

# **BUILDING ON SOLID GROUND**

## **THE RELEVANCE OF THE HOUSING AND URBAN RENEWAL SECTOR IN THE EU-AFRICA PARTNERSHIP**

**A Policy Brief**

**by Habitat for Humanity International/EMEA**



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## 1. A brief guide to the current context of the Africa-EU relationship

The period 2020/2021 is pivotal to redefine Africa-EU relations, a partnership that has been reinforced in recent decades. Throughout the different phases of this alliance, the need for enhanced cooperation and coherence has been increasingly recognised and aid has been gradually dropped as a primary objective. The need to deepen the relationship with Africa has also been high on the EU agenda, as stated in the 2019–2024 EU political guidelines ‘A Union That Strives for More’.

Africa remains the only region in the world with a rapidly increasing demography and labour force; but the continued fragilities of the continent impose challenges to collecting the so-called “demographic dividend,” that is to say, to drive sustainable economic growth through changes in the population’s age structure, and ensuring inclusive and sustainable development. Investing in effective solutions to overcome such hurdles will require structured dialogue between the EU and African states and a new model for cooperation based on equality and respect.

Revitalizing EU cooperation with the continent will be operationalised through two crucial parallel partnerships. By the end of 2020, the EU and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS, or ACP countries) have agreed on a wide-ranging 20-year partnership deal to succeed the Cotonou Agreement. Cooperation between the EU and the 79 ACP countries has been relying on one of the most comprehensive frameworks that the EU has ever engaged in, and the new realities justify the need to modernize this model. The new Partnership Agreement will include a common foundation, setting out values and principles of the partnership, and three targeted action-oriented regional protocols for each region.

Simultaneously, the EU and African Union Commission (AUC) are also discussing how to take their partnership to a new level, through intensifying cooperation around major priorities of shared interest. The 6th AU-EU Summit was expected to take place in 2020, but the constraints brought by the COVID-19 pandemic led to its postponement to 2021. This delay allows deepening the discussion on the best ways to ensure that a new partnership model effectively serves joint priorities. The main areas for this pancontinental cooperation identified by the EU are: i) green transition and energy access; ii) digital transformation; iii) sustainable growth and jobs; iv) peace and governance; and v) migration and mobility<sup>1</sup>. To advance this common vision, four joint Africa-Europe Sectoral Task Forces were set up in 2018 and a new Africa-Europe Foundation was created by the end of 2020, with five Strategy Groups dedicated to health, digital economy, rural Africa, sustainable energy and transport<sup>2</sup>.

EU’s proposal for a new strategy with Africa, through collaboration with the AUC, suggests a larger focus on large-scale, infrastructure investment. Regional integration remains a central element of cooperation between the EU and Africa and for African countries themselves. In its dialogue with the EU, the AUC has confirmed that it will first concentrate on a fewer number of priorities that may have continental impact, rather than the full-fledged Vision 2063 Agenda<sup>3</sup>. In this context, the EU has already confirmed continuous support to the new

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, March 9, 2020. “*Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa*”. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=158375318333&uri=JOIN%3A2020%3A4%3AFIN>.

<sup>2</sup> Supported by the European Commission, the Foundation was established by Friends of Europe and the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, in partnership with ONE and the Africa Climate Foundation. More information can be found here: [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/news/new-africa-europe-foundation-and-five-strategy-groups-launched-enhance-common-vision\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/news/new-africa-europe-foundation-and-five-strategy-groups-launched-enhance-common-vision_en).

<sup>3</sup> Adopted in 2015, Vision 2063 is the African strategic framework that aims at transforming the continent into the global powerhouse of the future: <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview>

phase of the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), as an opportunity to build back better<sup>4</sup>.

EU suggested priorities with Africa were already reflected in the new Consensus on Development (2017)<sup>5</sup>, a strategic blueprint outlining a shared vision for action in development cooperation for the EU and its Member States. The Consensus recognises that EU assistance will be significantly allocated in Africa, where the need is greatest given the concentration of fragile and Least Developed Countries. This illustrates that, even where there is willingness to set greater political, economic and investment prospects between Europe and Africa, development cooperation will remain key for this international partnership.

As the African Union, African countries and the EU seek to work out a new partnership model, there are several open questions about the future of EU development cooperation, including for supporting resources that are currently under review.

So far, it has been difficult to move beyond rhetoric and ensure that Africa-EU partnerships deliver on the principles of development effectiveness. Because the five priorities identified for the new partnership with Africa mirror the internal EU agenda, there is a risk that EU development cooperation becomes mainly EU interest-driven, questioning the principles of ownership and alignment. Also, as the EU strives to move as a unique voice, bilateral interests still represent a constraint to cohesion in development cooperation and Africa issues.

This already complex exercise will be further hampered by the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which may cause the first recession in 25 years in Africa<sup>6</sup>. African countries are expected to be among the worst hit by this crisis due to structural gaps that undermine the continent's resilience. According to recent research, the pandemic could obliterate a decade of continuous growth and human capital improvement, resulting in up to 43 million people falling into extreme poverty<sup>7</sup>.

It is therefore sensible that the EU will mainstream COVID-19 response into its International Partnerships, including with Africa. But what this entails in terms of strategy and operationalization remains unclear. The so-called "Team Europe," a collaboration between the EU, its Member States and International Financial Institutions, has committed to support partner countries' recovery in the short and long term. But it remains to be seen how this collaborative approach will translate into transparent and clear mechanisms for development partners to deliver on, against current bilateral interests.

Additionally, given the economic fallout from the pandemic and possible global shrinking budgets, it will be essential to safeguard political priority and investments in those areas that bring multiplier effects. The current setting has the potential to turn the recovery into an opportunity to do things right, by grounding the new Partnerships on a 'policy first' approach, guided by development needs, the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this context, it will be key that the Parties commit to creating solutions with positive ripple effects that have real impact for both continents.

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<sup>4</sup> For an overview of how PIDA is evolving, please consult: Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), 2021. "PIDA Progress Report 2019/2020". <https://www.au-pida.org/download/pida-progress-report-2019-2020/>.

<sup>5</sup> European Parliament Council, European Commission, 2017. "The New European Consensus on Development." June 30 2017. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:2017:210:FULL&from=EN>.

<sup>6</sup> Zeufack, Albert G.; Calderon, Cesar; Kambou, Gerard; Kubota, Megumi; Cantu Canales, Catalina; Korman, Vijdan. 2020. Africa's Pulse, No. 22, October 2020: An Analysis of Issues Shaping Africa's Economic Future. World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/34587>. License: CC BY 3.0 IGO

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

## 2. Why the housing and urban renewal sector matter

The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated that access to adequate housing is the front-line of defence against the virus. ‘Stay home, save lives’ became a global mantra to fight COVID-19. While for many this meant adapting routines and mindsets, which can be an effort in itself, many low-income and vulnerable families already suffering from housing poverty saw their vulnerabilities substantially worsened in the face of this global crisis.

Urban areas, including in Africa, rapidly became the epicentre of the pandemic with a vast concentration of confirmed COVID-19 cases. Those living in slums and informal settlements were disproportionately affected and faced increased challenges in accessing healthcare services. Businesses are still facing drastic reductions, leading to a drop of employment and a diversion of labour into informal markets, where contact with the virus can be higher.

While the global housing crisis is not new, there is now an opportunity to place the housing and urban renewal sector at the centre of social and economic recovery. Inclusive housing strategies can have multiplier effects on inclusive economic growth, by providing safety and security while generating employment and consumption.<sup>8</sup> While forging a new partnership, EU and Africa now have an opportunity to rethink and reinvest in this sector as a central piece to the post-pandemic efforts, not just to rebuild, but to build back better.

Furthermore, the centrality of adequate housing contributes to and derives from a continuous fast-paced urbanization. By 2050, the world’s urban population is expected to almost double by an additional 2.5 billion people<sup>9</sup>, confirming urbanization as one of the century’s most transformative trends<sup>10</sup>. Today, urban population already represents an unprecedented rate of 55% of the world population<sup>11</sup>. Urban sprawl has become a global phenomenon, as prohibitive land and housing costs result in people living in the urban periphery. Housing in informal settlements is often poorly constructed and overcrowded, with lack of infrastructure and basic services creating increased vulnerability for residents. Other unintended consequences include ecological degradation and increased exposure to environmental threats, worsened by the absence of waste and sewage management. Conversely, if well planned, cities can be powerful catalysts for economic growth, socio-economic development and environmental sustainability.

Despite existing progress in improving informal settings, many countries continue to be ill-equipped and unable to address the housing crisis: following a positive decline of urban population living in slums, from 28% in 2000 to 23% in 2014, this trend has been recently reversed (23.5% in 2018). Current estimates point to over 1 billion vulnerable people living in slums or informal settlements worldwide<sup>12</sup>.

This is also a specific challenge to the African continent. The African urban population increased more than 10 times in six decades<sup>13</sup>. In 2019, almost half (47) % of this population

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<sup>8</sup> Habitat for Humanity International, 2020. “Cornerstone of Recovery. How housing can help emerging market economies rebound from COVID-19”. [https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/Cornerstone-of-Recovery\\_Oct2020.pdf](https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/Cornerstone-of-Recovery_Oct2020.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019. “World Urbanization Prospects, 2018”. <https://population.un.org/wup/Publications/Files/WUP2018-Highlights.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, 2016. “New Urban Agenda”. Point 2. <https://www.habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda>

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019. “World Urbanization Prospects, 2018”. <https://population.un.org/wup/Publications/Files/WUP2018-Highlights.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/goal-11/>.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Habitat, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, United Cities and Local Governments, United Nations Capital Development Fund, Shelter Afrique, 2020. “COVID-19 in African Cities – Impacts, Responses and Policies Recommendations”. [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/06/covid-19\\_in\\_african\\_cities\\_impacts\\_responses\\_and\\_policies2.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/06/covid-19_in_african_cities_impacts_responses_and_policies2.pdf).

lived in slums or informal settlements. These trends in urbanization and population growth in Africa are expected to continue generating increased demand for adequate housing.

Moreover, housing is a key component of the right to an adequate standard of living. This has been enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, among others<sup>14</sup>. Increasingly perceived as a commodity, adequate housing is not just having a roof over one's head: it is about enjoying the right to live in safety, stability and dignity in a decent home.

Lack of access to adequate and affordable housing<sup>15</sup> hampers the enjoyment of economic, social and political rights. Without proof of residency, a person may not be able to explore livelihood possibilities, education opportunities, political participation or access health benefits; if evicted, homeless people may have to relocate to regions scarce of employment opportunities. Inadequate or lack of housing also has serious ramifications on the right to health. Features of inadequate housing that contribute to disease prevalence include lack of safe drinking water, sanitation and hand washing facilities, ineffective waste disposal, exposure to disease vectors and inadequate food storage. Lack of housing and overcrowding also contribute to respiratory infections, in addition to damp, cold, and mouldy housing. Access to adequate and affordable housing may, conversely, lead to investment in improvements in water and sanitation, garbage disposal or air conditions, among others, all of which contribute to improved health. Homeownership has positive implications on mental health and distress<sup>16</sup>.

What do we mean by adequate housing:

1. Legal security of tenure
2. Affordability
3. Habitability
4. Availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure
5. Accessibility
6. Location
7. Cultural adequacy

Affordability can be constrained by the high cost of homes, lack of access to financing and undeveloped partnerships for expanding housing and government programmes in the housing sector.

Source: UN Habitat

Housing quality and stability can positively affect children's safety and health outcomes, leading to better school attendance rates and improved attentiveness in class. Affordable housing can additionally provide families with financial security, leading to improvements in housing quality and residential stability, which in turn can lead to better school outcomes.

Housing poverty can also include other key elements such as energy poverty. Furthermore, in many parts of Africa, the housing sector provides employment to millions of young people seeking employment given its low entry barrier for labourers. Plus, the location of housing can impact social capital, which can be conducive to inclusive and equal development and quality of life.

Access to adequate housing is an imperative for human development and to forge a path out of poverty. An adequate home can have transformational impact on individuals and communities: in addition to providing stability and security, families can find better health, social and economic conditions. But despite the central place of adequate housing to sustainable development, around 1.8 billion people, - almost a fourth of the world population - still lack adequate housing, while 150 million people are homeless<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Other examples include the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (article 11.1).

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/housing/toolkit/pages/righttoadequatehousingtoolkit.aspx>

<sup>16</sup> Bloze, C. & Skak, M., 2012. "Housing Tenure and Psychological Distress".

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14616718.2012.737557?scroll=top&needAccess=true&journalCode=reui20>.

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Habitat. <https://unhabitat.org/project/housing-rights>.

One of the key elements that undermines access to adequate housing is security of tenure. Land tenure represents the relationship between people and land<sup>18</sup>. Ultimately, security of tenure enables individuals to feel safe in one's own home and to control their housing environment. The lack of national land registers is a challenge that cuts across many African countries. Land grabbing is recurrent, leading to loss of financial resources and, in some cases, violence. The inadequate allocation of land that lays in the path of natural disasters, be it due to inadequate policies or lack of geotechnical assessments, also affects the enjoyment of a range of human rights, especially for the most vulnerable, and leads to financial losses.

Security of tenure is also a major challenge from a gender lens. A key contributor to the 'feminization of poverty', access to land may be considered a more relevant indicator than income: female workers still earn approximately 80% of male wages<sup>19</sup>, while only 20% of landowners globally are estimated to be female<sup>20</sup>. Security of tenure for women has the potential to put an end to economic uncertainty, enhance social position and contribute to healthier and safer environments. Research shows that when women have secure land rights, they are more able to invest in their own and that of their children's health. Moreover, this security decreases the risk of gender-based violence, both for intimate partner violence and other forms outside the household<sup>21</sup>.

Where security of tenure exists, families are more likely to invest in their home and neighbourhood improvements, leading to positive human and community development. It also creates an incentive to the promotion of land use practices that enhance the environment. Land tenure regularization has the potential to raise revenue from taxes and fees, leading in return to finance the provision of improved services. Security of tenure therefore enables environments that encourage private and public investment and enhance local governance. For more details about the transformative impact of the housing sector in Africa, please consult HFHI's Compendium of best practices for housing in Africa<sup>22</sup>.

## How the importance of housing has been recognized in global and regional agreements

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) included a specific target for slum dwellers<sup>23</sup>, and the SDGs upgraded this into a specific goal to Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (SDG 11)<sup>24</sup>. In 2016, UN Member States reinstated the importance of aligning efforts around adequate housing and sustainable urbanization through the adoption of the New Urban Agenda (NUA).

With the adoption of the 2017 Consensus on Development, the EU committed for the first time in its external cooperation to the NUA and the promotion of inclusive sustainable urban development, focusing on those most in need and living in informal settlements and slums<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Tenure policies and laws define how access to the housing environment is allocated, transferred, controlled and managed.

<sup>19</sup> International Labour Organization, 2018. "Global Wage Report 2018/19". <https://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/global-wage-report/2018/lang-en/index.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> World Economic Forum, 2017. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/women-own-less-than-20-of-the-worlds-land-its-time-to-give-them-equal-property-rights/>.

<sup>21</sup> Habitat for Humanity International, 2016. "Shelter Report 2016". <https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/shelter-report-2016.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Habitat for Humanity International, 2020. "Compendium of best practices for housing in Africa". [https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/compendium\\_best\\_cases\\_Africa.pdf](https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/compendium_best_cases_Africa.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> United Nations. MDG Ensuring environmental sustainability, Target 7D 'a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers'.

<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that many other SDGs are also relevant for the Sustainable Urban Agenda, such as SDG 1, Fighting Poverty, 5 Gender equality, 6 Clean water and sanitation, among others.

<sup>25</sup> European Parliament Council, European Commission, 2017. "The New European Consensus on Development." June 30 2017. Point 60.



This entailed improving equitable access to, inter alia, basic services and accessible, decent and affordable housing. In its Strategic Approach to Resilience in External Action, the EU also commits to create resilience particularly in rapidly growing urban areas, in line with the NUA<sup>26</sup>.

Under the Cotonou Partnership Agreement, the EU and ACP countries committed to improving 'access to safe water and adequate sanitation' and 'the availability of affordable and adequate shelter for all [...] and improving urban development'<sup>27</sup>. This commitment was done with a view to enhancing social and human development under the partnership<sup>28</sup>. In 2009, African Governments endorsed the Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa<sup>29</sup>, which became subject of cooperation under the Joint Africa-EU Strategy in 2011-2013. Under its priority area for a high standard of living, the AU Agenda 2063 also calls for speeding up actions related to access to affordable and decent housing, including housing finance and basic services<sup>30</sup>. The Agenda 2063 is a reference for EU's proposal for a new strategy with Africa.

2021 offers a "make it or break it" opportunity to bolster these existing commitments and set the stage for ensuring housing can contribute to and benefit from inclusive transformation in Africa.

### **3. Why the new Africa-EU partnerships offer the possibility to build back better**

To ensure that both the EU and Africa build back better, it is key to rely on an integrated and 'policy first' approach, steered by Africa's development needs. This will be essential to avoid overturning development gains, while investing in innovative approaches that can bring multiplier effects, such as those provided by the housing sector.

To ensure the right of every individual to access housing, namely the most vulnerable, the EU and African States can adopt measures at various levels, including legislative, policy, administrative and funding allocation. There is a dual role that governments can play, be it as providers of direct assistance or facilitators of measures for the production and improvement of housing. The new partnerships between Africa and the EU can become great outlets for this.

The new EU agreement with the OACPS should strengthen the Cotonou focus and highlight the right to housing as a priority pertaining to human development, human rights, inclusive sustainable economic growth and climate change. Given the fast-growing pace of urbanization in Africa and associated need for adequate housing, it would be important to recognise these links under the overall strategic priorities of the partnership, on top of the African protocol.

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<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:2017:210:FULL&from=EN>. In the new Consensus, the EU also commits to implementing the 2030 Agenda in line with the NUA (point 7).

<sup>26</sup> European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, July 6, 2017 "Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's external action."

[https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/Join\\_2017\\_21\\_f1\\_communication\\_from\\_commission\\_to\\_inst\\_en\\_v7\\_p1\\_916039.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/Join_2017_21_f1_communication_from_commission_to_inst_en_v7_p1_916039.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> The Cotonou Agreement, "Social and Human Development.", Part 3, Chapter 2, Section 2, Article 25. Pp 38 ff. June 22, 2010 version. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:r12101>.

<sup>28</sup> The ACP Group has also operationalised the Participatory Slum Upgrading Program, together with the EU and UN Habitat.

<sup>29</sup> Africa union, Africa Development Bank, Economic Commission for Africa, 2010. "Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa. Land Policy in Africa: A Framework to Strengthen Land Rights, Enhance Productivity and Secure Livelihoods. [https://www.uneca.org/archive/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/fq\\_on\\_land\\_policy\\_eng.pdf](https://www.uneca.org/archive/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/fq_on_land_policy_eng.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> Africa Union Commission, 2015. "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want." September 2015. Aspiration 1, Point 10. <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview>.

The new Africa-EU partnership also has the potential to reinforce the dialogue between both continents on sustainable urbanization and ensure that the different areas of action underpin inclusive transformation of the African continent. In line with its current priorities, the EU identified five key areas for this new partnership, all of which can integrate housing as a central element to bolster the necessary transformation in the continent.

### **3.1. How housing can contribute to and benefit from a Green Transition and Energy Access**

Urban areas consume over two-thirds of global energy and are responsible for around 70% of energy-related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions<sup>31</sup>. Depending on how expanding cities are designed in low and middle-income countries, where most of the demographic growth is expected to happen, these spaces will impact CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and possibly undermine endeavors to reduce them. Energy inefficient construction is among the main factors contributing to energy poverty of low-income households. Moreover, the housing sector can also be one of the largest producers of waste, in addition to also being highly extractive in terms of raw materials to the environment.

In addition to the quality of energy consumption and waste management, sustainable housing also depends on the location. How cities decide to use their land and infrastructure can either create resilience or exacerbate vulnerabilities towards shocks, such as disasters<sup>32</sup>. Climate related disasters and displacement are already affecting the need for housing and the emerging solutions that will continue to evolve.

Both Africa and the EU are undergoing a period of structural transformation towards a more sustainable economy. If the booming cities in Africa are expected to propel inclusive sustainable development, it will be critical to ensure they rely on the promotion of clean energy and sustainable use of land and resources. The role African green cities can play is already recognized in the EU's proposal for a new partnership. Investments in innovative, sustainable, and adequate housing can contribute to responsible consumption and production, while promoting a circular economy. Such investments would follow the EU's commitment to a green transition, as reflected in the European Green Deal.<sup>33</sup>

In line with this need to undergo structural transformation, the new Africa-Europe High-Level Platform on Sustainable Energy Investments report puts forward key recommendations for continental coordination. These include, among others, the launch of a capacity-building program, the enabling environment for a green transition, and improvement of energy efficiency, including in the building sector<sup>34</sup>. These initiatives are all welcome and should be used as a channel to straighten dialogue between both continents for urbanization. For example, the re-investment on the African manufacturing sector will be key to reduce costs of the green transition. This is particularly relevant considering that green buildings may translate into immediate costs for low-income families, who may not prioritize the financial and sustainable gains of the sector in the long run.

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<sup>31</sup> International Energy Agency, 2016. <https://www.iea.org/news/cities-are-at-the-frontline-of-the-energy-transition>.

<sup>32</sup> The global agreement Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction specifically calls for mainstreaming disaster risk assessments into urban planning and reinforcing prevention of human settlements in disaster risk-prone zones

<sup>33</sup> The Green Deal aims to, among others, boost the efficient use of resources through a clean and circular economy, to support the promotion of sustainable urban development strategies and to manage environmental disasters.

<sup>34</sup> Africa-Europe High Level Platform for Sustainable Energy Investments in Africa, 2020. "Scaling up energy investments in Africa for inclusive and sustainable growth. Report of the Africa-Europe High Level Platform for Sustainable Energy Investments in Africa". [https://africa-eu-partnership.org/sites/default/files/documents/11-2019\\_sei-platformreport-executivesummary\\_05.pdf](https://africa-eu-partnership.org/sites/default/files/documents/11-2019_sei-platformreport-executivesummary_05.pdf).

In addition to capacity-building for a green building sector, it will also be important to safeguard the existent local knowledge. This could be done through the support of decentralized and community-led initiatives for renewable and clean energy sources as a way to increase resilience and adaptive capacities. This approach would also enable increasing sustainable consumption and production. Moreover, it will be important to ensure that disaster prevention and preparedness is adequately integrated in urbanization plans to contribute to cities resilience.

How to build and plan green, including through the housing sector, should hence become central to a transformative Africa-EU partnership.

### **3.2. How housing can contribute to and benefit from a Digital Transformation**

A digital transformation can be instrumental to safe cities. Digital technologies are key for strong and inclusive management frameworks and accountable institutions. If a government is committed to improved good governance practices, including for regulatory standards, it is important to ensure the integrity of land administration structures at all levels. This implies the digitalization of land information management systems that ensure clear, efficient and accountable service delivery, on top of security of tenure. This is a pre-condition for the adequate application of the 'Voluntary guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure'<sup>35</sup>.

Improving access to adequate housing requires identifying how informality can be changed over time. Digitalization and the strengthening of land registry systems and land management practices is one of the core interventions that can guarantee the continuum from informal to formal households.

The New Africa-Europe Digital Economy Partnership Final report acknowledges that the growing trend to resort to eServices can revolutionize major economic and social areas, including for smart cities<sup>36</sup>. To ensure digitalization can lead to transformation, the report recommends the safeguarding of essential skills for all; improvement of access to finance and business support services to boost digitally enable entrepreneurship; and accelerated adoption of e-services and the further development of the digital economy for achieving the SDGs.

All these aspects can underpin the transformational role the housing and urban renewal sector can have. It would be important not to miss out on this opportunity. Additionally, technology innovation can spur access to adequate and affordable housing. ShelterTech<sup>37</sup>, Habitat for Humanity's leading platform for affordable housing innovation, is a great example of how digitalization can help new businesses being ahead of the game while answering to development needs. Moreover, technology offers through digitalization can support communities to mobilize and deploy resources. Examples of such approaches include digital platforms facilitating housing finance, fully digital retail banks, partnerships between digital

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<sup>35</sup> 'Voluntary guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of land, fisheries and forests in the context of national food security', an internationally negotiated document adopted in May 2012 by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) under the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO). <http://www.fao.org/nr/tenure/voluntary-guidelines/en/>.

<sup>36</sup> European Commission, African Union Commission, AU-EU Digital Economy Task Force, 2019. "New Africa-Europe Digital Economy Partnership. Accelerating the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals". <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/new-africa-europe-digital-economy-partnership-report-eu-au-digital-economy-task-force>

<sup>37</sup> Habitat for Humanity International's Terwilliger Center for Innovation in Shelter, 2020. "ShelterTech Opportunities." <https://www.habitat.org/sheltertech/opportunities>.

platforms and commercial banks or lending companies and housing finance companies embedding technology into core operations.<sup>38</sup>

### **3.3. How housing can contribute to and benefit from Sustainable Growth and Jobs**

The job creation and economic growth potential brought in by the housing sector is immense in Africa. Given the continent's demographic expansion, the booming urbanization is responsible for spurring the construction of more houses. Housing programs can generate direct and indirect local employment opportunities: it is estimated that the surge in construction brought in by African urbanization has contributed to one-third of net employment gains between 2000 and 2010<sup>39</sup>. Investing in this sector addresses the high unemployment levels in the continent while contributes to skill development, including of vulnerable communities. This is particularly relevant in the context of building green, for which a new set of skills is required. The housing sector can also generate income by using locally available solutions, like labor, materials, land and markets, and stimulate consumption spending levels and entrepreneurship.

The importance of investments in housing under this priority is already recognized in the EU strategy for a new partnership, but it will be important to ensure this is translated into concrete initiatives. The development and implementation of inclusive housing strategies can be instrumental in the EU's and Africa's response to the COVID-19 crisis. Including housing policies and investments as part of stimulus plans has the potential for economic and social welfare impact, as well as improved community health outcomes over the short and long term. For this, focus should be placed on underserved middle- and lower-income households that have the potential to increase investment in and consumption of better housing, in addition to the inclusion of both formal and informal housing markets<sup>40</sup>.

The AU Commission recognized in this context the need to coordinate with the private sector to ensure housing development can be a driver of economic growth<sup>41</sup>. Habitat for Humanity trusts that the private sector can have a positive role in securing adequate and affordable housing for all. But the role of this stakeholder in enhancing market systems must be subject to transparent and accountable rules that promote inclusiveness and increase urban populations' ownership. These rules include the Busan development effectiveness principles and the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure, among others.

The focus on young generations under this priority is also welcome. The large African youth cohort represents a historic opportunity to contribute to sustainable and inclusive progress by harvesting the demographic dividend. But this can only happen if the adequate environment is safeguarded for young people to thrive and investments are adequately placed in the multidimensions of human development. An adequate home can have transformational impact on the lives of these young people, providing stability and security. Only through the provision of quality basic services should this youth cohort be able to fully benefit from education and skills training preconized by the new Partnership.

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<sup>38</sup> For more information, please consult: FinDev Away, 2021. Article "Emerging Tech-Based Financing Models in Affordable Housing". <https://www.findevgateway.org/blog/2021/02/emerging-tech-based-financing-models-affordable-housing>.

<sup>39</sup> McKinsey Global Institute, 2010. "Lions on the move: the progress and potential of African economies. MGI Report". <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/middle-east-and-africa/lions-on-the-move>.

<sup>40</sup> Habitat for Humanity International, 2020. "Cornerstone of Recovery. How housing can help emerging market economies rebound from COVID-19". [https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/Cornerstone-of-Recovery\\_Oct2020.pdf](https://www.habitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/Cornerstone-of-Recovery_Oct2020.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2019. Article "Preparations for the 2020 Africa-France Summit take off". <https://www.africa-newsroom.com/press/preparations-for-the-2020-africafrance-summit-take-off>.

Once more, the critical issue of housing and urban renewal and its relationship with structural transformation in Africa should be accounted for under this priority.

### 3.4. How housing can contribute to and benefit from Peace, Security and Governance

By being a pre-condition of strength, stability and self-reliance, access to housing contributes to long-term socioeconomic development of people, namely the most vulnerable, and cities. Access to housing, including land tenure and slum upgrade efforts, have proven to be elements impacting social cohesion and conflict prevention<sup>42</sup>. These linkages are not new to the EU: in its Strategy for Peace and Security and Communication on Resilience<sup>43</sup>, the EU acknowledges the positive interrelation between housing, land and basic services and the key contributions to advance the SDGs and the NUA.

For the new Partnership to effectively contribute to peace, security and governance, it should have human development at its core and address the structural causes of conflict. Promoting access to adequate and affordable housing can be a preventive solution to ethnic grievances and conflicts. The protection and promotion of the right of local communities to access and control natural resources, such as land and water, with a special focus on women, should be safeguarded at all levels. Both the EU and the AUC are cognizant of this importance, as established in the new EU Gender Action Plan III for external action<sup>44</sup> and the AUC Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa (2010).

Access to adequate housing can be a pivotal component to improve public responsibility, strengthen institutions and update management systems that contribute to human rights, democracy and the rule of law. For this, it is fundamental that governments include communities in the decision-making process for adequate and affordable housing.

Under this priority, it is hence fundamental to recognise the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) as development actors in their own right. To ensure inclusive and sustainable development, these organisations should be involved in all stages of decision-making and implementation of the new Partnership. CSOs are also instrumental to the urban sector, as recent evaluations showed their positive contribution to improved access to housing<sup>45</sup>. CSOs can also be active in advancing accountability and empowering community members on the rights they are entitled to; past experiences have shown that this engagement significantly contributed to security of tenure<sup>46</sup>. For a successful partnership, future cooperation should also include specific participation mechanisms of direct dialogue with civil society<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> As HFH's experience in Papua New Guinea can illustrate: Habitat for Humanity, 2007, "Habitat Continues To Transform Lives and Communities In Papua New Guinea". <https://www.habitat.org/ap/about/newsroom/2007-04-3-Habitat-Transform-Lives-and-Communities-In-PapuaNewGuinea>.

<sup>43</sup> European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, July 6, 2017 "Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's external action." [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/Join\\_2017\\_21\\_f1\\_communication\\_from\\_commission\\_to\\_inst\\_en\\_v7\\_p1\\_916039.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/Join_2017_21_f1_communication_from_commission_to_inst_en_v7_p1_916039.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, November 25, 2020 "Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III – An Ambitious Agenda FOR Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in EU External Action". <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020JC0017>. The new Communication introduced in November 2020 includes as a thematic objective 'Increased access for women in all their diversity to financial services and products, and productive resources' under the thematic area 'Promoting economic and social rights and empowering girls and women'.

<sup>45</sup> European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2016. "Joint Staff Working Document Evaluation of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement". [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-post-cotonou\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/evaluation-post-cotonou_en.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p20

<sup>47</sup> United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, 2016. "New Urban Agenda". Point 92. <https://www.habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda>.

### 3.5. How housing can contribute to and benefit from Migration and Mobility

Internal and international migration is a common trend in Africa: African citizens living outside their country of nationality represented around 14% of migration in 2015<sup>48</sup>. The reallocation of labor resources leads to internal migration and economic transformation, which can have both advantages and disadvantages. If families cannot secure stability and self-reliance, they tend to migrate. Adequate and affordable housing, including quality basic services and land tenure security, is a pre-condition for resilience and socioeconomic development of households. The absence of such conditions may turn into root causes of migration.

Recognizing the importance of these links, the Report by the Africa-EU Task Force for Rural Africa, 'An Africa-Europe Agenda for Rural Transformation'<sup>49</sup> has recommended the new Partnership to 'Support rural governance and an innovative local action program, based on a territorial approach', with a focus on youth and gender. Such recommendation would imply support to sustainable management of land, natural resources and climate action.

The recommendation to reinforce land-tenure rules in this context is very welcome. Several African governments have successfully adopted the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land (VGGT), which constitutes a chief advance towards improved land governance. The future partnership should reinforce efforts in this front as a way of ensuring that transformation can become a reality in Africa.

Moreover, shelter and settlements are key components in responses to forced displacement. Adequate space and physical conditions are important, in addition to the location of temporary settlements and camps. Access to temporary and safe shelter, that is socially acceptable and socioeconomically viable, is another key area to consider under this priority.

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<sup>48</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016. "International Migration Report 2015". [https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2015\\_Highlights.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2015_Highlights.pdf).

<sup>49</sup> European Commission, Task Force Rural Africa, 2019. "An Africa-Europe Agenda for Rural Transformation. Report by the Task Force Rural Africa". [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/food-farming-fisheries/farming/documents/report-tfra\\_mar2019\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/food-farming-fisheries/farming/documents/report-tfra_mar2019_en.pdf).

#### 4. Key recommendations

Access to adequate housing is a human development imperative. For the renewed Africa-EU relationship to be transformative, it must rely on a policy first approach, with development needs, in line with the SDGs, steering decision-making. Given the fast-growing pace of urbanization in Africa and associated need for adequate housing, the transformational impact of the housing sector as an essential component to build back better should be recognised under both revised partnerships.

- The pandemic has shown that housing is central to public health and can also spur inclusive economic growth as part of the recovery. EU and Africa now have an opportunity to rethink and reinvest in adequate and affordable housing as a central piece to post-pandemic efforts, not just to prevent the reversal of development gains, but to build back better under both partnerships.
- Particularly, the new EU-OACPS agreement should highlight the importance of housing as it pertains to human development, human rights, inclusive sustainable economic growth and climate change. It is important to recognise these under the overall strategic priorities of the partnership, in addition to the African protocol specifically.
- The new Africa-EU partnership should reinforce the dialogue between both continents on sustainable urbanization and ensure that the EU's five priorities underpin inclusive transformation of the African continent, by recognizing the importance of the housing sector, including urban renewal and access to land, in all of them: Green transition, Digital Transformation, Sustainable Growth and Jobs, Peace, Security and Governance and Migration and Mobility.
- Inclusive strategies under both partnerships should engage communities in the decision-making process for adequate and affordable housing. This would allow safeguarding gender equality, youth empowerment and community-based action planning.
- Both partnerships should recognize the role of CSOs as a critical stakeholder to ensure communities are at the heart of designing and implementing housing programs.



## About Habitat for Humanity International

Driven by the vision that everyone needs a decent place to live, Habitat for Humanity began in 1976 as a grassroots effort on a community farm in southern Georgia. The Christian housing organization has since grown to become a leading global nonprofit working in local communities across all 50 states in the U.S., and in more than 70 countries. Families and individuals in need of a hand up partner with Habitat for Humanity to build or improve a place they can call home. Habitat homeowners help build their own homes alongside volunteers and pay an affordable mortgage. Through financial support, volunteering or adding a voice to support affordable housing, everyone can help families achieve the strength, stability and self-reliance they need to build better lives for themselves. Through shelter, we empower.

To learn more, visit [www.habitat.org/emea](http://www.habitat.org/emea).

## Habitat for Humanity in Africa

Habitat for Humanity currently has programs and partnerships in Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia

## About Build Solid Ground

Build Solid Ground is an awareness raising and citizenship engagement project funded by the European Union grant under the Development Education and Awareness Raising program. Over three years, 14 partners from seven EU countries have worked as a consortium to inform and educate young European on global development issues.

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