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Executive Board of the United Nations  
Human Settlements Programme  
First session of 2021  
Nairobi, 7 and 8 April 2021  
Item 7 of the provisional agenda\*

**Implementation of the normative and operational activities of UN-Habitat, including reporting on the programmatic activities of UN-Habitat in 2020 and the implementation of subprogrammes, flagship programmes and technical cooperation activities, and update on the UN-Habitat response to the coronavirus disease pandemic**

## **Response by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic\*\***

### **Report of the Executive Director**

1. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of our urban systems and the severity of spatial inequalities like never before, reminding us of the price we pay for weaknesses in health systems, social protections and public services. Across the globe, the pandemic has taken root in cities and proven to be a potent disruptive force to the “engines of economic growth” and sustainable development at large. The pandemic has very clearly demonstrated that while national and state governments play a crucial role towards a systematic and unified response, it is in the cities and urban systems where the battle is being fought.
2. In the past year, UN-Habitat has supported several responses at the global, national and city levels, producing knowledge, placing our technical expertise and normative tools at the service of different governments, advocating for building back more resilient, sustainable and inclusive cities. The programmatic response has focused on urban areas as they have been hit hard in view of their density, the mobility and the connectivity of its population.
3. To date, a total of \$32 million has been mobilized to UN-Habitat COVID-19 response, 44 per cent of the required \$72 million pledged in UN-Habitat COVID-19 Response Plan in April 2020. The portfolio includes 75 projects in 37 countries and 300 cities, benefiting over 10 million people. UN-Habitat’s profiling of urban contexts included mapping and data from 1700 cities benefiting over 10 million people by informing decision-making and improving coherence in the responses to the pandemic.
4. The engagement of UN-Habitat at the highest level of coordination in the UN System has contributed to greater visibility of the specific challenges of the COVID-19 response in human settlements and cities. UN-Habitat has provided technical expertise to policy as well as produced a specialized database and new knowledge on the urban dimension of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on UN-Habitat contribution, the key major UN response strategies, policy briefs and plans have a strong understanding of urban issues, the role of local governments, and how cities are part of the problem and the solution to this pandemic.

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\* HSP/EB.2021/1.

\*\* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

5. Noteworthy is the UN Secretary-General's Policy Brief on COVID-19 in an Urban World led by UN-Habitat in collaboration with UNDP, UNDESA, UNEP, UNICEF, UNODC, ILO, WHO, OHCHR, and all Regional Economic Commissions. The Policy Brief has encouraged more integrated policy support across the UN system at global, regional and country level. It also has set the scope and priorities for UN-Habitat's engagement and leading global response in the following areas:

(a) Developing further the health and development nexus: reviewing and setting standards, manuals, tools in relation to urban determinants of health conditions, including poverty, inequality and urban morphology, and the impact on the SDGs;

(b) Considering health, governance and urban finance nexus: documenting best practices, reviewing lessons learned, and creating capacity building tools that can inform innovative and resilient recovery strategies;

(c) Understanding the central role of urban planning and infrastructure provision in the post COVID-19 recovery and the unique opportunity to start rethinking the way we plan more resilient cities;

(d) Understanding long-term implications of pandemics, public health emergencies and environmentally sustainable solutions, for the ongoing work of UN-Habitat;

(e) Considering socio-economic impacts, the links with urban finance and the need to address spatial inequalities in cities;

(f) Investing in basic services, housing and slum upgrading.

6. As the pandemic endures, the approach to confronting this disease has shifted to city- and country-specific responses, preparing for future spikes and advancing plans for sustainable recovery and resilience. UN-Habitat has increased focus on policies and actions to mitigate the local social and economic impact of COVID-19, working with a coalition of global thought leaders and stakeholders in public and private spheres.

7. Extra effort has been put in the engagement through United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs), supporting the review and elaboration of socio-economic analysis of the COVID-19 impact and related response plans. UN-Habitat is actively supporting the elaboration of Common Country Analysis (CCAs), and Cooperation Frameworks (CFs) building also on the Secretary-General Policy Brief on COVID-19 in an Urban World. This is clearly a strategic entry point to guarantee the mainstreaming of urban issues, which UN-Habitat contributed to at global level, is trickled to the response and recovery at national and local levels.

8. UN-Habitat's State of the World's Cities Report "Cities and Pandemics: Towards a more green, just and healthy future", to be launched end of March 2021, provides strong normative and urban policy guidance on the impacts of COVID-19 and the future city responses in four inter-connected areas: i) poverty and inequality; ii) the form and the function of the city; iii) the normative and governance mechanisms and iv) the urban economy systems. Based on the data and policy information provided by this report, UN-Habitat will be able to lead a global debate around city resilience, socio-economic recovery and the need of more cohesive and integrated societies that could be living with pandemics. UN-Habitat will also lead global discussions on the UN Research Roadmap for the Covid-19 Recovery, focusing on leveraging the power of science in support of a better socio-economic recovery and a more equitable, resilient and sustainable future.

9. As of 1 March 2021, UN-Habitat suspended the Level 3 emergency protocols for COVID-19 response consistent with the deactivation of the system-wide COVID-tailored IASC Scale-Up protocols on 23 January 2021. With the deactivation, the Agency reverts to its standard procedures for programming and crisis response as defined in the established structure. The experience of the past year will inform UN-Habitat's collective learning and knowledge to support responses to future urban crises.