



The Habitat Agenda Commitments on Youth and Children

This paper reviews the **specific principles and commitments** that States have adopted in the Habitat Agenda¹ at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held in Istanbul in 1996. These references serve to remind stakeholders what governments and, by extension, multilateral agencies promised then, in order to reconsider them in (1) the indispensable evaluation of their implementation and (2) testing their validity in the current context before adopting the new Agenda at the United Nations conference on housing and 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 youth and children 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 concerning youth and children over the ensuing 20 years. The Habitat Agenda's preamble recognizes that:

"The needs of children and youth, particularly with regard to their living environment, have to be taken fully into account. Special attention needs to be paid to the participatory processes dealing with the shaping of cities, towns and neighbourhoods; this is in order to secure the living conditions of children and of youth and to make use of their insight, creativity and thoughts on the environment. Special attention must be paid to the shelter needs of vulnerable children, such as street children, refugee children and children who are victims of sexual exploitation. Parents and other persons legally responsible for children have responsibilities, rights and duties, consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to address these needs"; (H2:13)

The Habitat II principles, commitments and action strategies concerning **youth and children** are reproduced in the following sections. As mentioned above, these form criteria for the indispensable

¹ United Nations, Report of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) (Istanbul, 3–14 June 1996), A/CONF.165/14, 7 August 1996, at: <http://www.hlrn.org/img/documents/Habitat%20II%20&%20Ist%20Decl%20EN.pdf>.

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

The document provides as well a list of the relevant obligations for youth and children 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 taking into account youth and children.

Habitat II Goals and Principles

As human beings are at the centre of our concern for sustainable development, they are the basis for our actions as in implementing the Habitat Agenda. We recognize the particular needs of women, children and youth for safe, healthy and secure living conditions. We shall intensify our efforts to eradicate poverty and discrimination, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, and to provide for basic needs, such as education, nutrition and life-span health care services, and, especially, adequate shelter for all. We shall also ensure the full and equal participation of all women and men, and the effective participation of youth, in political, economic and social life; (ID:7)

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; (H2:27)

Habitat II Commitments and actions

In implementing these (all) commitments, special attention should be given to the specific needs and circumstances of children, particularly street children (...); (38)

Adequate livelihood

Promoting shelter and supporting basic services and facilities for education and health for (...) children who are survivors of family violence (40) Promoting socially integrated and accessible human settlements, including appropriate facilities for health and education, and recognizing and respecting the rights of all, especially of children; (43a)

Adequate shelter must be recognized as an important component of the particular care and assistance to which children and their families, as well as children living outside or without families, have a right. Special consideration must be given to the needs of children living in difficult circumstances; (94)

Formulate and implement human settlements development policies that ensure equal access to and maintenance of basic services, including those related to the provision of food security; education; employment and livelihood; basic health care services; safe drinking water and sanitation; adequate shelter; and access to open and green spaces, giving priority to the needs and rights of women and children, who often bear the greatest burden of poverty (116a)

Children are particularly vulnerable to harmful urban environments and must be protected. It is therefore essential to take a holistic approach to health, whereby both prevention and care are placed within the context of environmental policy, supported by effective management systems and plans of action incorporating targets that reflect local needs and capacities; (60)

Eliminate the sexual and economic exploitation of young women and children, improving their quality of life and increasing their contribution to sustainable human settlements development; (120f)

Ensure that children have access to the natural world on a daily basis through free play outdoors, and establish education programmes to help children investigate their community environments, including natural ecosystems; (139e)

Promoting assistance for activities in the field of shelter and human settlements development in favour of people living in poverty, particularly (...) street children, through specific targeted grants; (204y)

Participation and governance

Involve local communities, particularly children, in decision-making and in setting priorities for the provision of services and standards for community facilities and in the operation and maintenance of those facilities; (86b,86c, 213)

Integrate youth concerns into all relevant national, subnational and local policies, strategies, programmes and projects; develop a core capacity for institution-strengthening and capacity-building that includes needs of children and youth as integral components; (120a, 184cii, 45f, 113l, 182m,176j)

Enable and promote full potential of youth by supporting and valuing their ability to play an active and creative role in building sustainable communities and adequate shelter for all; (120b, 123d, 123i, 182)

Facilitate the participation of local organizations, including youth groups, children's groups and other organizations based in the community, in the decision-making processes concerning social welfare programmes; (124b)

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

Capacity development

Working in partnership with youth in order to develop and enhance effective skills and provide education and training to prepare youth for current and future decision-making roles and sustainable livelihoods in human settlements management and development (45e)

Encourage, in cooperation with relevant interested parties, including parents with respect to their children's education, the development of school curricula, education programmes and community-based centres aimed at developing understanding and cooperation among members of diverse cultures; (117d)

Promote and strengthen productive enterprises, including micro-enterprises and small-scale private and cooperative sector enterprises and expand market and other employment and training opportunities for

youth, including people with disabilities and, where appropriate, strengthen the linkages between the informal and formal sectors; (118i)

Provide equal access to basic education and increased relevance and quality education, paying special attention to people living in poverty and to youth living in rural areas and addressing constraints created by distance, lack of educational facilities and social or economic barriers; (120c, 120d)

Utilizing both formal and non-formal educational and training activities and programmes, promote—in partnership with youth—employment programmes and vocational skills development that enhance youth's capacity to participate fully in the social, economic and political processes of human settlements; (120e)

Encourage and support local heritage and cultural institutions, associations and communities in their conservation and rehabilitation efforts and inculcate in children and youth an adequate sense of their heritage; (120g, 153c)

Implement programmes that encourage the use, especially by children, youth and educational institutions, of public libraries and communication networks; (191d)

Data and research

The well-being of children is a critical indicator of a healthy society. 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; (51)

Adequate research to assess how and to what extent women and children are particularly susceptible or exposed to environmental degradation, disasters and hazards, including, as necessary, research and data collection on specific groups of women and children, particularly women with low incomes, indigenous women and women belonging to minorities; (136c, 171)

Promote the free flow of, and access to, information in the areas of public policy, decision-making, resource allocation and social development that have an impact on women and children in particular (191i)

Continue to identify and disseminate best practices, and develop and apply shelter and human settlements development indicators, including those that reflect the rights and well-being of children; (241)

International Norms related to Youth and Children

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)**;
- UNGA, [Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons](#), A/res/3447, (1975)†;
- UNGA, [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), A/Res/44/25, (1989)**;
- [World Conference on Education for All](#), Jomtien (Thailand), 5–9 March 1990:
 - [World Declaration on Education for All](#)†

- [Framework for Action to Meet the Basic Learning Needs](#)[†]
- [World Summit for Children](#), New York (USA), 29–30 September 1990:
 - [Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children](#)[†]
 - [Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration](#)[†]
- [International Conference on Population and Development](#), Cairo (Egypt), 5–13 September 1994:
 - [Programme of Action](#)[†]

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.

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

- CESCR, [General Comment No. 13](#) on the right to education, (1999)**;
- UNGA, [Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children](#), A/RES/55/25, (2000)*;
- UNGA, [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography](#), A/RES/54/263, (2000)**;
- UNGA, [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts](#), A/RES/54/263, (2000)**;
- UNGA, [United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto](#), A/Res/55/25, (2000)**;
- Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), [General Comment No. 1](#) on the aims of education, (2001)**;
- High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Economic and Social Council, [Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking](#), E/2002/68/Add.1 (2002)[†];
- CRC, [General Comment No. 4](#) on adolescent health and development in the context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2003**;
- CRC, [General Comment No. 5](#) on general measures of Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, (2003)**;
- CRC, [General Comment No. 6](#) on the treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin, (2005)**;
- CRC, [General Comment No. 7](#) on implementing child rights in early childhood, (2005)**;
- CRC, [General Comment No. 9](#) on the rights of children with disabilities, (2006)**;
- CRC, [General Comment No. 10](#) on Children’s rights in juvenile justice, (2007)**;

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

- CRC, [General Comment No. 11](#) on indigenous children and their rights under the Convention, (2009)**;
- CRC, [General Comment No. 12](#) on the right to the child to be heard, (2009)**;
- CRC, [General Comment No. 17](#) on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts, (2013)**;
- CRC, [General Comment No. 16](#) on state obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children’s rights, (2013)**;
- CRC, [General Comment No. 15](#) on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, (2013)**;
- CRC, [General Comment No. 14](#) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration, (2013)**;
- UNGA, Resolution on Rights of the Child, [S/RES/70/137](#) (2015)*;
- UNSC, Resolution on Children and Armed Conflict [S/RES/2225](#) (2015)*;

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