
PRESS RELEASE

New UN-Habitat Report calls for post COVID-19 cities to lead the way to a fairer, greener and healthier future for all

Nairobi, 30 March 2021 - UN-Habitat's new report - *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a more just, green and healthy future* – demonstrates how cities can reduce the impact of future pandemics and become more equitable, healthy and environmentally friendly.

Urban areas have been at the forefront of the COVID-19 crisis, with 95 per cent of all cases recorded in cities in the first months. Urban areas were faced with a rapidly changing public health crisis, along with challenges in safe public transport, increased water and sanitation needs, use of public spaces and the economic consequences of lockdowns.

Despite these pressures, many local governments and community leaders responded quickly and effectively to prevent the spread of the pandemic and mitigate its effects, taking the first steps towards an accelerated recovery.

Based on the documentation of more than 1,700 cities and well-founded policy analysis, the UN-Habitat Report provides both empirical evidence on the state of cities and recommendations for actions for a sustainable recovery

Urban leaders and planners must rethink how people move through and in cities, using lessons from COVID-19, according to the UN-Habitat Report. Patterns of inequality, characterized by the lack of access to basic services, poverty and overcrowded living conditions, have been key destabilizing factors in increasing the scale and impact of COVID-19.

The UN-Habitat Report's recommendations include an increased focus at the local level on planning neighbourhoods and communities that are multi-functional and inclusive. The Report explores how well planned cities combining residential and commercial with public spaces along with affordable housing can improve public health, the local economy and the environment.

The Report calls for cities to be at the forefront of moves towards a Social Contract between governments, the public, civil society and private sector.

"Cities are engines of dynamism and innovation, and can help us overcome development deficits. They can spearhead reforms towards a New Social Contract to tackle poverty, strengthen social protection, restore public trust and reach people who are on the margins or who face discrimination," states the UN Secretary-General António Guterres in his foreword to the Report.

The Report outlines how a new normal can emerge in cities “where health, housing and security are prioritized for the most vulnerable not only out of social necessity, but also from a profound commitment to human rights for all.”

This requires governments to focus on policies to protect land rights, improve access to water, sanitation, public transport, electricity, health and education facilities and ensure inclusive digital connectivity.

“We need to address systemic poverty and inequality in cities head on, giving greater focus to housing, basic services, sustainable mobility and connectivity,” said the UN-Habitat Executive Director, Maimunah Mohd Sharif. “This also means protecting jobs and providing financial support to cities to allow them to create financial resilience.”

The Report recommends strengthening access to municipal finance to enable city leaders to build a new urban economy that reduces disaster risk as well as addressing climate change by developing nature-based solutions and investing in sustainable infrastructure to enable low carbon transport.

The Cities and Pandemics Report makes it clear that the way cities and towns recover from the pandemic will have a major impact on the global efforts to achieve a sustainable future for all and provides important recommendations on moving towards a more just, greener and healthier future.

The Report and other related resources are available [here](#).

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UN-Habitat (United Nations Human Settlements Programme)

UN-Habitat works in over 90 countries supporting people in cities and human settlements for a better urban future. A significant part of its work relates to responding to natural and man-made crises and on building back in a greener, safer and in a more resilient and inclusive way. Working with governments and local partners, its high impact projects combine world-class expertise and local knowledge to deliver timely and targeted solutions. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a dedicated Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on cities, SDG 11, to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

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