

# HUMAN RIGHTS AND URBANIZATION

*Excerpt from the*  
UNDG Guidance Note on Human  
Rights for Resident Coordinators  
and UN Country Teams

2017



---

UNITED  
NATIONS  
DEVELOPMENT  
GROUP

---

# Human Rights and Urbanization\*

## Key points and messages that the Resident Coordinator should know about the issue

- More than 50 percent of the world's population is now urban and by 2030, the number is expected to rise to 60 percent. During this period, 90 percent of the world's population growth will take place in the cities, particularly in Africa and Asia.
- While urbanization has the propensity to extend benefits of development to all, including those who are in vulnerable situations and marginalized, it has generally led to the creation of more slums, more people residing in inadequate living conditions lacking security of tenure of housing and land, and greater disparities, inequalities and discrimination. If not curbed, these symptoms of a deficit to protect, respect and fulfill human rights in cities will only increase in the future affecting many more people.
- To this end, human rights are imperative in advancing and developing urbanization processes and outcomes that are sustainable and socially inclusive; promote equality, combat discrimination in all its forms and empower individuals and communities. The SDGs and the New Urban Agenda are opportunities for state authorities at all levels to implement their human rights obligations toward all inhabitants and to "leave no one behind", including women and girls, children and youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples and local communities, slum and informal settlement dwellers, homeless people, workers, smallholder farmers and fishers, refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons, and migrants, regardless of migration status.

## Relevant international standards

All human rights norms are relevant to the urban context as they are for the rural context. Urbanization processes should be in particular guided by:

- **UDHR:** Article 2, 21, 22, 25
- **ICCPR:** Article 2, 9, 14, 16, 17, 19, 21, 25
- **ICESCR:** Article 2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15
- **ICERD:** Article 5
- **CRC:** Article 2, 12, 19, 26, 31
- **CEDAW:** Article 1, 2, 3, 7, 11, 14
- **ICRMW:** Article 7, 27, 41, 42, 43, 45
- **UNDRIP:** Article 2, 3, 5, 11, 12, 15, 20, 21, 31
- **CRPD:** Article 4, 9, 28, 30
- **DEVAW:** Article 3

## Role that the Resident Coordinator and UN Country Team can play in promoting the issue

Urbanization could be a transformative force that can have a major positive or negative impact on the fulfilment of human rights. The RC/UNCTs and UN urban activities and programmes should aim at ensuring positive transformation, and to serve as a means of protecting and promoting the human rights of all inhabitants, includes paying particular attention to:

- The free, active and meaningful participation of all inhabitants, in particular the most marginalized. Urban and spatial development should be done with and for all of a city's inhabitants, with the priority being to protect and improve the living conditions of the most vulnerable.

- The root causes of discrimination, inequalities and violence are addressed – not only on the basis of gender and geography, but also on the basis of race, culture, religion, age, disability and social and economic status.
- Urban development activities should support the political, social and economic empowerment of all inhabitants and holding national, sub-national and local authorities accountable for their decisions, prioritization and the maximum use of available resources. In practice this requires upholding fundamental rights and freedoms, in particular freedom of speech and assembly, the right to information, consultation and participation in decision-making processes, and the right to vote, among others.
- Adopt a common positions based on human rights to face particular situations like forced evictions or land grabbing (for instance the UNCT in Cambodia developed and agreed on a “UN Viewpoint on resettlement and evictions”).
- Integrate urban issues in UNDAF in a coordinated way with rural issues and with the aim of promoting and protecting human rights. Example: [Nepal UNDAF 2013-2017](#).
- Develop and help supporting the development by authorities and CSOs of [human rights indicators](#) to a) assess the progress on human rights issues and of particular groups including the ones that are not general taken into account by state survey (homeless people, people living in informal settlements, etc.); b) to provide a tool for UN programming; c) to provide a basis for dialogue with various partners; d) to provide information for periodic reviews of the country (including treaty bodies, UPR, etc.).
- Support the establishment of judicial and non-judicial recourse and grievance mechanisms in cities (for instance city ombudsman)
- Engage in joint activities, trainings and capacity building with local authorities and other local partners.
- There should also be a mechanism in place used to channel questions from UNCTs to relevant colleagues and mechanisms in the system (colleagues working on urbanization and human rights, land and human rights, economic, social and cultural rights, security and human rights, etc.; the UN Housing Rights Programme; colleagues working on the Voluntary Guidelines on Governance of Tenure of Land, etc.). Colleagues that have expertise on urban issues and human rights could be deployed for limited period of time within UNCTs.

## Support and tools available from the United Nations system

- [Basic principles and guidelines on development-based evictions and displacement](#);
- [Guiding Principles on security of tenure for the urban poor](#) (A/HRC/25/54);
- [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#);
- [Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure](#);
- [Urbanization and human rights](#);
- [Forced evictions](#);
- [Land and Human Rights](#);
- [The ESCR portal](#) (including the toolkits on the right to adequate housing, water, etc.).

(20) See <http://www.un.org/spanish/News/story.asp?NewsID=26595#.VVUDR0ZpE-o>

(21) See [www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific//2012/03/drug-detention-centre/JC2310\\_Joint\\_Statement6March12FINAL\\_En.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific//2012/03/drug-detention-centre/JC2310_Joint_Statement6March12FINAL_En.pdf)

*\*This two-pager was developed by UN Habitat & OHCHR based on the “Frontier Dialogues” on emerging human rights issues launched in 2016 by the former UNDG Human Rights Working Group with members taking the lead on specific issues. These messages were approved by the UNDG and have been incorporated into the UNDG Guidance Note on Human Rights for Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams.*