



IMPLEMENTING  
THE NEW  
URBAN AGENDA

# JOINT STATEMENT TO THE 2022 HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON THE NEW URBAN AGENDA

Of the Organized Constituency  
of Local and Regional Governments





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**At the occasion of the High-Level Meeting on the New Urban Agenda,** six years after the adoption of the Quito Outcome Document, our constituency gathers to reiterate our support to achieve the contribution of the Universal Development Agendas. This High-Level Meeting is a critical opportunity to stress the role that the New Urban Agenda plays as an accelerator of the SDGs and 2030 Agenda, as a basis to reach the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework and the Global Compacts for Migrants and Refugees, bringing about a new model of development anchored in social, economic, environmental, and territorial sustainability.

Some of the starkest inequalities between our populations have increased in the last years. COVID-19 has exacerbated already existing trends in income and power asymmetries. In a world facing an unprecedented crisis, local and regional governments and their representative associations and partner civil associations have been and still are at the forefront of service delivery while fostering a culture of peace.

Local and regional governments have worked to mitigate the worst effects of the pandemic and engage in a sustainable recovery by adding the dimension of care to their service provision. Caring for their communities has come to mean a way of governing with empathy, prioritizing the public goods responding to the needs of people regardless of gender, age, disability, economic or administrative status: ensuring economic sustainability and enabling livelihoods and wellbeing in our society. This shift towards a brighter future needs to be a collective effort that facilitates access to basic services and the defence of the rights of our communities.

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of the World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments**



## TAKING STOCK OF THE FIVE YEARS AFTER THE ADOPTION OF THE NEW URBAN AGENDA

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The New Urban Agenda was a pioneer document, enshrining the Right to the City approach, highlighting the relevance of the Right to the City principles to reclaim urban spaces as collective places for communities, with a commitment to a rights-based approach that prioritizes the social function of the city. The process of its adoption is also a testament to the importance of mobilization by non-state actors.

The New Urban Agenda provides an opportunity to territorialize and accelerate the achievement of the universal development agendas. It provides a framework for multilevel governance to ensure responsible, equitable, inclusive and sustainable development from and in our territories, to preserve common goods, especially air, water and soil, and the right to universal and effective access to vital resources. It underlines the importance of urban-rural synergies especially with regard to food production and distribution centered on citizens needs in terms of nutrition and well-being and food systems must consider urban rural linkages and be guided by multilevel governance. Local and regional governments are key actors for transforming and guaranteeing sustainable and inclusive food systems as opposed to mere consumers.

However, more than five years on, as we take stock of the progress in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, the current situation gives rise to mixed feelings. Commitment by national governments towards its implementations remains limited; the setbacks brought about by the pandemic (and beyond) to the right to the city and the rise of inequalities have broadened the circle of exclusion and discrimination. Regardless, the caring communities have developed. In spite of this, there are initiatives and measures driven by care that renew our bring hope to the idea of achieving the New Urban Agenda..

Even before the COVID-19 crisis, homelessness was on the rise, affecting marginalized and historically disadvantaged communities and, increasingly, middle and upper-income households. Today, moreover around a quarter of the world's urban communities reside precariously in slums or spaces of informality settlements and precarity. Ensuring a larger supply of affordable housing and equitable access is an urgent and essential matter. It is a cornerstone for reducing inequalities and facing the challenges of the urban era, and this can only happen through involving local and regional governments in the process.

Local and regional governments remain committed to strengthening the collaboration initiated within Habitat III convening and promoting the Right to the City as a useful framework for transformation, one that fosters the social function of our cities and territories, mitigates social and territorial inequalities through the delivery of quality public services.

Against this backdrop, it is our joint duty, as an organized constituency representing over 250,000 local and regional government, and composed of 27 networks to highlight the New Urban Agenda as a critical building block and an accelerator for the achievement of the SDGs to achieve sustainable, inclusive, accessible, fair and safer cities for all and beyond.



## LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC

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Throughout the worst of the pandemic, it has often been local and regional governments, supported by their associations and networks across the world, who worked tirelessly at the frontline caring for their communities and protecting their rights and health via local public service delivery, underpinning health measures, and ensuring the livelihoods of workers.

The pandemic has shown us that we are only as strong as the most vulnerable among us and that, in particular, it is women, children, people of colour, people with disabilities, older persons and other marginalised groups who continue to be disproportionately impacted. Local and regional governments have understood this and taken it to heart by ensuring the maintenance of essential services such as public transport, by contributing to maintain sanitary measures, by promoting an ecosystem of services that could protect communities during the worst times.

Ultimately, the pandemic has taught us that the responsibility for ensuring all populations do have access to quality public local services lies within local, metropolitan and regional governments. Cooperation among national, local and regional governments, as well as alliances with local actors, are critical for upholding such responsibilities. As we move into the future, reinforcing the capacity of our local public service systems will define how cities and territories can mitigate the negative impacts of complex emergencies facing their populations.



## CARE AT THE CENTER OF LOCAL SERVICE PROVISION

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It is essential to build upon the display of care provided by local and regional governments over the past years. Care is a dimension that needs to be incorporated into any and all policy decisions, starting by protecting our communities' health and access to healthy territories. We need to honour our commitments to universal and equal health coverage by ensuring vaccines are a public good and by bringing all stakeholders together in the development of a pandemic treaty.

Bridging the digital divide is more crucial than ever, with digital rights and the protection of human rights at the digital level becoming increasingly vital, and local and regional governments have been the first sphere of government to acknowledge this reality. It is necessary to carry out an equality framework to ensure full inclusion and participation of all, including vulnerable groups, in the digital sphere, and creating public infrastructures to facilitate equal access to the internet in public spaces and to guarantee adequate support as a new public service in order to guarantee universal digital rights.

Fostering inclusive gender equality and the participation of women and local feminist leaders in decision-making is core to the democratic processes, and key to enabling governance with empathy and responding to the diverse needs and aspirations of communities. Involving persons in vulnerable positions in governance, in particular older persons, migrants and persons with disability, will contribute to territories that work for all.

Recognizing the positive contributions of migrant and displaced populations to their communities of origin, transit and destination is a prerequisite to ensure that the recovery is inclusive, fair and equitable, regardless of migration status. This recognition requires an active role from all spheres of government and members of society to address and eliminate the sources of discrimination that prevent many individuals and communities to access opportunities and fully enjoy their rights.

The role of local and regional governments as a lever for transformation is becoming more and more evident. All of the lessons that the pandemic has taught us can only be put to the test if local and regional governments are included in decision-making processes at all levels, and if the international system's full responds to the needs of all actors.



## **LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW URBAN AGENDA**

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The right to safe and affordable housing, to healthcare, to basic services, to a clean environment, to quality public education, are as necessary now as they were when the New Urban Agenda was adopted. Access to housing remains a challenge, inequalities have risen, and urbanization is not providing equal opportunities to all, but in many cases, it is hampering access to services. This same issue is true when it comes to technology: an instrument to improve the life of our communities that needs to be accessible and affordable to all people, regardless of age, gender, disability or income. Local and regional governments play a critical role in promoting a fair, ethical and inclusive digital development, harnessing AI and ensuring technology is accessible to all.



## **PROTECTING OUR PLANET**

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Climate action is a necessity in order to ensure a future for our communities. This action, however, cannot rely just on modifying our current habits: we need to shift away from an economic model rooted in 'growth', and to rethink our relationship with nature, and to prioritise peoples' and planetary wellbeing, including managing fire forests. Localized food systems that consider nutrition, food security, and the entire food cycle as well as the importance of territories and intermediary cities will be essential to develop fairer models.

Local and regional governments have always pioneered in developing sustainable public transport. They facilitate smooth, efficient and smart transport to provide better public services to all. Public transport remains a cornerstone of service delivery, a pillar for economic growth and to ensure a green recovery.



## PROTECTING OUR COMMUNITIES

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Health is a critical dimension that needs to be understood beyond access to healthcare. We need to understand the importance that healthy, liveable age friendly cities and regions, with open spaces accessible to all, can have in the development of healthy communities. The pandemic has shown the importance of ensuring equal and safe access to public spaces, which is starting to be understood by policymakers as a core issue. Transforming public spaces into hubs for socialization needs to go hand-in-hand with facilitating access to safe public green spaces, and planning for our communities needs to be involved in all aspects of policy making.

We need to consolidate all forms of culture including traditional knowledge as a true pillar of sustainable development in caring societies. Public policies must guarantee cultural rights for all and respond both to access, participation and contribution to cultural life, and to the main challenges of our times, such as climate change, accessibility, gender equality, health, resilience, social cohesion and peace. The involvement of civil society is critical to this end and to achieving decent working conditions for the culture sector, whose pre-existing precarity has been severely aggravated by the crisis.



## THE NEW URBAN AGENDA AND THE LOCALIZATION OF THE GLOBAL GOALS

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The progress on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda shows that we are not where we need to be: few countries have in place the policies nor the capacity to make it a reality, and the document is not seen as what it really is: a key lever for the acceleration of the agendas.

Our constituency is convinced that the 2030 Agenda remains a framework fit for transformation of our systems. This cannot happen without localization: their effective implementation from the bottom-up. Effective coordination mechanisms, establishing synergies, interlinkages and partnerships between spheres of government and stakeholders remain essential to transform our shared commitments into effective actions.

The role of local monitoring, through voluntary local and subnational reviews (VLRs and VSRs) of the Sustainable Development Goals implementation provides a way forward. These mechanisms are a testament to the political will to actually contribute to systemic changes that need to be triggered to leave no-one and no place behind, for bottom-up transformation, and an inspiration to monitoring processes of the New Urban Agenda.

We stand ready to demonstrate the interconnection between the New Urban Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees. We are convinced that, beyond acceleration, it can territorialize and ensure a bottom-up achievement of the 2030 Agenda, building on a system of metropolitan and intermediary cities and regions, and that all universal development agendas are interconnected and need to be achieved in unison.



## **THE NEW URBAN AGENDA AS THE CORNERSTONE OF THE COMMON AGENDA**

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The UN Secretary General's Our Common Agenda acknowledges that now is the time for a stronger, more networked and inclusive multilateral system, anchored within the United Nations. This calls for the inevitable transformation of the international system in the face of renewed challenges, through stronger involvement of all relevant stakeholders, and we will seek the appointment of having an Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments as a first step in this process.

The potential of the New Urban Agenda cannot be understated as a cornerstone to achieving necessary transformation. Through its implementation, we will be closer to fulfil the Right to the City, viewing our territories as common goods, and managed through the involvement of the entire community.

In short: through the localization of the universal development agendas, we will be closer to delivering a renewed social contract anchored in human rights; to shaping the future between and between generations; to delivering global public goods; and to adapting the UN System for a new era, the four pillars of the Common Agenda.



## **LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS CALLS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW URBAN AGENDA**

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This is what we call for the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda by addressing the renewal of the multilateral system. The necessity of developing a system in which local and regional governments are fully engaged by holding a permanent seat at the decision-making tables representing their communities and for a strong international community and updated UN system that reflects the current context, including local and regional governments in all stages of decision-making processes giving a more direct representation of communities and including the value and potential of city diplomacy for a renewed multilateral system. We call on national governments involved in the New Urban Agenda to support the engagement of our constituency, as a cornerstone for the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals and the achievement of the vision of the UNSG's Common Agenda. We commend the allocation of time for our constituency to deliver its messages, and yet we call for the full involvement of our spheres of government in its follow-up and review.

We call on national governments and the international system to secure adequate financing and revenue streams for better planning and investment to achieve the global agendas. Our fiscal architecture needs to be rethought to empower local and regional governments to strengthen their own resources and achieve the SDGs.

We stand ready to collaborate to achieve this Common Agenda, working with the PGA's Advisory Committee on Sustainable Urbanization to identify institutional mechanisms to engage local governments in intergovernmental and national planning and implementation processes.



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