



# HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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## 2018 Review of SDGs implementation: SDG 11 – Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable <sup>1</sup>

The pledge of Goal 11 to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable provides an unparalleled opportunity for the attainment of collective and inclusive progress, and for the achievement of sustainable development in the world.

Since 2015, SDG 11 has catalyzed collaboration and partnerships between diverse groups of stakeholders at the local level, and between local, regional, and national governments. However, cities and regions continue to struggle with providing adequate housing, services, and infrastructure, especially in light of the increasing global incidence of natural disasters. A number of challenges in data availability to track progress towards implementation of SDG 11 also present significant barriers to assessing global progress on the goal.

Nonetheless, although cities are often characterized by stark socioeconomic inequalities, social exclusion, extreme poverty, unemployment, poor environmental conditions, and high production of greenhouse gas emissions, their potential for growth and development makes them strong drivers for positive change. Their density and economies of agglomeration act as strings that connect all Sustainable Development Goals together, linking economy, energy, environment, science, technology and social and economic outcomes. With nearly 54% of the world’s population living in cities today—and potentially two-thirds by 2030—this critical mass of urban dwellers has an enormous potential for change both in urban and rural areas.

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<sup>1</sup> This Background Note draws upon the policy brief, [“Accelerating SDG 11 Achievement: Policy Brief in Support of The First SDG 11 Review at the UN High-Level Political Forum 2018”](#), as well as other sources listed at the end of the document.\*





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## Status of Progress on SDG 11

This section presents the baseline and progress, where available, for each target under SDG 11 using available data and proxy indicators in some cases. Ongoing initiatives from regions and country-specific reports are presented, highlighting opportunities and challenges, as well as best practices in data collection.

### ***Ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums (Target 11.1, Indicator 11.1.1)***

Inadequate housing impacts negatively on urban equity and inclusion, urban safety and livelihood opportunities, and causes negative health conditions. The indicator is measured by the notion of deprivation in three fundamental areas: slums, informal settlements and inadequate housing. Building on MDG methodology, and to ensure the indicator is universal, modifications were introduced to add housing inadequacy in the measurement that contemplates the use of geospatial technologies for slum identification. Data is available from UN-Habitat's urban indicators database, but mostly limited to the slum and housing informality components. According to updated data, while the proportion of the global urban population living in slums decreased from 28% to 23%, the absolute numbers of people living in slums increased, from an estimated 807 million people in 2000 to 883 million in 2015; with higher numbers recorded in the fast urbanizing sub-regions.

### ***Provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport (Target 11.2, Indicator 11.2.1)***

Adequate transport infrastructure and affordable transport services are still widely lacking in many developing countries, hampering economic growth and poverty reduction efforts. Transport is the largest end-user of energy in many developed countries and the fastest growing one in most developing countries making this target key to the achievement of most—if not all—SDGs. Experts consider it should have four attributes: equitable in access, efficient, safe and climate responsive. However, the SDG indicator focuses only on convenient access. Expert consultations focused on refinement of the method of analysis, proposing a new technique that will expand the utilization of diverse existing databases with more possibilities of conducting trend analysis over the years. Global transport data has been collected for several domains ranging from usage, road networks, to safety, transport fatalities, and frequency of transport. Latest data from 38





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countries from Asia, Europe, North America and LAC depict a general increase in the global public transport demand between 2001 and 2014, estimated at nearly one fifth.

***Enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries (Target 11.3)***

*Urban Sprawl (Indicator 11.3.1).* Cities are rapidly expanding, with the rate of land consumption increasingly overtaking that of population growth rate. As of 2017, the average rate of the physical expansion of cities remains about one and a half times that of population growth. The forces driving this urban expansion include, among others: population growth, rising per capita incomes, cheaper agricultural lands, efficient transport, and the proliferation of informal settlements. There are, however, regional variations in urban sprawl. For example, urban sprawl is increasing in Western Asia and Northern Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and East Asia and Oceania, while it is decreasing in South-Eastern Asia, Central and Southern Asia, Europe, North America and Japan (land-rich developed countries). Important progress has been made in the measurement of this indicator using remotely sensed data and image interpretation with the involvement of various agencies working in the field of geographic information and earth sciences.

*Urban governance and participation (Indicator 11.3.2).* Elections are the most common participation avenue for citizens followed by public hearings and public consultations, while participatory budgeting is the least utilized participation method. There are, however, huge variations in the levels of participation for each activity per region. For example, while participatory budgetary scores lowest in the Australia and New Zealand sub-region, it is quite common in the LAC sub-region. This indicator is formulated with subjective definitions on issues such as ‘direct participation’, and the notion of ‘operate regularly and democratically’, and experts have proposed unified mechanisms with score cards to overcome this situation. Using proxy indicators, about 46 countries in all regions have data relevant to this indicator, covering activities such as public consultations, participatory budgeting, elections and local referenda, as well as protest and demonstrations, public hearings, neighborhood advisory committees, Town Hall meetings, formal petitions and social media campaigns. Eastern and South-Eastern Asia demonstrates more developed public participation mechanisms at the city level, followed





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by Australia and New Zealand while central and southern Asia scores least, followed by Europe and North America.

## ***Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural & natural heritage (Target 11.4, Indicator 11.4.1)***

The contribution of culture to sustainable urban development is widely recognized, including the transversal role it plays in achieving several other associated SDGs. Similarly, the way urbanization is planned and managed has a direct impact on the protection and safeguard of the world's cultural and natural heritage. Based on a preliminary analysis, many countries have public expenditure data but the amount of detailed data available to produce indicator 11.4.1 varies greatly. Due to the various dimensions of information that this indicator collects (i.e. public/private expenditure; type of heritage; level of government; type of funding), the data for private expenditure on heritage will be more limited. Initial results show that 71% of responding countries had at least one source of heritage data on public expenditure while only 29% of countries had a least one source of private heritage expenditure data.<sup>2</sup>

## ***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 (Target 11.5, Indicator 11.5.1 and 11.5.2)***

The growing concentrations of people and economic activity in most cities increases risk, especially when urbanization is rapid, poorly planned and occurs in a context of poverty, high-risk exposure, environmental degradation, and climate change. In fact, from 1990 to 2013, almost 90 per cent of mortality attributed to internationally reported disasters occurred in low and middle-income countries, many of which have seen rapid urban expansion in recent years. Disasters also undermine prospects for sustained economic growth and sustainable development and push millions of vulnerable people into poverty every year. In 2017, economic losses attributed to natural hazards were the highest on record, conservatively estimated at \$314 billion versus an annual average of \$153 billion over the previous decade. The availability of timely data on disasters is also a major challenge, particularly because of the dispersion of data sources among government offices and agencies. Working with other partners, UNISDR, as a custodian

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Culture and Communication Unit – UIS SDG 11.4 Metadata Survey of Cultural and Natural Heritage Statistics





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agency for the disaster risk reduction indicators of the SDGs, has been leading monitoring efforts and support to Member States in the development of national disaster loss databases based on official data, academic records, and other sources. UNISDR also continues to strengthen the capacity of local governments through the delivery of targeted training, together with affiliated partners. This indicator is also included in the monitoring for the Sendai Framework global targets and will be monitored under both frameworks.

***Reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management (Target 11.6, Indicators 11.6.1)***

Large and densely populated cities place significant pressures on public services, with poor waste management leading to negative side effects on health and biodiversity. Investing in improved urban solid waste management (SWM) systems has positive effects on various SDGs and other global agendas. It is strongly connected to health, but also to poverty, as SWM's informal sector self-employment collection and recycling provides sustainable livelihoods to many urban poor. Notwithstanding the quality and efficiency of collection, based on data collected for 213 cities/municipalities, 74 per cent of municipal solid waste is collected. The collection of solid waste is a particular challenge in cities in sub-Saharan Africa, where less than 50 per cent of all municipal waste is collected.

*Urban Air pollution (Target 11.6, Indicator 11.6.2).* In 2016, 91 per cent of the urban population still breathed air that did not meet the WHO's Air Quality Guidelines value for particulate matter (PM 2.5) and more than half was exposed to air pollution levels at least 2.5 times above that safety standard. Air pollution today is also responsible for around 3.4 million deaths annually, affecting everyone, regardless of geography or social status, and is indeed one of the global environmental challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Studies indicate that in recent years' exposure levels have increased significantly in some parts of the world, particularly in rapidly industrializing countries with large populations. Despite the advancements in technologies in monitoring of air pollution, there are still many gaps in global monitoring to better understand risks to human health and ecosystems. Global standards must be adopted with better monitoring across cities and within cities, which offer higher levels of disaggregation of information. Capacity development must address hardware and systems that process the collected data, including support for creating central database facilities for air quality.







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***Provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces  
(Target 11.7)***

*Public spaces (Indicator 11.7.1).* Public spaces are broadly associated with several benefits such as increases in property values, retail activity multiplication, effective and efficient transportation and mobility, city attractiveness, enhanced safety, social cohesion, equality, health and well-being. Data on public spaces is collected at the city level, and is now available for more than 300 cities across the world. The latest data shows that the expansion of cities in Europe, North America and Oceania has been accompanied by changes in land use, both in terms of form as well as structure. In these sub-regions, streets, as public spaces, are losing their importance in terms of their share of land. Data has shown that the proportion of land allocated to streets between the city cores and suburbs, accounts for 25% and 15%, respectively. Most cities in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean allocate less than 15% of land to streets in the city cores and less than 10% in the suburbs.

*Safety of urban spaces (Indicator 11.7.2).* Levels of safety in a city affect the level of accessibility and inclusivity, particularly for vulnerable urban populations including women and children, older persons, and persons with disabilities. To standardize data collection and reporting on SDG indicators related to the safety of spaces, UNODC has developed the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS), which provides a standard classification of criminal offences enhancing the consistency and international comparability of crime statistics. Available data from UNODC shows an upsurge in victimization related crimes across the world since 2009.

***Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning  
(Target 11.a, Indicator 11.a.1)***

UN-Habitat's work in the development of the National Urban Policy Database provides a global overview of the state of urban policy at the national level and serves the purpose of monitoring this indicator through four categories: Feasibility, Diagnosis, Formulation, and Monitoring and Evaluation. The latest data from shows credible progress in national planning, with 150 countries developing national-level urban policies; of these, 73 are in the process of implementation, and 23 have reached the monitoring and evaluation phase. A comprehensive review of urban policies and the methodology





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used to assess the Global State of Urban Policy, including agreed qualifiers of national urban policies, constitutes the basis of this modified indicator.

***National and local disaster risk reduction strategies (Target 11.b, Indicators 11.b.1 and 11.b.2).*** Supporting sustainable and resilient cities and human settlements and the achievement of the SDGs requires that disaster risk reduction be integrated in core social, economic and development planning. Augmented efforts are needed to develop and implement national and local disaster risk reduction strategies and achieve target 11.B of the 2030 Agenda, ensuring they are based on a local understanding of risk. Access to financing resources is also critical to enable the implementation of these strategies.

***Support least developed countries, including through financial and technical assistance, in building sustainable and resilient buildings utilizing local materials (Target 11.c, Indicator 11.c.1)***

The construction industry has a significant impact on material extraction, consumption of natural resources and human comfort. However, data is unavailable for this indicator, and so is the contribution of in-country investments, as well as other foreign direct investments linked to the construction sector. Nevertheless, formal definitions have been developed, with feedback from consultations recommending an adjustment in the framing of the current indicator to ensure it is more aligned to existing data systems and existing complimentary definitions and standards.

## Interlinkages and implications for policy-making and implementation to realize SDG 11

The interlinkages of Goal 11 with other goals and with other development agendas such as the New Urban Agenda and the Sendai Framework are extensive and wide-ranging. Most of the 234 SDG indicators have a direct connection to urban policies and a clear impact on cities and human settlements. Nearly one third of indicators are also being measured at the local level. The goal on poverty is linked to access to land, slums and inadequate housing; health is often affected by 'place'; and gender equality can benefit from access to public spaces, basic infrastructure, and participation in local governance and decision-making. Urban waste management is strongly associated to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene; energy systems are critical for the development of safe, resilient and sustainable human settlements; and inclusive and productive cities are





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important for entrepreneurship and job creation. Similarly, resilient infrastructure and industrialization are essential for the prosperity of cities; intra-city and spatial inequalities are fundamental for understanding and addressing the goal on inequalities; and the efficient management of natural resources, safe disposal and treatment of toxic waste and pollutants can contribute to health, as well as responsible consumption and production. The goal on cities offers many opportunities to develop mitigation and adaptation strategies to address climate change especially through environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development. The proper management of waste generated by cities has direct implications on the pollution of oceans and the degradation of natural habitats and the loss of biodiversity largely depends on the way cities are managed. The promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies requires cities free of violence and with a rule of law. Understanding the urban dimension of the different sustainable development goals is key to unlocking their full potential.

## Recommendations

### Implementation Recommendations

- **Promote a comprehensive and integrated approach to city development and management.** This is essential to ensure competing demands are properly considered, and that trade-offs and co-benefits are properly harnessed throughout the decision-making process and budget allocations, including those between urban and peri-urban areas.
- **Integrate urbanization into national development planning.** Given its implications for overall growth and transformation, more efforts need to be undertaken to increase awareness to ensure that urbanization is integrated into national development planning from a strategic and multi-sectoral perspective that is linked to socioeconomic and sector priorities, policies and strategies.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>[https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/18785E\\_HLPF\\_2018\\_2\\_Add.4\\_ECAadvanceduneditedversion.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/18785E_HLPF_2018_2_Add.4_ECAadvanceduneditedversion.pdf)







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- **Increased consultation and coordinated efforts among multiple stakeholders**, including line ministries from all sectors, local authorities, metropolitan authorities, national statistics offices, the private sector, academia and civil society is necessary for the successful implementation of SDG 11.<sup>4</sup>
- **Successful leverage of finance is paramount to achieving SDG 11.** This depends on reforms that empower local governments through intergovernmental transfers, own source revenue collection, and enhanced creditworthiness of cities to create certainty for subnational investment. Local governments must improve their governance structures and institutional capacities to manage long term debt, leverage their own finances, and engage in PPPs — thereby reducing risk and exposure to develop needed infrastructure.<sup>5</sup>
- **More needs to be done to make cities more inclusive and accessible for different social groups such as women and girls or persons with disabilities.** This includes improving safety and availability of public transport, multimodal transport, street lighting or making all parts of the city accessible to wheelchair users or the visually impaired.<sup>6</sup>
- **Governance structures and normative frameworks for disaster risk reduction in urban areas need to be strengthened**, including improving and enforcing land use plans and building codes. Disaster risk assessments should be a prerequisite for infrastructure and housing investments, including urban development, water and sanitation, energy and education infrastructure.
- **Increased support to the most vulnerable and exposed countries is needed**, particularly least developed countries and small island developing States, with the capacities, technologies, and financial resources to prevent the creation of new disaster risk and to reduce existing levels of risk, leaving no one left behind.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/APFSD5\\_INF1E\\_0.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/APFSD5_INF1E_0.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/APFSD5\\_INF1E\\_0.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/APFSD5_INF1E_0.pdf)





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## Monitoring Recommendations

Many of the Goal 11 indicators are new and challenging to monitor even for the most advanced countries. They require spatial or territorial analysis and the collection and computation of data at the local level, and they depend on a technical definition of the city as a unique entity of analysis. Gaps in data availability have compelled governments and custodian agencies to use proxy indicators to assess progress in various targets for these early years of SDGs.

- **Adopt a functional statistical definition of what constitutes the city and its boundaries.** A major obstacle is agreeing globally on what constitutes ‘urban’ and the ‘city’ as units of analysis; otherwise comparability in various indicators that have a spatial component will be seriously compromised. The international community needs to adopt a functional statistical definition of what constitutes the city and its boundaries. This will help to standardize values and harmonize results to prevent technical inconsistencies.
- **Strengthen supportive frameworks and capacity development for better SDG 11 monitoring.** Goal 11 monitoring and reporting presents significant and unique challenges. National Statistical Offices need to coordinate with local authorities in the data collection process, including the integration of spatial information. Strengthening national and local capacities is therefore paramount for collecting, analyzing and disseminating data and information including different forms of disaggregation, accompanied by spatial analysis, and the necessary mechanisms to aggregate urban data at the national level. This requires partnerships, institutional coordination, adequate systems and monitoring and reporting frameworks.
- **Mainstream gender, youth, persons with disability and culture in SDG 11 monitoring.** SDG 11 indicators must be disaggregated based on these parameters, making mainstreaming of this data and information a monitoring requirement for policy purposes as opposed to an inclusion-at-will or optional undertaking.





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## Questions for Further Discussion

- What are additional key recommendations for accelerating the implementation of SDG11?
- What specific policy measures and tools can ensure that development in cities and human settlements is inclusive and reaches those most often left behind, such as people living in informal settlements?
- How can we strengthen the capacity of local and regional governments to achieve SDG 11?
- Who are the furthest behind and who is at risk of being left behind for SDG 11?

