

**ECOSOC Special Meeting on the Implementation of the New Urban Agenda
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Statement by Dr. Zsuzsanna Jakab, Deputy Director-General, World Health Organization

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

With nearly 70% of the global population projected to live in cities by 2050, the World Health Organization considers sustainable urban development, through the lens of urban health, as a growing priority. WHO approaches cities as an important asset for ensuring health and well-being of citizens. As urban populations grow, urban development significantly influences public health across a wide range of issues, from inadequate housing and transport, to violence, poor sanitation and waste management.

The COVID-19 pandemic has served as a wake-up call for some, and a reminder for many others of the importance of the urban environments for health and well-being. The disproportionate impact that COVID-19 has had in cities has also highlighted the persisting health inequities at the urban scale, both in term of health access and outcomes.

We need to use what we have learnt from this experience to further strengthen people's health.

For the New Urban Agenda to further succeed, the health of the people who dwell in cities today must therefore be a central concern.

Over the last few decades, WHO has carried out work in urban health through a large number of activities.

The successful outcomes implemented since the adoption of the New Urban Agenda include the strengthening of well-established initiatives such as the Healthy Cities and the Age-friendly Cities. The breadth of technical areas covered by urban health work is wide, with targeted action in key areas such as air pollution, transport, non-communicable diseases, health emergency preparedness in cities and urban settings, and more.

Building healthy, liveable cities is one key prescription made by WHO's Manifesto for a healthy and green recovery, released in May 2020, a few months after the pandemic broke out. And integrating health and wellbeing into urban planning is a fundamental step in that direction.

The joint WHO / UN Habitat publication "Integrating Health in Urban and Territorial Planning", which has been conceived as a concrete support mechanism to implement the New Urban Agenda, assists national governments, local authorities, and planning professionals on how to incorporate health considerations into urban planning.

At the regional level, offices have been following mandates on urban health by expanding promotion programmes with municipalities, piloting local interventions such as the Urban Health Initiative, conducting urban community outreach programmes, setting up a regional observatory for urban governance, and validating regional frameworks for healthy cities.

All these activities strongly contributed to the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda and have been implemented in close collaboration with key UN agencies.

For decision-makers who apply a focused but flexible “health lens” to the New Urban Agenda, new opportunities – and cost-effective, inclusive ways of taking advantage of them – will come into sharp focus.

WHO will scale up concrete technical support for the implementation of regional and national response to address urban health, and will continue to actively participating in UN wide coordination on urban development going forward.

Thank you.