

WUF11 SESSION CONCEPT NOTE

EQUITABLE URBAN FUTURES

1. List of Partners Contributing to the Session:

- Council of Urban Initiatives (TBC)

2. Key Words:

Human rights-based development, leave no one and no place behind, persisting and new urban inequalities, new social contract, social protection, housing, accessible services, digital services, multilevel governance, financing equitable development, inclusive multilateralism

3. Objectives of the Session:

Despite the inequal urban landscapes, most of global economic growth and related income opportunities are concentrated in urbanized areas and waiting to be tapped into. The dialogue will explore how cities can address the challenges of inequity and poverty and strengthen social cohesion so that a prosperous, inclusive and equitable future can be realized for all.

The discussion will focus on the extension of human rights to meet new challenges to equity in cities following the COVID-19 pandemic: Universal social protection, affordable housing and services, including health, internet access, renewable energy and other critical resources. Potentials such as renewed social contract, called for by the UN Secretary-General, between governments and people for more effective urban policies and actions against inequalities will be discussed as means to achieve universal equitable urban development and human rights. The dialogue aims to identify opportunities to extend the new social contract for all people in all places, considering global, regional and national specific challenges.

4. Summary:

The vision for an equitable urban future is hindered by persisting poverty, discrimination, violence, and exclusion. Inequity in rights and opportunities to live a peaceful, safe and dignified life is perpetuating multiple forms of marginalization – the homeless, immigrants, ethnic minorities, refugees and the displaced and disabled persons. Although the face of marginalization varies across countries, a common thread is limitations in basic human rights¹ of universal social protection, health coverage, education, skills, decent work and housing, and universal access to internet.

Inequalities take various forms, old and new, between and within countries and cities. Crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and conflicts rapidly exacerbate and create new inequalities – access to vaccines, technology, education and income opportunities, environmental and climate inequalities, and refugee flows. The combined effect of social, economic, cultural inequality is leaving entire communities behind.

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

Building an equitable urban future, though inevitably a daunting task, is possible if an urgent corrective course is taken to redress systemic, persistent and frontier urban issues. A call for action against planetary scale crises and expanding political instability can renew the **social contract**² between Governments and their people and within societies to rebuild trust through full participation, more effective governance arrangements, stronger social protection, health, housing and internet provisions and by ensuring carbon neutral future for all.

As first responders to transformations, cities require appropriate legislative framework supported by competent urban planning and management that are adequate financed. A well-functioning multilevel governance empowers local actors to lead with results. Yet these drivers remain elusive to a vast majority of cities.

Cities that adopt a rights-based approach to human settlements development can create inclusive, lively, and prosperous societies. This Dialogue will bring together a diverse milieu of officials and professionals to shed light on new policies and partnerships that are helping to fulfil the right to affordable housing, services and social protection and that recognize the new frontiers in progressing social, technological, political, and environmental equity.

5. Guiding Questions for Discussions:

- What are the new and transformative approaches that can be taken to address the needs of the most vulnerable groups? How can progressive urban social programmes be scaled up?
- What are models for human-rights based approach to reduce inequalities and promote equitable development in the built environment and urban systems?
- What interventions are necessary for multi-level institutional reforms to be pro-equity in the post-covid recovery?
- What are the new and emerging partnerships for social equity-oriented financing? How can the risks of privatization of public goods with engagement of non-state actors and other types of external donors be minimized and mitigated?
- What policies/procedures can be put in place to ensure that digital and technological innovations are aligned with the universal values?

6. Expected Outcomes and Impact:

- Participants of the dialogue will have a vision of the new types of partnerships that provide strong potential for integrated approaches to equitable urban development.
- Urban stakeholders will be better aware of the global and regional platforms and data available for global dialogues and visioning on equitable urban development and knowledge sharing.

7. Session Format:

² <https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/summary.shtml>

The dialogue will follow the Davos-style moderated discussion format: The group of 5 or 6 panelists will sit on stage in front of the audience. First, each speaker presents his/her key lines of thinking, supported by data where applicable, on the Dialogue's theme (max. 5 minutes), followed by a moderated discussion between the panelists. After arriving at some preliminary agreements, the dialogue is opened to comments and questions from audience. No powerpoint presentations are requested from the speakers to support their opening remarks. The dialogue will foster an open, lively debate and moderated interaction.

A case study or a short interview on a success story with a city representative will be conducted by the Moderator to add a field perspective to the panel dialogue. The event will end with the panelists addressing the questions from the audience and the moderator.

