

# Secretary General's Foreword



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The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted lives and economies around the world. The social and economic fallout is reversing development gains, and global poverty is expected to increase for the first time in three decades.

Cities have borne the brunt of the pandemic. Urban areas are already home to 55 per cent of the world's population, and that figure is expected to grow to 68 per cent by 2050. Our rapidly urbanizing world must respond effectively to this pandemic and prepare for future infectious disease outbreaks.

The most vulnerable to disease are those living on the margins of our cities. Unplanned urban living leaves people vulnerable. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed deep inequalities and demonstrated that tackling the virus is more challenging in urban areas, where access to quality healthcare is uneven, housing inadequate, water and sanitation lacking, transport infrastructure patchy and jobs precarious.

We cannot go back to business as usual. Cities and communities are demanding that those in authority take the opportunity to build back better. To emerge stronger, we need a sustainable, inclusive and green recovery for people and the planet. That means dealing with the existing challenges of how cities are planned, managed and financed, and ensuring their development is compatible with the goal of net zero emissions by 2050.

With appropriate policies and supportive frameworks, resilient cities with improved housing and infrastructure can bounce back from the devastating impacts of disasters, including pandemics. The Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda provide the blueprint to implement these measures.

The *World Cities Report 2020* reaffirms that sustainable urbanization remains central to overall sustainable development by creating economic, social and environmental value that supports the fight against poverty, inequality, climate change and other global challenges. This simple but powerful message should guide development efforts as the world recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic and throughout the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.