



SDG 11: Progress, gaps and recommendations for the UK

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By 2030, 60% of the world’s population will live in cities. The current model of urban growth is environmentally, socially and economically unsustainable.²³⁵ It is estimated that 90% of future urban growth will occur in less developed regions, with three countries –India, China and Nigeria – accounting for over a third of the increase. The fastest growing cities are those with less than 1 million inhabitants, which account for 59% of the world’s urban population. At least 1.6 billion people worldwide currently live in sub-standard housing. This lack of affordable, safe and accessible housing is a global crisis, and it’s increasing.²³⁶

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has hit cities particularly hard, with greater population densities making social distancing more difficult, increasing the risks of transmission. Slum housing, which has inadequate water access, poor sanitation, overcrowding and hazardous conditions, made self-isolation, handwashing and basic hygiene difficult. The escalating housing deficits across both Africa and Asia underscore how affordable housing is a key opportunity for post-Covid economic growth strategies. Yet only 15% of countries have housing initiatives in their Covid economic recovery plans.²³⁷

The climate crisis poses a significant challenge for urban environments. How future cities are built, the materials used,

and the source and efficiency of energy use is critical. People living in urban environments in low- and middle-income countries are being increasingly affected by the impact of the climate crisis, rising sea levels, increased pollution and climate-vulnerable infrastructure.²³⁸ Investing in and constructing climate-smart, affordable urban infrastructure and housing in Africa and Asia can address a range of climate-related mitigation and resilience challenges at scale.

SDG 11 provides a framework for addressing many of the challenges faced by an urbanising world and links with many other goals. The aims of SDG 11 are complemented by the New Urban Agenda²³⁹, and supported by biannual World Urban Forums²⁴⁰. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and relevant disaster risk reduction (DRR) forums also link with Target 11.5. But progress was off-track even before the Covid-19 pandemic, which the latest UN Secretary-General’s report on SDG progress concludes makes it ‘even more unlikely that this Goal will be achieved, with more people forced to live in slums, where quality of life is deteriorating and vulnerability increasing.’²⁴¹

The UK has several projects looking at cities in developing countries and emerging economies. Yet, two years since the FCDO was formed, there is still insufficient clarity over responsibility for implementing SDG 11. Its now-closed Cities and Infrastructure for Growth (CIG) project developed a series of resources for informing urban programmes, including an urban handbook.²⁴² Current UK projects include national urban poverty reduction programmes in Myanmar and Bangladesh, and a sustainable urban economic development programme in Kenya.²⁴³ Investment into cities

235. UN Habitat (2020), [World Cities Report 2020](#) [p.7]

236. UN Habitat (2016), [World Cities Report 2016](#)

237. World Economic Forum (20 January, 2022), ‘[3 ways to reinvent affordable housing in a post-pandemic world](#)’ [online article, accessed June 2022]

238. UN Habitat (2020), ‘[Climate change](#)’ [web page, accessed June 2022]

239. UN Habitat (2017), [New Urban Agenda](#)

240. UN Habitat, ‘[World Urban Forum](#)’ [web page, accessed June 2022]

241. UNDOC (2021) [Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Report of the Secretary-General](#)

242. ICED (2019), [The Urban Handbook for Sub-Saharan Africa](#)

243. Development Tracker, ‘[Cities and Infrastructure for Growth \(CIG\) - Myanmar Country Programme](#)’ [web page, accessed June 2022]



and sustainable urbanisation has continued through British International Investment (formally the CDC Group) and the Private Infrastructure Development Group.

The UK has previously funded research supporting national governments and city leaders to unlock the potential of cities while reducing climate risks.²⁴⁴ Global Future Cities, a recently closed £20m programme, has developed an approach to assessing the potential of urban development projects to contribute towards the implementation of the SDGs.²⁴⁵ It is unclear how these lessons will be shared, particularly in the new £500 million British Support for Infrastructure Projects programme, and there is currently a lack of transparency about how the initiative will promote SDG implementation and focus on poverty alleviation.²⁴⁶

including climate finance – particularly for people in the bottom 40% of global income distribution.

An estimated 300 million homes are required by 2030. This provides the UK government with an opportunity to build on its experience to catalyse this market through strategic investment and interventions and to harness expertise from across the UK’s built environment sector, such as its world-leading green innovations and finance sector. Yet, since the merger to create the FCDO, there has been uncertainty and a lack of clarity on future direction and funding. But there are opportunities for the UK to continue to take this work forward across different government departments and country offices, and for the UK to build on the momentum in scaling up its investment and impact.



Target 11.1:

By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums

Quality affordable housing with secure tenure, clean water and sanitation is a catalyst for meeting the health and wellbeing needs of people living on low incomes. Building in ways that are climate-smart ensures that the construction of much needed affordable homes will not result in negative future climate impacts and will instead boost climate resilience and foster social cohesion. Delivering housing at scale will catalyse macroeconomic growth and job creation and support financial inclusion when ‘building back better’.

The UK government has played a strong role in pioneering urban affordable housing solutions in Africa and Asia, notably through its long-term support of Reall’s 2002-2021 Community-Led Infrastructure Finance Facility (CLIFF) programme.²⁴⁷ The CLIFF programme enhanced access to affordable housing for people in the lowest income groups by developing market-oriented solutions to demonstrate the long-term commercial viability of affordable housing to commercial property developers and housing finance providers who, in turn, have offered products to low-income customers. While the FCDO funding has ended, this work has continued, and it now includes green solutions that are ready for scaling up. Better data is critical to bridging housing market data, unlocking cities as engines of growth, and demonstrating the impact of affordable housing, in order to resolve information asymmetries and increase investment,



Target 11.2 and 11.6:

Target 11.2: by 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons and Target 11.6: By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management

Of the 1.35 million road traffic deaths that occur each year (relevant to Targets 11.2 and 3.6), 93% occur in low- and middle-income countries.²⁴⁸ For over a decade, the UK has supported the World Bank’s Global Road Safety Facility (GRSF) with funding from both the FCDO and the National Institute for Health Research.²⁴⁹ This has funded practical resources to make roads safer, such as high quality reports, a ‘speed management hub’, and a series of tools including the new Road Safety Screening and Appraisal Tool, which informs all World Bank spending on road projects.²⁵⁰ There are promising signs that the World Bank’s new Environmental and Social Framework (ESF), which requires that all projects avoid or minimise road safety risks and impacts, is leading to a significant improvement in the safety of road projects. Joint funding from the GRSF and the new UN Road Safety Fund is enabling additional support to countries, such as Tanzania.²⁵¹ Support for global road safety is a UK success story, contributing to over 320,000 lives saved and leveraging \$43 in road safety commitments for

244. FCDO Development Tracker, ‘[New Climate Economy Coalition for Urban Transitions](#)’ [web page, accessed June 2022]

245. Global Future Cities Programme, ‘[How is the Global Future Cities Programme addressing the SDGs?](#)’ [web page, accessed June 2022]

246. UK Government, DIT (2021), ‘[Policy paper: Made in the UK, Sold to the World \(web version\)](#)’ [online, accessed June 2022]

247. Reall (2021), [Affordable Homes Movement in Africa and Asia 2014-2020: summary report of Phase 2B of the Cliff Programme](#)

248. WHO (2018), [Global status report on road safety 2018](#)

249. Global Road Safety Facility – World Bank (2021) [Annual Report 2021](#)

250. Global Road Safety Facility – World Bank, ‘[Speed Management Hub](#)’ [web page, accessed June 2022]

251. World Bank (11 August, 2020), ‘[The UNRSF and GRSF Announce Partnership to Improve Road Safety Delivery in World Bank Funded Projects in Tanzania](#)’ [online media release, accessed June 2022]



every \$1 invested.²⁵² It is vital the UK maintains its positive role in this area.

Air pollution (Target 11.6) from vehicles is also a major issue in cities. Poor air pollution contributes to 11.65% of deaths globally, with highest levels in low- and middle-income countries.²⁵³ The UK government, as host of COP26, prioritised electric vehicles and has helped establish the Zero Emission Vehicle Transition Council to accelerate the shift to electric vehicles globally.²⁵⁴ Within the UK, London has made bold moves in expanding its Ultra Low Emission Zone, and its Mayor, Sadiq Khan, is currently Chair of the C40 Cities, a global network of 97 cities that is aiming to tackle air pollution worldwide and support emissions reduction strategies, particularly in cities on the frontline of the climate crisis.²⁵⁵

The New Urban Agenda calls for governments to “promote the safe and healthy journey to school for every child as a priority”. Investing in safe roads, and quality infrastructure for walking and cycling, has multiple benefits and supports the achievement of many other SDGs. To support social distancing on transport in response to Covid-19 and replace reduced capacity on public transport, many cities around the world have introduced ‘pop up’ measures to promote space for safe walking and cycling.

infrastructure to better deliver connected and more inclusive cities and infrastructure services for all. The strategy also commits to promote the application of universal design concepts. and collaborate with people with disabilities whenever the FCDO engages with governments on their infrastructure strategies and cities plans. At the recent Global Disability Summit, the UK re-committed to expanding disability inclusive actions in the Private Infrastructure Development Group. However, the Independent Commission for Aid Impact has found that commitments to universal design are not always included in terms of reference or carried out in implementation.²⁵⁶ In addition, provisions which support people who have been marginalised are often the first to be cut. It is essential that the FCDO publishes the delivery plan for this strategy with clear indicators, a timeline and allocated funding. This will help ensure these commitments are implemented and monitored so that people with disabilities can access services, jobs and amenities and fully participate in society.

The strategy recognises the increased risk of violence faced by women and girls with disabilities and the need to ensure they can access essential services. For example, evidence has also shown that lack of accessible and affordable transportation options means that, when family planning clinics closed in local communities, women and girls with disabilities faced increased challenges to travel to other communities to receive sexual and reproductive health services and goods.²⁵⁷ It is essential that the UK government recognises intersectionality by mainstreaming age, gender and disability, and using appropriate indicators in infrastructure and urban development to improve the lives of people who have been marginalised.

Target 11.2 and 11.7:

Target 11.2: By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons and Target 11.7: By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities

Target 11.4:

Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage

SDG 11 includes two targets that specifically reference people with disabilities (11.2 on accessible transport and 11.7 on green and public spaces) and recognises the need for inclusive human settlements. It is positive to see that the FCDO’s new Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy commits to accessible, disability-inclusive, universally designed

SDG 11.4 calls on stakeholders to strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage. The Cultural Protection Fund is a £50 million official development assistance (ODA) fund that supports efforts to protect cultural heritage at risk. The fund aims to help to create sustainable opportunities for economic and social development through sharing knowledge and learning to foster, safeguard and promote cultural heritage. Grants are available to applicants working with local partners in one or more of the fund’s ODA target countries.

Recognising the urgent need to protect cultural heritage from climate change, in 2020 DCMS and the British Council

252. World Bank, ‘[Global Road Safety Facility](#)’ [web page]; World Bank (25 November, 2015), ‘[Road safety is an issue of equity for the poor](#)’ [online article, accessed June 2022]

253. Our World in Data (2017; revised 2021), ‘[Air Pollution](#)’ [web page, accessed June 2022]

254. UK Government, BEIS/DfT (10 November 2021), ‘[Notice: Zero Emission Vehicles Transition Council: 2022 action plan](#)’ [online document, accessed June 2022]

255. Mayor of London (4 March, 2022), ‘[Mayor announces plans to expand Ultra Low Emission Zone London-wide](#)’ [online media release, accessed June 2022]; C40 Cities, ‘[The C40 Chair](#)’ [web page, accessed June 2022]

256. ICAI, ‘[Report: DFID’s transport and urban infrastructure investments. A performance review – 12 Oct 2018](#)’ [web page, accessed 2022]

257. UNFPA and Women Enabled International (2021), ‘[The Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Girls with Disabilities](#)’



launched a new climate programme as part of the Cultural Protection Fund. Funds were awarded to five heritage projects that respond to the risk of climate change to heritage in East Africa. The projects aim to advance regional cultural protection by supporting knowledge exchange between experts and empowering local organisations with the skills to protect their cultural heritage.²⁵⁸

To achieve SDG 11, the UK government should:

1. Clearly articulate its strategy for urban development, and how it will address the challenges and opportunities in low- and middle-income countries.
2. Outline how it will capitalise on its experience to continue leading pioneering, affordable urban housing solutions, working with partners with an increasing green focus.
3. Continue to fund vital road safety research to ensure wider spending on road infrastructure from multilateral banks and national partners is effective.
4. Widen its support for low-carbon mobility in low- and middle-income countries, including walking and cycling infrastructure and zero emission vehicles.
5. Publish delivery plans and accompanying budgets for the commitments made at the Global Disability Summit in the Disability Inclusion Strategy; use appropriate indicators broken down by age, gender and disability, and meaningfully engage groups that have been marginalised.
6. Invest in more programmes that implement accessibility audits and disability-inclusive infrastructure, such as the Disability Inclusive Development programme, to build on progress and continue to foster pooled expertise to realise the promise of inclusive sustainable cities.
7. Continue to ensure support for cultural heritage contributes to the achievement of wider environmental and social goals.

258. For more information, see British Council [‘Evaluating the Impact of the Cultural Protection Fund’](#) [web page, accessed June 2022]