Implementation of the New Urban Agenda in Europe and North America

A review in preparation for the second Quadrennial report (2022)

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AFINUA	Action Framework for Implementation of the New Urban Agenda
C40	Cities Climate Leadership Group
COVID19	Coronavirus Disease
CPI	City Prosperity Index
ECE	Economic Commission for Europe
EU	European Union
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
Habitat III	United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development
ICLEI	Local Governments for Sustainability
LRG	Local and Regional Governments
LGBTQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer
NBS	Nature-Based Solutions
NCSD	National Concept for Spatial Development (NCSD)
NUA	New Urban Agenda
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NUP	National Urban Policies
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Canada
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
VLRs	Voluntary Local Reviews
VNRs	Voluntary National Reviews
WCR	World Cities Report

Acknowledgements
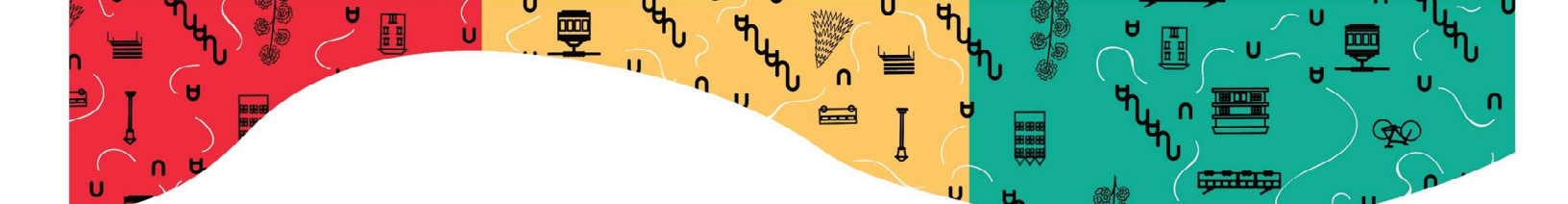
Executive summary:

Key Findings

- Considerable progress has been made since 2018 in implementing the NUA in the ECE region: governments at all scales, together with civil society have been acting impactfully in implementing the goals of the NUA and the SDGs. However, much progress is still urgently required with many barriers and challenges to overcome for effective implementation of the NUA and achievement of its transformative commitments across the entire ECE region.

- Despite some significant progress, key foundational elements of enabling environments remain a critical gap to address throughout the region.

- The implementation of the NUA can make considerable progress in reaching global development goals: Implementation of the NUA through effective frameworks of action such as AFINUA can substantively enhance sustainable urbanization and resilience across diverse regions. Of particular importance are complementary regionally specific and urban local initiatives which can strengthen uptake of these global sustainability agendas.

- Voluntary national and local reviews on progress of SDG implementation are key for improving understanding of progress on implementation of the NUA and challenges thereto.

- However, reporting is still limited and more emphasis needs to be placed on promoting the NUA platform as a facilitatory and supportive tool. Institutional structures for enabling national and local governments to report on NUA progress are critical. LRG involvement in the preparation of VNRs remains limited and more collaborative processes are required.

- Subnational governments are showing growing leadership in the climate crisis, particularly through collaborative action, and are urging national governments to follow suit. Local urban authorities are major agents of change for achieving the transformative commitments of the NUA and meeting the SDGs. The proliferation of national and international city networks is playing a significant role in sharing experience, knowledge and good practice in relation to urban sustainability and climate change.

- Cities across the ECE region are increasingly embedding equity and inclusion considerations at the core of development agendas.

- The COVID19 pandemic has deepened existing inequalities and cultures of discrimination and undermined opportunities for already vulnerable groups
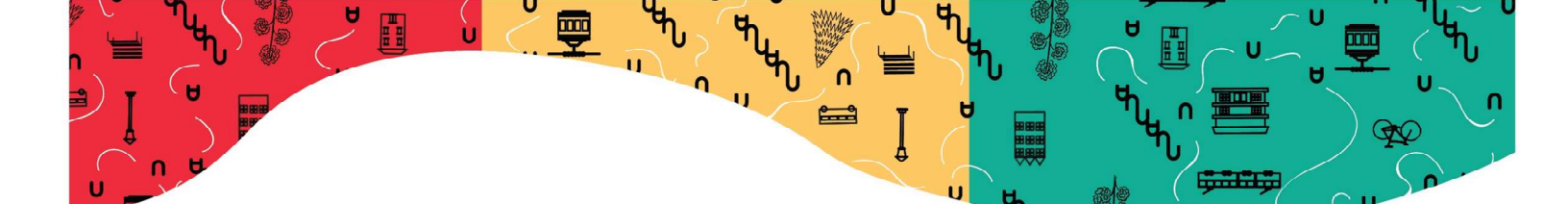
such as migrants, disabled persons and women. The LGBQT community has also been disproportionately impacted. These issues require urgent attention under a rights based approach and new social contract.

- Evidence from across the ECE demonstrates that proactive actions to mitigate and adapt to climate change are increasingly being taken by local to national governments across the ECE region. However, to date, there is generally a stronger focus on mitigation to date, with more limited emphasis and examples of climate change adaptation

- Multi-level governance and collaboration across scales: Cooperation across scales and meaningful inclusive participation of urban citizens are essential for all aspects of urban development and planning for sustainability. Yet, effective and efficient multi-level governance across the ECE region has proved challenging. Appropriate institutional frameworks and innovative measures to support multi-level governance need to be promoted and enhanced.

- Investments are urgently needed to boost cities' capacity for effective policy formulation as well as to build robust legislative frameworks that support effective urban management and development.

Key Messages

- Only by acting consistently and collaboratively across administrative and political boundaries at all scales, from local communities to international organisations, can the commitments of global development agendas be achieved. Stronger multi-level governance frameworks are needed to foster vertical and horizontal cooperation.

- The 2030 Agenda represents a 'new social contract' for co-creation of sustainable urban futures. Local governments are key actors in the new social contract and together with partner institutions including civil society, community groups, the private sector and regional and national governments can co-create transformative sustainability initiatives to help achieve the transformative commitments in the NUA.

- The need for a long term and predictable financing mechanism is still a key priority. This includes creating enabling environments with effective policy and regulatory frameworks, providing technical assistance for supporting innovative financing solutions with a focus on participatory processes.

- The impacts of COVID 19 and climate change are complexly interconnected and do not adhere to boundaries, thereby further highlighting the importance of multi-scale governance and collaboration for achieving environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development

- While strongly recognized in the NUA and SDGs, issues of cultural diversity, gender, age and other dimensions of intersectionality, require more central integration in the design of national and local policies on urban sustainability and resilience. To effectively respond to structural inequalities compounded by the COVID 19 pandemic all urban policies and development activities require fundamental focus on gender and women's needs, reduction of exclusion, marginalisation of vulnerable groups and different forms of poverty.

- Innovation in technology and data are key for implementing the NUA and achieving transformative commitments. Mobilization of diverse sources of data and delivering effective action and policies within data constraints is vital. Capacity building and resource allocation is vital to strengthen government's ability to effectively collect and analyse data regulate the use of technology

- Collaboration and co-operation across scales is central to enhancing sustainability
Effective integrated development planning for urban areas requires critical attention to the interconnections between all global development agendas.

- The world is at a critical juncture for developing inclusive and locally led urban transformation pathways in implementing the NUA across all contexts. Urban futures need to be radically reimagined, with concurrent systemic changes in financing and investment structures and with cities at the centre, as drivers of innovation and solutions to global challenges. To achieve this and of importance for the 2026 Quadrennial Report is to continue to develop streamlined and integrated processes for monitoring and evaluation of the NUA and SDGs (and other global agreements) and promote their intricate relationship in terms of financing, local ownership and other key factors.

- Cities worldwide can transform the COVID19 crisis into a window of urban opportunity to build back better – more sustainably and equitably. Attention to rights-based approaches and justice are essential, with inclusivity and equality at the forefront of policies, plans and actions.

1. Introduction

In order to monitor the implementation of the New Urban Agenda (NUA), Member States are requested to carry out periodic reviews to track progress, assess impact and ensure the Agenda's effective and timely implementation in an inclusive manner. The process is necessarily inclusive, drawing from contributions from diverse state and non-state actors across scale. This report reviews progress in the implementation of the NUA[1] in the UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region, encompassing Europe and North America between 2018 and 2021. Specific focus is on progress made since 2018 in the three transformative commitments of the NUA, which are *social inclusion and ending poverty; inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all; and environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development*.

As an accelerator, the NUA is closely linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other internationally agreed frameworks, goals and targets relevant to building sustainable urbanization. The NUA places strong emphasis on effective implementation at the local level and on the central role of local governments. The implementation of the NUA contributes to the achievement and localization of the SDGs through providing an implementing framework for the integrated delivery of multiple SDGs at the urban scale.[2] Cities that are sustainably planned and managed can generate significant economic, environmental, social and intangible gains and support progress towards the three transformative commitments of the NUA. Each of these are closely interconnected.

Both the NUA and SDGs are underpinned by the inspiration to create an inclusive urban agenda and enabling environment to empower cities to achieve core developmental, environmental and other commitments. This is a notable departure from past UN and other global agendas as the importance of cross scale governance rather than top-down implementation is clearly recognised.[3] A significant precedent for the United Nations is the explicit recognition of the centrality of subnational entities, particularly cities, in national and international systems for driving sustainability.[4] As clearly articulated in the Secretary General's Quadrennial Report on implementation of the NUA,[5] understanding the relationship between the NUA and SDGs is critically important, particularly SDG11 and urban-linked components of many other goals. Since this report, there are now over 550 cities worldwide that are undertaking measures to improve their NUA/SDG monitoring tools.[6]

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[1] Adopted at Habitat III, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development in Quito, Ecuador
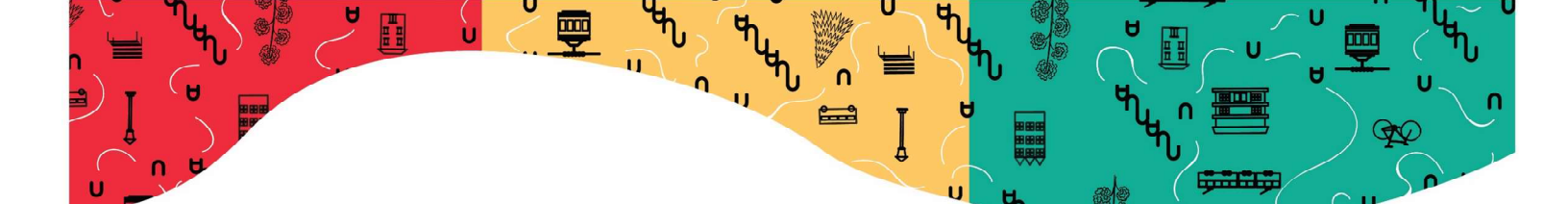[2] UCLG, 2021
[3] Valencia et al, 2019, Krantz and Gustafsson, 2021
[4] Parnell, 2016; Cohen and Habron, 2018; Valencia et al, 2019
[5] UN-Habitat, 2018
[6] UN-Habitat, 2020a, p2

Since its emergence at the end of 2019, the coronavirus pandemic (COVID 19) has led to unprecedented global impacts and disruption in what is arguably the worst public health crisis in over a century.[7] The onset of the pandemic was not anticipated when Member States adopted the NUA in 2016, nor for the 2018 Quadrennial Report. The pandemic is a major new global defining feature that needs to be principally considered hereon and has highly significant implications for the implementation of the NUA. UN Habitat's flagship COVID report[8] outlines some key shortfalls of the NUA and its implementation regarding COVID as follows: new vulnerabilities resulting from an extreme health crisis are not anticipated, thus creating the need for a more overt human rights-based approach underpinned by the principles of social and economic justice; inadequate recognition of the salience of digital access and infrastructure investments necessary for the creation of inclusive and sustainable urban economies and thirdly, insufficient comprehension of the extent of poverty and structural inequality globally that has since been exposed by the pandemic. This notwithstanding, the NUA's transformative commitments, guiding principles and means of implementation remain pertinent, and perhaps even more so, for supporting global recovery and building back from the pandemic.[9] Of particular relevance is the emphasis on national approaches to facilitate co-ordination between cities and across scales, as well as the call for more fiscal autonomy for cities and local governments. The NUA's emphasis on inclusive urban planning, public space and well-designed cities are also key to recovery.

Several cities have already taken the lead in incorporating COVID 19 considerations into their development agendas. For example, the impacts of COVID 19 and implications for achieving the SDGs are a major focus point in Helsinki and Orlando's most recent VLRs.[10] The NUA serves as a robust framework in supporting responses to COVID19 and recognising multiple interacting crises. Through their efforts to address COVID issues cities globally have concurrently made progress in implementing the NUA both directly and indirectly. This is demonstrated throughout the report. Furthermore, the pandemic needs to be understood within the broader global context within which it has emerged. Four powerful underlying and closely interlinked forces currently facing the global economy and societies worldwide are; the climate crisis, extreme poverty and inequality; the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and COVID 19.[11]

The 2018 Quadrennial Report on implementation of the NUA recommends an incremental approach to reporting on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, based on four elements: (a) systems for the production of user-friendly and participatory data platforms that add to existing sources of data; (b) new and expanded platforms for engagement on knowledge production and reporting; (c) a United Nations system-wide coordination mechanism that strengthens and expands partnerships; and (d) capacities to report on the implementation of the sustainable
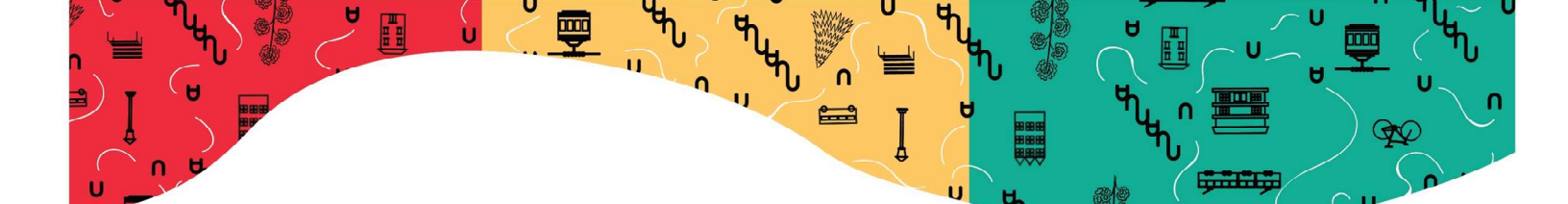
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[7] UN-Habitat, 2021
[8] UN-Habitat, 2021
[9] UN-Habitat, 2021
[10] City of Helsinki, 2021; City of Orlando and ICLEI, 2021
[11] UN-Habitat, 2021

urban development agendas, including data collection and analysis, policy development, implementation and stakeholder engagement.[12] A significant development since 2018 is the introduction of the New Urban Agenda Platform developed by UN-Habitat. This is a user-friendly and participatory online platform that serves as a central global hub to facilitate monitoring, reporting and information sharing on progress on the implementation of the NUA and SDGs. This report draws on the NUA platform, amongst many other sources, in assessing the implementation of the NUA across the ECE region.

Implementation of the NUA is supported by effective frameworks of action at different institutional and spatial scales. UN Habitat's Action Framework for the Implementation of the New Urban Agenda (AFINUA) identifies five key pillars for implementation: (1) national urban policies; (2) urban legislation, rules and regulations; (3) urban planning and design; (4) urban economy and municipal finance; and (5) local implementation.[13] Underpinning AFINUA are the core values of inclusion, innovation and integration and three cross-cutting principles of participation, governance and transparency. Each pillar and core values are considered throughout the report. To support monitoring of SDG 11 and other urban-related indicators monitoring, UN-Habitat has also been coordinating activities with inputs from partner organizations in application of appropriate methodologies that support assessment of progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and providing technical support and capacity development programmes to support countries and cities in generating appropriate data for monitoring the SDGs and NUA.[14] UN-Habitat has also developed the City Prosperity Index (CPI), a data-based framework that allow cities to collect, collate and analyse data on urban prosperity such as quality of life and equity and social inclusion. These are all highly significant frameworks for developing and implementing effective policies and programmes towards the implementation of and monitoring of the NUA and SDGs.[15] This has the potential to complement progress on the NUA, with more granular and specific SDG reviews benefitting Member States, sub-national entities and urban residents.[16] Hundreds of cities globally are already using the CPI and is evidently viewed as a key useful tool to help implementation of the NUA and other global sustainable development agendas.[17]

Drawing from these and other diverse sources and using specific examples and policy pointers, together with illustrative boxes, tables and figures, this report assesses how diverse cities across the ECE region have made progress in achieving the SDGs and fulfilling the NUA between 2018 and 2021. The report also considers progress made in implementing these recommendations of the 2018 QR, and outlines recommendations for the QR 2026.

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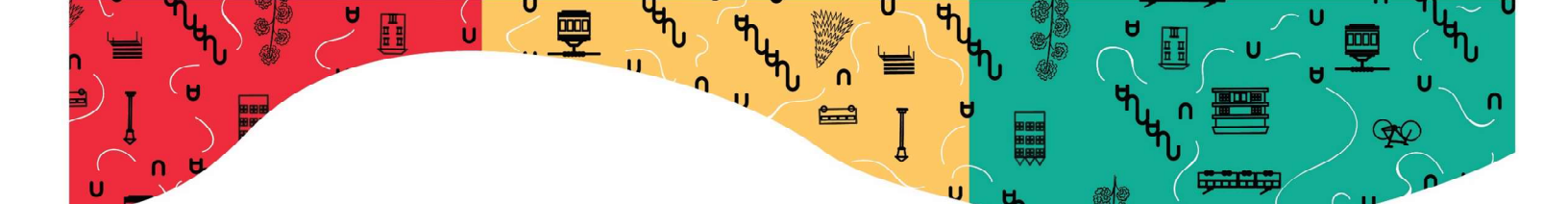
[12] UN-Habitat, 2018
[13] UN-Habitat, 2017
[14] UN-Habitat, 2020b
[15] UCLG, 2020
[16] UN-Habitat, 2020b
[17] UN-Habitat, 2020b

The remainder of the report is structured as follows. The following Section 2 provides background and contextual information for the ECE region. It includes information on geographical coverage of the ECE region and demographic statistics. With this framing section in place, the report then focuses specifically on progress made in the three transformative commitments of the NUA across the ECE region: social inclusion and ending poverty; inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all; and environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development (Section 3). The report then turns to an analysis of effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda in terms of the urban governance structure and the planning and managing of urban development (Section 4). Sub sections present critical discussions on Voluntary National Reviews and Voluntary Local Reviews, achieving multi-level governance and the centrality of local and regional governments in implementing the NUA (4.2), national and subnational urban policies, planning and management, urban design and Ppanning – public space and multi-modal urban transport and culture/cultural heritage as a priority component of urban planning. The final Section 5 assesses mmeans of implementation of the NUA in the ECE region, focusing on mobilization of financial resources; capacity development; and information technology and innovation. The report concludes with a concluding Section 6, presenting critical reflections, concluding remarks and lessons for policy.

2. Background and Context

2.1 *Geographical coverage of the ECE region*
The UN Economic Commission for Europe region extends across the globe and encompasses the majority of the Northern Hemisphere. The region has 56 member States, including the microstates of Andorra, Monaco and San Marino continental countries of Canada, the Russian Federation and the United States of America. The Arctic Ocean and all the signatories of the Arctic treaties are also encompassed by the region.[18]

The region's population is approximately 1.3 billion with over 263 cities of 500,000 or more citizens.[19]

This report covers the entire ECE region, with a focus on four distinct sub-regions to support review and analysis as follows:
(a) North America;

(b) Central and Western Europe (European Union, European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and microstates);

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[18] United Nations, 2017
[19] UN World Urbanization Prospects Key Facts, 2018; OECD Stats, 2020

(c) The subregion of Eastern Europe, including the Russian Federation, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EERCCA); and

(d) South-Eastern Europe, Israel and Turkey.

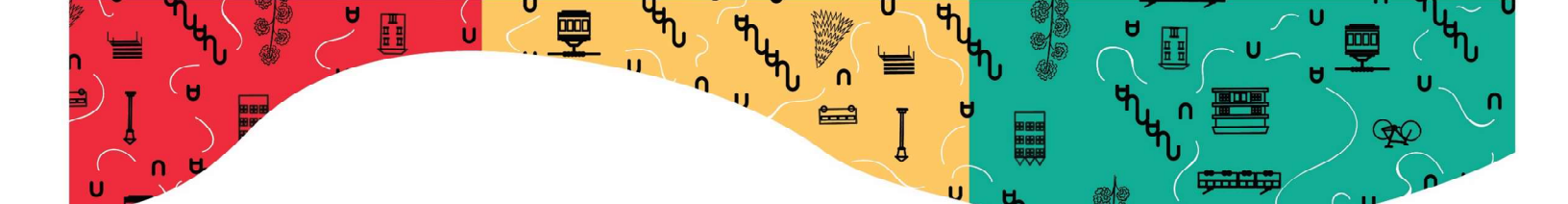In considering the implementation of the NUA, the report considers commonalities and differences between the sub-regions, key aspects pertaining to specific regions and learning points that apply across the region and globally.

2.1.1. The subregions

The region covers two major continental land masses: North America, and Central and Western Europe. All the countries that make up each sub-region are listed in Table 1 below. Northern America is the world's most urbanized region with 82 per cent of its population living in urban areas in 2018. Europe is also highly urbanized with a 74 per cent urban population.[20]

The North American subregion includes United States of America (9,147 million km2 and Canada (9,093 million km2) and together they comprise 41.5 per cent of the landmass of the ECE region.[21] Both countries are highly urbanised with over 80 per cent of their populations living in cities.[22] The population of the United States is approximately 329.48 million; while Canada's population is approximately 38 million.[23]

The European Union/EFTA or Central and Western European subregion includes the 28 countries of the European Union, the 4 members of EFTA and the 3 European microstates (Andorra, Monaco and San Marino), amounting to over 60 per cent of ECE's member States. Central and Western Europe cover more than 4 million km², with over 520 million inhabitants across rural and urban areas.[24]

There are 12 former Soviet countries outside of the European Union located within the EERCCA subregion and together they cover a vast territory of north Eurasia. Its total population is over 287 million, with the Russian Federation occupying the largest territory with the highest population.[25] The EERCCA population densities are lower than Europe with a relatively dispersed city concentration with major urban centres having the highest population concentrations, as well as temperate regions.

As noted in Table 1 the South-Eastern European countries comprise Israel, Turkey and the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).[26] They have similar climates and share

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[20] UN World Urbanization Prospects Key Facts, 2018
[21] www.data.worldbank.org
[22] UN World Urbanization Prospects Key Facts, 2018
[23] OECD Stats, 2020
[24] OECD Stats, 2020
[25] UN World Urbanization Prospects Key Facts, 2018; OECD Stats, 2020
[26] United Nations, 2017

coastlines across the Mediterranean Sea. They are more culturally diverse than the other three subregions. South-Eastern Europe covers an area of 1,005 km2 and has a population of just over 100 million.[27]

Table 1: Geographical coverage of ECE Region:

EU/EFTA or Western and Central European Sub-region EU countries	Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
EFTA countries	Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland
South Eastern Europe Countries	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Israel, Montenegro, Serbia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey
Sub-region of Eastern Europe, Russia, Caucasus and Central Asia (EERCCA)	Armenia, Azerbijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrggyzstan, Republic of Maldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan
Non EU countries	Andora, Monaco, San Marino
North American sub-region	United States of America Canada

2.1.2 *Demographics*

Most of the 52 cities[28] globally that have experienced population decline since 2000 are in Europe and multiple in North America (see Figure 1). Population sizes across Europe, particularly Eastern and south-Eastern Europe have become stagnant or are beginning to shrink largely due to persistent low fertility rates.[29]

Populations have also declined in other parts of the ECE region due to natural disaster occurrence or economic deterioration. For example, in the United States, New Orleans has lost a considerable population due to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and population shrinkage in the cities of Buffalo and Detroit has been linked to an overall decline in industry and employment opportunities (see Section 3).[30]

In several countries such as Finland, recent national level population growth has been fuelled largely by immigration, thereby creating new challenges and divisions

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[27] OECD Stats, 2020

[28] Out of the 1,146 cities with 500,000 inhabitants or more in 2018

[29] UN World Urbanization Prospects Key Facts, 2018

[30] World Cities in 2018

between regions and within urban areas that need to be accounted for (see Section 3).[31]
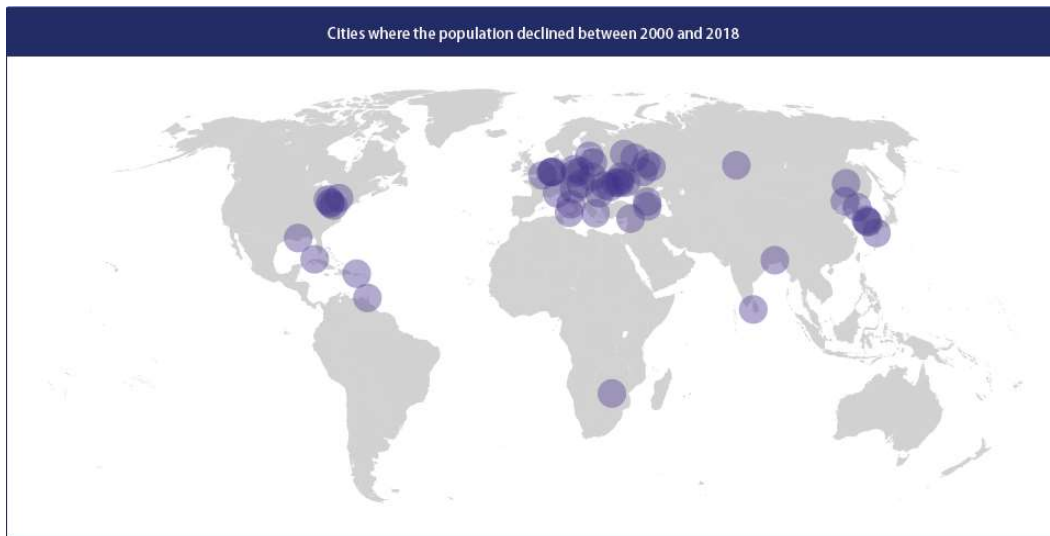
Figure 1: Global map of cities where the population declined between 2000 and 2018

Source: UN, 2018[32]

North America and Europe encompass the majority of the worlds 'mega regions', with 10 and 6 in each region respectively. Four of the five largest mega-regions in the world are also found in these sub-regions; Bos-Wash (from Boston to Washington D.C. via New York City), Par-Am-Mun (from Paris to Munich via Amsterdam), Chi-Pitts (from Chicago to Pittsburgh), and SoCal (from Los Angeles to San Diego).[33]

European cities have an average density of 3,000 inhabitants per km^2, whereas North American cities have an average density of only 1,600 inhabitants per km^2.[34] Around 3,000 inhabitants per km^2 is widely viewed as the minimum required to sustain efficient public transport.[35] There are 79 cities globally with populations exceeding five million inhabitants and only four of these are based in Europe. London and Paris are the only two mega cities (over 10 million inhabitants) in Europe, while North America has considerably more. Only 16 per cent of city residents in Europe live in these large cities, compared and 28 per cent in North America. Europe's cities have several distinctive features in comparison to their counterparts across the globe.[36] A key feature is that there has been very little change in the share of population in European cities over the past five decades and is low for global standards. European

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[31] Ministry of Environment Finland, 2021
[32] United Nations, 2018
[33] The fifth is Greater Tokyo.
[34] EU and UN Habitat, 2016
[35] EU and UN Habitat, 2016
[36] EU and UN Habitat, 2016
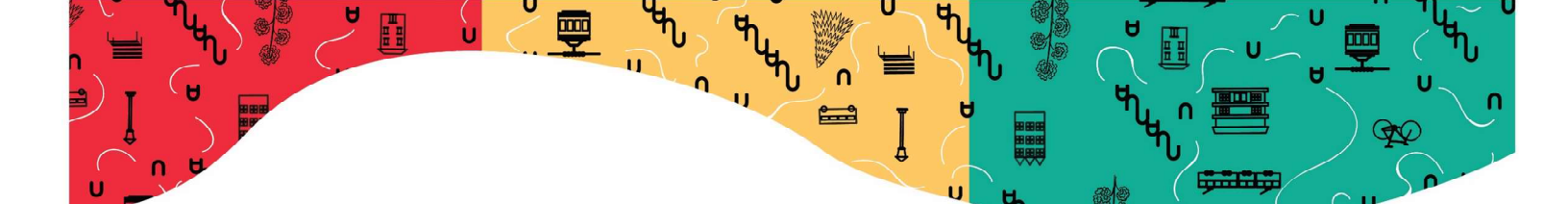
cities are predominantly mid-sized in a dense network pattern and average population densities. European cities are twice as dense as North American cities.[37]

With this contextual information for the ECE region now in place, the following section turns to a critical discussion of the progress made in the three transformative commitments of the NUA across the ECE region.

3. Progress made in the three transformative commitments of the NUA across the ECE region

3.1 Social inclusion and ending poverty

Urban areas have been at the epicentre of the COVID19 pandemic with over 90 per cent of COVID cases recorded in urban settlements in over 1,500 cities worldwide.[38] The pandemic has raised the profile of cities even further as being key to building more resilient and inclusive societies, and central to countries' recovery strategies.[39] Beyond the primary concern of the public health emergency and containing the virus to protect societies, the pandemic has compelled cities to reconsider how spaces are planned and used, how services are delivered and how equitable development and economic growth can be resumed to achieve more just, inclusive and equitable societies.[40] This is a vital prerequisite for meeting the NUA's transformative commitments and achieving the SDGs. The centrality of adequate public space and housing critical elements of urban structure is clearly emphasised in the NUA. The implementation of the NUA's broader socio-economic and environmental goals are increasingly linked to public spaces that are inclusive, safe and adequate.[41]

The level of income inequality in cities as reflected by their Gini coefficients varies significantly across regions of the world. European cities have the lowest levels of inequality among developed countries, while cities in North America, especially the US, have the highest levels of inequality.[42] The COVID19 pandemic has further exposed existing inequalities across the ECE region, with low income populations and communities of colour being disproportionately impacted.[43] Despite housing systems in the ECE region being rich and diverse the housing crisis remains a key defining feature of many cities (e.g. London, Dublin, Chicago, San Francisco), with housing unaffordability and homelessness escalating, particularly as a result of

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[37] EU and UN Habitat, 2016

[38] Acuto et al, 2021

[39] OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS, 2021; Acuto et al, 2021
[40] OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS, 2021

[41] Mehaffy et al, 2019

[42] WCR, 2020
[43] Spotswood et al, 2021

economic crises.[44] The 2015 key study *Social Housing Models in the UNECE Region: Models, Trends and Challenges* revealed that the 2008 global financial c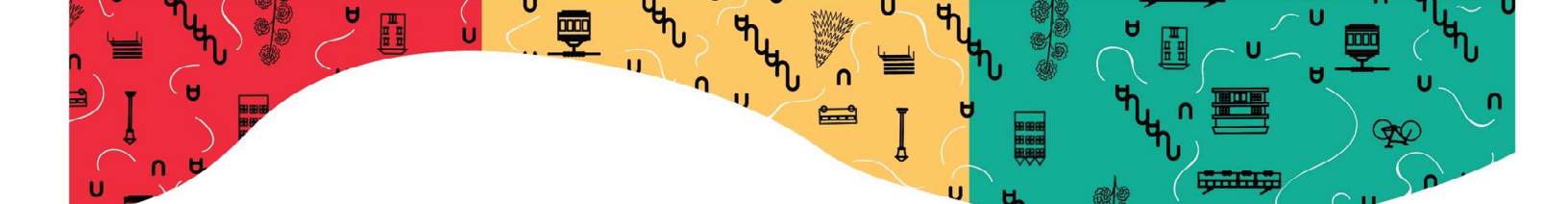risis lead to an unprecedented housing need in the ECE region. Despite investment in social housing forming an integral part of the recovery programmes in a number of countries in Europe and North America in response to the financial crisis, cities have struggled to address this backlog to date.[45] Difficulties in meeting housing needs are exacerbated by historical shortfalls from the 1980s and mounting pressures from large numbers of immigrants continuously arriving.[46] While to a considerably less degree than many developing cities, the ECE region is also not yet free of informal settlements. For example, France, Italy, Portugal and Spain all still have considerable numbers of people living in informal settlements, increasingly inhabited by migrant and refuge populations.[47]

Certain social groups, particularly vulnerable groups such as immigrant populations are disproportionately affected by the housing crisis. To illustrate, in Orlando, nearly half of the homeless population are from the youth and LGBTQ+ communities and less than 12 per cent of people with disabilities own or lease their own home in San Francisco.[48] Several initiatives have been implemented to address the housing crisis across the ECE region. Box 1 illustrates the 'Housing First' approach which has begun to dominate government responses to homelessness in several ECE regions.[49] Hundreds of communities have participated in the approach and the main focus is on providing permanent housing to homeless people together with personalised support for reintegration.[50] However, 'Housing First' has been increasingly criticised in recent years, particularly in the US context, where issues of cost-effectiveness and ability to improve the lives of the homeless have been brought into question.

Box 1: Housing first: a dominant approach to homelessness
The 'Housing First' initiative is a multipronged approach to address homelessness which provides permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness in conjunction with tailored support for reintegration. The initiative has been piloted in many cities around the world. Multiple cities in EU countries are experimenting with or scaling up Housing First (www.housingfirstguide.eu/). To support the exchange of information on local homelessness strategies, the European Federation of Homelessness NGOs set up HABITACT - a transnational forum comprising more than 80 cities.

In recent years the Trump administration modified the federal government's commitment to Housing First after findings indicated that community efforts to end homelessness in states such as California have failed to address its increase and raised concerns around cost-effectiveness.

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[44] UN Habitat, 2020
[45] UN Habitat, 2020
[46] UN Habitat, 2020
[47] EU and UN Habitat, 2016
[48] City of Orlando and ICLEI, 2021
[49] EU and UN Habitat, 2016
[50] EU and UN Habitat, 2016

Source: EU and UN Habitat, 2016; Eide, 2020

Evidently, more innovative, inclusive and far-reaching policy and practical measures are needed to address critical housing issues across the region. A notable recent development in this regard is #Housing2030 which is a joint international initiative of housing experts from over 56 governments across UNECE and 43,000 affordable housing providers and neighbourhood developers represented by Housing Europe.[51] Principal focus is on improving the capacity of national and local governments to devise policies that improve housing affordability and sustainability. Emphasis is also on addressing climate change and supporting the social and economic recovery from the COVID pandemic. #Housing2030 also outlines a 'tool kit' for responding to the evolving and diverse demands of member states and regions.[52]

Furthermore, ctity responses to the COVID 19 pandemic have demonstrated the great potential for addressing shelter and housing needs, particularly through collaborative actions involving state and non-state actors. Table 2 below highlights responses by several cities in the ECE region to the COVID 19 pandemic that specifically address issues of housing/shelter and inequalities for vulnerable groups – particularly victims of gender based violence and homeless people. Despite the temporary nature of many of these responses, more effective support measures and plans can be mobilised through collaborative and inclusive efforts to address core issues relating to poverty and inequality – and thereby the NUA's transformative commitments, with co-benefits for meeting SDGs. As evident from Table 2, partnership arrangements between local governments and the private sector, as well as civic society organisations have proven critical.

Table 2: Responses to COVID 19 pandemic: Providing shelter and inclusive spaces for vulnerable populations with co-benefits for NUA implementation

Examples of Co-benefits for SDGs	Co-benefits for NUA implementation and achieving three transformative commitments	Responses to COVID 19 pandemic: Providing shelter and inclusive spaces for vulnerable populations
SDG 11 Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable	Providing shelter and inclusive spaces for vulnerable populations contributes to implementation	**Toronto, Canada** - authorities provided isolation units and vacant hotel rooms to support homeless residents in quarantine. **Bratislava, Slovaki** - extensive 'quarantine town' established with medical and professional support to house and provide care for around 4,000 homeless people.

[51] UNECE and Housing Europe, 2021
[52] UNECE and Housing Europe, 2021

SDG 5 Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls	of the NUA and reaching the transformative commitment of addressing poverty and inequality.	**Spain** - public authorities partnered with private sector housing providers to temporarily expand social housing stock: **Barcelona** – 200 vacant apartments secured through arrangement with a tourism agency to shelter the homeless in the Pandemic's first wave. **Madrid City Council** - opened 15 places in shared housing during the first wave of the pandemic for victims of gender violence. This temporary measure increased the city council's capacity in response to the increase in gender-based violence during the pandemic. **Malmö** - introduced counselling centres and online awareness raising initiatives for potentially vulnerable groups using social media such as Facebook.

Source: OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS, 2021
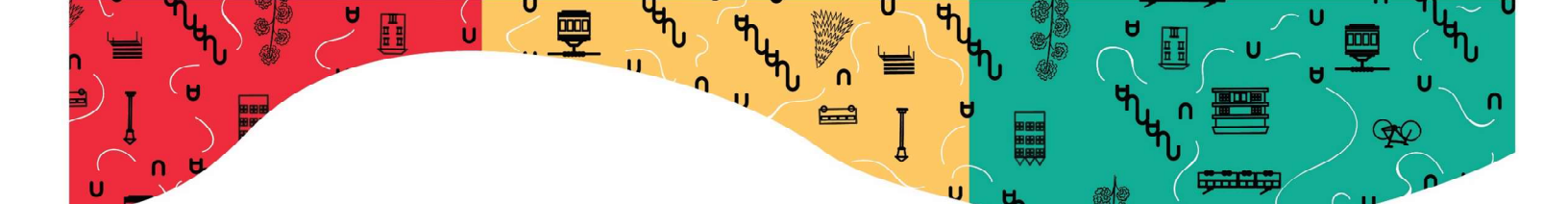
In the Netherlands, the NWB Bank (Nederlandse Waterschapsbank) has also made considerable progress in developing affordable housing bonds. The NWB Bank is a large Dutch public investment bank which created affordable housing bonds and targeted at investors supporting social and green housing. Non-profit organizations also play a key role in managing the bonds.[53]

In addition to the shrinking population trend, much of Europe has also experienced population ageing in recent decades. The ratio of the size of the working-age population (aged between 20 and 64 years) in the EU relative to the total number of older persons (aged 65 years or over) fell from 3.9 in 2001 to 2.9 by 2020; and is predicted to decrease to 1.6 by 2080.[54] Such shifts in population structure can have significant implications for pressing issues such as government revenues, pension funds and health and social care services. It can also lead to shortages of labour supply and economic decline, amongst other challenges.[55] It is thus critical that these issues are factored into decision making and planning for implementing the NUA. In preparing to accommodate growing elderly populations cities across the region are beginning to support active ageing through, for example, creating public spaces, transport and buildings that are accessible for people with restricted mobility. This will also benefit urban dwellers with disabilities. Many cities across the region are also linked to the 'Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and

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[53] UNECE and Housing Europe, 2021

[54] Eurostat, 2021
[55] Eurostat, 2021

Communities' that promotes healthy, active ageing and aims to improve quality of life for the elderly.[56]

Additionally, youth are still commonly marginalised in urban policy, decision making and interventions. This leads to further marginalisation and vulnerabilities such as demonstrated by the COVID19 pandemic, which has resulted in widespread school closures and significant restrictions on their socialization and outdoor extracurricular activities.[57] There have been significant disruptions to education and may exacerbate inequalities through reduced social interaction and access to school meals and social care as well as future opportunities. Children's ability to access classes and learning materials during the pandemic through online forums has been impacted by the lack of access to the internet and computers and other electronic devices amongst already marginalised households.[58] Cities across the ECE region are however taking increasing measures to prioritise the needs of children and the youth such as in Rotterdam and Antwerp where a major focus of city planning is creating more child-friendly play opportunities.[59]

LGBTQ poverty and unemployment is a rising significant concern across several parts of the ECE region, specifically for LGBTQ communities of colour and transgender and gender non-binary people. For example, LGBTQ New Yorkers have considerably high unemployment rates and more than 60 per cent of the low-income LGBTQ New York population report difficulty in being able to pay for a basic need in the last year.[60] For building back from COVID19 The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights has requested that donors, governments and multiple stakeholders pay particular attention to the rights of the LGBTI people (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex) and for those with gender non-conforming identity.[61] Measures to address the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic need to address the specific vulnerabilities of these groups of people through, for example, reconsidering the appropriateness of existing social protection and health care measures and consider ways in which government and community actors have attempted to promote human rights and equal opportunity for all throughout the pandemic.[62] Gender related issues are intersectional with other social relations and elements such as class and race that need to equally accounted for in urban policy.

Cities across the ECE region receive a constant inflow of migrants through domestic and international migration and this contributes significantly to urban population growth with implications for age distributions as migrants are often young.[63] In London, New York, Los-Angeles and Toronto foreign-born residents account for over one-third of the population whereas in Brussels they significantly outnumber the

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[56] WCR, 2020
[57] OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS, 2021
[58] UN Habitat, 2021
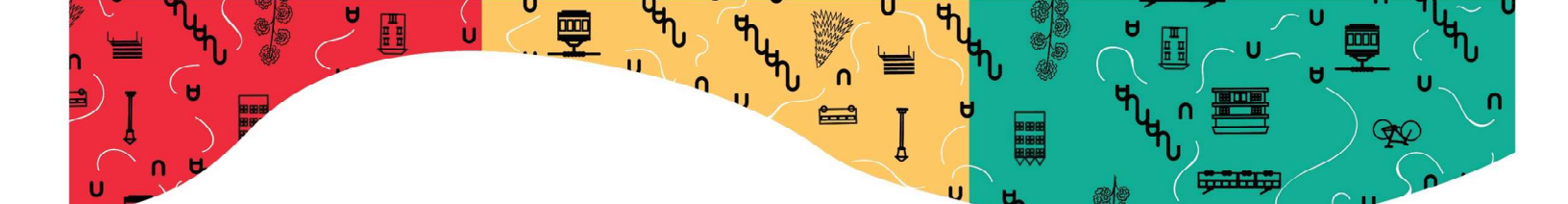[59] UN Habitat, 2020
[60] Legal Services NYC, 2021: https://www.legalservicesnyc.org/storage/PDFs/lgbt%20report.pdf
[61] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, 2021
[62] OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS, 2021
[63] WCR, 2020

local population.[64] Urban areas are being increasingly transformed through international migration which results in increasing heterogeneity and multicultural spaces. Migration of refugees or displaced persons due to conflict, climate change and other shocks is on the rise across the ECE region and poses many political and socio-economic challenges. Immigration is a politically charged issue particularly in the EU (e.g. key defining issue of Brexit referendum on the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union) and has led to much conflict and new lines of division.[65] However, certain cities and local governments have been increasingly welcoming of refugees and immigrants such as in Germany where "welcome departments" have been established within several city halls to accommodate the arrival of refugees and immigrants.[66] Increasing migrant populations offer significant socio-economic and creative cultural contributions open up new opportunities for shrinking cities in Europe and North America, experiencing deindustrialization, ageing populations and low birth rates.[67] Notably, over the past fifteen years immigrants have accounted for an estimated 47 per cent of the increase in the workforce in the US and 70 per cent in Europe.[68] However, unemployment and poverty rates remain considerably high among migrant populations and migrant populations have been disproportionately affected by the COVID pandemic, particularly due to rising job losses. More inclusive policies are required to integrate migrant populations into cities and will lead to a reduction in skills shortages as well as socio-economic enrichment of urban areas.[69]

The NUA acknowledges the value of indigenous peoples globally and commits to continuous dissemination of indigenous knowledge derived from long-term occupancy of a geographic area.[70] Recently, there has been a growing interest in cities in indigenous knowledge and ways of being to support sustainability and resilience, including in cities where indigenous communities have historically been marginalised. This has also been driven by grassroots advocacy and growing concerns for urban environmental justice and inclusive public participation processes for urban decision-making.[71] As indigenous populations continue to grow and their centrality in global agreements are increasingly emphasised cities and regions across the ECE have begun to implement various initiatives to support indigenous populations and inclusivity in urban processes. For example, Hawaii's local framework for SDG and NUA implementation; the i*Aloha+ Challenge* is grounded in a legacy of systems thinking and indigenous wisdom through Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) host culture values and practice to *mālama* (care for and steward).[72] Furthermore, through the Global Island Partnership, the Hawai'i Green Growth Local2030 Hub is leading the Local2030 Islands Network which brings together a diverse set of island nations, states and provinces, communities and

[64] WCR, 2020
[65] UN Habitat, 2020
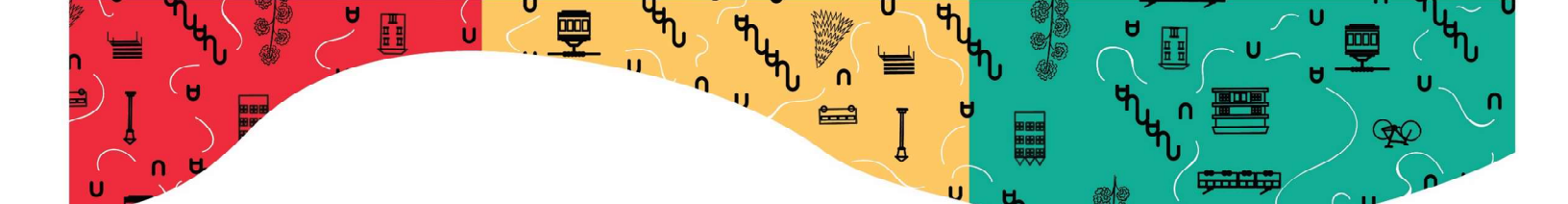[66] UN Habitat, 2020
[67] UCLG, 2021
[68] UN Habitat, 2020
[69] UN Habitat, 2021
[70] UN Habitat, 2020
[71] UN Habitat, 2020
[72] Hawai'i Green Growth (HGG) Local2030 Hub, 2020.

cultures from all regions of the world to achieve the SDGs with a strong emphasis on indigenous knowledge and building on and strengthening island culture and values.[73]

A particularly pertinent recent example is Kelowna in Canada's Voluntary Local Review which is embedded in an indigenous approach: 'Leaving no one behind: an indigenous approach' that places indigenous knowledge and communities at its core.[74] This is in recognition of the pressing need to redress the current unequal power dynamics that stem from the consequences of colonialism, as recorded in Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) final report. The report clearly acknowledges that significant progress is required to foster new equitable relationships centred around Indigenous engagement and perspectives and to create inclusive societies.[75] In 2018, 26 per cent of Kelowna's homeless population were Indigenous Peoples, though they only comprise 4.4% of the total population.[76] In Canada and indeed across many other ECE regions, considerable disparities in social and economic conditions continue to persist between Indigenous groups and the general populations that need to be better addressed to achieve the NUAs and SDGs.[77]

The pandemic has also been accompanied by an uprising of community solidarity and cohesion, participatory joint action by informal actors and institutions and mutual aid funds. This further highlights the value of local interventions and reveals the window of potential to reconfigure urban societies and settlements to be more inclusive and just.[78]

Justice for all and meeting the transformative commitments of the NUA requires collaborating with urban dwellers who have detailed contextual knowledge for enhancing sustainability and significantly add to government's capacities across all levels to implement the NUA and achieve the SDGs. State-civil society collaboration and community-led initiatives are emphasised in the AFINUA. Alliances and networks involving local civil society actors helps to enhance capacities of vulnerable and marginal groups. Community led responses to the pandemic have been of critical importance in strengthening the overall response and driving citizen-led solutions. For example, a well-established volunteering organisation called Forlì Città in the Italian city of Forlì committed to inform all migrants, regardless of their residency status, about the measures that needed to be followed during lockdown and how to stay safe.[79]

While it is imperative that cities act swiftly to address the challenges of the pandemic it is critical that accountability and transparency remain at the forefront to ensure that urban governance and decision-making structures are not corroded by corruption and existing inequalities are not further exacerbated.

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[73] Hawai'i Green Growth (HGG) Local2030 Hub, 2020.
[74] BCICC and GECCO, 2021
[75] BCICC and GECCO, 2021
[76] BCICC and GECCO, 2021
[77] BCICC and GECCO, 2021
[78] Acuto et al, 2020
[79] OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS, 2021

3.2 Inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all

Ensuring productive employment for all remains a key challenge across cities of the ECE region, particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups such as migrants and young people. Several cities have begun to address this issue through innovative mechanisms as reported in recent VLRs. For example, in Orlando involvement with beehives is having a considerable impact on youth who are part of city's Parramore Kidz Zone; a program focused on reducing juvenile crime and school drop-out rates in the city's most poverty stricken neighbourhoods.[80] Through Parramore Kidz Zone 'Black Bee Honey' student entrepreneurship program, youth are being trained as beekeepers through opportunities to maintain hives on city facility rooftops and selling their honey at farmers markets, local businesses, and online.[81] The city of New York also has an annual Summer Youth Employment Program that involves thousands of youths.[82]

Unemployment rates amongst women are generally higher than men across the ECE region and gender pay gaps remain significant. For example, on average women earn approximately 14% less than men in in the EU.[83] Moreover, female job loss rates resulting from COVID19 are almost two times higher than male job loss rates globally.[84] Women's integration in the labour force has been a critical factor for economic development in recent years. COVID 19 has resulted in the exclusion of many women from the labour force due to excess care responsibilities as essential services and schools closed. There is extensive empirical evidence throughout the world on this, for women working both in formal and informal employment[85]. Increased attention is required to support how care tasks can be performed on a daily basis by women while they also work in paid employment. Being forced to stay at home to perform care and other tasks has also resulted in increased risk of domestic violence for women and girls; the 'Shadow Pandemic' which has emerged amidst the COVID 19 crisis which requires urgent attention.[86]

There are multiple innovative examples that have recently emerged to address such gender disparities in employment. Box 2 highlights a recent initiative in New York: 'Women Entrepreneurs NYC (WE NYC) promotes an enabling environment and
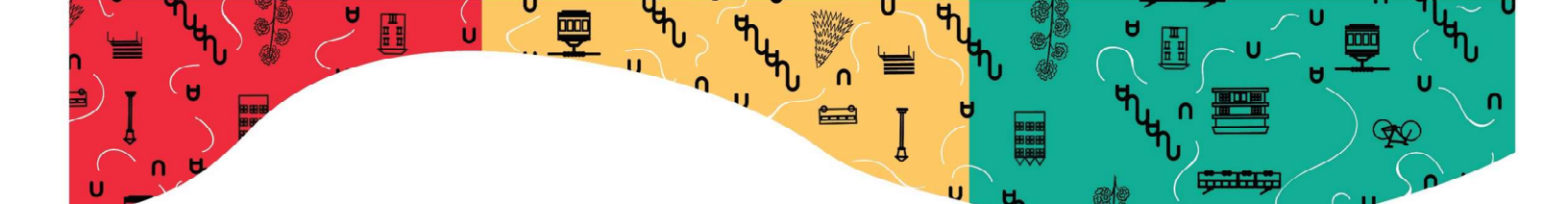
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[80] City of Orlando and ICLEI
[81] City of Orlando and ICLEI, 2021
[82] NYC, 2019
[83] Eurostat 2021

[85] UN Women & UNEP, 2020

[86] UN Women, 2020

provides targeted financial, capacity building and other support to women entrepreneurs for business start-ups.[87]

Box 2: NYC Initiatives to address gender disparity and support small businesses

Support Women Entrepreneurs

Women Entrepreneurs NYC (WE NYC) addresses the unique barriers women face when starting businesses by providing workshops to equip women with knowledge and skills, networking and mentorship opportunities, free legal clinics, and a crowdfunding platform. The City recently launched WE Fund: Growth, a targeted loan program providing over $5 million in capital to women entrepreneurs. WE Fund: Credit helps women entrepreneurs access lines of credit. WE Venture is a $10 million NYC EDC initiative to encourage Venture Capital Partners to invest in companies founded by women.

Support the Growth and Retention of Small Businesses

New York City is home to more than 230,000 small businesses, 50 percent of which are owned by immigrant New Yorkers. Small businesses are essential to both the local economy and the character of our neighborhoods, providing opportunities for individuals to strengthen their own economic security and employ members of their communities. The City supports businesses as they start, operate, and grow by providing free services at scale and investing in innovative projects that create long-term change for entrepreneurs across the City.

Ensure Businesses Are Resilient

The City will work to ensure that businesses are resilient and prepared for emergencies. A newly established Business Resiliency Steering Committee will identify the most valuable measures for businesses and facilitate implementation by aligning laws and regulations, by providing business owners with the resources they need to adopt these measures, and by mobilizing businesses across the city to implement them.

Source: NYC, 2019
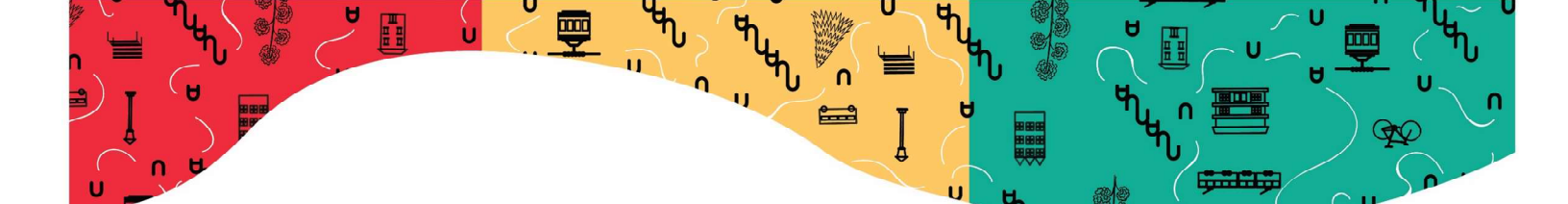
According to its most recent VLR, New York is also implementing innovative measures to support small and medium businesses such as providing free services at scale and investing in projects that support entrepreneurs across the city. This will be of particular benefit to immigrants who own more than half of New York's small businesses (See Box 1).

COVID19 has had drastic implications for employment and business opportunities across the ECE region. Enterprises and industries have been hard hit by the pandemic. In particular, restaurant and accommodation services, entertainment and recreation, arts, and specialised shops have been severely affected by the restrictions.[88] Large decreases in turnovers and sales has hard major implications

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[88] OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS, 2021

for employment. However, some sectors have experienced considerable growth such as grocery trade and information and communication technologies.[89] There has also been considerable growth in employment opportunities within cities relating to environmental and climate agendas such as urban green development. The discussion now turns to an analysis of environmentally sustainable and resilient Urban development in the ECE region – a key transformative commitment for the NUA.

3.3 Environmentally Sustainable and Resilient Urban Development

Countries across the ECE region face diverse environmental challenges. Despite efforts to curb emissions, the region continues to produce a very significant percentage of global emissions and clean and efficient energy production remains a major challenge.[90] A growing number of cities in the ECE region are developing tools for monitoring air pollution and adopting air quality action plans through policy tools (e.g. London's Ultra Low Emission Zone).[91] Many cities have also increased attempts to expand public and green spaces (e.g. Edmonton, Canada's ambitious Urban Forest Management Plan) in support of climate change mitigation and adaptation.[92] However, the systemic transition towards a green economy has been hindered by inadequate environmental policies, lack of political will, and other challenges. Certain regional trends, notably urban sprawl, undermine climate change mitigation efforts, through increased commute times – and therefore increases in energy use – and the dominance of detached and semi-detached dwellings that have higher energy needs.[93] Environmental conditions affect urban life in multiple interconnected ways. In the US, the extension of the wildland-urban interface is increasingly viewed as being linked to devastating wildfires due to urban encroachment on forests and in Europe over 10 per cent of deaths are linked to poor quality environments.[94] Such challenges are exacerbated by climate change impacts. As evident from Figure 2, many cities across the ECE region are at high risk to one more or types of natural disaster.

[89] NYC, 2019
[90] Spotswood et al, 2021
[91] UN Habitat, 2020
[92] UN Habitat, 2020
[93] Spotswood et al, 2021
[94] UN Habitat, 2020

Cities' risk of exposure to natural disasters

City population
- 10 million or more
- 5 million to 10 million
- 1 million to 5 million
- 500,000 to 1 million

Risk of natural disaster
- High risk of one type of disaster
- High risk of two types of disaster
- High risk of three or more types of disaster
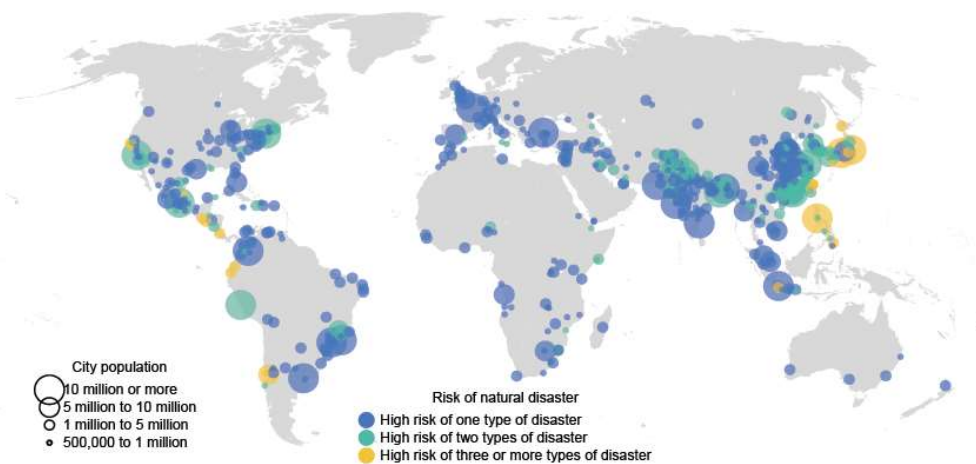
Figure 2: Cities at high risk to one more or types of natural disaster
Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2018

An increase in extreme weather events has been recorded across the region in recent years. Floods, heatwaves, and droughts are increasing in southern parts of the region. Heatwaves are of particular concern for the region's ageing population as the elderly are more vulnerable to their impacts. The West Coast of the United States, Southern Europe and the Caucasus are also susceptible to earthquakes and landslides.[95] The United States is also subjected to hurricanes and tornadoes.[96]

COVID 19 and climate change are intricately connected; the root cause of COVID 19 and other pandemics are closely tied to the combined societal impacts on natural processes and ecological systems. High landscape fragmentation and low native biodiversity can create higher risks for zoonotic diseases and thus require increasing attention in efforts to improve environmental sustainability and build urban resilience.[97] The impacts of COVID 19 and climate change are complexly interconnected and do not adhere to boundaries, thereby further highlighting the importance of multi-scale governance and collaboration for achieving environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development. COVID recovery measures with beneficial environmental impacts have been rising considerably. However, according to findings from the Green Recovery Database spending on environmentally positive measures accounts for only one fifth of total COVID19 recovery spending in OECD, EU and Key Partner countries.[98]

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[95] EU, 2016
[96] EU, 2016
[97] OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS, 2021
[98] OECD, 2021

Climate change adaptation and mitigation are increasingly embedded in existing developmental and other processes that contribute to the SDGs, NUA and other international goals.[99] The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-30 was established in 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in September 2015, followed soon afterwards by the Paris Agreement (December 2015) and the NUA in 2016. These refer to the importance of mainstreaming of disaster risk assessments, adaptation and mitigation into urban planning and development policy and implementation. The agreements recognise "Sustainable cities and communities" (SDG11) and subnational authorities are identified as critical entities for achieving global goals. Achieving the objectives of the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Prevention are key to fulfilling the goals of NUA and the SDGs. Cities in the ECE region are increasingly considering and implementing adaptation measures. For example, the city of Barcelona is tackling climate change under the 'Urban Agenda Partnership on Climate Adaptation'. Through support from the European Structural and Investment Funds Barcelona is focusing on supporting and enabling municipalities to implement climate adaptation measures.[100]

The recent authoritative UNEP *Adaptation Gap Report*[101] concludes that while actions are being implemented worldwide at slowly increasing rates with planning and financial support and across multiple scales, more ambition is urgently required. Resilience and disaster preparedness are incorporated in the NUA, yet, as with the majority of international agreements, the devastating impacts of COVID19 were not anticipated.[102]

Signatories of the NUA are committed to building environmentally sustainable and resilient cities that are adaptive to climate change and support mitigation. Despite significant gaps, there have been notable efforts from cities to national and global levels to address the climate crisis and other environmental issues, thereby progressing towards the NUA's transformative commitments of environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development. Cities are at the forefront of climate action globally. In 2019, over 10,000 cities from 139 countries (many in the ECE region) committed to measurable climate action through the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy. National Urban Policies have also been increasingly focusing on mainstreaming climate change. For the period between 2018-2020, NUPs allocating moderate to extensive attention to climate resilience grew from 36 to 48 percent. Over 50 NUPs address both climate resilience and the low-carbon transition to leverage synergies with low-carbon mobility (89%), mixed-use and compact development (74%), sustainable buildings (69%), risk assessment (63%) and risk-sensitive land-use policies (59%).[103]
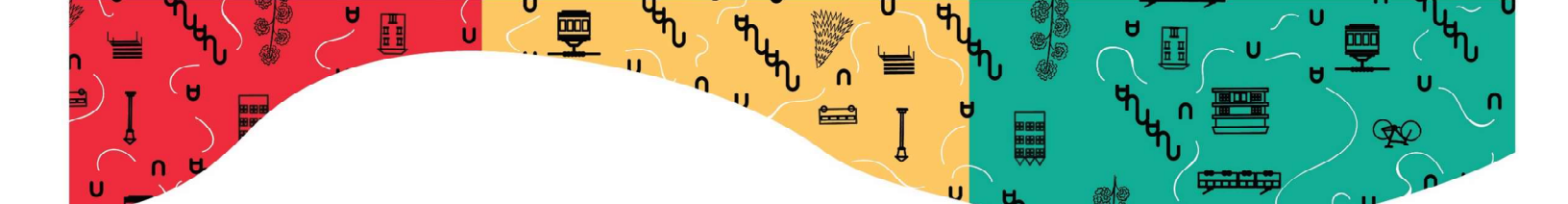
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[99] UNEP, 2021
[100] EU, 2021
[101] UNEP, 2021
[102] OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS, 2021
[103] OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS, 2021

A review of the regional VNRs and VLRs produced to date reveals however that there is generally a stronger focus on mitigation to date, with more limited emphasis and examples of climate change adaptation. Findings from the UNEP report also indicate that adaptation implementation is unevenly distributed.[104] For example, there is considerably less evidence of adaptation demonstrated in Eastern Europe in comparison to other ECE regions.[105] National laws and policies are key for supporting the translation of adaptation plans and commitments to action. During 2020 and 2021, several nations adopted or significantly changed laws and policies relating to adaptation or disaster risk management. For example, the Russian Federation released its first National Adaptation Action Plan; and Spain published a significantly revised adaptation policies from the 2011 version.[106] Understanding the effectiveness of adaptation projects and their results is currently hindered by dominant monitoring and evaluation systems that focus on easily measurable short-term outputs and targets such as policies drafted, with limited scope to assess transformations in vulnerability or risks or detect maladaptation.[107]

Integrative planning approaches that incorporate climate adaptation and mitigation into everyday decision making are supported by the NUA and SDGs. These agendas also strongly recognise the importance of city and community level action that is linked to and complemented by national and international interventions. Both the NUA and SDGs provide foundations for an international framework for supporting implementation of such action with a focus on empowering cities. Ireland's 2019 Climate Action Plan exemplifies how national targets (e.g. large scale retrofitting of homes) can be effectively designed with local implementation considerations at the forefront.[108] The Plan sets out a national sectoral roadmap that is reliant on direct partnership with local authorities, each of which have created Climate Action Regional Offices which have responsibility for delivering the action plans. Recently, Bulgaria has initiated a distinct requirement to incorporate climate action measures in all the regional integrated territorial strategies of the regions as well as in city integrated municipal development plans.[109]

Subnational governments are showing growing leadership in the climate crisis, particularly through collaborative action, and are urging national governments to follow suit.[110] For example, In November 2021 at the UN Climate Summit in Glasgow (COP26) 68 states, regions and cities announced a series of new, immediate actions to tackle climate change through the Climate Group, Under2 Coalition. Thousands of cities globally now have some sort of climate action plan(s) in place, many of which are located in the ECE region. These plans also help motivate climate action and solutions at other scales. However, turning plans into action faces many challenges relating to inadequate finance, technical abilities, resources and other aspects.

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[104] UNEP, 2021
[105] UNEP, 2021
[106] UNEP, 2021
[107] Eriksen *et al.* 2021; UNEP, 2021
[108] ODI, 2021
[109] OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS, 2021
[110] Coalition for Urban Transitions, 2019

In order to address some of these challenges, there has been a recent growing trend towards collaborative efforts between diverse city stakeholders to deliver climate action.

"Reinventing Cities" is a competition organized by C40, in collaboration with the European Institute of Innovation and Technology Climate Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC). The overall aim is to collaboratively deliver sustainable and community focused urban projects that demonstrate zero-carbon solutions for building construction and facilitate urban regeneration and resilience in sites of decline, with a core focus on social concerns.[111] The initiative is highly collaborative involving multi-disciplinary teams including private sector (e.g. architects and developers), environmentalists, creative project holders, start-ups, academics and community associations and local government. Competition candidates are required to respond to ten climate challenges in designing the projects.[112] Mitigation is the core focus but as evident from Table 3 the projects have several co-benefits for adaptation. Of the 12 participating cities in the 2021 edition of the competition 7 are from the ECE region: Chicago, Houston, Madrid, Milan, Montréal, Reykjavík, Roma and San Francisco. While the focus of "Reinventing Cities" is on built environment initiatives (SDG 11.c), the projects have considerable social and environmental co-benefits, in support of the NUA's transformative commitments. Table 3 presents a summary of three 2021 winning projects, demonstrating their collaborative and cross-cutting nature in efforts to address both mitigation and adaptation. More funding and scaling up of such innovative initiatives are required in the ECE region in support of the NUA's transformative commitment for environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development.

Table 3: Reinventing Cities: 3 examples of winning projects 2021

Project overview	Key focus areas
Madrid, Spain LABORATORIO-SUR, Mercado de orcasur Description: ambitious net-zero energy project proposing the renovation of an unused market in a socially challenged neighbourhood.	Sustainable and local consumption habits, developing activities for intergenerational and social solidarity by creating a new green area. On-site energy production with intention to become fully energy self-sufficient, promote local and organic produce, public workshops are intended to raise climate awareness. Sustainable and local construction materials used
San Fransisco, US The Kelsey Civic Center Description: urban community with 102 homes for people of all abilities, incomes, and backgrounds.	Addresses climate change and the housing crisis, with a key focus on people with disabilities, fully accessible building will include commercial space for green business that employs people with disabilities, training programs for people with disabilities to participate in green

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[111] C40 Climate KIC, 2019
[112] C40 Climate KIC, 2019

	economy. Co-living housing model to minimize waste and support community cohesion, all-electric zero carbon building with on-site renewable energy and energy storage, public garden to support biodiversity and urban agriculture.
Reykjavik, Iceland The Circular District- Description: The District will feature the first circular building in Iceland (through transforming abandoned cement factory)	Cornerstone for local urban farming and food services in the area, venue for innovation and collaboration promoting a sustainable lifestyle, and building a cohesive community, focus on food security (e.g. through indoor vertical farming) in a post-pandemic reality while minimizing the adverse impacts of impacts of building and construction practices on the climate, carbon neutral .

Source: Reinventing Cities, 2021

People centred design and planning for climate resilient societies are central to achieving the transformative commitments of the NUA. Gender is a key variable influencing risk and vulnerability within urban populations.[113] While experiences differ significantly, women living in urban areas are often more vulnerable than men due to differing experiences, challenges and opportunities, with women often bearing additional burdens due to inequalities underpinned by structural socio-economic and cultural barriers.[114] To achieve SDG 5 on gender equality, these considerations need to factored into all aspects of urban policy, planning and decision making. The report finds that countries globally are increasingly embedding gender-responsive approaches into adaptation planning through using gender-disaggregated data and analysis, introducing goals and actions to improve gender equality and monitoring progress in gender-responsive budgeting, planning and implementation.[115] For example, Canada has shown significant progress in enhancing gender equality and gender-responsive climate policy development and action at the national and multilateral levels.[116] Its most recent climate plan was informed by specific gender analysis to support gender equality in existing and planned policies and programmes.[117] Despite this growing attention gender issues, together with broader equity and justice concerns require much greater consideration overall in climate action across the ECE region and more widely.[118]

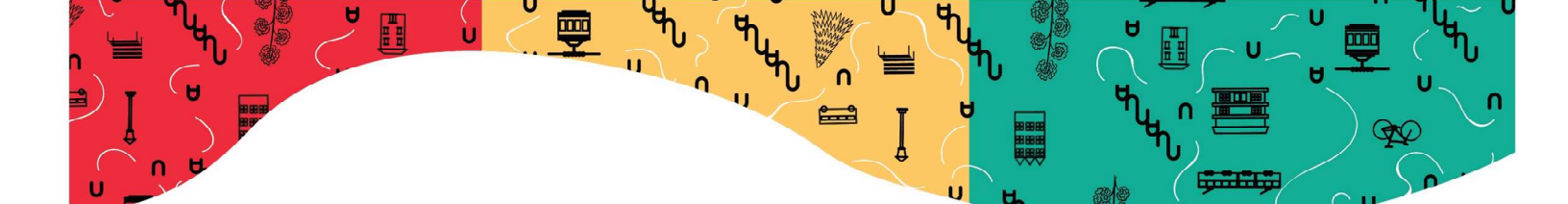[113] Bradshaw and Fordham, 2015; Ahmad, 2018
[114] Bradshaw and Fordham, 2015; Ahmad, 2018
[115] UNEP, 2021

[116] Canada 2021a; Canada 2021b
[117] Canada 2021a; Canada 2021b
[118] UNEP, 2021

A further recent development has been a growing focus by cities in the ECE region on developing disaster risk reduction and resilience strategies that place inclusivity at their core. Racial equity considerations form the basis of Boston's (US) resilience strategy. An illustrative example is the racially and culturally diverse Dudley Square neighbourhood where the city is partnering with a local community land trust, Dudley Neighbours Incorporated (DNI), to secure land for providing essential services and facilities (e.g urban gardens) within the neighbourhood, which help food security, community cohesion and environmental sustainability in the face of climate change and other shocks.[119] In support of its commitment to equity and resilience The City of Atlanta merged key departments into a single Office of Resilience, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, known as One Atlanta. Established in 2018, One Atlanta is responsible for mainstreaming equity and resilience into city government operations, streamlining and enhancing the City's equity work, and collaborating with diverse stakeholders to facilitate an intersectional approach.[120] These inclusive initiatives support implementation of the NUA and progress on all three transformative commitment, as well as SDG 11 and reduce exposure and vulnerability in line with the Sendai Framework and Paris Agreement. While cities in the ECE region and globally are leading efforts to foster racially equitable and resilient societies much more progress is still required. This can be facilitated through more city to city learning and scaling up of efforts.

Mounting emphasis is placed on urban greening and green infrastructure in the ECE region and worldwide as effective methods for minimizing urban sprawl and biodiversity loss and supporting environmental resilience. There are many examples across the ECE region of initiatives to promote incorporation of green infrastructure and other ecosystem service-based approaches – also called nature-based solutions (NBS) - such as greenways and parks, rain gardens, trees, permeable pavements and green roofs that are being implemented in support of environmental resilience and climate change action.[121] These measures often have considerable ecological, biological and other co-benefits such as increasing community resilience to air pollution, extreme heat and flooding; all central to NUA's transformative commitments of environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development and multiple other developmental goals and targets (e.g. Universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces" - SDG Targets 11.1, 11.2, 11.7).

Urban greening and NBS have important co-benefits for supporting both climate change adaptation and mitigation, disaster risk reduction, creating employment opportunities, and community health and cohesion - all of which are central to achieving the NUA's transformative commitments. Green public spaces such as parks can also help to address gender discrimination (and support achievement of SDGs 5 and 16 and NUA's transformative commitments) if designed and managed in a gender sensitive manner.[122] For example, a recent study in Denmark found that
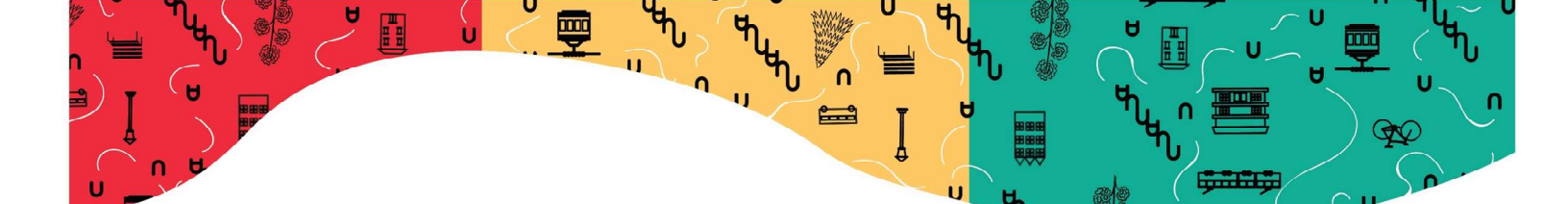
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[119] Boston Government, 2019; WCR, 2020
[120] Boston Government, 2019
[121] Anguelovski et al, 2019; Anguelovski et al, 2021
[122] Anguelovski et al, 2021

public spaces were used more equally by both males and females during lockdown than previously.

NBS are also increasingly supported by city networks such as C40. More recently, NBS have been widely promoted as an effective response to the combined pressures of COVID 19 and climate change.[123] For example, in an open letter 180 representatives including ministers from 10 European countries, 79 EU lawmakers and chief executives of major private companies have indicated their commitment to promoting NBS for supporting a green recovery, addressing climate change and rebuilding from COVID. It also highlights the potential of green action to deliver jobs, growth and foster resilient societies.[124]

Despite this, there is an increasing literature that points to potential unintended adverse consequences of urban greening, particularly in the North American context in the form of green 'climate gentrification' linked to resilience and climate adaptation. A notable example is the Atlanta Beltline; a key greening project in People's Town, Atlanta that involves transforming abandoned rail lines surrounding the city into a greenbelt, connecting other green spaces and transport lines. Despite these benefits, in Peoplestown, the beltline is also viewed by residents as a threat culturally and economically, "nothing but a sidewalk to displacement".[125] Such threats disproportionately impact historically marginalised urban populations and can drive further social exclusion and housing.[126] A further example is High Line and Brooklyn Bridge Park in New York City where positive outcomes such as green space expansion have been accompanied by displacement of low-income residents.[127] Access to nature also unequally distributed in the United States and other ECE regions with green open space often less available and accessible in low-income neighbourhoods and communities of colour.[128] A recent significant study in the United States revealed that the communities most impacted by COVID19 are also those with the least green spaces nearby.[129] Given the interlinkages between urban nature, human health and biodiversity, these results have significant implications both during and beyond the pandemic that need to be better accounted for by cities in the US and across the ECE region.[130]

As such, to avoid new forms of inequality emerging from green action and sustainability policies it is essential for cities to place equity and justice at the core of efforts to build healthy and sustainable neighbourhoods for all. A recent study of 400 sustainability initiatives in over 200 urban areas (many from the ECE region) reveals that the principles of environmental and social justice are already becoming embedded in current environmental action at the local scale as cities implement

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[123] UN Habitat, 2021
[124] Baczynska, and Abnett, 2020;
[125] Anguelovski et al, 2019; Anguelovski et al, 2021
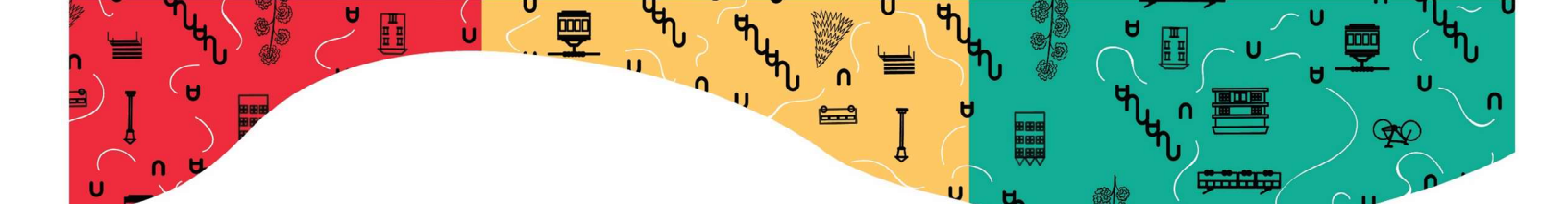[126] Anguelovski et al, 2021
[127] Anguelovski et al, 2018
[128] Spotswood et al, 2021
[129] Spotswood et al, 2021
[130]Spotswood et al, 2021

measures to deliver on the NUA and the SDGs[131]. While nature-based and other green solutions are vital for enhancing environmental value, addressing the structural drivers of vulnerability necessitates more inclusive and transformative socio-ecological interventions that have social protection, and access to critical services and infrastructure at their core.

In order to achieve the transformative commitments it is necessary for governments and non-state actors to consider and access means of implementation of the NUA. These include mobilization of financial resources; capacity development; and information technology and innovation. Section 4 below considers effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda in terms of urban governance structure and the planning and managing of urban development.

4. Effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda in terms of the urban governance structure and the planning and managing of urban development

4.1 *Voluntary National Reviews and Voluntary Local Reviews*
In recent years, there has been a significant expansion in urban related research, policy and frameworks seeking to inform urban development and practice across all scales. Coherence and alignment between agreements and policies, as well as actors and sectors across all scales is critical for effective implementation. As noted in the 2018 Quadrennial Report, at the regional level, the European Union has examined the interlinkages between development agendas and is drawing on the NUA as the implementing agenda for the urban aspects of the global agreements through the Urban Agenda for the European Union (Pact of Amsterdam) and implementation of the 2030 Agenda.[132] A critical gap and challenge to policy coherence highlighted in the 2018 Quadrennial Report and which is yet to be overcome is that enabling environments – particularly at local levels – are yet to be created in many places. This relates to cross cutting issues of data access, knowledge, municipal finance, expertise and capacity development. It would be particularly beneficial for forthcoming Quadrennial Reports to develop further appropriate methods for measuring progress in fostering enabling environments for cities in the ECE region, similar to the city enabling environment rating in the Asia-Pacific region.
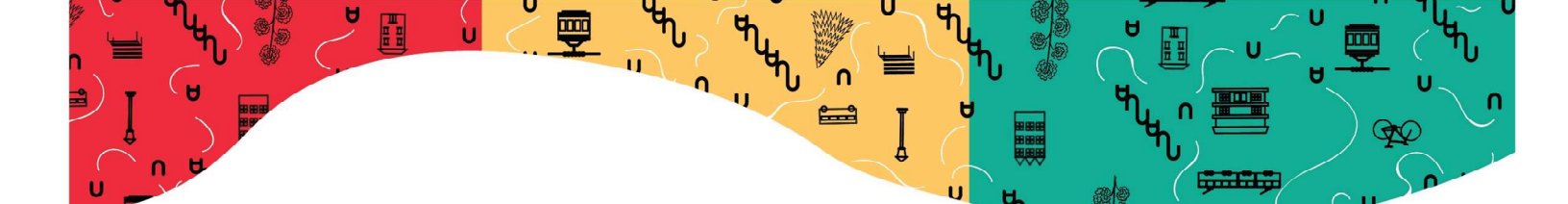
Voluntary national and local reviews on progress of SDG implementation are key for improving understanding of progress on implementation of the NUA and challenges thereto.
To date, less than 10 per cent of Member States have submitted their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) on implementation of the NUA. There have been five submissions from the ECE region to date: Finland, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Turkey.

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[131] Castán Broto and Westman, 2017
[132] UN Habitat, 2018; https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/sustainability-transitions/urban-environment/links/eu-strategies-and-policies/the-pact-of-amsterdam-urban

This low number is due to multiple interacting factors such as lack of financial capacity and other resources across countries and limited awareness. Reporting rates are considerably higher for the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR) with multiple cities across the ECE region submitting reports since 2018, but many are yet to submit. The following VLRs have been launched in the ECE region in 2021: Kelowna (British Columbia, Canada), Gladsaxe (Denmark), Oulu, Tampere, Vantaa (Finland), Asker, Bergen, Oslo, Trondheim, Viken (city and region), Helsingborg, Malmo, Stockholm and Uppsala (Sweden); Izmir and Sultanbeyli (Turkey) and Moscow (Russia).[133]

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the local and regional government movement for the localization of the SDGs has been expanding globally, yet at varying rates within and between regions.[134] Progress is most noticeable in Northern and Western European countries and in North America. Inspired by New York City's 2018 declaration to develop a local equivalent of the VNR exercise, several cities have followed suit to develop VLRs and accelerate efforts to implement SDGs and the NUA since 2018.

In North America, a growing number of high-profile cities and states are demonstrating their commitment to reporting on the NUA and SDGs. For example, New York City has submitted multiple VLRs and Los Angeles has prepared a VLR to monitor their respective progress toward achieving the SDGs. Orlando was the most recent US city to publish a VLR, and was preceded by New York City, Pittsburgh and Los Angeles. Several European cities (e.g. Helsinki) and local regions (e.g. Basque) have also submitted multiple reports. VLRs aim to localize the 17 SDGs and 169 targets to the city-scale. Each city's VLR is informed by differing key themes and emphases within the broader framing of SDG and NUA goals. For example, Orlando's first VLR focuses on systemic recovery from COVID 19 through inclusive approaches while advancing eight SDG goals for social, economic and environmental prosperity.[135] New York City's 2019 VLR, *Global Vision | Urban Action*, aligns the City's OneNYC vision with 10 of the SDGs (with subsequent VLRs covering remaining SDGs).[136]

VLRs can also inspire greater ambition and identify core areas of concern to inform VNRs -
effective collaborative multi-level governance is important for achieving this. However, as further exemplified below much more effort is required since LRG involvement in the preparation of VNRs remains limited. Increasing resources are slowly being developed and allocated to support cities to undertake VLRs. For example, Bristol (the first UK city to produce a VLR) has produced a guide British cities published in late 2019 by Bristol, the first in the UK to undertake one.[137] The Institute for Global Environmental Strategies has also developed an Online Voluntary

[133] UNHabitat 2020b
[134] UCLG, 2019
[135] City of Orlando and ICLEI, 2021
[136] NYC 2019
[137] Fox and Macleod, 2019

Local Review Lab to support local governments in undertaking their reviews.[138] These processes are central for further entrenching the centrality of local and regional governments (LRGs) in the implementation of the SDGs and NUA. A notable advancement since 2018 is the formulation of the Guidelines for the Development of Voluntary Local Reviews in the UNECE Region, endorsed in October 2021by the UNECE Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management.[139] These Guidelines serve as a framing to facilitate local and regional governments in the region to develop VLRs. The Guidelines contain a set of principles and recommendations on concrete steps to be adopted. The guidelines were elaborated based on the existing best practices in the region with the development of the VLRs and in consultation with UN-Habitat and other partner organizations, cities and their networks and other stakeholders.[140]

There is extensive reference to sub-national and local governments in the NUA, predominantly in relation to implementing national policies. Sub national governments, particularly city government, as well as non-state actors such as civil society are key agents of change for implementing the NUA and achieving its transformative commitments. The explicit recognition of subnational entities as supported by national governments – as signatories of these agendas - emphasises the necessity of collaborative and inclusive multi-level governance.[141] As indicated in the NUA, implementation of NUPs would be supported through multi-level governance and multi-stakeholder partnerships across all sectors of society.

4.2. *Achieving multi-level governance and the centrality of local and regional governments in implementing the NUA*

Effective multi-level governance is central to the implementation of the NUA and facilitating progress towards achieving its transformative commitments. This is encapsulated in the NUA (paras 85–91) which emphasises the need for an urban paradigm shift dedicated to multi-stakeholder collaboration and partnerships across all government scales (both formal and traditional) to facilitate sustainable urban development across administrative boundaries. Inclusive decision making involving all urban citizens is central to this. Indeed, transformative change can be achieved through effective multi-level governance; working across and beyond sectors and levels of governments, regions and actors and in partnership with government and civil society.[142] For example, the 2019 Spanish Urban Agenda includes specific mechanisms for stakeholder inclusion and participation as well as specific measures for sharing good practices and knowledge in support of a participatory culture.

In practice, effective multi-level governance has proved challenging across the ECE region due to challenges such as mismatches and sometimes conflicts in priorities,
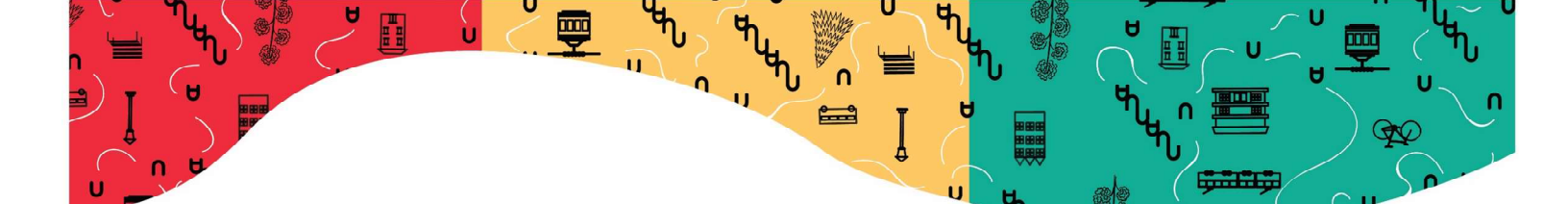
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[138] https://iges.or.jp/en/projects/vlr
[139] https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/ECE_HBP_2021_4-2109985E.pdf
[140] https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/ECE_HBP_2021_4-2109985E.pdf
[141] Leck and Simon, 2013; Valencia et al, 2019
[142] WCR, 2020

powers and resources across scales. Local governments are at the forefront of multi-level governance and facilitating partnerships and collaboration for implementing the NUA. This is particularly evident in the growing emphasis on 'localisation' of global agendas and the criticality of cities in this process. Localisation is linked with territorial approaches, highlighted in NUA paras 93–99. Key research findings from the 2020 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report on a territorial approach to SDG implementation reveal the considerable extent to which OECD cities and regions still fall short of reaching targets across most Goals, most notably Goal 13 (Climate Action) and Goal 5 (Gender Equality), for which around 95 per cent of OECD cities are yet to achieved goals and suggested end values.[143]

Cities and regions in OECD countries are responsible for approximately 60 per cent of total public investment (including for climate transition), and an estimated 40 per cent of public expenditure linked to vital issues such as water, housing, transport and infrastructure which underpin sustainable development and well-being.[144] OECD countries are increasingly drawing on the SDGs as a facilitative framework for multi-level governance, specifically vertical coordination.[145] For instance, Germany is promoting the "localisation" of the SDGs from the central government through providing capacity building and financial support to cities and regions for their local SDGs strategies.[146] Many Spanish cities have produced action plans as part of the Implementation Strategy of the Spanish Urban Agenda, with cities also playing a key role in national processes for implementing the NUA and vice versa, which has improved coordination and synergies across government levels in support of territorial governance.[147] The city of Mannheim used the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda as the basis for citizen participation in planning the "Mannheim 2030 vision" with a focus on stimulating action and change. The rigorous participation process to develop the "Mannheim 2030" vision was held over two years and focused on combining innovative technology such as social media platforms and dynamic community engagement.[148]

A key issue since the 2018 Quadrennial report has been to further embed the centrality of local and regional governments (LRGs) in implementation of the SDGs and NUA.
Box 3 shows some key examples of countries in the ECE region with a strong level of LRG involvement in the VNR process, particularly since 2018.

Box 3: Key examples of countries in the ECE region with a strong level of LRG involvement in the VNR process
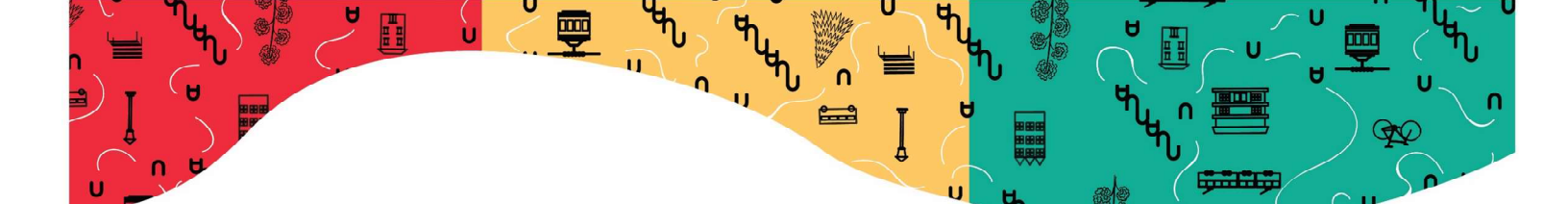
[143] OECD, 2020, UCLG, 2021
[144] OECD, 2020
[145] OECD, 2020
[146] OECD, 2020
[147] Martínez-Córdoba et al, 2021
[148] Hubel, 2021

Denmark: the Ministry of Finance contacted municipalities that were active in SDG implementation through LRG organisations. Danish Regions and Local Government Denmark contributed to a specific section of the national report, together with several Danish municipalities (e.g Gladsaxe, Copenhagen, Sonderborg, Guldborgsund, Vejle and Aarhus). Several also participated in the SDG Panel, which incorporates perspectives of the LRGs

Spain: Regional governments and the LGA had the opportunity to contribute and participate in the VNR through a survey process.

Germany: VNR includes an annex summarising VSR contributions by 3 LGAs: the Deutscher Städtetag, the German Association of Towns and Municipalities, and the German County Association

Sweden: VSR developed by the LGA in 2021 was a catalyst for dialogue with the national government and opened the opportunity to contribute to the VNR.
Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities collaborated in the working group created for the VNR process representing the municipalities and county councils of Norway; part of the process led by the country's Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation. The report specifies that the partnership was established with the explicit objective of highlighting the measures taken by Norwegian municipalities to promote sustainable development.

Source: Adapted from OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS (2021)
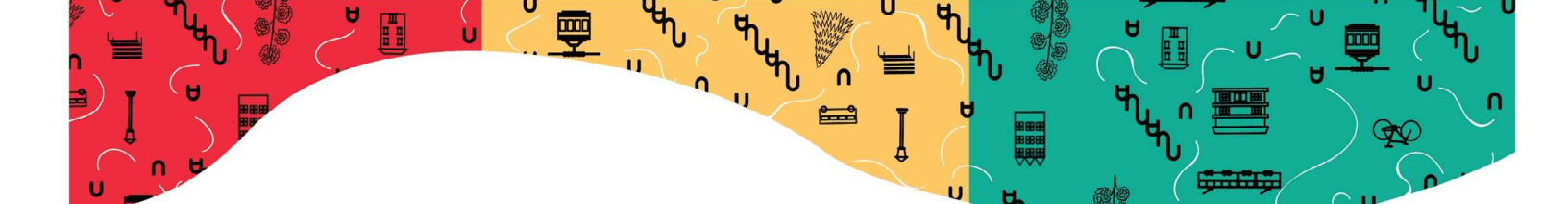
Evidently, some countries have made considerable progress in recent years in adopting collaborative approaches to developing VNRs and evidence is emerging of the transformative potential of such reporting, underpinned by multi-level co-operation to advance the 2030 Agenda. This notwithstanding, LRG and other stakeholder engagement in VNR and other national reporting processes remains limited in many countries in the ECE region and globally, thereby highlighting the need for greater efforts to cement the centrality of local and regional governments and other local stakeholders in implementing and reporting on the SDGs and NUA. This is also key for supporting more VLR-VNR alignment which is essential for effective use of resources and capacities, enhancing cohesion and synergies in policies and plans across scales and for fostering new ways of combining local planning for cohesive national economic planning and development.[149]

4.3 National and sub-national urban policies

National urban policies (NUPs) feature strongly in the NUA, particularly as a framing for national action (NUA para 89) and have gained increasing prominence over the past decade as key enabling frameworks to support coherent and integrative urbanization within national borders. UN-Habitat has also produced guidelines for

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[149] UN-Habitat, 2020; OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS, 2021

tackling climate change in the context of such policies.[150] The introduction of NUPs under the NUA supports the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 5.[151] NUPs provide support for policy coherence and synergies across scale through linking urbanization with national development processes.

While over 160 countries globally have NUPs in place, these are in various forms and stages of development – some have developed explicit NUPs, while others are partial and several have begun implementation, while others are still in the development stage.[152] In some countries, governments may have insufficient resources and specialised skills to undertake the NUP process.[153] There is also a growing need for mutual learning and support between governments and on how NUPs can address new demands and be developed in inclusive, integrated and evidence-based ways ().

NUPs are highlighted in the NUA as central to the promotion of collaborative and effective multi-level governance for accelerating achievement of national development targets (paras 15, 21, 87, 89, 130 and 149). The NUA also emphasises the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships to underpin NUPs and adequate resource allocation for all government levels to fulfil their objectives under NUPs. OECD-UN-Habitat's comprehensive study[154] identifies 5 key thematic areas covered in NUPs internationally and priorities for the ECE region ranked in descending order as follows: economic development, spatial structure, environmental sustainability, human development and climate resilience. As outlined below, there are some generalisable aspects of NUPs for the ECE region that have supported implementation of the NUA. This is despite differences in regional priorities due to considerable diversities.

Since 2018 a growing number of counties in the ECE region have developed or revised their NUPs to support NUA implementation and effective multi-level governance. Sweden is a notable forerunner in the ECE region with the introduction of the key national document: *Local implementation of the SDGs and New Urban Agenda: Towards a Swedish National Urban Policy.*[155] The report targets policy development and considers the application of the NUA and SDGs with regards to the specifics of the Swedish context, where large cities have considerable autonomy in comparison to many other countries across the region.[156] In supporting NUA implementation the policy aims to provide an enabling framework for sustainability at local scales and facilitate collaboration between actors across scales and support international networking regarding lessons learnt and good practice for sustainable development.[157]

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[150] UN-Habitat, 2016b
[151] UN-Habitat, 2018b
[152] OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS 2021
[153] OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS 2021
[154] OECD-UN-Habitat, 2018, pp. 31-2, 34-5, 44-5
[155] Fabre, 2017; Krantz and Gustafsson, 2021
[156] Valencia et al, 2019; Krantz and Gustafsson, 2021
[157] UCLG, 2021

NUPs are interlinked with and influenced by policies across other scales including sub-national governments (e.g. state, province, cities) and supra-national entities.[158] Supra-national policy frameworks are important for facilitating coherence on cross-border policy matters such as for housing and labour markets, public transport and infrastructure which transcend administrative borders and for issues with global reach such as climate change. In comparison to other regions globally, supra-national policies are particularly prominent in Europe and mentioned in several NUPs. Several key examples are presented in Box 4 below. NUPs are important for cross-border co-operation and urban-rural integration in urban policy as they provide an important foundation for policy development and can help synergise and co-ordinate polices from sub-national to supra-national scales.[159]

Multiple sub-national urban development policies and strategies have been developed and implemented by sub-national government across the ECE region and are underpinned by local objectives (see Box 4). As evident from Box 4, this is an increasing trend particularly in European countries. Alignment between NUPs and sub-national urban policies is critical for all levels of government since sub-national policies orientate resources, strategies and measures from the national agenda to specific local contexts. Such policies also facilitate effective urban-rural integration and co-operation in support of territorial development.

Box 4: Supra and Sub-National Policies across the ECE Region

Supra-National Policies
Europe:
Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Turkey, Poland
NUPs reference the contribution of European Union supranational policies and funding mechanisms (e.g. EU Cohesion Policy, European Fund for Regional Development) for facilitating issues such as integrated urban or regional development, innovation, research and partnerships for urban areas transcending administrative borders.
Luxembourg:
Engagement with cross-border co-operation policy – focus on agglomerations such as Franco-Luxembourg conurbation of Alzette Belval, and involvement with various Ministries, e.g.:
- Development, Monitoring and Implementation of Cross-border Spatial Development Strategies (led by the Ministry of Energy and Spatial Planning),
- Interministerial Co-ordination Committee for Cross-Border Cooperation (led by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs).
Netherlands:
Ongoing and longstanding cross-border collaboration and agreements with Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland regarding river management and urbanised delta areas.

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[158] OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS, 2021
[159] OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS, 2021

Sub-national Urban Policies
Europe

Austria
The region of Upper Austria planned and implemented a strategy, with supporting financial resources, to facilitate urban-rural co-operation in multiple smaller urban areas to address and limit land take.

Canada
Land use planning and urban policy is regulated through provincial planning acts, with municipalities being "creatures of the province". The Act regulates land use and development, particularly in relation to city growth.

Germany
Policies (programmes) in place on the Länder-level, such as WiN (Wohnen in Nachbarschaften, "Living in Neighbourhoods") in Bremen and RISE (Rahmenprogramm Integrierte Stadtteilentwicklung, "Framework Programme Integrated District Development") in Hamburg.

Netherlands
Urban strategies corresponding to their explicit NUP (the National Strategy on Spatial Planning and Environment) are produced by provinces and municipalities.

Czechia
Regional Innovation Strategies implemented across all 14 regions. The strategies provide support to cities for issues such as competitiveness, innovation, research and development, and for effective implementation of the European Structural and Investment Funds and public funds.

Ireland
Regional Spatial Planning and Economic Strategies for three regions, with the aim of developing metropolitan areas for the country's five major cities. e.g. Dublin Metropolitan Area Spatial Plan key policy focus includes compact sustainable growth to promote consolidation of the city and suburbs, integrated transport and land use across public transport networks and nodes, and enabling infrastructure capacity. Local authorities in the Dublin metropolitan area are required to consider these policies within their local plans.
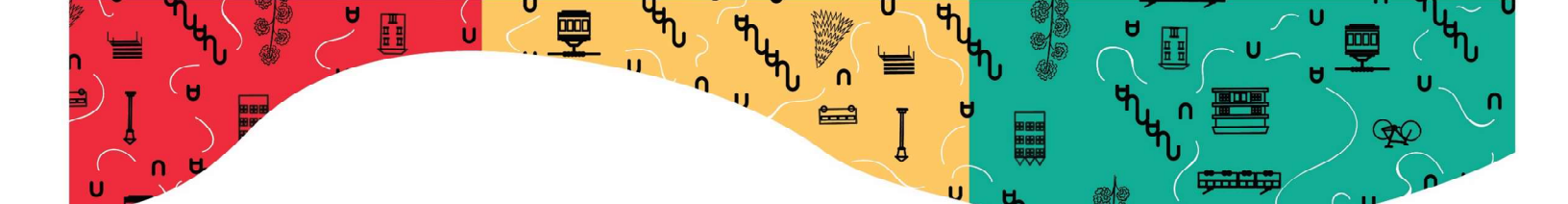
Similar regional development policies exist in *Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy and the Netherlands,* where the National Strategy on Spatial Planning and Environment comprises sub-national forms for provinces and municipalities.

Source: Adapted from OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS[160]

4.4 *Planning and managing urban development*

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[160] OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS, 2021

Regional differences in planning approaches are significant. In Europe and North America planning systems are generally mature.[161] Across OECD countries national governments are responsible for providing enabling legislation for planning and undertaking strategic spatial national and regional planning, and local governments implement land use planning. In federal countries (especially the US) planning operates primarily at state and local levels.[162] Equitable and well-planned cities and human settlements are more resilient to health crises such as the COVID 19 pandemic and other shocks or stresses such as disaster events.[163] Across the ECE region, implementation of the NUA is complicated by the varied mandates of municipal governments pertaining to issues within municipal borders. For example, in Sweden municipalities are mandated to address physical planning and education for elementary and secondary school levels and responsibility for post-secondary education lies with the national government. Regional government presides over health care and public transport issues.[164]

Multiple complementary initiatives have emerged at various scales in recent years to help monitor the progress of SDGs and related objectives of the NUA. For example, several EU specific methods for local monitoring and reporting of the SDGs and NUA have been developed in recent years. The URBAN2030-II Project supports the achievement of SDGs in European cities and regions and focuses on providing methodological support for the design and implementation of SDG Voluntary Local Reviews. As noted, the NUA and SDGs (specifically SDG 11) are closely interlinked, particularly through the implementation of NUPs. The SDG target 11.a aims to "support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning". To support monitoring the progress of SDG 11.a, the revised indicator 11.a.1 is as follows "number of countries that have national urban policies or regional development plans that: (a) respond to population dynamics, (b) ensure balanced territorial development, (c) increase local fiscal space". 30 countries globally have reported that either their NUPs or RDPs meet all the three qualifiers, thus fulfilling the SDG 11.a., and most meet at least one.[165] "Balanced territorial development" is the most strongly considered, followed by "population dynamics" and considerably fewer include "fiscal space". Numerous cities across the ECE region are characterised by low density urban development and sprawl, resulting in the need to focus strongly on balanced territorial development to support more sustainable land use and resource consumption patterns.[166] *Leading Change* sets out UN-Habitat's guidelines for introducing urban and territorial planning that supports urban sustainability through implementation of the NUA.[167] Territorial approaches and city-

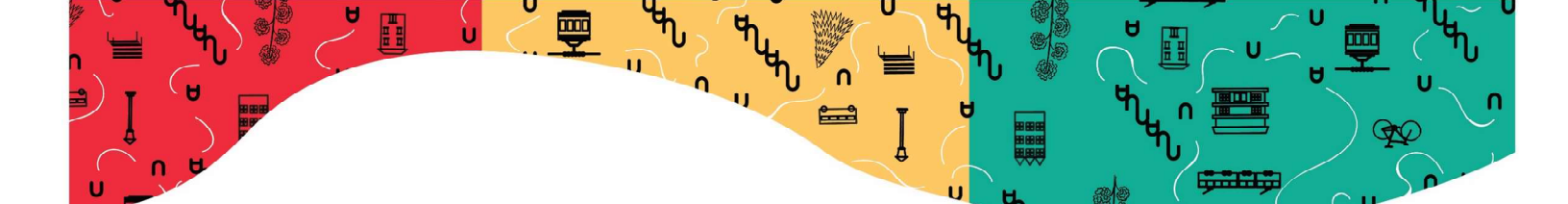[161] EU and UN Habitat, 2016
[162] EU and UN Habitat, 2016
[163] UN Habitat 2021
[164] Valencia et al, 2019
[165] OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS, 2021
[166] OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS, 2021
[167] UN-Habitat, 2018c

region models need to be considered in light of context-specific characteristics such as administrative boundaries and governance capacities.[168]

The findings also highlight the value of NUPs to cities as vehicles to help assess and address the impacts of unplanned urban expansion. The consideration of "population dynamics" in NUPs and RDPs reflects country recognition of increasing urbanisation and the need for people centred approaches[169]. "Fiscal space" is the least considered element in NUPs thus suggesting that a clearer understanding of its centrality in sustainable urban development and ways of integrating into NUPs and RDPs needs to be developed. Fiscal capacity is central to all cities' capabilities to achieve sustained economic growth and secure investments in urban areas.[170] Several examples of NUPs from the ECE region integrate all the three elements. Austria, Germany and Sweden's NUPs (or RDPs) have strong fiscal equalisation mechanisms indicating national commitment to support a balanced urban system. These three nations also indicated the unique catalytic role of development banks in enhancing fiscal space through supporting policy and institutional reforms in partner countries, catalysing the quality of urban programmes and supporting the progression of global agendas. Bulgaria's National Concept for Spatial Development (NCSD) and regional development plan meets all three qualifiers and is informed by regional socio-economic and demographic trends to foster balanced development and reverse negative demographic trends across the country. The NCSD specifies fiscal support and transfer for regions, cities and municipalities. 'Moderate polycentrism' is encouraged in the NCSD to facilitate balanced territorial development[171].

4.4.1 *Urban Design and Planning – public space and multi-modal urban transport*

Sustainable transport systems and mobility are critical to achieving environmentally sustainable and resilient cities. The New Urban Agenda emphasises the importance of urban design and planning for safety, with promoting walkability and cycling as a core component of this (NUA 100). In encouraging urban safety SDG 11.2 calls for "safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport". Cities across the ECE region have implemented various transport related measures in pursuit of these goals and are also realising co-benefits such as emissions and air pollution reductions and improved health.[172] For example, the City of Kelowna in Canada is currently updating its Transportation Master Plan to identify strategic investments for the next two decades for a safe, cost-effective and sustainable transport network, with a core focus on increasing safe and accessible bikeways for all ages and abilities throughout the city.[173] Importantly, Kelowna recognises the importance of

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[168] Watson, 2019; OECD 2020
[169] OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS, 2021
[170] OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS, 2021
[171] OECD/UN-HABITAT/UNOPS, 2021
[172] Schuster et al. 2017; Spotswood et al, 2021
[173] BCICC and GECCO, 2021

considering transit and active transportation networks in the context of land use planning to ensure systems are linked, affordable, safe and accessible with equitable distribution throughout the city and region.[174] By focusing on issues such as access for all abilities and equity much progress can be made towards achieving core goals of the NUA. COVID 19 has compelled cities to rethink planning across all scales to build back better, particularly in relation to public spaces and mobility. For example, the notion of a "15-minute neighbourhood" - "characterized by compactness and the ability to meet daily needs (e.g. health care, education) within walking distance from home is being increasingly supported, with the Mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, proposing to "radically reshape the city "around this idea to combat stress and pollution levels.[175]

Establishing safe and convenient walking and cycling infrastructure can have multiple co-benefits for population health such as improved physical fitness and reduced exposure to air pollution.[176] Table 1 below highlights recent initiatives to enhance public transport infrastructure (with focus on non-motorised options), as direct response to COVID 19 that which have co-benefits for achieving SDG targets and implementation of the NUA.

Table 1: Responses to COVID 19 pandemic: Enhancing public transport infrastructure with co-benefits for NUA implementation

SDG Target 11.2	Co-benefits for NUA implementation and achieving three transformative commitments	Responses to COVID 19 pandemic: Enhancing public transport infrastructure, with focus on non-motorised options
By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs	Enhancing public transport infrastructure, particularly non-motorised options such as walkways and cycle lanes enhances mobility for urban populations with co-benefits of reducing overall environmental impact (e.g. reducing	**Berlin, London, Milan, New York** - investment in and expanded walking and cycling infrastructure. **City of Montréal, Canada** – introduced "Active and Safe Lanes", a network of accessible transportation corridors for pedestrians and cyclists. 112 kilometres of cycle paths and pedestrian routes, with further networks implemented throughout the summer **Milan, Italy** – plans for city centre to be partly restructured for allocation of 35 kilometres of road space to cyclists and pedestrians, with stricter speed limits for motor vehicles to promote safety. **Brussels, Belgium** – large scale pedestrianization plan in place before onset of pandemic has been accelerated for more rapid implementation, and

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[174] BCICC and GECCO, 2021
[175] UN Habitat, 2021
[176] Schuster et al. 2017

of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons	GHG emissions) and improved public health. Shifts to non-motorised options can also offer equitable transportation options for those that cannot afford other modes of transport.	during pandemic the entire core city changed into a priority zone for cyclists and pedestrians. **Paris, France -** cycle lanes expanded and planned long-distance cycleways opened before scheduled.

Source: Adapted from UN Habitat, 2021

Technological advancements are also having a considerable impact on urban mobility in cities of the ECE region such as increased use of electric mobility such as e-scooters, bikes and motorcycles and shared mobility which impacts mobility and livelihood patterns.

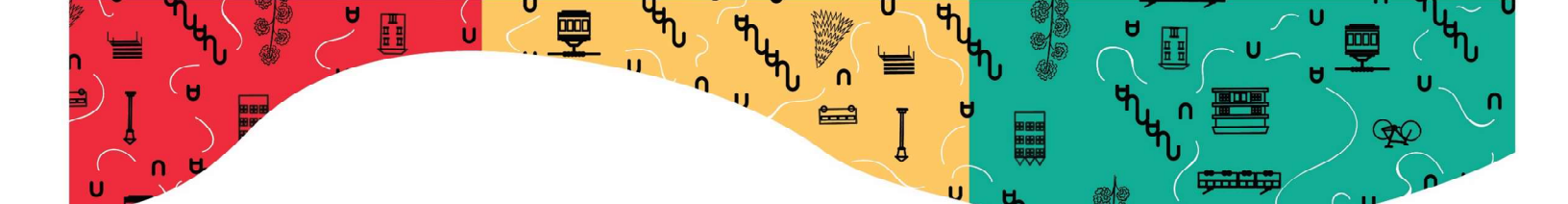*4.4.2 Culture/Cultural Heritage as a priority component of urban planning*

Given their vast geographical scope, cities in the ECE region are highly diverse with many different cultures, ancient urban civilizations and medieval city-States. Culture and cultural diversity are recognised in the NUA as being central to urban planning and supporting sustainable development and inclusivity in cities and human settlements. Furthermore, the NUA recognizes the central role of culture in supporting the implementation of new sustainable consumption and production patterns that facilitate sustainable and responsible resource use (NUA 10). SDG 11.4 also calls on governments to "to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage". Cities are playing a leading role in promoting and prioritising culture and diversity through their urban plans and strategies (e.g. Bilbao in Spain). Over 500 local governments, many of which are from the ECE region, have adopted the Agenda 21 for Culture wherein cultural rights and policies are key pillars of sustainable strategies advancing diversity and inclusion.[177] Together with UN-Habitat and other partners UNESCO have devised a set of indicators for tracking the contribution of culture to sustainable urbanization.[178] Four thematic areas are covered: environment and resilience; prosperity and livelihoods; knowledge and skills; and inclusion and participation.[179] The indicators are aimed at assessing both the quantitative and qualitative impacts of culture through adopted urban policies and public action that incorporate culture in the implementation and monitoring of global agendas. [180]

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[177] WCR, 2020
[178] UNESCO, 2019
[179] UNESCO, 2019
[180] UNESCO, 2019

The Urban Agenda for the EU (established in May 2016) aims to improve the urban dimension of policies through focusing on multi-level governance and partnerships as well as improve cities' participation in national policy-making and implementation, and their capacities to deliver more sustainable and resilient urban development. The Agenda is underpinned by multiple key themes such as climate adaptation, urban poverty and air quality and culture and partnerships.[181] The culture and cultural heritage partnership (February 2019) was one of the most recently developed and includes 28 partners from 10 cities.[182] Given the variety of members such as Berlin and Florence and their varied experiences the partnership addresses multiple interrelated issues linked to culture such as access to finance for cultural projects and heritage conservation.[183] The partnership also works with local stakeholders to facilitate the mobilisation of citizens enhancing cultural heritage and common goods.[184] In addition, Member States play a key role in promoting a multi-level approach to culture and cultural heritage. Culture and cultural heritage are crucial for regional competitiveness and social cohesion and form key elements of urban identity.

The lack of cultural heritage and historical data has hindered comprehensive assessments and understanding of the impacts of cultural elements on urban trajectories. There is considerable potential through implementation the NUA and analysing data collected through this process for gaining greater insights into the role of culture as a driving force for sustainable urbanisation and shifts in urbanisation trajectories. To date, there has been limited consideration of culture in both VNRs and VLRs across the ECE region. However, this is beginning to shift in recent years as exemplified in Helsinki's 2021 VLR: "So far, cultural sustainability has been on the back burner, but in the future it will receive more attention and be linked to the other areas of sustainability". Kelowna (Canada)[185] and Hawaii's[186] VLRs also place strong emphasis on the role of culture as a priority component of well-being, urban planning and all aspects of urban life.

Section 5 below critically considers the means of implementation for the ECE region and progress made since 2018.

5. Means of implementation of the NUA: mobilization of financial resources; capacity development; and information technology and innovation
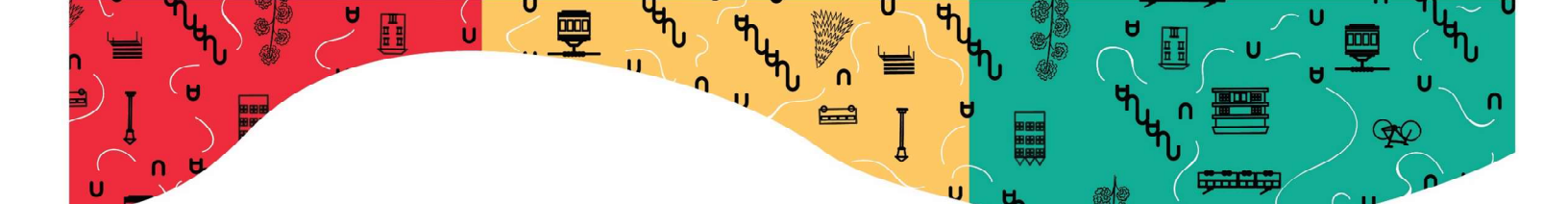
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[181] EU, 2019
[182] EU, 2019
[183] EU, 2019
[184] UCLG, 2021
[185] BCICC and GECCO, 2021
[186] BCICC and GECCO, 2021

5.1 Mobilization of financial resources

Financing sustainable urbanization requires effective enabling environments where local and regional governments are empowered to attain the required revenue for sustainable development. The NUA and other development agendas are being implemented within a broader global context of inadequate funding available for urban development programmes. The economic and other impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic exacerbate this shortfall. The GDP of Europe and North America is projected to drop by 6 −7 per cent in 2020 because of the pandemic and countries in Eastern Europe have been hardest hit.[187] The impact of the pandemic on subnational finances will be become even more important and apparent in years to come and these impacts need to be accounted for in recovery packages and it will be necessary to support more equitable and sustainable economic development through implementation of the NUA, which needs to assessed in forthcoming Quadrennial Reports.

Member States in the EU have focused on developing a collective response to the crisis and have implemented National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs) that collectively support common debt reform and investment response at the regional level. For example, the Spanish Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan aligns municipal priorities, projects and budgets with National and EU priorities, proposing a pipeline of *ready-to-implement* transformative projects that foster expenditure capacity for all governance levels and support the development of private-public partnerships.[188] However, more structured processes for city contributions to national processes are required.

The EU Cohesion policy also provides funding for deploying the New Urban Agenda through its territorial and urban dimension.

Recent research points to significant infrastructure investment gaps for achieving the SDGs (and by extension the NUA goals), estimated to be around $38 trillion for the years 2020-2030 (see Figure 3 below).[189] This notwithstanding, financial resources are increasingly becoming available through new schemes and mechanisms, including public-private funds, new development partners, new financing frameworks and finance institutions.[190] Estimates of the total public and private investment *capacity* are much larger than the estimated gap, at approximately $98 trillion (see Figure 3 below).[191] Exploiting and mobilising this financial capacity to bridge the financing gap requires significant commitment and willingness from both state and non-state actors.[192] There is thus an urgent need for

[187] UN Habitat, 2021
[188] Gobierno De Espana, 2021
[189] UN-Habitat 2020c
[190] UN-Habitat 2020c
[191] Habitat 2020c
[192] UN Habitat, 2021

innovation in developing and accessing alternative forms of financing for urban development and implementing the NUA.

Total Public and Private Investment capacity (2020-30) $98 Trillion

| Commercial banks $33.3T | Investment banks $24.2T | Insurance and Private pensions $21.7T | Sovereign Wealth funds $6.7 | Infrastructure and Private equity funds $2.5T |
| | | | Public pensions and Pension plans $9.2T | Public donors, Endowments and foundations $0.8T |

Investment need vs. public and private investment capacity 2020-2030 (US$ Trillions)

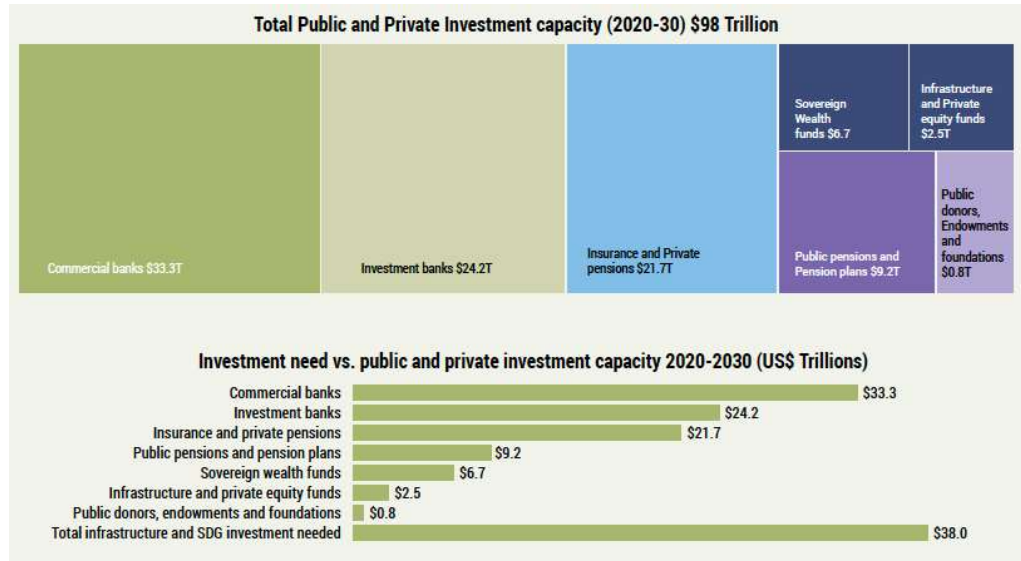|	
Commercial banks	$33.3
Investment banks	$24.2
Insurance and private pensions	$21.7
Public pensions and pension plans	$9.2
Sovereign wealth funds	$6.7
Infrastructure and private equity funds	$2.5
Public donors, endowments and foundations	$0.8
Total infrastructure and SDG investment needed	$38.0

Figure 3: Total Public and Private investment capacity and Investment need vs public and private investment capacity 2020-2030
Source: UN Habitat, 2020

Local governments are key agents for implementing the NUA with many responsibilities falling to the local level. Effective municipal financing is integral to equitable planning
and development. However, across the region, increased local government responsibility has not been matched with commensurate increases in revenues allocated to local governments. Paragraph 34 of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda adopted by United Nations Members States commits to effective financial empowerment of local governments for achieving the SDGs and the NUA. There is no one size fits all or standard methodology for financing urban sustainable development. Financing needs are highlight contextual and baselines for each region are considerably different. Contrasts are particularly glaring between developed and developing countries. Many ECE city sustainability objectives are focused on issues such as digital infrastructure and expanding non-motorised public transport, for example, where in developing countries more likely to be around creating sufficient bus services and providing basic services and data sets.[193]

As recommended in the *World Cities Report*, current local fiscal systems thus require revision to enable an incremental approach based on a dynamic and resilient local tax system that ensures a fairer share of national fiscal revenues through steady and transparent intergovernmental transfers and enhances responsible borrowing to

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[193] UN Habitat, 2021

empower local governments to implement the goals of the NUA and SDGs.[194] However there is much progress to be made to achieve this transformation. The extent of fiscal decentralization is highly uneven across the ECE region and there is an urgent need for more adequate financing flows. There are many fiscal tools for governments to draw from, if they are empowered to deploy them effectively.

The city of Trondheim provides an interesting local level example of how to apply an SDG budgeting approach to municipal financing to connect urban planning to financial resources. [195] Trondheim uses SDG budgeting to integrate the SDGs into local finance structures through applying a data science approach to existing municipal finance systems that links together the UN targets and local accounting standards.[196] The city of Munich is a further important example of how horizontal coordination and funding leverage across multiple sectors can be facilitated through the creation of task forces. Munich city owns and operates its key utilities jointly including telecommunications, energy, water, waste and transport are owned thereby enabling effective management in terms of retaining revenues to invest in their future and help set up new task forces to help overcome operational silos. [197]

Various funding mechanisms are also emerging to address finance gaps for climate action. Over the past five years multiple local government initiatives have foregrounded innovative ways of connecting developmental and climate projects and proposals with financial opportunities. For example, through the C40 Cities Finance Facility and ICLEI's Transformative Actions Programme. The Global Covenant of Mayors and the European Investment Bank have also combined forces to prepare and accelerate financing of urban climate action projects.[198] UN-Habitat Cities Investment Facility is further supportive platform for technical assistance and establishing connections supports cities in developing urban development projects in financially effective ways that are credible for potential investors.

In order to enable essential local action on climate change it is also important for global green finance to be more accessible to cities and local governments. Between 2010 and 2019, more than 2,600 principal adaptation projects were been funded by the top 10 bilateral donors on adaptation, underscoring the significance of bilateral finance as a driver of adaptation.[199]

Cities across the ECE region are also exploring innovative ways to generate finances for climate action. This is increasingly through multi-actor partnerships and networks involving the private sector, research institutes, local actors and other stakeholders (See Table 3).
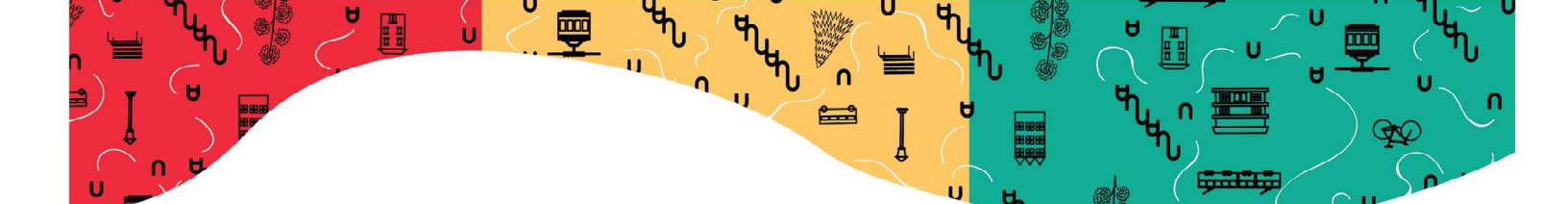
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[194] UN Habitat, 2021
[195] UCLG, 2021
[196] UCLG, 2021
[197] ODI, 2021
[198] UN Habitat, 2021
[199] UNEP, 2021

More advanced taxation and value-capture measures with relevant insurance schemes are also required.[200] Additional potential avenues for increased financing include municipal bonds, strengthening the revenue capacity of local governments, improving the financial capacities of public service utilities, and more effective and efficient use of public financing (e.g. smart and well-targeted subsidies) to leverage private financing.[201] Technical assistance facilities at the national level to facilitate LRGs in structuring investment projects and connecting local investment needs to available resources is of critical importance.[202] Partnering with the private sector in public-private partnerships is an increasingly dominant approach for all levels of government mobilize additional investments and fiscal resources for urban sustainability. These partnerships often have co-benefits for capacity building in technology and innovation and services such as project design.

Pooled financing mechanisms (PFMs) are a further collaborative effort that is of increasing importance in the ECE region. PFMs entail collating the borrowing requirements of a group of municipalities and gaining the collective debt through the capital market or other finance sources.[203] Pooling of assets also supports diversification of risks for investors. PFMs are particularly effective for many medium sized and small local governments to access long-term and adequately priced debt financing. This can be achieved through a state agency or through cooperation. PFMs vary depending on the context.[204] In Europe, local government funding agencies (LGFAs) are the most prevalent pooled financing vehicles. They include Kommuninvest (Sweden), Kommunekredi (Denmark), Bank Nederlandse Gemeenten (The Netherlands), Kommunalbanken (Norway), Munifin (Finland), Agence France Locale (France) and UK Municipal Bond Agency (UK).[205] These are special-purpose agencies owned and guaranteed by local authorities and, in some cases, with shareholding by central government or other public stakeholders. In the North American context, the Municipal Finance Authority of British Columbia (Canada) has had its objectives and mandate extended over time to include pooled investment funds (PIFs). In 2019, the authority issued over Can$1.2 billion of long-term securities and Can$4.7 billion of short-term securities in the capital markets. PFMS are evidently highly relevant to implementing the NUA and achieving the SDGs across the ECE region.[206]

5.2 Capacity development and Networking

Linked to these hybrid financing mechanisms is the growing importance of intra and intercity co-operation and exchange of urban solutions and learning and capacity building involving diverse state and non-state actors. The recent Geneva Declaration

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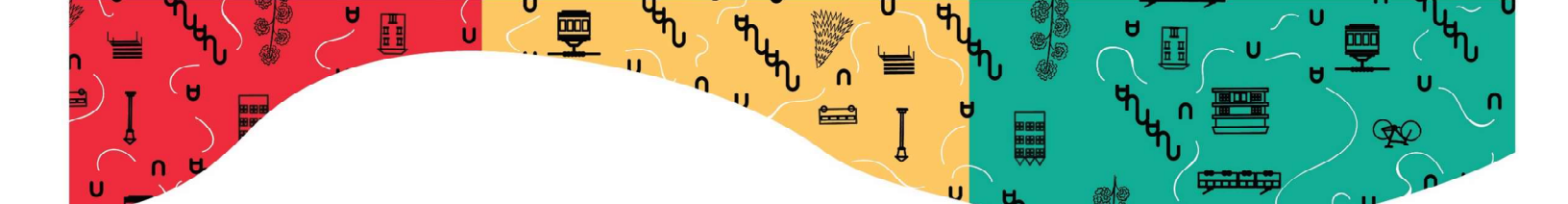
[200] UN Habitat, 2020.
[201] UN Habitat, 2021
[202] UCLG, 2021
[203] UN Habitat, 2020
[204] UN Habitat, 2020
[205] UN Habitat, 2020
[206] UN Habitat, 2020

of Mayors endorsed by Mayors of the UNECE region during the pandemic in October 2020 is of particular significance for its ambition and shared vision and commitment to collaboration to "place the SDGs at the centre of our recovery efforts and create new urban realities for the benefit of all" (see Box 5).

Box 5: Geneva Declaration of Mayors

Geneva Declaration of Mayors
The Geneva Declaration was endorsed by the Mayors of the UNECE region at the first Forum of Mayors held in October 2020. It is a commitment to:
1. Strengthen the **resilience** of our cities;
2. Take ambitious **climate action**;
3. Make our cities greener;
4. Accelerate the transition to **sustainable energy**;
5. Ensure urban **transport** is sustainable;
6. Ensure **housing** is affordable, healthy and adequate;
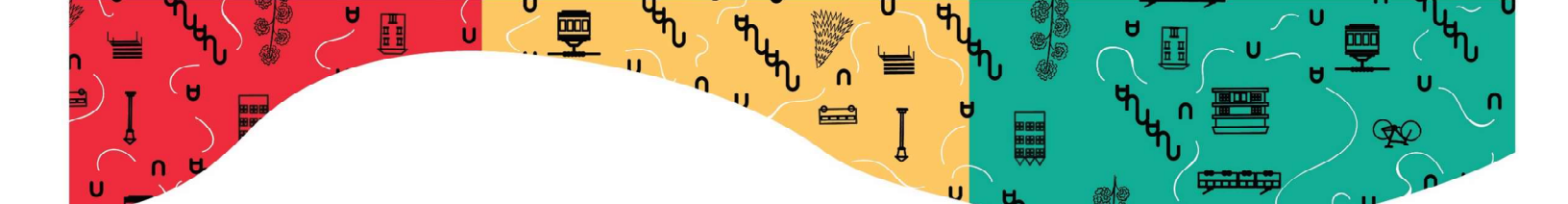7. Make cities more equitable and **inclusive**.

Signatories declare their commitment to "build back better" from COVID and "turn the recovery into a real opportunity for shaping a healthy and resilient future. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 calls for action to work towards inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities – it is now in our hands to place the SDGs at the centre of our recovery efforts and create new urban realities for the benefit of all".

Source: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/Mayors%20declaration%20booklet%20-%20ver.4.pdf

Many local governments (e.g. London, Berlin, New York, San Franciso, Los Angeles) are embarking on partnerships with UN-Habitat and other international organizations (such as the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Global Resilient Cities Network for designing and implementing resilience and development strategies. Emphasis is often on drawing on new technologies and promoting the involvement of diverse actors including the private sector and local communities.[207] There has been a recent proliferation of national and international urban coalitions and networks initiated in support of achieving the SDGs and NUA. Indeed, city networks, and their increasing membership, are playing an increasingly significant role in city-to-city capacity building in terms of sharing experiences, knowledge, lessons learnt and good practice for urban sustainability and addressing climate change. Many countries have long had national local authority associations, fulfilling such roles as well as lobbying of central government. Global local authority membership organisations are also increasingly important for capacity building and knowledge sharing, such as the well established Local Governments for

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[207] UN Habitat, 2021

Sustainability (ICLEI), the Cities Alliance and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).[208] The recent and growing phenomenon of transnational networks (e.g. C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group (C40)) of individual cities reveals that city leaders in diverse regions are increasingly valuing knowledge and good practice sharing regarding shared problems relating to urban sustainable development. These networks also propel innovation dissemination and scaling up of solutions in support of increased implementation of the NUA in locally relevant approaches.

A further illustrative example is, 'America Is All In' is a large coalition championing ambitious, whole-of society climate action across the United States; the most expansive coalition of leaders ever gathered in support of climate action in the United States.[209] The coalition has mobilised thousands of state and non-state actors across the country including states, cities, tribal nations, the private sector, schools, research organisations, faith, health, and cultural and religious institutions. It works together with the federal government to develop a national climate strategy in line with the demands of the climate crisis and scale up climate action across the country. The coalition is focussed on drastically reducing U.S. emissions 2030 and reach net zero emissions by 2050, while protecting against climate change impacts, 'with the goal of a healthy, prosperous, equitable and sustainable future'.[210] The coalition launched its flagship report Blueprint 2030 Stronger Together: An All-In Climate Strategy for Faster, More Durable Emissions Reductions in November 2021 co-inciding with COP26.

Cities across the ECE regional are also increasingly partnering with diverse organisations in developing their VLRs and initiatives to support monitoring. For example, the City of Orlando partnered with ICLEI to develop its VLR.[211] The organisations worked together to complete an SDG mapping process to bring Green Works Orlando's global contributions into greater focus. Orlando's VLR was developed explicitly to serve both as internal analysis tool and an external teaching tool. The collaborative effort links to SDG 17 relating to partnerships. Through its partnership with ICLEI, Orlando's lessons learnt and innovations will be shared with a network of hundreds of local governments throughout the United States .[212]

The private sector is playing an increasing role across the ECE region in partnering with local government and other city actors in efforts to achieve the SDGs and implement the NUA (see Table 3). Such collaborations are supported through various measures such as UN-Habitat's SDG Project Assessment Tool – an interactive guide that combines sustainability principles to support alignment of urban projects with the SDGs and NUA – which is designed to enhance inclusivity and sustainability of development projects through supporting dialogues between public and private sector partners.[213]

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[208] Rosenzweig et al., 2018
[209] America is All In, 2021
[210] America is All In, 2021
[211] City of Orlando and ICLEI, 2021
[212] City of Orlando and ICLEI
[213] UN Habitat, 2021

Over the past five years there has been an international groundswell of youth advocacy and involvement in urban climate change agendas. Most prominent is through worldwide protests since May 2019 by schoolchildren and youth more widely under the banner of 'Fridays for the Future', to underline the urgency of climate action to address the climate crisis. This has led to further localised youth led climate actions and alliances across the ECE region. For example, the Hawai'i Youth Climate Coalition, formed as an outcome of the global climate strike and is a youth-led initiative to support an equitable, climate-resilient future for Hawai'i through organized climate strikes, community workshops and civic and legislative engagement.[214] These globally connected youth led climate action initiatives have considerable potential for peer-to-peer learning and capacity development.

Linked to the New Urban Agenda Platform, local governments and their networks across the ECE region are also initiating and promoting innovative initiatives to support effective monitoring. In Germany, for example, a coalition of public and private partners have developed a national platform to collect and monitor SDG related data from municipalities across the country.[215] Cities are also supporting capacity building through fostering learning and knowledge exchange about diverse issues such as providing affordable housing through online database sharing. Cities, urban areas, regions and countries across the EU are in need of a stable framework of conditions to ensure that their populations can find accessible and affordable housing.[216] A critical issue identified by the Housing Partnership, established under the Urban Agenda for the EU concerns the systemic lack of knowledge about existing social and affordable housing solutions, which hampers learning and knowledge exchange, and limits the development and supply of social and affordable housing. For example, the Housing Partnership developed an 'Affordable housing good practice database on affordable housing' which gathers the best practices of the social and affordable housing sector to support learning and knowledge exchange about the provision of affordable housing in European cities.[217]

5.3 *Innovation and technology*

Remote working and other consequences of COVID 19 have further accelerated technological trends such as digitalization, distance learning and virtual delivery of key services in urban contexts. Regarding EU Member States, for example, Finland had the highest percentage of employed people usually working from home in 2020 at 25.1% followed by Luxembourg (23.1%) and Ireland (21.5%).[218] Vast inequities in digital access, capacities, knowledge and affordability have also been further revealed by the pandemic. These disparities are being increasingly recognised and in

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[214] Hawai'i Green Growth (HGG) Local2030 Hub, 2020
[215] UCLG, 2021
[216] EU, 2019
[217] EU, 2019
[218] Eurostat, 2020

some contexts beginning to be addressed such as in New York City where an Internet Masterplan was developed in 2020, outlining approaches for connecting millions of residents without access to internet. Technological advancements have a major influence on key urban sectors such as finance, urban planning and education. For example, more marginalised communities are able to access finance through the growth in mobile money services. In line with NUA guidance Member States are increasingly adopting national ICT strategies (e.g. Germany, Sweden, Spain, Canada).

The smart city concept is also gaining increasing traction with growing emphasis on people centric approaches to smart city transition being increasingly emphasised such as in London and Barcelona. The Federal Smart Cities guide was issued by the US in 2018 and the Living in EU declaration was launched in 2020, followed by the EU Climate Neutral and Smart Cities mission in 2021. Effective and equitable technology governance is also increasingly emphasised such as London's 'Emerging Technology Charter' in 2021. The use of artificial intelligence is growing considerably in cities across the ECE region for diverse issues such as traffic management and energy efficiency. Barcelona, New York and Amsterdam have all published AI strategies and AI ethical frameworks in light of rising concerns around AI ethics and impact on human rights and gender equality.

In response to SDG 11, UNECE with ITU has also introduced the Smart Sustainable Cities (SSC) Programme for the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda in the UNECE Region (2020-2023). Several Smart Sustainable City Profiles (SSCPs) gave been developed, for example: a) NurSultan, Kazakhstan [219]. b) Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan and c) Grodno, Belarus. SSC profiles were also recently developed for Alesund, Asker, Rana, and Trondheim (Norway) and Voznesensk, Ukraine[220]. Strategies are data-driven and based on multi-stakeholder alliances that include diverse actors across state and non-state entities.[221] UNECE develops its smart sustainable cities profiles based on the key performance indicators under the SSC. Key performance indicators are closely linked to the SDGs and thereby support measuring and achieving the SDGs and NUA objectives at local levels. UNECE also endorsed the Guidelines on Tools and Mechanisms to finance SSC projects.

The NUA and SDGs recognize the importance of collecting and applying more accurate data. Both include commitments to improve the quality of actionable data for urban settlements and development. Multiple forms of data, including spatial and qualitative information such as best practices are relevant for the monitoring of and reporting on implementation of the NUA and other global agendas. Effective analysis and sound application of such data is central to achieving the goals of global agendas.[222] However, in a recent global assessment of VLRs cities noted major issues linked to data availability and aggregation. In many cases, there is no
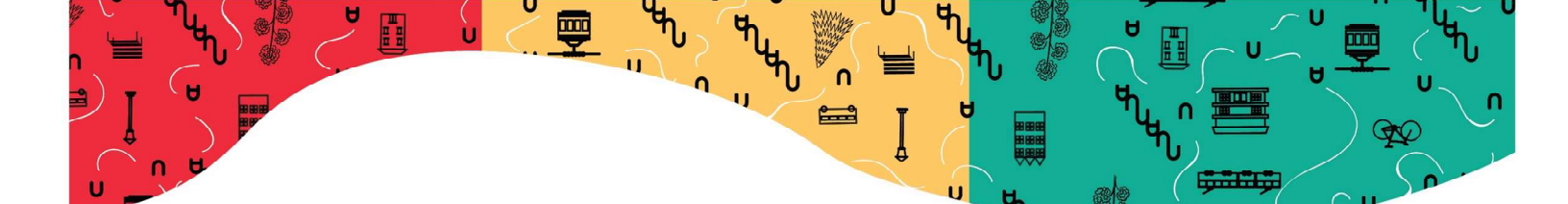
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[219] See https://unece.org/info/Housing-and-Land-Management/pub/2921
[220] See https://unece.org/info/Housing-and-Land-Management/pub/351960
[221] ITU and UNECE, 2016
[222] UN Habitat, 2018b

available data at the local level for certain indicators and existing data is outdated. A lack of data also undermines abilities to hold government accountable.[223] These aspects notwithstanding, much available data is tilted disproportionately towards cities in Europe and North America where settlement types, technologies and so forth facilitate effective data collection and analysis.[224] Cities are showing increasing creativity in overcoming this challenge such as through drawing on community data sources, open data and other sources. The process of localising SDGs can also help to review available data, and identify gaps for monitoring.

As stated in the 2018 Quadrennial Report, monitoring and reporting on the New Urban Agenda benefits from efforts to strengthen the SDG and other global agenda monitoring platforms.[225] UN-Habitat has begun to orient existing tools and initiatives such as the City Prosperity Initiative and the City Resilience Profiling tool to help address monitoring gaps for areas specific to the New Urban. Notably, several VLRs emphasise the importance of data sharing and are underpinned by data-transparency initiatives. The City of Los Angeles, State of Hawaii (in partnership with Hawaii Green Growth) and Helsingbord, Sweden have recently developed open data dashboards to display VLR progress and open opportunities for engagement by the public and all stakeholders.[226] Box 6 below provides further detail on Hawaii's Aloha+ Dashboard. The critical role of civil society in collecting and analysing data in support of achieving urban development goals is increasingly recognised in such initiatives. These open-data platforms support accountability and transparency on the goals, with community-driven metrics to inform local to national-level decision making. The critical role of civil society in collecting and analysing data in support of achieving urban development goals is increasingly recognised in such initiatives, including a core focus on gender equality in participation. These open-data platforms support accountability and transparency on the goals, with community-driven metrics to inform local to national-level decision making.

Box 6: State of Hawaii (in partnership with Hawaii Green Growth) Aloha+ Dashboard for measuring progress on SDGs:

The Aloha+ Dashboard (www.alohachallenge. hawaii.gov) is an open-data platform that measures progress on Hawai'i's state-wide sustainability goals. Metrics on the Dashboard were co-developed through an initial four-year stakeholder engagement process starting in 2014 facilitated by Hawai'i Green Growth that brought together government, business, academia, philanthropy, civil society and community partners in meetings across all four counties. Guided by measuring what matters to Hawai'i's communities, the Aloha+ Dashboard currently tracks six sustainability goals through thirty-seven targets and over two-hundred and eighty indicators based on available data. Hawai'i Green Growth Local2030 continues to convene stakeholders regularly throughout the year through
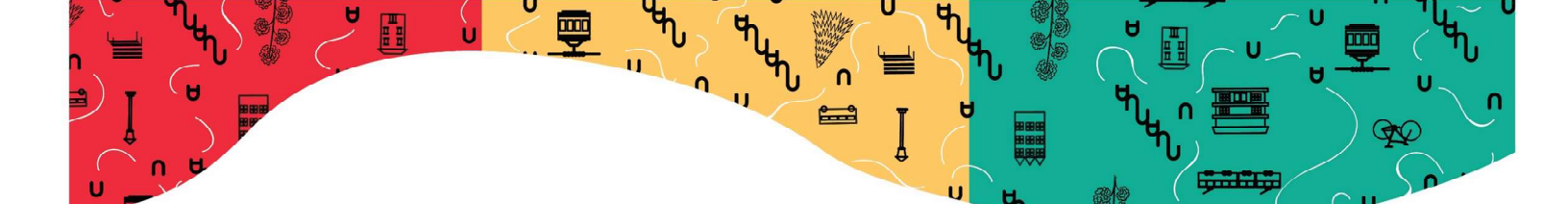
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[223] Mahendra et al, 2021
[224] UN Habitat, 2021
[225] UN Habitat, 2018b
[226] Hawai'i Green Growth (HGG) Local2030 Hub, 2020

established working groups focused on data, policy and legislation, local-global next generation leadership and a CEO-led Sustainability Business Forum.

The Voluntary Local Review is part of the on-going *Aloha+ Challenge* stakeholder engagement process through partner-driven working groups, forums and other convened processes to update the data, identify new metrics, and set priorities for action based on the trends. Hawai'i's local framework and process are aligned with the UN Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (IGIF) aimed at implementing the SDGs at the country-level, and can be applied to increased stakeholder engagement at the subnational leadership.

Source: State of Hawaii VLR (2021)

Trondheim, London and Amsterdam, have also recently developed open access platforms for city data, linked to SDGs.[227]

Fulfilling the NUA's transformative commitments in contexts of limited data and resources requires innovative approaches to mobilise and combine existing data sets, and necessitates delivering strategic action through collaboration of multiple actors and developing new innovative modes of data collection. As highlighted in the 2018 UN Quadrennial Report, of particular importance is drawing on multiple innovate data sources such as community-led data and enumerations that contribute to data and statistical capacities across all government levels, as well as drawing from extensive private sector sources.[228]

Over the past decade and particularly in recent years, data collection and analysis has been increasingly revolutionised through the rapid global increase in new innovative technologies and will continue to develop apace.[229] For example, service coverage data can be gathered in an efficient and frequent manner with high resolutions of spatial data and disaggregation between socio-economic groups.[230] Very large data sets can be generated using diverse technologies and tools that allow crowdsourced information to be gathered and rapid community surveys, as well as through anonymized mobile phone records and electronic transactions.[231]

In New York, government engagement through digital platforms is becoming increasingly commonplace. NYC Open Data — the nation's largest free municipal data service — is a digital pathway for New York residents to learn more about how government works, and to use data to gain a better understanding of their communities.[232] Box 7 highlights key plans to further enhance the NYC Open Data Program with a core focus on inclusivity and participation.

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[227] UCLG, 2021is
[228] UN Habitat, 2018b
[229] Mahendra et al, 2021
[230] Mahendra et al, 2021
[231] Mahendra et al, 2021
[232] NYC, 2019

Box 7: NYC Open Data Program, New York:

To further leverage the NYC Open Data Program , the city plans to:
• Increase the usability of the NYC open data platform by improving resources through Metadata for All,
• Train Students from the City University Of New York (CUNY) to identify, collect, clean, and publish data onto NYC Open Data.
• Develop a repository of open source educational resources to empower teachers, and commissioning curriculums for targeted communities such as activists
• Empower local activists and researchers to publish community-collected data onto NYC Open Data and provide a civic solutions pathway for locally developed data-driven solutions.
• Scale civic data literacy efforts by training volunteers across all five boroughs to provide NYC Open Data training at libraries and other community centers.
• Introduce the first NYC open data inclusive advisory council to further develop the City's Open Data program.

Source: NYC, 2019

Collaborations between cities, communities, universities, and the private sector are particularly important for developing inclusive and complementary data sets for supporting sustainable development and implementing the NUA.[233] Investments by national and regional governments as well as development agencies in capacity building at the city level for state and non-state actors in providing the tools and training for effective data collection, analysis and sharing is critical and can help lead to more inclusive policy. This needs to be ongoing since data and technologies are constantly evolving. Democratizing data production and access through the integration of community knowledge and other sources can reveal gaps in government action and support communities in advocating for change.[234]

There have also been increasing efforts by national statistical offices (NSOs) globally to localise SDG related data in support of urban and regional monitoring of progress in reaching the SDGs. For example, the government of Ireland – in partnership with Ordnance Survey Ireland, the Central Statistics Office and the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) – has created an online SDG platform (irelandsdg.geohive.ie) that incorporates data and maps at the regional scale for multiple indicators under the UN indicator framework (WCR). Evidence-based policies and measures in the EU are also enhanced by the Urban Data Platform, which includes extensive information on European cities and regions.[235] Such monitoring systems can facilitate best practice and information sharing across cities and regions in support of achieving the SDGs and NUA commitments.[236]

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[233] Mahendra et al, 2021
[234] Mahendra et al, 2021
[235] UCLG, 2021
[236] UN Habitat, 2020

The pandemic has further reinforced the importance of information technology and effective and accessible data for supporting effective data-driven decisions during times of crisis.

Innovative digital tools have been developed through collaborations between cities and the private sector, particularly tech companies. For example, Philadelphia has partnered with Mastercard to use 'DataBridge' data-sharing platform to support its response to the pandemic and is now drawing on the platform to correlate point-of-sale data with mobility patterns to improve understandings of economic trends.[237] London, Madrid and New York are also drawing on Mastercard's tools to support decision-making on budgets, aid disbursement and investment for post COVID recovery plans.[238]
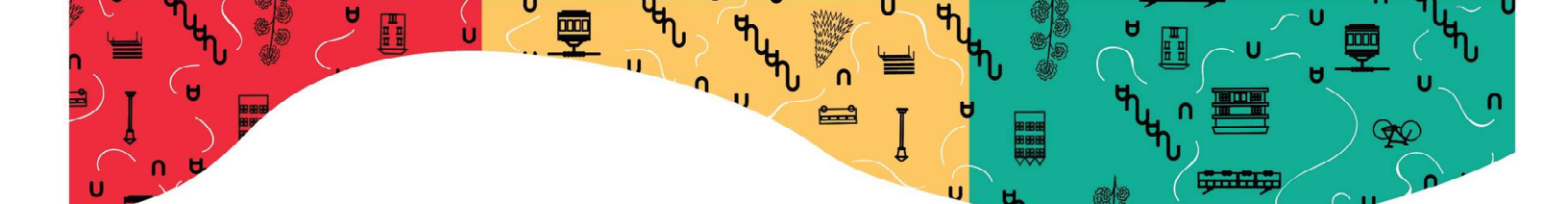
6. Concluding remarks and lessons for policy

Through drawing on illustrative examples and case studies from the recently launched NUA platform, VLRs and VNRs, amongst many other sources this report has assessed the implementation of the NUA for the ECE region for the period between 2018 and 2021. Particular focus has been on the NUA's three transformative commitments; *social inclusion and ending poverty; inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all; and environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development*. As shown throughout this report, considerable progress has been made since 2018; governments at all scales, together with civil society have been acting impactfully in implementing the goals of the NUA and the SDGs. There has been growing focus on reporting, monitoring and collaborations for progressing towards sustainable and resilient urban development. The 2030 Agenda represents a 'new social contract' for co-creation of sustainable urban futures.[239] Local governments are key actors in the new social contract and together with partner institutions including civil society, community groups, the private sector and regional and national governments can co-create transformative sustainability initiatives to help achieve the transformative commitments in the NUA. This has been exemplified by examples of collaborative responses to the COVID 19 pandemic highlighted throughout the report. In the context of increasing urbanization, the COVID 19 pandemic has further highlighted the rising importance of local governments and non-state actors within multi-level systems for identifying and implementing efficient responses and solutions to growing risks and threats and implementing the NUA and other global agendas. These developments need to be further harnessed and strengthened. In implementing the NUA, with all the supporting tools and monitoring platforms, such as the NUA platform, stakeholders will increasingly progress towards achieving resilient and sustainable urbanization.

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[237] UN Habitat, 2021
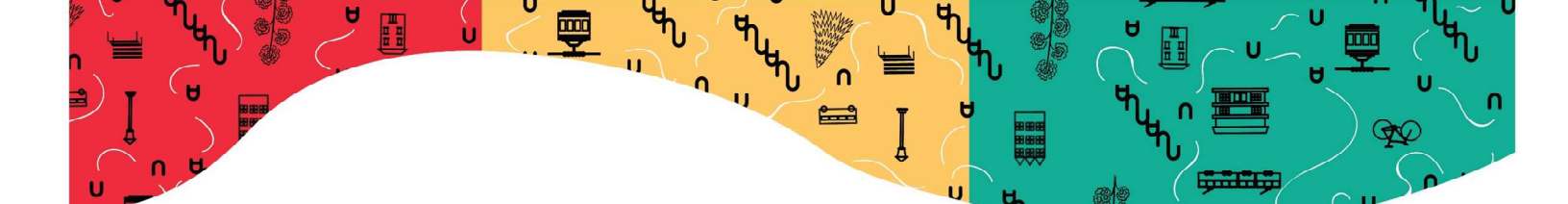[238] UN Habitat, 2021
[239] UCLG, 2019

However, much progress is still urgently required with many barriers and challenges to overcome for effective implementation of the NUA and achievement of its transformative commitments across the entire ECE region. Implementation of the NUA needs to be urgently accelerated if cities across the ECE region are to fulfil their commitments to the NUA, SDGs and other global agendas. As indicated in the AFINUA and UN Quadrennial Report for effective implementation of the NUA to be achieved and policy coherence developed it is essential for overarching enabling environments to be developed at all scales. Despite some significant progress, as highlighted throughout this report, key foundational elements of enabling environments remain a critical gap to address throughout the region. Amongst multiple others, these include adequate and equitable financing at all levels, capacity development, data availability and accessibility. Inadequate institutional and fiscal capacity is of particular concern at the local and regional government scale. Despite significant advancements presented through the report, far-reaching progress is still required for addressing cross-cutting issues that are critical to achieving the NUA. For example, prioritising the rights of vulnerable and marginalised groups, enhancing gender equality and cultural diversity and effective and equitable multi-level governance underpinning planning and decision-making processes. More innovative data collection and analysis methods are also urgently required. This will help to address gaps for goals that still have limited data and measurable targets particularly relating to children and youth, the elderly and disabled.[240] Each of these challenges identified have important implications for policy and planning for the 2026 Quadrennial Report and supporting the incremental approach outlined in the 2018 Quadrennial Report.

Globally, cities are only at the beginning of the long recovery from the devastating and far reaching impacts of the COVID pandemic which has exacerbated pre-existing structural inequalities. While COVID 19 has spread indiscriminately across the globe there has been a disproportionate impact on the lives and livelihoods of the poor and socially marginalised. As a consequence, the COVID19 pandemic risks further deepening existing inequalities and cultures of discrimination and undermining opportunities for already vulnerable groups such as migrants, disabled persons and women. The pandemic has reinforced the urgency of making progress towards urban sustainability and the challenges thereto. Environmental and social injustices have increased globally and are exacerbated by climate change. The impacts of COVID 19 and climate change are closely interconnected and do not conform to boundaries, thereby further highlighting the importance of multi-scale governance and collaboration for achieving environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development.

Cities worldwide can transform the COVID19 crisis into a window of urban opportunity to build back better – more sustainably and equitably. Attention to rights-based approaches and justice are essential, with inclusivity and equality at the forefront of policies, plans and actions. Central to this is also comprehending and addressing the structural drivers of risk and exclusion and linking to the broader

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[240] Nissen et al, 2020

goals of the SDGs and NUA. City governments are at the frontline of addressing these issues but require more support and collaboration from all other government levels, as well as from external actors and institutions. Increased investment is urgently required to support inclusive economic recovery and development across the region. Governments at all scales have already devoted highly significant COVID recovery funds and these need to be deployed in effective, equitable and sustainable manners.

The NUA and other global development agendas provide important enabling frameworks for meeting the challenges for achieving urban sustainability, recovering from COVID 19 and investing in the future. The global sustainable development agenda provides a unique framework and opportunity to invest for the future. The world is at a critical juncture for developing inclusive and locally led urban transformation pathways in implementing the NUA across all contexts. In implementing an incremental approach to achieving the NUAs urban futures need to be radically reimagined, with concurrent systemic changes in financing and investment structures and with cities at the centre, as drivers of innovation and solutions to global challenges. To achieve this and of importance for the 2026 Quadrennial Report is to continue to develop streamlined and integrated processes for monitoring and evaluation of the NUA and SDGs (and other global agreements) and promote their intricate relationship in terms of financing, local ownership and other key factors.

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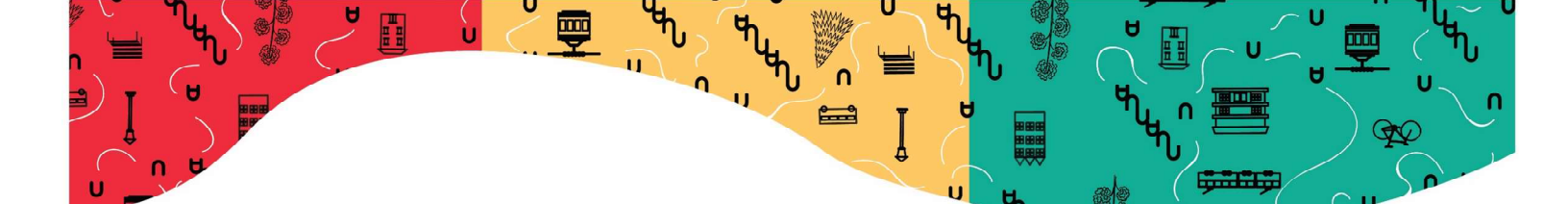
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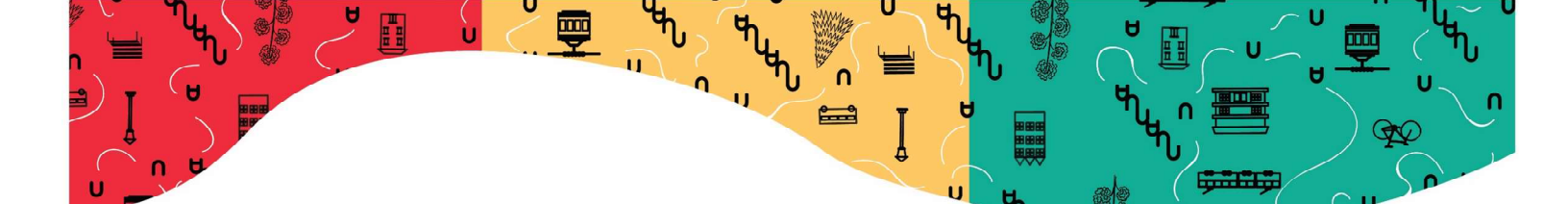
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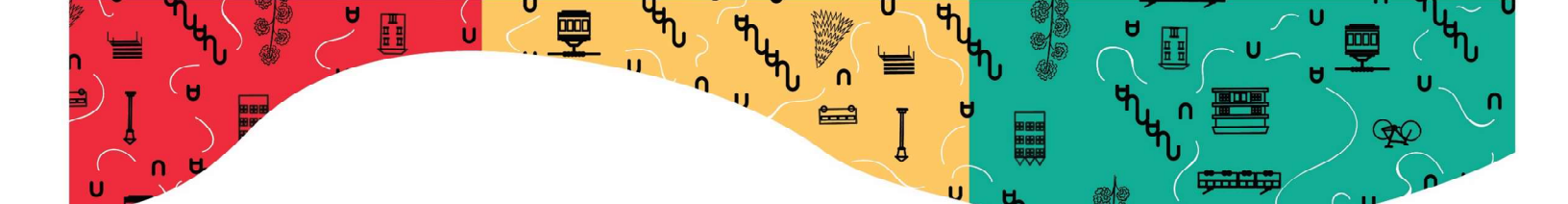
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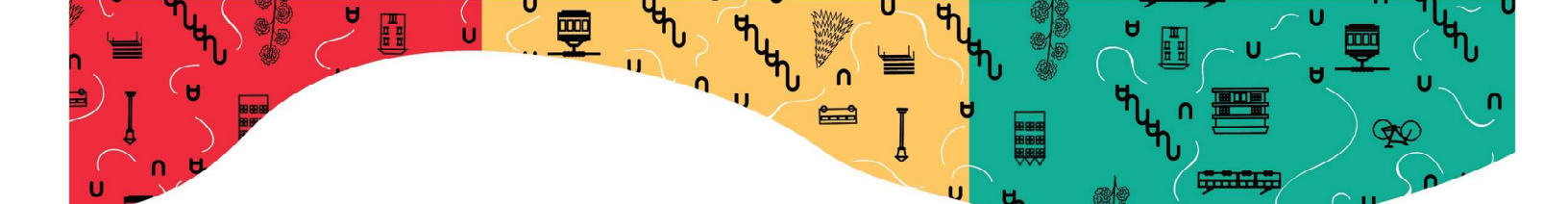
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