

Prague Declaration – Draft 1 version 7 December 2015

Prague Declaration to be adopted by the Heads of UNECE national delegations participating in “European Habitat” - the High Level Regional Meeting for Habitat III on Sustainable Housing in Liveable Cities for Europe (Prague, 16-18 March, 2016)

Preamble

1. We, the participants of the “European Habitat” Meeting, note that:
 - (a) Sustainable urban development and management are crucial to the quality of life of our people
 - (b) Green, inclusive, compact and resilient cities are a priority in national policies and in regional cooperation with regard to people with special needs and other vulnerable population groups
 - (c) Involvement of cities in urban development, and raising cities’ capacities to address urban development challenges, are important
 - (d) There is a need, through the regular cooperation of national governments with local authorities and communities, to renew and plan cities
 - (e) Community cohesion and personal security are prerequisites for quality of living conditions in cities
 - (f) Transparent and efficient land use, property registration, and a sound financial system are fundamental bases for sustainable housing and urban development
 - (g) Investments in housing and urban development stimulate employment in cities.
2. We support the key messages of the HABITAT III Regional Report for the UNECE Region “Towards a city-focused, people-centred and integrated approach to the New Urban Agenda” (Annex 1 to this document – to be attached).
3. We urge governments at all levels and relevant stakeholders to promote the implementation of the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”¹, “The Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing”², the “UN-Habitat Global Housing Strategy”³ and the “Strategy for Sustainable Housing and Land Management in the ECE region for the period 2014-2020”⁴.

Introduction

4. The objectives of the Third Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development “Habitat III” are to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable urban development, assess accomplishments to date, address poverty, and identify and address new and emerging challenges. The Conference will result in a concise, focused, forward-looking and action-oriented outcome document. It will be the first UN global summit after the adoption of the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” and the new “Climate Change Agreement”.
5. The “European Habitat” Regional Meeting involved a wide range of participants who debated priorities for the “New Urban Agenda” and policy recommendations, and agreed on this declaration as an official input to the “Habitat III” preparatory process.
6. The “European Habitat” Meeting focused on “Housing in Liveable Cities”. Housing is a key factor in the quality of human life. It is also a major function of liveable cities. Planned urban development, constructed and used in a way that minimizes environmental impact, can promote economic, social and environmental sustainability and prevent urban sprawl. Therefore, governments at all levels need to debate housing and urban development policies with an emphasis on engaged and

¹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

² http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/documents/Publications/UNECE_Charter_EN.pdf

³ <http://unhabitat.org/urban-themes/housing-slum-upgrading/>

⁴ <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/sessions/docs2013/draft.strategy.post.pdf>

negotiated civic involvement, social inclusiveness, public health, transparency, and a concern for ethical processes.

7. This declaration expresses joint statements of the governments of UNECE Member States, made on 18 March 2016, at the high-level segment of the “European Habitat” Regional Meeting, hosted by the Ministry of Regional Development of the Czech Republic.

Challenges to housing and urban development in the UNECE region

8. Countries in the UNECE region face multiple challenges:

- (a) **Urban poverty:** Lack of affordable and accessible housing is becoming a major problem for individuals who face limited choices in low cost housing. In some cities, a lack of public spaces and of transport deprives the residents of amenities and a standard of living which should be available to all. The re-emergence of informal housing is anticipated, as those who cannot get into the housing market find themselves relegated to living in slums with poor infrastructure.
- (b) **Demographic changes:** Important demographic changes have taken place in the last century, and these need to be addressed. Ageing citizens have become a significant issue, with the majority of housing being ill-equipped to cater to this ever-increasing group. Poor housing conditions have a direct effect on the physical and mental health of the population. This justifies the need to provide adequate and healthy housing.
- (c) **Climate change:** Currently, housing is part of the problem regarding climate change. Member States can seek to adapt and mitigate environmentally negative effects. This can include measures to reduce overall CO₂ emissions, to ensure that homes are energy-efficient. Focus should also be placed on more efficient and environmentally friendly public transport systems. Housing stock should be made resilient to climate change and to the natural and man-made disasters this entails, which can damage large amounts of housing stock.
- (d) **Urban growth and urban sprawl:** While urban growth is needed, it can lead to urban sprawl if it is not controlled. To prevent this, Member States should promote strategic planning of human settlements. Cooperation in urban planning and management between different levels of governments and local NGOs should be encouraged. This entails enacting measures at national and local levels to ensure that policies are appropriate for each scale of governance, thereby guaranteeing the most effective results. This includes the need for the participation in planning by all the key stakeholders and the inhabitants, as they would be affected by developments in housing. In order to raise sufficient funds and increase economic growth, Public, Private, People’s Partnerships (PPPPs) should be encouraged. This will allow for the public and private sectors to work together, benefiting both parties.
- (e) **Rapid development of technology:** Progress in technologies and the availability of data are rapidly changing our life and its organization. Urban planning and management should adopt latest technological innovations and use available data. This requires educating and building the capacity of urban managers and decision-makers. The security concern related to the abundance of open data also needs to be addressed. Lastly, there should be harmonization between countries in terms of the data collected and the standards for it. Countries with transition economies will require even more technical assistance to overcome the technological and digital divide in urban planning and management between countries.

Key directions to address the challenges

9. UNECE Member States and relevant stakeholders, such as regional and local authorities and international organizations in the UNECE region, shall address the above challenges, in particular through:
- (a) 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
 - (b) Developing in-depth assessments and flagship reports, including a series of Country Profiles on Housing and Land Management
 - (c) Harmonizing methodologies and definitions in the area of housing and land management at the regional and international levels, and supporting the development of common terms, language definitions and standards
 - (d) Promoting dialogue between governments and relevant stakeholders using existing platforms, such as the UNECE Committee on Housing and Land Management, the European Commission, the European Union housing focal points, and the Intergovernmental Council for Cooperation in Construction of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), to facilitate the exchange of experience and the sharing of good practices
 - (e) Creating regional networks of governments and experts; organizing workshops; managing study trips; developing synergies; and building activities using existing platforms and with the involvement of other relevant UN and EU programmes, agencies and bodies and other stakeholders, to ensure consistency and complementarity and allow effective collaboration on housing and land related issues
 - (f) Developing and implementing capacity-building programmes for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning for all relevant stakeholders. This can be achieved through high-quality training courses, study tips, advisory services and publications
 - (g) Regular monitoring of the implementation of the 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/ITU⁵ 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 publically 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.

⁵ International Telecommunication Union.