

Policy Brief:  
**Youth, Cities  
and  
COVID-19**

1 JULY 2020



# Introduction

Urbanization is the engine that propels the world towards prosperity in the 21st century and youth are its engineers. Youth are society's most essential and dynamic human resource. There are more people under the age of 30 today than ever before, totalling over three billion or almost half of the total global population. Youth between 15 and 24 years of age number 1.21 billion and account for 15.5% of the global population, according to the World Youth Report 2020.

These youth live, by and large, in cities and towns. Fifty-five percent of the world's population live in urban areas, which is expected to increase to 68% by 2050. It is estimated that as many as 60% of all urban dwellers will be under the age of 18 by 2030.

**As of 2019, 9.7 million Kenyans are aged 15-24, many of them living in informal settlements and slums. Approximately 70% of the people in slums in Kenya are under the age of 30.<sup>1</sup> The prevalence of slums and informal settlements in Africa is 47% in total urban populations, and 52% in Sub-Saharan Africa as the leading prevalence.**

Historically, youth have not been seen as a demographic important enough to engage with and they are not a focus for governments or funding agencies. Yet there has been a growing understanding and concern over the declining socio-economic situation of young people and their lack of livelihood opportunities, especially in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa. These youth often grow up in poverty and they are excluded from the economic, political, and social life of their countries, which in turn breeds disillusionment

and hopelessness, violence, and upheaval. This is the case in 'normal' contexts, and there is no question that a pandemic would intensify such circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

The impact of COVID-19 has been felt across the globe. The pandemic has affected countries in every region, making this a truly global situation where every country must respond. UN-Habitat has a clear added value in supporting national and local authorities as they take up this challenge. The pandemic will hit the world's most vulnerable people the hardest—many of them living in informal settlements and slums.

Slums are densely populated, with overcrowded public transport systems, little or no waste management, an absence of basic services and poor housing. These informal settlements are characterized by a lack of durable housing (permanent structures that withstand extreme climate conditions); lack of access to safe water at affordable prices and within a reasonable distance and in sufficient amounts; and lack of access to adequate sanitation provisions.

Recommended measures to prevent COVID-19 transmission such as physical distancing is often impossible in these areas, and health facilities are minimal. "Other preventative measures are equally challenging. Only a third of households in Africa have access to basic hand washing facilities and in many informal settlements piped water is a luxury. And as a large majority of the workforce is informally employed, and most cannot work from home, they still need to use public transport and cannot follow social distancing."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 2019 Kenya National Population and Housing Census: Volume III.

<sup>2</sup> Cities of Youth, Cities of Prosperity, UN-Habitat

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Human Settlements Programme 'Fighting COVID-19 in Africa's Informal Settlements' 8 June, 2020

From health to the economy, security to social protection, the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated for children and youth simply by virtue of their age and it is in informal settlements that they are disproportionately affected. For example, Kibera in Nairobi, has a child mortality rate two to three times higher than the average of the rest of the city.<sup>4</sup> These children are at high risk of fatality due to the virus. Adverse impacts are amplified in contexts of fragility, emergencies, disaster risk reduction, and conflict where social cohesion is already undermined, and institutional capacity and services are limited. Immediate action is required to assist youth in informal settlement to stay well protected and healthy. Measures to decrease the transmission such as physical distancing, self-quarantines, or community-wide lockdowns are exceptionally challenging due to the overcrowded state of these areas.

“A strong coalition is needed with local government networks and grassroot organizations to cope with the scale of the problem, mobilize quick action, provide direct guidance and fast-track learning across countries and regions.”<sup>5</sup> It is necessary for there to be parallel interventions that are locally adaptable and produced wherever applicable to ensure consistency and implementation locally.

To implement interventions locally, it is key to work directly with communities and connect formal and informal governance mechanisms.

- Adverse economic impacts are felt especially by young women who are generally earning less, saving less, and holding insecure jobs or living within informal settlements.
- As a result of COVID-19, the health of youth has been significantly impacted through the reallocation of resources

and priorities, and basic services in particular (i.e. water, health, sanitation).

- As the COVID-19 pandemic accelerates, economic and social effects, along with restricted movement and social isolation measures have caused youth-based violence to increase exponentially. Many young people stay in their home with their abusers. Services to support survivors, which were already limited, are now disrupted or inaccessible.
- The pandemic has created adverse implications in terms of livelihoods, health, education, resource and service accessibility, human rights, youth-based domestic violence and spatial movement. These implications will be discussed and analysed further within this policy brief.

This policy brief focuses on each of these issues in turn, exploring how young people are impacted in the face of COVID-19 in informal settlements and outlining measures to accompany both the immediate response and longer-term recovery efforts post-COVID.

Recovery must lead to an equal world that is resilient to future crises. Fiscal stimulus packages and emergency measures to address public health gaps have been put in place in many countries to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. However, it is crucial that all local and national responses place youth, their inclusion, representation, rights, social and economic outcomes, equality and protection at the centre of policy and decision making if they are to have the required impacts in order to rectify long-standing inequalities but also to facilitate a more just and resilient world.

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<https://unhabitat.org/fighting-covid-19-in-africa's-informal-settlements>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations UN Women (2020). *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women*. April 9, 2020, Nairobi.

As youth make up a significant portion of the global population, they will be one of the hardest hit by this pandemic but they will also be the backbone of recovery in communities. Therefore, policy responses need to include youth community groups and recognise youth in decision making to ensure positive change.

To achieve this, the policy brief underlines three cross-cutting priorities:

- 1) ENSURE YOUNG PEOPLE'S EQUAL REPRESENTATION IN ALL RESPONSE PLANNING, DECISION-MAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION.** Evidence across sectors suggests that policies that do not consult youth and include them in decision-making are less effective and may have adverse effects. Youth organizations who are at the front line of response in communities should be represented and supported. As youth, and young girls in particular, are overrepresented in urban slums and similar settings it is key to consider their representation in all COVID-19 response planning to ensure that their needs are met as they are becoming one of the most underrepresented categories within response planning.
- 2) TARGET YOUTH IN ALL EFFORTS TO ADDRESS THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19.** It is essential to apply a youth lens to the design of social assistance programmes to achieve equality, opportunities, and social protection. This is even more important in terms of having a youth in informal settlements lens as they are disproportionately affected by the impacts of the pandemic.

- 3) FACILITATE TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE FOR EQUALITY BY CREATING MORE OPPORTUNITIES AND SOLUTIONS FOR YOUTH IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS.** The post COVID-19 response will need to work towards rectifying impacts including health, education, human rights and others by reforming national legislation and response policy towards vulnerable categories of youth and creating solutions to ensure that all young people have equal access to basic services, resources, adequate healthcare and education, and should be afforded their rights in practice, not solely in theory.

These priorities reflect the Secretary-General's recent Call to Action on Human Rights, which singled out measures that, if pursued, would have meaningful impact on the rights of women and girls. These measures have become more vital in the context of the pandemic.

Our response to the pandemic must aim to empower youth through substantial inclusion in these processes, at both a local and international level. "The idea of the 'youth burden' – an unemployed youth bulge failing to become a demographic dividend in countries in fragile situations in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) – often does not take into account the considerable opportunities that could be presented if we help young people regain this sense of agency."<sup>6</sup>

Humanitarian responses in the coming months are expected to take over development initiatives in fragile contexts. Including youth in the "humanitarian response by designing age- and gender-sensitive programmes that take on board local needs, existing inequalities and community dynamics will be key".<sup>7</sup> The use of the of digital technologies and youth-driven networks will be instrumental to create awareness for best-

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<sup>6</sup> Overseas Development Institute (ODI) (2020) *The 'youth burden' needs a new narrative and how we respond to Covid-19 in conflict zones can change it*, [https://www.odi.org/blogs/16966-youth-burden-needs-new-](https://www.odi.org/blogs/16966-youth-burden-needs-new-narrative-and-how-we-respond-covid-19-conflict-zones-can-change-it)

[narrative-and-how-we-respond-covid-19-conflict-zones-can-change-it](https://www.odi.org/blogs/16966-youth-burden-needs-new-narrative-and-how-we-respond-covid-19-conflict-zones-can-change-it), 20 May, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

practices between youth, drive behavioural changes and ensure trustworthy communication.<sup>8</sup>

Policy responses to the pandemic will have lasting implications for youth, including youth living in informal and fragile settlements. Local and national governments need to ensure that youth engagement is no longer given a lesser priority

within the peace and security agenda and in response planning processes. They must seize the moment to embrace youth-led action for sustainable systemic change. It requires policy to be informed by the impacts of COVID-19 on youth, and to begin with, youth in informal settlements – to ensure no one is left behind.

# I. Livelihood Impacts

The impacts of the COVID-19 could be considerably higher on poor urban communities that are characterized by overcrowding, a factor that weighs heavy on the urgency to adhere to recommended measures such as self-isolation and social distancing. Residents from such crowded and underserved neighbourhoods are aware of the heavy impacts of the disease. However, staying home is often not an option.

COVID-19 has greatly impacted livelihoods, leading to an increase of the inequality gap globally especially in the developing world. Despite efforts being made by countries and international financial institutions such as the IMF in reinstating the global economy; up to 190 million people lost their source of income at the beginning of 2020.<sup>9</sup> In developing countries, the COVID-19 pandemic will push approximately 49 million people to poverty and at worst under the poverty line.<sup>10</sup> An estimated 42-66 million children could fall into extreme poverty, adding to the estimated 386 million children already in extreme poverty in 2019.<sup>11</sup>

Tourism, export and import are the most negatively impacted sectors and are foreseen to

have a great post facto COVID-19 effect. With the two sectors being the source of high revenue/income to developing countries, the closing of borders by countries due to the pandemic has led to lose of jobs, seize of production and damage of goods. For example; agricultural and horticultural products are the main exports from developing countries. In April 2020, Kenya's horticultural farms were closed with over 10,000 casual workers laid off and 50% of permanent employees forced to annual leaves without pay or pay cuts.<sup>12</sup> In Sri Lanka, unemployment in the export sector has been hugely felt by women in this industry with garments, tea and rubber being the key export products to the US and Europe markets.<sup>13</sup>

The widening of the inequality gap has been experienced in the labour market in which people on contractual services, that is, temporary contracts and domestic workers have lost their livelihoods as a result of their contracts not being renewed or terminated. In the developing world, 60% of the population comprises of young men and women, most of whom are engaged in temporary jobs and informal employment. ILO projects that up to 1.6 billion people in the

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Reuters in Geneva (2020). COVID-19 to wipe out equivalent of 195m jobs, says UN agency. The Guardian, 7 April.

<sup>10</sup> World Bank (2020). The Impact of COVID-19 (Corona virus) on global poverty: Why Sub-Saharan Africa might be the region hardest hit, 20 April.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Group (2020) *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Children*, 15 April, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Reuters (2020). No ed of roses: Flower workers now lose jobs as corona virus hits exports. The Standard, 12 April.

<sup>13</sup> PWC (2020). COVID-19 outbreak: Impact on Sri Lanka and Recommendations.

informal sector are at a risk of losing their jobs by the second quarter of the year.<sup>14</sup> The sudden loss of jobs in a community that has no savings/emergency funds to sustain them during worst times has led to an increase in crime, domestic violence and high urban to rural migration.

Amid the pandemic, young men and women are in the forefront of the fight against COVID-19 by being innovative and flexible in their line of work. For example, youth have turned to the production and sale of face masks. Many youth also volunteer as agents to fight against the pandemic through the sensitization of their communities and partnerships with organizations in setting up of handwashing stations. For example, in Kibera and Mathare, two of the largest slums in Nairobi, Kenya, young men and women have been trained to run handwashing stations.

In addition, countries have advocated for local manufacturing and encouraged young people to be innovative as a measure of countering unemployment. Again, the pandemic is greatly affecting youth's livelihoods, especially in the informal sector. The informal sector accounts for

well over half of all urban employment and is largely dominated by young female workers. In this context, COVID-19 restrictions may have potential negative impacts on young women participating in the informal economy including on their safety, livelihoods, and food security.

“As street road traffic decreases and public markets continue to close, anecdotal evidence in Kampala, Uganda, El Alto, Bolivia and Quito, Ecuador suggest that women vendors are losing their produce and forced to sell their produce on empty and unsafe streets.”<sup>15</sup>

With youth's limited access to critical services within informal settlements and the overrepresented of young girls in urban slums, they carry the burden of water collection in 80% of water deprived households.<sup>16</sup> “For millions of women and girls, this reality increases the risk of sexual violence due to poor WASH access. Physical distancing is next to impossible due to cramped living conditions. COVID-19 restrictions implemented in deprived urban areas will further affect time poverty and increase unpaid care work of women with children out-of-school.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> International Labour Organization (2020). ILO: As job losses escalate, nearly half of global workforce at risk of losing livelihoods, 29 April.

<sup>15</sup> UN Women (2020) COVID-19 and Ensuring Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls

<https://cities4health.org/assets/library-assets/brief-covid-19->

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

## II. Health Impacts

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The most immediate impact of COVID-19 on youth has been health impacts. When it comes to youth living in informal settlements, the situation becomes worse both physically and mentally as they are facing high risk of getting infected.

A large proportion of youth are currently suffering from hunger caused by the decline of livelihoods. Those who live hand to mouth do not know whether they will be affected by the corona virus or hunger first. Moreover, informal settlements are marked by the density of living environments, which causes higher transmission rates as well as limits the space for youth to exercise and maintain physical well-being during their stay at home. Lastly, with the rising crime rate and domestic violence, their safety will be affected.

When it comes to mental health, youth living in informal settlements are more likely to experience stress and anxiety caused by unemployment and decline of income. With the increase of domestic violence, being the victims (being abused or being a witness of domestic violence) of violence will also affect their mental health. Stressors such as a prolonged duration of the pandemic, fears of infection, frustration and boredom, inadequate information, lack of in-person contact with classmates, friends, and teachers, lack of personal space at home, and family financial loss can have become even more problematic and has persistent effects on youth in informal settlements.

Many factors threaten the health of youth living in informal settlements. First, youth living in informal settlements are likely to have limited access to water and sanitizer, quality health services, or insurance coverage for routine and catastrophic

health costs. They often cannot afford medical treatment.

Youth living in low-income households or informal settlements are more likely to face higher rates of chronic health conditions and are likely to suffer from illnesses that are correlated to a lack of basic healthcare and hygiene, including diarrhoea, gastroenteritis, malaria and tuberculosis.<sup>18</sup> As mentioned earlier, as we see in Kibera in Nairobi for example has a child mortality rate two to three times higher than the average of the rest of the city which is due to a lack of basic services and healthcare.<sup>19</sup>

Secondly, they have higher risk of being exposed under COVID-19. Many youth make a living in waste management. They are being exposed to lots of medical waste such as used masks around the community since they cannot afford wearing personal protective equipment.

The majority of community activists are youth, promoting community participation, which means lots of human contacts, which in turn means infection risks. Thirdly, they have limited access to reliable healthcare information, for example, official news on TV. With limited access to education and low levels of literacy in some settings, they have difficulties in distinguishing misinformation from correct knowledge on infection control.

“In Somalia, the UN-Habitat immediate response involves providing medical supplies and personal protection equipment to front line health workers, supporting the Mogadishu local authority response strategy with plans to help communities improve

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<sup>18</sup> United Nations Human Settlements Programme ‘Fighting COVID-19 in Africa’s Informal Settlements’ 8 June, 2020

<https://unhabitat.org/fighting-covid-19-in-africa’s-informal-settlements>.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

water, sanitation and hygiene, and mitigate the economic impact on the most vulnerable.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Case study:**

Overcrowding and lack of hand washing facilities can result in the rapid spread of the virus. In Mathare, the second biggest slum in Nairobi, Kenya, the youth-led organization, a coalition of 21 youth-led groups led by Mathare Environmental One Stop Centre and Mathare Roots, constructed 28 handwashing stations with support from UN-Habitat, the Canadian High Commission, the Norwegian Embassy, and the Chandaria Foundation. The assistants of each handwashing station are local youth. These youth attendants working in frontline are also at high risks.

UN-Habitat provided training for them about infection control of COVID-19, as well as delivered PPEs for protection. Additionally, UN-Habitat also worked with local youth to create a video blog series. There are now six videos, in English and Swahili, to spread correct knowledge about COVID-19 as well as dismiss misconceptions and misinformation within the community.

### **Way Forward**

UN-Habitat is working closely with WHO and partners to tailor public health responses and guidance and support local governments and community driven solutions in informal settlements by ensuring that public health measures (testing, contact tracing, etc.) are underpinned by action guaranteeing livelihoods and food security.<sup>21</sup>

The health of youth needs to be put in the forefront in policies without stigmatising and advocating against discrimination of people who are affected by the virus. The most fundamental

needs of human beings are physiological and safety needs. We need to put food safety, stable water supplies, safe environments and other survival needs of youth first. While local residents in informal settlements have to make a choice between being affected by hunger or by COVID-19, ensuring the recognition of the importance of food security in informal settlements when fighting against COVID-19 is crucial.

Basic services, particularly to vulnerable communities, must be a priority for national and local governments. These should include water, food, and sanitation and, for the poorest, cash transfers. They also need to ensure health centres and hospitals offer services to all and look at providing primary health care through community workers. Organisations must also work with government agencies to set up emergency funds for youth who cannot afford treatment.

UN-Habitat is working with youth to map existing COVID-19 assets such as healthcare facilities, clinics and water stations - and seeing if these can be upgraded. Self-quarantine is hard to achieve because of the density of living environment in informal settlements. Taking advantage of the existing facilities and upgrading it for medical use is an effective solution. This can be done by generating and integrating community data to shape local responses by planning public spaces and buildings for health and emergency services. Community organisations and health officials need to develop appropriate solutions for the self-isolation of those most at risk.

In Central America, UN-Habitat is supporting eight countries through SISCA (Central American Social Integration System) to support the implementation of COVID-19 mitigation measures contributing to strengthening long term socio-

<sup>20</sup> United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2020). UN-Habitat COVID-19 Response Plan: [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/04/final\\_un-habitat\\_covid-19\\_response\\_plan.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/04/final_un-habitat_covid-19_response_plan.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2020). UN-Habitat COVID-19 Response Plan: [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/04/final\\_un-habitat\\_covid-19\\_response\\_plan.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/04/final_un-habitat_covid-19_response_plan.pdf)

economic and health resilience of informal settlements communities.<sup>22</sup>

Agencies need to identify the most vulnerable and marginalized youth and pay attention to their needs and avoid the centralization of resources by powerful individuals. Mapping should be conducted to find out where the most vulnerable youth live, for example, the poor, the disabled, victims of domestic violence, young girls, and youth living with HIV.

A hotline can also be set up for free physical and mental health consulting service. When feeling stress or anxiety, people could call for assistance. South Africa's Department of health has created 24hrs hotline numbers; one for emergencies in case one suspects they might have contracted the virus and a WhatsApp contact number for speaking to a health worker.

There is also a need for radio information, call centres or social media in spreading correct information about COVID-19. Promoting public education and providing accessible information sources are key. Messaging must be accessible, culturally appropriate and understandable by all.

In Pakistan, a project named 'Call 1166' is a free consulting service to inform people on how to stay safe and connect them to a doctor when required. They have received around 70,000 calls a day since the outbreak of COVID-19.<sup>23</sup> In South Sudan, the Ministry of Health and UNICEF have partnered with over 25 radio stations across the country to broadcast and disseminate messages in 10 languages.

It is also necessary to continue to increase the capacity of youth-led organizations who were among the first to fight against COVID 19. Many of these groups have been providing services to the community for over a decade – COVID-19 is a "proof of concept" that they are up to the task – and more.

"In Ethiopia, UN-Habitat helping to supply water to waster pickers in the capital Addis Ababa who are at risk of infection. UN-Habitat is also conducting rapid mapping of community assets, spaces and vulnerable hotspots to allow appropriate responses such as providing water and sanitation, waste management and using public spaces near informal settlements to isolate people with COVID-19."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2020). UN-Habitat COVID-19 Response Plan: [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/04/final\\_un-habitat\\_covid-19\\_response\\_plan.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/04/final_un-habitat_covid-19_response_plan.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> UNICEF (2020). 'Call 1166': The COVID-19 helpline centre in Pakistan: <https://www.unicef.org/stories/call-1166-covid-19-helpline-centre-pakistan>.

<sup>24</sup> United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2020). UN-Habitat COVID-19 Response Plan: [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/04/final\\_un-habitat\\_covid-19\\_response\\_plan.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/04/final_un-habitat_covid-19_response_plan.pdf)

# III. Resource & Service Accessibility

As the COVID-19 pandemic deepens, the accessibility of resources and services has become increasingly limited for marginalized people, especially youth. With the fear of the community spread of COVID-19 virus, learning institutions were closed indefinitely cutting off children and youth from their education. Despite the embrace of e-learning and usage of online platforms to continue the school's curriculum, it has been a challenge for young people in rural areas and informal settlements to access online classes; they lack internet access or Wi-Fi hotspots, electricity, and infrastructure.

In Kenya, the government introduced Google's Loon balloons to provide a wider range of internet to rural areas, fill coverage gaps and improve the network by providing a 4G internet service.<sup>25</sup> This has been in cooperation with Telkom Kenya. However, most of the youth in the informal settlements and rural areas are unable to access this internet service as they are unable to pay for these services.

Developing countries have resorted to using of radio, television, home schooling and blended learning to avail education to the learners. These approaches are easily accessible compared to e-learning. However, they also bring the aspects of cost of teaching and need to purchase of electronic devices to facilitate the learning, which

is a challenge for the informal settlement dwellers.<sup>26</sup>

In Iraq, UN-Habitat is reorienting its existing activities to carry out COVID-19 responses, focusing on water, sanitation and hygiene, shelter improvements for the most vulnerable, job creation and public messaging. Working with UN partners, we contribute to an online platform that provides government endorsed information on COVID-19.<sup>27</sup>

During the pandemic, most recreational facilities have also been closed under government directives. The lack of access to education facilities and engagement in creative activities during the pandemic period has led to the increase in teenage and young women pregnancies aged 15-24 years. In Kenya for example, since January 2020, teenage pregnancies have increased and peaked in March in which schools were closed.<sup>28</sup> The lack of access to sexual reproductive health has also majorly contributed to the high rate of teenage pregnancies, which will directly affect the number of girls who will return to school post-COVID. These teenage and young women's often unwanted pregnancies have led to domestic violence and unsafe abortions.

Accessibility of medical services from hospitals has also been negatively impacted. Despite the government opening up the borders for persons needing medical attention; the shutdown of

<sup>25</sup> World Bank (2020). How countries are using EdTech to support access to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/edutech/brief/how-countries-are-using-edtech-to-support-remote-learning-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>

<sup>26</sup> University of Nairobi (2020). Follow the Bridge: COVID-19 and Remote Learning in Kenya, 11 May 2020.

<sup>27</sup> United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2020). UN-Habitat COVID-19 Response Plan: [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/04/final\\_un-habitat\\_covid-19\\_response\\_plan.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/04/final_un-habitat_covid-19_response_plan.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> AllAfrica (2020). Kenya: Report on Teen Pregnancies Alarms Kenyans, 18 June 2020.

clinics, increase in medication cost and neglect by health care workers as they focus on COVID-19 has made things worse.<sup>29</sup> As a result, patients with chronic diseases have been unable to access medical services, leading to deterioration of their health.

In addition, young pregnant women in informal settlements are at a risk of not accessing medical services due to lack of transportation during curfew hours. This can lead to the increase of maternal mortality. It was reported that the attendance of hospitals in Kenya reduced by 50%.<sup>30</sup> This is due to the fear or perception of one contracting the virus when seeking medical attention or being wrongly diagnosed as being a carrier of the COVID-19 virus. This perception has been growing by the increasing number of health workers who have contracted the virus while in their line of duty in Kenya and globally.

With the instability and sudden loss of jobs, it has become an extreme challenge for young entrepreneurs to access financial resources in the form of short- and long-term loans. Banks and micro finance institutions have decreased money lending due to the uncertainty of the payback by the young entrepreneurs. In Kenya, for example, in 2017 there was a huge increase of instant mobile lending apps, which immensely boosted small businesses as no collateral/guarantor was required. These mobile lending apps helped young entrepreneurs start or grow their businesses despite the high interest rates. However, the announcement of the first COVID-19 case in Kenya in March 2020 led to the mobile lending apps stopping the provision of loans thus negatively impacting young entrepreneurs' businesses.<sup>31</sup>

In Sri Lanka, UN-Habitat is supporting provincial councils and local authorities to establish a service provision database, facilitating online discussions with local authorities on their emergency response and training them on online reporting of services they provide. Discussions are ongoing on launching a risk communication campaign for communities in the tea plantations.<sup>32</sup>

Water is "recognised as being essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights and is defined as the right of everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable and physically accessible water for personal and domestic uses."<sup>33</sup> While many countries ensure that their constitution guarantees citizens the right to clean and safe water in adequate quantities, many fail to put it into practice, and the lack of water is particularly severe in informal settlements.<sup>34</sup>

While Sustainable Development Goal 6 strives to achieve equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water by 2030, globally, the UN-Water's World Water Development Report has highlighted, this is not the reality.<sup>35</sup> "Billions still lack safe water and sanitation facilities and people are being left behind because of discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, culture and socioeconomic status, among others."<sup>36</sup>

The OHCHR surveyed households across Kenya to follow the objectives of SDG 6 for those living in informal settlements and vulnerable communities. They found that residents of informal settlements pay up to 50 times the regular price of water per litre compared to middle class households, which meant that affording water for more frequent handwashing presents a significant economic

<sup>29</sup> Anita Chepkoech (2020). High risk patients have it rough in COVID-19 war. Daily Nation, 13 May 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Global Citizen (2020). Pregnant Women in Rural Kenya are Struggling to Access Health Care Amid COVID-19, 15 April 2020.

<sup>31</sup> Wainaina Wambu (2020). Tough times ahead as mobile lending apps freeze loans. The Standard, 7 April 2020.

<sup>32</sup> United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2020). UN-Habitat COVID-19 Response Plan: [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/04/final\\_un-habitat\\_covid-19\\_response\\_plan.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/04/final_un-habitat_covid-19_response_plan.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (2020) 'Kenya's Informal Settlements Need Safe Water to Survive COVID-19' 6 April, 2020.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> United Nations UN Water, 'World Water Development Report 2019', 18 March, 2019.

<sup>36</sup> United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (2020) 'Kenya's Informal Settlements Need Safe Water to Survive COVID-19' 6 April, 2020.

challenge.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, there were many security-related concerns by women who need to pay people to provide security while they collect water after dark due to increased crime rates. A third (35%) of respondents also indicated that it took them more than 30 minutes to access water since there are very few water points near their homes.<sup>38</sup> They also reported high incidences of water-borne diseases such as cholera as a result of contamination due to the poor condition of water and sewerage lines. This case is a fair representative of the conditions in informal settlements and cause a threat to youth.

As a way forward, the OHCHR developed a set of recommendations to national and county governments, which can be applicable globally. Recommendations included, “investing in extending the availability and accessibility of public water supply to informal settlements and vulnerable communities; putting in place regulatory frameworks to ensure the affordability of safe drinking water; investing in water and sanitation infrastructure, noting the close correlation between the rights to water and sanitation, and the right to health.”<sup>39</sup>

“In Kenya, the right of all Kenyans to safe and quality water in adequate quantities is enshrined in their Constitution, however, the survey revealed that while urban agglomerations generally have better access to water than rural areas, inequalities in access and affordability are acute for people living in informal settlements.”<sup>40</sup>

There is an urgent need for more vigorous water governance and management of pro-poor water policies, both at the local, national and international level. It is also essential to engage youth in the decision-making processes and

collaboration during policy formulation, implementation, and tracking. There is also a growing need to enhance access to and sharing of best practices in water resource management globally, drawing on both the national and international experiences.<sup>41</sup> “UN Human Rights is continuing its partnership with the Social Justice Centres to monitor the human rights impact of the COVID-19 crisis in informal settlements, and orient response and prevention measures to address the range of risks for vulnerable communities and groups.”<sup>42</sup>

Government institutions are called upon to enhance coordination of water related multi-stakeholder efforts, to build on and strengthen existing structures where possible, and to fight the outbreak in informal settlements.<sup>43</sup> With the global pandemic only becoming worse, we need sustainable measures to provide clean and safe water to informal settlements.

“As a matter of urgency Government should take back this important role and dismantle existing cartels in the settlements that sell water at high prices. Government should also as a matter of urgency in partnership with the community build sanitation blocks with constant water supply in the informal settlements. The response by the Government should address the systemic challenges facing informal settlements on matters water and sanitation. Urging the urban poor to adhere to frequent hand washing as a measure to prevent COVID 19 yet water is unavailable in the settlements is a big failure on the part of Government. As part of the emergency funds put in place to fight COVID 19 in Kenya, provision of accessible and safe water in the settlements should be a top priority.”<sup>44</sup>

<sup>37</sup> United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (2020). Right To Water in Kenya: Assessment of Access to Water in Informal Settlements.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Hakijamii (2020) *Looming Crisis of COVID-19 in Informal Settlements in Kenya*. 2 April 2020.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



## IV. Spatial Movement

In view of the exceptional situation and to preserve life, countries have no choice but to adopt extraordinary measures. Extensive lockdowns, adopted to slow transmission of the virus, restrict by necessity freedom of movement and, in the process, freedom to enjoy many other human rights. Such measures can inadvertently affect people's livelihoods and security, their access to healthcare (not only for COVID-19), to food, water and sanitation, work, education, as well as to leisure. Measures need to be taken to mitigate such unintended consequences. A lack of movement also means that youth are even less able to access essential services.

Confinement measures increases the likelihood of violence towards young people - particularly physical and sexual violence against girls, boys and

adolescent girls and young women - and may also hinder their ability to seek supportive services, including mental health services. Additionally, disproportionate restrictions by governments can leave young peacebuilders, human rights and environmental defenders less protected against attacks and threats.

Informal settlements are densely populated, with overcrowded public transport systems, little or no waste management, an absence of basic services and poor housing. Recommended measures to prevent COVID-19 transmission such as hand washing and physical distancing are often impossible in these areas, and health facilities are minimal. Youth and community-led civil society groups historically have stepped in to provide services often viewed as the domain of local

government, such as garbage collection and recycling, recreation and public space.<sup>45 46</sup>

It is common for families of 2-5 people to live in a single room shack or tenement block of around three by four metres. Shacks are often close to each other, with a single water tap and pit latrine shared between 5-10 families.<sup>47</sup> There is very limited public space for roads and pathways.

The average population density of 'slums' in Nairobi, Kenya, was 28,200 people per square kilometre in 2009, a 51% increase in just 10 years. One large high-density informal settlement (Mukuru) has a population density of 108,128 people per square kilometre. This makes it likely that the virus will spread rapidly.<sup>48</sup>

"Mapping and spatial analysis is key to inform decision-making. It is critical to map and understand the emergence of hotspots and their relationship to essential services. It can also help to map, predict and monitor population movements. This global mapping and analysis can shape and localize response: re-organizing informal markets and urban transport hubs, allocating space or buildings to be repurposed for emergency health services (triage points, self-isolation for those without adequate housing, etc)."<sup>49</sup> At UN-Habitat for example, the agency has collected a network of local and national partners who provide skills and resources in mapping to collect analytical data using innovative technology.

Capacities, risks, vulnerabilities and resilience profiling can be mapped. Through this mapping, the monitoring of local community resources and other factors can inform decision makers in areas that lack government visibility; issues such as

livelihoods, housing, food security, health and hygiene, etc) within informal settlements.

Monitoring this data and working with stakeholders and partners to analyse risk profiles and vulnerable populations ensures that needs can be met during and post-COVID-19.

Data is to key enabling evidence-based programming and responsiveness in combating COVID-19. Researchers and policy makers should work alongside youth community groups, utilizing local knowledge to better understand local contexts and challenges.

"In Tunisia UN-Habitat is supporting the development of a Leave No One Behind mobile app to provide a one-stop-shop information portal on COVID-19 to allow vulnerable communities to easily access essential services provided by the State, UN agencies, the private sector and civil society organizations."<sup>50</sup>

"In Egypt, UN-Habitat is using riverbank filtration technology which is easy to operate and maintain to extend affordable access to clean water and sanitation to vulnerable communities at high risk of infection."<sup>51</sup>

Another dimension of spatial movement is the use of public space. In the context of informal settlements and how youth in particular navigate and utilize public space, this is very complex. Temporal patterns and spacing of youth users over the day have changed drastically as they try to avoid peak hours, ensuring that they are staying inside during lockdown or curfew hours, and these new modalities have caused a shift in the pattern of public space usage.

<sup>45</sup> UN-Habitat and Tone Vesterhus, (2015); Youth-led Development in a Mathare Slum

<sup>46</sup> UN-Habitat and Tone Vesterhus, (2017); Youth, Informality and Public Space

<sup>47</sup> International Institute for Environment and Development (2020). 'Dealing with COVID-19 in the towns and cities of the global South' 27 March, 2020

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2020). UN-Habitat Covid-19 Policy and Programme Framework. 30 March, 2020.

<sup>50</sup> United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2020). UN-Habitat COVID-19 Response Plan: [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/04/final\\_un-habitat\\_covid-19\\_response\\_plan.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/04/final_un-habitat_covid-19_response_plan.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Additionally, “in the United States, geospatial data has shown that lower-income workers continued to move around in the midst of the pandemic, while higher income workers were more likely to work from home.”<sup>52</sup> Although skilled workers in the knowledge economy can easily transfer to working from home and practice distancing measures to minimize exposure, lower income workers may not have this choice. This most definitely is the case for young workers in the informal sector. If the informal “tele-working model becomes more entrenched”, it can alter the course of public space usage in general, as it will dictate who uses which space and generate more social divisions.<sup>53</sup>

Youth who are unable to work from home will be more likely to use public spaces, streets, public transit. The authors of the paper on ‘The Impact of COVID-19 on Public Space: A Review of the Emerging Questions’ also posit that, “some public spaces may cease to be places for social mixing by class, education level or income. The structural production of spatial segregation in public spaces creates political and moral dilemmas for future design and investment in urban space. Judging from the history of public urban investment allocations, it is easy to imagine where future improvements will be made.”<sup>54</sup> This is even more alarming for informal settlements and lower-income societies as the authors note.

“These racial, class and neighbourhood inequities may transfer over into the public-space realm. For instance, vulnerable groups tend to have less access to green spaces, public or private. Moreover, green spaces in lower-income neighbourhoods and informal settlements are either non-existent, are often smaller, under-maintained, and less numerous than those in wealthier neighbourhoods.”<sup>55</sup>

It is undeniable that for youth communities and for youth in informal settlements in particular,

public spaces serve a variety of purposes and are important as recreational outdoor spaces for these residents can provide relief from cramped living conditions.<sup>56</sup> These public spaces are particularly important for children and youth not only due to an increase in youth-based domestic violence or susceptibility to health conditions, but also because a lack of public space use will prevent them from staying active both physically and mentally, which will in turn also have adverse effects.

Globally, it is evident that the “limited quality of public spaces in lower income neighbourhoods and informal settlements is compounded by the absence of safety and security, as criminal groups have taken functional control of these spaces. In Chile, Venezuela, Turkey, Iran, Hungary and elsewhere, the pandemic has led authorities to re-assert control of the streets to enforce the quarantine and restrict movement, thereby making these spaces safer for health workers or essential services, but unusable for the general public, especially for protest.”<sup>57</sup>



This is especially evident in cities where we see police-based violence in regulating curfews and lockdown directives, which creates new questions with regard to the advisability of this militarized approach to ensuring safety in city spaces. This has disturbingly become a pattern in East Africa, India and other areas where police force is frequently

<sup>52</sup> Honey-Roses, J., Anguelovski, I, et al (2020) The Impact of COVID-19 on Public Space: A Review of the Emerging Questions (21 April, 2020) <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/rr7xa>

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

used as a regulation measure, providing another layer of insecurity for youth populations.



## V. Human Rights Impacts

The global pandemic has led to a significant increase in restrictions on the freedom of movement of people worldwide. This has led to an adverse impact on civic space and the ability of communities and individuals to exercise their right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.

Young people continue to bear the brunt of harassment and human rights violations both on and offline, however, prospects of a long-term global recession raises serious concerns over how these protection gaps and human rights restrictions will be addressed. Post-pandemic recovery will hopefully lead to an expansion of rights and participation of youth in public affairs so that we are more resilient to future crises.

Youth citizenship and engagement in governance is about more than political engagement. It is as much about dealing with limited access to economic resources, basic services and socio-

political assets. This begins with engaging youth as equal partners, recognizing their rights to participate in decision-making processes and to productively use their knowledge, perspectives, and experience to collaboratively inform on policy.<sup>58</sup>

Strong models of real and meaningful youth participation are crucial to secure effective youth engagement.<sup>59</sup> While youth make up a large proportion of the population in developing countries, they are often under-represented in decision-making processes and make up a large portion of vulnerable groups around the world.

Human rights are key in shaping the pandemic response, both for the public health emergency and the broader impact on youth lives and livelihoods. Further, youth in impoverished areas should be put at centre-stage in decision making. Responses that are shaped by and implement

<sup>58</sup> UN-Habitat (2013) Advancing Youth Civic Engagement and Human Rights. <https://unhabitat.org/advancing-youth-civic-engagement-and-human-rights>

<sup>59</sup> Norwegian Youth Council (LNU), UN-Habitat (2015); The Right to Participate.

human rights evaluations result in better outcomes in fighting the pandemic, ensuring healthcare for everyone and preserving human dignity. They can prepare us to emerge from this crisis with more equitable and sustainable societies, development and peace and a different outlook relating to youth impacts.

Globally, Human Rights law standards and international law guarantees individuals, including youth populations, the right to the highest attainable standard of health and safety. International human rights law obligates governments to take the necessary developments to ensure public health, prevent threats to health, and to deliver medical care to all, regardless of economic status, or the formal or informal settlements in which they live.

The Charter of the United Nations and The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) specifically prominently features in the Preamble of the Charter of the United Nations, "... to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small..."<sup>60</sup>

International Human Rights Law also acknowledges that during an emergency response, "serious public health threatens the life of the nation, restrictions on some rights can be justified when they have a legal basis, are strictly necessary, based on scientific evidence and neither arbitrary nor discriminatory in application, of limited duration, respectful of human dignity, subject to review, and proportionate to achieve the objective."<sup>61</sup>

A fundamental concern is the right to participation and inclusion of youth. "Containment and physical distancing measures may limit the capacity of youth to exercise their rights, leading to discrimination and the exclusion of young people

from decision-making processes, as well as limiting their right to peaceful assembly and association."<sup>62</sup> Although digital solutions exist, inequalities in access to the internet limits youth participation, while increasing cybercrime and other youth-based violence.

Another key concern is the right to peace and security for youth in informal settlements. "The risks of instability, radicalization and violence fuelled by the pandemic - especially in countries already affected by conflict, organized crime and terrorism – are unprecedented challenges for the international community."<sup>63</sup> Globally, youth have been advocating for stronger multilateral cooperation, equal public safety and security based on human rights and the rule of law, and decisive action to respond to the United Nations Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire.<sup>64</sup> Regarding young migrants and refugees, barriers faced to integrate into labour markets, education, health systems, and access basic services and sanitation within informal settlements may be exacerbated by the pandemic.

Human rights need to be in the forefront to advance protecting fundamental rights such as freedom of association and expression which are critical for young people to continue their human rights and peacebuilding work, during and post-pandemic.

Equality and non-discrimination are core human rights that apply at all times, but this pandemic provides evidence to why inequality and discriminatory practices are unacceptable and ultimately hurt everyone. We cannot afford to leave anyone behind in fighting the pandemic. Inequality affects the enjoyment of human rights by certain marginalized communities and youth in informal settlements in particular. The pandemic is revealing underlying structural inequalities that

<sup>60</sup> United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* December 10, 1948.

<sup>61</sup> Human Rights Watch (2020) 'Human Rights Dimensions of COVID-19 Response' 19 March 2020.

<sup>62</sup> United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth (2020) *Statement on COVID-19 & Youth* April 2020.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

are causing certain groups to be disproportionately affected.

Examples of good practice where responses are being shaped by human rights show that there is progress ahead. Many countries, where resources allow, have taken targeted measures to mitigate the economic and social impact of the crisis on the most vulnerable. Some countries have temporarily granted residency rights to all migrants and asylum-seekers in an irregular situation to give them full access to the country's healthcare as the outbreak escalates, thereby reducing the risks for wider public health. Others have made coronavirus care free to all. Measures have been adopted in some countries to protect vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, homeless people and young people living in institutions. Others suspended arrests of irregular migrants.

Young people are finding new ways to mitigate the risks that physical distancing poses on social justice and inclusion, as well as safeguarding the human rights of groups who are at risk. Young people are also seeking accountability for decisions made in COVID-19 responses to strengthen institutions and the rule of law through transparency and anti-corruption measures.

### **Way Forward**

The role of youth in the COVID-19 pandemic must be recognized. We must translate into actions so that governments and other stakeholders take to implement and monitor the SDGs, including in the selection of national-level indicators and the involvement of young people in monitoring progress. If made into a reality, these commitments to listen to and act on young people's views, including those most likely to experience discrimination and exclusion, will fulfil young people's rights and ensure that

governments develop strategies and plans that build on and learn from young people's experiences, innovation, and expertise. Young people are entitled to hold the state and its decision-makers accountable for their duties and performance.

Human rights should be at the centre of the COVID-19 response planning process. Urban safety and security strategies should be human rights-based, respecting the rule of law and promoting a culture of lawfulness. Holistically, they should actively address the culture of youth-based violence, intolerance and corruption, with the primary objective of ensuring that all people, institutions, local and national governments take care of and protect inhabitants during this time, allowing them to live free from fear, crime and violence, promoting civic responsibility, social cohesion and solidarity.<sup>65</sup>

The United Nations system-wide guidelines on safer cities and human settlements states, "it is crucial that local governments, in collaboration with national and subnational governments, fully integrate human rights in their strategic urban planning and decision-making processes post-COVID and in the delivery of services. This requires taking account of the specific experiences, interests and needs of youth at all stages, and of those who belong to at risk and excluded communities and groups. To be effective, urban safety and security strategies should be aligned with the obligations, responsibilities and actions of States and institutions within the framework of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and inform the vision, objectives, programme priorities and capacities of all relevant local departments."<sup>66</sup> This alignment must be implemented on a local level within informal settlements to ensure that the interests of marginalised youth in these communities adequately met.

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<sup>65</sup> United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) *United Nations System-wide Guidelines on Safer Cities and Human Settlements*, 31 May, 2019.

<sup>66</sup> United Nations Habitat Assembly of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, *Draft United Nations system-wide guidelines on safer cities and human settlements*, Report of the Executive Director 31 May, 2019. HSP/HA/1/2/Add.3

# VI. Education

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented impact on the world, creating uncertainty and risks for all. Due to the unexpected outbreak in more than 200 countries, many students had to spend extended periods of time at home. The Chinese Ministry of Education estimates that more than 220 million children and adolescents are confined to their homes. More than 127 million kindergartens, primary, and secondary school students in Eastern and Southern Africa remain at home due to the COVID-19 outbreak.<sup>67</sup>

Evidence suggests that when children are out of school (i.e. weekends and summer holidays), they are physically less active, have much longer screen time, irregular sleep patterns, and less favourable diets, resulting in weight gain and a loss of cardiorespiratory fitness. Such negative effects on health are likely to be much worse when children are confined to their homes without outdoor activities and interaction with same aged friends during the outbreak. And the situation is much worse for youth living in dense rooms in informal settlements.

To combat the challenges of COVID-19 on the education system, learning at home has been supported by online tools in most parts of the world. However, in Eastern and Southern Africa, internet access is limited; barely one in five (22%) of households have internet access, while 84% of the rural population have no electricity.<sup>68</sup>

The situation faced by youth living in informal settlements is that they have no access to the internet, they cannot afford computers or tablets to join online learning, and many do not have a

stable power supply. In some areas of informal settlements, students use TV or radios for distance learning, which limits immediate communication with teachers. These challenges do not give them the same opportunities and access to online learning resources.

Youth living in informal settlements work at the home; they take care of their younger siblings, clean, etc. This work can distract them from their schoolwork. In the long-term, continuing education will be more difficult for those living in informal settlements. With long lockdowns, youth are more likely to be deprived of education in the future. Families may not be able to afford the youth going back to school.

'No one left behind' is the principle for education and ensuring equal developmental opportunities is the only way for youth to achieve their potential. We need to think holistically and take resilience into consideration. Action should be taken now to guarantee that youth have equal access to education.

UNICEF is working with the Government of Bangladesh to offer effective remote learning programmes using TV, radio, mobile phone and internet platforms to reach the maximum number of children and youth. UNICEF has also trained people to assist teachers with remote classes. Unlike in many developed countries, most children in Bangladesh do not have access to the internet. This is why the initial education response focused

<sup>67</sup> Lancet (2020) Mitigate the effects of home confinement on children during the COVID-19 outbreak; [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30547-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30547-X/fulltext)

<sup>68</sup> <https://www.developmentaid.org/#!/news-stream/post/64376/schools-remain-locked-for-more-than-127-million-children-in-eastern-and-southern-africa>

on delivering classes on TV, as television sets are more widely available in households.<sup>69</sup>

“In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil with support of the Ministry of Education, specific content for Microsoft Teams digital classroom platform and printed materials are being prepared for students.”<sup>70</sup>

### **Way Forward**

The UN continues to work with education systems and government allies to make quality of education a top priority under all circumstances. It is essential to pursue quality education despite the different teaching modes adopted. It is important that less privileged children do not lose out. We urgently need to act now to give them alternative ways to learn and to help rebuild routines.

It is also necessary to ensure that communities have electricity. Applications of special funds in upgrading the infrastructure on the improvement of information, communication, technology creates possibilities for distance learning for youth living in informal settlements.

Governments should also provide guidelines and principles in effective online learning and ensure that the contents of the courses meet the educational requirements. Governments might mobilize existing resources, perhaps involving NGOs, and create a platform for gathering the best online education courses about healthy lifestyle and psychosocial support programmes available for schools to choose from.

Schools have a critical role to play—not only in delivering educational materials to children, but in offering an opportunity for students to interact with teachers and obtain support. Schools need to design emergency home schooling plans and implement them according to the local environment. For example, for those who cannot afford to buy a computer and obtain internet services, they could be guided to learn through means such as radio, phone and printed materials.<sup>71</sup> Efforts should be made by schools and teachers at all levels to create online courses and deliver them through TV broadcasts or other modalities. For example, the textbooks could be delivered home to youth living in informal settlements.

Increasing the communication between families and teachers produces participation from parents and siblings within an education system. Creative solutions and self-help groups need to be built to create opportunities for youth to receive better education opportunities. Specifically, heightened attention should be paid to continuous education for girls. Girls tend to shoulder more housework at home within informal settlements, so they have less time for learning at home, as mentioned. Girls tend to drop out from school if the families have limited budgets. Public education is crucial for gender equality.

It is necessary to build partnerships with the private sector to address the digital divide, and to provide access to women, youth and children to support the continuance and advancement of distance learning. And finally, it is essential to support soft skills, vocational skills and digital literacy among youth at risk of violence.

<sup>69</sup> UNICEF(2020): Students in Bangladesh adjust to remote learning via national TV during COVID-19 lockdown: <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/stories/students-bangladesh-adjust-remote-learning-national-tv-during-covid-19-lockdown>

<sup>70</sup> UN Women (2020) COVID-19 and Ensuring Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls

<https://cities4health.org/assets/library-assets/brief-covid-19-and-ensuring-safe-cities-and-safe-public-spaces-for-women-and-girls-en.pdf>

<sup>71</sup> UNICEF (2020). Schools remain locked for more than 127 million children in Eastern and Southern Africa: <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/schools-remain-locked-more-127-million-children-eastern-and-southern-africa>

# VII. Youth-Based Violence & Safety

Movement restrictions, loss of income, isolation, overcrowding and high levels of stress and anxiety are increasing the likelihood that young people, especially children, experience and observe physical, psychological and sexual abuse at home – particularly those children already living in abusive situations.

For young people coming from higher-income families, while online communities have become central to maintain many children’s learning, support and play, it is also increasing their exposure equally to cyberbullying, risky online behaviour and sexual exploitation. The situation is aggravated by children’s lack of access to peers, teachers, social workers and the safe space and services that schools provide. The most vulnerable young people – including refugees, migrants, and children who are displaced, living on the street and in urban slums, with disabilities and living in conflict-affected areas – are a particular concern.

Family relationships may worsen during quarantine. Domestic violence is increasing globally as the COVID-19 pandemic combines economic and social stresses with measures to restrict contact and movement. Crowded homes, substance abuse, limited access to services and reduced peer support are exacerbating abuse.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) youth also face potential physical and psychological violence, as they are often confined in hostile environments with unsupportive family members or co-habitants. This can increase their exposure to violence, as well as their anxiety or depression.

At the same time, support services are struggling, and this impacts youth as well. Judicial, police and health services that are first responders for youth are overwhelmed, have shifted priorities, or are otherwise unable to help. Some domestic violence shelters are full due to the rising needs, others have had to close or have been repurposed as health centres. Some COVID-19 prevention measures, such as the closing of schools, have abruptly cut children off from positive and supportive relationships they rely on when in distress, including at school, in the extended family, and in the community.

Aside from domestic violence, youth-based violence should also be taken into consideration. With the rising crime rate, girls are more likely to be the victim of sexual abuse. Current measures to respond to COVID-19 such as physical distancing and curfews have decreased the number of people on the street, resulting in a heightened risk of sexual violence and other forms of violence that women regularly experience when exercising outdoors, working in public work settings, living on the street, traveling to and from home and work (for example those performing essential services, or those working in the informal sector).

During COVID-19, sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women continue to occur on streets, in parks, on transport, and online:

- In Chile, Canada, Nigeria, the Philippines, Kenya, India, and the US cases of sexual violence against women in public spaces continue being reported

during the crisis.<sup>72</sup> Different forms of online violence are on the rise including bullying, and sexual harassment. This has led to increased calls to domestic violence helplines, police and shelters in order to seek help.

- In Vancouver, reports of domestic violence to helplines have increased by 300 % since the lockdown.<sup>73</sup>
- In New York, the number of visits to the city's domestic violence resource website, has nearly tripled - from about 45 visits per day to 115 between March 18 to April 5, 2020.<sup>74</sup>

Emerging data including data from human rights organizations and police reveal that sexual violence against women and girls in public spaces continues to occur since the outbreak of COVID 19 in urban, rural and online settings, which is exceptionally concerning where there are greater restrictions on movement. "In Valparaiso, Chile, London, Canada, Nigeria, the Philippines, Kenya, India, and the US, government authorities and/or civil society partners have indicated cases of sexual violence against women in public spaces during the crisis, including some incidences where substance abuse is a facilitating factor."<sup>75</sup> There has also been an increase of reported sexual harassment cases with young women workers who walk or cycle to work to avoid public transport during the pandemic.<sup>76</sup>

Fear and experience of sexual violence impacts youth's right to the city including freedom of movement, livelihoods, and access to services. Local leaders responding to COVID-19 related impacts can work towards securing resources such as personal protective equipment and advocate for local resources in proposed stimulus plans to mitigate the socioeconomic impacts of the crisis including violence against youth and children.<sup>77</sup>

They can communicate the message on COVID-19 and youth safety measures, and in informal settlements where communication is limited, online and offline, in coordination locally with public health, police, schools, economic development, public transportation and other authorities and partners.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, they can ensure safe spaces for youth, young girls in particular, and reassure victims/survivors including strengthening and expansion of shelters, helplines and counselling adapted to the crisis context.

### **Way Forward:**

Home should be a child's first line of defence and protection. Stressors related to COVID-19 are threatening that defence. Households worldwide are struggling to cope with livelihood stress and unpredictability of life and future. We need to work with the government to identify the most vulnerable families and provide emergency support systems for them. Reducing survival stress will reduce the tension within the family and create a harmonious family environment for youth development.

Quarantine measures have disrupted the formal and informal protective systems that generally identify and respond to young people's risks. Under these circumstances, we need come up with new intervention plans. On one hand, we need extend the capacity of shelter homes for victims of youth violence. On the other hand, we need to come up with a standardized procedure of intervention when identifying suspected domestic violence, and especially youth-based violence cases.

Public education regarding domestic violence prevention is essential during this time. Parents and other family members need to realize that violence cannot solve problems, violence will put

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<sup>72</sup> UN Women (2020) COVID-19 and Ensuring Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls <https://cities4health.org/assets/library-assets/brief-covid-19-and-ensuring-safe-cities-and-safe-public-spaces-for-women-and-girls-en.pdf>

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

the family in a vicious cycle of stress. To assist in mitigation, the government could provide free hotline consulting services for people to express their stress in a healthy way. As well as encouraging neighbours to be actively involved in monitoring violence within communities and report to community leaders for intervention.

Governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), communities, schools, and parents need to raise awareness of youth-based violence and effectively address these issues immediately. Youth-based violence solutions are comprised of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention measures. They need to be holistic, integrating prevention in broader urban strategies and interventions. Local governments have demonstrated that as the level of government closest to the people, they are in the best position to empower and mobilize communities to tackle the root causes and modify the situations which breed violence. Some of them have organized communities holistically to face the challenge of domestic violence.

As highlighted in the UN-Habitat Strategic Plan 2020 -2023, it is important to address safety as a cross-cutting theme for sustainable urban development, and therefore its further integration in urban development support strategies and interventions (NUA, 103) should be actively pursued. Recognizing urban safety as a cross-cutting theme and as a key component of progress towards sustainable urban development will complement efforts that have been made to place urban safety and crime prevention in the Security and Justice sectors at national level, as part of the broader efforts of UN-HABITAT for the inclusion of specific urban agendas in such strategies.

The SDG 11 reinforces the UN-Habitat's mandate and work on making cities and human settlements safe, read in link with SDG 16 and SDG 5. As well, the SCP is aligning its work in response to NUA para 103 calling on governments to integrate crime prevention policies into urban strategies and

interventions – this is necessary now more than ever to be implemented into the COVID-19 response to address the impact that the pandemic has on youth-based violence.

The co-production of safety and security at the local level is a fundamental part of an urban safety and security strategy, especially during this pandemic. It is process-oriented, amplifying the role of local leadership and including inhabitants as key actors, taking into consideration the wide-ranging nature of the causes of crime and violence, and the skills and responsibilities required to address them. This requires the establishment of partnerships across levels of government and among community organizations, non-governmental organizations, the business sector and inhabitants, including those who are most excluded.

Local governments, in collaboration with national and subnational governments, should recognize the different constituencies within civil society and should strive to ensure that all are represented in the co-production of safety and security in their communities and neighborhoods.

“In Ethiopia, the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth (MoWCY) in collaboration with UN Women are providing support to homeless women, youth and children including shelter, food and sanitary products during the emergency. In Hawassa City, safe city messages on prevention and response to domestic violence and sexual violence have been shared with religious authorities for community outreach.”<sup>79</sup>

Community leaders could call the urban actors on a weekly/monthly basis to explore their current needs of families with difficulties and allocate resources to the vulnerable. Teachers could call students to ensure their safety at home. Social workers could also play an active role in helping parents cope with family issues arising from the situation when needed. Traditional and religious

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

leaders, youth and women leaders need to drive the responses as they often have care roles and are well connected in the community. They need to be empowered to create a self-help group in combating youth-based violence and supporting each other. Intervention should also be tailored to the context of local communities. Such a social safety net could be particularly useful for the disadvantaged and the service should be accessible to victims of youth-based violence.

“The city of Valparaiso, Chile, as part of the Safe City and Safe Public Spaces Initiative is promoting bystander interventions around empty buildings to prevent violence against women in public spaces during COVID 19 in collaboration with the Mayor’s office and UN Women.”<sup>80</sup>

“In Bogota and Cali, Colombia and Mexico City, Mexico, safe city with women and girls’ partners are working to strengthen apps and mobile technology to offer services to women survivors of violence during the quarantine.”<sup>81</sup>

Making cities and human settlements safe is one of the key aspirations reflected in Goal 11 of the 2030 Agenda. Similarly, in the New Urban Agenda, Member States committed to promoting a safe, healthy, inclusive, and secure environment in cities and human settlements, enabling all to live, work and participate in urban life without fear of violence and intimidation, taking into consideration that women and girls, children and youth, and persons in vulnerable situations are often particularly affected.

Most importantly, UN-Habitat is calling for a multilevel governance of safety approach with youth as agents of change; of a planning for safety approach, with specific attention to youth in informal settlements and public spaces; of a management of safety, with specific attention to integrated youth policies at the municipal level that invest in youth leadership of violence

prevention programmes at the neighbourhood level.

We must intervene with tools by drawing from our agency normative strength – reflected in the United Nations System-wide Guidelines on Safer Cities and Human Settlements. The concept of “safer cities and human settlements” therefore comprises integrated, innovative and inclusive approaches to urban safety and security, which are complementary to and build on the concept of crime prevention to be applied during and post-COVID-19.

Ensuring urban-rural safety and security requires a city-wide and participatory process to address the multiple causes and risk factors for crime, violence and insecurity in cities and human settlements, and to put in place the factors that protect against those causes and risks. Such a process helps to create the conditions for more sustainable, inclusive, cohesive and just cities and human settlements, by intervening to address the multiple causes of crime; by improving the quality of life and combating social exclusion and inequality in cities and human settlements. It also reflects a recognition that better urban planning and good urban governance are necessary but not sufficient to address crime and violence during and post-COVID. They must also be accompanied by other risk-based interventions that target particular issues in specific areas, with support from subnational and national government agencies.

Achieving urban safety and security is both a process and an outcome. National, regional and local governments must put in place appropriate measures towards the full realization of urban safety and security. In accordance with the availability of resources (financial and other), governments should take progressive steps to fulfil this mandate without jeopardizing prior achievements and basic human rights.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

# VIII. Climate Change

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This year marks the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, but the COVID-19 outbreak meant that celebrations looked very different from usual. Scenes from previous years of millions of children and young people marching for climate action have been replaced by empty streets and deserted public spaces. Children and young people may be staying home, but they are continuing to make their voices heard as they move the #ClimateStrikeOnline.

The last few years have seen young people around the world raising their voices on an unprecedented scale, asking adults and leaders to protect them from climate change. In September 2019, around 6 million students from more than 100 countries marched in the streets demanding political action be taken. Groups like Fridays for Future have taken their weekly demonstrations online. Now, by staying inside and taking their climate marches online, young people are showing solidarity with older members of society, who are more vulnerable to the virus, by helping to stop the spread.

This kind of intergenerational solidarity is what solves crises. As the impact of climate change intensifies over time, it is the children and young people of today who will face its worst effects. Young people have been telling us that they are afraid of climate change with the same urgency as people now feel about COVID-19. This is a time for children and young people to talk with parents and grandparents, to discuss the kind of world we want to create when the pandemic has passed.

This pandemic has highlighted the need to shift to a more resilient energy infrastructure based on renewables. It is necessary that we craft a green economic future where we take care of everyone, especially our youth, and that no one is left behind.

It is estimated that governments might invest approximately ten trillion dollars or more for coronavirus response and recovery. Using these funds to help shift towards a much more low-carbon and resilient economy going forward and one which is much more equal for people around the world in society is something that can be done to seize the opportunity while we have seen significant declines in greenhouse gas emissions in some places during the pandemic, which is unlikely to be sustainable if we return to 'normal'.

Both climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic require us to listen to experts, to unite behind the science and not play politics with people's lives. This means responding to the challenge at the appropriate scale and treating a crisis like a crisis with the urgency that's needed. UNICEF has created a toolkit for young people to raise awareness and take action against COVID-19. Many of these lessons and guidance can also be applied to climate change, such as helping to combat misinformation online. Due to COVID-19, around 1.6 billion children are deprived of education.<sup>82</sup> This creates risks for a generation less equipped to take action on, or deal with the impacts of, the climate crisis. All children should be equipped with the resources, including remote learning and technology, to continue their

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<sup>82</sup> UNICEF (2020). Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic for tackling the climate crisis: <https://www.unicef.org/stories/lessons-covid-19-pandemic-tackling-climate-crisis>

education, even if they are not physically at school.

Education is one of the most valuable tools we have to fight climate change, because it provides children and young people with the skills and knowledge, they need to create a better tomorrow. We can help them use this time at home to build their strengths, their creativity, and their desire to confront any challenge.

In terms of economic resilience and job security in the future, the Climate and Economics World Resources Institute states that green bonds in particular are essential in terms of trying to build back better coming out of the pandemic and they do so in a way which creates more resiliency against future shocks as well as clean energy investments that can yield an estimated three to eight times the economic return of fossil fuel investments and global renewable energy which could provide 42 million new jobs by 2050.

With the inevitable rise in unemployment that Covid-19 may result in, for example, an African economic rebound based on resilience and powered by the continent's abundant clean energy resources will create more jobs, enhance trade and contribute to global climate action, while addressing the continent's chronic energy access deficit.

Many young climate activists are worried about the broader impact that the COVID-19 crisis will have on climate policy, concerned that some measures currently under review as ways to mitigate the impact of the pandemic, may worsen the climate crisis in the long run.

### Youth Activism

Fridays for Future is asking politicians to kickstart the economy with sustainability in mind, so society

will also benefit. They believe it would be a better use of taxpayers' money to invest in renewable energy sources or improved healthcare systems than subsidies for the coal industry. Calling for change online: Fridays for Future are joined by environmental organizations, trade unions, the Protestant Church and political parties like the Greens in their calls for a digital strike for the climate.

The group from Cologne has also planned bicycle protests. Demonstrators will ride in twos at a safe distance from one another through the city using microphones or sound systems to make themselves heard. Those who live along the bike route received flyers in their mailboxes informing them of the protest — and also inviting them to hang posters in their windows or on their doors.<sup>83</sup>

In a contribution to an Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) publication on COVID-19, the African Climate Policy Centre (ACPC) of the ECA says while momentum on climate action may be hampered by the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis, the way the world has responded to the pandemic may help the global response in dealing with the existential threat of climate change.<sup>84</sup>

Governments across the board have taken swift actions to deal with the pandemic, including financial stimulus and support packages, and there has been great solidarity between countries and between communities, the medical profession and the science community with data sharing and support across borders.

“This is the time for everyone to reflect on their contribution to our planet. We should be asking ourselves tough questions. I think we should maintain the lifestyle we've adopted during COVID-19. It's a clear signal that when we don't take action, we risk millions of lives. It's a reminder to treat all emergencies as emergencies. We need

<sup>83</sup> Deutsche Welle (2020). Climate strikers get inventive during the COVID-19 crisis: <https://www.dw.com/en/climate-strikers-get-inventive-during-the-covid-19-crisis-fridays-for-future/a-53229262>

<sup>84</sup> United Nations Africa Renewal (2020). COVID-19 lessons offer hope for global efforts to address climate change impacts: <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/news/coronavirus/covid-19-lessons-offer-hope-global-efforts-address-climate-change-impacts>

to listen and base [our actions] on science, not personal opinions.

Climate change is reducing crop production, causing hunger, starvation and malnutrition in children. The change in weather patterns has [sparked the rise of] diseases like malaria and cholera. Air pollution is also affecting human health. The urgency used to respond to COVID-19 should also be used in addressing climate change. There's danger in delaying climate action. We can promote climate action as individuals, groups, communities and as governments. Climate action is everyone's responsibility." Leah Namugerwa is a 15-year-old climate activist and Team Leader at Fridays for Future Uganda.<sup>85</sup>

In a recent opinion piece, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said; "the impact of the coronavirus is immediate and dreadful. We must act now, and we must act together. Just as we must act together to address another urgent global emergency that we must not lose sight of — climate change."<sup>86</sup>

## Conclusion

In a post-COVID world, youth must be empowered to assume strong leadership and participation in coordination roles and to inform policies related to health, security and the governance and the management of public and urban affairs. They need to do this with strong participation of vulnerable youth populations for us to move towards liveable settlements, reduced inequalities, and equal access to basic services, education, and healthcare.

Accurate and timely data and analysis on youth-specific programmes with effective monitoring modalities can ensure that sustainable youth-focused policy changes are made. There is an urgent need for innovation, new technology, new business models and new types of financing with more partnerships with the private sector to scale

up initiatives for disadvantaged youth communities. Through and beyond COVID-19 we need to implement new strategies to affect sustainable change.

The response to COVID-19 in informal settlements provides an opportunity to rethink urban planning and find innovative sustainable ways to eradicate slums, and to provide basic services to ensure that the impacts detailed in this policy brief are adequately analysed and that solutions are created to ensure that equal disaster and crisis risk management is effectively delivered in the most vulnerable areas, such as informal settlements.

Local authorities will have to be the driving force in reducing inequality, supported by national government policies to leapfrog into a sustainable

<sup>85</sup> UN Women (2020). Advice from activists: How COVID-19 is changing climate activism for young women:

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/compilation-covid-19-and-climate-activism>

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

urban future with safer, more accessible, and more resilient settlements.

As one of UN-Habitat's core objectives for example, it is necessary for community-based programming to be implemented for an integrated response and to raise public awareness to foster behavioural change within policy and decision-making. These community-based centres are critical in giving a voice to disadvantaged youth populations and marginalized youth groups to illustrate the inequalities they face in accessing water and other basic services, expressing their priorities and shaping the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the grassroots level.

As billions of individuals still lack safe water, sanitation and health facilities and other basic services, it is clear that people are still being left behind due to discrimination based on age, gender, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic status and more. Although these rights are enshrined in constitutions globally, inequalities, especially within marginalized youth groups, are even more evident due to the pandemic. It is also exceptionally difficult to implement WHO directives on hygiene, handwashing and physical distancing prevention measures in informal settlements due to the limited access of services.

It is evident that measures need to be taken to ensure that youth are recognized and that this recognition is translated into actions that local and national governments and other stakeholders can implement and monitor effectively while utilizing young people in the monitoring process. It is essential that governments create strategies and development plans that incorporate youth experiences. Programmes implementing the SDGs and Agenda 2030 should be monitored in a way that captures both the experiences and views of young people and includes them in the processes that hold governments accountable for these global commitments, and overall to have marginalized youth participate to inform decision making on policies, and as 'critical agents of change',<sup>87</sup> young people have an important role in generating, using and analysing data on key issues that affect their lives. Goal 16 sets out clear and objectives to ensure 'effective, accountable and transparent institutions' (16.6), alongside 'responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making' (16.7), at all levels. The pandemic has made it distinctively clear that realizing and operationalizing the voices of marginalized youth is more crucial than ever before.

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<sup>87</sup> UNDP, Plan International, "Critical agents of change' in the 2030 Agenda: Youth-inclusive governance indicators for national-level monitoring. January, 2016.