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UN-backed Asia-Pacific forum discusses social, environmental protection in cities



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Delegates from governments, civil society, private sector and academia in the Asia-Pacific region gathered in Bangkok today for a United Nations-convened forum to discuss ways of ensuring that urban economic prosperity is socially equitable and ecologically sustainable.

The theme of the three-day Fifth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum (APUF), attended by more than 300 delegates, is “Cities of opportunity: Partnerships for an inclusive and sustainable future” and is organized by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific ([ESCAP](#)) and its development partners.

Urban areas in the Asia-Pacific are expanding rapidly and producing more than 80 per cent of region’s economic growth as they become centres of both social and cultural dynamism.

Yet the growth in cities is marked by extreme social and economic disparities, with an estimated 35 per cent of the region’s urban dwellers lacking adequate access to shelter, basic services, opportunities to earn income, and excluded from decision-making on issues affecting that affect their lives.

“To make our cities inclusive and sustainable, we need to address economic growth, environmental sustainability, poverty reduction and resilience to climate change,” said Noeleen Heyzer, the Executive Secretary of ESCAP. “This requires that we take a fresh look at how cities are managed.”

Asia-Pacific cities are also highly vulnerable to natural disasters and extreme weather-related hazards. More than 50 per cent of the region’s urban population lives in low-lying coastal zones

or flood plains exposed to high risk of increased flooding due to climate change, according to a new joint report by ESCAP and the UN Human Settlements Programme ([UN-HABITAT](#)).

“The frequency and intensity of these and other climate-related disasters will increase,” said Ms. Heyzer. “We simply do not have the luxury of growing first and cleaning up later.”

Participants at the forum will identify priorities and share experiences on good and innovative practices to promote inclusive and sustainable urban development.

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