

Hab Post

Updates from
UN-Habitat

UN HABITAT
www.unhabitat.org
unhabitat-info@un.org

ISSUE 06 | 21 MAY 2020



Life in the Time
of COVID-19

Editor's note

This week marks a turning point for HabPost. **Today's issue will be the last focusing on COVID-19, and we'll soon release the first issue of HabPost 2.0.**

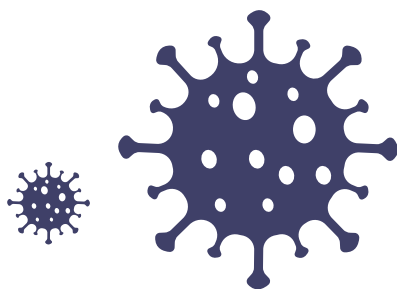
We hope to be able to soon bring you fresh news on the topics you're interested in (if you've missed it, [we invite you to check this information in last week's issue](#)), but we also look forward to hearing from you if you'd like to contribute and share topical content with colleagues. Note that the distribution frequency of one of your favourite communication mediums – we're not inventing anything, check out the above link – is changing: your weekly fix turns into a fortnightly (for now).

In the meantime, we hope you enjoy this issue of HabPost, which explores considerations for a reopening of our duty stations. **Will we soon be going back to the office? What are the key elements to keep in mind when thinking of a return? Are we seeing a structural change in work modalities?** Find answers to all these questions and a message from our Executive Director on travelling in the midst of COVID-19 in the following pages.

Finally, we'd like to thank our contributors without whom the last few issues of HabPost would not have become possible. We hope we can continue to work hand in hand to keep everyone abreast of the latest developments at UN-Habitat.

Do stay safe, and Happy reading!

The HabPost Team



In the oven



Here is a list of themes for some of our issues in the making—keep an eye out for your HabPost email!

▶ **First issue of HabPost 2.0**

In the world



As of 20 May, there were **more than 4,735,622 confirmed cases of COVID-19** infections around the world (an increase of 18 per cent since last week), **with 316,289 confirmed deaths** (up 13 per cent) according to WHO. Monitor the situation at <https://covid19.who.int/>.

Highlights:

- The **Chinese** city of Wuhan, where the pandemic began, has announced plans to carry out **mass COVID-19 testing on an unprecedented scale**, aiming to **test all 11 million residents of the city**.
- After over 30,000 deaths and the world's first national lockdown, which lasted 10 weeks, **Italy** has begun reopening shops, bars, restaurants, tourist sites and churches, as long as government safety measures are ensured.
- The death toll in **Brazil** continues to surge, becoming the fourth highest globally, with the country's largest city São Paulo warning that its healthcare system is close to collapsing.
- Key coronavirus hotspots are beginning to be identified in Africa. They include Kano, **Nigeria**; Mogadishu, **Somalia**; Western Cape, **South Africa**, and parts of **Tanzania**, where concerns have been raised as the government abruptly ceased to release data on infections.
- On 18 May, **Japan's** economy – the third largest in the world – **officially fell into recession**. Japan is the largest economy to go into recession, joining countries including Germany and France, with many other major economies predicted to follow.
- The 73rd WHO World Health Assembly, and the first ever virtual edition, opened on 18 May with the global COVID-19 response leading the agenda. Follow the proceedings of the World Health Assembly [here](#).



Get the latest updates on Covid19 [Here](#)



Business not as Usual: All Roads Lead to...Where Exactly?

Worldwide, governments are reviewing their options to get back to “normal”. At the time of writing, the impacts of opening up are still unfolding. While it was relatively easy to restrict movement to slow down the spread of the pandemic, it is proving infinitely harder to open up in an attempt to return to some kind of normality. In fact, whatever form of work modality we return to, it will be very different to the one that we were used to.

UN-Habitat is in a unique position to share its experience in managing this transition. As part of a United Nations Secretariat agency with a unique mandate to develop and implement norms and standards, we have the opportunity to learn from everyone across the agency and better

understand how and if to go back to our work quarters.

In past issues of HabPost, we highlighted that not everyone is equal in the face of COVID-19, and that not everyone is affected in the same manner. In some places, our operations have continued with some degree of normality, while they were brought to a halt in others. In Japan, where the team has been working from home since 28 February, our colleagues have been proactively planning to return to work with critical personnel only starting to come back to the office.

Gradualism seems to be the go-to word for many UN agencies. UN-Habitat is following in these tracks and is adopting the same cautious approach. At the recent UNON Town Hall, the UNON

Director-General explained that it will be some time before colleagues in Nairobi return to the UN complex. Those of us located in Kenya will begin to return to the office on three conditions:

1. **WHO declares that the pandemic in Kenya has subsided.**
2. **The Government of Kenya announces that the country is opening up.**
3. **Our workspaces have been retrofitted to provide at least four square meters of space for each employee.**

The new normal in Kenya

We won't hide it further:

whatever can be considered normal will be quite dramatically altered. See why and how for yourself.



To go or not to go In their latest address to employees, UNON explained that the teleworking modality has been unusually successful for Nairobi-based operations – in fact this assessment can be extended to many other duty stations. Productivity has increased, and we now have proof of concept that a lot of our work can be carried out remotely. 95 per cent of all Nairobi-Based personnel are now working from home, and the campus is only catering to 5 per cent of so-called critical personnel. When we do decide to open up, only 40 per cent of us would be going back to the campus at the best of times.



Space puzzles Not only will we need to retrofit our buildings to ensure maximum ventilation once we are back, we also need to redesign our office space to ensure that each employee works in an invisible bubble of four square meters. Perhaps not so invisible, in fact, as everyone will need to be sheltered behind screens. Corridors will be no exception and will need to be clear of obstructions to ensure adequate physical distance. And it will be a large-scale game of hide-and-seek: some of us will be coming in, while others will be working remotely.



Lunch is served Seemingly simple functions such as catering will also have to be reconfigured. Much depends on how we manage kitchen staff and monitor the handling of food. In some countries in East Asia, people now dine in newly re-opened restaurants separated by screens.



Carry me In the new normal, we will need to evaluate the modes of transportation to safely bring the lucky 40 per cent into the office. In Nairobi, buses will need to offer adequate space to ensure physical distancing. In other duty stations, public transport will also need to function with adequate space to avoid transmission by proximity. Subways, trains, and other modes of mass public transport will need to be carefully reviewed.



Dry hands are the new hands

Basic utilities and washing facilities will also have to be upgraded. Even before we started working from home, sanitisers and guidance on hygiene were put up in our offices. Going forward, cleaning and sanitising procedures including cleaning frequency and crucial surfaces to be kept consistently cleaned will need to be upgraded. Similarly, guidance on interpersonal interactions will also need to be issued.

State of play across our locations

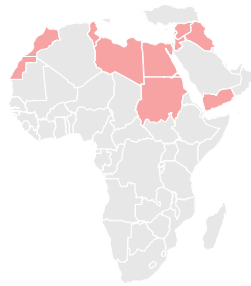
What's going on overseas? Find out what the big plan is for our main locations.



Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP)

Starting on 28 February, ROAP introduced flexible working arrangements to ensure minimal exposure to COVID-19 during commute as per the *ROAP Operating Procedures for Preventive Measures in Response to the COVID-19 in Fukuoka Office*. During this time, the business continuity plan was prepared, and work-from-home arrangements tested. Since 30 March, strict telework arrangements are in place. For urgent matters, team members may request permission of the Regional Representative to come into the office. This arrangement is currently in place until 30 May despite the lifting of the state of emergency in Fukuoka prefecture on 15 May.

ROAP has drafted guidelines for all offices in the region that will help operationalize the [UN-Habitat COVID-19 Policy and Programmatic Framework](#). These guidelines establish clear Standard Operating Procedures for health and safety, building off guidelines produced by the UN hub in Bangkok. Only 20 per cent of personnel will initially return to the office, with the objective of reaching 50 per cent shortly after. The procedure include guidance on the use of open spaces, but also tips on restricting entry to deliveries and visitors, on commuting using public transport, and on hygiene and the use of personal protective equipment (PPE).



Regional Office for Arab States (ROAS)

To date, the work-from-home modality prevails although critical staff members have gone into the office in a few locations. Field staff in humanitarian and recovery response areas continue delivery on the ground while applying safety and security measures. Throughout the region, governments are deliberating on reopening procedures and major announcements are expected after Ramadan. It is anticipated that the return to some kind of normality will be implemented in stages starting June.



Regional Office for Africa (ROAF)

In Africa, where we have a major collective footprint, we will see some major challenges as the entire continent is trailing behind the global pandemic curve. A very young population and a lack of diseases associated with affluence have seen the number of deaths unusually low. All personnel are currently working from home, and the opening of offices is not yet on the table as countries have not yet reached the infection peak. Offices in the region closed last, and gradual reopening could constitute the way forward.



Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ROLAC)

This is where the greatest challenge lies at the moment. Uneven governmental policies and major outbreaks in some countries including Brazil will pose significant challenges to our operations in the region. More turbulences are to be expected before thinking of going back to normal. The work-from-home modality is still in place to allow business continuity.



Bangkok Office Co-located with the Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and over 20 other UN entities, the office is currently in the second week of the gradual return to the office plan (phase 1) in accordance with a set of principles developed by the COVID-19 Contingency Management Team (CCMT). During this phase, office access will continue to be made possible for essential staff (up to 20 per cent) for an initial two to three-week period. There will be an ongoing assessment made by the CCMT to determine transition to other phases but return to the office will not be made mandatory in either phase 1 or 2.

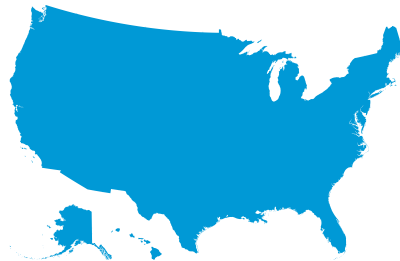


Brussels Office Our office in Brussels follows the guidelines imposed by the National Security Council of Belgium and coordinates its response with other UN entities at the UN House in Brussels. Since 17 March and in line with the host government and WHO recommendations, the United Nations Brussels Team (UNBT) has initiated a firm confinement policy for all personnel along with a teleworking modality. All activities and functions that can be performed from home will continue to be carried out under this new modality for the foreseeable future. The National Security Council has decided to initiate phase 2 of the exit plan starting 18 May. Instructions to work from home remains in power until 8 June when these may be revised. UNBT has created a COVID-19 Task Force working on a plan for gradually reopening the UN House in Brussels, which is organised around three stages defined by ceilings of premise occupancy of 30, 50, and 65 per cent.



Geneva Office Many changes were observed this week in Switzerland with the further easing of confinement measures. Switzerland plans to [open borders with Germany, Austria and France](#) on 15 June. The UN in Geneva is preparing a plan to go back to the office through briefings with managers

and personnel. There will be a town hall meeting with personnel once the host country has shared additional details about the third stage of deconfinement, starting 8 June. Currently, a special permission is needed to obtain a ground pass and enter the UN complex. When reopening does take place, buildings will only be occupied at a 30 per cent capacity to allow for physical distancing.



In the United States and **particularly in New York**, the Secretary-General has postponed the opening of the UN Headquarters until the end of June. Whilst the US is gearing up for reopening the country, it remains to be seen if New York City will follow. The return to the UN campus will happen in phases, with the first phase likely to consist of no more than 10 per cent of the workforce, or approximately 400 employees. Full opening is expected in September. More on reopening the UN Headquarters in New York can be found [here](#).

So what?

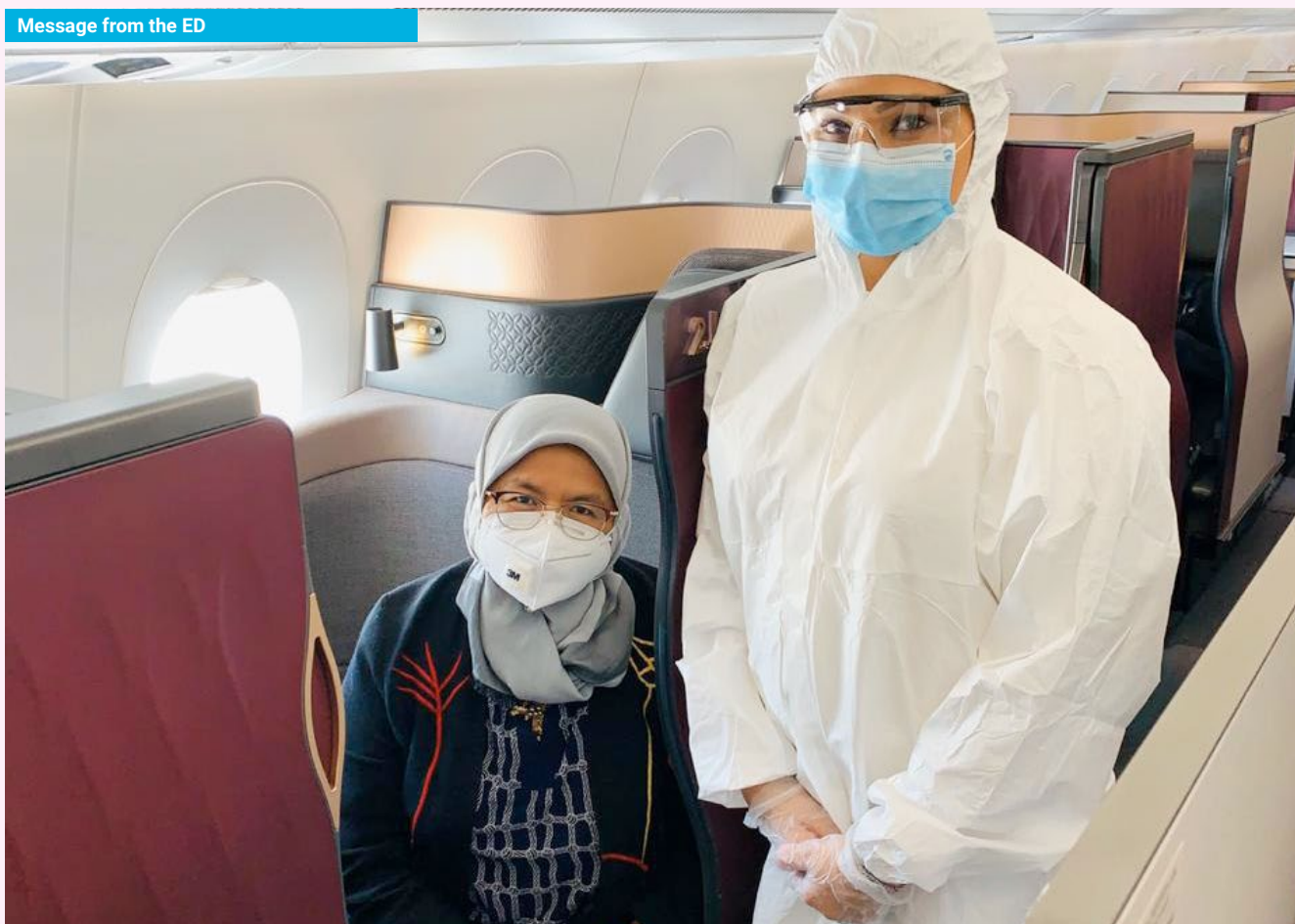
What will the new work modality mean for UN-Habitat? If we can deliver effectively and efficiently with many of us working remotely, do we need to return to the old normal? Having everyone working in a single campus or location may foster encounters and the fertilisation of ideas, but it is a small dividend outweighed by a much higher risk of infection and community transmission. Will certain types of work modalities become obsolete? How do we retrain personnel and provide everyone with new functions aligned

with a more digital and virtual style of working and collaborating? Do these new ways of working help us contribute to a greener footprint? All these questions will need to be explored as we write the new chapter of our work modalities. But whatever happens, it will not be anytime soon.

Principles for reopening: zoom-in on Brussels

The UN Brussels Team has agreed on the following key principles for reopening:

- 01 Protecting personnel and dependents** Ensuring health and safety is the overarching principle that should guide all decisions regarding a return of personnel to the workplace.
- 02 Approach of return** A slow, extremely cautious, and gradual approach will be adopted that may be stricter than the measures indicated by the Belgian authorities, but under no circumstances lighter.
- 03 Empathy** Empathy in the recognition of individual needs and constrains (e.g. children and schools, the elderly, public transportation state, physical conditions) is needed.
- 04 Teleworking** Teleworking remains the norm for the vast majority of personnel, and the return to the workplace should be done on a voluntary basis until further notice.
- 05 Critical functions** A careful and conservative interpretation of the functions that require a physical presence at the office should be the norm. Critical functions mean functions that can only be done in the workplace.
- 06 Adaptability** A continuous risk assessment is carried out, informed by WHO and relevant local policies and rules.
- 07 Flexibility** The agencies should align the return of their personnel taking into account their agency-specific business continuity and the characteristics of their respective offices.
- 08 Monitoring** There should be a permanent monitoring of the accompanying measures to improve the safety of the workplace.
- 09 Communication** There should be regular communication and consultation with personnel.



Travelling Troubled Waters: **Away but Around**

At the end of last week, I left Nairobi for Malaysia. Naturally, many colleagues have started to wonder: why such a sudden departure? With this short piece, I'd like to reassure all of you that I'm still in Nairobi, Malaysia. But I also wanted to share with everyone my experience travelling in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic so that anyone planning to travel may get an idea of what their trip could look like.

As most of you will know, I always like to take some time towards the end of the fasting month to return home and visit my family. Yet this year has been different — not just for me but for everyone at UN-Habitat. We have all worked hard to maintain our operations, and I am proud of the work of all personnel across the board. So after ensuring that our organisation was stable, I

decided to make use of the home leave modality from early June, and have started to return to my home country Malaysia.

Most of us have now been working remotely for over two months. We have been very productive, but this new work modality has also been challenging. With no vaccine in sight, a return to the office will

probably mean a mixed work modality at best. Not all of us will be able to go back to our desks — at least not at the same time. So just like me, many colleagues have decided to return to their home base and work from there for a little while.

If you too are planning to go home, but also in preparation for an eventual opening-up, you will need to give your travel arrangements a good thought. From my experience, I can say that travel will never be the same again. Somewhat like 9/11 transformed air travel, I believe COVID-19 will have complex ramifications for international travel going forward.

Travel preparations

Once you do have decided to leave, you will first need to secure a flight out. If you are departing from a country which has imposed stringent travel restrictions such as Kenya, your local embassy will be your source of information on available non-standard flights. I would encourage Nairobi-based colleagues to [visit the newly created page on iSeek summarizing information on available flights](#). If you indeed travel from Kenya, you will be required to clear a medical test for COVID-19 in order to secure a seat. The test can be done at the office of Lancet – a medical laboratory in Nairobi – and must be taken no more than 72 hours before your departure. The test results will be emailed to you within 48 hours.

Medical test results and airline tickets in hand, you can begin preparations for your journey. I will not stress this enough: this process is as important as the test itself. I personally packed two types of masks: one slightly more comfortable that I used at the airport, and one medically certified to use on board the aircraft. I have tried to wear surgical gloves and use sanitisers as much as possible to keep myself and all surrounding surfaces clean, but I also avoided touching my face at all times. I recommend that everyone carrying food keep everything sealed in plastic wrapping to limit contagion risks.

In and out the airport

Once at the airport, make sure to remember the recommendations by the WHO to physically distance yourself from others – something that proved to be quite tricky during check-in and boarding at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. Those traveling with children will need to be even more careful, and patient. But despite being dressed in full protective gear, the cabin crew was extremely polite and



helpful. I am truly thankful to all ground crews and cabin crews who are exposing themselves to great risks to ensure that we passengers get to travel safely. “Better safe than sorry”, as the saying goes, so since I was fasting I decided to keep my mask on throughout the flight.

Upon landing and transiting at Doha, it was clear that standard operating procedures were in full swing. The airport seemed ready to open up again although non-essential services such as shopping arcades and duty-free boutiques were all closed – only the pharmacy and the food halls remained open for business. Seating arrangements were made to allow for physical

distancing although the airport was almost completely deserted.

Skip a few hours forward and the reception at Kuala Lumpur International Airport was well organised. This time, I could line up and distance myself from others thanks to yellow markings on the ground.

On to quarantine

Malaysia’s policy is to have everyone placed on quarantine for two weeks before they can continue their journey, so all passengers were directed to quarantine hotel-bound buses and boarded in small groups to avoid overcrowding. Everyone was wearing masks and

gloves throughout the process. The medical staff from the Ministry of Health greeted us as we lined up to fill in forms and provide our personal details, our flight details, and the name of our next of kin. All this information was necessary for contact tracing. We then had to take a medical test whereby a swab was taken from our throat as well as the nasal cavity – a slightly uncomfortable experience, but over in the blink of an eye.

In my case, a police van was waiting to transport me to the hotel where I would be quarantined. All other passengers were transported by bus with physical distancing

applying throughout. Once at the hotel, we were ushered in through the service entrance. I was escorted to my room where supplies for two weeks had already been left for my use.

Work away

Since then, work continues as usual as I can connect to the internet and have brought all my equipment with me. Because of the difference in time zones, I quickly realised I tended to work 16 hours a day, so I decided to stick to the Nairobi schedule starting work at 1.30 p.m. and finishing at 10 p.m. to make sure I could participate in New York-based events.

Colleagues, rest assured that I am with you even though I am over here in Malaysia. Throughout the next 10 days, I will keep up with my duties as though I was still operating from my home in Runda. Although I have been a civil servant my whole life, this is a rather new experience for me. I am sure it must also be for virtually all of you. But I am confident that with the right technological support, we all can be as effective at home as we were in our offices.

I thank you all for your important work, and hope you and your loved ones can stay safe.



Resources



Medical

Joint Medical Service (JMS)

+254 20 762 1717 (Hotline)

+254 724 255378 (JMS 24/7)

+254 728 961 939 (Staff Counsellor)

Email: unon-jms-medicevacuation@un.org

<https://medical.unon.org>



Security and emergencies

UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS)

+ 254 (0) 707 722 503 OR + 254 (0) 707 722 505

(UNDSS Security Operations Centre - 24/7)

Email: soc.undsskenya@un.org

+ 254 (0) 720 629 999 OR +254 (0)733 629 999;

+254 20 762-26666 (UNDSS Security Control

Room - 24/7)

+254 (0) 722 667112 (DPU Command Centre)



Links

Travel: <https://hr.un.org/page/travel-health-information>

UN FAQ: <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/covid-19-faqs>

UN information page: <https://hr.un.org/page/coronavirus-disease-covid-19>

UN-Habitat COVID-19 website: <https://unhabitat.org/covid-19-pandemic>

UNICEF information page: <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/covid-19>

WHO MythBusters: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters>

WHO Situation reports: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports>

WHO Q&A list: <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>



ICT

UNON Helpdesk

icts.servicedesk@un.org or 020 762 1111



Participate!

HabPost is growing in scope. Want your story featured? Submit your ideas or reach out to us at unhabitat-habpost@un.org.

Editorial Team

Advisors:

Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director

Victor Kisob, Deputy Executive Director

Leads: Neil Khor, Amy Wood

Coordinator and editor: Rachad Nassar

Sub-Editor: James Ohayo

Design & Layout: Michael Lusaba

Contributors: Graham Alabaster, Erfan Ali, Bernhard Barth, Tam Hoang, Atsushi Koresawa, Paulius Kulikauskas, Cynthia Mbutia, Oumar Sylla, Elkin Velásquez, Christopher Williams

UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE



**UN-Habitat COVID-19
Response Plan**



**Take action with us in
cities and communities**