



Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet

SDG 11 SYNTHESIS REPORT
HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM 2023

Executive Summary



UNITED NATIONS





Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet

Copyright © United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) 2023

All rights reserved

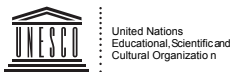
United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

P.O. Box 30030 00100 Nairobi GPO KENYA

Tel: 254-020-7623120 (Central Office)

www.unhabitat.org

Disclaimer: The designations employed and the presentation of the material on all maps in the report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UN Habitat and partners concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.



Executive Summary

Rescuing SDG 11 for a resilient urban planet

- Humanity's present and future is urban. Now is the time to think, plan and act urban.** Urbanization—how cities develop and grow—is now central to determining people's quality of life. Creating the conditions for environmentally sustainable, economically prosperous, and socially equitable and just cities and human settlements is of paramount importance for present and future generations.
- SDG 11 is critical to achieving the 2030 Agenda's broader vision of global development.** Cities and human settlements are the locus of opportunity to accelerate progress on the 5 Ps of the SDGs: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships. Delivering on each of these areas will increasingly be determined by how well we plan and manage our cities and human settlements, the effectiveness of local action, and responses to emerging challenges and opportunities.
- A critical predictor of the ability to pursue a healthy, productive and peaceful life is directly tied to where someone lives and what that place offers.** Well-planned, -managed and -governed cities and human settlements with access to sufficient resources are a potent positive force for sustainable development, but inadequate or poor planning, management, governance and investment can easily degrade quality of life.
- Cities need to adequately monitor and prepare for forecasted shifts in their demographic composition.** As the global population ages, urban planning and service delivery must adapt to meet the needs of older persons. At the other end of the demographic spectrum,

cities host a large share of the youth population, especially in developing countries, necessitating deliberate investments corresponding to their needs.

- By 2030, we will not meet most/all SDG 11 targets without major shifts in urban policy and investments.** Halfway into the implementation phase, the world is far from achieving the targets set out in SDG 11. Some progress has been made toward SDG 11 targets related to transport and national urban policies, yet vast gaps remain in the other areas such as slum proliferation, inadequate public space and insufficient waste management. Substantial regional variations prevail, with Sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Southern Asia lagging on most targets.
- Cities are increasingly becoming grounds where global divergence between haves and have nots manifests,** including socioeconomic gaps, spatial fragmentation, climate-driven inequalities and the digital divide. The lack of progress towards attaining SDG 11 is bound to exacerbate these global divides. Therefore, measuring progress on SDG 11 and identifying remedies for action is more important than ever to address global divergence.
- The response capacity of local and regional governments to crises and threats shapes impacts globally.** The disruptive nature of the COVID-19 pandemic is a stark reminder that urban areas need to be prepared for dynamic and unpredictable futures. Likewise, the climate and biodiversity emergencies, violence and armed conflicts, inflationary pressures, displacement and other natural and human-caused disasters manifest most acutely in cities and force local governments to the forefront of the response.



Cities are increasingly becoming grounds where global divergence between haves and have nots manifests, including socioeconomic gaps, spatial fragmentation, climate-driven inequalities and the digital divide



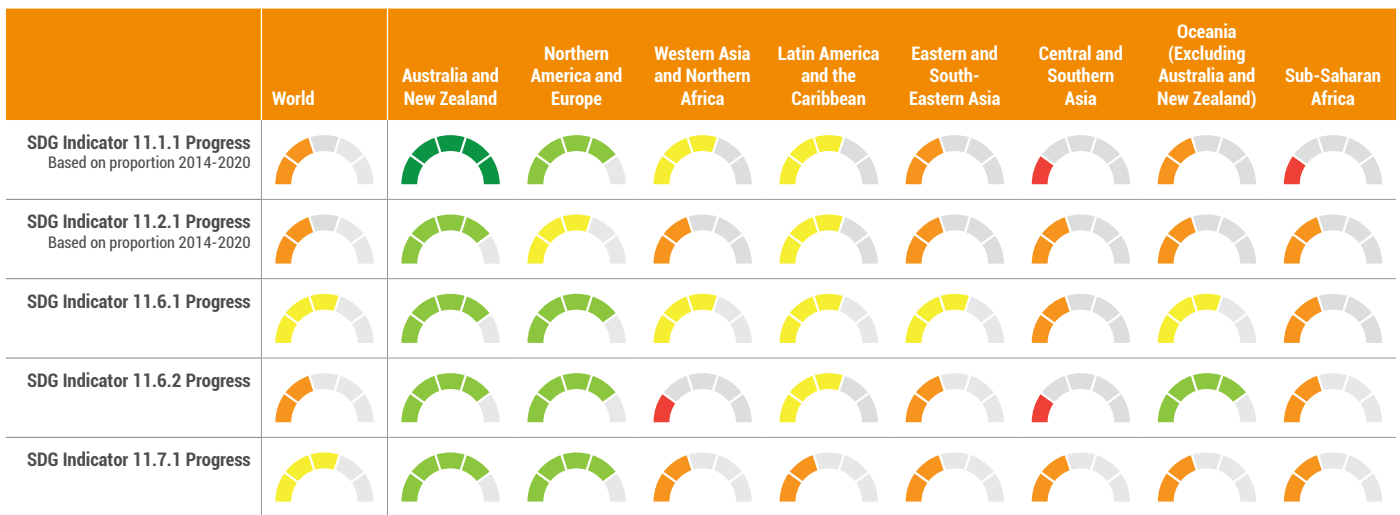
The New Urban Agenda is a necessary accelerator for the SDGs. It defines ways in which better planning, design, management, governance and finance will allow cities to enable the realization of the 2030 Agenda

- **Progress towards the SDGs is tied to the ability of countries and cities to localize the goals.** Some of the most critical efforts and investments to implement the commitments made in the SDGs occur at the local level. Local and regional governments are the closest to the people by delivering public services, infrastructure and opportunities to their constituents. As such, the shared vision of leaving no place and no one behind requires interventions at the local scale.
- **The New Urban Agenda is a necessary accelerator for the SDGs.** It defines ways in which better planning, design, management, governance and finance will allow cities to enable the realization of the 2030 Agenda. It addresses a wide range of actions and avenues that are necessary for making cities spatially effective for sustainable development and details strategic actions necessary for ensuring that cities and human settlements support and facilitate the implementation of the SDGs
- **Our efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda are off track and much is at stake if we fail.** The consequences of not achieving SDG 11 in particular are immense, directly impacting billions of people's daily lives. When urban challenges are left unaddressed, they escalate into global threats that spill over across national borders. To prevent the disastrous consequences ahead calls for changing the way cities and human settlements are planned, managed and governed. To avoid a collective failure and rescue Agenda 2030, actions need to be taken now and at scale, since the magnitude of the challenges faced requires a comparable level of action.

Progress Towards SDG 11

At the midpoint stage of the 2030 Agenda, the status assessment to date indicates there is a high possibility of SDG 11 not being achieved in the next seven years unless Member States and the global community significantly and urgently implement and scale up policies, initiatives and investments that accelerate progress towards the 10 targets behind SDG 11.

Goal 11 Indicators Progress Chart



LEGEND

- Target met or almost met
- Close to target
- Moderate distance to target
- Far from target
- Very far from target

Despite the overall lack of progress, analysis of trends since 2018 also reveal key markers of progress that must be acknowledged. Perhaps the most notable area of progress for SDG 11 at the global level has been of the significant improvements in data production and monitoring progress, which is now reflected in the status of many SDG 11 indicators that are now classified as Tier I and II by the IAEG-SDGs as well as increasing number of countries and cities producing data-rich voluntary national and local review.

A review of progress along each SDG 11 target and indicator provides insights into key achievements and gaps.

Target 11.1

By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums

- **The world remains far off the mark in reducing the proportion and absolute numbers of slum dwellers.**
 - While the proportion of people living in slums and informal settlements continued to decline, the absolute number is on the rise (2014-2020). In effect, the world is producing new slum dwellers faster than it can address existing slums.
 - The rate of decline in slum proportions also slowed down (2014-2020), against an increasing rate of change in the absolute number of slum dwellers, pointing to an overall worsening in performance on indicator 11.1.1 over this period.
 - Roughly 2.8 billion people are estimated to be affected by different forms of housing inadequacy, of which close to 1.1 billion reside in slums and informal settlements.
 - 165 million more slum dwellers have emerged globally over 20 years, reaching nearly 1.1 billion in 2020.
- Of these nearly 1.1 billion global slum dwellers, 90 per cent were in Africa or Asia in 2020.
- Additionally, an estimated 318 million people across the globe are homeless, while one in four live in conditions which harm their health, safety and prosperity.
- **Most world regions are off track in addressing slums and informality.**
 - Five world regions are far or very far from target in reducing the proportion of slum dwellers (Eastern and South-eastern Asia, Central and Southern Asia, Oceania and Sub-Saharan Africa).
 - Four regions are on track to reduce the proportion of slums dwellers as they are close to or have met the target of zero slums (Australia and New Zealand, Northern America and Europe, Western Asia and Northern Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean).
 - A reduction in the proportion of slum dwellers is happening concurrently as a rise in the absolute number of slum dwellers. For instance, Western Asia and Northern Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean have seen their absolute slum population increase even as the proportion of slum dwellers decreases.
 - Four regions have seen limited or no progress, or an increase in the absolute number of slum dwellers (Eastern and South-eastern Asia, Central and Southern Asia, Oceania and Sub-Saharan Africa).
- **Countries experiencing or transitioning out of conflict appear to be worse off in terms of slum conditions.**
 - Out of the 10 countries that reported a rise in the proportion of the urban population living in slums between 2000 and 2020,

more than half are experiencing, or are transitioning out of, conflict.

- In 2021 there were 89.3 million displaced people globally, all of whom will eventually need adequate housing.
- **As all world regions continue to urbanize, the world may fail to meet the corresponding growth demand for housing.**
 - When humanity crossed the 8 billion mark in November 2022, more than half of the world's population-56 per cent-were living in cities. This figure is expected to rise to 68 per cent by 2050. An estimated 2 billion people are expected to join the global urban population by 2050, with all regions projected to become more urbanized.
 - UN-Habitat estimates that 96,000 new affordable and accessible housing units are needed every day in order to meet demand for adequate housing in 2030, which will correspond to about 3 billion people, or roughly 40 percent of the world's population.
 - The housing crises may be more critical in smaller towns and intermediate cities where most future urban growth will occur.

Target 11.2

By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons

- **Global progress is at a moderate distance from meeting the target to ensure the proportion of population has convenient access to public transport.**
 - Still, only about half of the global urban population (51.6 per cent) has convenient

access to public transport, which mostly consists of low-capacity modes of transport such as buses across all regions of the world.

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an observed trend of cities shifting their priorities towards healthier solutions to support collective transport and non-motorized transport options. In many cities, walking and cycling increased significantly.
- Road fatalities and injuries continue to derail progress, with about 1.3 million people dying each year as a result of road traffic crashes.
- **There is a pronounced divide between the Global North and Global South in terms of the proportion of people with convenient access to public transport.**
 - Two regions of the Global North are on track for this indicator (Australia and New Zealand, North America and Europe).
 - However, all of the remaining regions, from the Global South, are largely off track (Western Asia and Northern Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, Central and Southern Asia, Oceania and Sub-Saharan Africa) in meeting this indicator.
- **Low-capacity transport systems remain dominant as opposed to high-capacity options.**
 - In all regions, low-capacity systems account for the majority of the global public transport modes (averaging 60 per cent in all regions).
 - Globally, almost half (47 per cent) of all trips are by private motorized transport.

Target 11.3

By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries

- **The physical expansion of cities remains higher than the rate of population growth rate**
 - During the period 1990 to 2020, the physical expansion of cities was faster than the rates of population growth. The global land consumption rate during the period 2010 to 2020 averaged 1.5 per cent while population growth rate averaged 1.2 per cent.
 - The urban built-up area per capita is increasing. According to data from 681 cities across 124 countries, the built-up area per capita marginally increased from an average of 161m² per person in 1990 to 169m² per person in 2020, with a slight drop recorded in 2000
 - All regions experienced overall net growth in the built area per capita from 1990 to 2020, despite slight declines observed in Central and Southern Asia and Western Asia and Northern Africa (between 1990 and 2010) as well as in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia regions (between 1990 and 2000).
- Australia and New Zealand and Northern America and Europe currently record the highest built-up area per capita values, while Western Asia and Northern Africa and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia record the lowest values.
- **Civil society engagements in decision making and development processes is under threat in several parts of the globe in recent years**
 - Only half of the 272 cities surveyed have structures for civil society participation in urban planning and management processes, according to a survey conducted by UN-Habitat.
 - There are even fewer opportunities for citizens to participate in budget decision-making processes, with only 40 per cent or fewer experts agreeing that their cities have participatory structures for budget management.
 - Civil society participation in the evaluation of urban management performance is also constrained, with only 40 per cent of experts indicating that their cities offer these opportunities.



panoramic urban city skyline aerial view under twilight sky and neon night in tokyo, Japan

Target 11.4
Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage

- **Culture is a driver of urban economies and employment.**
 - Nearly one third of UNESCO World Heritage sites and more than 70 per cent of cultural properties are located in urban areas.
 - Creative and cultural industries, which account for 3.1 per cent of global GDP, are largely based in urban areas and comprise about 13 per cent of employment in major cities.
 - Cultural tourism is another core component of urban economies. In 2019, prior to the global lockdown, tourism injected US\$8.9 trillion into the global economy, or 10.3 per cent of global GDP, with cultural tourism accounting for an estimated 40 per cent of all tourism worldwide – the widest share of which is also driven by urban settlements.
- **Expenditure per capita spent on the preservation, protection and conservation of cultural and natural heritage is concentrated at the national level.**
 - Expenditure on cultural and natural heritage predominantly occurs at the national level, rather than at regional or local levels.
 - In some countries, however, the average share of local government expenditure on cultural and natural heritage is significant.
 - Public expenditure on heritage for developing countries is significantly less compared to developed countries.
 - Public investments for safeguarding cultural and natural heritage varied during COVID-19.



About two-thirds of the world's cities with populations over five million are located in areas at risk of sea-level rise.

Target 11.5
By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations.

- **Exposure of people to disaster related risks remains significant.**
 - About two-thirds of the world's cities with populations over five million are located in areas at risk of sea-level rise.
 - The number of deaths and missing persons due to disasters per 100,000 population has steadily decreased from 1.64 between 2005 and 2015 to 0.86 between 2012 and 2021.
 - The average disaster mortality rate was 47,337 deaths per disaster during the period from 2015 to 2021.
 - However, the number of persons affected by disasters per 100,000 people rose from 1,198 between 2005 and 2015 to 2,113 between 2012 and 2022.
 - About 60 per cent of displacements due to conflicts and natural disasters occur in cities.
- **More countries are putting in place disaster risk reduction strategies.**
 - The number of countries with national strategies for disaster risk reduction has increased from 55 in 2015 to 126 in 2021.
 - A total of 118 countries have reported having some level of policy coherence with other global frameworks, such as the SDGs and the Paris Agreement.

Target 11.6

By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management

- **Increasing waste generation and mismanagement in cities remains widespread**
 - The world generated 2.3 billion tonnes of municipal solid waste in 2020, of which almost 40 per cent was managed in uncontrolled facilities, predominantly open dumpsites.
 - Municipalities in Sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania continue to struggle in increasing the amounts of municipal solid waste collection rates, with the average collection rate remaining below 60 per cent.
 - In Asia, as well as Latin America and the Caribbean, cities are performing better in municipal solid waste collection and transport to transfer stations, recovery facilities or disposal facilities, with recorded collection rates ranging from 70–85 per cent.
- **The world's cities are suffocating from air pollution.**
 - 99 per cent of the world's urban population live in areas that exceed the new WHO guidelines on air quality, established in 2021, with significant variations noted across regions.
 - Air pollution has on average declined in populous countries over the last decade. However, in 2019, ambient air pollution from traffic, industry, power generation, waste burning and residential fuel combustion resulted in 4.2 million deaths and the loss of millions more healthy years of life.
 - Suburban and peri-urban areas have, on average, worse air pollution than urban areas across the globe, highlighting that air pollution is not only an urban problem.

Target 11.7

By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities.

- **The world is far from the target to provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible public and green spaces by 2030.**
 - Only an average of 45.2 per cent of urban dwellers across the globe have convenient access to open public spaces, leaving the majority of urban residents and visitors without adequate opportunities to enjoy the benefits of such spaces.
 - Five regions are far from target (Western Asia and Northern Africa, Eastern and Southeastern Asia, Central and Southern Asia, Oceania, Sub-Saharan Africa).
 - Two world regions are at a moderate distance from target (Northern America and Europe; Latin America and the Caribbean). Only one region, Australia and New Zealand, has met or almost met the target.
- **A growing number of countries have national urban policies.**
 - Since 2018, an increasing number of countries are developing and implementing national urban policies (NUPs).
 - Out of 157 countries for which information on NUPs was available in 2020, 38 per cent were in development stages, 46 per cent were in implementation stage and 16 per cent had already begun monitoring and evaluation.
 - As of 2021, over 90 per cent of NUPs fulfilled the first two qualifiers for indicator 11.a.1 ("respond to population dynamics" and "ensure balanced territorial development"), but less than half fulfilled the third qualifier ("increase local fiscal space").

Target 11.b

By 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels.

- **The contribution of cities to climate change remains significant.**
 - Urban areas are major contributors to climate change, accounting for 70 per cent of CO₂ emissions.
 - CO₂ levels increased from 2020 to 2021 at a rate higher than the average global annual growth from the last decade, and are already 149 per cent higher than pre-industrial levels.
- **Cities represent high concentrations of people and infrastructure vulnerable to climate change.**



Impact of climate change. Flood on the expressway in Millennium City Gurgaon. Haryana, India
© Shutterstock

- In the coming decades, hundreds of millions of people in urban areas will likely be affected by rising sea levels, increased precipitation, inland floods, frequent and stronger cyclones and storms, and extreme temperatures.
- Climate change may also negatively impact infrastructure and worsen access to basic urban services and quality of life in cities.

Fast tracking SDG 11: Key entry points

Achieving SDG 11 in seven years before 2030 requires urgent and large-scale policy interventions and investments in sustainable. The progress observed in some areas points to a clear opportunity to turn the tide and rescue SDG 11 globally. Yet governments will need to prioritize the most effective interventions given the obvious limits to the scale and scope of their future actions amidst competing demands and resource constraints. Striking this balance is perhaps one of the central difficulties at hand for decision makers facing limited resources yet vast demands and needs arising from global urbanization, one of the mega-trends of the 21st century. Nevertheless, in an urban world, the risk of not investing in sustainable urbanization is too high.

Key actions are needed to focus on the most strategic, high-impact responses for addressing structural and systemic bottlenecks, generating multiplier effects and optimizing returns on investment. Actions that can potentially accelerate progress on specific targets of SDG 11 are highlighted in Table 1. These need to be responsive to global shifts and contexts, leverage innovation and digital technology, and draw on impactful practices and lessons to date. Furthermore, while they hold the potential to be applicable globally, these actions are ideally locally adaptable and offer possibilities for scaling up. Importantly, given multiple interlinked drivers and risk factors related to SDG 11, policy interventions and investments specific to one target will also have crosscutting impacts on other targets.

Table 1: Highlights of key actions to accelerate SDG 11**Target 11.1: By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums**

- Promoting a “housing at the center” approach as a fundamental human right and cornerstone of development priorities is urgent.
- Public investment is critical to ensuring access to affordable housing and services.
- Land-based financing tools, including value-capture instruments, can further help facilitate public investment and accelerate progress.
- Public-private partnerships (PPPs) contribute to affordable housing and vital slum improvements.
- Promoting multiple housing finance options can improve access to adequate housing.
- Active and broad political participation is essential to ensure access to safe, adequate and affordable housing and basic services in all communities.
- Introducing and enforcing legislative measures is critical.
- Green-building measures in the housing sector are essential to curb emissions.

Target 11.2: By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.

- Sustainable Urban Mobility plans that consider both transportation and land are key in integrated planning approaches.
- Prioritizing investment in multi-modal public transport, integrated with walking and cycling is essential.
- Transit-oriented development (TOD) policies are key in promoting compact, mixed-use, and walkable communities around public transport stations and corridors.
- Investments in technology-based solutions and zero-carbon mobility can improve the convenience, accessibility, efficiency, safety, and sustainability of transportation systems.
- Informal transport networks should integrate into future transport planning.

Target 11.3: By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries.

- Planned city expansion is urgent to mitigate the risks associated with unplanned future urban growth.
- Metropolitan governance is key for effective urban planning and management beyond the boundaries of any particular jurisdiction.
- Compact, socially inclusive, better integrated and connected cities are an imperative for sustainable urban futures.
- Building trust and legitimacy of institutions is crucial for shaping cities and communities.

Target 11.4: Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage.

- Linking culture and urban policies more deliberately is instrumental for a more sustainable urban future.
- Promoting creative urban industries can boost urban economies.
- Culture can be leveraged as a means of urban regeneration.

Target 11.5: By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations.

- Mainstreaming urban resilience capacities in urban planning is essential.
- Proactive climate change, vulnerability and disaster risk reduction and pandemic response policies are needed

Target 11.6: By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management

- Robust investments in waste management infrastructure are essential to ensuring the proper collection, treatment, and disposal of municipal solid waste in cities.
- Effective waste collection systems are crucial to ensuring that municipal solid waste is collected efficiently and on a regular basis.
- Extended producer responsibility (EPR) systems can play an important role.
- Public engagement and awareness campaigns foster improved waste- management practices.
- Proper waste disposal and treatment systems are needed in cities. Implementing robust emission regulations are needed control and limit the release of harmful pollutants in cities.
- Promoting cleaner household energy sources is crucial for mitigating both indoor and outdoor air pollution and improving air quality in the city.
- Enhancing public transportation and promoting active mobility are key strategies for tackling air pollution.

Target 11.7: By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities

- Urban Greening initiatives can help to enhance the availability and quality of open spaces within cities.
- Land pooling, readjustment and reblocking can help consolidate and increase the amount of public space.
- Inclusive design is needed to ensure open spaces correspond to the needs of people of all genders, gender identities, ages, and abilities.
- Creating multifunctional open spaces helps cities provide versatile environments that cater to various purposes and activities.
- Implementation and enforcement of anti-harassment policies can help cities effectively address sexual harassment in public spaces.
- Improved public safety infrastructure is a necessity to enhance the physical environment and promote safety.

11.a: Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning

- Encouraging countries to develop and implement comprehensive national urban policies is of paramount importance.
- Strengthened regional development planning is needed to foster collaboration between national, regional and local authorities.
- Improved effectiveness of governance structures and building institutional capacities at the national, regional, and local levels is key to enhancing linkages across the urban-rural continuum.

Target 11.b: By 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels

Target 11.c: Support least developed countries, including through financial and technical assistance, in building sustainable and resilient buildings utilizing local materials

- Strengthening institutional capacity is vital to develop and implement effective national strategies aligned with the Sendai Framework.
- Promoting multi-sectoral collaboration plays a crucial role as disaster risk reduction requires the involvement of various government ministries, departments, and agencies.
- National governments can play an important role in improving local government financing for disaster risk reduction strategies.
- International cooperation is valuable to promote a broader perspective and access a wider range of tools, strategies, and technologies for disaster risk reduction.
- Promotion of local material industries can advance sustainable and resilient building practices.

The scale, complexity and multidimensional drivers of urbanization call for transformative shifts that depart from status quo or business-as-usual responses to realize SDG 11.

Transformative shifts entail significant and fundamental changes in approach or direction to embrace innovative and bold measures that can bring about substantial change. These changes require adopting new strategies, principles and frameworks that can profoundly alter the way in which policies are designed, implemented, and financed. Transformative shifts require political will, governance continuity and policy agility to bring about the desired changes. These shifts are cross-cutting in their impact across both specific targets and commitments for SDG 11 and the other 16 SDGs. They are also highly interlinked, calling for holistic approaches to their operationalization.

- **The need to transition from recognition to action is urgent**

- *Fostering experimentation is key to this transition in the of face unprecedented challenges.* Urban labs and incubators, supported by either government or the private sector, can provide entrepreneurs with the financial support and space to experiment with new ideas without immediate market or regulatory pressures. Expanding transnational municipal networks can similarly act as important accelerators of urban experimentation and SDG 11 by facilitating flows of technical knowledge, ideas and expertise across the urban world.
- *Spatial planning generates an SDG multiplier effect.* This is due to its ability to focus investments in critical areas and impact multiple cross-cutting issues such as housing, transportation, and public spaces. Effective planning can thus help maximize the impact of limited resources and investments and ensure balanced spatial development both within cities and across the urban-rural continuum.

- *Multilevel and multistakeholder governance is an accelerator for SDG 11.* Improved coordination and clearly delineated roles across agencies, jurisdictions and levels of government are key to creating procedural synergies, reducing overlap and critical gaps between institutions, and promoting trust and accountability that enhance policy coherence and promote inclusive territorial development. Collaboration with other stakeholders such as private firms, civil society and NGOs furthermore help ensure efficient and inclusive urban and metropolitan governance.
- *Recasting urban planning at the core of public policy capabilities is key to urgent action on SDG 11.* There is a shortage of urban planners, designers and other roles critical for urban service delivery and urban governance, particularly in Asia and Africa where the world's fastest urban growth is happening. Prioritizing the training of urban professionals to respond to the wave of urban growth in these and other regions is essential, including making available the funds to facilitate education, training and knowledge exchange.

- **An urban anchor in SDG financing**

- *A strong urban and local component, rooted in multilevel governance is needed in SDG stimulus implementation.* Urban areas offer immense opportunities to boost financing across the SDGs, as an estimated 65 per cent of the Agenda 2030 cannot be fully achieved without the involvement of urban and local actors. Reforming the international financial architecture to deliver the SDGs must fully consider the central role of local finance and governments, as well as the challenges and opportunities of SDG financing at all levels of government.
- *Reform of the global financial system is critical to address urban inequalities.* Global financial and economic crises



View of the High Line, an elevated green urban park in New York City
© Shutterstock

tend to disproportionately impact poor communities where local governments have limited resources and capacity to adapt to shocks. Understanding impacts and responses at the local and regional levels can furthermore help address these imbalances and promote capacity for SDG localization and acceleration.

- *National and local fiscal performance are intertwined.* National debt or austerity measures, for instance, can reduce budgets and access to financing for local governments. Excessive local and regional borrowing can similarly contribute to debt sustainability risks for national governments. Prudent financial management and sufficient autonomy at all levels are therefore crucial in reforming the global financial architecture and enhancing SDG financing.
- *Unlocking stranded urban resources is a major opportunity to finance the SDGs.* Cities and urban areas drive the global economy and can generate substantial revenues to finance development goals, when managed properly. However, factors such as poor regulatory environments, weak institutional capacities, and geographic fiscal imbalance can lead to under-collected municipal revenues, especially in low-income countries. Investments in enforcement capacities, regulatory reforms and strategic

taxes, such as those which target negative externalities like pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, can help local governments maximize revenue collection and contribute to SDG financing.

- *Funding infrastructure maintenance is critical to prevent sliding back on SDG targets.* Sustained incremental investments in maintenance can help governments avoid these poor conditions as well as expensive emergency repairs or large-scale replacements.
- *Consolidating urban investment portfolios around key outcome areas can scale impact.* Traditional sector-focused investments and policies can lead to inefficient and fragmented urban development. Focusing on key outcomes, such as reducing urban greenhouse gas emissions, rather than sectors like infrastructure or automobiles, can help promote large-scale and holistic investments that are well integrated with other policy areas and government actions.
- **Leapfrogging through data and technology**
 - *Urban data disaggregation is key to advancing inclusive and equitable urban development.* Consideration of data by various demographic categories, such as income, gender or race, refines understanding of urban dynamics, guides investments, and promotes balanced outcomes, especially in traditionally overlooked or systemically unequal areas. Such detailed data furthermore help identify and address city-level disparities, providing an accountability tool for stakeholders.
 - *Integrating implementation data with monitoring data is essential to achieving SDG 11.* These provide valuable context-specific information crucial to implementing transformative urban projects. However, significant resources are needed to enable the training and capacity-building of local

governments and communities to collect, process and interpret implementation data and ensure equal spatial access to these valuable data.

- *Diversifying technology is a key opportunity for sustainable urban development.* It combines traditional, nature-based, and emerging technologies, providing cities with a path to sustainable growth. However, these advancements can also intensify socio-economic disparities and create new challenges. To harness these technologies effectively and counter potential inequalities, cities need to proactively adapt their approaches, center people in their solutions, and leverage novel data sources and tools such as AI and machine learning, which are already revolutionizing urban data and sectors like transportation and disaster management.
- *Urban foresight is essential for establishing resilient urban trajectories.* Instead of adhering to the limitations of traditional planning centered on current conditions and short-term objectives, cities must focus on incorporating long-term strategies and future-oriented perspectives in their decision-making processes. Adopting this anticipatory mentality enables cities to effectively navigate upcoming uncertainties, enhance their adaptive capabilities, and create more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient urban futures.

- **The urban opportunity to advance global agendas**

- *Reinstating housing as a central focus is pivotal for renewing the social contract between governments and their citizens.* While housing has been recognized as a fundamental right, its actual realization remains inconsistent, pointing to the need for housing to be strategically positioned within national development, economic, and ecological transition planning, as it

influences multidimensional needs like education, health, and income, and supports overall wellbeing. Housing policy can't be viewed as a stand-alone sector but needs to be linked to priority targets and backed by appropriate policy interventions, with the active involvement of impoverished communities and local governments in policy definition, implementation, and review, serving as the cornerstone of progress.

- *Cities need to be at the forefront of climate action, as they account for a significant portion of global emissions and energy use.* Coalitions like the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group and the Global Covenant of Mayors demonstrate their commitment to climate action, often surpassing national governments in ambition. The SURGe Initiative, in particular, led by COP27 Presidency, UN-Habitat, and ICLEI, aims to enhance urban climate action through integrated tracks, accelerating progress towards the Paris Climate Goals and the SDGs.
- *Empowered cities and local governments can drive transformative shifts in crisis recovery and sustainable development.* Providing them with tools, resources, and scientific data is crucial for mobilizing action at scale. By involving local governments in the design and implementation of responses such as addressing migration and displacement challenges, cities can contribute to positive growth and effective solutions.

**A better quality of life for
all in an urbanizing world**



UN-HABITAT

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME
P.O. Box 30030, Nairobi 00100, Kenya
unhabitat-info@un.org
www.unhabitat.org

   @UNHABITAT

