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# The Great Transformation: Future Cities and emerging trends for inclusive urban resilience



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A young girl in a pink dress sits on an orange wheelchair. There are steps and an unpaved road. People with disabilities face undue burdens and new obstacles in the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

*“The challenges of the new society are the challenges of the city. The majority of the world’s population already lives in cities and this proportion only continues to rise. Therefore, cities are places where all the challenges and contradictions of the social human system emerge. Cities are where we witness everything in its most exaggerated manner — all the different conflicts of society. Whether we are talking about the future of work or the future of the social contract, all of the big issues are perfectly represented in the new urban reality.”*

- Joan Clos — Former Executive Director of UN Habitat, and former Mayor of Barcelona

The COVID-19 pandemic will in the coming months and years challenge millions of jobs around the world. It will also challenge the economic viability of many important sectors of the economy. This will heavily affect not just tourism but also construction and manufacturing. It will challenge many aspects of modern living and provide an opportunity to assess the technology-driven transformation that society has experienced already and the direction that this transformation will take in the near future.



A couple in Singapore wear face masks as they walk through a park. The restrictive measures are being eased in most parts of the world, but the outbreak continues.

## The Fourth Industrial Revolution

Understanding the future of cities is really about understanding transformation. We are currently experiencing the Fourth Industrial Revolution. It is the digital revolution that is being built on top of the electronic and information technology revolution that came before it. This Fourth Industrial Revolution is characterized by a fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution incorporates a whole range of technologies including biosensors, robotics, drones, and artificial intelligence. It is a range of different forces that is shaping the ways that we will live and rewriting the equations of who is going to be empowered and who is going to be disempowered. Who is going to be included and who is going to be excluded.

It is important to recognise that this current transformation has already been underway for many years. But the Fourth Industrial Revolution is the framework upon which we can understand how society's production capacity and the capability to produce value has changed, evolved, and merged with many other technologies that are currently under development and being piloted.

## **Technology-driven transformation**

*“The rapid growth of technology is currently being accelerated right now faster than at any point in time due to the current COVID-19 crisis. Because of this crisis, all of us are working from home and able to continue with our day to day lives because of technology. The internet, video conferencing, and connected devices are allowing city governments, companies and businesses to continue to operate today.”*

Jeff Merritt, Head for IOT, Robotics, Smart Cities Center for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, World Economic Forum

The current technology-led transformation we are experiencing includes the Internet of Things (IoT), which is an entire system of interrelated computing devices. These are both mechanical and digital machines that transfer data over a network without requiring human-to-human or human-to-computer interaction. As a result, there are now already more connected devices in the world today than there are humans.

The sheer number of IoT devices already deployed creates some cause for concern. There is a clear need to guarantee data security and privacy. While these new technologies are an integral part of lives, there is also a need to ensure technologies such as Ai and Big Data also protect our human rights.

We need to create a set of norms that should be driving technologies such as AI, robotics, and Big Data to ensure these technologies are used virtuously in an inclusive and transparent way. We should be able to monitor the social impact of these technologies as

we deploy them. This needs to occur in virtual sandboxes or policy sandboxes as we experiment with their uses, benefits, and potential drawbacks.

We are moving faster in the transformation than we are in regulating that transformation. So we must ensure that the prevention of social harm is prioritized. We must also ensure that the rollout or uptake of these technologies is done in a way that prevents discrimination or the reinforcement of inequalities on marginalized groups or those most at risk of exclusion.

## **How can cities be accessible, inclusive and resilient in the "new normal"?**

*"The ASEAN region is a very diverse area, and in the current situation, there are many cities where migrant workers are stuck and cannot return to their home countries. Many live in slum areas, with limited internet connectivity or smartphone access. So the conditions they are experiencing in the face of the COVID-19 epidemic can be very different to those faced in other parts of the globe."*

Aiko Akiyama, Disability focal point, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

If we agree that one of the major problems that the world is currently facing is of inequality, then where we are seeing inequality expressed most abruptly is in urban realities. That applies to both the developed and developing world. This is being expressed as a consequence of major shifts in the means of production and therefore in employment.

Changes to employment inevitably become linked to changes occurring in housing affordability. This has to do with the evolution of cities. The city is attracting most of the economic activity, but at the same time it is at the front line of changing work patterns.

Some of the key ways that these inequalities can be addressed is via:

- *Improved research*
- *Empowering social services*
- *A focus on universal design-based accessibility*

- *Inclusive-disaster risk reduction measures*
- *Improved procurement processes*
- *A greater focus on participation — “Nothing about us without us”*

## Emerging trends that can impact inclusion

*“As well as inclusion, we need to focus on creating cities that are good for our physical and our mental health. And that is required more than ever in the context of COVID-19.”*

- Alice Charles, Project Lead, Cities, Infrastructure and Urban Services Platform, World Economic Forum

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have created many often sudden changes to the ways we carry out our lives. Some of the most important of these include:

- Rapid adoption of remote working
- Greater data privacy considerations posed by COVID-19 tracking apps
- The increased risks posed by cyber attacks as security risks rise
- Using hotels to house people experiencing homeless
- Increased strain on digital infrastructure
- Acceleration in the adoption of automation and transition to virtual service delivery
- Shift to participatory, virtual cultural experiences
- Flourishing of open innovation
- Isolation intensifying mental health challenges
- Momentum towards a cashless economy
- New financing needs and models

Each of these shifts provide clear risks as well as opportunities for cities and societies. These changes can have exaggerated impacts on at-risk people including people with

disabilities or older people as they are often the last people considered when sudden trends emerge and society has little time to enact proper planning.

However, these new trends also provide the opportunity to use these changes as a way to alter the course of the greater transformations underway. For example by making these changes to work practices, data privacy measures, accommodation, and service delivery properly consider those most at risk so that the longer-term adaptations that society is forced to make to deal with the pandemic ultimately result in greater equity and accessibility for all.

It also presents opportunities to realize or pursue new funding opportunities, as identified by Ayman Seijiny. CEO, The Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector (ICD) of the Islamic Development Bank Group (IsDB).

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*“One of the best opportunities that exist to better include people with disabilities as beneficiaries of project-based initiatives is to follow a similar process to that created with green bonds. These ultimately allow for lower cost financing and a similar approach can be used to issue disability bonds. It will be interesting to see how disability can be benefited by these types of funding models that could also for example include crowdfunding and other alternative financing options.”*

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## Recommendations and declared actions

The following are the key recommendations and declared actions that can be used by cities to enhance inclusive urban resilience:

1. Ensure that **governments** issue **agile regulatory structures** specifying standards, procurement policies and guidelines that ensure accessibility and usability of apps, websites, kiosks, and other digital products and services
2. Ensure that **local governments** monitor and assess the impact of emerging technologies on citizens especially PWD and those most at risk of exclusion
3. Ensure that local governments create risk management plans to increase their **cyber inclusion and resilience** by guaranteeing the delivery of essential city services
4. Ensure that emerging technologies can maximize benefits and minimize harm by collaborating with civil society organizations, academia, policymakers, and **DPOs**

5. Ensure that **technology companies** collaborate with a **broad range of actors** (government, academia, DPOs) to design and perform **impact assessment** of AI technological products along all their life cycle
6. Ensure that technologies **do not reinforce exclusion, discrimination, or power asymmetries** through clear **human-rights based** regulatory frameworks
7. Ensure that governments, both local and national, protect citizens including PWD and vulnerable people when **collecting and using data for technology development**

## **Space is limited, sign up to join our final webinar:**

<https://worldenabled.m-pages.com/c4a-webinar-series>

## **Learn more from the Cities for All "Equity and Access" COVID-19 Learning Series**

World Enabled, with our Cities for All partners, are hosting action-oriented webinar series called "Equity and Access in times of Pandemic". This series will feature expert speakers from affected areas and highlight global responses to protect older persons and persons with disabilities.

### **Key questions for the webinar series:**

1. What actions are local governments taking to protect and respond to the needs of persons with disabilities and older persons during the pandemic?
2. How are local governments engaging with persons with disabilities and older persons to ensure that all pandemic responses are disability-inclusive?
3. What does an inclusive and accessible COVID-19 response look like at the local level?

### **Webinar 1**

**Topic:** Why Cities Matter? Challenges and opportunities of COVID-19 Pandemic

**Content:** Kick-off meeting gathers Cities For All signatories and partners to coordinate and set goals for coordination task force. Challenges and opportunities of the COVID-19

Pandemic for local governments will be discussed.

**Outcome:** Coordinate commitments, resources, and impact by region and map stakeholders projects

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## **Webinar 2**

**Topic:** Urban Access and Non-Discrimination in times of Pandemic

**Content:** Identify efforts and the critical role of participation, advocacy and awareness-raising to create equity and access in Pandemic Response.

**Outcome:** Document and assess local level pandemic responses to inform more equitable and inclusive short-term and long-term urban development policies.

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## **Webinar 3**

**Topic:** Resilience and Recovery Planning: Scaling Inclusive Urban Policies and Programs

**Content:** Review and Discuss guidelines and standards implemented by local governments that align inclusive recovery & resilience planning with SDG and CRPD.

**Outcome:** Identify and align best practices implemented by local governments with the key principles of the C4All Global Compact on Inclusive and Accessible Cities.

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## **Webinar 4**

**Topic:** Valuing Lives: Combating Myths and Threats to Older Persons and Persons with Disabilities in Local Level Responses (Asia Focus)

**Content:** Investigating the impact of Pandemic on attitudes and public service delivery and the role of implicit bias in pandemic response

**Outcome:** Mapping how persons with disabilities and older persons are being affected during emergency response and getting global status updates on negative attitudes from



leading cities.

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### **Webinar 5**

**Topic:** Measuring Access, Equity and Resilience: Scaling Partnerships for Disability Inclusive Open Data Initiatives

**Content:** Review disability-inclusive data collection strategies and dissemination platforms to drive inclusive policies, investments, and budget allocations.

**Outcome:** Streamlining strategies on data collection, resource mobilization, funding strategies, and budget allocation in times of crisis.

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### **Webinar 6**

**Topic:** Accessible Online Platforms for Capacity Building and Training with C4A Signatory Cities

**Content:** Investigate the roles of peer-to-peer learning, urban planners, and professional associations in scaling knowledge transfer.

**Outcome:** Delineate actions to provide online training for inclusive urban development, and create platforms for building communities of practice and skills upgrading during times of pandemic.

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### **Webinar 7**

**Topic:** Technology and other emerging trends for inclusive urban resilience

**Content:** Discuss digital inclusion and the role of AI and technologies in easing crises

**Outcome:** Identify and feature emerging technologies that can inform/support local governments and delineate strategies to scale accessibility in virtual/online education.

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