IBC on Environment and Climate Change

Recommendations for COVID-19 recovery

BUILDING BACK BETTER:

pathways for a more inclusive, environmentally sustainable and resilient recovery[1]

The purpose of this summary of recommendations is to give basic guidance to Resident Coordinators, UN Country Teams and other partners working on the assessments of the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19[2] and, as first ideas, on how to build back better in line with environmental and climate sustainability. Based on the feedback from the Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams, this generic guidance will be followed by more elaborated guidelines on post-pandemic recovery strategies accompanied by capacity building.

The present document group recommendations under the following headings:

- Health and protecting people, with a focus on waste management and circularity
- The economic response and recovery, covering environmental sustainability and green economy, sustainable consumption and production, the clean energy transition, nature-based solutions and natural resources management
- Social cohesion and community resilience, including disaster risk reduction and resilience building, governance and risk-informed decision-making and transboundary, regional and global cooperation

Health and protecting people

Environmental degradation and biodiversity loss create the conditions for an increase in the type of animal-to-human zoonosis that can result in viral epidemics. They also contribute to pre-existing medical conditions such as asthma that make persons more vulnerable to viral infections.

The substantive elements of the right to sustainable environment, including a safe climate, water and sanitation, clean air, healthy and sustainably produced food, non-toxic environments, and healthy

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[1] For various guidance materials on COVID-19, see https://www.unece.org/runcwelcome/issue-based-coalitions/environment-and-climate-change/covid-19-and-environment.html

[2] For the framework used, see https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/coronavirus/socio-economic-impact-of-covid-19.html.

ecosystems and biodiversity, are prerequisites for human health and resilience in the face of illness and for reducing the risk of zoonosis and expansion of existing disease vectors.

Human health and the right to a healthy environment

- Respect, protect and fulfil the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment in any COVID-19 response.

Waste management and circularity

- Follow guidance on waste management provided by WHO and UNEP.
- Optimize utilization of stop-gap solutions during COVID-19 to prevent the spread of contamination and the increase in litter reaching the marine environment; in the meantime, sort, segregate and store.
- Analyse all perspectives connected to waste management, including reduction, collection, disposal, services and infrastructure, economic aspects, advocacy and awareness raising.
- Ensure that recycling programmes and the sorting of waste continue, resume and expand. Provide the sector and its employees with all necessary protective equipment and containers, especially for workers in medical waste facilities and hospitals, but also for workers in municipal waste management facilities in municipalities with limited resources and workers in displacement settings.
- Assess the impacts of disinfectant and cleaning solutions used to control the spread of COVID-19.
- Maximize the circularity of the medical sector to better manage single use products and devise strategies for the proper treatment of unrecyclable waste.
- Provide accessible guidance to the public on how to safely dispose of household and personal medical waste.
- Avoid impacts on human health, livelihoods and rights, which are likely to hit the poorest, most vulnerable and marginalized communities without access to waste management or sanitation infrastructure.
- Manage levels of air pollution through emission control to improve both human and environmental health.
- Establish systematic, comparable and transparent monitoring activities and emissions inventories.
- Conduct mapping of the poorest, most vulnerable and marginalized communities.
- Conduct mapping of the available capacity for treating healthcare waste.
- Actively engage landfill owners, waste management companies and other relevant local stakeholders, including municipalities, to prepare for waste disposal. Ensure meaningful, informed and effective participation of stakeholders regarding waste management.
- Prepare a separate cell within landfills for the waste generated by the epidemic.

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- Analyse the economic dimensions and the business models for the operation of healthcare waste management, including public private partnerships, to promote sustainable management.
- Provide training particularly on segregation, collection and transportation of waste, selection of healthcare waste management technologies and installation and operation of equipment.

Economic response and recovery

The recovery presents an opportunity to support improved social protection measures and a just transition to a sustainable, inclusive, carbon-neutral, circular economy founded on renewable energy, environmentally-sound technology, innovation, education, capacity-building, critical infrastructure (including health infrastructure), community empowerment and sustainable livelihoods.

The green transition will necessitate reskilling employees, including migrant workers, or providing social protection measures for those unable to be reskilled.

Moving away from an extract-manufacture-use-discard economy will create new jobs in waste management, the reuse and re-processing of materials, and services such as rental and repair.

Environmental sustainability and green economy

- Utilize the post-crisis recovery as a unique window of opportunity to prioritize climate resilience and environmental standards across economic stimuli.
- Integrate climate action into fiscal stimulus packages to avoid a return to business-as-usual that results in rising emission rates and even more severe climate change impacts, affecting those already in vulnerable situations the hardest.
- Impose conditions based on environmental, climate and sustainable development commitments, including measures to leave no one behind, on financial support measures, including preferential loans, loan guarantees and tax abatements, to enhance environmental performance in pollution-intensive sectors.
- Fund climate-friendly agricultural practices and large-scale food production systems, including for women in agriculture.
- Phase out tax exemptions for fossil fuel production and consumption to support the transition to cleaner alternatives.
- Promote a national development trajectory that focuses on sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth.
- Facilitate the integration of green jobs, green growth, SMEs, digitalization and sustainable finance into economic recovery and financial stimuli, and ensure that women, woman-owned businesses, and other vulnerable groups are included. Redevelop skills of local communities dependent on sectors affected by the pandemic.

- Invest in ecotourism products that simultaneously protect local natural and cultural heritage, without contributing over-tourism and while respecting the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples. Encourage the use of local value chains and local and youth employment in the tourism sector.
- Invest in inclusive green technologies that contribute to environmental and climate action and provide sustainable livelihoods.
- Enhance policies for eco-innovation by increasing finance for environmental research and development, clean technology incubators and skills and education programmes, including for women and other vulnerable groups.
- Support skilling and re-skilling of migrant workers, especially those employed in the extractive sectors or from environmentally fragile communities, so that they can contribute to the green transition. Promote "Just Transition" principles to ensure that migrant workers are not adversely affected across the global supply chain.

Sustainable consumption and production

- Mainstream sustainable consumption and production into all aspects of COVID-19-related economic stimulus plans.
- Support research and development of eco-design, reusable and sustainable (biodegradable) packaging to improve the longevity of products and enhance recycling opportunities.
- Support the production of more sustainable, long-use personal protective equipment (PPE) and its equitable distribution and access, especially to high risk communities.
- Reinforce and resume measures to reduce waste, especially the single use of plastics, in all relevant sectors. Reverse any recent lapses in this respect.
- Promote eco-labelling and eco-auditing, and develop communication campaigns to promote more sustainable consumption behaviour and lifestyle-choices that reduce demands on the environment. Also encourage a shift towards nutritious and safe diets with a lower environmental footprint.
- Invest in local and sustainable food production systems, such as urban farming, to support livelihoods.
- Include sustainability criteria incorporating economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in national and local-level procurement of products and services, ensuring access to information and participation in such processes and that the alignment with the criteria is monitored on a continuous basis.
- Cooperate with businesses and industry to ensure sustainable, resource efficient, resilient and inclusive value chains in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and including an emphasis on business continuity plans.

- Support the resilience of micro and small-scale enterprises (MSMEs), including women-owned MSMEs, by connecting them to sustainable and responsible value chains.
- Support the phase-out of internal combustion engine vehicles in favour of electric mobility, including for trade, transportation, individual and other types of mobility, and in favour of developing infrastructure for cycling and walking where possible.

Clean energy transition

PREPARE: electrify existing and temporary health facilities, to strengthen countries' first line of defence against the pandemic.

RESPOND: ensure the continuity of power supplies and access to energy for vulnerable populations to help countries slow the spread of the virus and provide social protection for groups in vulnerable situations.

RECOVER: leverage sustainable infrastructure investments to speed-up recovery and to seize opportunities to reform fossil fuel subsidies, to help countries recover from the economic and social impacts in the months to come.

- Place emission reduction targets at the centre of economic stimuli to ensure continued progress towards global climate action and nationally determined contributions.
- Apply green fiscal policy instruments such as carbon taxation, fossil fuel subsidy reform (or cessation) and investment in renewable power systems.
- Link recovery efforts to climate action by divesting in goods and services dependent on fossil fuels.
- Divest from high-carbon infrastructure systems and fund programmes that are climate resilient and benefit air quality.
- Support and finance rights-based renewable energy and energy efficiency to generate renewed economic benefits.
- Support renewable energy projects that improve women's access to energy, including that of female-headed households, to also reduce emissions, contribute to important health benefits, alleviate women's traditional care burdens and open economic, educational and social opportunities, including for women's civic engagement.
- Provide financial support to innovative low-carbon activities as well as clean technology research and development, including into the storage of renewable energy.
- Provide incentives to channel remittances and diaspora funding into clean energy and sustainable building and renovation, as remittance-recipient households spend a substantial portion of their income in construction or renovation.
- Ensure that people in displacement settings have access to clean energy.

Nature-based solutions

- Invest in and utilize urban green and blue infrastructure systems to advance climate change adaptation, support urban resilience and improve air quality.
- Invest in projects that restore or conserve the capacity of ecosystems to sequester carbon dioxide, including the conservation of coastal ecosystems, forests and oceans.
- Take urgent action to address illegal wildlife trade and wildlife trade products to reduce the risk of zoonoses.
- Reinstate the support and funding of conservation programmes to protect biodiversity and safeguard ecosystems.
- Fund further research into the nature-health nexus.
- Support countries to identify and assess high-risk factors for the emergence of zoonotic diseases linked to biodiversity loss, livelihoods and wildlife consumption and trade.
- Sustain the livelihoods and rights and foster resilience through livelihood diversification of indigenous and local communities, who were heavily dependent on severely affected economic sectors, such as tourism, nature-based tourism and agriculture.

Natural resources management

- Include the protection and management of the natural resource base in COVID-19 recovery efforts, since the performance and resilience of socio-economic systems depend on the availability of natural resources and the health of the natural environment.
- Ensure that the largest industries commit to sustainable use of natural resources to prevent unsustainable resource extraction during the post-crisis recovery.
- Monitor closely trends in natural resources management, including through participatory monitoring and governance, notably for any possible changes related to COVID-19.
- Ensure all industries follow measures to prevent, prepare and respond to hazardous events that could harm natural resources, ecosystems and public health.
- Promote integrated and sustainable water resources management, including health and sanitation. Promote also a multi-sectoral approach to integrated water resources management under the One Water One Health concept.
- Monitor and assure water quality in relation to the pandemic. Sample wastewater to monitor local infection outbreaks of COVID-19.
- Monitor and assure air quality due to the impacts of air pollution on respiratory health and the immune system. High levels of air pollution might exacerbate the risk and impact of COVID-19, for example, through increases in respiratory diseases such as asthma.
- Support local communities with the safe and sustainable use of natural resources to strengthen the resilience of communities that directly depend on natural resources for their livelihoods.
- Mitigate the risk of transmission of zoonotic diseases by reducing habitat destruction.

- Use the current situation as an opportunity to enhance sustainable and inclusive land and forest management, ecological agricultural practices and the protection of sensitive ecosystems to reduce the pressure on wildlife and biodiversity, while also decreasing greenhouse gas emissions.

Social cohesion and community resilience

Environmental harms disproportionately impact individuals, groups and peoples already living in vulnerable situations – including women, children, the poor, minorities, migrants, indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities. Crises such as COVID-19 amplify those impacts, including through adverse effects on access to food and land, water and sanitation, housing, livelihoods, decent work, healthcare and other necessities. Fulfilling human rights, including the human right to a healthy environment, not only reduces disproportionate impacts, it also fosters more resilient societies.

Climate-related natural hazards can disrupt essential public services, such as water and sanitation systems, which are crucial to managing public health emergencies. Climate change can exacerbate existing public health risks, for instance, by affecting the occurrence of infectious diseases and increasing exposure of some communities to vector-borne diseases. Climate change adaptation also plays a role in epidemic preparedness.

Across every sphere, the impacts of both COVID-19 and climate change are exacerbated for women and girls simply by virtue of their sex.

Disaster risk reduction and resilience building

- Apply multi-sector, multi-hazard and multi-stakeholder approaches to the COVID-19 recovery and other national and international disaster risk reduction efforts.
- Ensure that the COVID-19 response is well-aligned with the 2030 Agenda, contributing to progress in implementing the Sendai Framework and the SDGs.
- Make use of the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to learn about managing compound risks, apply that knowledge to better anticipate and prepare for future shocks and further improve national, regional and international disaster management. Focus particularly on the links between preparedness and response activities, emergency coordination mechanisms and risk communication and warning systems. Use these measures to contribute to averting, managing and addressing displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change. Focus additionally on the existing gender differentials in all preparedness and response activities to ensure that both women and men's needs are considered and planned for.
- Support the use of notification systems to ensure early communication and effective responses to pandemics and disasters, including their environmental and health effects and effects that cross national borders.

- Invest in disaster risk reduction to save lives and resources and protect livelihoods, placing disaster prevention first, and gearing up for preparedness for response.
- Consider climate and health-related risks in a more integrated manner to develop new multi-hazard approaches and translate such approaches into integrated contingency and preparedness plans to contribute to societal resilience.
- Enhance progress on climate resilience to reduce the risks of future of pandemics.
- Communicate clearly the benefits of improving the overall environmental health of societies, including the benefits of a safe, healthy and sustainable environment in terms of human rights and well-being, reduced risks and greater societal resilience.
- Strengthen the role of the National Disaster Management Agencies and other national and international agencies and organizations that contribute to disaster management.
- Strengthen mechanisms for the effective prevention of pandemics, related disaster risks and other environmental disruptions, including climate change and biodiversity loss.
- Ensure preparedness and resilience of small, medium and large enterprises, including women-owned SMEs, for future epidemics.
- Support uninterrupted provision of public services by national disaster management and emergency agencies.
- Follow the COVID-19 Recovery Needs Assessment inter-agency Methodology.

Governance and risk-informed decision-making

- Align different risk management systems and consider the interplay of natural hazards and public health work. Renew a focus on cross-sectoral risk frameworks that include the impacts of environmental change.
- Apply a multisectoral approach to development and implementation of the COVID-19 response policies and mechanisms. Provide for adequate environmental expertise in any institutional arrangements put in place for this purpose.
- Use country-level socioeconomic impact analysis of COVID-19, the Common Country Analysis, UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and the UN Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights (including its dedicated section on climate justice and rights of future generations) as important entry points for ensuring risk-informed and inclusive decision-making processes, building back better and for operationalizing the human right to a healthy environment.
- Explore and put in place appropriate innovative solutions and safeguards to enforce existing environmental laws and standards, particularly where these may be affected by the restrictions of the pandemic control. Such measures may include the use of virtual means for continuing impact assessments and conducting consultations, social distancing and other safety measures

put in place to maintain compliance monitoring or developing transparent online permitting procedures.

- Strengthen national risk governance arrangements to better prepare for and respond to all types of hazards by incorporating biohazards, including epidemics, along with natural, climate-related and technological hazards, as part of integrated and systemic risk management.
- Enhance stakeholder awareness, advocacy for more inclusive and environmental considerate management.
- Ensure fulfilment of the rights of the public to access to information and justice and participate in decision-making in environmental matters.
- Pay attention, and put in place measures, to ensure empowerment of environmental human rights defenders and their effective protection from threats, reprisals and harassment, especially during the COVID-19 crisis when their safety can be impacted by restrictive measures enacted following a declaration of a state of emergency.
- Advance the digital transformation of environmental governance and promote interoperability between environmental, health, statistical, geospatial and other information systems (including pollutant release and transfer registers) within open data and e-government frameworks.
- Carry out training and capacity-building to ensure that all persons and governments have the necessary capacity to address climate change. Build capacities of groups in vulnerable situations, enabling them to be agents of change for sustainable, rights-based climate action and a just transition.
- Hold multi-stakeholder dialogues on sectoral issues and strategic development priorities, including those referred to in previous sections, to make recovery efforts sustainable and provide for ownership by the key stakeholders. Involve relevant authorities, members of the public, indigenous peoples, local communities, civil society, women's organizations, scientists, the private sector, children and youth, financial institutions and other stakeholders in such dialogues.
- Ensure that, while striving to attain new emission targets, necessary measures are considered to avert, minimize and address displacement.
- Ensure that women and vulnerable groups are included in COVID-19 recovery efforts, starting with women's equal representation and participation in decision-making. Involve women in COVID-19 and climate change specialized groups or task forces, as well as legislative, policy and budgetary decision-making processes, even if this requires special measures to guarantee their participation. Ensure that women's organizations, who are often on the front line of COVID-19 and climate change responses in communities, are represented, supported and consulted in planning and recovery processes.
- Collect, analyse and make available sex-disaggregated data for risk-informed decision-making.
- Ensure decision-making is based on evidence and effective science-policy interfaces; strengthen data collection and analysis to inform decisions on recovery and responses to pandemics and related environmental issues.

Transboundary, regional and global cooperation

- Enhance transboundary, regional and global cooperation to establish more effective and coordinated decision-making in recovery efforts, and to build back better.
- Support information exchange across borders to strengthen prevention, preparedness and response to future pandemics and environmental emergencies.
- Create and conduct exercises to train for coordinated effective responses to pandemics and disasters across borders and strengthen related capacities.
- Increase international support for countries to integrate disaster and climate risk considerations into governance, policy and actions that build resilience and reduce systemic risk, especially during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Enhance mutual assistance across countries for response efforts and recovery plans.

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Email Regional.Bureau-SC@unesco.org