



High Level Meeting of the General Assembly to assess the implementation of the New Urban Agenda

*Thursday, 28 April 2022, 10am – 1pm; 3pm – 6pm
General Assembly Hall, United Nations Headquarters, New York*

Concept Note

Cities are facing unprecedented demographic, environmental, economic, social, and spatial challenges. Six out of every ten people in the world are expected to reside in urban areas by 2030, rising to nearly 68% by 2050.¹ By 2050, cities are projected to produce 84% of all global economic output².

The mega-trend of rapid urbanization clearly has global implications. In the absence of effective and sustainable urban planning, the consequences of the unprecedented rise in urbanisation will be dramatic. In many places around the world, the effects can already be felt, with lack of proper housing and growth of slums, inadequate and outdated infrastructure – be it roads, public transport, water, sanitation, or electricity – escalating poverty and unemployment, safety and crime problems, pollution, and health issues, as well as poorly managed natural or man-made disasters and other catastrophes due to the effects of climate change.³

The **contribution of cities to the realization of the global targets on climate change is essential**. While climate impacts are felt disproportionately in urban communities, sustainable urbanisation can provide an opportunity to advance climate resilient development.⁴ Though cities account for 67-76% of global energy use and for 71-76% of man-made CO₂ emissions,⁵ well planned, and built in compact urban form, and supported by high quality public transport, cities can also offer the most sustainable form of human settlement.

The **COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated the challenges that cities were already facing** – from rising numbers of slum dwellers, worsening air pollution, limited open public spaces, and limited convenient access to public transport. While more than 90% of COVID-19 cases occurred in cities, the pandemic has also demonstrated the crucial role of cities in leading the frontline response, in delivering essential services, and spearheading long-term recovery.

¹ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2018). World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision.

² Pricewaterhousecoopers (2015) “The World in 2050 Will the shift in global economic power continue?”

³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Global Report 2020”.

⁴ Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Working Group II Contribution to the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report

⁵ Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the IPCC

Urban displacement has also become an increasingly common feature of disaster and conflict, with growing numbers of refugees, migrants and internally displaced people living in cities. During 2020 alone, more than 82 million people were displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence, and climate change. Targeted interventions are necessary to help migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons to make positive contributions to societies. Interventions also need to ensure zero discrimination, taking into account the needs of women, youth and children, people with disabilities, marginalised groups, older persons, indigenous people, among other groups.

Urgent action is also needed to **upgrade slums and address housing affordability crisis** – another challenge further exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, the socio-economic impacts of COVID19 have been most devastating in poor and densely populated urban areas, especially for the one billion people living in informal settlements and slums worldwide, where overcrowding made it difficult to follow social distancing and self-isolation.

The global housing deficit is estimated to be 440 million homes by 2025⁶. Violations of land and housing rights persist globally and have continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. While many national governments in developing countries are providing financial tools to upgrading their homes, it is not reaching everyone, and there is the risk of leaving many behind. Recent resolutions of the General Assembly⁷ address these challenges and encourage the launch of multistakeholder partnerships to promote affordable and sustainable housing and end homelessness as part of investments in jobs and social protection systems.

While the demands and challenges faced by cities continue to rise globally, the implementation of **sustainable solutions and localised responses continue to be impeded by inadequate financing and other means of implementation**. During the peak of COVID19, cities raised expenditures dramatically for emergency social security measures but had to live with lower tax revenues due to the strict lockdowns and consequent economic decline. Local revenue capacity continues to be strained, especially in small and intermediary cities. Moreover, national legal frameworks restrict the capacity of subnational governments in their efforts to borrow money, issue municipal bonds, and raise endogenous revenue. Effective urban financing depends on more nuanced approaches to fiscal decentralization that has not adequately progressed. Technical capacity and know-how also continue to be obstacles. Moreover, planners and policy makers need to take full advantage of the digital innovations and new technology available in developing smart cities that address the challenges of today and anticipate and prepare for the challenges of the future.

In is in this context, the President of the General Assembly is holding a **one-day High-level Meeting** to assess progress on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, in collaboration with UN-Habitat, **pursuant to** General Assembly Resolution 75/224 of 21 December 2020.

⁶ Jonathan Woetzel and others (2014) “A Blueprint for Addressing the Global Affordable Housing Challenge” (McKinsey Global Institute).

⁷ General Assembly resolution 76/133: “Inclusive policies and programmes to address homelessness, including in the aftermath of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19)”

The New Urban Agenda, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urbanisation (HABITAT III)⁸ held in Quito, Ecuador on 20 October 2016, is an action-oriented document that sets **global standards of achievement in sustainable urban development**, rethinking the way we build, manage, and live, in cities. It offers countries a road map to achieve SDG 11's targets to enhance access to housing and sustainable transport systems; upgrade slums; enhance participatory human settlement planning; safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage; reduce cities' adverse environmental impacts; and implement Disaster Risk Reduction Frameworks. SDG 11 has the most explicit reference to culture in the SDGs.

However, six years after the adoption of the New Urban Agenda, few countries have in place the multilevel governance, national policies, inclusive urban planning, capacity, technology, and financing necessary to ensure sustainable urbanization. At the same time, the New Urban Agenda does not seem to have received sufficient attention, nor benefited from sufficient integration into deliberations on global agendas, international agreements, and national planning processes.

Failure to strengthen the key drivers of sustainable urbanization, as called for in the New Urban Agenda, severely limits efforts by Member States to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, reduce poverty, address inequality, achieve balanced prosperity, keep the Paris Agreement's 1.5 degrees target alive, and promote social cohesion and peacebuilding.

The High-Level Meeting aims to:

1. Position the **New Urban Agenda as a road map for accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda**, notably Sustainable Development Goal 11 in conjunction with climate action, women's empowerment, inter-generational rural-urban partnerships, urban resilience, and with building peaceful, inclusive, and participatory societies for liveable cities.
2. Recognise the **importance of cities**, and the transformative actions identified in the New Urban Agenda, including promoting integrated sustainable urban development strategies, following a participatory and place-based approach, **in ensuring a more just, sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic**.
3. Accelerate **action on the urban dimension of nationally determined contributions**, and support coordination at global, regional, national, sub-national, and local levels towards climate and disaster resilience, adaptation and mitigation, nature-based solutions, circular economy, and land and marine pollution.
4. Explore opportunities to **amplify implementation of the New Urban Agenda in countries in post-conflict and disaster situations** experiencing migration and displacement, utilizing participatory planning tools and durable solutions to improve livelihoods of women and men, promote social cohesion & build peace.
5. Draw upon growing interest among Member States, including recent resolutions of the General Assembly, to encourage the launch of **multistakeholder partnerships to promote**

⁸ Resolution A/RES/71/256 adopted by the General Assembly on 23 December 2016

affordable and sustainable housing and end homelessness as part of investments in jobs and social protection systems.

6. **Identify institutional mechanisms, best practices, digital technologies, and customizable implementation tools** to engage local governments in intergovernmental and national coordination, planning and implementation processes.
7. **Build momentum to support the means of implementation for the New Urban Agenda**, including **through predictable financing for sustainable infrastructure** and urban basic services, strengthening the **mobilization of endogenous resources**, and the **preparation of bankable projects conducive for private sector and IFI support** that facilitate balanced territorial development for increased economic, social, and territorial cohesion.

Outcomes

Upscaling engagement and implementation of the New Urban Agenda will require simplifying its contents, increasing knowledge of its workings, and prioritizing the key actions that have positive ripple effects across multiple global agendas, and building foundations for more multi-stakeholder coalitions that Member States can partner with to overcome technical, financing, and capacity gaps.

In light of the urgency of addressing sustainable urbanization, it is expected that discussions at the High-level meeting will inform Member States' engagement at other high-level meetings, including on migration, climate change, biodiversity, disaster risk reduction, at the G20, G7, the World Urban Forum, the Habitat Assembly, as well as the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, which reviews SDG11.

Results-oriented discussions at the High-Level meeting will be captured through a summary of the PGA, with the aim of helping the international community chart the way forward. The summary will contain an annex that consolidates the current actions and future commitments towards implementing the New Urban Agenda as expressed at the High-Level meeting by Member State delegations and participating local and non-State actors.