

Understanding Housing Exclusion as a Process: A Systematic Review of Interventions, Mechanisms, Affected Populations, and Outcomes

ABSTRACT

Housing exclusion has become a pressing issue for sustainable urban development, yet it remains conceptually underdefined and geographically uneven in the literature. This paper presents a systematic review of 200 journal articles to examine how housing exclusion is defined, produced, and manifested across urban contexts. The review adopts a working definition of housing exclusion as a process of unequal access to housing resources, which the literature most commonly understands as dynamic and shaped by market restructuring, institutional practices, and unequal power relations. It is produced through interventions such as urban renewal, welfare conditionality, tenant screening, eviction, and administrative gatekeeping, and generates unequal outcomes across individual, social, and spatial levels. The review also shows that housing exclusion has distinct analytical value because it helps identify low-visibility forms of housing inequality that do not always appear through homelessness, visible conflict, or other extreme outcomes. Building on these findings, the paper develops a process-oriented conceptual framework that explains how housing exclusion operates across structural, institutional, and everyday levels, how exclusion outcomes feed back into vulnerability, and how these processes unfold unevenly over time. It also identifies a marked geographical imbalance in the evidence base, with research concentrated in the Global North. The paper therefore calls for a more globally grounded, comparative, and process-sensitive research agenda for inclusive and sustainable urban development.

KEYWORDS

Housing exclusion, Housing inequality, Sustainable urban development, Spatial justice, Systematic review

1 INTRODUCTION

Housing exclusion has intensified markedly in recent decades. Globally, over 1.8 billion people lack adequate housing, more than one billion live in informal settlements, and approximately 150 million are entirely without shelter. Each year, around 15 million people are forcibly evicted from their homes (UN Human Rights, 2019). Housing costs have also risen sharply. Between 2021 and 2024, residential property prices across the EU rose by an average of 11.3%, rental costs by 8.2%, and energy prices by 43.2% (FEANTSA, 2025a), leaving poor households spending nearly double the population-wide share of their income on housing. These pressures extend beyond individual hardship. Adequate, secure and affordable housing is central to SDG 11's vision of inclusive, safe and sustainable cities, yet its systematic denial to growing shares of the urban population places that goal under increasing strain.

Several intersecting pressures have sharpened these inequalities, particularly for already vulnerable groups. Climate change and the growing frequency of extreme weather events place inadequately housed populations at acute risk of displacement and physical harm (Evans, 2021; FEANTSA, 2025b). The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted housing security at scale, disproportionately affecting those in precarious tenancy arrangements and informal settlements (Carvalho et al., 2025; A. Li et al., 2025). Rising flows of refugees and migrants continue to encounter structural barriers to housing access (Andersson, 1999; Bolzoni et al., 2015; Guentner et al., 2016). For these groups, inadequate housing is not a peripheral concern but a direct threat to safety and survival (Pimentel Walker et al., 2023).

Beyond these specific contexts, housing exclusion is a global phenomenon that the United Nations links to violations of the right to an adequate standard of living. Its consequences extend well beyond shelter, encompassing deteriorating physical and mental health (Bonuck and Drucker, 1998; Silva et al., 2025), deepening social and spatial isolation (Darcy, 2013; Morris et al., 2005a), and constrained access to education and civic participation. These outcomes directly undermine the social cohesion, spatial equity, and inclusive access to urban resources that sustainable urban development depends upon (Lu et al., 2023; Pawson and Kintrea, 2002), making housing exclusion a pressing concern for urban sustainability scholarship as much as for housing policy.

A growing body of research has examined these concerns across sociology, urban geography, public health, environmental science, and public administration. Research on housing exclusion spans a wide range of themes, from governance and allocation systems that restrict access (Whiteford and Simpson, 2015), to financialisation and gentrification that drive displacement (Gutierrez and Domenech, 2017; Smigiel, 2024), to the effects of housing insecurity on health and well-being across the life course (Morris et al., 2025). This literature shows that exclusion unfolds through multiple processes and stages, but it remains fragmented across different mechanisms, social groups, and contexts. Regional emphases further reinforce this unevenness: research in North America has concentrated heavily on racial discrimination and institutional gatekeeping (Reosti, 2020; Teresa, 2022), while European scholarship tends to foreground migration and gentrification as primary drivers (Bolzoni et al., 2015; Posthumus et al., 2013). Existing research has deepened understanding

of housing exclusion, but it has also exposed persistent conceptual and synthetic gaps that a systematic review is well placed to address.

Across this literature, housing exclusion is increasingly understood not as a fixed outcome but as a dynamic process (M. August and Mah, 2025; Benfer et al., 2025, pp. 2017–2024; Ramiller, 2022; Seymour and Akers, 2021; Wong et al., 2020). This view shifts attention away from visible housing conditions, such as homelessness, rooflessness and overcrowding. It instead focuses on the mechanisms, institutional arrangements and power relations that produce and reproduce unequal access to housing (Latocha, 2024; Seymour and Akers, 2021). In this review, housing exclusion is defined as a process of differential access to housing resources, involving exclusionary drivers, exclusionary practices, affected groups and resulting outcomes (Benfer et al., 2025, pp. 2017–2024; DeMarco, 2023; So et al., 2025). This process may unfold gradually or through distinct stages, and it can generate both visible and less visible forms of disadvantage (Hock et al., 2024). A process-oriented perspective broadens the analytical scope of housing exclusion beyond extreme deprivation. It brings into view severe overcrowding, precarious informal tenancies and affordability-driven immobility, which often escape crisis-based policy responses despite affecting large segments of the urban population. Policies focused only on visible symptoms, such as emergency shelter provision, are therefore unlikely to alter the structural conditions that produce exclusion.

Despite this emerging consensus, the concept of housing exclusion remains underdefined. Existing classification frameworks, most notably ETHOS, have improved measurement and cross-national comparison by categorising observable living situations into rooflessness, houselessness, insecure housing and inadequate housing (FEANTSA, 2017). However, these frameworks are organised mainly around physical conditions and observable outcomes. They offer limited insight into the processes through which people enter or move between these states, and into how exclusion operates across different social groups. In the wider research literature, explicit definitions of housing exclusion are rare. The concept is often conflated with related terms such as homelessness, housing insecurity and housing inadequacy, which obscures its distinct analytical character (Carvalho et al., 2025; DeLuca et al., 2019; Fraser et al., 2022; Lidén et al., 2025; Pawson and Kintrea, 2002). This ambiguity is not merely terminological. When housing exclusion is left loosely defined or conflated with related concepts, its broader analytical significance is easily underestimated. In particular, it becomes difficult to understand systematically the mechanisms through which exclusion operates and how they interact with affected groups.

A further gap lies in the fragmented state of the field. Existing studies often examine housing exclusion through single dimensions, such as particular policies, social groups or outcomes, rather than connecting them within a broader analytical framework. As a result, exclusionary drivers, institutional practices, affected groups, exclusion outcomes and their wider implications for urban development have rarely been synthesised in a systematic way. Against this background, this article presents a systematic review of the housing exclusion literature. It examines how housing exclusion is defined, produced and experienced across different institutional and geographical contexts. The

review addresses five research questions:

RQ1: How is housing exclusion defined in the literature, and what dimensions or manifestations are identified?

RQ2: What policy interventions or institutional practices contribute to the intensification or mitigation of housing exclusion?

RQ3: What structural and institutional mechanisms generate housing exclusion?

RQ4: How does housing exclusion manifest across different vulnerable groups?

RQ5: What individual, social, and spatial outcomes arise from housing exclusion processes?

Through an in-depth analysis of the five research questions, this review clarifies the concept of housing exclusion, synthesises fragmented evidence, and develops a process-oriented framework to inform future research and policy for more equitable and sustainable urban development.

2 METHODS

2.1 A working definition of housing exclusion

Existing studies have not reached a clear and consistent definition of housing exclusion. Although this issue has been widely discussed, many accounts do not define housing exclusion directly, but frame it through related concepts. These include housing insecurity associated with involuntary moves under poverty (Hock et al., 2024; Seymour and Akers, 2021), restricted housing rights, discriminatory access (DeMarco, 2023; Korver-Glenn, 2018), exclusionary neighbourhoods (Stewart, 2022), migrant marginalisation (Guentner et al., 2016), and homelessness in later life (Grenier and Sussman, 2024). While closely related to housing exclusion, such formulations are not equivalent to the concept itself. In addition, existing definitions are often embedded in specific institutional settings or policy contexts, and therefore remain highly context-specific. Attention has been directed to hukou status (Wu et al., 2016), eligibility rules (Guentner et al., 2016), welfare arrangements (Andersson, 1999), discrimination (Fraser et al., 2022), deprivation of rights (Stagni, 2025; Teremetskyi and Avramova, 2022), and barriers to neighbourhood entry. In some cases, the focus is placed on the states or outcomes associated with housing exclusion rather than the exclusionary process itself (Fanning and Veale, 2004; Jesús M. González-Pérez et al., 2020; Vilenica and Škobić, 2023). Overall, existing research tends to capture only partial aspects of housing exclusion and rarely provides an integrated definition that can accommodate different contexts, stages, and forms.

A clear definition of housing exclusion is necessary before conducting the systematic review. The topic covers a wide range of issues. It includes policy, planning, and market interventions, as well as the mechanisms through which these interventions affect different groups and generate housing, social, and spatial consequences. Without a relatively coherent conceptual boundary, later stages of literature screening, data extraction, and thematic coding would lack a consistent analytical basis. It would also be difficult to compare studies within a shared framework. For this reason, this review does not treat housing exclusion as a single outcome label. Instead, it understands it as an analytical concept that can organise different parts of the literature.

Based on the initial reading of the literature, housing exclusion is not simply a descriptive term. It is

better understood as a multidimensionally conceptualised structural process. It refers not only to exclusion that prevents particular social groups from entering neighbourhoods they could otherwise afford. It is also related to the erosion of everyday life and the weakening of social inclusion in the course of urban development. Compared with defining housing exclusion as a single condition or event, a process perspective is better able to explain the links across the literature and to capture how unequal access to housing takes shape. On this basis, this review understands housing exclusion through a connected chain of interventions, mechanisms, affected groups, and outcomes.

In light of the above, this review defines housing exclusion as a process in which housing resources are distributed unequally (DeLuca et al., 2019; Gutiérrez and Domènech, 2017; Migozzi, 2024; Teresa, 2022). This process includes exclusionary interventions, exclusionary mechanisms, affected groups, and the outcomes that follow. It may occur in routine and everyday forms, or emerge in concentrated ways during particular events or stages, and it ultimately infringes the housing rights of specific groups (Bhatia, 2020; Pappoe, 2023). The emphasis on process helps distinguish housing exclusion from state-based concepts such as homelessness, poor housing quality, or housing insecurity (Martine August and Mah, 2025; Hock et al., 2024; Rowlands Snyder et al., 2021; Sullivan, 2017). These may be important manifestations or consequences of housing exclusion, but they are not housing exclusion itself (Hock et al., 2024; Seymour and Akers, 2021; Versey, 2022). This distinction helps avoid treating outcomes as definitions and keeps the analytical levels clear. The emphasis on unequal distribution also highlights the relational nature of housing exclusion. Housing exclusion is not simply a matter of lacking housing resources. It is a process in which certain groups are placed in systematically disadvantaged positions in access to housing through the combined effects of institutional rules, market selection, and existing social inequalities (Filandri and Semi, 2022; Y. Huang and Yi, 2015; Raymond et al., 2021; Teresa, 2022). Its core is not housing shortage in a general sense, but the formation and reproduction of unequal opportunities in concrete processes (Carvalho et al., 2025; Fawaz et al., 2025; Lu et al., 2023; Pimentel Walker et al., 2023). From a temporal perspective, this review includes both everyday and staged forms of exclusion in order to capture its varied expressions more fully. Some forms operate through routine institutional practices, such as eligibility thresholds, tenant screening, and access rules (DeMarco, 2023; Guentner et al., 2016; Hock et al., 2024; Hoffman et al., 2010; Robben et al., 2023; So et al., 2025). Others appear more sharply in specific events, such as eviction, demolition, urban redevelopment, or resettlement arrangements in times of crisis (Geva and Rosen, 2022; Ling Li et al., 2025; Molinari, 2022; Niu et al., 2025; Ramiller, 2022; Seymour and Akers, 2021; Watt, 2022). These forms differ in how they unfold, but both are part of the process of housing exclusion. In addition, from the perspective of law, this review understands housing exclusion as an infringement of housing rights (Blakeley, 2021; Ranslem, 2015; Robben et al., 2023). This provides the concept with a necessary normative basis. It also helps connect housing exclusion with existing debates on housing rights while retaining its analytical value for empirical research.

It should be noted that this is a working definition rather than a final definition of housing exclusion. Its main purpose is to provide an operational boundary for the review and to guide the subsequent design of literature screening, data extraction, and coding. At the same time, the ways in which

existing studies define housing exclusion and use related concepts remain an important part of the review findings and will be presented and discussed later in the paper.

2.2 Data Source & Search Strategy

A systematic literature search was conducted across two major academic databases: Web of Science and Scopus. The database search was completed on 17 December 2025, and this date was treated as the search end point for the review. The search strategy combined three conceptual blocks: (1) housing-related terms (e.g., housing, residential, accommodation, shelter, dwelling, tenure); (2) core exclusion phenomena (e.g., exclusion, exclusionary, segregation, discrimination, marginalisation, displacement, eviction, renoviction, gentrification); and (3) process and mechanism descriptors, including policy-oriented terms (e.g., eligibility, residency requirements, legal status, tenure insecurity), market-oriented terms (e.g., financialisation, commodification, tenant screening, rent gap), and process descriptors (e.g., gatekeeping, discretionary practices, barriers to access, mechanisms of exclusion). Subject area filters were applied to retain studies from sociology, environmental sciences, arts and humanities, economics, engineering, business, and decision sciences; publications were restricted to journal articles and review articles in the English language. The initial search yielded 2104 records across both databases. After deduplication, 1,455 unique records were retained for screening.

Table 1. Search strategy applied

Block	Category	Search terms
Block 1: Housing-related concepts	Core housing terminology	Housing OR Residential OR Accommodation OR Shelter OR Dwelling OR Tenure
Block 2: Core exclusion phenomena	Exclusion phenomena and exclusionary actions	Exclusion OR Exclusionary OR Segregation OR Discrimination OR Marginalisation OR Marginalization OR Displacement OR Eviction OR Renoviction OR Gentrification OR "Social cleansing"
	(i) Policy interventions and mechanisms	eligibility OR entitlement OR "allocation criteria" OR "access requirements" OR "residency requirements" OR "legal status" OR "tenure security" OR "tenure insecurity"
Block 3: Descriptions of exclusion processes	(ii) Market interventions and mechanisms	financialisation OR financialization OR commodification OR speculation OR speculative OR "rent gap" OR "exclusionary markets" OR "tenant screening" OR "risk-based selection"
	(iii) Exclusionary practices	"everyday practices" OR "routine practices" OR "informal practices" OR "operational practices" OR gatekeeping OR "discretionary practices" OR "selective access" OR "frontline practices"
	(iv) Supplementary process descriptors	"rising rents" OR "rent increases" OR "housing price increases" OR "price escalation" OR "cost escalation" OR "pushed out" OR "forced to move" OR "forced relocation" OR "involuntary mobility" OR "loss of access" OR "restricted access" OR "constrained access" OR "barriers to access" OR "exclusion process" OR "processes of exclusion" OR "pathways to exclusion" OR "mechanisms of exclusion"
Filters: Subject areas	Discipline limitations (OR)	Social Sciences (SOCI) OR Environmental Science (ENVI) OR Arts and Humanities (ARTS) OR Economics (ECON) OR Engineering (ENGI) OR Business and Management (BUSI) OR Decision Sciences (DECI)
Filters: Document type & language	Publication type and language	Document type: Article OR Review Language: English

Note: Blocks 1, 2, and 3 were combined using AND; terms within each block were combined using OR.

2.3 Inclusion and exclusion Criteria

Eligibility was assessed in two sequential stages. At the title and abstract screening stage, studies were required to: (1) treat housing or residential conditions as a central focus; (2) engage explicitly with housing exclusion as a dynamic, relational process; and (3) examine how exclusion is produced through policy, market, or institutional mechanisms, rather than focusing solely on its outcomes. Both empirical and conceptual studies were eligible. Studies addressing only social or spatial inequality unconnected to residential access, land access in non-urban contexts, housing outcomes without process analysis, or general social exclusion without a housing dimension were excluded. Full exclusion criteria are provided in Appendix 1.

Articles passing the first stage underwent full-text screening using six structured screening questions (SQ-1 to SQ-6; see Appendix 2 for the complete protocol). As summarised in Table 2, two questions were strict, whereby a NO on either resulted in immediate exclusion, whilst four were non-strict, contributing to a cumulative count. Articles with two or more non-strict NOs were excluded; one non-strict NO triggered second review.

Table 2 Full text screen criteria

ID	Question	Type & decision rule
SQ-1	Housing-adjacent topic (segregation, rent differentials, short-term rentals) engages analytically with housing exclusion?	Non-strict (N/A if not applicable)
SQ-2	Housing exclusion is the primary analytic focus?	Strict — NO = exclude
SQ-3	Exclusion domain is housing or residential?	Strict — NO = exclude
SQ-4	Housing exclusion treated as a central analytical outcome?	Non-strict
SQ-5	Exclusion process or mechanism identified and analysed?	Non-strict
SQ-6	Findings transferable to broader housing exclusion theory?	Non-strict

Note: Full definitions and the decision rule are reported in Appendix 2.

2.4 Data extraction

Data were extracted using a structured coding framework developed iteratively from the review's research questions and conceptual orientation. The framework organises extraction around five analytical dimensions: definitional framing, mechanisms and interventions, affected populations, individual and social and spatial outcomes, and theoretical framing. The definitional dimension was included because preliminary screening revealed that explicit conceptualisations of housing exclusion are largely absent from the literature, addressing RQ1. The mechanism and intervention dimensions distinguish between surface-level policy instruments and the underlying structural logics through which exclusion is generated, addressing RQ2 and RQ3. The population dimension documents which groups are affected and how their vulnerability is explained, addressing RQ4. The outcome dimension captures individual-level, social-level, and spatial-level consequences of exclusion processes, addressing RQ5. Basic bibliographic information, including study type and geographic focus, was extracted for all included studies. Each study was coded independently across all applicable dimensions; as studies frequently address multiple mechanisms, populations, or outcomes simultaneously, categories are not mutually exclusive and percentages reported in the results therefore sum to more than 100%. Table 1 summarises the full extraction framework,

including the coding categories within each dimension and the research question each addresses.

Table 3. Data extraction framework

Dimension	Part	Key coding categories	RQ addressed
Basic bibliographic information	A	Study type; country/region; journal	/
Definitions of housing exclusion	B	Conceptual framing (process / outcome / social exclusion / rights-based violation / market failure / policy failure); dimensions and manifestations; relationship to adjacent concepts	RQ1
Interventions	C	Policy interventions (eligibility criteria, welfare reform, residency requirements, anti-discrimination law); market interventions (financialisation, tenant screening, rent deregulation, speculative buying); governance and institutional practices (gatekeeping, discretionary allocation); urban planning and development; mitigating interventions	RQ2
Mechanisms	D	Structural conditions (financialisation, commodification, welfare retrenchment, spatial segregation, displacement pressures); institutional mediation (state actors, financial institutions, landlords, developers); everyday allocation and access (eligibility assessment, discriminatory practices, frontline decisions)	RQ3
Affected populations	E	Low-income households; racial and ethnic minorities; migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees; women and gender-based vulnerability; children and youth; older adults; people experiencing homelessness; people with disabilities; LGBTQ+ individuals; ex-offenders	RQ4
Outcomes	F	Individual (housing instability, health deterioration, economic precarity, identity erosion); social (stigmatisation, community fragmentation, social isolation, political disengagement); spatial (residential segregation, displacement, poverty concentration, uneven urban development)	RQ5

2.5 Synthesis and Bias Assessment

Risk of bias was assessed across all 200 included studies. Given the methodological heterogeneity of the included literature, a single standardised tool was not considered appropriate. Quality was instead evaluated against four criteria: clarity of research design, transparency of the analytical process, adequacy of evidence for claims about exclusion mechanisms, and reflexivity regarding context-specificity. Each criterion was rated as met, partially met, or not met. Conceptual and theoretical studies were assessed using adapted criteria focused on internal coherence, engagement with existing scholarship, and analytical contribution to understanding exclusion as a process.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Overview of the reviewed publications

Figure 1 illustrates the study selection process in accordance with PRISMA guidelines. A total of 2,104 records were identified through database searches, including 1,197 from Web of Science and 907 from Scopus. After 649 duplicates were removed, 1,455 unique records remained for screening. Of these, 1,085 were excluded at the initial stage. Among the 370 records sought for retrieval, 16 could not be obtained, leaving 354 reports for eligibility assessment. A further 154 were excluded, resulting in a final sample of 200 studies. Overall, the reviewed literature shows clear variation in thematic focus, geographical coverage, and methodological approach.

In thematic terms, the literature was organised into five overarching themes and 11 specific topics, as shown in Figure 2. Some studies covered more than one topic, but the primary coding shows a clear concentration in several key areas. Housing Policy & Governance accounted for the largest share at 23.5%, followed by Structural Mechanisms & Systemic Inequality at 17.5%, Vulnerable Groups & Migration at 16.0%, Gentrification & Displacement at 13.5%, and Financialisation & Commodification at 11.5%. This suggests that current housing exclusion research is mainly concerned with governance and market intervention, the structural production of inequality, and the uneven impacts of exclusion across different social groups. At the same time, the repeated appearance of structural mechanisms, governance, and vulnerable groups across multiple coding levels indicates that housing exclusion is often approached as a multi-dimensional process rather than a single housing outcome.

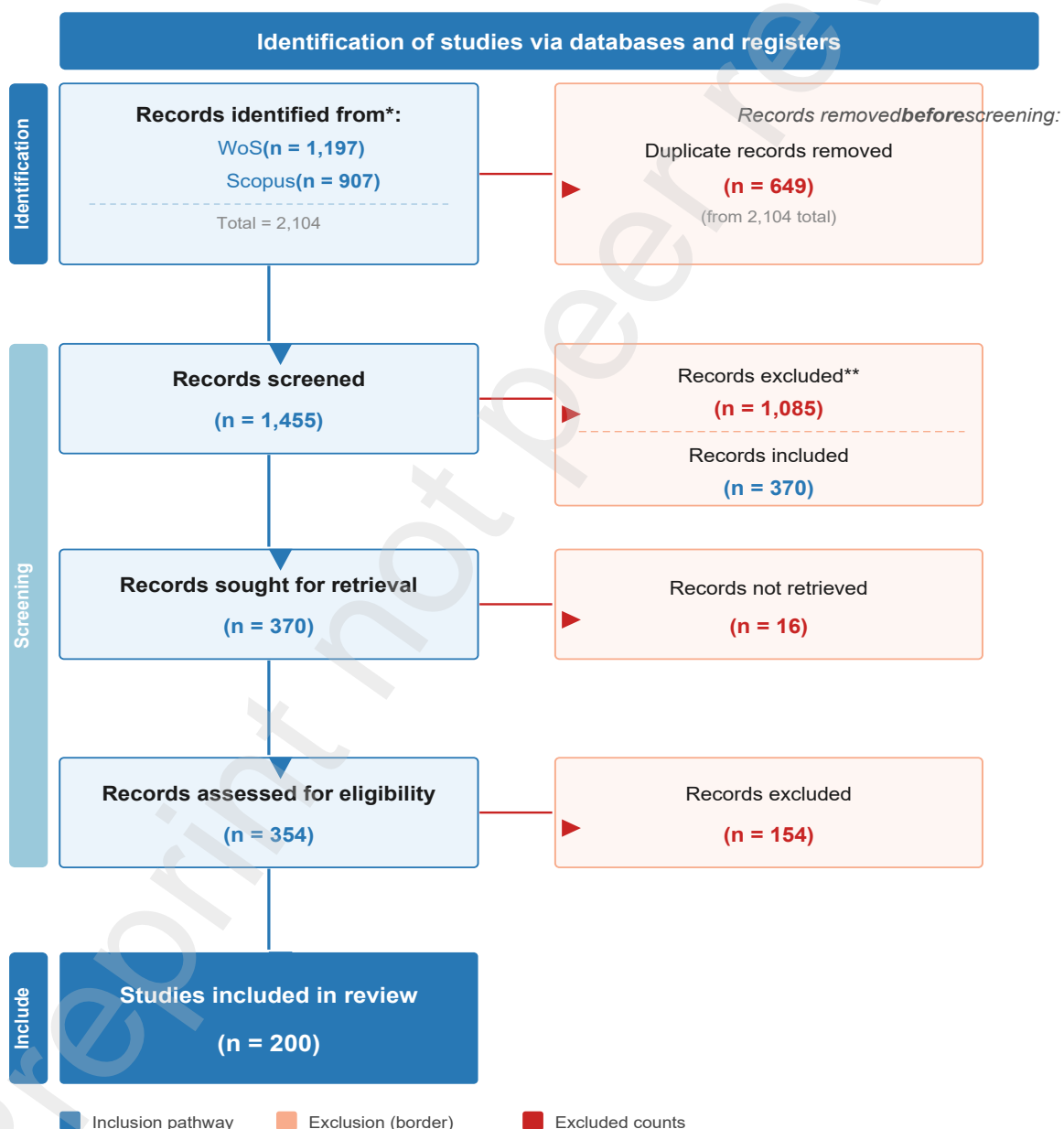


Figure 1 | PRISMA flow diagram illustrating the systematic literature search and study selection process.

* Records identified through Web of Science (WoS, n = 1,197) and Scopus (n = 907); total before deduplication = 2,104.

** Records excluded on the basis of title and abstract screening using predefined eligibility criteria.

Figure 1 PRISMA flow diagram

As shown in Figure 3, the geographical distribution of the literature is highly uneven. North America accounted for 38.5% of the reviewed studies and Western Europe for 28.0%, with the United States far exceeding any other single national context. By contrast, Africa and South America were the least represented. This pattern may not reflect the actual severity of housing exclusion, but it does point to a clear imbalance in the current evidence base, with research from the Global South remaining limited. In methodological terms, qualitative research accounted for the largest share of studies at 45.0%, while quantitative research represented 22.0%. Mixed-methods research accounted for a further 14.0%. The remaining studies included conceptual or theoretical work as well as review-based research. This indicates that housing exclusion research still relies primarily on qualitative analysis, with fewer studies adopting quantitative or integrated designs.

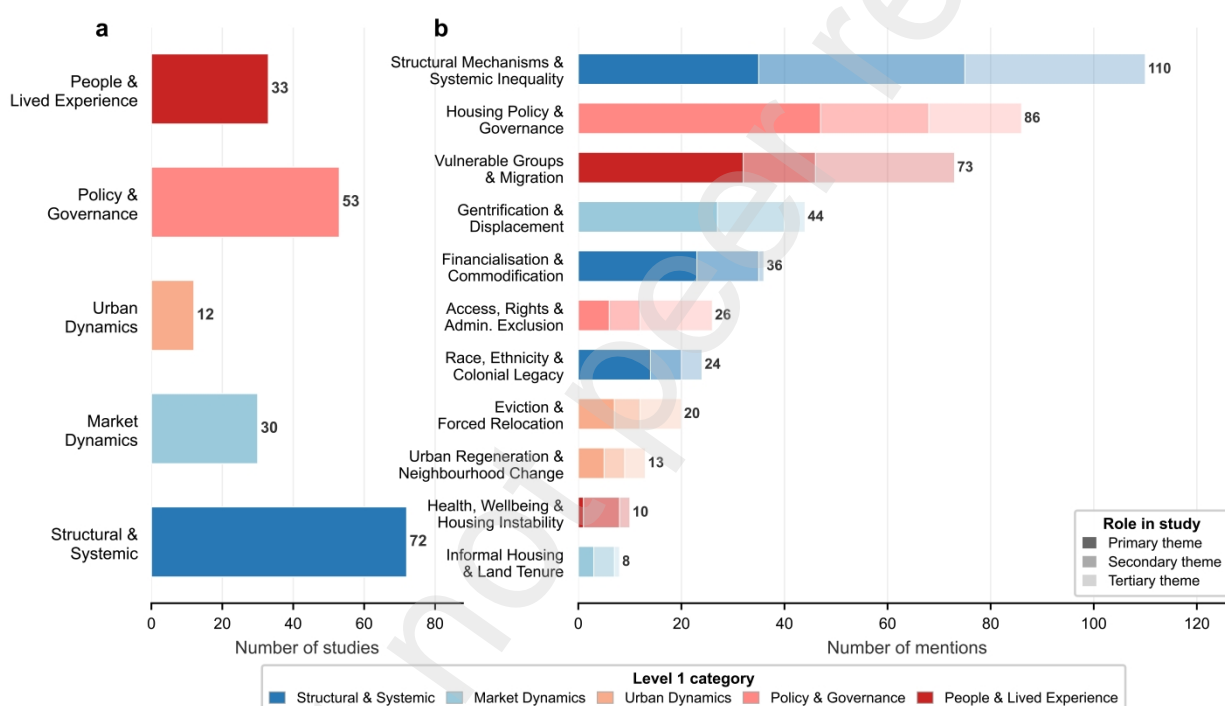


Figure 2 Distribution of study themes in included literature. (a) shows the distribution of studies across five level 1 categories. (b) shows the corresponding level 2 themes, stacked as primary, secondary, or tertiary.

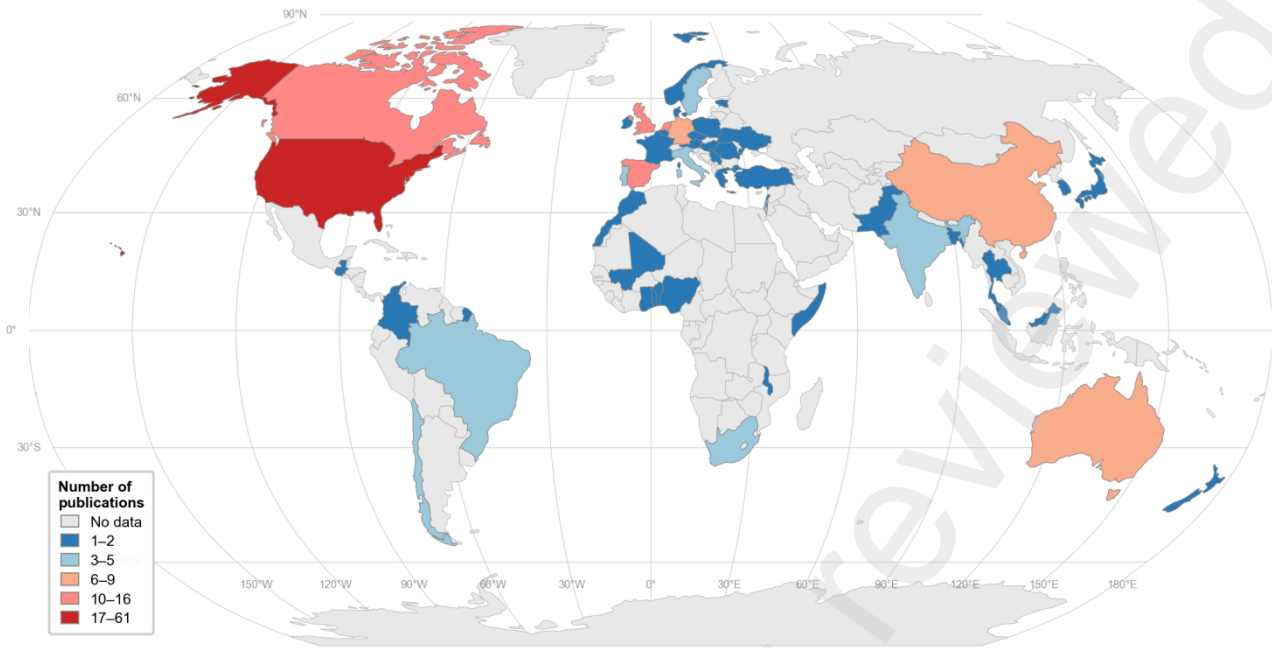


Figure 3 Geographic distribution of included literature

3.2 Definitions of Housing Exclusion

The reviewed literature offers no single agreed definition of housing exclusion. Explicit definitions are relatively limited, and many studies do not define the term directly, as shown in Table 4. Instead, housing exclusion is often understood through broader conceptual framings that reflect how the issue is interpreted and analysed across different studies. In this review, these framings refer to the main analytical perspectives through which housing exclusion is approached, rather than to formal definitions alone. This distinction indicates that variation in the literature lies not only in terminology, but also in the aspects of housing exclusion that are prioritised in analysis.

Table 4. Existing definitions and related conceptualisations of housing exclusion

Author and year	Term/concept defined	Definition or core meaning	Relevance to housing exclusion
Direct definitions			
Teremetskyi and Avramova, 2022	Housing exclusion	Restriction of the right to housing, leaving individuals or groups unable to access or live in housing on discriminatory grounds.	Provides a direct rights-based definition, centred on discrimination and restricted access.
Lacombe-Duncan et al., 2019	Housing exclusion / housing insecurity	Housing exclusion is expressed through insecure living arrangements, including shelters, transitional housing, sofa surfing, and sleeping in public or temporary spaces.	Links housing exclusion to severe insecurity, but mainly frames it through precarious housing conditions.
Related or context-specific formulations			
Hock et al., 2024	Housing insecurity	Experiencing, or being at risk of, repeated involuntary moves linked to poverty.	Captures insecurity and forced mobility, but addresses housing insecurity rather than housing exclusion itself.
Stewart, 2022	Exclusionary neighbourhoods	Disproportionately white and higher-income areas with limited residential opportunities for low-income groups.	Highlights socio-spatial exclusion, but addresses exclusionary neighbourhoods rather than housing exclusion more broadly.
Youqin Huang and Yi, 2015	Housing exclusion in the Chinese context	Housing operates as a means of excluding migrants through hukou-based stratification, stigmatising classification, and spatial control.	Shows the institutional and context-specific character of housing exclusion in relation to hukou and migrant governance.
Grenier and Sussman, 2024	Homelessness in later life	An experience of unequal ageing shaped by age-based structures and social relations that restrict support and produce exclusion and	Illuminates exclusion in later-life homelessness, but focuses on a related condition rather than housing

Author and year	Term/concept defined	Definition or core meaning	Relevance to housing exclusion
		unmet need.	exclusion directly.

Across the reviewed literature, the most common conceptual framing understands housing exclusion as a process, appearing in 84.0% of the studies. Exclusion is dynamic rather than fixed, and is produced through unequal power relations as well as institutional, policy, and market arrangements (Rinn et al., 2022; Silva et al., 2025). A second common framing places housing exclusion within wider patterns of social exclusion, accounting for 46.5% of the studies (Hoffman et al., 2010; Nichols and Braimoh, 2018). The same proportion, 46.5%, understands it as an outcome or state, with greater attention to its observable consequences, such as housing instability, accumulated disadvantage, and exclusionary living conditions (Geva and Rosen, 2022). Less frequently, housing exclusion is framed as a rights-based violation at 7.5%, as the result of policy failure at 9.0%, or as the consequence of market failure at 3.5% (Birchall, 2019; Versey, 2022). These perspectives often overlap, with many studies treating housing exclusion both as an ongoing process and as a condition that becomes visible in concrete outcomes. The process framing treats housing exclusion as an ongoing phenomenon produced through unequal power relations and reproduced through institutional, policy, and market arrangements (Nichols and Braimoh, 2018). By contrast, the outcome or state framing places greater emphasis on its observable consequences, such as residential segregation, housing instability, homelessness, and sustained marginalisation (Guentner et al., 2016; Reosti, 2020; St Arnault and Merali, 2019; Lopez-Sala and Molinero-Gerbeau, 2022). This latter perspective also provides a clearer basis for measurement and policy intervention, such as ETHOS.

Housing exclusion is also defined through several recurring dimensions. Economic and market exclusion was the most frequently identified dimension, appearing in 47.5% of the studies, followed by structural or systemic exclusion (45.5%) and displacement and eviction (44.0%). Other commonly identified dimensions include identity-based exclusion (21.0%), housing precarity and inadequacy (18.5%), institutional or policy exclusion (16.5%), and spatial or geographical exclusion (15.5%). These dimensions show that housing exclusion extends beyond access to housing alone, and is also shaped by market pressures, systemic inequality, forced mobility, identity-based disadvantage, insecure or inadequate housing conditions, policy barriers, and spatial marginalisation.

3.3 Interventions of Housing Exclusion

3.3.1 Policy Interventions and Governance Practices

Policy interventions and governance practices play an ambivalent role in housing exclusion. In the reviewed literature, they are discussed both as interventions that produce exclusion and as instruments intended to mitigate it (Uitermark and Loopmans, 2013; Crosby, 2020).

Within the policy intervention, urban development was the most frequently identified category, appearing in 46.5% of the studies. This mainly includes urban renewal, redevelopment, reconstruction, and planning decisions (L. Li et al., 2025). State-led reconstruction and resettlement programmes often displace low-income and marginalised residents across different institutional contexts (Geva and Rosen, 2022; Lata, 2020). In China, state-managed resettlement directly displaces

residents (Luo et al., 2026; Niu et al., 2025). In Turkey, counter-urbanisation policies combined with high-end housing development have removed Roma communities from long-established neighbourhoods (Avar et al., 2024). In the United States, capital-led redevelopment has driven eviction and displacement in gentrifying areas (Raymond et al., 2021).

Eligibility criteria (11.5%), residency requirements and legal status conditions constitute a further category of exclusionary governance instruments (Bolzoni et al., 2015; Robben et al., 2023). The hukou system in China structurally excludes rural-to-urban migrants from formal housing entitlements (Y. Huang and Yi, 2015), whilst in European and North American contexts, immigration status requirements and bureaucratic eligibility thresholds deny access to social housing and support services for migrants and asylum seekers (Serpa, 2021; Usman et al., 2021).

Policies designed to mitigate housing exclusion demonstrate variable and often contradictory effects. Social housing systems and affordable housing programmes are the most widely documented mitigating interventions, yet the literature reveals a persistent paradox: such policies can inadvertently generate new forms of exclusion, including stigmatisation, spatial segregation, and deteriorating housing quality (Bradley, 2014; Mösgen et al., 2019). The progressive residualisation of social housing concentrates disadvantage and reinforces spatial inequalities (Darcy, 2013). As eligibility becomes increasingly restricted to the most marginalised, privatisation policies further reduce affordable stock and expose low-income households to market pressures (Filandri and Semi, 2022). Rent control and rent-capping legislation offer a more targeted response to affordability exclusion, though their effectiveness is often constrained by enforcement challenges and landlord circumvention (Woodhall-Melnik et al., 2025). Anti-discrimination and fair housing legislation establish important normative frameworks but face similar limitations in practice (Reosti, 2020). Housing First programmes are identified as a promising unconditional approach to mitigating housing exclusion (Canham et al., 2018; Gezinski and Gonzalez-Pons, 2021).

3.3.2 Marketisation and Housing Market Dynamics

Market-based interventions are the most pervasive exclusionary practices in the dataset. They include speculative buying, mortgage-related exclusion, privatisation, rent deregulation, tenant screening, short-term rental conversion, and renoviction. Together, these practices reduce affordability, weaken housing security, and intensify displacement.

Among market-based interventions, financialised forms are the most prominent. Speculative buying is the most widely documented intervention (35.5%), while mortgage-related exclusion appears in 30.0% of studies. Together, they show how housing is increasingly treated as a financial asset rather than a social good. Large-scale acquisitions by institutional investors, real estate investment trusts, and private equity firms inflate rents and intensify displacement (Crosby, 2020; Luo et al., 2026; González-Pérez et al., 2020; Vilenica et al., 2023). Predatory lending, subprime products, redlining, and discriminatory underwriting, by contrast, restrict access to homeownership and channel racialised and lower-income groups into riskier and more expensive borrowing arrangements (Joshi et al., 2024). Together, these interventions restructure both rental and ownership access in

exclusionary ways.

Privatisation and the withdrawal of public investment from housing provision are identified in 25.5% of studies. These shifts erode the supply of non-market housing and push lower-income households into increasingly unaffordable private rental markets (D'Adda and Kusiak, 2025; Fenton et al., 2013). Rent deregulation, identified in 23.5% of studies, further intensifies rent inflation, insecurity of tenure, and displacement by expanding landlord and investor power.

Tenant screening appears in 10.5% of studies and is increasingly automated. Credit scoring, criminal background checks, income-to-rent thresholds, and other risk-based criteria are used by landlords and letting agents to filter applicants (Bhatia, 2020; So et al., 2025). These practices disproportionately exclude low-income households, racialised minorities, and people with prior eviction records, and are increasingly discussed as forms of algorithmic injustice (Davis and Cassel, 2025; Migozzi, 2024; So, 2023).

Short-term rental conversion is identified in 8.5% of studies. Research on platforms such as Airbnb shows how the conversion of residential units into tourist accommodation reduces long-term affordable supply, inflates rents, and concentrates exclusionary pressures in high-demand urban neighbourhoods (Cheung and Yiu, 2022; Wachsmuth and Weisler, 2018). Rather than a simple sharing economy practice, this model often functions as an investment strategy geared towards extracting higher returns from housing (Cocola-Gant and Gago, 2021; Rainer and Steiner, 2025; Wachsmuth and Weisler, 2018). Renoviction is less frequently identified (3.5%) but remains important as a mechanism through which renovation is used to justify rent increases and tenant removal.

3.4 Mechanisms Underlying Housing Exclusion

Whilst Section 3.3 focused on the policy and market interventions associated with housing exclusion, this section examines the mechanisms through which those interventions produce unequal effects (Liu, 2019). In this review, interventions are understood as the observable means by which exclusion is enacted, whereas mechanisms refer to the underlying processes that shape their operation. To organise the findings, the identified mechanisms are discussed across three levels: structural conditions, institutional mediation, and everyday allocation and access.

At the structural level, housing exclusion is rooted in broader political-economic conditions, particularly financialisation, commodification, welfare retrenchment, displacement pressures, and spatial segregation. Financialisation and commodification (70.0%) and displacement mechanisms (54.5%) establish the wider conditions within which other mechanisms operate. The treatment of housing as an investment asset, through institutional portfolio acquisition, speculative capital flows, and the subordination of use value to exchange value, systematically inflates costs and erodes affordable supply. This creates incentives for landlords and developers to displace lower-income tenants through rent increases, eviction, and redevelopment (Luo et al., 2026; Raymond et al., 2021; Swope et al., 2025). Policy failure and welfare retrenchment (47.0%) intensify these dynamics by

withdrawing the non-market safety net (Akers and Seymour, 2018; Filandri and Semi, 2022; Sharma, 2021), whilst spatial concentration and segregation (30.5%) consolidate their effects geographically, confining marginalised groups to areas with limited access to employment, services and resources (Xu, 2022).

These structural conditions are mediated through state institutions, housing authorities, financial actors, landlords, developers, and planners, who translate them into policy, market, and spatial practices. State and government actors (80.5%) set the parameters of exclusion through policy formulation, urban planning, and welfare governance (Lata, 2020), whilst financial institutions (41.5%) shape access through redlining, discriminatory underwriting, and housing financialisation (Korver-Glenn, 2018; So, 2023). Private landlords and letting agents (69.0%) contribute to exclusion through tenant screening, rent-setting, and eviction practices (Geddes and Holz, 2025; So et al., 2025), while developers and urban planners (30.5%) reshape urban space through land-use decisions and redevelopment projects that displace lower-income residents (Beck and Martin, 2025; L. Li et al., 2025). Governance and discretionary power (41.5%) are especially important at this level (Fleming-Klink et al., 2023; Hock et al., 2024), as institutional actors often have considerable latitude in how policies are interpreted and implemented. This discretion creates scope for broader structural biases to enter decision-making and generate unequal outcomes among individuals in similar circumstances (DeMarco, 2023; Greene et al., 2024).

Housing exclusion is then enacted in everyday allocation and access processes, where eligibility assessment, discretionary decision-making, and discriminatory practices shape housing outcomes. Street-level actors such as housing officers, social workers, and allocation committees (19.5%) are directly involved in translating institutional arrangements into lived housing outcomes (M. August and Mah, 2025; Bolzoni et al., 2015; Smart, 2003). Their decisions, even where not explicitly discriminatory, can reproduce exclusion through uneven and socially patterned applications of eligibility rules (Molinari, 2022; Robben et al., 2023). At this point, broader inequalities become concrete in access decisions. Discriminatory practices based on race, ethnicity, gender, and age (32.5%) further intensify disadvantage and reinforce pre-existing inequalities (Fleming-Klink et al., 2023; Nichols and Braimoh, 2018; Whiteford and Simpson, 2015).

3.5 Affected Groups of Housing Exclusion

Housing exclusion is rarely attributable to a single identity or structural position; rather, it is produced through the compounding of multiple vulnerabilities, including race, class, gender, legal status, age and disability, interacting with institutional and market mechanisms to deepen and entrench disadvantage.

Low-income households and people experiencing poverty constitute the largest group in the dataset (88.0%). Their exclusion is primarily driven by the structural mismatch between stagnant incomes and rising housing costs (Howard et al., 2024; Rolnik et al., 2024), compounded by precarious employment, insufficient welfare provision and the erosion of social housing supply (Hock et al., 2024; Morris et al., 2005b; Silva et al., 2025). The literature documents how low-income households

are systematically filtered out of competitive private rental markets through affordability thresholds, credit scoring and income-to-rent ratio requirements (Hock et al., 2024), leaving them concentrated in residual or inadequate housing or at heightened risk of homelessness (August and Mah, 2025). A cyclical dynamic is frequently emphasised, whereby housing insecurity exacerbates poverty through increased transaction costs, disrupted employment and reduced access to education and services (Fleming-Klink et al., 2023; Morris et al., 2025).

Racial and ethnic minorities are the second most prominently represented group (39.5%). The literature documents how systemic discrimination, residential segregation and discriminatory lending and rental practices create compounded barriers to safe, affordable and quality housing (Korver-Glenn, 2018). Historical instruments, including redlining, racially restrictive covenants and discriminatory mortgage underwriting, have produced durable spatial inequalities that continue to shape contemporary patterns of exclusion (Xu, 2022). Studies consistently adopt a structural racism lens, situating individual discriminatory acts within broader institutional arrangements that reproduce racial disadvantage across generations (So, 2023).

Women and individuals experiencing gender-based vulnerability are discussed in 17.0% of studies. Housing exclusion for this group is shaped by the intersection of economic inequality, gender-based violence and discriminatory market practices (Bhatia, 2020; Chennault and Sutton, 2023). Single mothers, women fleeing domestic violence and female-headed households face barriers that include income insufficiency, lack of appropriate emergency accommodation and inadequate legal protections in private rental markets (Hock et al., 2024; Morris et al., 2025; Thomas et al., 2016). Several studies highlight how housing insecurity itself functions as a mechanism of coercive control, trapping women in abusive situations in the absence of viable housing alternatives (Chennault and Sutton, 2023; Fanning and Veale, 2004).

Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees are examined in 22.0% of studies. Precarious legal status, residency requirements and documentation barriers consistently restrict access to formal housing markets and social housing entitlements (Bolzoni et al., 2015; Robben et al., 2023). Undocumented and irregularly-status migrants are systematically excluded from public housing allocation, leaving them dependent on informal and often exploitative private arrangements characterised by overcrowding and insecurity (Haubert Weil, 2009; Lopez-Sala and Molinero-Gerbeau, 2022; Rugh, 2021). The intersection of migration status with ethnicity and socioeconomic disadvantage is frequently foregrounded, with racialised migrants facing compounded exclusion across both market and institutional channels (Bonnet et al., 2020; Santamarina and Karaliotas, 2025).

Several further groups experience distinct and analytically significant forms of housing exclusion, though they are less numerically represented in the dataset. Housing exclusion among children, youth and young adults (11.5%) is shaped by family poverty, limited independent income and the intergenerational transmission of housing insecurity, and is associated with poorer educational attainment and reduced life chances (Sotomayor et al., 2022). Older adults and elderly populations (8.0%) face exclusion linked to fixed incomes, health-related housing needs and age-based

discrimination, with declining health or bereavement frequently precipitating housing precarity (Canham et al., 2018; Morris et al., 2005b). People experiencing homelessness are addressed in 10.0% of studies, not merely as an outcome but as a group whose exclusion is sustained by stigmatisation, restricted access to support services and legal barriers to re-entry into stable housing (Jenkinson et al., 2021; Whiteford and Simpson, 2015). Smaller bodies of literature address people with disabilities (5.0%) (Fleming-Klink et al., 2023), ex-offenders and formerly incarcerated individuals (2.5%) (DeMarco, 2023), and LGBTQ+ individuals (2.5%) (Wong et al., 2020), for whom stigma, inaccessible housing design, criminal record screening and the absence of tailored support constitute specific exclusionary barriers.

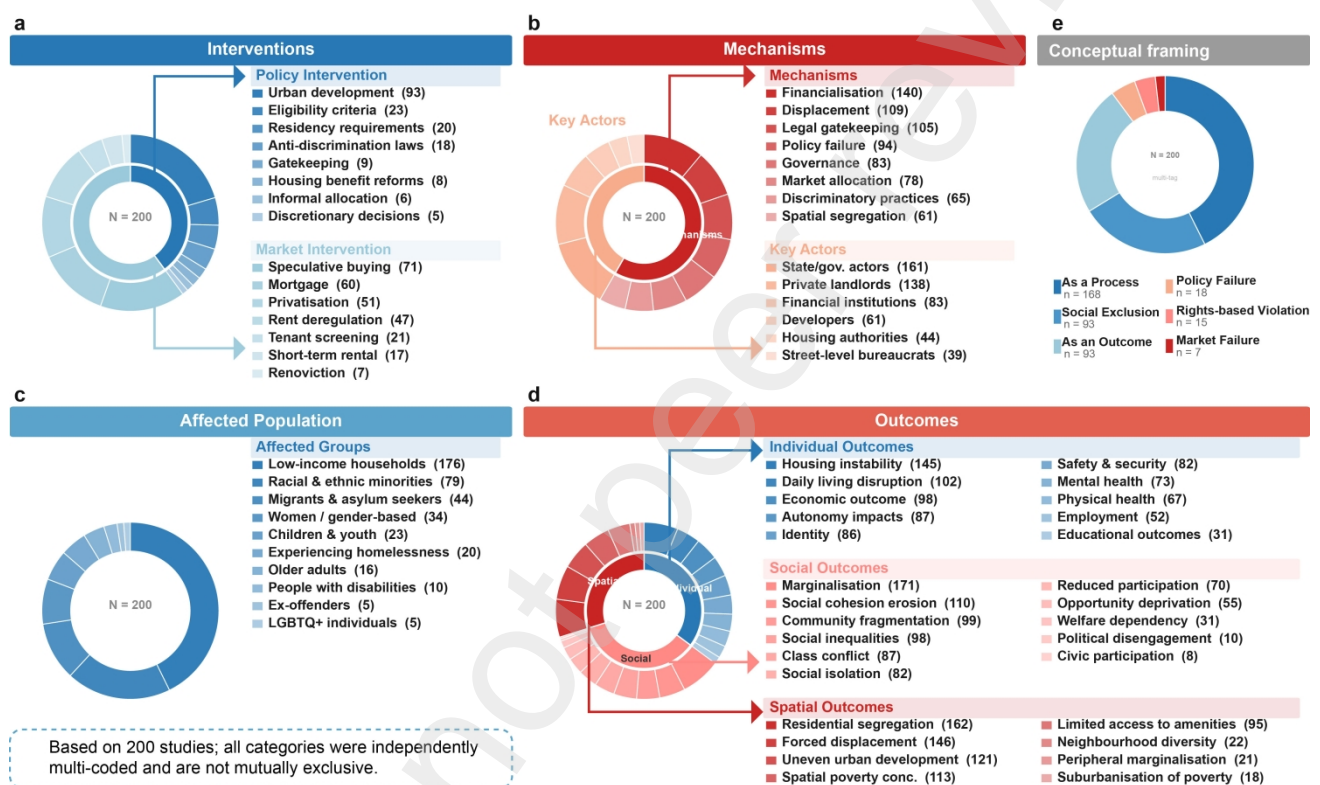


Figure 4 Analytical overview of the housing exclusion literature, showing the distribution of coded studies across (a) policy and market interventions, (b) mechanisms and key actors, (c) affected populations, (d) individual, social, and spatial outcomes, and (e) conceptual perspectives.

3.6 Outcomes of Housing Exclusion

The dataset documents a wide and interrelated range of outcomes arising from housing exclusion, spanning individual, social and spatial dimensions.

3.6.1 Individual-level outcomes

Individual-level consequences of housing exclusion are concentrated around three closely connected domains: housing instability, deteriorating health, and economic precarity. Housing instability, including repeated involuntary moves and eviction cycles, is the most frequently reported outcome, identified in 145 studies (72.5%), and is often described as the condition through which other harms are intensified (Lens et al., 2020; Versey, 2022). Across the reviewed literature, unstable housing is

shown to disrupt employment, education, and everyday routines, making longer-term security difficult to sustain.

Health impacts are also widely documented. Mental health consequences, including stress, anxiety, depression, and trauma, are reported in 73 studies (36.5%), while physical health effects, such as chronic illness, poor nutrition, and exposure to environmental hazards, appear in 67 studies (33.5%) (Lens et al., 2020; Silva et al., 2025). The literature links these outcomes to both direct material conditions, including overcrowding, damp, and inadequate heating, and indirect pressures associated with insecurity, chronic stress, and disrupted access to healthcare (Hock et al., 2024).

Economic consequences are similarly prominent, documenting job instability (26.0%), income reduction, and deepening financial precarity (49.0%) (Seymour and Akers, 2021). These pressures are often compounded by the costs associated with frequent moves, longer commutes, and disrupted childcare arrangements. Beyond these immediate effects, housing exclusion is also associated with reduced safety and security (41.0%), particularly through greater exposure to violence, exploitation, and unsafe living conditions (Hock et al., 2024). Other reported consequences include the erosion of identity (43.0%), as well as disrupted schooling and lower educational attainment (15.5%), especially among children affected by repeated displacement (Silva et al., 2025; Watt, 2022; Kahlmeter, 2021).

3.6.2 Social-level outcomes

Stigmatisation and marginalisation constitute the most pervasive social outcome (85.5%), often compounding other forms of exclusion. Community fragmentation (49.5%) and the erosion of social cohesion (55.0%) are also widely documented. Repeated displacement severs established social networks, weakening the foundations for mutual support and civic life (Cocola-Gant and Gago, 2021; Richard, 2024; Wong et al., 2020). In contexts of gentrification and urban redevelopment, these pressures generate social conflict and class tension (43.5%), as lower-income residents contest their displacement and assert the right to the city (Fält, 2016; Mirabal, 2009; Mösgen et al., 2019). Political and civic exclusion follow as downstream consequences: housing insecurity reduces political participation and undermines the capacity of excluded groups to advocate collectively (Nichols and Braimoh, 2018; Reosti, 2020).

3.6.3 Spatial-level outcomes

Housing exclusion produces profound spatial consequences that reshape urban environments and entrench territorial inequality (Ha, 2001; Sharma, 2021). Displacement and forced relocation feature in nearly three quarters of the studies reviewed (73.0%), underscoring the centrality of involuntary mobility across diverse geographic contexts (Bakonyi, 2021; Fält, 2016; Govindasamy, 2010). The spatial concentration of poverty (56.5%) and residential segregation (81.0%) are closely interconnected: excluded populations channelled into deprived areas face deteriorating housing stock, limited employment, and constrained access to public services (August and Mah, 2025; Fleming-Klink et al., 2023). Restricted access to urban amenities, including education, healthcare, and public transport (47.5%), further constrains social mobility (Chennault and Sutton, 2023; Silva et al., 2025). Uneven urban development (60.5%) and gentrification-related processes (e.g.

touristification) accelerate these dynamics, concentrating investment in high-value areas whilst displacing lower-income residents from established neighbourhoods (Cocola-Gant and Gago, 2021). Housing exclusion thus reshapes urban space as much as social life. Its effects extend beyond residential displacement to encompass the uneven distribution of services, opportunities, and neighbourhood quality—patterns that often reinforce disadvantage across generations (Joshi et al., 2024; Kirk, 2025; Migozzi, 2024).

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Housing exclusion as an analytical concept for identifying hidden exclusionary practices

The value of housing exclusion as an independent analytical concept lies not only in describing housing disadvantage, but also in identifying exclusionary practices that are widespread and persistent in cities, yet do not always appear through extreme outcomes, visible conflict, or clear event boundaries. Compared with related concepts, the distinctiveness of housing exclusion does not lie in a simple focus on more severe housing problems. Rather, it lies in its ability to reveal low-visibility forms of exclusion embedded in institutional arrangements, market selection, spatial restructuring, and everyday governance (Youqin Huang and Yi, 2015; Lidén et al., 2025; Pawson and Kintrea, 2002). In this sense, housing exclusion provides an explanatory middle-range concept for housing studies, urban sustainable development, and the wider social sciences. It helps connect macro structures with micro experience and brings apparently fragmented forms of housing disadvantage back into the broader process of exclusion.

Housing exclusion covers a wider spectrum of exclusion than concepts centred on extreme housing deprivation (Govindasamy, 2010; Pawson and Kintrea, 2002). Compared with concepts such as homelessness, which focus more on extreme outcomes, housing exclusion is concerned not only with the complete loss of housing (Hock et al., 2024), but also with broader constraints in access to, retention of, and improvement in housing (Lata, 2020; Polyzou and Spyrellis, 2024; Thomas et al., 2016). Limited access to public housing, high entry barriers, persistently poor physical housing conditions, and the continued placement of certain groups in inferior residential positions can all be understood as forms of housing exclusion (Bernt et al., 2017; Chennault and Sutton, 2023; Guentner et al., 2016; Korver-Glenn, 2018; So et al., 2025). Exclusion therefore does not emerge only at the point of crisis. It may also exist in more routine and normalised ways within urban housing systems (DeMarco, 2023; Lidén et al., 2025). The analytical value of housing exclusion lies in bringing into view those exclusionary practices that may not end in extreme crisis, but remain widespread and continue to shape housing opportunities (Martine August and Mah, 2025).

Housing exclusion also helps identify exclusionary processes that accumulate slowly and unfold in stages (DeLuca et al., 2019; Migozzi, 2024; Teresa, 2022). Compared with more event-based concepts such as eviction, housing exclusion is better suited to capturing processes that have no clear breaking point but continue over longer periods. Eviction usually appears as a direct form of housing loss or displacement. By contrast, housing exclusion also includes processes through which certain groups are gradually moved out of city centres or high-resource areas under urban redevelopment, rent increases, changing eligibility rules, relocation policies, and spatial restructuring (Guibard and

Le Goix, 2024; Gutierrez and Domenech, 2018; Posthumus et al., 2013). These processes do not necessarily lead to homelessness or a sudden decline in living standards, and are therefore often difficult to identify directly as exclusion. Yet over time, such gradual forms of relocation and resettlement may continuously reshape the spatial distribution of access to public services, infrastructure, and development opportunities (Alba et al., 2014; Seymour et al., 2025). A process-based perspective on housing exclusion is therefore useful for identifying exclusion that is not produced through a single event, but through cumulative change over time (Chennault and Sutton, 2023; Desai, 2021; Kahlmeter, 2021; Liu et al., 2024).

Housing exclusion further helps identify exclusionary outcomes that do not depend entirely on explicit discriminatory intent. Compared with housing discrimination, which places greater emphasis on subjective prejudice and direct differential treatment, housing exclusion does not require a clear exclusionary motive in order to become analytically meaningful (Carvalho et al., 2025; DeLuca et al., 2019). Many forms of exclusion are not produced by the overt hostility of a single actor, but by the combined effects of policy goals, institutional arrangements, market responses, and everyday governance practices (Pimentel Walker et al., 2023; Posthumus et al., 2013). For example, large-scale upgrading programmes aimed at improving informal housing may raise rents while improving physical conditions, eventually forcing original residents to leave (Liu et al., 2024). Likewise, resettlement housing provided by governments may later become associated with territorial stigmatisation and inadequate resources as urban development proceeds, leaving low-income groups in persistently disadvantaged residential positions (Darcy, 2013). Such cases may not fit a narrow definition of housing discrimination, yet they still result in restricted housing opportunities, deteriorating living conditions, or spatial marginalisation for particular groups. The strength of housing exclusion as a concept lies in its capacity to identify these processes, which may not stem from explicit malicious intent but still produce substantive exclusionary effects.

Housing exclusion also connects structural inequality with everyday residential experience. Compared with more macro-level concepts such as housing inequality and financialisation, housing exclusion places greater emphasis on the concrete constraints individuals face in accessing, retaining, and using housing (Bonuck and Drucker, 1998; Chennault and Sutton, 2023; So et al., 2025; Thomas et al., 2016). It draws attention to how people encounter barriers to entry, pay additional costs, accept poorer housing conditions, or endure the long-term effects of spatial marginalisation, social stigmatisation, and limited service accessibility in daily life (DeMarco, 2023; Youqin Huang and Yi, 2015; Versey, 2022). At the same time, compared with concepts such as residential segregation and exclusionary neighbourhoods, which focus more on spatial patterns and outcomes, housing exclusion goes beyond describing unequal spatial distributions. It also examines how such inequalities are produced in practice and how they are actually perceived and experienced by individuals (Korver-Glenn, 2018; Rollwagen and Mayhew, 2025). For instance, even where there is no clear geographical segregation, some groups may still be required to pay higher rents to obtain housing, or may remain subject to community exclusion and spatial disadvantage after securing a dwelling (Martine August and Mah, 2025; Kurfali and Ozçurumez, 2023; Latocha, 2024). These situations are more effectively understood through the lens of housing exclusion. At this level, housing exclusion

links macro structures, institutional mechanisms, and micro-level residential experience, and thus offers a fuller account of how exclusionary practices operate in reality.

Overall, the value of housing exclusion does not lie in replacing existing concepts such as homelessness, eviction, housing discrimination, housing inequality, or residential segregation. Rather, it offers a more process-oriented and integrated analytical framework for aspects that these concepts do not fully capture (Figure 5). It allows researchers to see that exclusionary practices that do not always appear as extreme deprivation, do not always result from direct discrimination, and cannot always be fully identified through macro indicators are in fact widespread within urban housing systems and continue to shape housing opportunities and quality of life. Housing exclusion is therefore not only a descriptive concept, but also an important analytical tool for revealing low-visibility exclusion, connecting multiple levels of mechanism, and engaging with questions of urban sustainable development.

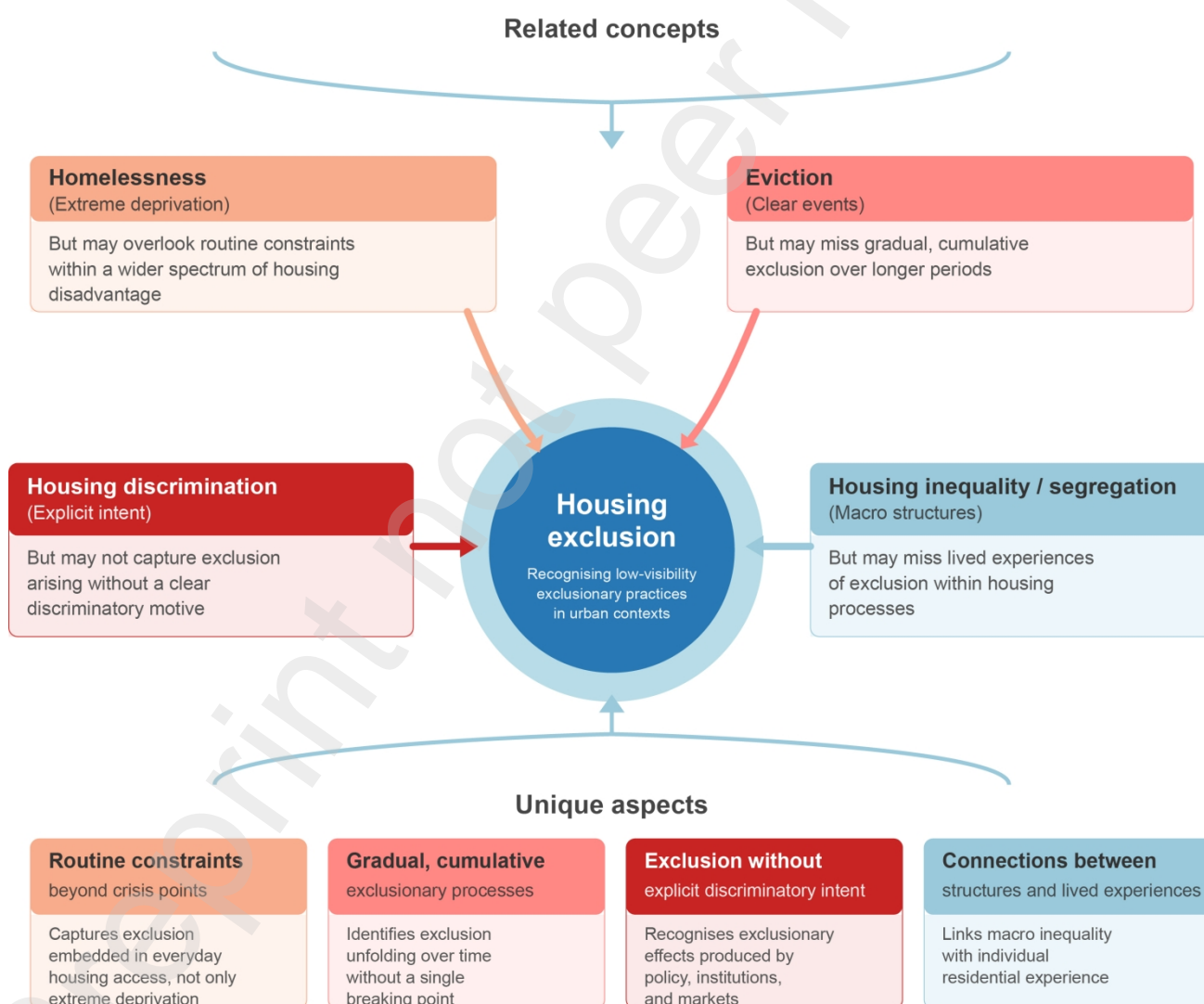


Figure 5 Housing exclusion key term map

4.2 A Process-Oriented Conceptual Framework of Housing Exclusion

This review proposes a process-oriented conceptual framework of housing exclusion (Figure 6). The purpose of this framework is not only to provide a more unified analytical pathway for housing exclusion research, but also to develop, on the basis of the systematic review, a processual framework that explains how housing exclusion operates across levels and over time. Existing studies have generated substantial knowledge on forms of intervention, operating mechanisms, affected groups, and exclusion outcomes. However, because housing exclusion is complex, dynamic, and multi-staged, individual studies often focus on only one part of the process. As a result, the literature remains conceptually fragmented and lacks a comparable analytical language across contexts. This review therefore uses a process-oriented framework to organise the key elements of housing exclusion into a dynamic explanatory model and to provide a shared framework for integration, comparison, and analytical development across different national, institutional, and urban settings.

The core chain of the framework consists of three elements, namely interventions, affected groups, and outcomes. It does not treat housing exclusion as a fixed condition or as a static label attached to disadvantaged groups. Instead, it understands housing exclusion as a dynamic process (DeLuca et al., 2019; Migozzi, 2024; Teresa, 2022). In this process, different interventions act on specific populations and generate uneven effects under existing conditions of social inequality, which then develop into multi-level exclusion outcomes (Posthumus et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2025). More specifically, urban renewal, eligibility requirements, welfare conditionality, tenant screening, and the withdrawal of public housing provision can all be understood as observable forms of intervention through which exclusion is initiated or intensified (Guibard and Le Goix, 2024; Liu et al., 2024; So, 2023). These interventions do not affect all populations equally. Rather, through their interaction with existing structures of inequality, they place some groups in positions of greater exposure and vulnerability. Affected groups should therefore not be understood as fixed population categories, but as social positions that become more exposed to exclusionary pressure and more likely to experience disadvantage under particular interventions (Alba et al., 2014; DeMarco, 2023; Desai, 2021). Exclusion outcomes first appear at the individual level, such as restricted housing opportunities, housing instability, deteriorating health, or constrained personal development. As these disadvantages accumulate and extend, they further develop into social outcomes such as stigmatisation, social exclusion, and fractured social relations, as well as spatial outcomes such as marginalisation, segregation, and uneven resource distribution (DeLuca et al., 2019; Evans, 2021). Housing exclusion therefore does not produce a single form of outcome, but unfolds progressively across individual, social, and spatial levels (Carvalho et al., 2025; Pimentel Walker et al., 2023).

Within this core chain, exclusion mechanisms are not a separate module parallel to the main structure. They are embedded in the transmission process through which interventions act on affected groups (Lidén et al., 2025; Thomas et al., 2016). In other words, mechanisms explain not what happens, but why interventions are translated into exclusion for particular groups. This review divides that process into three interconnected levels. This division is not arbitrary, but is consistent with the basic logic of stratified social theory (Bhaskar, 1975; Bhaskar, 1979). Critical realism argues that social outcomes are not generated at a single level, but are jointly shaped by deep

structural conditions, institutional processes, and observable practices (Danermark et al., 2002). On this basis, at the structural level, financialisation, commodification, welfare retrenchment, displacement pressure, and spatial segregation form the broader conditions in which housing exclusion is produced (Darcy, 2013; Filandri and Semi, 2022). At the level of institutional mediation, state actors, financial institutions, landlords, developers, and planners translate these conditions into concrete policy, market, and spatial practices (Polyzou and Spyrellis, 2024; Raymond et al., 2021). At the level of everyday allocation and access, street-level actors reproduce exclusion through eligibility assessment, discretionary decision-making, and discriminatory practices (McDonald et al., 2024; Polyzou and Spyrellis, 2024). Housing exclusion is therefore neither a mechanical result of macro conditions nor simply the direct product of individual prejudice. It takes shape gradually through the interaction of mechanisms across levels.

Housing exclusion is not a one-way linear chain with a fixed endpoint. It has a clear feedback dynamic. Exclusion outcomes are not the end of the process. They feed back into affected groups, intensify vulnerability, and increase the likelihood of disadvantage under subsequent interventions (Youqin Huang and Yi, 2015; Silva et al., 2025). Housing instability, deteriorating health, social stigmatisation, spatial marginalisation, and restricted development opportunities are not only outcomes of housing exclusion. They also weaken the resources, capacities, and bargaining position of individuals and groups (Bonuck and Drucker, 1998; Santamarina and Karaliotas, 2025). As these disadvantages accumulate, affected groups often become more likely to experience renewed disadvantage in the next round of policy adjustment, market selection, or spatial restructuring (Fraser et al., 2022; Xu, 2022). Housing exclusion therefore shows a strong negative feedback dynamic and a self-reinforcing cycle (Fleming-Klink et al., 2023; Lu et al., 2023). The outcomes of one round of exclusion enter the next and continue to deepen existing inequalities.

The framework also highlights the temporal dimension of housing exclusion. Exclusion does not always unfold at the same pace or in the same cycle. Interventions may be short-term and event-based, or long-term and staged. The former usually have clearer event boundaries and can quickly generate visible effects, such as eviction, sudden clearance, or immediate housing instability caused by policy change (Carvalho et al., 2025; DeLuca et al., 2019). The latter often lack a clear breaking point. Their exclusionary effects may not be obvious in the short term, but may gradually emerge through accumulation (Desai, 2021; Guibard and Le Goix, 2024; Luo et al., 2026). Urban redevelopment, relocation, changes in rent structures, or the reorganisation of public resources may not immediately produce a housing crisis. Over a longer timescale, however, they may weaken the spatial position of some groups in relation to services, infrastructure, and development opportunities, and then develop into deeper forms of disadvantage (Liu et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). Whether generated by short-term shocks or long-term processes, these effects may accumulate through feedback mechanisms and intensify group vulnerability (Gutierrez and Domenech, 2018; Teresa, 2022). Housing exclusion is therefore not only recursive, but also temporally uneven. It includes both rapid exclusion driven by specific events and slower exclusion that accumulates through staged processes (Posthumus et al., 2013).

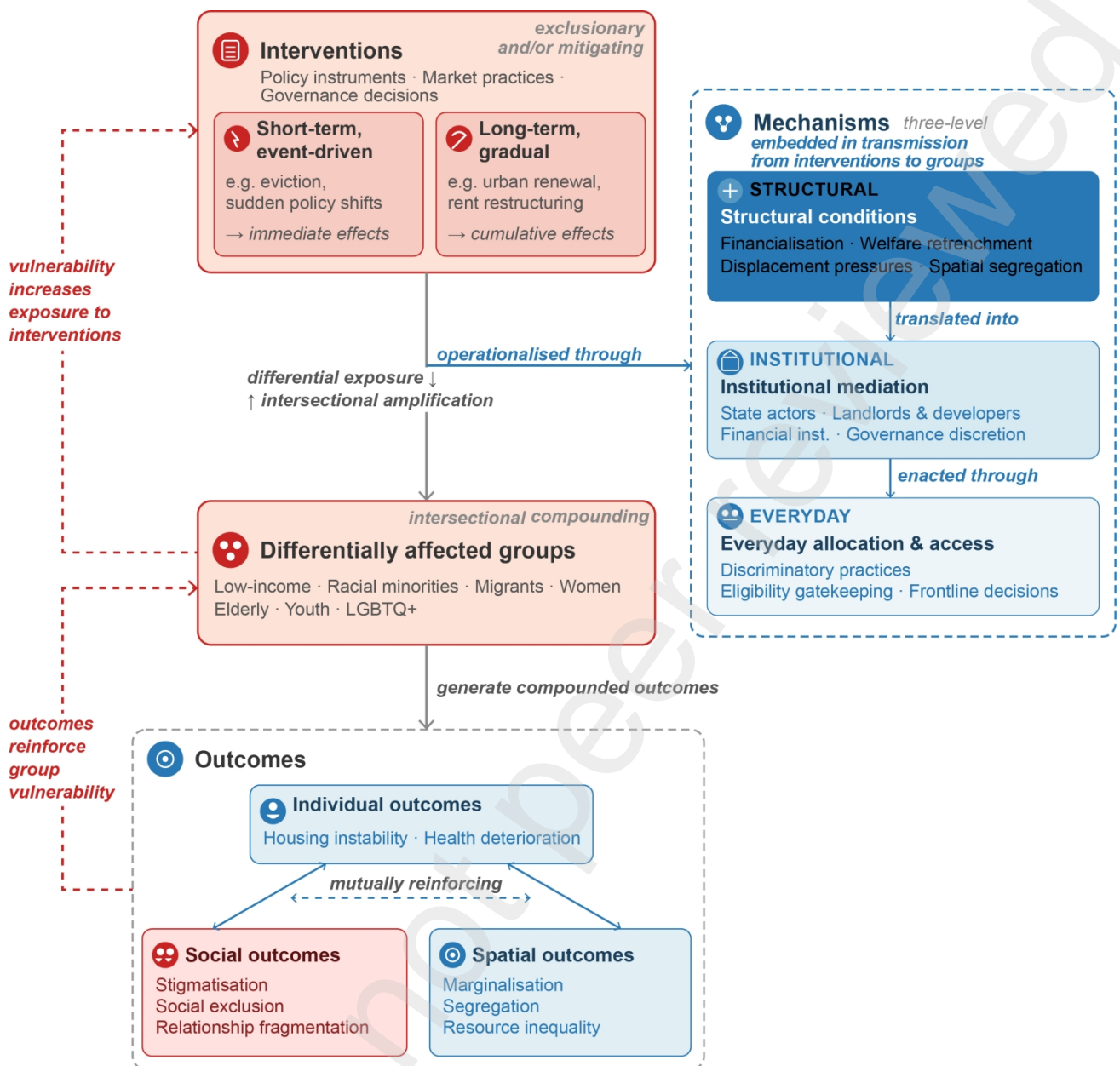


Figure 6 Process-oriented conceptual framework of housing exclusion

Overall, the process-oriented framework proposed in this review understands housing exclusion as a dynamic process initiated by interventions, transmitted through multiple mechanisms, realised through differentiated effects, and continually reinforced through feedback loops. Compared with approaches that focus on a single intervention, a single group, or a single outcome, the strength of this framework lies in its ability to identify the multi-level, recursive, and temporally uneven character of housing exclusion, and to explain how these features jointly shape cumulative disadvantage. It helps explain how housing exclusion unfolds across levels and timescales, and why some groups become trapped in cycles of exclusion and experience sustained disadvantage at the individual, social, and spatial levels. In this sense, the framework is not intended to replace context-specific empirical research or existing classificatory tools, but to provide them with a stronger processual basis for analysis. Compared with classification tools that focus on identifying

states, this framework is more concerned with how people are channelled into, kept within, or repeatedly drawn back into disadvantaged housing conditions, and therefore complements existing research by strengthening its analysis of process.

4.3 Regional Variations

The geographic distribution of the dataset shows a clear concentration of research in the Global North. This imbalance matters not only in bibliometric terms, but also because it shapes the conceptual perspectives through which housing exclusion is understood. Frameworks developed mainly in high-income and liberal market settings may not transfer easily to other housing systems and urban conditions.

Within the Global North, the literature also shows some clear regional tendencies. In the United States, studies more often focus on racial and ethnic discrimination and institutional gatekeeping, especially in relation to minoritised groups (So, 2023; Haubert Weil, 2009; Xu, 2022). This pattern may partly reflect the lasting influence of racialised housing histories, including redlining, restrictive covenants, and discriminatory mortgage practices. Canadian research places greater emphasis on homelessness, youth housing insecurity, and affordability, which may reflect the pressures of a liberal housing regime with persistent gaps in support for younger and more vulnerable groups (Jenkinson et al., 2021; Sotomayor et al., 2022). Studies from Western and Northern Europe more often foreground migration and gentrification, in line with intensified housing pressures and large refugee and migrant inflows (Rinn et al., 2022; Posthumus et al., 2013; Bhimji, 2021). Research from the United Kingdom and Ireland gives greater attention to youth, education, and housing affordability (Hock et al., 2024), while studies from Southern Europe more often emphasise financialisation, spatial segregation, and migration (Gutiérrez and Domènech, 2017; Cocola-Gant and Gago, 2021; Bolzoni et al., 2015). Taken together, these patterns suggest that housing exclusion is not only unevenly studied across regions, but also understood through different institutional and socio-spatial conditions.

Research from the Global South is more limited in volume, but it reveals thematic patterns that differ in important ways from the dominant perspectives developed in the Global North. In Latin America, environmental and crisis-related forms of housing exclusion appear more prominently (van Minnen & Coates, 2025). This suggests a close relationship between housing vulnerability, disaster risk, infrastructural precarity, and uneven state capacity. Studies from Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa place greater emphasis on urban renewal, slum redevelopment, eviction, and forced relocation (Beier, 2021; Ranslem, 2015). These patterns are often associated with settings in which state-led clearance and land commodification act as major mechanisms of exclusion. Research from East and Southeast Asia gives greater attention to spatial segregation and gentrification-related displacement (Kuang Deng et al., 2025; Niu et al., 2025), while studies from South Asia more often foreground financialisation and the redevelopment of informal settlements (Bhide, 2023). Overall, these patterns suggest that housing exclusion in the Global South is shaped by urban trajectories that remain only partly captured by the dominant conceptual perspectives in the literature.

These regional differences have implications beyond descriptive mapping. When conceptually influential work is concentrated in the Global North, there is a risk that market allocation, tenant screening, and administrative gatekeeping come to be treated as broadly applicable mechanisms. At the same time, forms of exclusion that are more prevalent in the Global South, including disaster displacement, state-led eviction, and informal tenure insecurity, may receive less analytical attention. A more globally representative evidence base would not only broaden the empirical scope of housing exclusion research, but also help refine the conceptual language through which it is understood.

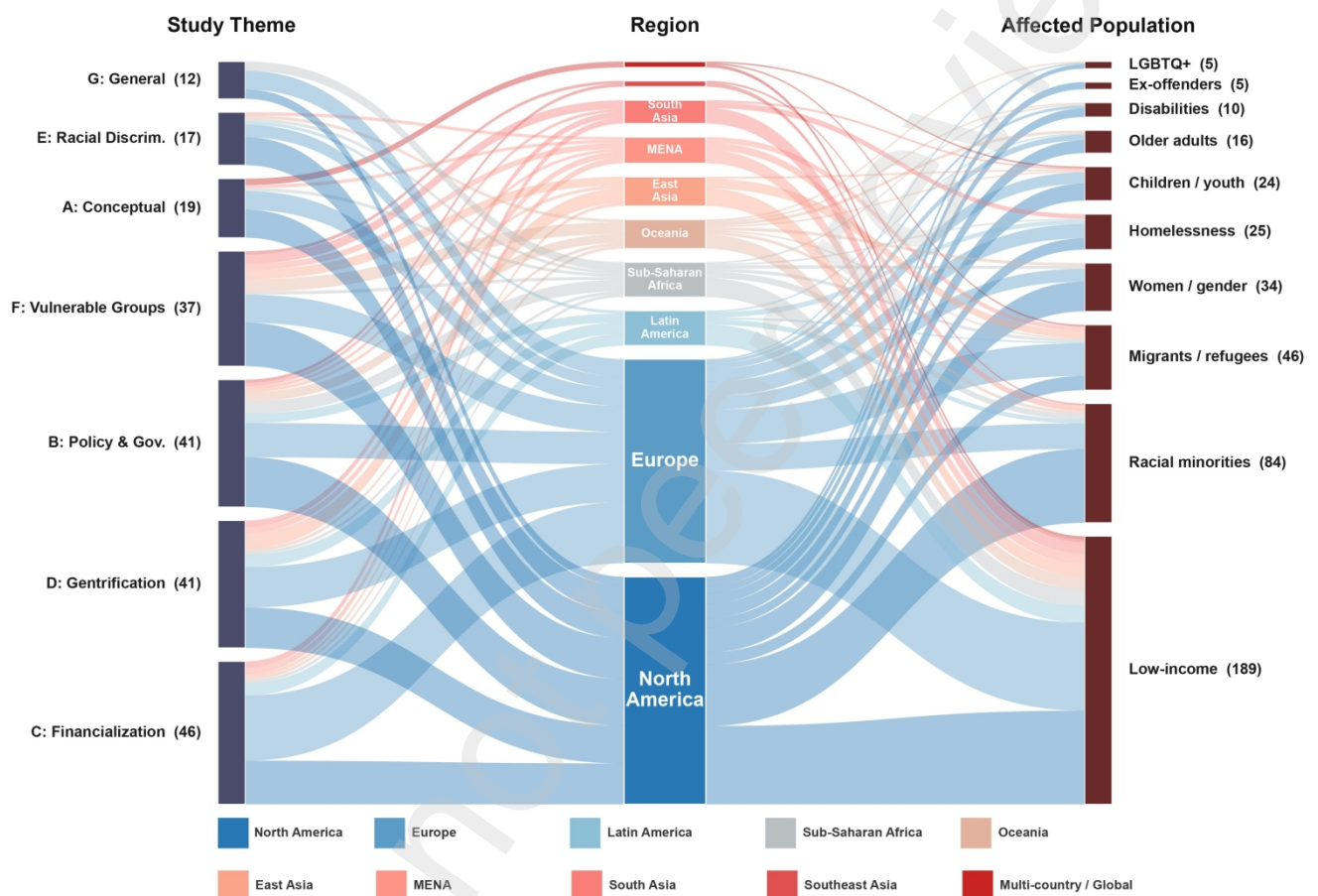


Figure 7 Connections among study themes, study regions, and affected populations

4.4 Implications for Research and Policy Implementation

The findings of this review suggest that effective responses to housing exclusion require a fundamental reorientation of policy logic: from reactive, outcome-focused approaches such as emergency shelter provision towards proactive, process-oriented strategies that address the structural conditions through which exclusion is produced. The evidence consistently demonstrates that market-led solutions and deregulation exacerbate rather than mitigate exclusion, reinforcing the case for robust structural interventions including stringent rent regulation, the decommodification of housing stock, and the expansion of unconditional social housing provision. Equally important is the need for policymakers to critically evaluate the exclusionary potential of their own interventions. Urban regeneration programmes and restrictive welfare eligibility criteria are among the most

consistently identified sources of new forms of spatial and social marginalisation in the dataset. Policy evaluation frameworks must therefore extend beyond measuring the number of housing units delivered to assess the equity of the processes governing access, security of tenure, and the spatial consequences of housing allocation. A process-oriented framework of the kind proposed in this review offers a more appropriate evaluative lens for this purpose.

Future research must address the methodological and geographic gaps identified in this review. There is a pressing need for longitudinal study designs capable of tracking the temporal dynamics of housing exclusion, the long-term consequences of displacement, and the cumulative effects of intersecting vulnerabilities over the life course. The field also requires the development of process-oriented measurement instruments that capture the mechanisms of exclusion, including administrative barriers, spatial peripheralisation, and discriminatory practices, rather than focusing solely on the resulting states of deprivation. Geographically, a significant expansion of research in the Global South is essential. The mechanisms most relevant to rapidly urbanising and informally settled contexts, including land tenure insecurity, post-colonial spatial legacies, and state-led displacement in the absence of formal legal protections, remain inadequately theorised within existing frameworks. Cross-national comparative studies that move beyond the Global North are necessary for developing a genuinely global and decolonial understanding of housing exclusion.

4.5 Limitations

Several limitations should be noted. The interdisciplinary nature of housing exclusion research, spanning sociology, urban planning, public health, and geography, inevitably introduced a degree of subjectivity in the screening process, as studies framing similar phenomena through different disciplinary vocabularies may have been inconsistently captured. The contested conceptual boundaries between housing exclusion, homelessness, and broader social exclusion further complicated consistent application of inclusion criteria. The review was restricted to English-language publications indexed in Web of Science and Scopus, which likely reinforced the geographic skew towards Global North scholarship already evident in the dataset. Finally, the predominantly cross-sectional nature of the included studies limits the review's capacity to address the temporal dynamics of exclusionary processes and their long-term consequences.

5 CONCLUSION

This review suggests that housing exclusion is more usefully approached not as a set of housing disadvantages, but as a structural process through which access to housing is unevenly organised. Rather than focusing only on visible outcomes, this perspective draws attention to the market, institutional and governance arrangements that produce and reproduce unequal access across social groups. Building on this insight, the review develops a process-oriented conceptual framework linking interventions, mechanisms, affected groups and exclusion outcomes. The findings also point to a geographically uneven evidence base, with research concentrated in the Global North, indicating the need for a more globally grounded and comparatively sensitive account of housing exclusion.

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Understanding Housing Exclusion as a Process: A Systematic Review of Interventions, Mechanisms, Affected Populations, and Outcomes

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