

# Building sustainable and resilient cities

## OVERVIEW

The 31st of October is celebrated as World Cities Day. The aim is to promote the international community's interest in global urbanization, push forward cooperation among countries and cities in meeting opportunities and addressing challenges of urbanization, and contributing to sustainable urban development.

World Cities Day contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals and it is recognized by the New Urban Agenda as a priority platform for partners.

## BUILDING SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT CITIES

The general theme of World Cities Day is Better City, Better Life. Each year a different sub-theme is selected to either promote successes of urbanization or address specific challenges resulting from urbanization.

Building Sustainable and Resilient Cities, the theme for World Cities Day 2018, is a call to action for all of us to rethink how cities may become better places to protect and enhance people's lives, leaving no one behind. The global observance of this year's World Cities Day is being held in Liverpool, United Kingdom.

With over half of the population living in urban areas and the numbers increasing daily, cities are facing unprecedented demographic, environmental, economic, social and spatial challenges. This World Cities Day is engaging with local, regional and national governments, partners, communities of practice and residents to raise awareness about the importance of resilient cities and inspiring action for building resilience for more sustainable cities.

World Cities Day 2018 focuses on building urban resilience as defined by UN-Habitat below:

Urban Resilience is the measurable ability of any urban system, with its inhabitants, to maintain continuity through all shocks and stresses, while positively adapting and transforming toward sustainability. A Resilient City assesses, plans and acts to prepare and respond to hazards—natural and human-made, sudden and slow-onset, expected and unexpected—in order to protect and enhance people's lives, secure development gains, foster an environment for investment, and drive positive change.

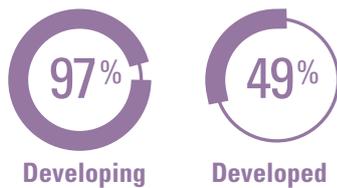
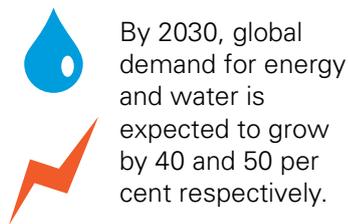
Major challenges to resilience include economic, environmental, cultural, civic and disaster mitigation and recovery.

## FACTS AND FIGURES

By 2050, 70% of global population will live in cities. 60% of new urban settlements are yet to be built, representing a huge opportunity for building resilient cities.



**200 million** people live along coastlines less than **5 metres** above sea level.



97% of cities in the developing countries do not meet air quality standards. 49% in developed countries.

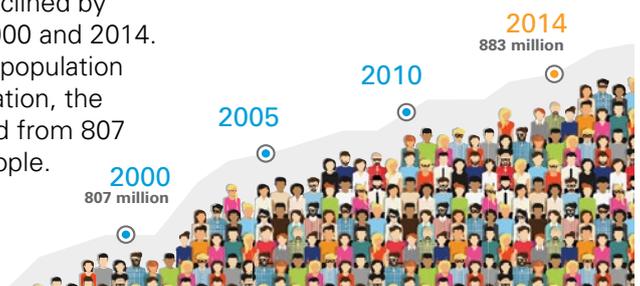
In developing countries, due to a lack of capacity to manage rapid urban growth, much of the population expansion is taking place outside or in absence of official planning frameworks and a large part of the housing demand is being met by growing informal settlements often located in areas exposed to natural hazards.

**42%** of economic losses in housing are due to **floods,** and 25% to earthquakes



18 out of the 20 biggest cities in the world and 88% of the global population are in the northern hemisphere where temperatures are rising fastest.

The proportion of the population living in slums declined by 20% between 2000 and 2014. However, due to population growth and migration, the number increased from 807 to 883 million people.



Cities are centres of innovation and investment and are pivotal for economic growth and development. At the same time, cities are vulnerable to severe impacts from a range of challenges, shocks and stresses that can be both natural and human made.

Over the last decade, natural disasters affected more than 220 million people and caused economic damage of USD **\$100 billion per year**



By 2030, without significant investment to make cities more resilient, natural disasters may cost cities worldwide

**\$314 billion each year**

and climate change may push up to 77 million more urban residents to poverty.



In 2016

**108 countries**

and territories were hit by disasters.

Some 15% of the world's population live in fragile and conflict-affected countries.



## Characteristics of a Resilient City

### **Persistent**

A persistent city anticipates impacts in order to prepare for current and future shocks and stresses. It builds robustness by incorporating coping mechanisms to withstand disturbances and protect people and assets. It encourages redundancy in its networks by generating spare capacity and back-ups to maintain and restore basic services, ensuring reliability during and after disruption.

### **Adaptable**

An adaptable city considers not only foreseeable risks, but also accepts current and future uncertainty. It diversifies its services, functions and processes by establishing alternatives and is resourceful in its capacity to repurpose human, financial and physical capital. It is flexible and can absorb, adjust and evolve in the face of changing circumstances, dynamically responding by turning change into opportunity.

### **Inclusive**

An inclusive city centres on people by understanding that being resilient entails protecting each person from any negative impact. Recognising that people in vulnerable situations are among the most affected by hazards, it actively strives towards social inclusion by promoting equality, equity and fulfilment of human rights. It fosters social cohesion and empowers comprehensive and meaningful participation in all governance processes in order to develop resilience.

## The urban resilience process must be:

### **Integrated**

An integrated city appreciates that it is composed of and influenced by indivisible, interdependent and interacting systems. It combines and aligns many lenses to ensure input is holistic, coherent and mutually supportive towards a common cause. It enables a transdisciplinary collaboration that encourages open communication and facilitates strategic coordination. It supports the collective functioning of the city and guarantees far-reaching, positive and durable change.

### **Reflexive**

A reflexive city understands that its system and surroundings are continuously changing. It is aware that past trends have shaped current urban processes yet appreciates its potential to transform through shocks and stresses over time. It is reflective, conveying the capacity to learn from knowledge, past experiences and new information. It also learns by doing and installs mechanisms to iteratively examine progress as well as systematically update and improve structures.

### **Transformative**

A transformative city adopts a proactive approach to building resilience in order to generate positive change. It fosters ingenuity and pursues forward-looking, innovative solutions that over time create a system that is no longer prone to risk. A transformative city is focused and goal-oriented towards a shared vision of the resilient city.

## CALLS TO ACTION

Innovative tools for local resilience. There is a pressing need for new tools and approaches that strengthen local administrations and empower citizens, while building their capacity to face new challenges and better protect human, economic and natural assets. The tools and approaches must be integrated in urban planning and management practices

National policies on urban resilience. Governments must lead coordinated policies that push for resilient urban areas, providing support to regional and local governments.

Strengthening local and global partnerships. A successful urban resilience agenda requires partnerships between all key international actors, as well as the engagement with principle city players. Inclusive cooperation is needed in order to build upon a shared resilient vision.

Sharing knowledge: Stakeholders should provide feedback or information on their work on innovation towards resilient cities.

## THEMES

World Cities Day 2018 seeks to influence five key areas:

### **Climate Action**

From altered weather patterns to rising sea levels and more extreme meteorological events, climate change impacts on people's wellbeing and livelihoods. In a rapidly urbanizing world, the World Cities Day 2018 is promoting effective climate action in our cities and recognizes that sustainable and resilient urban development cannot be achieved or sustained without mitigation and adaptation measures, such as water recycling, water and energy sensitive urban and building design, sustainable urban planning of city extensions, financial and planning tools for risk management and awareness campaigns for behavioural change.

### **Upgrading from Informality**

The number of people at risk is increasing significantly where rapid urbanization exceeds formal planning capacity, leading to uncontrolled and densely populated informal settlements in hazard-prone areas. Unplanned cities are more vulnerable to shocks as they often have to cope with pre-existing stresses. Urban systems are complex and interdependent. If rapidly growing cities are to respond equitably to the Sustainable Development Goals and Sendai Framework for Risk Reduction, holistic tools are needed to help planners prioritise investment in an inclusive manner, based on limited information and rapidly changing contexts.

### **Economic and Social Resilience**

Building urban resilience takes multiple forms, but must seek the improved living conditions for people, specifically those in vulnerable situations. Poor people are exposed to hazards more often, lose a greater share of their wealth when hit, have limited safety nets, and receive less institutional support. The impact is often felt most by the poorest of the poor and especially by women, girls, and the elderly.

### **Governance and Decentralization**

The analysis of decentralization in terms of local governments' responsibilities, planning and financial capacity is key for building city resilience. Local governments have a particular role to play in urban resilience as they are in charge of a variety of processes related to the functioning of the city as well as the first line of response in any crisis situation. Local governments need to be empowered to efficiently deliver on these requirements, and good national-local level cooperation to build resilience in time of crisis is key.

### **Humanitarian Urban Crises**

Resilience also lies at the core of the humanitarian-development nexus, bridging two often disparate agendas. Ingraining resilience can reduce risks by increasing capacities and addressing vulnerabilities to decrease fragility and mitigate impacts, thereby enhancing an effective and forward-thinking response.

## **GLOBAL AGENDAS**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and its dedicated goal on cities—SDG 11 to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable—puts sustainable urbanization as one of the key priorities.

In addition, under the New Urban Agenda, there is a defined and renewed dedication among the global development community to ensure our cities expand in a sustainable way for all.

By engaging all stakeholders in resilience efforts, cities can harness transformational change and improve the lives of their inhabitants. Over the past decade, urban resilience has emerged as one of the core principles of sustainable urban development widely acknowledged in various agreements including the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Generally, cities lack the capacity to operationalize these national commitments alone and shifting from awareness to action remains a challenge. These trends won't change unless we start working all together towards building resilience for more sustainable cities.