Key issues in East Asia and the Pacific

In Asia, cities generate roughly 75 per cent of a country's Gross Domestic Product, and urban areas are 5.5 times more productive than the rural economy.¹ It has been projected that more than half of the total East Asia and the Pacific population would be living in urban areas by 2018.² Of the estimated 1.2 billion people living in urban areas, the World Bank calculates that more than 250 million live in slums and 75 million live below the poverty line of US$3.10/day.³ Although there are pockets of concentrated poverty in some large cities, urban poverty is higher in small- and medium-sized cities. In Viet Nam for example, small cities and towns host 43 per cent of the country's total urban population and more than 70 per cent of the total urban poor. Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, which host 32 per cent of the country's total urban population, only have 11 per cent of the total urban poor population. Higher costs of living, social barriers and exclusion prevent many in the region from accessing services and opportunities.

Rural-urban migration, natural population increase and the reclassification of administrative boundaries contribute to urbanization in the region. Incomplete decentralization reforms have left cities administratively and fiscally incapable of providing adequate services, leading to an increase in inequality, risk and exclusion for the most marginalized and disadvantaged urban dwellers.⁴ Many cities are well-equipped to respond better to children's needs from their own resources, by mobilizing private contributions and learning from effective existing initiatives. However, due to a lack of demand by marginalized communities and inadequate participatory surveillance and accountability systems in place, awareness of services and identification of solutions is stifled. Marginalized urban communities, such as migrant women and children, face multiple deprivations and prohibitive and exclusionary registration policies, lack basic services, and are highly vulnerable to exploitation, discrimination and insecurity. Rapid urbanization also impacts upon family structures, with young adults leaving children and other family members behind as they seek economic opportunities. In China, for example, both migrant children and those left behind by migrant parents engage in significantly fewer interactions and demonstrate lower competence (functioning) than other Chinese children.⁵

¹ ADB 2016.
Driving results for children

The rural-urban continuum poses challenges for both source (rural) and destination (urban) areas that must be considered in planning interventions to address inequality in cities. By fostering community networks and protective factors such as traditional care systems, children living in cities will be able to access support when they experience violence, abuse or neglect. Reducing child and household poverty will help prevent children in cities being forced into exploitative situations. It is essential that governments, the private sector and development partners take pre-emptive and proactive action to equip children and families with the knowledge, skills and resources they need to access services and be protected from risks.

In line with Sustainable Development Goal 11, UNICEF prioritizes support to: (1) improving urban governance, and ensuring meaningful participation by children and adolescents in identifying challenges and opportunities, and gaining insight into the factors that determine child well-being; (2) developing and implementing inclusive and innovative policies and interventions, with a particular focus on interventions in the first 1,000 days of life, and for adolescents; (3) reinforcing central and local public finance management processes to secure adequate resources for integrated and comprehensive services for all children; and (4) promoting child-friendly infrastructure and services.

Key programme strategies

**Systems and capacity**
- Strengthen urban governance, particularly in small- to medium-sized cities, and urban centres where new growth is taking place, through increased knowledge exchange and advocacy for improved urban design and social services.
- Building on the 2018 Growing Up Urban conference in Surabaya, create opportunities to: share experience across cities; exchange data, research and analysis; and allow replication of good urban governance on delivering services and understanding emerging urban risks for children and adolescents.
- Nurture the child-friendly cities initiative by tapping into lessons learned from the experience of other countries, for example Brazil and Colombia.
- Collaborate on the Child Health Initiative that integrates the climate change, air pollution and urban planning agenda.
- Strengthen urban social protection systems and interventions.

**Data, evidence and knowledge**
- Strengthen mapping and analysis of: informal settlements and communities, existing urban activities and case studies of area-based strategies.
- Sector-specific studies including: nutrition in cities; water, sanitation and hygiene for the urban poor; and migration challenges.
- Support to improve sampling and inclusion of the urban poor and marginalized communities in multiple indicator cluster surveys and data collection exercises; and improve disaggregated data collection, analysis and dissemination.
- Map urban stakeholders, identifying roles, capacities and interventions.
- Conduct analysis of public finance management in and for cities.
- Support efforts to engage children and adolescents in monitoring child well-being in cities, and the challenges they face.
- Literature review of slum and informal settlement studies.
- Define data collection and research methodology to conduct further data collection and analysis of urban areas and slums.

**Partnerships and alliances**
- Engage with city authorities, mayoral and non-traditional national-level agencies to promote innovative action and resource allocation to improve children’s outcomes.
- Set up a Children and Youth Committee and organize a networking session within the United Cities and Local Governance organization.
- Expand partnerships with international organizations, civil society, the private sector, academia, local governments and targeted communities to foster information sharing, joint action, monitoring and data collection, evidence generation and advocacy.
- Collaborate with UN agencies, particularly UN-Habitat, as part of the Regional Task Team on Sustainable Urbanization and Urbanization Programming.

**Governance, policy and budget**
- Advocate in relation to emerging urban risks and opportunities for marginalized and impoverished children and adolescents, including through public financial management systems and public-private partnerships.
- Support efforts to strengthen public finance management for essential services for poor and marginalized children in urban centres.

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6 Wang and Mesman. 2015. The paper discussed three types of functioning of children: emotional functioning means children’s feelings about themselves; social functioning refers to children’s interactions with peers and includes positive and negative outcomes; school functioning refers generally to school grade and sense of belonging to school.

7 “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.”