Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

OUTLOOK

The prospects for achieving this goal are mixed, given the large number of people living in cities, ongoing urbanization and weak planning and management in most cities of Asia and the Pacific. The hurdles lie in meeting basic needs; providing housing, basic services and transport for the large numbers of people who are poor; and addressing the emerging issues of increasing exclusion and inequality, natural disasters, insecurity, resource efficiency and health pandemics. Cities have the potential to develop innovative solutions to the many challenges covered by the 2030 Agenda and to mobilize broad-based support for their implementation.¹

THE PHOTO

A peri-urban area in South-East Asia

Photo credit: Kibae Park/United Nations
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**INSIGHTS**

- The Asia-Pacific region is home to 53.5 per cent of the global urban population. In 2016, 48.7 per cent of the region’s 4.3 billion population lived in urban areas. By 2018, half of the region’s population will be urban residents. Cities account for as much as an estimated 80 per cent of the region’s economic output. Thus, the economic performance of cities drives the region’s prosperity, which is why it is so important that it is inclusive and environment friendly.

- Cities account for 60–80 per cent of global energy consumption and generate more than 70 per cent of the human-induced greenhouse gas emissions, primarily through the consumption of fossil fuels for energy supply and transportation. Transport emissions have more than doubled since 1970 and are projected to increase at a faster pace than emissions from other energy end-use sectors, reaching about 12 gigatonne of CO$_2$ a year by 2050. Unplanned urban sprawl has contributed to the accelerated growth in emissions in the region’s developing countries.

- Urban areas in the region generate about 1.21 million tonnes of municipal solid waste a day. By 2025, this amount will more than double, to 2.65 million tonnes daily. Waste collection rates in developing countries are low, and collected waste is dumped, highlighting an urgent need for improved solid waste management in urban centres.

- According to the World Health Organization (WHO) 2014 report on the 100 most polluted cities, nearly 70 of them were in Asia and only a few in Europe or the United States. The region, however, also has some of the most successful green cities (and nation state), such as Hong Kong, China, Seoul and Singapore, with low transport emissions. Even in these cities, the demand for green public spaces is on the rise.

- The high density of people, jobs and assets that make cities so successful also make them extremely vulnerable to disaster risks. For example, the 2015 earthquakes in Nepal claimed 9,100 lives, collapsed more than 30 monuments (including UNESCO heritage sites in the Kathmandu Valley) and an additional 120 monuments incurred partial damage. There is lack of sufficient urban data on possible loss and damage, including on the preservation of the world’s cultural and natural heritage. To improve their resilience against disasters, however, some cities have engaged in participatory planning, data collection and assessing the likely impact of climate change-related risks.

**BRIGHT SPOTS**

- In 2015, the share of urban populations in the region with access to improved water sources was 97.2 per cent.
With the emerging transboundary challenges, cities offer a new force of good governance. City leaders are coming together to act on global issues, such as climate change. Such initiatives include the Global Parliament of Mayors, the EU Covenant of Mayors and its Compact of Mayors, the 100 Resilient Cities, the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group and the ASEAN Cities Mayors Forum.

Information technology offers significant opportunities for cities to enhance the quality, performance and interactivity of their urban services, to reduce costs and resource consumption and to improve contact between citizens and government. Of particular relevance are emerging developments with respect to smart cities, smart energy grids, high-speed (5G) digital connectivity and the internet of things.

HOTSPOTS

Housing, basic services and slums

In 2014, an estimated 440 million people, representing about 26.9 per cent of the region’s total urban population, lived in slums or informal settlements, which are characterized by housing that is non-durable or overcrowded, lacking in access to improved water and sanitation facilities and lacking security against eviction. This included nearly two-thirds of the urban population in Afghanistan and Bangladesh, while in Cambodia and Nepal, it was more than half of the urban populations. Although the proportion of people living in a slum is decreasing in all subregions, the absolute number is increasing in many cities.

Even though the region has made significant progress in access to safe drinking water, progress with sanitation has been much slower and varies across the subregions, ranging in 2015 from 49.1 per cent in South and South-West Asia and 72.3 per cent in South-East Asia to 79.6 per cent in East and North-East Asia.

Inclusive and sustainable urbanization

Many cities exceed the WHO standard of annual mean concentration of 10 micrograms and 20 micrograms of PM2.5 particles and PM10 particles per cubic metres of air volume, respectively. The annual mean concentration of PM2.5 and PM10 in cities varies from 5.8 and 9.6 micrograms in Australia to 101.2 and 281.8 micrograms per cubic meter in Pakistan, respectively. Other countries with higher PM2.5 concentrations include Mongolia (at 64.1 micrograms), India (at 58.8 micrograms), China (at 41.3 micrograms) and Turkey (at 38.9 micrograms).

Evidence from 191 Demographic and Health Surveys conducted over the past several years shows that infants and children residing in slums have substantially greater incidence of diarrheal illness than their urban peers and are less likely to survive to their fifth birthday. The urban poor in the region’s industrialized countries also face marked disparities in health and well-being.
Emerging Issues

- Cities face converging challenges, including migration and population growth, changes in family structure, increases in informal settlements, vulnerability to climate change and disasters, exclusion, rising inequality and rising insecurity. With the growth of the middle class in cities, emissions and wastes are likely to increase unless there is change in production and consumption patterns.

- Rising inequality, competition over scarce resources (such as land), impunity from the law and weak city governance could increase the risk of violence and potential breakdowns in law and order. The fear of crime and violence continues to be pervasive in cities and is one of the top concerns in citizens’ everyday lives.

Targets

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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