



POLICY BRIEF

URBAN DISASTER RESILIENCE

OVERVIEW

"We need a people-centred and inclusive approach to planning, building, and managing cities."

UN Secretary-General António Guterres

The world's population passed eight billion in late 2022, with much of the increase concentrated in ever-expanding urban areas, where more than 80 per cent of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is generated. By 2030, 60 per cent of people will live in urban areas. These cities, towns and settlements are already home to many of the world's development challenges – as well as many of its opportunities.

A series of compounding challenges – economic, social, and environmental – has meant an unprecedented period of uncertainty for many urban areas. In particular, climate-fueled disasters, such as the massive 2022 floods in Pakistan, are becoming more frequent, intense, and unpredictable for urban communities, resulting in many being caught in a vicious cycle of increasing exposure and vulnerability.

At the same time, local authorities are striving to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and other systems-wide crises, such as water, food and energy.

In the face of such a challenging context, there is the opportunity for national and local governments to scale-up their disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation actions to protect citizens and local infrastructure assets and systems before the climate emergency slams this brief window of opportunity shut.

The resilience dividends of such scaled-up disaster-risk-informed development are significant and include reduced inequality and greater social cohesion that can multiply through the interconnected systems that characterize every urban area.

KEY POINTS:

- The New Urban Agenda provides a clear, coordinated, integrated, inclusive, risk-informed framework for resilient and sustainable urban development. It identifies four fundamental drivers for transformational change: policy and legislation; urban and land use planning and design; governance; and financing mechanisms.
- National urban-resilience policies should, through regulatory and financial means, empower local authorities, as the closest institutional level to citizens and communities, to strengthen risk-informed development planning and investment towards low-emission, nature-based, equitable, resilient and circular development
- Investing in preventative measures, such as the Early Warning for All initiative, protects the lives, livelihoods and wellbeing of citizens.
- The use of clearer investment criteria and metrics, more public-private partnerships, and expanded regulatory frameworks, risk-proofs local infrastructure assets and systems, such as roads, power and water supplies, schools and hospitals.
- Widened use of technology, especially that within reach of least-developed countries (LDC) and small island developing states (SIDS), is a game-changer, enabling cities, for instance, to apply data analysis and develop innovative risk-management solutions.
- Mechanisms, networks and initiatives, such as Making Cities Resilient 2030 (MCR2030), harness the power of peer-to-peer learning between municipalities; help implement solutions to urban disaster resilience challenges; and broker technical support from partners, including the private sector.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction provides guidance and priorities for strengthening resilience. While a national government has the primary responsibility for preventing and reducing disaster risk, it is a shared responsibility between governments at all levels and relevant stakeholders.

Around the world, success stories of innovation in urban development and resilient investment are emerging. However, the political and financial will to catalyse this transformation in ambition and action at sub-national level is not at the scale needed.

The *main findings and recommendations of the Midterm review of the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030* can accelerate this transformation.

The Midterm review can also act as a bridge to influence other related processes and reviews, such as the UN Water Conference; the quadrennial review of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and SDG Summit; the High-Level Dialogue on Financing for Development; COP28 and the Global Stock Take of the Paris Agreement.

THE CHALLENGES

- Inter-connected risk drivers, such as poverty, inequality, unplanned urban development, weak governance and the decline of ecosystems, are creating consecutive and compounding shocks, pressures and increased vulnerabilities for urban areas.
- Systems-level crises, in water, food, health, energy and ecosystems, as well as climate and conflict-driven urban migration, are affecting an increasing number of urban areas.
- Rapid urbanization has increased this vulnerability and exposure to disaster risk. This is particularly the case in urban areas in LDCs and SIDS, as well as in smaller, and medium-sized cities and peri-urban areas in all contexts.
- There has been limited progress in the development of local disaster risk reduction strategies as well as access to quality data and reliable risk information. Existing solutions, such as from the private sector, are not being shared at scale.
- Capacities and guidance for systematic approaches to managing complex risks are inadequate. In tandem, there is a lack of multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder planning and implementation of climate and disaster risk reduction measures.
- Understanding of, and access to, financing options for disaster-resilient urban development remains a major gap.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

National and sub-national level

- Develop empowered, resourced and inclusive governance systems (legislation and policy) where national government promotes and coordinates the engagement of sub-national authorities, linking with all levels and all sectors.
- Promote meaningful and diverse participation, engagement and leadership, through an inclusive all-of-society approach that integrates gender perspectives and includes persons with disabilities in urban-resilience policies and practices
- Embed risk reduction at the core of integrated local development planning, so that plans are holistic and inclusive, backed by evidence-based legal and financial frameworks.
- Ensure appropriate national budget allocations, guidance, technical support, capacity building, data sharing and a clear division of roles and responsibilities between various actors.
- Establish strategic financing mechanisms to advance resilient public-infrastructure investment, coupled with strengthened local government capacity to develop projects and proposals that attract resources for resilient investments.
- Strengthen the links between local governments and international financing institutions and global financing streams, such as green finance, loss and damage finance.

- Prioritize equal access to public services such as health care, waste management, energy, sanitation, education and justice, to address inequalities.
- Ensure risk awareness and access to Early Warnings for All for every urban community by 2027.
- Expand the use of nature-based solutions that prioritize nature-friendly options such as promoting green spaces in urban areas over expensive engineering projects.
- Facilitate greater local-government-private-sector partnership through networks and platforms, such as the Private Sector Alliance for Disaster Resilient Societies (ARISE), to increase municipality access to wider technical skills and solutions as well as business's ability to operate and invest in a more climate and disaster-risk-sensitive manner.
- Enhance partnerships with scientific, technological and academic institutions to improve the quality of, and access to, applicable risk information for decision-makers.
- Invest in capacity development for data collection and analysis to shift from single hazard to multi-hazard risk assessments at local level, based on a deeper understanding of vulnerability and exposure.
- Explore the option of local governments adopting ISO37123 for resilient cities, to improve data management and risk-informed decision making, and establish dynamic monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess implementation of local disaster-resilience initiatives.

International level

- Agree on methodologies, definitions, concepts, metrics, parameters and timeframes for data collection, analysis, dissemination and reporting.
- Establish or enhance monitoring and reporting mechanisms for urban-resilience-related targets and indicators
- Scale-up the UN's Early Warnings for All initiative by 2027 so that all urban areas and their citizens are protected
- Advocate for scaled-up gender and disability inclusive approaches in urban-disaster-resilience policies and practices.
- Elevate the Leave No One/ No Locality Behind agenda, with a stronger focus on urban areas in more exposed and vulnerable contexts (i.e., LDCs, SIDS, and those cities in conflict situations) as well as smaller and medium-sized cities and peri-urban areas.
- Strengthen capacity development support to accelerate national-local disaster risk governance, the development and implementation of inclusive and participatory, multi-hazard local disaster risk reduction strategies with a broadened scope beyond preparedness and response.
- Invest in collective initiatives such as Making Cities Resilient 2030, to enable peer-to-peer learning, share solutions and facilitate technical support.