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United Nations Human Settlements Programme Background Guide 2022

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Carrie Ellis and Tomas Paramo, Assistant Directors



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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2022 National Model United Nations New York Conference (NMUN•NY)! We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). This year's staff are: Directors Olivia Sophia Alphons (Conference A) and Allison Baker (Conference B), and Assistant Directors Carrie Ellis (Conference A) and Tomas Paramo (Conference B). Olivia has a Bachelor's degree in European Studies and is completing her Master's in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Magdeburg. Allison is originally from Alaska and currently living in New York working at a medical technology company. Carrie graduated from Seton Hill University in 2020 with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. She served for a year as an AmeriCorps member, and currently works at Dentons Cohen and Grigsby as an Immigration Paralegal. Tomas is originally from Colombia and currently living in Seattle. He is pursuing a degree in International Relations with a minor in economics.

The topics under discussion for the United Nations Human Settlements Programme are:

1. Sustainable Transportation for Better Air Quality in Urban Areas
2. Mitigating the Spread of Diseases in Urban Areas during Health Crises

UN-Habitat is an integral player in the UN's development agenda, striving to ensure that urbanization issues are prioritized globally. To this end, UN-Habitat collaborates with all actors, including other international organizations, state governments, local authorities, and civil society organizations to promote sustainable cities. At NMUN•NY 2022, delegates are not limited to the strict mandate of the UN-Habitat Council as a budgetary and administrative body, during the conference. On the contrary, for the purposes of NMUN•NY 2022, and in line with the educational mission of the conference, the committee has the ability to make programmatic and policy decisions on issues within the mandate of UN-Habitat which align with the overall function of the organization.

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to explore your Member State's policies in depth and use the Annotated Bibliography and Bibliography to further your knowledge on these topics. In preparation for the Conference, each delegation will submit a Position Paper by 11:59 p.m. (Eastern) on 1 March 2022 in accordance with the guidelines in the [Position Paper Guide](#) and the [NMUN•NY Position Papers](#) website.

Two resources, available to download from the [NMUN website](#), serve as essential instruments in preparing for the Conference and as a reference during committee sessions:

1. [NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide](#) - explains each step in the delegate process, from pre-Conference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Please take note of the information on plagiarism, and the prohibition on pre-written working papers and resolutions. Delegates should not start discussion on the topics with other members of their committee until the first committee session.
2. [NMUN Rules of Procedure](#) - include the long and short form of the rules, as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure.

In addition, please review the mandatory [NMUN Conduct Expectations](#) on the NMUN website. They include the Conference dress code and other expectations of all attendees. We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated. If you have any questions concerning your preparation for the committee or the Conference itself, please contact the Under-Secretaries-General for the Development Department, Vincent Carrier (Conference A) and Martin Schunk (Conference B), at usg.dev@nmun.org.

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the Conference!

Sincerely,

Conference A

Olivia Sophia Alphons, Director
Carrie Ellis, Assistant Director

Conference B

Allison Baker, Director
Tomas Paramo, Assistant Director

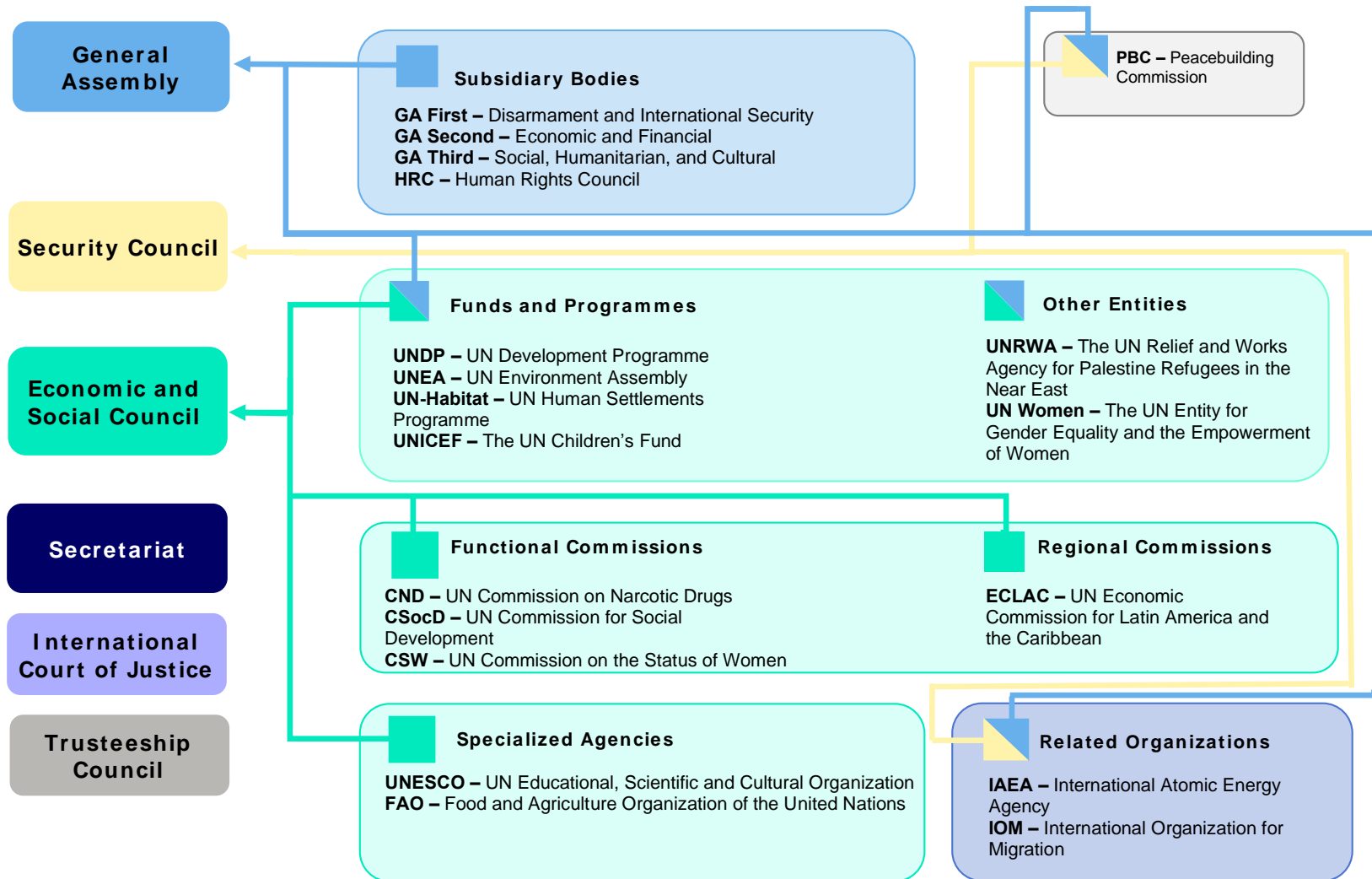


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United Nations System at NMUN•NY

This diagram illustrates the UN system simulated at NMUN•NY and demonstrates the reportage and relationships between entities. Examine the diagram alongside the Committee Overview to gain a clear picture of the committee's position, purpose, and powers within the UN system.



Committee Overview

Introduction

Rapid urbanization places immense pressure on the environment, industries, and infrastructure.¹ By 2050, an estimated 68% of the global population will be living in an urban area, with 90% of urban growth forecasted to take place in Africa and Asia.² If prioritized, urbanization can serve as an opportunity to further sustainable development for those who live in cities.³ However, unabated urbanization poses risks to general global well-being.⁴ Inadequate urban planning and limited housing have fed the growth of over 1 billion people now living in urban slums or informal settlements.⁵ By 2030, informal urban settlements will house an estimated 3 billion people who will need access to adequate housing, infrastructure, and basic services.⁶ Obstacles to establishing adequate housing include affordability, sustainability, and limited capacity for governance.⁷

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly established the UN Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation (UNHHSF) on 1 January 1975 with the purpose of addressing urbanization issues.⁸ UNHHSF was tasked with assisting country-level human settlement programs through the delivery of fiscal and technical assistance.⁹ In 1976, the UN hosted the Habitat I conference which addressed the pervasive challenges of urbanization and also adopted the *Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements*.¹⁰ This global framework recommended the creation of the UN Commission on Human Settlements and its secretariat, the UN Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat).¹¹ In 1996, the UN hosted Habitat II to evaluate the global progress since Habitat I and to outline goals for the new millennium.¹² The resulting *Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements* (Habitat Agenda) (1996) outlined the goal of ensuring the creation of sustainable cities with adequate housing, employment, water, sanitation, and other basic public services.¹³ In 2016, the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) took place in Quito, Ecuador.¹⁴ Conference participants adopted the *New Urban Agenda* (NUA) (2016), which serves as a global framework for stakeholders to achieve sustainable and equitable urban development.¹⁵

The UN system reformed its approach to human settlements after the adoption of the *UN Millennium Declaration* (2000).¹⁶ The resulting General Assembly resolution 56/206 on “Strengthening the mandate and status of the Commission on Human Settlements and the status, role and functions of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements” (2002) consolidated the UN Commission on Human Settlements, Habitat, and the UNHHSF into the current UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).¹⁷ UN-Habitat is now an integral player in the UN system’s development agenda.¹⁸ Today, UN-Habitat collaborates with governments, the private sector, and many intergovernmental and civil society organizations (CSOs) to

¹ UN-Habitat, *The Strategic Plan 2020-2023*, 2019, p. v.

² UN DESA, *68% of the World Population Projected to Live in Urban Areas by 2050*, 2018.

³ UN-Habitat, *The Strategic Plan 2020-2023*, 2019, p. v.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵ UN DESA, *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019*, 2019, p. 44.

⁶ UN-Habitat, *Up for Slum Dwellers – Transforming a Billion Lives Campaign Unveiled in Europe*, 2016.

⁷ UN DESA, *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019*, 2019, p. 44.

⁸ UN-Habitat, *Learn More About Us*, 2021.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Habitat III, *The New Urban Agenda*, 2016.

¹⁵ UN-Habitat, *Learn More About Us*, 2021.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ UN General Assembly, *Strengthening the mandate and status of the Commission on Human Settlements and the status, role and functions of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (A/RES/56/206)*, 2002.

¹⁸ UN-Habitat, *Learn More About Us*, 2021.

ensure that urbanization issues are prioritized globally and advocates for socially and environmentally sustainable towns, cities, and communities.¹⁹

Governance, Structure, and Membership

Under General Assembly resolution 73/239 on “Implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements and on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)” (2018), UN-Habitat was reformed.²⁰ A three-tier governance structure was established that consists of the UN-Habitat Assembly, the Executive Board, and the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR).²¹ UN-Habitat Assembly is a universal body made up of 193 Member States that convenes every four years at UN-Habitat headquarters in Nairobi.²² The Executive Board consists of 36 elected Member States according to a regional rotation that convenes three times per year to discuss operational activities, ensure accountability, and strengthen effectiveness.²³ The CPR convenes every two years in an open-ended format, once prior to UN-Habitat Assembly for preparation and a second time for a high level mid-term review meeting.²⁴ The three governing bodies were created to strengthen the accountability and transparency of the programme.²⁵

The Executive Director also plays an integral role in shaping UN-Habitat agenda and priorities, thereby ensuring adherence to the organizational mandate.²⁶ Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif from Malaysia is the current UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director for UN-Habitat who was appointed in 2018 by the UN Secretary-General.²⁷ The current UN Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director for UN-Habitat is Mr. Victor Kisob from Cameroon.²⁸ Regional offices also assist with project implementation, including the Regional Office for Africa (ROAf) and the Arab States (ROAAS), the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP), and the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ROLAC).²⁹

UN-Habitat reports to the General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) regarding all fiscal matters and organizational activities.³⁰ Around 80% of UN-Habitat’s income is funded through regular budget allocations approved by the General Assembly and voluntary contributions from Member States and intergovernmental donors.³¹ UN-Habitat also receives donations from other UN entities, local authorities, and the private sector to fund country-level technical projects and specific policy work.³² 70% of the agency’s funds are used for country programs on sustainable urbanization and 30% are used for core normative work such as policy development and capacity building.³³ In 2020, UN-Habitat’s total income was \$193.7 million, representing 76.6% of its target.³⁴

¹⁹ UN-Habitat, *Learn More About Us*, 2021.

²⁰ UN General Assembly, *Implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements and on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) (A/RES/73/239)*, 2018, p. 1.

²¹ UN-Habitat, *Governance*, 2021.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ UN-Habitat, *Committee of Permanent Representatives*, 2021.

²⁵ UN-Habitat, *Governance*, 2021.

²⁶ UN-Habitat, *Governing Council*, 2021

²⁷ UN-Habitat, *Leadership*, 2021.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ UN-Habitat, *Learn More About Us*, 2021.

³⁰ UN-Habitat, *Governance*, 2021.

³¹ UN-Habitat, *Donors*, 2021.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ UN-Habitat, *Annual Report 2020*, 2021, p. vii.

Mandates, Functions, and Powers

The General Assembly mandated UN-Habitat to “promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all.”³⁵ UN-Habitat reports to the General Assembly and focuses on all urbanization and human settlement matters within the UN system.³⁶ One of the original targets in the mandate of UN-Habitat was to achieve an improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020, which was achieved in 2013, seven years ahead of the target.³⁷ The programme also works with partners across the globe to support the implementation of its global and country specific programs.³⁸ UN-Habitat advocates for well-planned and sustainably developed settlement areas to ensure the provision of basic goods and services through established initiatives and action plans to shape policy.³⁹ The programme also offers technical assistance, alongside implementing projects and providing tailored support to Member States.⁴⁰ However, UN-Habitat does not have the authority to enforce project implementation with Member States.⁴¹ Despite this limitation, UN-Habitat plays an integral role in international development by providing partnership programs and targeted guidance to policy makers.⁴²

UN-Habitat’s current mandate builds upon General Assembly resolutions 3327 (XXIX) (1974) and 32/162 (1977), which created UN-Habitat’s predecessors: UNHHSF, the UN Commission on Human Settlements, and Habitat.⁴³ UN-Habitat was formally established by General Assembly resolution 56/206 (2002) on “Strengthening the mandate and status of the Commission on Human Settlements and the status, role and functions of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.”⁴⁴ In 2015, the General Assembly strengthened the governance of UN-Habitat and reinforced its central role in implementing the 2030 Agenda through General Assembly resolution 70/210 (2015).⁴⁵ In 2018, the General Assembly adopted resolution 73/239 on “Implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements and on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)” which replaced UN-Habitat’s Governing Council with the UN-Habitat Assembly and reaffirmed the programme’s overall mandate.⁴⁶ Most recent, the General Assembly adopted resolution 75/224 (2020) which addressed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and reaffirmed the programme’s focus on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the NUA.⁴⁷

Additional foundational documents demonstrate the increasing global emphasis placed upon sustainable urbanization and ensuring adequate housing for all, including the *Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements* (1976) and the *Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium*

³⁵ UN-Habitat, *Mandate*, 2021.

³⁶ UN-Habitat, *Learn More About Us*, 2021.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ UN-Habitat, *Mandate*, 2021.

⁴⁰ UN-Habitat, *Learn More About Us*, 2021.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ UN General Assembly, *Establishment of the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation (A/RES/3327(XXIX))*, 1974; UN General Assembly, *Institutional arrangements for international co-operation in the field of human settlements (A/RES/32/162)*, 1977.

⁴⁴ UN General Assembly, *Strengthening the mandate and status of the Commission on Human Settlements and the status, role and functions of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (A/RES/56/206)*, 2002.

⁴⁵ UN General Assembly, *Implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) (A/RES/70/210)*, 2015.

⁴⁶ UN General Assembly, *Implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements and on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) (A/RES/73/239)*, 2018, p. 4.

⁴⁷ UN General Assembly, *Implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conferences on Human Settlements and on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) (A/RES/75/224)*, 2020.

(2001).⁴⁸ UN-Habitat was influenced by the *UN Millennium Declaration* and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which preceded the post-2015 development agenda.⁴⁹ The SDGs and the 2030 Agenda also advance the urbanization agenda.⁵⁰ UN-Habitat has been designated as a custodian agency for nine of the 15 indicators under SDG 11 (“sustainable cities and communities”), which aims to achieve the goal of making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.⁵¹ Likewise, UN-Habitat also supports SDG 17 (“partnerships for the goals”) with the goal of strengthening and revitalizing global partnerships for sustainable development.⁵²

Recent Sessions and Current Priorities

UN-Habitat’s *Strategic Plan 2020-2023* (2019) focuses on the vision for “a better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world.”⁵³ This plan calls UN-Habitat to prioritize efforts in five specific areas for changing for increased impact: UN-Habitat as a global center of excellence and innovation, challenges and opportunities of a rapidly urbanizing world, becoming a ‘solutions agent’ to deliver change, leveraging partnerships, and repositioning and organizational change.⁵⁴ UN-Habitat also supports the implementation of the SDGs through the NUA.⁵⁵ The UN-Habitat-managed NUA platform is an effective knowledge sharing portal for national governments, local authorities, civil societies, private sector, UN entities, and all other key stakeholders to voluntarily share qualitative and quantitative information and data on implementation of related SDGs.⁵⁶ Member States formally report progress of the implementation of the NUA every four years, with the next expected report deadline being in 2022.⁵⁷

UN-Habitat is active in more than 90 countries worldwide, and current key thematic areas include urban policy advice at the government level, addressing the proliferation of slums, housing issues, and post-disaster recovery programs.⁵⁸ The Africa Urban Agenda Programme (AUA) is one of many programs in which UN-Habitat is engaged with which works to establish people-centered processes that enhance local accountability, by promoting ownership among citizens for the sustainable development of Africa.⁵⁹ The AUA is comprised of two projects: The Strengthening Partnership for an Africa Urban Agenda (SPP) and the Presidential Initiative (PI).⁶⁰ Both projects focus on capacity development and advocacy frameworks for high-level political buy-in and increased stakeholder participation.⁶¹ Also in the African region, UN-Habitat started a four year project in July 2020 called Building Urban Climate Resilience in South Eastern Africa to strengthen urban resilience, promote disaster risk deduction, and increase climate change adaptations in Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, and the Union of Comoros.⁶² UN-Habitat estimates that the project will directly benefit the lives of around 350,000 people.⁶³

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, more than 90% of COVID-19 cases have occurred in cities and the consequences of the global health crises on urban settlements will likely be long-lasting.⁶⁴ UN-Habitat has been working with key agencies and local governments to raise more than \$32 million

⁴⁸ UN-Habitat, *Learn More About Us*, 2021.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ UN DGC, *Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*, 2021.

⁵¹ UN-Habitat, *Sustainable Development Goals*, 2021.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ UN-Habitat, *The Strategic Plan 2020-2023*, 2021, p. v.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. v.

⁵⁶ Habitat III, *The New Urban Agenda*, 2016.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ UN-Habitat, *Learn More About Us*, 2021.

⁵⁹ UN-Habitat, *Africa Urban Agenda Programme*, 2021.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² UN-Habitat, *UN-Habitat launches climate resilience project in Southeastern Africa*, 2020.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ UN-Habitat, *Annual Report 2020*, 2021, p. 3.

and rolled out an immediate response plan in 37 countries to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶⁵ UN-Habitat also created a *COVID-19 Policy and Programme Framework*, which addressed four key challenge areas: supporting local government and community-led solutions, profiling of urban context using data mapping and knowledge, mitigating economic impact and initiating recovery, and promoting active learning on policy measures and practices.⁶⁶ This framework has enabled UN-Habitat to support over 10 million people through mapping and data from 1,700 cities which allows for more informed decision-making and better continuity in the ongoing response to the pandemic.⁶⁷

In 2021, UN-Habitat partnered with the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) and Cities Alliance to publish the *Global State of National Urban Policy 2021* report.⁶⁸ This joint report was developed as part of the National Urban Policy Programme (NUPP) created in 2016 at Habitat III to provide a review of national urban policy (NUP) in 162 countries.⁶⁹ One main finding from the report is that all 162 countries studied have some form of existing national-level urban policies.⁷⁰ The progress of this and related UN-Habitat projects will likely be assessed at the 11th World Urban Forum (WUF) in June 2022 held in Poland.⁷¹ The goal of this forum will be to provide greater insights and clarity on the future of cities based on existing trends, while becoming more knowledgeable about the different possibilities that the future of cities offers.⁷²

Conclusion

As the primary international organization working to ensure that cities provide safe and adequate housing for all, UN-Habitat holds a unique position within the global arena.⁷³ UN-Habitat provides a platform for international collaboration to ensure sustainable urbanization.⁷⁴ The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the way that UN-Habitat supports national and local governments and communities, while exposing systemic inequalities in urban environments and the need to address these pressing issues.⁷⁵ UN-Habitat is poised to play a vital role in the realization of the SDGs, NUA, and the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic over the coming years in urban environments.⁷⁶

Annotated Bibliography

Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development. (2016). *The New Urban Agenda*. Retrieved 17 September 2021 from: <https://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/>
The New Urban Agenda will help delegates understand the long-term goals of UN-Habitat, including its focus on the SDGs and aim to meet specific targets by 2050. This document highlights the implementation plan for the New Urban Agenda in regard to sustainable urban development for social inclusion and ending poverty, environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development, and sustainable and inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all. It is important for delegates to note the implementation methodology and reviews that play a part in determining the effectiveness of the agenda.

⁶⁵ UN-Habitat, *Annual Report 2020, 2021*, p. vi.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶⁷ UN-Habitat, *Annual Report 2020, 2021*, p. 6.

⁶⁸ UN-Habitat, *Global State of National Urban Policy 2021, 2021*, p. 3.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13

⁷¹ UN-Habitat, *The Eleventh Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF11)*, 2021.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ UN-Habitat, *International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning discussed at ISOCARP Congress*, 2016.

⁷⁴ UN-Habitat, *Learn More About Us*, 2021.

⁷⁵ UN-Habitat, *Annual Report 2020, 2021*, p. 25.

⁷⁶ UN-Habitat, *Learn More About Us*, 2021.

United Nations, General Assembly, Fifty-sixth session. (2002). *Strengthening the mandate and status of the Commission on Human Settlements and the status, role and functions of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) (A/RES/56/206)*. Adopted on the report of the Second Committee (A/56/565). Retrieved 8 August 2021 from: <http://undocs.org/A/RES/56/206>

This resolution is foundational for understanding the role and function of UN-Habitat and acts as an important resource for delegates by outlining the history and initial establishment of the committee. Additionally, it provides a comprehensive overview of the mandate and structure of the organization and serves as a useful starting point for delegates in understanding the primary mission and aim of UN-Habitat. This document is responsible for establishing UN-Habitat in its current form.

United Nations, General Assembly, Seventy-third session. (2018). *Implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conferences on Human Settlements and on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) (A/RES/73/239)*. Adopted on the report of the Second Committee (A/73/239). Retrieved 26 June 2021 from: <http://undocs.org/A/RES/73/239>

In 2018, the General Assembly passed this resolution which restructured UN-Habitat. This resolution outlines the dissolution of the previous structure of the programme and set up a new three-tiered governance structure that consists of the UN-Habitat Assembly, the Executive Board, and the Committee of Permanent Representatives. Delegates will find this document helpful in understanding the governance, structure, and membership of UN-Habitat.

United Nations Human Settlements Programme. (2019). *The Strategic Plan 2020-2023*. Retrieved 26 June 2021 from: https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-09/strategic_plan_2020-2023.pdf

The Strategic Plan 2020-2023 defines four domains of change for the committee to focus on over the next four years: reduced spatial inequality, enhanced shared prosperity of cities and regions, strengthened climate action and improved urban environments, and effective urban crisis prevention and response. This document highlights a shift in UN-Habitat's priorities, as the committee focuses on becoming more outcome and impact-oriented, versus focusing on processes and outputs. Delegates will find this document helpful when researching what the current goals and strategies are for the committee.

United Nations Human Settlements Programme. (2021). *Annual Report 2020*. Retrieved 17 September 2021 from: <https://unhabitat.org/annual-report-2020>

The Annual Report 2020 highlights the progress made during the first year of the Strategic Plan 2020-2023. The report is delivered to the General Assembly to show how the Strategic Plan is contributing to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. UN-Habitat demonstrates its efforts over four key areas of change and emphasizes the important role that UN-Habitat played during the COVID-19 pandemic. This document will be useful to delegates looking to gain of understanding of the current projects and priorities for the committee.

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United Nations, General Assembly, Seventieth session. (2015). *Implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) (A/RES/70/210)*. Adopted on the report of the Second Committee (A/70/473). Retrieved 8 August 2021 from: <http://undocs.org/A/RES/70/210>

United Nations, General Assembly, Seventy-third session. (2018). *Implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conferences on Human Settlements and on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) (A/RES/73/239)*. Adopted on the report of the Second Committee (A/73/239). Retrieved 26 June 2021 from: <http://undocs.org/A/RES/73/239>

United Nations, General Assembly, Seventy-fifth session. (2020). *Implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conferences on Human Settlements and on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) (A/RES/75/224)*. Adopted on the report of the Second Committee (A/75/459). Retrieved 17 September 2021 from: <https://undocs.org/A/RES/75/224>

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1. Sustainable Transportation for Better Air Quality in Urban Areas

Introduction

Present in more than 90 countries, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme's (UN-Habitat) vision is to build "a better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world."⁷⁷ UN-Habitat's *The Strategic Plan 2020-2030* (2019) establishes UN-Habitat as a leader in all issues related to sustainable and urban development.⁷⁸ One of its main focuses is addressing poor air quality in urban areas by tackling this issue primarily from the local level.⁷⁹ Currently, over 80% of people living in monitored urban settlements are exposed to levels of air quality that exceed the guidelines set by the World Health Organization (WHO).⁸⁰ Moreover, 98% of cities with populations over 100,000 in developing countries do not meet the air quality conditions established by WHO guidelines.⁸¹ Underdeveloped regions such as the Eastern Mediterranean, Western Pacific, South-East Asia, and African report the highest concentrations of particulate matter (PM) out of all WHO regions.⁸² Particulate matter is the term for solid and liquid particles found in the air.⁸³ Particulate matter is categorized by two types of sizes, 10 micrometers or below, and 2.5 micrometers or below (PM10 and PM2.5, respectively).⁸⁴ Urban areas produce around 78% of global carbon emissions and other air pollutants that affect over 50% of the population living in them.⁸⁵ Newly implemented WHO guidelines recommend that urban areas improve air quality levels by significantly reducing the concentration levels of particulate matter.⁸⁶ During 2020, reductions in transport along with other factors were the reason for a 60% reduction in nitrogen dioxide levels and 31% reduction in PM-levels in 34 countries.⁸⁷

In *The Brundtland Report* of 1987, the United Nations (UN) defined sustainability as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."⁸⁸ To achieve sustainable development in the world, the UN has established a framework for both developed and developing countries in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015) and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁸⁹ SDG 11 ("sustainable cities and communities") addresses issues regarding the quality of air and its effects on public health.⁹⁰ Air quality is specifically addressed in SDG target 11.6 which focuses on reducing the negative environmental impacts of urban settlements, such as air pollution, as air quality is poorer in urban areas than in rural areas.⁹¹ Transportation is also a great contributor of pollutants in the air, making up 23% of global carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions.⁹² Based on the Global Sustainable Transport Conference in 2016, the UN refers to transport as a source of

⁷⁷ UN-Habitat, *The Strategic Plan 2020-2023*, p. 14.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁷⁹ UN-Habitat, *Solutions Start with Cities: UN-Habitat's Foundation Fund*, 2021.

⁸⁰ UN DESA, *UN health agency warns of rise in urban air pollution*, 2016.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² WHO, *SDG Indicator 11.6.2 Concentrations of fine particulate matter (PM2.5)*, 2021.

⁸³ United States Environmental Protection Agency, *Particulate Matter (PM) Basics*, 2021.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Liang & Gong, *Urban and air pollution: a multi-city study of long-term effects of urban landscape patterns on air quality trends*, 2020.

⁸⁶ WHO, *New WHO Global Air Quality Guidelines aim to save millions of lives from air pollution*, 2021.

⁸⁷ Venter et al., *COVID-19 lockdowns cause global air pollution declines*, 2020.

⁸⁸ UNAI, *Sustainability*.

⁸⁹ UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

⁹⁰ The World Bank Group, *Atlas of Sustainable Development Goals 2020: From World Development Indicators*, 2020.

⁹¹ The World Bank Group, *Atlas of Sustainable Development Goals 2020: From World Development Indicators*, 2020; UNEP, *Air pollution, which kills an estimated 7 million people every year, is the biggest environmental health risk of our time*.

⁹² UNEP, *Air pollution, which kills an estimated 7 million people every year, is the biggest environmental health risk of our time*.

development by enabling trade, tourism, and other economic activities such as increasing access to jobs, services, education, and creating richer and happier lives for citizens.⁹³

International and Regional Framework

The *Paris Agreement*, adopted in 2015 by the 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is an international binding document that seeks the reduction of global warming to 2 to 1.5 degrees Celsius a year.⁹⁴ This relates to the quality of air in urban areas because global warming and air pollution are both greatly impacted by greenhouse gas emissions, of which the transport sector makes up 23% of total emissions.⁹⁵ The fossil fuel combustion, while being the main contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, is also a contributor to two thirds of outdoor air pollution.⁹⁶ The *Paris Agreement* encourages Member States to reduce transport emissions by 30% by 2030, as the combustion of fossil fuels in urban areas is largely due to the transport sector.⁹⁷

The *2030 Agenda* (2015) emphasizes the importance of building a sustainable environment in which the global economy can prosper.⁹⁸ Other global issues related to sustainable development are also addressed in the *2030 Agenda*, including health, climate change, and economic growth.⁹⁹ Air pollution is mentioned in two goals, SDG 3 (“good health and well-being”), which aims to achieve good health globally, and SDG target 11.6 (“sustainable cities and communities”), which aims to improve sustainable transportation and air quality in urban areas.¹⁰⁰ Air quality is established as a critical element of achieving sustainable development in the *2030 Agenda*, the framework notes that it ultimately aims to reduce the number of deaths from air pollution by two thirds by 2030.¹⁰¹ The *2030 Agenda*’s introduction also notes the UN’s vision to improve sustainable transport systems and transport-related infrastructure in both the developed and developing worlds with the usage of the SDG framework.¹⁰²

In 2016, UN-Habitat held the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) conference where the *New Urban Agenda* was adopted, focusing on the sustainable urbanization and development of cities.¹⁰³ The *New Urban Agenda* is a legally non-binding document that sets a framework and implementation plan to achieve SDG 11 (“sustainable cities and communities”).¹⁰⁴ The *New Urban Agenda* contains five main pillars of implementation: national urban policies, urban legislation and regulations, urban planning and design, local economy, municipal finance, and local implementation, for the overall sustainable development of cities.¹⁰⁵ The *New Urban Agenda* is committed to reducing the economic, environmental, and public health costs of poor air quality.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, from the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in 2015 and as a continuation to the 2002 *Monterrey Consensus* and the 2008 *Doha Declaration on Financing for Development*, the *Addis Ababa Action Agenda* was implemented.¹⁰⁷ The *Addis Ababa Action Agenda*

⁹³ UN DESA, *Sustainable Transport on the Agenda for Global Conference*.

⁹⁴ COP 21, *The Paris Agreement*, 2015.

⁹⁵ Climate and Clean Air Coalition, *UN urges governments to act on climate and air pollution for health’s sake*, 2019.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ European Federation for Transport and Environment, *Surface transport and climate targets*, 2021.

⁹⁸ UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ International Institute for Sustainable Development, *WHO Global Conference Recommends Reducing Deaths from Air Pollution by Two-Thirds by 2030*, 2018.

¹⁰² UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

¹⁰³ UN-Habitat III Conference, *Housing and Sustainable Urban Development*, 2016.

¹⁰⁴ UN-Habitat, *History, mandate & role in the UN system*, 2021.

¹⁰⁵ UN General Assembly, *New Urban Agenda (A/RES/71/256)*, 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Global Sustainable Transport Conference, *Ashgabat Statement on Commitments and Policy Recommendations of the Global Sustainable Transport Conference*, 2016.

establishes a landmark framework for urban areas to follow to finance sustainable development, while considering all other priorities a city may have in designating urban planning funding.¹⁰⁸

Role of the International System

In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) introduced *Agenda 21*, focusing on the negative impacts humans have on the environment.¹⁰⁹ It particularly emphasized the important role that urban areas play in sustainable development.¹¹⁰ Since then, other frameworks and policies have been implemented and supported by the UN, including in 1996, when the Vancouver Conference held the first Towards Sustainable Transportation Conference, with the follow-up conference scheduled to happen in October of 2021 in Beijing.¹¹¹ These documents build on the progress made at the first Global Sustainable Transport Conference in Ashgabat in 2016, where different reforms and resolutions were adopted and built upon by UN-Habitat such as the *Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries* (LDCs) (2016) and the *Almaty Programme of Action for the implementation of sustainable transport in Landlocked Developing Countries* (LLDCs) (2016).¹¹²

According to these established global priorities, addressing the need for sustainable transportation for better air quality is an important issue for UN-Habitat to prioritize in its frequent partnerships with other UN entities, such as United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and WHO.¹¹³ The WHO, for instance, has implemented a policy platform for Member States and stakeholders in the pan-European region to collaborate and integrate health and environmental considerations into transport policies while improving transport and urban planning solutions.¹¹⁴ As well, the Global Environment Monitoring System for Air (GEMS Air) is now UNEP's main mechanism on air quality monitoring, and sustainable transport is addressed by the Greener Cities Partnership between UN-Habitat and UNEP.¹¹⁵ Under this partnership, UN-Habitat focuses on preventing or avoiding urban problems by integrating land-use and transport planning, while UNEP takes an "improving" approach by promoting cleaner fuel sources and vehicles.¹¹⁶

Multiple of these UN organizations also work alongside the private sector to promote sustainable transport for better air quality, for example, UN-Habitat, working alongside UNEP and private partners, has released a new regional model to promote the implementation of sustainable urban transport solutions in East African cities.¹¹⁷ UN-Habitat, UNEP, and IQAir have partnered together to develop the world's largest real-time air quality databank.¹¹⁸

With UN-Habitat utilizing local governments and entities as main conductors of reform, partnerships like the Global Network of Urban Planning and Design Labs are crucial to the execution of UN-Habitat's role

¹⁰⁸ Global Sustainable Transport Conference, *Ashgabat Statement on Commitments and Policy Recommendations of the Global Sustainable Transport Conference*, 2016.

¹⁰⁹ UNCED, *Agenda 21*, 1992.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Climate and Clean Air Coalition, *UN urges governments to act on climate and air pollution for health's sake*, 2019; OECD, *Towards Sustainable Transportation: The Vancouver Conference*, 1996.

¹¹² Global Sustainable Transport Conference, *Ashgabat Statement on Commitments and Policy Recommendations of the Global Sustainable Transport Conference*, 2016; UN General Assembly, *The Future We Want*, 2012; UN General Assembly, *Report on the Comprehensive High-level Midterm Review of the Implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020*, 2016; UNECE, *Almaty Programme of Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Transport in Landlocked Developing Countries*.

¹¹³ UN-Habitat, *Partners*, 2021.

¹¹⁴ WHO, *Air Pollution: Better Air for Better Health*.

¹¹⁵ UN-Habitat, *Greener Cities Partnership (UN-Habitat and UN Environment)*, 2021; UNEP, *Monitoring Air Quality*.

¹¹⁶ UN-Habitat, *Greener Cities Partnership (UN-Habitat and UN Environment)*, 2021.

¹¹⁷ UN-Habitat, *Promoting Sustainable Transport Solutions for East African Cities*, 2021.

¹¹⁸ UNEP, *Monitoring Air Quality*.

in sustainable urban development as they work closely with local governments on the planning and construction of urban projects.¹¹⁹ Other partnerships include the Cities and Climate Change Initiative, the Global Alliance of Cities in Crises, and the Global Network of Urban Planning and Design Labs.¹²⁰

Public Transportation and Non-Motorized Options

Urban transport, both public and private, and sustainable development are closely intertwined.¹²¹ The main contributor to air pollution in urban areas is fossil fuel combustion from the transport sector, making up 23% of global CO₂ emissions.¹²² Rapidly growing towns and cities, especially in developing regions, struggle with implementing sustainable transport systems to keep up with the demands of their growing populations.¹²³ These challenges make public transportation and non-motorized mobilization options a viable solution to many of these cities' problems.¹²⁴

Public transportation, over the use of cars, plays a key role in the sustainability of a city as it facilitates the movement of people and the improvement of the economy.¹²⁵ For example, cities that experience congested roads suffer from high emissions in the air and social costs such as accidents, both of which can be mitigated by effective public transport.¹²⁶ However in many cases, developing cities have little to no public transportation offered due to infrastructure and cost constraints, leaving individuals to purchase their own vehicles, which are often poor quality and expensive.¹²⁷ These unmoderated systems result in large emissions of toxic pollution, as well as road safety hazards and trapping individuals in cycles of poverty created by the cost of fuel, maintenance, and vehicle upkeep.¹²⁸

One of the most effective and sustainable methods of public transportation that developing cities can incorporate are Bus Rapid Transit systems (BRTs), as they maximize efficiency and reduce air pollution at a low cost.¹²⁹ BRTs are cost-effective bus transit systems that provide fast and efficient services to metropolitan areas.¹³⁰ BRTs have individual lanes and stations usually in the center of roads and highways and operate with off-board fare collections.¹³¹

It is difficult for cities to transition from informal mass transit systems to efficient BRTs, but there are successful models that can be followed such as Bogotá, Colombia.¹³² In the 1990s, Bogotá's population grew rapidly due to internal displacement caused by conflict in Colombia.¹³³ The mostly informal transit systems that the city had at the time were in poor condition, and were not able to keep up with the growing population.¹³⁴ This changed in 1999 when mayor Enrique Peñalosa implemented the TransMilenio.¹³⁵ TransMilenio would maximize and improve the efficiency and safety of public transport services by giving access to lower income communities, improving private sector involvement, reducing air pollution, and laying the foundation for a successful urban development in the city.¹³⁶ Today, the

¹¹⁹ UN-Habitat, *Global Network of Urban Planning and Design Labs*, 2021.

¹²⁰ UN-Habitat, *Partnerships at UN-Habitat*, 2021.

¹²¹ Miller et al., *Public Transportation and Sustainability: A Review*, 2016.

¹²² Climate and Clean Air Coalition, *UN urges governments to act on climate and air pollution for health's sake*, 2019.

¹²³ EU, *How to get cities moving: Public transport challenges in developing countries*, 2017.

¹²⁴ UNEP & University of Cape Town, *Cost Benefit Analysis of NMT Infrastructure Projects*, 2017.

¹²⁵ Miller et al., *Public Transportation and Sustainability: A Review*, 2016.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ UN-Habitat et al., *Quick Guide to Bus Sector Modernization*, 2020.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Institute for Transportation & Development Policy, *What is BRT?*

¹³¹ Ibid

¹³² Urban Sustainability Exchange, *TransMilenio Bus Rapid Transit System*.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

TransMilenio system is the largest BRT in the world.¹³⁷ From 2013 to 2019, the estimated annual average reduction of CO₂ emissions in the city is 578,918 tCO₂eq (Carbon dioxide equivalence per tonne), which is equivalent to the same amount of emissions of around 123,174 cars per year.¹³⁸

Recently, UN-Habitat has been working on implementing this same model in multiple cities and regions.¹³⁹ Using successful models such as this, both UN-Habitat along with UNEP have promoted a programmatic shift to non-motorized and public transport through various initiatives.¹⁴⁰ For example, UN-Habitat has cooperated with the New Urban Communities Authority under the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Local Development, as well as other Egyptian governmental entities to build the “Western BRT Corridor” in the Greater Cairo Region.¹⁴¹

Non-Motorized Transport (NMT) options for the sustainability of urban settlements are also some of the most effective in reducing pollution and particulate matter in the air.¹⁴² NMTs have many benefits for society and individuals such as “improvements to physical health, air quality, the environment, climate change, personal finance, accessibility, mobility and the empowerment of vulnerable groups.”¹⁴³ New York, Bogotá, London, Nairobi, and Chennai have been able to implement successful NMT systems mainly by investing in NMT infrastructure.¹⁴⁴ A case study by UNEP in Nairobi, Kenya showed that the main factor influencing the effectiveness of NMTs are their infrastructure.¹⁴⁵ Safe bicycle paths and sidewalks were found to be the key starting point for the sustainable transition of transit systems in Nairobi.¹⁴⁶ With the proper infrastructure, cities can maximize their economic efficiency, safety of individuals, and the quality of air.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, UN-Habitat worked closely with local governments and entities in Addis Ababa, such as the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy, to implement policies for pedestrians and cyclists.¹⁴⁸ Due to Ethiopia’s recent economic growth, the *Transport Sector Ten Years Perspective Plan (2021)* has been put in place to improve the transport conditions of the country and its overall economic potential.¹⁴⁹ The *Transport Sector Ten Years Perspective Plan* is expected to make over 3,000 kilometers of NMT infrastructure across the country, based on the previous successful cases of NMT and with UN-Habitat support.¹⁵⁰

Emerging Technologies in Transportation to Reduce Air Pollution

Diesel vehicles are the most abundant source of particulate matter emissions.¹⁵¹ Diesel vehicles are also responsible for the majority of short-lived climate pollutants (SLCP) such as black carbon climate pollutants.¹⁵² In developing cities, new vehicular technologies are usually prevented from being implemented by the lack of solid and effective mass transit systems and non-motorized transit systems.¹⁵³ This cycle increases pollution to levels over WHO guideline limits, resulting in significant health and social impacts.¹⁵⁴ Updated WHO guidelines state that annual average concentrations of fine particulate matter

¹³⁷ Urban Sustainability Exchange, *TransMilenio Bus Rapid Transit System*.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ UN-Habitat, *The Bus Rapid Transit Project (BRT)*, 2021.

¹⁴⁰ UN-Habitat, *Greener Cities Partnership (UN-Habitat and UN Environment)*, 2021.

¹⁴¹ UN-Habitat, *The Bus Rapid Transit Project (BRT)*, 2021.

¹⁴² UNEP & University of Cape Town, *Cost Benefit Analysis of NMT Infrastructure Projects*, 2017.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ FiA Foundation, *Non-Motorized Transport (NMT)*, 2016.

¹⁴⁵ UNEP & University of Cape Town, *Cost Benefit Analysis of NMT Infrastructure Projects*, 2017.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ UN-Habitat, *Making Ethiopia’s Streets Safer for Pedestrians and Cyclists*, 2021.

¹⁴⁹ FDRE Ministry of Transport, *Ethiopian Transport Investment Summit*, 2021.

¹⁵⁰ UN-Habitat, *Making Ethiopia’s Streets Safer for Pedestrians and Cyclists*, 2021.

¹⁵¹ WHO, *Strategies for healthy and sustainable cities*.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

(PM_{2.5}) should not exceed 5 µg/m³.¹⁵⁵ However, new organizations and emerging technologies in various sectors are making new paths for the sustainable development of cities.¹⁵⁶ New technologies that can help reduce the amount of PM in the air and improve its quality include fuel efficiency combustion engines, electric and fuel cell vehicles, artificial intelligence, and biodiesel, among other emerging technologies.¹⁵⁷ Initiatives from UN-Habitat like the Electric Mobility Initiative focus on promoting electric vehicles to reduce air pollution.¹⁵⁸ Other work that UN-Habitat has been doing in this area includes the United Nations Innovation Technology Accelerator for Cities, which promotes open governance of data and digital platforms such as visual data maps and promoting “the principles of people-centered smart cities.”¹⁵⁹ UN-Habitat has also worked with local and national governments to implement new technologies.¹⁶⁰ For example, the *Smart City Rwanda Masterplan* (2017) sought to modernize Rwanda by implementing Information and Communication Technologies where “leaders and citizens use data, information and knowledge to ensure a co-created resilient and sustainable future.”¹⁶¹

The Global Fuel Economy Initiative (GFEI) promotes fuel efficiency in vehicles “through the adoption of the cost-effective fuel efficiency technologies.”¹⁶² GFEI has set the proposition of improving the average fuel economy for newer vehicles by 50% by 2030, and for “light duty” vehicles by 2050.¹⁶³ These actions would save 33 gigatons (Gt) of CO₂ by 2050 and \$2 trillion by 2025.¹⁶⁴ These funds are planned to be used to support the world’s transition to electric vehicles.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, other UN agencies such as the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), have been working to seek different methods and alternatives to implement technology in sustainability.¹⁶⁶ In 2019, the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology (APCTT), held the International Conference on Emerging Technologies for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.¹⁶⁷ Here, 12 Asia-Pacific nations shared models and ideas of regional cooperation on science, technology and innovation (STI) policies and technology transfer by “wielding novel industry approaches,” in order to reduce air pollution.¹⁶⁸ This conference also functioned as a next step in international cooperation in order to advance implementation of emerging technologies to achieve the SDGs, with improving air quality in urban settlements among the priority issues.¹⁶⁹ The conference concluded with the proposition that “a conducive landscape of supportive infrastructure, policies, the right talent and industry commitment is crucial in accelerating the adoption and application of these technologies to achieve the SDGs.”¹⁷⁰

Conclusion

Fossil fuel combustion makes up two thirds of outdoor air pollution.¹⁷¹ With the transportation sector accounting for most of that pollution, it is becoming harder for cities, especially those in developing regions, to meet sustainability targets.¹⁷² Multiple international agreements and framework documents

¹⁵⁵ WHO, *New WHO Global Air Quality Guidelines aim to save millions of lives from air pollution*, 2021.

¹⁵⁶ UNESCAP, *International conference highlights role of emerging technologies in achieving sustainable development*, 2019.

¹⁵⁷ UN DESA, *Global Fuel Economy Initiative (GFEI)*, 2016.

¹⁵⁸ Urban Electric Mobility Initiative, *Urban Electric Mobility Initiative*.

¹⁵⁹ UN-Habitat, *Smart City Rwanda Masterplan*, 2017.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² UN DESA, *Global Fuel Economy Initiative (GFEI)*, 2016.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ WHO, *Ambient (Outdoor) Air Pollution*, (2021)

¹⁷² UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

have been adopted to address this issue such as the *Paris Agreement*, the 2030 Agenda, and the *New Urban Agenda*.¹⁷³ UN-Habitat works closely with local governments to implement practical solutions to this issue, while partnering with other UN organizations and private sector entities for the development of infrastructure and technology.¹⁷⁴ Effective examples of UN-Habitat's leadership role can be seen in the successful implementation of BRT and NMT infrastructure, as well as partnering with other agencies to further develop useful technologies.¹⁷⁵ With awareness rising every year of the impact of pollution on urban areas, and positive progress being made developing regions by UN-Habitat and partners, achieving the targets established by the *2030 Agenda* is a possibility that is within reach.¹⁷⁶

Further Research

While further researching this topic, delegates can ask themselves the following questions: How can UN-Habitat promote and ensure accountability on sustainable transport projects in developing regions? What are other practical solutions for transportation that UN-Habitat could implement? How can working with local governments differ from working with national governments, and how does this effect the efficiency of sustainability infrastructure? How can cities with successful models be used to support the sustainability of developing regions, and how could this inter-region cooperation be bolstered? What are main factors preventing UN-Habitat from lowering the PM levels in developing cities? How can transportation help reduce air pollution? What impact does improving air quality have on society and the economy?

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http://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/convention/application/pdf/english_paris_agreement.pdf

The Paris Agreement functions as the landmark document on climate change, sustainability, and pollution levels. Understanding this Agreement will provide delegates with necessary background on how multilateral cooperation can be brokered between stakeholders on this topic. Additionally, the Agreement will provide readers with an understanding of the concrete recommendation of the framework, such as developing nationally determined contributions (NDCs), which will be key to developing their own proposals.

United Nations Human Settlements Programme. (2021). *Solutions Start with Cities: UN-Habitat's Foundation Fund*. Retrieved 18 July 2021 from: https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/04/un-habitat_foundation_fund_16032021.pdf

This brochure was created by UN-Habitat to summarize all of the relevant information about its framework and operations. This source will be useful to delegates beginning their research by providing direct information, case studies, and data on UN-Habitat's impact around the world on urban planning issues. It also provides relevant information on UN-Habitat's approach to funding and financial management, which will be particularly relevant to this topic.

United Nations Human Settlements Programme et al. (2020). *Quick Guide to Bus Sector Modernization*. Retrieved 22 July 2021 from: <https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/03/quick-guide-to-bus-sector-modernisation-201023.pdf>

This policy guide by UN-Habitat summarizes previous Bus Rapid Transit Planning Guides projects, and also provides new information focused on how governments can begin

¹⁷³ COP 21, *The Paris Agreement*, 2015; UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

¹⁷⁴ UNEP, *Monitoring Air Quality*.

¹⁷⁵ UN-Habitat, *The Bus Rapid Transit Project (BRT)*, 2021.

¹⁷⁶ UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

creating their own bus-based rapid transit systems. It serves as a guide to developing more stable, economically beneficial, and sustainable public transport systems. Furthermore, this resource discusses the negative effects non-BRT options can have on the environment and the quality of the air and provides examples of successful public transit models made by other cities, as well as information on the funding and frameworks of BRTs.

World Health Organization. (2021). *Global air quality guidelines*. Retrieved 20 July 2021 from: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/345329/9789240034228-eng.pdf>

These updated guidelines by WHO provide recommendations on how cities and nations can reduce particulate matter levels in the air to 5 µg/m³. More evidence and critical information are now available compared to the previous guidelines released in 2015, allowing nations to faster and more effectively meet their goals. This guideline will help delegates understand how particulate matter is originated, its effects on individual health and on society, and recent data on pollutants and air quality levels in urban areas.

World Health Organization. (2021). *SDG Indicator 11.6.2 Concentrations of fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5})*. Retrieved 17 July 2021 from: [https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/concentrations-of-fine-particulate-matter-\(pm2-5\)](https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/concentrations-of-fine-particulate-matter-(pm2-5))

This WHO website provides a graphic representation of the regions most impacted by particulate matter in the air. It is connected to SDG Target 11.6, which is about improving the quality of air in urban areas. Moreover, this website highlights that poorer and developing regions are the most impacted, and the ways in which is discrepancy manifests. Delegates can use this website to assess the air quality and concentrations of PM_{2.5} in various regions in the world.

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2. Mitigating the Spread of Diseases in Urban Areas During a Health Crisis

Introduction

Health crises have been recurring events throughout human history.¹⁷⁷ From smallpox, to the Spanish Flu, to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, and many more in between, infectious diseases and the ways humans combat them have shaped the course of history, societal relations, health systems, and city development.¹⁷⁸ Over 50% of the world's population lives in urban areas and this figure is predicted to rise to over 70% by 2050.¹⁷⁹ The high population concentration and interdependent activities of urban areas increase the risk of infectious disease spreading.¹⁸⁰ Consequently, over 95% of all COVID-19 cases are in urban areas.¹⁸¹ Infectious disease jeopardizes urban livelihoods, prevents having a productive workforce, limits mobility, and endangers lives, especially of vulnerable populations.¹⁸² The United Nations Human Settlement Programme's (UN-Habitat) mission is to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities, and its work intersects with the promotion of public health and the mitigation of the spread of disease in urban areas.¹⁸³

Public health is defined as “the art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life, and promoting health through the organized efforts to society.”¹⁸⁴ A health crisis is defined as “a state of affairs in which the health of a substantial portion of a community's members is either compromised or in imminent danger because of the inability of existing mechanisms for safeguarding the public's health to cope with an emergent health threat.”¹⁸⁵ One major public health threat that cities face is infectious diseases, which are communicable and can spread through air, physical contact, contaminated water, or invasive species carrying parasites.¹⁸⁶ Mitigating or lessening the severity of the spread of disease during a health crisis involving infectious disease will help secure a healthy population, which the *Global Report on Urban Health* (2016) deems necessary for developing economically competitive and inclusive cities.¹⁸⁷

Historically, steps used to reduce the spread of disease have included good hygiene practices, vaccination, isolation when infected, and avoidance of rodents and bugs.¹⁸⁸ When health crises have increased in severity, urban areas have used lockdown measures to ensure people stay home and do not spread infectious disease.¹⁸⁹ At the end of the 1970s, there was a shift toward preventative medicine and health promotion.¹⁹⁰ This shift started alongside rapid urban population growth resulting from advances in medicine, which highlighted the consequences of rapid urbanization and the need for sustainable human settlements.¹⁹¹ The first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, Habitat I, convened in 1976 as a result of these emerging trends.¹⁹² Promotion of public health in urban areas can be done with preventative measures that also encourage sustainable urbanization.¹⁹³ For instance, increasing safety standards and decreasing reliance on public transportation can reduce the health risk that transport hubs

¹⁷⁷ UN-Habitat, *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green, and Healthy Future*, 2021, p. xv.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. xv-xvii.

¹⁷⁹ The World Bank Group, *Urban Development Overview*, 2021.

¹⁸⁰ UN-Habitat, *COVID-19 Key Facts and Data*, 2021.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² WHO, *Urban Health*, 2021.

¹⁸³ UN-Habitat, *Learn More About Us*, 2021.

¹⁸⁴ WHO, *Public Health Services*, 2021.

¹⁸⁵ London, Research in a Public Health Crisis: The Integrative Approach to Managing the Moral Tensions, *Emergency Ethics: Public Health Preparedness and Response*, 2016.

¹⁸⁶ Merz, *How to Prevent Infections*, 2021.

¹⁸⁷ UN-Habitat & WHO, *Global Report on Urban Health*, 2016, p. 8.

¹⁸⁸ Merz, *How to Prevent Infections*, 2021.

¹⁸⁹ Office of the Secretary General, *Policy Brief: COVID-19 in an Urban World*, 2020, p. 10.

¹⁹⁰ UN-Habitat, *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green, and Healthy Future*, 2021, p. xvii.

¹⁹¹ UN-Habitat, *Conferences | Habitat*, 2021.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ UN-Habitat, *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green, and Healthy Future*, 2021, p. 35.

may pose during a health crisis.¹⁹⁴ Cramped and poor quality housing conditions can be a contributor to the spread of diseases, and improving these conditions also promotes public health.¹⁹⁵

International and Regional Framework

In 2015, The UN General Assembly adopted resolution 70/1, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.¹⁹⁶ The 17 Sustainable Development Goals established in the *2030 Agenda* serve as guides for global progress.¹⁹⁷ In particular, SDG 3 for (“good health and wellbeing”) and SDG 11 (“sustainable cities and communities”) are at the forefront of tackling the spread of diseases in urban areas during a health crisis.¹⁹⁸ Relevant targets for SDG 3 include target 3.3, which commits to combat communicable diseases; target 3.8, which aims to achieve universal health coverage, access to health care services, and access to safe and effective essential vaccines; and target 3.d, which seeks to reduce risk and strengthen management of national and global health risks.¹⁹⁹ Relevant targets for SDG 11 include target 11.1 for access to adequate and affordable housing, and target 11.3 for access to safe and sustainable transport systems.²⁰⁰

In 2016, the *New Urban Agenda* (NUA) was adopted at the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, known as Habitat III.²⁰¹ This conference was predated by the Habitat II conference in 1996 and Habitat I in 1976.²⁰² The Habitat conferences have provided an important forum to evaluate the international impact experienced from the challenges of rapid urbanization.²⁰³ Each conference has produced a major document on the topic of sustainable urban development, including the *Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements* (1976) and the *Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements* (1996).²⁰⁴ The NUA builds upon these predecessors as a modern framework to achieve sustainable and equitable urban development.²⁰⁵ It recognizes that health is essential to sustainable urban development.²⁰⁶ According to the NUA, ensuring a clean environment, access to clean water and sanitation, and adequate housing conditions, among other factors, can improve human health and wellbeing.²⁰⁷

UN-Habitat and the World Health Organization (WHO) collaborated on the *Sourcebook for Integrating Health in Urban Territorial Planning* (2020) which builds upon the NUA, but uniquely places health and wellbeing at the center of the urban planning process.²⁰⁸ This sourcebook is the convergence of both health and urbanization in one document, as it identifies urban and territorial planning intervention areas as the means to prevent many types of communicable diseases.²⁰⁹ For example, it identifies malaria as a disease mostly spread through mosquitoes, and suggests environmental modification to reduce contact between humans and disease vectors, as well as ensuring mosquito-proof drinking water.²¹⁰ Through

¹⁹⁴ UN-Habitat, *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green, and Healthy Future*, 2021, pp. 28-32.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁹⁶ UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

¹⁹⁷ UN Statistics Division, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report*, 2020.

¹⁹⁸ UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015, p. 14.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

²⁰¹ UN General Assembly, *New Urban Agenda (A/RES/71/256)*, 2016.

²⁰² UN Conferences | Habitat, *Conferences | Habitat*, 2021.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ UN Conference on Human Settlements, *The Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements*, 1976; UN Conference on Human Settlements, *The Habitat Agenda: Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements*, 1996.

²⁰⁵ UN General Assembly, *New Urban Agenda (A/RES/71/256)*, 2016.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 8, 11, 16, 19.

²⁰⁸ UN-Habitat & WHO, *Integrating Health in Urban Territorial Planning: A Sourcebook*, 2020.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

examples such as these, the sourcebook identifies specific actions to take for the prevention of specific diseases.²¹¹

The *International Health Regulations* (IHR) were adopted by World Health Assembly resolution 58.3 *Revision of the International Health Regulations* on 23 May 2005.²¹² This was a revision of a previous iteration of the IHR, with updates relating to global disease outbreaks.²¹³ The updates were called for in response to growing concerns about the threat of international disease and other health risks associated with the exponential increase of international travel and trade.²¹⁴ The stated purpose of the IHR is "to prevent, protect against, control and provide a public health response to the international spread of disease in ways that are commensurate with and restricted to public health risks, and which avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade."²¹⁵ The IHR is an all-encompassing framework that can address the factors that affect the emergence and transmission of most diseases.²¹⁶

Role of the International System

UN-Habitat's mandate of "promoting socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all" is intrinsically linked to the mitigation of the spread of disease in urban areas during a health crisis.²¹⁷ The committee can use its experience with promoting sustainable solutions to urban problems to suggest measures that will not only prevent the spread of infectious disease, but also improve overall sustainability of cities.²¹⁸ UN-Habitat works closely with Habitat Agenda Partners, which may include national governments, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, community organizations, and the private sector, to achieve its goals.²¹⁹ In 2019, UN-Habitat created *The Strategic Plan 2020-2023* with the vision of "a better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world."²²⁰ It identifies four "domains of change," including reduced social inequality and poverty, enhanced shared prosperity, strengthened climate action, and effective urban crisis prevention.²²¹ UN-Habitat's *Annual Report 2020* is a preliminary update on the implementation of *The Strategic Plan 2020-2023*.²²² The report reflects on the year of 2020 and specifies how UN-Habitat continued to take action in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.²²³ It analyzes the specific four "domains of change" identified in the original strategy and describes how the pandemic has affected progress on each of them.²²⁴ The *Strategic Plan* and the *Annual Report* both demonstrate how urbanization has been addressed pre-pandemic and post-pandemic.²²⁵ The *Annual Report* also shows that pre-pandemic goals can still be met, and addressing these goals can prevent the future spread of disease in urban areas.²²⁶

Wherever possible, UN-Habitat aims to provide direct guidance and support to local governments and mobilize the assets available to communities, the local private sector, and other local actors.²²⁷ For example, in 2021, UN-Habitat supported the Mayors Migration Council, an organization of mayors engaging in migration policymaking and diplomacy, in the launch of the Global Cities Fund for Inclusive

²¹¹ UN-Habitat & WHO, *Integrating Health in Urban Territorial Planning: A Sourcebook*, 2020, pp. 2-3.

²¹² WHO, *Frequently Asked Questions About the International Health Regulations (2005)*, 2009, p. 1.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²¹⁴ WHO, *International Health Regulations (2005)*, 2005, p. 1.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2005.

²¹⁷ UN-Habitat, *Learn More About Us*.

²¹⁸ UN-Habitat, *Learn More About Us*, 2021; UN-Habitat, *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green, and Healthy Future*, 2021.

²¹⁹ UN-Habitat, *Our Partners*, 2021.

²²⁰ UN-Habitat, *The Strategic Plan 2020-2023*, 2019.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² UN-Habitat, *Annual Report 2020*, 2021.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ UN-Habitat, *Annual Report 2020*, 2021; UN-Habitat, *The Strategic Plan 2020-2023*, 2019.

²²⁶ UN-Habitat, *Annual Report 2020*, 2021.

²²⁷ UN-Habitat, *COVID-19 Policy and Programme Framework*, 2020.

Pandemic Response.²²⁸ The Fund provided \$1 million to five cities for COVID-19-related service provision to migrants, refugees and internally displaced people in urban areas.²²⁹ UN-Habitat contributed to the Fund by facilitating outreach to applicant cities, advising on the application process, and providing technical advice and support to selected city grantees.²³⁰

UN-Habitat's report *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green, and Healthy Future* (2021) explains how disease is spread through a city, and the methods that can be used to mitigate the spread of disease and promote sustainable urban development at the same time.²³¹ The report identifies four priorities for improving urban resilience for future health crises: rethinking the form and function of the city, addressing systemic poverty and inequalities in cities, rebuilding a 'new normal' urban economy, and clarifying urban legislation and governance arrangements.²³² The UN-Habitat *COVID-19 Policy and Programme Framework* (2020) is a comprehensive approach to combining the best possible health response with socioeconomic mitigation measures.²³³ This framework suggests that the issues at the center of mitigating the spread of disease in urban areas are providing adequate housing, clean water, and safe urban transport.²³⁴ The Office of the Secretary-General's *Policy Brief: COVID-19 in an Urban World* (2020) details how cities became the "epicenter of the pandemic" and highlights the important role that local governments have in health crisis response and recovery.²³⁵ It identifies the following three focus areas: tackling inequalities and development deficits, strengthening the capacities of local actors, particularly local governments, and pursuing a resilient, inclusive and green economic recovery.²³⁶

The WHO is a key actor in issues relating to public health and mitigating the spread of diseases.²³⁷ It is "the directing and coordinating authority on international health within the United Nations system," and it includes 194 member states, and a team of over 8,000 of the world's leading public health experts.²³⁸ The WHO detects public health threats with an expansive global surveillance system, then assesses and communicates the level of risk, often suggesting measures to improve vector tracking and communication strategies.²³⁹ The WHO provides essential health services to people with limited access to health care, which may involve deploying mobile medical teams and maintaining stockpiles of essential supplies.²⁴⁰ The WHO also builds strategies to prevent epidemics and pandemics, including the *A Global Strategy to Eliminate Yellow Fever Epidemics 2017-2026*, and the *Global Influenza Strategy 2019-2030*.²⁴¹ These strategies suggest measures to improve surveillance and communication of health threats, mass vaccination campaigns, and urban readiness plans.²⁴² The *Global Report on Urban Health* (2016) is an example of the successful partnership between the WHO and UN-Habitat.²⁴³ This report focuses on health in cities as it relates to equity gaps and suggests that health and non-health sectors are determinants for each other's outcomes.²⁴⁴

²²⁸ Mayors Migration Council, *Mayors Migration Council, 2021*; UN-Habitat, *UN-Habitat supports Mayors Migration Council to Provide COVID-19 Services to Urban Refugees and Migrants*, 2021.

²²⁹ UN-Habitat, *UN-Habitat Supports Mayors Migration Council to Provide COVID-19 Services to Urban Refugees and Migrants*, 2021.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ UN-Habitat, *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green, and Healthy Future*, 2021.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ UN-Habitat, *COVID-19 Policy and Programme Framework*, 2020.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Office of the Secretary General, *Policy Brief: COVID-19 in an Urban World*, 2020.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ WHO, *Who We Are*, 2021.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ WHO, *Rapidly Detecting and Responding to Health Emergencies*, 2021; WHO, *Communicating Risk in Public Health Emergencies*, 2021.

²⁴⁰ WHO, *Assessing Essential Health Services in Fragile, Conflict-Affected and Vulnerable Settings*, 2021.

²⁴¹ WHO, *Global Influenza Strategy 2019-2030*, 2019; WHO, *A Global Strategy to Eliminate Yellow Fever Epidemics 2017-2026*, 2018.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ UN-Habitat & WHO, *Global Report on Urban Health*, 2016.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

In 1997, the International Coordinating Group (ICG) on Vaccine Provision was established, after major outbreaks of meningitis in Africa, to “manage and coordinate the provision of emergency vaccine supplies and antibiotics to countries during major outbreaks.”²⁴⁵ ICG is made of four member agencies, including WHO, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and Médecins Sans Frontières (also known as Doctors Without Borders or MSF).²⁴⁶ ICG has created vaccine stockpiles to combat Yellow Fever, Meningitis, Cholera, and Ebola outbreaks.²⁴⁷ The creation of vaccine stockpiles allows for the timely deployment of vaccines when outbreaks occur, and be an effective form of pre-pandemic planning.²⁴⁸

Regional and local governments are responsible for determining what strategies to implement in their individual area when it is undergoing a health crisis.²⁴⁹ As an example, in 2021 Guinea ended an Ebola outbreak within six months.²⁵⁰ The Ministry of Health of Guinea initiated a detailed response plan that included contact tracing, vaccination, decontamination of health facilities and schools, and provision of clean water access and hand washing equipment.²⁵¹ Guinea was able to work with WHO and other partners to mitigate the spread of disease in urban areas efficiently and effectively.²⁵²

Transport Planning

People in cities are highly mobile and often rely on public transportation to maintain access to their livelihoods.²⁵³ Transportation methods in urban areas include walking, cycling, public transportation via bus or train, and private vehicle transportation.²⁵⁴ High volumes of reliant people make public transportation difficult to keep sanitary and decrease the amount of space available for isolating or distancing, which in turn increases the risk of the spread of disease in these transport hubs.²⁵⁵ UN-Habitat recognizes the urban poor living in informal settlements and slums are particularly at-risk because this population is more likely to rely on public transportation.²⁵⁶

Hygiene standards on public transportation are also of increasing importance during a health crisis.²⁵⁷ During the COVID-19 pandemic, many cities, such as Tokyo, Moscow, and Paris have enforced social distancing, mask-wearing, and strict sanitation on their public transport systems.²⁵⁸ Sanitation efforts include using disinfecting pesticides on surfaces, being sure to highlight high-touch areas such as benches, door handles, and handrails.²⁵⁹ Antimicrobial shielding products and air filters have been added to many transport systems, as an effort to prevent the spread of airborne disease.²⁶⁰ Screening provisions have been used in some urban transport systems to use imaging technology to determine if a passenger has a fever.²⁶¹ The American Public Transportation Association, an organization of over 1,500 public and private sector members that advocates for the public transportation industry in the United States and Canada, has published a service restoration checklist that includes many of these measures and more for cities attempting to make their transport hubs safer for passengers.²⁶² These increased efforts at

²⁴⁵ WHO, *International Coordinating Group (ICG) on Vaccine Provision*, 2021.

²⁴⁶ CIDRAP, *Group creates global Ebola vaccine stockpile*, 2021.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Galal & Kadapurath, *Building More Resilient Cities to Endure COVID-19 and Future Shocks*, 2021.

²⁵⁰ WHO, *Ebola - Guinea*, 2021.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ UN-Habitat, *COVID-19 Policy and Programme Framework*, 2020, p. 8.

²⁵⁴ UN Office of the Secretary General, *Mobilizing Sustainable Transport for Development*, 2016.

²⁵⁵ UN-Habitat, *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green, and Healthy Future*, 2021, pp. 28-32.

²⁵⁶ UN-Habitat, *COVID-19 Policy and Programme Framework*, 2020, p. 8.

²⁵⁷ UN-Habitat, *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green, and Healthy Future*, 2021, pp. 28-32.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 30.

²⁵⁹ APTA, *Cleaning and Disinfecting Transit Vehicles and Facilities During a Contagious Virus Pandemic*, 2020, p. 12.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

²⁶¹ Ibid., p. 22.

²⁶² APTA, *Developing a Pandemic Virus Service Restoration Checklist*, 2021.

sanitation, coupled with the reduced ridership that cities saw over the course of the pandemic allowed for public transport to be used safely during the pandemic.²⁶³ However, reduced ridership has also meant that fare revenue collected from passengers has decreased, and many cities had to suspend some of their public transport operation because it was not economically viable.²⁶⁴ This was the case in Atlanta, where 70 of the usual 110 bus routes were suspended in 2020.²⁶⁵

As lockdown measures may reduce ridership, UN-Habitat warns this can have adverse effects on vulnerable populations, because decreasing fare revenue could result in increasing the cost of public transportation for those who rely on it for basic needs.²⁶⁶ Efforts to increase walkability in the design of urban areas can reduce total reliance on public transportation.²⁶⁷ UN-Habitat endorses the concept of the “15-minute compact city neighborhood” in the 2021 *Report on Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future*.²⁶⁸ This is a type of neighborhood where all residents can have all their needs met for work, school, shopping, health, leisure or culture, within 15 minutes from their own doorstep by foot, bike and/or public transport.²⁶⁹ According to UN-Habitat, the 15-minute compact city design could reduce the spread of disease, as people would not need to travel in and out of their own neighborhood to meet their daily needs.²⁷⁰ UN-Habitat also warns that such a model would only function if there was an equitable distribution of essential services, streets, and public space.²⁷¹

Adequate Housing Conditions

One billion people, or 24% of the world’s urban population, reside in slums or informal settlements with multiple basic needs not being met.²⁷² Informal settlements and slums have high population density with limited open space and limited access to proper water reticulation networks, which makes social distancing and sanitation difficult.²⁷³ UN-Habitat has found that cramped and poor-quality housing conditions are a major contributor to the spread of diseases.²⁷⁴

In the midst of a health crisis, one way to protect people living in these areas is to frame public spaces as gathering points to raise health awareness, by establishing hand washing stations and distribute medical supplies.²⁷⁵ While restrictions on movement may keep people in their homes, public spaces do not need to only be framed as threats to public health.²⁷⁶ For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, UN-Habitat developed communal handwashing stations in four urban neighborhoods in Beirut, Lebanon, benefitting over 30,000 residents.²⁷⁷

The global homeless population accounts for at least 150 million people.²⁷⁸ People experiencing homelessness do not have the means to physically distance or sanitize themselves, making them particularly vulnerable to the spread of disease during a health crisis.²⁷⁹ Repurposing vacant spaces to house the homeless population is one way some cities have addressed this during the COVID-19

²⁶³ UN-Habitat, *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green, and Healthy Future*, 2021, p. 30.

²⁶⁴ The New York Times, ‘Existential Peril’: Mass Transit Faces Huge Service Cuts Across U.S., 2020.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ UN-Habitat, *COVID-19 Key Facts and Data*, 2021.

²⁶⁷ UN-Habitat, *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green, and Healthy Future*, 2021, p. 37.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 37.

²⁶⁹ UN-Habitat, *Guidance on COVID-19 and Public Space*, 2020, p. 3.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁷¹ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁷² UN Office of the Secretary General, *Policy Brief: COVID-19 in an Urban World*, 2020, p. 3.

²⁷³ UN-Habitat, *COVID-19 Key Facts and Data*, 2021.

²⁷⁴ UN-Habitat, *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green, and Healthy Future*, 2021, p. 39.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 37.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 37.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 37.

²⁷⁸ UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report*, 2020, p. 25.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 25.

pandemic.²⁸⁰ This approach is a short term emergency response to reduce the spread of disease, but once accommodation efforts are scaled back, cities may see infection rates in the homeless population start to rise again.²⁸¹

Regulation of the real estate market to ensure affordable housing can give urban dwellers the chance to secure safe homes in a health crisis.²⁸² High house price-to-income ratios and inability to access housing finance cause people to reside in informal and unsafe housing conditions.²⁸³ Regulation of the real estate market is a goal highlighted in the *Cities for Adequate Housing Declaration* (2018), a pledge made by many cities at the 2018 United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.²⁸⁴ An example of a real estate regulation policy is the *Egypt Housing Strategy*, which was prepared by the Ministry of Housing, Utilities, and Urban Communities in coordination with UN-Habitat in 2020.²⁸⁵ The strategy offers incentives to owners to place vacant units in the market and reduce building permits for unfinished units, and sets up loan and grant programmes to encourage the completion and marketing of units at affordable prices.²⁸⁶

Conclusion

Infectious diseases are a major health threat to all urban dwellers.²⁸⁷ The high concentrations of population and interdependent activities of urban areas increase the risk of diseases spreading, but cities have the opportunity to react, recover, and build resilience.²⁸⁸ Historical understandings of health crises demonstrate that basic steps for reducing the spread of disease include good hygiene practices, vaccination, isolation when infected, and avoidance of rodents and bugs.²⁸⁹ In preparation for future health crises, cities can take preventative action against factors that may exacerbate a crisis, like inadequate housing conditions, or poor transport planning.²⁹⁰ UN-Habitat is uniquely positioned to suggest and implement strategies that can simultaneously mitigate the spread of disease, and promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities.²⁹¹ Short-term measures and immediate response plans will save lives in a health crisis, and long-term preventative plans can ensure that less lives are at risk to begin with.²⁹²

Further Research

While delegates begin researching this topic, they should consider the following questions: How does housing inequality affect the spread of disease? What groups are most vulnerable during a health crisis and how can those groups be protected? How can regional and local governments implement policies to prevent the spread of disease? How can cities rethink transportation planning to mitigate the spread of disease? What short term measures can be taken during a health crisis and how long do they last? What long term measures can be taken to prevent the spread of disease in the future, and when should cities implement them?

²⁸⁰ UN-Habitat, *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green, and Healthy Future*, 2021, p. 39.

²⁸¹ Ibid., p. 72.

²⁸² UN-Habitat, *Addressing the Housing Affordability Challenge: A Shared Responsibility*, 2020.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report*, 2020, p. 214; United Cities and Local Governments, *Cities for Adequate Housing: Municipalist Declaration of Local Governments for the Right to Housing and the Right to the City*, 2018.

²⁸⁵ UN-Habitat, *Addressing the Housing Affordability Challenge: A Shared Responsibility*, 2020; UN-Habitat, *Egypt Housing Strategy*, 2020.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ WHO, *Urban Health*, 2021.

²⁸⁸ UN-Habitat, *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green, and Healthy Future*, 2021, p. xiv; UN-Habitat, *COVID-19 Key Facts and Data*, 2021.

²⁸⁹ Merz, *How to Prevent Infections*, 2021.

²⁹⁰ UN-Habitat, *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green, and Healthy Future*, 2021.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid.

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United Nations, General Assembly, Seventy-first session. (2016). *New Urban Agenda (A/RES/71/256)*. Adopted without reference to a Main Committee (A/71/L.23). Retrieved 8 August 2021 from: <http://undocs.org/A/RES/71/256>

The New Urban Agenda is the international framework to achieve sustainable and equitable urban development. It is the result of the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III). Its approach to using sustainable development of cities to promote shared prosperity for all is multifaceted as it covers many factors contributing to urban sustainability. It also provides guidance on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, actions to be taken to combat climate change, and emphasizes the responsibility that cities have to providing basic services for all citizens. This resource will be useful for delegates to understand the commitment that many Member States have taken on in regard to sustainable urban development.

United Nations Human Settlements Programme. (2021). *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future*. Retrieved 8 August 2021 from:

https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/03/cities_and_pandemics_towards_a_more_just_green_and_healthy_future_un-habitat_2021.pdf

This report will be a useful resource for delegates to learn about how disease is spread through a city, and the methods that can be used to mitigate the spread of disease and promote sustainable urban development at the same time. The report starts with a historical overview of pandemics in cities before COVID-19, then identifies four priorities for recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and improving urban resilience for future health crises. Delegates will find information in this report relating to the subtopics of transport planning and adequate housing conditions, as well as additional problem areas for cities during a health crisis, to be useful in formulating their own proposals for solutions.

United Nations Human Settlements Programme & World Health Organization. (2016). *Global Report on Urban Health*. Retrieved 8 August 2021 from: https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/download-manager-files/Global%20Report%20Urban%20Health_%20Full%20Report.pdf

This collaboration between UN-Habitat and WHO describes how improving equity and health in cities can benefit sustainable development. The report includes a detailed discussion on the health inequities found in cities, reviews urban issues related to health, and describes how other sectors can contribute to the improvement of urban health. Delegates will benefit from the comprehensive review of the health sector and how it intersects with other city sectors, as well as this report's summary of how different organizations within the UN work together to provide complementary expertise.

United Nations Human Settlements Programme & World Health Organization. (2020). *Integrating Health in Urban and Territorial Planning: A Sourcebook*. Retrieved 8 August 2021 from:

https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/05/1-final_highres_20002_integrating_health_in_urban_and_territorial_planning_a_sourcebook.pdf

This sourcebook details the how and why of integrating health concerns into urban and territorial planning. It aims to centralize public health as a motivation for city planning. With city planning at the center of this material, delegates will get a better idea of how physical space can be regulated and adapted to benefit public health in cities. This is particularly important when considering ways to offer safe housing to urban dwellers during a health crisis.

United Nations, Office of the Secretary-General. (2020). *Policy Brief: COVID-19 in an Urban World*. Retrieved 8 August 2021 from:

https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_covid_urban_world_july_2020.pdf

This report details how cities became the “epicenter of the pandemic” and highlights the important role that local governments play in health crisis response and recovery. It identifies these three focus areas: tackling inequalities and development deficits, strengthening the capacities of local actors, particularly local governments, and pursuing a resilient, inclusive and green economic recovery. This policy brief also offers details on what local governments can do to make cities safer in a health crisis. Delegates will benefit from the perspective that this report offers on the future of cities post-COVID-19.

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