

# Geneva Declaration of Mayors

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## Times of Change: Reshaping our Urban Realities









### CONTEXT

Our cities had to face an unprecedented emergency that found us, as well as our governments, unprepared. The COVID-19 pandemic posed a threat to all of us and our health, severely damaged our economies and put to test the administrations of our cities. In dense urban areas the crisis was felt particularly strongly; and hit the most vulnerable groups of society hardest.

While many cities were in lockdown – and many industries, transport networks and businesses closed – we also started to experience an unknown urban life: from better air quality to the return of nature to our cities and to empty streets giving space to cyclists and pedestrians. We stood up in solidarity and recognised the critical work of frontline workers who kept our societies functioning, including medical workers and employees operating essential services. The pandemic provided a testing ground for what cities could look like; the transformation of urban spaces happened overnight. If there is only one lesson to learn from this crisis, it is that rapid change of our urban reality is possible, behaviour patterns can be adapted, and humans can stand in unprecedented solidarity for a common cause.

We, the Mayors of the UNECE region, want to use the current momentum to rebuild our cities where all of us can thrive, quality of life is the guiding principle, nature and biodiversity are an integral part of urban planning, sustainable economies generate wealth for all, solidarity among city-dwellers prevail, inequalities are actively narrowed. We align ourselves with the initiative of UN Secretary-General António Guterres to “build back better” and turn the recovery into a real opportunity for shaping a healthy and resilient future. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 calls for action to work towards inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities – it is now in our hands to place the SDGs at the centre of our recovery efforts and create new urban realities for the benefit of all.

With this vision in mind we, the Mayors of the UNECE region, aspire to:

-  **Strengthen the resilience of our cities**
-  **Take ambitious climate action**
-  **Make our cities greener**
-  **Accelerate the transition to sustainable energy**
-  **Ensure urban transport is sustainable**
-  **Ensure housing is affordable, healthy and adequate**
-  **Make cities more equitable and inclusive**
-  **Turn these aspirations into reality**



## Strengthen the resilience of our cities

### RESILIENCE

**Increase our cities' ability to anticipate, manage and recover from any future emergency**, be it a pandemic, extreme and changing climate, or a disaster arising from natural or man-made hazards. We strive to make resilience and disaster risk reduction part of our urban development planning and allocate funds for contingency plans. Smart city solutions are an important step in the development of sustainable and resilient cities. This shift from crisis mode to medium- and long-term resilience strategies will help us protect the health, lives and safety of our city residents.

**Build healthy cities**, by creating environments which improve the physical, mental and environmental health of our communities. By integrating health in urban planning, we strive to improve access to urban green spaces, tackle air and noise pollution, improve sanitation and water management, improve sustainable mobility and promote healthy lifestyles. We recognise the role of spatial planning as a key instrument for building sustainable cities and the importance of actively involving all stakeholders in the planning and decision-making processes for healthier cities and city-dwellers.



## Take ambitious climate action

### CLIMATE ACTION

**Accelerate the transition to carbon neutrality**, by setting clear decarbonisation goals, promoting the use of renewable energy, increasing energy efficiency and low-carbon alternatives, especially in housing and transportation. We are strongly committed to tackle climate change at the local level by playing our part to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C and achieve net-zero carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions by 2050.

**Focus on climate change adaptation**, by developing and implementing local adaptation plans with a view to enhancing cities' resilience to extreme and slow-onset climate impacts based on participatory processes and with the involvement of civil society and the private sector. We commit to building adaptive capacity in line with local circumstances and making full use of scientific, local and indigenous knowledge, where appropriate. In doing so, we will pay special attention to cost-effective, no-regret ecosystem restoration, conservation and nature-based solutions for adaption – we recognise natural solutions bring a range of co-benefits for local sustainable development beyond climate action. When designing and implementing adaption measures, we will cater for local communities that are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change.



## Make our cities greener

### ENVIRONMENT

**Promote urban biodiversity**, by integrating green spaces and trees into urban planning. Make sure green spaces are properly and evenly located and distributed in the city and allow access to all citizens and residents in a safe manner. These measures will help improve air quality, reduce urban heat islands, and improve the health of inhabitants and the liveability of our cities.

**Create opportunities for the increase of urban micro-farming** and inclusion of surrounding rural areas, as means to promote food security and enhance the social and environmental benefits of local farming.

**Tackle food waste** and provide opportunities for redistribution of currently wasted and lost food which will reduce carbon emissions and the waste of natural resources



## Accelerate the transition to sustainable energy

**Improve the energy efficiency of cities to save energy**, reduce emissions and costs, leading to economic, health, and environmental benefits. By integrating energy efficiency options into buildings, transport and urban planning, we will set our cities on a path of green growth.

**Promote high performance buildings** with no or low-carbon energy sources to reduce the carbon footprint of cities and energy costs for residents.



## Ensure urban transport is sustainable

**Plan and design sustainable urban transport systems**, with the aim to reduce traffic congestion, environmental pollution and increase road safety<sup>1</sup>. Ensure that urban mobility systems are accessible, affordable and interlinked, aligned with land management and integrated into the wider urban development. Guarantee that future users are efficiently included in the processes of planning and implementation.

**Ensure that transport in the urban environment is sustainable** through the promotion of safe, secure, green, healthy and affordable smart mobility solutions.

**Ensure enhanced resilience and preparedness of urban transport systems** in times of population growth, urban sprawl, pandemics and natural disasters, with emphasis on public transport as the backbone of many cities and as a provider of essential services in keeping cities moving.



## Ensure housing is affordable, healthy and adequate

**Ensure access to decent, adequate, affordable and healthy housing for all.** Actively tackle the undersupply of affordable housing, rising urban rents, low quality of housing and urban infrastructure, limited access to land for housing construction and renovation, and mounting urban poverty and homelessness. Protect the most vulnerable groups of society by providing adequate housing where it is lacking and ensuring that the housed do not become homeless, especially in times of pandemics where the public appeal is to “stay home”.

**Improve access for all to healthy and good quality housing**, by integrating a health dimension in urban planning and governance. Promoting decent housing conditions, including adequate infrastructure and services, has a direct effect on the health and quality of life of our residents and is vital to make our cities more habitable.

<sup>1</sup> A good example for this is the European Commission’s concept of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP).



## Make cities more equitable and inclusive

**Build inclusive cities which guarantee equal rights and participation of all**, including the most vulnerable groups in our communities. The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic – and also the impact of a changing climate – intensified pre-existing inequalities and put socio-economic progress at risk of being rolled back. This is why we commit to “build back better” in a more equitable and inclusive manner.

**Ensure women participate fully in political decision-making processes** and actively tackle the underrepresentation of women in local governments. It is critical to give women a voice for influencing public priorities and ensuring that urban planning responds to the needs of women and girls.

**Ensure that contingency plans respond to the specific needs of different population groups** that might be more vulnerable in emergency situations and under climate change, including women, children, senior citizens, people with disabilities, international and internal migrants and those who are economically disadvantaged. Provide for public participation in decision-making when developing emergency plans.



## Turn these aspirations into reality

We, the mayors of the UNECE region, are willing to use the existing tools, our influence and channels to turn these aspirations into reality. We consider UNECE as a connector and enabler, and the Forum of Mayors as a platform for:

- **On-going exchange and mutual learning:** We will share successful local solutions and action plans with our peers to facilitate mutual learning and to support each other in making progress.
- **Spreading the word:** We will act as promoters and champions of this Declaration and publicly commit to it, e.g. by translating and publishing this Declaration on our communication channels. We will consult our action plans with stakeholders and create local partnerships for their implementation. We will actively encourage fellow mayors to become champions for this Declaration.
- **Multiplier effect:** We will act as multipliers and join urban networks and initiatives, including the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy, in order to develop and subscribe to concrete, ambitious commitments for our cities.
- **Tracking progress:** We commit to tracking the progress on the commitments, respond to UNECE’s progress survey, and present results of progress at next year’s Forum of Mayors.