

# Hab Post

Updates from  
UN-Habitat

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

ISSUE 02 | 16 APRIL 2020



---

Life in the Time  
of COVID-19

# Editor's note

We're delighted to bring you the second issue of HabPost. Many of you enjoyed last week's issue – the first step in our initiative to improve information delivery and internal communication at UN-Habitat. We're happy to receive your feedback and we hope to be able to continue to satisfy your information needs, notably on COVID-19. We will work towards a more inclusive newsletter once most of these needs have been answered.

Since our last issue, the global situation continued to evolve quickly. On Tuesday, US President Donald Trump decided to suspend funding to the World Health Organization (WHO) – a move condemned by the UN Secretary-General indicating that it was “not the time” to be reducing funds to any organization fighting the pandemic.

This week's issue of HabPost looks at the measures adopted around the world to slow down the spread of COVID-19 – from curfews to lockdowns and other social distancing strategies. What is it like, is it effective, when will it end, and what does it mean for us? We try to address these questions that worry you during this time of uncertainty. We also look at how UN-Habitat continues to work and makes sure everyone stays safe and secure – see it a glance in the “**How we work during COVID-19**” section. And as with every issue, we provide you with an update of the latest international developments and share the experience of colleagues in various duty stations.

We've also put together a summary of your answers to our last survey, so be sure to scroll down if you're curious to know how your peers feel and where their thoughts are during this pandemic.

## 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!

- **Work-life balance and health and safety**
- **UN-Habitat's response to COVID-19 and partners response**
- **Reflection on the positive and broad impact of COVID-19**

## In the world

As of 14 April, there were **more than 1,812,734 confirmed cases** of COVID-19 infections around the world, **with 113,675 confirmed deaths**, according to WHO. The virus has been **reported in 209 countries, areas or territories**. Europe and the Americas are currently the most affected, while Africa has so far been the least impacted with 10,787 confirmed cases. You can monitor the situation at a glance at <https://who.sprinklr.com/>. 

### Some highlights:

- ➔ The **Kenyan** Government has **enhanced its testing capability** and the ministry of health endeavours to carry out **mass testing**.
- ➔ In **Spain**, a country severely affected by COVID-19, **some non-essential workers are now heading back to work** and **some business operations are resuming** as daily deaths continue to fall.
- ➔ **Italy's** daily death toll is decreasing.
- ➔ There is so far **little impact on the global food supply chain**, but that could change if anxiety-driven panic by major food importers takes hold. See [this WFP report](#) for more information.
- ➔ There is no evidence that the Bacille Calmette-Guérin vaccine (BCG) protects people against infections with COVID-19 virus. **Two clinical trials addressing this question are underway**, and WHO will evaluate the evidence when it is available. In the absence of evidence, WHO does not recommend BCG vaccination for the prevention of COVID-19.
- ➔ WHO announced that it is investigating reports that coronavirus patients who finally tested negative after recovering have tested positive for the virus days later.



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

# How to Save the World by Lying Down on your Couch

Last week, Wuhan marked the end of a 76-day lockdown with a [light show](#) paying tribute to those on the frontline of the coronavirus battle. Animated images of health workers aiding patients were displayed on skyscrapers as Wuhan residents were once again allowed to travel in and out of the city without special authorization. The city at the epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak had been placed under strict lockdown since 23 January 2020.

After a sharp fall in the number of cases, the Chinese authorities decided to progressively lift the lockdown on an estimated 56 million residents of Hubei Province including Wuhan and neighboring cities.

Originating in Wuhan, the virus quickly contaminated tens of thousands of people in mainland China before starting to spread overseas. Less than two weeks after the first death from COVID-19 was reported, China imposed a lockdown on Wuhan, effectively discontinuing all public transport and restricting movement outside of the city. If you're wondering what the Wuhan lockdown looked like on 10 March, [this drone footage should do the trick](#).

As infections spread outside of Wuhan, many neighboring cities imposed similar measures in a bid to curb the number of infections — what many have referred to as “flattening the curve”. But the real motive behind the lockdown — or the initiative by countries to restrict business operations, transportation, and the movement of people — was to ease the strain on the healthcare system. That way, no decision over who gets to live and who doesn't need to be made.

Outside China, similar measures started to be replicated. Lockdowns and curfews started to be implemented around the world to reveal a [yet unknown face of our cities](#). But these measures vary in scope and stringency even today. Decisions to impose restrictions on the movement of people depend on national circumstances, including the severity of contaminations and economic considerations. Now some European countries are taking the first cautious steps out of their lockdowns. So what does this mean for us?

For countries like China and those slowly showing progress in reducing their daily cases, things aren't yet back to normal. While China has effectively lifted its lockdown on Wuhan, restrictions still apply. Many shops, schools, or entertainment venues remain shut, and people must continue to show their [health code](#) at checkpoints around the city. Some European countries are considering using similar systems, but the challenge there is to remain cautious and avoid a second wave of infections.

On the other hand, places that have imported cases late now have to tackle an increase in cases. The answer to how to best manage the spread of infections could be found in the example of China, in which case we may see more stringent measures applied in countries which have imposed partial lockdowns. This was the case in China where people were initially allowed out of their homes but where restrictions quickly tightened to restrict outings per household or order people to stay home.

Still, not all countries have decided to impose daunting measures to combat

COVID-19. Those that have tested widely for the virus, isolated cases and quarantined suspected cases — such as South Korea and Singapore — seem to have managed to control the transmission of the virus. And social distancing measures in low-come countries, in densely populated areas, or in areas with poor sanitation might be difficult to implement. Put simply, the world cannot adopt a one-size-fits-all approach.

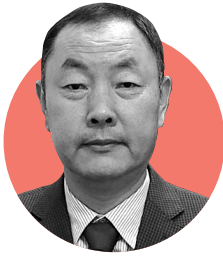
The answer to when will the crisis be over, when can we go back to our normal lives, when can we go back to work, and when will a vaccine be available is the same for all these questions: we just don't know. But to allow sick people to get treated and for the rest of us to start living normally again soon, sacrifices need to be made. The time spent in isolation is turned into an opportunity by many—just take a sneak peek at your social media feeds and you'll see they've turned into a bakery and embroidery class. It seems the best thing we can do now is stay home and help stop the spread from the comfort of our couch.



Talking Heads



This week, we've asked colleagues in China how they witnessed the impact of COVID-19 first-hand and tried to understand what the situation was like for people living in the slums. Hear it from **Zhenshan Zhang**, Habitat Programme Manager for China in Beijing, and **Linus Sijenyi**, Community Development Expert and Programme Officer, Human Rights and Social Inclusion Unit, Global Solutions Division.



“Despite reports of the new coronavirus in Wuhan, I travelled there in January 2020 to discuss cooperation with the Wuhan Land Use and Urban Spatial Planning and Research Center (WLSP), a long-term partner of UN-Habitat. I also met with the staff of the Wuhan Women’s Federation and participated in the WLSP year-end conference before flying back to Beijing in the evening of 17 January. I was back in the office on 20 January and maintained distance with my colleagues. As the day progressed, I cancelled meetings and events and made the decision to self-isolate at home starting 21 January. Luckily, I am alright.

Work continues to be affected by the epidemic. But while our travel to WUF10 was cancelled, we still supported our partners to attend and made sure we could hold the “Wuhan Keep Strong” event. Our cooperation with Wuhan is currently on hold, and events are being postponed. But we are still working hard as some projects continue to be implemented. We are producing promotional materials to manage the epidemic and are summarizing China’s experience of community governance, hoping to help other places in their prevention and control of the virus.”

**Zhenshan Zhang**  
Habitat Programme Manager for China



“The Kibera slum of Nairobi has been and will always remain my home. Life in the informal settlement is humbling. Social distance is impractical, there is no water, many people depend on casual jobs to lead their life, and the curfew and the partial lockdown prevent residents from meeting the basic needs of their families. There are limited sanitation facilities and this pandemic has just resulted in insecurity and gender-based violence alongside other social vices.

The Government of Kenya called upon the youth to use their numbers, mobility and energy to fight the pandemic. They have played a central role in all UN-Habitat interventions aimed at raising awareness of the pandemic and providing ways to fight it in the slums. Five hand washing stations were set up in strategic locations in Kibera, and more than 25,000 people used them the first week. To date, close to 7,000 small hand washing stations have been set up in houses and business stalls. This has brought the reality closer to home: the potential of the youth had never made sense to me before.”

**Youth organizations from the informal settlements were mobilized to share the COVID-19 messages by all means possible.**

**Linus Sijenyi**  
Community Development Expert and Programme Officer,  
Global Solutions Division

# How we work during COVID-19



Since the beginning of the crisis, UN-Habitat has been closely monitoring the evolution of COVID-19 and has taken steps to ensure the safety and security of personnel as well as the continuity of our operations. After going through the first two operating modes of UNON's contingency plan, UN-Habitat now operates under the Disaster Mode modality by focusing on staff safety and on sustaining minimum critical functions. Find out how we continue to work and the measures taken to protect personnel in this section.

## UN-Habitat Covid-19 Emergency Plan

The objectives of the Covid-19 Emergency Plan are to:

**Protect staff and minimize risk** to staff health and safety and security



**Achieve a timely and orderly recovery and reconstitution of normal operations** that allows the resumption of critical functions and operational services following an emergency



**Mitigate the impact of disruptions** on UN-Habitat operations



**Preserve modes of communication** within UN-Habitat and with other UN agencies and stakeholders



Direct and guide UN-Habitat managers in **taking appropriate actions to ensure the capability exists to continue critical functions, processes and essential services**, until normal operations are reconstituted



**Establish clear decision-making structures** following emergency or crisis events



## Crisis Management Group

A UN-Habitat Crisis Management Group (CMG) has been formed to ensure staff safety and security, ensure business continuity, and manage UN-Habitat's emergency programmatic response and coordination. The CMG meets daily and is responsible for implementing the security recommendations and instructions of the Executive Director as recommended by the Designated Official, and to cover essential duties during the crisis. If you need to contact the CMG, write to [unhabitat-cmg@un.org](mailto:unhabitat-cmg@un.org).

## How we work during COVID-19



### Town Hall sessions

The Office of the Executive Director has been holding a series of virtual Town Hall sessions to establish a dialogue with divisions and regional offices during COVID-19. While these Town Halls are primarily designed to inform offices of the way UN-Habitat is fulfilling its duty of care towards personnel, they also address the way the organization adapts to the ever-evolving situation to deliver on its mandate and Strategic Plan. Divisions and regional offices are also invited to give an overview of the impact of COVID-19 on their respective portfolios and operations and share what they anticipate the state of play to look like post-crisis.



### Webinars and online learning

To help you manage your work and your team during COVID-19, a number of open access learning opportunities are available to you just a few clicks away. Until the end of May, the [UN Leadership in Times of Uncertainty](#) online learning programme offers managers guidance on how to best handle their evolving role, including tips on managing emotions, leading through communication, and building resilience to change. Similarly, the Helping Teams Navigate Uncertainty webinars aim to support UN officials with team management and leadership responsibilities in the management and structuring of work from home, and with their remote coaching practices, among others. Enroll [here](#) for the EU time zone or [here](#) for the US time zone. If you are interested in programmatic work, you may participate in webinars addressing [how to continue waste management services during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) where

experts and cities from different regions share their experience. Know that other learning opportunities—self-paced or with facilitators—such as LinkedIn Learning are available to staff. Refer to the emails by UNON or the UN Broadcasts for the full list of opportunities and enrollment methods.



### Spreadsheet almighty

Call it a questionnaire, a spreadsheet, or a dashboard, since the beginning of the crisis — and even more so after moving to home-based workstations — this data hungry tool has been the go-to email attachment for information collection. Be it on the outputs of UN-Habitat staff, the impact of COVID-19 on our projects, progress against work plans, or the completion of performance appraisal processes (e-PAS), Headquarters has been liaising with offices to understand and take stock of the latest programmatic and operational situation across UN-Habitat, and to better provide support when needed.



### Personal protective equipment

A number of operational projects need to continue throughout the pandemic to provide urgent urban basic services. After identifying needs and locations, UN-Habitat has been ensuring that over 2,000 employees working on its behalf in around 50 countries are provided with adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) and advice. Similarly, UN-Habitat continues to determine which programmes need to be scaled up and which need to be temporarily suspended for safety and security reasons.



### Remote work platforms

As we indicated in the last issue of HapPost, a range of tools has been made available to you to work remotely. All personnel with a UN account have access to Office 365, Teams, Sharepoint, and OneDrive, so that everyone can share work plans, assign tasks, chat, and meet in the comfort of their homes. Look out for emails from the Unite Service Desk for information on remote working or visit <https://iseek.un.org/article/tips-telecommuting> for tips on telecommuting. If you're late to the game, the UN-Habitat ICT team has developed and made available training sessions to help you become familiar with remote work tools. MS Teams training videos are also accessible [here](#).



### Official missions

Travel is currently restricted to emergency and humanitarian response missions. All requests for travel are to be cleared by the Office of the Executive Director, and all travel should be recorded in [TRIP](#).



### Recruitment

Hiring procedures may still be initiated but decisions on onboarding dates will depend on the COVID-19 situation. If needed, extensions of temporary appointments beyond 729 days are allowed up to 30 June 2020 and will be reviewed monthly from then onwards. Exceptions to the terms of consultant services should be requested to the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, Office of Human Resources.

## 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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:icts.servicedesk@un.org) or 020 762 1111

## Your feedback

We've asked, you've answered. Let's have a look at the results from last week's survey.



### You are concerned with...

Role of the UN Medical resources  
Scope and spread of the virus  
Job security  
Health and safety  
Staying home and isolation  
Work life balance  
Business continuity

### You would like to hear about...

Reflection on the positive  
Situation in African cities  
Corporate responsibility  
Food security  
Health and safety  
UN Habitat response  
Latest updates  
Business continuity  
Work life balance  
Partners response



Let us know what you think!

HabPost is what you make it. We want to hear from everyone, so let your voice heard by sending us your views via the [survey](#) or contact us at [unhabitat-habpost@un.org](mailto:unhabitat-habpost@un.org).



## Editorial Team

### Advisors:

Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director  
Victor Kisob, Deputy Executive Director

**Leads:** Neil Khor, Amy Wood

**Coordinator:** Rachad Nassar

**Sub-Editor:** James Ohayo

**Design & Layout:** Michael Lusaba

### Contributors:

Cheryl Carvalho, Zhenshan Zhang, Linus Sijenyi

**UN HABITAT**  
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE



IMPLEMENTING  
THE NEW  
URBAN AGENDA



**COVID-19  
RESPONSE**