

World Cities Report 2020 The Value of Sustainable Urbanization

PRESS RELEASE



Cities will be critical for the global COVID-19 recovery and building back better according to UN-Habitat flagship report

NAIROBI, 31 October 2020 – Cities hold the key to the global recovery from the COVID-19 health crisis and the worst recession for decades, according to the flagship 2020 World Cities Report released today by UN-Habitat, the UN agency working on urban issues.

Cities have been at the epicentre of the COVID-19 outbreak with 95 per cent of cases found in urban areas.

“With appropriate policies and supportive frameworks, resilient cities with improved housing and infrastructure can bounce back from the devastating impacts of disasters, including pandemics,” said the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres in his foreword to the Report

The Report, on the theme “The Value of Sustainable Urbanization”, analyses the intrinsic value of cities in generating economic prosperity, mitigating environmental degradation, reducing social inequality and building stronger institutions. It shows how together these can drive transformative change.

“The World Cities Report 2020 convincingly affirms that well-planned, managed, and financed cities and towns create economic, social, environmental and other unquantifiable value that can vastly improve the quality of life of all,” said the UN-Habitat Executive Director, Maimunah Mohd Sharif. “Urbanization can be leveraged for the fight against poverty, inequality, unemployment, climate change and other pressing global challenges.”

The Report analyses the value of urbanization from an economic, social and environmental perspective, including the unquantifiable value giving cities their unique character.

The Report found that cities generate economic value when they function efficiently, for example by providing transport options that shorten travel times and reduce traffic congestion, allowing for more productive employment.

Environmental value is generated by compact cities with walkable urban centres which employ nature-based solutions that can reduce their overall carbon footprint.

Urban areas can reduce social inequalities when they provide affordable housing for low-income residents and create safe spaces for marginalized groups such as migrants and LGBTQ+ individuals.

When cities are well-planned and managed, they also create intangible value by instilling civic pride in urban identity and serving as centres of cultural traditions.

According to the Report, the value of sustainable urbanization can be unlocked once various planning, finance and governance conditions are in place. It calls on national governments to create an environment that empowers local governments to raise revenue, regulate land use, plan for urban growth, limit urban sprawl and relieve overcrowded housing. In turn, the Report says, says local governments should collect revenue to improve municipal services and public spaces.

The Report emphasizes the role of the New Urban Agenda, the UN's 20-year plan for sustainable urbanization, as a local road map to achieving the United Nations' sustainability agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

UN-Habitat's World Cities Report 2020 was launched today at the virtual Global Observance of World Cities Day. The full report is available at https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/10/wcr_2020_report.pdf

UN-Habitat's World Cities Reports provide the latest thinking and findings on the trends, conditions and ideas around urbanization and city issues, informing policies and launching global and regional debates on the most up-to-date and pressing topics. The previous World Cities Report was published in 2016.

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