

## Draft Geneva Declaration on sustainable housing and urban development

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**Draft Geneva Declaration on housing and urban development to be adopted by the Heads of UNECE national delegations and stakeholders participating in 78<sup>th</sup> session of the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management on the occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Committee establishment (Geneva, 11-12 September 2017)**

1. We, the National Government delegations from the member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), as well as relevant stakeholders, including local and regional authorities, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations agencies, professionals and academia, the private sector, civil society, women and youth participating in the in 78<sup>th</sup> session of the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management in Geneva on 11-12 September 2017, met to discuss challenges and opportunities of housing in liveable cities and human settlements and to mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Committee.
2. We welcome the adoption of the New Urban Agenda by Habitat III - the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development<sup>1</sup>. We reiterate the importance for governments at all levels and relevant stakeholders to promote the implementation of the Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030<sup>2</sup>, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030<sup>3</sup>, UN Climate Change Paris Agreement<sup>4</sup>, the UN-Habitat Global Housing Strategy<sup>5</sup>, The Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing<sup>6</sup>, The International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning and the Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management in the ECE region for the period 2014-2020<sup>7</sup>. We underline the need to promote synergies and cross-sectoral links in implementing the above mentioned global and regional accords.

### **A. We further note that:**

3. The UNECE region is home to 1.3 billion people, some 17% of the total global population. It contains at least 263 cities of 500,000 or more inhabitants, and contributes to more than 40% of the world's GDP. The **already large proportion of its population living in its cities** is still growing, albeit slowly.
4. **The countries are very diverse in almost all features:** size, geography, economy and culture. It corresponds mostly to what has been referred to as the Global North'.<sup>8</sup>
5. The region is characterised by the following trends and patterns:

#### Urbanisation and demography

6. Within the urban population, there is **a trend towards urban concentration and agglomeration into super-cities**, such as those in the metropolitan regions from Boston to Washington, D.C.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.habitat3.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/sendai-framework>

<sup>4</sup> <http://newsroom.unfccc.int/paris-agreement/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://unhabitat.org/urban-themes/housing-slum-upgrading/>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/documents/Publications/UNECE\\_Charter\\_EN.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/documents/Publications/UNECE_Charter_EN.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/sessions/docs2013/draft.strategy.post.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> The Part A of the Declaration is based on the analyses, conclusions and recommendations of the Habitat III Regional Report for the UNECE Region, <http://www.unece.org/housing/habitat3regionalreport.html>

7. There is a countervailing **trend towards shrinking cities** within less successful and more remote regions where population is declining due to outmigration. This often goes along with ageing, as the young and/or highly qualified leave. This problem is almost exclusive to the UNECE region.
8. There is a general **tendency towards urban sprawl**, not only in cities experiencing population growth. This poses problems for social dynamics and environmental sustainability. These problems are likely to be exacerbated by the consequences of the ageing of the population.
9. **A rapidly ageing population** is most prominent in Western, Central and Eastern Europe and in Russia. Ageing and population decline both pose serious challenges for cities, particularly in regard to diminishing local tax revenues, the provision of services, transportation, housing, and accessibility of public space. Conversely, Central Asian countries in the region are experiencing growth in the young population, posing difficulties regarding housing and job provision.
10. **Migration is a key issue** throughout the region. Its magnitude and significance has increased in the past 20 years. It has led to increased diversity in many cities, a process that boosts social innovation, but also brings challenges for social cohesion. Migrants settle mainly in large cities leading to urban polarization. Vibrant rural areas could play an important role in lowering migratory pressure on cities, allowing them to plan and manage urbanisation processes.

#### The Economy of Cities

11. A substantial part of the region has undergone **economic transition** in recent decades, from centrally-planned to market economies. In general, large and capital cities have prospered, with GDP returning to pre-1990 levels, while smaller ones have fared less well, economically, physically, environmentally and culturally. The economic restructuring held huge challenges for old industrial cities, company towns in particular, in Eastern Europe, Russia, Caucasus and Central Asia.
12. The manufacturing industry has declined in the region since Habitat II however it remains important. There is a **shift to cleaner, greener manufacturing** with smaller spatial demands. The rise of the **knowledge economy in North America and Europe, built on a digital revolution**, is bringing both opportunities and challenges for cities. These changes demand different forms of space and use that better suit the new conditions of economic production, social requirements and cultural institutions. While globalization remains significant, the local qualities of cities become ever more important.
13. **The digital revolution** brings both challenges and opportunities for governments in the region. **Technical innovation and ICT<sup>9</sup>** offer new opportunities for urban planning and development, land use (e.g. driverless vehicles), interaction with the public (e.g. crowd sourcing), public participation in decision-making, awareness raising, and transparency of urban management. However, data privacy, security and ownership are challenging the capacity of governments to utilize these technical innovations in defence of the public interest.

#### Living in cities

14. The global financial crisis that started in 2008 has led to **more inequality in the region**, lowering the income of a substantive part of the population, and affecting many aspects of people's lives.
15. **Lack of affordability of housing** is a critical matter, leading to problems of accessibility to adequate housing, and increased spatial segregation in cities. Despite being less acute than in other regions, homelessness and informal settlements remain a problem. The housing sector needs to ,

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<sup>9</sup> Information and communication technologies

address these problems while meeting new aspirations, such as energy efficiency and customer-adjusted design, along with the provision of additional services (e.g. for elderly, homeless and migrant people).

16. The past two decades have witnessed **a general trend towards increasing home ownership and reinforcing housing markets in the region**. The total stock of, and investment in, social and public housing is decreasing. Social housing stock in advanced economies has been reduced, while the former public housing in the countries with economies in transition has been rapidly privatized, leaving little time for local governments and individuals (especially owners) to adapt.
17. . In the eastern part of the region, **the phenomenon of “poor owners”** has become endemic, as a result of the privatization of public housing, a lack of maintenance, and energy inefficiency. Delays caused by collective decision-making by owners of large housing estates, whether in ‘affluent’ or ‘poor’ areas, have increased costs and often resulted in the deterioration of apartment blocks, particularly in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.
18. **Social interactions in cities** have changed over the past 20 years. There has been, on the one hand, a tendency to develop closed communities and shopping malls, and, on the other, a reaffirmation of the central role of public spaces as frameworks for innovation and social interaction.
19. Many of the factors that support equity in a city also support the **health and well-being** of all its citizens. These include access to housing, transportation, energy and water supplies, public services, public participation in decision-making, availability and access to safe and healthful food, green spaces, and the reduction of emissions. There is a growing recognition of these issues in countries throughout the region.

#### Environment and Disaster Risks

20. **The region is among the largest emitters of greenhouse gases (GHGs)** per capita. Environmental threats are often also health threats. Action taken to reduce environmental pollution will also help secure public health and well-being.
21. Air pollution, flooding and heat-waves are the most prevalent environmental issues of the region, with cities being most vulnerable. **Disaster risk reduction (DRR)** is an issue more pressing in parts of the UNECE region with increased threat/risk of natural disaster which have a negative impact on the quality of life in urban areas and can even imperil lives.
22. **Urban sprawl has increased and has resulted in growing consumption of land and pressure on green spaces**. The extension of road networks and increasing traffic congestion have further affected the availability of urban land and contributed to urban emissions. There is a need to limit the negative impact of housing on the environment and enhance the energy efficiency of the housing sector. Numerous programmes have taken initiatives to improve urban environmental conditions and the impact of cities on the global climate, however urban areas, still lag behind.

#### Governance

23. There has been **an increase in the importance of the role of local governments, with a corresponding growth in that of city networks, electronic access to information, and public participation**.
24. The region exhibits a wide variety of different governance model however **urban governance has experienced decentralisation**. These differences reflect both the local context and the history. Successful governance modes and institutional structures often cannot be simply transplanted from one part of the region to another: context is crucial.

25. . In the majority of the countries, the **management of urban planning issues** are largely in the hands of local governments within the framework of larger territorial strategies Whereas federal/national governments concentrate on ...
26. Many challenges for urban governance remain, such as **the effectiveness in limiting urban sprawl, the creation or reinforcement of socially-cohesive and culturally diverse neighbourhoods, the secure management of urban technology, the management of urban functional areas that extend over several administrative jurisdictions**, the resistance to change of highly fragmented institutional frameworks, the harmonization of norms, and the role of participatory frameworks and platforms for inhabitants' involvement in urban governance.
27. **The private sector plays a central role in the development and transformation of urban areas**, In general, an erosion of the public sphere was observed since Habitat II, resulting in more opportunities and responsibilities for the private sector.
28. **The growing use of e-Government, e-Governance, e-Participation and e-Inclusion at city level** has been driven by the supply of new information and communication technology (ICT) services Local authorities' capacity to maximize the benefit of the digital revolution without undermining their democratic mandate is a challenge that remains to be addressed. The progress of e-Governance is variable and in some countries – for instance, in Central Asia – it is underdeveloped.

#### Outlook and future trends

29. **The cities of the region are subject to the processes of urban concentration, sprawl and shrinkage brought about by market forces and events such as the recent financial crisis.** In an era of ageing and migration, favouring compactness over sprawl is not only a managerial issue for the city, it is a key means to supporting equity, integration and cohesion in society.
30. Across the region, **the shift to a post-industrial, knowledge economy, and the increasingly important role of services, are changing the structure and character of the economy**, introducing demands for enhanced qualifications from the labour market and placing different spatial demands on the city. The knowledge economy and the digital revolution flourish around centres of scientific and educational excellence, and are placing new demands on the physical structure of the city.
31. **ICTs play a growing role in the development of smart, sustainable cities, with initiatives aimed at sustaining and improving quality of life in urban areas, though this growth presents its own unique set of challenges.**
32. **Social and spatial inequality within and among the cities in the region has been growing**, making high quality urban areas affordable only to the most affluent. The demographic ageing in many countries and the recent wave of migration exacerbate the complexity of the growing inequalities.
33. **There is widespread consensus for inter-governmental action on the environment and climate change.** In the cities of this region, this will mean an accelerated trend to further curbing pollution and faster de-carbonizing urban development and life, requiring more stringent environmental regulations and high volumes of public and private investment.
34. **International standards in housing and sustainable development are driving action towards resilient, connected, spatially- and socially-integrated and compact cities in an equitable**

**partnership with rural areas.** There is a trend towards people-centred and integrated planning through urbanism.

35. These aims and processes will continue to **require collaboration, consensus and positive action among national and city governments, technical stakeholders and communities.** Addressing these ever more complex social, economic and environmental challenges will require new paradigms and a redoubling of effort from the governance systems to achieve sustainable urbanization.

**B. The participants of the 78th session of the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management invite** national governments and relevant stakeholders, including local and regional authorities, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations agencies, professionals and academia, the private sector, civil society, women and youth to **work together to address the above challenges**, in particular by:

36. Elaborating country-specific policy guidance and recommendations on challenges related to housing, urban development and land management in the UNECE region through regional and thematic studies.
37. Developing in-depth assessments and flagship reports, including a series of Country Profiles on Housing and Land Management.
38. Harmonizing methodologies and definitions in the area of housing, urban development and land management at all levels, supporting development of common terms, language definitions and standards.
39. Promoting dialogue between governments and relevant stakeholders using the existing platforms, such as the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management and others, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), other relevant UN programmes and agencies, the European Commission, the European Union housing focal points, the Intergovernmental Council for Cooperation in Construction of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Housing Europe - the European Federation of Public, Cooperative & Social Housing, International Union of Tenants, Housing Cooperatives International; Geneva UN Charter Centres for Sustainable Housing and Urban Development; to facilitate the exchange of experience and the sharing of good practices.
40. Promoting national urban policies conducive to balanced urbanisation and their translation to localised urban legislation and regulations; promoting strategic planning of human settlements; enacting measures at national and local levels to ensure that policies are appropriate for each scale of governance; thereby guaranteeing the most effective results.
41. Strengthening use of spatial planning and design of urban extensions, ensuring participation in planning by all key stakeholders and the inhabitants.
42. Introducing effective financial systems at the national and municipal levels, ensuring that local governments of the cities can implement the plans elaborated and support equitable and sustainable development of the human settlements.
43. Stressing that approaches will have to be locality-specific, and to be effective, to be as varied as the diversity of the countries, economies, societies and cultures in the UNECE region.
44. Promoting smart and sustainable cities as well as an integrated and holistic approach to planning and managing cities, and facilitating the use of ICT.

45. Promoting innovative and productive cities to increase cities' attractiveness with a focus on innovation, inclusiveness, improvement of youth perspectives and job creation through entrepreneurial-friendly environments.
46. Promoting green, compact and resilient cities by increasing urban resource efficiency<sup>10</sup>.
47. Promoting inclusive cities- by addressing the multiple aspects of urban poverty and exclusion.
48. Promoting the improvement of access to basic services allowing sustainable growth and job creation. The empowerment of women and better gender equality will be priorities of the EU external cooperation urban development policy.
49. Promoting good urban governance- by supporting and building capacity at local level - of local authorities and other stakeholders such as homeowner associations and housing cooperatives, a key element for sustainable development of urban areas
50. Focusing on capacity building and institutional support, especially to countries with transition economies, to promote policy implementation.
51. Creating regional networks of governments, experts and stakeholders; organizing workshops and study trips; creating synergies using existing platforms and involving relevant programmes, agencies and bodies and other stakeholders, to ensure consistency, complementarity and allow effective collaboration on housing and land related issues.
52. Developing and implementing capacity-building programmes for participatory, integrated and sustainable, resilient and affordable human settlement planning for all relevant stakeholders.
53. Regular monitoring and following up the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, Sustainable Development Goals and other targets, including those in the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing, the Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management in the ECE Region 2014-2020, and the UNECE/ITU<sup>11</sup> Smart Sustainable City Indicators, through the regular collection and analysis of data, etc. Data should be gathered using common international standards to ensure it is compatible between member States. It should, as much as possible, be publicly available to support policy-making, research and economic development. Lastly, global and regional data repositories should be further developed to support the policy-making process.

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<sup>10</sup> i.e. consumption of energy, water and land, reducing waste, improving air quality and by improving cities' resilience to flood, heat waves and natural hazards