



Everyone included – how to end homelessness

Homelessness is one of the crudest manifestations of poverty, discrimination and inequality, affecting people of all ages, genders and backgrounds. Globally, 1.6 billion people worldwide live in inadequate housing conditions, with about 15 million forcefully evicted every year according to UN-Habitat, which has noted an alarming rise in homelessness in the last 10 years.

This month, for the first time ever, the UN Commission for Social Development will discuss the global homelessness crisis and the strategies to put an end to it by the end of the decade. Meeting at the UN Headquarters in New York from 10 to 19 February 2020, the Commission will hear from a variety of speakers, representing not only governments, but also NGOs, businesses, municipal authorities and academia.

The delegates will share their experiences and examples of innovative solutions that have worked in fighting homelessness, such as Finland's "Housing First" policy, which since its launch in 2008, has reduced the number of long-term homeless people in Finland by more than 35%, nearly eradicating rough sleeping in the country's capital.

The Commission will also kick off the celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the World Summit for Social Development. Held in Copenhagen in 1995, the summit was a watershed moment in the fight for social justice, agreeing on three key objectives of social development: eradicating poverty, promoting full and productive employment, and fostering social inclusion.

More than 100 presidents, royals, prime ministers and other heads of state and governments and over 14,000 other delegates adopted the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, which emphasized that eradicating poverty is not only an ethical, but also a social, political and economic imperative. The 186 participating countries also agreed to "place people at the centre of development by ensuring full participation by all."

A quarter of a century later, much progress has been made to make social inclusion a reality, but we are still far away from realizing the 10 commitments of the Copenhagen Summit, most of which are now included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

As we celebrate the 25 years of championing social inclusion, UN DESA will be reminding Member States and other stakeholders that economic growth is necessary but not sufficient to reduce poverty, and that social policy is crucial to achieving sustainable development for all. Building a world we want is only possible when everyone is included.

For more information:

58th Session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD58)

Celebrating 25 years of Championing Social Inclusion

HIGHLIGHTS



Ocean action starts here

From pollution to overfishing, to raising temperatures and acidity, the life-support system provided by our ocean is under relentless pressure and its capacity to absorb it is running low. This June in Lisbon, Portugal, the 2020 United Nations Ocean Conference will seek innovative solutions to put an end to the abuse of our ocean and to restore our planet to its healthy, blue self.

Co-hosted by Portugal and Kenya, the Conference will bring together Member States, civil society organizations, industries and youth from all over the world to jointly discuss ways of protecting the ocean, seas and marine resources, on which billions depend for food and livelihoods.

Ahead of the Conference, a two-day preparatory meeting on 4 and 5 February will decide the themes of the eight interactive dialogues of the UN Ocean Conference and the elements of a brief, concise, action-oriented declaration. Held at the UN Headquarters in New York, the preparatory meeting will be co-chaired by Denmark and Palau.

The ocean plays a critical life-sustaining role in safeguarding the health of our planet. It provides oxygen and food, controls the weather, absorbs excess carbon emissions and helps to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

During a speech in January about his 2020 priorities, UN Secretary-General António Guterres cited the Ocean Conference as a key moment to “act decisively” for the environment this year.

“The world’s oceans are under assault from pollution, overfishing and much else. Plastic waste is tainting not only the fish we eat but also the water we drink and the air we breathe,” the Secretary-General said. “We must use the Lisbon conference to protect the oceans from further abuse and recognize their fundamental role in the health of people and planet.”

Science and innovation—keystones of this year’s Ocean Conference—are indispensable to improving our understanding of marine ecosystems and devising scalable ways to sustainably manage its resources. Ensuring that ocean knowledge and new technologies are made widely available is also critical.

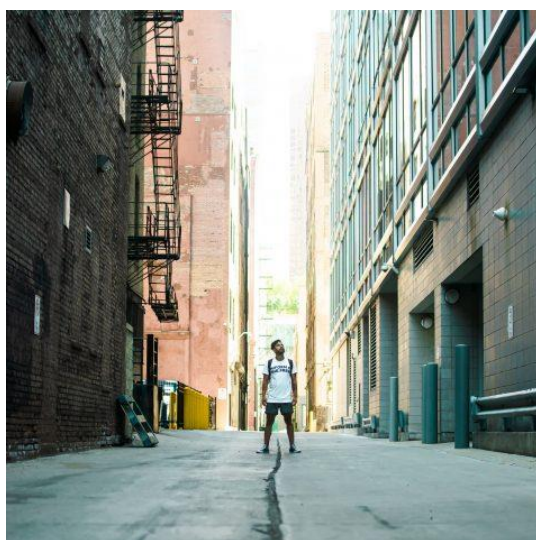
“As a large ocean state, we are all too conscious of our responsibility for the ocean,” said Ngedikes Olai Uludong, Permanent Representative of Palau to the UN. “Caring for the ocean is not just for islands or coastal peoples, but for all of us – because all of humanity depends on the ocean. And we need to work with, and not against, the ocean if we are to prosper. We need to be ambitious, we need to listen to science, we need to be innovative and we need to be action-oriented.”

February’s preparatory meeting for the 2020 UN Ocean Conference will sound the call for more measurable commitments from all stakeholders to safeguard our ocean resources. The commitments will be registered in a [database](#) maintained by UN DESA and highlighted at the Conference.

“Our oceans are facing a global emergency. Sea levels are rising, plastic pollution is increasing, the ocean is warmer and more acidic, fish stocks are overexploited and half of all living coral has been lost. We need greater urgency and greater ambition at all levels if we are to achieve SDG 14. We need more truly innovative, entrepreneurial and science-based approaches to ocean and coastal restoration and protection,” said Martin Bille Hermann, Permanent Representative of Denmark to the UN.

“As co-facilitator for the 2020 UN Ocean Conference preparatory process and its outcome document, it is my sincere hope that all Member States come to the Preparatory Meeting with concrete and ambitious ideas that will bring us closer to our common goal of achieving SDG 14,” he added.

HIGHLIGHTS



Urbanization: expanding opportunities, but deeper divides

Whether the process of urbanization is harnessed and managed, or allowed to fuel growing divides, will largely determine the future of inequality, says UN DESA’s World Social Report 2020. For the first time in history, more people now live in urban than in rural areas. And over the next three decades, global population growth is expected to take place almost exclusively in the world’s

cities and towns. The total number of people living in cities is expected to grow from approximately 4.4 billion today to 6.7 billion in 2050.

Like some other megatrends, urbanization has the potential to become a positive transformative force for every aspect of sustainable development, including the reduction of inequality. When properly planned and managed, urbanization can reduce poverty and inequality by improving employment opportunities and quality of life, including through better education and health. But when poorly planned, urbanization can lead to

congestion, higher crime rates, pollution, increased levels of inequality and social exclusion.

Inequality within cities has economic, spatial and social dimensions. Economically, inequality is generally greater in urban than in rural areas: the Gini coefficient of income inequality is higher in urban areas than in rural areas in 36 out of 42 countries with data.

Larger cities are generally richer but more unequal than smaller cities. The opportunities that cities bring are unevenly distributed in space, preventing entire neighbourhoods and groups of population from accessing proper health care, good schools, sanitation, piped water, employment opportunities and adequate housing among others. Slums are the most notable extreme of the spatial concentration of urban poverty and disadvantage.

The uncontrolled growth of many cities has resulted in inadequate provision of public services and a failure to guarantee a minimum quality of life for all urban residents. The current speed of urbanization in developing countries makes urban governance and adequate planning increasingly urgent. As cities grow, inequality is likely to increase unless we implement policies to address it.

While there is no one-size-fits-all solution to reducing urban inequality, some Governments have been able to address the spatial, economic and social aspects of the urban divide and promote inclusive urbanization, including in rapidly growing cities. Their successful strategies have four elements in common. First, they have established land and property rights, paying particular attention to security of tenure for people living in poverty.

Second, they have improved the availability of affordable housing, infrastructure and basic services and access to these services, since good transport networks, including between residential and commercial areas, are key to spatial connectivity and economic inclusion.

Third, they have facilitated access to education and decent employment for all urban residents.

Fourth, they have introduced mechanisms to allow participation in decision-making, encouraging input from all stakeholders on the allocation of public funds and on the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies.

For more information on the links between urbanization and inequality, please see Chapter 4 of the *World Social Report 2020: Inequality in a rapidly changing world*.



Working together to end homelessness

“We want everyone to be involved and make change happen!” says Amine Lamrabat, Information Officer in UN DESA’s Division for Inclusive Social Development. Ahead of the UN Commission for Social Development (CSocD) this month, which for the first time in its history will address homelessness, he shares how we can all work together to end homelessness and promote affordable housing. Learn about six key actions we can all support!

- **Raise awareness** to support the empowerment and full participation of homeless persons in the societies we live in, paying particular attention to family homelessness, women, children, adolescents, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, people living in poverty and people displaced by natural disasters and conflicts.
- **Advocate** for the rights of homeless people to live a dignified life. You can get involved in great initiatives such as the [world’s big sleep out campaign](#), which was founded by Josh Littlejohn, the co-founder of the charity Social Bite, based in Scotland. Social Bite started as a small sandwich shop in Edinburgh that began offering employment and free food to homeless people.
- **Educate yourself**, teach others, and push for policies that help the homeless. There are so many reasons why a person becomes homeless. We need to understand how they got there in the first place to be able to do something about it.
- **Invest in your community**, volunteer and contribute to the trusted foundations and charities who are working hard to make change happen.
- **Organize networking events and outreach** activities to show solidarity with homeless people such as [Making Us Count](#), a campaign powered by the UN Working Group to End Homelessness, made up of NGOs from across the world. The campaign calls on the United Nations to make the voices of homeless people count.
- **Show respect** towards homeless persons and treat them with dignity as you would do with anyone else.
- **Contribute to ending** this global social crisis, which is growing in every country.

“By adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Member States agreed to make significant progress towards implementing appropriate social protection systems for all and committed to ensuring access to safe and affordable housing for all. Homelessness is a global problem and needs a global solution. We need to find innovative solutions to end and prevent it. All people have the right to lead a decent life with dignity”, says Amine Lamrabat at UN DESA.

It is the first time in the history of the UN Commission for Social Development (CSocD) that the issue of affordable housing and homelessness is addressed. Join the discussions at the CSocD 58th session from 10 to 19 February 2020 at UN Headquarters in New York or live online via [UN Web TV](#).

For more information, please visit the [CSocD58 website](#).



Powell, a Sustainable Development Officer in UN DESA's Division for Sustainable Development Goals about what to expect.

Shifting gears toward sustainable transport

Trains, bike paths, ships, roads – we all rely on transport to get to school or work, and to get the food and products we need to live. But we could be moving people and goods in a smarter, greener and more inclusive way. To help us get there, the second Global Sustainable Transport Conference this May in Beijing will bring together governments, the private sector, academia and civil society to rethink the way we move people and goods and consider innovative ways to improve our transport systems. We spoke with Julie

What do we mean when we say sustainable transport?

“Transport enables the mobility of people and goods. It enhances economic growth and livelihoods while improving access to services, such as health, education and finance. It strengthens connectivity at all levels, helping integrate economies, improving social equity, enhancing rural-urban linkages and building resilience.

At the same time, transport can have negative environmental, social and health impacts, such as road crashes and contribution to greenhouse gas emissions. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the transport sector accounts for around a quarter of all energy-related CO₂ emissions.

Sustainable transport seeks to alleviate these negative impacts and provide services and infrastructure for the mobility of people and goods in a manner that is inclusive, safe, affordable, accessible, efficient and resilient. UN DESA is part of the [Sustainable Mobility for All initiative \(SuM4All\)](#), which defines four main objectives of sustainable transport: universal access, efficiency, safety and green mobility. As you can see, sustainable transport is not an end in itself, but rather a means to help all people achieve a better life, both for this generation and the next.”

What are the major obstacles in achieving sustainable transport, and some good ways for working around them?

“The challenges related to achieving sustainable transport are multiple and can differ from country to country. Global megatrends, such as population growth and increased urbanization, will exacerbate these challenges and pose many new ones. This is also true for climate change, which increases challenges related to resilience.

At the same time, we need to be proactive in ensuring access for all. In order to meet the increasing and changing transport demands, while preserving the planet for current and future generations, we will have to change the way we see, plan, develop and use our transport systems. This will ideally not only affect our own behavior, but also the way we establish policies, develop technologies and design our cities, supply chains and overall transport systems.”

How can sustainable transport accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and climate action?

“Advances in sustainable transport are crucial for reaching many of the SDGs and will give a significant boost to climate action, given the sector’s contribution to climate change. Some SDGs are directly connected to sustainable transport through targets and indicators, such as SDG target 3.6 on road safety, SDG 9.1 on infrastructure and SDG 11.2 on providing access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all and expanding public transport.

Many others are also connected through the enabling role of sustainable transport across the 2030 Agenda. Progress can only be accelerated if the systems that connect across the goals and targets of the SDGs are transformed in ways that resolve trade-offs and deliver on the potential synergies, as recently emphasized in the [Global Sustainable Development Report 2019](#). Only continued collaboration by all stakeholders can move the sustainable transport agenda forward.”

How will the second Sustainable Transport Conference move us in the right direction?

“The second United Nations Global Sustainable Transport Conference is a unique opportunity to underscore the importance of sustainable transport for the SDGs and climate action. As a Secretary-General’s Conference, it will bring together key stakeholders from governments, the UN system and other international organizations, the private sector, and civil society. This will reflect the diversity and complexity of the transport sector and offer an occasion for vivid exchange of ideas and solutions.

The Conference will be an opportunity for policy dialogue as well as forging partnerships and initiatives to advance sustainable transport worldwide, especially in the context of the Decade of Action. It will shine a spotlight on the needs and challenges of vulnerable groups and developing countries, including least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states.

Apart from plenary sessions and parallel thematic sessions, the Conference programme will also comprise a Minister’s Forum, Business Forum and a Science, Engineering and Technology Forum. All stakeholders will be encouraged to [register](#) measurable, bold commitments toward building the sustainable transport systems we need. We expect participants to scale up the existing partnerships for sustainable transport and build new, durable partnerships.

For more information:

[Second Global Sustainable Transport Conference](#)



State of our world

Climate-induced fires, rising inequalities, political unrest and a bleak economic forecast; last year was a very turbulent one. How can we make sense of it? UN DESA recently released two major reports on the global economy and the state of global inequality, which offer solutions that could get us out of our predicament and back on the sustainable track.

The climate crisis, as well as persistently high inequalities, and

rising levels of food insecurity and undernourishment, is affecting the quality of life in many societies and fuelling discontent, warns the 2020 World Economic Situation Report (WESP).

The UN DESA experts behind the report are unequivocal in their call for “massive adjustments” to the energy sector, which is currently responsible for around three-quarters of global greenhouse gas emissions.

If the world continues to rely on fossil fuels over the next few years, and emissions in developing countries rise to the level of those in richer nations, global carbon emissions would increase by more than 250 per cent, with potentially catastrophic results.

The report’s authors insist that the world’s energy needs must be met by renewable or low-carbon energy sources, which will lead to environmental and health benefits, such as lower air pollution, and new economic opportunities for many countries.

However, the 2020 WESP finds that the urgent need to switch to clean energy continues to be underestimated, noting that countries are continuing to invest in oil and gas exploration, and coal-fired power generation.

This report describes the reliance on fossil fuels as “short-sighted”, leaving investors and governments exposed to sudden losses, as the price of oil and gas fluctuates, as well as contributing to deteriorating climatic conditions, such as global warming.

“Risk associated with the climate crisis are becoming an ever-greater challenge”, concludes the report, and “climate action must be an integral part of any policy mix”.

Strategies and technology for a transition to a clean economy that delivers accessible to reliable and decarbonized energy already exist, continues the report, but will require political will and public support. Failure to act will significantly increase the ultimate costs.

For its part, UN DESA’s *World Social Report 2020* shows that inequality is growing for more than 70 per cent of the global population, exacerbating the risks of divisions and hampering economic and social development. But the rise is far from inevitable and can be tackled at a national and international level, the report concludes.

Income inequality has increased in most developed countries, and some middle-income countries – including China, which has the world’s fastest growing economy.

The challenges are underscored by UN chief António Guterres in the foreword, in which he states that the world is confronting “the harsh realities of a deeply unequal global landscape”, in which economic woes, inequalities and job insecurity have led to mass protests in both developed and developing countries.

“Income disparities and a lack of opportunities”, he writes, “are creating a vicious cycle of inequality, frustration and discontent across generations.”

For more information:

Listen to the podcast “State of our world”

2020 World Economic Situation Report (WESP)

World Social Report 2020

February Monthly Briefing on the World Economic Situation and Prospects

MORE FROM UNDESA

The future of our planet depends on getting our cities right



By Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director, UN-Habitat

Every week, three million people move to our cities and towns across the planet. Over half the global population currently live in cities and towns – and this will rise to two thirds by 2050.

There is no escaping the fact that the future of our planet now lies in our cities and towns. We have just ten years left to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). And without our cities and towns on board we will not achieve them. Our ever-growing urban

areas are responsible for a large proportion of the world's problems – not least climate change – but they are also powerhouses of change and innovation and can also provide the solutions.

The world leaders who agreed on the SDGs in 2015 clearly recognized this, and for the first time we had an 'urban' goal, the Sustainable Development Goal 11, which has been termed the docking station for all the other SDGs. It calls for making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

This basically comes down to creating a better quality of life for everyone. It includes having affordable housing, parks and public spaces, efficient public transport, clean air and water, renewable energy.

Cities are also on the frontline when it comes to impacts of climate change and must be at the heart of action to combat it. Cities generate 70 per cent of human-induced greenhouse gas emissions and consume 78 per cent of the world's energy. And these figures will grow.

We are entering the Decade of Action – 10 years left to implement all the SDGs. And cities play a role across the board to make sure we turn our goals into reality, to overcome major global challenges such as poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, climate change, fragility and conflict.

This month, the world will come together for the world's premier conference on urbanization, the [World Urban Forum \(WUF\)](#). This tenth edition of the WUF is also the first major UN meeting in this Decade of Action, bringing together global policy makers, influencers, thought leaders, investors, community leaders, urban planners, academics and artists to exchange ideas and mobilize for action.

The achievement of the urban dimensions of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), depends on how we are able to manage rapid urbanization and its challenges through policy, planning and programming, responding to the needs of national, local and regional governments, while connecting the private sector and other key stakeholders in the process of providing innovative solutions.

UN-Habitat, the United Nations focal point for sustainable urbanization, aims to promote transformative change in cities and communities and human settlements development. Through the [New Urban Agenda](#), we are confident that sustainable urbanization and the SDGs can be achieved.

Going forward, UN-Habitat will continue to play its role, facilitating knowledge and data exchange and sharing global best practices. UN-Habitat has the mandate and capacity to provide innovative normative and operational solutions to urban challenges around the world. We aspire to be a centre of excellence and the go-to agency for sustainable urban development to ensure that no one and no place is left behind in our rapidly urbanizing world.

**The views expressed in this blog are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of UN DESA.*

More countries could leave the ‘least developed’ category, but better support needed



Five Asian countries – Bangladesh, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Nepal and Timor-Leste – could be leaving the least developed countries (LDC) category as soon as 2024, joining Angola, Bhutan, Sao Tome and Principe, Solomon Islands and Sao Tome and Principe, which are already set to graduate in the coming years.

At its annual plenary meeting, from 24 to 27 February 2020, the UN Committee for Development Policy (CDP) will lay the groundwork for next year’s Triennial Review, when it will make recommendations on these five countries and identify additional states that meet the criteria for starting the multi-year graduation process.

Graduation from the LDC category is a milestone in the development process, but the progressing countries still require dedicated support to confront their sustainable development challenges. What support is needed and how it can be delivered will be a central focus of the Committee’s deliberations this year.

Established by the United Nations in 1971 and currently comprising 47 countries, the LDC category aims to assist low-income countries that are highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks and have low levels of human assets.

In addition to the LDC issues, the Committee will also make recommendations for the decade of action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and discuss its analysis of countries’ Voluntary National Reviews of SDG progress.

The UN Committee for Development Policy comprises 24 internationally renowned experts in development policy from all over the world. While the Committee’s Plenary meetings are closed, it will hold one open session on Tuesday, 25 February at 3 pm, to discuss “Development Policy and New Inequalities.” Additionally, on 27 February the Committee will brief Member States on its deliberations on LDC issues.

For more information:

Committee for Development Policy

SDG 11 in numbers



The world is becoming increasingly urbanized. Since 2007, more than half the world's population has been living in cities, and that share is projected to rise to 60 per cent by 2030. Cities and metropolitan areas are powerhouses of economic growth—contributing about 60 per cent of global GDP. However, they also account for about 70 per cent of global carbon emissions and over 60 per cent of resource use. Rapid urbanization is resulting in a growing number of slum dwellers, inadequate and overburdened infrastructure and services (such as waste collection and water and sanitation systems, roads and transport), worsening air pollution and unplanned urban sprawl. To respond to those challenges, 150 countries have developed national urban plans, with almost half of them in the implementation phase. Ensuring that those plans are well executed will help cities grow in a more sustainable and inclusive manner.

Access more data and information on the indicators for SDG 11 in the [SDG Progress Report 2019](#).



MAKE CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS INCLUSIVE, SAFE, RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE



2 BILLION PEOPLE

DO NOT HAVE ACCESS TO WASTE COLLECTION SERVICES

1 OUT OF 4 URBAN RESIDENTS LIVE IN SLUM-LIKE CONDITIONS (2018)



ONLY HALF (53%) OF URBAN RESIDENTS HAVE CONVENIENT ACCESS TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT (2018)



9 OUT OF 10 URBAN RESIDENTS BREATHE POLLUTED AIR



150 COUNTRIES HAVE DEVELOPED

NATIONAL URBAN PLANS, WITH ALMOST HALF OF THEM IN THE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE



UPCOMING EVENTS

- 4-5 February, New York Ocean Conference Preparatory Meeting
- 10-19 February, New York 58th Session of the Commission for Social Development – CSocD58
- 12-14 February, Manila Asian Regional Thematic Conference on managing a statistical organization in times of change
- 24-28 February, New York Committee for Development Policy
- 24-28 February, Manila Regional Training Workshop on Economic Statistics SDMX

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