

## Sustainable urban development and the review of progress on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda at the five Regional Forum for Sustainable Development in 2022<sup>1</sup>

The RFSDs coordinated by Regional Economic Commissions constitute a key component of the UN's regional architecture for follow up and review of the SDGs. Regional Commissions have integrated the New Urban Agenda and localisation as priorities for acceleration of the SDGs through the RFSDs. This has allowed for the contextualisation of the New Urban Agenda within regionally specific agreements, priorities and realities. The engagement of local and regional governments has also been steadily becoming more prominent at the RFSDs leading to improved local-national coordination of SDG implementation.

Below are some highlights of how the RCs are building bridges between the New Urban Agenda and the SDGs, bringing local development issues to the regional dialogue and facilitating local-national-regional dialogue. The RCs have included progress in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in the five regional forums as follows:

The [Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development](#) (ARFSD) was held in Kigali, Rwanda from 3-5 March 2022. It is an annual multi-stakeholder platform organized jointly by the United Nations Economic Commission of Africa (ECA), the host government in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank and other entities of the United Nations System. It brought together ministers, senior officials, experts and practitioners from UN member States, private sector, civil society, academia and UN organizations. to deliberate on the theme of "*Building forward better: A green, inclusive and resilient Africa poised to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063*". The Forum recognized the role of sustainable urbanization and local implementation as accelerators of the SDGs and Agenda 2063 in Africa.

In particular, the Forum welcomed and extensively considered the role of Voluntary Local Reviews of progress with the SDGs and Agenda 2036. On this, the Forum recommended that member States strengthen institutional mechanisms to engage local governments in regional and global agendas; to leverage institutionalize national-local partnerships and multi-stakeholder dialogue in the conduct of voluntary local reviews; to enhance the knowledge, skills and financial capacities of local and regional governments and to leverage voluntary local review processes to identify, implement and accelerate interventions for local development. Importantly, member States were requested to strengthen the disaggregation of data relating to Sustainable Development Goal indicators at the subnational level. The use of the Africa VLR Guideline produced by ECA, UN-Habitat and United Cities and Local Governments for such reviews was underscored. The Forum also took note of the Secretary-General's intention to establish and Advisory Group on local and regional governments through Our Common Agenda.

Furthermore, the Forum requested member States to urgent action to plan and manage urbanization and human settlements for sustainability as part of the New Urban Agenda, taking advantage of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, to be held on 28 April 2022, to galvanize momentum and action. In addition, member States were requested to strengthen engagement in the high-level political forum on sustainable development and put forward strong arguments regarding the importance of urban and human settlement as key elements for the overall implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the critical role of voluntary local reviews in this regard. In this regard, a further request to member States was to place housing and basic services at the core of the implementation of global and regional commitments and to mobilize the power of cities to accelerate implementation of the Paris Agreement.

In the ECE region the second [Forum of Mayors](#)<sup>2</sup> held on 4-5 April 2022 reported its outcomes at and fed into the [Regional Forum for Sustainable Development](#) on 6-7 April 2022. Mayors and city leaders gathered

<sup>1</sup> This summary of the Regional Forum for Sustainable Development (RFSD) in fulfillment of the mandate in resolution [75/224](#) paras 14 and 17.

<sup>2</sup> Summary can be found in Annex 1.

to exchange experiences, present their efforts to tackle challenges in their cities, and discuss how to work together in the context of the UN. It included sessions on: **Sustainable urban transport, shared mobility and safer roads; Vibrant public spaces, green cities and nature-based solutions; Resilient, healthy and climate-neutral buildings and affordable and adequate housing; and Sustainable urban planning, the 15-minute city and smart urban development solutions.**

The RFSD included a peer-learning roundtable: **Urban forests for future proof cities**<sup>3</sup>. Which engaged governments in the discussion about national and local policies and tools that are currently available to support urban and peri-urban forestry so that it can effectively contribute to achieving agenda 2030, the Paris Agreement, and other global, national and local goals. Furthermore, these exchanges focused on financial mechanisms and forms of cooperation implemented by governments to advance sustainable urban forestry as an integrative solution.

There were also many related side events during the **Forum of Mayors** and the **Regional Forum for Sustainable Development**. Both featured events that delved deeper into the issues raised during the Sessions. They included:

- Localizing the SDGs: Voluntary Local Reviews in the UNECE region. Experiences and good practices
- #Housing2030, effective policies for affordable housing in the UNECE region
- Scaling-up financing for Sustainable Urban Infrastructure – Experiences from the UNECE Region
- Urban Pandemic Preparedness - City contributions to international processes on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response
- UN Regional Commissions Work with Mayors: Good practices, Present, Future Perspectives
- City diplomacy by the city of Bari and City Diplomacy Lab at Columbia Global Centers
- Local Resilience to climate change and COVID-19 – No one left behind in urban resilience building
- Plan, deliver on and monitor the 2030 Agenda in cities with the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC tool): experiences from the URBACT Global Goals for Cities (GG4C) network

At the [Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development 2022](#) held in Costa Rica from 7-9 March 2022, issues related to sustainable urban development, human settlements and the New Urban Agenda were addressed in various instances. Among these, the side event “Reviewing the potential of the New Urban Agenda as an accelerator of the SDGs in territories and cities” focused on addressing how the implementation of the NUA is unfolding in the region and in identifying key areas of action. Some of the issues touched on included: the importance of bringing local actors to the table in national planning exercises to ensure development plans and policies respond to local realities and needs, the need to promote vertically and horizontally integrated urban policies to break sectoral silos that continue to prevail and mainstreaming the concept of resilience into all urban planning processes.

The side event “Making cities resilient: Integrating multidimensional tools for local planning” presented experiences of integration of climate adaptation tools, disaster risk reduction, territorial planning, and resilience building to strengthen and promote sustainable development at the local level. Furthermore, case studies of integration of topics included disaster risk reduction, adaptation to climate change, management of environmental systems, land use planning among others, were presented.

The event “Cities as a space for a Big Push for Sustainability” presented a discussion concentrating on the role of the transport/ mobility sector in addressing the environmental sustainability of cities. As the population and the economic activity of the region is concentrated in urban areas, these are responsible for the majority of greenhouse gas emissions. The environmental commitments assumed by local and national governments will require a structural change in their economy, and this will not be achieved without forceful actions within the transport sector. Investment in sustainable mobility must consider impacts beyond the financial returns, due to the diverse positive externalities that maybe generated. Finally, the importance of rethinking mobility planning as part of an integrated set of urban development policies, such as housing and land use policies, was highlighted.

Finally, the *Intergovernmentally Agreed Conclusions and Recommendations of the fifth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development*<sup>4</sup> made specific

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<sup>3</sup> Summary can be found in Annex 2.

<sup>4</sup> <https://foroalc2030.cepal.org/2022/en/documents/intergovernmentally-agreed-conclusions-and-recommendations-fifth-meeting-forum-countries>

reference to the importance of accelerating the implementation of New Urban Agenda. In the context of the ever rising human and financial costs associated with disasters which trap countries in cyclical patterns of emergency response, thus inhibit the ability of government to achieve sustainable development. The Forum recognized that improving environmental quality in cities is one of the challenges that lies ahead and that measures required to address this (related to water scarcity and sanitation, sustainable transportation, sustainable production and consumption, energy efficiency, waste management, among others) take into consideration the New Urban Agenda and its promotion of the right to adequate housing and standard of living without discrimination. The Forum further welcomed the outcome of the first session of the UN Habitat Assembly held in 2019 and noted that it looks forward to the high-level meeting of the GA on the implementation of the NUA in 2022.

The [Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development \(APFSD\)](#) is another key platform ESCAP organizes which has focused on sustainable urban development in the region. The annual intergovernmental forum is part of the formal follow up and review process for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and has incorporated the voice of local authorities. The 2018 APFSD included the focused review and a roundtable on regional progress on SDG11, and engaged representatives of local government and city networks. ESCAP also produces an annual SDG Progress Report and maintains the SDG Helpdesk, which acts as a one-stop online service providing access to tools, knowledge products, expertise, advice and opportunities for peer-learning and regional cooperation through thematic areas, covering all SDGs topics. The 2022 APFSD was held on 28 to 31 March 2022, and a pre-meeting on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda was held on 21 March 2022 to consolidate inputs for APFSD. The meeting was attended by line ministries, NGOs and civil society and UN organizations and resulted in a draft statement delivered by the Government of Indonesia at APFSD.

The Government of Indonesia delivered a statement<sup>5</sup> at the APFSD endorsed by participants at the pre-meeting<sup>6</sup> (see Annex III). The report of the 9<sup>th</sup> APFSD<sup>7</sup> referenced the pre-meeting while the Chair's summary noted the need to translate international and regional development priorities and frameworks into national actions, and highlighted support to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. The Chair's Summary emphasized the need for platforms to support local governments, such as the Asia Pacific Mayors Academy and welcomed the development of voluntary local reviews, both highlighted in the statement from the pre-meeting.

The [Arab Forum for Sustainable Development held \(AFSD\)](#), organized annually by ESCWA, in collaboration with the League of Arab States and other United Nations entities operating in Arab countries, was held 15-17 March 2022. It brought together Arab Governments and a broad range of stakeholders to address sustainable development priorities from a regional perspective, discuss progress, review national experiences, and enhance the region's voice HLPF.

This year, AFSD brought the voice of local authorities and highlighted urban issues through plenary and thematic sessions, including: A roundtable on "voluntary national reviews: Subnational follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and tackling inequality". This roundtable aimed to showcase recent experiences in conducting Voluntary Local Reviews and other sub-national reviews in the Arab region and discuss how sub-national follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda can support national planning and be geared to leaving no one behind and tackling inequality.

Urban issues were also tackled through a **Special Session** on "Urban resilience to COVID-19 and climate change" and A **Virtual Knowledge Fair**<sup>8</sup> with a course on the NUA – Promotional Video included in the ESCWA Learning Platform and knowledge products: Diagnostic and Planning Tool for Building Resilience; Technical Paper on Smart cities, Global compendium of Practices on urban economic resilience, and the Illustrated handbook on the NUA in Arabic<sup>9</sup>. In addition, the first Annual SDG Review<sup>10</sup>, a report published annually for the AFSD, which focuses on a number of regional priorities, in 2022, it focused on Social Protection; Green Economic Recovery; and Digital Transformation.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://unhabitat.org/asia-pacific-states-send-strong-message-of-commitment-to-the-new-urban-agenda-process>

<sup>6</sup> [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/03/nua\\_pre-meeting\\_apfsd\\_final\\_statement\\_21032022\\_1.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/03/nua_pre-meeting_apfsd_final_statement_21032022_1.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.unescap.org/events/apfsd9>

<sup>8</sup> <https://afsd-2022.unescwa.org/knowledge-fair-escwa.html#1>

<sup>9</sup> <https://unhabitat.org/ar/the-new-urban-agenda-illustrated>

<sup>10</sup> <https://publications.unescwa.org/projects/sdgs-review-2022/index.html>

## Annex I

### Summary of the Second Forum of Mayors

Presented by the rapporteur of the Forum of Mayors, Ms. Josiane Lei, Mayor of Evian, France to the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, Geneva, 6 April 2022.

1. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Second Forum of Mayors took place from 4-5 April 2022 at the Palais des Nations, in Geneva, Switzerland, back-to-back with the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (RFSD) in the ECE region as mandated by EXCOM (ECE/EX/2020/L.16). It constituted Part I of CUDHLM eighty-third session and the full report of the committee session will be adopted in San Marino on 3-6 October 2022 in accordance with CUDHLM agenda.

2. The Second Forum of Mayors was held in hybrid format under the theme “Recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic while advancing the implementation of the SDGs” and was chaired by the Chair of CUDHLM, Doris Andoni. It brought together over 500 online and in-person participants representing cities and member States from across the Economic Commission for Europe region and beyond, the United Nations regional commissions and specialized organizations, non-governmental organizations and academia. Mayors and vice mayors from 44 cities shared their experiences in finding people-centered solutions that simultaneously meet the needs and aspirations of their citizens, hedge against disasters and rise to the climate change challenge in a manner that ensures the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. These experiences were shared under four thematic sessions, focusing on the following global challenges identified in the Geneva Declaration of Mayors<sup>11</sup> as follows:

#### a) **Session 1: Sustainable urban transport, shared mobility and safer roads**

The city leaders shared creative solutions on:

- Ensuring the efficient use of roads
- Revamping the city’s public transport
- Establishing modern traffic control centers
- Establishing mass transit systems
- Repurposing abandoned tunnels and parking lots
- Sharing mobility by using smart applications
- Improving mobility through widening pedestrian pavements
- Promoting electronic mobility (e-mobility)
- Mobility for all by subsidizing public transport

#### b) **Session 2: Vibrant public spaces, greener cities, and nature-based solutions**

The city leaders shared creative solutions on:

- Business facilitation to encourage citizens to switch to e-cars
- Public spaces for education
- Transforming car parking lots into vibrant green public spaces
- Repurposing land for agriculture
- Deploying the notion of green public spaces to streets
- Creating bicycle and pedestrian lanes
- Beautifying iconic spaces
- Free public transport
- Planting trees
- Establishing youth education centres
- Finding creative solutions for financing vibrant spaces.
- Revitalizing for and with citizens
- Redesigning old streets so that they become people-centered

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<sup>11</sup> The Geneva Declaration of Mayors is available at: <https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/Mayors%20declaration%20booklet%20-%20ver.4.pdf>

**c) Session 3: Resilient, healthy and climate neutral buildings & affordable and adequate housing**

The city leaders shared creative solutions on:

- Transforming old buildings into community centers
- Refurbishing of housing stock, factories and old mines
- Using sustainable construction materials
- Reconceptualizing the supply of affordable and adequate homes
- Utilizing upgrades of basic and social infrastructure upgrades
- Engagement of youth

**d) Session 4: Sustainable urban planning, the 15-minute city and smart urban development solutions**

The city leaders shared creative solutions on:

- Implementing the 15-minute city concept around the city's main rivers
- Ensuring efficient use of land
- 15-minute city as part of smart urban development solutions
- Closing off the city centre for cars
- Climate neutral smart transport systems
- Sustainable urban solutions
- City-wide integrated platforms offering innovative ways for social interaction

3. The mayors exchanged their experiences, which were compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, they all saw the pandemic as an opportunity to launch creative solutions with a view to build back better. The Forum leaders emphasized that central to addressing the above challenges is the simultaneous integration of SDGs into local and national levels, as this would provide a common objective and, thereof, allow for creating dynamic synergies between local and national development efforts. Several cities have launched own SDG plans and the majority were committed to become climate neutral by 2030.

4. City leaders emphasized that without a participatory approach, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to ensure responsiveness to the needs of all citizens. Even with broad based participation, the translation of the aspired forward-looking plans and solutions into reality was not without challenges. Each solution was faced with tremendous resistance, as citizens saw change as a disruption to their day-to-day life or a departure from what is familiar. The importance of “standing the course” and thinking about the future generation instead of the next election was a constant refrain among the city leaders.

5. The Forum city leaders expressed their solidarity with Ukraine, emphasized their readiness to host Ukrainian refugees, help Ukrainian cities “build back better” so that they surpass modern cities, and stressed that peace is an essential precondition for the creation of green and vibrant cities.

## Annex II

### Regional Forum for Sustainable Development in the UNECE region

#### *PEER LEARNING ROUND TABLE*

#### **LIFE ON LAND: SDG 15**

#### **URBAN FORESTS FOR FUTURE PROOF CITIES**

7 April 2022 - 10:00 to 12:00

Over two-thirds of humanity will live in cities by 2050; achieving national sustainable development objectives and the SDGs depends on healthy and resilient cities. Already responsible for around 75% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, cities are at the forefront of fighting climate change and are particularly vulnerable to its impacts.

Sustainable urban forestry is an integrative and cost-effective nature-based solution to these challenges and can help develop greener, healthier, and more resilient cities. Trees and forests in urban and peri-urban areas provide vital benefits for health and wellbeing, sustainable development, climate adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity, and disaster risk reduction. This contributes not only to sustainable local development, but also to national objectives and to most SDGs.

There is an urgent need to maintain and expand the urban forest cover in our urban and peri-urban areas, but any intervention should be planned, designed, and managed sustainably, including through adequate funding. This ensures that benefits provided by urban forest are optimized over time. In addition to local action by city governments, national governments can support urban forestry through national policies and targets, standardized data collection and tools, the provision of financial support and by facilitating cooperation across boundaries and sectors.

## Annex III

### Statement on the Implementation of the New Urban Agenda at the 9th Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD)

#### **Pre-meeting on the Implementation of the New Urban Agenda**

A pre-event to the 9th Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development and to the High-Level Meeting on the acceleration of the New Urban Agenda (HLM)

**Monday, 21 March 2022, 15.00 –18.15 GMT+7 (Bangkok time)**

#### **STATEMENT (FINAL)**

1. The Government of Indonesia delivers this regional statement on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. This statement was inclusively endorsed at a 21 March regional Pre-meeting to APFSD.
2. The 2nd Quadrennial Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the NUA highlights progress in the region on delivering on commitments of the NUA, but the challenges towards 2030 are immense.
3. Implementing the NUA at all levels and localizing the SDGs will support pandemic recovery and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This requires an inclusive, gender-responsive and multi-stakeholder informed territorial development process taking into account urban-rural linkages.
4. The Quadrennial Report finds that priorities such as financing sustainable urban development and housing for all requires stronger integrated governance. There is also an urgent need to address the digital divide. More capacity building and collaboration in the region is needed to accelerate actions, including through South-South and triangular cooperation.
5. Asia and the Pacific also needs to scale up action on resilience. Rapid and unplanned urbanization combined with climate change and the pandemic impact seriously on people's everyday lives and economies now and in the future.
6. To increase SDG gains and address climate and disaster threats, it is pivotal to increase the resilience of settlements and communities, leaving no one and no place behind. Coordinated and stepped-up actions by cities and national governments are to achieve a net-zero carbon footprint. Priorities include urgently reducing air pollution and waste, including plastics; increasing green infrastructure and smart energy and mobility solutions; and investing in safe and healthy housing by applying green building standards.
7. The Participants in the Pre-meeting also called on Member States, local governments and partners to share more knowledge and good practices, utilizing the Urban Agenda Platform, the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum and similar channels and venues. They called for the continued support of ESCAP, UN-Habitat, local government associations, and relevant regional partnerships.
8. The Participants encouraged more Voluntary Local Reviews, using the regional guidelines to capture more local and subnational reporting on the localization of the SDGs, taking into account national context, and to increase multi-stakeholder participation and coordination with the Voluntary National Review processes.
9. The Participants of the Pre-meeting also appreciated the reporting done to date on the implementation of the NUA and the urban dimensions of the SDGs. They specifically looked forward to more voluntary national NUA reporting by 2026, for the 3rd Quadrennial Report. A stronger alignment of NUA reporting with Voluntary National Reviews on the 2030 Agenda as well as with Nationally Determined Contributions reporting is recommended to increase effective NUA monitoring.