

Update from UN-Habitat on COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve rapidly and UN-Habitat is working on a daily basis to support its staff and partners, while also leveraging its knowledge to help cities and human settlements on the front lines manage the health, social, and economic impacts of the pandemic.

The world's great cities are now on the front line of the fight against COVID-19 with daily reported cases and death tolls rising. Ultimately, how urban areas respond to the pandemic will be critical to halt the pandemic. UN-Habitat's focus is supporting the city-level response by extending our work in informal settlements and slums. These underserved neighbourhoods are where communities are most at risk due to overcrowding and lack of basic services and medical facilities. We are working with our network of partners, communities, mayors, governors and slum-dwellers to find innovative ways to support their efforts.

How has UN-Habitat adapted and responded to the COVID-19 pandemic?

We have activated our emergency protocols. Our crisis management group, chaired by the Executive Director, Maimunah Mohd Sharif, meets daily to discuss three focus areas: business continuity (led by Director of Management, Advisory and Compliance Gary Landes); staff safety and security (led by the Officer-in-Charge of the Executive Director's Office Neil Khor); and our emergency programmatic response and coordination (led by the Director of External Relations, Strategy, Knowledge and Innovation Christine Knudsen who was also appointed Director of Emergencies following the COVID-19 outbreak).

The health and welfare of our personnel is a key priority and UN-Habitat Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya is working closely with regional and country offices to ensure our colleagues are able to take all possible steps for their safety and security. This means that we are providing regular advice, updates and guidance to staff and have instructed them to **work remotely, postpone work-related travel and replace all face-to-face meetings with video conferences**. The compound of the United Nations at Nairobi is now closed and only accessible by essential staff.

UN-Habitat is ensuring field staff have **adequate personal protective equipment (PPE)** while we also determine which programmes will **continue**, which need to be **scaled up**, and which need to be temporarily **suspended** for security and safety reasons.

In order to expedite innovative responses and quick impact in this fast-evolving global crisis, UN-Habitat has created an **emergency fund of USD \$1 million** to support small-scale projects addressing the needs for prevention and preparedness in informal settlements and slums.



With a focus on the most vulnerable, we hosted a **virtual expert group meeting on 20 March jointly with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)** to assess the needs and priorities of slums and informal settlements as well as identify creative solutions that could be easily deployed to slow and prevent disease spread. In overcrowded communities with limited or no access to basic services, we believe that guidance on social distancing, self-quarantine and regular handwashing must be realistically adapted to daily conditions that these communities face. Following the meeting's recommendations, we have activated our networks of partners to share this advice broadly, advocate for additional services and mobilize community engagement.

UN-Habitat recognizes that local governments are at the forefront of the struggle against COVID-19, and we are supporting them directly and through our partnership networks. On 25 March, in collaboration with United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and Metropolis, UN-Habitat launched **#BeyondTheOutbreak, a virtual live learning series for selected mayors and local leaders**. In the first three-hour session, 20 cities across Asia, Europe, South America and Africa shared their experience and some 100 participants joined the global online peer-to-peer session. This weekly series will focus on different issues relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic in urban areas, including housing, mobility and technology. These sessions will contribute to the **online knowledge database [Cities for Global Health](#), which already has 82 initiatives shared by cities around the world**.

In our host country of Kenya, we are working closely with the UN Country Team to support the government's efforts in this fight. We are seconding staff to support the Government of Kenya through **data mapping, economic analysis, public communications, and water and sanitation**. With partners, we are **sharing key messages about prevention and response in Swahili** and mobilizing with youth and community groups to scale up handwashing stations in slums.

UN-Habitat has joined the United Nations coordinated inter-agency appeal to **mobilize over USD \$2 billion for the Global Humanitarian Response Plan COVID-19**. UN-Habitat will support preparedness and response to the COVID-19 pandemic among the most vulnerable populations in urban settlements with a focus on delivering water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, modeling movement in urban areas and providing local authorities with messaging and advisory capacity on preparedness and response.

The UN Secretary-General's message is clear: "COVID-19 will require a response like none before — a 'war-time' plan in times of human crisis." UN-Habitat is implementing its plan in this time of crisis to ensure that its essential work continues and is scaled up to support cities, towns and communities, especially the most vulnerable, at this most critical juncture.