

# NHSMUN50

National High School Model United Nations



## UN-HABITAT BACKGROUND GUIDE



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## A Note on the NHSMUN Difference

Esteemed Faculty and Delegates,

Welcome to NHSMUN 2024! We are Dennis Zhang and Christian Hernandez, and we are this year's Secretary-General and Director-General. Thank you for choosing to attend NHSMUN, the world's largest and most diverse Model United Nations conference for secondary school students. This year is particularly special as NHSMUN celebrates its **50th Anniversary**, and we are thrilled to welcome you to our hometown, New York City, this March for this landmark year!

As a space for collaboration, consensus, and compromise, NHSMUN strives to transform today's brightest thinkers, speakers, and collaborators into tomorrow's leaders. Our organization provides a uniquely tailored experience for all through innovative and accessible programming. We believe that an emphasis on education through simulation is paramount to the Model UN experience, and this idea permeates throughout numerous aspects of the conference:

**Realism and accuracy:** Although a perfect simulation of the UN is never possible, we believe that one of the core educational responsibilities of MUN conferences is to educate students about how the UN System works. Each NHSMUN committee is a simulation of a real deliberative body so that delegates can research what their country has said in the committee. Our topics are chosen from the issues currently on the agenda of that committee (except historical committees, which take topics from the appropriate time period). We also strive to invite real UN, NGO, and field experts into each committee through our committee speakers program. Moreover, we arrange meetings between students and the actual UN Permanent Mission of the country they are representing. Our delegates have the incredible opportunity to conduct first-hand research, asking thought-provoking questions to current UN representatives and experts in their respective fields of study. These exclusive resources are only available due to IMUNA's formal association with the United Nations Department of Global Communications and consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. No other conference goes so far to deeply immerse students into the UN System.

**Educational emphasis, even for awards:** At the heart of NHSMUN lies education and compromise. Part of what makes NHSMUN so special is its diverse delegate base. As such, when NHSMUN distributes awards, we strongly de-emphasize their importance in comparison to the educational value of Model UN as an activity. NHSMUN seeks to reward students who excel in the arts of compromise and diplomacy. More importantly, we seek to develop an environment in which delegates can employ their critical thought processes and share ideas with their counterparts from around the world. Given our delegates' plurality of perspectives and experiences, we center our programming around the values of diplomacy and teamwork. In particular, our daises look for and promote constructive leadership that strives towards consensus, as real ambassadors do in the United Nations.

**Debate founded on strong knowledge and accessibility:** With knowledgeable staff members and delegates from over 70 countries, NHSMUN can facilitate an enriching experience reliant on substantively rigorous debate. To ensure this high quality of debate, our staff members produce detailed, accessible, and comprehensive topic guides (like the one below) to prepare delegates for the nuances inherent in each global issue. This process takes over six months, during which the Directors who lead our committees develop their topics with the valuable input of expert contributors. Because these topics are always changing and evolving, NHSMUN also produces update papers intended to bridge the gap of time between when the background guides are published and when committee starts in March. As such, this guide is designed to be a launching point from which delegates should delve further into their topics. The detailed knowledge that our Directors provide in this background guide through diligent research aims to increase critical thinking within delegates at NHSMUN.

**Extremely engaged staff:** At NHSMUN, our staffers care deeply about delegates' experiences and what they take away from

their time at NHSMUN. Before the conference, our Directors and Assistant Directors are trained rigorously through hours of workshops and exercises both virtual and in-person to provide the best conference experience possible. At the conference, delegates will have the opportunity to meet their dais members prior to the first committee session, where they may engage one-on-one to discuss their committees and topics. Our Directors and Assistant Directors are trained and empowered to be experts on their topics and they are always available to rapidly answer any questions delegates may have prior to the conference. Our Directors and Assistant Directors read every position paper submitted to NHSMUN and provide thoughtful comments on those submitted by the feedback deadline. Our staff aims not only to tailor the committee experience to delegates' reflections and research but also to facilitate an environment where all delegates' thoughts can be heard.

**Empowering participation:** The UN relies on the voices of all of its member states to create resolutions most likely to make a meaningful impact on the world. That is our philosophy at NHSMUN too. We believe that to properly delve into an issue and produce fruitful debate, it is crucial to focus the entire energy and attention of the room on the topic at hand. Our Rules of Procedure and our staff focus on making every voice in the committee heard, regardless of each delegate's country assignment or skill level. Additionally, unlike many other conferences, we also emphasize delegate participation after the conference. MUN delegates are well researched and aware of the UN's priorities, and they can serve as the vanguard for action on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Therefore, we are proud to connect students with other action-oriented organizations to encourage further work on the topics.

**Focused committee time:** We feel strongly that face-to-face interpersonal connections during debate are critical to producing superior committee experiences and allow for the free flow of ideas. Ensuring policies based on equality and inclusion is one way in which NHSMUN guarantees that every delegate has an equal opportunity to succeed in committee. In order to allow communication and collaboration to be maximized during committee, we have a very dedicated administrative team who work throughout the conference to type up, format, and print draft resolutions and working papers.

As always, we welcome any questions or concerns about the substantive program at NHSMUN 2024 and would be happy to discuss NHSMUN pedagogy with faculty or delegates.

Delegates, it is our sincerest hope that your time at NHSMUN will be thought-provoking and stimulating. NHSMUN is an incredible time to learn, grow, and embrace new opportunities. We look forward to seeing you work both as students and global citizens at the conference.

Best,

Dennis Zhang  
Secretary-General

Christian Hernandez  
Director-General

## A Note on Research and Preparation

Delegate research and preparation is a critical element of attending NHSMUN and enjoying the debate experience. We have provided this Background Guide to introduce the topics that will be discussed in your committee. We encourage and expect each of you to critically explore the selected topics and be able to identify and analyze their intricacies upon arrival to NHSMUN in March.

The task of preparing for the conference can be challenging, but to assist delegates, we have updated our [Beginner Delegate Guide](#) and [Advanced Delegate Guide](#). In particular, these guides contain more detailed instructions on how to prepare a position paper and excellent sources that delegates can use for research. Use these resources to your advantage. They can help transform a sometimes overwhelming task into what it should be: an engaging, interesting, and rewarding experience.

To accurately represent a country, delegates must be able to articulate its policies. Accordingly, NHSMUN requires each delegation (the one or two delegates representing a country in a committee) to write a position paper for each topic on the committee's agenda. In delegations with two students, we strongly encourage each student to research each topic to ensure that they are prepared to debate no matter which topic is selected first. More information about how to write and format position papers can be found in the NHSMUN Research Guide. To summarize, position papers should be structured into three sections:

**I: Topic Background** – This section should describe the history of the topic as it would be described by the delegate's country. Delegates do not need to give an exhaustive account of the topic, but rather focus on the details that are most important to the delegation's policy and proposed solutions.

**II: Country Policy** – This section should discuss the delegation's policy regarding the topic. Each paper should state the policy in plain terms and include the relevant statements, statistics, and research that support the effectiveness of the policy. Comparisons with other global issues are also appropriate here.

**III. Proposed Solutions** – This section should detail the delegation's proposed solutions to address the topic. Descriptions of each solution should be thorough. Each idea should clearly connect to the specific problem it aims to solve and identify potential obstacles to implementation and how they can be avoided. The solution should be a natural extension of the country's policy.

Each topic's position paper should be **no more than 10 pages** long double-spaced with standard margins and font size. **We recommend 3–5 pages per topic as a suitable length.** The paper must be written from the perspective of your assigned country and should articulate the policies you will espouse at the conference.

Each delegation is responsible for sending a copy of its papers to their committee Directors via [myDais](#) on or before **February 23, 2024**. If a delegate wishes to receive detailed feedback from the committee's dais, a position must be submitted on or before **February 2, 2024**. The papers received by this earlier deadline will be reviewed by the dais of each committee and returned prior to your arrival at the conference.

Complete instructions for how to submit position papers will be sent to faculty advisers via email. If delegations are unable to submit their position papers on time, please contact us at [info@imuna.org](mailto:info@imuna.org).

**Delegations that do not submit position papers will be ineligible for awards.**

## Committee History

On January 1, 1975, the UN General Assembly created the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), originally referred to as the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation (UNHHSF).<sup>1</sup> The committee was constructed to control the rapid growth of cities and provide safe and adequate protection.<sup>2</sup> In 1977, UN Resolution 32/162 transformed the Committee on Housing, Building, and Planning into the Commission of Human Settlements. Then, in 2002, UNHHSF and the Commission on Human Settlements and Habitat merged into UN-Habitat, an independent committee headed by the Executive Director and managed by the Secretariat.<sup>3</sup> The committee's mission is to “promote socially and environmentally sustainable human settlements, development and the achievement of adequate shelter for all.”<sup>4</sup>

UN-Habitat is structured into three main bodies: the Governing Council, Secretariat, and the Committee of Permanent Representatives. The committee contains 193 member states from Europe, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>5</sup> UN-Habitat also has an Executive Board of 36 member states. These member states are elected by the UN-Habitat assembly and convene tri-annually to oversee ongoing operations.<sup>6</sup> The Committee of Permanent Representatives meets every two years in an open-ended manner to prepare for the session and a high-level mid-term review meeting.<sup>7</sup> UN-Habitat's headquarters are located at the United Nations Office in Nairobi, Kenya. However, it also has two other regional offices in Fukuoka, Japan, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.<sup>8</sup> Since May of 2019, the member states of UN-Habitat have met every four years in Mexico. These assemblies usually evaluate previous projects completed between committee meetings to discuss results and possible improvements.<sup>9</sup> UN-Habitat is most frequently referred to as a “resolution writing committee” where each member is given one vote and no special vetoing power. All decisions, whether substantive or procedural, are decided by the majority vote.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, UN-Habitat's Committee mandate is based on the 2020–2023 Strategic Plan. This broad mandate is separated into four areas of action: “Reduced spatial inequality and poverty in communities across the urban-rural continuum; enhanced shared prosperity of cities and regions; strengthened climate action and improved urban environment; and effective urban crisis prevention and response.”<sup>11</sup> Because UN-Habitat is a subsidiary organ of the UN General Assembly, the Programme collaborates with governments, UN agencies, civil society organizations, foundations, academic institutions, and the private sector. Since its inception, UN-Habitat has performed many important international undertakings. The committee has raised awareness on urban development issues at many levels and highlighted the importance of addressing urban issues in poverty reduction strategies. According to the UN-Habitat's 2020 annual report, the committee worked on 71 projects designed to help countries adapt to and recover from socioeconomic conditions imposed by the global pandemic.<sup>12</sup> Each day, the importance of UN-Habitat's work on urgent issues is highlighted, and they will continue to undertake these essential missions.

1 “History, Mandate & Role in the UN System: UN-Habitat,” United Nations Human Settlements Programme, accessed September 10, 2021, <https://unhabitat.org/history-mandate-role-in-the-un-system>.

2 “Background,” United Nations Human Settlements Programme, accessed September 10, 2021, <https://evaw-un-inventory.unwomen.org/en/agencies/un-habitat>.

3 United Nations Human Settlements Programme, “History, Mandate & Role in the UN System: UN-Habitat.”

4 United Nations Human Settlements Programme, “History, Mandate & Role in the UN System: UN-Habitat.”

5 “Our Structure,” United Nations Human Settlements Programme, accessed September 10, 2021, <https://unhabitat.org/our-structure>.

6 “Executive Board,” United Nations Human Settlements Programme, accessed September 10, 2021, <https://unhabitat.org/governance/executive-board>.

7 “Committee of Permanent Representatives,” United Nations Human Settlements Programme, accessed September 10, 2021, <https://unhabitat.org/governance/committee-of-permanent-representatives>.

8 “Regional Offices,” United Nations Human Settlements Programme, accessed September 10, 2021, <https://mirror.unhabitat.org/categories.asp?catid=22>.

9 “General Concept,” United Nations Human Settlements Programme, accessed September 10, 2021, <https://unhabitat.org/results-based-management/4-1-general-concept>.

10 “United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat),” Special Presentation, accessed September 10, 2021, [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/01/rules\\_of\\_procedure\\_of\\_the\\_united\\_nations\\_habitat\\_assembly.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/01/rules_of_procedure_of_the_united_nations_habitat_assembly.pdf)

11 “Programmes,” United Nations Human Settlements Programme, accessed September 13, 2021, <https://unhabitat.org/programmes>.

12 “Annual Report 2020,” United Nations Human Settlements Programme, accessed September 10, 2021, <https://unhabitat.org/annualreport/domain-of-change-4.html>.





UN-HABITAT  
NHSMUN 2022



# TOPIC A: PLANNING URBAN SPACES FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY

Photo Credit: Gugerell



## Introduction

Cities, like the majority of modern societies, have been designed by men to accommodate men, often ignoring important safety considerations for women living in those cities.<sup>1</sup> Urban planning efforts often disregard the specific challenges facing women, resulting in cities that cannot meet their needs. This urban planning phenomenon is known as a gender-blind approach, and it can significantly impact women's mobility, safety, and access to opportunities and services.<sup>2</sup> This issue is considered a result of traditional gender roles in which women are perceived as being responsible for childcare and housekeeping, which created an expectation that they would spend most of their time at home while men spent their time outside the house in public spaces.

Women report feeling unsafe or threatened in urban spaces much more often than men do. For instance, in the United Kingdom, a survey asked participants whether they felt afraid while waiting for the train at night. While 93 percent of female respondents responded yes, only 53 percent of male respondents said the same, highlighting the significant gap between men's and women's sense of safety in public spaces.<sup>3</sup> The feeling of insecurity shared by most women stems from the multiple forms of violence they face in public spaces, particularly verbal and sexual harassment. They are especially at risk when using services such as public bathrooms or waiting at transportation stations.<sup>4</sup> For women to comfortably use public spaces and services, their challenges and concerns need to be considered during urban planning processes.<sup>5</sup>

Public transportation is a service that is often overlooked in urban planning, as cities have increasingly been built for car users. However, women are usually more reliant on public transportation than men, particularly in low-income or middle-income countries.<sup>6</sup> While this highlights

women's need for reliable public transportation, the reality is particularly concerning, considering that most women report fearing harassment when using this service.<sup>7</sup> Outside of transportation, women on average also feel less safe than men when walking around their streets at night. A 2011 Gallup poll with data from 143 countries concluded that there was a 10 percent gap between the number of men reporting feeling safe walking at night in their neighborhood compared to women.<sup>8</sup> To ensure women can fully experience the urban environment and take advantage of all the opportunities it offers them, it is imperative to guarantee their safety and comfort within their neighborhoods and transportation services.

When addressing women's issues, urban planning efforts must also consider violence against women in the private sphere, as domestic violence affects many women worldwide.<sup>9</sup> In slums, this form of violence can be exacerbated by other factors such as poverty, inadequate housing, lack of services, community violence, and substance abuse.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, ensuring affordable housing and emergency shelters is essential to help victims

1 "Cities are designed by men, for men: why local government needs more female leadership," Citymonitor, Last modified March 8, 2017, <https://citymonitor.ai/community/equity/cities-are-designed-men-men-why-local-government-needs-more-female-leadership-2862>.

2 Sahana Dharmapuri, "Back To The Basics: Gender Blindness Negatively Impacts Security," *Our Secure Future*, last modified March 3, 2017, <https://oursecurefuture.org/opinion-insights/back-basics-gender-blindness-negatively-impacts-security>.

3 Christine Ro, "How to design safer cities for women," *BBC*, April 11, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20210409-how-to-design-safer-cities-for-women>.

4 Taz Khatri, "Designing Safe Cities for Women," *Smart Cities Dive*, accessed June 13, 2021, <https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/ex/sustainablecitiescollective/designing-safe-cities-women/1052876/>.

5 Ro, "How to design safer cities for women."

6 Crina Boros, "Exclusive-Poll: Latin American cities have most dangerous transport for women, NYC best," *Reuters*, October 28, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/women-poll/exclusive-poll-latin-american-cities-have-most-dangerous-transport-for-women-nyc-best-idUKL6N0S32MQ20141029?edition-redirect=uk>.

7 Kathryn Travers, Margaret Shaw and Cassandra McCleery, "Making Cities Safer for Women and Girls, Part I," *Urbanet*. March 8, 2017, <https://www.urbanet.info/safe-cities-for-women-and-girls>.

8 Travers, Shaw and McCleery, "Making Cities Safer for Women and Girls."

9 Jeevan Bhatta, Junu Bhatta, Sharmistha Sharma, and Roshna Rajbhandari, "Assessing Domestic Violence and Its Causes against Women of Urban Slum of Nepal," *International Journal of Health Sciences and Research* 8, no. 10 (2018): 238-243, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346779005\\_Assessing\\_Domestic\\_Violence\\_and\\_Its\\_Causes\\_against\\_Women\\_of\\_Urban\\_Slum\\_of\\_Nepal](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346779005_Assessing_Domestic_Violence_and_Its_Causes_against_Women_of_Urban_Slum_of_Nepal).

10 Shahina Begum, Balaiah Donta, Saritha Nair, and C. Prakasam, "Socio-demographic factors associated with domestic violence in urban slums, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India," *The Indian journal of medical research* 141, no. 6 (2015): 783, <https://www.ijmr.org.in/text.asp?2015/141/6/783/160701>.



escape their abusers by breaking their financial independence to their partners.

Currently, countries are tasked with combating the reality that women are more likely to remain with abusive spouses if they are not economically independent and secure since they have no consistent means of sustaining themselves on their own.<sup>11</sup> The issue of financial dependence is also tied to inaccessible education and employment opportunities, with countless women being forced to rely on their partners as a result. As such, economic instability, low incomes, and lack of education are directly related to women's higher risk of suffering from intimate partner violence (IPV).<sup>12</sup> Feeling unsafe in public spaces can also prevent women from fully accessing employment opportunities—women may hesitate to take jobs far away from their homes to avoid public transportation or might refuse to work night shifts to escape harassment while walking alone in the dark.<sup>13</sup> UN-Habitat is tasked with finding sustainable ways to plan urban spaces for women's safety, ensuring that their input is considered for implementation.

## History and Description of the Issue

### Women's Insecurity in Streets and Urban Services

On average, women feel more unsafe in public spaces than men, interfering with their freedom of movement and expression. Sexual harassment and violence prevent women from exercising their 'right to the city,' which is the right of

a city's inhabitants to freely experience the city they live in without the fear or threat of harassment, intimidation, or violence.<sup>14</sup> Cities where women can exercise this right can be referred to as women-friendly cities, where their needs are considered in the urban planning process.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, women-friendly cities are not the global standard, as the reality for most women involves facing different forms of sexual violence in public spaces, including unwanted sexual remarks, physical assault, rape, and even femicide.<sup>16</sup> The fear of such violence and actual occurrences of sexual violence may affect their routines and lifestyles, as well as their emotional and physical health.<sup>17</sup>

There is a commonly held belief that "revealing" clothes make women more likely to be harassed, which causes women to change how they dress in public spaces without properly addressing the root issues leading to intimate partner violence (IPV). A survey conducted by a British media outlet, *The Independent*, highlights that 55 percent of male respondents and 41 percent of female respondents agreed that the more revealing the clothes a woman wears, the more likely she is to suffer harassment or assault.<sup>18</sup> However, these opinions are not supported by evidence, clothing has been proven to not be a significant factor, and most cases of rape are committed by someone the victim knows and happen in their homes. Moreover, the belief only contributes to victim-blaming discourse, as it suggests women have control over the crimes in which they are attacked.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, this belief that revealing clothes contribute to sexual assault stems from the notion

11 Begum, Donta, Nair, and Prakasam, "Socio-demographic factors associated with domestic violence in urban slums, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India."

12 Begum, Donta, Nair, and C. Prakasam, "Socio-demographic factors associated with domestic violence in urban slums, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India.," Shuba Kumar, Lakshmanan Jeyaseelan, Saradha Suresh, and Ramesh Ahuja, "Domestic violence and its mental health correlates in Indian women," *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 187(1), (2005), doi:10.1192/bjp.187.1.62 <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-british-journal-of-psychiatry/article/domestic-violence-and-its-mental-health-correlates-in-indian-women/025446455A6E1AD84DC5D74A5B242489>.

13 Erika Fraser, Kalpana Viswanath, Laura MacLean, *Violence against Women and Girls, Infrastructure and Cities: briefing note, Infrastructure and Cities for Economic Development*, (2017), [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/620485/Infrastructure-Cities-briefing-note.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/620485/Infrastructure-Cities-briefing-note.pdf).

14 Rewa Marathe and Zoe Condliffe, *Digital Landscape of Women's Safety* (Perth: State of Australian Cities Conference, 2019), 1-3, <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2019-12/apo-nid306033.pdf>.

15 "Women Friendly Cities," Women Friendly Cities, accessed August 4th, 2021, <http://www.kadindostukentler.com/wfc-women-friendly-city.php>.

16 UN-Women, *Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces* (New York: November 2015), <http://www.kadindostukentler.com/wfc-women-friendly-city.php> <https://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2014/un%20women%20safe%20cities%20brief-us-web.pdf>.

17 Nandita Bhatla, Pranita Achyut, Abhishek Gautam, Ravi Verma, *Safe Cities Free From Violence Against Women and Girls* (New Delhi: International Center for Research on Women, 2012), [https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Baseline-Research-of-Safe-Cities-programme-\(1\)\[smallpdf.com\].pdf](https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Baseline-Research-of-Safe-Cities-programme-(1)[smallpdf.com].pdf).

18 Maya Oppenheim, "Majority of men believe women more likely to be sexually assaulted if wearing revealing clothes, study suggests," *The Independent*, February 23, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/men-sexual-assault-clothes-women-victim-blaming-rape-a8792591.html>.

19 Oppenheim, "Majority of men."

that sexual violence is related to inescapable biological urges. In fact, sexual violence is about controlling and acting on violent urges against women.<sup>20</sup> Telling women that IPV can be avoided through clothing choices serves to limit women without acknowledging or condemning the choices made by perpetrators, making it imperative for safe spaces to limit the agency of perpetrators without enforcing restrictions for women.

Alternatively, factors such as street lighting and time of day can genuinely influence women's sense of safety while in public spaces. In Britain, nearly 63 percent of women fear going out in the dark, compared to only 33 percent of men.<sup>21</sup> This has significant consequences on women's personal and professional development, as poorly lit streets and the fear of going out in the dark may stop women from fully accessing employment opportunities, reaching educational goals, and engaging with their communities.<sup>22</sup> In countries like Colombia and Guatemala, women have been increasingly dropping out of night school due to fears of being attacked in the dark while traveling to or from school.<sup>23</sup> This fear also extends to the workplace itself. According to the National Commission for Women in India, one-third of women felt unsafe working night shifts.<sup>24</sup> Thus, fears of going out in the dark and facing violence at night shifts may prevent women from taking on jobs in such periods.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, evidence indicates that women are indeed more likely to face violence in public spaces at night.<sup>26</sup> The fear of going out at night also extends to elderly women. For instance, the World Health Organization reports that elderly people in urban areas are especially concerned with their safety at night.<sup>27</sup> Thus, perceived and actual insecurity

20 Oppenheim, "Majority of men."

21 "Almost two thirds of Women Feel Unsafe Walking Alone After Dark," Plan International UK, October 11, 2016, <https://plan-uk.org/media-centre/almost-two-thirds-of-women-feel-unsafe-walking-alone-after-dark>.

22 Taz Khatri, "Designing Safe Cities for Women," *Smart Cities Dive*, accessed June 13, 2021, <https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/ex/sustainablecitiescollective/designing-safe-cities-women/1052876/>.

23 Erika Fraser, Kalpana Viswanath, Laura MacLean, *Violence against Women and Girls, Infrastructure and Cities: briefing note, Infrastructure and Cities for Economic Development*, (2017), [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/620485/Infrastructure-Cities-briefing-note.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/620485/Infrastructure-Cities-briefing-note.pdf).

24 Ragini Bhuyan, "Night shifts are not the answer to getting more women to work," Mint, Last modified June 1st, 2016, <https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/jKzxtpAoIhrLnes2P6uXdL/Night-shifts-are-not-the-answer-to-getting-more-women-to-wor.html>.

25 Bhuyan, "Night shifts are not the answer to getting more women to work."

26 Fraser, Viswanath, MacLean, *Violence against Women and Girls, Infrastructure and Cities: briefing note, Infrastructure and Cities for Economic Development*.

27 World Health Organization, *Global age-friendly cities: a guide*, (Geneva: WHO Press, 2007), [https://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Global\\_age\\_friendly\\_cities\\_Guide\\_English.pdf](https://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Global_age_friendly_cities_Guide_English.pdf).

28 Brenda Bhooyo, *Urban Design Factors that Influence Women's Choice of Route of Movement: The Case of Nairobi Central Business District*, (2014), <http://ir.jkuat.ac.ke/handle/123456789/1524?show=full>.

29 Bhooyo, *Urban Design Factors that Influence Women's Choice of Route of Movement: The Case of Nairobi Central Business District*.

30 Angelique Moss, "Making Streets Safe for Women," *The Diplomat*, February 17, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/02/making-streets-safe-for-women/>.

31 Khatri, "Designing Safe Cities for Women."

during nighttime affects women of different ages and their ability to access available opportunities and services.

Other important factors that may impact women's sense of safety in urban environments are street activity, surveillance, signage, and clear visibility of streets and buildings. The presence or absence of these factors may even cause women to change their routes when moving from one place to another to find safer pathways to avoid violence.<sup>28</sup> Land uses, for example, are a determining factor to secure the presence of pedestrian women in a determined location or pathway. Pathways with shops, restaurants, and cafés attract pedestrian women, as they result in active streets and invite walk-in or walk-by traffic.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, high vehicle traffic, police stations, and schools discourage the social use of streets and pathways, leading to women feeling less comfortable using these routes. This unconscious restriction of access to urban spaces also has long-term impacts on the participation of women in public life and recreational activities, as they feel discouraged to utilize and explore part of the cities they live in.<sup>30</sup>

Apart from inadequate lightning and gender-based violence, women are disproportionately affected by unstable housing and inadequate sanitation facilities. The lack of access to proper sanitation may prompt the use of outdoor bathrooms, which increase vulnerability to sexual harassment, often providing little privacy and located far away from their living accommodations.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, in many places, public toilets for women are not widely available, and when they are, many women still perceive them as a threat to their safety. For example, a survey conducted in Delhi, India, found that





Breastfeeding corner in Taipei City, Taiwan

25 percent of low-income women perceive public toilets as unsafe.<sup>32</sup> This is supported by the fact that studies have related inappropriate sanitation spaces, such as shared or open toilets with poor infrastructure and a lack of water, to a higher risk of women and girls being raped.<sup>33</sup>

Water and sanitation infrastructure can support health and safety efforts by creating private spaces and ensuring safe access to essential supplies. In South Africa, for example, 25 percent of all households do not have access to private toilets.<sup>34</sup> A 2020 study in the country found a 45 percent higher risk of non-partner sexual violence in women who use shared toilets when compared to those with private toilets, demonstrating

how shared private spaces can create openings for perpetrators.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, a study by McMaster University found a strong relationship between the lack of consistent water supply and sanitation with higher rates of domestic violence, sexual assault, and violence between women.<sup>36</sup> Poor water infrastructure may cause women to fight amongst themselves to access the available supplies. At the same time, being unable to supply water to their households also puts women at a higher risk of suffering domestic violence due to social expectations that women must fulfill their household expectations.<sup>37</sup> Insufficient information about available public services may also prevent women from accessing them and add to the struggles they face.<sup>38</sup>

Women are often the primary caregivers of their families; therefore, safe spaces for children and infants, such as breastfeeding corners, are another vital aspect in fostering women's safety.<sup>39</sup> Such spaces could be private sections separate from bathrooms with comfortable structures and strong, functioning locks, present both in women's working spaces and other public spaces such as stores. Providing such spaces is important to ensure women's safety, as urban women are less likely to breastfeed due to the lack of appropriate spaces and embarrassment of breastfeeding in public.<sup>40</sup> Ample access to secure breastfeeding spaces could also help with their work-life balance, as a study by the United States Breastfeeding Committee found there is a 77 percent reduction in absenteeism, or a pattern of missing work, among firms with lactation support.<sup>41</sup> Establishing spaces for breastfeeding may also contribute to sustainable development, as breastfeeding is the most ecologically sustainable way to feed children and could prevent severe nutritional health

32 Bhatla, Achyut, Gautam, and Verma, *Safe Cities Free From Violence Against Women and Girls*.  
 33 Andrew Gibbs and Tarylee Reddy, "Why access to decent toilets could help reduce sexual violence in South Africa," *The Conversation*, September 17, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/why-access-to-decent-toilets-could-help-reduce-sexual-violence-in-south-africa-146150>.  
 34 Gibbs and Reddy, "Why access to decent toilets could help reduce sexual violence in South Africa."  
 35 Gibbs and Reddy, "Why access to decent toilets could help reduce sexual violence in South Africa."  
 36 Morgan Pommells, *Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene as a Gender Based Violence Risk: How Inadequate Access To Clean and Reliable Water Increases Rates Of Violence Against Women in East Africa* (Hamilton: McMaster University, 2015), [https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/bitstream/11375/18420/2/Pommells\\_Morgan\\_S\\_FinalSubmission1509\\_MasterofSocialWork.pdf](https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/bitstream/11375/18420/2/Pommells_Morgan_S_FinalSubmission1509_MasterofSocialWork.pdf).  
 37 Pommells, "Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene as a Gender Based Violence Risk: How Inadequate Access To Clean and Reliable Water Increases Rates Of Violence Against Women in East Africa."  
 38 Namira Shameem, "Women-Friendly Urban Services," Power and Participation Research Centre, last modified February 18, 2020, <https://www.pprc-bd.org/women-friendly-urban-services-the-future-of-womens-economic-empowerment/>.  
 39 Khatri, "Designing Safe Cities for Women.," Shameem, "Women-Friendly Urban Services."  
 40 "Barriers to Breastfeeding," *Breastfeeding Coalition Tasmania*, accessed August 26, 2021, [http://www.breastfeedingtas.org/about/barriers\\_to\\_breastfeeding#Embarrass](http://www.breastfeedingtas.org/about/barriers_to_breastfeeding#Embarrass).  
 41 Katherine Lewis, "How to Set up a Lactation Room to Breastfeed at Work," *Very Well Family*, last modified June 16, 2020, <https://www.verywellfamily.com/lactation-room-breastfeeding-at-work-3545106>.

impacts on infants.<sup>42</sup>

Additionally, the lack of childcare facilities and eldercare facilities may also impact women's ability to balance work and family life, as women are still generally tasked with primary caregiver responsibilities worldwide. Thus, the absence of affordable and accessible childcare hurts the ability of women to find accommodating employment opportunities. Therefore, investing in daycare and eldercare facilities near women's workplaces could foster relief on the responsibilities imposed on many women and aid economic equality.<sup>43</sup> Mothers are also affected by the absence of leisurely spaces for women and children.<sup>44</sup> Providing adequate access to green and safe public spaces for women and children would increase their quality of life and improve their community as a whole.<sup>45</sup> Poor road conditions can affect a mother's ability to navigate cities, as they can make maneuvering baby strollers more difficult.<sup>46</sup> For example, in Buenos Aires, a woman drew international attention when poor road conditions caused her infant's stroller to break, forcing her to carry her child, belongings, and the stroller. She ended up being mugged and had no option but to keep walking.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, the absence of women-friendly streets and services may also negatively impact their health. Women residing in neighborhoods of low socioeconomic status are more likely to experience adverse reproductive outcomes. These places often present poor housing conditions, a lack of public spaces for socializing, and limited walkability. On the other hand, better walkability, which includes greater pedestrian safety, the presence of nature, and well-maintained streets, has

been associated with lower odds of adverse maternal health outcomes.<sup>48</sup> This could be because poorer neighborhoods may have fewer supermarket options for healthy eating and are also associated with greater levels of maternal stress, which can induce health-diminishing behaviors by women, such as smoking and substance abuse.<sup>49</sup> Better walkability can also help pregnant women engage in physical activity, contributing to the prevention of negative health outcomes.

To ensure streets and services are planned to address women and girls' needs, it is important to include them in the planning and decision-making process.<sup>50</sup> One such successful example is Safetipin, an organization that has developed apps that map the safety levels of different areas based on lightning, public transport, and other factors. They found that women highlight visibility, or 'street eyes,' as a critical factor in making them feel safe.<sup>51</sup> In Delhi, this digital tool was used to increase the participation of women and girls in the improvement of infrastructure.<sup>52</sup> Having women lead design initiatives ensures that gaps in safety are addressed and improved.

In 2010, UN-Women and UN-Habitat launched the Safe Cities Global Initiative with two different flagship programs for fostering partnerships with local governments and women's organizations in different cities.<sup>53</sup> According to UN-Women, "it is the first-ever global comparative programme that develops, implements, and evaluates comprehensive approaches to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls in public areas." This initiative yielded several results in Quito, Ecuador, including passing local legislation to

42 Judith Fitzpatrick and Jessica Moore-Kaplan, "Unicef: Rapid Urbanization hurting children and pregnant women," Health and Human Rights Blog, March 5, 2012, <https://sites.sph.harvard.edu/hhropenforum/2012/03/05/unicef-rapid-urbanization-hurting-children-and-pregnant-women/>; Athena Sheehan, Karleen Gribble, and Virginia Schmied, "It's okay to breastfeed in public but..." *International breastfeeding journal* 14, no. 1 (2019): 1-11. <https://internationalbreastfeedingjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13006-019-0216-y>.

43 Shameem, "Women-Friendly Urban Services."

44 Maliha Khan and Aanila Tarannum, "Imagining a women-friendly city," *The Daily Star*, March 8, 2019, <https://www.thedailystar.net/supplements/international-womens-day-2019/news/imagining-women-friendly-city-1712164>.

45 *New Urban Agenda*, (Nairobi: UN-Habitat, October, 2016), <https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2019/05/nua-english.pdf>.

46 Juan Ignacio Coda, "Gender Inclusive Cities: Can Urban Planning Take into Account Women and Minorities," *The World Bank*, March 7, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/03/07/ciudades-feministas-diseno-urbano-para-mujeres-y-minorias>.

47 Juan Ignacio Coda, "Gender Inclusive Cities: Can Urban Planning Take into Account Women and Minorities," *The World Bank*, March 7, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/03/07/ciudades-feministas-diseno-urbano-para-mujeres-y-minorias>.

48 Ria Hutabarat Lo, "Walkability: what is it?," *Journal of Urbanism* 2, no. 2 (July 2009): 145-166, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17549170903092867>; Lisa Vinikoor-Imler, Lynne Messer, Kelly Evenson, and Barbara Laraia, "Neighborhood conditions are associated with maternal health behaviors and pregnancy outcomes," *Social science & medicine* 73, no. 9 (March 2011): 1302-1311, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.08.012>.

49 "Neighborhood conditions are associated with maternal health behaviors and pregnancy outcomes."

50 Kathryn Travers, Margaret Shaw and Kassandra McCleery, "Making Cities Safer for Women and Girls, Part II," *Urbanet*, March 9, 2017, <https://www.urbanet.info/safe-cities-for-women-and-girls-part-ii/>.

51 Christine Ro, "How to design safer cities for women," *BBC*, April 11, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20210409-how-to-design-safer-cities-for-women>.

52 Marathe and Condliffe, *Digital Landscape of Women's Safety*.

53 Bhatla, Achyut, Gautam, and Verma, *Safe Cities Free From Violence Against Women and Girls*.



increase measures against harassment in public spaces.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, Egypt's Ministry of Housing, Utilities, and Urban Development adopted women's safety audits to guide urban planning, and New Delhi integrated Safe Cities recommendations into their social protection infrastructure.<sup>55</sup> The initiative conducts surveys to uncover the extent to which women are affected by sexual violence in their cities and has implemented mapping programs to motivate women to report and respond to experiences of sexual harassment.

### Gender-based Violence and Harassment in Public Transportation

Public transportation is an area of great concern when it comes to women's safety. A considerable amount of women depend on public transport for their daily routines and responsibilities. In countries like the US, they account for up to 55 percent of public transportation users.<sup>56</sup> Unfortunately, it is also one of the public services women feel most unsafe using.<sup>57</sup> Women, especially those living in poverty, walk and use public transportation more than men, thus exposing them more to strangers and the feeling of insecurity. In 2014, 85 percent of global working women and 82 percent of students were harassed in public transport, showing how the problem impacts the vast majority of women.<sup>58</sup>

Harassment in public transport can include visual, verbal, and physical aggression. It can happen at bus stops and on streets as women are on their way to public transportation, both of which may be dimly lit and sparsely populated at night.<sup>59</sup> In a

2007 survey conducted by the New York Times online with New York City residents, 63 percent of subway users said they had been sexually harassed, while 51 percent reported they were sometimes or frequently threatened with sexual assault and harassment.<sup>60</sup> In Washington DC, women were three times more likely to have experienced unwanted attention in public transport than men, including touching and sexual assault.<sup>61</sup> This problem is worsened by bystander apathy when individuals witnessing harassment do not intervene, making girls feel less secure about being protected from threats to their wellbeing. For example, in Sri Lanka, 82 percent of bystanders say they rarely intervene when witnessing instances of sexual harassment, as the responsibility for preventing harassment is often placed on women, girls, and gender non-conforming people.<sup>62</sup> Unwanted sexual attention in public transportation can significantly impact women's lives as it affects their mobility, including their access to jobs and educational opportunities.<sup>63</sup> It is estimated that two-thirds of women have changed their mobility habits according to their perception of security.<sup>64</sup> Sexual harassment in public transportation also poses psychological impacts, such as increased anxiety, sleep disorders, depression, and self-esteem issues in victims of sexual harassment.<sup>65</sup>

Moreover, sexual harassment on public transit is greatly underreported. A study in London, England, found that 1 in 10 Londoners were victims of unwanted sexual attention, but 90 percent did not report it to the police.<sup>66</sup> Several women perceive reporting as a useless action, as they believe it will

54 UN-Women, *Safe Cities Global Initiative*, (New York: 2013), <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/~media/44F28561B84548FE82E24E38E825ABEA.ashx>.

55 UN-Women, *Safe Cities Global Initiative*.

56 Sarah Goodyear, "More Women Ride Mass Transit Than Men. Shouldn't Transit Agencies Be Catering to Them?," *Bloomberg*, January 30, 2015, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-01-30/more-women-ride-mass-transit-than-men-shouldn-t-transit-agencies-be-catering-to-them>.

57 Travers, Shaw and McCleery, "Making Cities Safer for Women and Girls, Part I; Ajuntament de Barcelona, "Stop Sexual Harassment on Public Transport," *Info Barcelona*, March 5, 2020, [https://www.barcelona.cat/infobarcelona/en/tema/security-and-prevention/stop-sexual-harassment-on-public-transport\\_1046192.html](https://www.barcelona.cat/infobarcelona/en/tema/security-and-prevention/stop-sexual-harassment-on-public-transport_1046192.html).

58 Nirmal Gautam, Nirmal Sapakota, Sarala Shrestha, and Dipika Regmi. "Sexual harassment in public transportation among female student in Kathmandu valley," *Risk management and healthcare policy* 12 (2019): 105, <https://doi.org/10.2147/RMHP.S196230>.

59 Lina Marcela Quinones, "Sexual harassment in public transport in Bogotá," *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice* 139 (2020): 54-69. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2020.06.018>; Martine Powers, "Why the #MeToo movement is a public transportation issue," *The Washington Post*, October 20, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/dr-gridlock/wp/2017/10/20/why-the-metoo-movement-is-a-public-transportation-issue/>.

60 Powers, "Why the #MeToo movement is a public transportation issue."

61 Rachel Kurzius, "Data: More Than Three Quarters of People Harassed in Trains Don't Report It," *DCist*, April 12, 2016, <https://dcist.com/story/16/04/12/data-more-than-75-percent-of-people/>.

62 "Sexual harassment on public transport? 'It's not my business to intervene' say urban commuters in Sri Lanka," Oxfam International, July 22, 2019, <https://www.oxfam.org/fr/node/10868>.

63 Quinones, "Sexual harassment in public transport in Bogotá."

64 Ajuntament de Barcelona, "Stop Sexual Harassment on Public Transport."

65 Gautam, Sapakota, Shrestha, and Regmi, "Sexual harassment in public transportation among female student in Kathmandu valley."

66 Travers, Shaw and McCleery, "Making Cities Safer for Women and Girls, Part I.," "Report It to Stop It" campaign encouraging greater

not lead to any punishments or consequences, which is often supported by accounts of women who have attempted to report but have been met with several difficulties. In many cities in the Global South, authorities tend to impose increased difficulties to report gender-based violence, and a global challenge to reporting assaults in public transport is that since most perpetrators are strangers, it becomes difficult to track them down.<sup>67</sup> Apart from this fact and unsupportive authorities, victim-blaming also prevents women from becoming empowered actors who can take necessary action to promote change.

Several cities have launched anti-harassment campaigns that seek to educate the public on acting in these situations. Examples include London's "Report it to Stop it" and Paris's

reporting of unwanted sexual behaviour," Transport for London, last modified August 3, 2016, <https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/media/press-releases/2016/august/-report-it-to-stop-it-campaign-encouraging-greater-reporting-of-unwanted-sexual-behaviour>.

"*Stop, ça suffit*," which encourage bystanders and victims to report harassment through apps and online platforms.<sup>68</sup> One year after the release of the London campaign in 2014, reports increased by 31 percent, resulting in more than 500 arrests.<sup>69</sup> In Washington, DC, anti-harassment campaigns also led to an increase in reported events. However, it is important to note that these campaigns did not stop the harassment from happening. The success of these campaigns has been limited to increased reporting of harassment, but more action will be needed to prevent and intervene in such events.<sup>70</sup> Other campaigns, like the "Not On My Bus" campaign in Sri Lanka, focusing primarily on increasing bystander intervention through public events to prevent sexual harassment from happening.<sup>71</sup> These kinds of campaigns should be examined



Women-only carriage in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

67 Quinones, "Sexual harassment in public transport in Bogotá."

68 Travers, Shaw and McCleery, "Making Cities Safer for Women and Girls, Part I."

69 Transport for London, "Report It to Stop It" campaign encouraging greater reporting of unwanted sexual behaviour."

70 Powers, "Why the #MeToo movement is a public transportation issue."

71 Oxfam International, "Sexual harassment on public transport? "It's not my business to intervene," say urban commuters in Sri Lanka."



to determine how public spaces can allow for more bystander intervention.

In several cities globally, public transportation systems implemented women-only carriages, allowing only women to enter during pre-determined periods. Examples of countries with such policies are Iran, India, and Brazil.<sup>72</sup> In Indian cities such as Delhi and Mumbai, entire train passages may be reserved for female passengers, but some women see it as a step back, as they are simply isolated and do not see progress against the root causes of sexual harassment in public transportation.<sup>73</sup> Activists also criticize the enforcement of women-only carriages and other measures, such as in Rio de Janeiro, where there is a lack of security guards to enforce them and ultimately place the responsibility to prevent harassment on women.<sup>74</sup> Another source of criticism is that although the law establishes that specific carriages are to be used only by women at certain times, there are no actual consequences for men who infringe this rule.<sup>75</sup> Another Brazilian city, São Paulo, introduced a recent law that authorizes buses to stop outside their official bus stops between 10 PM and 5 AM. This law aims to help women and people with disabilities who may be more vulnerable at night, helping those groups from having to walk longer paths unaccompanied to reach bus stops that often make them more vulnerable to harassment.<sup>76</sup> Sexual harassment in transportation has also led to alternative transportation methods, such as female-driven taxis, including Lady Driver in Brazil, Pink Taxi in Egypt, and DriveHER in Toronto, Canada.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, this form of transportation may not be affordable for many women, so they are left with no choice but to use public transportation.

72 Emma Graham-Harrison, "Women-only carriages around the world: do they work?," *The Guardian*, August 26, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/26/women-only-train-carriages-around-the-world-jeremy-corbyn>.

73 Graham-Harrison, "Women-only carriages around the world: do they work?."

74 Graham-Harrison, "Women-only carriages around the world: do they work?."

75 Capobianco, "Metrol do Rio convida artistas para sinalizar vagões femininos."

76 Alana Ambrosio, "Lei autoriza desembarcar fora do ponto na Grande SP," *Folha de São Paulo*, October 16, 2020, <https://agora.folha.uol.com.br/sao-paulo/2019/10/lei-autoriza-desembarcar-fora-do-ponto-na-grande-sp.shtml>.

77 Ivan Livingstone, "Taxi Drivers Are Mostly Men, These Women Entrepreneurs Want to Change That," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, September 24, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-09-24/taxi-drivers-are-mostly-men-these-women-entrepreneurs-want-to-change-that>.

78 Quinones, "Sexual harassment in public transport in Bogotá."

79 Powers, "Why the #MeToo movement is a public transportation issue."

80 Prateek Shrivastava and Saurabh Shrivastava, "A study of spousal domestic violence in an urban slum of Mumbai," *International journal of preventive medicine* 4, no. 1 (January 2013): 27, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3570908/>

81 Jeevan Bhatta, Junu Bhatta, Sharmistha Sharma, and Roshna Rajbhandari, "Assessing Domestic Violence and Its Causes against Women of Urban Slum of Nepal," *International Journal of Health Sciences and Research* 8, no. 10 (2018): 238-243, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346779005\\_Assessing\\_Domestic\\_Violence\\_and\\_Its\\_Causes\\_against\\_Women\\_of\\_Urban\\_Slum\\_of\\_Nepal](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346779005_Assessing_Domestic_Violence_and_Its_Causes_against_Women_of_Urban_Slum_of_Nepal)

82 Bushra Sabri and Jacquelyn Campbell, "Intimate partner violence against women in slums in India," *The Indian journal of medical research* 141, no. 6 (2015): 757, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4103%2F0971-5916.160693>

83 Begum, Donta, Nair, and C. Prakasham, "Socio-demographic factors associated with domestic violence in urban slums, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India."

Studies have claimed that efforts should be made to prevent sexual harassment and assaults from happening in the first place. Women are often pressured into changing their usual behaviors with this objective, such as avoiding certain clothes, routes, or taking transportation accompanied by someone.<sup>78</sup> However, researchers emphasize that harassment happens regardless of women's choices, and the responsibility to prevent harassment cases should be placed on authorities and society as a whole. Others argue for measures such as locating bus stops in widely frequented areas such as restaurants and grocery stores and increasing police presence to stop offenders from committing sexual assaults.<sup>79</sup>

### Domestic Violence in Slums and Lower-Income Communities

Among other forms of abuse, domestic or intimate partner violence can include verbal, physical, and sexual harassment.<sup>80</sup> This form of abuse is particularly common for women in lower-income communities. A study conducted in urban slums in Nepal confirmed that the number of women abused by their husbands was as high as 86.3 percent.<sup>81</sup> While all women face a certain risk of domestic or intimate partner violence, women living in slums are particularly vulnerable. Slums are residential areas that are unfit for human habitation due to dilapidation, overcrowding, or lack of ventilation, electricity, or sanitation facilities.<sup>82</sup> A study conducted in Pune, India, has found that 22.9 percent of women in slums had experienced domestic violence, compared to 14 percent of women in non-slum areas.<sup>83</sup> However, some speculate that this is because women from higher socioeconomic status are

less likely to report incidents of intimate partner violence as they fear that reporting such abuses may threaten their status and economic situation. Regardless, violence against women in intimate relationships was also more frequent, more severe, and more likely to be repeated in economically disadvantaged areas. Research by the American National Institute of Justice (NIJ) found that the proportion of women suffering domestic violence in underprivileged areas in the United States was 8.7 percent. In comparison, that number was 4.3 percent in higher-income neighborhoods. Thus, women in economically disadvantaged areas were two times more likely to have suffered from this form of violence than other women.<sup>84</sup>

One factor that may explain the wider occurrence and harsher consequence of abuse in poor communities is that women living in slums or economically disadvantaged neighborhoods have less access to support services.<sup>85</sup> Even when support systems are available, women may not be aware of them as they may not be widely publicized, preventing them from accessing the help they need to leave abusive relationships.<sup>86</sup> Abusive partners may also prevent women from accessing these services, as victims may not be able to freely leave their homes to seek support networks. In addition, high crime rates are associated with higher levels of sexual and physical violence against women.<sup>87</sup> One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that violent crime may increase stress levels, which is associated with a greater likelihood of IPV.<sup>88</sup> However, it can also be the case that violent crime is more likely to happen in areas with less policing and support systems, which would make reporting and preventing domestic violence more difficult. Moreover, lower household income, hierarchical

gender relations, and economic stress are also correlated with domestic violence.<sup>89</sup> Financial stressors include housing nonpayment, food insecurity, and disconnected phone services.<sup>90</sup> In another report by the NIJ in the United States, domestic violence in economically burdened couples was 9.5 percent. In contrast, that percentage was 2.7 percent in other couples with lower levels of economic burden.

Economic factors may increase existing stressors and dissatisfaction, contributing to an increased likelihood of intimate partner violence. A study with Mexican Indigenous women showed influences that may greatly worsen violence, including higher density residences and the absence of privacy and relations with the husband's in-laws.<sup>91</sup> Financial stress may also cause women to remain in abusive relationships, as they may be economically dependent on their abusive partners.<sup>92</sup> Poor housing conditions and planning have also been associated with a greater likelihood of domestic violence, as the absence of affordable and safe housing can hinder women's ability to escape domestic and abusive relationships. Implementing policies that encourage and allow women to be property owners can protect them from marital violence as it would remove the sense of dependency from their partners. Without affordable housing options, and with women making up less than 15 percent of property owners worldwide, they may be forced to remain in abusive relationships.<sup>93</sup>

Additionally, many women seek emergency shelters when trying to leave abusive environments. They can be critical resources, as studies have found that abused women who can access them enjoy a greater quality of life.<sup>94</sup> However, these

84 "Economic Distress and Intimate Partner Violence," National Institute of Justice, January 4, 2009, <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/economic-distress-and-intimate-partner-violence>.

85 Sabri and Campbell, "Intimate partner violence against women in slums in India."

86 Anne Menard, "Domestic violence and housing: Key policy and program challenges," *Violence Against Women* 7, no. 6 (2001): 707-720, doi:10.1177/10778010122182686

87 Sabri and Campbell, "Intimate partner violence against women in slums in India."

88 "Levels of domestic violence increase globally, including in the Region, as COVID-19 pandemic escalates," WHO, accessed August 10, 2021, <http://www.emro.who.int/fr/violence-injuries-disabilities/violence-news/levels-of-domestic-violence-increase-as-covid-19-pandemic-escalates.html>.

89 Begum, Donta, Nair, and C. Prakasam, "Socio-demographic factors associated with domestic violence in urban slums, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India."

90 Laura Schwab-Reese, Corinne Peek-Asa, and Edith Parker, "Associations of financial stressors and physical intimate partner violence perpetration," *Injury epidemiology* 3, no. 1 (2016): 1-10, doi:10.1186/s40621-016-0069-4.

91 Erika Fraser, Kalpana Viswanath, Laura MacLean, *Violence against Women and Girls, Infrastructure and Cities: briefing note, Infrastructure and Cities for Economic Development*, (2017), [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/620485/Infrastructure-Cities-briefing-note.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/620485/Infrastructure-Cities-briefing-note.pdf).

92 National Institute of Justice, "Economic Distress and Intimate Partner Violence."

93 Fraser, Viswanath, and MacLean, *Violence against Women and Girls, Infrastructure and Cities: briefing note, Infrastructure & Cities for Economic Development*.

94 Leslie Tutty, "Addressing the safety and trauma issues of abused women: A cross-Canada study of YWCA shelters," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 16, no. 3 (2015): 101-116, <https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1817&context=jws>.





Slum in Mumbai, India

are not always available or cannot accommodate all women, forcing victims to return to their aggressors.<sup>95</sup> However, even when emergency shelters are available, the lack of access to the necessary information about the available services and housing options is another barrier to accessing those “safe havens.”<sup>96</sup> Emergency shelters are temporary solutions, and women should be given the option of permanent and affordable housing for their long-term planning, as well as economic opportunities when transitioning away from shelters.

Apart from being a violation of human rights, domestic violence also poses a significant threat to public and individual health. Women in slums have less access to infrastructure like

hospitals, making them especially at risk of negative health outcomes of IPV.<sup>97</sup> Domestic violence has been associated with negative outcomes to physical, reproductive, and mental health, such as higher levels of anxiety and depression. Sexual violence is associated with higher risks of physical injuries, chronic diseases, and sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV, as abused women are less likely to access protection methods.<sup>98</sup> This is of great concern to public health, particularly in informal settlements, where HIV rates are usually higher and strongly tied to IPV. In South Africa, the prevalence of HIV in informal settlements is twice that of formal housing settlements.<sup>99</sup> Gender disparities in informal settlements stem from the financial and social dependence of the community on men, leading to limiting spaces that contribute to IPV and

95 Tutty, “Addressing the safety and trauma issues of abused women: A cross-Canada study of YWCA shelters.”

96 Menard, “Domestic violence and housing: Key policy and program challenges.”

97 Sabri and Campbell, “Intimate partner violence against women in slums in India.”

98 WHO, “Intimate Partner Violence and HIV/AIDS,” accessed August, 27, 2021, <https://www.who.int/hac/techguidance/pht/InfoBulletinIntimatePartnerViolenceFinal.pdf>

99 Andrew Gibbs et al., “HIV-Prevalence in South Africa by settlement type: A repeat population-based cross sectional analysis of men and women,” *PLoS ONE* 15, no. 3 (March 2020): 1-20, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0230105>.

higher HIV rates.<sup>100</sup> An increase in IPV cases places a burden on the health systems worldwide, as research conducted in the U.S. shows that health expenses increase two and a half times more when women are exposed to violence.<sup>101</sup>

Moreover, domestic violence also poses risks to women's mental health, affecting their well-being and the well-being of babies and infants.<sup>102</sup> Mental health consequences include anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidality, and substance use. This problem is more prevalent in slum and rural areas: more women from urban slum areas (48 percent) and rural areas (44 percent) had poor mental health compared with those from urban non-slum areas (23 percent).<sup>103</sup> Therefore, given the drastic impacts on women's well-being and health, domestic violence in informal settlements and slums must be addressed. Efforts relating to early reporting mechanisms, legislation, and female empowerment may help protect women's safety.<sup>104</sup> Healthcare workers must also be prepared to identify domestic violence and intervene appropriately.

Inside the scope of UN-Habitat, several projects have been implemented. In 1996, UN-Habitat launched its Safer Cities Programme to partner with local authorities and implement the Habitat Agenda, which addresses the importance of local authorities in preventing crime.<sup>105</sup> In terms of gender-based violence, it recognizes that it occurs in both the public and private spheres and seeks to implement a gender-sensitive approach to preventing it. In Tanzania, for example, the project encourages women to seek safe employment and openly voice their concerns.<sup>106</sup> The program allows women

to participate in income-generating activities and have their fears of violence heard by other community members. Another important initiative is the Rakai Project in Uganda, which is aimed at preventing HIV infections.<sup>107</sup> They also connect their research on the disease with domestic violence. This initiative is led by the Ugandan Ministry of Health and other Ugandan and American universities. They train their counselors and health professionals to identify indications of domestic violence and intervene when necessary. They also educate such professionals on the importance of voluntary counseling and testing for HIV prevention.<sup>108</sup> These projects highlight how public spaces can be redesigned to help women experiencing IPV and connect them to valuable resources for support.

### Lack of Access to Employment and Educational Opportunities

The relationship between education, employment, and women's safety is complex. Although employment is viewed as the first step towards gender equality and independence, studies found that being employed is not necessarily correlated with greater safety for women. Women who were unemployed but then were able to find employment were 80 percent more likely to have an increase in the level of violence they suffered than women who remained unemployed.<sup>109</sup> Much of this connection comes from the fact that employment and violence depend on the formality and quality of employment, with low-paying, informal jobs being correlated with higher levels of domestic violence than better-paid, high-quality

100 Andrew Gibbs, Laura Washington, Samantha Willan, Nolwazi Ntini, Thobani Khumalo, Nompumelelo Mbatha, Yandisa Sikweyiya et al., "The Stepping Stones and Creating Futures intervention to prevent intimate partner violence and HIV-risk behaviours in Durban, South Africa: study protocol for a cluster randomized control trial, and baseline characteristics," *BMC public health* 17, no. 1 (2017): 1-15, <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-017-4223-x>.

101 Aygül Akyüz, Tülay Yavan, Gönül Şahiner, and Ayşe Kılıç, "Domestic violence and women's reproductive health: A review of the literature," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 17, no. 6 (2012): 514-518, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1359178912000729?via%3DIihub>.

102 Winter, Obara, and McMahan, "Intimate partner violence: A key correlate of women's physical and mental health in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya."

103 Begum, Donta, Nair, and C. Prakasam, "Socio-demographic factors associated with domestic violence in urban slums, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India"; Kalokhe, Iyer, Kolhe, Dhayarkar, Paranjape, Del Rio, Stephenson, and Sahay. "Correlates of domestic violence experience among recently-married women residing in slums in Pune, India."

104 Bhatta, Jeevan, Junu Bhatta, Sharmistha Sharma, and Roshna Rajbhandari, "Assessing Domestic Violence and Its Causes against Women of Urban Slum of Nepal."

105 "Safer Cities Programme," UN-Habitat, accessed August 27, 2021, <https://unhabitat.org/safer-cities>.

106 Lori Michau and Dipak Naker, *Preventing Gender-based Violence in the Horn, East and Southern Africa* (UN-Habitat, 2004), <https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/download-manager-files/Report%20Preventing%20Gender-based%20Violence%20in%20the%20Horn%2C%20East%20and%20Southern%20Africa.pdf>

107 Michau and Naker, *Preventing Gender-based Violence in the Horn, East and Southern Africa*.

108 Michau and Naker, *Preventing Gender-based Violence in the Horn, East and Southern Africa*.

109 Krishnan, Rocca, Hubbard, Subbiah, Edmeades, and Padian, "Do changes in spousal employment status lead to domestic violence? Insights from a prospective study in Bangalore, India."



jobs.<sup>110</sup> Other factors mentioned previously, including lack of safety on public transport or lack of well-lit spaces for walking home at night, might also contribute to these rates.

Apart from domestic violence, women also face risks to their safety when traveling to their place of employment. For instance, a study financed by the World Bank found 50 percent of Mexican women have been victims of sexual harassment in public transportation.<sup>111</sup> Additionally, a study in Peru found that women who have access to safe and fast public transportation routes were far more likely to be employed and receive higher salaries than women without said infrastructure.<sup>112</sup> Thus, the offer of proximate and safe transportation remains a crucial factor in providing women with the chance to have greater economic stability.<sup>113</sup>

Apart from their employment situation, educational opportunities can also significantly impact the safety and health of women. A study conducted in New Zealand found that low academic achievement by a partner is strongly associated with physical aggression.<sup>114</sup> In fact, it seems that higher levels of education for both women and men may create better skills for coping with stressful situations, acting as a protective buffer against domestic violence and its accompanying mental health effects. Of course, this does not mean that education alone is sufficient to counter domestic violence, as such aggressions may be underreported in higher-income communities in which both spouses have access to education. Rather, it is a form of empowering women and raising awareness in order to prevent gender-based violence, but it should be coupled with other efforts to prevent and

increase accountability for instances of violence.

The relationship between domestic violence, education, and mental health is also particularly important. In fact, it has been found that mental morbidity, which is physical or psychological degradation due to a mental condition, in women who had 12 years or more of education was 20 percent in rural areas, 25 percent in urban slum areas, and 10 percent in urban non-slum areas. In comparison, those numbers were 40, 50, and 39 percent respectively in uneducated women from these three areas. Thus, an increase in the number of years of education is associated with a reduction in proportion with poor mental health, likely due to the factors previously stated.<sup>115</sup> This is very important as poor and less educated women have an increased risk of mental health issues due to economic, physical, and social stresses. Alongside domestic violence, these factors are likely to increase their vulnerability to mental morbidities.

Moreover, poor housing quality has also been linked to worsening mental health as it may act as a stressor and impact women's ability to regulate family activities.<sup>116</sup> Living in overcrowded conditions, with leaking roofs, pest infections, and other problems can increase stress and worsen other mental health issues. Pest infections specifically are associated with a higher risk of having depression.<sup>117</sup> Additionally, poor housing quality can exacerbate the burdens of families living under financial stress instead of serving as a safe haven from economic or other pressures.<sup>118</sup> Therefore, a comprehensive solution to target this issue should include preventing domestic violence, increasing women's participation in education, especially those in slums and more impoverished areas,

110 Cathie McIlwaine, "Urbanization and gender-based violence: exploring the paradoxes in the global South," *Environment and Urbanization* 25, no 1. (April 2013): 65-79, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0956247813477359>.

111 Fraser, Viswanath, and MacLean, *Violence against Women and Girls, Infrastructure and Cities: briefing note, Infrastructure & Cities for Economic Development*.

112 Patricia Lynn Scholl, "Are women with access to safe and fast public transit more likely to be employed and earn more?," *Impacto*, November 15, 2019, <https://blogs.iadb.org/efectividad-desarrollo/en/are-women-with-access-to-safe-and-fast-public-transit-more-likely-to-be-employed-and-earn-more/>.

113 Fraser, Viswanath, and MacLean, *Violence against Women and Girls, Infrastructure and Cities: briefing note, Infrastructure & Cities for Economic Development*.

114 Shuba Kumar, Lakshmanan Jeyaseelan, Saradha Suresh, and Ramesh Ahuja, "Domestic violence and its mental health correlates in Indian women," *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 187(1), (2005), doi:10.1192/bjp.187.1.62.

115 Kumar, Jeyaseelan, Suresh, and Ahuja, "Domestic violence and its mental health correlates in Indian women.," Shrivastava, and Shrivastava, "A study of spousal domestic violence in an urban slum of Mumbai."

116 David Pevalin, Aaron Reeves, Emma Baker and Rebecca Bentley "The impact of persistent poor housing conditions on mental health: A longitudinal population-based study," *National Library of Medicine*, December, 2017, DOI: 10.1016/j.jpmed.2017.09.020; Will Schupmann, "How Housing Quality Affects Child Mental Health," Housing Urban Institute Initiative, October 26, 2017, <https://housingmatters.urban.org/articles/how-housing-quality-affects-child-mental-health>.

117 Shah, Snehal N., Alan Fossa, Abigail S. Steiner, John Kane, Jonathan I. Levy, Gary Adamkiewicz, Willie Mae Bennett-Fripp, and Margaret Reid, "Housing quality and mental health: The association between pest infestation and depressive symptoms among public housing residents," *Journal of Urban Health* 95, no. 5 (2018): 691-702, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30141116/>.

118 Schupmann, "How Housing Quality Affects Child Mental Health."

improving housing quality, and addressing the mental health issues of those who already suffer from domestic violence.<sup>119</sup>

Poor housing conditions may also impact the education of young girls. Poor sanitation and lack of access to water are associated with poor nutrition and a higher risk of contracting infectious diseases, which can have educational and behavioral impacts in children, such as higher levels of aggression.<sup>120</sup> The educational impact can be due to illnesses making them more likely to skip school, leading to long-term effects on their future employment opportunities.<sup>121</sup> Poor housing quality is also associated with higher rates of stress in parents, which can also increase stress in children. Specifically, higher levels of both maternal and parental stress are associated with worse stress levels in children. It is also associated with a worse reaction by children to situations of living in environmental chaos, such as housing instability and disorder.<sup>122</sup> Overcrowded homes may also impact young girls cognitive and emotional development, as cramped and unsafe environments prevent children from interacting and learning from the environment around them.<sup>123</sup>

Furthermore, young girls living in slums are affected by the lack of government investments in constructing roads, schools, and health facilities. Limited or nonexistent government investments have resulted in significant disparities in access to education for the children living in urban slums compared to children who live elsewhere. For instance, a study conducted in Guatemala found that only 54 percent of children living in slums are engaged with primary education, compared with 61 percent in rural areas and 73 percent in non-slum urban areas.<sup>124</sup> Thus, the absence of quality education due to lacking government funding in slums can put young girls at a disadvantage and diminish their chances of leaving contexts of poverty.

Moreover, maternal education is strongly correlated with the educational achievement of a child. Parents living in lower

socioeconomic neighborhoods face a dilemma between using their time to acquire and provide basic sustenance for their children or investing time to pursue an education that might lead to higher-income careers. This choice becomes increasingly difficult when considering that education costs both time and valuable income. Mothers living in informal settlements may have little to no savings, and their financial situation can be impacted by natural disasters, illnesses, and the loss of children's employment. All of this, in turn, impacts their ability to pay bills and fees for children's education. Even when children can remain in school, the quality of education is low, and schools may be overcrowded and lack the necessary materials such as pens, paper, and desks.

Furthermore, some children may have difficulties accessing school due to limited, unstable, or nonexistent transportation. In some cases, schools may not be within walking distance. In this situation, children would have to commute through public transportation or other means, but this is not always available in poorer neighborhoods or slums. Even when different methods of transport are accessible, they may not be affordable. Therefore, it is important to address the challenge of commuting children to school so young girls can access more educational opportunities.<sup>125</sup>

Additionally, living in areas with higher rates of violence can greatly impact young girls. For example, child exposure to crime and violence has been associated with poor academic performance and higher school dropout rates, aggression, anxiety, depression, and other behavior problems in both developed and developing countries. In a study conducted in Jamaica, 61 percent of children have witnessed violence in their schools. Higher exposure to violence was associated with lower achievement in spelling, reading, and mathematics. Domestic child abuse and witnessing domestic violence can also have negative mental and health impacts in children, just as in the women who are victims of these aggressions.

119 Kumar, Jeyaseelan, Suresh, and Ahuja, "Domestic violence and its mental health correlates in Indian women."

120 Reinilde Eppinga, *Understanding the Effects of Poor Sanitation on Public Health, the Environment and Well-being Report of a study conducted in Homa Bay, Elgeyo Marakwet and Kericho counties in Kenya*, (Netherland Development Organization: 2018), [https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/180006\\_snv\\_synthesis\\_report\\_lr.pdf](https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/180006_snv_synthesis_report_lr.pdf).

121 Eppinga, *Understanding the Effects of Poor Sanitation on Public Health*.

122 Schupmann, "How Housing Quality Affects Child Mental Health."

123 Schupmann, "How Housing Quality Affects Child Mental Health."

124 Kacey Ernst and Beth Phillips, "Slums are not places for children to live: vulnerabilities, health outcomes, and possible interventions," *Advances in pediatrics* 60, no. 1 (2013): 53-87, [https://www.advancesinpediatrics.com/article/S0065-3101\(13\)00006-6/abstract](https://www.advancesinpediatrics.com/article/S0065-3101(13)00006-6/abstract).

125 Ernst and Phillips, "Slums are not places for children to live: vulnerabilities, health outcomes, and possible interventions."



This can increase levels of anxiety and depression in women and increase anxiety in children, negatively impacting their development and ability to focus on educational attainment.<sup>126</sup>

Efforts must be made to address the educational gap between women and young girls living in slums vs. non-slum areas. These efforts should be addressed in the context of housing and urban planning, which are the main focuses of UN-Habitat's mandate, and how that relates to their protection from violence and safety. Specifically, housing and urban planning must prevent harassment and support women in their daily tasks while ensuring their safety.

## Current Status

### Case Study: Gender Mainstreaming in Urban Planning in Vienna

The city of Vienna in Austria is seen as a model for gender mainstreaming. According to Ursula Bauer, the head of the city's Department of Gender Mainstreaming, this term refers to "the idea of planning a society based on equal structures, settings and conditions for both women and men."<sup>127</sup> The UN proposed this notion in 1985, and since then, the city has conducted about 60 gender-sensitive projects. This urbanization process considered the different needs and interests of groups that are often ignored, emphasizing the inclusion of different groups of society in planning and decision-making processes.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, streets and public spaces in neighborhoods like Aspern are named after women to show that they are a crucial part of the urban planning process. In Vienna's initial planning, however, there was no consideration of women's transportation method because it was perceived that unpaid work, such as childcare, was

still mostly their responsibility.<sup>129</sup> In fact, it was found that women moved around the city primarily by foot and public transportation, while men used mainly cars, demonstrating a difference in how they moved and used the city. Nevertheless, before the gender-mainstreaming approach, Vienna was planned with mobility via cars in mind, highlighting the importance of understanding factors being considered throughout the urban planning process.

To ensure that gender inequalities were considered in planning, the Department of Gender Mainstreaming set up a system of gender experts and recruited women in the planning process to integrate their needs and difficulties into the design of residences and public spaces. This is part of the five principles of gender mainstreaming: gender-sensitive language, gender-specific data collection, equal access and use of services, involvement of women in the decision-making process, and equal treatment in the overseeing of the implementation of such projects.<sup>130</sup> For example, publications including advertisements and reports were made to show women as visible as men.<sup>131</sup> Construction signs feature female representation, and transport seats show diverse passengers such as pregnant, physically disabled, and older women.<sup>132</sup>

Gender mainstreaming has been criticized for upstanding traditional gender roles. However, Eva Kail, a member of the strategic planning unit of Vienna, opposes this view.<sup>133</sup> She believes that although architecture cannot change the amount of caregiving and unpaid work done by women, it can support it, and with changes in the amount of unpaid work done across genders, more men would benefit from these support systems. Therefore, all members of society can benefit from this planning process.<sup>134</sup>

The urban planning process in Vienna also takes into account

126 Baker-Henningham, Helen, Julie Meeks-Gardner, Susan Chang, and Susan Walker. "Experiences of violence and deficits in academic achievement among urban primary school children in Jamaica." *Child abuse & neglect* 33, no. 5 (2009): 296-306. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2008.05.011>.

127 Noele Illian, "How Vienna built a gender equal city," BBC Travel, March 24th, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20210524-how-vienna-built-a-gender-equal-city>.

128 Noele Illian, "How Vienna built a gender equal city."

129 Noele Illian, "How Vienna built a gender equal city."

130 Noele Illian, "How Vienna built a gender equal city."

131 "The five principles of gender mainstreaming," Office for Gender Mainstreaming, accessed July 10th, 2021, <https://www.wien.gv.at/english/administration/gendermainstreaming/principles/five-principles.html>.

132 Office for Gender Mainstreaming, "The five principles of gender mainstreaming."

133 Elisabeth Irschik, Eva Kail, Gruppe Planung, Astrid Klimmer-Pölleritz, Andreas Nuss, Gregor Puscher, Manfred Schönfeld, Angelika Winkler, *Gender Mainstreaming in Urban Planning and Urban Development*, (Vienna: Urban Development Vienna, 2013), <https://www.wien.gv.at/stadtentwicklung/studien/pdf/b008358.pdf>

134 Irschiket al., *Gender Mainstreaming in Urban Planning and Urban Development*.



Priority seat signs in the public transportation system of Vienna, Austria

different ages. To ensure the safety of young children who must be accompanied by a caregiver, public open spaces and kindergartens were implemented. The latter was constructed in front of government-subsidized housing to shorten commuting distances, enabling women to better balance child care with their other responsibilities.<sup>135</sup> On the other hand, elderly women and women with disabilities need to have apartments and housing environments free of barriers to their mobility. This barrier-free planning strategy is central in Vienna. For instance, building wider corridors does not only help women with limited mobility, but also women with children, baby strollers, or groceries bags.<sup>136</sup> Sidewalks are at least two meters wide to ensure pedestrian safety, which can facilitate mobility for elderly women who have difficulties

walking. Benches are also included in parks and open spaces to encourage older people to leave their homes knowing they have somewhere to sit when needed.<sup>137</sup>

Another way mobility is facilitated for all age groups through gender-mainstreaming is the distance between residences and public services.<sup>138</sup> To support women's unpaid work, architects designed the city so that services such as supermarkets and schools could be at shorter walking distances from their homes. The same applies to public transportation, which was planned to be within 500 meters of their residences.<sup>139</sup> This can significantly increase their sense of safety by diminishing the amount of time they walk alone to these methods of transport, especially at night when they feel more

135 Elle Hunt, "City with a female face: how modern Vienna was shaped by women," *The Guardian*, May 14, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/may/14/city-with-a-female-face-how-modern-vienna-was-shaped-by-women>

136 Hunt, "City with a female face: how modern Vienna was shaped by women."

137 Hunt, "City with a female face: how modern Vienna was shaped by women."

138 "Roads, paths, and squares - ways to implement gender mainstreaming," Office for Gender Mainstreaming, accessed July 10th, 2021, <https://www.wien.gv.at/english/administration/gendermainstreaming/examples/street.html>

139 "Roads, paths, and squares - ways to implement gender mainstreaming,"



vulnerable.<sup>140</sup> Regarding public transportation, wider stops, better lighting, clear signs, and sitting areas also improve the service's quality while keeping women's needs and safety in mind. While lighting may not be the main focus of Vienna's strategy, it helps diminish hesitancy from women to use those services, increasing their mobility and consequently their access to the city, its services, and employment and education opportunities.<sup>141</sup>

Apart from improving a sense of safety, gender-sensitive policies also tackle visibility in signs and illustrations. For example, some seats are reserved for parents. In the railway system, those seats are highlighted by illustrations of a man with a child, which helps symbolize that men also have the responsibility to care for their children though women are still the primary caregivers.<sup>142</sup> Thus, the well-planned urban transport system supports both mothers and fathers, hopefully providing a path for more men to share these tasks equally with women.

Housing was also taken into consideration in the planning process. Buildings with appropriate corridor lighting, close to open spaces and playgrounds, and natural light in car parks can facilitate housework and tasks and increase women's overall safety by providing visible spaces for them and their children to use. By making playgrounds visible from flats, children can be safer to play as adults are able to watch them while performing other tasks at home. An example of such implementation in Vienna is Frauen-Werk-Stadt I, a subsidized housing unit created to support women's unpaid work and increase their sense of safety and belonging to the neighborhood. It was designed by female architects and includes low heights to ensure streets are visible, storage for baby strollers on every floor, and wide corridors to enable interactions between neighbors. Residential blocks were also planned to be short distances from each other to decrease the number of times women and young girls are walking unaccompanied. All of this may diminish their sense of unsafety and increase their

mobility and access to services within their residential areas.<sup>143</sup>

Furthermore, in 2020, the public-square Reumannplatz was redesigned following a gender-mainstreaming approach. It includes a podium referred to as a girls' stage, though anyone can use it, together with exercise stations, a playground, and additional trees. Parks in the city also have spaces for smaller groups to play and greater sitting area, taking into account the needs of teen girls as it was found that they preferred to chat or play in small groups rather than in big teams such as in soccer fields. The safety of women was also addressed by implementing well-lit and straight pavements with separated bushes to make them more visible. These efforts were very successful, as more girls are going to parks and taking advantage of them.<sup>144</sup>

The city of Vienna has also sought to support the LGBTIQ+ community and make it more visible. Some traffic lights feature same-sex couples, and to demonstrate their support to this group during the pandemic, the city inaugurated its first transgender crosswalk close to the country's only transgender healthcare center in the Vienna General Hospital. Such effort aims to improve the visibility and thus safety and sense of belonging of transgender and queer women in the city by increasing the debate about gender diversity in the country.<sup>145</sup>

To ensure gender mainstreaming is implemented, the city uses gender budgeting. For example, all departments must report biannually how they are using their budget to benefit men and women equally. Moreover, housing units must comply with gender-sensitive parameters to be subsidized. Thus, to ensure housing addresses the needs of women, governments require certain gender-sensitive parameters to give out funding.<sup>146</sup>

These efforts are beneficial not only to women but to all of a city's residents since urban planning taking into account the needs of different groups improves the quality of life and the safety of all inhabitants of that city. Some are skeptical of this approach, especially men who drive cars, claiming that it

140 Irschik, Kail, Planung, Klimmer-Pölleritze, Nuss, Puscher, Schönfeld, Winkler, *Gender Mainstreaming in Urban Planning and Urban Development*.

141 Irschik, Kail, Planung, Klimmer-Pölleritze, Nuss, Puscher, Schönfeld, Winkler, *Gender Mainstreaming in Urban Planning and Urban Development*.

142 Cassandra Nerva, "A Look Into the Gender Equal City of Vienna," Tripzilla, May 27, 2021, <https://www.tripzilla.com/gender-equal-vienna/122615>.

143 Hunt, "City with a female face: how modern Vienna was shaped by women."

144 Illian, "How Vienna built a gender equal city."

145 Illian, "How Vienna built a gender equal city."

146 Hunt, "City with a female face: how modern Vienna was shaped by women."

disrupts their quality of life. For example, they may be fearful of changes to traffic lights that benefit pedestrians. However, this does not mean a loss of quality of life, as these measures benefit all pedestrians and not just women. Moreover, supporters of gender mainstreaming argue that this group is fearful of losing its current power. Gender-mainstreaming is meant to allow all segments of society to utilize a city's services equally. Vienna does not feel like a city planned only for women. In reality, it is simply a well-designed city with safe, effective, and lively public spaces and services that can benefit all of its inhabitants.<sup>147</sup>

### COVID-19's Effect on Domestic Violence

It is essential to address how the COVID-19 pandemic has posed additional challenges for combating domestic violence in urban spaces. A study published in the *Journal of Family Violence* found that the number of domestic violence instances increased in the first six months of the pandemic and the severity of this form of aggression. In Brazil, domestic violence cases increased by more than 40 percent. Other countries have experienced a similar trend. In Spain and Cyprus, calls to hotlines had a 20-30 percent increase days after the first restrictions were imposed. In the United Kingdom, reports demonstrated a 25 percent increase in domestic violence victims reaching out to hotlines just one week after lockdown measures were put in place.<sup>148</sup> This trend can also be observed in major cities. One study in the United States found that lockdowns and distancing measures led to an increase in calls related to domestic violence from areas of cities without a previous history of calls, indicating that the pandemic has led to new, unsafe situations for women in urban areas.<sup>149</sup> The alarming rise in domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic means that it is urgent to address the needs of women in urban areas concerning this global crisis.

147 Hunt, "City with a female face: how modern Vienna was shaped by women."

148 Amalesh Sharma, and Sourav Bikash Borah, "Covid-19 and domestic violence: an indirect path to social and economic crisis," *Journal of family violence* (2020): 1-7, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s2Fs10896-020-00188-8>.

149 Leslie, Emily, and Riley Wilson, "Sheltering in place and domestic violence: Evidence from calls for service during COVID-19," *Journal of Public Economics* 189, (September 2020), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0047272720301055>.

150 Sharma and Borah, "Covid-19 and domestic violence: an indirect path to social and economic crisis," 1-7.

151 Frailing Kelly, and Dee Wood Harper, *Interpersonal Violence in Disaster*, Disaster Studies, (New York, Macmillan, 2017) chap. 10, [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-46914-4\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-46914-4_4)

152 Frailing and Harper, *Interpersonal Violence*, chap. 10.

153 Sharma and Borah, "Covid-19 and domestic violence: an indirect path to social and economic crisis," 1-7.

154 Henke, Alexander, and Lin-Chi Hsu, "COVID-19, staying at home, and domestic violence," *Review of Economics of the Household* 19, (November 2020): 145-155, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-020-09526-7>.

This problem is consistent with what historically has happened in post-disaster situations and rare occurrences. For example, in New Zealand, after the 2011 Christchurch earthquake, the level and seriousness of domestic abuse worsened. In that instance, this was attributed to businesses shutting down and increased alcohol consumption. Both financial burden and substance abuse are risk factors that increase the odds of domestic violence occurring.<sup>150</sup> Studies show that generally, "the number of people who call domestic violence hotlines or who seek services from shelters appears to increase in the wake of disasters."<sup>151</sup> Notably, crime overall tends to decrease as disasters increase, with the exception of crime that is related to domestic violence.<sup>152</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic is simply the latest example of this trend.

Although most countries have eliminated their pandemic-related restrictions, the pandemic showed the risks inherent in our current responses to global medical emergencies. Some experts fear a resurgence of COVID-19 or a mutation could force countries to reinstate lockdowns. Even if that does not happen, though, the world is always at risk of a new, unexpected pandemic emerging. If the world's response to the next pandemic is similar, the world risks following these same dire trends once again.

Some of the main factors contributing to the increased violence for women in urban spaces during the pandemic scenario are increased social isolation and lockdown restrictions. Sociologists have observed that the more extended families are together, the greater the events of domestic abuse. One potential explanation for this is that when families are in close contact for long periods, this reduces safe time and spaces for vulnerable family members.<sup>153</sup> This is known as the exposure reduction theory, "where domestic violence is modeled as a crime of opportunity and being near an abuser for longer periods creates more opportunities for violence."<sup>154</sup> In the



context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the increased prevalence of online or remote work and stay-at-home orders to prevent the spread of the virus means that victims are facing a higher risk of suffering more intense and frequent violence.<sup>155</sup> This vulnerability to violence is especially prominent in cities, further emphasizing the need for safe urban spaces for women. In Beijing, China, the non-governmental organization *Equality* reported a surge in calls to its crisis line after the Chinese government placed cities in Hubei Province under lockdown.<sup>156</sup>

Lockdowns have the potential to limit when victims can contact support in the case of domestic violence, restricting women's access to their support systems. First, it is possible that they may not be able to reach out to family support or seek help in their workplace. Furthermore, it can make it harder for them to report intimate partner violence, as they may be in the constant presence of their abuser. This is likely the case in the United States, where researchers from Harvard Medical School have found that calls to domestic-violence helplines have decreased by 50 percent in some areas. It is important to note that this is unlikely to represent an actual decrease in domestic violence. Rather, it is probably the result of being at home with the perpetrators of violence and not being able to contact hotlines.<sup>157</sup> Susan Pearlstein from the Philadelphia Legal Assistance agrees that though fewer calls have been made to hotlines, this is likely due to victims having a harder time calling and not because fewer instances of abuse are happening.<sup>158</sup> For instance, in New York City, a drop in police reports of domestic violence contrasted with increased calls to women's shelters.<sup>159</sup> Similarly, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, calls to the city's domestic violence hotline increased by 32 percent after implementing lockdown restrictions. Notably,

hotline calls received from the police fell by 62 percent while calls directly from victims increased by 127 percent.<sup>160</sup> This indicates both an increase in domestic violence incidents and a shift in methods of reporting these incidents. In light of these developments, it is crucial to consider how to increase access to support services and incident reporting mechanisms in urban spaces as the COVID-19 pandemic continues.

As a result of lockdown restrictions, women may have increased difficulty accessing shelters. Many shelters and hotels have been following limited capacity restrictions, diminishing the number of domestic abuse victims that can resort to these places when their homes are no longer safe.<sup>161</sup> While some have restricted and limited access, other shelters have closed completely. This forces women to be trapped at home with their abusers, enabling them to keep on perpetrating violence.<sup>162</sup> Travel restrictions may also impede women from seeking support from family or shelters outside of their area of residence.

Furthermore, women may face more barriers when trying to gain protective orders and reporting to the police. For example, not all police departments have followed the same procedures when it comes to domestic violence, especially during the pandemic. While some have implemented online reporting systems, others still require victims to go in person.<sup>163</sup> This can pose an obstacle to women who may not be able to leave their homes during the pandemic without their partners knowing. In some countries, members of civil society and entrepreneurs are developing new and safer reporting options for women. In Poland, a high school student created a fake online makeup store where victims could request to buy a cream and would be attended by a psychologist instead of a salesperson. This

155 Sharma and Borah, "Covid-19 and domestic violence: an indirect path to social and economic crisis," 1-7.

156 Amanda Taub, "A New Covid-19 Crisis: Domestic Abuse Rises Worldwide," *The New York Times*, April 6, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/world/coronavirus-domestic-violence.html>

157 Megan Evans, Margo Lindauer, and Maureen Farrell, "A pandemic within a pandemic—Intimate partner violence during Covid-19," *New England journal of medicine* 383, no. 24 (2020): 2302-2304, <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2024046>.

158 Sarah Fielding, "In quarantine with an abuser: surge in domestic violence reports linked to coronavirus," *The Guardian*, April 3 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/apr/03/coronavirus-quarantine-abuse-domestic-violence>.

159 Ashley Southall, "Why a Drop in Domestic Violence Reports Might Not Be a Good Sign," *The New York Times*, April 17, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/17/nyregion/new-york-city-domestic-violence-coronavirus.html>.

160 Carreras, Enrique, Santiago M. Perez-Vincent, M. Amelia Gibbons, Tommy E. Murphy, and Martín A. Rossi, *COVID-19 Lockdowns and Domestic Violence: Evidence from Two Studies in Argentina* (Washington: Inter-American Development Bank, 2020), <https://publications.iadb.org/publications/english/document/COVID-19-Lockdowns-and-Domestic-Violence-Evidence-from-Two-Studies-in-Argentina.pdf>.

161 Evans, Lindauer, and Farrell, "A pandemic within a pandemic—Intimate partner violence during Covid-19."

162 Evans, Lindauer, and Farrell, "A pandemic within a pandemic—Intimate partner violence during Covid-19."

163 Evans, Lindauer, and Farrell, "A pandemic within a pandemic—Intimate partner violence during Covid-19."

enabled them to report domestic violence safely, without their abuser being aware of it.<sup>164</sup> A similar approach was taken in France, in which people could utilize specific code words at drug stores, letting pharmacists know they are suffering abuse.<sup>165</sup> In this way, victims can report domestic violence even when abusers accompany them to pharmacies. The pharmacists then can contact the police via texts, and they will be immediately put into action.<sup>166</sup>

Identifying instances of domestic abuse in urban spaces is a critical step towards assisting victims, whether or not a report is made. Healthcare workers play a crucial role in identifying victims of domestic abuse. They may determine evidence of violence in their physical examinations, even when women don't report those instances. Then, they can contact social workers and disclose to victims what support systems are available to them. However, this process has also been disrupted with social distancing measures, as a great part of examinations have been conducted online. Poor internet connections and the presence of an abuser during health exams can make the process of recognizing victims of intimate partner violence harder.<sup>167</sup>

Delays in arrests can also put victims at a greater risk of being exposed to more violence, as they may need to keep living with their abusers until law enforcement is imposed. Delays are common, especially when the victim has previous criminal records, exposing them to violence for longer periods of time. This can be a barrier, especially to migrant women, who may fear contacting the police if they have an irregular status.<sup>168</sup> Therefore, there must be efforts to aid vulnerable groups of women, especially those who are part of minority groups, in reporting instances of abuse. Furthermore, law enforcement measures taken as a consequence of reports must also be improved and become more efficient while ensuring the

protection of victims.

Economic burdens, neighborhood violence, and precarious housing can all add to the difficulties faced by victims of intimate partner violence. As a consequence of measures to contain the spread of the virus, many people have become unemployed, with businesses closing. If this is the case with women, they can be less likely to leave their partners as they may become financially dependent on them. Additionally, economic instability coupled with a lack of support systems in certain communities can increase stress levels among couples. For example, worrying about housing costs is related to a greater chance of arguing with a partner and higher levels of stress and insomnia.<sup>169</sup> Online schooling has also added stress as women may have to constantly balance work, childcare, and housing duties. This stress is exacerbated when there is an absence of childcare services, which may be closed due to sanitary restrictions.

It is essential to address the need for temporary housing options for people that are vulnerable to violence, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Women in urban spaces need both emergency shelters and longer-term solutions such as subsidized or transitional housing. In these cases, governments or other organizations can provide short-term housing or financial assistance to help women pay rent, security deposits, or related supplies and services.<sup>170</sup> Certain strategies, including improving emergency response systems, integrating domestic violence response into healthcare, expanding social services, and offering shelter and temporary housing, can all help women in urban spaces navigate domestic violence beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and during any future pandemic.<sup>171</sup>

Many different proposals aim to help victims of domestic abuse reach safer situations. For instance, some local programs

164 Adam Easton, "Why this teen set-up a prize winning fake cosmetic shop," *BBC News*, News, March 1 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56172456>.

165 Ibtissem Guenfoud, "French women use code words at pharmacies to escape domestic violence during coronavirus lockdown," *ABC News*, April 3, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/french-women-code-words-pharmacies-escape-domestic-violence/story?id=69954238>.

166 Christina Carrega, "The last coronavirus holdout in New York: A rural upstate county braces itself," *ABC News*, April 3 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/coronavirus-holdout-york-rural-upstate-county-braces/story?id=69934960>.

167 Evans, Lindauer, and Farrell, "A pandemic within a pandemic—Intimate partner violence during Covid-19."

168 Sharma and Borah, "Covid-19 and domestic violence: an indirect path to social and economic crisis," 1-7.

169 Dawn Foster, "Poor Housing Is Bad for Your Mental Health," *The Guardian*, February 4, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/housing-network/2016/feb/04/poor-housing-bad-mental-health>.

170 "Housing for Domestic Violence and Victims," Helping Americans Find Help, accessed August 10 2021, <https://helpingamericansfindhelp.org/housing-for-domestic-violence-victims/>.

171 Sharma and Borah, "Covid-19 and domestic violence: an indirect path to social and economic crisis," 1-7.



in the United States help victims find housing by paying rent to landlords. In other models, women who have suffered IPV share buildings or apartments with each other. This provides a more stable, safe, and longer-term option than shelters, which can be overcrowded and not always have the best sanitation or services. These options are important to ensure safe and affordable alternatives so that they can leave their current abusive situation and avoid facing homelessness. In the US, the rate of homelessness amongst women caused by domestic violence is approximately 22 to 57 percent.<sup>172</sup> Efforts at providing affordable and safe alternatives to women must also be coupled with solutions to increase their financial stability to be independent of potential abusers.<sup>173</sup> In South Africa, where gender-based violence is relatively widespread, a study found that social housing is extremely important for the security of women and entire families. Therefore it is critical to focus on gender when discussing housing policy. Social housing policies in South Africa are intended to draw low and middle-income people to large cities with greater access to social services. However, researchers concluded that the government should specifically empower women economically so that they can afford this housing option.<sup>174</sup> When discussing the impact of COVID-19 on violence against women in urban areas, it is important to be mindful of regional circumstances that affect access to social services and housing options.

## Sustainable Development Goals

To address some of the main issues faced by the international community, the United Nations developed 17 Sustainable Development Goals. These goals serve as guidelines to ensure a more equal and sustainable future by tackling issues such as peace, justice, poverty, climate change, and more.<sup>175</sup> Inside the mandate of UN-Habitat, several SDGs play an essential role in its policies and guidelines. Regarding urban planning for women's safety, the most relevant SDGs to keep in mind are SDG 5: Gender Equality, SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities, and



Community shower facility in Uganda

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities.

The first goal to keep in mind is SDG 5, which plays a significant role in this issue. One of its aims is to end violence against women in both private and public spaces. It also deals with the inclusion of women in leadership positions and decision-making processes, equal employment opportunities, and the recognition of unpaid work.<sup>176</sup> Firstly, ensuring the end of gender-based violence through urban planning is crucial since the gap between the sense of safety across men and women significantly alters how they use and move around their city. Women face particular challenges towards working and participating fully in urban life without fear of violence and intimidation. They also face unique barriers to access to

172 Abigail Williams and Peace Gwam, "Domestic Violence Survivors Urgently Need Housing Stability and Solutions during the Pandemic," Urban Institute, February 2, 2021, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/domestic-violence-survivors-urgently-need-housing-stability-and-solutions-during-pandemic>.

173 Williams and Gwam, "Domestic Violence Survivors Urgently Need Housing Stability and Solutions during the Pandemic."

174 Mziwandile Sobantu, "Revisiting Gender and Housing: Housing as Seen Through the Eyes of Women in Social Rental Housing in Gauteng, South Africa," *Social Work* 56, no. 1, issue 5 (2020), [http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0037-80542020000100006](http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0037-80542020000100006).

175 "Water and Sanitation – United Nations Sustainable Development," United Nations (United Nations), accessed July 12, 2021, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/water-and-sanitation/>.

176 "Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls," United Nations, Accessed October 1, 2021, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality>.

land, titles, and homeownership. Therefore, urban planning needs to address gender-specific needs and differences to support them and ensure equal access to cities and the services they have to offer. Women must be included in the planning process to ensure their needs and concerns are addressed.<sup>177</sup>

The second goal relevant to this topic is SDG 10, which includes targets on ensuring equal inclusion of all groups in economic and social opportunities and decision-making processes. It is also aimed at ending discriminatory legislation.<sup>178</sup> Because women are a heterogeneous group and do not all experience these issues the same way, initiatives to improve safety in urban spaces must also address the unique needs of women of different ages, ethnicities, and economic backgrounds. Regarding the issue of urban planning, elderly or pregnant women may face additional challenges with their mobility. On the other hand, migrant women and women belonging to the LGBTIQ+ community suffer from prejudice and reduced access to support systems. Thus, efforts to improve urban planning for women's safety cannot treat women as a homogeneous group and must reduce differences amongst various communities.<sup>179</sup>

A third SDG that is particularly relevant is SDG 11, which aims to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and reliable.<sup>180</sup> In 2016, UN-Habitat established the New Urban Agenda in the Habitat III conference in Quito, Ecuador. The Agenda was intended to serve as a propeller of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 11, which is aimed at ensuring safe and affordable housing for all. UN-Habitat established that this is crucial for women in particular, as they may be able to escape situations of abuse and homelessness if adequate housing is accessible. Moreover, financial dependability can also pose an additional barrier to leaving situations of intimate partner violence.<sup>181</sup> Another target of SDG 11 is ensuring safe transportation, which is also central in urban planning to prevent harassment in railways, bus stops, and more. It also

seeks to implement economic and social growth in urban areas, which again is very relevant to the issue of women's security as their perceived sense of safety can affect their mobility and, consequently, choice of employment.<sup>182</sup> While SDG 11 seems like the most relevant objective to this topic, many different goals will inform the work of UN-Habitat towards improving urban planning to meet the needs of women.

## Bloc Analysis

### Points of Division

When it comes to achieving gender equality in urban spaces and cities, each country has its own unique approach to inclusion, security, and justice. One tool that measures the differences within these varying approaches is the Women, Peace and Security Index. This index was developed by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, and it measures factors such as women's sense of safety and exposure to discrimination within their country. Countries are then ranked based on 11 measures and given a score between zero and one. 167 countries are included, and they are separated into five quintiles, or ranges, based on their scores.

Countries are ranked not only on their policies but also on how safe their women perceive themselves to be. Inclusion includes several factors, such as the proportion of women in politics and their access to employment, education, and financial security. In terms of security, countries diverge on three points: community safety, the levels of intimate partner violence, and the scale of organized violence present within the country itself. Community safety relates to a woman's sense of safety when walking alone at night, whereas organized violence considers deaths caused by conflicts. Lastly, justice refers to both formal and informal discrimination of women. This includes legal discrimination, bias towards having male

177 UN-Habitat, *New Urban Agenda*, (Nairobi: UN-Habitat, 2016), <https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2019/05/nua-english.pdf>.

178 "Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries," United Nations, Accessed October 1, 2021, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/inequality>.

179 Reduced inequality within and among countries— United Nations Sustainable Development," United Nations, accessed July 12, 2021, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/water-and-sanitation/>.

180 "Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable," United Nations, Accessed October 1, 2021, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/cities>.

181 UN-Habitat, *New Urban Agenda*, (Nairobi: UN-Habitat, 2016), <https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2019/05/nua-english.pdf>.

182 United Nations, "Goal 11."



children, and beliefs that women should not hold high-paying jobs.<sup>183</sup>

Country scores may also vary depending on whether they engage in gender-blind or gender-sensitive urban planning. Gender-sensitive urban planning considers evidence that demonstrates how different genders utilize the city and its services, and so it seeks to address the needs of these different groups. As such, women of different ages and ethnic groups are included in the design of their cities. In contrast, gender-blind approaches usually do not consider the needs of women at all and tend to center a male perspective in the planning and decision-making process.<sup>184</sup> Ultimately, since country scores are a reflection of factors such as policy and perception of safety, the positions of countries on this index may come to shape the initiatives that they will support on this topic.

### Countries Highly Ranked on the Women, Peace and Security Index

Countries within this bloc are between the first and second quintile of the WPS Index, which reaches a score of 0.740. Examples include Norway, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Israel, the Republic of Korea, Bulgaria, and Canada. These countries show high levels of financial inclusion for women and low levels of intimate partner violence and organized violence. They also have higher levels of community safety, with more women reporting they feel safe walking unaccompanied in the dark. Similarly, countries within this ranking tend to have legislation that specifically seeks to include women.<sup>185</sup> One example that was previously mentioned is Austria. Apart from the gender mainstreaming implemented in Vienna, the Austrian Constitution also establishes de facto equality for men and women. Essentially, it states that the federal, state, and local government must implement gender mainstreaming

in their policies and the proper allocation of funds.<sup>186</sup>

Because these countries are known for their strong commitment to inclusion and gender equality, they are likely to support ambitious, progressive policies promoting more inclusive urban planning. For instance, they may prioritize bigger-picture initiatives such as promoting women's equal participation in planning and decision making as well as eliminating gender-based violence in urban spaces and major cities. For instance, Norway has a high proportion of women in government and leverages this to ensure the continued development of gender-sensitive approaches to planning.<sup>187</sup> Norway has achieved many SDG 11 targets because it has been incorporating social inclusion and equity into its planning strategies for years; one of the priorities that remains is the further development of high-quality housing.<sup>188</sup> Similarly, Estonia emphasizes that "the active role of the community and, more broadly, the cooperation of the participants is important for the quality of life and sustainable development of cities and settlements."<sup>189</sup> Further, it prioritizes prevention and protection measures in cities in order to "promote safe and secure behaviour."<sup>190</sup> Such initiatives are sure to help women participate more fully in their communities and ensure that they have access to safe spaces in cities and major urban areas.

### Countries with a Medium Rank on the Women, Peace and Security Index

These countries are on the third quintile, with scores between 0.741 and 0.695 on the WPS Index. They are positioned from the 66th to the 101st rank. Countries with this score may rank well in certain measures of the Index but do poorly on others. For example, one country may score high for women's inclusion in politics but low on community safety. Examples of countries

183 Eve Conant, "The best and worst countries to be a woman," *National Geographic*, October 15, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/peril-progress-prosperity-womens-well-being-around-the-world-feature>.

184 Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security Research Institute, *Women Peace and Security Index 2019-2020: Tracking sustainable peace through inclusion, justice, and security for women*, Washington, D.C: Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security Research Institute, (2019): 1-4, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>.

185 Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security Research Institute, *Women Peace and Security Index 2019-2020: Tracking sustainable peace through inclusion, justice, and security for women*.

186 "Gender Mainstreaming Approach - Austria," European Institute for Gender Equality, accessed July 12th, 2021, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/countries/austria>

187 *Norway, Initial Steps Towards the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, Voluntary National Review* (New York: United Nations, 2016), <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10692NORWAY%20HLPF%20REPORT%20-%20full%20version.pdf>

188 *Norway, Initial Steps*.

189 *Review of the Implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda in Estonia* (Tallinn: Republic of Estonia Government Office, 2020), [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26285VNR\\_2020\\_Estonia\\_Report.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26285VNR_2020_Estonia_Report.pdf).

190 *Review of the Implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda in Estonia*.

in this group include Brazil, Colombia, Thailand, Panama, and China. In the case of China—even though the country has an official commitment to ending gender inequality through the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action—women's safety and inclusion vary significantly around the country. There is no legislation prohibiting sexual harassment in public spaces, and victim-blaming is common.<sup>191</sup> Like other countries in this bloc, although China has made important strides regarding legislation, women are not included equally in the economy and education. Another example is Brazil, which implemented the Maria da Penha Law in 2006 to establish severe penalties for domestic violence (DV), but only began considering femicide, or homicide targeting women, a crime in 2015. Years after its neighboring countries did so, the country still reports high levels of femicides, with 649 cases in the first half of 2020.<sup>192</sup>

Overall, these countries recognize the importance of reaching gender equality and addressing domestic violence but remain far from reaching true gender equality in practice. Therefore, they are likely to support policies that will address this gap. Panama has implemented 83.3 percent of legal frameworks that promote greater gender equality, focusing on preventing gender-based violence in particular. However, the country does not regularly monitor “gender and poverty, physical and sexual harassment, women's access to assets (including land), and gender and the environment,” all areas critical to policies that promote the inclusion of women in cities.<sup>193</sup> Countries in a similar position will benefit from increased data collection methods and initiatives that address gaps in knowledge and social support.

Furthermore, countries in this bloc may also focus on supporting women-headed households as a means of financial and social inclusion. For instance, in Kenya and Nicaragua, “one-third of woman-headed households suffer from four

shelter deprivations. These relate to the lack of durable housing, insufficient living space, poor access to clean water, inadequate sanitation or insecure tenure.”<sup>194</sup> Woman-headed households are becoming increasingly common in urban areas and cities, which makes this a pressing matter to address.<sup>195</sup> Ultimately, countries with medium or mixed rankings will want to promote the aspects of their policies that do well, and address the ones that perform poorly.

### Countries Lowly Ranked on the Women, Peace and Security Index

This bloc includes countries on the fourth and fifth quintiles, ranked from 102 to the lowest rank of 167, held by Yemen, with a score of 0.351. Other examples in this range include Syria, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. These countries typically have high levels of organized violence, legislation that discriminates against women, and low levels of women's inclusion in employment, society, and politics. For instance, Turkey (ranked 114) pulled out of the Istanbul Convention—an agreement that aims to prevent and tackle domestic violence—arguing that it opposed traditional family values.<sup>196</sup> Furthermore, the country has rising rates of Intimate Partner Violence, child marriage, and femicide. In 2020, legislators also discussed a bill that would give amnesty to sexual assaulters, given that they marry the victims of their violence. This is extremely concerning, as it would grant protection to the perpetrators of this crime and could stop victims from coming forward out of fear of being forced into wedlock. Some have also argued that it would legitimize child marriage and statutory rape, allowing the perpetrators to commit this crime and simply marry their victim to avoid legal consequences.<sup>197</sup>

Countries in this bloc have the most progress to be made in terms of inclusive and gender-sensitive policies. However, this also means that they would benefit greatly from such initiatives.

191 Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security Research Institute, *Women Peace and Security Index 2019-2020: Tracking sustainable peace through inclusion, justice, and security for women*.

192 Pilar Olivares, “Brazil women suffer in silence as COVID-19 sparks domestic terror,” Reuters, March 5, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-women-antiviolence-brazil-widerimage-idUSKCN2AX26M>.

193 “Country Fact Sheet: Panama,” UN Women, Accessed October 1, 2021, <https://data.unwomen.org/country/panama>.

194 “Gender Equality and Sustainable Urbanisation Fact Sheet,” UN WomenWatch, Accessed October 1, 2021, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/urban/factsheet.html>.

195 UN WomenWatch, “Gender Equality.”

196 “Domestic Violence: Turkey Pulls out of Istanbul Convention,” *BBC News*, March 20, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56467689>.

197 Kate Dannies, “Opinion: Turkey's ‘marry your rapist’ bill is part of a disturbing global pattern,” *The Washington Post*, January 29, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/01/29/turkeys-marry-your-rape-bill-is-part-disturbing-global-pattern>.



According to UN-Habitat, “women are a city’s greatest asset, and contribute heavily to sustainable urban development.”<sup>198</sup> Therefore, these countries still have an incentive to participate in forming policies that advance women’s inclusion in urban spaces around the world. In Yemen, refugees and migrants in need of critical social and economic support often have great difficulty accessing these services; these communities are most commonly located in coastal areas and major urban centers.<sup>199</sup> By working to foster more inclusive urban spaces for migrant communities and migrant women, these coastal areas and cities can become much safer and feature greater degrees of economic and social participation in society.

In Chad, another country with a poor ranking on the WPS index, gender equality is still elusive—women hold only 15.4 percent of seats in parliament, and in 2015, 17.5 percent of women from 15-49 years old had recently experienced physical or sexual violence.<sup>200</sup> However, there are still efforts within the country to combat these trends and build inclusive urban spaces as a means toward greater gender equality. For example, UN-Habitat has a longstanding partnership with the government that involves public institutions, community organizations, NGOs, and private companies. Within this partnership, “women and the youth are considered key players and are frequently consulted...for the urban agenda in the country.”<sup>201</sup> Partnerships such as these can provide a model for countries with poor gender equality scores to make greater progress on these issues and participate in the effort to engage in gender-sensitive urban planning.

## Committee Mission

Given the various impacts that violence, harassment, and inequality have on women’s mobility, health, life, and education, it is imperative to implement policies that counter and prevent this issue. Particularly, countries must assess how they can apply a gender lens in the urban design process and

consider the unique challenges facing women in public spaces, services, transportation, and housing. According to the UN-Habitat mission, the committee “is mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all.”<sup>202</sup> Thus, it is perfectly positioned to tackle urban development and gender equality.

UN-Habitat is committed to sustainable urban development and to ensuring efficient cities and towns. Sustainable development refers to social inclusion, countering poverty, offering equal opportunities while also fostering environmentally friendly and resilient urban development. Thus, it includes the equal inclusion and participation of women in cities while ensuring their safety. To achieve this goal, the committee conducts research and data collection regarding sustainable cities and human settlements.

The committee also provides experts to provide help in sustainable urbanization and crisis management and aids in developing frameworks and policies in national and local governments. Lastly, the committee partners with intergovernmental and UN agencies, civil society organizations, foundations, academic institutions, and the private sector to implement the necessary changes to foster sustainable urban development.<sup>203</sup> Therefore, all of these efforts can be implemented in the context of urban design to ensure women’s security. The committee should not seek to enforce certain laws or legally-binding agreements, but rather encourage countries to collaborate on initiatives that promote gender-sensitive urban planning.

198 *State of Women in Cities 2012-2013: Gender and the Prosperity of Cities* (Nairobi: United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2013), <https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/download-manager-files/Gender%20and%20Prosperity%20of%20Cities.pdf>.

199 *Conflict and Gender Relations in Yemen* (Nairobi: Oxfam International, 2016), <https://www.care-international.org/files/files/YemenGenderReport171116.pdf>.

200 “Chad,” UN Women, Accessed October 1, 2021, <https://data.unwomen.org/country/chad>.

201 “Chad,” UN Habitat, Accessed October 1, 2021 <https://unhabitat.org/chad>.

202 “Mandate,” UN Habitat, Accessed October 1, 2021, <https://mirror.unhabitat.org/content.asp?cid=2467&catid=1&typeid=24&subMenuId=0>.

203 UN-Habitat, *The Strategic Plan: 2020-2023*, (Nairobi: United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2020), [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-09/strategic\\_plan\\_2020-2023.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-09/strategic_plan_2020-2023.pdf).





UN-HABITAT  
NHSMUN 2022



TOPIC B:

INCREASING ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Photo Credit: Marcelo Camargo / Agência Brasil



## Introduction

When speaking on the subject of cities, UN Secretary-General António Guterres remarked, “Cities are engines of dynamism and innovation, and can help us overcome development deficits...tackle poverty...build a new urban economy that invests in sustainable infrastructure...[to address] schooling and housing for all.”<sup>1</sup> With over half of the world’s population living in cities, the development of affordable housing is an important element of urbanization to consider.<sup>2</sup> With an average annual growth rate of 1.9 percent, the rapid increase in the world’s urban population has posed significant challenges in providing sustainable and affordable housing.<sup>3</sup> Urban sprawl, slums, and homelessness result from the growing disparity between housing supply and demand. A few key factors affecting affordable housing are migration patterns, renting culture, environmental limitations to housing development, and inadequate urban planning.

Migration patterns increase urban populations, which affects domestic housing demand. Increased domestic demand for housing piques the attention of foreign investors and speculators, who create foreign housing demand, thus artificially inflating housing prices. Speculation can also have drastic economic consequences on the housing market and can cause housing bubbles—where housing prices rise to a breaking point. Both homeowners and renters face affordability issues. Globally the average house costs more than five times the yearly income of prospective homeowners, and many renters allocate more than a quarter of their monthly income to pay rent.<sup>4</sup>

Aside from economic influences, geography and climate also play a leading role in housing demand and supply, policies and building codes, and urban planning. In states like Japan, Singapore, and the United Kingdom, limited land requires innovative solutions such as artificial islands and vertical property development.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the World Bank reports that extreme weather events have resulted in 75 percent of all environmentally caused human deaths and financial losses since 1980.<sup>6</sup> Without significant investment to improve

disaster risk prevention and building resilience measures by 2030, cities worldwide may lose up to USD 314 billion annually from natural disasters.<sup>7</sup> As concerning as this is, the human cost of failure to implement prevention and resilience measures is even greater. Flooding alone could threaten the lives of 1.3 billion people by 2050, and unprecedented rates of urbanization and population growth are increasing these risks.<sup>8</sup> Considering these trends, the discussion on providing affordable housing should also consider the ability of communities to withstand these climate impacts—their resiliency to these forces.

Location-specific urban planning is also necessary to ensure housing is accessible and affordable. Rising living costs in metropolitan areas have caused low-income and minority groups to move farther away from urban centers since the 2000s.<sup>9</sup> This has also resulted in longer commute times for underprivileged and minority workers, as they are pushed to live farther away from businesses, basic services, and offices. As such, transportation options are essential to the fabric of city life and regional cohesiveness. Urban-rural linkages, for instance, serve to transport individuals between urban

1 United Nations Human Settlements Programme, *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future* (Nairobi: United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2021), <https://unhabitat.org/cities-and-pandemics-towards-a-more-just-green-and-healthy-future-0>.

2 Rania Abouzeid, “How women are stepping up to remake Rwanda,” *National Geographic*, October 15, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/2019/10/how-women-are-remaking-rwanda-feature/>.

3 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020*; UN-Habitat, *The Fundamentals of Urbanization: Evidence base for Policy Making* (Nairobi: UN-Habitat, 2016), <https://unhabitat.org/the-fundamentals-of-urbanization-evidence-base-for-policy-making>.

4 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020*.

5 UN-Habitat, *The Fundamentals of Urbanization: Evidence base for Policy Making*; River Davis, “What Housing Crisis? In Japan, Home Prices Stay Flat,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 2, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/what-housing-crisis-in-japan-home-prices-stay-flat-11554210002>.

6 “Disaster Risk Management,” World Bank, last modified March 16, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disasterriskmanagement/overview#1>.

7 World Bank, “Disaster Risk Management.”

8 World Bank, “Disaster Risk Management.”

9 Elizabeth Kneebone and Natalie Holmes, *The growing distance between people and jobs in metropolitan America* (Washington D.C.: Brookings, 2015), [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/srvy\\_jobsproximity.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/srvy_jobsproximity.pdf).

and rural areas, advance sustainable development, and help regions eradicate poverty and establish adequate standards of living for all.<sup>10</sup>

The international community has recognized the significance of urbanization for sustainable global development. In 2016, the United Nations Human Settlement Program (UN-Habitat) published the 2016 New Urban Agenda (NUA), alongside treaties such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. The Committee aimed to demonstrate a global collaborative commitment to reevaluate how urban processes occur and, more importantly, to provide adequate and affordable housing for all.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have further emphasized the need for adequate shelter and well-designed urban environments. Viewing the affordable housing crisis through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic will provide the most current insight on the challenges the world faces as it strives to meet SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities.<sup>12</sup>

## History & Description of the Issue

### Rising Urbanization & Migration

Between 2015 and 2020, the global urban population increased by almost 400 million people.<sup>13</sup> In Nigeria alone, the urban population is projected to increase by 58 million from 2018 to 2030, and an estimated 17 million additional housing units will be needed to meet that demand.<sup>14</sup> Migrants are poised

to represent a large share of the world's urban population growth. However, international migration is not the only factor responsible for the current and projected increase in the urban population.

Migrants are vital players in influencing housing demand due to the sheer magnitude of migration patterns. In metropolitan centers like The Hague, London, San Francisco, and Toronto, one-third of the urban population consists of immigrants.<sup>15</sup> Most of them are of working age, which is highly beneficial to countries with aging populations like Australia and most of Europe.<sup>16</sup> Of the 232 million migrants in 2013, the International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that 150 million were employed in some manner.<sup>17</sup> With so many migrants engaged in the workforce, providing them with adequate, affordable, and fair housing is essential.

Internationally, there are 763 million internal migrants.<sup>18</sup> Internal migrants include those who move within their country's borders by choice and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement define IDPs as those forced to flee from their homes due to conflict, violence, natural disasters, or human rights violations but have not crossed internationally recognized state borders.<sup>19</sup> Though environmental issues and persecution are factors in migration, economic opportunity is a key motivator for many migrants to relocate to urban centers. Urban areas are responsible for generating 80 percent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) despite only holding 55 percent of the world's population.<sup>20</sup> Because urban areas provide more employment opportunities, migrants tend to be concentrated in cities. This can benefit the host communities. Countries

10 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020*.

11 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020*.

12 "Goal 11 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs," United Nations, accessed July 15, 2021, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal11>.

13 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020*.

14 Edward Alden et al., "Visualizing 2020: Trends to Watch," Council on Foreign Relations, December 12, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/article/visualizing-2020-trends-watch>.

15 Migration Data Portal, "Urbanization and migration," *Migration Data Portal*, May 6, 2021, <https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/urbanisation-et-migration>.

16 UNESCO, *Cities Welcoming Refugees and Migrants* (Paris, UNESCO: 2015), <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5a5f429a4.pdf>; "International Migrant Stock 2019," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, September 2019, [https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationStock2019\\_TenKeyFindings.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationStock2019_TenKeyFindings.pdf); Sajeda Tuli, "Migrants want to live in the big cities, just like the rest of us," *The Conversation*, March 31, 2019, <https://theconversation.com/migrants-want-to-live-in-the-big-cities-just-like-the-rest-of-us-113911>.

17 UNESCO, *Cities Welcoming Refugees and Migrants*.

18 UNDESA, "International Migrant Stock 2019."

19 United Nations Commission on Human Rights, *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* (Geneva: United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 1998), E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.22, <https://undocs.org/E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2>.

20 Abouzeid, "How women are stepping up to remake Rwanda."

such as Australia count on skilled migrants to bolster their workforce and economy.<sup>21</sup> As the economic potential of a country grows, so does the process of urbanization.<sup>22</sup> This rapid rate of urbanization brings increased challenges of providing affordable and sustainable housing for those who are relocating to new environments.

Asylum seekers are another category of migrants in need of access to affordable housing. The United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) defines asylum seekers as “individuals who have sought international protection and whose claims for refugee status have not yet been determined.”<sup>23</sup> Availability of data on displaced people varies significantly according to population group and country of

asylum. Only 79 percent of refugees have corresponding age and sex demographic data.<sup>24</sup> The lack of accurate data makes the distribution of resources, provision of adequate housing, and implementation of integration policies difficult for governments.

Recording accurate information is essential to providing affordable housing, especially for countries with considerable numbers of migrants and asylum seekers. The UNHCR reports that “upper-middle income countries—including Turkey, Colombia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Lebanon and Jordan—hosted 43 percent of people displaced across borders at the end of 2020.”<sup>25</sup> Low-income countries hosted the second-highest proportion of people displaced across



Major cultural events attract tourists and create economic opportunities

21 Tuli, “Migrants want to live in the big cities, just like the rest of us.”

22 Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser, “Urbanization,” Our World in Data, November 2019, <https://ourworldindata.org/urbanization#populations-urbanize-as-they-get-richer>.

23 UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2016* (Copenhagen: UNHCR, 2017), <https://www.unhcr.org/5943e8a34>.

24 UNHCR, *Global Trends in Forced Displacement - 2020* (Copenhagen: UNHCR, 2021), <https://www.unhcr.org/60b638e37/unhcr-global-trends-2020>.

25 “World Bank and lending groups,” World Bank, accessed September 12, 2021, <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups%20>.



borders (22 percent), and high-income countries hosted about the same proportion as lower-middle-income countries (17 percent and 18 percent, respectively).<sup>26</sup> A disproportionately large responsibility to host forcibly displaced people stresses host countries' infrastructure and financial and natural resources, creating further challenges in providing affordable and adequate urban housing.

The supply and affordability of public housing in many cities dramatically depend on financial support from central governments. Due to the lack of available temporary shelters, cities receiving large surges of migrants have seen an increase in overcrowding, segregation in residential spaces and conditions, and the application of informal housing strategies such as migrants sleeping in the streets or living with volunteers.<sup>27</sup> These forms of social housing are inadequate for sheltering migrant populations, and private rental markets are also inaccessible to migrant populations because of unaffordable rent prices and discrimination from landlords.<sup>28</sup>

Legislation such as the EU's Racial Equality Directive (RED) has taken steps to prevent discriminatory practices in areas such as housing. Although it was one of the first pieces of legislation in the EU to protect minority groups and confront residential segregation, critics of the bill point out that enforcement is limited. Residents, especially vulnerable residents, face a host of obstacles in reporting instances of housing discrimination.<sup>29</sup> For instance, a study of Belgian real estate agencies found that almost half the agencies were "willing to steer away foreigners as prospective tenants, either before or after a visit to an apartment," despite knowing that it is illegal to purposely turn away prospective tenants based on their national origin.<sup>30</sup> Such discouragement strategies that housing agencies use to discriminate against certain residents evade anti-discrimination laws and share many similarities with the American housing environment that

ultimately led to the Fair Housing Act (FHA) of 1968.<sup>31</sup> The FHA intends to address public and private housing, prevent slum conditions, and encourage open and unbiased housing. The FHA expanded methods of prosecuting discrimination by allowing economic and social inequalities to demonstrate proof of discrimination.<sup>32</sup> Passing the FHA was especially critical to addressing resistance to racial integration in the United States—a prevailing issue at the time. The RED and the FHA are just two examples of anti-discrimination housing policies. Assessing the shortcomings and successes of laws such as these in preventing housing discrimination will better allow more governments to provide accessible and affordable housing for vulnerable groups like migrants.

Though progress has been made worldwide to integrate immigrants into communities, economic indicators still reflect unaddressed inequities. According to the Migration Integration Policy Index, Sweden has the most effective integration policies in the world.<sup>33</sup> However, it still faces challenges with providing adequate living environments for migrants. During the last quarter of 2020, the unemployment rate for foreign-born workers in Sweden was more than four times higher than that for Sweden nationals.<sup>34</sup> Workers with migrant backgrounds are usually at a greater educational and language disadvantage, and many hold informal jobs, which are often excluded from legal protections and secure wages. Furthermore, migrants have a greater likelihood of experiencing workplace and housing discrimination. Language and cultural barriers exacerbate tensions with coworkers, employers, and landlords, increasing their chances of job loss and home eviction. The setbacks migrants face in building wealth, ensuring adequate shelter for themselves and their families, and creating positive relationships with local community members all fall under the creation of a safe and supportive urban community.<sup>35</sup>

Alongside domestic demand for housing, foreign investment

26 World Bank, "World Bank and lending groups."

27 UNESCO, *Cities Welcoming Refugees and Migrants*.

28 UNESCO, *Cities Welcoming Refugees and Migrants*.

29 Hilary Silver and Lauren Danielowski, "Fighting Housing Discrimination in Europe," *Housing Policy Debate* 29, no. 5 (February 2019): 1-17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2018.1524443>.

30 Katleen Van Den Broeck and Kristof Heylen, "Discrimination and selection in the Belgian private rental market," *Housing Studies* (August 2015): 1-14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2015.1070798>; Silver and Danielowski, "Fighting Housing Discrimination in Europe," 1-17.

31 Silver and Danielowski, "Fighting Housing Discrimination in Europe," 1-17.

32 Silver and Danielowski, "Fighting Housing Discrimination in Europe," 1-17.

33 "Main Findings," Migration Integration Policy Index 2020, accessed August 9, 2021, <https://www.mipex.eu/key-findings>.

34 Simon Johnson, "New Swedes left out as economy powers through pandemic," *Reuters*, March 17, 2021, <https://www.fur.reuters.com/article/us-sweden-unemployment-pandemic/new-swedes-left-out-as-economy-powers-through-pandemic-idUSKBN2B91MO>.

35 Brett Line and Linda Poon, "How Other Countries Handle Immigration," *National Geographic*, June 30, 2013, <https://www>.

also plays a role in determining housing prices. Foreign investment creates foreign demand, which is when non-residential buyers purchase housing for investment purposes. From 1999–2014, average housing prices have more than tripled in England and Wales.<sup>36</sup> The price increase was linked to rising foreign investment and decreasing homeownership rates.<sup>37</sup> Importantly, a rise in foreign investment rates was not met with an increase in housing construction and coincided with lower rates of domestic homeownership, suggesting that domestic residents were priced out of the housing market in areas with active foreign investment.<sup>38</sup> Foreign demand competes with domestic demand, and the combined demand for housing can drive up housing prices.<sup>39</sup> In the case of real estate, speculation can lead to housing bubbles, which occur in two stages: first, the price of housing rapidly increases due to demand and speculation, and soon after that, the demand for housing stops increasing, although supply continues to increase, causing a sharp drop in housing prices, which is when the bubble “bursts.”<sup>40</sup> These volatile price changes can spell economic ruin for many economies and communities and can contribute to major economic crashes, as they did in the infamous 2008 global financial crisis.

Rapidly and significantly rising home prices is one of the primary challenges to providing accessible and affordable housing. Unreasonably high housing prices deter prospective buyers, leading to properties sitting unoccupied. These unoccupied properties could have been residences for those who seek to live in urban areas, yet they are forced to live further away from necessary amenities due to prohibitive prices. This means households have to spend more resources on commuting rather than on education, nutrition, or other investments that would improve their quality of life.<sup>41</sup> However,

rising housing prices are not always an indicator of rising unaffordability and may depend on regional circumstances. For instance, a study of major cities in China—which has experienced nearly unprecedented urbanization rates in the last few decades—showed that as the average housing price in a city increased, the housing vacancy rate decreased.<sup>42</sup> This trend can be partly attributed to how rising housing prices in the study represent the rising quality of life rather than evidence of growing unaffordability. Thus, it is crucial to consider the variations in the need for affordable housing in different countries and regions.

The major challenges posed by urbanization and migration must be addressed to increase access to affordable housing for all. Urban migration stresses housing supply, and further highlights the need to prioritize the fair treatment and integration of migrants, regardless of race or citizenship status.<sup>43</sup> Despite its challenges, migration offers boundless opportunities for innovation in growing cities. When considering solutions for affordable housing, it is important to keep in mind the challenges confronting migrant populations and the importance of fostering inclusive communities.

## Environmental Constraints in Housing Development

Sustainability often goes hand in hand with the provision of affordable housing. Not only do low-income and marginalized renters spend a disproportionate amount of their income on making rent, but much of this is also worsened by burdensome energy bills due to ill-maintained and unsustainable infrastructure.<sup>44</sup> Experts say that “investing in green affordable housing will generate new jobs, strengthen

[nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/130630-immigration-reform-world-refugees-asylum-canada-japan-australia-sweden-denmark-united-kingdom-undocumented-immigrants?](https://nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/130630-immigration-reform-world-refugees-asylum-canada-japan-australia-sweden-denmark-united-kingdom-undocumented-immigrants?)

36 Filipa Sá, “The effect of foreign investors on local housing markets: Evidence from the UK,” Centre for Economic Policy Research, January 4, 2017, <https://voxeu.org/article/effect-foreign-investors-local-housing-markets-evidence-uk>.

37 Sá, “The effect of foreign investors on local housing markets.”

38 Sá, “The effect of foreign investors on local housing markets.”

39 James Chen, “Speculator,” Investopedia, November 19, 2020, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/speculator.asp>.

40 “Housing Bubble,” Investopedia, December 25, 2020, [investopedia.com/terms/h/housing\\_bubble.asp](https://www.investopedia.com/terms/h/housing_bubble.asp).

41 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020*.

42 Zhiru Tan, Donglan Wei, and Zixu Yin, “Housing Vacancy Rate in Major Cities in China: Perspectives from Nighttime Light Data,” *Complexity* (September 2020): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1155/2020/5104578>.

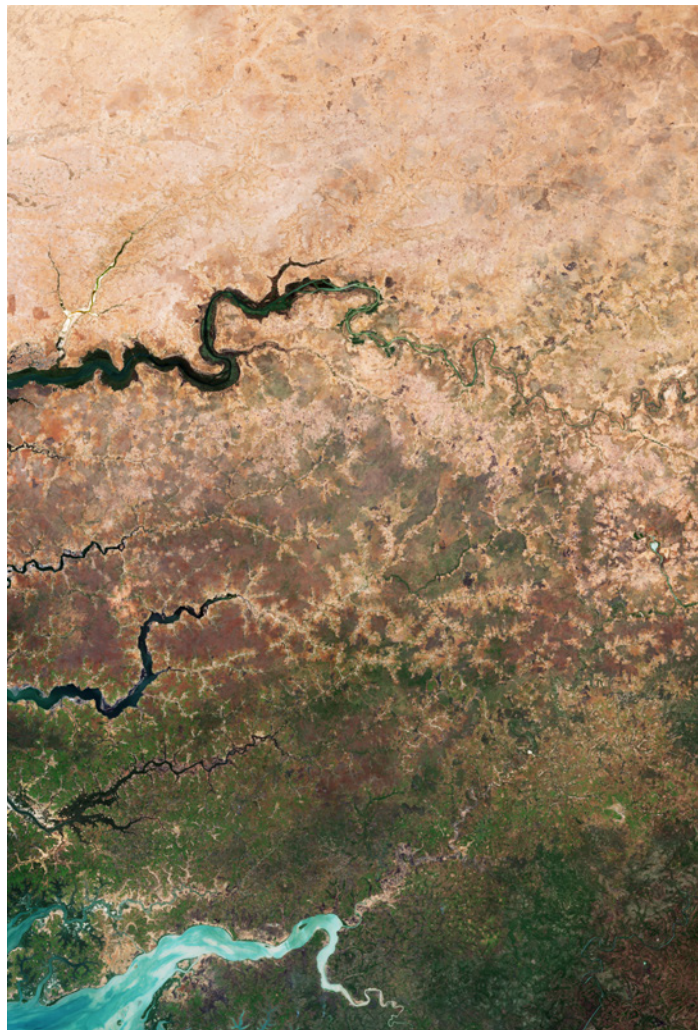
43 Alden et al., “Visualizing 2020.”

44 Sydney O’Shaughnessy, “Building Green: How affordable housing can tackle justice and sustainability,” Environmental and Energy Study Institute, last modified April 21, 2021, <https://www.eesi.org/articles/view/building-green-how-affordable-housing-can-tackle-justice-and-sustainability>.

communities, build resilience, and decrease emissions.”<sup>45</sup> To develop sustainable forms of housing, it is vital to recognize the current environmental challenges of urbanization.

Climate change and unprecedented environmental shifts are informing urban housing plans. The continent of Africa is on track to lose two-thirds of its farmable land to desertification—a process by which fertile land becomes desert and thus unusable—by 2030.<sup>46</sup> Continued projected increases in city populations will also shift settlement patterns across the continent. As climate change accelerates, it will closely interact with processes of urbanization and migration. Thus, regional environmental variations must be factored into housing policy and implementation that prepare local communities for the effects of climate change.

Urban growth is occurring at an unprecedented pace, equivalent to building a city the size of New York City every six weeks.<sup>47</sup> By 2030, there will be an estimated two billion additional urban residents, making awareness of the environmental impact of urbanization more crucial now than ever before.<sup>48</sup> As a result of growing economic and industrial development, the production of greenhouse gas emissions from cities worsens the environmental degradation of rapid urbanization.<sup>49</sup> Increased energy needs from urbanizing areas also factor into housing development. In some regions, fossil fuels dominate due to their relative abundance and cheapness than other, more sustainable energy sources.<sup>50</sup> However, there is potential to incorporate green energy strategies into the building of housing options. For instance, Paris, France, established a target to increase access to low energy and affordable housing as part of a city-wide agenda for sustainable urban planning.<sup>51</sup> The city implemented so-called “eco-quarters,” neighborhoods with buildings required to meet certain environmental performance criteria regarding transportation, waste recycling, and emissions.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore,



Satellite imagery captures land degradation around settlements in Senegal, the Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau

these “eco-quarters” were expected to meet social diversity measures, which aimed to integrate low-income residents through the provision of social housing. However, due to the attractiveness of living in these green neighborhoods, most housing intended to accommodate low-income residents ended up appealing to upper-middle-class tenants.<sup>53</sup> While eco-quarters constitute just one example of a strategy that incorporates sustainability and social policy, they reflect a significant new challenge for cities: managing sustainable and

45 O’Shaughnessy, “Building Green.”

46 Africa Renewal, “Desertification a threat to Africa’s development,” *Africa Renewal*, accessed July 2, 2021, <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/web-features/desertification-threat-africa%E2%80%99s-development>.

47 Robert I. McDonald et al., “Research gaps in knowledge of the impact of urban growth on biodiversity,” *Nature Sustainability* 3 (December 2019): 16–24, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41893-019-0436-6#citeas>.

48 McDonald et al., “Research gaps in knowledge of impact of urban growth on biodiversity,” 16–24.

49 McDonald et al., “Research gaps in knowledge of impact of urban growth on biodiversity,” 16–24.

50 Amit Prakash, “Boiling Point,” *Finance & Development* 55, no. 3 (September 2018), <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2018/09/southeast-asia-climate-change-and-greenhouse-gas-emissions-prakash.htm>.

51 Elise Machline, David Pearlmuter, and Moshe Schwartz, “Parisian eco-districts: low energy and affordable housing?” *Building Research & Information* 46, no. 6 (2018): 636–652, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09613218.2016.1258852>.

52 Machline, Pearlmuter, and Schwartz, “Parisian eco-districts: low energy and affordable housing?” 636–652.

53 Machline, Pearlmuter, and Schwartz, “Parisian eco-districts: low energy and affordable housing?” 636–652.



inclusive urban growth and equitable access to environmentally friendly housing options.

Deforestation—a major consequence of urban growth and increased demand for space—contributes significantly to the emission of greenhouse gases. Deforestation is a major problem in countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, where large fires are set to clear forested areas to make room for land development. Half of Indonesia’s greenhouse gas emissions come from deforestation.<sup>54</sup> Emissions from Indonesia’s 2015 clearing fires released 11.3 million tonnes of carbon dioxide daily over two months, which was more than 1.25 times the EU’s daily emissions over the same period.<sup>55</sup> In response to the deforestation crisis, Malaysian researchers have proposed strategies such as vertical housing—building taller buildings to make more efficient use of limited land. Other strategies include more sustainable agriculture methods and improved disaster risk management teams to respond to environmental catastrophes.<sup>56</sup>

Current urbanization trends greatly jeopardize global resilience to natural disasters. Every year, roughly 60,000 people die from natural disasters.<sup>57</sup> By 2050, it is estimated that two-thirds of the world’s population will live in urban areas. The swelling of urban areas and the accompanying environmental impacts greatly increase the risks of natural disasters. By 2050, flooding alone could threaten the lives of 1.3 billion people and cause up to USD 158 trillion in damages.<sup>58</sup> Though natural disasters only cause about 0.1 percent of deaths annually, low-income communities are disproportionately affected by these environmental disasters.<sup>59</sup> This means that increasing access to affordable housing should also prioritize resilient structures and the needs of vulnerable communities

in the face of climate change. Shock events like sudden flooding from heavy rain can have disproportionately large humanitarian and economic impacts.<sup>60</sup> For example, in 2010 and 2011, Colombia experienced losses of up to USD 768.38 billion in infrastructure and USD 846.70 billion in agriculture due to an unusually harsh rainy season which provoked many flash floods and landslides across the country.<sup>61</sup> Fortunately, there are many methods to incorporate climate resilience into affordable housing strategies. In Colombia, experts recommended several key strategies to increase resilience and access to housing. A major step is investing heavily in prevention strategies, such as improving the quality of existing housing or resettling homes in areas of high disaster risk. Furthermore, they concluded that the government must balance the construction of new high-quality housing with providing government funding for the structural improvement of existing neighborhoods and population resettlement if necessary.<sup>62</sup> Climate resilience strategies may vary per region but are an essential factor to consider when weighing the accessibility of high-quality housing for people worldwide.

A region’s vulnerability to natural disasters and their proximity to fault lines (the shared boundaries of tectonic plates that are frequent sites of earthquakes) also affect building codes—the laws regulating various aspects of construction projects. In many cases, there is a delicate balance between environmental constraints and the risk of natural disasters. For example, to address limited land space, housing and construction projects can develop vertically, but they must have countermeasures in the event of dangerous weather or environmental conditions.<sup>63</sup> The Taipei 101 building (Taipei), Shanghai Tower (Shanghai), New Wilshire Grand Center (Los Angeles), and Mori Tower

54 Prakash, “Boiling Point.”

55 “Indonesia forest fires in 2015 released most carbon since 1997: Scientists,” *The Straits Times*, June 29, 2016, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesia-forest-fires-in-2015-released-most-carbon-since-1997-scientists>.

56 Abdelnaser Omran and Odile Schwarz-Herion, *Deforestation in Malaysia: The Current Practice and the Way Forward* (Singapore: Sustaining our Environment for Better Future, 2020), [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-13-7158-5\\_11](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-13-7158-5_11).

57 Ritchie and Roser, “Natural Disasters.”

58 World Bank, “Disaster Risk Management,” March 16, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disasterriskmanagement/overview#1>.

59 Ritchie and Roser, “Natural Disasters.”

60 Joe Parkin Daniels, “Colombia: tens of thousands ordered to evacuate after floods at dam,” *The Guardian*, May 16, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/16/colombia-tens-of-thousands-of-ordered-to-evacuate-after-floods-at-dam>.

61 Ritchie and Roser, “Natural Disasters.”

62 Carlos Cortes and Luis Triveño, *Housing policies to increase resilience to disaster and climate related events in Colombia*, (Bogota: Land Governance in an Interconnected World, 2018), [https://www.oicrf.org/documents/40950/0/296\\_04-09-Cortes\\_Mateus-625\\_paper.pdf/1eb09f24-5861-31dd-6a31-8d1c891213b8?t=1568020914375](https://www.oicrf.org/documents/40950/0/296_04-09-Cortes_Mateus-625_paper.pdf/1eb09f24-5861-31dd-6a31-8d1c891213b8?t=1568020914375).

63 Matthew Fulco, “Housing Prices in Taipei: Leveled Off But Still High,” *Taiwan Business Topics*, February 13, 2020, <https://topics.amcham.com.tw/2020/02/high-housing-prices-in-taipei/>.

(Tokyo) are examples of tall developments with strong resistance to seismic activity such as earthquakes.<sup>64</sup>

Building engineers utilize various technologies to minimize the risk of structural damage to buildings in the event of strong winds or earthquakes, an important aspect of resilient and high-quality housing. Seismic activity is of particular concern to Japan. The country experienced one-fifth of all recorded high-magnitude earthquakes (magnitude of 6.0 or greater) globally between 2000 and 2009.<sup>65</sup> The country has revised its building code in response to every major earthquake. For example, a 2000 revision required ground stability testing before construction and added structural regulations, and 2006 revisions subjected buildings taller than three stories to mid-construction inspections.<sup>66</sup> Approximately 76 percent of Japan's housing stock meets these safety regulations, and a major challenge has been addressing particularly old buildings that predate the country's rigorous reforms in its building codes.<sup>67</sup> Istanbul's earthquake-resilient building code is another example of how cities engage in risk management via urban planning. The government of Turkey implemented the Istanbul Seismic Risk Mitigation Project (ISMEP) from 2004 to 2015. The USD 550 million investment is the country's first risk-reducing project. It has improved earthquake resistance in the Umraniye Maternity and Children's Hospital, 1175 public buildings, and 944 schools, which reach over 1.5 million students.<sup>68</sup> The project has also resulted in the digitization of building permit processes, which has made it easier for prospective developers to obtain necessary permits.<sup>69</sup> Japan and Turkey's successes with risk mitigation policies demonstrate the necessity of environmental considerations in urban planning and increasing access to affordable, adequate housing.

Governments must balance regulation, safety, and affordability in urban planning. There are many examples of effective and ineffective policies that attempt to address environmental concerns and housing development. For instance, despite rarely experiencing earthquakes, Mozambique's building code requires strict measures such as brick or cement blocks for walls and reinforced concrete beams.<sup>70</sup> The regulations prevent all but the wealthy from constructing new housing and serve as a telling example of how housing policy must align with region-specific environments and needs.<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, planning strategies such as vertical development may be promising for housing accessibility. A study of "compact city" development plans in Indonesia, which promotes vertical development and higher population density to limit urban sprawl, found evidence that this approach can potentially improve housing affordability, especially when considering transport and housing costs. The study's authors also suggested that future urban development policies should focus on a "non road-based transport system network, such as rail-based mass public transport" to increase accessibility and affordability within cities.<sup>72</sup>

Without significant investment into disaster risk prevention and resilience measures by 2030, the World Bank reports that cities worldwide may lose up to USD 314 billion annually from natural disasters.<sup>73</sup> For many coastal cities or those near sources of water, flooding is a relevant concern. Urbanization generally increases the likelihood of flooding due to the removal of vegetation, replacement of soil with impermeable pavement, and redirection of more water runoff into nearby bodies of water.<sup>74</sup> Instead of clearing floodplains, wetlands, or other naturally occurring buffer zones, some developers retain native plants and use them as natural flood buffers,

64 Dallon Adams, "These 7 quake-resistant buildings are designed to withstand the next big shockwave," *Digitaltrends*, June 14, 2017, <https://www.digitaltrends.com/cool-tech/earthquake-resistant-buildings/>.

65 Jiro Yoshida, "Land scarcity, high construction volume, and distinctive leases characterize Japan's rental markets," Brookings, April 20, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/japan-rental-housing-markets/>.

66 "Earthquake building codes in Japan," Japan Property Central, accessed September 30, 2021, <https://japanpropertycentral.com/real-estate-faq/earthquake-building-codes-in-japan/>.

67 Yoshida, "Land scarcity, high construction volume, and distinctive leases characterize Japan's rental markets."

68 "The Istanbul Seismic Risk Mitigation," *World Bank*, April 4, 2016, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkey/brief/the-istanbul-seismic-risk-mitigation-project>.

69 World Bank, "The Istanbul Seismic Risk Mitigation."

70 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2016*.

71 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2016*.

72 Yulia Dewita, Barbara Yen, and Matthew Burke, *The link between compact urban form and housing affordability in Indonesia: Where is the empirical evidence?* (Land Use Policy, 2018), <https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au/bitstream/handle/10072/402078/Dewita428150-Published.pdf?sequence=2>

73 World Bank, "Disaster Risk Management."

74 Christopher P. Konrad, "Effects of Urban Development on Floods," United States Geological Survey, November 29, 2016, <https://>

which reduces the likelihood of flooding in paved streets.<sup>75</sup> A neighborhood in Seattle, United States, reduced the width of streets and integrated native plants to them, resulting in a 98 percent reduction of runoff.<sup>76</sup> Installing green roofs and rain gardens or more roof-level drainage to keep water off the streets has been noted as another effective strategy.<sup>77</sup>

In contrast to areas vulnerable to flooding, dry areas face their own sets of challenges, such as droughts and fires. The 2020 Australian wildfires are only one piece of evidence. The fires devastated 44.5 million acres of land, destroyed numerous homes, and displaced or killed three billion animals.<sup>78</sup> To reduce the occurrence of catastrophic wildfires, the nonprofit, The Nature Conservancy, and other forestry experts advise applying controlled burning—intentionally setting low-intensity fires to clear out dense forests.<sup>79</sup> Controlled burning prevents the buildup of ground-level fuels that lead to more intense and uncontrollable blazes. This fire prevention act could save numerous lives and financial assets for human settlements bordering forests and other woodlands. In crowded urban areas—especially those with wood buildings—fires can easily spread. Even with fire-resistant facades, insulating materials, and coatings on buildings, walls can be covered in fire, and the flames can spread between windows of adjacent buildings.<sup>80</sup> It is crucial to have meticulous urban planning, emergency plans, and timely response measures to prevent and confront such emergencies.

Environmental constraints demonstrate how nuanced the task of developing affordable housing is. Any initiative to improve sustainability and climate resilience should also consider the element of affordability. As a housing assessment in the city of Gorakhpur, India, found that “the two key issues that would

enable the large-scale adoption of climate-resilient housing amongst the vulnerable sections of the urban population are: i) finance (affordable and accessible); and ii) skills/knowledge available at the local level (both amongst the masons and households).”<sup>81</sup> UN-Habitat must develop potential solutions to acknowledge the environmental impact of urbanization, significant variation in regional environmental conditions, and the sobering effects of climate change.

## Combating Housing Shortages

A crucial step to providing more affordable housing is the establishment and promotion of a culture of renting. Hundreds of millions of people practice renting, including newly arrived migrants, students, people in transitory periods of life, and others. Renting carries many benefits: it provides landlords with income, increases population density, reduces demand for expensive infrastructure in urban and surrounding areas, supports public transport, and combats urban sprawl.<sup>82</sup> While renting is not always more affordable than owning a home and varies in individual countries, it is a promising option for increasing access to affordable housing. For instance, a recent study found that renting is cheaper than buying a home in almost every major city in the United States.<sup>83</sup> Countries should be familiar with regional contexts as it pertains to renting culture and property availability.

The rates of renting vary according to rural and urban designations and city size, among other factors. In countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and the United States, more people rent in larger metropolitan cities than in small cities. For instance, data from 2005 shows that 37 percent of the urban population rented in Colombia compared to 12 percent

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pubs.usgs.gov/fs/fs07603/.

75 “Why are Wetlands Important?” United States Environmental Protection Agency, accessed July 6, 2021, <https://www.epa.gov/wetlands/why-are-wetlands-important>.

76 Konrad, “Effects of Urban Development on Floods.”

77 Konrad, “Effects of Urban Development on Floods.”

78 Nick Baker, “One year since Australia’s devastating wildfires, anger grows at climate change ‘inaction,’” *NBC Universal*, February 4, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/science/environment/one-year-australia-s-devastating-wildfires-anger-grows-climate-change-n1256714>.

79 “Wildfires and Forest Management,” The Nature Conservancy, March 10, 2021, <https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/idaho/stories-in-idaho/wildfires-and-forest-management/>.

80 Yuhei Nishio et al., “Fire Spread Caused by Combustible Facades in Japan,” *Fire Technology* 52 (July 2016): 1081-1106, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10694-015-0535-5>.

81 Dilip Singh, and Bijay Singh, *Scaling-up of climate resilient housing in Gorakhpur, India* (Gorakhpur: Asian Cities Climate Resilience, 2016), <https://pubs.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/migrate/10785IIED.pdf?>

82 United Nations Human Settlements Programme, *Policy Guide to Rental Housing in Developing Countries* (Nairobi: United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2011), HS/024/11E, <https://unhabitat.org/policy-guide-to-rental-housing-in-developing-countries>.

83 Michael Kolomatsky, “Renting is Cheaper than Buying Almost Everywhere,” *The New York Times*, June 10, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/10/realestate/renting-cheaper-than-buying.html>.



of rural populations.<sup>84</sup> Across countries, the percentage of homes rented varies significantly across urban and rural regions.<sup>85</sup> There are three main challenges to establishing a culture of renting in both urban and rural areas: cultural beliefs and norms, legal limitations, and physical constraints.

Cultural and social beliefs can contribute to lower rates of renting. In many societies, there is a dominant belief that homeownership is more meaningful than renting. This belief is entrenched in many Asian countries, which see property ownership as an indicator of one's financial stability, independence, social standing, and readiness to marry.<sup>86</sup> Compared to homeownership rates of 50–60 percent in European countries such as the United Kingdom and Germany, ownership rates in East Asia are as high as 85

percent in Taiwan and 90 percent in China.<sup>87</sup> Only in recent years has a culture of renting rather than ownership begun to develop.<sup>88</sup>

Increasingly high costs of living have also challenged efforts to promote renting. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the cost of urban living is 20–30 percent higher than in other countries with similar income levels, and renting is 55 percent more expensive than other regions.<sup>89</sup> Ineffective government policies sometimes exacerbate the high costs of living. For example, in many cities in South Korea, residents face high living costs due to poor government management and crisis response. From 2017 to 2020, apartment prices in Seoul rose by 58 percent, and the current average price of an apartment is about 16 times the average household income.<sup>90</sup> For reference, apartments in



In German on a wall in Berlin, "Living space is not a commodity!"

84 UN-Habitat, *Policy Guide to Rental Housing in Developing Countries*.

85 Wade Shepard, "China Now Has Answer To Its Housing Crisis—It's Called Rent," *Forbes*, October 29, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/wadeshepard/2019/10/29/china-now-has-an-answer-to-its-housing-crisis-its-called-rent/?sh=45075ea81a60>.

86 Fulco, "Housing Prices in Taipei."

87 Fulco, "Housing Prices in Taipei"; Statista Research Department, "Home ownership rate in selected European countries in 2019, by country," Statista, February 3, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/246355/home-ownership-rate-in-europe/>; Peking University Institute of Social Sciences, "Home Ownership Rate in China decreased to 89.68 percent in 2018 from 90 percent in 2014," Trading Economics, accessed June 5, 2021, <https://tradingeconomics.com/china/home-ownership-rate>.

88 Matthias Helble, "The housing unaffordability crisis in Asia," Asian Development Bank, December 2, 2019, <https://blogs.adb.org/blog/housing-unaffordability-crisis-asia>.

89 Shohei Nakamura et al., "Is Living in African Cities Expensive?" *World Bank Policy Research Working Papers* (April 2016): 3-12, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/24215>.

90 Economist Staff, "South Korea's government has failed to make housing cheaper," *The Economist*, February 25, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2021/02/25/south-koreas-government-has-failed-to-make-housing-cheaper>.

London cost about 12 times the average household income. Housing demand in South Korea increased sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that demand has far outpaced the available supply. Government policies attempting to curb this demand—which has driven prices far out of reach for most Koreans—have been largely ineffectual. The government has cracked down on housing speculators that have contributed to price hikes, increased restrictions on loans borrowing, and increased taxes on homeowners, among other policies—all of which have failed to cool demand.<sup>91</sup> Experts have criticized the South Korean for fundamentally misunderstanding the root of the issue. There simply are not enough apartment units to house the country's large population, half of which resides in the Seoul area, crammed into luxury high-rises, urban slums, and everything in between.

In response to soaring rental prices, which have barred young adults from entering the housing market altogether, the government has announced plans to construct 836,000 new housing units in the next four years, and in November 2020, launched a campaign to convert hotels into 100,000 public housing units.<sup>92</sup> While the addition of new high-quality housing units will ideally address supply issues, the government must also grapple with cultural resistance to renting and public housing. Negative social stigmas about public housing persist and threaten to render these latest government initiatives futile.<sup>93</sup> The housing crisis has been one of South Korea's longest and most severe policy challenges and reflects the unfortunate reality of seeking housing in rapidly developing urban centers.

An anomaly to this trend has been Tokyo, which has maintained steady home prices. Although habitable land only accounts for 29 percent of Japan's land area, the average monthly rent for a

two-bedroom unit in Tokyo has stayed relatively constant for the past decade, at slightly below USD 1000 per month.<sup>94</sup> Two of Japan's largest construction companies attribute their ability to meet housing demand to the government's deregulation of housing construction. Daiwa House Industry Co. and Sekisui House Ltd. have claimed that deregulation has allowed them to increasingly replace “low-rise residential complexes with much higher ones.”<sup>95</sup> This reflects the trend of vertical development as a strategy towards greater accessibility, as less government regulation allows construction companies to build higher residential towers.

A lack of land and poor urban planning also exacerbate existing challenges to making renting more affordable. Countries with a high population density must come up with creative solutions to combat a dire housing shortage. In India, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs predicts a shortage of 30 million housing units by 2022.<sup>96</sup> Of the predicted deficit, approximately 95 percent will belong to low-income households.<sup>97</sup> Businesses and nonprofits are attempting to address the lack of housing for this demographic, but a key issue is the lack of coordination between policymakers, residents, and innovators. India Migration Now, a research and advocacy group, uses its network of government, private, and nonprofit partners to promote adequate and affordable housing for low-income migrant households in India.<sup>98</sup> Innovators such as the social venture, Pop-up Housing, have created more economically available homes that cost less than an iPhone by leveraging recyclable materials and the principle of self-assembly.<sup>99</sup> Experts acknowledge the efforts of various non-governmental entities in providing housing but emphasize the necessity of public-private partnerships and improvements in policies on property and land rights in

91 Economist Staff, “South Korea's government has failed to make housing cheaper.”

92 Sang-Hun Choe, “The Den of Thieves: South Koreans Are Furious Over Housing Scandal,” *The New York Times*, March 23, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/23/world/asia/korea-housing-lh-scandal-moon-election.html>; “South Korea to convert hotels into apartments to address rental home shortages,” *CNBC*, November 18, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/19/south-korea-converts-hotels-into-apartments-amid-rental-shortages.html>.

93 *CNBC*, “South Korea to convert hotels into apartments.”

94 Yoshida, “Land scarcity, high construction volume, and distinctive leases”; Davis, “In Japan, Home Prices Stay Flat.”

95 Davis, “In Japan, Home Prices Stay Flat.”

96 “India Housing For All,” International Trade Administration, March 25, 2021, <https://www.trade.gov/market-intelligence/india-housing-all>.

97 Sudha Srinivasan, “A roof over their heads: The complex challenges of urban housing,” *Deccan Herald*, April 23, 2021, <https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/panorama/a-roof-over-their-heads-the-complex-challenges-of-urban-housing-977459.html>.

98 Srinivasan, “A roof over their heads.”

99 Think Change India, “This pop-up house made of recycled materials will last for 30 years and costs less than an iPhone,” *YourStory Media*, April 25, 2017, <https://yourstory.com/2017/04/popup-house-recycle/amp>.



improving the living conditions of vulnerable communities.<sup>100</sup>

## Women’s Access to Housing

Women’s access to land, property, and adequate housing is another major problem confounding the issue of housing access. Gender inequities in land and property ownership and wage gaps are challenges to affordable housing for all.<sup>101</sup> Discriminatory statutory and customary laws, gender-neutral laws that do not account for women’s increased vulnerability to violence and exploitation, and women’s exclusion from decision-making processes all contribute to the unfair treatment of women in the housing sphere.<sup>102</sup> UN-Habitat has worked with women in Cochabamba, Bolivia, to address the differences in land ownership and property rights between genders. The Committee has empowered local women to communicate effectively with the government, resulting in a change in national property laws requiring registration to be in the name of both spouses, not just the male spouse.<sup>103</sup> The rights to adequate housing and the right to own property are enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and other human rights treaties.<sup>104</sup>

Of the households around the world that are headed by women, these women face their own sets of obstacles. In Latin American countries, the proportion of female-headed households in all urban households has increased by an average of 9.8 percent between the late 1980s and 2010.<sup>105</sup> More than a quarter of Brazil’s population and a fifth of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s population consist of female-headed households living in inadequate housing—which constitutes an overwhelming number of women in poor housing conditions.<sup>106</sup> Women in inadequate housing are especially

susceptible to the effects of natural disasters. Female-headed households were particularly impacted in the aftermath of the 2005 Hurricane Katrina in the southern United States. Low-income Black women headed almost half of all pre-Katrina households in New Orleans, and Black communities suffered the most in the aftermath of the hurricane.<sup>107</sup> Since the hurricane, New Orleans’ population has generally become more white and wealthier than before the storm. At the same time, the city’s homeless population doubled to 12,000 after the storm—presumably consisting of large numbers of Black residents displaced in the hurricane.<sup>108</sup> After the storm, many government-subsidized social housing units were either never built back or demolished, leaving just 37 percent of low-income housing intact. Concurrently, rent prices soared up by 46 percent following the hurricane, leaving low-income women with few options for housing access.<sup>109</sup> Women-headed households often also account for low-income households, emphasizing the importance of gender-sensitive policies that support women’s access to adequate housing.

Currently, empirical data about gender equality, poverty, and housing is limited due to governments’ failures to collect disaggregated data. This means that governments are not collecting or publishing specific data on housing outcomes concerning gender, income level, or race, among other demographic markers.<sup>110</sup> Governments and civil society actors must work to collect and publish more specific data to improve housing outcomes for women, especially low-income women and woman-headed households.

## Urban Planning

Not only must housing be affordable, but it must also be connected to basic services and amenities and integrated within the broader community. By 2030, there will be an estimated

100 Srinivasan, “A roof over their heads.”

101 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *The Right to Adequate Housing* (Geneva: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2014), [https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/fs21\\_rev\\_1\\_housing\\_en.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/fs21_rev_1_housing_en.pdf).

102 OHCHR, *The Right to Adequate Housing*.

103 United Nations Human Settlements Programme, *Women and Housing* (Nairobi: United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2014), HS/042/14E, <https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/download-manager-files/Women%20and%20Housing%20Book.pdf>.

104 OHCHR, *The Right to Adequate Housing*.

105 UN-Habitat, *Women and Housing*.

106 UN-Habitat, *Women and Housing*.

107 UN-Habitat, *Women and Housing*.

108 UN-Habitat, *Women and Housing*.

109 UN-Habitat, *Women and Housing*.

110 UN-Habitat, *Women and Housing*.

43 megacities globally—cities with 10 million residents.<sup>111</sup> For comparison, there were only two megacities in 1950.<sup>112</sup> With cities rapidly consolidating labor capital, effective urban planning is necessary to keep cities safe, efficient, and orderly.

City planners note that the most significant challenges with urban commuting are balancing personal versus public transportation, managing traffic, and building infrastructure. As housing costs rise, prospective homeowners and renters respond by moving farther from city centers, resulting in longer commutes to access businesses and basic services.<sup>113</sup> Over the past few years, average commuting distances have increased, especially for poor and minority workers who have been forced to move to suburbs to escape the insurmountable costs of urban living.<sup>114</sup> The Brookings Institute, an American think tank, notes that in the 2000s, Hispanic and Black residents in major metropolitan areas saw a decline in the number of available jobs at a rate two to three times faster than white residents. Similarly, the typical poor resident saw a 17 percent decrease in nearby job availability compared to a 6 percent decrease for non-poor residents.<sup>115</sup> This job decline forces low-income and minority workers to spend more time and money commuting to provide for themselves and their families, feeding the cycle of poverty.

Evidently, ease of transportation is closely related to housing affordability. The capital cities in the European Union (EU) have a relatively even split between cities more reliant on public transportation and those more reliant on cars.<sup>116</sup> The region reported that more than half of employed residents had less than half an hour of a one-way travel to work in 2019.<sup>117</sup> This relatively short commute time in the EU can be

attributed to thorough urban planning that minimizes traffic and provides reliable alternatives to personal automobiles in urban areas. Cycling programs, for example, have proven to work well in flat cities with moderately congested roads. This is why Copenhagen has a strong cycling culture while Paris, a city where heavily congested roads and limited bike lane networks, does not.<sup>118</sup> Some governments have found unique solutions to managing personal vehicle usage. Chinese cities have implemented road space rationing, which limits the number of drivers by only allowing certain license plates or last names on the road on certain days.<sup>119</sup> Though this policy has worked for China’s strong central government, similar policies may not be as easily implementable in countries without highly centralized governments.<sup>120</sup>

The private sphere also plays a role in the behavior of commuters. Some companies, like Amazon, take advantage of nearby public transport infrastructure by offering tax-free public transit accounts or free public transport for employees.<sup>121</sup> While operating near public transport hubs offers immense convenience to employees, the costs to employers are also significant. OperationsInc CEO David Lewis reports that office spaces can be “as much as 75 percent more expensive” when located by a train station than a property far from a station.<sup>122</sup> For giant corporations like Amazon that can afford to pay, operating out of an urban center is basically expected. For smaller businesses—many of which cannot afford to pay their workers as much as corporations like Amazon do—the choice is less clear. Some businesses avoid the commuting dilemma entirely by allowing employees to work remotely, an option that has become dramatically widespread due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Internet connectivity through

111 Alex Thornton, “10 cities are predicted to gain megacity status by 2030,” World Economic Forum, February 6, 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/02/10-cities-are-predicted-to-gain-megacity-status-by-2030/>.

112 Thornton, “10 cities are predicted to gain megacity status by 2030.”

113 Jenny Schuetz, “Cost, crowding, or commuting? Housing stress on the middle class,” Brookings, May 7, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/cost-crowding-or-commuting-housing-stress-on-the-middle-class/>.

114 Elizabeth Kneebone and Natalie Holmes, *The growing distance between people and jobs in metropolitan America* (Washington D.C.: Brookings, 2015), [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/srvy\\_jobsproximity.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/srvy_jobsproximity.pdf).

115 Kneebone and Holmes, *The growing distance between people and jobs in metropolitan America*.

116 Feargus O’Sullivan, “Breaking Down the Many Ways Europe’s City-Dwellers Get to Work,” Bloomberg, October 18, 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-10-18/the-many-ways-europe-s-city-dwellers-get-to-work>.

117 “Majority commuted less than 30 minutes in 2019,” European Commission, October 21, 2020, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20201021-2>.

118 O’Sullivan, “Breaking Down the Many Ways.”

119 Commuter Benefits, “How China Cuts Down on Car Commuting,” Commuter Benefits, September 4, 2019, <https://commuterbenefits.com/2019/09/how-china-cuts-down-on-car-commuting/>.

120 Commuter Benefits, “How China Cuts Down on Car Commuting.”

121 Brian O’Connell, “How to Ease Commuting Pains,” SHRM, June 8, 2019, <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/all-things-work/pages/how-to-ease-commuting-pains.aspx>.

122 O’Connell, “How to Ease Commuting Pains.”



the establishment of fiber-optic networks provides high-speed internet access to residents and enables remote work arrangements.<sup>123</sup> As such, sophisticated internet infrastructure will be a major component of effective urban planning.

The safety of cities is another major consideration in urban planning. Experts surveyed in 22 cities worldwide overwhelmingly classify sexual harassment as a high or extremely high risk for women and girls in urban areas.<sup>124</sup> According to a poll of the world's largest cities conducted by the Thomson Reuters Foundation, approximately six in every 10 women reported being physically harassed while using public transportation systems in Latin American cities.<sup>125</sup> Ill-maintained public transportation systems, gender gaps among drivers, and inadequate reporting and enforcement systems have contributed to the unease of female commuters in the region. Urban cities in Latin America and the Caribbean host almost 80 percent of the region's population, yet urban use of public transportation has decreased while car use has increased.<sup>126</sup> Only 30 percent of all licenses in the region belong to women, suggesting that women use public transportation and walk significantly more than men do.<sup>127</sup> Because women in the region rely heavily on public transportation, they are far more vulnerable to harassment and violence while commuting. Since the 2000s, countries like Japan and Indonesia have begun implementing women-only carriages, buses, and trains to combat sexual assault. This initiative has since spread to other countries, including India, Mexico, Brazil, with varying degrees of success.<sup>128</sup> While many women have welcomed the move, others regard it as a step back. A chief criticism of this

policy is that it segregates women and places the onus on them to stay safe rather than addressing the perpetrators of abuse. Education of young people, bystander intervention training, accessible reporting systems, and stricter punishments for perpetrators should be implemented as holistic approaches to preventing and responding to sexual harassment in public spaces.<sup>129</sup> Ensuring the safety of all urban community members is vital to affordable and integrated housing.

Conscious design can be crucial in improving safety in urban areas. This can include constructing buildings to overlook public spaces and provide "natural surveillance" of streets, footpaths, building entrances, and exits.<sup>130</sup> Ensuring that public spaces encourage pedestrian traffic and engagement is another way of creating an active, safe, and welcoming community.<sup>131</sup> The Planning Institute of Australia suggests providing street crossings, maintaining clear sightlines by keeping landscaping neat and developing neighborhoods with mixed land use to increase street-level activity.<sup>132</sup> Developing hybrid residential and business areas can further ease access to necessary services.

Creating and maintaining public green spaces can also improve community safety. Studies have suggested that converting vacant lots into green spaces can lead to improved mental health in those living within a quarter-mile radius of the revitalized space.<sup>133</sup> Several studies also showed a link between green spaces and physical activity.<sup>134</sup> Exercising is known to have positive effects on all aspects of health. These studies have also suggested that an increase in green spaces and exercise could

123 O'Connell, "How to Ease Commuting Pains."

124 Plan International, *Expert Survey: Girls' Safety in Cities Across the World* (Plan International, 2018), <https://plan-international.org/publications/expert-survey-girls-safety-cities#download-options>.

125 Crina Boros, "Exclusive-Poll: Latin American cities have most dangerous transport for women, NYC best," *Reuters*, October 28, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/women-poll/exclusive-poll-latin-american-cities-have-most-dangerous-transport-for-women-nyc-best-idUKL6N0S32MQ20141029?edition-redirect=uk>.

126 Rivas, Suárez-Alemán, and Serebrisky, "Stylized Urban Transportation."

127 Rivas, Suárez-Alemán, and Serebrisky, "Stylized Urban Transportation."

128 Reuters Staff, "Jakarta introduces women-only trains to avoid groping," *Reuters*, August 29, 2010, <https://www.reuters.com/article/oukoe-uk-indonesia-trains/jakarta-introduces-women-only-trains-to-avoid-groping-idUKTRE67J07J20100820>.

129 Kate Wills, "Which city is worst for sexual harassment?" *The Guardian*, October 8, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/oct/08/which-city-is-the-worst-for-sexual-harassment-on-public-transport>.

130 Heart Foundation, *Design Principle - Safety and Surveillance* (Heart Foundation, 2009), <https://www.healthyplaces.org.au/userfiles/file/Safety%20and%20Surveillance%20June09.pdf>.

131 Heart Foundation, *Design Principle - Safety and Surveillance*.

132 Heart Foundation, *Design Principle - Safety and Surveillance*.

133 Penn Medicine News, "Greening Vacant Lots Reduces Feelings of Depression in City Dwellers, Penn Study Finds," *Penn Medicine*, July 20, 2018, <https://www.pennmedicine.org/news/news-releases/2018/july/greening-vacant-lots-reduces-feelings-of-depression-in-city-dwellers-penn-study-finds>.

134 Michelle C. Kondo et al., "Urban Green Space and Its Impact on Human Health," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 15, no. 3 (March 2018): 19-20, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15030445>.

lower crime rates.<sup>135</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) has also expressed its support for implementing green spaces in infrastructural projects.<sup>136</sup> The WHO has said that integrating nature in housing, transportation, and hospitals is a long-term investment in “health, well-being, and quality of life.”<sup>137</sup> In addition to government policy, community engagement is crucial to plan, design, and maintain these spaces. Germany has a tradition spanning 150 years of providing large sections of land dedicated to “allotment gardens,” a communal garden separated into distinct plots and protected by federal law.<sup>138</sup> Allotment gardens give residents a place to enjoy gardening and nature while being in a social setting.<sup>139</sup> In dense cities, such as New York City, rooftop gardens have also been set up to maximize space in urban areas. A 2008 study by the American Real Estate and Urban Economics Association revealed that community gardens bring significantly larger and more sustained benefits to low-income neighborhoods instead of wealthy neighborhoods.<sup>140</sup> Researchers suggest that gardens in poor neighborhoods provide alternatives to city parks, which are often located in affluent neighborhoods and are less accessible to low-income residents.<sup>141</sup> Not only do green spaces create safe and healthy environments, but they can work to create greater equity between low-income and wealthy neighborhoods.

Furthermore, water and sanitation infrastructure is necessary to ensure the health and prosperity of cities. The UN estimates that women in the Republic of Malawi spend upwards of one hour each day collecting water while men spend just an average of six minutes—a nine-fold difference.<sup>142</sup> Women

in many water-deprived areas, including Guinea, Tanzania, and many other Asian and sub-Saharan African countries, shoulder a disproportionate time burden of collecting and transporting water. Women are estimated to be the primary collectors of water in 72 percent of households worldwide.<sup>143</sup> In Sub-Saharan Africa, the UN estimates that 37 percent of rural populations and 14 percent of urban populations rely on drinkable water sources more than half an hour away. The distance from drinkable water emphasizes the need for effective urban planning, as it is imperative to guarantee effective resource distribution through investments in and the development of water infrastructure.<sup>144</sup> Creating thoughtful plans for pipelines and sewage systems will help manage natural water resources and bridge gender and opportunity gaps.

Reducing noise pollution is another method of supporting a healthy urban environment. Traffic-induced noise accounts for 80 percent of all urban noise sources.<sup>145</sup> Trains are a prominent source of noise-related health effects. However, the dominant noise source is the friction between the tire and the road surface for fast-driving automobiles.<sup>146</sup> Although electric vehicles are the more sustainable alternative to regular automobiles and drastically reduce noise pollution, they are expensive and require special charging stations.<sup>147</sup> A 2011 WHO report titled *Burden of Disease from Environmental Noise* states that prolonged exposure to industrial noise—the amount of sound energy absorbed while working—can lead to health problems such as reduced focus, sleep disorders, headaches, and more.<sup>148</sup> Construction sites are major sources

135 Kondo et al., “Urban Green Space,” 20–21.

136 Regional Office for Europe, *Urban green spaces: a brief for action* (Copenhagen: World Health Organization, 2017), <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/urban-health/publications/2017/urban-green-spaces-a-brief-for-action-2017>.

137 Regional Office for Europe, *Urban green spaces: a brief for action*.

138 Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB), *White Paper: Green Spaces in the City* (Berlin: BMUB 2018), <https://www.bmi.bund.de/EN/topics/building-housing/city-housing/national-urban-development/urban-green-spaces/urban-green-spaces-node.html>.

139 Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB), *White Paper: Green Spaces in the City*.

140 Voicu and Been, “The Effect of Community Gardens on Neighboring Property Values,” 241–278.

141 Voicu and Been, “The Effect of Community Gardens on Neighboring Property Values,” 241–278.

142 “UNICEF: Collecting water is often a colossal waste of time for women and girls,” United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, August 29, 2016, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-collecting-water-often-colossal-waste-time-women-and-girls>.

143 Asian Development Bank, *Gender and Urban Poverty in South Asia: Proceedings Report of the 2012 Subregional Workshop* (Mandaluyong: Asian Development Bank, 2013), <https://www.adb.org/publications/gender-and-urban-poverty-south-asia-proceedings-report-2012-subregional-workshop>.

144 UNICEF, “Collecting water.”

145 Sanja Grubesa and Mia Suhanek, “Traffic Noise,” *IntechOpen* (June 2020), <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.92892>.

146 Grubesa and Suhanek, “Traffic Noise.”

147 Grubesa and Suhanek, “Traffic Noise.”

148 Regional Office for Europe, *Burden of disease from environmental noise* (Copenhagen: World Health Organization, 2011), <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/326424>.



of industrial noise.<sup>149</sup> Housing close to sources of traffic or industrial noise should receive sound insulation to protect residents.<sup>150</sup> Noise pollution reduction technologies such as noise screens and facade insulation have proven effective in mitigating the accompanying health effects. Many European cities such as Amsterdam, Brussels, Copenhagen, Gothenburg, Paris, Rotterdam, and Turin have tested silent roads constructed from thin asphalt layers and other materials.<sup>151</sup> As an alternative to the conventional dense asphalt concrete (DAC) pavement of roads, quiet road surfaces take the form of thin surface layers, single-layer porous asphalt, two-layer porous asphalt, and stone mastic asphalt. Advocates of quiet road surfaces acknowledge that installing sound-reductive pavement can cost 10 percent more for thin asphalt layers and up to 200 percent more for two-layer porous asphalt than installing conventional DAC.<sup>152</sup> Over 30 years, though, quiet road surfaces have been shown to have lower costs per decibel noise reduction than other noise-reduction measures.<sup>153</sup> This makes quiet roads a compelling resource. Though they are more expensive up-front than regular, DAC-paved roads, the long-term investment in quiet road surfaces can pay off.

Urban planning is central to the development of sustainable, integrated, and affordable housing. Engagement with residents, collaboration with policymakers, and insights from experts are necessary to identify and address health and safety concerns from the beginning of the housing development process. Thoughtful consideration of urbanization and migration, environmental constraints, cultural norms, legal factors, and intentional urban planning are instrumental to quality, affordable housing.

149 Grubesa and Suhanek, “Traffic Noise.”

150 Grubesa and Suhanek, “Traffic Noise.”

151 Working Group Noise EUROCIITIES, *Low-noise road surfaces* (Brussels: EUROCIITIES, 2015), [https://workinggroupnoise.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/leafletlayout\\_v2\\_simplecover\\_final.pdf](https://workinggroupnoise.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/leafletlayout_v2_simplecover_final.pdf).

152 Working Group Noise EUROCIITIES, *Low-noise road surfaces*.

153 Working Group Noise EUROCIITIES, *Low-noise road surfaces*.

154 Yongjin Yi, “Housing Shortage and Homelessness in Mongolia,” The Borgen Project, May 28, 2020, <https://borgenproject.org/homelessness-in-mongolia/>.

155 Enkhtsetseg Shagdarsuren, *Activities in Ger Area Upgrading of Ulaanbaatar City* (Ulaanbaatar: United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2020), <https://caroph.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Activities-in-Ger-Area-Upgrading-of-Ulaanbaatar-city.pdf>.

156 United Nations Human Settlements Programme, *Guidelines for Upgrading of Middle Ger Areas* (Ulaanbaatar: United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2010), [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-05/gusip\\_output\\_2.2\\_middle\\_ger\\_area\\_guidelines\\_november\\_2010.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-05/gusip_output_2.2_middle_ger_area_guidelines_november_2010.pdf).

157 UN-Habitat, *Guidelines for Upgrading of Middle Ger Areas*.

158 United Nations Human Settlements Programme, *Citywide Pro-Poor Ger Area Upgrading Strategy of Ulaanbaatar City* (Ulaanbaatar: United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2010), <https://unhabitat.org/citywide-pro-poor-ger-area-upgrading-strategy-of-ulaanbaatar-city>.

## Current Status

### Case Study: Mongolia’s Ger Areas

The Ger areas of Mongolia are a prime case study into providing quality, affordable housing and managing urban sprawl. These informal housing communities receive their name from their most common architectural feature: the Ger (or yurt), a low-cost, portable housing construct shaped like a round tent and traditionally used by regional nomads.<sup>154</sup> Ger areas are now viewed as “semi-permanent features” of the country’s urban landscape, housing more than half of Mongolia’s urban population. They house more than half of Mongolia’s urban population.<sup>155</sup> In Mongolia’s capital city, Ulaanbaatar, the sprawling Ger communities are home to over 60 percent of its residents.<sup>156</sup> The majority of Ulaanbaatar’s residents are migrants, most of whom move into Ger areas due to a lack of affordable housing.<sup>157</sup> These areas are a comparatively affordable option because the residences are unplanned and informal. However, they were not built using professional labor and did not follow any building code. As a result, most Ger dwellings do not have access to electricity, water, or sanitation. The most common method of waste disposal is pit latrines—holes dug in the ground. Air pollution, flooding, and the prevalence of disease are major issues in these communities.<sup>158</sup> Although these informal settlements may be more affordable, they face key issues in quality of living.

Ulaanbaatar’s Ger areas are separated into three types based on geography and development—central, middle, and semi-urban Ger areas. Central Ger areas are located near the capital’s urban center and have relatively high access to services and infrastructure compared to the other two types. Middle Ger



Ger structure in Ulaanbaatar

areas are located between central and semi-urban Ger areas and have limited access to urban resources. Semi-urban Ger areas are located at the city's periphery, experience daily expansion, and have little to no access to urban resources. The ever-changing nature of semi-urban Ger areas impedes implementing infrastructure and systems to link the semi-urban Ger areas with the city center.<sup>159</sup> The Municipality of Ulaanbaatar partnered with Cities Alliance, a global alliance, to address the living conditions and uncontrolled urban sprawl around the capital. Cities Alliance supported UN-Habitat to develop the Ger-area Upgrading Strategy and Investment Plan for Ulaanbaatar (GUSIP). The group published the *Citywide Pro-poor Ger-area Upgrading Strategy of Ulaanbaatar City*, approved in July 2007 for implementation.<sup>160</sup> Specific upgrading guidelines were also prepared for each type of community.

Ger housing is not connected to the electrical grid, thus

relegating households to rely on firewood and coal to cook and warm their homes during the winter months. Ulaanbaatar is the coldest capital in the world, having an average temperature of  $-24.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ .<sup>161</sup> Wintertime air pollution results in layers of smog up to two meters thick, blanketing the city. Estimates attribute 90 percent of air pollution to firewood and coal-burning stoves used for cooking and heating. The overreliance on energy-inefficient stoves and boilers saturates the indoor and outdoor environments with smoke and soot, worsening the air quality and negatively impacting the health of residents. The Central Laboratory for Environmental Monitoring reports that Ulaanbaatar's wintertime carbon dioxide and nitrogen dioxide levels reach as high as 2.5 times acceptable rates.<sup>162</sup> The high demand for fuel has a natural cost as well. Up to 300,000 cubic meters of firewood are consumed every winter. From 2001 to 2020, Mongolia lost 11 percent of its tree cover to deforestation, and global tree cover decreased

159 "Ger-area Upgrading Strategy and Investment Plan for Ulaanbaatar," Urban Sustainability Exchange, accessed July 14, 2021, <https://use.metropolis.org/case-studies/ger-area-ulaanbaatar>.

160 Urban Sustainability Exchange, "Ger-area Upgrading Strategy."

161 Enkhbaatar Davaanyam and Batdelger Gantsetseg, *Air Quality Monitoring in Mongolia* (Ulaanbaatar: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2020), [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/9.%20Air%20Quality%20Monitoring%20in%20Mongolia\\_IRIMHE.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/9.%20Air%20Quality%20Monitoring%20in%20Mongolia_IRIMHE.pdf); UN-Habitat, *Citywide Pro-Poor Ger Area Upgrading Strategy*.

162 UN-Habitat, *Citywide Pro-Poor Ger Area Upgrading Strategy*.

by 10 percent.<sup>163</sup> Providing practical and integrated heating and cooling systems independent of firewood and coal to Ger area households would significantly alleviate environmental and health concerns.

Ger housing units also lack running water, meaning that fetching coal and water are daily chores. The most common sources for acquiring water are water kiosks, small buildings that house a water tank where residents can pay a fee to fill containers with water. Distance is a major concern, as some kiosks are as far as three kilometers away from Ger settlements. The time required to fill, purchase, and transport water containers could instead be used to earn wages. Moreover, Mongolia's 2010 population and housing census showed that just over one-third of the country's population had access to private toilets, while 55 percent of the population used outdoor toilets.<sup>164</sup> The majority of Ger area residents use unlined pit latrines to dispose of waste. Without a lining, human waste permeates and pollutes surrounding soil, threatening groundwater resources, which Ulaanbaatar's water supply depends on.<sup>165</sup> However, homes with better access to utilities and services are unaffordable for many communities in Mongolia that cannot pay off loans they would require.<sup>166</sup>

Indeed, waste disposal is one of the most foremost concerns of informal settlements like Ger areas. Many waste collection vehicles have been used for over 15 years and thus are very ill-maintained.<sup>167</sup> The inadequacy of the vehicles impacts the frequency of waste collection, as twice as much waste is produced than is collected during winter months.<sup>168</sup> In addition, monthly waste collection fees are high, costing MNT 2,500 or USD 2.20, and do not account for different amounts of waste generated.<sup>169</sup> Compared to the city, Ger area collection fees are higher despite lower incomes among the

residents. Many households are ultimately unable to afford the collection service, which exacerbates poor sanitation conditions.<sup>170</sup>

Recommendations to address sanitation concerns in Ger areas focus on central areas and all other areas. For instance, central Ger areas could develop more apartments and in-built sanitation systems for individual housing units. Other areas might further build upon existing sanitation methods and dwellings rather than entirely overhaul these systems. Such recommendations include investing in ventilated improved pit latrines, dry toilets, pit emptying systems, and lined gray water holes, as well as building additional bathhouses for personal hygiene. However, costs and scarce resources remain major limitations. Researchers have described ventilated improved latrines as having “prohibitively high” construction costs.<sup>171</sup> With bathhouse costs ranging from MNT 10 million to 40 million, or USD 10,000 to 40,000, the limited finances of local governments are unable to meet residents' needs and demands.<sup>172</sup>

To address the substandard housing conditions in Ger areas, the Mongolian government, in partnership with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), has implemented a USD 570.1 million project to “turn Ulaanbaatar's Ger areas into affordable, low-carbon, climate-resilient, and livable eco-districts.”<sup>173</sup> The project intends to build “10,000 homes in 20 new environmentally friendly eco-districts with good services, green spaces, and access to shops and jobs.”<sup>174</sup> Construction of these districts will integrate new and old residents through a method known as “voluntary land swapping.”<sup>175</sup> By obtaining the unanimous consent of residents on the land identified to be developed into the districts, respect for residents' autonomy is ensured. Often, any kind of addition or land development

163 “Dashboard,” Global Forest Watch, accessed August 6, 2021, <https://www.globalforestwatch.org/>.

164 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation on his mission to Mongolia* (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2018), [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Water/A\\_HRC\\_39\\_55\\_Add\\_2\\_EN.docx](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Water/A_HRC_39_55_Add_2_EN.docx).

165 UN-Habitat, *Citywide Pro-Poor Ger Area Upgrading Strategy*.

166 Karen Lane, “Building affordable, green houses in Mongolia's ger districts,” Asian Development Bank, December 29, 2020, <https://www.adb.org/results/building-affordable-greenhouses-mongolia-s-ger-districts>.

167 UN-Habitat, *Citywide Pro-Poor Ger Area Upgrading Strategy*.

168 UN-Habitat, *Citywide Pro-Poor Ger Area Upgrading Strategy*.

169 UN-Habitat, *Citywide Pro-Poor Ger Area Upgrading Strategy*.

170 UN-Habitat, *Citywide Pro-Poor Ger Area Upgrading Strategy*.

171 UN-Habitat, *Citywide Pro-Poor Ger Area Upgrading Strategy*.

172 UN-Habitat, *Citywide Pro-Poor Ger Area Upgrading Strategy*.

173 Lane, “Building affordable, green houses.”

174 Lane, “Building affordable, green houses.”

175 Lane, “Building affordable, green houses.”



in Ger areas requires renegotiation and readjustment of *kebshaas*—individual fenced-in plots of land.<sup>176</sup> Voluntary land swapping addresses the issue of land scarcity by offering current residents the option to exchange their existing homes for an upgraded apartment or townhouse in the newly developed eco-district. The mechanism is a mutually beneficial exchange: pre-construction residents will have improved housing, developers are permitted to work, and the new, more organized developments provide more people with adequate, affordable, and sustainable housing. Through the incentivization of cooperation for Ger upgrading, developers obtain plots of land in otherwise land-scarce areas.<sup>177</sup>

Although urban communities in other countries may not be identical to the Ger areas, this case study offers important lessons for affordable, high quality, and sustainable housing. For instance, affordable housing options do not guarantee that the services in that area are affordable for residents, even when necessary for public health and safety. In addition, the increasing prevalence of environmental concerns and pollution in various urban settings indicates the need for more sustainable housing to protect these communities from future harm.

## COVID-19 and Affordable Housing

The most severe public health crisis of the century, the COVID-19 pandemic, revealed shortcomings and inequalities in planning and managing cities.<sup>178</sup> The Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-Habitat, Maimunah Mohd Sharif, noted that COVID-19 “[reversed] the gains made in poverty eradication” and has pushed the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals back by at least a decade.<sup>179</sup> According to the United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research, the short- and medium-term effects of COVID-19 could result in the world’s impoverished population increasing by half a

billion people.<sup>180</sup> The impoverished and those deprived of basic services are the most vulnerable to the virus. Lack of access to clean water, sanitation, waste management, green spaces, transportation systems, electricity, internet, and housing security have contributed to the disproportionate suffering of vulnerable groups during the pandemic. Low-income households and informal economy participants face quarantine conditions that restrict their ability to safely earn income, interact with social groups, continue their education, and more.

In Africa alone, up to 90 percent of some countries’ labor force works in the informal sector, where labor is not monitored, regulated, or protected by the government. Up to 20 million jobs are thought to have been disrupted, although precise data is hard to find. Substandard living conditions in certain areas also prevented households from receiving the latest health guidelines and put them at much greater risk of exposure to the virus.<sup>181</sup>

Dharavi, outside of Mumbai, India, is considered to be one of the world’s largest slums. It is densely populated, as 850,000 residents share 55,000 mostly one-room homes.<sup>182</sup> Close living conditions, malnutrition, poor diets, and weakened immune systems make residents of slums and informal settlements exceedingly vulnerable to contracting diseases. In addition, the tenuous economic conditions in many countries have exacerbated household finances for renters. The financial strain of reduced work hours and layoffs has forced millions of renters worldwide into a global eviction crisis that countries are still trying to mitigate. In total, millions of tenants have faced or risk eviction due to missed rent payments.<sup>183</sup>

To reduce the spread of the virus and combat increases in homelessness, governments have strived to ensure that populations are housed. Governments around the world have implemented eviction diversion programs, rental assistance,

176 UN-Habitat, *Upgrading of Middle Ger Areas*.

177 Lane, “Building affordable, green houses.”

178 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020*.

179 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020*.

180 Andy Sumner, Chris Hoy, and Eduardo Ortiz-Juarez, “Estimate of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty,” *United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research* (April 2020), <https://www.wider.unu.edu/sites/default/files/Publications/Working-paper/PDF/wp2020-43.pdf>.

181 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020*.

182 Roli Srivastava, “As COVID-19 ravages India, a slum succeeds in turning the tide,” *Reuters*, May 11, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-india-slum/as-covid-19-ravages-india-a-slum-succeeds-in-turning-the-tide-idUSKBN2CT002>.

183 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020*.

and eviction moratoria—temporary bans on evictions.<sup>184</sup> These programs all aim to support vulnerable residents keep their homes. Eviction diversion programs create channels of communication and assist in relationship management between tenants and landlords. Moratoria on mortgages and evictions extend deadlines for borrowers and tenants to pay their loaned mortgage and rent, respectively. Rental assistance and housing subsidies provide direct financial aid to tenants. Depending on the terms of the government policy, the funding can cover utilities such as internet and home energy costs in addition to rent.<sup>185</sup> Unfortunately, as the pandemic fades further into history, many of these protections are being lifted now, exposing renters to the risk of eviction once again.

Governments' focus on ensuring housing for all during the pandemic is well-founded. The Eviction Lab found that there is a pattern of areas with high eviction filings and low vaccination rates in nine cities across the United States.<sup>186</sup> It is thus necessary to prevent evictions because individuals who are not yet vaccinated must retain housing, so they are not unduly exposed to the virus while homeless. However, around the world, evictions have still occurred even at the height of the pandemic. In the United States, almost a quarter-million individual tenants and households have been evicted since the beginning of the pandemic.<sup>187</sup>

Studies reveal that the spread of COVID-19 is not dependent on population density in cities but is instead closely correlated to overcrowding and access to basic services.<sup>188</sup> More than one in five children under 17 years of age live in overcrowded conditions in many European countries.<sup>189</sup> The prevalence of children living in overcrowded households increases health

risks to children. It furthers the cycle of poverty, given that children in low-income households are twice as likely as children in high-income households to live in overcrowded conditions.<sup>190</sup> Overcrowding is especially relevant in slums and informal settlements. A lack of urban planning and financial support to help individuals and families rise out of poverty and move out of slums contributes to the increase in absolute slum populations despite decreasing global percentages of urban slum populations. COVID-19 caseloads were higher in urban neighborhoods with slums than in non-slum urban neighborhoods.<sup>191</sup> Researchers at the Imperial College London on the urban spread of COVID-19 found that “the top 20 percent of neighborhoods, ordered by COVID-19 caseload, accounts for 31 percent of cases in Mumbai, 69 percent in Cape Town, 58 percent in Rio de Janeiro, 50 percent in Dhaka, and 65 percent in Lagos.”<sup>192</sup> The pandemic disproportionately affected the poor and minority groups because they are more likely to live in overcrowded living conditions without access to basic services.

In direct opposition to rising slum populations, the pandemic has spurred migration away from major urban centers. The prevalence of remote working options has reduced the need for employees to live near their workplaces. This shift of workplace culture has granted smaller cities with more affordable living costs the opportunity to grow.<sup>193</sup> In the long term, UN-Habitat views this trend as a balancing of urban populations. Ultimately, the distribution of populations across urban areas will promote more equitable development and stronger rural-urban linkages.<sup>194</sup>

184 United Nations Human Settlements Programme, *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future* (Nairobi: United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2021), HS/058/20E, <https://unhabitat.org/cities-and-pandemics-towards-a-more-just-green-and-healthy-future-0>.

185 Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, “Federal help with paying your rent,” United State Government, accessed August 5, 2021, [https://www.consumerfinance.gov/coronavirus/mortgage-and-housing-assistance/renter-protections/emergency-rental-assistance-for-renters/?utm\\_source=outreach&utm\\_medium=banner&utm\\_campaign=treasury\\_banner/#2](https://www.consumerfinance.gov/coronavirus/mortgage-and-housing-assistance/renter-protections/emergency-rental-assistance-for-renters/?utm_source=outreach&utm_medium=banner&utm_campaign=treasury_banner/#2).

186 Kriston Capps, Marie Patino, and Jeremy Diamond, “Where Eviction Risk Is High, Covid Vaccination Rates Are Low,” Bloomberg, July 30, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-07-30/where-eviction-risk-is-high-vaccination-rates-are-low>.

187 UN-Habitat, *Cities and Pandemics*.

188 UN-Habitat, *Cities and Pandemics*.

189 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Society at a Glance 2019: OECD Social Indicators* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2019), [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/society-at-a-glance-2019\\_soc\\_glance-2019-en#page1/](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/society-at-a-glance-2019_soc_glance-2019-en#page1/).

190 OECD, *Society at a Glance 2019*.

191 Anand Sahasranaman and Henrik Jeldtoft Jensen, “Spread of COVID-19 in urban neighbourhoods and slums of the developing world,” *Journal of the Royal Society Interface* 18 (January 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsif.2020.0599>.

192 Sahasranaman and Jensen, “Spread of COVID-19 in urban neighbourhoods and slums.”

193 Johanna Flashman, “A new wave of remote workers could bring lasting change to pricey rental markets,” City Monitor, July 7, 2020, <https://citymonitor.ai/economy/a-new-wave-of-remote-workers-could-bring-lasting-change-to-pricey-rental-markets>.

194 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020*.

## Sustainable Development Agenda

The most relevant Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to the mission of the United Nations Human Settlement Programme is SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, which aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. More specifically, Target 11.1 aims to “ensure access for all to adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums” by 2030.<sup>195</sup> With one in four urban residents worldwide still living in slum-like conditions, the need to ensure housing affordability is as relevant as ever.<sup>196</sup> Despite the decrease in proportionate urban slum residents, the absolute number of slum residents has continued to increase. The UN is committed to ensuring that no one or place is left behind in global development processes.

Such commitment to equitable development reveals itself in Targets 11.2, 11.3, and 11.7 as well. These targets indicate a commitment to implementing adequate transportation systems and infrastructure, responsible urban planning, and safe public spaces, respectively. Public transportation is only reliable and accessible for half of the world’s urban population, and less than half of the population live within easy walking distance (400 meters) to public spaces.<sup>197</sup> Ensuring the safety and accessibility of vulnerable populations while using these services is necessary for adequate housing. Not only must housing be affordable, but it must have complete and reliable access to basic services, too. Consideration for vulnerable populations and other details of urban planning extending beyond the physical household is necessary for developing reliable plans for affordable housing.

In addition to improving urban housing conditions for human accessibility, the SDGs address the need to confront the harmful environmental impacts of urbanization. Targets 11.5 and 11.6 call for countries to account for climate change and mitigate natural and human-made disasters in

urbanization processes.<sup>198</sup> Low-income households and slum-dwelling communities are disproportionately affected by climate change-induced natural disasters. Their housing often lacks the safety measures capable of withstanding natural disaster threats, and weak governance can render evacuation measures inadequate or completely absent. Slum-like housing also lacks water and sanitation systems, which further threatens the health and wellbeing of residents. Worldwide, two billion people experience water stress.<sup>199</sup> As evident in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, lack of services was a factor in communities’ inability to comply with quarantine guidelines.<sup>200</sup> The increased vulnerability of those living in slum-like conditions results in longer-lasting and more severe consequences of natural disasters.

While seemingly unrelated to increasing the supply of affordable housing, the protection of cultural and natural heritage sites cannot be overlooked as countries continue to develop. Target 11.4 recognizes the value of culture, tradition, and documented history as institutions to be protected during urbanization. Cultural and natural heritage are integral to the identity and legacy of Indigenous communities. Because housing directly affects residents, the provision of affordable housing must be a non-invasive process. Thus, an understanding and appreciation of local customs, values, and history are necessary for the successful implementation of affordable housing processes. Integrating the concerns of Target 11.4 while investigating methods to provide affordable housing to communities will allow greater progress made on sustainable development.<sup>201</sup>

Though SDG 11 is most obviously applicable to the mission of UN-Habitat, the management of urban areas is critical in the achievement of almost all of the SDGs. Experts in development and data science argue that “up to 65 percent of the SDG Targets are at risk should local urban stakeholders not be assigned a clear role in the implementation of the

195 “Goal 11 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs,” United Nations, accessed July 15, 2021, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal11>.

196 United Nations Statistics Division, *Metadata-11-01-01* (New York: United Nations, 2020), <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-11-01-01.pdf>.

197 United Nations, “Goal 11 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs.”

198 United Nations, “Goal 11 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs.”

199 United Nations Statistics Division, *Metadata-11-01-01*.

200 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020*.

201 United Nations, “Goal 11 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs.”



agenda.”<sup>202</sup> Many international treaties recognize the major role that urbanization will play in global development, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the New Urban Agenda, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.<sup>203</sup> The 2020 World Cities Report recognizes the essential role of urban areas in achieving the SDGs and specifically highlights the following goals as being unachievable without engaging in responsible urbanization: “poverty (SDG 1), inequality (SDG 10), climate change (SDG 13), gender equality (SDG 5), water and sanitation (SDG 6), economic growth and employment (SDG 8), industrialization and innovation (SDG 9) and consumption and production patterns (SDG 12).”<sup>204</sup>

Overall, affordable housing will improve the quality of living, expand economic opportunities, create more resilient and tolerant communities, and contribute to equitable and sustainable development. Given that urban residents make up 55 percent of the world’s population—with the number expected to grow—urban cities are on track to become global cornerstones in sustainable development.<sup>205</sup>

## Bloc Analysis

The main point of contention between countries regarding affordable housing is the condition of existing, available urban housing in their respective states. Residence in inadequate shelters is usually the result of housing unaffordability. Many low-income households cannot afford other urban housing options and are forced to live in residences deprived of basic services. Countries with much of their urban population living in slum areas usually suffer from greater housing shortages, prevalent unaffordability, and poor urban planning. Rather than a point of contention, the proportion of urban populations living in slums indicates the underlying differences

in need between countries.

Of the 1.6 billion people living in inadequate housing worldwide, one billion live in slums and informal settlements.<sup>206</sup> Slums and informal settlements demonstrate some of the “most extreme forms of deprivation and exclusion.”<sup>207</sup> Residents of these areas often experience deprivation of water, electricity, and sanitation. The deprivation of basic services makes residents of such areas more vulnerable to natural disasters and health crises. Studies have shown that the spread of COVID-19 strongly correlates with a lack of basic services. Therefore, concerns about living conditions in slums and informal settlements are well-founded and recognized.<sup>208</sup> Of the respondents of the 2018 Voluntary National Review of Sustainable Development Goal 11, over 90 percent of countries reported difficulties stopping the spread of slums and informal settlements.<sup>209</sup>

UN-Habitat recognizes how important halting the spread of slums is. People should not have to live in overcrowded and unsafe living conditions, deprived of their right to adequate, accessible, and affordable housing because of their finances or identity. In the 2020 World Cities Report, UN-Habitat provides actual population statistics on residents of urban slums in 116 countries, all of which have slums of varying sizes.<sup>210</sup> The Committee does not provide classifications for the prevalence of urban slum populations in each country. However, for ease of communication, the countries are separated into approximate thirds in the following blocs.

Observing urban populations living in slums provides insight into housing and relevant institutions at the local and state levels. Slums are indicative of greater underlying challenges in providing affordable housing. Naturally, the needs of each country require tailored methods to optimize effectiveness and address the unique circumstances in each country. Thus, using the prevalence of urban slum populations as an indicator

202 Adelphi and Urban Catalyst, *Sustainable Development Goals and Habitat III: Opportunities for a successful New Urban Agenda* (Brussels: Cities Alliance, 2015), <https://www.citiesalliance.org/sites/default/files/Opportunities%20for%20the%20New%20Urban%20Agenda.pdf>.

203 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020*.

204 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020*.

205 “Urban Development,” World Bank, April 20, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/overview#1>.

206 Jonathan Woetzel et al., *A blueprint for addressing the global affordable housing challenge* (McKinsey Global Institute, 2014), [https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/Urbanization/Tackling%20the%20worlds%20affordable%20housing%20challenge/MGI\\_Affordable\\_housing\\_Full%20Report\\_October%202014.pdf](https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/Urbanization/Tackling%20the%20worlds%20affordable%20housing%20challenge/MGI_Affordable_housing_Full%20Report_October%202014.pdf).

207 United Nations Statistics Division, *Metadata-11-01-01*.

208 United Nations Statistics Division, *Metadata-11-01-01*.

209 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020*.

210 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020*.

of varied housing needs between countries is necessary to address affordable and quality housing challenges.

### States with High Urban Populations Living In Slum Areas

Countries with more than 60 percent of their urban population living in slum areas fall under the “high urban populations living in slum areas” bloc. UN-Habitat recognizes that the main reasons for the absolute numbers of urban residents living in slum-like conditions are the internal population growth of slums and rural-urban migration processes.<sup>211</sup>

Internal population growth of slums is linked to a lack of migration away from slums. The Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP) is one initiative that has been particularly effective at moving slum households out of slum-like living conditions.<sup>212</sup> PSUP focuses on involving slum residents, local and national governments, and other stakeholders in an integrative process to improve the living conditions of slums.<sup>213</sup> Countries with large slum populations like Côte d’Ivoire, Haiti, and Moldova will likely advocate for similar measures.<sup>214</sup> Growing slum populations due to rural-to-urban migration typically require similar interventions, including focusing on social housing policies. In some cases, such policies improve the financial security of low-income households through social support nets. Other policies to consider may include eviction diversion services and housing rent support.

Countries with large slum populations will prioritize addressing communities deprived of access to basic necessities such as water, sanitation, and electricity. While housing affordability is still a major concern for these countries, governments in this bloc find it much more pertinent to first address severely deprived communities. While improving public spaces is a consideration of such countries, more pressing issues like connecting residents living in slum-like conditions to energy, water, and sanitation systems take precedence. States in this

bloc prioritize upgrading slums and equipping households with the basic services and amenities core to residents’ health and safety.

### States with Medium Urban Populations Living In Slum Areas

Countries with “medium urban populations living in slum areas” have between 30 percent and 60 percent of their urban population living in slum areas. Similar to the other blocs, countries in this bloc are not constrained to one geographical region. Rather, members of this bloc are similar because they must balance addressing the poor living conditions in slums with addressing informal settlements and local homeless populations, when applicable. Solutions that this bloc proposes may differ from those of states with low and high urban populations living in slum areas because of the difference in resource allocation between slums and non-slums. Bloc members must ensure flexibility in resource allocation to address slums and non-slums because each state within this bloc faces different circumstances. Thus, a 50/50 split in focus will not be viable for all states in this bloc. Deferring to state sovereignty in resource allocation is the most likely outcome. Not only must these states focus on upgrading slums, but they must also consider policies to uplift those living without access to basic necessities.

Bloc members must balance improving living conditions in slums with increasing housing accessibility in cities, ensuring the safety of women and other vulnerable groups, and preventing homelessness and the expansion of informal settlements. One member of this bloc is the Philippines. With over 22 million people (44.3 percent of its urban population) living in slums, the country ranks in the middle of the bloc for the proportion of urban residents living in slum-like conditions. As one of the countries most affected by natural disasters, residents of slums are disproportionately vulnerable to frequent typhoons, landslides, and earthquakes.<sup>215</sup> An

211 Global Urban Observatory, “Monitoring SDG Indicator 11.1.1,” United Nations Human Settlements Programme, accessed July 15, 2021, <https://urban-data-guo-un-habitat.hub.arcgis.com/pages/global-monitoring-of-slums>.

212 Global Urban Observatory, “Monitoring SDG Indicator 11.1.1.”

213 “The Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP),” United Nations Human Settlements Programme, accessed August 8, 2021, <https://unhabitat.org/programme/the-participatory-slum-upgrading-programme-psup>.

214 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020*.

215 Jessica Dillinger, “Countries Most Prone To Natural Disasters,” World Atlas, September 26, 2018, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/countries-with-the-deadliest-natural-disasters.html>.

average of 20 typhoons affect the country annually.<sup>216</sup> India also faces many challenging environmental conditions that exacerbate the country's housing crisis, living conditions in slums and informal settlements, and the well-being of the homeless. Both countries also have moderately high Gini coefficients—a measurement of wealth distribution ranging from 0 (most equal) to 100 percent (most unequal)—of 44.4 and 35.7 percent, respectively.<sup>217</sup> Unequal distribution of wealth compounds the housing affordability crisis, furthers the cycle of poverty, and prevents the outmigration of people living in slum-like conditions. Other countries with moderately-sized urban populations living in slum areas and similar challenges include Guatemala, Jamaica, Nepal, Uganda, and Venezuela.<sup>218</sup>

Though the conditions of countries in this bloc vary, the key to potential policies proposed by this bloc will likely

include options that support adequate temporary housing and emergency shelters. Members of this bloc also support the policies of the other two blocs, although they may call for a compromise of the ideas proposed by blocs one and three.

### States with Low Urban Populations Living In Slum Areas

Countries with “low urban populations living in slum areas” have less than 30 percent of their urban population living in slum areas. This bloc has a higher concentration of European and Latin American countries. Potential policy proposals will have a greater focus on informal settlements, homelessness, and preventing the development of slums, given that a smaller proportion of their urban population currently resides in slums. Housing accessibility, integration of rural and urban



Woman evicted from home in Zimbabwe rests in shelter

216 “Housing poverty in the Philippines,” Habitat for Humanity Great Britain, accessed July 15, 2021, <https://www.habitatforhumanity.org.uk/country/philippines/>.

217 “Country Comparisons - Gini Index coefficient - distribution of family income,” Central Intelligence Agency, accessed July 15, 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/gini-index-coefficient-distribution-of-family-income/country-comparison>.

218 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020*.



areas, walking distance, transportation systems, and public spaces will play a larger role in dictating solutions. In addition, countries in this bloc will also support social policies directed towards poverty alleviation and financing to provide affordable housing to the homeless and residents of informal settlements and deprived neighborhoods—communities lacking physical, social, and financial resources.<sup>219</sup>

Many bloc members are middle- and high-income countries. However, many bloc members such as Austria, Egypt, Mexico, Thailand, and Zimbabwe face severe unequal wealth distribution despite fewer urban slum residents.<sup>220</sup> In the case of South Africa, 26.4 percent of the urban population lives in slum areas.<sup>221</sup> Despite the low percentage of urban slum residents, the country's Gini coefficient was 63 percent in 2014 and had an unequal distribution of wealth.<sup>222</sup> Because these countries have fewer slums in urban areas, and given that many are mid to high-income states, slum upgrading schemes are far more feasible.<sup>223</sup> Many countries in this bloc have higher rates of urbanization and more centralized governments. Therefore, policies addressing housing affordability and accessibility will likely require greater deferral to state sovereignty. As suggested by the 2021 UN-Habitat report evaluating responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, such solutions may take the form of exploring empowerment of local communities and governments with more significant monetary and fiscal autonomy in urban planning as an extension of policies passed during the pandemic.<sup>224</sup>

## Committee Mission

In over 90 countries, UN-Habitat has worked to improve cities and other human settlements through “knowledge, policy advice, technical assistance and collaborative action.”<sup>225</sup> The Committee firmly believes that urbanization is a “positive transformative force” for communities and that adequate, affordable housing is a human right.<sup>226</sup> In partnership with

other UN agencies, UN-Habitat publishes reports with updates on global progress and policy advice for sustainable urbanization and housing. Within its mandate, the Committee assists countries in improving living conditions and quality of life, such as the upgrading of Ger areas in Ulaanbaatar.

Increasing access to affordable housing is key to UN-Habitat's mission. Since urbanization is a complex and multifaceted issue intrinsically linked to affordable housing, delegates must note the Committee's limited scope when addressing this issue. The topic of housing inevitably touches many other major global issues, such as migrants and refugees. Rather than solutions addressing migration policies and practices, the Committee aims to provide adequate housing and urban spaces that encourage integration, trust-building, and cultural exchange. Similarly, while reliable transportation systems are necessary for accessible urban spaces, solutions proposed by UN-Habitat should make sure to be first and foremost housing-focused. While addressing how transportation enables sustainable development and integrated cities is necessary, the central topic should always promote affordable housing. Discussion of the relationship between cities and their environment is also critical. However, as the UN-Habitat primarily focuses on housing and urban planning, larger, non-housing-related climate change issues do not fall under the Committee mandate.

Finally, it is important to note that decisions proposed by UN-Habitat are not legally binding upon any state. All debate conducted and solutions proposed should be respectful of cultural differences and national sovereignty. Improvements to slums and informal settlements, apartments, and other shelters will help cities become more integrated, inclusive, and sustainable. With more than two-thirds of the world predicted to live in cities by 2050, the need for adequate, accessible, and affordable housing is greater than ever.

219 Mai Stafford and Michael Marmot, “Neighbourhood deprivation and health: does it affect us all equally?” *International Journal of Epidemiology* 32, no. 3 (June 2003): 357-366, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyg084>.

220 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020*.

221 UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020*.

222 Central Intelligence Agency, “Country Comparisons.”

223 “High Income Countries 2021,” World Population Review, accessed July 15, 2021, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/high-income-countries>.

224 UN-Habitat, *Cities and Pandemics*.

225 “About us,” UN-Habitat, accessed August 1, 2021, <https://unhabitat.org/about-us>.

226 “About us,” UN-Habitat; OHCHR, *The Right to Adequate Housing*.

## Research and Preparation Questions

Your dais has prepared the following research and preparation questions as a means of providing guidance for your research process. These questions should be carefully considered, as they embody some of the main critical thought and learning objectives surrounding your topic.

### Topic A

1. What are some examples of urban planning legislation passed by your country concerning women's safety in the streets? Do they follow a gender-blind or gender-conscious approach?
2. What resources does your country provide for victims of domestic violence? Do they partner with agencies or NGOs that provide emergency shelters or affordable housing for domestic violence survivors, etc.?
3. What measures has your country implemented to ensure women's safety on public transportation? If any notable measures have been adopted, what have been the results of employing these strategies?
4. Has your country taken any steps to improve women's access to education? How does insecurity in the streets affect women's access to education and employment in your country?
5. Does your country participate in any international initiatives to aid women's safety?

### Topic B

1. What can be learned from your country's past practices regarding affordable housing? How do currently implemented solutions address the issues present in both affordable housing and achieve the SDGs?
2. How effective were your country's past solutions to affordable housing, and what can be improved for the future?
3. How has your country worked with other agencies, organizations, and countries to develop projects that improve living conditions and tackle the issue of access to affordable housing?
4. How does the environment, such as water, mountains, and high flooding areas, impact your country's housing? Do certain regions of your country require different approaches to providing adequate housing?
5. What are your country's previous and current laws regarding foreign investment? How has speculation affected your country's housing market?
6. Are there any concerns regarding the costs of rental housing in your country? How has rental housing been used to address the housing crisis in your country?

## Important Documents

### Topic A

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## Topic B

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Written by Marina Lamas Koria and Annabel Zhao

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