

Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future



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UN  HABITAT

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Foreword



Seen from an urban perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the extent of global vulnerabilities and inequalities. Cities have been at the forefront of the crisis, as indicated by the scenes of enormous suffering, job losses and adversity. How they emerge will have an enormous impact on public health, social cohesion, prosperity and our prospects for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Fortunately, cities tend to be highly resilient. In response to past health crises, they radically overhauled systems of sanitation and waste. Indeed, cities were among the first to embrace the very notion of public health. Early indications from today's emergency indicate that another reset is under way. Cities are rethinking urban

space, not only from the perspective of health, but also ecology. They are recognizing the need to promote inclusive planning and to take regional dimensions into account. And, as in past health crises, cities today are striving to revitalize public sector institutions and reinforce local government.

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. And they can help to build a new urban economy that invests in sustainable infrastructure, reduces disaster risk, uses nature-based solutions to address climate change and ensures digital access, health coverage, schooling and housing for all.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the centrality of local action. I call for the heightened commitment of the cities of the world as we seek to connect the dots, recover better and build a healthier, more inclusive, just, green and gender-equal world for all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'António Guterres'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a long, thin horizontal line that tapers to a point on the right side.

António Guterres
Secretary-General of the United Nations

Preface



A year ago, in March 2020, many cities and communities went into lockdown. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme, working hand-in-hand with the wider UN family, took action by providing immediate support in 17 countries with a focus on the most vulnerable communities. This may seem to be an inauspicious way to start the first year of the implementation of the UN-Habitat Strategic Plan 2020-2023 but twelve months on, we realize that our strategic focus is more relevant than ever.

Building on the Secretary-General's policy statement, the report aims to bring national and local governments together to ensure that policy is followed by practice. *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future* provides the basis for the much needed local-level action in spatial planning, poverty and inequality, the economy, and governance.

We need to address systemic poverty and inequality in cities head-on, going back to housing, basic services, mobility and connectivity. We also have provided recommendations on how to adopt rights-based principles to recovery. This also means protecting jobs and providing financial support to cities to allow them to create financial resilience.

We must not forget digitalization that has created two realities: one for those online and another for those offline. We provide recommendations on creating greater and more equitable digital opportunities that are ever more important in the "new normal" as we learn to live with pandemics.

Finally, let me stress the importance of greater multilevel coordination between international, national and local governments, especially when investing in and implementing stimulus programmes, so that we can truly build back better, greener and fairer while also protecting our communities. This report provides recommendations on how to do this at regional, city, neighbourhood and building scales. These recommendations provide the basis for better integrated spatial development planning as well as demonstrate the value of multilateralism when tackling a global pandemic locally.

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MAIMUNAH MOHD SHARIF
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Contents

Foreword	v
Preface	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
List of Figures, Boxes and Tables.....	x
Acronyms and Abbreviations	xiii
Introduction	xiv

1

Rethinking the Form and Function of the City..... 2

1.1. Reconfiguring Regions: The Need For More Sustainable and Integrated Systems	5
1.1.1. Environmental systems	6
1.1.2. Connectivity, networks of cities and regional linkages.....	13
1.1.3. Agriculture and food systems.....	16
1.2. Cities in the Face of COVID-19: The Role of Population Size, Density and Urban Form	18
1.2.1. Population size.....	18
1.2.1. Density	19
1.2.3. Weak spots	25
1.2.4. Urban mobility	28
1.3. Reimagining the Neighbourhood: The Renewed Importance of Local Living	34

2

Addressing Systemic Poverty and Inequality in Cities in Response to the Pandemic..... 52

2.1. Poverty, inequality and the pandemic	54
2.1.1. Poverty reduction in reverse	54
2.1.2. The impact of social inequality	55
2.1.3. Slums and informal settlements	56
2.2 Health and environment	61
2.2.1. Healthcare services	61
2.2.2. Water and sanitation	62
2.2.3. Waste management.....	64
2.3. Housing.....	66
2.3.1. Overcrowding	66
2.3.2. Tenure security and evictions.....	69
2.2.3. Homelessness	71

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