

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Alexander Khvtisiashvili, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia**

UNECE Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management

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**Affordable, adequate, and resilient housing in liveable cities, including cities which face extreme weather conditions**

It is my great pleasure and honor to address you today at the outset of what promises to be a very fruitful gathering in discussing the new initiatives on thematic, crosscutting cooperation in the area of resilient housing. It is also an excellent opportunity for us to take stock of what has already been achieved and share our views on sustainable and affordable urbanization opportunities for our citizens.

From the onset, I should note that my Government has already embarked on a comprehensive multibillion programme of upgrading and developing housing infrastructure to increase its availability to those in need. This is particularly relevant nowadays, since COVID-19 pandemic had significant adverse social and economic effects on vulnerable groups by further exacerbating their existing housing challenges.

To this end, building infrastructure is a powerful mechanism to address the issue of a spatial disparities and homelessness thus contributing to the fulfillment of SDG goals. In this context, it is imperative to target both the “hardware”, accelerate the construction of new buildings, as well as the “software” side, which includes adoption of the relevant legislation to facilitate the process.

At the legislative level, the Georgian Law on Social Assistance regulates a number of issues related to housing policy. According to Georgian Law on Social Assistance the competencies, rights and responsibilities of the local self-government bodies include, among other things, the provision of shelter for the homeless.

It's worth emphasizing that in 2018, Government of Georgia has launched implementation of a “Housing policy documentation and strategic plan”. In accordance with the housing policy document, housing policy-working group will be set up to further elaborate legislative proposals on funding schemes for the local and central government levels.

Furthermore, the government of Georgia has introduced homeless assistance programme, such as “**Housing in the Village**” initiative, which provides homes for homeless families in depopulated areas where existing housing stock exceeds housing demand. **This is truly a win-win situation** to mitigate depopulation in villages while ensuring housing for refugees. Thus refugees can choose a house in a village and the Government of Georgia will buy it for them. By maintaining the pace of progress in this direction, country will easily reach the SDG target of providing long-term housing to 50 thousand IDP families by 2030.

There are opportunities for citizens without a shelter who own a land plot to fill an application form and in case they meet the certain assessment criterion, Government will build a housing for them.

Government implements additional policies to improve the quality of life in high mountainous regions of Georgia, which experience a severe shortage modern infrastructure. In 2015, the Law on Development of High Mountain Regions was adopted that grants special status of mountainous to more than 1700 settlements and provides tax exemptions to approximate 400 enterprises. Government rehabilitates roads, water supply and sewage systems and modernizes tourist infrastructure in these regions.

To sum-up, I would like to emphasize that Georgia is right on track to achieve its SDG targets, including the Goal: 11 *to ensure access to the affordable, adequate and resilient housing for its citizens.*

Thank you.