

Mapping the Global Housing Affordability Crisis: A Comprehensive Bibliometric Review with Insights on Significant Contributing Factors

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ABSTRACT

Housing affordability has evolved from a localised economic issue into a complex global crisis, threatening social stability and public health in both developed and emerging economies. Despite the growing volume of literature, there is a lack of comprehensive reviews mapping the intellectual structure of this field, particularly in how global trends apprise local policy contexts like Malaysia. This study employs a bibliometric analysis to evaluate 297 documents retrieved from the Scopus database between 1996 and 2025, utilizing VOSviewer and Biblioshiny for performance analysis and science mapping. The results identify a significant surge in academic interest following the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, with Housing Studies and Urban Studies emerging as dominant publication venues. Science mapping reveals three distinct thematic clusters which include governance and markets, focusing on the financialization of housing, social dimensions, linking affordability to poverty, homelessness, and health; and contemporary challenges, addressing urbanization, gentrification, and the impact of COVID-19. The findings suggest that the discourse has shifted from simple supply-side economics to a multidimensional understanding of housing as a social determinant of health. These insights provide critical implications for policymakers in emerging markets, emphasising the need to integrate public health and market regulation into national housing strategies.

Keywords: Housing Affordability, Bibliometric Analysis, Global Housing Crisis, Urbanization

INTRODUCTION

Housing affordability has emerged as one of the defining socioeconomic challenges of the 21st century. Across the globe, from major metropolitan hubs in developed nations to rapidly urbanizing cities in emerging economies, the cost of housing has increasingly decoupled from household income. According to UN-Habitat (2011), affordable housing is defined not merely by price, but by its adequacy in quality and location, ensuring that housing costs do not compromise the ability to meet other basic needs. Globally, the "financialization" of housing markets and rapid urbanization have driven prices up, creating a universal crisis where millions are priced out of ownership. A consensus in international literature suggests that households should spend no more than 30% of their gross income on housing costs, including utilities (O'Dell et al., 2004; Osman et al., 2017). Exceeding this threshold forces families, particularly low- and middle-income groups, to sacrifice other essentials such as healthcare, education, and nutrition.

While this crisis is global, its impact is acute in emerging economies like Malaysia, where the aspiration to own a home remains a significant cultural rite of passage. However, this ritual is becoming increasingly unattainable as the income-housing affordability gap widens. In Malaysia, income growth has failed to keep pace with the skyrocketing property prices driven by urbanization and the pursuit of better employment opportunities in major cities. This disparity is not just a market failure but a threat to social stability, mirroring trends seen in other developing nations but with unique local policy challenges.

Housing has always been central to Malaysia’s national development agenda. The Ministry of Local Government and Housing, founded in 1964, was established to provide affordable housing for a growing nation. Since 1976, the *Perumahan Awam Kos Rendah* (PAKR) program has evolved into the *Projek Perumahan Rakyat* (PPR), the government's flagship initiative for the underprivileged, specifically targeting the B40 (bottom 40% income group) and M40 (middle 40% income group). Current strategies focus on direct social housing, subsidized units (e.g., PR1MA), and financing assistance. Key programs for B40 households include the PPR (offering low-cost flats via rent-to-own or below-market rent), Transit Housing (temporary accommodation for youth and young families), and Bank Negara Malaysia’s affordable financing funds. Meanwhile, the programmes laid out for M40 households are PR1MA (subsidised housing in both urban and suburban areas), My First Home (first-home ownership scheme made with zero downpayment), Rumah Selangorku (affordable housing programme offered specially for Selangor residents), and Rent-To-Own (financing scheme to assist first-time homeowners to be able to afford downpayment and financing) (Aziff & Ziad, 2021).

Malaysia's housing affordability challenge requires urgent, evidence-based policy action. The widening gap between wage growth and property prices has exacerbated socioeconomic inequality, further worsened by a market skew: an oversupply of high-end luxury properties coexists with a severe shortage of quality affordable homes (Rushidi, 2025). While domestic policies are robust, there is a need to understand global trends and successful strategies implemented elsewhere. Most existing literature focuses on isolated case studies or specific policy critiques. There is a lack of comprehensive bibliometric reviews that map the global evolution of housing affordability research to identify key drivers that could inform local solutions.

Hence, this article aims to analyse the evolution of global research on housing affordability and crises over time through a bibliometric approach. By employing performance analysis and science mapping visualisation, this study seeks to pinpoint significant global research trends, influential drivers, and gaps. This "global-to-local" perspective provides a roadmap for future research and policy-making, offering insights that are critical for resolving the affordability paradox in nations like Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

The bibliometric analysis in this study utilized Biblioshiny, the graphical web interface for the bibliometrix R package and VOSViewer platforms. Biblioshiny support citation analysis, network visualization, and broad array of bibliometric statistics, enabling a thorough assessment of research trends, scholarly impact, and collaboration pattern (Moral-Munoz, *et al.*, 2020). Raw data for this analysis were extracted from Scopus database via the EzAccess UiTM website on 11 September 2025, resulting in an initial set of 309 documents.

Scopus was selected due to its comprehensive disciplinary coverage, rigorous selection standards, and established reputation as a reliable source of peer-reviewed articles (Jeroen *et al.*, 2020; Baas, 2020). The dataset covers publications from 1996 to 2025 and is limited to English-language documents. The search and screening protocol comprised three stages as detailed in Table 1.0: (1) defining the research topic and specifying the scope to establish eligibility criteria; (2) screening the initial document set based on these criteria; and (3) final inclusion of documents suitable for bibliometric analysis (Zakaria *et al.*, 2021).

Table 1.0 Identification of studies via databases

Identification	Topic	Global Housing Affordability Crisis
	Scope and Coverage	Database: Scopus Search Field: All fields Time Frame: 1996 - 2025 Language: English
		Source Type: Journal, Book, Conference Proceeding Document Type: Article, Book Chapter, Conference Paper, Review, Book, Editorial, Note, Erratum

	Keywords and Search String	TITLE-ABS-KEY(housing affordability AND global housing affordability) AND PUBYEAR > 1999 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE,"English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE,"j") OR LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE,"b") OR LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE,"p"))
Screening	Date Extracted	11 September 2025
	Record Identified and Screened	309
Included	Record Removed	12
	Record Included for Bibliometric Analysis	297

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the bibliometric analysis, offering a detailed examination of the key trends, influential contributors, and thematic structures within the global housing affordability literature. The findings are organised into two primary sections, namely Performance Analysis and Science Mapping. The Performance Analysis section evaluates research productivity and impact by examining publication volume, citation trends, and the most prolific sources and authors. The Science Mapping section delves into the intellectual structure of the field, visualising the keyword co-occurrence network and analysing the most globally cited documents to understand the conceptual evolution of the crisis. Together, these analyses provide a comprehensive roadmap of how housing affordability research has evolved from a niche policy discussion to a major global academic discourse.

Performance Analysis

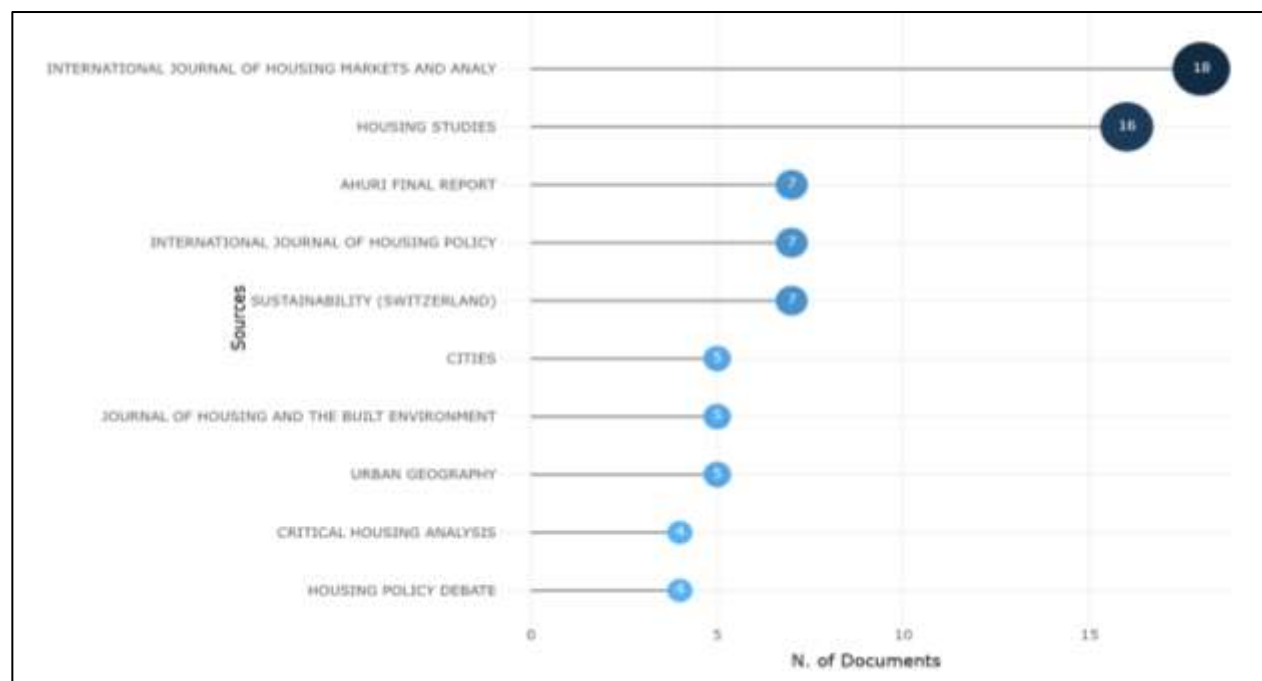


Figure 3.1 Most Relevant Source

Figure 3.1 illustrates the top publication venues for housing affordability research. The analysis reveals that Housing Studies and the International Journal of Housing Markets and Analysis are the central pillars of this domain, contributing 16 and 18 documents, respectively.

The dominance of Housing Studies is significant; as a premier journal in the field, it tends to focus on the sociological and policy implications of housing, suggesting that the academic discourse is heavily weighted towards social welfare and governance. Conversely, the presence of the International Journal of Housing Markets and Analysis indicates a strong parallel stream of research focused on the economic and financial mechanics of the crisis. Other key sources, such as the AHURI Final Report (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute), highlight the critical role of government-funded research bodies in shaping the policy narrative, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.

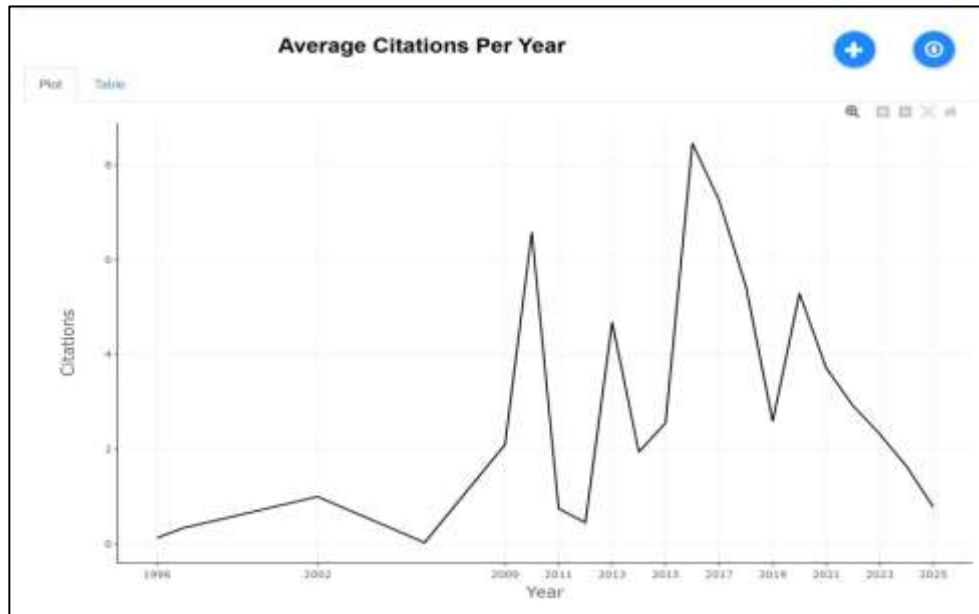


Figure 3.2 Average Citations per Year

The trend in average citations per year from 1996 to 2025 in Figure 3.2 shows a gradual increase in scholarly impact beginning in the early 2000s, with a significant rise starting around 2009 and peaking in 2016 at over eight citations per year. This peak indicates a period of heightened academic influence on the housing affordability issue, followed by fluctuating citation rates and a general decline from 2020 onward. The lower citation counts in recent years may be attributed to the typical lag in citation buildup for newer publications. These patterns suggest that research published in the mid-2010s has had the most substantial and sustained academic impact within the examined timeframe.

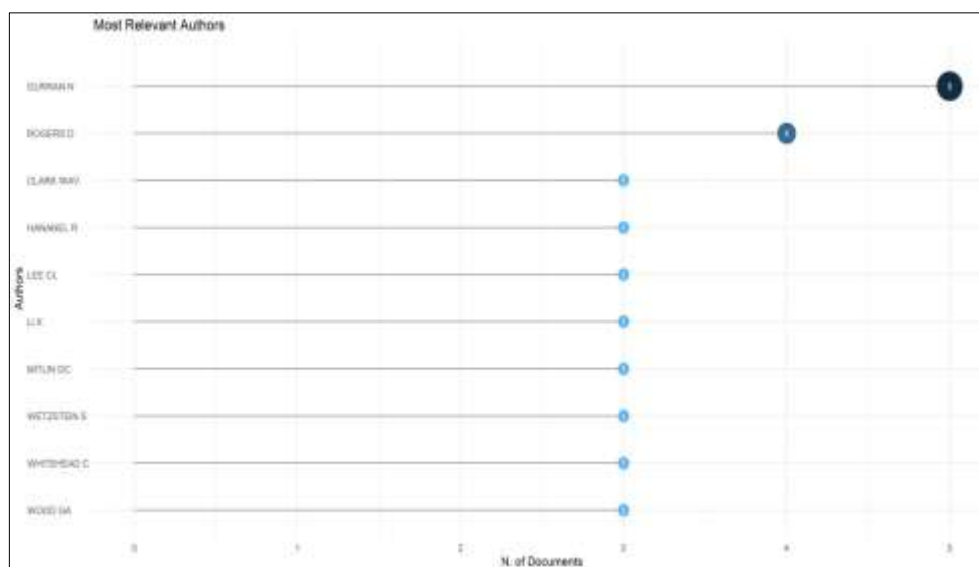


Figure 3.3 Most Relevant Authors

Meanwhile, Figure 3.3 highlights the most prolific contributors to the field. Nicole Gurran from University of Sydney emerges as the leading contributor with 5 documents. Her work is seminal in understanding the intersection of urban planning systems and housing supply. Next, Dallas Rogers follows with 4 documents, known for his work on the geopolitics of real estate and foreign investment. Other notable scholars, with 3 documents each, include W.A.V. Clark, Steffen Wetzstein, and Christine Whitehead. It is crucial to note the geographic concentration of these authors. A significant portion (e.g., Gurran, Rogers, Wood) are affiliated with Australian institutions. This suggests that Australia serves as a major case study and academic hub for housing affordability research, likely due to the country’s acute property market challenges, which provide rich data for global comparative studies.

Science Mapping

This section involves depicting and analysing the structure and dynamics of scientific knowledge within a specific field or discipline. For this paper, it highlights on the global housing affordability crisis topic area. Science mapping visualises the structural relationships between research elements. This section analyses the local impact of sources and the conceptual network of keywords.

Table 3.0 Resources Local Impact by H-Index

Source	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC	NP	PY_start
HOUSING STUDIES	15	16	0.882	709	16	2009
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HOUSING MARKETS AND ANALYSIS	7	11	0.467	145	18	2011
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HOUSING POLICY	6	7	0.667	197	7	2017
JOURNAL OF HOUSING AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT	5	5	0.417	136	5	2014
	5	10	0.333	140	47	2011
AHURI FINAL REPORT	4	7	0.235	53	7	2009
URBAN STUDIES	4	4	0.267	701	4	2011
CRITICAL HOUSING ANALYSIS	3	3	0.333	13	4	2017
HOUSING POLICY DEBATE	3	4	0.75	47	4	2022
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF URBAN SCIENCES	3	3	0.5	134	3	2020

Table 3.0 ranks the top sources by their H-index, a metric that balances productivity and citation impact. Housing Studies is the dominant source with an h-index of 15 and 709 total citations, Housing Studies is arguably the most influential journal in the field. Its high g-index (16) confirms that its articles are consistently highly cited, not just a few outliers. Emerging sources include journals like Housing Policy Debate show a high mindex (0.75) despite a later start year (2022 in this dataset subset), indicating that their recent publications are rapidly gaining traction in the academic community.



FIELDS DJ, 2016, Urban Stud.	10.1177/0042098014543704	344	34.40	4.06
WETZSTEIN S, 2017, Urban Stud.	10.1177/0042098017711649	334	37.11	5.12
PLOUFFE LA, 2010, J. Urban Health	10.1007/s11524-010-9466-0	314	19.63	2.98
NAGATA JM, 2013, BMC Public Health	10.1186/1471-2458-13-388	261	20.08	4.29
HOCHSTENBACH C, 2018, Urban Geogr.	10.1080/02723638.2016.1276718	225	28.13	5.17
RAMOS A, 2017, Energy Convers. Manag.	10.1016/j.enconman.2017.03.024	187	20.78	2.86
MEEHAN KM, 2020, WILEY Interdiscip. Rev. Water	10.1002/wat2.1486	146	24.33	4.60
ROGERS D, 2015, Hous. Stud.	10.1080/02673037.2015.1006185	102	9.27	3.62
CROMMELIN L, 2018, Urban Policy Res.	10.1080/08111146.2018.1460722	95	11.88	2.18

Table 3.1 lists the top 10 most globally cited documents, providing a clear window into the intellectual foundation of the "Global Housing Affordability Crisis." Analysing these seminal works reveals three distinct but interconnected themes that dominate the academic discourse. The first major theme is the Financialization Thesis. The high citation counts for Fields D.J. (2016) (Urban Studies) reflects a pivotal shift in the literature towards understanding housing as an investment asset rather than a social good. This paper serves as a cornerstone for current debates, illustrating how global capital flows and private equity investment directly impact local rental markets, often exacerbating affordability issues for long-term residents.

Closely related is the Urbanization & Supply Debate, highlighted by the contributions of Zhang X. (2016) (Habitat International) and Wetzstein S. (2017) (Urban Studies). Wetzstein's work, in particular with a high Normalized TC of 5.12, is foundational. It explicitly framed the "global urban housing affordability crisis" as a distinct, interconnected phenomenon, moving the academic debate beyond localised supply and demand metrics to consider global structural drivers that affect cities worldwide. Finally, the literature reveals a strong Health and Well-being dimension. The inclusion of papers by Plouffe L.A. (2010) and Nagata J.M. (2013) indicates a robust interdisciplinary link with public health. These studies provide critical empirical evidence on how poor housing affordability directly degrades physical and mental health outcomes, reinforcing the argument that the housing crisis is also a public health crisis.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to map the evolution of global research on the housing affordability crisis, identifying key trends, influential drivers, and thematic shifts over the past three decades. By systematically analysing 297 documents from the Scopus database, this bibliometric review provides a comprehensive overview of how the academic community has responded to one of the most pressing socioeconomic challenges of the 21st century. The analysis reveals that research on housing affordability is no longer a niche interest but a rapidly expanding, multidisciplinary field. The path of publications shows a distinct surge following the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, indicating that economic instability is a primary driver of academic inquiry. Thematically, the field has evolved from simple supply and demand economic models to a complex ecosystem involving dominant clusters focused on the financialization of housing markets, the social determinants of health, and emerging threats such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate sustainability.

The findings of this global review offer critical insights for policymakers in emerging economies, particularly Malaysia. The global literature strongly suggests that addressing affordability requires more than just increasing the supply of low-cost units. Instead, it demands a holistic approach that tackles the structural drivers of price escalation. For Malaysia's specific context, this topic aims on targeting the B40 and M40 groups, hence the global emphasis on "financialization" serves as a warning. Programmes like PR1MA and PPR must be insulated from speculative market forces that drive up land costs. Furthermore, the strong link between housing and health identified in the global clusters suggests that Malaysian housing initiatives should be integrated with public health policies, recognizing that housing adequacy is a preventative health measure rather than merely a construction target.

While this study provides a robust overview, it is not without limitations. First, the data was restricted to the Scopus database, which while comprehensive, may exclude relevant studies indexed solely in Web of Science or local Malaysian journals. Second, the restriction to English language documents may have omitted significant contributions from non-English speaking regions that face acute housing crises. Finally, bibliometric analysis focuses on metadata trends and may not capture the qualitative nuances of individual policy critiques.

Based on the gaps identified in this review, several key avenues for future research are proposed. Future studies should aim to localize the global framework by applying the "financialization" lens specifically to the Malaysian property market to understand how global capital flows impact local affordability. Additionally, there is a pressing need for empirical research on how the COVID-19 pandemic has permanently altered housing preferences and affordability in Southeast Asian cities. Finally, as homeownership becomes increasingly out of reach, research should pivot towards analysing the viability of long-term rental models, such as build-to-rent schemes, as a sustainable alternative to the traditional ownership-centric model.

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