
PRESS RELEASE

UN-Habitat Launches its World Cities Report 2022

Katowice, Poland (29 June 2022) – A new United Nations report says that rapid urbanization was only temporarily delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the global urban population back on track to grow by another 2.2 billion people by 2050.

The large-scale flight from major cities in the early stages of the pandemic to the perceived safety of the countryside or smaller towns was a short-term response that will not alter the course of global urbanization, according to the UN-Habitat's World Cities Report 2022.

Despite greater incidence of the virus in urban areas and the economic difficulties created by the pandemic, cities are once again serving as beacons of opportunity to people in search of employment, education and training or taking refuge from conflict.

With existing urban populations also continuing to grow naturally through rising birth rates, particularly in lower income countries, the urban population is forecast to grow from 56 per cent of the global total in 2021 to 68 per cent by 2050.

The report concludes that "cities are here to stay, and the future of humanity is undoubtedly urban", though it says that levels of urbanization are uneven, with growth slowing in many high-income countries.

"Urbanization remains a powerful 21st century mega-trend," said Maimunah Mohd Sharif, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-Habitat, which produced the report.

"That entails numerous challenges, which were further exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic. But there is a sense of optimism that COVID-19 has provided us with the opportunity to build back differently. With the right policies and the right commitment from governments, our children can inherit an urban future that is more inclusive, greener, safer and healthier.

"We must start by acknowledging that the status quo leading up to 2020 was in many ways an unsustainable model of urban development, and take the best practices learned in our responses to COVID-19 and the climate crisis."

Envisaging the Future of Cities is published this week to coincide with the Eleventh Session of the World Urban Forum, the premier global conference on sustainable urban development. It is being held in Katowice, Poland, from 26-30 June, convened by UN-Habitat and co-organized with the Government of Poland and the city of Katowice.

Amid warnings about the dangers facing cities, from a sudden global spike in inflation and cost of living, supply chain disruptions, climate change and new armed conflicts, the report details an optimistic vision in which cities are more equitable, greener and more knowledge-based.

The biannual report is an authoritative, thorough and far-sighted look at the state of the world's cities, trends in urban policy and the outlook for sustainable development.

This new report calls for greater commitment by national, regional and local governments, and encourages the further adoption of innovative technologies and urban living concepts such as the "15-minute city." Popularized in Paris, Melbourne and other places, it envisages that residents can meet most of their daily needs within a 15-minute journey.

The report reaffirms UN-Habitat's belief that achieving equal and inclusive cities will involve a new social contract in the form of universal basic income, universal health coverage and universal housing and basic services.

It says that the New Urban Agenda, created five years ago by UN-Habitat and endorsed by the UN General Assembly, provides a broad framework for urban policy that encourages the integration of all elements of sustainable development.

Katowice was a deliberate choice of venue for the Forum, given its successful transition from a heavy industrial city to a diverse, forward-looking economy.

Marcin Krupa, Mayor of Katowice, said: "Faced with industrial closures and population decline, our city in southern Poland has embraced technologically driven economic growth and cultural development to diversify its local economy.

"The recent history of our city shows that with a combined effort, a coherent and bold vision and appropriate financial resources, change can happen, though it doesn't always happen overnight. I am optimistic that other cities can transform themselves as we have."

Grzegorz Puda, Polish Minister of Development Funds and Regional Policy, said: "Polish cities are at the center of our country's emergence from the dark decades of communist rule. They have become centers of business and culture, attractive not only to domestic but also to foreign investors.

"It has certainly been a long and sometimes difficult journey, over 30 Polish cities have undergone a remarkable transformation. Not only has our politics changed, but so has the attitude of government, local authorities and residents to urban development."

"Thanks to the World Cities Report 2022, we can look at urban problems from a global perspective and compare them with national challenges and approaches. By juxtaposing the two points of view, we can prepare better solutions at the local level," said Małgorzata Jarosińska-Jednak, Deputy Minister for Development Funds and Regional Policy.

Download full report here: unhabitat.org/wcr

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About the World Urban Forum

The World Urban Forum (WUF) was established in 2001 by the United Nations to address one of the most pressing issues facing the world: rapid urbanization and its impact on people, cities, economies, climate change and policies. Held every two years, the Forum is convened by UN-Habitat. It is designed as a high level, open and inclusive platform for addressing the challenges of sustainable urbanization.

Each session is staged in a different city - the Eleventh Session in Katowice from 26-30 June, 2022, will be the first in central and Eastern Europe.

For more information, visit wuf.unhabitat.org

About the United Nations Human Settlements programme (UN-Habitat)

UN-Habitat is the United Nations agency for human settlements. It has programmes in over 90 countries that support people in cities and human settlements and focus on socially and environmentally sustainable cities and towns.