

Urban regeneration as a tool for inclusive and sustainable recovery

Report on the Expert Group Meeting

1 - 2 December 2021

Hybrid event co-hosted by UN-Habitat and the Basque Country Government
in Bilbao, Basque Country, Spain.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), through its Inclusive, Vibrant Neighbourhoods and Communities Flagship Programme, and within the framework of the collaboration between UN-Habitat and the Government of the Basque Country, organized an **Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the role of Urban Regeneration as a tool for Inclusive and Sustainable Recovery** that was held on **December 1-2, 2021** in the Basque city of **Bilbao**. The event brought together experts and practitioners from national, regional and local governments,

research institutions, as well as private sector and civil society actors from around the world. This report summarises the proceedings of the two-day meeting, highlighting key messages, discussion points, best practices and recommendations from experts and participants. The debate focused on Urban Regeneration as an integrative process and essential instrument that city leaders, planners and policymakers, together with civil society, investors, and the private sector should consider achieving sustainable and inclusive cities, and the COVID-19 pandemic recovery.

Insights and recommendations

- Urban Regeneration represents an integrative process and essential city planning instrument that should reflect the new trends of fast-moving climate change, urban health, accelerated digital transformation, shifting notion and products of culture and increasing spatial inequality. These present challenges should also be seen as opportunities to advance, finance and build-back-better through urban regeneration initiatives.
- In the context of unprecedented government responses through fiscal stimulus packages, Urban Regeneration is being prioritised at the different scales and becomes a central tool for the execution of recovery plans.
- Inclusive and sustainable Urban Regeneration promotes a shift in the paradigm for urban life. It must consider social, economic, physical, and environmental aspects and set Environmental Social Governance (ESG) at the core of policies and operations.
- Urban Regeneration needs to be built on qualitative, reliable and comparable data and evidence.
- The integration of different governance levels, sectors, interested parties and the local community is crucial, and an investment is needed in partnerships, matchmaking, and innovation in working with different types of partners.
- Costs and investments should reflect a more holistic approach to Urban Regeneration: budget streams need to be connected and co-benefits articulated.

Urban regeneration moving forward

Participants in the EGM underlined their need and desire to work together multidisciplinary and at global level by sharing experiences, learning from each other and being part of a Reference Group, with cities, researchers and practitioners committed to the study of Urban Regeneration. This will lead to the development of global norms, principles and standards, and also support the efforts to consolidate benchmarks, data and methodologies to monitor spatial inequality and the contribution of Urban Regeneration to spatial inclusion and integration.

This collaborative effort also extends to the 11th World Urban Forum, which will take place in Katowice, Poland, in June 2022. In the future, UN-Habitat plans to promote further knowledge-sharing and international collaboration within its *Flagship Programme 1: Inclusive, Vibrant Neighbourhoods and Communities*, and also with the development of the *Guidelines on Inclusive and Sustainable Urban Regeneration*, that will include some of the content debated on the EGM around data, impact orientation, benchmarks and methodologies, among other areas.



Expert Group Meeting participants | © UN-Habitat

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Introduction

Regeneration processes around the world are seeking to transform urban areas into more diverse and vibrant neighbourhoods and extend those positive impacts into the wider city-scale. As an integrated and inclusive process that combines physical, environmental, and socio-economic measures, Urban Regeneration has been recognized as one of the most comprehensive and effective tools that governments can adopt to promote more inclusive, resilient, safer, and sustainable cities.

It is in this context that the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on *Urban Regeneration as a tool for inclusive and sustainable recovery* gathered a diverse group of urban experts, representing different levels of governance as well as other urban actors, to exchange and compare international experiences, highlight good practices and discuss on concepts, data, methodologies and current challenges and opportunities. It also aimed at providing specific recommendations for the green and digital transition in cities, the financial packages, policy, and governance models, all of which facilitate positive regeneration processes.

The discussion revolved around current urban dynamics that force us to look at Urban Regeneration through an adjusted lens, including urban health and post-pandemic recovery, climate change adaptation and mitigation, shifting notion and products of culture, and the digital transformation. These dynamics may be perceived as challenges within the urban environment, but they also represent significant opportunities.

Regeneration processes require innovative approaches and financing, as well as complex, inclusive and sustainable policies that counteract the realities of displacement and speculation, historically associated with urban renewal strategies. Policy and governance frameworks, as well as innovative finance for Urban Regeneration were also discussed during the EGM as they continue to represent significant challenges, especially in the strained economic conditions many cities face today.

In the actual context of an increasingly urban world, the UN Secretary-General's Policy Brief on COVID-19 in an Urban World (July 2020) calls attention to the role of cities in addressing inequalities. Urban Regeneration has emerged as a fitting urban planning tool to ensure sustainable and inclusive city growth and enable the fulfilment of the objectives of the New Urban Agenda and SDG 11 in order to form inclusive settlements where the environmental values of urbanization are accessible to all citizens.

This report provides a summary of the EGM, with insights from each of the four panel sessions including key discussion points, tools, resources and recommendations from the experts, as well as the way forward and the expected outcomes of the meeting.



EGM objectives

- Share international experiences and good practices related to Urban Regeneration.
- Unpack current trends, identify opportunities, and provide specific recommendations for the green and digital transition in cities, the financial packages, policy, and governance models, facilitating positive Urban Regeneration processes.
- Identify the necessary preconditions for governments wishing to develop Urban Regeneration policies and interventions that take into account the new urban vulnerabilities and trends that have emerged after COVID-19.

Speakers

Speakers included 22 representatives of national and local governments, civil society, academia, global institutions and the private sector, from which more than half of them were women. They presented insights and case studies from Singapore, Netherlands, Spain, UK, USA, Chile, Italy, France, South Africa, Iran, Denmark and the European Commission. 12 Special guest respondents from 8 different countries were also invited to comment on the presentations and initiate the open discussion.

Participants

A total of 42 invited participants took part on the EGM, including the speakers and special guest respondents of each session, moderators from UN-Habitat and some attendees that were invited to take part in the open debate. The event was held in a hybrid format, with both face-to-face and online participation from all global regions.

There was equal participation by men and women, and also in-person and online attendance (Figure 1). Participants were representatives of various types of institutions (Figure 2), as well as from all global regions (Figure 3).

Fig 1. EGM participation by gender and attendance



Fig 2. EGM participation by institution type



Fig 3. EGM participation by global region



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