

Third Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Sustainable Urban Development
“Implementing the UfM Strategic Urban Action Plan”

Final Declaration

Preamble

1. We, the Ministers of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in charge of sustainable urban development and housing, met in Zagreb, Croatia on 4 May 2023. The Meeting was co-chaired by HE Mr Ahmad Maher Hamdi Taawfiq Abuelsamen, Minister of Public Works and Housing, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and by HE Ms Elisa Ferreira, Commissioner in charge of Cohesion and Reforms, European Union, in the presence of HE Mr Nasser Kamel, Secretary-General of the Union for the Mediterranean, and was being hosted by HE Mr Branko Bačić, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets of the Republic of Croatia.

Recalling key framework documents guiding strategic actions in the Euro-Mediterranean region which are more than ever of importance to increase the resilience of sustainable urban development given the multiple and complex and interconnected crises and global challenges, including climate change, we are facing together:

2. The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and especially Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities, SDG 17 on Partnerships for the goals, as well as the UN New Urban Agenda, adopted in 2016 during the Habitat III conference.
3. The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean of 1995 (the Barcelona Convention), as well as the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development adopted in 2005.
4. The Arab Strategy for Housing and Sustainable Urban Development 2030 adopted on the 30th Arab Council for Housing and Construction held in 2013, which is considered to be a framework for joint Arab action in housing and sustainable urban development. Consideration should be given as well to the Agenda 2063 of the African Union.
5. On the 24 November 2022, the League of Arab States and UN-Habitat signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to advance existing relations and focus on the localisation of the Arab Strategy for Housing and Sustainable Urban Development 2030 and the New Urban Agenda.
6. The recommendations and the way forward as expressed in the SURGe (Sustainable Urban Resilience for the next Generation) Initiative, which was launched on 17 November 2022 during the Ministerial Meeting on Urbanization & Climate Change Conference of Parties, held in Sharm el-Sheikh under the Egyptian Presidency of COP27 which adopted the Motto "COP for Implementation". The ministerial meeting was focusing on housing, urban development and multilevel action related to climate change. It has also reinforced the commitment to the Paris Agreement and called for acceleration of climate change mitigation, adaptation, and finance.
7. The recommendations of the 7th Arab Housing Conference of December 2022 (New Administrative Capital, Egypt) which asserts the commitment of all Arab countries to achieve Sustainable Development Goals, promote Arab urbanisation amid technological developments along with the economic, social and environmental changes taking place around the world, and explore future prospects through proactive visions to establish resilient cities by way of planning smart sustainable urban communities capable of improving the quality of life for the Arab citizen.

8. The Urban Agenda for the EU and its framework documents including the 2016 Pact of Amsterdam, and the 2021 Ljubljana Agreement and its Multiannual Working Programme which initiated the new phase of the Urban Agenda for the EU.
9. The 2020 New Leipzig Charter, as an overarching strategic framework document for integrated sustainable urban development in pursuit of the common good in the European Union, and of broader international reference in the post-Covid-19 context.
10. The European Green Deal, and its external dimension, setting up a blueprint to achieve climate neutrality in the European Union by 2050 while boosting green, sustainable and inclusive growth for resilient societies; together with the New European Bauhaus as a movement to facilitate and steer the transformation of our societies.

Building on:

11. The **first UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Urban Development** of November 2011 (Strasbourg, France), which established cooperation on sustainable urban development as a means of developing a genuine urban dimension within the UfM.
12. The **second UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Urban Development** of May 2017 (Cairo, Egypt) which set out the UfM Urban Agenda, which brings to bear climate resilience, environmental sustainability, economic and human development, and spatial structure on a regional level by connecting national urban policies with key international agreements and policy frameworks.

Considering global objectives for accelerating sustainable development and in particular:

13. The call of the UN Secretary-General, in September 2019, for a “**Decade of Action**” for achieving the SDGs, marking a new sense of urgency.
14. Upcoming international gatherings reviewing the implementation of sustainable urban development guided by the 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals and UN New Urban Agenda, in particular the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July 2023, and the **World Urban Forum (WUF 12)**, which will take place in 2024 in the Mediterranean region (Cairo, Egypt).
15. Several UfM Member States presented their key efforts to implement the New Urban Agenda at the occasion of the **UN High Level Meeting on the Implementation of the UN New Urban Agenda (2022)**. The EU and its Member States renewed the three voluntary commitments made at the Habitat III conference and announced three new voluntary commitments, notably enhancing support to external cooperation and international partnerships within the framework of the Global Gateway and the external dimension of the European Green Deal.
16. The results of the **Mediterranean Assessment Report** drafted by Mediterranean Experts on Climate and Environmental Change (MedECC), identifying the Mediterranean region as one of the most severely hit by the effects of climate change globally, and the urgent need for action.

Affirming

17. That urban development should be focused on the “common good” for improving quality of life as well as and economic, social and territorial cohesion for all; it should be considered an opportunity to promote sustainable growth and social innovation by following an integrated, multi-level governance, and place-based approach responding to local challenges and framework conditions.
18. Our strong and ambitious engagement to boost sustainable, resilient, safe and integrated urban development, and our conviction of **the necessity to deploy and monitor our urban**

cooperation by accelerating our efforts to implement the UfM Strategic Action Plan as part of our commitment to achieving the SDGs, particularly through the UN New Urban Agenda.

19. **We will carry out these transformative and structural changes while considering the profound modifications several interrelated crises have brought** to our economies, policies and mindsets, as well as the implication of different levels of governance in carrying out measures, policies and initiatives.

We, Ministers:

20. **Welcome** the progress achieved under the UfM umbrella since the last UfM Ministerial Meeting on Sustainable Urban Development to implement the 2017 ministerial mandate, including the delivery of the UfM Strategic Urban Development Action Plan 2040 and its Housing Action Plan.
21. **Underline and share** the fundamental need for establishing a more integrated, coordinated and multi-level governance approach in the Euro-Mediterranean countries with regard to policies, legislation and investments with a potential impact on urban areas, and hereby endeavour to strive for regional and social cohesion by reducing socio-economic inequality experienced in urban areas and regions around the Mediterranean.
22. **Support, encourage and call for the mobilisation of all concerned actors** to prompt the deployment and implementation of UfM Strategic Urban Development Action Plan, including its Housing Action Plan, within human-centric and holistic approaches for cities of all sizes thus offering a strong operational framework for activating the necessary urban transitions in the region.
23. **Consider** these documents and their common principles will bring ownership on the ground to unlock the potential of cities as they provide strategic and sound guidance and long term vision for further action and support to be provided to climate action, enhanced prosperity, safety, spatial equity and justice, sustainable land use, better regulation and good governance, heritage-led development and improved living standards in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

In light of the work accomplished and further support needed to uphold and accelerate sustainable and integrated urban development, Ministers:

24. **Welcome** the work of the UfM Regional Platform on Sustainable Urban Development, which facilitated knowledge and experience sharing through peer-learning and dissemination of information about relevant programmes and initiatives to advance on the common regional priorities.
25. **Welcome** the dialogue on sustainable urban development in port city transformation to enhance the collaboration between public authorities in finding the optimal balance between economic development and the management of its externalities.
26. **Appreciate** the successful organisation of meetings and provision of tools to address common challenges such as energy efficiency in buildings, urban regeneration, the valuation and dissemination of vernacular architecture and traditional building materials, land and urban legal instruments necessary to meet the challenges of sustainability and resilience, and work on the consideration on health through urban planning. Existing instruments and EU programmes, such as TAIEX, have been successful for supporting knowledge exchange between public administrations and could continue to support this work in the future.
27. **Encourage** the work of the Regional Platform in supporting countries in the production of urban data, better measuring and accurate monitoring of SDGs, including at local level. Through the support of the European Commission Joint Research Centre, the use of the Degree

of Urbanisation to define cities, towns and rural areas for international comparisons was promoted, as the global methodology endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission. It strengthens evidence based urban development policies as well as links with other EU programmes and entities such as the Copernicus programme or the European Environment Agency.

28. **Acknowledge** the work of the UfM-IFIs (International Financing Institutions) Urban Project Committee in raising awareness about sustainable financing in coordination with IFIs, international development cooperation agencies and donors.
29. **Salute** the first two phases of the Urban Project Financing Initiative (UPFI) lead by the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and the European Investment Bank (EIB) with the UfM as a partner. Throughout these years the UPFI has supported project promoters in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean regions as well as in the Western Balkans, assisting them in preparing and financing exemplary urban development projects.
30. **Support the work done and further encourage actions** on improving the engagement of local authorities, stakeholders and citizens in the design of urban policies and projects including the cooperation with the Shiraka Programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, or the collaboration with regional networks of local authorities such as MEDCities.
31. **Recognise** the support offered to create a network of Schools of Architecture and Urban planning of the region to set in motion the process of review, updating and convergence of curriculums of those Schools. This process aims at enhancing skills development in higher education, while facilitating youth employment, and promoting links between academia, students of architecture and decision makers in the region.

Ministers wish to express their joint understanding of resilient, safe and sustainable urban development in the Euro-Mediterranean region and direct their commitment and support to accelerating the implementation of the corresponding place-based UfM Action Plan. In this respect, Ministers:

32. **Strongly support** the acceleration of the delivery of the UN New Urban Agenda through the implementation of the UfM Strategic Action Plan on Urban development, and UfM Urban Agenda' strategic, long-term, and shared vision.
33. **Mandate** the UfM Regional Platform on Sustainable Urban Development to focus on the effective implementation and monitoring of the UfM Urban Agenda, through the UfM Strategic Urban Development Action Plan 2040. This will include setting up indicators for monitoring and reporting on the progress achieved in consultation with all relevant parties. Indeed, delivery of effective strategic responses is more than ever needed as we are globally re-thinking a post-Covid-19 city.
34. **Call on** continuing with further vigour regional dialogue and partnerships, linking up and cooperating with the relevant regional and international organisations such as the UN's relevant agencies, the European Union, and other related bodies.
35. **Encourage** the active engagement of the relevant national and local authorities, as well as partners, organisations, agencies and stakeholders to collaborate with the UfM, in achieving its objectives to promote sustainable and integrated urban development, taking into account the realities and complexities of territorial development at ground level.
36. **Call on** the UfM to continue to promote projects that could be showcased as best practices under the UfM Strategic Urban Action Plan, and assessed by financial institutions as politically viable and fiscally bankable throughout project life-cycles.

37. **Emphasise** the consideration for urban-rural linkages as a key principle to create balanced territorial development and benefit from synergies, as well as from their various assets and capacities in order to tackle global challenges, as may be applicable.
38. **Call on** the UfM to address the issue of urban and peri-urban infrastructure that support cross-border integration around the region for infrastructure interoperability and better connectivity, including in the framework of the Global Gateway initiative and better resilience in case of natural disasters.
39. **Call on** the UfM Regional Platform to promote citizen engagement and co-creation as well as bottom-up approaches in the drafting and designing of projects and policies, while considering gender related challenges, accessibility in cities taking into account the rights of people with disabilities, and to:
- continue identifying strategies to improve urban health by promoting better planning, providing local communities with social spaces and services, climate action, ensuring the sustainability of natural resources, and nature-based solutions.
 - advancing in the comparison of land management instruments for regulating coastal zones to promote the adoption of more effective urban policy and urban legal-regulatory instruments in the face of climate emergency.
 - encouraging joint work on sustainable urban development in port city transformation and port-city cooperation.
 - addressing the promotion of public policies and programmes to tackle affordable housing including the set-up of Housing National Housing Agencies and Housing Observatories; such observatories notably contribute to providing monitoring tools on the multi-faceted housing conditions, to come up with accurate insights on the critical issues related to the housing phenomenon, offering meaningful dashboards for devising effective housing policies.
 - boosting energy efficiency in buildings through the set-up of national programmes or the improvement of legislation.
 - promoting the valuation and dissemination of vernacular architecture and traditional building materials as a means to increase cultural embeddedness and climate adaption solutions, promoting innovative processes as well as heritage conservation-based strategies as part of the sustainable urban development, taking into account the quality assessment checklist from the European Commission report entitled '*Towards a shared culture of architecture: investing in a high-quality living environment for everyone (2021)*'.
 - promoting interventions taking into account interplays between quality of living and related cross-cutting issues, taking into account the 'Do Not Significant Harm' (DNSH) principle relating to the environment, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the building or renewal of assets framed to meet public needs.
 - encouraging stakeholders to strengthening efforts in developing comparable data to support evidence-based policies and investments and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at regional level, taking into account that comparable and reliable statistics are key to efficiency and positive impact of the work on urbanisation in the Mediterranean.
40. **Call on** working together to increase the safety of the citizens and the resilience of cities in the face of natural and man-made disasters.
41. **Welcome** the deployment of resources to support UfM Member States in applying the global definition of cities called "Degree of Urbanisation", including with trainings and

methodological resources provided by the relevant European and international institutions and agencies.

42. **Call** on strengthening links between Schools of Architecture and Urban planning and decision makers in the region.

Agree

43. To re-convene before the end of the Decade of Action to review the progress on the implementation of the UfM Urban Agenda. A progress report should be submitted by the UfM Secretary General to support this review.
44. To continue ensuring strong multilateral cooperation and alliances, as well as maintain our ambitions and commitments towards global goals, especially as they are very much interlinked with the development and transformations of urban areas.

Express

45. Our gratitude to the Government of Croatia for hosting the Third UfM Ministerial Conference on Sustainable Urban Development.