



HOUSING AND LAND RIGHTS NETWORK Habitat International Coalition

The Habitat Agenda Commitments on Older Persons

This reference paper reviews the **specific principles and commitments** that States adopted in the Habitat Agenda¹ at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held in Istanbul in 1996, to assist in their reconsideration before adoption of the new Agenda at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat III), to be held in Quito in October 2016.

For the Habitat III process and outcomes to be credible, it is crucial to assess implementation of the commitments of Habitat II, as promised in Habitat Agenda's section "G. Assessing Progress." Many of those commitments also remain the essential core for any new global agenda.

At the heart of the Habitat II achievements were: (1) an affirmation of the centrality of human rights, in particular the progressive realization of the human right to adequate housing in human settlements and (2) recognition of the principles of good governance in balanced rural and urban development. Those two pillars of the Habitat II Agenda are reflected in the Istanbul Declaration and Habitat II Agenda.

The commitments related to older people are to be understood within the concept of human habitat, a concept the two relevant bi-decennial global policies established, first at Vancouver in 1976 (Habitat I) and, secondly, at Istanbul (Habitat II) in 1996. The concept of habitat is both urban and rural, involving a "regional and cross-sectoral approach to human settlements planning, which places emphasis on rural/urban linkages and treats villages and cities as two ends [points] of a human settlements continuum in a common ecosystem" (H2, para. 104).

At Habitat II (1996), states, including their various spheres of government, committed to principles and actions over the ensuing 20 years. Concerning elderly people, the Habitat Agenda recognizes in the preamble that:

"Older persons are entitled to lead fulfilling and productive lives and should have opportunities for full participation in their communities and society, and in all decision-making regarding their well-being, especially their shelter needs. Their many contributions to the political, social and economic processes of human settlements should be recognized and valued. Special attention should be given to meeting the evolving housing and mobility needs in order to enable them to continue to lead rewarding lives in their communities"; (H2: 17)

The Habitat II principles, commitments and action strategies related to **older persons** are reproduced in the following sections. As mentioned above, these form criteria for the indispensable evaluation of Habitat II's implementation by governments and development agencies, in particular, UN-Habitat. These reminders serve further as the minimum elements upon which to build a new Habitat Agenda, which we expect to address the new challenges facing human settlements in the 21st Century, with States and

¹ United Nations , Report of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), Istanbul (Turkey) 3-14 June 1996, Consulted on March 2016 [on line]: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G96/025/00/PDF/G9602500.pdf?OpenElement>

development actors committing to more-progressive development and far more-diligent implementation.

The document provides as well a list of the relevant obligations related to older people that States have assumed in the Habitat agenda and the intervening period since Habitat II, jointly with other relevant documents forming part of the current minimum norms for human settlements development, administration and governance from an older people perspective.

Habitat II Goals and Principles

Equitable human settlements are those in which all people, without discrimination of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, have equal access to housing, infrastructure, health services, adequate food and water, education and open spaces. In addition, such human settlements provide equal opportunity for a productive and freely chosen livelihood; equal access to economic resources, including the right to inheritance, the ownership of land and other property, credit, natural resources and appropriate technologies; equal opportunity for personal, spiritual, religious, cultural and social development; equal opportunity for participation in public decision-making; equal rights and obligations with regard to the conservation and use of natural and cultural resources; and equal access to mechanisms to ensure that rights are not violated. The empowerment of women and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, whether rural or urban, are fundamental to sustainable human settlements development; (H2:27)

Human health and quality of life are at the centre of the effort to develop sustainable human settlements. We therefore commit ourselves to promoting and attaining the goals of universal and equal access to quality education, the highest attainable standard of physical, mental and environmental health, and the equal access of all to primary health care, making particular efforts to rectify inequalities relating to social and economic conditions, including housing, without distinction as to race, national origin, gender, age, or disability, respecting and promoting our common and particular cultures. Good health throughout the life-span of every man and woman, good health for every child, and quality education for all are fundamental to ensuring that people of all ages are able to develop their full capacities in health and dignity and to participate fully in the social, economic and political processes of human settlements (...); (H2:36)

Habitat II Commitments and actions

In implementing these (all) commitments, special attention should be given to the circumstances and needs of (...) older people (...); (38)

Adequate livelihood

Promoting shelter and supporting basic services and facilities for education and health for the (...) older persons; (40l)

Work with the private and non-profit sectors, community-based organizations and other actors to provide adequate shelter for people belonging to vulnerable groups, making special efforts to remove all physical constraints to the independent living of persons with disabilities and of older persons; (97b)

Improve shelter conditions so as to mitigate those health and safety risks, particularly risks to (...) older persons (...) that are associated with activities in the home; (136d)

In order to achieve sustainable transport in human settlements, Governments at the appropriate levels, in partnership with the private sector, the community sector and other relevant interested parties, should: Support an integrated transport policy approach that explores the full array of technical and management options and pays due attention to the needs of all population groups, especially those whose mobility is constrained because of disability, age, poverty or any other factor; (151a)

Participation and governance

Institutionalize a participatory approach to sustainable human settlements through the development and support of strategies and mechanisms that encourage open and inclusive dialogue among all interested parties, with special attention to the needs and priorities of (...) older persons and persons living in poverty and exclusion; (113l)

Encourage the establishment of programmes and projects based on voluntary participation, especially of (...) older persons, to prevent violence, including violence in the home, and crime; (123i)

Promote the active role of older persons as custodians of cultural heritage, knowledge, trades and skills; (153f)

Ensure the participation in disaster planning and management of all interested parties, including women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities, in recognition of their particular vulnerability to human-made and natural disasters; (172b)

Promote comprehensive training, education and human resources development policies and programmes that are gender-sensitive and involve local authorities and their associations/networks, as well as academic, research, training and educational institutions, community-based organizations and the private sector, focusing on: The training of trainers to develop a core capacity for institution-strengthening and capacity-building that includes gender awareness and the needs of children, youth and the elderly as integral components; (184cii)

Governments as enabling partners should create and strengthen effective partnerships with (...) the elderly (...) and communities, local authorities, the private sector and non-governmental organizations in each country. National mechanisms should be established or improved, as appropriate, to coordinate actions at all relevant government levels that have an impact on human settlements and to assess this impact prior to governmental actions; (214)

Data and research

(...) Age and gender-sensitive indicators, disaggregated data and appropriate data-collection methods must be developed and used to monitor the impact of human settlements policies and practices on cities and communities, with special and continuous attention to the situation of those belonging to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. (...); (51)

Generate and disseminate gender disaggregated data, while ensuring that such statistics are collected, compiled, analysed and presented by age and sex; set up monitoring mechanisms in government structures; and integrate the results into mainstream policies for sustainable human settlements development; (119j)

Enhance the performance of local authorities by undertaking data collection, disaggregated by gender, age and income, and comparative analyses of, and by disseminating information on innovative practices in, the delivery, operation and maintenance of public goods and services, in providing for the needs of their populations and in exploiting the fiscal and other potential of their cities; Collect, analyse and disseminate, as appropriate, comparative data, disaggregated by gender, age and income, on the performance of local authorities in providing for the needs of their populations; (180g and I)

International Norms related Older Persons

The International normative frameworks cited in the Habitat Agenda:

- United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), [Charter of the United Nations](#), (1945)*;
- UNGA, [The Universal Declaration on Human Rights](#), A/RES/3/217A, (1948)*;
- UNGA, [International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#), A/res/21/2200, (1966)**;
- UNGA, [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), A/res/21/2200A (1966)**;
- [United Nations Conference on Environment & Development](#), Rio de Janeiro (Brasil), 3–14 June 1992:
 - [Agenda 21](#)[†]
 - [Rio Declaration on Environment and Development](#)[†]
- [World Conference on Human Rights](#), Vienna (Austria) 14–25 June 1993:
 - [Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action](#)[†]
- [International Conference on Population and Development](#), Cairo (Egypt), 5–13 September 1994:
 - [Programme of Action](#)[†]
- [Fourth World Conference on Women](#), Beijing (China), 4–15 September 1995:
 - [Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action](#)[†]
- [World Summit for Social Development](#), Copenhagen (Denmark), 6–12 March 1995:
 - [Copenhagen Declaration Social Development Declaration](#)[†]
 - [Programme of Action](#)[†]

The international normative documents developed after the adoption of Habitat Agenda or not mentioned in the Habitat Agenda²:

- CESCR, [General Comment No. 4](#) on the right to adequate housing, (1992)**;
- CESCR, [General Comment No. 6](#) on the economic, social and cultural rights of older persons, (1996)**;
- CESCR, [General Comment No. 20](#) on non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural rights, (2009)**;
- CESCR, [General Comment No. 21](#) on Right of everyone to take part in cultural life (2009) **;

² This is an illustrative non-exhaustive compilation of international norms.

- CEDaW, [General Recommendation No. 27](#) on older women and protection of their human rights (2010) **;
- UNGA, [The Future We Want](#), A/RES/66/288, (2012)†;
- UNGA, [Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), A/RES/70/1, (2015)†;

Key to symbols:

* = binding on all States; ** = binding on all States party to the relevant treaty; † = declaratory law as guidance for States and their governments to comply with general principles of international law and certain treaty-law requirements.