

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



KEY ASKS

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SDG 11: SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Currently, around 56% of the world's population – 4.5 billion people – live in cities. With 80 million people added to the urban population every year, the figure is set to rise closer to 60% by 2030 and to almost 70% by mid-century. Over 90% of this growth will take place in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. This rapid urbanization which is largely unplanned and unregulated raises a myriad of development challenges including massive environmental, socio-economic, and spatial challenges. The slum population has crossed 1 billion and is increasing in proportion and absolute terms every year with more than 80% of slum dwellers living in Asia and Africa. It is estimated (conservatively) that there are around 350 – 500 million children living in slums with limited access to housing, basic infrastructure, and quality essential services.

UNICEF's analysis reveals massive inequalities in urban areas with children from households in the richest quintile benefiting from a substantial advantage across multiple dimensions over children from households in the poorest quintile. The large 'wealth advantage' of the urban rich obscures deprivations by pulling up the averages for children in urban areas giving the mistaken impression that children in urban areas are better off compared to their peers in rural areas. In half of the countries analysed, children in the poorest urban quintile are at least twice as likely to die before their fifth birthday as their richest urban peers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the situation, especially for the most vulnerable children in urban areas. Experience from previous epidemics show that inequalities - including those based on economic status, ability, age, and gender – are created or exacerbated. Initially, governments significantly scaled up social protection responses to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. However, broader scale up and long-term commitment to social protection is needed to enable an inclusive recovery especially in the face of the various ongoing global polycrises including the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, the war in Ukraine and economic downturns.

Urban areas present specific challenges for child protection due to heightened risks of exploitation, violence, crime, and drugs, particularly for the most disadvantaged children often living in informal settlements. Lack of public and green spaces limit children's options for play and leisure. Cities in the developing world are more vulnerable to disasters and humanitarian crises due to poorly managed or uncontrolled rapid urbanization and inadequate governance. Overcrowding and poor living conditions contribute to health emergencies including outbreaks of communicable diseases. Urban air pollution is a problem that is particularly egregious to children's physical development and a growing global challenge: more than 300 million children live in areas where area pollution exceeds the WHO recommended guidelines by more than six-fold.



KEY ASKS

Building child-responsive sustainable cities and communities requires systematic policy and programmatic responses at local and national levels. UNICEF encourages all governments to:

1. Strengthen and adapt urban policies and plans for children, particularly the most disadvantaged:

- Provide continuity and quality of basic services for children including WASH services and WASH products for the poorest and most vulnerable populations (e.g., in urban slums and refugee and/or displacement camps) with special attention for children with disabilities and those living in humanitarian settings.
- Adequate housing that protects children and families from communicable diseases and injuries and allows children to study and play safely.
- Affordable, safe, and sustainable transport systems that improve ambient air quality in streets and allow children and families to go to school and work safely. Reducing road crash related injuries and fatalities among children requires improved policies for safer roads, speeds, vehicles and road users.
- Urban accessibility is a precondition for children with disabilities to participate fully and equally in society. One in ten children globally are children with disabilities and are often excluded in both rural and urban settings. Commitments from Agenda 2030 and Habitat III require communities to provide accessible learning and living opportunities.

- Municipal waste management and air quality policies decrease children’s exposure to polluted air, soil and waste and related environmental health risks.
- Safe and inclusive green and public spaces have development gains for children, in terms of physical capacities, cognitive understanding and socio-emotional interaction. Creating and sustaining safe environments include targeting interventions to interrupt community violence ‘hotspots.’

2. Develop national planning (infrastructure and spatial) standards that are child responsive.

3. Strengthen capacity of city governments to plan, coordinate and implement programmes for basic services and safety of children. Strengthening sectoral integration will be critical to foster links between national and local programs and ensure that national-level plans complement those undertaken specific to urban areas and municipalities.

4. Ensure public services in slums and informal settings. Informal settlements such as slums and unregulated peri-urban habitations are often left out of public planning and budgeting, leaving the millions of children who live in these areas without any access to the socio-economic services they need to survive and thrive. While the focus is often on hard-to-reach rural areas, these areas close to rich economic centres should not be overlooked.

5. Strengthen urban resilience and disaster risk reduction for children and with children. Disaster resilience and urban development are closely linked: well planned and managed urbanization, environmental protection and strong governance decrease the vulnerability of the most disadvantaged children and communities. Safe school structures in earthquake zones, youth dialogue to enhance social cohesion, and participatory spatial risk mappings of the built environment are examples of working for and with children to achieve resilient development in risk-prone settings.

6. Ensure quality and affordability of services provided by the private sector. The private sector has been shown to reach into areas where the public sector is limited and acknowledgement, regulation and inclusion of this reach has the potential to benefit millions of children who are currently overlooked.



MONITOR -- THE IMPORTANCE OF DISAGGREGATED DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND USE

While there are enormous gaps in the availability and quality of official statistics to meet the demands for SDG progress assessments at sub-national, national, regional, and global levels, at the same time there are large amounts of existing data yet to be accessed and used for evidence-based policy advocacy and analysis. Only when data from various sources are used can their value be recognized, which in turn strengthens the case for boosting investment in further data improvements.

A positive development over the last several cycles of VNRs is that an increasing number of national reports use indicators to highlight patterns of development by citing data coming from a variety of sources, including censuses, sample surveys (including sample household surveys) and administrative records. There are also ongoing explorations to use such emerging big data sources as geospatial information to gain insights in SDG implementation. Governments are encouraged to cite the use of data from a variety of sources to inform SDG implementation as well as:

- Strengthen the evidence base on children in urban areas through disaggregated data collected from official statistical channels;
- Establish data systems for regular disaggregated intra-urban data for girls and boys in informal settings;
- Regularly monitor air quality especially in the vulnerable areas and take corrective action.



INVEST -- SOCIAL SPENDING AND PROGRESS ON RESULTS FOR CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

Prioritizing the education, protection, health, and well-being of children, including in urban settings, constitutes the best and most robust investment we can make to fulfil the promise of Agenda 2030 – for children, adolescents and youth themselves and the fundamental rights that they have – and for peace, human security and sustainable development for all of us and the planet we inhabit. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) recognizes the link between child- and youth-focused investments and growth by treating children and youth not just as passive recipients of social services and assistance but as active agents of inclusive development. Therefore, UNICEF encourages governments to:

- Prepare evidence-based plans that address the needs of children, adolescents and their families, based on national standards for children’s rights;
- Ensure social spending of urban governments is efficient, effective, equitable and inclusive; and monitor the progress of spending and the results it contributes to;
- Integrate emergency preparedness, disaster risk reduction, and adaptation to climate change into local planning and budgeting systems.

For more information, visit: <https://www.unicef.org/sdgs>



ACTIVATE -- AWARENESS BUILDING AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

Engaging with children and youth in the design, implementation, and monitoring of policies and programmes that address their well-being is essential in fostering inclusion as well as ownership of the principles of the SDGs. To this end, UNICEF encourages governments to:

- **Develop children, adolescent, and youth capacities for participating in development and humanitarian contexts:** through identifying vulnerable and marginalized groups and establishing safe spaces for them to assess their situation, identify challenges and opportunities, form an opinion and express it.
- **Actively involve children, adolescents, and youth, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, in local and national planning processes in development and humanitarian contexts** through consultation and other participatory means, and as part of ongoing efforts to make children, adolescents and youth aware of these issues, inspire their positive action and expand the space for their participation in accountability mechanisms and activities. This should be part of a continuum to engage children, adolescents, and youth regularly, meaningfully and consistently as agents of change to influence behaviours and social norms amongst themselves, their households and their communities. It goes beyond engagement just for the purposes of reporting periods, but rather systematizing the engagement of young people in a variety of ways and across media and communications channels including digital platforms (such as U-Report), participatory theatre, intergenerational community dialogues, community & children's radio, participatory video, school clubs, TV Edu-tainment and child-participatory research.
- **Establish institutionalized mechanisms for promoting participation and implementing recommendations from children, adolescent, and youth** by ensuring that there is a responsive audience, dedicated budgets, accountability mechanisms and feedback loops.
- **Provide spaces for children, adolescents, and youth to learn about, discuss and take action on the SDGs, including Sustainable Cities and Communities.** UNICEF can support this effort through our existing work in this space and by creating child-friendly education and entertainment materials through our foundational partnerships on the [World's Largest Lesson](#). [UNICEF's Youth Activate Talk Methodology](#) is also a platform for children to express their ideas on the SDGs through a variety of mediums.

Additional information is available on: <https://www.unicef.org/social-policy/urban>