

Food for Thought

Political Declaration to renew commitment and accelerate the implementation of the New Urban Agenda

1. Scene-setting and framing the New Urban Agenda in the current global context

The High-Level Meeting on the New Urban Agenda provides a timely opportunity to renew commitment to sustainable urbanization as a driver of inclusive development. Nearly a decade after Habitat III, cities face intensified pressures stemming from a variety of challenges, including widening inequalities, climate change, fiscal constraints, displacement and rapid technological transformation, while also serving as engines of innovation, investment and social cohesion.

The New Urban Agenda, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito in 2016, provides a shared global framework for sustainable urbanization as a driver of social inclusion, economic prosperity and environmental sustainability. It serves as an important accelerator for the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the urban dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 11, while contributing to the achievement of the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and related global commitments.

The Political Declaration of the High-Level Meeting is therefore not a stocktaking exercise alone but gives Member States the opportunity to issue an action-oriented Political Declaration that provides strategic blueprint for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in the run-up to 2036. It represents a political opportunity to reaffirm our shared vision, principles and transformative commitments undertaken in the New Urban Agenda, as well as to strengthen the means of implementation and accountability for the coming decade. In doing so, it can position cities as strategic platforms for delivering on multilateral commitments, those existing at the time of adoption of the New Urban Agenda, as well as those adopted later. The prominent recent multilateral commitments, which the Political Declaration could draw from, are the Pact for the Future, the Sevilla Commitment, and the Doha Political Declaration of the “World Social Summit” under the title “the Second World Summit for Social Development”.

Guiding questions:

- Which main messages should the Political Declaration send?
- How do we best reaffirm our shared vision, principles and commitments in the New Urban Agenda?
- Which contemporary global multilateral frameworks should the Political Declaration be anchored in?
- How do we ensure that the Political Declaration provides strategic yet pragmatic guidance for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in the next decade?

2. Reviewing the transformative commitments undertook in the New Urban Agenda and means of their effective implementation

a. Sustainable urban development for social inclusion and ending poverty

At its core, the New Urban Agenda strives to leave no one behind. The Political Declaration may reaffirm this principle through renewed emphasis on the following aspects of the social dimension of sustainable development.

Adequate, affordable and sustainable housing for all. The Declaration may emphasize adequate and quality housing as a resilient foundational pillar of the renewed social contract for inclusive, resilient and sustainable development, with special attention paid to quality housing resilient to climate-induced disasters.

The Declaration may also recognize homelessness and informal settlements as a growing global development challenge and encourage a coordinated, system-wide response.

Universal access to basic services. The Declaration may renew commitments to promoting equitable and affordable access to basic physical and social infrastructure, including affordable housing, safe drinking water and sanitation, modern and renewable energy, health-care services, sustainable mobility and transportation, markets, cultural assets and digital connectivity.

Inclusive urbanization policies. The Declaration may address the differentiated impacts of urbanization on vulnerable groups and reinforce the message on the need to design urban policies that are responsive to the rights and needs of women, children and youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants, and indigenous peoples and local communities.

b. Sustainable and inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all

The New Urban Agenda recognizes that sustainable economic growth is a crucial element of sustainable urban and territorial development and that cities and human settlements should be places of equal opportunities. In this context the Political Declaration may focus on the following economic aspects.

Resilient infrastructure. The Declaration may recognize the resilient and accessible infrastructure as a driver of productivity and inclusivity, including by its role in ensuring reliable supply and value chains, connecting urban-rural interactions, and preventing marginalization, including addressing urban-rural inequalities.

Sustainable spatial development. The Declaration may address spatial development as a means of promoting integration and avoiding gentrification and economic exclusion, while preserving cultural heritage. The Declaration may further recognize that sound spatial development strategies promote both economic and social development activities, including human capital development and leisure activities.

Decent work. The Declaration may advocate for contribution of all urban inhabitants to economic development, including by women, unpaid, domestic and migrant workers. In this context, the Declaration may reaffirm the importance of productive employment and decent work for all, as well as focus on overcoming challenges faced by micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises. The Declaration may further harness the urban demographic dividend and promote access for youth to education, skills development and employment.

Digital transformation. The Declaration may advocate for science, technology and innovation centers in urban settings as drivers of digital transformation to close digital divide. The Declaration could borrow the language on this from the Pact of the Future.

c. Environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development

Cities concentrate people, infrastructure, innovation and investment, making them both major contributors to global emissions and frontlines of climate risk. Increasing exposure to climate change and its related risks, floods, heatwaves, droughts and other weather-related hazards as well as human-made disasters, biodiversity loss and pollution, threaten lives, livelihoods, supply chains and public trust in institutions if left unaddressed, with disproportionate impacts on residents of informal settlements. The Political Declaration may strengthen the environmental dimension of the New Urban Agenda, including in the following aspects.

Affirming cities and local governments as indispensable actors for delivering mitigation and adaptation efforts related to climate change. The Declaration may promote integrated city planning and environmentally sound management of resources that improve urban ecosystems and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution, while ensuring that climate-resilient urban development does not exacerbate inequalities and reduces climate risks, through just transition approaches.

Advancing resilient infrastructure and clean energy as engines of green transformation. The Declaration may recommit to utilizing renewable and affordable energy, promoting energy conservation and efficiency, as well as advancing sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Promoting risk-informed urban development. The Declaration may advance more proactive disaster risk reduction efforts, including multi-hazard management approaches, anticipatory actions and resilient recovery, and embedding them in long-term urban development planning.

Guiding questions:

- Which aspects of sustainable development of cities, in its social, economic and environmental dimensions, need to be included in the Political Declaration? Which ones are of the biggest concern of being unrealized and deserve particular attention and renewed commitment, including consequences of urban-rural migration, public space safety, social cohesion?

3. Strengthening means of implementation, governance, data and partnerships

Effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda depends on strong multilevel governance and on inclusive, and participatory urban policies. The Political Declaration may underscore cooperation across national, regional and local levels of government and recognize the role of local and regional governments as partners in policy design, financing and implementation. Engagement with civil society, academia and the private sector further strengthens inclusive and evidence-based approaches. The Political Declaration may also consider the recommendations to advance structured engagement of local and regional governments and their associations in intergovernmental deliberations as well as to strengthen the UN-Habitat's normative, convening and technical mandate in translating global commitments into local results.

Closing the urban financing and investment gap is indispensable for effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda. The Political Declaration may contain a call to enhance domestic resource mobilization and include a variety of innovative instruments, policies and partnerships, such as enhancing subnational and municipal finance, access to climate, development and blended finance, and deeper engagement with multilateral development banks and private investors.

The role of data, science, technology and innovation in guiding urban policy is of growing importance, given the accelerated pace of technological development. The Declaration may assert that scientific, technology and innovation competencies as well as data and statistical capacities at the national, subnational and local levels are appropriately strengthened in order to effectively implement the New Urban Agenda and monitor progress of this implementation.

Guiding questions:

- How can the Political Declaration enhance System-Wide, whole-of society and whole-of government approaches in the process of implementing the New Urban Agenda? What are the existing platforms and partnerships that the Declaration can recognize and empower?
- Which means of implementation are desirable and proven successful in realizing sustainable urbanization? Which new and innovative means of implementation remain insufficiently tapped?
- How to strengthen the digital technology and data dimension of the New Urban Agenda?