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Priority issues in achieving social development in the Arab region

**ESCWA, HABITAT III and the New Urban Agenda from a socially
inclusive perspective**

Summary

The present document sets out the preparations for and outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), held in Quito, Ecuador, from 17 to 20 October 2016. It presents the objectives of the New Urban Agenda adopted at Habitat III and its implications for the Arab region. It also provides information on ESCWA contributions to regional preparations, and its prospective role in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda from a social development perspective.

The document concludes with proposed recommendations on implementing the ESCWA urban mandate from a socially inclusive perspective.

CONTENTS

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	1-2	3
<i>Chapter</i>		
I. HABITAT III: RENEWAL OF COMMITMENTS FOR A NEW URBAN AGENDA	3-11	3
A. Habitat III	4	3
B. Ensuring the transformative role of cities towards sustainable development	5-9	4
C. The New Urban Agenda	10-11	4
II. REGIONAL DIMENSION OF PREPARATIONS FOR HABITAT III	12-15	5
A. Mandates for regional preparations	12-13	5
B. ESCWA regional preparations	14-15	5
III. REGIONAL CONSULTATIVE OUTCOMES TOWARDS THE FORMULATION OF THE NEW URBAN AGENDA	16-26	6
A. Transformative force of urbanization in the Arab region	16-21	6
B. Main regional messages shared in the global process	22-26	8
IV. THE NEW URBAN AGENDA, THE 2030 AGENDA AND ESCWA	27-32	9
A. Synergies and inter-linkages between the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda	27-29	9
B. Role of ESCWA in implementing and monitoring the New Urban Agenda and SDG 11 from a social development perspective	30-32	10
V. THE WAY FORWARD	33-36	11

Introduction

1. The United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) was held in Quito, Ecuador, from 17 to 20 October 2016. It concluded with the adoption of the New Urban Agenda, an action-oriented document guiding the next 20 years of sustainable urban development. The Agenda was subsequently endorsed at the seventy-first session of the United Nations General Assembly.¹

2. Habitat III was the first United Nations global summit held following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015, and of a new climate change agreement (Paris Agreement) in December 2015 at the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Habitat III therefore offered a unique opportunity to discuss the challenges of planning and managing cities, towns and villages, and their role as drivers of sustainable development. The New Urban Agenda sets out a vision to make cities more inclusive, and to optimize their role as drivers of economic growth and social development.

I. HABITAT III: RENEWAL OF COMMITMENTS FOR A NEW URBAN AGENDA

3. To render cities more inclusive and optimize their role as drivers of economic growth and social development, the Habitat III secretariat worked with various national, regional and global partners to formulate a new urban vision, which is not only fully inclusive but also sustainable, resilient and safe.

A. HABITAT III

4. The aim of Habitat III was to encourage United Nations member States to adopt a new global urban agenda, and reinvigorate previous global commitments on sustainable urbanization. The New Urban Agenda builds on the main messages of the Habitat Agenda issued at Habitat II (Istanbul, Turkey, 1996), which emphasized the notions of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements as drivers of development in an urbanizing world. In an inclusive and participatory process, Habitat III aimed to renew political commitment on sustainable urban development, assess progress achieved over the last two decades since Habitat II, and identify new and emerging challenges and priorities (box 1).

Box 1. Main targets of Habitat III

Habitat III aimed to:

- Rethink the Urban Agenda: by embracing urbanization at all levels of human settlements, more appropriate policies can embrace urbanization across physical space, bridging urban, peri-urban and rural areas, and assist governments in addressing challenges through national and local development policy frameworks;
- Integrate equity to the development agenda: equity becomes an issue of social justice, ensures access to the public sphere, extends opportunities and increases the commons;
- Foster national urban planning and planned city extensions;
- Decide how relevant sustainable development goals will be supported through sustainable urbanization;
- Align and strengthen institutional arrangements with the substantive outcomes of Habitat III, so as to ensure effective delivery of the New Urban Agenda;
- Revise and renew the mandate of UN-Habitat to ensure that it is fit for its purpose: UN-Habitat is ready to join efforts with government stakeholders to promote a new model of urban development for the twenty first century.

Source: <http://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda>.

¹ A/Res/71/256.

B. ENSURING THE TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE OF CITIES TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

5. Habitat III offered a unique opportunity to discuss the challenge of planning and managing cities, towns and villages, and their role as possible drivers of sustainable development. The world urban population grew from 746 million in 1950 to 3.9 billion in 2014.² This rapid urbanization process will continue – the urban population is expected to reach 66 per cent of the world’s total population by 2050, up from 54 per cent in 2014.³ Rapid urbanization is particularly prominent in developing countries: there are currently 28 urban agglomerations with populations exceeding 10 million, most of which are in developing countries.⁴

6. Major new challenges have emerged with rapid urban growth, including urban poverty and unemployment, slums and urban sprawl, gated cities, a lack of public spaces, overburdened basic urban infrastructure, considerable disparities between urban and rural areas, and the significant impact of urban agglomerations on human development, social cohesion, climate change and the environment.

7. These growing challenges require collective action at all levels to ensure that cities promote economic growth and prosperity in an environmentally sustainable manner. Adequate policies and new legislation must be implemented to ensure equity and equality of access to urban public and social services. Citizens must also be able to easily access means of production, and exchange goods and services in an optimal manner. It is hoped that commitment to the New Urban Agenda will provide an informed response to such challenges, while addressing the urban development needs and priorities of member States.

8. The Habitat III secretariat worked with various national, regional and global partners, including the United Nations regional commissions and other regional entities, such as the League of Arab States, to formulate a new urban vision, which is inclusive, sustainable, resilient and safe. The New Urban Agenda underwent several rounds of formal and informal discussions between stakeholders, United Nations experts and member States before its adoption at Habitat III. It goes well beyond the 1996 Habitat Agenda by addressing new urban challenges facing the world. It benefits from developments in technology and accrued knowledge, promotes a new model of urban development that integrates all facets of sustainable development to foster equity, welfare and shared prosperity, and considers means for mobilizing the global community to achieve those goals.

9. Cities and towns can act as effective and efficient drivers of sustainable economic and social development provided that inclusive and sustainable urban policies and programmes are put in place; necessary commitments are made by all actors; and agreed actions are implemented at the national, regional and global levels.

C. THE NEW URBAN AGENDA

10. The New Urban Agenda includes the Quito Declaration on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements for All, which emphasizes the need to maximize “the opportunities of urbanization as an engine of sustained and inclusive economic growth, social and cultural development, and environmental protection”.⁵ The Agenda’s implementation requires many actors, a variety of means, and an enabling environment. Capacity development, cooperation, financial resource mobilization, and political and legal frameworks all form part of the overall means of implementation.

11. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) is recognized in the Agenda as a focal point for sustainable urbanization. It will take the lead in supporting the follow-up and review of the Agenda, and in monitoring its implementation in collaboration with other United Nations entities, particularly the

² <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/Publications/Files/WUP2014-Highlights.pdf>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/Maps/CityDistribution/CityPopulation/CityPop.aspx>.

⁵ www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/256.

regional commissions. It has been agreed that the Agenda's follow-up and review mechanisms should go hand in hand with those of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

II. REGIONAL DIMENSION OF PREPARATIONS FOR HABITAT III

A. MANDATES FOR REGIONAL PREPARATIONS

12. The role of United Nations regional commissions in preparing for Habitat III was recognized by the General Assembly in resolutions 67/216, 68/239 and 69/226; by the Economic and Social Council in resolution 2012/27; and by the Governing Council of UN-Habitat in resolution 24/14, thus highlighting the regional dimension of the Conference. In these resolutions, the five regional commissions are requested to contribute to each stage of the preparatory process by drafting regional reports, contributing to a global outcome document, convening regional consultative meetings, and utilizing their regular sessions to provide inputs to the process and prospective commitments to the New Urban Agenda.

13. In line with those mandates, ESCWA actively supported the preparatory process for Habitat III, both regionally and globally, and led a regional consultative process to develop the regional messages included in the regional report, which contributed to the global process of formulating the Agenda.

B. ESCWA REGIONAL PREPARATIONS

14. ESCWA and the UN-Habitat Regional Office for Arab States (ROAS), in close cooperation with the League of Arab States, led the regional preparations for Habitat III. Other regional partners were brought on board, including United Nations stakeholder organizations, urban development experts, regional organizations including the League of Arab States and the Arab Towns Organization, and civil society organizations. A regional road map of activities was developed jointly by ESCWA and ROAS, in close consultation with the Habitat III secretariat, and included preparing a regional report, providing assistance in preparing national reports that fed into the regional report, holding a set of regional consultative expert group meetings, actively participating as United Nations System Task Team focal point for Habitat III in the United Nations inter-agency meetings, coordinating regional preparations with the other four regional commissions, and organizing several awareness-raising campaigns on the New Urban Agenda.

15. These national and regional consultative processes and activities identified emerging urbanization trends in the region over the past 20 years and their accompanying challenges, and the main priorities and best practices, which were ultimately shared in the global process to formulate the New Urban Agenda. ESCWA also participated in and contributed to the preparatory committee meetings held in preparation for Habitat III: PrepCom II (Nairobi, April 2015) and PrepCom III (Surabaya, Indonesia, 2016). As a focal point of the United Nations System Task Team for Habitat III, ESCWA was actively engaged in informal meetings on formulating the Agenda, and in discussions on the final drafts before its adoption. The activities assumed by ESCWA⁶ were aligned with the UN-Habitat road map towards Habitat III. ESCWA also coordinated with the other four regional commissions to ensure coherence of the ongoing regional preparations, flesh out the regional dimension in the Agenda, and explore possible synergies and cooperation opportunities in the implementation of the Agenda after its adoption.

⁶ See document E/ESCWA/SDD/2017/IG.1/3 for details of the main activities assumed by ESCWA in preparation for Habitat III and during the Conference.

III. REGIONAL CONSULTATIVE OUTCOMES TOWARDS THE FORMULATION OF THE NEW URBAN AGENDA

A. TRANSFORMATIVE FORCE OF URBANIZATION IN THE ARAB REGION

16. The goals of inclusion, resilience, safety, prosperity and sustainability are critical to the development of Arab cities and the Arab region, which is undergoing rapid population growth. In 2010, 56 per cent of the population of Arab countries (estimated at 357 million) lived in cities. By 2050, the total population of Arab countries is forecast to increase to 646 million, 68 per cent of whom will live in cities.⁷ The urban population in Arab countries grew four-fold between 1970 and 2010, and will more than double between 2010 and 2050.

17. Table 1 sets out the average annual change rates of the urban population in all Arab countries, and compares them with world averages. Over the period 2010-2015, 16 of 22 Arab countries were estimated to have higher average annual change rates than the world average.

TABLE 1. AVERAGE ANNUAL CHANGE RATES OF THE URBAN POPULATION
IN ARAB COUNTRIES, 2000-2030 (percentage)

Location	2000-2005	2005-2010	2010-2015	2015-2020	2020-2025	2025-2030
World	2.27	2.20	2.05	1.84	1.63	1.44
Algeria	2.63	2.87	2.77	2.26	1.77	1.33
Bahrain	5.50	7.08	1.71	1.77	1.28	1.00
Comoros	2.42	2.60	2.67	2.71	2.81	2.98
Djibouti	1.49	1.49	1.60	1.52	1.35	1.18
Egypt	1.74	1.68	1.68	1.75	1.79	1.86
Iraq	2.88	2.54	3.01	2.79	2.68	2.43
Jordan	2.23	4.49	3.79	1.26	1.79	1.56
Kuwait	3.74	5.31	3.63	2.29	1.99	1.75
Lebanon	4.31	1.84	3.18	-0.57	0.81	0.64
Libya	1.70	1.73	1.13	1.64	1.37	1.13
Mauritania	4.52	4.04	3.54	3.20	2.88	2.62
Morocco	1.62	1.89	2.26	1.92	1.68	1.41
Oman	3.03	2.86	8.54	2.17	1.53	0.96
Qatar	6.72	15.38	6.02	1.63	0.95	0.74
Saudi Arabia	4.35	2.25	2.10	1.81	1.34	1.02
Somalia	3.85	3.75	4.06	4.05	3.99	3.86
State of Palestine	2.40	2.69	2.81	2.75	2.61	2.41
Sudan	2.77	2.62	2.54	3.02	3.14	3.21
Syrian Arab Republic	2.78	4.09	1.37	3.59	2.27	2.09
Tunisia	1.54	1.38	1.38	1.28	1.12	0.94
United Arab Emirates	6.81	14.64	2.87	2.32	1.82	1.61
Yemen	4.72	4.29	4.03	3.76	3.40	3.00

Source: <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/DataQuery/>.

18. Table 2 shows that, in 2014, 18 Arab countries had higher mid-year urban population shares than the world average of 53.6 per cent. In Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, over 80 per cent of the population lived in urban areas.

⁷ <https://unhabitat.org/books/the-state-of-arab-cities-2012-challenges-of-urban-transition>.

TABLE 2. PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION IN ARAB COUNTRIES AT MID-YEAR RESIDING IN URBAN AREAS

Location	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2014	2020	2030
World	29.6	33.7	36.6	39.3	42.9	46.6	51.6	53.6	56.2	60.0
Algeria	22.2	30.5	39.5	43.5	52.1	59.9	67.5	70.1	73.4	77.4
Bahrain	64.4	82.3	83.8	86.1	88.1	88.4	88.5	88.7	89.1	90.0
Comoros	6.6	12.6	19.4	23.2	27.9	28.1	27.9	28.2	29.0	31.5
Djibouti	39.8	50.3	61.8	72.1	76.0	76.5	77.0	77.3	77.8	79.2
Egypt	31.9	37.9	41.5	43.9	43.5	42.8	43.0	43.1	43.8	46.7
Iraq	35.1	42.9	56.2	65.5	69.7	68.5	69.0	69.4	70.2	72.4
Jordan	37.0	50.9	56.0	60.0	73.3	79.8	82.5	83.4	84.8	86.6
Kuwait	61.5	74.9	85.7	94.8	98.0	98.1	98.3	98.3	98.4	98.6
Lebanon	32.0	42.3	59.5	73.7	83.1	86.0	87.2	87.7	88.4	89.6
Libya	19.5	27.3	49.7	70.1	75.7	76.3	77.6	78.4	79.6	81.8
Mauritania	3.1	6.9	14.6	27.4	41.3	49.2	56.7	59.3	62.6	66.9
Morocco	26.2	29.4	34.5	41.2	48.4	53.3	57.7	59.7	62.6	67.0
Oman	8.6	16.4	29.7	47.6	66.1	71.6	75.2	77.2	79.7	82.8
Qatar	80.5	85.3	88.4	89.4	92.8	96.3	98.7	99.2	99.5	99.7
Saudi Arabia	21.3	31.2	48.7	65.9	76.6	79.8	82.1	82.9	84.1	85.9
Somalia	12.7	17.3	22.7	26.8	29.7	33.2	37.3	39.1	42.0	47.3
State of Palestine	37.3	44.0	54.3	62.4	67.7	72.0	74.1	75.0	76.4	78.8
Sudan	6.8	10.7	16.5	20.0	28.6	32.5	33.1	33.6	35.0	38.8
Syrian Arab Republic	32.7	36.8	43.3	46.7	48.9	51.9	55.7	57.3	59.7	63.8
Tunisia	32.3	37.5	43.5	50.6	57.9	63.4	65.9	66.6	67.9	70.6
United Arab Emirates	54.5	73.5	79.8	80.7	79.1	80.2	84.1	85.3	86.8	88.5
Yemen	5.8	9.1	13.3	16.5	20.9	26.3	31.7	34.0	37.5	43.2

Source: <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/DataQuery/>.

19. The Arab region is experiencing the transformative force of urbanization. Many Arab countries have embarked on successful urban development plans and projects, sometimes as part of national development planning strategies,⁸ to meet rising demand for housing and urban services and facilities, and to provide necessary urban infrastructure for service growth and development. However, the process of urbanization in several Arab countries has been accelerated and complicated by conflict, crises and massive displacement and migration, posing considerable added challenges.

20. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the region is witnessing globally unprecedented rates of refugees and displaced persons, mainly in connection with recent conflicts in Iraq, Libya, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.⁹ Cities and towns in both conflict and neighbouring countries have struggled to accommodate the influx of millions of refugees and displaced persons, coupled with insufficient housing and other social services. The last few decades have also witnessed unprecedented growth in informal settlements, including in urban peripheries and on agricultural land, which

⁸ See, for example, ESCWA, Bridging the Urban Divide in the ESCWA Region: Towards Inclusive Cities, 2011; and UN-Habitat, The State of Arab Cities 2012: Challenges of Urban Transition, 2012.

⁹ The numbers of refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees (refugees and IDPs) and stateless persons of concern to UNHCR registered by the end of 2014 were approximately 11.6 million Syrians, 4.1 million Iraqis, 2.9 million Sudanese and 2.3 million Somalis. These fall under the concern of UNHCR, whereas Palestinian refugees and IDPs fall under the responsibility of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). See www.unhcr.org/statistics/country/556725e69/unhcr-global-trends-2014.html.

sometimes threaten the environment and natural resources, exacerbate water scarcity, and overburden already strained urban infrastructure.¹⁰ Other challenges have also arisen, including issues related to employment, equity, equality, sustainability, decent and adequate housing, and the lack of public spaces.

21. A new participatory approach to housing and urban development is therefore needed in the Arab region to address increasing urban challenges, and to meet the needs and aspirations of its peoples in terms of inclusiveness, sustainability, social cohesion and prosperity.

B. MAIN REGIONAL MESSAGES SHARED IN THE GLOBAL PROCESS

22. Consultative activities led by ESCWA to reach consensus on regional messages to be shared in the global process to formulate the New Urban Agenda resulted in a major regional report,¹¹ addressing the contribution of urbanization to development in the Arab region. The report comprises five main parts, an executive summary and a concluding chapter. Each part focuses on drivers of the region's urbanization and the proposed policy responses of Arab Governments on the impact of urbanization trends and dynamics, including population dynamics, economic, social, environmental and governance issues, sustainability, inclusion, social cohesion, resilience, and the security of Arab cities and societies.

23. The main messages of the report focus on achieving more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable Arab cities. It was recommended that a new consensual approach to housing and urban development be introduced in the region to meet the needs and aspirations of its peoples. The challenges and priorities the report identifies deal with economy, employment, population dynamics, and urban governance. Rapid urban growth has resulted in critical urban challenges, including a lack of decent employment, expansion of slums and informal settlements, urban sprawl, inadequate provision of basic urban services, social inequity and exclusion, insufficient urban governance capacity, and shortfalls in municipal financial resources. In addition, many Arab cities face a wide range of pressing environmental challenges, including climate change, sustainable water and natural resources management, and solid waste disposal. In several Arab countries, those challenges are exacerbated by occupation, war, civil unrest, political turmoil and displacement.

24. Noting the above and based on the analysis provided in the regional report, many key regional challenges need to be addressed to meet the objectives and targets of the New Urban Agenda, including the following:

- Increase equality of access to opportunities for the advancement of Arab populations, especially for young people; and create an enabling environment and incentives to increase investments in productive employment opportunities;
- Tackle economic and social inequalities and provide social protection for all, including migrants; develop innovative policies for the displaced that go beyond durable shelter solutions; and uphold the rights of refugees, including their right of return;
- Promote equitable access to urban services and opportunities, notably for low-income groups and marginalized populations;
- Address climate change, water scarcity and current resource-use patterns, and employ adequate management for the preservation of valuable resources and the protection of the environment.

25. The above cannot be achieved without fostering sound urban growth management strategies, urban governance and citizen participation, and developing inclusive and sustainable reconciliation, restitution and

¹⁰ www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/social-development-bulletin-urbanization-sustainable-development-arab-region-english.pdf.

¹¹ ESCWA and others, Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development Regional Report for the Arab Region: Towards inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable Arab cities (forthcoming).

reconstruction frameworks in the region. The report suggests that urban challenges can be effectively addressed through the formulation and implementation of urban policies covering five broad areas: employment, population dynamics, equitable access to the city and urban services, environment and climate change, and urban governance.

26. Ultimately, the report tries to formulate a new inclusive approach to sustainable urban development, anchored in the key principles and goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to ensure the safety, inclusiveness, resilience, and sustainability of Arab cities and societies.

IV. THE NEW URBAN AGENDA, THE 2030 AGENDA AND ESCWA

A. SYNERGIES AND INTER-LINKAGES BETWEEN THE NEW URBAN AGENDA AND THE 2030 AGENDA

27. Following the adoption of the New Urban Agenda, United Nations member States and stakeholder organizations, led by UN-Habitat, were invited to determine necessary actions for achieving sustainable urban development, while anchoring the New Urban Agenda in the 2030 Agenda.¹² SDG 11 specifically addresses cities and human settlements, with particular emphasis placed on the need to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. It emphasizes universal access to adequate, safe and affordable housing, basic services and sustainable transport systems, and slum upgrading, among other critical urban economic, social and environmental issues (box 2).

28. ESCWA, together with UN-Habitat and other regional and global partners, is currently working on detailing the interlinkages between the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda. Analysis and discussions focus on the synergies and points of alignment in implementation and outcome processes.¹³ Ten SDGs are directly or indirectly linked to SDG 11, and to 30 per cent of its targets and 39 per cent of its indicators.¹⁴ In addition, the League of Arab States, in cooperation with other regional and national partners, has developed the Arab Strategy for Housing and Sustainable Urban Development 2030, launched at Habitat III. ESCWA seeks to strengthen its collaboration with the League and UN-Habitat ROAS on implementing the Strategy, in line with the New Urban Agenda and SDG 11.

29. The 2030 Agenda proposes the means of implementation to be adopted as an integral part of the 17 SDGs. For SDG 11, this means strengthening national and regional development planning with a view to strengthening socioeconomic and environmental links among urban, peri-urban and rural areas; formulating and implementing integrated policies to promote inclusion, resource efficiency, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and disaster risk management at all levels; and providing financial, technological and other support to least developed countries. The details of those interconnections are currently being discussed globally and regionally with regards to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. ESCWA is currently joining forces with international, regional and specialized organizations to clarify synergies between the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda, and to harmonize, utilize and optimize the outcomes of both agendas to promote development.

¹² [A/RES/70/1](#).

¹³ Cities Alliance, Sustainable Development Goals and Habitat III: Opportunities for a Successful New Urban Agenda, 2015.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Box 2. SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

11.1 By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums;

11.2 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 of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons;

11.3 By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries;

11.4 Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage;

11.5 By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations;

11.6 By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management;

11.7 By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities;

11.a Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning;

11.b By 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels;

11.c Support least developed countries, including through financial and technical assistance, in building sustainable and resilient buildings utilizing local materials.

Source: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>.

**B. ROLE OF ESCWA IN IMPLEMENTING AND MONITORING THE NEW URBAN AGENDA
AND SDG 11 FROM A SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE**

30. The New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda foresee a pivotal regional role in achieving their goals. Increasingly, regional and subregional country groupings are being requested to identify solutions to their common development challenges, and regional institutions are called upon to work collectively with member States to develop regional strategies and approaches. Furthermore, the 2030 Agenda notes the importance of inclusive regional follow-up and review processes, and encourages the regional commissions to support United Nations member States in those processes. The New Urban Agenda also supports United Nations regional and subregional collaboration with all levels of government, for an “inclusive, multilevel, participatory and transparent follow-up and review of the New Urban Agenda”.¹⁵

31. In resolution 67/290, the General Assembly decided that the first meeting of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development would have a thematic focus, reflecting the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development. The resolution states that the theme of the 2018 Forum shall be “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies”. The resolution also provides that the Forum, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, “shall discuss a set of Goals and their interlinkages, including, if appropriate, with other Goals, at each session representing the three dimensions of sustainable development, with a view to facilitating an in-depth review of progress made on all Goals over the course of a

¹⁵ A/RES/71/256, para. 162; and A/RES/70/1.

four-year cycle, with means of implementation, including with respect to Goal 17, reviewed annually". For 2018, the SDGs to be reviewed in detail include Goal 11 on human settlements, Goal 6 on water and sanitation, Goal 7 on energy, Goal 12 on sustainable consumption and production patterns, and Goal 15 on terrestrial ecosystems.

32. ESCWA is well positioned to work with its member States on extending support for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and SDG 11. It is already entrusted by its member States to help integrate the SDGs into their national plans by providing the necessary regional platforms to facilitate coordination, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda.¹⁶

V. THE WAY FORWARD

33. ESCWA will provide support to its member States in implementing the New Urban Agenda, including on issues pertinent to social inclusion, urban poverty reduction, equity and equality, housing and slum upgrading, and on key environmental and economic issues, while aligning the outcomes to the 2030 Agenda. In doing so, ESCWA will benefit from its already established mandates, make use of its global and regional knowledge platforms, and develop synergies with key regional partners, such as UN-Habitat ROAS, the League of Arab States, and the Arab Towns Organization.

34. Those mandates have been strengthened by a recent ESCWA Executive Committee recommendation, requesting the ESCWA secretariat to produce normative studies and provide technical cooperation to support the implementation of the New Urban Agenda by member States in the economic, social and environmental fields.¹⁷

35. ESCWA has the expertise and capacity to respond to this strengthened mandate in several economic, social and environmental areas, including policy analysis of the provision of adequate housing, social inclusion and social protection.

36. The implementation of several activities in these areas will be carried out through the continued production of studies, policy research and analysis; the organization of expert group meetings; and the implementation of field projects and the provision of technical assistance.

¹⁶ See Doha Declaration on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially paragraph 27 detailing the type of support needed.

¹⁷ See report of the third meeting of the ESCWA Executive Committee.