

**Forum:** Economic and Social Council

**Issue:** Addressing the issue of urban slums in South America

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**Position:** Chair of Economic and Social Council

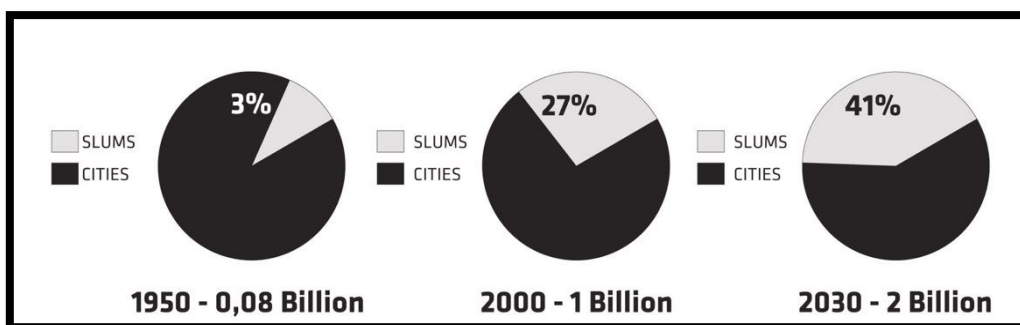
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## Introduction

From the 1950s onwards, mass rural to urban migration has taken place, many migrants arrive at flourishing cities hoping for better jobs, wages and a better lifestyle in general. Most of the time, these hopes and dreams are crushed as many migrants end up living a lifestyle that lacks the luxury they wished for.

Currently, 80% of South America's 600 million people live in cities, which is a larger number compared to any other region in the world. Most urban landscapes in Latin America include poor neighbourhoods that are tightly packed with shacks and slums made of brick, scrap metal and wood. It is estimated that around 113 million people of South America, which is a fifth of the continent's population, live in slums.

The urban slums can cause various economic, social and environmental issues. Due to the crowded nature of the shanty town, the job competition is extremely fierce, leaving many slum dwellers unemployed, for example, more than half of the adults in Rocinha are currently unemployed. This will lead to them placing themselves in the informal economy. Some social issues include the growing inequality and social exclusion of those living in urban slums. In some cases, slum dwellers do not have access to basic water and sanitation services and secure housing, due to the fact that slums are illegal housings.



*Proportion of the population living in slums on the total urban population*

## Definition of Key Terms

### Urban Slums

The definition of urban slum as proposed by UN-Habitat is a dwelling that lacks one or more of the following conditions: access to improved water; access to improved sanitation; structural quality and durability of dwelling; sufficient living space that is not overcrowded; security of tenure.

### Slum Dwellers

The term that refers to those who live in slums.

### Favela

The term is Brazilian Portuguese for ‘slum’, it usually refers to Brazilian shanty towns, shacks and slums. One example of a favela is Rocinha in Rio de Janeiro.

### Street Peddling

Street peddlers are travelling vendors of goods such as food and clothes. There are many successful businesses that have started off with street peddling.

### Informal Economy

This is a system of trade or economic exchange used outside government controlled or money-based transactions. Examples of this include selling of goods and services on streets, street trading, cleaning, picking up garbage and mutual self-help. Income in the informal economy is not recorded in taxation purposes and is not included in gross domestic product (GDP) calculations.

### Rural to Urban Migration

Rural to urban migration is when people in rural areas migrate to urban areas in search for work. Although there are some positive impacts, there are mostly negative impacts on the rural communities.

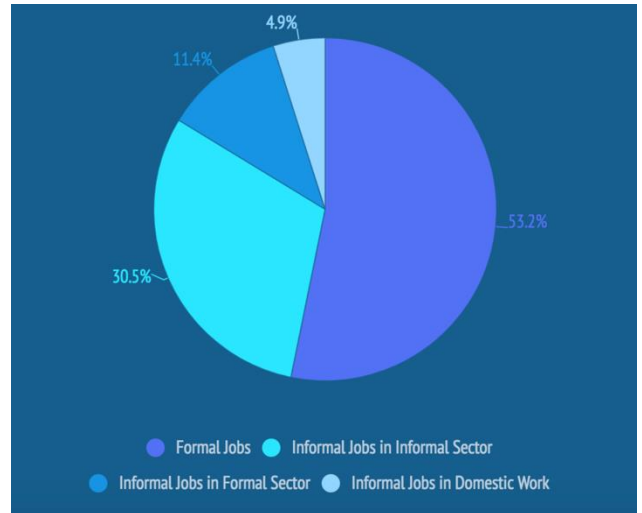
### Vigilante Militia

Vigilante militia refers to a self-appointed group of citizens who undertake the law enforcement in their local community without legal authority, typically because the legal agencies are thought to be inadequate.

## General Overview

### Economic issues

With a high population, the competition for the limited job spots in slums are fiercer and more intense. This has led to higher unemployment rates and left many slum dwellers no choice but to employ themselves in the informal sector for ‘cash in hand’, where the quality of jobs is much lower. As of 2010, the number of the Latin American working population in the informal economy is as high as 46.8%. Jobs in the informal sector are also poorly paid and the income is unstable, meaning that the quality of life will also be reduced. Unemployment may also lead to slum dwellers joining criminal gangs, which tangles in with the social issues of slums in South America. Many slum dwellers decide to join criminal gangs as the income for slum dwellers is unstable, the slum dwellers feel as though joining a criminal gang will make matters better.



*A Pie Chart of Employment in Latin America*

### Rocinha, Brazil

Rocinha, is one of Rio de Janeiro's richest and most developed favelas. However, some inhabitants of Rocinha can only afford to live on £1 per day, and according to the Organisation of Civil Society in Rocinha, only 5% of the favela's population earns more than \$400 per month. A shocking 81% of slum dwellers have lowest paying jobs in the service sector. The impact unemployment has had on the largest favela in Rio is extremely high. With the country of Brazil's unemployment rate reaching the bewildering number of 33%, many slum dwellers have had no choice but to enter the informal economy. Many favela residents resort to making money through collecting garbage and street peddling. As money made by jobs in the informal sector are not included in taxes, this has led to the Brazil government not having enough money to provide better quality services. The consequences of this include not being able to take care of the public services properly, for example, in a very short amount of time, waterways have suffered drainage problems due to the amount of water pollution, causing a water stoppage.

However, authorities in Rio de Janeiro have taken measures to reduce the number of issues in Rocinha. With the many self-help schemes and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Green My Favela and Project Favela, Rocinha has developed a lot and now has hundreds of businesses such as banks, drug stores, bus cables and a local television line called 'TV ROC'.

### Environmental issues of urban slums in South America

The development of urban slums can cause many environmental issues such as water pollution and light pollution. In addition, the poorly constructed illegal houses can destabilise densely inhabited hills, causing dangerous landslides and risking the lives of many slum dwellers. For example, in mid-December 1999, an extremely heavy rainfall in Caracas led to the already saturated soil sliding and flooding the whole city, the storm killing 32,000 people, leaving 140,000 people homeless and 200,000 people jobless.

#### *Puno, Peru*

Lake Titicaca in Peru used to be one of the most worshipped places by the Incas, who believed that the deep blue waters of the lake were the birthplace of the sun. Puno, a Peruvian city home to many slums, is perched on the shore of the ancient lake. These days, the shores of the largest lake in the whole of Latin America is covered in litter such as dead frogs, empty paint buckets and soggy trash. Inside of the dirty lake is toxic levels of lead and mercury. The polluted water of Lake Titicaca has caused many health problems among the 1.3 million people living near it. The untreated sewage water from 24 cities nearby is only one of the many pollutants of the famous lake; illegal gold mines in the Andes mountains dump 15 tons of mercury into a river that flows into Titicaca every year.



*A photo of the pollution of Lake Titicaca,  
Peru*

### Social issues of urban slums in South America

Social issues of urban slums include inequality and exclusion from the rest of the society and crimes such as drug dealing and thieving. South America has 10 out of the 15 most unequal countries in the world and the Americas has the highest crime rate in the entire world. Research has shown that areas in which the

rich and poor coexist have higher crime rates; this shows that inequality is one of the many reasons to higher crime rates. Additionally, crime rates in slums correlate with the insufficient laws in place. Laws in slums are not appropriate enough as they are not regions that have formal recognition from the government. Furthermore, women are more prone to violence in slums. Issues such as unemployment will put stress on marriages and may lead to domestic violence. It is worth noting that most social issues of urban slums are the outcomes of economic issues.

### *Rocinha, Brazil*

The slum homicides alone reduce the life expectancy of slum dwellers in Brazil by 7 years. With many gang movements such as ‘Amigos Dos Amigos’ present in Rocinha, the favela is so feared that the Brazilian police do not enter the area without guns. There have been cases of intense gun battles between the local police and the local gang members and with the violence increasing, students have not been able to attend school and many health cares have been shut. At extreme cases, the Brazilian army has been deployed into Rocinha.

### *Caracas, Venezuela*

In the Venezuelan capital of Caracas, there were 3,012 murders alone in 2016, making the city often referred to as the most dangerous city in the world. Nowadays tall walls, barred windows and armed security are becoming increasingly common and more and more people are avoiding going outside during night; and even stories about criminals advising their victims on how to stay safe in Caracas have gone viral.

Unfortunately, slum dwellers in Caracas slums such as Petare have less money for protection. Shards of glass have been embedded into the concrete to stop criminals from entering, but not much has been done to solve this issue. Residents of slums are forced to get home before dark and leave early before dawn to avoid robberies and assaults.

### *Mexico*

Criminal impunity, corrupt police are one of the many reasons that is causing social inequality in Mexico to grow. In the slums of Mexico, gang members openly patrol the streets and the safety of slum dwellers is often ignored. 2,540 of Mexico’s nearly 125 million people hold 43% of the country’s individual wealth and only the elite are able to afford security against the criminals in Mexico. Slum inhabitants are relegated and forgotten, and life outside the high walls and personal guards is described as a slaughterhouse by many. The Mexican police ignore most robberies and are only willing to help when paid money.

The slum inhabitants of Mexico have tried to tackle the issue at hand themselves, organising self-defence groups, also known as vigilante militia, to replace the corrupt police. However, with untrained gunmen acting with impunity, this only catalysed the breakdown of Mexico's society. Many of the vigilante militia were bought off by cartels, whilst others started drug and human trafficking. Contrary to popular belief, research has shown that vigilante militia is not necessarily common in areas with higher crime rates; rather, their presence is stronger in areas where there is a larger gap between the rich and the poor.

## UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) is the United Nations programme working towards a better urban future. The mission of the UN-Habitat is to promote socially and environmentally sustainable human settlement development and to achieve adequate shelter for all. The UN-Habitat has been working with volunteers and initiatives, such as the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, to help the betterment of the lives of slum dwellers.

Assembly resolution 55/2 targets on achieving a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020. There was also a target on water and sanitation of the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, which aimed to halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by the year 2015. Furthermore, Assembly resolution 65/1 had member states committing themselves to continue working towards cities without slums, beyond current targets by reducing slum populations and improving the lives of slum dwellers.

There have been events organised by the UN-Habitat, such as the World Urban Forum (WUF), which is an international conference dedicated to urban issues such as slums. The WUC is a platform for cities to share and learn about initiatives, actions and policies implemented by governments. World Habitat Day is the day designated by the United Nations on the first Monday of every October to reflect on the state of cities and towns and the basic human right to adequate shelter, this has helped in spreading awareness amongst people in other countries to some extent, as it is not a very publicised day.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
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1978	The UN-Habitat was mandated by the General Assembly resolution 3327, by which the General Assembly established the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation.
September 18 <sup>th</sup> , 2000	Assembly Resolution 55/2, also known as the Millennium Development Goals, adopted by the General Assembly in New York, USA, endorsed by 189 countries, which works towards the significant improvement of the lives of slum dwellers.
November 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 2010	General Assembly 2 <sup>nd</sup> told that global action is necessary as the number of slum dwellers continues rising globally.
September 22 <sup>nd</sup> , 2010	Assembly Resolution 65/1, keeping the promise and working together united towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.
December, 2015	The World Atlas of Slum Evolution published by the UN-Habitat.

## Possible Solutions

One potential solution could be to **better the education and healthcare in South America**. Member states may work towards this goal by collaborating with United Nations organisations (UNOs) and NGOs to help the lives of slum dwellers. Some examples of NGOs include Green My Favela and Project Favela. The lives of slum dwellers can be improved by providing them with treatments for those who are ill and helping the next generation by providing them with adequate education. In addition, the government can work towards building better infrastructures such as roads, hospitals and schools. Governments can also ensure that additional and affordable land and housing is available for growing low-income communities.

Member states should also aim to **reduce the social inequality and exclusion** by investing in solutions that start with the grass roots, for example the slum dwellers. This is due to the fact that corrupt government and people in higher levels of the society may use the money for their own benefit. Member states should try to monitor the progress of the slums by conducting meetings with representatives of the slums. This is because those who are in the lowest level of the society know what they need and want for the betterment of their lives, therefore this solution may be a more efficient way to deal with issues happening in the slums.

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