

REPORT FROM THE ROUNDTABLE “INFOCUS SDG11” 5 October 2020

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(5 min)

Madam the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
Distinguished delegates,
Excellencies,
Colleagues and partners,

It is my pleasure and honour to deliver the report on the outcomes and recommendations emerged from this year's roundtable “In Focus: SDG11”, organised by UNECE in cooperation with UN-Habitat and the Geneva Cities Hub. The event took place on the 5th of October, “World Habitat Day”, and featured a substantial participation by city networks, urban partnerships and initiatives that brought together the voices of cities and local authorities with Geneva-based UN agencies, NGOs, academia and civil society, to discuss and exchange on the topic of “Supporting city actions for a resilient future”.

I will now share a set of **key outcomes** and **recommendations** that emerged from the discussion.

As for the **outcomes**:

1. Multilateralism must be more than ever inclusive and multi-level.

This year's “sustainable cities week” at the UN in Geneva was acknowledged as an important step towards bridging the gap between global institutions and local governments. Opening panellists welcomed UNECE's and other UN agencies' “inclusive, multi-level multilateralism” approach that recognizes and works with cities and local authorities, including them in intergovernmental processes to tackle global crises, and to advance the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda.

2. Cities are the epicentres and the frontline responders of crises.

The socio-economic consequences of Covid have been particularly harsh and visible in cities. All levels of governments have mobilised in the emergency, yet cities and their communities have been at the core and at the forefront of the pandemic. They have led swift frontline responses redeploying municipal budgets, setting up emergency shelters, and readapting public service delivery to the crisis context.

3. Crises in urban settings magnified and exacerbated existing inequalities and vulnerabilities.

Covid brutally exposed the global housing crisis and the direct relationship between lack of access to public services and public health. It has taken a heavy toll on women, who born the brunt of unemployment, and experienced a surge in informal and domestic work and gender-based violence. It also exposed racial tensions and worsened the challenges of vulnerable groups including girls, migrant and refugees, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender

and Intersex individuals (LGBTI), many of whom are overwhelmingly affected by poverty, precariousness, inequality, discrimination and xenophobia.

Now, as for the **recommendations**, the following key messages stood out:

1. Global challenges need local solutions. Cities and local governments must have a seat at the table in global and national policymaking.

National crisis management committees need to include local and regional representatives. At a global level, a special envoy for cities to the UN Secretary General could be appointed and mayors' participation in national delegations at the UN General Assembly can be enhanced. New pathways are also needed for cities to take part in multilateral processes in their own capacity.

2. SDGs implementation must be fast forwarded and there needs to be a systemic paradigm shift that puts local governments and local communities at the heart.

SDG 11 is the backbone of all SDGs, which must be implemented at a local level. The global health crisis questions the current production and consumption models and requires putting the aspirations and the ambitions of local communities and societies at the centre of global policy and action, protecting our commons and ensuring public service delivery and access for all. As they build back, cities need to encompass a human-rights based approach in their recovery plans.

3. An inclusive, cooperative, whole of government and whole of society approach is a pre-requisite for effective, lasting recovery plans.

As Covid will leave behind a legacy of socio-economic hardship, all governance structures and stakeholders need to redouble efforts, cooperation, solidarity, trust and collective action to ensure that cities become key hubs of inclusion and equal opportunities for all. This vision requires the meaningful participation of local authorities and of all categories of inhabitants, including vulnerable groups, in global, national and local policy development and implementation.

4. Empowering local governments, building their capacity and securing adequate resources equates to empowering people.

Decentralisation, subsidiarity, local autonomy must be strengthened and accompanied by capacity building and adequate funding. There is an urgent need to redesign the architecture of municipal financial and fiscal systems to ensure that cities have adequate resources to effectively tackle the increasing demands and crises they face.

5. Good practice sharing, peer learning and cooperation across departments and across all levels of governments are essential to build effective local and national resilience plans.

There must be support for city-to-city cooperation to enhance peer learning and cross-fertilization on how to best develop specific solutions that consider and address local realities.

6. Reliable, consistent data collection, management and sound governance systems are critical to build effective crisis response and resilience plans.

They are fundamental to identify city needs and meet them with efficient solutions to crises.

I thank you for your attention and wish you every success in today's work and deliberations.