



NGO Major Group Urban Thematic Cluster **2021 High Level Political Forum Position Paper**

INTRODUCTION:

The NGO Major Group Urban Thematic Cluster (“Urban Cluster”), recognizes that with an estimated two-thirds of humanity - 6.5 billion people of all ages - living in cities by 2050, increasingly from the developing world, governments cannot achieve sustainability, resilience, and poverty reduction without significantly transforming the way we plan, design, build, and manage our urban areas to “*Leave No One Behind.*”

The Urban Cluster draws attention to the need to address inequalities and well-being in cities that may arise from pandemics, structural racism, demographic changes and climate inaction. This is particularly relevant and urgent as we have witnessed a global COVID-19 pandemic and inequalities, including racial unrest, ageism, the “shadow” pandemic of dramatic increase in domestic violence for all women and children together with growing economic disparities around the world.

As a majority of the world’s population lives in places that extend from urban to rural, the Urban Cluster addresses Sustainable Development Goal SDG 11 (“Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable”), integrates with the other 16 SDGs, and with other global agreements, such as the *Paris Agreement* and the Sendai Framework. In particular, the Urban Cluster aligns with the *New Urban Agenda* and the documents developed for its localization from the civil society perspective.

As more than 193 countries endorsed the SDGs to address the global challenge of eradicating poverty and achieving sustainable development in a balanced, equitable, integrated, and cross sectoral manner, the Urban Cluster is focused on SDG 11 as a means to ensure access to safe, adequate, accessible and affordable housing, upgrading informal settlements, investing in public transport, creating accessible green public spaces, protecting natural and cultural heritage, reducing adverse effects of natural disasters and the impacts of climate change on cities while improving urban planning and supporting innovative management and governance. The Urban Cluster holds that balanced territorial development should guide national, regional and local policies in fulfillment of SDG 11 which needs to be seen as cross cutting as it relates to other relevant SDG goals. Broad stakeholder participation inclusive of marginalized groups often left behind in the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of such policies is essential.

2021 HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM (HLPF):

The theme of the 2021 HLPF “*Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the Decade of Action and delivery for sustainable development*” and the review of nine of the SDGs: 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17, are relevant to SDG 11 if we are to ensure that urban settlers are not left behind. While SDG 11 will not be specifically reviewed this year, it has broad application and is aligned with all of the SDGs. Cities have been hit especially hard during the pandemic and those that have densely populated areas, especially in informal settlements, have contributed greatly to its spread.

COVID-19 has had an enormous impact on cities and other human settlements; over 90% of COVID-19 cases are occurring within urban areas. The direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19 have resulted in an increase in the number of people living in slums leading to the deterioration of the quality of life as well as increasing the vulnerabilities for those already living in these deplorable conditions. In the Global South, 80% of the 59 countries where data are available, the impact on women is significant, as they are overrepresented in slums although women and men are equally likely to live in urban areas (SDG 3).

The pre-existing inequalities slum dwellers experience have been exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic. The UN explained: “Many of these urban residents already suffer from inadequate housing with limited or no

access to basic infrastructure and services, including water, sanitation and waste management. Overcrowding of public transportation and limited health-care facilities have had a catastrophic effect on these communities,

them into epicentres within epicentres. Many urban dwellers in the developing world work in the informal sector and are at high risk of losing their livelihoods as cities lock down” (SDG 8).

The UN Secretary-General’s 2021 *Progress towards Sustainable Development Goals Report* noted that: before the pandemic, cities experienced rising slum dweller populations, worsening air pollution, minimal open public spaces and limited convenient access to public transportation. The number of slum dwellers is continuing to grow reaching over 1 billion in 2018. With the impact of the pandemic and the need to maintain social distance, the 2020 sample data from 911 cities from 114 countries is significant. Globally, the urban area allocated to streets and open public spaces only averages about 16%, well below UN-Habitat’s recommended 30% and an additional 10-15% to open public spaces. (SDG 13)

Recent research warns that the economic fallout from the global pandemic could increase global poverty by as much as a half billion people or 8% of the total human population. This would be the first time that poverty has increased globally in thirty years. (SDG 1)

The term ‘new’ poor has gained world-wide use during the pandemic crisis as the world went into lock down, businesses closed, people lost their income, heightened food security, faced evictions and loss of their homes, and for the first time dealt with extreme poverty. Developing countries remain the most at risk, however, eight out of ten ‘new poor’ will be in middle-income countries. According to UNDP income losses are expected to exceed \$220 billion in developing countries, and an estimated 55% of the global population have no access to social protection. These losses will reverberate across societies; impacting education, human rights and, in the most severe cases, basic food security and nutrition. (SDG 1, 2, 3, 8, 12, 13)

CONCLUSION:

Post Covid-19 recovery process, the Urban Cluster will continue to focus on new opportunities to bring attention to the importance and need to address issues of sustainable urbanization, resilience, mobility, health and wellness and the public realm. We urge Member States and Local Authorities to agree and confirm that housing is a human right and all people have the right to equity, equality, inclusion and to live with dignity within their cities. To this end, the Urban Cluster promotes the need to build cohesive and inclusive partnerships to support just spatial, social, environmental and economic aspects of the SDGs to accelerate their implementation and build Cultures of Peace. (SDG 16, 17)

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Rethink and redevelop human settlements and cities, by creating safe environments that prioritize the persons that use them in all their diversity across the life course.
- Provide services that recognize different mobility patterns, reduce overcrowded and unsafe routes, accommodate the movement of everyone, including people with disabilities, provide service outside of peak hours, have proper lighting and shelters to ensure safety of riders and make public transportation more affordable by instituting fare policies that allow for multi-stop journeys.
- Commit to forms of governance where cities and their inhabitants jointly participate in decision-making for the planning of spaces and their management, use and upkeep.