

UN-Habitat inputs to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in July 2023

Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the SDGs and targets, including policy implications of their synergies and trade-offs

- **The pandemic diminished local and national government capacities to implement SDG 11.** Cities incurred increased expenditure for crisis response, but at the same time the pandemic radically hit their tax base, undercutting key sources of revenue. Municipal revenues shrunk due to reduced economic activity and tax cuts, temporary breaks or delayed payments put in place to protect businesses and households. National governments' capacities for SDG 11 implementation were also compromised by the combined effects of lost revenues, high debt and subdued economic growth. Recovery from these impacts and lingering aftereffects may take time for both local and national economies, as they rebuild their financial and economic foundations, with potential long term adverse consequences for SDG 11 implementation.
- **Pre-existing structural deficits in cities exacerbated the pandemic's impact.** The scale and nature of impact was heavily influenced by the pre-pandemic conditions in cities globally. Access to services and infrastructure, income, social protection, and adequate housing determined how the pandemic affected urban households and communities. The pandemic's health, economic and social impacts fell most severely on marginalized and low-income households due to their pre-existing vulnerabilities. For instance, those living in informal settlements under conditions of overcrowding and severe infrastructure deficits including in respect to water, sanitation and health faced heightened risks. Similarly, for local governments, weaknesses in their capacities before the pandemic hit shaped the nature and effectiveness of their responses. Lags in implementation of SDG 11 mean that cities and human settlements remain critically vulnerable to the effects of future shocks and crises.
- **The pandemic further deepened urban poverty and inequality risking SDG 11 attainment.** Global poverty levels rose due to COVID-19 potentially reversing decades of progress and dampening prospects for achieving the 2030 target to end poverty in all forms everywhere. In cities too, the pandemic has exacerbated the multiple deprivations already experienced by the urban poor, pushing many further into poverty. For households, lost income, higher health spending and inflation related hikes in spending increased the risk of worsening poverty. This was especially so for this in informal employment, most of whom also fall beyond the reach of social protection schemes. This poses critical challenges for achieving the vision of SDG 11 to ensure inclusive cities and human settlements. This is especially so as the impacts of interlocking global crises in the post-pandemic period continue to exacerbate poverty and inequality among urban households and communities.

- **Critical data gaps in cities compromised pandemic monitoring and response capabilities.** Urban data produced at the global and country levels is still scarce, despite the important role that cities can play. The lack of consistent and accessible data in many contexts made it difficult to comprehensively track patterns and scale of the pandemic's impact in cities. More broadly, this remains a persistent bottleneck for monitoring and reporting on SDG 11 and other urban related targets of the 2030 agenda.
- **Global resilience is not possible without urban resilience.** In the wake of COVID-19 and concurrent and subsequent global crises, renewed focus is on the urgent need to strengthen resilience to future shocks at all levels. In an urban world, and as shown clearly by the pandemic, impacts to shocks and crises will manifest in urban areas. The way in which cities are planned and managed, and the response capacities of local governments directly impacted the pandemic's impact on households, communities and countries. Continued global urban growth means that this will continue to be the case in future. Therefore, strengthening global resilience is unlikely without adequate focus and investment on the resilience of cities and local governments. promoting "future-ready cities" addressing the longstanding structural deficits in global urbanization through SDG 11 is therefore urgent in the pursuit of global resilience.
- **The COVID-19 pandemic has reconfirmed the centrality of local action for the SDGs.** Given the concentration of cases in cities, urban authorities were at the frontline in delivering responses to cushion the health, social and economic of the pandemic in cities. The critical need and value of enhanced multilevel coordination between international, national and local governments was also evident during the crisis. Going forward, local governments and regional governments will be the center stage in shaping readiness for future shocks. Accelerating SDG 11 implementation is thus imperative to strengthen planning and management of cities for resilience, including through centering the role of local and regional governments in delivering sustainable development globally.

<p>Three key areas where transformative actions for accelerated progress have been successful, and three key areas where support is most urgently needed, with regard to the cluster of SDGs under review in July 2023</p>

- **Major policy interventions are needed to enhance provision of affordable and adequate housing globally.** Up to 1.8 billion people live in inadequate housing globally. An estimated 1 billion people live in slums and informal settlements. In addition, there are an estimated 330 million homeless urban households worldwide projected to grow to 440 million households (a total of 1.6 billion people) by 2025 unless drastic measures are taken to address the problem. Given the centrality and impact of housing adequacy on many of the SDGs including health, education, poverty and inequality, it is essential to tackle this as a matter of urgency if progress towards the SDGs is to be accelerated.

The effectiveness of Global climate action is tied to urban adaptation and mitigation. Cities account for 60–80 per cent of energy consumption and generate as much as 70 per cent of the human-induced greenhouse gas emissions. Cities are also highly vulnerable to the effects of

climate change and extreme weather events. . Indeed, in both developing and developed countries, urban areas are increasingly facing episodes of heatwaves, droughts, floods, wildfires, hurricanes and landslides, which are intensifying with climate change. In addition to being a global issue, climate change is thus also a local issue, and cities have a crucial role to play in addressing climate change and meeting the target of the Paris Agreement. Strengthening climate action capacities of local and regional governments is therefore urgent.

Cities offer unique opportunities to respond, recover and build long-term resilience amidst global crises. Interlinked crises facing today's world are manifesting in cities and human settlements including those related to climate and biodiversity emergencies, violence and conflicts, inflationary pressures, displacement and other disasters. For instance, it is estimated that 60 percent of refugees and 80 percent of Internally Displaced Persons live in urban areas. Cities are also increasingly the battlegrounds for armed conflicts with immediate and long-term devastating impacts on their future sustainability. Amidst rising global inequality in income and wealth terms over the last two decades, systemic divides are deepening in cities. Critical urban inequalities persist in both developed and developing countries. Crises have highlighted growing inequalities and spatial fragmentation experienced in cities globally including the lack of adequate housing and decent jobs for all.

Examples of specific actions taken to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic that also accelerate progress towards multiple SDG targets, including actions identified by your intergovernmental body, building on interlinkages and transformative pathways for achieving SDGs

- **Pandemic related urban transformations can accelerate SDG 11 progress.** Cities introduced measures during that pandemic that offer immense opportunities to promote sustainable urbanization. For instance, the critical importance and value of public space was ever more evident during the pandemic with a number of cities repurposing or designating new public spaces for communities. Furthermore, due to the pandemic, non-motorized transport did emerge as a viable option for mobility in cities, with an observed deliberate provision of infrastructure for this in some cases. More broadly, growing support to enable accessibility in cities is evident, with the notion of the "15-minute city" providing daily needs within walking distance likely to radially reshape urbanization. While some of these shifts may have been temporal in nature, it is important to sustain the drive to increase public space accessibility in cities as a core target of SDG 11.

Assessment of the situation in the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and within the respective areas addressed by your intergovernmental body, and policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda .

- **While overall progress with SDG 11 is lagging, some targets have improved.** For instance, available evidence points to progress with respect to SDG target 11.7 (Providing universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities). Based on analysis in 2018, the average share of the population within 400 metres walking distance of an open public space is around 31 per cent. This has increased to 45% based on current analysis (2023) based on a larger sample of cities globally. Similarly, with respect to Target 11.a (Support Positive Economic, Social and Environmental Links between Urban, Peri-Urban and Rural Areas by Strengthening National and Regional Development Planning), the number of countries with national urban policies increased from 150 in 2018 to 162 in 2020.
- **Significant strides have been made in strengthening SDG 11 monitoring.** Tracking progress with SDG 11 was constrained considerably by the fact that many of the indicators to monitor corresponding targets were Tier 2 (data not produced regularly) or 3 meaning (without internationally established methodology). Through the joint action of UN-Habitat and other custodians of SDG 11 targets, as well as member State efforts, a number of targets have now been elevated. For instance, indicators 11.6.1 and 11.7.1 have been moved from Tier 3 to Tier 2 while indicator 11.2.1 has been reclassified from Tier 2 to Tier 1.
- **The risk of not achieving SDG 11 by 2030 is high.** For instance, there is an observed global stagnation in respect to SDG 11.1 which aims, by 2030 to ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums. With respect to SDG 11.2, only 51.6% of the world's urban population has convenient access to public transport in 2022. In regard to target 11.6, 2.4 billion tonnes of municipal solid waste was generated in 2018, of which 18% was collected and 45% was managed in uncontrolled facilities. Significant investments are needed in urban infrastructure and services in the next 7 years to accelerate progress with SDG 11 while strengthening resilience in a context of likely overlapping global crises. This is critical given that between 2019 and 2050, it is estimated that an additional 2.36 billion people will be living in urban areas, adding up to approximately 6.66 billion people or 68.4 per cent of the total estimated global population who will need to be accommodated in and around cities.

5. **Key messages for inclusion into the Political Declaration of the September 2023 SDG Summit.**

- The quality of urbanization is central to determining people's quality of life in today's urban world. Attaining truly environmentally sustainable, economically prosperous, and socially equitable and just cities is of paramount importance for present and future generations.
- People's ability to pursue healthy, productive and peaceful lives is directly tied to where they live and what those spaces have to offer, with a global majority now in urban areas.
- The risk of not achieving SDG 11 by 2030 is high without urgent scaled up policy interventions and investments. Major policy interventions are needed to enhance provision of affordable and adequate housing globally, enhance the effectiveness of urban

climate adaptation and mitigation and strengthen the resilience of cities amidst global crisis.

- Cities may increasingly become the grounds for global divergence, an ever more prominent feature of today's world with the gap between and within countries widening and deepening on several fronts.
- Global resilience is not possible without urban resilience. In the wake of COVID-19 and concurrent and subsequent global crises, renewed focus is on the urgent need to strengthen resilience to future shocks at all levels. In an urban world, and as shown clearly by the pandemic, impacts to shocks and crises will manifest in urban areas
- Achieving sustainable development requires addressing, through SDG11, several development challenges in cities, including poverty, inadequate infrastructure, poor health institutions, increased slum dwellings, governance, economic, political, climate change and other negative environmental impacts, as well as inadequate access to safe water and sanitation.
- The attainment of the SDGs and other global agendas is rooted firmly in the ability of countries and cities to localize them and put in place programs and mechanisms to advance towards the desired common goals.
- Multi-level governance ensuring coherence in SDG implementation at all levels is an essential foundation to not only accelerate progress, but scale impact leveraging complementary capacities and responsibilities.