

**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific****Eightieth session**

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Item 4 (c) of the provisional agenda\*

**Review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific and issues pertinent to the subsidiary structure of the Commission: environment and development****Crisis-resilient cities for a sustainable Asia-Pacific region****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The present document contains an overview of the current state of urban development challenges in the Asia-Pacific region and policy recommendations for sustainable urbanization. It provides information on a range of multidimensional approaches and strategies necessary to drive sustainable urban development in the Asia-Pacific region, drawing on insights from the report *Crisis Resilient Urban Futures: The Future of Asian and Pacific Cities 2023* and from discussions and outcomes of the Eighth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum, including the high-level communiqué for sustainable urban development in Asia and the Pacific and country statements by member States on sustainable urban development.

The Asia-Pacific region is rapidly urbanizing, with the urban population projected to increase from approximately 2.5 billion in 2023 to 3.4 billion in 2050, making it one of the most populous regions in the world, with growing cities, economies and digital landscapes. The region is also facing multiple interlinked crises that are having an impact on cities, infrastructure, biodiversity, pollution and policies to address climate change, which make the achievement of sustainable urban development both urgent and essential. Cities, especially in developing countries, are under pressure to meet the growing demand for urban services, housing and infrastructure with limited resources and capacity. The escalating nature of these challenges and the growing urban population create a demand for immediate action to make cities more inclusive and crisis-resilient. In order to ensure that no one or place is left behind, it is essential to employ inclusive urban and territorial planning, people-centred policies, local climate action, multisector partnerships, digital technology and targeted finance to create compact and low-carbon cities supported by urban nature.

In the present document, the secretariat advocates for collaborative partnerships involving Governments, businesses, civil society and local communities and encourages regional dialogue and collaboration to identify and address common challenges in sustainable urban development.

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific may wish to take note of the priorities and recommendations contained in the present document and advise on the future work of the secretariat.

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\* ESCAP/80/1.

## I. Context

1. The Asia-Pacific region is currently undergoing a spatial, social, environmental and economic transformation, driven by rapid urbanization and economic growth. The associated significant shift in demographics is reshaping the landscape of the world's most populous region, with the urban population expected to surge from approximately 2.5 billion in 2023 to 3.4 billion by 2050.<sup>1</sup> The emergence of cities as dynamic hubs of economic, social and technological progress is a defining feature of the Asia-Pacific region's twenty-first century narrative. At the same time, urbanization in the region presents its own set of challenges and complexities. As urban areas grow and prosper, they also confront multiple interconnected crises that cannot be addressed by traditional capabilities and approaches, necessitating innovative solutions and new development pathways. These challenges include critical issues such as persisting infrastructure gaps and housing shortages, rising cost of living, increasing energy demands and pollution, widening social inequality, loss of nature and green space, growing impacts of climate change and increasing vulnerability to disasters, all intersecting with the lingering consequences of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The pandemic revealed vulnerabilities, such as insufficient access to basic services and fragile or failing health-care systems, and exacerbated socioeconomic disparities due to rising unemployment and increased costs, pushing many into poverty.<sup>2</sup> All of these complexities have significant implications for the spatial, social, economic and environmental development of cities in the region. Understanding the scale and complexity of these issues is essential for policymakers and practitioners to make informed decisions to ensure transformative, resilient and sustainable urban development. The region's urban centres are currently home to 54 per cent of the global urban population,<sup>3</sup> demonstrating how sustainable urban development and localization of the Sustainable Development Goals are needed to protect the long-term well-being of the region's inhabitants and the health of the planet.

2. Key to addressing the challenges caused by rapid urbanization are robust urban and territorial planning processes, which have a direct impact on the sustainability of cities. The effectiveness of urban and territorial planning depends on the existence of legislative and regulatory frameworks that guide spatial and land-use planning, as well as the capacity of governments to manage and enforce such frameworks. By prioritizing integrated urban and territorial planning as a foundational principle to support sustainable urban development, countries may be able to navigate the challenges of rapid urbanization and population growth more effectively and achieve more balanced growth. What can pose significant problems, however, especially in developing countries experiencing rapid urbanization, is unplanned urbanization. It strains urban planning management and environmental sustainability, while placing immense pressure on local governments already grappling with limited resources and capacity to meet the growing demand for urban services. The convergence of multiple crises further compounds these challenges, increasing the strain on urban systems, exacerbating social inequality and heightening vulnerability to climate change.

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<sup>1</sup> *Crisis Resilient Urban Futures: The Future of Asian and Pacific Cities 2023* (United Nations publication, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *The Future of Asian and Pacific Cities: Transformative Pathways towards Sustainable Urban Development* (United Nations publication, 2019).

3. Cities across the region are confronted with many challenges stemming from climate change impacts that require mitigation, adaptation and resilience-building strategies. These challenges, which include rising temperatures that lead to heatwaves, an increase in extreme weather events such as typhoons and floods, and heightened risk of sea level rise for coastal cities, have a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable populations. In response, cities are intensifying their efforts to implement climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, focusing on bolstering infrastructure resilience and nature-based urban solutions, transitioning to renewable energy sources, embracing sustainable urban planning and adopting policies and local climate action plans that promote climate resilience solutions. Solving these challenges also requires improved data collection and monitoring systems and multi-stakeholder engagement, especially from those most affected.

4. As they expand and develop, cities are key contributors to climate change, owing to their increased energy usage and unsustainable consumption and production patterns. This trajectory is unsustainable and needs to be addressed as the region's urban population continues to grow. More than 70 per cent of the region's emissions are generated in urban areas.<sup>4</sup> This is especially significant as the Asia-Pacific region now accounts for more than half of global greenhouse gases. Emissions in the region have doubled since 1990, in parallel with urbanization trends, largely due to increasing demand for electricity and growth in the manufacturing and transport sectors, with significant concentrations in urban areas. There is also an urgent need to address the impacts of climate change in the region, which are especially visible in cities. During the past six decades, temperatures in the Asia-Pacific region increased faster than the global mean, intensifying the urban heat island effect and drastically escalating the demand for cooling solutions.

5. Urban air pollution has become a crisis in the region, as the combination of energy, transport, household, industrial and biomass emissions and other pollutants from construction has concentrated in urban areas. Cities across the Asia-Pacific region are regularly identified as having the worst air quality in the world. Air pollution is recognized as one of the most pressing environmental challenges in Asia and the Pacific. The crisis has only heightened in recent years, leading to a rise in premature deaths, threatening livelihoods and compromising the sustainable development of the region, in particular in many cities where air pollution has worsened as the urban population has grown. In 2019, the United Nations Environment Programme claimed that 2.3 billion people in the region are exposed to air pollution at concentrations several times the World Health Organization guideline level for safe air.<sup>5</sup> In 2022, 16 of the 20 most air-polluted cities in the world were in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>6</sup> Addressing the intertwined challenges of climate change and air pollution requires creating innovative adaptation strategies, aggregating solutions, collaborating across all levels of government, improving data

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<sup>4</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change – Contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, Priyadarshi R. Shukla and others, eds. (Cambridge, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Cambridge University Press, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> *Air Pollution in Asia and the Pacific: Science-based Solutions* (United Nations publication, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> IQAir, “2017–2022 World’s most polluted cities”. Available at [www.iqair.com/us/world-most-polluted-cities](http://www.iqair.com/us/world-most-polluted-cities) (accessed on 15 January 2024).

collection and using localized evidence – all of which are vital to expediting climate action and sustainable development in urban settings.

6. Economic activity plays an important role in driving the sustainability of cities, and the Asia-Pacific region is home to some of the world's fastest growing economies. As its cities continue to grow, they create vast potential for digital markets and products, contributing to massive growth and investment in the digital sector. Revenue in the Asia-Pacific Internet of things market is estimated to reach \$436 billion by 2026, of which smart cities are expected to account for one third.<sup>7</sup> Digital technologies are also creating new job opportunities and contributing to economic growth by enabling increased productivity and reduced transaction costs. Smart cities in South-East Asia have the potential to deliver real quality-of-life improvements, including an additional 1.5 million jobs through the creation of more efficient and productive environments for businesses and hiring.<sup>8</sup> Overall, growth in the digital sector is driven by a growing middle class, increasing smartphone adoption, higher online business penetration and an increasing number of government initiatives to digitalize economies. At the same time, cities across the region are experiencing unequal growth and development. Unplanned and unmanaged urbanization leads to increased congestion, pollution and environmental degradation and contributes to growing infrastructure and social inequality. There is also a growing digital divide across cities, countries and subregions, which highlights the importance of making digital technology, connectivity and literacy inclusive to ensure that everyone can benefit from technological advancements.

7. One pressing challenge in the context of inclusive urban digitalization is the need for coherent national policies that support and guide local governments and their smart city strategies. It is essential to ensure no one is left behind, in particular by addressing gender, disability and human rights considerations. A significant hurdle has been the tendency to treat smart city development ventures as isolated projects rather than integral components of a broader, multi-stakeholder policymaking process. There are opportunities to initiate digital transformation in government services in order to enhance accessibility and reach historically marginalized communities. The implementation of digital transformation projects should be guided by long-term, people-centric policies aimed at reducing access gaps in a socially diverse and pro-poor environment and providing a more comprehensive vision for leveraging digital innovation for sustainable development and climate action.

8. The finance challenges faced by cities in the Asia-Pacific region are multifaceted and pose significant hurdles to sustainable urban development. These challenges include insufficient local revenue generation, hindering the ability of cities to meet the increasing demand for services and infrastructure, and a substantial investment gap for essential urban projects in areas such as transportation, water supply and climate resilience. The presence of informal settlements and growing income inequality in urban areas further complicate resource allocation and equitable financing. Weak municipal borrowing capacity, governance issues and corruption can divert resources from essential

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<sup>7</sup> Denham Sadler, "Smart cities to fuel growth in IoT", Information Age, 27 April 2021.

<sup>8</sup> McKinsey & Company, "Smart cities in Southeast Asia", discussion paper, July 2018. Available at [www.mckinsey.com/~/media/mckinsey/business%20functions/operations/our%20insights/smart%20cities%20in%20southeast%20asia/mgi-smart-cities-in-southeast-asia.pdf](http://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/mckinsey/business%20functions/operations/our%20insights/smart%20cities%20in%20southeast%20asia/mgi-smart-cities-in-southeast-asia.pdf).

projects, while the digitalization of financial systems introduces cybersecurity concerns and the need for universal Internet access. Other challenges include the difficulty for cities to access long-term financing and data gaps in their finance flows. Addressing these issues necessitates innovative financing mechanisms, improved governance structures, capacity-building at the local level, a commitment to sustainable and inclusive urban development and collaboration among governments, the private sector and international organizations to find effective solutions.

9. Bridging the urban climate finance gap is imperative given the challenges arising from rapid urbanization and the compounding effects of climate change on cities. To address these urban finance challenges comprehensively, it is essential to strengthen local revenue systems, enhance collaboration between the private and public sectors through mechanisms such as public-private partnerships and ensure that civil society is actively engaged. Recognizing the importance of a just transition and ensuring the inclusion of vulnerable groups in climate finance initiatives are also crucial, as is using digitalization to equip local governments with more efficient tools for financial management. Adopting a holistic approach that involves government bodies and wider society is paramount, particularly in addressing the complexities of informality in urban areas.

## **II. Sustainable urban development policy recommendations**

10. The present document contains sustainable urban development policy recommendations with a focus on four thematic areas: urban and territorial planning; urban resilience and climate action; inclusive urban digitalization; and urban finance. These insights are drawn from various regional dialogues, including the Eighth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum, which was held in Suwon, Republic of Korea, from 23 to 25 October 2023, and from the flagship report *Crisis Resilient Urban Futures: The Future of Asian and Pacific Cities 2023*, which was jointly developed by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the Asian Development Bank, the city of Suwon and the University of Melbourne. Regional dialogues are crucial for engaging diverse stakeholders and representatives from across the Asia-Pacific region to address the multifaceted challenges and opportunities brought about by rapid urbanization and climate change. Collaborative partnerships and regional dialogues also play a pivotal role in contributing to policy and actions that align with the Sustainable Development Goals. The policy recommendations for sustainable urban development in the Asia-Pacific region outlined below, which are taken from the flagship report, are a result of these regional dialogues, as well as expert inputs, and highlight the significance of transformative urban and territorial planning, action-oriented climate initiatives, inclusive digital transformation and technology support, innovative financial mechanisms and capacity-building.

11. Promoting sustainable urban development in the region requires significant investment in urban and territorial planning processes, legislation and regulatory frameworks and enhanced implementation capacities at both the national and local levels. It also requires creating accessible and green public spaces and infrastructure, actively engaging communities and ensuring balanced, inclusive and equitable territorial development. Urban planning plays a pivotal role in driving sustainability, as planners, policymakers and developers must consider the intricate web of systems within cities and the advantages of planning for compact, low-carbon, resilient and well-organized urban spaces. In so doing, they can address many challenges, including

mobility issues, ensuring universal equitable access to services and providing affordable housing, in particular for people living in informal settlements. Integrated and inclusive planning is crucial, emphasizing a holistic perspective that encompasses social, economic and environmental dimensions. Urban planning must prioritize the needs of vulnerable groups, such as older persons, women, persons with disabilities and young people, to create more liveable and inclusive cities. Collaboration among governments, the private sector, civil society, academia and local communities is essential for cities to achieve these goals and enhance resilience, reduce inequality and promote sustainable urbanization. This applies to megacities, secondary cities and smaller urban centres alike, as municipalities of all sizes face urban development challenges in the Asia-Pacific region. The urban and territorial planning policy recommendations set out in the flagship report are: (a) create a policy environment for transformative and resilient urban planning, enabled by multilevel governance; (b) ensure capacity-building and coordination for effective urban planning and local action; (c) develop holistic housing, urban planning and disaster risk management policies, strategies and regulations to tackle the affordable housing crises in cities; and (d) promote integrated, compact, mixed-use neighbourhoods and cities, supported by public transport and active mobility to meet climate and sustainability targets.

12. Urban resilience and climate action are necessary to address the consequences of climate change that threaten urban centres in Asia and the Pacific. The region is vulnerable to extreme weather events and climate-related hazards, with significant implications for cities. The impact of rapid urbanization, coupled with rising greenhouse gas emissions, inadequate infrastructure, limited financial resources and competing development priorities, complicates efforts to implement effective climate mitigation measures. The policy recommendations set out in the flagship report to ensure the development of low-carbon and resilient cities in the Asia-Pacific region, supported by an enabling environment at the national and regional levels, are: (a) integrate urban communities as key actors to build resilience against climate and other shocks; (b) deploy innovative urban adaptation pathways to address existing and new climate risks; (c) enhance data collection and local evidence to inform and accelerate climate action in cities; (d) shift to low-carbon sources to tackle the urban energy crisis; (e) provide platforms for monitoring, reporting, verifying and integrating multilevel climate action; and (f) harmonize and enhance nature in cities to address climate, clean air and biodiversity crises.

13. Emerging challenges related to inclusive urban digitalization have highlighted the need for cohesive national policies that provide vertically integrated support for local governments. Urban digital transformation in the context of sustainable urban development should focus on how to ensure inclusivity, accessibility and the equitable distribution of digital technologies, in particular in areas with limited infrastructure and resources. Leveraging partnerships with the private sector to drive innovation, mobilize investment and implement digital solutions at scale, which would ultimately accelerate the region's progress towards building sustainable and inclusive smart cities, is important. The recommendations set out in the flagship report for policymakers to consider as immediate actions to drive urban digital opportunities are: (a) develop people-centred national smart city policies as enablers for inclusive and sustainable urban development; (b) enhance urban governance capacity at all levels to design and implement inclusive digital strategies with a clear resilience mindset; and (c) promote citizen engagement and multi-stakeholder partnerships for digital transformations in cities.

14. Addressing urban finance challenges is key to making progress towards realizing the Sustainable Development Goals in the Asia-Pacific region. Adequate financial resources are necessary to invest in critical areas such as infrastructure, housing, health care, education and social services, all of which are vital in order to achieve sustainable and inclusive urban development. However, between the COVID-19 pandemic and the multiple crises that continue to strain the financial capacities of many governments in the region, there is limited fiscal space to allocate funds to urban development. There is an urgent need to explore innovative financing mechanisms, public-private partnerships and domestic and international cooperation to bridge the urban finance gap and ensure the region's resilience and ability to make progress towards localizing the Goals. The policy recommendations set out in the flagship report are: (a) expand, diversify and increase municipal revenue collection to stimulate a local economic recovery; (b) establish a transparent framework for intergovernmental transfers for greater economic resilience against future shocks; (c) ensure that land-based financing instruments are aligned with the development of compact polycentric urban areas; (d) create more stable and predictable policy, regulatory and incentive frameworks to enhance private sector investment for urban economic recovery; and (e) promote enabling environments to facilitate climate-responsive urban finance and municipal finance instruments in support of local climate action.

15. In summary, all of the above policy recommendations for sustainable urban development in the Asia-Pacific region highlight the importance of transformative and resilient urban planning, capacity-building and coordination among stakeholders. They emphasize the need for comprehensive housing, urban planning and disaster risk management policies to address affordable housing crises and advocate for integrated and compact mixed-use urban environments supported by sustainable transportation to enhance mobility and access to services and employment opportunities. In addition, the recommendations underscore the importance of community involvement in building urban resilience against climate and other shocks, innovative adaptation strategies, enhanced data collection and the shift to low-carbon energy sources. They also stress the importance of inclusive and equitable digital transformations, as well as citizen engagement and multi-stakeholder partnerships. They also highlight the need for expanded municipal revenue collection, transparent intergovernmental transfers, land-based financing, stable policy frameworks for private sector investment and enabling environments for climate-responsive urban finance to support local climate action and progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the region. Overall, these recommendations emphasize the importance of innovative policies and coordinated stakeholder efforts to address the challenges posed by rapid urbanization and climate change, ultimately supporting the region's progress towards achieving the Goals.

### **III. Shared commitments of national and local governments for sustainable urban development**

16. In the context of sustainable urban development in the Asia-Pacific region, national Governments play a crucial role in setting national policies, allocating resources, establishing regulatory frameworks and providing capacity-building support to local governments. They also monitor progress, coordinate efforts and facilitate collaboration among stakeholders. Local governments are then responsible for implementing these central government policies at the municipal level, in areas such as land-use planning, infrastructure development, service delivery, community engagement, environmental protection and economic development. This division of roles

ensures a coordinated approach to urban development, with national Governments providing the overarching vision and resources and local governments executing strategies and actions that promote sustainability and enhance the well-being of urban residents.

17. The descriptions of the roles of governments in sustainable urban development in this section are drawn from the high-level session at the Eighth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum, co-chaired by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport of the Republic of Korea and the Ministry of Local Government Development of Malaysia, where member States<sup>9</sup> exchanged perspectives, shared commitments and discussed regional and international partnerships in the context of sustainable urban development and the alignment of their efforts with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Sustainable urban and territorial planning, integrated urban policies, inclusivity, collaboration and partnerships, climate action and disaster risk management, technology, economic growth, and urban finance all emerged as crucial elements in shaping a sustainable urban future. Several of the country statements were delivered at the ministerial level.

18. Strengthening multilevel governance and vertically integrating national legislative frameworks with local spatial planning, master urban plans and zoning policies can create urban spaces that are both balanced and sustainable, ensuring minimum environmental impact, mitigating climate change impacts and encouraging participatory approaches. In managing urban environments, policymakers need to strike a balance between economic growth, environmental sustainability and social inclusivity. Taking an integrated approach through urban and territorial planning while actively involving local communities in decision-making processes is critical in ensuring that urbanization occurs with minimal environmental impact. The challenges presented by rapid urbanization require the development of national legislative and normative regulatory frameworks. These frameworks serve as essential tools to guide and regulate urbanization, with a focus on environmental protection and community engagement. Initiatives and plans aimed at ensuring balanced development often involve digitalizing urban planning processes, decentralizing governance and encouraging participatory decision-making at the community level. This kind of collaborative and inclusive approach empowers local communities and aligns with global sustainable development objectives.

19. Given the increasing frequency and intensity of disasters in the region, disaster risk reduction and urban resilience are critical for cities in Asia and the Pacific. It is essential for cities to assess the condition of existing housing stock and infrastructure and to promote green energy and energy-saving principles to mitigate the risks associated with natural disasters. Proactive approaches are required to build urban resilience in the face of climate change and environmental challenges.

20. Inclusivity is a core requirement for creating urban environments that are equitable and accessible to all citizens, with particular attention paid to marginalized groups, including older persons, women, persons with disabilities and young people. Incorporating international principles, such as those set out in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, into domestic law is one mechanism for increasing inclusivity. Various schemes and initiatives

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<sup>9</sup> Armenia, Cambodia, China, Fiji, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Turkmenistan and United States of America.



aimed at improving the lives of persons with disabilities have been implemented in the region, including the creation of a national database on persons with disabilities and the establishment of national campaigns for universal access to physical infrastructure for persons with disabilities. The overarching goal of these initiatives is to mainstream persons with disabilities into national development agendas, with a strong emphasis on investment in accessible urban infrastructure. The vision shared by member States is to create truly inclusive urban environments that cater to the needs of all sections of society. True inclusivity means leaving no one behind and committing to this principle through policy enhancement, strategies and actions.

21. Urban areas play a pivotal role in driving economic growth and transformation. Urban renewal and sustainable urban development play an important part in economic revival and should include a specific focus on climate change mitigation and adaptation. For both national and local governments, cities present significant potential as engines of growth and innovation. Reforms are needed to maximize the contributions of urban areas to the national economy, with a focus on community involvement in decision-making processes, cultural and educational opportunities for all citizens and policies that promote equitable urban development.

22. Cities need to achieve net-zero emissions to demonstrate their commitment to addressing climate-related challenges. Increased pledges are required for initiatives in the areas of circular economy, electric vehicle usage and infrastructure, and carbon neutrality. Shifts within countries and cities towards such initiatives serve as examples of the sustainable practices and mechanisms that are required to drive economic growth in environmentally responsible ways.

23. Urban finance is a crucial enabler of sustainable urban development. Strategies for bridging the gap in urban climate finance and ensuring adequate financial resources to implement sustainable urban initiatives include using local revenue systems, expanding collaboration between the private and public sectors through public-private partnerships and involving civil society in financing mechanisms. It is important to acknowledge the need for a just transition and include vulnerable groups in financial strategies. Digitalization is a tool that can be used to equip local governments with more efficient financial tools and mechanisms. Digital transformation is seen as a mechanism for enhancing transparency and accountability in urban finance.

24. Overall, these themes reflect a collective dedication to building cities that are not only economically vibrant but also environmentally conscious, inclusive and resilient to the challenges of the twenty-first century. As countries in the Asia-Pacific region continue to urbanize at a rapid pace in a multi-crisis context, the sharing of lessons learned, experiences, policy recommendations and commitments provides a valuable road map for creating urban environments that are sustainable, inclusive and capable of addressing complex challenges. By emphasizing these core policy recommendations and working together, urban stakeholders and actors can forge a path towards a brighter, more sustainable urban future for all.

#### **IV. Regional cooperation and collaborative partnerships for sustainable urban development**

25. At the seventy-ninth session of the Commission, member States adopted resolution 79/7 on advancing regional cooperation for sustainable urban development and localization of the Sustainable Development Goals in

Asia and the Pacific. The resolution provides a framework for guiding regional cooperation and the efforts of development partners as they strive to achieve a prosperous and sustainable future for Asia and the Pacific. In line with the resolution, which encourages members and associate members to share evidence-based knowledge, good practices and lessons learned, approaches that can be taken to accelerate local action informed by local realities include undertaking voluntary local and subnational reviews, localizing the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), and strengthening multilevel governance and multi-stakeholder engagement to enhance inclusive multilateralism and regional cooperation. Regional cooperation plays a key role in moving from recommendation to action.

26. Some of the ways in which member States collaborate in support of sustainable urban development across the region include enhancing the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals through voluntary local reviews, local climate action plans and support for smart city initiatives. Collaborating on national smart city strategies is a way to leverage digital innovation to address challenges related to rapid urbanization and climate change, building the resilience of cities and their capacity to navigate a multi-crisis context. Member States also have acknowledged the importance of continuing to collaborate with the Commission through knowledge-sharing platforms, workshops, forums and digital platforms for documenting successful solutions and sharing best practices, as well as of supporting research collaboration to facilitate the exchange of urban development experiences and lessons learned.

27. The high-level communiqué released by ministers and senior officials of the Governments participating in the Eighth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum reflects a voluntary regional consensus on sustainable urban development. It reflects the signatories' intention to promote Asian and Pacific cities as engines of progress for sustainable urban development and climate action. It is a statement for the region to localize the Sustainable Development Goals and reinforce the New Urban Agenda for a more sustainable, equitable and prosperous urban future through priority actions and partnerships for collaborative action.

28. The priority actions set out in the communiqué are: (a) promoting integrated urban and territorial planning; (b) fostering multilevel climate governance; (c) prioritizing inclusive urban policies to address the needs of all marginalized and vulnerable communities, which involves investing in basic services and housing; (d) supporting the creation of an enabling environment to attract both public and private investments for urban infrastructure to catalyse stimulus for the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level; and (e) recognizing the potential of technology in driving innovation to accelerate the implementation of the Goals across sectors such as transportation, governance and public services.

29. In terms of partnerships for collaborative action, the signatories to the communiqué: (a) support collaborative action to address the complex challenges posed by unplanned urbanization; (b) encourage policies at all levels to foster synergies and align urban policy frameworks; (c) seek collaborative partnerships across governments, businesses, civil society and local communities to yield innovative solutions, efficient resource allocation and equitable urban development outcomes; (d) encourage an environment of dialogue and collaboration to harness collective wisdom, promote ownership and generate greater awareness of and commitment to sustainable urban development objectives; and (e) recognize that establishing robust mechanisms

for regional cooperation within the Asia-Pacific region will enable peer learning, the replication of successful models and the identification of context-specific solutions, amplifying the impact of sustainable urban development initiatives.

30. Multisector and multilevel governance is essential for urban sustainability and collaborative partnerships across the region. Policies at all levels need to foster inclusion and synergies and align urban frameworks, engaging national Governments, regional bodies, local authorities and other stakeholders in harnessing resources and expertise for comprehensive joint strategies promoting inclusive, resilient and sustainable urban growth. Collaborative partnerships help countries identify and adopt inclusive approaches that consider the diverse needs of their populations. By collaborating, countries can exchange valuable insights on what works and what does not in different contexts. Dialogue and collaboration between national and local governments, the private sector and local communities can be used to harness collective wisdom, promote ownership and generate greater awareness and commitment towards sustainable urban development objectives. Collaborative projects, jointly funded by regional organizations, local governments and donors, can also be initiated to address critical urban challenges, fostering a sense of shared responsibility.

31. Regional dialogue serves to strengthen advocacy and solidarity. Countries can collectively advocate for their urban development priorities on the regional global stage and showcase their achievements. Regional cooperation, including on advocating for and strengthening the availability of urban finance, will accelerate the implementation of urban solutions. Establishing robust mechanisms for North-South, South-South, triangular and city-to-city cooperation within the Asia-Pacific region will enable peer learning, the replication of successful models and the identification of context-specific solutions. By fostering mutual support and knowledge exchange, regional cooperation will amplify the impact of sustainable urban development initiatives.

32. Despite the advantages, there are also challenges associated with collaborative partnerships and regional dialogue, including non-alignment of interests and resource constraints. Efforts should be made to ensure inclusivity and support for member States with limited resources. Regional and national forums on urban issues should be organized, with clear goals and agendas to ensure that discussions and initiatives remain focused on common objectives. Efforts should be made to involve all member States in the region, regardless of their size or resources, to ensure inclusivity. Providing needs-based technical assistance and capacity-building support to national and subnational authorities can help ensure their active participation in collaborative urban initiatives. Regional cooperation efforts should aim to foster trust and collaboration among countries. Overall, collaborative partnerships and regional dialogue are essential pillars of sustainable urban development in the Asia-Pacific region. By sharing knowledge, pooling resources and working together, countries can address common urban challenges, promote inclusivity, and make progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. While challenges to collaboration exist, concerted efforts to establish clear goals, promote inclusivity and facilitate technical assistance can help overcome them and pave the way for a brighter and more sustainable urban future for all countries in the region.

## **V. Issues for consideration by the Commission**

33. The Commission may wish to take note of the outcomes of the Eighth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum to inform the future work of the secretariat on sustainable urban development in the lead-up to the eighth session of the Committee on Environment and Development, to be held in Bangkok from 16 to 18 October 2024, and the twelfth session of the World Urban Forum, to be held in Cairo from 4 to 8 November 2024.

34. The Commission may also wish to provide direction on strengthening the secretariat's work on technical cooperation, regional urban forums and partnerships to implement sustainable urban development and localize the Sustainable Development Goals, including by enhancing regional support for voluntary local and subnational reviews.

35. Members and associate members are invited to share their suggestions for enhancing regional cooperation to strengthen the capacity of cities to realize the integrated implementation of the Paris Agreement, the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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