

**Committee:** Social, Cultural and Humanitarian

**Issue:** Humanitarian Response to Urban Crisis in light of the New Urban Agenda

**Student Officer:** Kally Glentze

**Position:** Chair

## INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is a modern issue, which is increasing in importance as the population is rising and the resources and space are limited. Over recent years there has been an increase in the migration from rural areas to urban areas, especially in countries which are still developing. This is due to the fact that as a country is developing the majority of the work force abandons primary jobs, such as agriculture and moves into secondary jobs (such as manufacturing) and tertiary jobs (such as medicine, teaching, etc). In most countries, rural areas are not developed and most only provide jobs revolving around agriculture. As a result, more people migrate into urban areas and as a result urbanization occurs.

The United Nations has created 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) which attempt to tackle worldwide issues whilst improving living standards internationally. Specifically, goal 11 aims to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.<sup>1</sup> The United Nations recognizes that cities are one of the areas where inhabitants have a fair access to advancements both socially and financially. However, they acknowledge the reality of the situation. This means that cities which grow rapidly with erroneous planning tend to be unable to cater for such high populations. For example, in Bangalore, India in 2015 there were 7 million inhabitants with a double increase of urban population in the past 30 years. The city is struggling to handle such a high population; however, it is projected to have 21 million inhabitants by



<sup>1</sup>"Cities - United Nations Sustainable Development Action 2015", *United Nations Sustainable Development*, 2019 <<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/cities/>> [Accessed 7 July 2019].

2100.<sup>2</sup> The city itself even 25 years ago was uninhabited and now its environment has been sacrificed for the fast-growing economy of India which without planning destroys the land.

For cases such as these, the United Nations attempts to tackle this issue through further adjustments and improvements. This is where the New Urban Agenda comes into practice as it answers the question for whom and how this improvement will take place. The New Urban Agenda is an attempt to solve this issue through ensuring a new global standard for sustainable urban development. One goal of the New Urban Agenda is to provide basic services for all citizens, ensuring cleaner cities and addressing climate change in relation to greenhouse gasses.

The New Urban Agenda can be divided into five different sections. Primarily, the national urban policy. This forces and promotes the government to commit and act sufficiently. Secondly, urban legislation, rules and regulations. These can be thought as various rules, such as how and where buildings should be built as well as the ratio between built-up areas vs. green land. A law could possibly be that each building, whether residential or industrial, should have a proportion of green areas. Then, urban planning and design. There should be an agreed upon ratio between public and private space across all cities. Another section is urban economy and municipal finance. This means that the city should work to help improve the economy of the country through ensuring productivity. Finally, the law requires local implementation.

## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

### Urban Crisis<sup>3</sup>

A certain combination of factors joined together which highlight the problems currently faced in cities. These factors are as follow.

- 1) Primarily the increased issue of poverty both in the degree of poverty but also the severity of poverty.
- 2) The inability of governments to reach a budget balance as there is a huge reliance on revenue from taxes and a large amount of money spent on subsidizing firms and the rich.
- 3) Government bureaucracies need to be maintained however politically ingrained they are.
- 4) The inadequacy of health services which is reflected in the rates of infant mortality.

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<sup>2</sup>John Vidal, "The 100 Million City: Is 21st Century Urbanisation Out Of Control?", *The Guardian*, 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/mar/19/urban-explosion-kinshasa-el-alto-growth-mexico-city-bangalore-lagos>> [Accessed 7 July 2019].

<sup>3</sup>"Urban Crisis And Black Politics", *Solidarity-U.S.Org*, 2019 <<https://solidarity-us.org/atc/54/p2882/>> [Accessed 7 July 2019].

## New Urban Agenda

This was adapted by the United Nations in order to promote housing and sustainable urban development in all regions.

## Urban Environments

Urban environments are characterized by high numbers of very different people living and working in close proximity to one another. <sup>4</sup>

## Displaced persons <sup>5</sup>

This term is connected to the physical displacement of people from their current area of residence to another. The reasons for this are referred to as social change and issue; the reasons are usually natural disasters, famine and development or economic changes. These people are usually measured as a percentage known as Internationally Displaced People (IDP).

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The New Urban Agenda provides solutions which counter the issue of urbanization whilst improving economic and living situations. There is a manipulation of the physical situation of a country in order to promote a sufficient urban service, working infrastructure, formal settlements, economics stability, equality, social security and environment. Three different levels exist for the easier implementation of the New Urban Agenda. These include city level, region level and national level.

By 2030, there is a prediction that 4 billion people will live in the low-income and middle-income towns and cities of various countries. It is also known that over the past 40 years approximately, there has been a 326% increase in urban population in lower-income and struggling countries. <sup>6</sup> This is due to the fact that people who are either refugees or emigrating for either economic or social issues tend to live in urban areas which are more compact. As most countries do not have many areas which are easily accessible to emigrants, the problem of urbanization is exacerbated. To clarify, if for example a man decides to immigrate with his family to Greece, they will most likely live in Athens. This is reasonable since Athens has more

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<sup>4</sup> Parker, Elizabeth. *Humanitarian Response to Urban Crisis*. OAD, [pubs.iied.org/pdfs/10742IIED.pdf](https://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/10742IIED.pdf).

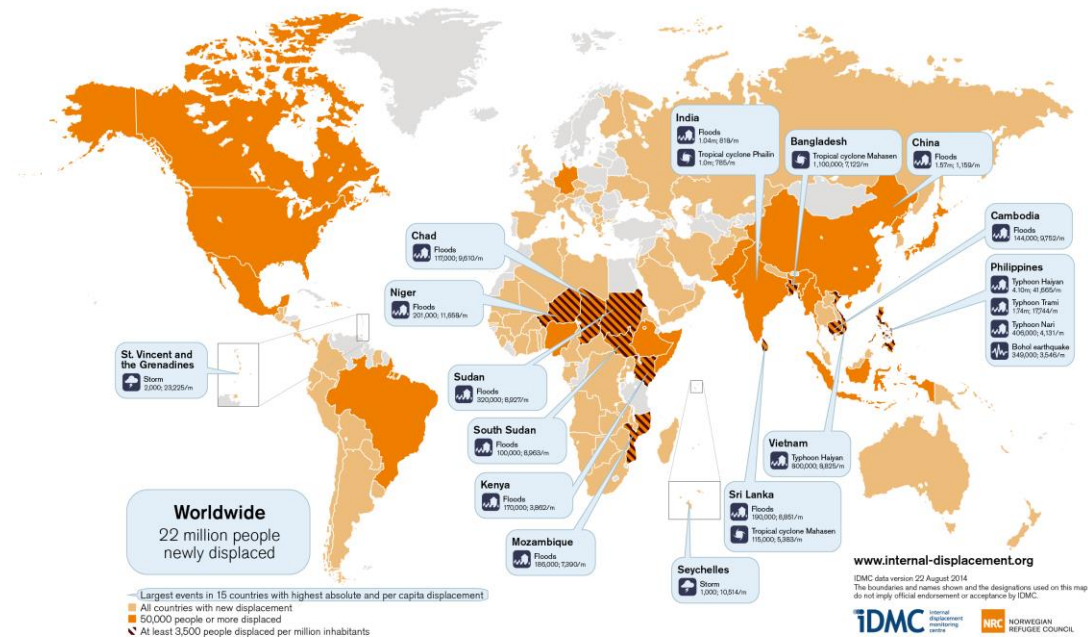
<sup>5</sup> "Displaced Person / Displacement | United Nations Educational, Scientific And Cultural Organization", *Unesco.Org*, 2019 <<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/displaced-person-displacement/>> [Accessed 7 July 2019].

<sup>6</sup> "Publications." *Publications | IDMC*, Sept. 2014, [www.internal-displacement.org/publications/global-estimates-2014-people-displaced-by-disasters](http://www.internal-displacement.org/publications/global-estimates-2014-people-displaced-by-disasters).

to offer a family, however, as this happens consistently with many people all over the world it is an issue for urban areas.

It is important to be aware of the number of people and the rate at which people are migrating from country to country. The main reasons for displacement are usually wars, natural hazards or financial reasons. Figure 1.1 highlights solely the displacement of people due to natural hazards. What is shocking is the fact that these 22 million displaced people who are recorded have been displaced solely due to environmental factors and other factors such as economic or social are excluded.

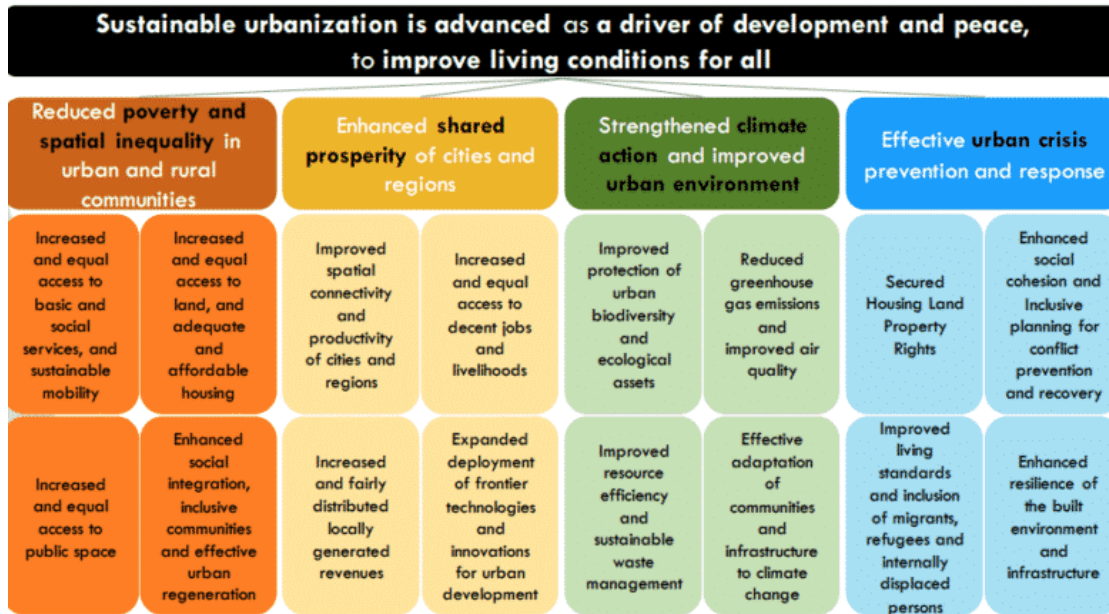
**Disaster-induced displacement worldwide in 2013**



**Figure 1.1 Data of those displaced due to natural disasters and hazards**

This data highlights the importance of the environmental aspect which needs to be solved as it causes the displacement of millions of people. This displacement leads to a pressure on resources and spaces of specific areas only, which causes issues for the lives of all the inhabitants. Large numbers of displaced people aggravate the problems of urbanization as besides the existing issue of unplanned building and management of a city there is an additional pressure from the population which moves to the city for reasons such as natural hazards.

Unfortunately, the displacement issue is not solely based on natural hazards and environmental factors. The humanitarian response and attempts are often not tightly connected to local municipalities in countries which are suffering. This means that the plans of the New Urban Agenda are not always as effective due to communication issues. Also, it is difficult to trace and control every action each rural or urban area takes in order to be able to avoid the issue of displacement. For example, this is clear with Syrian refugees where there were not enough plans or instructions provided for the migration. Their migration should have been completed as smoothly as possible with the prospect of protecting the people and reducing inequalities, however this was hardly controlled.



*Figure 1.2 UN's agreement concerning the urban crisis*

Figure 1.2 represents a summarized form of UN's agreement on how the situation should deal with the crisis. It highlights the topics and discussions of the new urban agenda. There are four main focuses.

Primarily poverty and spatial inequality are focused on in both rural and urban areas. This could be improved with an equal and increasing access to social services as well as access to land and affordable housing. Furthermore, allowing more access to public spaces as well as greater social integration could create a more peaceful and equal environment.

Shared prosperity aims to improve spatial connectivity and productivity of cities and regions as well as increase the access to fair jobs and livelihoods equally. Another aim is to fairly distribute local revenue and promote innovation in sectors of urban development and frontier technologies.

Taking into account the importance of the active climate change, there is a focus on protecting urban biodiversity and ecological assets while reducing the emission of greenhouse gases that have an effect on air quality; therefore, improving it. Climate change is not going away anytime soon; as a result, communities and infrastructure should be effectively adapted for this change. Importantly, sustainability concerns not only our current generation but allows for us to consider the needs of future generations, therefore by ameliorating resource efficiency and effectively managing sustainable waste we could do our part in helping others. The Paris Agreement is one of the primary steps to improve the situation.

In recent years there has been an increase in crises across the world. That being so, by preventing and responding effectively to such urban problems would make communities coexist in better terms. Immigrants and refugees have been displaced from their homes and a solution to improving their quality of life would be to improve living conditions, while also including enhancements in social cohesion and planning for conflict recovery and prevention. The ability to come back from damage and difficulties is what would make any community stronger. Finally, securing housing and property rights would prevent petty property disagreements.



## MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

### Vienna, Austria

Vienna's population has grown drastically with 12% from 2007 to 2016 and is expecting another 2 million migrants by 2029. Vienna is known to some as an 'immigrating city' as many people, mostly Europeans migrate to Austria mainly for living standards. Public spaces need to be organised in a way which will benefit the urban lifestyle. Already, there have been 10,000 new homes and 20,000 new jobs are offered, however it is difficult to counter the problems that arise with the increasing percentage of IDP. The people in Vienna recognize that immigrants come from a different cultural background and they try to help with the difficulties they may face when living in Vienna. Small attempts such as improvements of the schooling systems have been made to ensure all the goals which are set by the New Urban Agenda are met.

### Syria<sup>7</sup>

In Syria urbanization has increased by 25% in 4 years from 2010 to 2014. There has been a large issue with the displacement rate of people. 3.2 million people live in cities which suffer from the inability to provide enough facilities for their inhabitants. This means that the number of hospitals, schools and housing units which were available are currently not operating due to damage. The UN-Habitat project has started a strategic plan in 2015 which encompasses new city profiles; support in water supplies, hygiene and waste management; shelter protection and responses; and various reports on the situation of Syrian cities.

### UN-Habitat Assembly<sup>8</sup>

The United National Habitat Assembly met on the 27-31<sup>st</sup> of May 2019 in Nairobi, Kenya for the first session. The theme was the Innovation for Better Quality of Life in Cities and Communities. The sub-theme of this assembly was the 'Accelerated Implementation of the New Urban Agenda towards Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals'. This assembly established the Executive Board of the UN-Habitat as well as elected its members with the initiative for them to discuss and ensure the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. Another aim was to approve the UN-Habitat Strategic Plan 2020-2025.

### Paris Agreement<sup>9</sup>

The Paris Agreement acknowledges the global warming issue that the world is facing as well as its severity. In the Paris Climate Conference 195 countries discussed topics

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<sup>7</sup>"UN-Habitat Syria Priorities For 2015 – UN-Habitat", *Unhabitat.Org*, 2019 <<https://unhabitat.org/syria-un-habitat-syria-priorities-for-2015/>> [Accessed 7 July 2019].

<sup>8</sup>"UN-Habitat Assembly – UN-Habitat", *Unhabitat.Org*, 2019 <<https://unhabitat.org/habitatassembly/>> [Accessed 7 July 2019].

<sup>9</sup>"The Paris Agreement | UNFCCC", *Unfccc.Int*, 2019 <<https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>> [Accessed 7 July 2019].

such as controlling the emission of greenhouses gases as well as the impact of climate change. It was agreed that there would be an attempted controlled increase of only 2°C from current worldwide temperatures. These goals have been set for either 2025 or 2030 depending on the country where future targets are sets. Countries have also been informed of a 5 year review of the goals set which promotes the enforcement of various actions to counter the issue. The Paris Agreement is relevant, as it promotes a more sustainable way of living. A better quality of life is the main aim.

### United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

In 2017, the UNDP along with Member States endorsements presented the Strategic Plan 2018-2021 which allocated strategic guidance to the policies and programmes of the UNDP for the following four years. This plan aims for a new and improved UNDP to provide support and help to countries with problems such as extreme poverty and inequality while achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

It recognizes that the fluctuation of demographic patterns tests mainstream ideas of development, while understanding that to address urban challenges requires dedication and intricate applications of investment and expertise in each country and circumstance as a case of its own to be handled by good practices and international standards.<sup>10</sup>

The Plan encourages the discovery of new ways of ‘working to help sectors to work better for sustainable development [and] enabling them to prevent crisis and recover faster’. This coincides with the reform agenda of the UN Development System of the Secretary General.

### TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
Haiti 2010 - Natural Hazard	A large earthquake occurred in 2010 in Haiti which was eye-opening as to the consequences which are faced as a result of demographic shifts. A large number of people are still living in camps despite humanitarian responses, which lead to questions on the efficiency, resources and knowledge the Haitian capital had.
Syria 2011 – Civil War	There has been an urban crisis in the Middle East and the situation has forced Syrian citizens to flee the country to cities in neighboring countries. Pressure of space, jobs and homes has been an

<sup>10</sup>"Cities 2030: Implementing The New Urban Agenda | UNDP", *UNDP*, 2019  
<https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/blog/2018/cities-2030--implementing-the-new-urban-agenda.html> [Accessed 7 July 2019].

	issue and there are still a large number of people living in camps.
Japan 2011- Natural Hazard	In 2011, there was a major environmental issue of an earthquake, a tsunami and a nuclear accident which caused a humanitarian crisis and negative economic impacts.
Ecuador 20 <sup>th</sup> of October 2016	The New Urban Agenda was adopted in the conference Habitat III.
23 <sup>rd</sup> of December 2016	The New Urban Agenda was endorsed in the General Assembly in a conference concerning housing and sustainable urban development.

In the table above, various natural hazard or civil wars have caused humanitarian crises which have triggered an alarm. Responses from the United Nations and worries from the UNDP have produced the New Urban Agenda in order to improve the living situations as well as aim to fulfil the goal 11 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

### **UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS**

(December 2012) <https://undocs.org/A/RES/67/216>

This resolution enforces the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements and initiates the implementation of the Habit Agenda.

(December 2013) <https://undocs.org/A/RES/68/239>

This resolution addresses the decision of the United Nations to convene the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development.

(December 2014) <https://undocs.org/A/RES/69/226>

This resolution implements the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) whilst works to strengthen the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat).

(December 2015) <https://undocs.org/A/RES/70/210>

This resolution is a further continuation of the aforementioned resolutions.

(December 2016)

[https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A\\_RES\\_71\\_256.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_71_256.pdf)

The resolution continues and adapts the previous resolution in order to improve the situations of the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

### **PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE**

### **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

Upon discussion of how to solve any issue it is important to recognize what the problem is. In this case facts and data are the basis of the issues which join to create what is known as the urban crisis. However, for the correct implementation of solutions, it is important to ensure that more thorough research is done in order to



understand the functioning of countries, cities and municipalities. Through this, solutions can be achieved to a greater extent.

The spread of public knowledge, advertising and education of the topic would also promote the speed at which actions are completed. Most of the humanitarian literature is aimed at an audience of humanitarian agencies and within the general humanitarian community. Through further education to less involved parties there would be large benefits. For example, there would be a wealth of new solutions and ideas which have not been heard of or considered. Moreover, through the formation of smaller groups of locals, their voices would be heard. This would improve the solutions as the cause of the problem would be clearer.

The issue derives from the displacement of people towards cities as they believe they will have a better quality of life there. However, it is important to set limits to the number of new inhabitants each city can accept. Through the development of more urban areas this would be a goal which would be more easily achieved. This means that there should be a spread of the facilities and services which are offered in capital cities throughout the whole of the country. This would encourage people to live in other areas outside cities which would stabilize populations and therefore promote equality.

This could be done through granting subsidies to construction and firms in areas outside the main urban areas. Therefore, people would be more attracted to those areas to live as rent would be cheaper. Also, if the firms are able to invest in those areas of land, especially when they need large areas of land for factories, they will be more likely to locate outside the city. Then these 'rural areas' are more accessible and attractive to people as they will be able to work near their homes as well as pay lower rent. Eventually, as people move outside the cities, there will be even growth which will promote equality and improve living conditions.

The issue is, however, how this will be implemented in different countries as it is difficult for humanitarian communities and agencies to communicate with every municipality and government. Through closer and more interactive workshops or presentations this could spread and if legislation and rules are passed, the implementation will be even easier. This solves the issue of the spatial issue and better living standards.

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