World Vision

WORLD VISION POSITION PAPER
# 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Urban Development

- Addressing the urban vulnerabilities, inequities, and exclusion of the most vulnerable

- Promoting just cities for children that are safe, healthy, prosperous, and resilient

## ISSUES AT A GLANCE

**1) Poverty is urbanising.** According to the World Bank (WB), the new poor are urban poor; largely as a result of COVID-19 which is rapidly creating new and vulnerable contexts.[1] The United Nations (UN) and the WB look at unregulated and unplanned urbanisation as a major factor exerting pressure on already overburdened urban systems, leading to higher incidence of violence and child abuse, gender violence. Even before COVID-19 started, an estimated 1 billion people lived in slums, of whom more than 300 million were children.[2] This number is projected to increase to 3 billion or almost half of the projected global urban population (6.5 billion) by 2050.[3] The urban future lies in low and low-middle income countries, where approximately two-thirds of the world's urban population growth will be.

**2) Human migration is an irreversible phenomenon of this urban century.** Although March 2020 saw a reverse in migration patterns spurred by job losses and the anticipation of lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and a mass movement of migrants rushing back to their countries of origin,[4] as the pandemic is receding, this picture is changing. The complex dynamics of rural-urban and urban-urban mobility is still presenting challenges to city planning and decision-making authorities. Cities are still attracting large numbers of people, especially forcibly displaced persons, in search of better economic opportunities and access to services. Migrants, refugees and internally displaced people (IDP) continue to be at risk due to their living conditions and the barriers they face to access basic urban services, as well as due to the increasing stigmatization and/or scapegoating they face in host communities as the perceived vector/source of COVID-19 in a community.

**3) More than one billion children reside in cities today**, with hundreds of millions living in slums and informal settlements and exposed to violence and exploitation of all kinds. There are inadequate safe spaces in these settings to learn, develop, and grow in a healthy, stable environment. By 2050, it's projected that 70% of the world's children will live in cities;[5] more and more in informal, poor, and fragile areas where they are especially prone to suffer from poverty, exclusion, hazards, violence, and unintentional injuries. The Child Rights agenda is at risk amidst other emerging global priorities, and it will likely continue to fall off the main Global Agenda threatening children's future.

**4) Inequality and exclusion proliferate in cities, at the expense of sustainable development that delivers for all**. Many urban dwellers face challenges in accessing their rights and entitlements to urban services and livelihood opportunities, impacting their ability to fully participate as city residents. The 'urban advantage' – the notion that proximity to services, higher incomes, and better infrastructure improves urban residents' lives – is not presented equally to all children, youth and their families in cities. The urban poor continue to be excluded due to political, social, cultural, or economic factors. UNICEF research reveals that in multiple countries with rapidly growing urban populations, intra-urban disparities can be so great that many of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children in urban areas fare worse than the poorest children in rural areas of their countries in key child well-being indicators including child mortality and primary school completion.[6]

**5) Urban conflict, violence, and fragility are increasing.** Hostilities and armed conflict are increasingly occurring in cities and highly populated urban areas, making life worse for children living in towns and cities in conflict zones and violent areas. Children's homes, schools, and playgrounds are becoming battlefields as a result of urban warfare. More children are separated from parents and live in broken families (single headed or child headed households, in care of grandparents or other relatives), dropping out of school, and suffering trauma and health issues as a result of urban conflict and violence. The rights of children, especially from migrant groups, often go unrecognised, and the voices of children and youth are often excluded from key city decision making processes. Urban crises have the potential of long-lasting implications that go beyond the countries/cities involved. The Russian war on Ukraine is shifting the geopolitical landscape and will challenge progress on COVID-19 recovery, climate change and addressing conflicts globally. Risk of humanitarian funding falling short in many conflicts amidst growing humanitarian needs continues to be imminent.

**6) Climate deterioration is impacting cities.** Cities are a key contributor to climate change, with urban activities accounting for the majority (nearly 70%) of greenhouse gas emissions.[7] At the same time, they have a critical role to play in developing and executing solutions to this growing crisis. Due to the growing concentration of people and industries in low-lying coastal zones and other areas, the vulnerabilities of cities and their populations is rising. Often, urban dwellers with the lowest incomes, living in informal settlements, are most exposed to these hazards. Climate change has also been exacerbating urban displacement, migration and a wider range of environmental issues such as pollution, overuse of water resources, deforestation all of which contribute to physical loss of land and reduces viability of natural resource dependent livelihoods such as agriculture where the majority of the poorer populations work. Climate change is also the reason for exacerbating

existing emergencies such as natural disasters. Some countries will be more affected than others, for example, according to C40, "70% of cities are already dealing with the effects of climate change, and nearly all are at risk. Over 90% of all urban areas are coastal, putting most cities on earth at risk of flooding from rising sea levels and powerful storms."[8]

**7) COVID-19 has put cities on the frontline of the pandemic and revealed structural inequalities.** It has highlighted how population density when combined with extreme poverty, informality and marginalisation, leads to the creation of urban hotspots of acute vulnerability and compounded crises for the urban poor. The COVID-19 crisis presented the humanitarian sector with new issues. The pandemic has pushed some WV offices with no urban programming experience to respond in cities and other urban areas due to fast spreading especially in urban hotspots such as low-income urban neighbourhoods, urban slums and informal settlements. In those contexts, issues like predisposition to health risks, dependence on informal services (from healthcare to education and social services) and on daily earning requiring massive movement, including to informal markets, meant that COVID-19 containment measures impacted all aspects of lives of urban hotspots residents putting them at higher risks than their counterparts in more affluent urban and peri-urban areas. Further, the harmful effects and secondary impacts of this pandemic are not distributed equally. The negative effects are expected to be most damaging for children in the poorest countries, and in the most vulnerable neighbourhoods, and for those in already disadvantaged or in fragile settings such as slums and informal settlements.



# LEARNING FROM OUR PROGRAMMING

World Vision's global mission and vision is for every child, including those living in urban and urban fragile contexts, to experience life in all its fullness. In 2008, World Vision launched an action research and learning initiative to respond and adapt to growing urbanisation and its negative impacts on the most vulnerable children, their families, and communities. The research investigated the relevance of our development models and frameworks and our ability to contribute to realisation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child in urban settings in six cities. Through this learning and research, we confirmed that children are the first casualties of urban poverty. Child vulnerability in urban contexts is concentrated in fragile pockets of the city, mainly in the periphery, in slums and informal settlements. Many children and families living in urban slums and low-income neighbourhoods of developing, fragile and/or conflict-affected countries are far from realising their rights to adequate shelter and access to basic services, including quality education, health, and sanitation, or in taking part in the opportunities that urbanisation offers. World Vision found that a large number of children in fragile pockets of the city are not included in city planning and budgeting processes. These issues need to be tackled and addressed during the implementation of *the New Urban Agenda* and SDG 11. As a result of our research and to achieve this agenda, World Vision developed an Urban Programme Approach called *Cities for Children* that seeks to address urban vulnerabilities, rising inequalities, and exclusion faced by the most marginalised, living in the fragile pockets of the city. This approach is now rolled out across the organization. By 2025, all existing and new urban programmes in World Vision will be aligned with this approach. As per the recently published urban programming capacity overview (June 2022), currently 257 programmes across 46 country offices are categorised as urban or peri-urban in both stable and fragile settings. The global urban programming team is engaging with 30+ country offices to continue to learn from practice and refine our approach.

Through our years of research and learning from our urban programmes, we have learned that:

1. Cities and towns are engines of power, growth and technology–they are seen as positive signs of development and opportunity. Although this has provided opportunity and success for many, it is also **leaving a vast population behind**, resulting in the growth of slums and informal settlements.

2. Children living in urban slums, on precarious sites such as along drains, near landfills, or on low-lying land, in chronic poverty, and with little access to basic urban services (e.g., healthcare, education), are highly vulnerable to slow-onset disasters. They are frequently exposed to physical hazards, such as

polluted water, open sewer systems, lack of local safe play areas, or cultural facilities, and overcrowding, all of which severely restricts their independent mobility and opportunities for play and recreation, while increasing their exposure to hazards, violence, and unintentional injuries. **Among urban children, some groups are more vulnerable than others**, particularly migrant, stateless, displaced and refugee children, children living in informal housing, children living and working in the streets, children recruited by gangs or armed groups, disabled children, and child laborers. This is to a great extent caused by the lack of adequate protective mechanisms and poor public service governance in the surrounding physical, socio-economic, and politico-legal environment.

3. Migration across the rural-urban continuum is playing an important role in driving complexity due to human mobility and the shift to cities is a global phenomenon. **Most city governments and local institutions are not prepared to deal with the realities of migration, be it voluntary or forced**. Planning and policy responses do not seek out and incorporate the voices of migrants, refugees and the stateless or the unique needs and vulnerabilities of children in these groups. Poor families are attracted and seek to access the possible opportunities cities offer, which at times has resulted in inflows of unaccompanied children and youth. Informal groups, like faith communities and grassroot organisations, are stepping up and taking on the challenge of addressing the emerging urgent needs and responding to the most vulnerable groups.

4. Without adequate protection, support networks, and information on their new environment, children and youth are more vulnerable to exploitation, such as child labour and trafficking. Trapped in fragile pockets of cities, **children suffer terrible violations of their basic human rights**; lack access to services; live in overcrowded spaces or on streets contaminated with garbage and dangerous waste; lack safe public spaces to play; and are vulnerable to crime, violence, abuse, and exploitation.

5. **There is a lack of accurate and disaggregated data** (by age, sex, ethnicity, etc.) at neighbourhood and city levels to inform city planning, resourcing, and delivery of basic urban services. While migration internally and across borders continues to re-shape the social and demographic profile of cities, the limited information available or capacity to gather this information at the local policy and planning unit level leaves officials unable to meet needs. Data on children's well-being and extreme poverty that is experienced in urban slum communities can be obscured by the relative affluence of their neighbouring communities.

6. The traditional notion of **community does not exist** due to continuous movement of individuals and groups in urban areas. People belong to several communities not just a community of place; such as communities of interest, practice and culture. Diversity in cities often leads to a decreased sense of community and belonging. Tensions often rise over resources and opportunities. In cases where cities are hosting displaced or migrant groups, the latter end up living in informal areas, slums and low-income neighbourhoods at close proximity to host communities, contributing to increased tension and competition over resources.

7. Urban environments are volatile and ever changing. People, power structures, resources, and policies continuously change in the city. **Multi-sectoral strategic partnerships are required** to effectively deal with complex issues in the city and to advocate for sustained change through policy reform involving government and multiple stakeholders. Faith institutions are viable, stable partners in city programmes, especially in fragile cities where local and city governments are not functional or simply do not exist.

# WORLD VISION'S RECOMMENDATIONS

World Vision believes that every child and youth should grow up in a fair, just, and socially cohesive city; cared for and protected from violence; with equal opportunity to grow, learn, and contribute to shaping future cities. Children and youth must be recognised as key resources and agents of change and provided opportunities to meaningfully engage in local, national, regional, and global decision-making processes; including in the planning and design of the cities where they live. Children and youth can drive social, political, technological, and economic transformation in cities, as knowledge bearers of their local contexts, and as such should be considered more than mere beneficiaries. They should be acknowledged among key urban actors and included in partnerships formed to shape city development at the policy and programming levels.

To achieve the 2030 Agenda and leave no one behind, based on our extensive experience working with children, youth and families and partners in both fragile and stable urban contexts, World Vision recommends that local and national governments, donors, and civil society organisations work together in urban contexts to:

**1. Protect the most vulnerable children, especially from abuse and exploitation.** Children, especially from migrant groups, become the first casualty of urban poverty and marginalization falling victims to abuse, exploitation and violence. Some of the common manifestations that occur in informal, unplanned settlements in or near cities are child labour, trafficking and criminal gang violence. Evidence based solutions, adequate financial resources and better budget allocations are needed to end violence against children and create healthy and protective environments for children, especially in fragile, violence- and conflict-affected contexts and humanitarian emergencies. This should be done through building partnerships across multiple levels, including with businesses and the private sector to end child labour and trafficking by creating decent employment opportunities for youth and adults, inclusive of new migrants, internally displaced persons, and refugees in cities and engaging with faith actors who are often vital service providers with strong knowledge of local vulnerabilities and with significant political, social and cultural influence.

**2. Improve access to equitable, quality, and ethically provided urban public services, safe spaces, and a healthy, stable built environment where children and youth can live, learn, develop, and thrive.** Lack of proper planning (especially in informal areas), child-friendly public spaces, and green areas force children to play in dangerous areas. Inadequate housing space to accommodate rapidly increasing populations can lead to lagging dense and fragmented neighbourhoods, neglected with poor infrastructure, overcrowded housing, economic and geographic exclusion (no roads or transport), crime, violence, and micro-politics. Many newly arrived migrants, internally displaced people, and refugees of all ages face challenges in accessing their rights and entitlements to urban services and opportunities, which impacts their ability to fully participate in urban life.

**3. Based on strong and continuous context analysis, design urban interventions that promote social cohesion among city residents to establish collective actions, address social tensions and drivers of fragility, build bridges between diverse groups sharing the same geographical boundaries, and create more inclusive cities.** The notion of a cohesive community is a challenge and urban development interventions can only be sustainable if they build a sense of community and strengthen social cohesion. While the incredible density and diversity of the urban socio-cultural fabric can contribute enormous human and cultural capital to cities, trust and solidarity is often lacking among its urban residents; fundamental for maintaining cohesive and strongly networked communities. This is particularly important in fragile cities where the social contract between urban residents and their governing bodies is broken. In many urban contexts, churches and other faith communities are some of their most important partners, as they are often among the most effective promoters of social cohesion and joint action for the most vulnerable in urban environments.

**4. Enhance knowledge building and support participatory urban governance by promoting the inclusion of marginalised and vulnerable voices in decision-making processes, particularly new migrants, the displaced and refugees, undocumented 'invisible' urban populations, and especially children and youth.** The issue of gaps in formal data on urban poverty is often due to the challenges posed by the urban distinctive. Children and youth are cognizant of the issues and challenges of the contexts they live in. They bring diverse perspectives and solutions on key issues relevant to sustainable urban development to inform local, national, regional as well as global policies. Governments (at local and national levels) need to ensure children and youth are given the space and tools, including through the use of technology, to advocate for their rights, needs, and views. This can be achieved by establishing permanent structures and platforms for dialogue with young people, especially the most marginalised and vulnerable among them. It is important that urban actors, including children and youth, collaborate in mutually beneficial cycles of information sharing, in order to become valuable knowledge assets for local decision-makers to support more inclusive and accurate policymaking and pro-poor interventions.

**5. Invest into collaboration to establish multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder partnerships for citywide impact.** For cities and human settlements to be inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable, urban development must apply a multi-disciplinary approach and the principle of complementarity. It is increasingly evident that no single actor can unilaterally achieve the type of large-scale transformational change necessary to create cities where children and youth really thrive. Thus, establishing strong partnerships in urban contexts is not optional; it is critical for sustained impact. These efforts should be inclusive of local governments and others engaged at the city level, such as private sector and businesses as well as at the neighbourhood level such as faith institutions, community-based organizations and grassroot groups.

**6. Contribute to the operationalization of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus at local, citywide and national levels.** With crises increasingly occurring in urban areas and urban growth projected to take place in countries and cities that are already fragile, it is imperative that organizations operating in cities take a triple nexus approach when designing programmes. Addressing immediate humanitarian needs should be done with a long-term vision of improving development outcomes and contributing to peacebuilding and social cohesion among diverse urban residents in order to ensure sustainability of outcomes.

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[3] United Nations. 2019. SDGs Report. https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/goal-11/#:~:text=The%20absolute%20number%20of%20people,Southern%20Asia%20(227%20million).

[4] World Bank. 2020. COVID-19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens. Migration and Development Brief,no. 32;. World Bank, Washington, DC. © World Bank. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33634 License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

[5] Child Friendly Cities. Growing Cities. https://childfriendlycities.org/growing-cities/

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[8] C40. Sea Level Rise and Coastal Flooding. https://www.c40.org/what-we-do/scaling-up-climate-action/adaptation-water/the-future-we-dont-want/sea-level-rise/

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