

## 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 78th 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. There is **a large proportion of its population living in its cities** – between less than 50% in Central Asia and up to more than 80% in North America and Western Europe. The region's urban population is 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**, i.e. clusters of thriving cities in close proximity to one another,

<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>

such as the metropolitan regions from Boston to Washington, or London through the Randstad and the Ruhrgebiet to the cities of Northern Italy.

7. There is a countervailing **trend towards shrinking cities** within less successful and more remote regions. These cities are losing population due to outmigration, which often goes along with ageing, as the young and/or highly qualified leave. Almost all of the world's countries that are currently experiencing population shrinkage, or are expected to do so, are situated in this 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, such as high levels of car dependency, soil sealing, and expenditure for sustaining oversized infrastructure. 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 will be a major challenge in the coming decades. Population 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. At the same time, Central Asian countries in the region are experiencing growth in the young population, which poses difficulties related to providing jobs and housing for them.
10. **Migration is a key issue** throughout the region. Its magnitude and significance has increased in the past 20 years. Migrants settle mainly in large cities. This has led to urban polarization, as best-performing cities or neighbourhoods tend to attract population growth, youth and economic activities, leaving other areas in a state of economic stagnation and demographic shrinkage which, in turn, reduces opportunities for positive social interaction and cohesion. Migration has led to increased diversity in many cities, a process that boosts social innovation, but also brings challenges for social cohesion. To lower migratory pressure on cities and allow them to plan and manage urbanization processes, vibrant rural areas can play an important role. There is a continuing need for policy to address the integration of migrants into human settlements, particularly cities.

#### The Economy of Cities

11. A very substantial part of the region has undergone **economic transition** over the last few decades, from centrally-planned to market economies. In general, large and capital cities have prospered, with GDP now returning to pre-1990 levels, while smaller ones have fared less well, economically, physically, environmentally and culturally. Economic restructuring during the transition held huge challenges for old industrial cities, company towns in particular, in EERCCA.
12. The manufacturing industry has declined in the region in the last 20 years since Habitat II. However, the manufacturing sector remains important. There is **a shift to cleaner, greener manufacturing** that has smaller spatial demands in cities. The rise of the **knowledge economy in North America and Europe, built on a digital revolution**, is bringing about massive opportunities and challenges for cities. Changing manufacturing and the growing knowledge economy 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** comes with challenges and opportunities for all 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

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

sourcing), public participation in decision-making, people education and awareness rising, 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 a prosperous part of the world, homelessness and informal settlements are issues, although they are less acute than in other regions. The housing sector needs to respond to these changes, securing new sites for housing provision, and 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. The total stock of social housing in advanced economies has been reduced, while the former public housing in the countries with economies in transition has largely been privatized. In general, the housing sector has seen limited engagement of national authorities in the market, but increased involvement of the private sector, both profit and non-profit organizations.
17. The transition towards market economies of large parts of the region was accompanied by a very rapid and almost total privatization of housing. Generally, the process was too fast for many local governments and individuals (especially owners) to adapt to. 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, particularly in cities and urban areas. Environmental threats are often also health threats. Action taken to secure the environment in respect of pollution reduction 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 some parts of the UNECE region, with additional threats of earthquakes, landslides, volcanic eruptions and wildfires, which have a negative impact on the quality of life in urban areas and, in some circumstances, imperil lives.
22. Concerns about environmental problems and quality of life are increasing among the public and governments of all scales in the region. **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, while having high ambitions in this regard, 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. **Urban governance has experienced decentralization** in some parts of the region, although there is a wide variety of governance modes and institutional structures across the individual countries. These differences reflect both the local context and the history. Municipalities in the western part of the region benefit from a strong institutional tradition that has been built over several centuries. Those in the countries with transition economies are working to raise their capacities to address multiple challenges simultaneously. Successful governance modes and institutional structures often cannot be simply transplanted from one part of the region to another: context is crucial.
25. In many countries, federal/national governments concentrate on formulating policies and legislation, establishing norms and standards, and providing subsidies for housing and infrastructure from the urban to the territorial scale. In most of the countries, the **management of urban planning issues** is in the hands of local governments within the framework of larger territorial strategies.
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,** and in the financing and realization of housing, urban infrastructures, urban services and even urban management. 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 in the absence of dedicated consolidated policies. 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 some parts, clusters of the most successful cities are coalescing into urban areas or ‘super-cities’ with many millions of inhabitants. 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.** The digital revolution has brought many opportunities for individuals, communities and companies, but also a variety of challenges, particularly in the area of urban data management (privacy, security, defence of public interests, etc.).
  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. This is a result of demographic and economic processes and their territorial and spatial manifestations, such as urban sprawl, concentration and shrinkage. 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, the active process by which cities are designed, developed and managed.
  35. These aims and processes will continue to **require collaboration, consensus and positive action among national and city governments, technical stakeholders and the communities** they serve and lead. 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 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 the regional and international levels, and supporting the development of common terms, language definitions and standards.
39. Promoting dialogue between governments and relevant stakeholders using existing platforms, such as the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management, 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 and compact and resilient cities by increasing urban resource efficiency 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.
47. Promoting inclusive cities- by addressing the multiple aspects of urban poverty and exclusion. Cities are places where disparities and inequalities are concentrated and they are also places where different cultures may co-exist, where ethnic diversity may become a source of innovation and renewal, and where social mobility is possible.

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. This could be done by empowering all concerned levels of the government and stakeholders to tackle social, economic, environmental and demographic urban development challenges in an integrated manner; establish legislative frameworks; and consolidate shared knowledge bases.
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 and 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. This can be achieved through high-quality training courses, study trips, advisory services and publications.
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>10</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> International Telecommunication Union.