

Adapting Cities for Climate Resilience

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World Cities Day aims to promote the international community's interest in global sustainable urbanization, push forward cooperation among countries and cities in meeting opportunities and addressing challenges of urbanization, and contributing to sustainable urban development around the world.

Under the general theme of World Cities Day: Better City, Better life, this year's sub-theme will be **Adapting Cities for Climate Resilience**. The main goals of World Cities Day 2021 are to:

- Increase awareness on climate change adaptation and urban resilience,
- Inspire effective climate action at the local level by sharing knowledge on effective urban systems resilience solutions, and
- Contribute to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Paris Agreement for Climate Change to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This relates to Sustainable Development Goal 11, target 11b which includes: *"By 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards... adaptation to climate change and resilience to disasters..."*.

The New Urban Agenda (Para 79) includes a complementary commitment to: *"promoting international, national, subnational and local climate action, including climate change adaptation... and...supporting building resilience"*.

World Cities Day will represent the culmination of the month-long celebration of Urban October, which this year promotes ambitious climate action in cities. Other climate related events include **World Habitat Day** on 4 October 2021 – under the theme of Accelerating urban action for a carbon-free world and the **Innovate4Cities Conference** from 11 - 15 October 2021 co-hosted by UN-Habitat and the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy (GCoM).

World Cities Day occurs immediately before the **26th Conference of Parties (COP-26) to the UN Framework Convention (UNFCCC)**, from 1-12 November 2021 in Glasgow, Scotland. World Cities Day (and Urban October in general) will offer a chance to consolidate messages, successes and concerns from the urban community to carry forward to COP-26.



Climate impacts on cities: Key challenges

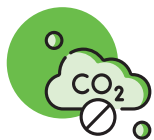
Cities worldwide are increasingly suffering the effects of climate-related and other challenges and hazards such as floods, droughts, sea level rise, heatwaves, landslides, and storms. At least 130 port cities with over one million inhabitants each are expected to be affected by coastal flooding. In a warming world, the direct and indirect effects of recurring droughts and heatwaves must be addressed. Home to more than half of the world population, cities and towns are places where people, assets and economic activity are concentrated and are at risk. Impacts related to climate change as well as other hazards could cost cities worldwide USD 314 billion every year by 2030 if we fail to build multi-hazard urban resilience to potential shocks and stresses now.

Adaptation financing has lagged as a proportion of total climate finance. One UN estimate suggests only about 20 percent of climate financing helps countries adapt to climate change. The Climate Policy Initiative estimates that, of a recent average of USD 357 billion/year in climate financing that flows to non-OECD countries, only USD 27 billion or seven per cent was directed to adaptation (GCF 2021). Investment in urban systems resilience measures is under-represented (IPCC 2014). Additional challenges in financing urban resilience involve scaling up successful solutions and better leveraging private sector resources.

The world's **one billion people** living in urban informal settlements are particularly vulnerable. They are, to varying degrees, deprived of adequate housing and access to basic services such as appropriate sanitation, fresh and potable water and storm drainage systems, reliable electricity supplies and efficient, affordable mobility. They are especially vulnerable to a multitude of hazards, including climate change as the informal settlements are in exposed, precarious locations.

Reliable, validated data and information is crucial for several stages of the disaster risk management processes. From prevention to response, recovery and reconstruction, it is extremely important that decisions are made based on concrete evidence and needs. This should also support awareness raising of communities. Urban data has a particular relevance considering the rapid world's urbanization trend and the subsequent increased vulnerability of cities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the limitations and challenges of our urban environments. Inequalities, vulnerabilities and risk seem to be embedded in how our urban systems have been conceived, structured and managed in the past, putting people and planet at high risk. As the world starts to emerge from the disruption caused by the pandemic, this is the chance for cities to seek synergetic solutions enabling socio-economic recovery and ambitious urban sustainable development that put people and planet first.



Adapting cities to climate change: Solutions & remaining issues

While facing important challenges, cities are also places of opportunity and innovation in developing sustainable solutions to bounce forward after a disruption. Building adaptive capacity and cultivating social capital in cities can reduce disaster risks and strengthen urban resilience to the often-unpredictable future challenges but predictable vulnerabilities. Adapting cities for climate resilience help cities and inhabitants prepare for, mitigate, and respond to risks posed by both predictable and unpredictable shocks and stresses. Therefore, climate adaptation is one of the key priorities for future urban resilience and the health and well-being of people and the environment. Strategies include the following:

Build resilience holistically. The United Nation's Agenda for Sustainable Development and its dedicated goal on cities "to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" (SDG 11) recognises the need to address the complex urban challenges in an integrated and holistic way. This involves addressing a range of issues including the climate crisis, urban poverty, informal settlements, providing resilient urban infrastructure and ensuring access to basic services for all, managing urban ecosystems and systems, making livelihoods sustainable and resilient. It also involves building urban resilience to a range of potential shocks and existent stresses. A multi-hazard, multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholders approach that considers complexities of urban systems is fundamental for any city resilience building.

Embrace a pro-poor approach. In building climate resilient cities, supporting the most vulnerable, in planning, building, and managing the urban environment, as well as cultivating inclusive planning and governance practices are essential to make sure that no one and no place is left behind. People with low incomes, especially women and girls, youth, the elderly, persons with disabilities and others vulnerable groups, are often disproportionately affected by the impact of extreme events, including climate related ones, on a range of urban systems, including water supply and management, food distribution and health centres and support. Supporting informal settlements, is an opportunity for mainstreaming resilient urbanization, starting by reducing vulnerability and building coping capacity for the communities most at risk.

Invest in climate-proof, more sustainable infrastructure, safeguard access to basic urban services. As the world is urbanizing at a rapid pace and the frequency and intensity of climate-related disasters is projected to increase further in the coming decades, today's infrastructure investment and development will determine cities' and people's capacity to cope with future challenges. Safeguarding access to urban services in times of crisis and disruption is a prerequisite to reduce the vulnerability of all inhabitants. This not only implies investing in resilient infrastructure, but also rethinking their management and how infrastructures and services interact to avoid cascading effects and prolonged disruption when disaster hits.

Explore nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches to adaptation. Localising climate adaptation for resilience implies adapting generic measures to specific conditions, challenges and opportunities and scaling up "home-grown" innovative solutions. Long-term exploitation of natural resources has resulted into the degrading of nature's own defence mechanisms toward natural hazards. Ecosystem-based adaptation and nature-based solutions combine mitigation and adaptation efforts in cities and can generate significant additional economic, social, and environmental benefits aside from being effective in dealing with unpredictable future climate- and weather-related disruptions.

Mainstream climate adaptation strategies into the broader development agenda, including the COVID response. Mainstreaming climate resilience and adaptation will boost local economies and limit the cost and disruption of future climate-related disasters. The recovery presents an opportunity to transform the contemporary urban economies to become more sustainable, socially just, and resilient through scaling up innovative, green, and inclusive solutions. Every crisis response, including the COVID-19 pandemic should include a building resilience recovery for the future. Every resource invested now, should build the foundations for sustainable urbanization.

Inter-city cooperation for risk reduction and resilience building. Urban areas have differentiated needs and opportunities but can still learn from each other, sharing knowledge, lessons learned, disaster risk management and city resilience building practices. City-to-city cooperation and collaboration mechanisms can lead to more integrated and effective responses to climate crises and others, also serving as a catalyst for developing or improving local solutions and contributing to increased city to city exchange of capacity and knowledge.



Key Messages

Well-designed urban actions for climate and urban resilience generate significant additional economic, social, and environmental benefits which will ensure a better life for all in an urbanizing and changing world. The COVID-19 recovery offers a unique opportunity to mainstream urban resilience and climate action in cities.

We need to take a holistic, multi-hazard approach to building resilience in our cities. Reducing vulnerability and exposure to climate-related risks is a continuous and iterative process which requires the engagement of all stakeholders. National and local governments play a key role in putting in place ambitious and credible plans and setting out the guidelines for transformative change. Only if we choose to face the climate challenges together, we can ensure that all our communities – especially the most vulnerable – don't just survive climate shocks and stresses but thrive.

For further information go to <https://urbanoctober.unhabitat.org/wcd>
or contact unhabitat-WCD@un.org