



Global Platform for the Right to the City
Plataforma Global por el Derecho a la Ciudad
Plateforme Globale pour le Droit à la Ville

CITIES FOR DIGNITY, NOT FOR PROFIT!

Social Function of the City and the Right to the City

Urban October and World Day for the Right to the City

We are social movements, civil society and local governments' organizations committed to social change through the promotion, defense and fulfillment of the right to the city for all. We jointly call and are committed to face the ongoing [global crises evidenced by the pandemic](#) through alternative policies based on the right to the city. We support activists of the right to the city, [who are increasingly under threat](#), including local authorities and defenders of the right to housing and land, against all forms of attack and violence.

The city cannot be for profit and speculation. The city is our shared material, symbolic and political space and community. Our struggle is for the effective transformation of urban life, involving universal access to adequate housing and land, as well as the provision of basic services, public spaces, essential goods and social, economic and cultural opportunities necessary for social reproduction. Our agenda calls for prioritizing dignity, care and the effective democratization of the decisions concerning the present and the future of cities.

The **Right to the City** is the right of all inhabitants, present and future, permanent and temporary, to inhabit, use, occupy, produce, govern and enjoy just, inclusive, safe and sustainable cities, villages and human settlements, defined as commons essential to a full and decent life. **The social function of property, land and the city** as a whole is one of the key principles that will help us make the right to the city a reality.

Within this framework, **a city fulfills its social function** by ensuring equitable and affordable access for all to housing, goods, services and opportunities, particularly for women, marginalized groups and people with special needs. We defend a city/human settlement that prioritizes the collectively defined public and social interest, ensuring a just and environmentally balanced use of urban and rural spaces, and that recognizes and supports the social production of habitat.

Although the fulfillment of the social function of the city (13a) and social function of land (69) are explicitly included in the New Urban Agenda and many Constitutions and legal instruments around the world [*] these principles are far from being fulfilled in most cities.

COVID-19 and Climate emergency crises show how people's opportunities in terms of access to a quality of life depends on the place they occupy within the cities. These crises make evident long-standing inequalities and the vulnerable condition of groups such as the



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homeless, slum dwellers, people threatened by evictions, informal workers, migrants and refugees, Indigenous people, LGBTI and impoverished people in general, particularly women, older people and children. At the same time, the pandemic crisis has shown that bold, courageous measures and policies can be taken to foster urgently needed structural changes, not the return to the 'normality' of failed neoliberal policies.

[Civil society and local governments are demonstrating leadership](#) in the response of the aforementioned crises, developing both emergency responses to the most urgent needs and initiatives that move towards mid and long-term transformations. Some governments were quick to recognize and protect the social function of the city, housing and essential services under emergency measures; this logic must prevail beyond the pandemic in order to develop cities and communities that are truly for all.

We demand cities that **are understood as common goods, and as such** fulfill their **social function and the Right to the City beyond the global crises**,—at the service of the whole community, ensuring social protection and quality of life for each and every one.

In this sense, we demand all spheres of governments and the international community to commit to protecting the social function of the city by:

1) Ensuring the **right to adequate housing** for all by setting and implementing policies that put an end on evictions, displacements and gentrification, building and reinforcing the mechanisms to protect the social function of housing and land: carrying participative mappings of vacant or underused land, buildings and infrastructures; establishing municipal land and property banks that are managed democratically with the participation of marginalized communities; regulating the price of land and housing; support the social production of habitat as well as community land trusts and cooperative housing; defending and expanding public social housing and making sure no one loses their home without suitable alternative housing, with a special attention to the most vulnerable groups.

2) Recovering and strengthening **community public services**, ensuring universal accessibility to health, water, electricity, sewage systems, mobility, transport and internet, among others, by regulating prices and (re)municipalizing or nationalizing these services, ensuring that these essential services are publicly managed, as to guarantee their quality and accessibility for all.

3) Protecting and developing **diverse and safe public spaces in every neighbourhood**, implementing comprehensive policies to prevent and combat violence against women and other discriminated groups, with spaces and facilities for diversity, accessible and safe transportation, places of recreation and shelter. Today we see a tendency towards increasing privatization of public spaces and the role of urban renewal initiatives that contribute and enhance gentrification, leading to the exclusion and expulsion of local communities. Public



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spaces as epicenters of community life have to be accessible to all and integrated to the network of urban services, enhancing social interactions, political participation and citizen advocacy, promoting sociocultural expressions, embracing diversity, fostering social cohesion and diverse economies;

4) Fostering **economies that are designed for the sustainability of life** and promote policies and initiatives of the social and solidarity economy. Recognize the domestic and unpaid care work that is mostly done by women and protect care as a right through territorial policies, infrastructure and care services as instruments of redistribution;

5) Strengthening **horizontal and democratic collaboration** between actors and institutions (government, communities, civil society, community-based and grassroots led groups) and at different scales (neighbourhood, city, national, international) towards inclusive and democratic social transformation;

6) Ensuring that **all inhabitants are able to fully enjoy the city and its opportunities**, with special attention to groups that are often marginalized or overburdened, such as workers in the informal economy, women in all their diversities, migrants, refugees, LGBTQI, indigenous peoples, inhabitants of informal settlements, and others.

[*] Non-exhaustive list of legal instruments that protect the social function of housing, land and the city:

- Brazil: 1988 Constitution explicitly recognizes the right to decent housing, and provides that property, whether urban or rural, "shall fulfill its social function";
- Colombia: 1991 Constitution recognizes property's "social function that implies obligations";
- Bolivia: Constitution explicitly recognizes property's social and environmental functions;
- Ecuador: Constitution explicitly recognizes property's social and environmental functions;
- Mexico: the social function of private property has been considered in the Constitution since 1917, and further expanded in the General Law of Human Settlements (LGAH) of 1976;
- Andalusia (Spain): in 2013 a law assuring the social function of housing and setting the legal instruments to protect was approved. However, in 2018, the Spanish Constitutional Court invalidated the law's disposition that allowed for the Andalusian government to expropriate empty houses owned by banks and investment funds.