

NATIONAL
URBAN FORUM



المنتدى الوطني الحضري
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FIRST

NATIONAL URBAN FORUM OF LEBANON

*Towards a more sustainable and inclusive
future for Lebanese cities*

— DECLARATION
Beirut, 24 March 2022

UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



We, the participants of the first National Urban Forum (NUF1) of Lebanon, co-organized by UN-Habitat and ESCWA, have gathered to participate in a multi-stakeholder platform to discuss, propose and define the necessary means and next steps to concretely foster enhanced and more inclusive implementation of sustainable urbanization, decision-making and review processes in line with the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals – aligned to national priorities. We have aimed to promote dialogue and partnerships among actors from the national government and local authorities, academia, United Nations agencies, international and local organizations, civil society and grass-roots organizations, and the private sector, among others.

We acknowledge that sustainable development in Lebanon, a small, densely populated, and highly urbanized country, largely depends on how its **cities** are developed and managed. We recognize that the manifold and multi-layered crises that Lebanon has been facing and the shocks it has been experiencing have mainly been **urban crises**, due to the highly urbanized distribution of the country's population. We also highlight that urban areas suffer from **long-standing challenges** related to lack of a long-term urban planning vision and functioning regulations, of effective governance and related institutions, and of availability of accurate and reliable data. Thus, the rapid urbanization of the last four decades and more has proceeded largely unplanned. We acknowledge that all of these have affected people's daily lives, especially the most vulnerable, in terms of access to safe, inclusive and affordable housing, transportation, infrastructure, and basic urban services in cities; as well as access to descent and equitable livelihood opportunities, among others. They have also contributed to increased inequalities in access to urban services and resources within and between cities. This situation is also associated with increased social tensions and safety issues. Vulnerable groups – such as poor Lebanese, women, people with disabilities, refugees, migrant workers, and others – are those bearing the heaviest blunt of the effects of these multifaceted challenges.

We draw attention to the significance of **urban data generation and analysis to promote evidence-led, transparent decision-making** for urban crisis response and resilience building, as well as policymaking aimed at longer-term development of Lebanese cities. We recognize that providing area- and sector-based evidence and analysis helps better understand and anticipate the local specificities of rapid urbanization and guides towards building back better in contextually responsive ways. We also emphasize the role of **innovative, smart and climate proof solutions** in Lebanese cities to overcome their multifaceted challenges.

We find that access to affordable housing with tenure security, to water and sanitation, and to transport and other basic services varies widely between and within Lebanese cities, with the poorest neighbourhoods and households experiencing dire multidimensional deprivation. We emphasize that now more than ever, there is an urgent need to **address disparities** in Lebanese cities, and to **uphold people's human rights** to housing, water, sanitation and other essential services and resources. We recognize that such efforts require good urban governance – encompassing the scale of today's expanded cities beyond their official administrative borders. Good urban governance should respond to immediate multisectoral needs while also working towards an urban recovery vision for Lebanon's main cities affected by compounded crises. We also emphasize the need for national urban policies to support urban recovery, to strengthen national systems, to ensure leaving no one and no place behind.

We recognize that a large and increasing share of Lebanon's residents are suffering from a lack of affordable and adequate **housing**. Major Lebanese cities, poorly regulated and largely unaffordable housing markets have led poor Lebanese and non-Lebanese residents to secure temporary shelter arrangements primarily in the informal rental market. The absence of an inclusive and diversified housing policy has allowed the mismatch between residential housing supply and demand to continue to hinder access to housing for households in need.

Therefore, we empathize the importance of: (1) better regulation and organization of land and real estate markets; (2) diversification of the channels of housing finance and production; and (3) regeneration of the existing low-quality housing stock in the formal and informal markets.

Immediate needs can be addressed in the short time with the available institutional, policy and legal frameworks, without further delay, to ensure a soft landing and pave the way for longer-term reforms.

We recognize that the design of an inclusive housing policy must rely on a rights-based approach and people-centred solutions, and the right to adequate housing as enshrined in international human rights law.

We acknowledge that in countries like Lebanon, access to **mobility** is severely deficient, negative impacts of **transport** on the economy and the environment are largely significant, and institutional and policy frameworks are inadequate. We also recognize that poor urban planning, lack of alternatives and public awareness, and an inadequate road infrastructure have contributed to an inefficient transport system in Lebanon. Moreover, transport – similar to housing – is one of the sectors particularly linked to Lebanon’s socially, spatially, environmentally and financially unsustainable urbanization. Its deficiencies penalize particularly the most vulnerable and contribute to enhanced inequalities, such as gender.

Therefore, we recognize the importance of: (1) reducing reliance on motorized means, and mainstreaming climate friendly and offsetting solutions; (2) rebuilding an organized, accessible and safe public transport system; (3) establishing/improving public transportation that is accessible, available and safe for all residents; (4) reclaiming urban space for walking and leisure, and enabling cycling and micro mobility; (5) reducing unnecessary travel by building on recent experiences from the COVID-19 confinement period; and (6) integrating the informal transport system in the shift to alternative and more sustainable transport means.

We acknowledge the multifaceted national- and prolonged area-based challenges of the **energy** sector in Lebanon. Maintaining a consistent electricity supply at reasonable cost and navigating between public supply and private generators have been severely exacerbated in the current economic crisis, with constraints on access to fuel-curling generation capacity at all levels. Thus, investment in alternative decentralized available, affordable and green technologies at both city and household levels, as well as raising awareness on the set legal frameworks and updating building regulations to improve energy efficiency for consumers have been discussed to potentially support a sustainability agenda in the future. We emphasize the need to explore opportunities presented by the current energy supply crisis, based on national and international best practices, including global climate change commitments, to trigger scalable shifts to renewable energy sources, addressing immediate and longer-term needs.

We recognize the **fundamental role of local authorities** in cities and towns in responding to crises and fostering sustainable urban development and enhanced resilience. We emphasize the importance of enhancing their human, technical and financial resources and capacities, so they can be engaged more effectively and actively in these processes, including in collecting and analysing multisectoral local data, and in securing affordable housing and local-level transport solutions and energy solutions, among others. We also highlight that increased **collaboration and partnerships** are needed between municipalities, as well as between municipalities and other key state and non-state actors, within and beyond specific cities to ensure a more inclusive and coordinated efforts.

We consider that, despite the ongoing compounded acute challenges pertaining to the current financial, monetary and economic crises facing Lebanon, it is important not to lose sight of **longer-term strategic planning for sustainable urban development**. This would require an integrated, multisectoral approach, which recognizes the complex nature of urban settings.

We value the multi-stakeholder and multi-levelled dialogue and exchange of knowledge fostered during the first National Urban Forum. These can help inform future operational frameworks between the Government of Lebanon, the United Nations family in Lebanon, the wider development community, and other stakeholders to support progress towards an increasingly sustainable urban future for Lebanon; hence, the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Now, at the conclusion of NUF1 of Lebanon, we declare our voluntary support to help advance sustainable urban development in Lebanon in line with these global frameworks.

