp and grime, and by the deterioration of physical infrastructure arising from poor maintenance. It was not uncommon to encounter foul odour emanating from different spaces reflecting the variety of odoriferous sources and hygiene status within the complex structure.

4.4 In all the 10 public housing complexes, significant infrastructure damage could be detected, reflecting insufficient care and maintenance of physical infrastructure. From the qualitative assessment in PPR Lembah Subang 1,



The internal courtyard is designed to bring communities together in interaction. Yet heavy littering, poor waste disposal practices and the danger of projectiles thrown from upper floors have rendered this space unsafe for community use.

PPR/PA	Total blocks	Total lifts per block	Total lifts	Frequency of breakdown ³⁰
Desa Tun Razak	4	3	12	High
Hang Tuah	2	2	4	High
Kg Baru Hicom	3	3	9	Medium
Lembah Subang 1	8	3	24	High
Seri Cempaka	2	2	4	High
Seri Kota	6	2	12	High
Seri Sabah 3A	4	2	8	High
Seri Sarawak	3	2	6	Medium
Seri Selangor	6	2	12	High
Taman Mulia	2	2	4	High

Table 7 Number of lifts across all 10 public housing complexes, with an average of 17.4 floors per block at the time of writing

³⁰ Frequency of breakdown is defined as follows: high: at least once a month; medium: at least twice in six months; rare: once a year or more

for example, only eight out of 23 lifts were working, while in PA Seri Sarawak, only three out of six lifts were working (Table 7). During peak hours, it was a common sight to see large crowds of residents jostling to use the only lift that worked. Other infrastructure also showed clear signs of damage—only two out of 10 sites had well-maintained floor tiles, while others suffered from grime, dirt and broken tiles that posed injury risks; wall conditions were similarly concerning, with eight out of 10 sites having damaged walls with peeling paint, cracks, bio growth, exposed steel rebar and hazardous protrusions; lighting fixtures were inadequately maintained, with only three out of 10 sites having good lighting, and others plagued by vandalised and unreplaced fixtures. Residents complained that wayfinding was difficult, as most public housing lacked proper signage and maps, with some areas resorting to rough hand-painted block numbers. Drainage systems were often broken, leading to stagnant water and foul odours, with inconsistent repairs evident across different housing areas. Internal courtyards were generally unsafe, being used as dumping grounds, with exhibiting holes, cracks and rodent infestations. Only one study site in Selangor had a usable courtyard.

4.5 Over half (50.6%) of the quantitative survey respondents expressed that the state of public facilities had not improved, signalling a stagnation or deterioration in service provision.

Particularly alarming was the case of PPR Lembah Subang 1, where the situation was dire, with almost 30% of residents reporting that the quality of public facilities had not only stagnated but decreased. In the qualitative surveys, residents identified poor quality of maintenance and delayed response to address reported problems as the top two issues that needed to be addressed immediately.

“Our lifts break down all the time, and we would usually have to wait for months, if not years, to get them fixed, and sadly, they would usually break down again not too long after, and we have to wait again for another months or so,” a female resident explained about lift conditions and maintenance schedules at PPR Lembah Subang 1.

4.6 All the 10 public housing complexes assessed under K2K had poor accessibility for PWDs. The qualitative survey under KDS exercise found the issue was most severe in PA Seri Selangor and PA Seri Sabah 3A. This neglect compromised the functionality and safety of essential facilities, exacerbating accessibility challenges for PWDs. Universal design principles were lacking, and in some sites, interventions to solve certain issues had created additional hurdles for PWDs. For example, bumps in front of lifts to prevent water from entering and ruining the lifts during rain created barriers for persons on wheelchairs. Similarly, structures erected to prevent motorcycles from entering recreation areas also prevented PWDs from accessing these important sites.



The quality of public spaces are undermined by vandalism and other deviant behaviour.

4.7 Community spaces such as playgrounds and common facilities were underutilised, with 46.7% of respondents from the quantitative survey reporting they had never used the public facilities provided. More than 50% of the respondents had never used six out of the seven public facilities listed, particularly social spaces such as multipurpose courts, *wakaf/gazebo/pondok*, and playground. The reasons were

varied and arose from physical, social and health impediments. It was not uncommon to find motorcycles and other physical barriers blocking entrances and pathways to community spaces. Danger of projectiles thrown from above, poor lighting at night and groups exhibiting risky behaviour posed other impediments, while the built-up of rubbish, prevalence of rats and occurrence of human excreta became a public health concern.



Grey water pipe that leads to biogrowth



Obstacles for PWDs



Across the 10 sample sites, an average 46.7% of respondents reported that they had never used the public facilities provided.

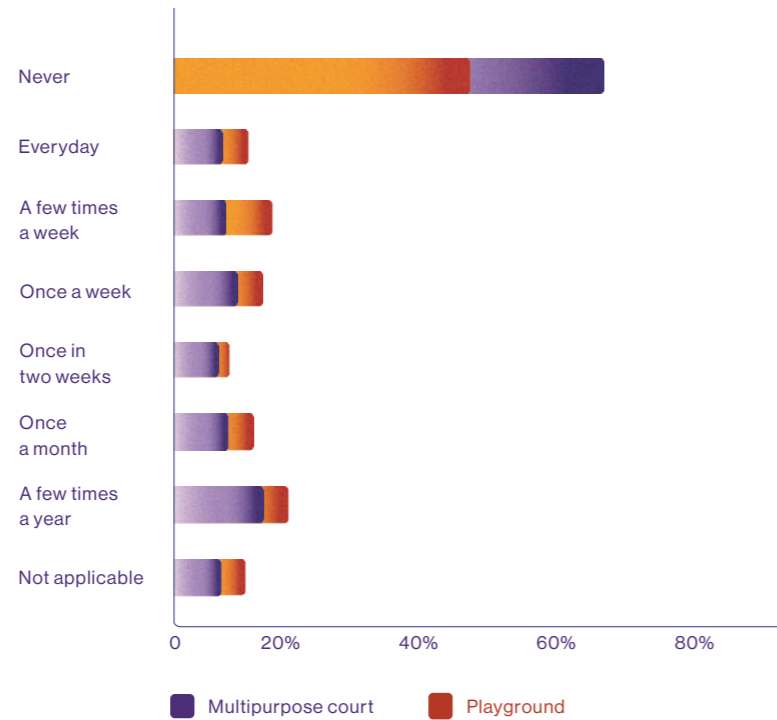


Figure 12 Frequency of using playgrounds and multipurpose courts

4.8 Common spaces within public housing complexes have become unsafe, with social spaces overlapping with areas of criminal activity, limiting residents' options for safe socialisation and network-building. The participatory mapping exercise with communities showed that criminal activities, such as drug use, drug distribution and trespassing, were rampant in these areas, making them unfit for community use. These unsafe

spaces included car parks, pocket playgrounds, courtyards and main entry points into the housing estates. "The police come here regularly, but they often catch the 'consumers' and not the *tokans* (pushers), so upon their release, these consumers will immediately return to consuming as supplies are easy to get," a male PA Seri Sarawak resident commented on drug distribution at his housing area. Illustration 2 below points to the unsafe spaces in one of the public housing complexes.

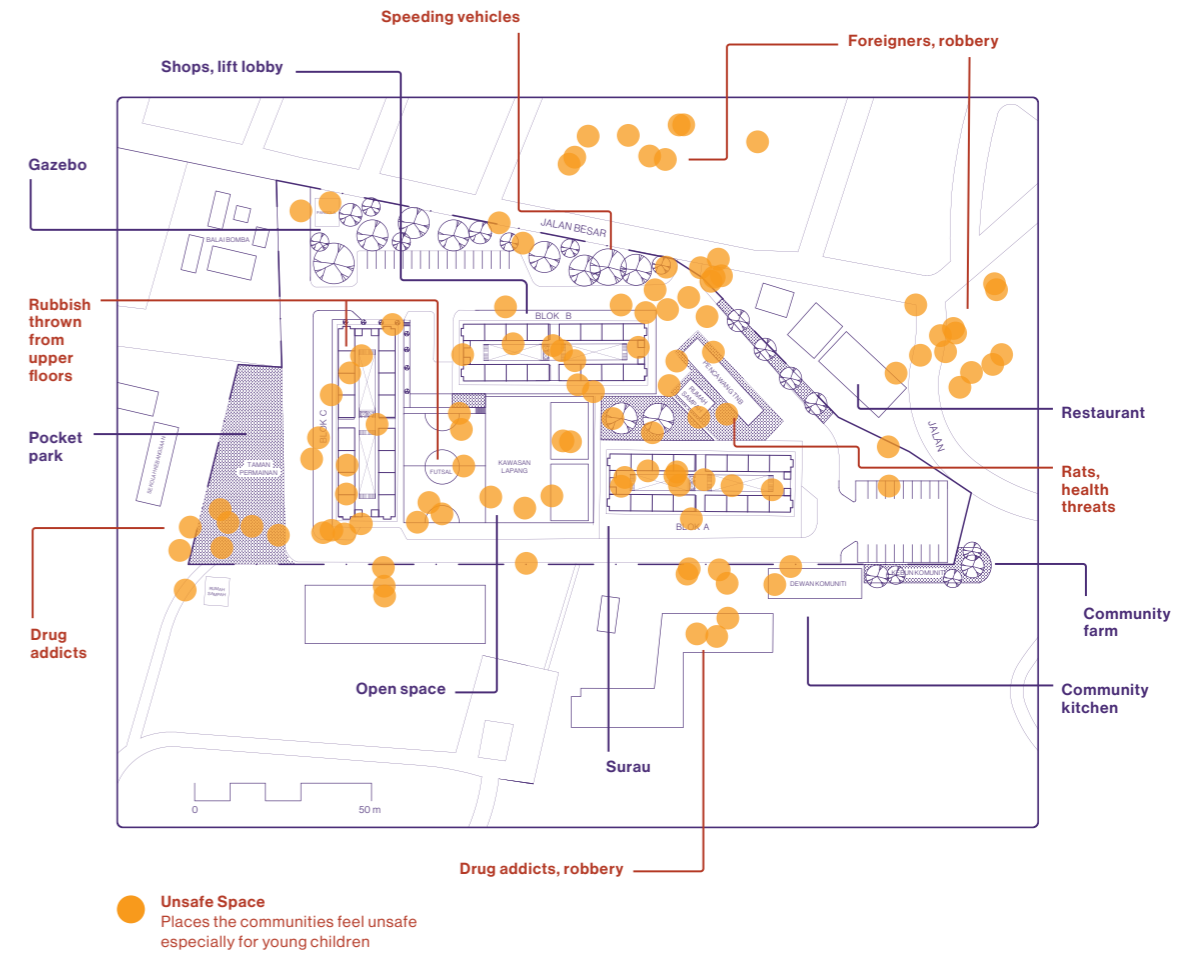


Illustration 1 An example of unsafe space identified by residents in a public housing complex

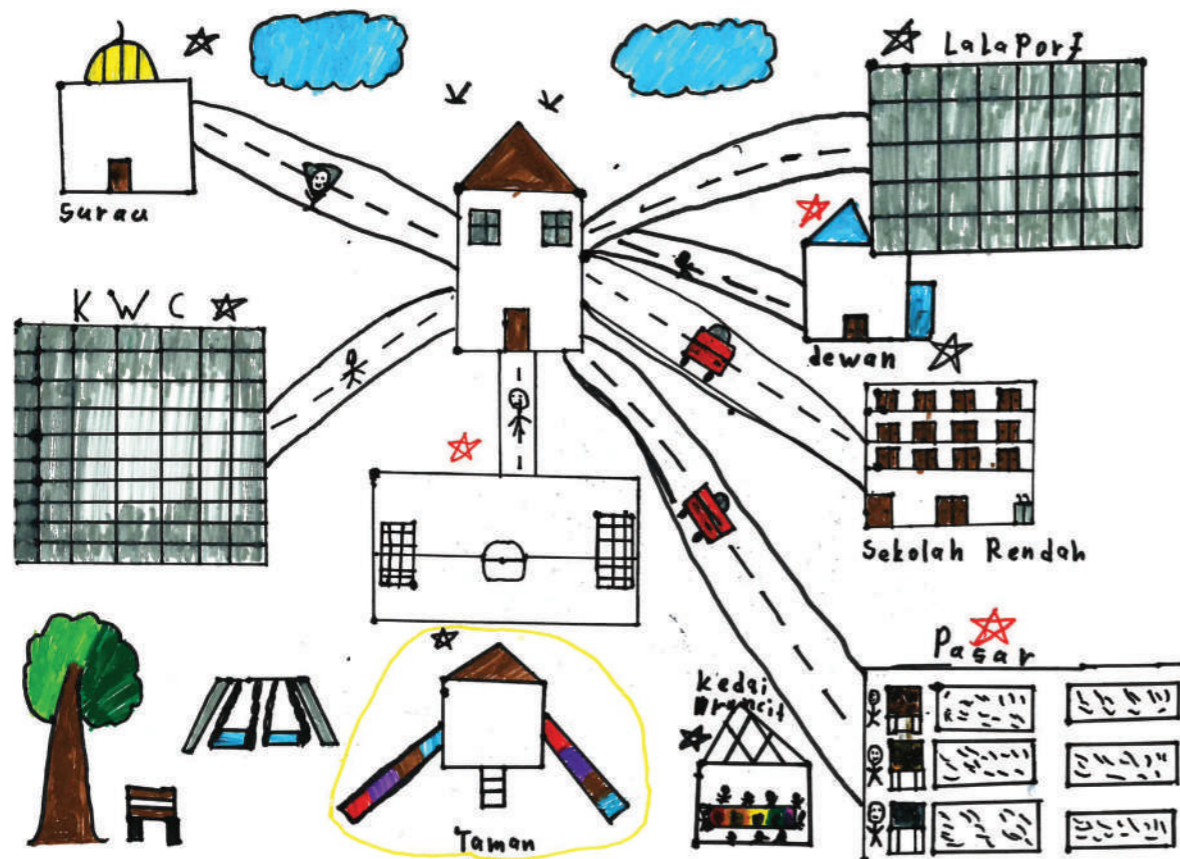


Image 2 These illustrations were created by young girls aged 7–11 during a pilot study on cognitive mapping conducted at one of the PPRs, where participants were asked to identify safe and unsafe spaces within their public housing areas. The participants marked the road in red because of heavy traffic, and identified a field, LaLaport shopping mall, a night market, and hawker stalls as unsafe spaces. Further exploration revealed that these common social spaces were predominantly occupied by male children, making female children and their parents feel unsafe. Interestingly, the girls identified the surau as a very safe meeting spot.

4.9 Community spaces can be exclusionary as girls avoid what is perceived to be unsafe geographies within the public housing complex. A Cognitive Mapping exercise with 7–11-year-old children revealed that girls perceived community spaces such as the playground, futsal court, neighbourhood market and neighbourhood mall as unsafe, and therefore were to be avoided. Parents were reported to discourage their young female children from “going downstairs” to these community spaces for fear of personal safety. The exclusion of girls from such spaces may impact on their physical well-being and constrain their ability to develop social skills and strengthen social capital. The same exercise undertaken with older teenage children found that boys in public housing had more friends than girls.



Playgrounds in general are neglected, and cavities pervade their concrete floors.

4.10 The absence of safe and inclusive spaces further restricts opportunities for peer interaction and the formation of supportive friendships among female adolescents. The lack of safe social spaces can heighten girls’ sense of vulnerability and fear of harassment or violence, undermining their confidence and sense of autonomy. This fear is not unjustified because of the safety issues described earlier in section 3.14. Without access to adequate social spaces, female adolescents may encounter barriers to self-expression, personal growth and meaningful participation in community life. Girls who are excluded from these environments may face challenges in developing critical life skills such as negotiation, conflict resolution and independence³¹.

³¹ Valentine, G. (1989). *The Geography of Women’s Fear*. Area, 21(4), 385–390

5 Problems

are Systemic

Deep Structure

- Gaps in policy and its implementation (left)
- Management of infrastructure (top left)
- Civic awareness of residence (top right)
- Education and skills building opportunities (right)
- Cost of living challenges (bottom right)
- Effectiveness of community leaders (bottom left)

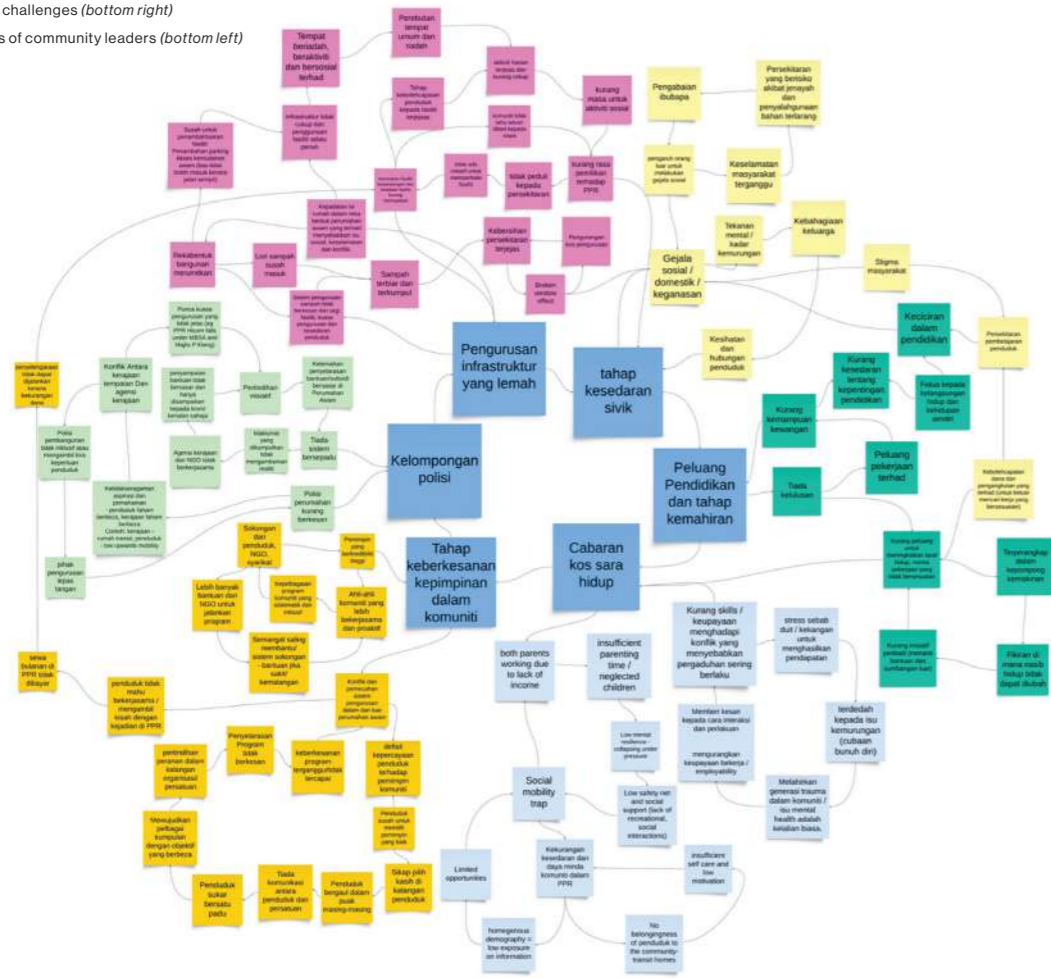


Illustration 3 Quality of life in public housing systems map



The issues faced by these communities are complex, multifaceted, interconnected, and systemic in the sense that each issue is related to and affects each other and the entire system. They stem from a combination of structural issues, management neglect, poor service delivery, unresolved conflicts, deviant behaviour and public apathy. These factors interact in complex ways, through negative feedback loops, to impact upon the ability of residents, communities

and authorities to address and resolve the spectrum of issues that contribute to the decline in the standard of living. Illustration 3 outlines the complex interlinking issues as identified in a systems mapping exercise with stakeholders from government agencies and non-governmental organisations. In this section, we describe this phenomenon through case studies of three behavioural issues in public housing—indiscriminate littering, illegal parking and deviant behaviour.



Signs of a solid waste collection system that has broken down

EXAMPLE 1

Indiscriminate littering impacts upon the health and development outcome of children in public housing.

The pervasive littering and poor waste management in many public housing sites do not only create a visual and odoriferous impact but, more seriously, impact upon the public health of the community. The overladen food items littered across the complex become an attraction for rats and other vermin. As the rat infestation increases in intensity, their excreta eventually enters the biological system of human residents. A Universiti Malaya study in 2019 found that 12.6% of residents living in public housing had been exposed to the leptospirosis pathogen. In a separate study by the same team in 2020, children living in public housing were found to exhibit a higher prevalence of IPI compared to children outside of public housing. Furthermore, the IPI incidence, at 22.5%, exceeds international safety standards, demanding public health intervention by the authorities. Public health issues such as these may play a role in the phenomenon of stunting and afflicting public housing children. Studies have shown how stunting can impact negatively on a child's educational and other development outcomes³². Unstructured interviews with female residents point to a perception that young children in public housing have poor essential learning skills—reading, writing, and counting— and that a notable number of older children are dropping out of school.

³² Unicef and UNFPA. (2021). *Families on the Edge report series*. Putrajaya: United Nations Children's Fund, Malaysia and the United Nations Population Fund. <https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/families-edge>

³³ CILISOS.my. (2018). "A Boy was Killed by a Falling Office Chair, but Smaller Sampah are just as Deadly. Here's Why." CILISOS! <https://cilisos.my/could-the-tragic-falling-chair-accident-be-avoided-if-it-was-something-smaller-we-ask-science/>

5.1 CASE STUDY 1: Indiscriminate littering produces

negative development outcomes.

The term "littering" fails to convey the enormity of the issue affecting public housing residents. The word carries the connotation of a minor infraction or misdemeanour. The scale of the problem, however, and the complexity of its impact, warrants a more serious treatment. This is illustrated in the following three examples where littering has resulted in the production of negative development outcomes.

Issues in the PPR are complex and interconnected.

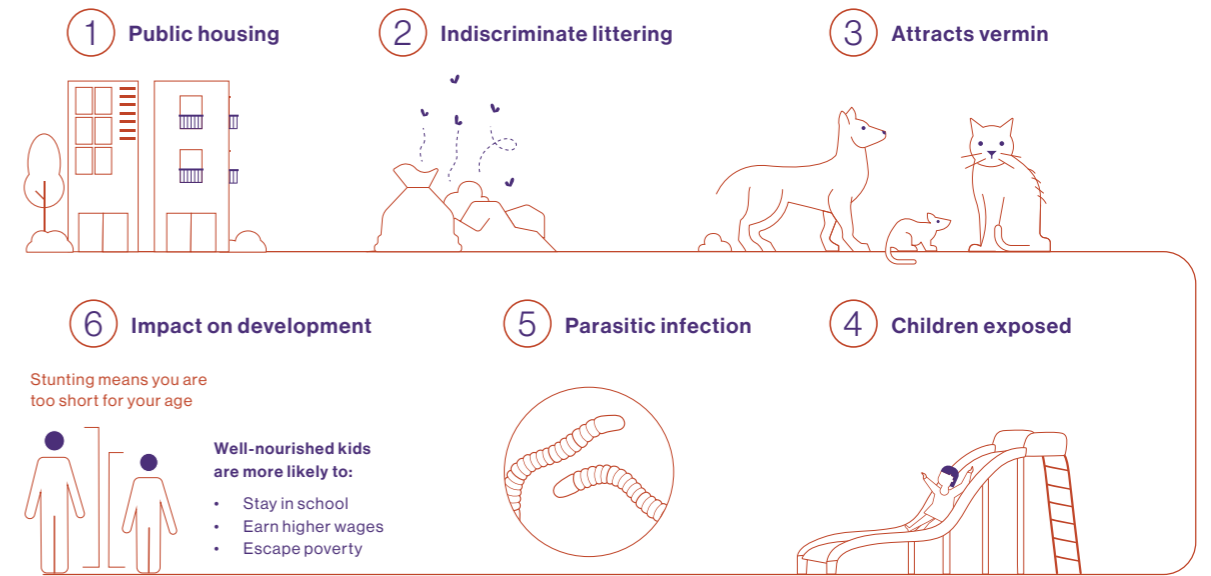


Illustration 4
Multidimensional impact of littering and poor waste management on health, safety and social spaces

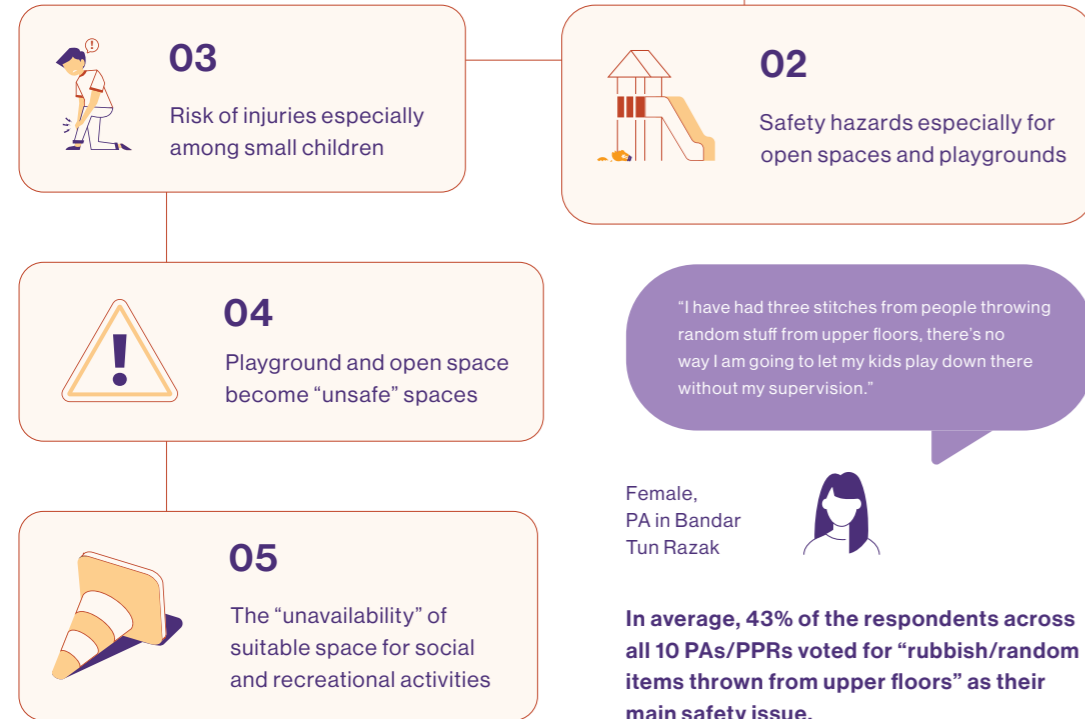
EXAMPLE 2

High-rise littering endangers lives.

A particular typology of littering involves the throwing or dropping of objects from a high level such as a balcony or window in the public housing. The objects may range from something innocuous as tissue paper or snack wrappers, to dangerous items like glass bottles, flowerpots or bricks. The issue is so pervasive that in all the sample public housing sites, there exist no-go zones that are avoided by residents for fear of falling projectiles. Paradoxically, this local knowledge allows residents to identify strangers who wander innocently into these danger zones. Cases of residents injured by falling objects are commonly reported, while deaths due to high-rise littering have been known to occur³³. These incidents also happen during social events at so-called safe spaces such as side benches and multipurpose courts. In addition, falling objects also damage vehicles parked on the ground floor and is a constant source of anger and frustration. The inability to identify or sanction perpetrators has been a source of latent conflict in the community.

Unsafe Social Spaces

Illustration 5 Interlinked spatial issues influencing social outcomes



EXAMPLE 3

Littering impairs access to community spaces.

Littering impacts on community spaces by making them unhygienic, unsafe and offensive to the senses. As a result, it creates spaces of exclusion within the public housing complex (Illustration 5). The courtyard, for instance, designed to be a space of social convergence for surrounding blocks, has become uncondusive for residents to socialise with each other because of the presence of accumulated waste, attracting more pests than people. Other common spaces such as corridors and walkways, vital arteries for a healthy social life, are also impacted by irresponsible littering.

³⁴ Asadullah, M. N., Biradavolu, M., Rao, V., & Simler, K. (2024). *Is there an Underside to Economic Growth? A Mixed-Methods Analysis of Malaysia*. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-10968>

³⁵ Free Malaysia Today. (2024). *6 units of low-cost flats in Cheras catch fire*. Free Malaysia Today. <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2024/02/12/6-units-of-low-cost-flats-in-cheras-catch-fire/>

5.2 CASE STUDY 2: Contestation over car parking space produces negative development outcomes. In the past, cars were regarded as a luxury and their utilisation, therefore, was not adequately accounted for in older public housing projects. Planners then made provisions for one carpark bay for every four apartment units. Today, however, cars have become a necessity for the working class ³⁴ and many public housing sites have become overwhelmed by the competition for car parking space. All the 10 sample public housing sites faced this issue, with cars double- or triple-parking along the roadsides and colonising open spaces. This phenomenon has grown over the decades as car ownership increases dramatically and is highly disruptive to the effective functioning of public housing. Below are two examples where unmanaged parking has produced negative development outcomes.



Abandoned vehicles occupy valuable parking spaces and exacerbate traffic congestion within the complex. This obstruction impedes emergency services like fire trucks and ambulances, while also hindering essential operations such as waste collection.

EXAMPLE 1

The narrowing of internal road arteries due to double-parking creates a fire-rescue hazard as fire-engines struggle to navigate choke points that impede access to critical zones. In a recent incident in Bandar Tun Razak, a fire broke out in one apartment on the top-most floor ³⁵. The fire truck arrived at the scene in less than 15 minutes, but it could not immediately attack the fire. This was because the truck needed to deploy its hydraulic stabiliser to extend its aerial ladder up towards the 17th floor. But as double-parked cars narrowed the road, there was inadequate space available for the hydraulic footing to be secured. As a result, the firefighters had to climb 17 flights of stairs by foot to fight the fire. The loss of time resulted in the fire spreading to six apartments before it was finally put out.



Garbage trucks face difficulty navigating roads congested by indiscriminately parked vehicles, impacting on their capacity to efficiently remove daily rubbish production.

EXAMPLE 2

To address the parking space shortage, public funds were invested to construct multistorey car parks. In the sample public housing sites in Bandar Tun Razak, existing community spaces were appropriated to build this new structure. The new structure promised to compensate for this loss by providing spaces for sports and recreation, children's playground and social gatherings on the top floor of the multistorey car park. However, the expected outcomes have not materialised. More than half the parking capacity have not been utilised and indiscriminate car parking on the streets continues to become a problem. Further, the unutilised spaces in the multistorey car park have been identified in the qualitative survey under KDS as unsafe spaces, due to risky behaviour and illegal activities taking place in the shadows.

As shared by a resident in one of the PPRs in Bandar Tun Razak, "We organised at least 50 community events, including sports day and PPR-wide festivals per year before the construction of the multistorey car park, and now, due to the lack of space, we are down to 0." The compensatory community spaces too, have been underutilised because of a failure to understand social dynamics. For instance, the spontaneity of play for children cannot be replaced by spaces that require advanced bookings and payments. These multistorey car parks offer a good example of public investments that have produced their planned development outputs but have created unintended negative development outcomes. Image 3 depicts an example of the appropriation of public space by the multistorey car park in PPR Desa Tun Razak. In the old photo (before), the green social space can be clearly seen surrounded by the residential blocks and functions as the focal point for social interaction. In the new photo (after), the main public space has disappeared, displaced by the multistorey car park building, yet one can still see cars double-parked on the streets.



Image 3 Before-and-after photos of multistorey car park at PPR Desa Tun Razak

5.3 CASE STUDY 3: Deviant behaviour impacts on development outcomes. A priority issue identified in the diagnostics was the decline of safety resulting from deviant behaviour by residents. This may range from vandalism of property such as spraying of graffiti, gouging of lift buttons and breaking of corridor lights, to gangsterism and petty theft, and more serious activities such as drug distribution, major theft and kidnapping. Deviance can also refer to negative behaviour such as the indiscriminate parking of motorcycles that blocks pathways and entranceways. There are large numbers of motorcycles in public housing as a significant percentage of the population participate in the gig economy as delivery riders. The disorderly parking behaviour creates obstacles to access and is felt disproportionately by weaker members of the community such as pregnant women, PWDs and the elderly.



Letter boxes left broken and vandalised are indicators of a management system that has broken down.

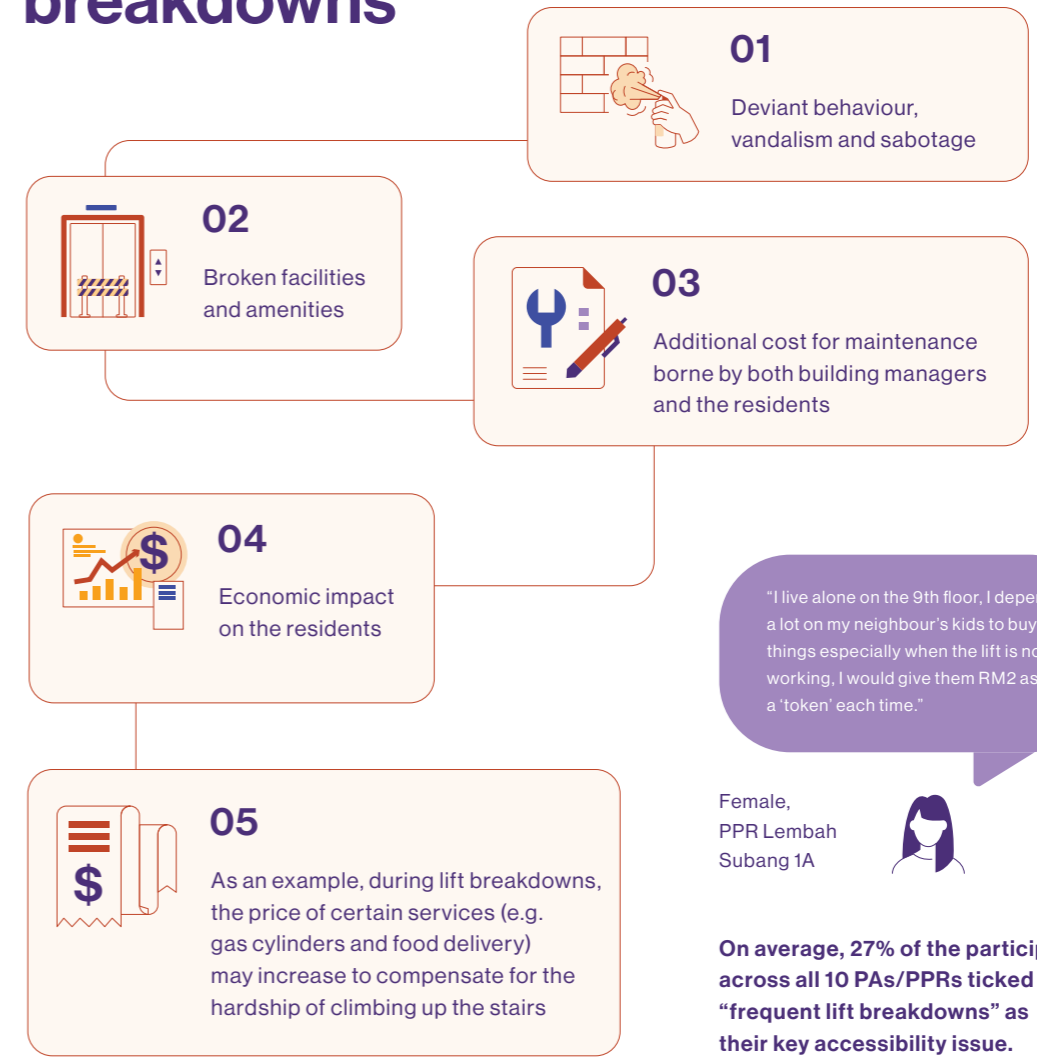


Overflowing rubbish around the garbage disposal room is a common view from the apartment windows.

In one case, a resident was observed pushing his motorcycle into the lift to park at the floor of his lift lobby. Such activity contributes to the frequent damage of the public housing lift system, which consequently impacts upon the mobility of residents, especially the weak, to carry out their daily activities, including the disposal of rubbish. When the offender was questioned about his infraction, he replied that he had no choice as leaving his motorcycle downstairs might result in the theft of his vehicle, or parts of his motorcycle, or the more frequent occurrence of petrol theft, all scenarios of which would negatively impact upon his livelihood and financial situation.

The breakdown of facilities such as the lift ultimately extracts an economic impact upon the residents (Illustration 6). Our observation shows that residents pay a premium to obtain certain goods because of the frequent breakdowns of lifts. In Bandar Tun Razak, for instance, residents reported that gas cylinder cost rises from RM28 to RM50 every time the lifts stop working. Residents also report paying higher costs for bottled water and other services like food and grocery delivery due to the frequent lift breakdowns. The descriptions above demonstrate how certain negative behaviours are embedded within the context of multiple other failures arising from the misgovernance of the public housing complex.

Recurring lift breakdowns



"I live alone on the 9th floor, I depend a lot on my neighbour's kids to buy me things especially when the lift is not working, I would give them RM2 as a 'token' each time."

Female, PPR Lembah Subang 1A

On average, 27% of the participants across all 10 PAs/PPRs ticked "frequent lift breakdowns" as their key accessibility issue.

Illustration 6 Deviant behaviour impacts on developmental outcomes

6 Management Challenges



Inadequate maintenance causes infrastructure decay and systemic failures in essential services like drainage and plumbing. These conditions foster fungal proliferation and mosquito breeding grounds, escalating public health hazards.



A community space meant for children to play has been used as a personal drying area and storage.

Management encompasses multiple elements, including the administration of resources, maintaining property conditions, addressing tenant concerns, and fostering community engagement. It involves a balance of strategic planning, policy implementation and day-to-day operations to meet the diverse needs of residents, while also adhering to legal and regulatory frameworks. The ability to address both structural maintenance and community empowerment issues, hence, is an important requirement for creating sustainable, resilient communities in our public housing complexes.

In the study area, the public housing complexes are managed by different entities. Eight of these are located in Kuala Lumpur and are managed by the Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL). The remaining two are located in Selangor, where one site (PPR Kg Baru Hicom) is managed by the state government through the Lembaga Perumahan dan Hartanah Selangor (LPHS), and the other site (PPR Lembah Subang 1) is by the federal government, through the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (KPKT). While these three different government agencies employ distinct managerial approaches, most of the issues and challenges relating to physical infrastructure and social development appear consistent despite the different management entities. In the sections that follow, we describe the multiple dimensions of management and identify the key issues impacting upon the efficacy of the overall management system.

6.1 Unlike private condominiums, the management of public housing suffers from poor accountability relationships that negatively impact upon its effectiveness. Centralised decision-making by government agencies impairs the ability of the management to be responsive and address site-specific issues. In contrast, private strata residences, such as condominiums, are managed by their individual management corporations (MCs), with flexibility to identify tailor-made strategies based on residents' needs. They also experience higher quality community engagement and communication as residents participate in key decisions regarding rules and expenditure.

6.2 Poor community participation creates significant communication gaps between managers of the public housing complex and residents. In the quantitative survey from KDS, an average of 28.9% respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their respective managements' unwillingness to take complaints. In one site, the dissatisfaction was expressed by as high as 39.5% of the respondents. Further, in our qualitative survey from the KDS, about 51% of respondents reported difficulty in accessing the managers of their public housing complexes. Reasons for this obstacle included a lack of clarity regarding whom to contact, a shortage of on-site staff and frequent changes in management personnel.

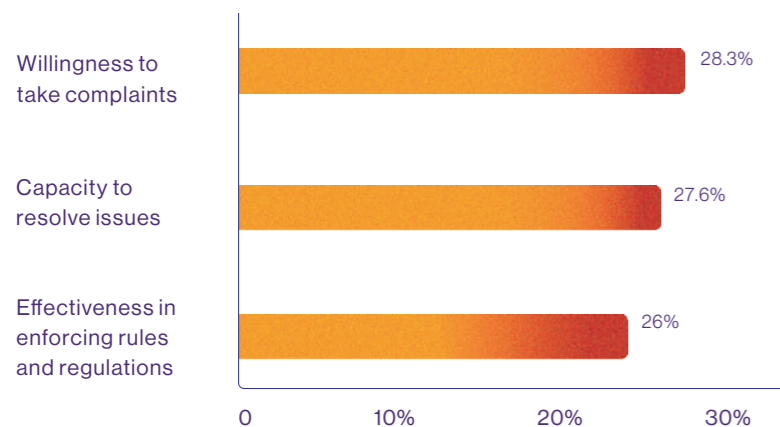


Figure 13 Average dissatisfaction on management effectiveness

6.3 Against this disconnect, the quantitative survey from KDS found that more than one fourth of the respondents expressed negative sentiments about management effectiveness. To a question about management's capacity to resolve issues, an average of 27.6% reported they were dissatisfied (Figure 13). In one site, the level of dissatisfaction was as high as 37.5%. Similarly, an average of 26% reported being dissatisfied with management's effectiveness in enforcing rules and regulations, with one site reporting a 40.3% dissatisfaction rate.

6.4 Ineffective management practices within public housing complexes lead to subpar maintenance upkeep, as evidenced by resident feedback. The qualitative survey under KDS found that 32% of residents noted their respective managements' sluggish response to complaints, indicating delays in addressing issues once reported. Furthermore, a significant portion, 23%, expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of maintenance and upkeep, suggesting that existing efforts fell short of meeting residents' expectations. For example, in one site, only about one third of the lifts had been operational for more than five years³⁶. In 2023, this site was allocated a budget from the federal government to address the lift repair and upgrade issue³⁷. However, recent feedback from residents indicated no improvement to the lift service performance.

6.5 Governance deficits are a major source of resident dissatisfaction in public housing, with nearly a third (28%) expressing discontent with how their communities are managed. The qualitative survey under KDS revealed that 50% perceived a lack of coordination within the top administration, unclear management directives and insufficient funding allocation (Figure 14). Furthermore, 14% of residents surveyed felt excluded from decision-making, indicating a sense of disconnection and disenfranchisement within the governance structure.

"We have a lot of ideas on how to best improve our PPR, but there is no proper channel for us to share these ideas apart from having to go through our dysfunctional Persatuan Penduduk."
—Female resident in a Bandar Tun Razak PPR

This finding highlights a desire among residents to be informed and involved in making management decisions.

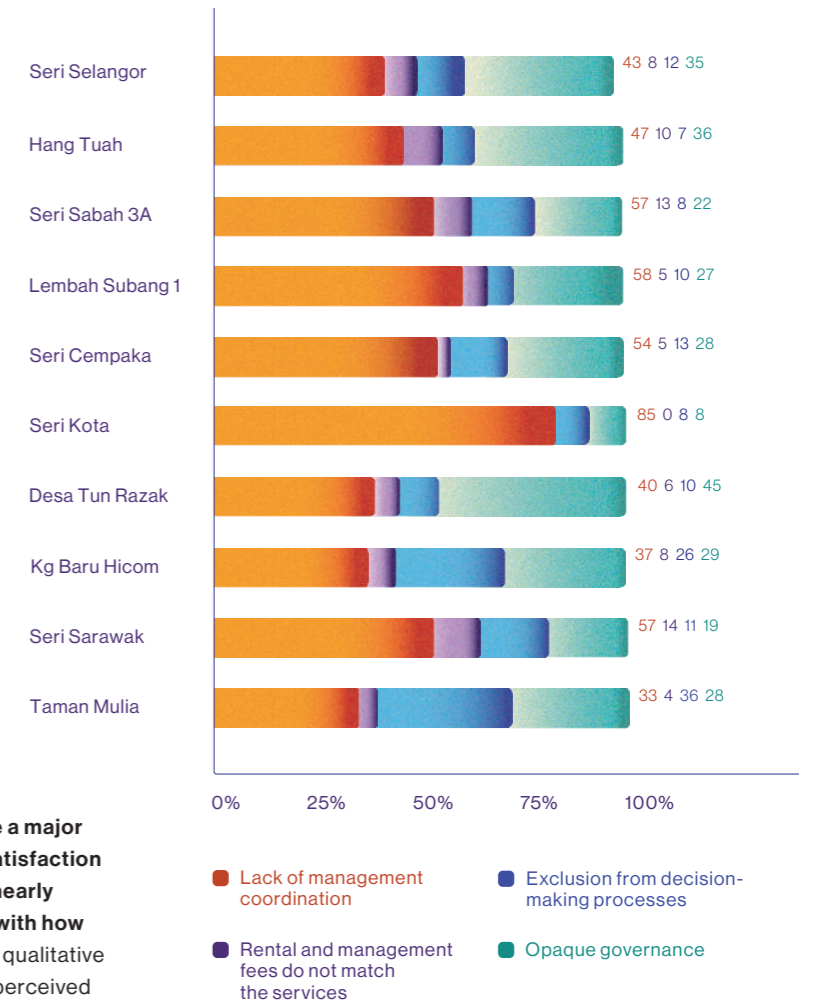
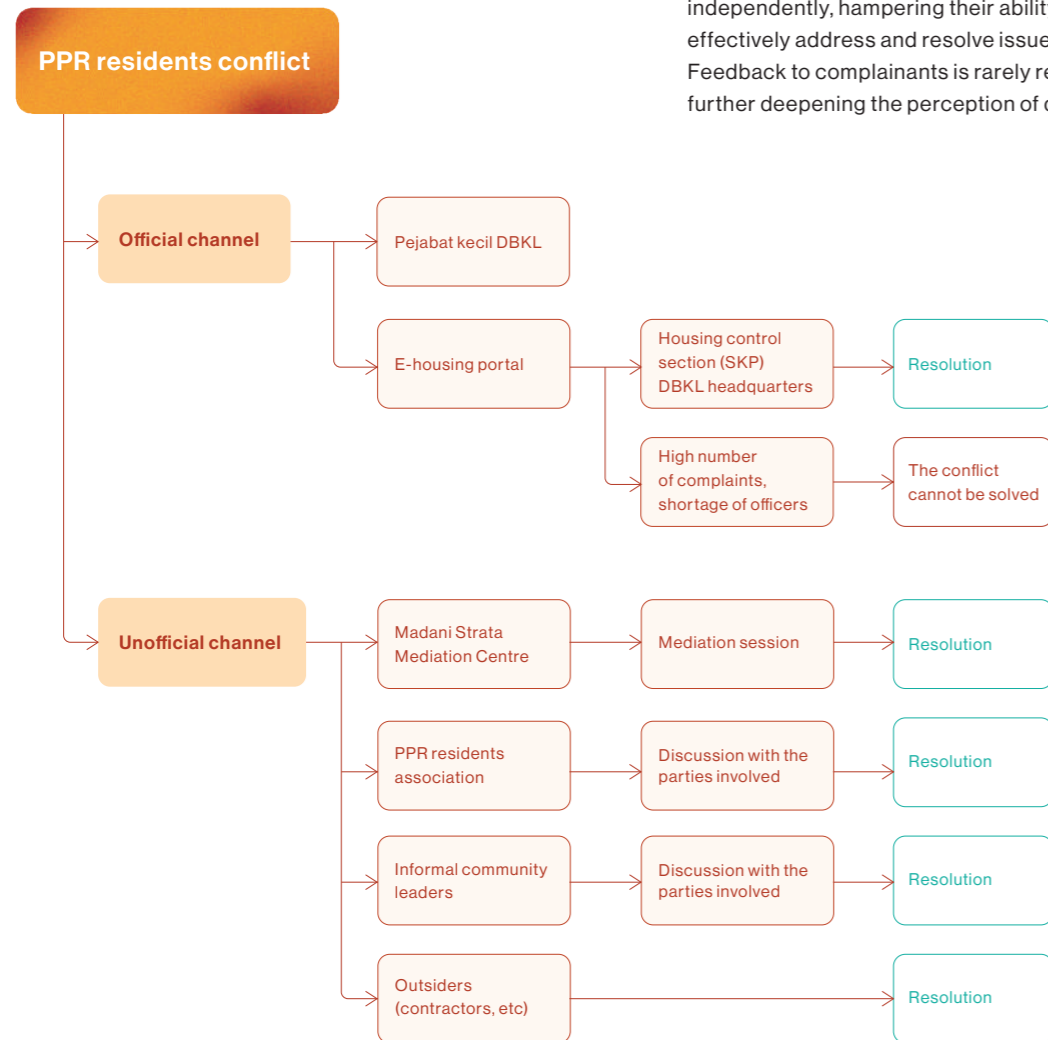


Figure 14 Management issues identified during qualitative survey under KDS

³⁶ Malaysiakini. (2017). *Lif rosak di PPR – Masalah lama tiada penghujung*. Malaysiakini. <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/390474>
³⁷ New Straits Times. (2023). *RM18 million for repair and maintenance of Lembah Subang housing project*. New Straits Times. <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/06/923615/rm18-million-repair-maintenance-lembah-subang-housing-project>

6.6 Findings from the ethnographic study found that residents were disillusioned with the complaint filing system. Complaints lodged by residents within public housing managements often encounter excessive bureaucracy, leading to prolonged resolution times and exacerbating resident dissatisfaction. Issues frequently fail to be addressed on site, further compounding frustrations among residents. Moreover, ground staff lack the authority to make decisions independently, hampering their ability to effectively address and resolve issues promptly. Feedback to complainants is rarely received, further deepening the perception of dysfunction.

Figure 15 Conflict management chart (formal and informal channels) as shared by residents



38 The Edge Malaysia. (2024). *DBKL blames low rents for poor state of low-cost flats*. The Edge Malaysia. <https://theedgemalaysia.com/node/720878>

Public housing complex	Property owner	Management	Management
PA Seri Selangor	DBKL	DBKL	DBKL
PA Seri Sarawak	DBKL	DBKL	DBKL
PA Hang Tuah	DBKL	Inactive JMB	Continued reliance on DBKL
PPR Seri Cempaka	DBKL	Inactive JMB	
PA Seri Kota	DBKL	Inactive JMB	
PPR Taman Mulia	DBKL	Inactive JMB	
PA Seri Sabah 3A	DBKL	Inactive MC	
PPR Desa Tun Razak	DBKL	Inactive JMB	
PPR Lembah Subang 1	KPKT	Nuzi Global Sdn Bhd	Dependent on Jabatan Perumahan Negara, KPKT
PPR Kg Baru Hicom	Lembaga Perumahan & Hartanah Selangor	Perumahan & Hartanah Selangor Sdn Bhd	

Table 8 List of joint management bodies (JMBs)/management corporations (MCs) and their effectiveness

6.7 Public housing with mixed tenure status undermines management effectiveness. Policy inconsistency driven by political expediency has resulted in some public housing complexes having both rental and privately-owned units. In six out of 10 sites of this study where this mixed tenure exists, a joint management body (JMB) had been formed to manage the complex in accordance with the Strata Management Act 2013. These JMBs are now being converted into MCs where residents are expected to be fully involved in the management of the complex. However, only private apartment owners are allowed to join the MC and vote on issues and representation. This leaves the tenants in rental units without a voice and feeling disenfranchised, and this has become a source of conflict within the community. These MCs further suffer from insufficient funding, inadequate resources, exceptionally low capacity and are ineffective in providing the requisite management services, thus rendering their existence almost purposeless. Consequently, the government agency (in this case, DBKL) is still expected to provide the much-needed management services, creating confusion and ambiguity in accountability.

6.8 Not only do the residents feel frustrated, but the managers of public housing also feel disempowered. Discussions with public housing managers revealed a group of officials who felt constrained by a sub-optimal operating environment. Officials faced complex challenges that arise from a combination of financing impediments, enforcement obstacles and jurisdictional conflicts. Policy inconsistencies and cumbersome implementation processes undermined existing development initiatives and enforcement efforts.

6.9 Managers operate with significant financial and resource constraints. The public housing complexes have been operating with inadequate budgets for an exceptionally long time. For DBKL sites, for example, the official monthly rent of RM124 per unit since 1998 has been insufficient to cover the cost of basic maintenance, which is estimated at RM250. This monthly cost goes up to RM300 when major repairs such as broken lifts and burst pipes are factored in³⁸. Residents have also blamed the inadequacy of on-site human resources and ineffectiveness of managers for the poor response time.

As a result of budget limitations, services that are procured are of sub-optimal scope and specification. In one example, the monthly cost of cleaning, security and basic maintenance service of the public housing is estimated at RM0.04 per square foot. In contrast, a nearby private apartment pays a service fee that is six times higher at RM0.23 per square foot. Such resource constraints impede the ability of public housing managements to provide timely and quality interventions to address infrastructure upkeep and maintenance issues.

6.10 The financial model for public housing operation and maintenance is unsustainable.

Officials have raised concerns that the financial model for ensuring adequate resources is outdated and deficient. For DBKL, the monthly rental of RM124 has not increased since the inception of the PPR scheme for more than 20 years. For comparison, if rent had kept pace with inflation rate, it would be RM312.15 today. Consequently, the gap between income and expenditure has expanded and grown uncontrollably. For example, in 2020, DBKL's rental collection was RM21.7 million, while it spent more than seven times or RM164.08 million on the management cost of public housing. In addition, RM49.37 million was spent on maintenance, upgrading and renovation of buildings in the same year³⁹. Such resource gaps undermine the financial model that is predicated on a self-sustaining flow of funds and instead, requires a constant injection of public funds to keep the operations afloat.

6.11 Political interference has been one factor impeding management effectiveness.

Officials also point to the interference of actors with political influence undermining the effective operation and upkeep of public housing³⁹. Because of its high population density, politicians have viewed public housing as an important source of voters. Hence, they are inclined to position themselves as the "protectors" of residents and assert their

influence over decision-making. Officials have shared many examples when their attempts at enforcement have been thwarted by such political encroachments.

6.12 More seriously, political interference has become an obstacle for the effective

collection of rent. For example, DBKL reported that arrears in rental collection had reached an estimated RM60 million as at July 2024³⁹. To further illustrate how this issue is prevalent outside the K2K study area, the Seremban Municipal Council reported rental arrears of RM2.03 million as at January 2024^{40,41} from two public housing schemes under its purview, while KPKT reported accumulated rental arrears of RM12 million from two of its public housing sites as at April 2024. The failure to systematically collect rent not only negatively impacts upon the financial sustainability of public housing, but undermines the trust relationship between residents and management, breeding resentment to an already stressed community.

6.13 High rental collection rates do not necessarily result in improved liveability outcomes.

In nine out of the 10 sites in this study, the rental collection rates had been sub-optimal at below 70%. Of these, the site with the lowest collection was below 50% of the eligible households. However, one site stood out for its high rental collection rate at 95%. It was also the site with the highest percentage of households reporting that they adhered to management instructions (82.2%), and they were afraid of management (13.4%). These figures were significantly higher than the average across all the other nine sites, which recorded 52.0% and 3.4%, respectively. This data suggests that management with high enforcement capabilities could yield high rental collection rates.



A solid waste disposal facility suffering from acute neglect.

However, it is important to note that despite its impressive collection performance, the liveability outcomes of this site were poor and were not much different from the other nine sites in this study. For example, 75.9% of households here reported that stress levels had worsened or not improved since the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, compared to the overall study's average of 73.27%. Similarly, 64.7% of households here reported that their quality of life had declined or not improved since the end of the Covid-19 pandemic.

³⁹ The Edge (2024). *DBKL blames low rents for poor state of low-cost flats.* The Edge. <https://theedgemaalaysia.com/node/720878>

⁴⁰ Mohd Reda, N. (2024). *PPR's high rent arrears, no thanks to errant defaulters.* Bernama. <https://bernama.com/en/news.php?id=2271745>

⁴¹ Mohd Reda, N. (2024). *PPR rent defaulters stifling social development.* Bernama. <https://www.bernama.com/en/bfokus/news.php?current&id=2289326>

7 Social Dynamics

The heterogeneity of public housing communities, marked by diverse ethnicities, ages, income levels and family structures, significantly influence social cohesion. While diversity can enrich the community through shared experiences and mutual support, it can also create social divisions. Differences in cultural practices, language barriers and varying needs can lead to misunderstandings or competition for limited resources, weakening communal ties. However, strong social cohesion can emerge when residents build inclusive networks, support one another and engage in collective action to address common challenges. The balance between diversity and unity within these communities is crucial in shaping the liveability outcomes of their homes and dwellings.

7.1 At the surface level, public housing communities project a sense of social cohesion and common identity.

A majority of respondents in the quantitative survey from KDS (56%) reported having more than 20 friends within the community, indicating strong social networks. Additionally, trust among residents appeared to be high, with 82% of participants in the quantitative survey expressing trust in their neighbours.

7.2 However, extended engagement and ethnographic findings reveal a community with weak social cohesion and poor trust relationships.

Across all 10 sites, public housing residents display low trust relationships that act as a barrier to collective action. In all sites, the perpetrators of indiscriminate littering are known to the community, but they are unable to organise a collective response. Similarly, it is common to hear respondents lament about their reluctance to sanction deviant behaviour by children because of fear of retaliation by their parents. Social capital tends to exist within particular narrow networks based on family or historical relationships. Respondents often refer to the existence of cliques as an indication of community fragmentation. Terms such as *puak-puak* (tribes) and *kroni* (cronies) are commonly used in the qualitative surveys to describe the existence of such cliques.

7.3 The public housing communities are not homogenous and have diverse backgrounds and settlement histories. This diversity plays a role in shaping different group identities. It also brings with it a range of socio-political views and affiliations, with political patronage playing a role in influencing local interactions and alliances. These differences in political beliefs and loyalties can contribute to tensions and inter-group conflict, as various factions hold distinct ideologies and approaches to improving their living conditions. The historic ties and political affiliations, however, seem to have diminished with the younger generation of residents, whose identities are shaped more directly by their lived experience, geographical and urban contexts.

7.4 Social cohesion is also weakened by competition amongst community-based organisations (CBOs) in the public housing for state resources. In many sites, there exists a history of antagonism between key

CBOs such as the residents' association (RA) or *persatuan penduduk*, Neighbourhood Watch (KRT) or *Kawasan Rukun Tetangga*, surau committee and other organisations. These entities are often led by charismatic individuals and organised along social networks with strong family and historical relationships. They also tend to be affiliated externally to various politically-inclined groups and government agencies. Interestingly, belonging to the same political party has also created intragroup competition, which at times lead to cliques that negatively compete with one another. As these CBOs are seen to capture state resources and distribute them exclusively along their individual social networks, it becomes a source of resentment for the rest of the community who are excluded from these benefits. These rivalries contribute to an unhealthy environment where community initiatives are unsupported, undermined or sabotaged. Occasionally, the tensions break out into direct conflicts, with instances of assault and criminal injury requiring police intervention.



Public housing communities are marked by diverse ethnicities and ages.



The voices of community captured during an open day.

7.5 Public housing complexes are sites of daily conflicts. The oppressive living condition of public housing creates an environment for conflicts to occur regularly. Generally, the issues take place in four different geographies of public housing as follows:

- a. Within the private space of individual apartments, where family disputes, including domestic abuse, may take place
- b. In shared spaces like corridors, lift lobbies and stairwells, where poor neighbourly conducts, such as noisy and boorish behaviour, indiscriminate waste disposal (including human excreta, cat waste and droppings) and the obstruction of corridors with furniture or vehicle storage, become everyday sources of discord
- c. Within the grounds where the playground, recreation and parking spaces and meeting rooms are located, and where friction of a physical, social or traffic nature occurs

7.6 The absence of mechanisms for conflict resolution exacerbates tensions, especially concerning matters outside of the management's immediate purview. Feedback from respondents in the quantitative survey from KDS suggests that the existing system for managing conflict is ineffective and therefore, is underutilised by the community. The absence of effective problem-solving mechanisms fosters an environment of resentment that can persist for extended periods, further undermining trust among residents and community stakeholders. In many of the case studies, the history of antagonism can be traced back to unresolved conflicts that began many years ago.

7.7 The consequences of these conflicts extend beyond mere disagreements, often manifesting in strained relationships and a breakdown in community cohesion. Residents may feel marginalised and unheard, leading to a sense of frustration and alienation within the community. Moreover, the absence of trust and effective communication channels exacerbates social divisions, making it difficult for residents to collaborate on collective issues and work towards shared solutions.

7.8 Without neutral grounds for communities to come together and address their concerns, disputes remain unresolved, perpetuating a cycle of discord and hindering efforts to foster cohesion and cooperation within public housing complexes. The lack of mechanisms for open dialogue and constructive engagement allows tensions to persist, creating an atmosphere of hostility and resentment that stifles the potential for positive social interaction and collaboration within public housing communities.

- d. In areas deemed to be unsafe, especially at night, such as corridors, recreation spaces and motorcycle parking spaces that are dimly lit, particular stairwells where illegal transactions take place, inside lifts late at night and the upper floors of underutilised multistorey car parks.

7.9 The conflict among different social groups in public housing complexes and their impact on social cohesion can be illustrated through the case studies below:

Case 1

In public housing communities, the formation of cliques, ideological differences and competition for resources have led to intense group fighting between CBOs, particularly the RAs and KRTs. In one example from Bandar Tun Razak, animosity between the RA and KRT has persisted for many years, stemming from an incident where the KRT allegedly failed to give due recognition to the RA's chairperson during an official event. In another case in Pudu, it involved a scuffle during the RA election when the incumbent physically prevented a contender from participating, which escalated until the police intervened and detained the contender. In a third example from Pantai, the regime change following the loss of Barisan Nasional's stranglehold in national politics in 2018 impacted upon historical political affiliations that subsequently reshaped the local political landscape and fuelled the conflicts between the RA and KRT. During initial engagements of Program K2K, the deep disunity was evident, with arguments and accusations over participation and resource allocation, highlighting the detrimental impact of ideological rifts and competition on community cohesion and development efforts.

Case 2

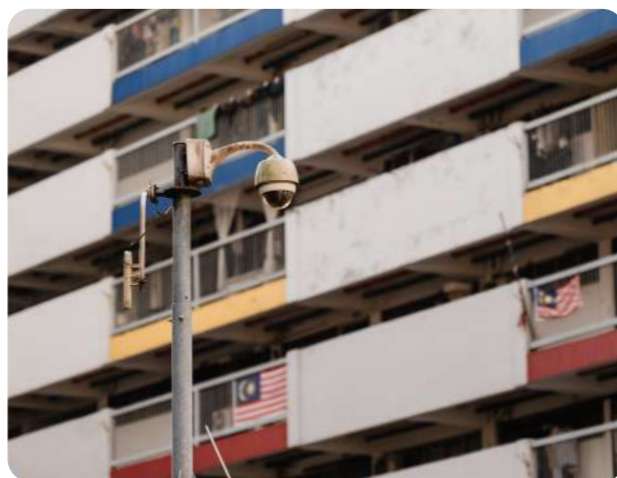
In several PPRs, the shift in management from DBKL and JMB to a newly elected MC has led to conflicts and resistance from residents uneasy with the new approach. Although just over half of the units in these complexes have been purchased, DBKL retains control over the remaining properties, creating a complex dual-management situation. The MC's focus on revenue collection, exemplified by the introduction of fees for services and spaces, has sparked frustration among residents and disrupted community structures. CBOs like RAs and KRTs, once operating at no cost, are now required to pay for office space. Attempts by the MC to justify these changes have been met with resistance, including community boycotts and acts of sabotage such as vandalising CCTV cameras, cutting landline cables and damaging water pipes. These incidents illustrate the deep-rooted opposition among residents, who perceive the MC as being more interested in revenue collection than in social development or community support. Moreover, the MC's ability to manage the public housing complex's demands is limited. Without sufficient resources, experience or capacity to address the operational responsibilities that come with managing a residential complex, this gap in competence has heightened the anxiety of residents.

Case 3

Incidents involving the safety and well-being of children in public housing communities often reveal the complex social dynamics at play. In one such case, an 11-year-old boy sustained an eye injury from a fishhook, initially claiming it occurred while performing *wudhu* with friends at the surau. He alleged that the injury was caused by a seven-year-old girl, which quickly escalated into a confrontation between the children's families. As the situation developed, a community leader intervened and began to investigate, having noticed inconsistencies in the boy's account. It was later discovered that the boy had been fishing in the river near the futsal court and had been injured while playing with friends—one of whom had accidentally caused the injury. Fearing punishment for being somewhere he wasn't supposed to be, the boy fabricated his initial story. The community leader played a key role in de-escalating the conflict by uncovering the truth and encouraging both families to engage in calm, constructive dialogue. This incident highlights the fragility of neighbourly relations in dense living environments, where miscommunication or misinformation can quickly lead to tension. Without open channels of communication and mutual trust, maintaining social harmony in such communities becomes increasingly difficult.

8 Coping Strategies

Despite their daily challenges, the communities display an indomitable spirit and enterprise in overcoming their obstacles and leading their lives with dignity. They develop coping strategies that rely on social support networks—including family, friends and community groups—that play a crucial role in providing emotional, financial and practical assistance. On a personal level, resilience-building through education, self-care practices and mental health support enables families and individuals to better cope with the stressors of marginalisation and systemic inequities that exist in public housing. Additionally, many residents turn to local agencies and non-governmental organisations for resources such as job training, healthcare and education support.



8.1 Faced with persistent challenges to liveability, public housing communities have developed their own local-level solutions through self-initiated interventions, programmes and activities.

These grassroots efforts reflect a remarkable degree of resilience and agency, underscoring the communities' capacity to adapt and respond to adversity. Their proactive approach illustrates not only resourcefulness but also a strong commitment to improving their shared environment, even in the absence of sustained external support.

8.2 Examples of such initiatives observed are listed below:

a. Cleanliness

Littering and indiscriminate waste disposal are persistent challenges in public housing communities, affecting cleanliness, safety and overall well-being. In PPR Kampung Baru Hicom, one resident recognised that some households struggled with time constraint and safety concerns in managing their waste. To address this, he launched a door-to-door waste collection service for a nominal fee, personally managing household refuse from individual units to the designated disposal area. This initiative required both physical and mental readiness, as he took on the responsibility of handling waste beyond his own household. His initiative has since expanded to involve the youths in the PPR through an initiative called "Geng Suka Bersih" that conducts complex-wide cleaning campaigns. Similar efforts have emerged in other public housing complexes, demonstrating residents' proactive approaches to environmental and safety concerns. Often, it involves the role of charismatic individuals who are able to mobilise local grassroots support to address issues of common concern. However, these initiatives, while important and necessary, tend to be short term in its impact because of lack of supportive institutional arrangements that can address issues such as funding, public awareness campaigns and enforcement.

b. Public safety

Safety is a key concern in many public housing complexes, where petty crimes and vandalism remain persistent challenges that are difficult to tackle through traditional patrolling alone. To enhance security, some communities have installed CCTVs in high-risk areas, but implementation requires both financial resources and collective agreement among residents. In PPR Lembah Subang 1, a group of residents from a particular floor organised themselves to address persistent security issues afflicting their level. They developed a common plan, pooled their money and installed cameras. The presence of CCTVs significantly reduced incidents of peeping Toms and petty thefts, as video evidence helped resolve disputes and hold perpetrators accountable. For some, the mere awareness of surveillance acted as a deterrent. As technology becomes more accessible and affordable, CCTV installation is emerging as a practical, community-driven solution to improve safety and crime prevention in public housing.

c. Youth development

Disillusionment and social ills in public housing communities often arise from systemic inequalities and the absence of meaningful social support—challenges that are particularly acute among youths. Limited access to opportunities, recreational spaces and positive role models leaves many young residents vulnerable to anti-social behaviour and illicit activities. In response, several community-driven initiatives have emerged to foster engagement, discipline and personal growth among public housing youths.

One such initiative is “Persatuan Belia Seri Cempaka”, established in 2012 by residents of PPR Seri Cempaka. This grassroots collective drive was formed to address the specific challenges facing youth in their complex, offering mentorship, structured activities and a safe space for personal and social development. Their deep, local understanding of youth dynamics in public housing has contributed to their success and generated demand for their services beyond their immediate community. Today, the organisation actively promotes sports, welfare, mentorship and volunteerism, extending its reach across the Klang Valley and into other states.

In some complexes, martial arts programmes have proven to be a powerful outlet for youth development, offering structure, discipline and a sense of purpose. In one notable case in PPR Seri Cempaka, a martial arts initiative transformed the lives of several boys once labelled as problematic—one of whom eventually rose to become a national champion. These examples underscore the transformative potential of community-led efforts in shaping positive trajectories for youths. They not only offer alternatives to harmful influences, but also strengthen social cohesion and cultivate a sense of pride and belonging within public housing communities.

d. Social enterprise

Entrepreneurship, when grounded in community values, can be a powerful catalyst for change—particularly in underserved and low-income communities. When individuals channel their business skills and social networks towards collective well-being, they help create resilient, self-sustaining ecosystems that uplift those around them. Women have often led such efforts, demonstrating exceptional resilience, adaptability and commitment to both economic and social development.

One example is Kak Misha of Lembah Subang 1, who has successfully developed her entrepreneurial pursuits with a deep sense of civic responsibility. Since 2016, she has managed several ventures, including food and beverage businesses and a spa, while also participating in various entrepreneurship development programmes. Her leadership came into sharp focus during the Covid-19 pandemic, when she mobilised food aid and coordinated community support initiatives for vulnerable households. Today, she manages the Women of Will Sewing Centre, which provides sustainable livelihood opportunities for single mothers and women from the B40-income group.

As co-founder and chairperson of “Persatuan Wanita Berdaya Lembah Subang 1”, Kak Misha continues to advocate for women’s empowerment through collaboration, skill-building and community advocacy. Her journey illustrates how grassroots enterprise, when driven by social purpose and strong networks, can build not only individual livelihoods but also the foundations of a more empowered and cohesive community.

e. Women as pillars of community resilience

Community leadership plays a critical role in building resilience, fostering social cohesion and driving development within public housing communities. In many of these settings, women frequently emerge as the central force behind local initiatives, particularly those aimed at supporting children, youth and vulnerable households. Their contributions extend well beyond traditional caregiving roles; they are architects of programmes that enhance education, well-being and economic opportunities within their communities.

One such example is “Persatuan Wanita PPR Hicom” (Perwacom), a grassroots organisation led by the women of PPR Kg Baru Hicom—many of whom are homemakers. Perwacom focuses on promoting community welfare, with a particular emphasis on child education. Their leadership was especially impactful during the Covid-19 lockdowns, when they swiftly compiled a database of residents and coordinated the distribution of aid to ensure no family was left unsupported. This rapid, organised response underscored the effectiveness of community-rooted leadership in times of crisis.

Beyond emergency relief, Perwacom has been instrumental in sustaining long-term development efforts. Their work includes the creation of safe spaces for youths, mentorship programmes and educational initiatives designed to steer young residents away from harmful influences and towards productive futures. By taking active roles in shaping their communities, women-led organisations like Perwacom not only reinforce the social fabric of public housing, but also lay the groundwork for a more empowered, resilient next generation.



While family responsibilities prevent many women from joining the formal workforce, they are keen to dedicate time daily to supplement their household income.

f. Traffic management

Limited parking in public housing has given rise to an informal workaround: residents commonly resort to double-parking, governed by an unwritten community code. To make this practice functional, drivers are expected to leave their handbrakes disengaged, allowing others to manually move vehicles when necessary. In one housing complex, if a car is found with the handbrake engaged, an announcement is made over the surau loudspeaker. If the owner fails to respond promptly, residents consider it within their rights to forcibly move the vehicle, with the owner held responsible for any resulting damage. This community-enforced system has helped minimise conflict and functions as a practical stop-gap measure.

It is not uncommon to see residents—young and old—working together to push vehicles around the compound. While this improvised arrangement demonstrates community coordination and resilience, it does not address the underlying problem of severe congestion. Blocked access routes continue to pose serious risks during emergencies, potentially delaying life-saving assistance. Additionally, service vehicles such as garbage trucks are frequently unable to enter, resulting in uncollected waste and overflowing bins, further undermining the liveability of the environment.



Residents are forced to double park because of inadequate parking spaces. Informal arrangements are devised by the community to manage the movement of traffic.

8.3 The above case studies show how coping strategies act as vital lifelines for public housing communities living under constant stress and precarity. In the absence of systemic support, residents draw on their own resilience, creativity and solidarity to navigate daily challenges—often through informal networks, collective problem-solving and quiet acts of care. These efforts reflect a deep well of agency and leadership that too often goes unrecognised by policymakers. Acknowledging and supporting these everyday heroes is essential to building more just, responsive and inclusive housing systems.

SERI kota



Jom kita
jaga kebersihan

94 Flat sri kota nak
tak. kalau nak kena
lah jaga KEbersihan
jom jom buat
sampah putih

Part B: CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

9 Policy Considerations

9.1 Where is public housing heading?

Policy failure occurs when government policies do not achieve their intended objectives, resulting in adverse outcomes or unmet needs. In Section A, we have described a sample community living in conditions of stress and experiencing various levels of deprivation and development challenges—a community that, by their own rating, perceives the liveability of their housing in negative terms. Despite the variability of the sample communities—located in different geographies of the Klang Valley, built in different times and governed by different management systems—the negative development outcomes have been striking in their similarity. This suggests that the factors undermining liveability are not simply local management issues but also broader institutional failings.

The trajectory of decline observed in this study resonates with previous studies conducted by Think City in other sites in Penang, Johor, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur. Clear parallels can be detected between policy weaknesses and the declining trajectory of living standards, social mobility and development outcomes. We believe that these findings are not unique to this sample and affect a larger cross-section of public housing categories and communities across the country. This includes privately-owned low-cost flats and other publicly-subsidised strata housing that, unlike the PAs and PPRs, do not receive financial support by local councils and public bodies and are left to their own devices.

In this section we frame the issues described in Section A against the broader context of public policymaking. In particular, we highlight five key areas for policymakers to focus on if we are to reverse the current declining trajectory. These are:

- a. Policy ambiguity
- b. A declining trajectory in development
- c. Higher cost of living
- d. Poor governance
- e. Unlocking the power of social assets

a. Policy ambiguity

Clarity of purpose is an essential condition for policy effectiveness. It provides a framework for decision-making, a guide for problem-solving and ensures consistency in planning. Over the decades, the purpose of Malaysia's public housing has become unclear. The wholesale relocation of communities under the "zero squatter" strategy has not translated into sustainable "zero poverty" development yields, as the findings from our survey have shown. While subsidies have been deployed to develop and operate public housing, it is unclear how long these subsidies should last. Further, the financial model for the operation and maintenance of public housing is unsustainable, with annual injections of public funds needed to keep these complexes running.

More fundamentally, the development objective of this sector has become problematic. Built originally as transit housing to address the relocation of squatters in major urban areas, government failure to formulate a clear exit programme has left both residents and officials in a limbo. As we have seen in our survey, 61% of households have lived in their complex for 10–30 years. It is not surprising therefore to find residents expecting the housing to be permanent and even an entitlement.

Consequently, some households, whose economic status have improved over the years, continue to live in public housing. Others rent out their units at a premium in the secondary market. In Bandar Tun Razak, for example, there are cases of absentee tenants paying RM124 per month rental to DBKL, while privately subletting their units out for RM900 per month. They have taken advantage of the privilege of public housing and appropriated its surplus value to becoming a secondary source of income.

The policy muddle is further clouded when past decisions allowed the sale of housing units to tenants at highly subsidised prices. To cite one example, an apartment unit in PPR Taman Mulia was sold to its tenant at RM38,000 or RM67.85 per square foot. In contrast, at Flat Taman Mulia, a private high-rise apartment located less than a kilometre away, a similar-sized apartment was transacted at RM165,000 or RM295 per square foot, four times higher than the PPR unit. The creation of asset ownership within the public housing complex is problematic as not every resident can afford to purchase his or her unit. It therefore undermines the original eligibility criteria for access to public housing and polarises the housing community into private apartment owners and tenants. Apart from promoting economic stratification, this policy undermines social inclusion by privileging the voice of asset owners over tenants. For example, private owners can become members of the JMB, but tenants can't and therefore have no voice in decision making. This discrepancy also raises fundamental questions about equity—why are public funds being used to subsidise private asset ownership for some people?

While some residents benefit disproportionately from the policy inconsistency, other residents, especially the vulnerable population, are left out. The absence of strategy in policy implementation means that households who suffer social and economic deprivation the most are not being monitored and are therefore not receiving systematic support for upward mobility. Without a clear exit strategy, the government cannot implement poverty-reduction programmes and plan for the transition of residents into permanent housing. This hampers the government's ability to ensure an adequate turnover of housing stock to address new and increasing public housing demands.

Policy ambiguity also impacts on intra-governmental coordination in their support programmes for various social groups living in public housing. What we observe is that many of these activities are underfunded, tend to be intermittent, are not programmatic and suffer from poor participation. In addition, the absence of a meaningful database, poor information sharing between agencies and weak monitoring of outcomes have resulted in ineffective targeting of programme beneficiaries and questionable impact on the social welfare and development of the community. The absence of a transparent and data-driven government support programme has also created an environment for elite capture of government resources.

The most glaring example of poor coordination is the statutory provision for creating the JMB and the KRT in the same public housing complex—two different CBOs under two different Acts and resourced by two different ministries. Both CBOs have suffered strategic neglect, and are constrained by a lack of capacity, weak governance and are severe underfunding. Consequently, both CBOs have not been able to play their roles as envisioned by the Acts, much less create synergies between themselves to produce positive outcomes for their communities. In many ways, the fragmentation of the community reflects the dissonant policy framework governing public housing.

b. A declining trajectory in development

Policymakers need to recognise that public housing is heading towards a trajectory of crisis—that the sector is experiencing systemic decline in terms of development outcomes. There is, therefore, a need for urgency in the policy response. The visible signs of neglect in public housing, such as vandalised public property, graffiti and litter, display classic signs of the “broken window syndrome”. This refers to the sociological phenomenon in which problems that are left unresolved and allowed to fester create an environment that fosters further disorder and anti-social behaviour. Consequently, a vicious cycle is perpetuated where small signs of disorder snowball into larger issues, such as the constant breakdown of lifts, higher crime rates and a decline in overall liveability.

The high-rise design of these housing complexes further restricts the informal surveillance of public places and minimises communication and social interaction among residents. This, together with the broken window syndrome, undermines the fabric of social relationships and mutual support that are essential to the informal control of crime. As the incidence of vandalism and crime increases, the geography of this community begins to assume certain negative traits or territorial stigmatisation in the public perception.

In the current trajectory, it is not inconceivable that Malaysia's public housing will become potential poverty trap. It will become a place where the urban poor will be concentrated as increasing numbers of residents succumb to the negative cycle of deprivation and poverty. Sociologically, this decline in liveability can be described in terms of a ghettoisation process. This pertains to the progressive socio-economic isolation of the community in a confined geography, leading to the marginalisation of affected groups, and further

limiting its access to resources and opportunities. The policy implication is clear. Left unchecked, these areas will form pockets of deep poverty and impact upon the overall attractiveness and liveability of the city. Addressing this decline would require a clear strategy to transform existing public housing complexes and develop the next generation of housing for the urban poor on strong foundations of liveability. The vision for this new generation of housing has been established in the concept of Madani. The policy challenge is to address the key issues seriously, formulate effective institutions and develop a clear roadmap to realise this vision.

c. Higher cost of living

While the rising cost of living is recognised as a national policy challenge, insufficient attention has been paid to the unique burdens faced by public housing communities. Residents in these areas are disproportionately affected because of structural and systemic factors that intensify their financial pressures. These challenges elevate everyday expenses, constrain economic mobility and trap many households in persistent cycles of poverty.

One significant contributor is the frequent breakdown of lifts, which increases the cost of goods delivery. When elevators are out of service, delivery workers often charge additional fees to carry heavy items, such as gas cylinders, up multiple flights of stairs. In some cases, prices can rise by as much as 30%, placing further strain on already stretched household budgets.

Security issues also contribute to rising costs. The recurrent theft of petrol and motorcycle parts is a major concern in many public housing areas. For residents who rely on motorcycles for commuting or livelihood activities, the cost of frequent repairs or replacements adds a heavy financial burden and disrupts income-generating routines.

Women in public housing face distinct economic disadvantages. Domestic responsibilities and caregiving duties often prevent them from participating in the workforce, thereby reducing the household's earning capacity. The absence of affordable and accessible childcare services further limits their employment options, resulting in a reliance on a single income source for many families.

Public health conditions exacerbate these challenges. Poor hygiene, sanitation problems and littering create unhealthy living environments that particularly affect children. The resulting illnesses can impact child development, increase absenteeism from school and lead to poorer educational outcomes—diminishing future earning potential and reinforcing intergenerational poverty. Finally, poor location and limited access to reliable public transportation further inflate living costs. Residents often have no choice but to rely on expensive private transport, diverting income from other essential needs such as food, education and healthcare.

Addressing these systemic challenges is essential to reducing the disproportionate economic burden on public housing residents. Structural improvements, enhanced security, accessible services and supportive social policies are key to alleviating financial strain and improving quality of life in these communities.



d. Poor governance

Observing the rule of law is important as it ensures that regulations are applied fairly and consistently, safeguarding individual rights and promoting accountability among public officials. In the context of public housing, it is essential for regulating behaviour by establishing clear expectations about the rights and responsibilities of residents, the power and obligations of public officials, and establishing the “rules of the game” for communal living. When applied consistently, it fosters public trust in government institutions and promotes a culture of compliance.

However, in our research, we find that adherence to the rule of law is alarmingly weak. Transgressions such as traffic offences, littering and vandalism happen openly on a daily basis without any consequence to perpetrators. The enforcement of regulations is severely lacking. Part of the problem lies with the weak compact between resident and manager. The tenancy agreement is vague about the rights and responsibilities of tenants and is equally unclear about the mechanisms of power for managers to apply sanctions—creating space for inaction or misuse. In some instances, there are insufficient legal provisions for managers to enforce regulations, such as impounding vehicles within public housing complexes. In many complexes, regulations are observed in the breach, particularly concerning fire safety standards in building design and operational practice. Finally, ambiguity surrounding the applicable laws governing the day-to-day management of public housing, notably concerning the Strata Management Act 2013, has created confusion about the responsibility of local government vis-à-vis the JMB or MC.

Against this background, it is not surprising to find accountability relationships to be opaque and unclear. When things break down, as they often do, residents are unable to obtain timely resolutions. Residents may lodge formal

complaints with managers, but problems rarely get resolved in a timely and satisfactory manner. Beyond the managers on site, residents have little access to the larger administrative decision-making system to seek recourse. In addition, residents’ involvement is hardly sought in the planning and management of service delivery. They are not consulted about the performance of contractors nor are they given the avenue to provide timely feedback on issues and problems by delivery partners. Residents have the option to turn to CBOs such as the JMB and the RA to help advocate their problems. However, these entities themselves suffer from poor capacity, accountability and transparency, and are negatively perceived to function for the benefit of particular elite groups within the community.

The poor accountability environment also impacts on the officials on the ground. Their inability to resolve issues undermines their stature in the community and diminishes their capacity to gain community support to organise response and collective action. For local government leadership, there is no clear accountability mechanism for ensuring performance in public housing management.

In many other countries, regular local government elections provide a strong incentive for ensuring performance in service delivery. Such an incentive does not apply in Malaysia when local governments are led by appointed officials without any downward accountability to residents. Without accountability, the tendency is for officials to manage by optics—to intervene whenever a crisis is reported in the media—rather than to systematically ensure the production of positive development outcomes.

The poor responsiveness of management erodes trust in the governance system, fostering frustration and resentment among residents. Over time, this leads to a culture of apathy and indifference within the community, as residents cease to seek solutions through official channels and instead turn to alternative means of conflict resolution, including reliance on “street gangs”.



This environment also cultivates a culture of non-compliance, where residents weigh the costs and benefits of adhering to regulations. In such a context of inadequate governance, it is often the strongest and most influential individuals who reap the benefits or elite capture, exacerbating inequities within the community. Additionally, the interference of politicians and external parties in management decisions creates inconsistencies that further undermine the governance framework and create an enabling environment for corruption. Ultimately, without effective management and accountability, the cycle of disillusionment and inequality is likely to persist, hindering the overall well-being of public housing residents.

When problems consistently fail to get resolved, a culture of apathy and indifference sets in, and communities look for alternative means for conflict management.

e. Unlocking the power of social assets

Policymakers are not optimising the power of social assets in driving public housing sustainability. Lessons from Program K2K have demonstrated the positive role of communities in enhancing the liveability of public housing, where activated residents can transform their living environments through collaboration and initiative. In all the public housing sites, we have observed the existence of a rich pool of talent that can contribute to the well-being of the community and support the effective function of the management system. When organised and empowered, this talent can be transformed into important assets, such as new social spaces, social platforms, community leaders and social networks. These assets, when deployed in the management strategy, can create a positive influence on the resolution of local issues, fostering a sense of belonging, and promoting sustainable practices within the public housing complex. There are many global examples of successful programmes that utilise the talent of residents in the management, design and development of public housing, namely the La Borda Housing Cooperative in Barcelona⁴², the Toronto Community Housing⁴³ and the Berlin Neighbourhood Management (NM) programme⁴⁴, among others.

⁴² Girbes-Peco, S., Foraster, M. J., Mara, L. C., & Morla-Folch, T. (2020). *The role of the democratic organization in the La borda housing cooperative in Spain*. *Habitat International*, 102, Article 102208. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2020.102208>

⁴³ August, M. (2014). *Negotiating Social Mix in Toronto's First Public Housing Redevelopment: Power, Space and Social Control in Don Mount Court*. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 38(4), 1160–1180. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12127>

⁴⁴ European Commission. (2012). *Berlin's neighbourhood management project brings decision-making on social development to the local level*. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects/germany/berlins-neighbourhood-management-project-brings-decision-making-on-social-development-to-the-local-level

One may wonder why resident-based organisations established by statutes such as the JMB, MC or KRT are not playing this role. As we have described in Section 6 and Section 9.1 above, these entities have been hobbled by poor governance and elite capture. They also suffer from weak capacities and are financially unsustainable. In an environment of insufficient resources, these different entities compete with one another in an unhealthy manner, contributing to the breakdown in social cohesion. In practice, they are perceived with indifference or cynicism by the community at large.

Unlike wealthier residents who live in condominiums, underprivileged communities in public housing face unique challenges that constrain their contribution to management. Their experience of poverty in all its dimensions (financial, time, nutrition, etc) necessitates more effective public support structures to create the capacities needed for effective management of their public housing complex. A revamp of the different legislations is needed to streamline a coherent community-focused management system that builds capacity and is established on a strong foundation of governance and financially sustainable model.

There is already a policy, the Dasar Komuniti Negara (DKN), that recognises the important role of community development. Launched in 2019, it aimed to empower local communities to actively participate in the management and maintenance of their housing. The policy correctly identifies community ownership, strategic cooperation between citizens and government, and social cohesion among diverse groups as key elements for enhancing the sustainability of urban living. However, from our observations, the policy has not been successful in creating the desired positive impact on underprivileged communities. This deficiency stems from two key areas— a superficial understanding of community development and a weak institutional framework — which we will describe in the following.

The heterogeneity and unique socio-economic condition of public housing communities, as we have described in Part A of this report, requires an ability to engage with complex urban social dynamics—addressing a range of issues such as social differentiation, power relations, economic marginalisation, deviant behaviour, spatial disparity, social cohesion, local governance and co-management, among others. Policy formulation, consequently, requires the deployment of technical competencies from social anthropology, urban geography and development economics, among others—approaches that are notably underrepresented in Malaysia’s public housing sector. Instead, the sector is predominantly populated by urban planners, architects and engineers who were originally recruited to focus on building more public housing, rather than to support the social development of these communities. This deficiency is evident in the DKN document, which is rich in aspirations but severely lacking in actionable instruments for implementation. As a result, programmes suffer from a lack of technical depth and strategic purpose. By focusing heavily on general outcomes rather than practical execution, the policy undermines its potential impact on enhancing community well-being.

The second area of policy weakness is its failure to integrate community development programmes into the institutional framework for public housing management. This results in a policy with no teeth and given low priority in the hierarchy of government programmes. Management strategies tend to focus heavily on physical infrastructure and services, with community development treated as a secondary concern. There is poor recognition given to the potential utility of social assets and the importance of investing and developing these assets. This neglect is reflected in the inadequate budget accorded to community development activities, poor monitoring of social development outcomes and absence of meaningful evaluation of development interventions. The failure to integrate social assets into the overall management strategy has impacted negatively on the sustainability of development interventions and contributed to the decline in liveability of public housing.

A positive recent development has been the acknowledgement by DBKL on the importance of integrating physical assets and social assets into a common management strategy. This approach has been described by the immediate past mayor of KL as a “Top-down and Bottom-up Convergence” necessary to align key actors and implement programmes with efficient coordination and synchronisation. It builds on the success of global experience such as the Social City Programme in Germany, Neighbourhood Renewal Programme in Australia and the Participatory Housing Rehabilitation Programme in Chile, among others.

9.2 So, is public housing in crisis?

Ten years ago, in 2015, the Selangor state government convened an investigation into public housing through the Special Select Committee on Competency, Accountability and Transparency (Selcat). The enquiry was triggered by the increasing cases of children falling to their deaths from failing corridor railings in their apartment buildings⁴⁵. The testimonies documented demonstrate eerie parallels with the deteriorating living standards today as observed in this report. Issues such as public safety, poverty, pest infestation, lack of public spaces, conflict between central and local agencies, ineffective management and policy ambiguity continue to blight the residents of public housing more than a decade later.

The policy conclusion we can draw is clear. Malaysia’s public housing sector is not healthy, and is positioned on a dangerous trajectory of systemic decline and crisis. The similarities in deprivation across geographically and administratively diverse communities point to institutional, not just local failures. Without urgent intervention, the compounding effects of policy ambiguity, governance breakdowns and social

To conclude, policymakers need to recognise the development benefits of investing in social assets and formulate strategies for their role in enhancing management effectiveness. Critical to success is their establishment on a robust governance foundation and investment in their capacities. Ultimately, when underprivileged communities are empowered to organise themselves and develop co-management strategies with local authorities, they can generate a transformative momentum that not only enhances liveability, but also produces strong development outcomes.

stratification will push these neighbourhoods into irreversible ghettoisation—trapping the urban poor in cycles of poverty and eroding the liveability of our cities.

Ghettoisation, further, can be identified through clearly established symptoms. We adopt the framework developed by Ying Xu and Dan Luo⁴⁶ from their case study of the city of Changsha, China. Like Malaysia, China’s fast-paced urbanisation had resulted in the rapid development of high-rise strata public housing, which, two decades later, have begun to scar the city with symptoms of urban decay. The authors tracked the characteristics of ghettoised public housing according to three categories of decline: physical dilapidation of housing estates, economic deprivation of housing residents and social marginalisation of housing neighbourhoods. The framework, further, is based on nine symptoms of ghettoisation that describe the interrelated mechanisms that produce physical dilapidation, economic deprivation and social marginalisation. We adapt this framework in Table 9 in the next page:

⁴⁵ Dewan Negeri Selangor (2015). *Penyata Jawatankuasa Pilihan Khas Mengenai Keupayaan, Kebertanggungjawaban dan Ketelusan bagi Penyelenggaraan dan Pemantauan Perumahan PPR Negeri Selangor*. Kertas Bil. 43/2015

⁴⁶ Xu, Y. & Luo, D. (2021). *Is China’s public housing programme destined to fail? Evidence from the city of Changsha*. *Popul Space Place*. 2021; 27:e2375

General features of decline	Symptoms of ghettoisation	Issues
Physical dilapidation of housing estates	1. Original design and construction deficiencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Poor design and spatial planning ✓ Poor construction quality ✓ Constant breakdown of infrastructure
	2. Lack of operation and maintenance funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Inadequate budget ✓ Unsustainable financial model
	3. Inept property management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ JMB is cash-strapped ✓ Poor services ✓ Low capacity ✓ Constrained by poor governance
Economic deprivation of housing residents	4. Welfare distribution targeting disadvantaged people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Concentration of residents from the B40 category and displaced slum dwellers
	5. Residualisation process and outmigration of working class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Capable households migrate and unlawfully sublet their units ✓ Multigenerational households increase ✓ Higher cost of living pressures
	6. Spatial mismatch and unemployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Manufacturing jobs located far away ✓ On-site retail spaces underutilised
Social marginalisation of housing neighbourhoods	7. Spacial isolation from other classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Physical isolation in some locations ✓ Social isolation ✓ Increase of elderly class (>65 years old)
	8. Prevalence of vandalism and crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Residents feel unsafe in their own homes ✓ Unsanitary environment creates public health risk
	9. Territorial stigmatisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The moniker “budak flat” carries a negative connotation ✓ Early signs of negative impact on adjacent properties’ values ✓ Increase in cost of services due to safety risks

Table 9 Symptoms of ghettoisation in Malaysia's public housing context

The ghettoisation framework provides a useful tool for policymakers to assess the health of public housing in their respective jurisdictions. The nine symptoms provide key indicators for mapping the depth and extent of degradation that have set in. What is apparent is that the sector as a whole is unhealthy. This is, furthermore, a multidimensional emergency that no single ministry or agency can fix. As we have shown, the problems plaguing public housing are multisectoral—they span urban planning, social welfare, local governance, economic policy and community development. They also suffer from poor coordination and alignment across federal agencies, and between federal, state and local authorities.

Moving forward, what is needed is an integrated, cross-agency programme management capability with clear accountability backed by data-driven policies and participatory governance. The success of initiatives like Program K2K proves that communities, when empowered, can drive change, but they need structured support, not fragmented programmes.

This is not a time for policy band-aid and incremental fixes. The gravity of the issue requires a strong government commitment for addressing the issues comprehensively and promoting a sustainable model for housing the urban poor. This will require addressing the following:

- Clarity of purpose for public housing
 - Establish clear developmental goals and align investments, exit strategies and ownership policies accordingly.
- Overhaul governance by streamlining planning, monitoring and enforcement
 - Create robust financial and institutional models, strengthen resident participation and eliminate elite capture.
- Invest in social assets, not just infrastructure, to rebuild trust and collective responsibility.

Creating a sustainable and liveable public housing sector is entirely consistent with the government's vision for societal improvement, but it will not happen without bold execution. If we act now, we can avert a crisis. If we delay, we risk entrenching an underclass with no way out. The choice is ours and the time to choose is now.

10 Rebuild, Reframe and Reform

In light of the above, and given the gravity of the issue, the approach to revitalising Malaysia's public housing must involve a strong government commitment to a long-term overhaul of the sector and bipartisan support by all key stakeholders towards this goal. Recent policy announcements are but feeble attempts at fiddling on the margins of a sector heading towards a crisis. Policymakers need to tackle serious issues dealing with the operational financing of public housing, of management effectiveness in service delivery and of community development in the shaping of an inclusive and vibrant society. This will entail interventions along three critical initiatives—Rebuild, Reframe and Reform—described in the section that follows.

10.1 REBUILD COMMUNITY

No initiative to improve the liveability of public housing can succeed without an effective programme to rebuild social cohesion and strengthen social capital within the community. Program K2K has demonstrated the positive impact of investing in resident empowerment to collaboratively address common issues. Strengthening social cohesion not only enhances residents' well-being, but also encourages collective responsibility for the upkeep and improvement of their shared living spaces, promoting a more sustainable and resilient community. Fundamental to this goal is the investment needed to develop social assets within the community. The programme of rebuilding will entail the following key interventions:

- a. **Establish the Forum Komuniti (Forkom) as a strong community-led platform in the public housing complex.** The Forkom under Program K2K has demonstrated that quick positive outcomes can be attained when communities have been mobilised and organised to make collective decisions and action. A common community platform run on strong principles of governance is a key missing ingredient in the empowerment of residents in public housing today. The Forkom will function as a critical intermediary between the residents, management and policymakers.
- b. **Provide institutional support to the Forkom.** The Forkom can achieve a lot more when given institutional support, including authority to enforce sanctions and to mobilise financial resources. The Forkom must be subjected to strong governance requirements and accountabilities. Provisions in the **Strata Management Act 2013** and the **Akta Rukun Tetangga 2012** are two legislations, among others, which need to be amended to provide stronger support to the Forkom. The strengthened legal structure will define clear roles, responsibilities and accountability frameworks, allowing for a collaborative approach between community members and governing bodies. To avoid elite capture and mismanagement, the Forkom must be subject to an annual **governance audit** and punitive sanctions imposed on any wrongdoing.
- c. **Establish a targeted social protection programme for vulnerable public housing residents.** Work with the Forkom to identify and formulate a local database of vulnerable residents needing social protection support. Establish demand-driven mechanisms that link the Forkom to government social protection programmes and ensure clear accountabilities between Forkom and the government agencies involved. The same mechanisms can be extended to a broader support network of non-government partners.
- d. **Establish a Public Housing Community Development Fund** to invest in social development and strengthening of social cohesion. For this fund, the government provides a matching grant to encourage communities to mobilise resources from other sources to ensure the sustainability of outcomes. This fund may be deployed for local projects, capacity-building initiatives and other community-based programmes that directly benefit residents, promoting a sense of ownership and responsibility towards their living environment.



The liveability of public housing can be enhanced with more meaningful community participation in management, effective institutional support and a consistent policy environment.

10.2 REFRAME THE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The current fragmented, under-resourced and disempowered management system needs to be discarded and replaced by a new system based on a strong centralised body and supported by effective local-level service delivery capabilities. Strong, however, does not mean big bureaucracy and the new management system should be designed based on a lean network governance structure utilising the full capabilities of new digital technologies and artificial intelligence. This new system will require the following key features:

a. **Establish a hub-and-spoke management system** based on the creation of a lean and strong central entity resourced by highly competent professionals, connected to local authorities and Forkom through new innovative mechanisms. The central entity will be responsible for producing development outcomes based on robust planning and monitoring, and deployment of financial resources. The local government and Forkom entities will function as local channels for ensuring service delivery performance and local-level problem solving. Critical to its success is the creation of effective feedback channels between hub and spoke.

b. **Establish a digitalised public housing ecosystem** through the creation of a digital platform that supports every aspect of public housing operation and service delivery. The digital platform will function as a powerful instrument for enhancing quality of service delivery, financial efficiencies and governance of the management system. The advantages are numerous and include:

- i. Significantly **lowering the cost of management** while increasing the quality of outputs and outcomes
- ii. Enhanced **delivery of services** to residents through economies of scale, better monitoring of output, feedback mechanisms and community participation
- iii. Enhanced **targeting of social protection** programmes and monitoring of outcomes
- iv. Enhanced **rental collection** through improved financial relationship with tenants including provision of financial planning and fintech services

- v. Enhanced labour and entrepreneurship support through creation of a **marketplace for talents, goods, and services** from the public housing complexes
- vi. Enhanced provision of food, pharmaceutical and other goods and services through **aggregation of demand** from public housing complexes
- vii. Enhanced **safety of housing complex** through effective access, and community monitoring, reporting, and response mechanisms

c. **Establish a new incentive framework for the management system.** This should include both career development and financial incentives and is aimed at ensuring the production of planned outputs and outcomes. The incentive framework would encourage efficient coordination and performance across the central "hub" and multiple "spoke" entities. Key incentives would include:

- i. Performance-based rewards, where spokes receive financial bonuses, resources or recognitions based on achieving specific metrics like community satisfaction, service delivery speed or operational efficiency
- ii. Resource-sharing incentives that would allow spokes that meet or exceed targets to access additional shared services

- or tools from the hub, such as advanced technology, marketing support or expert consultations
- iii. Training and development opportunities, allowing high-performing spokes to benefit from exclusive leadership and skills development programmes, enhancing their capacity to contribute to the overall system

By aligning these incentives with the objectives of the hub, the framework encourages spokes to operate efficiently while fostering a cohesive, collaborative network.

d. **Empower the central entity with autonomy for resource mobilisation.** Even though the "hub" is a government-owned organisation, it must have the versatility to mobilise resources and generate revenue through commercial activities or by issuing bonds and other financial instruments. This model gives the central entity greater flexibility to allocate resources more efficiently, especially through spatially focused sharing of assets and services. It also allows the entity to operate more like a private-sector business, leveraging its assets, services or infrastructure to attract investment, often through user fees, partnerships or issuing debt. This approach reduces the financial burden on government budgets while enabling the entity to pursue development goals more flexibly and sustainably.



10.3 REFORM POLICY

Malaysia today is an urban nation with close to 80% of its population living in cities. It is also a nation that is fast ageing with more than 15% of its population expected to join the elderly category by 2030. Consequently, the provision of sustainable housing for the underclass and needy will continue to be an important policy commitment for many decades to come. For this reason, the current policies related to public housing, which are outdated and flawed, need to be overhauled urgently. We recommend the following key actions to support the formulation of new policies for the reform of the public housing sector:

Establish a High-Level Task Force (HLTF) to conduct an examination of key lessons learned from public housing and propose a roadmap titled “**Public Housing Transformation Programme to Support a Madani Malaysia**”. This task force needs to work independently and autonomously and will consist of technical experts with support from relevant senior officials. It will report directly to the Prime Minister.

This HLTF should drive policy reform by identifying weaknesses, proposing sustainable financial models, and prioritising interventions through transparent assessments. Their outputs will ensure that public housing evolves into a resilient, inclusive and future-ready sector, aligned with Malaysia’s rapidly changing urban and demographic needs.

The HLTF will have the following key components in its terms of reference :

- i. **Conduct a public expenditure review** to identify the key weaknesses in current public investments in public housing. This will include a focus on the linkages between development expenditure and policy objectives, the tracking of liveability outcomes in the budgeting process, accountability framework for performance of service delivery, the efficiency of operating expenditure, mechanisms for resource mobilisation and other issues that impact upon the operating performance and financial sustainability of public housing. Identify new and innovative models of funding for current public housing and Iso public housing in the future. **Key output: propose a new financial model for public housing.**
- ii. **Conduct a rapid assessment of all public housing projects** to map out the different levels of ghettoisation in public housing across the country. This assessment will focus on infrastructure, service delivery and social development indicators developed by Program K2K. A public housing ranking should be developed to enable policymakers to plan and design priority interventions. This will include priority infrastructure upgrade, priority enforcement action and social protection interventions. **Key output: transparent ranking of existing public housing projects and priority intervention plan.**
- iii. **Develop a new institutional framework** to support the formation of a new public housing sector that can sustainably produce positive development outcomes. This framework will entail issues related to robust governance structure, effective management system, clearly defined accountability relationships, resource mobilisation and fiduciary management, planning innovation and talent pipeline development. The framework will move away from the outdated command-and-control approach and formulate new approaches based on network governance. **Key output: proposal for a new institutional framework for the public housing sector.**
- iv. **Formulate a roadmap for the transformation of the public housing sector.** Based on key insights into Malaysia’s political economy, identify the fastest and most efficient approach to implementing a phased public housing transformation programme. Such a programme will have to address both existing public housing complexes and new public housing projects. This roadmap will mobilise innovative public sector structures, private sector partners and strong community participation to produce concrete tangible improvements for existing public housing communities and the rollout of next-generation public housing. **Key outputs: roadmap for public housing transformation programme.**

BOX STORY

3

13th Malaysia Plan, Public Housing, and the Making of a Madani Society

The 13th Malaysia Plan (13MP) charts a bold national course, and its four strategic pillars resonate deeply with the urgent need to transform public housing. The challenges faced by these communities—economic stagnation, social fragmentation and physical decline—are directly addressed by the plan's focus on Advancing Economic Complexity, Enhancing Social Mobility, Accelerating Public Service Reform and Enhancing Well-being and Sustainability. This alignment presents a monumental opportunity to make strategic decisions that can fundamentally reshape the future of public housing in Malaysia.

Seizing this opportunity requires a proven methodology. Program Kita-untuk-Kita (K2K) has developed a clear roadmap for reversing the declining liveability of existing public housing by operationalising the six principles of Madani into concrete action.

Respect and Trust form the essential foundation, rebuilding the social cohesion needed in fragmented communities.

Compassion, Innovation and Sustainability are the key components of a new co-management system, fostering shared responsibility between residents and management.

Prosperity is the tangible goal—the outcome of a trajectory that moves communities from mere survival towards collective thriving and liveability.

To realise this vision at scale, three key reforms are imperative.

First, we must strategically invest in developing social assets—community hubs, leadership programmes, and local enterprises—to strengthen the very fabric of community development.

Second, investment is needed to modernise management systems, moving beyond basic maintenance to seriously incorporating co-management mechanisms, establishing sustainable financing for operations, and enhancing overall management performance.

Finally, an urgent reform of the fragmented policy environment is required to create a new, robust national housing policy that can coherently drive the sector-wide transformation.

The 13MP ambitious target of one million new affordable homes by 2035 is a critical national priority. However, the scale of this endeavour demands that we learn from the past. We must not risk building more physical structures that become poverty traps. Instead, the lessons from Program K2K are vital; they provide the essential "software" for these new "hardware" schemes. By embedding this people-centred, Madani-based approach from the outset, we can ensure these new homes are designed to support healthy, vibrant and self-reliant communities from day one. This is how we will truly achieve the vision of a Madani society—by building not just houses, but homes where dignity, opportunity and community flourish.

10.4 The 3R recommendations to rebuild the community, reform management systems and reform policy in this report is timely. More importantly, it remains aligned with the nation's aspiration towards quality, liveable and integrated housing. With the 13th Malaysia Plan's focus on enhancing efficiency of monitoring and management of housing, and its goal of delivering 1 million affordable homes, the recommendations above provide the right starting point. One that is focused on enhancing the liveability of existing public housing communities, yet provides the critical design, management and investment elements for building future public housing that supports the creation of a Madani Malaysian nation.

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ANNEXES

Annexe 1

K2K Factsheet

About K2K

K2K, which stands for Kita-untuk-Kita, is a programme that has built the capacity of communities in 10 public housing complexes in the Klang Valley through activities and initiatives that have uplifted overall public housing liveability.

A public investment through the 2023 national budget, Program K2K has developed social assets to strengthen the management of public housing and enhance liveability.

Program K2K employs a toolbox approach, not a one-size-fits-all cookie cutter methodology, enabling more than 2,000 activities in all 10 public housing complexes over 18 months.

At heart, it is a community empowerment programme that aims to rebuild and organise deprived and marginalised communities to take charge in the transformation of their living spaces and homes.

Objective

To create new social assets in public housing

To strengthen the capacity of communities in improving the liveability of their homes

To produce positive development outcomes

Initiatives

- Community diagnostic activities to obtain insights about social dynamics and priority groups, which are crucial in designing appropriate tools and interventions for the respective communities
- Community engagement programmes to build trust and social cohesion, enabling effective community mobilisation
- Community empowerment efforts—Forum Komuniti (Forkom) as the primary social asset developed to mobilise the whole community and organise towards collective action projects
- Collective action projects are undertaken by multiple social groups, overseen by Forkom, to problem-solve liveability issues in their respective PPRs. Examples include the lift lobby transformations in various sites along with improvements in safety and security.

Outcomes

- ✓ Establishment of the Forkom, where historically antagonistic parties in communities are able to sit around a common table and work together
- ✓ Consistently high participation rates in all activities organised
- ✓ Physical transformation projects in all 10 sites
- ✓ Communities mobilise capital and resources to undertake collective action projects
- ✓ Reduction of indiscriminate waste disposal and littering
- ✓ Reduction of crime and safety issues
- ✓ Enhancement of social capital

Annexe 2

K2K Public Housing Methodology

Overview

The K2K Diagnostic Study (KDS) seeks to fill the gap in the existing literature on the social perspective of public housing living in Malaysia. Despite decades of public housing implementation in their various forms, current research has primarily focused on housing affordability, maintenance, quality of life, low-income housing policy and governance. This study aims to comprehensively examine the living experience in Malaysia's public housing through a social lens, utilising community participatory design methods and the influence of physical spaces on social interactions and community identity. Additionally, the study reviews the management aspect of public housing to better understand its governance and maintenance effectiveness. The study draws inspiration from influential theories such as Lefebvre's "Social Space" and "Right to the City", Jacobs' "Placemaking and Identity" and Massey's "Gendered Geographies" and "Power Geometry".

Rationale for a mixed-method approach

Adopting a mixed-method approach in this study offers numerous advantages. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, researchers achieve a comprehensive view that neither approach could provide independently. Quantitative data from household surveys, for instance, offers a structured overview of socio-economic conditions, while qualitative methods like ethnographic studies and cultural mapping delve into residents' lived experiences, providing context to quantitative findings. Mixed method designs also

Research design

In this study, a mixed-method approach was employed to develop a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic, cultural, environmental and spatial dynamics within Malaysian public housing. The use of diverse methods—household surveys, cultural mapping, rapid assessment, Open Day validation, systems mapping, cognitive mapping, ethnographic study, site observation, and spatial mapping—from June 2023 to June 2024 allowed for an in-depth, multidimensional analysis, recognising the complex interplay of factors that affect residents' quality of life. A mixed-method research combines quantitative rigour with qualitative depth, enabling triangulation of data and enhancing the validity of findings (Creswell, & Clark, 2017). By integrating different data types and collection methods, this approach uncovers insights that might remain obscured in a single-method study, fostering a nuanced understanding of public housing challenges and opportunities (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989).

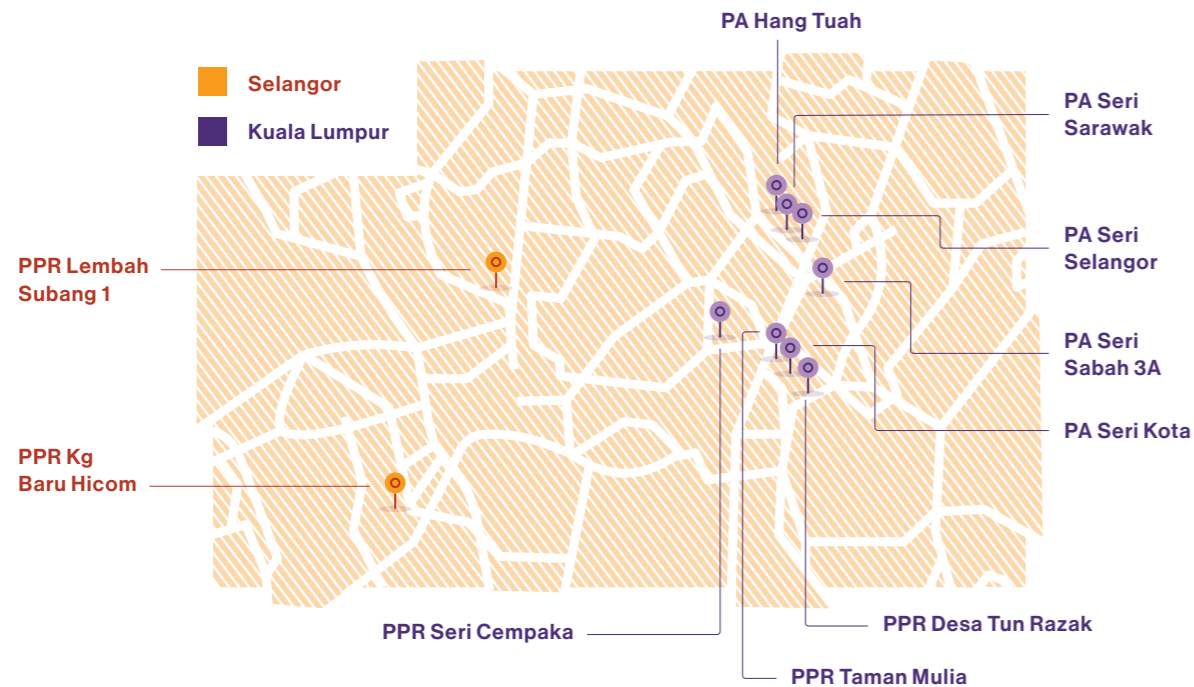
support methodological triangulation, enhancing reliability and providing checks across diverse data sources, which is critical in complex urban studies (Tashakkori, & Teddlie, 2003). This approach fosters a holistic understanding of public housing environments, accommodating diverse perspectives from multiple stakeholders and addressing the interplay between physical, social and policy dimensions of public housing.

Summary of data collection methods:

- 1 Household survey: Structured surveys from November to December 2023 captured extensive socio-economic data from 2,884 households across 10 public housing sites. The survey focused on demographic details, income, employment, health, education, housing satisfaction and social interactions aligned with the K2K Pillars of Community Empowerment, Co-management, Income Generation, and Policy Reform. This foundational dataset highlights socio-economic patterns and points to specific areas for potential policy reform.
- 2 Cultural mapping: To understand intangible values within public housing communities, cultural mapping explored residents' perceptions and feelings about their spaces through participatory focus group discussions. This qualitative approach complements statistical data by revealing the cultural dynamics and resources integral to community identity and cohesion.
- 3 Rapid assessment: Through on-site visual observations and resident interviews, rapid assessment evaluated the physical conditions of public housing sites, identifying factors that may pose health and safety risks. This method ensures the immediate identification of issues requiring prompt intervention.
- 4 Open day: Open day events engaged residents in validating data from the cultural mapping and the rapid assessment through exhibitions and interactive sessions. These events enhanced data accuracy and fostered community ownership of the findings, supporting the design of relevant interventions.
- 5 Systems mapping: Through workshops with diverse stakeholders, systems mapping visualised the relationships within the public housing ecosystem, identifying systemic forces that shaped residents' quality of life. This comprehensive map assists in designing interventions with long-term impacts by addressing interconnected factors.
- 6 Cognitive mapping: Participatory workshops with children and teenagers revealed how residents navigated and perceived their housing spaces. These spatial perceptions inform design improvements to make units more liveable and suitable for the residents' everyday activities.
- 7 Ethnographic study: Immersive observations and interviews provided insights into conflict management within public housing communities. This ethnographic approach revealed the community's social dynamics and governance challenges, guiding strategies for improved conflict resolution and cohesion.
- 8 Site observation: Researchers systematically observed social dynamics, community interactions and activities to understand the social fabric of public housing sites. Documented observations highlighted both community strengths and challenges, informing interventions that support social cohesion.
- 9 Spatial mapping: Spatial mapping assessed the geographic and spatial organisation within PPR sites, examining land use, building layouts, open spaces and accessibility. By capturing spatial distribution and connectivity, this method identified structural aspects that affect daily life, mobility and safety. Insights from spatial mapping are essential for optimising site planning and accessibility, ensuring that public housing layouts foster better community interactions and functional use of space.
- 10 Focus-group discussions: Focus groups were used to gather qualitative insights by facilitating open discussions that revealed participants' perceptions, experiences and social dynamics on a specific topic. This method complements quantitative data by uncovering nuanced perspectives and contextual factors often missed in surveys or structured interviews.

Annexe 3

PPR Profiles



PA Seri Selangor

The PA Seri Selangor, initially built in 1975 and currently managed by DBKL, stands as one of the oldest public housing complexes in Kuala Lumpur. Nestled in the heart of the city's textile business area, it is closely located to PA Loke Yew, PA Seri Sarawak, and PA Hang Tuah. It is also historically known as the San Peng flats, derived from its location at Jalan San Peng.

The community has a vibrant community hub, actively managed by its residents' association (RA) and Neighbourhood Watch or Kawasan Rukun Tetangga (KRT). These community-led managements spearhead numerous community programmes aimed at engaging the youth, recycling drives and used-cooking-oil collection efforts that not only promote environmental consciousness but also provide avenues for additional income. Adding to the community spirit, a lively pasar malam (night market) is hosted every Sunday, enhancing social cohesion while supporting the RA fund.

Moreover, PA Seri Selangor has served as a backdrop for cultural narratives, such as the filming location for "Budak Flat" (2023), and boasts the childhood home of Tan Sri Dato' Seri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah, Malaysia's esteemed health director-general (2013–2023) who was known to lead the country's public health policies during the Covid-19 pandemic.

PA Seri Sarawak

PA Seri Sarawak, established in 1984 within the Pudu precinct of KL, is strategically connected by major thoroughfares including Jalan Maharajalela, Jalan Hang Tuah and Jalan Dewan Bahasa. This public housing complex, shared with PA Loke Yew, is notable for its proximity to the oldest secondary school in KL, Victoria Institution, established in 1893; textile hubs, and essential public services, making it a vital part of the urban fabric.

The complex is nestled near vibrant business districts and tourist attractions such as Bukit Bintang, Pudu and downtown KL. As a hub of primarily renters, PA Seri Sarawak fosters a strong sense of community, aided by an active RA and KRT. These community-led managements play a crucial role in enhancing community welfare through various programmes, including health screenings and diverse community events.

Think City has collaborated with PA Seri Sarawak since 2018, contributing to the development of a community garden, a community hall, programmes for economic livelihood enhancement and most recently a rejuvenation of their public spaces.

PA Hang Tuah

Built in 1969, PA Hang Tuah is one of the oldest public housing complexes in Pudu, having been established for 55 years as of 2024. The design still features timber components, and it is conveniently located next to the Hang Tuah LRT and Monorail station. The complex is located close to PA Loke Yew, which was built in 1968 and shares similar timber features. The housing tenure is based on the public housing policy in the 1960s, where the units are for rental only.

There is an active RA and KRT that operate various community programmes to increase social connections among the residents.

Facilities include a multipurpose park with a children's play area, a futsal court, an open seating space, an outdoor gym, a community room, a Buddhist temple and a prominent Hindu temple, the largest religious centre in the neighbourhood. Think City has collaborated with PA Hang Tuah since 2021, most recently refurbishing the multipurpose park to create a more welcoming and functional space.

PPR Seri Cempaka

Constructed in 2009 along Jalan Kampung Pasir, PPR Seri Cempaka consists of two blocks with interconnected towers linked by corridors. PPR Seri Cempaka is located in Pantai Dalam, neighbouring a sewage treatment plant, low-cost housing and the Klang River. In 2007, the government introduced the Rent-to-Own (RTO) scheme to equip residents with the opportunity of homeownership, and PPR Seri Cempaka was impacted by this policy.

The community is supported by several active organisations, including the RA, KRT, surau committee, Pertubuhan Komuniti dan Kebajikan Seri Cempaka (PKKSC) and Persatuan Belia Seri Cempaka (PBSC). Through Think City's Program K2K, PBSC organised the K2K Youth Conference (Sidang Anak Muda K2K) to empower young leaders. The programme focused on debating issues related to PPR youth residents and was officiated by the then Youth and Sports Minister, Hannah Yeoh in June 2024.

Facilities include a surau, a hall surau, three community gardens, two futsal courts, a kindergarten and a nursery. Many residents run small-scale businesses, either home-based or in stalls along road reserves. In 2019, the community participated in the "Sayangi Rumahku" campaign organised by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (KPKT) to refurbish the complex's outdoor sports court. The refurbishment activity was majorly participated by the youth residents at PPR Seri Cempaka.

PA Seri Kota

Constructed in 1985, PA Seri Kota is situated near Bandar Tun Razak LRT and PPR Taman Mulia. The block complex is adequately maintained, featuring an inviting entrance adorned with a garden, thoughtful landscaping and several shaded seating areas.

There is an active RA and KRT. The RA is noteworthy for being the first RA in Bandar Tun Razak with a female leader. Several established organisations have collaborated to offer assistance within the precincts of PA Seri Kota. Furthermore, Think City has been involved with PA Seri Kota since 2021 through Bakul Program K2K, providing nutritious food baskets at affordable prices to the community during the pandemic.

PA Seri Kota was also selected among three public housings in KL as a pilot PPR to implement 1Community 1Recycle (1C1R) Programme in 2022. The programme aims to cultivate recycling practices among the residents by using a reward-based system. The residents can get rewards for basic necessities such as wheat flour, cooking oil, sugar and condensed milk.

Facilities include two futsal courts, three badminton courts, two playgrounds, one kindergarten, one community clinic, one outdoor stage, two community halls and a surau.

PPR Taman Mulia

Constructed in 2000, PPR Taman Mulia is situated adjacent to Bandar Tun Razak LRT, Pusat Komersial Komuniti Bandar Tun Razak and the Taman Mulia commercial area, and sits directly across from PA Seri Kota.

The PPR features two blocks, each containing three towers connected by narrow corridors, resulting in limited open spaces due to its compact design. Similar to PPR Seri Cempaka, PPR Taman Mulia has a mix of unit renters and owners, impacted from the RTO scheme introduced in 2007 by the government.

Community activities and programmes are organised by the RA and KRT, with support from the joint management body (JMB).

Facilities include a playground, multipurpose hall, prayer hall, surau, KRT room, RA room, a badminton court available for hourly rental, a futsal court also available for hourly rental and a community garden. PPR Taman Mulia previously had a large open space, sized about 2,456 square metres that was replaced by a multi-storey car park to address overcrowding cars within the complex.

PA Seri Sabah 3A

Constructed in 1982, PA Seri Sabah 3A is nestled among housing and commercial complexes, with train lines connecting it to major roads like Jalan Loke Yew and Jalan Cheras. The complex was located beside PA Seri Sabah 3B, sharing similar complex areas. The housing tenure consists of both renters and owners within the complexes.

The RA and KRT are the most prominent community-based organisations (CBOs) at PA Seri Sabah 3A. The PA's design includes an open-space playground, basketball court, futsal court, badminton court, sepak takraw court, volleyball court and community hall.

Furthermore, PA Seri Sabah 3A was the selected public housing in Bandar Tun Razak to host Pusat Ekonomi Digital (PEDi), an initiative to provide opportunities for the residents to increase their socio-economic well-being through digital platforms.

PPR Desa Tun Razak

PPR Desa Tun Razak, built in 1997, is situated in the industrial area near Bandar Tasik Selatan. Also known as PPR DeTuRa, it was originally constructed to relocate residents during the KL 1998 Commonwealth Games. While the PPR was intended as transit, many residents have remained to this day. In 2007, PPR Desa Tun Razak was also included in the RTO scheme, resulting in a mix of renters and owners in the complex.

The PPR used to feature a large open space, which has since been replaced by a multi-storey car park with futsal and badminton courts on top. Other amenities include a small playground and a public library. The complex is also conveniently located near schools and a mosque.

There are several active CBOs operating here, including the RA, KRT, Kelab AADK (Agensi Antidadah Kebangsaan), Kumpulan Marhaban, Persatuan Wanita Jaya, Kelab Belia Detura, Pertubuhan Sahsiah, Persatuan Ibu Tunggal, and Pertubuhan Kebajikan dan Sosial Masyarakat Berhati Rakyat Kuala Lumpur.

PPR Lembah Subang 1

PPR Lembah Subang 1, built in 1999, was known as PPR Taman Putra Damai. It is situated in Taman Putra Permai, Petaling Jaya, located conveniently near the Lembah Subang LRT, making it a strategic location for local shops. The complex consists of eight blocks, each featuring two interconnected towers.

Because of limited connectivity between the blocks, each block operates independently with its own CBOs, including RAs and KRTs. From 2001 to 2017, PPR Lembah Subang 1 was managed by Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ). The federal government, through KPKT, has taken over the management responsibilities of the PPR since 2018 as the landowner.

Facilities at PPR Lembah Subang 1 include a futsal field, two playgrounds, three community halls, three suraus and a Hindu temple. The site hosts numerous activities, as various NGOs run active programmes aimed at improving residents' quality of life through education and economic empowerment. PPR Lembah Subang 1 participated in Sayangi Rumahku campaign in 2019 to refurbish and repurpose the complex's badminton court to a multipurpose court.

PPR Kg Baru Hicom

PPR Kg Baru Hicom is situated near the Klang River, the Kg Baru Hicom settlement and a light commercial area. PPR Kg Baru Hicom temporarily accommodated some villagers and squatters from Padang Jawa. While many returned to their original homes, about a third chose to stay. Originally planned for young couples struggling to find accommodation, the high demand for housing and the rising cost of living in the city led many outside the target demographic to remain.

Before its construction, the Kg Baru Hicom area experienced severe flooding, which led to emergency evacuations. In 2000, the government addressed the flooding issue by constructing a river dam, repairing roads and raising street levels by three feet. In 2005, the Selangor state government, through the Lembaga Perumahan Hartanah Selangor (LPHS), completed Hicom's construction, providing residents with land titles and essential amenities. The facilities include a surau, three community halls, three multipurpose courts and two playgrounds.

Active CBOs at PPR Kg Baru Hicom include the RA, KRT, Persatuan Wanita PPR Hicom (Perwacom), as well as groups like the Group Sahabat Prihatin and the Youth Leader Club.

Annexe 4

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From Roof to Resilience tells the story of a policy that worked—but is now coming undone. Malaysia's public housing once lifted millions from urban poverty, replacing squatter settlements with homes and hope. Yet decades later, that hard-won progress is backsliding. Drawing on a landmark study of nearly 3,000 households across the Klang Valley, this book documents a system in visible decline: deteriorating infrastructure, rising crime, weakening social cohesion, and multigenerational families trapped in substandard living conditions. The research offers rich empirical insights into how fragmented governance and chronic underfunding have eroded liveability.

This book moves beyond blame to offer a clear-eyed assessment of what has gone wrong and what must change. For policymakers, development practitioners, urbanists, and an engaged public, it provides important insights and a framework for rebuilding. The message is urgent: piecemeal fixes will not suffice. Only systemic reform can reverse this trajectory. *From Roof to Resilience* is an essential resource for those seeking to understand how a once-successful social policy began to unravel—and what must be done to restore public housing as a foundation for resilient, inclusive communities.

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