



Declaration on the Habitat III process and the new Urban Agenda

PLATFORMA

Member of the Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments

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We, members of PLATFORMA¹, the European Voice of Local and Regional Authorities for Development, explicitly endorse the Key Recommendations of Local and Regional Governments towards Habitat III² and call on the institutions of the European Union (EU) and its Member States to adopt the following recommendations in view of the new Urban Agenda to be adopted at the Habitat III Conference in Quito:

- Give Local and Regional Governments a place at the negotiation table and include representatives in national delegations to the Conference;
- Encourage further empowerment, autonomy and financial sustainability of local and regional governments;
- Coordinate the New Urban Agenda with other recent international agreements and localise its implementation;
- Respond to the specific concerns of cities of all sizes and functional areas;
- Encourage effective working partnerships between central and local governments in each country towards the definition and implementation of integrated national urban policies;
- Support the cooperation with local stakeholders and the establishment of horizontal partnerships;
- Promote inclusive, green, innovative towns, cities and regions for all;
- Recognise international cooperation and exchange of good practices among cities and regions as an important instrument for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda;
- Design a strong action agenda and develop a monitoring mechanism in cooperation with Local and Regional Governments.

¹ PLATFORMA is a member of the Global Task Force (GTF) of Local and Regional Governments, a coordination mechanism bringing together major international networks of LRGs. The GTF is the convener of the II World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments, the political representation mechanism of our constituency before the Habitat III Conference.

² See the position of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments attached to this position paper.

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The Habitat III process touches many of the core competencies of Local and Regional Governments. For such a global agreement to respond to the local needs and realities it seeks to address, a structural partnership of all levels of government in all phases of the process is crucial. Local governments also face growing challenges they will need to address to ensure the sustainable development of their territories: climate change, demographic change, migration, instability, social cohesion, environmental sustainability, governance implying a renewed participatory approach. The objective of this Declaration is to ensure that the voice of European municipalities and regions, represented within the Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments, is heard and taken into account by the EU and its Member States when participating in the final stages of the Habitat III process leading to the adoption of the new Urban Agenda in October 2016. The new EU Urban Agenda should also serve as a basis for the EU input to the process, promoting the concept of ‘governing in partnership’ as an efficient working method for better regulation, better funding and better exchange of knowledge.

- **We call for a stronger involvement of LRGs in the negotiations leading to the new Urban Agenda as well as in the national delegations attending the Conference**

Local and regional governments are at the heart of the Habitat III conference. LRG’s will deliver the new urban agenda on the ground, in partnership with the other levels of government and civil society and will be perceived as main responsible level of government by their citizens and consequently be held accountable. It is therefore crucial that they are included in the Habitat III process. So far, the process has been relatively open, with strong involvement in the policy expert units and the regional and thematic meetings that have taken place since the beginning of the process. This should continue throughout the remaining phases leading to the Habitat III Conference in Quito and serve as a basis for a renewed global governance mechanism post Habitat III that enhances partnership between local governments and the international community.

Concretely, we want local and regional governments to be at the table of negotiations. We therefore call on EU Member States to include representatives of local and regional governments within their national delegations to the Conference. In the framework of Habitat II in 1996, local governments were recognised as the “closest partner”³ in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The Habitat III process is a great opportunity for LRGs to speak up and see their concerns included in the official output documents, bringing the principle of multi-level governance into practice.

- **We believe that the new Urban Agenda should encourage further empowerment and autonomy of local and regional governments and that the sustainability of local finances is crucial**

The EU must ensure that the new Urban Agenda promotes local democracy across the globe and embraces the importance of effective decentralisation and local autonomy. LRGs are the closest to the citizens and they are best able to deliver good quality services at the local level when a clear framework of powers and responsibilities is in place. We insist on the importance of the principle of **subsidiarity**⁴,

³ Paragraph 12, Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements, 2001

⁴ Article 5 and Protocol n°2 of the Treaty on European Union



and the autonomy of local self-government⁵. We call on the EU and its Member States to stay true to this fundamental element of the European Union *acquis* when building their position for the Habitat III Conference.

Moreover, if we want local governments to be in full capacity to implement the new Urban Agenda, they must have the adequate, stable and predictable funding in order to use their powers and responsibilities effectively. In order to close the gap between the resources and the responsibilities, the ability to raise local taxes and set up land added-value capture mechanisms, a better access to financial resources, and a fairer redistribution of resources between the different levels of government leading to the allocation of 20% of national resources to local governments, is needed.

- **We stress that the implementation of the New Urban Agenda needs to be coordinated with other recent international agreements and their content localised**

The New Urban Agenda needs to draw synergies with the main agreements adopted since last year, including the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Goal 11 on 'Making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable', and the Paris Agreement on climate change. The responsibility of their delivery should be shared with local governments primarily, in cooperation with other stakeholders such as the private sector and civil society organisations. Hence, **the EU should push for an Urban Agenda that presents a clear vision on how its commitments will be translated at the local level**. In the field of climate action, for instance, initiatives such as Mayors Adapt or the Covenant of Mayors are good examples of how local governments can play a key role in achieving the global goals at the local level. Localising these global agreements can only be done effectively within a territorial approach to development that gives Local and Regional governments a pivotal role in implementation and design.

- **We believe that the Urban Agenda should respond to the specific concerns of cities of all sizes and functional areas**

The EU must make sure that the new Agenda is not restricted to big cities and to city administrative borders, responding rather to the needs of a diversity of urban areas, from small towns and intermediary cities to megacities and metropolitan areas. The new agenda should stress the importance of functional areas and the continuum of territories beyond administrative borders for the well-being of urban populations and for preventing the rise of inequalities between cities and territories. Addressing urban-rural linkages is crucial. These linkages should promote territorial cohesion and address the increasing issue of rural depopulation and shrinking cities in some parts of the world, and urban expansion cannibalising rural hinterland in others. **Territorial cohesion is an important part of the European *acquis* and must therefore be one of the EU's key messages** at the Conference in Quito.

⁵ As defined by the CEMR Municipal Freedom Charter of 1951 and the Council of Europe's Charter of Local Self Government of 1985.



- **We stress the need for an effective working partnership between central and local governments in each country to define and implement integrated national urban policies.**

LRGs should be empowered to take the responsibility and leadership for well-being and the sustainability of urban areas. Hence, local governments and their associations should be involved from an early stage in the decision-making process, from the design of national urban policies and extending to the implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases. Consultation is not enough; their expertise should also be sought through formal multi-level governance structures when developing, implementing and evaluating policies that will have an impact on their daily work. That is to say, the **new Agenda should embody the principle of ‘Governing in partnership’**. The capacity to achieve sustainable local development and properly address its challenges depends on the quality and reality of this new governance paradigm.

National urban and territorial policies and effective decentralization should be the pillars of an adequate multilevel governance framework that drives “bottom-up development”. **The strong interdependence that exists between various urban sectoral policies calls for an integrated design.** An integrated approach is desirable in order to achieve territorial balance and resilience, aiming at building synergies between the different policy areas in order to result in a long-term benefit. Integrating the four complementary dimensions of sustainable development is thus crucial: the social, the economic, the environmental and the governance dimensions. For territorial planning this implies considering together policies and spatial locations for housing, transport, economy or social activities, public facilities and other infrastructures, together with responsible use of land and natural resources.

- **We support the cooperation with local stakeholders and the establishment of horizontal partnerships**

The Urban Agenda needs to involve civil society, knowledge institutions, universities and the private sector to ensure good local ownership and deliver customised solutions for local challenges. Local and Regional governments support the participation of these ‘third sector’ stakeholders in design and implementation of international agreements and are ready to take a pivotal role in this regard at local level. The positive trend towards multi-stakeholder inclusion cannot omit the very particular role of LRG’s in their territories. **The EU, its member states or any other party to Habitat III, should not perceived LRGs as yet another ‘stakeholder’ but as democratically legitimate policy makers, best placed to initiate and establish such horizontal partnerships.** At the same time local governments are ready to develop new ways to respond to trends of direct citizen participation and democracy. The new Urban Agenda should recognise that strengthening bottom-up governance and developing a new collaborative relationships between governments and the citizens will be instrumental.

- **We stress the need to promote inclusive, green, innovative towns, cities and regions for all**

Towns and cities need to ensure sustainable territorial development for the well-being of their citizens. **Amongst other, the EU must push for social cohesion as a major asset in the promotion of local and regional development.** This requires the respect of the right to information, consultation and participation of all the stakeholders in the decision-making process, including women, elderly, youth,



migrants and refugees, and people with disabilities. Multi-stakeholder consultation is key to reinforce local accountability and legitimacy. Moreover, the new Urban Agenda must stress the need to facilitate convenient and equal, non-discriminatory access to jobs, education, healthcare and public spaces through adequate infrastructure and transport systems. Territorial planning should take into consideration the specific patterns of those vulnerable groups and specifically target the challenges posed by deprived neighbourhoods and informal settlements. In this regard, we particularly emphasise that spatial planning is not a technical but a social responsibility of all tiers of government and **call for the inclusion of the Right to the City, which refers to cities as common assets based on equity, democracy, sustainability and subsidiarity, as a core and cross-cutting principle of the new Urban Agenda.**

- **We believe that international cooperation and exchange of good practices among cities and regions is an important instrument for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda**

The EU must support co-operation taking place among cities and regions through peer-to-peer capacity building projects and exchange of good practices, both within and outside of Europe. In today's globalised world, towns and regions do not stand alone in their efforts to find political and practical local solutions to global challenges and promote sustainable development in their territories. In Europe, thousands of them are already engaged in decentralised cooperation projects. Decentralised cooperation ensures sustainability, cost-effectiveness and reciprocity. Local and regional governments are committed to build on their legacy of international solidarity to manage the impact of global phenomena at the local level. The new Urban Agenda needs to make explicit reference to the potential of this kind of cooperation as a means for its own implementation.

- **We call for a strong action agenda and a monitoring mechanism developed in cooperation with LRGs**

The setting up of a strong review and follow-up mechanism to monitor the appropriate implementation of the new Urban Agenda is essential. However, we reject the unilateral development of binding urban indicators for cities. The EU should ensure that the indicators that will be used to monitor the implementation of the new Urban Agenda are designed in close cooperation with local authorities and constitute a tool for self-assessment on a voluntary basis. In Europe, we have a broad range of indicators that were developed in the last years, such as the ones in the Urban Atlas or the Reference Framework of Sustainable Cities (RFSC) that should be taken into account. These indicators must be adopted at the local level in an open and transparent way. Moreover, **we call for the definition of an Action Agenda Post Habitat III at global and at EU level that structurally includes all tiers of government and supports international cooperation between local governments.** This will ensure a tangible legacy for Habitat III.