Framing document: Housing and local governance: civil society propositions to advance housing as an infrastructure of care

Habitat International Coalition (HIC), Isandla Institute, and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) convened a two-part dialogue on housing, climate justice and care. *The goal was to discuss and give visibility to propositions from civil society and housing movements with local and regional governments throughout the research, advocacy, and political processes leading up to the UCLG World Congress in 2026 – including the U20, GOLD VII, and Local Social Covenant, among others. Participants explored how the lenses of climate justice and care provide tools to advocate for more just and adequate housing policies and practices, thereby transcending sectoral approaches to housing and establishing connections with other political agendas.*

This document is one of two framing documents that informed the dialogues: 1) housing as an infrastructure of care, and 2) climate justice. These documents will serve as the basis for the discussions at the U20 Mayoral Summit and for further informal advocacy and mobilisation moving forward.

1. The opportunity: Housing as an infrastructure of care

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) brings together cities, local and regional governments, and municipal associations to promote and strengthen local action to achieve sustainable development. UCLG has placed care at the heart of its political mobilisation, advocacy and research efforts, including the launch of the Local Social Covenant and the flagship GOLD VII research process. Throughout 2025 and in the lead-up to the UCLG World Social Congress in 2026, UCLG and its partners are working to showcase and further advance "Economies of Equality and Care" across territories. This builds on a growing interest from the municipal movement in the care agenda, in which UCLG has played a championing role through its town halls, publications and advocacy, and research activities.

The traction that 'care' has gained within the municipalist movement presents an opportunity to advance justice-oriented agendas, as caring opens the possibility of centring public action on people and planet. In this context, habitat-related movements and civil society organisations have an opening to build an actionable strategy that highlights the importance of housing in the care agenda. Likewise, as Housing Justice has also been prioritised by UCLG as one of the pillars of its 'Local Social Covenant', there is a unique window to introduce the right to adequate housing from a justice perspective as part of the UCLG agenda.

The political momentum built around the care agenda through the GOLD VII process, as well as key political moments such as the U20 Mayoral Summit, provide a window to bring in the demands of housing movements to local and regional governments. In this context, understanding 'housing as an infrastructure of care' helps link the issues of housing with broader discussions of public services and local governance, as well as other thematic entry points such as health, finance, culture, conflict, food, social and climate justice.

2. Framing: principles of infrastructure of care

Principles for infrastructures of care

The GOLD VII Multimedia Journal defines Care as an "*approach that cuts across municipal competencies and actions. It is a lens that invites us to move from a profit- and consumption-led economy to one that centers on social needs and aspirations, and that puts at the center the* ***reparative*** *duty of the public sector towards groups and people that lie at the intersection of inequalities and exclusion*."

The care agenda, which has been built drawing on feminist approaches that put gender equality at the center, is sustained by the promotion of "infrastructures of care". These infrastructures encompass the physical, social, governance and deliberation spaces needed to collectivise efforts to advance social wellbeing and tackle territorial inequalities and injustices. By shifting the focus from individuals to systems and collective efforts of care, infrastructures of care strengthen local efforts to provide essential basic services, promote wellbeing and solidarity.

Recognising the centrality of **reparation** in this framing of care, and drawing on their existing competencies and capacities, Local and regional governments (LRGs) advance infrastructures of care by:

- Reaching **people** who have been systematically discriminated against and excluded;
- Reaching **places** that have been historically marginalised; and
- Changing **systems** to promote more sustainable and justice-oriented societies

Housing Justice

Housing Justice is an idea under construction, currently used and mobilised by several networks and organisations, including HIC, in their research, advocacy, and networking activities. This lens has been developed using as a base several resources, including: IIED's issue paper "Towards housing justice. Four propositions to transform policy and practice", as well as the Audiovisual Exchanges "Defining Housing Justice" that informed its development; and the ongoing debates and proposals developed in the context of the Hub for Housing Justice and its Provocations Series.

Its current definition includes four entry points or propositions:

- Anti-discriminatory housing policy and practice, that address the disproportionate impact of housing deprivations on particular groups and geographies, which cannot be detached from historical trajectories of oppression.
- Radically democratic forms of housing production, through policy and practice to embrace, protect, support and expand non-speculative and collective forms of housing production.
- Housing as an infrastructure for more sustainable, just and caring cities that promote climate justice, through policy and practice that promote the right to the city to flourish sustainably.
- Housing policy and practice that broaden imaginations for housing futures, through diverse responses that engage with the needs, aspirations and practices of the world's majority of today and tomorrow

3. Preliminary recommendations for LRGs to promote housing as an infrastructure of care

LRGs have increasingly recognised the role that local housing action plays as an infrastructure of care to tackle economic and territorial inequalities. Civil society mobilisations around the right to adequate housing and the social and ecological functions of housing and land have also advocated for policies and practices that advance justice-oriented and reparatory approaches to housing. Addressing housing from the lens of care transforms the delivery of public services and the design and implementation of public policy in numerous ways, including by collectivising the responsibility of ensuring the wellbeing of all, acting upon the reparatory role of public policy, centring the lived experiences of residents, and nurturing the social fabric.

The following considerations will be further explored and complemented with local experiences in the upcoming publication, "Housing as an Infrastructure of Care", produced by IIED for the GOLD VII Multimedia Journal.

<u>Local and regional governments can advance infrastructures of care by:</u>

- **Promoting anti-discriminatory housing policies and practices that address legacies of exploitation and exclusion.** LRGs can advance infrastructures of care by focusing on reaching **people** who have been systematically discriminated against and excluded. Efforts might include providing housing for particular groups across gender, age, sexual orientation, migration status, ability, etc.; securing housing for the homeless or for specific low-income populations; approving regulations that promote women's titling; promoting housing solutions for caregivers and care receivers; among others.
- **Promoting territorial equality and prioritising the socio-ecological function of housing and property.** LRGs can employ policies and programmes that reach **places** that have been historically marginalised. This includes housing interventions in marginalised neighbourhoods; housing programmes promoting adaptation in disaster-prone areas;

anti-eviction efforts; urban regeneration strategies to recover abandoned buildings for low-income groups, etc.

- **Supporting more democratic and just housing frameworks, policies and processes that shift power imbalances and structural inequalities.** LRGs can advance towards economies of equality and care by transforming **systems** that advance sustainable and just-oriented housing. Such reforms may include democratising data collection for housing processes; diversifying housing options for more diverse groups; increasing inter-sectoral approaches to housing, basic services and infrastructure; reforms to encourage the social and ecological function of land, etc.

<u>Advancing housing as an infrastructure of care at the local and regional level requires the following steps:</u>

- **Employing the care lens as a way of prioritising housing decisions**. The care lens allows for LRGs to prioritise justice-oriented, reparatory forms of housing over individualised, profit-driven mechanisms; align processes from land use planning and zoning to budgetary processes to allocate sufficient investment in care infrastructures; and establish accountability mechanisms within levels of government and between the state and people.
- **Integrate housing into broader development plans**. This can take different forms, from a city office dedicated to housing coordination, to providing housing-related input into disaster risk reduction and response plans.
- **Identify ways of supporting diverse housing providers,** notably small-scale actors providing housing for lower-income groups and non-speculative organisations that can help LRGs' efforts to reach historically marginalised people and places. LRGs can work with housing providers through the provision of legal tools, land and materials, technical assistance, or catalytic financing.
- **Invest in data-gathering that reflects the diversity of housing experiences, needs and aspirations**. Through community-led data and partnerships with civil society, academic and research actors, LRGs can help fill data gaps and nuance policies and programmes. These efforts can also help ensure policies and programmes do not remain on paper, but are effectively implemented and monitored.
- **Involve residents to ensure the legitimacy and sustainability of care approaches**. Engaging the residents in the design, implementation, and monitoring of interventions will ensure that these will be more effective in achieving collective goals and providing the necessary care to residents and ensure public support through electoral cycles.