

# Gender Equality and Sustainable Urbanisation

## Fact Sheet



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For urbanisation to be sustainable, governments, policy makers and the development community need to understand the gender impacts of rural-urban migration, international migration, slum growth and rapid urbanisation. When urban design and services—including water, sanitation, transport and markets—address gender discrimination and promote equal opportunities, greater social and economic benefits can be achieved.

Gender equality and sustainable urbanisation are crucial not only for the survival of cities, but for the realisation of global commitments and targets, including the Millennium Development Goals.

The global challenge in an increasingly urban world is to ensure that towns and cities provide healthy and safe living environments, productive economies and social benefits to diverse groups, and for generations to come. Success depends on good governance and the engagement of men and women as equal partners and agents for change.

Today, just over half the world's people live in urban areas.<sup>1</sup> Ninety-five per cent of urban growth takes place in the developing world.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, gender inequalities in cities are substantial barriers to development in many, if not most, developing countries. The proportion of urban dwellers is expected to rise to 70 per cent by 2050,<sup>3</sup> and if governments fail to make effective interventions, the number of slum dwellers will continue to rise rapidly.

Slum dwellers make up close to 828 million people or 33 percent of the world's urban population.<sup>4</sup> They experience varying deprivations and risks, which can include a lack of durable housing, overcrowding, insufficient access to clean water, poor sanitation, and threats of forced evictions. Women and girls often suffer the worst effects.



*Vietnamese women on motorcycles*

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## URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

### Gender equality and adequate shelter for all



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change—these structures have the lowest resilience to disasters.

One of the targets of the Millennium Development Goals is to improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020, while providing adequate alternatives to new slum formation (Goal 7, [target 7.d](#)). Although conditions in slums vary, millions live in crowded conditions in simple structures made from poor building materials. Their homes often lack durability or adequate protection against the weather.

For the many who also live in hazardous zones—such as areas prone to floods or landslides, which are exacerbated by climate

UN-HABITAT's *State of the World's Cities Report 2008-2009* shows that "in some countries, woman-headed households suffer disproportionately from inadequate housing in poor urban neighbourhoods." In Kenya and Nicaragua, for example, one-third of woman-headed households suffer from four shelter deprivations. These relate to the lack of durable housing, insufficient living space, poor access to clean water, inadequate sanitation or insecure tenure. Woman-headed households are becoming more common in urban areas, making up on average about 20 per cent of urban households in 160 countries surveyed.<sup>5</sup>

Even in cases where woman-headed households do not necessarily suffer worse conditions than other slum dwellers, shelter is a good place to start for empowering women. For women, the home is often not only a place to live, but where they raise their children and perhaps work to earn their living. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) states:

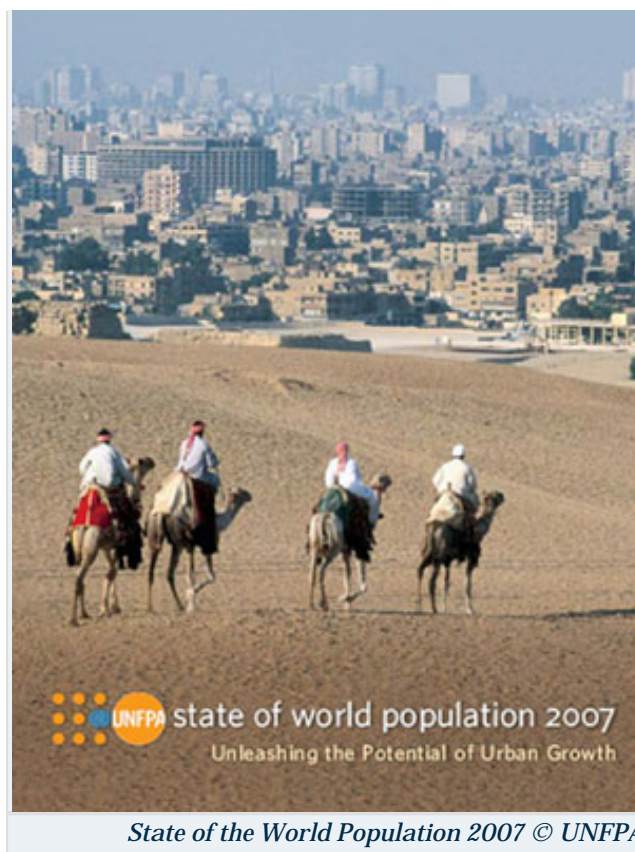
*"Shelter is at the core of urban poverty: Much can be done to improve the lives of people through better policies in this area. Initiatives in this domain are particularly beneficial for poor women who are often burdened with the triple responsibilities of child rearing, management of the household and income earning...A roof and an address in a habitable neighbourhood is a starting point for poor urban people."*<sup>6</sup>

Government action is thus needed to increase avenues toward

decent and affordable housing for poor urban women. These include housing finance schemes for low-income women. Such initiatives benefit women and their families and if adopted on a large scale, they can also improve living conditions for the urban poor significantly and reduce the prevalence of slums. Initiatives to improve [tenure security](#) for women are also important.

#### UN publications:

- [Global Report on Human Settlements 2003: The Challenge of Slums](#) (UN-HABITAT)
- [Improving the lives of 100 Million Slum Dwellers](#) (UN-HABITAT)
- [Policy Makers Guide to Women's Land, Property and Housing Rights Across the World](#) (UN-HABITAT)
- [State of the World's Cities 2008-2009: Harmonious Cities](#) (UN-HABITAT)
- [State of the World Population \(2007\): Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth](#) (UNFPA)



*State of the World Population 2007 © UNFPA*

#### Other resources on UN websites:

- [Improving the Lives of Slum Dwellers: a Home in the City, 2005](#) (UN Millennium Project)
- [Reports on women and adequate housing by the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing](#) (OHCHR)
- [The Right to Adequate Housing Fact Sheet](#) (OHCHR)
- [UN-HABITAT Governing Council resolution 21/9 on Women's land and property rights and access to finance, 20 April 2007](#)

## Improving gender equality through water and sanitation

It is widely assumed that cities are far better places than rural areas for accessing safe and convenient water and sanitation services, but in developing countries, access to urban services often differs widely between the rich and the poor, and between men and women.

Halving by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation is a target on environmental sustainability within the Millennium Development Goals. *It is estimated that less than half the population in urban centres of Africa, Asia and Latin America have water piped into*



Woman washing utensils by standpipe © UN-HABITAT

*their homes and less than one third have adequate sanitation.<sup>7</sup>*

Women and girls typically take responsibility for fetching water when supply is poor, and this can take hours out of their day, reducing time for education, employment, childcare and rest.<sup>8</sup> When relatives become sick because of poor hygiene, it is also women and girls who bear the greatest burden of care. A lack of separate-sex toilet facilities in schools, including those in informal settlements, can cause girls to miss classes or drop out of school in adolescence.<sup>9</sup>

Because women tend to spend more time than men in the home and neighbourhood,<sup>10</sup> they are also more directly exposed to environmental hazards of poor sanitation—such as diseases caused by poor drainage, contact with human faeces and decomposing rubbish. Attention to gender issues in the design and implementation of urban water and sanitation programmes can bring wide health, social and economic benefits to women and their communities.

**UN publications:**

- [Framework for Gender Mainstreaming: Water and Sanitation in Cities](#) (UN-HABITAT)

- [Mainstreaming Gender Water and Sanitation](#) (UN-HABITAT)
- [Navigating Gender in Development of Water and Sanitation in Urban Areas – A Rapid Gender Assessment of the Cities of Bhopal, Gwalior, Indore and Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh \(India\)](#) (UN-HABITAT)
- [Synthesis Report of Rapid Gender and Pro-Poor Assessments in the 17 Cities of the Water for African Cities \(WAC\) II Programme](#)(UN-HABITAT)
- [Water and Sanitation in the World's Cities: Local Action for Global Goals \(2003\)](#) (UN-HABITAT)
- [Women and Urban Crises: Gender sensitive strategies for managing critical urban environments in the South and in Eastern Europe](#) (UNESCO)
- [Mainstreaming Gender in Water Management, 2003](#) (UNDP)

**Other resources on UN websites:**

- [Cities, the Environment and Gender Relations portal](#) (UNESCO)
- [Human Development Report 2006: Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis](#) (UNDP)
- [“Small loans for poor women and vulnerable households for water and sanitation in the Lake Victoria region,” UN-HABITAT news release, 17 February 2009\\_](#)
- [General comment No. 15 on the Right to Water by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(E/C.12/2002/11\)](#) (ECOSOC)

## Gender equality in urban disaster environments

Environmental degradation, climate change, natural disasters and armed conflicts threaten the liveability of towns and cities. Since 1975, there has been a four-fold increase in the number of recorded natural disasters, including tsunamis, tropical cyclones, earthquakes and flooding.<sup>11</sup> Seven out of ten natural disasters are believed to be climate-related.<sup>12</sup> To improve policies and programmes, governments and urban planners benefit from understanding how gender affects women and men differently as victims of disasters, but also how the knowledge and skills of both can help them and their communities to survive.



*Girl and tent © Shabbir Hussain Imam/ IRIN News*

Many development agencies have noted that women tend to have lower rates of decision-making and participation in disaster management activities. Yet, they are often severely affected.<sup>13</sup> During the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, more females than males died. Male survivors outnumbered females by a ratio of almost 3 to 1 in four villages in Indonesia's Aceh Besar district.<sup>14</sup> Sexual assault and domestic violence escalate in disaster contexts,<sup>15</sup> and rape and torture of women during armed conflicts has affected hundreds of thousands of women in the past decade.<sup>16</sup>

As they take care of their families during crisis situations, women also face enormous challenges securing enough food and water, fuel for cooking and lighting, and wood or other building materials for rebuilding destroyed homes—especially if crops fail, droughts occur and natural resources are depleted.

### ***Women in cities bear the burden of tackling increasing environmental threats, but are also key to solutions and adaptation***

The realities of climate change and the prevalence of armed conflicts demand urgent action to improve disaster management, with gender equality as an important factor for success. Cities are highly vulnerable to rising sea levels and extreme weather associated with climate change: fourteen per cent of the urban population in developing countries live in low-elevation zones.<sup>17</sup> With disasters costing billions of dollars of damage each year, governments literally cannot afford to fail



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in the full engagement of both women and men in disaster planning, recovery, mitigation and adaptation.

Women can and do contribute to disaster management and the creation of resilient communities. Promoting women's equal leadership in adopting more environmentally sound practices—for example, around fuel use (for cooking and lighting) and in materials for home reconstruction—can reduce the negative impact of disasters. Women also play a strong role in mobilising communities in post-crisis reconstruction, and their

contributions should be further encouraged.

#### **UN publications:**

- [“Climate Change is Not Gender Neutral”](#), *Urban World*, March 2009 (UN-HABITAT)
- [Global Report on Human Settlements 2007: Enhancing Urban Safety](#), (UN-HABITAT)
- [Global Report on Human Settlements 2009: Planning Sustainable Cities](#) (UN-HABITAT)
- [Women 2000 and Beyond: Making Risky Environments Safer](#) (DAW)
- [State of the World Population \(2009\): Facing a Changing World: Women, Population and Climate](#) (UNFPA)

#### **Other resources on UN websites:**

- [Mainstreaming Gender in Energy Planning and Policies](#) (UNESCAP)
- [Report on the Expert Group Meeting on Gender-Friendly Sustainable Cities in Asia and the Pacific: Rebuilding Communities Affected by Disaster and Conflict](#) (UN-HABITAT)
- [Environment and Energy Site](#) (UNDP)
- [Women and the Environment](#) (UNEP)
- [Women and Environment](#) (WomenWatch)
- [Women, Gender Equality, and Climate Change](#) (WomenWatch)

## ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY IN CITIES

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### Decreased poverty and gender equality go hand-in-hand



*Slum and highrise contrast © Manoocher Deghati/ IRIN News*

According to the World Bank's economic research, poverty incidence tends to be lower in countries with more gender equality, while economic growth "also appears to be positively correlated with gender equality."<sup>18</sup> Although it is too simplistic to conclude that economic benefits are directly caused by gender equality, or vice versa, the research suggests the two go hand-in-hand.

As women gain more equality in the economic sphere, the effects of poverty on families can also be reduced. The World Bank states that studies from developing and developed countries "consistently show that when

mothers have greater control over resources, more resources are allocated to food and to children's health (including nutrition) and education."<sup>19</sup>

#### UN publications:

- [Global Monitoring Report 2007: Millennium Development Goals—Confronting the Challenges of Gender Equality and Fragile States](#) (World Bank)

#### Other resources on UN websites:

- [Gender Equality as Smart Economics](#) (World Bank)
- "Smart Economics," Mayra Bunvinic and Elizabeth M. King, *Finance and Development*, June 2007, Volume 44, Number 2 (IMF)

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### Gender inequalities as barriers to greater economic growth

Although some of the following gender statistics and findings are not specific to cities, they are important reference points on sustainable urban economies because urban areas are dominant economic centres in most countries.

The World Bank notes in its publication

[Gender Equality as Smart Economics:](#)

- Women continue to trail men in formal labour force participation, access to credit and infrastructure, entrepreneurship rates and income levels.
- In low-and middle-income countries, female labour force participation is 57 percent compared to 85 percent for men.
- On average, female workers earn about three-quarters of what men earn, but gender differences in education, work experience and job characteristics explain only a small fraction of this gap.



*Woman cooking over fire © Shabbir Hussain Imam/ IRIN News*

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) states in its 2007 annual survey that the region is losing \$40-42 billion a year due to restriction on women's access to employment and another \$16-30 billion a year because of gender gaps in education.<sup>20</sup>

“The International Labour Organisation notes that more women are working than ever before, “but they are also more likely than men to get low-productivity, low-paid and vulnerable jobs, with no social protection, basic rights or voice at work.” <sup>21</sup>

This can make them more vulnerable during times of recession, as indeed the ILO predicted women's unemployment rates would be 0.4 per cent higher for women than men during the global financial crisis that began in autumn 2008.<sup>22</sup>

**Resources on UN websites:**

- [Gender Equality as Smart Economics](#) (World Bank)
- [Global Employment Trends for Women 2008: More women enter the workforce, but more than half of all working women are in vulnerable jobs](#) (ILO)
- [ILO warns economic crisis could generate up to 22 million more unemployed women in 2009, jeopardize equality gains at work and at home](#) (ILO press release 5 March 2009)
- [The gender perspectives of the financial crisis](#) (WomenWatch)
- [Women and the Economy](#) (WomenWatch)



## Gender equality can help urban, rural and global economies



*Female fish vendor* © Caylee Hong/ UN-HABITAT

“reducing rural poverty by sending money back to their home villages.” <sup>24</sup>

Urbanisation is not only an issue facing cities, but with complex interactions, links and interdependencies between rural and urban populations. Yet, according to UN-HABITAT, many decision-makers and policy makers fail to recognise the dynamics of rural and urban experiences of poverty.<sup>23</sup>

Unleashing the full potential of the female labour force in urban areas can bring economic benefits that go far beyond a single town or city. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) highlights the “major role” of Latin America’s female urban migrants in

UN-HABITAT’s 2008 report [State of African Cities](#) has pointed to a trend of “feminisation of migration” of cross-border traders and workers (such as domestic workers, health workers and teachers) to the cities of Southern Africa:

*“In part, this is linked to globalisation and informalisation of economies that have reduced manufacturing jobs (traditional ‘men-jobs’) and increased service, care and informal economy jobs where women tend to outperform and out-compete men. Families make conscious decisions to send out their womenfolk to seek income opportunities. Rising numbers of woman-headed households has put pressures on women to seek income opportunities far beyond their local environments.”* <sup>25</sup>

Although the informal sector typically offers less job security, UN-HABITAT emphasises that informal employment is an important part of the economies of many developing countries and “vital for a sustainable urban economy.”<sup>26</sup> In sub-Saharan Africa, 84 per cent of women’s non-agricultural employment is informal.<sup>27</sup>

Governments and policy makers can take positive steps to improve conditions for workers in the informal sector, for example through ensuring equal access to basic services, offering them physical space to do business, and protecting workers from violence and crime.<sup>28</sup> Poor labour conditions, whether for men or for women, reduces productivity through sickness or negative social effects, such as fear of harassment.

### UN publications:

- [Global Employment Trends for Women Report, 2009](#) (ILO)
- [Global Report on Human Settlements 2009: Planning Sustainable Cities](#) (UN-HABITAT)
- [Progress of the World’s Women: Women, Work and Poverty, 2005](#) (UNIFEM)
- [Progress of the World’s Women 2008-2009: Who Answers to Women?](#) (UNIFEM)

- [State of African Cities 2008](#) (UN-HABITAT)
- [State of the World Population \(2006\): A Passage to Hope—Women and International Migration](#) (UNFPA)
- [2004 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women and International Migration](#) (DAW)

**Other resources on UN websites:**

- [Gender and Development Plan of Action, 2002-2007](#) (FAO) – on rural and urban Interdependencies
- [Gender Equality and Decent Work: Selected ILO Conventions and Recommendations Promoting Gender Equality](#) (ILO)
- “Urbanisation and Migration: An Analysis of Trend, Pattern and Policies in Asia,” Human Development Research Paper 2009/16 (UNDP)

### ***Helping women out of poverty through urban entrepreneurship and housing finance***

UN-HABITAT’s [Global Report on Human Settlements 2005: Financing Urban Shelter](#) notes that micro-credit institutions, which have largely focused on giving small entrepreneurs the credit they need to set up and expand their businesses, have recognised “the importance of home-based income-generating activities, particularly for women.

With more of them expanding into loans for housing, “they have become key partners in municipal initiatives to improve the living conditions of poor households in both urban and rural areas,” <sup>29</sup> according to the Global Report.

Such initiatives are in line with the [Habitat Agenda](#), which was adopted in 1996 by 171 countries. The Habitat Agenda emphasises the need to encourage community mortgage programmes to the poor, especially women. This helps them to “improve their living conditions and status within the household” by “providing them with access to capital, resources, credit, land, technology and information.” <sup>30</sup>

**Other resources on UN websites:**

- [Boosting Employment through Small Enterprise Development Programme \(EMP/SEED\): Women’s Entrepreneurship Development and Gender Equality Programme \(WEDGE\)](#) (ILO)
- [2009 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women’s control over economic resources and access to financial resources, including microfinance](#) (DAW)



*Woman in construction, Pakistan © UN-HABITAT*

### ***Nurturing the economic potential of young women and men in slums***

Youth make up 25 per cent of the global working-age population but account for 43.7 per cent of the unemployed. Among young people, young women face even higher rates of unemployment and underemployment, and they are typically paid lower wages than their male peers.<sup>31</sup> And yet, the earning power of young people is key to economic growth.

Attention to the gender dynamics affecting employment for slum dwellers helps to unblock barriers to productivity and to reduce poverty. UN-HABITAT notes:

*“The majority of young women in slums tend to have children at an earlier age than their non-slum counterparts. In the absence of an extended family to help with taking care of children, the sick and the elderly, young women living in slums are more likely to stay at home to look after children and do household chores. This limits their opportunity to look for jobs away from home, particularly in the formal sector.”*<sup>32</sup>

These observations suggest that policies and programmes for the improvement of employment opportunities for young people from slums may also need to be integrated with initiatives on women’s empowerment. Improving reproductive health, childcare, and young women’s access to training, education and technology can increase economic opportunities. Government commitment to gender-responsive budgeting is important to facilitate such efforts.

#### UN Publications:

- [State of the World Population Youth Supplement: Growing Up Urban, 2007](#) (UNFPA)
- [World Youth Report 2007— Young People’s Transition to Adulthood: Progress and Challenges](#) (UNESA)
- [State of the World Cities Report, 2006-2007](#) (UN-HABITAT)

## EQUITABLE SOCIAL BENEFITS

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### Women’s rights to land and decent housing



Land and housing are economic resources that also bring social benefits and improved status to those who own, control or have access to them. However, exclusion of women from land and property in rural areas has pushed many into the slums of urban areas, contributing to the rise in woman-headed households among the urban poor.<sup>33</sup>

UN-HABITAT’s 2007 Global Report on Human Settlements highlights the problem of “property-grabbing” in Southern Africa from widows who had been married to men infected with HIV/AIDS.<sup>34</sup> UN-HABITAT’s Advisory Group on Forced Evictions has also

### *Johannesburg cityscape* © UN-HABITAT

on women in slums and informal settlements.<sup>35</sup>

noted the disproportionate impact of evictions

Effective government reform around land and property is needed to provide pro-poor, gender-responsive policies and programmes that ensure that women's rights to land and property are not undermined by social norms and traditional practices that discriminate against women.

#### **UN publications:**

- [Law and Gender Review: Latin America, Land Tenure](#)
- [Law, Land Tenure and Gender Review: Southern Africa](#)
- [Policy Makers Guide to Women's Land, Property and Housing Rights Across the World](#)
- [Post-Conflict Land Administration and Peacebuilding](#), with chapter on gender (UN-HABITAT)
- [Rights and Reality: Are women's equal rights to land, housing and property implemented in East Africa?](#)
- [Shared Tenure Options for Women: A Global Overview](#)

#### **Other resources on UN websites:**

- [Commission on Human Rights Resolution 2004/21 on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living](#) (gives particular attention to women and draws attention to urban development)
- [Gender Evaluation Criteria for Large-Scale Land Tools, 2008](#) (GLTN/UN-HABITAT)
- [Muslim Women and Property](#) (UN-HABITAT)
- [Women's Rights to Land and Property](#) (UN-HABITAT)

## **Gender Equality and Urban Safety for All**

*“To create inclusive cities that respect the rights of everyone, we need to create conditions and physical environments where women, men, girls and boys can live, work, go to school, move around, and socialize without fear of harm. We also need to change attitudes and policies that perpetuate violence against women.”* <sup>36</sup>

*—Anna Tibaijuka, Executive Director, UN-HABITAT*

According to UN-HABITAT, women and girls still experience a higher degree of insecurity and vulnerability to violence (both in public and private realms), which limits their socioeconomic opportunities and access to city services, in comparison to their male

counterparts.<sup>37</sup> South Africa, for instance, has one of the highest incidences of violence against women in the world. Statistics from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime indicated that there were 124 rapes out of every 100,000 people.<sup>38</sup>

In conflict, disaster and post-crisis situations, risks to women and girl's safety are even greater. In these contexts, rape and gender-based violence against women are common and often used as systematic methods of terrorising and subjugating civilians. Sexual exploitation in camps for displaced people is also widely reported, and some studies have shown that domestic violence also tends to rise in post-crisis situations.



*Women in Seoul take part in a safety audit of nearby streets and public spaces. © Huairou Commission*

Municipal authorities have a responsibility to make it safer and easier women and girls to actualise their rights to city services, resources and facilities. These include rights to health services, schools and decent housing, and equal access to safe public transport, streets, sidewalks, parks, cultural centres and work spaces.

Many governments and city planners are now working with community groups, including women's networks, to improve safety and security through greater gender-sensitivity in urban design. For example, many local authorities involve groups of women in safety audits of cities. Some local authorities are also supporting campaigns to change attitudes condoning gender-based violence. Socially inclusive cities offer safety and security for all residents, despite age, race, gender or disability.

#### **UN Publications:**

- [Global Assessment on Women's Safety](#) (UN-HABITAT)
- [Global Report on Human Settlements 2007: Enhancing Urban Safety](#) (UN-HABITAT)
- [Urban Safety: Safety For All](#) (UN-HABITAT)
- [Women's Safety Audits – What Works Where?](#) (UN-HABITAT)

#### **Other resources on UN websites:**

- [Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls](#) (UNHCR)
- [Latin America: Making Cities Safer](#) (UNIFEM)
- [“UN-HABITAT and UNIFEM Join Efforts to Make Cities Free from Violence against Women and Girls,”](#) UN-HABITAT/ UNIFEM News Release, 3 June 2009)

## Gender Equality in Urban Services

Gender equality advocates point out that overt gender discrimination by authorities and urban planners is now less frequently the cause of poor services for women. The more serious problem is “gender blindness,” a lack of knowledge about, or attention to, the differing needs and priorities that women have, compared to men. Promoting gender-balanced participation and leadership in the design, implementation and evaluation of services can result in better services that cater to a diversity of needs.

### ***Increased female labour force participation needs to be supported by services for the young and the old***



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The World Health Organisation states in its 2008 report on social determinants of health ([Closing the Gap in a Generation](#)) that childcare responsibilities are “the single most important barrier to women’s participation in the waged labour market. Working mothers still often have the lion’s share of housework and childcare for their families (both unpaid) and this “double burden” can compromise their health, fitness for work, and time for rest and leisure.<sup>39</sup> However, governments can help by investing in affordable childcare, close to places of work.

According to World Health Organisation’s report [Global Age-Friendly Cities](#), the share of older people in urban communities of developing countries will “multiply 16 times from about 56 million in 1998 to over 908 million in 2050,” and by that time “older people will comprise one fourth of the total urban population in less developed countries.”<sup>40</sup> In almost all societies, women form the greatest proportion of older people.<sup>41</sup>

Women are most often carers for the elderly. But with increased urbanisation and greater numbers entering the workforce, women are less likely to be at home during the day to spend time with older relatives.<sup>42</sup> While governments promote more gender equitable work places, they should also invest in gender-responsive programmes and services for older people, providing not only care but also support for them to stay active.

### ***Making Public Transport Gender Responsive***

Women rely heavily on public transport—for securing daily household items, taking children to school, sick relatives to health services, going to work, or visiting friends. A UN-HABITAT study of nine cities in various developing countries found that while 11.6 per cent of households headed by men had cars, only 1.62 per cent of woman-headed households had them.<sup>43</sup>

Better public transportation in cities is an issue of gender equality because it helps to address women’s limited access to social and economic opportunities. In Dhaka, Bangladesh, one World Bank study found that “women’s exclusion from public transport due to overcrowded buses and inadequate sidewalks hindered access to the workplace.”<sup>44</sup> Helsinki, Finland, has introduced a policy where people travelling with young children in baby buggies travel free, encouraging parents to use public transport.<sup>45</sup>

Illness from road pollution poses risks, as well as crime on public transport, which includes theft and—particularly for women—sexual attacks and harassment. Solutions can involve improving scheduling and routes for public transportation, such as reducing distances between bus stops at night. Some local authorities have found that consultations with local women’s groups have helped significantly to make public transportation services more responsive to their needs.

#### UN Publications:

- [Closing the gap in a generation: health equity through action on the social determinants of health \(Final Report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health\)](#) (WHO)
- [Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide](#) (WHO)

#### Other resources on UN websites:

- [The Challenges in Addressing Gender Dimensions of Transport in Developing Countries: Lessons from the World Bank’s Projects](#) (World Bank)
- [Gender and Transport Site](#) (World Bank)

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## Gender Equality in Local Governance and Development

Sustainable cities and towns support the equal participation of women and men, especially in urban planning and management, as well as governance. Under the principles of decentralisation, states should ensure that local authorities have the right and the ability to regulate a substantial share of public affairs. Equality between men and women, and the full involvement of both, forms an important part of democratic local decision-making.

Over the last few decades, there has been substantial progress in women’s access to power and decision-making, but there is still persistent under-representation by women in politics. Women make up only 9 per cent of mayors and 21 per cent of female councillors in the world.<sup>46</sup> Only 18 per cent of members of parliament are women.<sup>47</sup>

A growing number of urban governance programmes and tools have been developed to improve women’s participation and empowerment, targeting diverse groups of women—from the grassroots to technical experts to the highest levels of academia and politics. By empowering citizens and enabling them to request greater gender equality and accountability, these initiatives play a strong role in helping towns and cities develop into vibrant and sustainable living environments, with equitable economic and



social benefits.

*Women's leadership and participation contributed to successful reconstruction projects after the Indian Ocean tsunami. © UN-HABITAT*

**UN Publications:**

- [Gender in Local Government: A Sourcebook for Trainers](#) (UN-HABITAT)
- [Gender Mainstreaming in Local Authorities Best Practices](#) (UN-HABITAT)

**Other resources on UN websites:**

- [Gender, Governance and Women's Political Participation](#) (UN-INSTRAW)
- [Gender Responsive Budgeting Site](#) (UNIFEM)
- [Governance and Women's Empowerment site](#) (UNDP)
- [Women in Power and Decision Making](#) (WomenWatch)

**Footnotes:**

<sup>1</sup>UN-HABITAT estimates that by 2010, 50.6 per cent of the world population will live in urban areas. These figures will appear in the upcoming UN-HABITAT report, *State of the World's Cities 2010-11*.

<sup>2</sup>UN-HABITAT (2008) *State of the World's Cities 2008/2009: Harmonious Cities*, p xi.

<sup>3</sup>UN-HABITAT (2009) *Global Report on Human Settlements 2009: Planning Sustainable Cities*, p. xxii.

<sup>4</sup>UN-HABITAT. The figures will be published in 2010 in the upcoming UN-HABITAT report *State of the World's Cities 2010-11*.

<sup>5</sup>UN-HABITAT (2008) *State of the World's Cities 2008/2009: Harmonious Cities*, p 104.

<sup>6</sup>UNFPA (2008) *State of the World Population 2007: Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth*, p. 38.

<sup>7</sup>UN-HABITAT (2003) *Water and Sanitation in the World's Cities: Local Action for Global Goals*

<sup>8</sup>UNDP (2006) *Human Development Report 2006: Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis*, 2006, p. 47.

<sup>9</sup>UN-HABITAT (2006) *Framework for Gender Mainstreaming: Water and Sanitation in Cities*, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup>UNESCO (2003) *Women and Urban Crises: Gender sensitive strategies for managing critical urban environments in the South and in Eastern Europe* brochure, p. 19.

<sup>11</sup>UN-HABITAT (2009), [Fact Sheet on Natural and Human-Made Disaster from the Global Report on Human Settlements 2009](#), accessed 12/10/09.

<sup>12</sup>United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2008), "Climate Change: Risks Overwhelming Current Global Humanitarian Capacity" as cited by UNFPA (2009) *State of the World Population (2009): Facing a Changing World: Women, Population and Climate*, p. 30.

<sup>13</sup>See cited publications and resources from UNIFEM, UNHCR and UN-HABITAT for examples.

<sup>14</sup>UN-HABITAT (2007) *Global Report on Human Settlements 2007: Enhancing Urban Safety*, p.181.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Between 250,000 and 500,000 women were raped in Rwanda alone during the genocide of 1994. See the United Nations' Secretary-General's Campaign to End Violence Against Women, "How Widespread is Violence Against Women" at <http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/pdf/VAW.pdf>

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>World Bank (2007) *Global Monitoring Report 2007: Millennium Development Goals—Confronting the Challenges of Gender Equality and Fragile States*, p.107.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid. p.110.

<sup>20</sup>UNESCAP (2007) *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2007*, p. 105.

<sup>21</sup>ILO (2008) *Global Employment Trends for Women 2008: More women enter the workforce, but more than half of all working women are in vulnerable jobs*, Press Release, 6 March 2008.

<sup>22</sup>ILO (2009) "ILO warns economic crisis could generate up to 22 million more unemployed women in 2009, jeopardize equality gains at work and at home" press release 05/03/09.

<sup>23</sup>UN-HABITAT (2008) *State of the World's Cities 2008/2009: Harmonious Cities*, p. 218.

<sup>24</sup>FAO (2003) *Gender and Development Plan of Action 2002-2007 brochure*

<sup>25</sup>UN-HABITAT, 2008, *State of African Cities*, p.140.

<sup>26</sup>UN-HABITAT (2009) *Global Report on Human Settlements 2009: Planning Sustainable Cities (Abridged Edition)*, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup>UN-HABITAT (2008) *State of the World's Cities 2008/2009: Harmonious Cities*, p. 88.

<sup>28</sup>UN-HABITAT (2009) *Global Report on Human Settlements 2009: Planning Sustainable Cities (Abridged Edition)*, p.ix and 2.

<sup>29</sup>UN-HABITAT (2005) *Global Report on Human Settlements 2005: Financing Urban Shelter*, p. 48.

<sup>30</sup>UN-HABITAT (1996) *Habitat Agenda*, paragraph 81(j).

<sup>31</sup>UNESA (2007) *World Youth Report 2007— Young People's Transition to Adulthood: Progress and Challenges*, p. 238.



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