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

# The right to the city as an accelerator for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda
*Local actors call for joint action to effective NUA implementation through the Right to the City*
26th of April, 2022

October 2021 marked the five years of the adoption of the **UN New Urban Agenda** (NUA) by 167 countries. Despite significant limitations, its contents highlight the **relevance of the Right to the City principles and proposals** to reclaim urban spaces as collective places for and by the people, with a commitment to a rights-based approach that prioritizes the **social function of the city instead of the accumulation of profits.**

**It is the first document of its kind to enshrine the Right to the City approach** and, to a large extent, it can be considered an achievement of the mobilization and trajectory of social movements and civil society networks around the world. In this sense, both the final text and the process that made it possible (including events, declarations and various other inputs) are part of a very important legacy that should be valued and built upon.
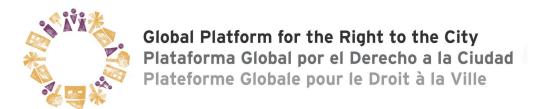
Some key points supported through this articulation and that acquire renewed relevance in today's context are:

- Protection, promotion and implementation of the Right to the City;
- Enshrining new paradigms for integrated and participatory, bottom-up planning and management;
- Fulfilling the social function of property by strengthening collective social, cultural and environmental interests over neo-liberal economic interests;
- Incorporating the priorities, needs and experiences of citizens and communities, especially women, the poor, minorities and marginalized groups, and the organizations supporting them;
- Promoting the democratic management of cities and territories, ensuring that all city inhabitants have the right to participate in political and city management processes;
- Ensuring that the participatory principles and practices of solidarity economy are mainstreamed;
- Implement real decentralization with the necessary competencies and resources, to ensure that local governments can take effective decisions to fulfill inhabitants' rights

More than five years on, as the **United Nations General Assembly gathers at a High Level Meeting to discuss the progress in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda,** the current situation is underwhelming and raises mixed feelings. We observe a **limited commitment, coordination and continuity between national governments for NUA implementation** through transversal strategies and integral policies that are co-constructed with civil society and diverse spheres of government. Business-as-usual attitude implies that discriminatory programmes that have failed (i.e. massive construction of new housing in the peripheries of cities) continue to be the norm, with widespread negative social, economic, cultural and environmental impacts.

Moreover, **the visibility of the New Urban Agenda, vis-à-vis other global agendas, seems to be limited, as well as the overall engagement with follow-up and monitoring.** As indicated in the UN Secretary General's Report on New Urban Agenda implementation, only 25 countries have submitted progress reports on NUA implementation, since those are voluntary. Moreover, in general the reports include very limited inputs from civil society. Participation and engagement in NUA follow-up has been weak, **with an overall lack of transparency as well as defined and stable mechanisms for participation and follow-up, both by National governments as well as by UN Agencies.**

**As concrete progress in NUA implementation has been stagnant, the overall reality in cities and territories around the world in the last 5 years has been marked by worsening conditions.** Particularly relevant to note are: a) the aggravation of **democratic crisis** with the rise of more conservative and authoritarian/autocratic governments with a concerning

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implication in terms of violations of Human Rights; b) the increased interference of private/corporate interests on public/common goods, with a growing trend towards the **commodification of cities**, with a clear effect in the rise of inequalities, segregation and exclusion in cities and territories; c) the aggravation of the **climate crisis** and its direct impacts, specifically for the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, calling for an increased commitment not only to climate action, but to climate justice; and, d) the immediate, **short, medium and long term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic**, both through its consequences in terms of heath and the social and economic impacts of the sanitary measures taken, but also in terms of how overall recovery efforts are approached.

As noted in the SG's report, the **COVID-19 pandemic has underlined and aggravated pre-existing systemic inequalities, leading to a reinforced recognition of the importance of public and common goods and the institutions that deliver them, and underscoring the relevance of the New Urban Agenda** as a robust framework for resilient urbanization that offers a pathway to greener, healthier and more just societies. Moreover, it has highlighted the centrality of the right to adequate housing, food and nutrition, health, education, as well as the need to secure universal basic service provision and social protection mechanisms to protect livelihoods, all under a redistributive framework that prioritizes care and the collective common good over profits.

Also highlighted in the SG report is the fact that the immediate response to the pandemic has opened the door for the i**mplementation of courageous initiatives that go to the heart of the transformations needed to address growing inequalities, social precariousness and the climate crisis.** It is key to point out to the centrality of care and the feminist approach now growing strongly and explicitly on the agenda of several actors. Moreover, progressive local governments and civil society are setting a course that it is essential to make visible, protect and support. These include (but are not limited to) emergency response policies such as eviction moratoria, implementation of social protection mechanisms to secure livelihoods, ensuring universal access to public services, opening new public spaces and promoting active mobility; as well as structural policies with a long-term impact in providing alternatives to the current economic and urban development models, such as support to the social production of habitat, cooperative models for economic activity and service provision, (re)municipalization of key public services such as water and electricity, collective management of common/community spaces, and the care and solidarity economy.

**Such initiatives and the strategic areas they reflect are historically tied to the development and implementation of the Right to the City, providing a concrete pathway for the implementation of NUA commitments and other related global agendas. Moreover, they point towards enormous capacity for mobilization, and multi-stakeholder and multi-level articulation. In this sense, ahead of the High Level Meeting on New Urban Agenda implementation, we call national governments and relevant UN Agencies, in particular UN-Habitat to:**

1. Commit to an accelerated implementation of the New Urban Agenda, leveraging the Right to the City as a driver for its implementation in the direction of promoting social, territorial and environmental justice, strongly articulating policies and programmes with the respect of Human Rights obligations and implementation of other global agendas such as the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.
2. Recognise and support local governments and civil society organizations as key stakeholders for the monitoring and effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda, leveraging and building upon the transformative initiatives and policies being driven by such actors, considering the city as a not-for-profit common good whose management must include the active involvement of the entire social fabric, with a particular focus on the traditionally marginalized groups and communities.
3. Put forward a systematic coordination framework between diverse spheres of governments, with civil society representation and the support of multilateral and regional organisms, as well as more clear definition of roles related to the implementation and follow-up of NUA commitment within government bodies.