

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## Safe cities: Future-proofing for tomorrow and beyond



### The Safe Cities Index 2021

The Safe Cities Index, a global policy benchmarking tool launched by the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2015, marks its fourth iteration in 2021. Measuring urban safety across five domains—digital, health, infrastructure, personal and environmental security—using 76 indicators, each edition of the survey has been refined to reflect new concerns, such as covid-19. This year's index has grown to cover 60 cities in Africa, the Americas, the Asia-Pacific, Europe and the Middle East, representing a variety of sizes, regions and income levels.

### **Future-proofing cities**

Covid-19 is the first global pandemic since 2007, when the world became more urban than rural. The crisis has stretched cities' resources, accelerated social and technological trends, and changed how we think about urban resilience.

To explore the urban security lessons that can be learned from covid-19, The Economist Group assembled an expert panel: Hans Jayatissa, chief technology officer at KMD; Esteban Léon, head of the City Resilience Global Programme at UN-Habitat; and Nicola Tollin, professor of urban resilience at the University of Southern Denmark (SDU).

# The technology and flexibility to address global challenges

In addressing global challenges, governments must be flexible and use a holistic approach that anticipates multiple threats and considers the interconnected nature of complex urban systems. Ranking first in the Safe Cities Index 2021 is Copenhagen, and to focus their discussion, panellists examined what it and Denmark have done well, particularly in the past year.

Copenhagen has successfully used technology to fight covid-19 and climate change. To meet these and other global threats, cities need support from national governments, civil society and the private sector. To aid collective action, cities should share their data and expertise, particularly with peers in developing countries.

In its two most recent surveys, the United Nations ranked Denmark as the world leader in e-government. During the pandemic, the Danish government used the secure national digital post service to deliver information about covid-19 to all citizens. The country's well-established telemedicine system was expanded to address social issues such as drug and alcohol abuse. A health app called "MinSundhed" or "MyHealth" was upgraded so people could receive covid-19 test results and demonstrate they had been vaccinated, and its user interface was enhanced to make it easier to navigate. Nicola Tollin of SDU attributes the utilisation of data in helping to monitor the spread of covid-19 to the trust held between civil society and the public administration.

Establishing effective cyber-security involves a delicate balance between protecting data and networks, and maintaining usability for people who may not have a technical background. Usability can be a particular concern for the elderly and people with disabilities. In Denmark, local organisations have offered training services so people could learn to access services without having to visit government offices during the pandemic. Copenhagen also focused on integrating its information technology systems to break down data silos and share health-care data more effectively.

In the public sector, digitalisation is often difficult. But in times of crisis, "this is really what distinguishes your city or your country from the rest," observes Hans Jayatissa of KMD. Mr Tollin says Copenhagen benefited from a range of supporting factors, including public infrastructure such as open and green spaces, strong neighbourhoods with good services, access to fundamentals like free health-care and social services, and high trust in civil society. The city also kept contact with its most vulnerable groups, including ethnic minorities and the homeless.

# Driving evidence-based decision-making

Data is a key to addressing global challenges such as climate change. For example, by using technology to measure the use of electricity, heat and water in government buildings, Copenhagen can better understand usage patterns, reduce consumption and increase efficiency. To do this, the data must drive what Esteban Léon of UN-Habitat calls "evidence-based decisions" at the political level.

While wealthy cities have the skills and technology to gather and exploit data, their peers in developing countries often lack resources. That represents an opportunity for cities like Copenhagen to share data, best practices and lessons learned, particularly with small- and medium-sized cities in the Global South.

Wherever they are, cities need support in the form of legislation, resources and capacity from national governments, civil society and the private sector. As Nicola Tollin notes, urban safety "should be a common effort, a common responsibility."

### The need for a new mindset

Climate change and similarly serious threats require a new mindset, because they are global in scope but require local action. That calls for effective communication and collaboration among supranational organisations, as well as between national, regional and local governments. At each of these levels, organisations need to be flexible so they can react quickly to changes in the environment.

"We need to understand that we need some radical changes in the ways in which we consume and we produce. These radical changes, unfortunately, are not going to be easy". Nicola Tollin

In addition to making a co-operative effort, leaders must embrace systems-based thinking. Complex urban systems are interconnected and require a "multi-hazard, multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach", says Mr Léon. "We should not forget about the important things because we are reacting to the urgent things."



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Nicola Tollin

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