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Summary of the Twelfth Session of the World Urban Forum: 4-8 November 2024 Cairo, Egypt

Access to adequate housing is a human right; yet almost three billion people worldwide face housing inadequacy, and 1.1 billion still live in slums and informal settlements. These figures, cited in the Cairo Call to Action, were front of mind throughout the week of events at the 12th World Urban Forum (WUF12), as participants addressed the housing crisis on different fronts: managing the impacts of displacement due to war and conflict; promoting social cohesion and inclusivity through urban planning and design; and addressing environmental sustainability concerns, including through waste management and circular economy approaches.

WUF12 was the largest in the Forum’s history, with participants at the venue and online totaling more than 63,000 people from 182 countries and more than 700 partner-led events. The Forum also marked a return to the African continent after 20 years. The opening ceremony featured four heads of state, from Yemen, Sudan, the State of Palestine, and the host country Egypt. Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, President of Egypt, noted that WUF12 comes at a time of crises and wars, and called for halting the destruction of settlements, supporting poor communities, and developing new projects to provide housing for all.

The Forum took place between two major global events: the UN General Assembly’s adoption of the high-level [Pact for the Future](#) in September 2024, and the forthcoming UN Climate Change Conference in Baku, Azerbaijan, which is expected to adopt a new collective quantified goal for climate finance (NCQG). WUF12 was, therefore, an opportunity to lend momentum and solidify key global commitments for sustainable development.

WUF12 events took place in dialogues and other high-level events, “special sessions” that included panel discussions, live performances and audience participation, roundtables of WUF’s partner constituencies, and “One UN” events sharing stories of successful UN agency projects. The Urban Expo, a showcase of many urban initiatives from around the world, ran throughout the week, alongside the meetings. Visitors to the Expo booths were able to view sculptures and fashion items made from recycled materials, a life-size display apartment and photos depicting

public housing, and children’s drawings expressing hope for the future. UN-Habitat also launched its flagship [World Cities Report 2024](#) during the Forum.

As discussions progressed during the week, panelists and participants highlighted many factors influencing the housing crisis, including rising land costs, wars and conflicts, and the impacts of climate change. Panelists and participants focused especially on the human costs involved, and how people can be at the center of any changes for the better.

Many examples of action were shared and promoted during the Forum. At the Government of Egypt’s special session on financing, for example, speakers highlighted Egypt’s economic reforms to improve the investment climate. They cited the country’s [Decent Life Initiative](#) for developing rural infrastructure, including, for example, loans to young people and women for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and services for industrial sites in rural areas.

By the end of the conference, several themes emerged. Speaking at a closing press conference, Anacláudia Rossbach, Executive Director, UN Human Settlements Programme

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Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine, **Abdel Fattah El-Sisi**, President of Egypt, and **Anacláudia Rossbach**, Executive Director of UN-Habitat

(UNHabitat), highlighted: urgency to manage the housing crisis; the need for financing to achieve better urban planning, land use, and sustainability; the value of sharing and learning from existing practices to accelerate action; and the power of partnerships.

Summing up the possibilities for housing and urban renewal worldwide, a quote from street art in the Bronx, New York, was cited in one of the sessions: “You don’t have to move out of your neighborhood to live in a better one.”

Daily reports of the WUF12 events can be found here: <https://enb.iisd.org/world-urban-forum-wuf12>

A Brief History of the World Urban Forum

UN-Habitat organizes and runs the WUF every second year as the world’s leading gathering on urban issues. Each session of the Forum focuses on the objectives of:

- raising awareness of sustainable urbanization among stakeholders and constituencies, including the general public;
- improving the collective knowledge of sustainable urban development through inclusive and open debates, sharing lessons learned, and exchanging best practices and good policies; and
- increasing coordination and cooperation between different stakeholders and constituencies for the advancement and implementation of sustainable urbanization.

Origin of the Process

In 1976, the first UN Conference on Human Settlements adopted the Vancouver Declaration, which officially established the UN Centre for Human Settlements as the major UN agency mandated by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) to pursue the

goal of providing adequate shelter for all. In December 2001, UNGA adopted Resolution 56/206 transforming the UN Centre for Human Settlements the UN Human Settlements Programme or UN-Habitat, with its own Governing Council and Secretariat.

In the same resolution, UNGA established the WUF as a “non-legislative technical forum in which experts can exchange views in the years when the UN-Habitat Governing Council does not meet.” The UN-Habitat Governing Council was the intergovernmental decision-making body for UN-Habitat, comprising its members who are elected to four-year terms by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

On 20 December 2018, UNGA decided to dissolve the Governing Council and to replace it with a UN-Habitat Assembly, a universal body composed of the 193 member states of the UN and convenes every four years.

The WUF provides opportunities for debate and discussion about the challenges of urbanization and operates as an open-ended think tank. The WUF aims to further advance the outcomes of several UN conferences on sustainable development, including the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and the associated [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), and the [New Urban Agenda](#) (NUA) that was adopted at the Habitat III conference in Ecuador in 2016.

Key Turning Points and Linkages with Other Processes

The UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED): UNCED, also known as the Earth Summit, took place from 3-14 June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The principal outputs of UNCED were the [Rio Declaration on Environment and Development](#), [Agenda 21](#) (a 40-chapter programme of action),



The flags of Egypt and the UN are raised at the beginning of WUF-12.

and the Statement of Forest Principles. Agenda 21 acknowledged rapid urbanization, noting the increase in the size and number of cities, “call[ing] for greater attention to issues of local government and municipal management,” and highlighting that if cities are properly managed, they can “develop the capacity to sustain their productivity, improve the living conditions of their residents, and manage natural resources in a sustainable way.”

World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD):

The WSSD, marking ten years since UNCED, took place in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 26 August to 4 September 2002. The conference reviewed progress achieved towards UNCED commitments and adopted the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, which, among other actions, called for achieving a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020. It also urged action at all levels to: improve access to land and property and provide adequate shelter and basic services for the urban and rural poor; increase decent employment, credit, and income; remove unnecessary regulation and other obstacles for microenterprises and the informal sector; and support slum upgrading programmes within urban development plans.

UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20):

The third and final meeting of the Preparatory Committee for Rio+20, pre-conference informal consultations, and Rio+20 convened back-to-back in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 13-22 June 2012. During those ten days, government delegations concluded negotiations on the Rio outcome document, [The Future We Want](#), and held an Urban Summit that involved roundtables on, *inter alia*, multi-level governance and how cities across the world can learn from each other. Governments also agreed to launch a process to develop a set of SDGs, and establish a High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) to follow up on implementation of sustainable development.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: In September 2015, the UN Sustainable Development Summit adopted [Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), a package that included 17 SDGs, 169 targets, and a framework for follow-up and review of implementation.

SDG 11 calls on countries to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable,” with specific targets on, among other issues:

- access for all to adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services and upgrading slums;
- sustainable transport systems for all;
- sustainable urbanization;
- reducing deaths and economic losses caused by disasters;
- reducing the per capita environmental impact; and
- universal access to urban green spaces.

High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

(HLPF): The HLPF was established by the 67th session of UNGA (resolution 67/290) on 9 July 2013 to provide political leadership, guidance, and recommendations for sustainable development. The HLPF has a system of Voluntary National Reviews in which countries present their progress towards the SDGs. SDG 11 on sustainable cities was reviewed at the HLPF in 2018.

UN-Habitat Conferences: UN-Habitat conferences take place every 20 years to set broad policy directions to manage the impacts of rapid urbanization. UNGA convened Habitat I in Vancouver, Canada, in 1976. The conference recognized that shelter and urbanization are global issues to be addressed collectively and created the UN Centre for Human Settlements.

Habitat II convened from 3-14 June 1996 in Istanbul, Türkiye. The Habitat Agenda and the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements, adopted by 171 governments during the Conference, outlined more than 100 commitments and strategies to address shelter and sustainable human settlements, emphasizing the themes of partnership and local action. The Habitat Agenda set the twin goals of achieving adequate shelter for all and the sustainable development of human settlements. The Conference also reaffirmed its commitment to the full and progressive realization of the right to adequate housing.

Habitat III, which took place from 17-20 October 2016 in Quito, Ecuador, adopted the NUA, a global, non-binding agenda for making cities safe, sustainable, and resilient. Habitat III also proposed to hold the fourth UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat IV) in 2036.



New Urban Agenda: The NUA, adopted at Habitat III, aligns with many of the SDGs, including SDG 11 on making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. In preambular text, the NUA sets out aims to end poverty and hunger (SDGs 1 and 2), reduce inequalities (SDG 10), promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth (SDG 8), achieve gender equality (SDG 5), improve human health and wellbeing (SDG 4), foster resilience (SDGs 11 and 13), and protect the environment (SDGs 6, 9, 13, 14, and 15). The Agenda promotes a vision for cities that is grounded in human rights and recognizes the need to give particular attention to addressing multiple forms of discrimination, including discrimination against people in slum settlements, homeless people, internally displaced persons, and migrants, regardless of their migration status.

The [Quito Implementation Plan for the New Urban Agenda](#) comprises three sections: transformative commitments for sustainable urban development; effective implementation; and follow-up and review. The section on implementation emphasizes the need for establishing strong urban governance structures, planning and managing urban spatial development, and accessing means of implementation.

The UN Secretary-General reports on implementation of the NUA every four years, with the first report submitted during UNGA's 72nd session (2017-2018), and the second during its 77th session (2022-2023). Some countries have presented [Voluntary National Reviews](#) and the UN Regional Commissions have prepared [regional reports](#) detailing progress on NUA implementation.

World Urban Forums: WUF1 took place from 29 April to 3 May 2002 in Nairobi, Kenya, on the theme of sustainable urbanization, and discussions focused on: the effect of HIV/AIDS on human settlements; violence against women; basic services and infrastructure, including provision of water and sanitation; and the need for secure tenure.

Subsequently, WUF sessions have been held every two years with themes ranging from "Implementing the New Urban Agenda" to "Cities of Opportunities: Connecting Culture and Innovation." WUF sessions have convened in: Barcelona, Spain; Vancouver, Canada; Nanjing, China; Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Naples, Italy; Medellín, Colombia; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; and Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

WUF11 convened as a hybrid event online and in Katowice, Poland, from 25-30 June 2022. A common thread in discussions was the "triple C crises" of the COVID-19 global pandemic, climate disasters, and emerging conflicts, pushing marginalized populations further into poverty. The major WUF11 themes included: the challenges of providing and financing affordable, inclusive, sustainable, and resilient housing; the need to improve stakeholder engagement in urban planning; and the use of smart technologies and other tools to prepare cities for future crises.

Summaries of ENB coverage of UN-Habitat conferences and WUF meetings can be found at: enb.iisd.org/negotiations/un-conference-human-settlements-habitat.

Report of the Twelfth Session of the World Urban Forum

WUF12 began on Monday, 4 November 2024, with the convening of the WUF Assemblies of partner constituencies. The official opening took place later in the day. Throughout the Forum, participants convened in dialogues, roundtables, and special sessions. This report is organized by session type.

Joint Opening of WUF Assemblies

The Assemblies held a joint opening before going into their own sessions.

At Monday's opening, hosts Shipra Narang Suri, Chief, Urban Practices Branch of UN-Habitat, and Sarah Syed, UN-Habitat Youth Advisory Board, urged participants to imagine a future where equality is not just a policy but a fulfilled promise. Manal Awad, Minister of Local Development, Egypt, highlighted WUF12 as an opportunity for all sectors to convene. She emphasized the need to start locally to achieve the SDGs.

Sherif El-Sherbiny, Minister of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities, Egypt, noted the Forum's various Assemblies cover many important topics surrounding human and economic development. He stated that gender equality, particularly the elimination of obstacles facing women, is paramount to achieving the SDGs at the local level.

Kalpana Viswanath, Founder and CEO of Safetipin, said strong, violence-free homes support communities and cities that are resilient and inclusive, noting women carry most of the burden of caring for the young and the elderly.

Ann Wanjiru Mbuthia, Coordinator, Mathare Legal Aid and Human Rights Advocacy, stressed the importance of empowering grassroots organizations to influence policymaking at the local and national levels. She stated that affordable accommodation helps enable livelihoods and build resilient communities.

Fatimetou Abdel Malick, President, Nouakchott Region, Mauritania, said local governments play an integral role in WUF12's commitment to developing localized solutions to advance the NUA, including through multi-level cooperation to build more resilient communities.



Shipra Narang Suri and Sarah Syed, UN-Habitat



Nasra Nanda, Chair, Africa Regional Network, World Green Building Council

Nasra Nanda, Chair, Africa Regional Network, World Green Building Council, said businesses are important partners on the journey towards sustainable cities. She also considered the unlocking of private sector finance, as well as the private sector's contributions to skills development, as vital to achieving the SDGs.

In closing, UN-Habitat Executive Director Anacláudia Rossbach emphasized WUF12's purpose to provide input to Member States of UN-Habitat and feed into the Strategic Plan 2026-2029 to be adopted at the UN-Habitat Assembly in May 2025. Noting that housing for almost three billion people is affected by conflicts, disasters, and various shortages, she called for collective action to influence policy change and create an enabling environment for sustainable urban development.

This report covers two of the five Assembly meetings—the Grassroots Assembly and the World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments. Assemblies of Women, Business and Foundations, and Children and Youth also met in parallel.

World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments: On Monday, Emilia Saiz, Secretary-General of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and UN-Habitat Executive Director Rossbach opened the meeting by recalling that 70% of the global population is expected to live in urban areas by 2050. Rossbach stated that with the Pact for the Future and the NUA, there is a clear roadmap to achieve the SDGs at the local level, and that it must include the integration of local governments into national and international decision-making processes.

Jan van Zanen, President, UCLG, stated that the [Quito Declaration on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements for All](#) is more important than ever in the face of the climate crisis.

Hisham El Helbawy, Egypt's Assistant Minister of Local Development, announced that Egypt will launch its National Strategy for Decentralization on the fourth day of WUF12, which he expected would help local governments develop ambitious plans to tackle their challenges.

In the **first panel**, speakers discussed approaches to achieving the SDGs, noting two-thirds of SDG targets require local government action. They highlighted that: it is in households and neighborhoods where human rights, equal opportunity and sustainable development are delivered; the NUA is a vital

framework for integrating sustainability into urban planning; partnerships with water utilities are critical for achieving broad sustainability benefits; knowledge sharing between local governments from across the globe is highly beneficial; and consultation with municipal governments is particularly effective if linked to national budget processes.

In the **second panel** on multistakeholder multilateralism and the outcomes of the Summit of the Future, panelists explored the role of multilateralism and partnerships to develop strategies for achieving the SDGs, building on discussions at the recent Summit of the Future. They discussed the needs for more resources and capacity building for the local level to achieve decarbonization; good leadership with the ability to balance listening to local needs and acting with vision for the benefit of the general public; development finance reform to reduce crippling debt burdens; decision making driven by data that captures community needs; and a unified, whole-of-society response.

In the **final panel** on financing the territories of today for future generations, speakers noted the importance of improving both the quantity and quality of finance being made available. They called for making finance more accessible to youth and to startup companies that can advance sustainable urban development at the local level. They also called for partnerships to encompass active listening to identify innovative solutions, not only addressing immediate issues but also medium-term problems. They favored the use of green bonds in financing solutions for interlinked climate and biodiversity challenges. They also supported information-sharing to open new avenues for action to remedy the unequal distribution of resources.

Grassroots: The Grassroots Assembly convened three panel discussions.

In the **first panel** on land, climate change, housing and livelihoods, speakers bemoaned the failure of governments to upscale community-led pilot projects, noting also that slum dwellers are greatly affected by climate change. They emphasized the need for trust-building and transparency when co-creating projects with local communities—as was done, for example, at Qursaya Island near Giza, where a community of 1,500 farmers and fishers now collect 30-40 tons of rubbish from the Nile every



Jan van Zanen, UCLG President and Mayor of the Hague

month to recycle or upcycle into new products. A panelist from Slum Dwellers International recommended prioritizing security of land tenure as the basis for building resilience.

In the **second panel** on policy change, financing, partnerships and scaling up, speakers drew on examples of local-level actions in Madagascar, Mexico, Kenya, and Jamaica and called for institutionalizing budget allocations for local needs such as water and sanitation. They noted that, “without budget, there are no rights,” and urged development partners and multilateral programmes to ensure their funding devolves to local governments and communities. They argued for grassroots communities to be present at all stages of delivery and to drive action at all levels, not only advocating for better housing but also safeguarding the quality and supply of housing so that it benefits the intended communities.

In the **final panel** on the role of the city, speakers focused on implementing policy and research through local community action. They noted the need for: financing; translating academic research into action; and collaborating to lobby governments to scale up local actions. Other speakers highlighted social models of housing delivery, dialogue among different governance bodies and marginalized people, and support for poor children in urban areas. They called for institutionalizing engagement between the grassroots communities and local government, and transferring ownership of programmes to local communities to ensure sustainability and to achieve human security. One speaker urged developing community capacity for managing financing.

Obiga Kania, State Minister of Internal Affairs, Uganda, reported on innovative approaches in Uganda, including enhancing community economic welfare for informed decision making.

Rosbach reminded participants that WUF was created to be “the mechanism of participation” for stakeholders. She expressed commitment to incorporating their views into documentation for discussion with Member States in the lead-up to the UN-Habitat Assembly in May 2025. She highlighted UN-Habitat’s work in participatory slum upgrading, and its mapping and monitoring of progress on implementing SDG 11 on sustainable cities.

WUF12 Opening Ceremony

Via video message, UN Secretary General António Guterres reaffirmed the importance of local and regional authorities, highlighting the new [UN Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments](#).

Jan van Zanen, President, UCLG, recalled that the two years since WUF11 have been some of the most difficult globally. He called on international actors to honor and implement the outcomes of the UN Summit of the Future, which took place in September 2024.

Anacláudia Rosbach, Executive Director, UN-Habitat, noted the Pact for the Future, which was agreed at the Summit of the Future, recognizes the importance of housing, cities, regional and local governments, and the NUA. She expressed her hope that WUF12 would present a unified message from urban stakeholders, including through its planned outcome document, the Cairo Call to Action.



Anacláudia Rosbach, Executive Director, UN-Habitat

Rashad al-Alimi, Chairman of the Yemen Presidential Leadership Council, identified WUF as a unique platform for countries to expose the impacts of armed conflicts, as well as the challenges arising from climate change.

Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, President of the Transitional Sovereign Council of Sudan, congratulated Egypt’s leadership on advancing sustainable urban development and expressed appreciation for UN-Habitat’s urban development programmes, including its strategies to take forward urban elements of the SDGs. He noted Sudan would withstand the damage from its current domestic strife and would seek support to rebuild its damaged urban infrastructure. He welcomed the convening of WUF12 at this time to consider progress on urban development.

Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine, noted that advancing sustainable urban development in Palestine would require building international partnerships to secure the future for coming generations, including by creating green jobs and driving forward digitalization. He stressed that Palestinians’ participation in WUF12 came in the context of ongoing Israeli attacks against Palestinians. He called on the international community to enforce the UNGA resolutions on the Palestinian situation and to allow Palestine to participate as a full member of the UN. He



Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine

concluded by praising Egypt's achievements on sustainable urban development.

Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, President of Egypt, noted that WUF12 comes at a time of crises and wars. He called for mobilizing political will and intensifying efforts to provide an immediate response, halt the destruction to settlements caused by conflicts, renovate slums and unplanned cities, support poor communities, develop new projects to provide housing for all, and achieve the local goals of the 2030 Agenda. He called on all stakeholders to help WUF12 achieve progress toward implementing the NUA. UN-Habitat Executive Director Rossbach then formally declared WUF12 open.

Dialogues

Six dialogues took place from Tuesday to Thursday, which brought together leaders from government, business, academia, multilateral and international organizations, and civil society. The dialogues addressed issues of critical importance for creating sustainable cities and providing adequate housing for all.

Housing Our Future: Opening the dialogue on Tuesday, Executive Director Rossbach drew attention to the current historically high gap between people's incomes and housing prices. She urged nations and cities to: give attention to land use, especially vacant or underutilized space; understand the accommodation needs of youth and the elderly; and bring together public investments, subsidies, family savings, and international finance.

Sherif El-Sherbiny, Minister of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities, Egypt, highlighted Egypt's experience in filling the gap between its annual 1.5-2 million population increase and the availability of decent and appropriate housing, describing housing rehabilitation to replace slums and the development of 38 new cities.

David Harvey, Urban Front, via video, called for organizing against the billionaire class that views housing construction as an investment opportunity for themselves rather than a social provision for those who desperately need a house at a reasonable cost.



Yasmine Fouad, Minister of Environment, Egypt

Numerous panelists spoke on their countries' experiences in grappling with the increasing gaps between population growth and adequate housing, highlighting the need for encouraging community autonomy, housing subsidies, and public investment in land for the benefit of citizens.

Marie-Josée Houle, Federal Housing Advocate, Canada, explained how her work helps hold governments accountable for realizing the human right to housing. She noted that her role involves monitoring the situation and raising concerns with the Federal Minister for Housing. She added that her monitoring reports are used as a basis for continued advocacy and conversations between government and civil society.

Jonathan Reckford, CEO, Habitat for Humanity, supported the practice of cross-sectoral budgeting and the provision of microfinance to very low-income people. He called for tackling corruption associated with tendering processes for housing construction through an "ecosystem" approach that would include all levels and sectors, noting that such an approach would increase transparency and accountability.

Others highlighted the challenges of recovering and rebuilding in conflict or post-conflict countries. Balakrishnan Rajagopal, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, lamented the difficulties of rebuilding when an occupying force bans entry of materials, as Israel has done in Gaza.

Cities and the Climate Crisis: Welcoming dialogue participants on Tuesday, Michal Mlynár, Deputy Executive Director, UN-Habitat, called for upcoming revisions to Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement on climate change to accelerate actions for cities.

Yasmine Fouad, Egypt's Environment Minister, highlighted Egypt's launch of the [Enhancing Nature-based Solutions for an Accelerated Climate Transformation](#) (ENACT) partnership at the 27th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 27) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, together with Germany and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). She said ENACT now involves around 90 countries and aims to coordinate global efforts to address climate change, land and ecosystem degradation, and biodiversity loss. She added that Egypt has started integrating climate into its planning processes.



Michal Mlynár, Deputy Executive Director, UN-Habitat

Carlos Moreno, creator of the “[15-Minute City](#)” concept, stressed that we are living in a climate emergency, as evidenced by the recent flooding catastrophes in European cities. He recommended adopting a strategy of “proxilience,” which combines proximity with the concept of resilience, to reduce spatial and temporal injustices that arise from some residents being pushed to the fringes of ever-expanding cities, where they face increased commuting times and distance from economic opportunities and services.

A **first panel** of speakers featuring representatives from the public sector and international organizations then discussed: critical capacity gaps in urban planning and landscape architecture; innovative types of insurance to mitigate livelihood losses due to extreme weather events; nature-based solutions as the future of urban planning; and cities as the vulnerable frontlines in the climate crisis.

A **second panel** then covered: mainstreaming climate action in city governance; “capacity enhancement” approaches as alternatives to capacity building; integrating traditional knowledge with scientific knowledge; and ensuring more funding goes to cities for adaptation to climate change.

In concluding remarks, Kobby Bomareo, Housing Minister, Papua New Guinea, noted his country is facing an increase in informal urban developments as residents of low-lying atolls flee the impacts of sea-level rise.

Stronger Together: On Wednesday, Rafael Tuts, Director, Global Solutions Division, UN-Habitat, convened this session on partnerships, stating that they are the road to resilience. In opening remarks, UN-Habitat Executive Director Rossbach urged coordinating stakeholders to integrate the development of green, social, and physical infrastructures and to connect the sustainable development, climate, and urban agendas. She concluded that global coalitions are vital to leveraging action from shared success stories.

Cruz Garcia, Director, WAI Architecture Think Tank, called for listening to the voices of marginalized ethnic, Indigenous, disabled, and LGBTQI communities because ensuring their

access to dignified housing, clean water, and health services would ensure access for all.

Ander Caballero, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Basque Government, outlined how his government has fully integrated the SDGs into its planning processes since 2018.

In the **first panel** on strengthening multilevel governance, speakers from Namibia, Italy, Japan, and the World Health Organization (WHO) advocated for collaboration across all levels of government, with multistakeholder inclusion and community engagement, including on infrastructure development and budgeting. They described successful partnerships on tackling water leakage, building community technical and financial capacity, and funding community waste management. One panelist reported a successful whole-of-government approach for community efforts to address COVID-19 and called for fostering competency for sustainable urban health and development. Final remarks noted the need to put real people at the center of public policy.

In the **second panel** on innovative localization efforts to ensure inclusivity and equity, speakers from Mexico, Colombia, Germany, and the International Olympic Committee called for embedding gender and disability issues in all public policies and urged empowering women to participate in policymaking on rebuilding of urban environments. One panelist advocated for empowering local governments to advance urban renewal by providing for multipurpose social infrastructure, while noting the need to improve opportunities for women and older people through upskilling and reskilling programmes. Another speaker concluded that efforts to encourage public-private investment in sports infrastructure would improve communities’ sports participation rates.

Financing Localization and Localizing Finance: On Wednesday, moderator and independent journalist Shahira Amin outlined challenges for cities across the globe, including poverty and inequality. Through interactive quizzes, she highlighted that the annual financing and investment gap for the SDGs stands at USD 2.5 to 4 trillion/year, and that only 4% of local government authorities in global South countries can access financing in international capital markets.

Manal Awad, Minister of Local Development, Egypt, opened the session alongside Haoliang Xu, Associate Administrator, UN Development Programme (UNDP). She noted Egypt is supporting the sustainable development journeys of local governments, and prioritizing efficient planning and equitable distribution of finance. Xu recommended: new revenue streams to boost fiscal space for cities to invest in sustainable development, including enhanced access to international development, climate, and blended finance; and the development of integrated local financing frameworks which include a mix of public and private capital.

Eva Granados, Secretary of State for International Cooperation, Spain, noted her country’s role in hosting the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) in 2025 and the opening of the UN Local2030 Coalition Secretariat in Bilbao, with the mission of localizing the SDGs.



Rafael Tuts, Director, Global Solutions Division, UN-Habitat

She called on all parties to support Spain's proposal to ensure a strong FfD4 outcome, including proposals to mobilize finance and develop capital markets to achieve the SDGs.

Ming Zhang, Global Director, Urban, Resilience and Land Global Department, World Bank, urged policy reforms to promote "infrastructure investment readiness" through improving the quality of cities' financial data and accounting practices.

Panelists from local governments, financial institutions, civil society, and academia focused on how to unlock additional finance for sustainable development at the local level. Panelists argued for:

- cities to lead with a collective vision and evidence-based decision-making;
- recognizing the value of educating women and children in developing a more educated population;
- having solid plans and a paper trail of financial discipline to assure banks of their low risk;
- expanding the use of property taxes globally as a sustainable source of revenue and ensuring revenue is invested in habitable land that can be built on; and
- considering the built environment as a key platform for improving quality of life and the economy.

Responding to participants' questions, panelists noted universities can act as a check and balance to ensure accuracy of data put out by finance ministries, and stressed government accountability as a basis for incentivizing taxpayers to pay their dues.

Putting People First in a Digital Era: On Thursday, Chika Oduah, Nigerian-American journalist, moderated this session, challenging panelists to explore leveraging technology to meet specific community needs as cities become smarter and more resilient.

In opening remarks, UN-Habitat Deputy Executive Director Michal Mlynár highlighted some themes for discussion, including ethical governance, inclusive technology, and sustainable innovation. He noted the growing implications of the digital divide, citing new international guidelines on smart cities expected to be adopted at UN-Habitat's resumed session in 2025.

Egypt's Vice Minister of Communications and Information Technology for Institutional Development, Ghada Mustafa Labib, presented her vision of building inclusive, sustainable, and resilient cities. She reaffirmed that technology should enhance people's lives rather than complicate them. She noted the country's 150 billion Egyptian pound investment in information and communications technology, which includes replacing copper cables with fiber optics.

Featuring government officials from various regions, the **first panel** focused on country-level efforts to introduce and use technology for a variety of needs. Developing country representatives highlighted ensuring digital literacy, especially in their young populations, with others speaking on the introduction of digital property tax systems allowing for faster work and more granular data collection, analysis, and planning. Others explored their challenges with developing legislation on the use of AI. Some speakers explored differences between a smart city and a

sustainable city, noting quality of life and urban governance are key elements to achieving smart city targets.

The **second panel** explored the application of technology in all sectors to meet needs across the globe, from helping populations get connected and make informed decisions when using digital products to using technology as a class equalizer in consultations and development of their local built environments. Speakers touched on the importance of knowledge sharing to ensure digital safety and smart city development.

The Loss of Home: On Thursday, Errol Barnett, CBS News, US, moderated this session. Welcoming participants, Amr Aljowaily, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Egypt, stated that 80% of displaced people live in cities, predominantly in low- and middle-income countries. He called for medium- and long-term investment in refugee-hosting communities, not just short-term humanitarian aid.

Keynote speaker Sultan Barakat, Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Qatar, lamented that "countering terrorism" now involves targeting whole cities, despite the illegality of such actions under international law. Other speakers questioned why international funders of UN agencies should "pay the bill" for Israel's aggression. He called for enabling long-term refugees to create a sense of home where they are, as home is critical to one's identity.

Ammar Azzouz, academic and writer, University of Oxford, defined the concept of "domicide" as the destruction of ordinary people's lives by war and by mass evictions, and called for addressing the root causes of violence. Ievgeniia Gubkina, Ukrainian architect, questioned the discourse of post-war reconstruction and challenged the UN to support the prosecution of war crimes. Azzouz and Gubkina, who are displaced by wars in Syria and Ukraine, respectively, stressed that there is no peace without justice and, without peace, reconstruction efforts are meaningless.

Other speakers discussed the impacts of climate change and conflicts on food security and the economy, which are driving migration to urban centers at an accelerated pace. They stressed: long-term resilience and the need for collective rebuilding



Sami Hijawi, Minister of Local Government, State of Palestine

of communities, not just houses, to reduce competition for resources; securing land tenure for displaced people; and providing benefits, resources, and opportunities to both displaced people and the host communities to make resettlement a positive experience.

Raouf Mazou, UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), explained that the organization is changing its focus to long-term development solutions, in view of the increasing numbers of displaced people and increasing length of displacement. He stressed that return of displaced people must be voluntary, and that resettlement must include the creation of housing and livelihoods.

Executive Director Rossbach highlighted UN-Habitat's draft strategic plan, which includes mobilizing resources from international financial institutions (IFIs).

Special Sessions

Discussions in these sessions focused on actions for implementing the NUA in different sectors. The sessions included panel discussions, live performances and audience participation in games that invited all to engage with questions of what practices are successful and replicable.

The Heartbeat of the City: Eliza Anyangwe, CNN, moderated this session on Tuesday.

Anna König Jerlmyr, former Mayor of Stockholm, defined quality of life as everything governments strive for in serving their citizens and underscored the value of human-centered design.

Ruth Dreifuss, former President of Switzerland, emphasized participatory decision-making and government accountability to prevent cities from making people unwell.

Norah Alyusuf, Saudi Arabia, called for focusing on: peoples' needs; health-responsive infrastructure; resilient housing; and data-driven investment in quality of life.

Paul Kalbfleisch, author, stressed urban design that creates collective joy, which, he said, would make cities and their residents more resilient.

Nathalie Roebbel, Unit Head for Urban Health, WHO, said a strategic approach to public health benefits other sectors, calling for participatory budgeting and legislation on collaboration.

Other speakers highlighted their countries' experiences in improving quality of life, noting that: design criteria should incorporate gender considerations; rapid urban growth can risk loss of identity; funding for urban planning is generally top-down but bottom-up participation creates a mindset change; cities can be made more breathable by bringing nature in; and "healthy city" strategies need continual updating.

The link to the webcast for this special session is here: <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k19/k19lvufnr8>

A Zero Waste World: Ben Brown and Ciara Doyle, Co-Founders, Going Green Media, hosted this dialogue on Tuesday, which began with a fashion show by the Egyptian Clothing Bank, showing dresses made from waste textiles, to a music soundtrack played on instruments also made from waste materials.

Betty Osei Bonsu, Green Africa Youth Organization, Uganda, recalled sustainable practices of the past, which were adopted based on necessity. She stressed that individual choices are



Aminata Farima Tidjani, Founder, Adansonia Green, Senegal

essential in achieving a zero-waste world, noting, however, that governments also bear responsibility.

Shahira Amin, independent journalist, Cairo, introduced the panelists and moderated the discussion.

Benedict Jasper Lagman, City Vice-Mayor of San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines, and President, Zero Waste Cities Network, Philippines, described efforts to introduce a national zero waste policy, establishing materials recovery facilities in every village, and partnering with NGOs that have technical expertise, noting that waste reduction cannot be achieved solely through government policies.

José Manuel Moller, CEO and Founder, Algramo, introduced his company's efforts to promote the use of prefilled and refillable containers. He stressed that, "people cannot decide between the planet and their pockets; reuse must be cheaper."

Farima Tidjani, Founder, Adansonia Green, Senegal, highlighted waste assessment as essential, noting that her organization had found 95% of street waste in her locality was plastic and 50-75% of household waste was organic. She described her efforts to promote reuse of containers among market and street vendors and to make compost as an educational activity for schoolchildren and their communities. She stressed that neighbourhood waste pickers are unrecognized experts.



Nathalie Roebbel, Urban Health, WHO

Manal Saleh, Founder and CEO, Egyptian Clothing Bank, highlighted the need to “re-utilize” used textiles, in addition to promoting “reduce, reuse, recycle and refuse,” for example, by washing and re-dyeing hard-to-recycle textiles, such as hair scrunchies and underwear.

Rizk Yosif Hana, El Tatweer El Motagaded (Garbage Collectors) Association, Egypt, called on governments to treat neighborhood garbage collectors on par with large multinationals, and not only as sub-contractors, arguing that small operators are able to carry out 100% of recycling activities.

The link to the webcast for this special session is here: <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1h/k1hhcsegk4>

A Space for All: On Tuesday, Laura Petrella, Chief of Planning, Finance and Economy Section, UN-Habitat, highlighted UN-Habitat’s commitment to supporting universal access to safe, green and accessible public spaces, noting the creation of 137 such spaces in 90 cities globally to date, reaching 2.3 million people. She invited everyone to visit the newly-opened Al Asmarat public space in Cairo.

The session then launched with an interactive experience, in which participants clapped along to African drums, led by curators from the Trust for Indigenous Culture and Health (TICAH), Kenya, who explained the value of art and culture in public spaces for building community and friendship.

Bahia Shehab, artist, designer and professor, American University, Cairo, presented examples of art installations she had created, including a pyramid of garbage built in a Cairo dump, and alternative “heaven and hell” experiences of climate change at the 2022 UN Climate Change Conference in Sharm el-Sheikh.

Ethan Kent, Executive Director, PlacemakingX, spoke about how public art can support an inclusive culture as “everyone feels they can be part of the narrative,” showing examples from cities in Qatar, the US, and Portugal.

Suhailey Farzana, community architect in Bangladesh, said when people lead the design process it becomes their own, “effecting a common dream collectively.” She encouraged involving children and creating a “listening platform” where the community presents the design to the authorities.

Emin Huseynov, Special Representative of the President, Azerbaijan, spoke on inclusive collaboration to recreate public spaces in Azerbaijan to sustain its cultural heritage as an enduring legacy and as a model for other countries recovering from conflict.

Jyoti Hosagrahar, Deputy Director, World Heritage Center, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), noted the importance of tools such as the UNESCO Urban Heritage Atlas as a technical aid for the implementation of UNESCO’s 2011 Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape. Pointing to examples of different community spaces in Peru, Morocco, and Tanzania, she stressed that fostering a wide range of traditional occupations and practices can contribute to inclusive economic benefits.

A panel of speakers discussed characteristics of public spaces and their interaction with cultural and creative activities. They noted the value in considering the range of spaces from the



Jyoti Hosagrahar, Deputy Director, World Heritage Center, UNESCO

waterfront to inland neighborhoods and from large to small as each space serves a different community—highlighting that the quality of public spaces is at least as important as their size. They also urged listening to people in communities as a critical factor in design, particularly to avoid overburdening public finances, as engaging communities can mobilize resources from within a community.

Matt Cottam, Founder and Principal Designer, Tellart, presented his “technology-forward” interactive exhibits. Visual artists Luis Alberto and Victor Mwangi spoke about their experiences as urban street artists and using their art to break stereotypes and reflect their identities.

The link to the webcast of this special session is here: <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k10/k10fk3pyhw>

Financing Urban Development: On Wednesday, Rania Hedaya, Representative (a.i.), UN-Habitat Regional Office for Arab States, moderated this session, which was hosted by Egypt.

During the **first panel**, speakers shared ideas on financing for action at the local level. Egypt’s Decent Life Initiative for developing rural infrastructure to attract private investment was cited and includes, for example: micro- and medium finance; loans to young people and women for SMEs; and services for industrial sites in rural areas. They emphasized maximizing the private sector’s role in creating new financial resources, such as green bonds and blended finance. They also welcomed private-sector leadership in the development process because of its comparative efficiency, knowledge, and sustainability.

Executive Director Anacláudia Rossbach described UN-Habitat’s roles in working with governments, convening knowledge-sharing initiatives, and supporting cities in: economic planning; physical, social, and green infrastructure; enabling public-private partnerships for housing; and improving rights and services in informal settlements. She also stressed its role in working for global financial architecture reform.

Speakers from the World Bank and the Government of Egypt discussed their experiences with blended finance models, public-

private partnerships, and developing projects that are low risk to attract investors such as international development banks.

Featuring high-level Egyptian government officials, a major general from Egypt's armed forces, and a real estate executive, the **second panel** covered investment success stories, such as Egypt's efforts to formalize informal settlements to address the housing crisis and develop new cities. They highlighted working with partners to secure diverse sources of financing, including concessional loans from multilateral development banks (MDBs) and foreign investment. Numerous speakers pointed to benefits for the private sector in Egyptian urbanization endeavors. They also noted the role of the military in intervening in the face of natural and industrial disasters, maintaining national security and societal cohesion, eradicating terrorism while contributing to Egypt's development, and complementing the private sector's role.

The link to the webcast for this special session is here: <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1r/k1rhtb3o1n>

G7 Economies Shaping Urban Futures: On Wednesday, Shipra Suri, Chief, Urban Practices Branch, UN-Habitat, convened this session, highlighting the release, on 4 November in Rome, of the [G7 Sustainable Urban Development Ministers' Communiqué](#).

UN-Habitat Executive Director Anacláudia Rossbach praised the Communiqué and its ambitious focus on advancing environmental, social, and digital transitions in cities' development, which tasks relevant G7 Ministers to consider "concrete actions to reduce spatial inequalities, protect the environment, [and] the climate, and promote smart and innovative economies in urban areas."

Sandra Gizdulich, Senior Urban Expert, Presidency of Council of Ministers, Italy, noted that the Communiqué aims to systematically address cities' ecological, demographic, and digital challenges, and recalled that its development stemmed from previous efforts by Germany and Japan. She looked forward to Canada taking implementation forward during its presidency in 2025.

Alessandro Ghinelli, Mayor of Arezzo, Italy, urged formal linkages between the [Urban 7 \(U7\) Group](#), comprising city



Javier Torner, Lead of Inclusive Communities Thriving Cities Programme, UN-Habitat

networks from G7 countries, with G7 national administrations. Suri also urged deep engagement with cities and regions. He highlighted that the upcoming global stocktake of localization efforts would assess real world progress on relevant SDG targets.

A **first panel** of speakers from South Africa, Egypt, Brazil, and India discussed developing country perspectives on the transitions highlighted by the G7 Communiqué. In particular, they addressed: mainstreaming climate change considerations into urban planning; promoting job creation through green industries; viewing housing challenges in a broad, structured way; acknowledging the benefits of digitalization to enable moving beyond cash; and ongoing challenges of securing investment, technical cooperation, and skills transfer.

A **second panel** of speakers from France, the US, and Japan discussed G7 perspectives. They suggested challenges remain for the construction sector in digitalizing, and some countries are taking holistic approaches to redevelop neighborhoods through extensive community input. They discussed the constraints around replicating G7 country solutions in developing countries and the value of using imaging technologies to support urban planning.

The link to the webcast for this special session is here: <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1t/k1t665t5oz>

The Legacy of Mega Events: On Wednesday, Javier Torner, Lead, Planning, Finance and Economy Section, Global Solutions Division, UN-Habitat, moderated this session, which included three panels that focused on the experiences of organizing World Expo events, the Olympics, and WUFs, respectively.

In a keynote address, Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf, Saudi Arabia, introduced Riyadh's transformation to an international city, through hosting many international events that have brought in 20 million visitors. He highlighted the value of proactive planning and of ensuring infrastructure built for events is suitable for multiple purposes, while also benefiting all residents. UN-Habitat Executive Director Rossbach noted that mega events are opportunities for transformation of the host cities, but bring challenges of increased pressures on housing and infrastructure.



Sandra Gizdulich, Senior Urban Expert, Department for Cohesion Policies of the Presidency of Council of Ministers, Italy

Speakers who led planning for the 2020 Dubai Expo and the 2024 Shanghai Expo stressed the importance of keeping sustainability principles at the core, treating Expo events as educational opportunities, and investing in infrastructure that people can continue to use, such as occurred with Shanghai's metro lines.

Speakers involved in managing the Olympics and Paralympics highlighted sustainability and social inclusion efforts; for example, the Paris Olympics held 25% of the games in existing venues to reduce the Games' carbon footprint; reduced the amount of meat offered to participants; and used 100% clean energy to power the events. The Paris Games also created many jobs and provided training opportunities for more than 2,000 people.

Mayors of Cairo, Egypt, and Katowice, Poland, highlighted the opportunities that hosting the WUF had provided; for example, the previous WUF in Katowice provided impetus for the transformation of an industrial area into a cultural precinct with a museum and theatre facilities.

The link to the webcast for this special session is here: <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k13/k13b45cjeu>

Towards a Global Coalition for Urban Data: UN-Habitat convened this by-invitation only session with potential partners on Thursday to discuss creating a shared platform for urban data. Edlam Yemeru, Chief, External Relations, Strategy, Knowledge and Innovation Division, UN-Habitat, invited participants to put forward proposals.

Robert Ndugwa, Head, Global Urban Observatory Unit, UN-Habitat, noted that data is available for less than 30% of the indicators associated with SDG 11 on sustainable cities. He welcomed potential contributions from citizen science, noting that issues of data quality and completeness, data privacy, and timeliness should be considered.

Participants, many from academic and research institutions, mentioned their work in: collecting data on homelessness; recognizing diversity and heritage in urban cultures; promoting data interoperability, transparency and traceability; developing standards for metadata to improve searchability; finding ways to access data used for regulatory purposes, for example, in the context of inland revenue, to better understand community needs; and applying AI to accelerate the process of data collection and analysis.

Other participants, from human rights and housing groups, cautioned that governments often do not prioritize housing and, therefore, lack interest in using community-generated data that has long been available.

Participants recommended keeping in mind the purpose of data gathering, involving data users, and connecting local needs with national agendas.

They proposed that a collaborative project could:

- develop consistent definitions of key terms in urban data;
- use data to plan for resilience, for example, through informing flood preparedness;
- compare different urban scenarios to inform the choice of interventions; and

- treat data collection not as a preliminary activity but an outcome of programme intervention.

Participants and UN-Habitat staff affirmed that: a concept note should be written, which would include a roadmap for action; an online portal could be established for “matchmaking” participants with similar interests; and a voluntary group could lead this process within an agreed time frame.

The Wisdom of Civilizations: On Thursday, Chika Oduah, Nigerian-American journalist, moderated this session.

In a keynote address, Rania Al-Mashat, Egypt's Minister of Planning, Economic Development and International Cooperation, recalled Egypt's enormous historical influence across thousands of years.

Yuriko Koike, Governor of Tokyo, Japan, walked the audience through 400 years of Tokyo's history, beginning with its humble start as an unassuming fishing village to becoming a modern metropolis of 14 million people, citing the innovations in urban planning that have helped the city thrive in a disaster-prone region of the world.

Michal Mlynár, Deputy Executive Director, UN-Habitat, recommended drawing inspiration from ancient civilizations while also being forward-thinking. The panel featured researchers in urban planning and engineering and people responsible for heritage conservation and the betterment of displaced peoples' living conditions. They spoke about:

- advances in wastewater management in cities, which have reduced illnesses and disease;
- the inspiration to be gained from travel;
- making use of heritage and local knowledge to address contemporary challenges;
- the impacts and importance of urban planning in cases such as Palestine to improve the lives of displaced peoples forced to live in inadequate housing; and
- current developments in making cities more resilient to climate change.

In closing, Ismail Serageldin, Founding Director of Bibliotheca Alexandrina, took the audience through thousands of years of civilization development, highlighting the pillars of good governance, including the rule of law, the recognition of



Rania Al-Mashat, Minister of Planning, Economic Development and International Cooperation, Egypt



A dance performance: "Empathy in Motion"

individual rights, democracy, and the free flow of information. He stressed that investment in human and social capital has historically been most crucial to development.

Empathy in Motion: On Thursday, this session provided insights into the experiences of people of different ages and abilities in advocating for fairer and more accessible urban transport. Maruxa Cardama, Secretary General, Partnership on Sustainable, Low Carbon Transport (SLOCAT), convened the special session with Ethan Kent, Executive Director, PlacemakingX.

A **first panel** of speakers from health and disability organizations, as well as UN-Habitat, considered transport needs from childhood to old age, and from the perspective of the visually impaired. Key insights included that: every child deserves the freedom to experience their world safely and fully through well-designed streetscapes; public transport that is close by and affordable enables educational and employment opportunities for those unable to drive a car; and reliable, accessible transport is key to keeping older people active.

The **second panel** comprised speakers from Albania, Germany, Ireland, the African Development Bank Group, the UN Environment Programme, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Panelists considered public responsibility for inclusive transport policies for all, regardless of age or ability. Insights included that: if budgets are constrained, initial small steps are valuable, such as reclaiming small public spaces for pedestrians; innovative approaches such as Ireland's "way-finding center" are valuable for planners to experience firsthand the mobility challenges faced by persons with disabilities; and investing in accessibility upfront is cost-efficient, avoiding expensive retrofits.

A dance performance, "Empathy in Motion," choreographed by Shaymaa Shoukry, reinforced the theme of enabling persons with disabilities to achieve their full potential.

It All Starts at Home: On Thursday, Executive Director Anacláudia Rossbach moderated this "fireside chat" for identifying housing solutions.



Héctor Becerril Miranda, National Council of Science and Technology, Mexico

Hector Becerril, academic researcher and keynote speaker, said the housing crisis affects three billion people, and homelessness affects 318 million, exacerbated by rising land costs, violence and conflict, and climate change. Noting that housing is central to human rights, he said political participation must transcend the paradigm of home ownership.

Panelists recommended:

- returning to bio-based materials and phasing out steel and concrete;
- reflecting social and ecological functions of land in economic systems;
- recognizing slum dwellers' own tools and financial systems;
- acknowledging governments' responsibility for adequate housing, and their capacity to contribute resources such as land;
- developing a mechanism to coordinate investment in environmental, social, and governance (ESG) to eliminate greenwashing;
- fixing the supply side of the housing crisis, particularly access to land for housing development;
- introducing appropriate financial tools after fixing supply;
- "leveling" institutions of authority by giving communities an equal voice;
- ensuring that subsidies for housing reach the poor; and
- regularizing land tenure for poor communities and slum dwellers.

Panelists also noted how changing demographics influences the types of housing that are most needed, stating that the nuclear family concept is no longer the reality in many contexts. One panelist stressed the power disparities between planners, practitioners, and politicians, and the need to build change incrementally. Another noted continuing problems in implementing legislation, despite 20 years of experience, and called for a movement to put housing at the center of the global agenda. One noted that 40-50% of publicly-owned land could be put into affordable housing.

In closing, Rossbach encouraged all to give attention to what is already working on the ground.

Roundtables

The Roundtable events brought WUF's partner constituencies together to exchange views with peers, identify areas of consensus, and find ways to address emerging issues and trends. Groups representing ministers, UN organizations, local and regional governments, children and youth, women, businesses and foundations, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, professionals, older persons, parliamentarians, civil society, and academia convened during the week. This report covers three of the many roundtables that took place: a Ministerial event on Tuesday; a Thursday by-invitation only event convened by UN-Habitat with IFIs and MDBs; and a Friday civil society event.

Ministerial: On Tuesday, UN-Habitat Executive Director Anacláudia Rossbach set the stage by reiterating the need to build 900,000 houses per year globally until 2030 in order to address the housing crisis. She recalled that WUF12 is happening within the context of the adoption of the Pact for the Future.

Egypt's Minister of Local Development, Manal Awad, spoke about her country's efforts to decentralize and support subnational governments' efforts to achieve sustainable development.

Launching into three-minute blocks per speaker, several countries reiterated their support for both the SDGs and the NUA. Many developing countries stressed that their efforts to help cities mitigate and adapt to climate change are happening despite significant financial barriers, and outlined their national strategies to ensure funding reaches subnational governments. Some countries identified public-private partnerships as key to their sustainable urbanization strategies.

Nepal highlighted it is working with UN-Habitat in over 700 municipalities to address unplanned urban growth. South Africa noted its multistakeholder approach which includes academia to ensure solutions are evidence-based and can be sustainable. Malaysia outlined that 80% of their population is expected to live in cities by 2030, which can improve the population's access to healthcare and education but can also exacerbate housing affordability issues. Malawi spoke of their efforts to make sure investments not only meet the needs of today, but are forward-thinking for the future.

Azerbaijan indicated it would launch an initiative at COP29, imminently taking place in Baku, that would look to address the interlinked challenges of urbanization and climate and build synergies between COPs and WUFs. The State of Palestine noted

the great challenge it faces in looking to build back better in the future. Lithuania noted its municipalities lead modernization programmes based on sustainable urban planning principles, with use of organic buildings and improved energy efficiency. Spain expressed support for policies that can help cities severely impacted by climate change, including Valencia, to recover fully.

The link to watch the entire roundtable can be found here: <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1x/k1xelwly5a>

International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs): On Thursday, Executive Director Anacláudia Rossbach convened this high-level roundtable to discuss a Future Global Action Plan on Housing and Infrastructure Finance. She noted that finance looms large at WUF12—particularly given the international reforms underway within the FfD process.

In other opening remarks, speakers recommended:

- private sector investment for meeting the affordable housing challenge, leveraged by public sector concessional funding and well-targeted regulatory frameworks;
- addressing cities' needs in the context of meeting the SDGs;
- distinguishing between concessional debt and commercial debt in IFIs' debt sustainability analyses; and
- considering access to funding realistically and much earlier in goal-setting processes.

Representatives from global, regional, and sectoral IFIs and MDBs then participated in a series of three panels.

In a **first panel** on unlocking investment for vulnerable communities, speakers pointed to key needs, including: high-level government leadership to facilitate investment; subnational governments engaging early with FfD process to identify their financing constraints; and coordination between UN-Habitat and MDBs to ensure projects are developed to be "bankable," involving creditworthy institutional participants.

In the **second panel**, on collaborative strategies for financing aligned with SDG 11, speakers said, *inter alia*, that: SDG 11 will only be achieved if IFIs work with key stakeholders to close the finance gap on housing; high African growth rates provide opportunities for at-scale investment in cities; subnational bodies should be able to access finance directly; and MDBs need to link project planning and delivery processes. They also noted an ongoing need for deep consultation with local governments on capacity building and a lack of data to support better targeted finance.

In the **last panel** on successful partnerships among local governments, IFIs, and the private sector, speakers pointed to a need for capacity building at the municipal level to enable development of bankable project concepts and to dialogue with communities to identify appropriate locations for sustainable housing.

Civil Society: On Friday, Siraj Sait, UN-Habitat Stakeholder Advisory Group Co-Chair, moderated this roundtable.

Speakers from civil society, government, and international agencies highlighted people-centered, demand-driven, evidence-based development, including the "P4" concept of people-public-private partnerships that share resources and risks.



View of the room during the Civil Society Roundtable

Some speakers highlighted engagement with foundations and philanthropies. Others spoke on funding or other support they themselves provide. One urged long-term funding for specific processes.

Many bemoaned the shrinking of civil society space, given increasing crises and democratic deficits. Speakers called for: integrating work with all levels of government and all sectors, including the private sector; countering such shrinking, as well as privatization, of land by increasing systematic, permanent civil society dialogue structures and community-public partnerships, such as a UN-Habitat mechanism; and halting over-reliance on the private sector and corporate capture. One speaker noted the private sector's urgent obligation to support the public sphere and strengthen democracy.

Another speaker noted the discrepancy between ministers and authorities speaking in civil society roundtables—and then departing without hearing civil society's perspectives—while not giving civil society access to WUF12's Ministerial Roundtable.

Participants urged:

- allowing slum and informal settlement inhabitants to improve dwellings rather than having to relocate;
- enabling people to stay in their homes rather than migrating to flee crises;
- building climate-resilient code-compliant houses;
- gathering community data collaboratively, including on forced evictions, integrating it into national-level data, and accelerating reporting under Indicator SDG 11.3.2 on civil society involvement;
- forming an “ecosystem” with all planning stakeholders to be more productive, “own” the process, and change politics;
- strengthening the [UN-Habitat Strategic Plan](#) on control over land, social production of habitat, rights to the city, and mechanisms of accountability; and
- training communities in advocacy.

UN-Habitat Executive Director Rossbach said WUF12 will contribute to UN-Habitat's Strategic Plan and other fora. She urged translating best practices into different contexts, expressing



Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, former Executive Director, UN-Habitat

hope for more systematic messaging from future WUFs and a UN-Habitat track dedicated specifically to housing.

An attendee said civil society representatives were abrogating their responsibility to marginalized communities by listening to speakers at this roundtable, who speak and then leave, instead of listening to communities. Another called on the international community, civil society organizations, and UNHCR to stop ignoring the Sudanese war and to recognize the suffering Sudanese women and children are enduring.

The link to watch the entire roundtable can be found here: <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k13/k13xgp3t4u>

One UN

Presentations and workshops in the “One UN” stream of events demonstrated impacts and outcomes of cooperation among different UN agencies, and drew attention to success stories. This report covers five of the many One UN events that took place during the week.

Implementing the New Urban Agenda: Anacláudia Rossbach, UN-Habitat Executive Director, and two former Executive Directors, Maimunah Mohd Sharif and Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, explored UN-Habitat and the genesis of the WUF and the NUA. They also discussed the future of the organization and the Forum. Executive Director Rossbach congratulated the former directors on their achievements in raising awareness about rapid urbanization, elevating the urbanization agenda, and solidifying the role of UN-Habitat in the broader UN system.

Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka noted that “urbanization” is dynamic, but UN-Habitat's lasting mandate is to pursue adequate shelter for all, especially vulnerable groups. She recalled challenges in defining “adequate shelter” and noted success in: building awareness of growing migration from rural areas to cities; creating the WUF platform for exchanging ideas; and increasing cities' capacities in planning and partnering with multiple stakeholders. She called for promoting balanced territorial development and holding regional planning meetings to coordinate with donors. She also called for clear urban indicators for measuring success.



Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Mayor of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and former Executive Director, UN-Habitat

Maimunah Mohd Sharif spoke about her term as Executive Director, which recently ended, and how her tenure was complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. She explained the pandemic showed that cities and local government are really on the frontlines, particularly women and girls. She noted that the pandemic also demonstrated the capacity for local governments to disburse funding and move with speed to tackle issues. She recalled that during her tenure, local and regional governments reached unprecedented levels of importance within the UN system, referencing the UN Advisory Committee of Local Authorities.

Looking to the future, Rossbach noted the importance of UNGA's adoption of the Pact for the Future, which recognizes the NUA. She explained that the NUA is crucial for sustainable development and urbanization, given its fundamental principles of inclusion, leaving no one behind, and putting people at the center of UN-Habitat's work. She resolved to strengthen the role of UN-Habitat in the UN system and remarked on how WUF has acted as an anchor for UN-Habitat through these challenging times.

The webcast can be found here: <https://wuf.unhabitat.org/event/wuf12/new-urban-agenda-where-are-we-how-get-there>

Social and Economic Inclusion of Migrants in Border Cities Through Safe and Accessible Public Spaces—The Case of Latin America and Western Asia: On Friday, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) presented this event in cooperation with UN-Habitat and project partners.

Roi Chiti, Coordinator for Andean Countries, UN-Habitat, made opening remarks, noting that migrants are often seen as competitors for scarce housing and infrastructure in the poorer neighborhoods where they typically live. He argued that public spaces can be venues for social integration and dialogue among host communities and migrants.

Moderator Monserrat Hernández, Head of Programs, IOM Ecuador, invited panelists to speak about their experiences with projects in Latin America and Western Asia, carried out in cooperation with UN-Habitat.

Abd El Menhem Osman, Mayor of Mehamrah, Lebanon, described how his town's original population has greatly increased as it has received 11,500 internally displaced Lebanese people, 8,500 Syrians, and 35,000 Palestinians. He explained how a UN Development Account project, running from 2021–2025, has helped local authorities and communities cooperate to create safe spaces for children, including tree planting and development of picnic areas.

Other project participants, who described similar efforts in their neighborhoods, came from the State of Paraná, Brazil, Cúcuta Municipality, Colombia, and Amman, Jordan. They emphasized: involving local communities in needs-mapping at the very beginning of a project, to ensure community ownership; advocating that local government authorities follow through on installing agreed facilities; and applying a cultural approach that can create a sense of community identity in public spaces.

The webcast for this session can be found here: <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/klm/klm8oykasp>



One UN: Public spaces for children

Public Spaces for Children: On Friday, this panel, which included speakers from the WHO and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), highlighted a variety of strategies on why we should be designing our cities for children. Speakers considered the deficit of public spaces for children as a global injustice, given that motor vehicle collisions are the major cause of death of children globally and that children have fewer opportunities to be active and to socialize.

Moderator Nathalie Roebbel, Lead for Urban Health, WHO, explained that public spaces are where children can play, learn, and grow socially. She noted they are crucial for development, health and wellbeing. With colleagues from UNICEF and UN-Habitat, she presented a summary of their upcoming Guide to Creating Public Spaces for Urban Children. A representative from the Van Leer Foundation explained their methodology of urging decision makers to consider what they would change about their city after experiencing it from the height of 95 cm, the average height of a three-year old child.

A panelist from the Global Design Cities Initiative explained that streets are the largest continuous use of public space in our cities, but humans have been completely alienated by the way streets are designed to favor cars, stating that we need to help young people move more independently.

A representative from the International Society for Urban Health described a case in which a neighborhood was transformed and saw a dramatic decrease in crime after two small child-focused spaces were installed.

A panelist from Sistema Urbano spoke about efforts to take streets and spaces back for children and families, explaining how differently caregivers and children experience the urban landscape and its mobility barriers.

The webcast for this session can be found here: <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/klm/klm8oykasp>

Greening Near East and North African Cities to Combat Climate Change: On Friday, Ahmad Mukhtar, Senior Economist, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa, convened this session in partnership with the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

Abdul Hakim El-Waer, FAO Assistant Director-General, Near East and North Africa, in opening remarks, stressed the need for



Ibrahim Saber Khalil, Governor of Cairo, Egypt

boosting investment in order to protect rural areas' production capacity from the increasing climate-related impacts of sand and dust storms. He noted cities are expanding to take up more and more arable land and urged increasing urban food production through innovative means. He explained that FAO is promoting agrifood transformation, increasing food-producing urban green spaces, and reducing food waste.

Panelists from ESCWA, the City of Amman in Jordan, a research center on vegetation cover in Saudi Arabia, and FAO called for integrated management of land and water resources in the face of increasingly frequent and severe sand and dust storm impacts across the region, with dire consequences for urban and rural landscapes and populations. They also noted:

- UNGA has declared 2025-34 as a decade for combating the impacts of these storms;
- the importance of partnerships in addressing the issue, including south-south collaboration;
- increasingly sophisticated meteorological and imaging technology being used to track the specific impacts of these storms and climate change more broadly, where the number of days per year above 50°C is increasing and water resources, such as lakes, are shrinking;
- undernourishment and malnutrition worsening due to food shortages;
- the importance of increasing tree planting, as is happening in Saudi Arabia, to reduce land productivity losses; and
- innovative approaches, such as “vertical agriculture,” including hydroponic and rooftop planting.

In closing remarks, Simone Borelli, Coordinator of the [FAO Green Cities Initiative](#), noted that the overarching objective of the programmes covered in the session is to better feed people and improve their health. He also called for training programmes on tree planting to improve seedlings' survival rate.

The webcast for this session can be found here: <https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k13/k132qyh8t>

WUF12 Closing Ceremony

At the afternoon [closing ceremony](#), UN-Habitat, hosts, and partners expressed warm appreciation for each other's work.

Ibrahim Saber Khalil, Governor of Cairo, stated that WUF12 had provided opportunities to connect with counterparts from



Yuriko Koike, Governor of Tokyo, Japan

around the world, share Egypt's rich cultural heritage, and exchange ideas and experiences. He highlighted Cairo's extensive sustainable urban development efforts.

Sherif El-Sherbiny, Minister of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities, Egypt, expressed appreciation that many WUF12 participants had taken the opportunity to go on site visits to view urban developments around Cairo which demonstrate that housing can go beyond simply constructing buildings to improving lives.

Egypt's Minister of Local Development, Manal Awad, spoke of WUF12 as a forum for Egypt to reaffirm its commitment to international dialogue on sustainable development. She spoke of the country's ongoing work to decentralize and increase funding for local authorities, and noted that virtual participation in WUF12 had boosted total participants to more than 40,000.

UN-Habitat Executive Director Anacláudia Rossbach pledged to convey the messages of the [Cairo Call to Action](#) to other multilateral forums, including the upcoming UN Climate Change Conference in Baku, Azerbaijan, which opens on 11 November.

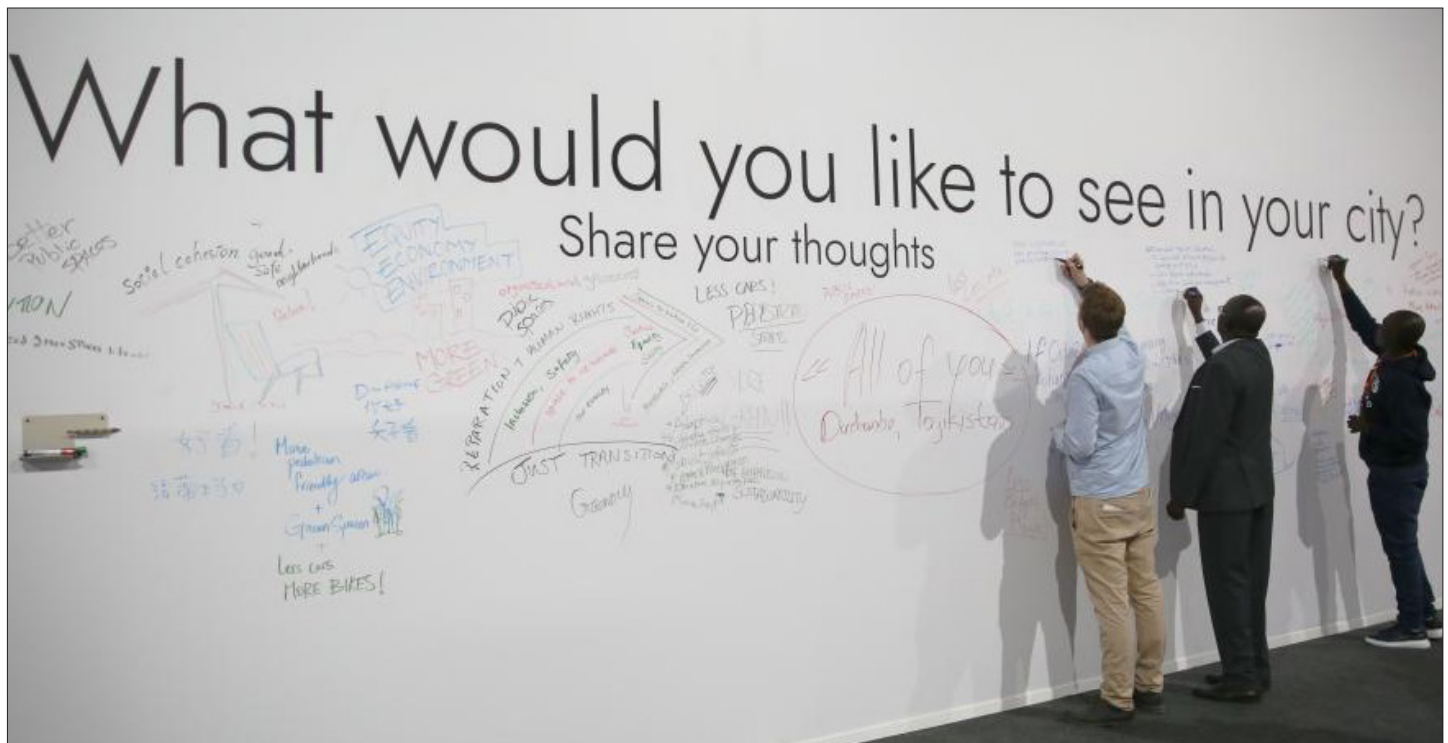
Yuriko Koike, Governor of Tokyo, affirmed that cross-border collaboration and cooperation are needed now more than ever, and called for applying a gender perspective in urban policy and for working together to create vibrant cities.

Sahar Attia, Egyptian Member of Parliament, enumerated many of the highlights of WUF12, including the attendance of more academics and Members of Parliament than at any previous WUF, powerful exhibitions and events, and the presentation of many innovative ideas.

Elizabeth Espinosa, Indigenous youth representative, spoke of her pride in participating in WUF12 and encouraged all youth activists to join her in contributing to global endeavors in which every voice will matter.

Minister Awad then introduced the ten-point [Cairo Call to Action](#), which calls for urgent action to address the global housing crisis and affirms the need for “sustained and systemic representation of communities as political actors in local and national decision-making processes.” Speakers then jointly launched this conference outcome.

UN-Habitat Executive Director Anacláudia Rossbach declared the Forum closed at 5:40 pm.



Cairo Call to Action

The ten-point [Cairo Call to Action](#) reaffirms participants' commitment to promote sustainable urbanization through the NUA, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Pact for the Future. The Call refers to the current humanitarian challenges and the role that local governments play in responding to the needs of those who have been forcibly displaced from their homes.

Among its ten substantive action points, the Call urges:

- addressing the global housing crisis, in terms of reconstruction and recovery, access to basic services, and housing affordability;
- empowering local actors to achieve global goals;
- sustaining systemic representation of local actors in local and national decision-making;
- sharing urban spaces inclusively with women, children and youth, persons with disabilities, the elderly, Indigenous groups, low-income households, migrants, refugees, and others;
- delivering better outcomes through participatory urban planning, including a holistic approach to the social, ecological, and economic functions of land, including land rights, and the promotion of “people-centered smart cities”;
- unlocking and increasing finance for cities and communities, through accessing financial markets and other untapped sources of revenue;
- ensuring equity and justice, including climate action;
- co-producing and using local, grassroots, and disaggregated data in decision making;
- integrating culture and heritage in urban development; and
- scaling up local action through coalitions.

Upcoming Meetings

UN Climate Change Conference: The next UN Climate Change Conference will include COP 29, the 19th meeting of the COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 19), and the sixth meeting of the COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 6). The conference is expected to develop a new collective quantified goal for climate finance. **dates:** 11-22 November 2024 **location:** Baku, Azerbaijan **www:** unfccc.int/cop29

Fifth UN World Data Forum: The aim of the Forum is to spur data innovation, nurture partnerships, mobilize high-level political and financial support for data, and build a pathway to better data for sustainable development. **dates:** 12-15 November 2024 **location:** Medellin, Colombia **www:** unstats.un.org/unsd/undataforum/

G20 Summit 2024: The 2024 Summit, which is taking place under Brazil's Presidency, is expected to discuss: social inclusion and the fight against hunger; energy transition; sustainable development in its social, economic and environmental aspects; and reform of global governance institutions. The 2024 Summit's theme is ‘Building a Just World and a Sustainable Planet’. **dates:** 18-19 November 2024 **location:** Rio de Janeiro, Brazil **www:** www.g20.org/en/

Second Session of the Fourth FfD Preparatory Committee: The second session of the Preparatory Committee will continue to make the organizational, procedural, and substantive preparations for the Conference. **dates:** 3-6 December 2024 **location:** New York, United States of America **www:** financing.desa.un.org/preparatory-process-ffd4/second-prepcom

World Forum of Local Economic Development: This meeting is intended to promote the local economic development

approach, advance the political debate, and strengthen global associations in order to achieve concrete actions at the local, national, and international levels. **dates:** 1-4 April 2025

location: Seville, Spain **www:** ledworldforum.org/

Sustainable High (SusHi) Tech Tokyo 2025: This event, featuring startups and city leaders, will showcase cutting-edge technology, diverse ideas, and digital know-how for overcoming global urban challenges and creating a sustainable society. **dates:** 8-10 May 2025 **location:** Tokyo, Japan **www:** sushi-tech-tokyo.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/top/en/

Resumed Second Session of the UN Habitat Assembly: UN-Habitat will resume this session to consider the Strategic Plan for UN-Habitat for 2026-2029. **dates:** 29-30 May 2025 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** unhabitat.org/events/resumed-second-session-of-the-un-habitat-assembly

Fourth International Conference for Financing for Development (FfD): The conference will address new and emerging issues and the need to fully implement the SDGs, support reform of the international financial architecture, and assess progress made in implementing the [Monterrey Consensus](#), the [Doha Declaration](#) and the [Addis Ababa Action Agenda](#). **dates:** 30 June - 3 July 2025 **location:** Seville, Spain **www:** financing.desa.un.org/ffd4

High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) 2025: The theme of the 2025 HLPF is “Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for leaving no one behind.” The SDGs to be reviewed in-depth are SDG 3 (good health and well-being) SDG 3, SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 14 (life below water), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals). **dates:** 21-24 July 2025 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** hlpf.un.org/home

13th International Conference of Sustainable Development: The 13th International Conference on Sustainable Development 2025 will focus on environmental, economic and socio-cultural sustainability with the theme “Creating a unified foundation for sustainable development: research, practice and education.” **dates:** 10-11 September 2025 **location:** Rome, Italy **www:** ecsdev.org/conference/13th-icsd-2025

World Habitat Day: This UN day is celebrated on the first Monday of October to reflect on the state of human settlements and people’s right to sufficient shelter. It also aims to remind people that they are responsible for the habitat of future generations. **dates:** 7 October 2025 **location:** worldwide **www:** urbanoctober.unhabitat.org/whd

World Cities Day 2025: This day is expected to promote the international community’s interest in global urbanization, push forward cooperation among countries in meeting opportunities and addressing challenges of urbanization, and contribute to sustainable urban development around the world. **dates:** 31 October 2025 **location:** worldwide **www:** un.org/en/observances/cities-day

Smart City Expo World Congress 2025: The Smart City Expo World Congress is the world’s leading summit addressing the link between urban reality and the technological revolution.

Corporate leaders, public representatives, entrepreneurs, experts, and academics from all around the globe will come together to learn from each other, share experiences, talk about best practices, and open new paths for international collaboration.

dates: 4-6 November 2025 **location:** Barcelona, Spain **www:** smartcityexpo.com/

UNEA-7: A final decision on the theme of the seventh session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) will be taken by the UNEA Bureau during its joint meeting with the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) scheduled for 11 December 2024. UNEA-7 will be preceded by the seventh meeting of the Open-ended CPR, which will take place from 1-5 December 2025. **dates:** 8-12 December 2025 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** unep.org/environmentassembly/unea7

61st ISOCARP World Planning Congress: The 61st International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP) Congress focuses on a planning theme of foremost international interest and has addressed vital topics in the field of regional planning every year since 1965. **dates:** TBD 2025 **location:** TBD **www:** isocarp.org/

13th Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF13): The Forum will provide a platform for global leaders to share expertise on the global challenges faced in urban development and the innovative ways we can overcome them. WUF13 will focus on how the world can achieve the SDGs and the NUA objectives. **dates:** TBD, 2026 **location:** Baku, Azerbaijan **www:** unhabitat.org/

For additional meetings, see sdg.iisd.org

Glossary

ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council of the UN
ENACT	Enhancing Nature-based Solutions for an Accelerated Climate Transformation
ESCWA	UN Economic and Social Commission for West Asia
FfD4	Fourth Financing for Development conference
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
IFIs	international financial institution
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MDB	multilateral development bank
NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions
NGOs	non-government organizations
NUA	New Urban Agenda
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
UNCED	UN Conference on Environment and Development
UNHCR	UN Refugee Agency
WHO	World Health Organization
WUF	World Urban Forum