United Nations Human Settlements Programme
Background Guide 2024

Written by M. Ismail Dogar and Giuliana Álvarez

NATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2024 National Model United Nations Galápagos Conference (NMUN•Galápagos)! We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). This year's staff are: Director M. Ismail Dogar and Assistant Director Giuliana Álvarez. Ismail received his BSc. in Health Sciences and International Business from Benedictine University, his doctorate in dental medicine from Midwestern University, and completed an advanced education in general dentistry residency at the University of New Mexico Hospitals. He has volunteered with NMUN since 2014, and most recently served as the Secretary-General for NMUN•NY in 2023. Giuliana is currently studying law at the University of San Francisco de Quito. She is the founder of the Leadership Club and a junior editor of the USFQ Law Review.

The topics under discussion for UN-Habitat are:
1. Achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11
2. Creating Inclusive Cities for the Elderly

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 November 2024 in accordance with the guidelines in the Position Paper Guide and the NMUN•Galápagos 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 Lauren Kiser at dsg.galapagos@nmun.org.

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

Sincerely,

M. Ismail Dogar, Director
Giuliana Álvarez, Assistant Director

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Committee Overview

Introduction

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) is the United Nation's leading institution tasked with all issues related to urbanization and human settlement issues.[1] Having become a full fledged programme of the United Nations in 2002, UN-Habitat was created with the merging of three precursor United Nations organizations which included the Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation (UNHHSF), and the Commission on Human Settlements.[2] While there are many aspects of urban development that fall under the purview of UN-Habitat, a special focus has been placed on adequate, safe and affordable housing by addressing informal settlements and upgrading slums.[3]

Mandate, Functions, and Powers

UN-Habitat was formally established by 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).[4] The General Assembly mandated UN-Habitat to "promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities."[5] The adoption of *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda) in 2015 by the General Assembly, and the associated 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), further specified UN-Habitat's mandate.[6] These SDGs include specific provisions that advance the urbanization agenda.[7] SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) outlines the goal of making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.[8] A key tenant of this goal is safe, adequate and affordable housing by 2030 for all.[9] Likewise, SDG 17 (partnerships) stipulates the goal of strengthening and revitalizing global partnerships for sustainable development.[10]

In 2016, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) convened in Quito, Ecuador, which resulted in the adoption of the *New Urban Agenda* (NUA).[11] The agenda "lays out standards and principles for the planning, construction, development, management, and improvement of urban areas along its five main pillars of implementation: national urban policies, urban legislation and regulations, urban planning and design, local economy and municipal finance, and local implementation."[12] As a result, much of UN-Habitat's energy today is focused on the achievement of the SDGs and NUA frameworks together in order to make cities sustainable and resilient to the benefit of all.[13]

While the following list is not exhaustive, UN-Habitat's mandate can be summarized as:

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[1] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *History, mandate & role in the UN system*. 2024.

[2] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Learn more about us*. 2024.

[3] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Slum Upgrading*. 2024.

[4] United Nations, 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.

[5] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *History, mandate & role in the UN system*. 2024.

[6] United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

[7] The Global Goals. *11 Sustainable Cities and Communities*. N.d.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Goal 17*. 2024.

[11] United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development. *About Habitat III*. 2016.

[12] United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development. *New Urban Agenda*. 2016.

[13] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Sustainable Development Goals*. 2024.

- UN-Habitat **will generally**: support country-led efforts to achieve the SDGs and the NUA through providing research, setting standards and principles, and monitoring global progress; partner with governments, UN agencies, and private stakeholders on programs focused on urban development challenges; support Member States through advocacy communication that brings together public, financial and political support to create policy frameworks, and national development programs; and give technical assistance from subject matter experts as it pertains to sustainable urban development.[14]

- UN-Habitat **will not generally**: authorize or enforce project implementation within Member States; create new development frameworks or policies that do not align with those adopted by the General Assembly.[15]

Governance, Funding, and Structure

In 2018, through the adoption of General Assembly 73/239 the former Governing Council of UN-Habitat was replaced by the United Nations Habitat Assembly of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat Assembly).[16] UN-Habitat's governance structure consists of the UN-Habitat Assembly, the Executive Board, and the Committee of Permanent Representatives.[17] UN-Habitat Assembly is composed of 193 members and convenes every four years.[18] It's responsibilities are: to determine the key areas of focus of UN-Habitat's work; review trends related to urbanization and settlements; adopt resolutions related to UN-Habitat mandate in order to support its strategic vision; make recommendations that support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the NUA; among others.[19]

The Executive Board is comprised of 36 Member States elected by the UN-Habitat Assembly and convenes three times each year to improve transparency and accountability of UN-Habitat, oversee the implementation of the operational and normative work of UN-Habitat, oversee and pass the budget, among other responsibilities.[20] The Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) to UN-Habitat convenes twice every four years to prepare for the UN-Habitat Assembly and review the agenda for the Assembly meeting and it liaises between the Executive Director and the UN-Habitat Assembly.[21] Under the leadership of the Executive Director, UN-Habitat has two units, a Governing Body Secretariat, four divisions, three offices, and multiple specialized sub-divisions and branches.[22] This organizational structure oversees, among various other duties, external relations, logistics, regional programs, strategic planning and monitoring, budgets, advocacy, and donor relations.[23]

The majority of UN-Habitat's income comes from contributions from National governments, which is around 80% of its annual funding.[24] The rest is from United Nations agencies, private sector and civil society contributions, and local authorities.[25] UN-Habitat's core funding is its main budget which is from its allocation of funds from the United Nations headquarters assessed contributions.[26]

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[14] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *About Us*. 2024.
[15] Ibid
[16] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *UN-Habitat Assembly*. 2024.
[17] UN Habitat. *Governance*. 2024.
[18] Ibid.
[19] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *UN-Habitat Assembly*. 2024.
[20] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Executive Board*. 2024.
[21] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Rules of procedure of the United Nations Habitat Assembly (HSP/HA.1/HLS.2)*. 2019.
[22] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *UN Habitat New Structure*. 2021.
[23] Ibid.
[24] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Monthly update including funding status*. 2024.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.

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https://www.globalgoals.org/goals/11-sustainable-cities-and-communities/

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Retrieved 27 July 2024 from: https://habitat3.org/the-conference/about-habitat-3/

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https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal17

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Settlements and the status, role and functions of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements
(A/RES/56/206)*. 2002. Retrieved 27 July 2024 from: www.undocs.org/en/A/RES/56/206

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from: https://unhabitat.org/about-us/learn-more

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Retrieved 30 July 2024 from: https://unhabitat.org/monthly-update-including-funding-status

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Assembly (HSP/HA.1/HLS.2)*. 2019. Retrieved 30 July 2024 from:
https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/01/rules_of_procedure_of_the_united_nations_habitat_assem
bly.pdf

United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Slum Upgrading*. 2024. Retrieved 27 July 2024 from:
https://unhabitat.org/topic/slum-upgrading

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July 2024 from: https://unhabitat.org/about-us/sustainable-development-goals

United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *UN-Habitat Assembly*. 2024. Retrieved 30 July 2024
from: https://unhabitat.org/governance/un-habitat-assembly

United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *UN Habitat New Structure*. 2021. Retrieved 30 July 2024
from: https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/11/un-habitat_new_structure_-_01.11.2021.pdf

1. Achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11

"For all of us to survive and prosper, we need new, intelligent urban planning that creates safe, affordable and resilient cities with green and culturally inspiring living conditions."[27]

Introduction

Over the past century, the world's population has exponentially increased, with the majority of the growth taking place in urban areas.[28] In 2020, the United Nations endorsed a common definition for three types of human settlements.[29] Cities are defined as having at least 50,000 inhabitants and a population density of more than 1,500 per km².[30] Towns and semi-dense areas are defined as having at least 5,000 inhabitants and a population density of at least 300 per km², and rural areas are considered everything else.[31] The number of individuals living in urban centers is forecasted to double by 2050, whereby it is estimated that nearly 7 in 10 people will live in cities.[32] The pace of this growth has created numerous sustainable development challenges that are not localized to one specific geographic area or demographic.[33] Cities comprise of just 3% of the world's land, but are responsible for 70% of the world's carbon emissions and consume between 60% and 80% of all energy produced.[34] Currently, 1.1 billion people live in slums or informal settlements, with that population expected to increase by 2 billion over the next three decades.[35]

Slums are defined as having one or more indicators of a "household deprivation," which includes a lack of access to water sources, sanitation facilities, sufficient living space, durable housing or security of tenure.[36] Security of tenure is a set of legal and informal relationships that allows for one to live in one's home in peace, security and dignity.[37] Informal settlements are considered synonymous to slums, but the focus of their definition often relates to the legal status of the ownership of the land, structure, or services.[38] Additionally, only one in two people worldwide have access to public transportation and three out of four cities have less than 20% of their land dedicated to public spaces or streets.[39] The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs states that urban air pollution contributes to one in ten deaths annually.[40] At the SDG Summit in 2023, the Secretary-General stated that the world is off target with many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and SDG 11 is no exception.[41] Conflict, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic have largely contributed to setbacks observed in achieving SDG

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[27] The Global Goals Campaign. Project Everyone. *11: Sustainable Cities and Communities*. N.d.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Dijkstra. Penn Institute for Urban Research. *UN Endorses a Uniform Measure for Urbanization*. 2020.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] World Bank Group. *Urban Development: Overview*. 2024.
[33] United Nations. *Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable*. N.d.
[34] United Nations Development Programme. *The SDGs in Action: Goal 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities*. 2024.
[35] United Nations. *Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable*. N.d.
[36] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *SDG Indicator 11.1.1 Training Module: Adequate Housing and Slum Upgrading*. 2018. pp. 8-11.
[37] United Nations Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing. *Guiding Principles on Security of Tenure for the Urban Poor*. 2014.
[38] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *SDG Indicator 11.1.1 Training Module: Adequate Housing and Slum Upgrading*. 2018. p. 12.
[39] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division. *Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable*. 2024.
[40] Ibid.
[41] United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *World Leaders Adopt Sweeping Political Declaration Reaffirming Commitment to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals, as Summit Commences (GA/12529)*. 2023.

11.[42] Challenges around access to infrastructure and funding pose continued roadblocks to the creation of sustainable cities.[43] With cities now playing such an outsized role in the overall well-being of the majority of the world's population, sustainable urban development and policy is therefore paramount in not only achieving SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), but the majority of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda).[44]

International and Regional Framework

In the 1970s, the international community, alarmed by the rapid and inequitable rate of urbanization, especially within the developing world, convened a conference on human settlements in Vancouver, Canada.[45] Habitat I, marked the first time policy makers discussed the idea of sustainable human settlements and the consequences related to rapid urbanization at the international level.[46] The outcome of this conference, known as the *Vancouver Declaration of Human Settlements*, and the related *Vancouver Action Plan* would serve as the first major strategy document on urban development.[47] The declaration drew the parallel that the conditions of human settlements largely determined quality of life, and that many of these conditions were unacceptable for many people.[48] The action plan provided 64 policy recommendations for countries to undertake in order to address urban growth challenges at the national level.[49] Less than two years later, in 1978, this document would play an important role in the formal creation of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), with the declaration and action plan serving as the cornerstones for the agency's mandate of promoting social and environmentally sustainable urban centers.[50]

Habitat II, convened in 1996 in Istanbul, Türkiye, reaffirmed the principles set in Habitat I and expanded upon the idea of what sustainable urban development should look like.[51] The international community adopted the Habitat Agenda within the *Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements* (Istanbul Declaration), which has 100 commitments and 600 recommendations.[52] It formulated two of UN-Habitat's main goals which are, "ensuring adequate shelter for all, and guaranteeing sound development of human settlements in an urbanizing world."[53] The agenda strongly advocated for a decentralized approach to better meet the demands of a rapidly changing urban landscape by aiming to strengthen the institutional and financial capabilities of local and municipal governments.[54] This way development could happen faster and would better meet the specific challenges of communities at a more grassroots level.[55]

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[42] United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *World Leaders Adopt Sweeping Political Declaration Reaffirming Commitment to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals, as Summit Commences (GA/12529)*. 2023.
[43] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet: Executive Summary*. 2023.
[44] Daniel. UN Chronicle. *Goal 11–Cities Will Play an Important Role in Achieving the SDGs*. 2015.
[45] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *History, mandate & role in the UN system*. 2024.
[46] United Nations. *Conferences Habitat: Background*. N.d.
[47] United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. *Report of Habitat: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements Vancouver, 31 May - 11 June 1976 (A/CONF.70/15)*. 1976.
[48] Ibid.
[49] United Nations. *Conferences Habitat: Background*. N.d.
[50] United Nations. *Conferences Habitat: Background*. N.d; United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *History, mandate & role in the UN system*. 2024.
[51] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *History, mandate & role in the UN system*. 2024; United Nations, Department of Public Information. *Habitat Agenda and Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements Summary: Road Map to the Future*. 1996.
[52] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *History, mandate & role in the UN system*. 2024.
[53] Ibid.
[54] United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. *Report of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (HABITAT II) Istanbul, 3-14 June 1996 (A/CONF.165/14)*. 1996.
[55] Ibid.

In 2015, the General Assembly adopted the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda).[56] The 2030 Agenda contains the SDGs, which have served as the driving force behind much of what the United Nations system is doing as it pertains to human development.[57] Goal 11 (sustainable cities and communities), includes 10 targets.[58] These include: access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing (11.1), access to safe and affordable transportation (11.2), inclusive urbanization (11.3), safeguarding cultural and natural heritage sights (11.4), reduction in adverse natural disaster effects (11.5), reduction in negative environmental impacts (11.6), providing safe and inclusive public and green spaces (11.7), creating strong national and regional planning infrastructure (11.a), implementing policies that address inclusion, resource efficiency and disaster risk reduction (11.b), and supporting least developed countries in their development (11.c).[59] Less than a year later, Habitat III convened in 2016 in Quito, Ecuador whereby the international community sought to create policies that would enable them to attain the targets laid out in the SDGs as it pertained to sustainable urban development.[60] The conference resulted in the *Quito Declaration* and the creation of the *New Urban Agenda* (NUA).[61]

The NUA serves as the most current policy framework for UN-Habitat and aims to create actionable items that would directly contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.[62] There are four core dimensions to the agenda which include, social, economic, environmental, and spatial (i.e. the physical form and area) sustainabilities.[63] The agenda lays out standards for planning, construction and good practices for the management and improvement of cities.[64] It builds upon the local approach to urban development initially defined in Habitat II, and stresses the vital need of stakeholders ranging from governments and private entities to continue to partner in order to realize these goals.[65] Lastly, the agenda contains provisions for adequate reporting and monitoring of these action items to ensure that the goals are being met.[66]

Regionally, UN-Habitat, realized the need to create a comprehensive monitoring framework, to standardize the progress on the attainment of SDG 11.[67] In 2016, it published the *SDG Goal 11 Monitoring Framework*.[68] This document was designed to help various levels of government in their efforts of collecting, analyzing, and validating data as they prepare and publish country based reports on their progress.[69] This was done by providing a standardized set of definitions, method of computation, and the sharing of key spatial and metadata indicators.[70] The reports that Member States create from this framework have come to be known as voluntary national reports (VNRs), and are one of the most important measures of individual progress on many of the SDGs including SDG 11.[71] At the SDG Summit convened by the General Assembly in 2023, nine countries presented their VNRs.[72] These presentations not only shared progress on the SDG targets, but also highlighted challenges being faced as well as

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[56] United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

[60] United Nations. *Conferences Habitat: Background*. N.d.

[61] Ibid.

[62] United Nations, General Assembly. *New Urban Agenda (A/RES/71/256)*. 2016.

[63] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *The New Urban Agenda Illustrated Handbook*. 2020.

[64] United Nations, General Assembly. *New Urban Agenda (A/RES/71/256)*. 2016.

[65] Ibid.

[66] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *The New Urban Agenda Illustrated Handbook*. 2020.

[67] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *UN-Habitat: Monitoring Framework, SDG Goal 11*. 2016. pp. 1-3.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

[71] International Institute for Sustainable Development. *HLPF 2023 Reviews SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11, and 17, Begins Discussion of VNRs*. 2023.

[72] Ibid.

lessons learned at the country level.[73] Of the 179 VNRs that have been published, 150 have specifically addressed SDG 11.[74]

Role of the International System

UN-Habitat is the principal authority tasked with urban development within the United Nations system, resulting in a mandate that mostly overlaps with SDG 11.[75] It works to improve the quality of life in urban areas by providing policy advice, technical knowledge and capacity building support to various stakeholders.[76] The agency is guided by a strategic plan that encompasses four pillars, coined as the "domains of change," which are in line with the SDGs.[77] These include: addressing spatial inequality and poverty, sharing prosperity in cities and regions, climate action, and urban crisis prevention and response.[78]

Various United Nations organizations assist in the achievement of SDG 11 as it relates to the targets that overlap within their respective mandates.[79] The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), plays a large role in addressing target 11.4, which aims to strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage.[80] The UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) created a standardized indicator which measures per capita spending on the protection of these assets, in both the private and public sectors.[81] The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) is tasked with reducing existing risk, preventing new disaster risks, and strengthening overall resilience.[82] As it pertains to SDG target 11.b, UNDRR created the Making Cities Resilient 2030 (MCR2030) campaign.[83] This initiative brings cities and various stakeholders together to build resilient systems through advocacy, city-to-city learning networks, sharing technical know-how, and connecting layers of governments together.[84] There are currently 1,716 cities that participate representing almost half a billion people.[85]

One of the best avenues the United Nations has to track all of this progress is the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).[86] This annual meeting, as mandated by the General Assembly, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, is the highest platform that brings together stakeholders throughout the international system to follow up and review the SDGs.[87] The HLPF reviewed progress of SDG 11 in 2023 and released a synthesis report regarding its progress.[88] The report notes that the world is off track in terms of achieving SDG 11 by a large margin.[89] If left unaddressed, the rising inequality amongst the least and most vulnerable socioeconomic groups, also known as the urban divide, will have lasting consequences on the achievement of this agenda.[90] The report attributed the

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[73] International Institute for Sustainable Development. *HLPF 2023 Reviews SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11, and 17, Begins Discussion of VNRs*. 2023.

[74] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet*. 2023. p. 10.

[75] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *About Us*. 2024.

[76] Ibid.

[77] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *The Strategic Plan 2020-2023*. 2019.

[78] Ibid.

[79] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *11 Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable: Progress and Info*. N.d.

[80] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics. *Sustainable Development Goal 11.4*. 2024.

[81] Ibid.

[82] United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. *Our Work*. N.d.

[83] United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. *MCR2030: Making Cities Resilient*. 2024.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

[86] United Nations. *High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development*. 2024.

[87] Ibid.

[88] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet*. 2023.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid.

COVID-19 pandemic to the decline in progress that had been made in the achievement of SDG 11, especially around adequate housing.[91]

One of the largest non-governmental organizations (NGOs) committed specifically to the mission of sustainable and affordable housing is Habitat for Humanity.[92] This organization, which operates within 70 countries, not only helps disadvantaged families in creating safe dwellings, but also does a significant amount of advocacy in many levels of government and the United Nations system.[93] This advocacy is focused around four areas which include, housing, security of tenure, community led development, and open and transparent access to data for the United Nations and governments.[94] In 2016, Habitat for Humanity was one of the largest NGOs to contribute to the creation of the NUA having been able to incorporate all three of its major advocacy focuses into policy within the agenda.[95] The World Bank Group has also been instrumental through both its advocacy and funding initiatives of the SDGs.[96] In 2023, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) issued a three year sustainable development bond focusing on the importance of sustainable cities.[97] The bond raised approximately $50 million, and will fund initiatives around achieving SDG 11 in line with the World Bank's Sustainable Development Framework.[98]

Inadequate Housing, Informal Settlements & Slums

UN-Habitat considers housing adequacy as an all encompassing concept that includes affordability, structural integrity and well located and serviced housing.[99] This translates to the idea that there are various forms of inadequate housing.[100] Informal settlements is a broad concept and is defined as areas where residents living in a given area do not own or have the legal right to the land that they are occupying.[101] This results from informal settlements being developed outside of official housing and land markets or planning regulations.[102] Informal settlements are often related to poor urban policy resulting from urbanization that is occurring too quickly or when there is a lack of affordable housing.[103] Slums, often a form of informal settlements, are almost always defined by their abject poverty, poor housing and living conditions.[104] The number of people living in these environments is estimated to be one in eight worldwide.[105] UN-Habitat specifically defines a slum household as an urban dwelling unit that is lacking one or more of the following criteria: durable, permanent housing that is protective of climate events, sufficient living space that equates to less than three people sharing a room, access to affordable and

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[91] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet*. 2023.
[92] Habitat for Humanity. *Policy Brief: January 2020: Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 11*. 2020.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] World Bank Group. *World Bank Issues Sustainable Development Bond While Highlighting Importance of Sustainable Cities in Eliminating Poverty and Boosting Shared Prosperity*. 2023.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet*. 2023. p. 23.
[100] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *The world is failing to provide adequate housing*. 2023.
[101] United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development. *HABITAT III Issue Papers: 22 - Informal Settlements*. 2015.
[102] Jason. Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. *Sustainable Development: Slums, Informal Settlements and the Role of Land Policy*. 2018.
[103] United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development. *HABITAT III Issue Papers: 22 - Informal Settlements*. 2015.
[104] Jason. Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. *Sustainable Development: Slums, Informal Settlements and the Role of Land Policy*. 2018.
[105] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *The Challenge of Slums*. 2003.

safe water, and security of tenure.[106] Slums are also heavily populated areas and often are socially isolated.[107] They lack proper infrastructure, including roads, public transportation, electricity, sewage, or access to healthcare or education.[108]

While there is significant overlap between the two, it is important to note that while most slums are a form of informal settlement, not all informal settlements are slums.[109] The question of an informal settlement is around the legal status of land ownership and use, with some informal settlements having what would be considered dignified living conditions.[110] It is important to stress that slums on the other hand are often the most challenging living environments that pose significant threats to the individuals overall well-being and carry multiple indicators of deprivation.[111] These conditions often perpetuate the cycle of poverty, and complicate the attainment of many other SDG goals like access to healthcare and education.[112]

SDG 11.1 aims to ensure universal adequate housing and basic services for all as well as to upgrade slums.[113] The world remains off-target in reducing the number of people who specifically live in slums, with some regions even expected to see a larger portion of the population living in them in the future.[114] Almost all slum dwellers are concentrated to South and Eastern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.[115] The United Nations has recognized that a significant improvement in the living conditions in these places is urgently required.[116] In 2022, a global action plan (GAP) for accelerating and transforming informal settlements and slums by 2030 was released by UN-Habitat in partnership with key stakeholders including the European Union, Slum Dwellers International, the World Bank Group and Habitat for Humanity.[117] The GAP aims to improve slums in a comprehensive manner, while applying key lessons that have been learned over the past two decades.[118] The focus of the plan includes provisions like the legal recognition of slums and informal settlements to allow for socially inclusive policy, reduction in spatial inequality, as well as the need for housing and infrastructure that will stand up to climate change.[119] Another key element to the plan is the ideological shift to co-creation and joint partnership driven policy and action.[120] The United Nations system has recognized that the incredibly complex nature of slums requires a multifaceted approach with all stakeholders working in harmony within a common framework of achieving SDGs.[121]

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[106] Cities Alliance. *Slums and Slum Upgrading*. 2024.

[107] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *The Challenge of Slums*. 2003.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Chatterjee. Assemble Papers. *The making of informal settlements*. 2019; Jason. Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. *Sustainable Development: Slums, Informal Settlements and the Role of Land Policy*. 2018.

[110] Jason. Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. *Sustainable Development: Slums, Informal Settlements and the Role of Land Policy*. 2018; United Nations Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing. *Guiding Principles on Security of Tenure for the Urban Poor*. 2014.

[111] United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development. *HABITAT III Issue Papers: 22 - Informal Settlements*. 2015.

[112] Urban Hub Team. Save the Children International. *A Global Action Plan to transform slums and help children thrive was approved: but where is the money?*. 2023.

[113] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet*. 2023.

[114] Ibid.

[115] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *The Sustainable Development Goals Extended Report 2023: 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities*. 2023.

[116] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Global Action Plan: Accelerating for Transforming Informal Settlements and Slums by 2030*. 2022. p. 4.

[117] Ibid. p. 4.

[118] Ibid. p. 17.

[119] Ibid. pp. 20-21.

[120] Ibid. pp. 9-11.

[121] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *The World is Failing to Provide Adequate Housing*. 2023.

While slums and informal settlements are heavily observed in developing countries, there are many aspects to inadequate housing that also affect more affluent economies.[122] This is because inadequate housing also includes provisions around housing affordability, accessibility and cultural adequacy.[123] UN-Habitat monitors aspects of inadequate housing as it also pertains to developed countries, especially when housing may be lacking or unaffordable.[124] Some examples of inadequate housing in developed countries include poor building codes and homes that are too small for the amount of occupants.[125] This trend is especially prominent and affects lower income renters living in smaller cities.[126]

Housing affordability, in particular, is affecting at least 1.6 billion people worldwide.[127] This global affordability crisis is not only responsible for the inadequate housing conditions observed in developed countries, but is also a major driver for the creation of slums and informal settlements in other places.[128] In Europe alone, 100 million low to middle income people are financially overburdened in affording adequate housing, using more than 40% of their income to afford their residence.[129] UN-Habitat estimates that 96,000 units of affordable housing are needed *per day* to meet demand and achieve adequate housing by 2030.[130] It is therefore imperative to create innovative policies that address things like increasing access to funding, especially for lower income and vulnerable people in order to achieve SDG 11.[131] Without access to capital resources, people will remain unable to afford homes, or be able to make upgrades to make their housing more secure.[132] Other bottlenecks to affordability include reducing barriers to zoning and land use regulations, increasing security of tenure to catalyze investment, and encouraging more political participation of communities facing inadequate housing so that their voices are not diminished in decisions that directly affect them.[133]

Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Transport Infrastructure

It is estimated that only half the world's population has access to reliable, sustainable transportation infrastructure.[134] SDG 11.2 directly addresses urban transportation.[135] The world remains off target in achieving this goal.[136] Cities are growing physically faster than the population growth, and therefore are

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[122] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Global Action Plan: Accelerating for Transforming Informal Settlements and Slums by 2030 presentation handout*. 2022.

[123] Ibid.

[124] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet*. 2023. pp. 23-25.

[125] Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University. *Housing Inadequacy Remains a Problem for the Lowest-Income Renters*. 2016.

[126] Ibid.

[127] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet*. 2023. p. 17.

[128] Ibid. pp. 118-121.

[129] Ibid. p. 23.

[130] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet Booklet*. 2023.

[131] Urban Hub Team. Save the Children International. *A Global Action Plan to transform slums and help children thrive was approved: but where is the money?*. 2023; Duncan. Habitat for Humanity. *Causes of Inadequate Housing in Latin America and the Caribbean*. N.d. p. 34.

[132] Urban Hub Team. Save the Children International. *A Global Action Plan to transform slums and help children thrive was approved: but where is the money?*. 2023.

[133] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet*. 2023. pp. 24-26.

[134] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division. *Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable*. 2024.

[135] United Nations. *Sustainable Transport, Sustainable Development*. 2021. p. 19.

[136] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet: Executive Summary*. 2023. p. 6.

becoming less walkable.[137] Most public transport is also low capacity (small buses) despite the need for higher capacity and almost 50% of all trips are operated by private transport.[138]

In 2014, former Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon created the High-Level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport (HLAG-ST).[139] The three year mandate of the group was to develop sustainable transport policies and encourage local, national and global partnerships between all possible stakeholders involved.[140] The HLAG-ST defined the term of sustainable transport as "the provision of services and infrastructure for the mobility of people and goods - advancing economic and social development to benefit today's and future generations - in a manner that is safe, affordable, accessible, efficient, and resilient, while minimizing carbon and other emissions and environmental impacts."[141] In its report *Mobilizing Sustainable Transport for Development*, it was recommended to shift transport planning from the current method of just adding additional infrastructure, to a more purpose driven approach known as Avoid-Shift-Improve (ASI).[142] In this approach, planners avoid inefficient or unnecessary travel, shift to more efficient modes of transportation, routes and infrastructure, and commit to improving the environmental impact of transport.[143] There has been adoption and success of this policy, most notably in 2011, when transport and environmental agencies from Central and South America came together in the first regional sustainable forum resulting in the adoption of the *Bogota Declaration*.[144] The declaration used the ASI framework and agreed to 25 objectives to meet this goal.[145] Objectives included committing to reduce individual motorized travel at the urban level, promoting river and rail modes of transport and reducing transport related emissions.[146] This has resulted in numerous national and regional programs that have been successful in furthering progress in several SDGs in addition to target 11.2.[147] For example, ASI based solutions can account for 40-60% reductions in transport emissions.[148]

Other areas of opportunity, as highlighted by UN-Habitat, remain largely connected to a lack of infrastructure, funding and access.[149] In real terms there just isn't enough transportation infrastructure in the world, whether it be road networks or public transportation systems.[150] One very large area of deficiency is the connection between urban and rural centers, with many individuals in rural areas having no reliable access to transport.[151] In cities, access to transportation also presents varying areas of opportunity.[152] The growing elderly population is more reliant on sustainable transportation infrastructure

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[137] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet: Executive Summary*. 2023. p. 6.

[138] Ibid. p. 6.

[139] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Secretary-General's Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport welcomes new agenda*. 2015.

[140] Ibid.

[141] United Nations. *Sustainable Transport, Sustainable Development*. 2021; United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport. *Mobilizing Sustainable Transport for Development*. 2016. p. 10.

[142] United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport. *Mobilizing Sustainable Transport for Development*. 2016. pp. 16-17.

[143] United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport. *Mobilizing Sustainable Transport for Development*. 2016. pp. 16-17.

[144] Foro de Transporte Sostenible para América Latina. *Bogota Declaration*. 2011.

[145] Ibid.

[146] Ibid.

[147] SLOCAT Partnership. *Avoid-Shift-Improve Refocusing*. 2024.

[148] Ibid.

[149] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet*. 2023. p. 34.

[150] Ibid.

[151] Ibid.

[152] United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport. *Mobilizing Sustainable Transport for Development*. 2016. p. 14.

for their mobility.[153] Additionally, women and girls are more severely impacted when access to transportation is not safe or reliable.[154] UN-Habitat, in its 2023 SDG 11 synthesis report, found that women are often underrepresented in transport agencies and that much of the transport needs of women are unknown especially as much of the current transportation data available has an implicit gender bias.[155] The World Economic Forum reinforced the gender disparity observed in transport stating that current transport infrastructure does not match the travel patterns of women and that policymakers often overlook their needs.[156] It is estimated that 20+ million women would need to be employed in the sector if it were to reach gender parity.[157] Organizations such as the International Transportation Union and Sustainable Mobility for All have recognized this disparity and have built gender working groups to address these challenges.[158] Attaining the SDG 11.2 target therefore will require innovative solutions to challenges ranging from good infrastructure policy to leaving no one behind.[159]

Conclusion

The rate of urbanization continues to increase, and cities are projected to house the overwhelming majority of the world's population.[160] This exponential growth has brought real challenges to urban development, many of which have only deteriorated since they were first defined in the late 1970s.[161] These conditions have placed significant downward pressure on the attainment of SDG 11.[162] 2023 was a unique year, in that it served as the midpoint for the 2030 Agenda, and the world is at a critical inflection point in regards to the SDGs.[163] At the SDG summit, Secretary-General António Guterres had a sober warning, "the SDGs need a global rescue plan."[164] Systemic issues, such as affordability of housing, and access to sustainable infrastructure and funding continue to remain key challenges in sustainable urban planning.[165] The creation and implementation of innovation solutions such as ASI is imperative.[166] In order to achieve this collective vision, there must be a concerted effort to accelerate progress of the 5 Ps of the SDGs (people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnerships) and the achievement of SDG 11 is a key to realizing the overall 2030 Agenda.[167]

Further Research

As delegates conduct further research and consider how to address this topic, they should consider: What challenges in regards to sustainable cities and communities does your Member State face? How have

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[153] United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport. *Mobilizing Sustainable Transport for Development*. 2016. p. 14.

[154] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet*. 2023. pp. 32-33.

[155] Ibid.

[156] World Economic Forum. *Transport has a gender bias problem. This is what needs to change*. 2022.

[157] Ibid.

[158] Ibid.

[159] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *The Sustainable Development Goals Extended Report 2023: 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities*. 2023.

[160] World Bank Group. *Urban Development: Overview*. 2024.

[161] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet*. 2023.

[162] Ibid.

[163] United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *World Leaders Adopt Sweeping Political Declaration Reaffirming Commitment to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals, as Summit Commences (GA/12529)*. 2023.

[164] Ibid.

[165] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet: Executive Summary*. 2023.

[166] United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport. *Mobilizing Sustainable Transport for Development*. 2016.

[167] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet*. 2023.

various systemic risks such as climate change or the COVID-19 pandemic altered the achievement of SDG 11? What are innovative ways for the least developed countries to attain more sustainable urban development? How can partnerships be further utilized in developing better cities? What are ways to address funding challenges or shortfalls when building sustainable housing and urban infrastructure?

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2. Creating Inclusive Cities for the Elderly

"Older persons are invaluable sources of knowledge and experience and have much to contribute towards peace, sustainable development, and protecting our planet."[168]

Introduction

The world is aging rapidly, in 2021 it was estimated that 761 million people were 65 years of age or older and that number is expected to double to 1.6 billion people by 2050.[169] The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) promotes the objective of a better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world by promoting socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities.[170] The *Strategic Plan 2020-2023* of UN-Habitat, acknowledges the challenges resulting from a rapidly urbanizing world that disproportionately affects the most vulnerable groups.[171] In fact, it recognizes that a correct implementation of the strategic plan will provide pathways to achieve a transformation towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[172] The elderly population, along with the increase of urbanization, are part of four global demographic megatrends, forcing a reorganization of how cities should be planned and managed effectively leaving no one behind.[173] According to the New Urban Agenda (NUA), it is expected that by 2050 the elderly population will double from 11% to 22%.[174] This will match the proportion of younger age groups living in cities from developed countries.[175] The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) defines an elderly person as someone aged 60 years and older.[176]

Urban population growth is estimated to increase from 55% to 68% in 2050.[177] Cities already face many challenges and crises such as inequalities, climate change, conflict, and are more sensitive to crises such as global pandemics.[178] These changes in population demographics within the world's urban centers will significantly impact societies, affecting all regions.[179] As populations age, their basic needs change and the ways they participate within society also adjusts.[180] Historically, elderly populations were often cared for by family, especially in rural settings.[181] However, as urbanization has increased, and with family units getting smaller, the responsibility of elderly care has fallen more on the State.[182] With advancements in modern medicine, the population ageing trend is irreversible, with the number of persons 65 and above expected to account for 1 in 6 people globally by 2050.[183] Policymakers will therefore need to address these complex issues, especially if the world is to meet the SDGs.[184]

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[168] Guterres. United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *International Day of Older Persons*. 2023.

[169] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Leaving No One Behind in an Ageing World: World Social Report 2023*. 2023. p. 17.

[170] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *About Us*. 2024.

[171] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *The Strategic Plan 2020-2023*. 2019. p 8.

[172] Ibid.

[173] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Euskal Hiria Kongresua 2020*. 2020. p. 3.

[174] World Health Organization. *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide*. 2007. p 8.

[175] Ibid.

[176] United Nations Development of Economic and Social Affairs. *World Population Ageing 2019*. 2020. p. 12.

[177] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Euskal Hiria Kongresua 2020*. 2020. p. 3.

[178] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Annual Report 2022*. 2023. p. 5.

[179] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Euskal Hiria Kongresua 2020*. 2020. p. 21.

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[181] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Eradicating Poverty and Promoting Prosperity for Older Populations in Cities*. 2017. p. 18.

[182] Ibid.

[183] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Leaving No One Behind in an Ageing World: World Social Report 2023*. 2023. p. 17.

[184] Ibid.

International and Regional Framework

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR), adopted in 1948, is a milestone historical document that outlines basic human rights for all.[185] Article 25 defines the right to have a standard of living that is adequate for the well-being of a person, and the right of security if unexpected issues such as unemployment, old age or other circumstances emerge.[186] This idea sets living standards for everyone regardless of origin, age, race, and gender.[187] The *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, adopted in 2006, recalls the necessity to guarantee access to persons with disabilities to retirement and housing that specifically address their disability.[188] The Convention outlined approaches of support related to education, personal independence, health, employment and social inclusion in communities where people live.[189]

The *United Nations Principles for Older Persons,* adopted by the General Assembly as resolution 46/91 in 1991, is a foundational document of 18 principles in regards to older persons that should be implemented by governments wherever possible.[190] Article 7 states that the elderly must be integrated in their communities giving them the chance to participate actively in the formulation and elaboration of policies that can directly affect their lifestyle as well as have the ability to share their knowledge and skills with younger generations.[191] In article 9, the elderly have the right to form movements or associations in order to propose and raise their voice within their communities.[192] Additionally, the principles further lay out that the elderly should benefit from family and community care as well as the ability to live with dignity and security that is free of exploitation and abuse.[193]

The *Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing* (MIPAA) was adopted at the Second World Assembly on Ageing in April 2002, and states that no one should be denied the chance to benefit from development.[194] The plan recognizes the social, cultural, economic and political contributions of the elderly in society and recommends ways that the elderly can share their knowledge and skills to future generations.[195] MIPAA firmly encourages the continued participation of elderly populations in society by allowing them to remain involved in community decision making processes.[196] MIPAA further calls for multifaceted strategies to be implemented to address the challenges elderly populations face.[197] One example is the improvement of the pension system in order for them to remain financially sustainable and continue to promote access for the elderly.[198]

The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda) adopted in 2015 as General Assembly resolution 70/1 aims to secure the rights and well-being of everyone.[199] The 2030 Agenda created the SDGs, a group of 17 overarching goals aimed at addressing various aspects of human development with

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[185] United Nations, General Assembly. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights.* (A/RES/217/A (1948)). 1948.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid.
[188] United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (A/RES/61/106)*. 2006. p. 19.
[189] Ibid.
[190] United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Principles for Older Persons (A/RES/46/91)*. 1991. p. 1.
[191] Ibid. p. 2.
[192] Ibid.p. 2.
[193] United Nations, General Assembly. *United Nations Principles for Older Persons (A/RES/46/91)*. 1991.
[194] United Nations, Second World Assembly on Ageing. *The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Political Declaration*. 2002. p. 19.
[195] Ibid. p. 20.
[196] Ibid. p. 21.
[197] Ibid. p. 21.
[198] Ibid. p.19.
[199] United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *The Sustainable Development Agenda: 17 Goals for People, for Planet*. N.d.

the goal of attaining these targets by 2030.[200] Goal 3 (good health and well-being), seeks to promote physical and mental health and to extend life expectancy for all by developing universal health care.[201] Goal 10 (reduce inequalities) is key to acknowledging that elderly face many, unique obstacles and should not be left behind.[202] Lastly, Goal 11 (sustainable cities and communities) aims to promote access to adequate housing and basic services, enhancing sustainable urbanization and giving special attention to vulnerable populations.[203] This goal acknowledges that working with authorities and communities to renew and plan cities for sustainable development and management are crucial to the quality of life for all people.[204]

The most recent United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (HABITAT III), in 2016, adopted the *New Urban Agenda* (NUA) in Quito, Ecuador and is considered the United Nations' most current framework related to sustainable urban development.[205] Paragraph 62 of the NUA commits to improve the quality of life of elderly by addressing economic, social and spatial issues while planning urban development.[206] The NUA acknowledges there remains opportunities for cities to develop policies that will improve local communities' lifestyles, including those of the elderly.[207] The NUA highlights the need for public-private partnerships in order to enhance cities when creating urban policy.[208] Further, the NUA stresses that achieving the 2030 Agenda, should also remain a central focus when coordinating cooperation and implementation of both frameworks.[209]

Role of the International System

UN-Habitat works to implement policies and programs all over the world in cooperation with local and national governments as it pertains to sustainable urban development.[210] UN-Habitat's focus relies on maximizing interactions between normative and operational work, aiming to impact areas needing it the most.[211] In its *2022 Annual Report*, UN-Habitat outlined several priorities which included the reduction of spatial inequalities and poverty in urban and rural communities, enhancing shared prosperity of cities, strengthening action on climate change while improving urban environments and creating effective responses on urban crises.[212] UN-Habitat established the Urban Agenda Platform (UAP) as a comprehensive progress tracker on the implementation of the NUA.[213] These trackers have a crucial role in generating real time data which helps decision makers take effective action on current urban challenges.[214] In order to increase the impact in communities, UN-Habitat has helped local governments address spatial connectivity through deployment of frontier technologies as part of their smart city strategies.[215]

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[200] United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *The Sustainable Development Agenda: 17 Goals for People, for Planet*. N.d.

[201] United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. p. 7.

[202] Ibid. p. 21.

[203] Ibid. p. 21.

[204] Ibid.p. 9.

[205] United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development. *New Urban Agenda*. 2016. p. 4.

[206] Ibid. p. 18.

[207] Ibid. p. 4.

[208] Ibid. p. 9.

[209] Ibid. p. 40.

[210] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Improving the Quality of Life of Elderly and Disabled People in Human Settlements.* 1993. p. 17.

[211] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *The Strategic Plan 2020-2023.* 2019. p 19.

[212] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Annual Report 2022*. 2023. p. 11.

[213] United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development. *New Urban Agenda*. 2016. p. 8.

[214] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Urban Observatories*. N.d.

[215] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Annual Report 2022*. 2023. p. 14.

The General Assembly has been a vocal advocate and partner for the elderly and the challenges that they face.[216] "The follow up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing", adopted by the General Assembly as resolution 78/177 in 2023, called upon all Member States to include global efforts towards an age-inclusive implementation of the 2030 Agenda.[217] The resolution also encourages the international community to link population ageing with sustainable development, and to create policies and programmes that address these challenges across all levels of government.[218] It also recommends that Member States improve their capacity to collect more accurate age-disaggregated statistics to improve assessment of the situation of the elderly worldwide.[219] In 2020, the General Assembly proclaimed the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021-2030 and tasked the World Health Organization (WHO) with leading the decade with the mandate of improving mechanisms on elderly development in their communities while supporting the progress of the SDGs.[220] Additionally, the General Assembly adopted in 2010 resolution 65/182 the "Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing General Assembly" (OEWGA).[221] OEWGA would evaluate the status of human rights of the elderly and identify and address gaps or inequalities within the international system and community.[222] OEWGA meets annually whereby global leaders and relevant stakeholders share ideas and promote the development of new policies and programs that address the identified gaps presented.[223] The fourteenth session of the OEWGA focused on accessibility, infrastructure and habitat regarding adequate housing and ensuring participation in public life and decision making processes.[224]

UN DESA compiles data and information around economic, social and environment policy areas, and uses it to analyze and generate proposals.[225] It runs the Programme on Ageing, which facilitates and promotes MIPAA.[226] The programme works to incorporate these concerns into global agendas, thereby enhancing the partnership between civil society and private sector stakeholders.[227] It also implemented the High-level panel discussion on the Fourth Review and Appraisal of the MIPAA with a shared vision of equality for persons of all ages.[228] Lastly, UN DESA published the *World Social Report 2023: Leaving No One Behind In An Ageing World*.[229] This report stresses the implementation of healthy ageing through different approaches to reduce inequalities by preventing poverty and ensuring economic and health security for retirement.[230]

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[216] United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Ageing.* N.d.

[217] United Nations, General Assembly. *Follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing (A/RES/78/177)*. 2023. p. 4.

[218] Ibid. p. 4.

[219] Ibid. p. 4.

[220] Amuthavalli et al. *The UN Decade of healthy Ageing: strengthening measurement for monitoring health and wellbeing of older people*. 2022; World Health Organization. *Ageing and Health*. 2022.

[221] United Nations, General Assembly. *Follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing (A/RES/65/182)*. 2010.

[222] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Open-ended Working Group on Ageing for the purpose of strengthening the human rights of older persons: Who Are We?*. 2024.

[223] United Nations, General Assembly. *Follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing (A/RES/65/182)*. 2010.

[224] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Fourteenth Session*. 2024.

[225] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *World Social Report 2023: Leaving No One Behind In An Ageing World*. 2023.

[226] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *United Nations DESA Programme on Ageing*. 2024.

[227] Ibid.

[228] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *High-Level Panel Discussion On The Fourth Review And Appraisal Of The Madrid International Plan Of Action On Ageing*. 2023.

[229] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *World Social Report 2023: Leaving No One Behind In An Ageing World*. 2023. p. 5.

[230] Ibid. pp. 5.

As the leading United Nations body on health, WHO has been a major policy contributor regarding aging and the elderly.[231] In 2007, WHO published the *Global age-friendly cities: a guide* that showed advantages and barriers that the elderly experience in many areas of city living.[232] It emphasized that an age-friendly city adapts its structures and services to be accessible and inclusive to the elderly based on their changing needs.[233] This guide is not only focused on the development of urban cities, but also includes provisions on how non-urban communities can become more age-friendly to increase prosperity and quality of life for all.[234] WHO promotes a conceptual approach on aging with three pillars: health, participation and security.[235] As it pertains to health, WHO focuses on primary health care, meeting the specific health needs of the elderly population, especially in areas such as chronic and noncommunicable diseases.[236] WHO also brings together governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), industry leaders and elderly representatives interested in promoting actions, creating dialogue and brainstorming new solutions to the various challenges aging brings to elderly populations.[237]

There are numerous local and international NGOs working to improve the quality of life of older persons.[238] One such organization is the International Federation on Ageing (IFA), started in 1973 and operating in 75 countries, the IFA worked to draft key initiatives in the *UN Principles for Older Persons*, and was a major advocate in the SDGs recognizing the needs of the elderly.[239] Additionally, in recent years IFA has also been focusing some of their efforts on the specific needs of the elderly LGBTQI communities.[240] It also hosts global conferences with various NGOs, academic institutions, policy makers and other stakeholders to advance the rights and needs of the elderly[241] Another organization, HelpAge International (HAI) works in lower and middle income countries with the mission of helping older men and women lead active, dignified and healthy lives.[242] Their 2030 strategy has eight pillars and includes things like improving income security, fighting ageism and other forms of discrimination and responding to humanitarian crises.[243]

Adequate Housing: Promoting Inclusive Cities for the Elderly

Globally, more than 1.8 billion people are lacking access to adequate housing as a result from many variables such as forced eviction, migration, discrimination or social exclusion.[244] Elderly populations currently find themselves struggling to feel included into modern societies with multiple challenges that restrict their human rights and contribution to their communities.[245] One important issue of exclusion comes from access to basic services through marginalization and emotional or financial abuse.[246] The exclusion the elderly face has its origin where at a certain age, the elderly stop working due to declining health or family responsibilities, leading them to live with very low or non-existent social benefits that can

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[231] World Health Organization. *Ageing: WHO Response*. 2024.

[232] World Health Organization. *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide*. 2007. p. 1.

[233] Ibid. p. 1.

[234] Ibid. p. 75.

[235] World Health Organization. *International Plan of Action on Ageing: report on implementation (EB115/19 (2004))*. 2004. p. 1.

[236] Ibid. p. 2.

[237] World Health Organization. *Ageing: WHO Response*. 2024.

[238] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *List of NGOs Accredited to the OEWG on Ageing*. 2011.

[239] International Federation on Ageing. *Driving our AGEnda*. 2024.

[240] International Federation on Ageing. *Older LGBTQI People*. 2024.

[241] International Federation on Ageing. *IFA´s 17th Global Conference on Ageing*. 2024; International Federation on Ageing. *Partners*. N.d.

[242] HelpAge International. *What we do*. N.d.

[243] Ibid.

[244] United Nations, Human Settlements Programme. *Housing rights*. 2024.

[245] United Nations Development Programme. *Ageing, Older Persons and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. 2017. p. 14.

[246] Ibid. p. 15.

result in extreme poverty.[247] In areas where the elderly population are rapidly growing, the government's capacity to provide adequate social housing protection for them is lacking.[248] Often, cities are governed by both formal and informal systems that work independently to respond to basic needs of vulnerable populations.[249]

Due to increasing population and urbanization, providing adequate housing and social support requires cooperation between all levels of government.[250] This is crucial given that populations are growing significantly in urban areas with 66% of the global population expected to be living in urban settings by 2050.[251] Policymakers will need to determine and formulate goals to raise public awareness to address the current housing challenges in order to achieve the SDGs.[252] Some of these targets include: Goal 10 (reduced inequalities) and Goal 11 (sustainable cities and communities) especially where the elderly find themselves forced to leave their jobs, feel abandoned, excluded and in some scenarios, become homeless.[253] A broad effort to reduce poverty and homelessness among the elderly is key to addressing the inadequate housing challenges they face.[254] One method that has been effective is the extension of pension (social security) systems to ensure income security and extend social protection.[255]

According to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), the right to adequate housing is defined by a place to live in security, peace and dignity.[256] The specific rights elderly should be entitled to are described in Fact Sheet No. 21, published by the United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, which contemplates equal and non-discriminatory access to adequate housing, participation in housing-related decision making at the national and community levels and other entitlements.[257] The elaboration of policies, such as the *Strategic Plan 2020-2023* promoted by UN-Habitat, the MIPAA, the OEWGA and among others, recalls effective urban cooperation, management and preparedness in order to improve housing benefits for the elderly.[258] Further, mainstreaming ageing problems into global agendas with a common effort to achieve equality through the involvement of stakeholders, such as the IFA, in the implementation of frameworks and programmes should remain central in addressing elderly wellness worldwide.[259]

WHO established the Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities that works to make cities become more age-friendly by: connecting communities worldwide to facilitate the exchange of information, knowledge and experience; and supporting cities to find appropriate, innovative and evidence-based solutions.[260] There are over 1600 cities covering 330 million people participating in this network.[261] A good approach on addressing elderly challenges should include improvements for basic

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[247] United Nations Development Programme. *Ageing, Older Persons and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. 2017. p. 14.
[248] Ibid.
[249] United Nations Human Settlement Programme. *Urban Recovery Framework: Policy Brief March 2022*. 2022. p. 7.
[250] United Nations Development Programme. *Ageing, Older Persons and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. 2017. p. 15.
[251] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Eradicating Poverty and Promoting Prosperity for Older Persons in Cities*. 2017.
[252] United Nations Development Programme. *Ageing, Older Persons and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. 2017. p. 18.
[253] Ibid. p. 18.
[254] Ibid. p. 23.
[255] Ibid. p. 23.
[256] United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. *The Right to Adequate Housing*. N.d. p. 3
[257] Ibid.
[258] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *The Strategic Plan 2020-2023.* 2019. p. 45.
[259] United Nations, Second World Assembly on Ageing. *The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Political Declaration*. 2002. p. 18.
[260] World Health Organization. *Creating age-friendly cities and communities*. N.d.
[261] World Health Organization. *About the Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities*. N.d.

services, labor markets, health and real estate systems as they are essential in family structures and generational relations.[262] Additionally, an expansion on social benefits on providing adequate spaces for the elderly can be achieved by offering broader tools based on elderly skills and experience having in mind that a greater promotion of decent work and inclusive opportunities helps in maintaining an adequate living standard.[263]

Fighting Discrimination and Abuse and Increasing Participation of the Elderly within Society

In the context of rapid urbanization, the impact of participation of older people in decision making processes at all levels of society is necessary.[264] A meta-analysis of 52 studies across 28 countries shows that one in six elderly persons has suffered from some type of abuse, often based on their age which is a growing problem.[265] In the United States alone, one in five older persons was abused during the pandemic resulting from discrimination, exclusion and violation of elderly human rights.[266] Additionally, ageism, known as the discrimination of a person based on age, is also becoming more prevalent.[267] As the elderly leave the labor market, this usually results in the shrinking of their social networks.[268] This means losing their main source of social identity and acceptance within society, as well as their financial security.[269] Additionally, elderly people who continue in the labor market, usually feel discriminated against and excluded because of their age.[270] According to UNDESA's report, "Leaving No One Behind in An Ageing World: World Social Report 2023", Member States should adopt coherent and integrated policies that give the elderly both the ability to overcome abuse and discrimination and access to a platform that will adequately express their concerns.[271]

National and local policy development and implementation must be human rights based, age-sensitive and age inclusive, with measurable indicators to track progress on the situation of older persons.[272] As the elderly continue to constitute an ever-greater proportion of the total population, they have the potential to be more influential in society.[273] This can have important implications for social, economic and political outcomes in those countries, especially as older persons tend to vote in greater numbers than young people, and are increasingly forming their own associations such as lobbying groups, political parties and grassroots organizations.[274] Governments and urban planners should tailor infrastructure policy and development that catalyzes the ability for elderly populations in cities to participate in society and the decision making process.[275] For example, providing financial resources and institutional mechanisms are needed so that the elderly can politically engage within society.[276] Additionally, making specific accommodations that recognize barriers faced by older persons to allow for meaningful participation is

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[262] United Nations Development Programme. *Ageing, Older Persons and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. 2017. p. 17.
[263] Ibid. p. 18.
[264] United Nations, Second World Assembly on Ageing. *The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Political Declaration*. 2002. p. 21.
[265] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Leaving No One Behind In An Ageing World: World Social Report 2023*. 2023. p. 88.
[266] UIbid. p. 87.
[267] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Taking a Stand Against Ageism*. N.d.
[268] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Leaving No One Behind In An Ageing World: World Social Report 2023*. 2023. p. 88.
[269] Ibid. p. 87.
[270] Ibid. p. 87.
[271] Ibid. p. 102.
[272] United Nations Development Programme. *Ageing, Older Persons and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. 2017. p. 19.
[273] Ibid. p. 12.
[274] Ibid. p. 12.
[275] United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. *Meaningful participation of older persons and civil society in policy making.* 2021.
[276] Ibid.

imperative.[277] This could include, for example, improving public infrastructure to help transport elderly groups to polling stations during elections or to local government meetings is just one of many ways older persons can have their voices in the decision making process.[278]

Other aspects of participation include the ability to have opportunities for social interactions within society.[279] Social connections are important for people's well-being and health.[280] Compared to younger people, older persons report fewer social interactions and a lack of social support in times of crisis.[281] Some important steps rely on encouraging the establishment of organizations to represent the elderly in decision making.[282] One good urban planning practice that has facilitated healthy aging in the elderly population in China has been the creation of "senior playgrounds," a long-standing feature in Chinese parks.[283] These playgrounds are centrally located, are often a component to a larger public space, offer outdoor exercise equipment, and are free for public use.[284] This infrastructure encourages older persons to engage in healthy, active lifestyles and provides a reliable avenue to social interaction and community building.[285] Data shows that in China, the parks are well used, with hundreds of seniors exercising together in the mornings *per* location.[286] The model's success is now being replicated in other countries around the world, and is a singular example of how good urban policy and smart infrastructure investment is helping achieve the rights of older persons and also making progress in the achievement of the SDGs.[287]

Conclusion

Currently, around 727 million people aged 65 and over exist worldwide, and this number is estimated to double to approximately 1.5 billion by 2050.[288] With increasing urbanization and population ageing, urban areas are expected to be the most affected by all matters of crises such as climate change and inequalities regarding jobs, housing and social opportunities.[289] UN-Habitat performs a key role in the implementation of the NUA to support the achievement of the SDGs.[290] The NUA represents a shared vision for a better and more sustainable future for all ages.[291] The vision for the future of communities is presented as one where all people can have equal rights and opportunities to a dignified life as also outlined in the *UN Principles for Older Persons*.[292]

From two crucial perspectives, much of the work being done within UN-Habitat to address the challenges faced by older persons has been in relation to the targets set forth by the SDGs, specifically goal 10

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[277] United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. *Meaningful participation of older persons and civil society in policy making.* 2021.
[278] Ibid.
[279] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Leaving No One Behind In An Ageing World: World Social Report 2023.* 2023. p. 87.
[280] Ibid. p. 87.
[281] Ibid. p. 87.
[282] United Nations, Second World Assembly on Ageing. *The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Political Declaration.* 2002. p. 21.
[283] British Broadcasting Corporation. *The cities designing playgrounds for the elderly.* 2019.
[284] Ibid.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Ibid.
[287] Ibid.
[288] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Euskal Hiria Kongresua 2020.* 2020. p. 21.
[289] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Annual Report 2022.* 2023. p. 5.
[290] United Nations Human Settlements Programme. *Urban Observatories: A Comparative* Review. 2021. p. 24.
[291] United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development. *New Urban Agenda.* 2016. p. 10.
[292] Ibid. p. 8.

(reduced inequalities) and goal 11 (sustainable cities).[293] The elderly face many obstacles in a rapidly changing world, which includes the ability to access adequate housing and remain active contributors within their communities and society.[294] Currently, many governments and policymakers have been unaware and unprepared for the changing demographics and needs of these growing groups which has led to social isolation, inadequate housing, and poverty.[295] It is imperative to enhance the inclusiveness and sustainability of urbanization, increase capacity for participation, and bring innovative and sustainable human settlement planning and management worldwide in order to offer the elderly the opportunity to perform an active life within a more conscious and sustainable society.[296]

Further Research

While further researching this topic, delegates can ask themselves the following questions: How can UN-Habitat support the creation of policies regarding the aforementioned problems? What are some challenges in ageing populations that have not yet been addressed? Which other international actors can get involved with the current UN-Habitat programmes? What challenges are not being addressed by past data collection? How can technology improve elderly quality of life? What are ways that can address funding challenges in underdeveloped or least developed countries? How can stakeholders get more involved? How can UN-Habitat efforts be more effective in local communities? What are some novel ways to improve the social participation of the elderly in their communities?

[293] United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *The Sustainable Development Agenda: 17 Goals for People, for Planet*. N.d.

[294] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Leaving No One Behind In An Ageing World: World Social Report 2023*. 2023. p. 107.

[295] Ibid. p. 107.

[296] United Nations, General Assembly. *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*. 2015. p. 6.

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