



**UN HABITAT Executive Board
of the United Nations
Human Settlements
Programme**

Distr.: General
23 August 2022

Original: English

**Executive Board of the United Nations
Human Settlements Programme
Second session of 2022**
Nairobi, 21–23 November 2022
Item 9 of the provisional agenda*

**Outcomes of the eleventh session of the World Urban
Forum**

Summary of the outcomes of the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum

Report by the Executive Director

1. The eleventh session of the World Urban Forum,¹ held from 26 to 30 June 2022, marked two decades since the establishment of the Forum by the General Assembly to address the pressing challenges faced by Member States in the light of rapid urbanization. Convened by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the Forum is a unique non-legislative United Nations platform where Member States, local governments and the stakeholders of the New Urban Agenda meet to share solutions and highlight how well-planned, well-integrated and well-managed urbanization leads to sustainable development. Since 2018, two years after the adoption of the New Urban Agenda, the World Urban Forum has provided an opportunity to advocate for and track the progress of local action towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.
2. At the joint opening of the World Urban Forum assemblies, the Executive Director listed five priorities for the eleventh session: partnerships to review the implementation of the New Urban Agenda; quick-impact projects to develop monitoring mechanisms; approaches for promoting human rights and equity; policies to monitor global commitments; and sustainable urban and land-use planning. The Forum aims to advance progress towards goals emanating from the various United Nations conferences on sustainable development, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.
3. With strong participation from stakeholders, the Forum continues to demonstrate UN-Habitat's ability to mobilize a wide range of participants representing national, local and regional governments, parliamentarians, civil society, older people, women, young people, children, people with disabilities, grass-roots groups, indigenous peoples, local communities, the private sector, foundations and philanthropic organizations, academia, professionals and other stakeholders of the New Urban Agenda.
4. The city of Katowice in Poland hosted the eleventh session of the Forum from 26 to 30 June 2022, under the theme "Transforming our Cities for a Better Urban Future". Katowice was the first city in Central and Eastern Europe to host the Forum, thus realizing the 1992 vision of UN-Habitat and UNEP with regard to the Sustainable Cities Programme. The city constitutes a global

* HSP/EB.2022/14.

¹ A summary of the meeting can be found at https://enb.iisd.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/wuf11_summary.pdf.

example of how integrated planning and the establishment of a new economy based on culture, services and creativity continue to attract financing to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, as demonstrated in 11 “SDG#11” zones throughout the city.

5. The regional government of Upper Silesia and local governmental partners from Poland played an active role in the Forum to ensure that regional considerations were discussed. Katowice and its region continue to inspire the world with examples of inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable human settlements for all, with a strong sustainable communities component of leaving no one and no place behind.

6. In terms of statistics, the eleventh session exceeded expectations, especially as the holding of the Forum had only been confirmed at the UN-Habitat Executive Board’s first session of 2022, held in March 2022, leaving the organizers three months to prepare. More than 17,000 participants from 155 countries attended the eleventh session. In the five days of the Forum, more than 450 high-quality knowledge exchanges took place in the form of assemblies, dialogues, round-table discussions and special sessions. There were also unique stakeholder-led events at the Urban Expo, and UN-Habitat priority programmes were showcased at the UN-Habitat Arena.

7. The eleventh session of the Forum established a new benchmark for accessibility, with full interpretation in all six official United Nations languages as well as in Polish and Ukrainian (six events). Information was also provided in both the international and Polish sign languages. Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) speech transcription and numerous other mechanisms providing improved access for people with disabilities demonstrated that transformative action to ensure accessibility for all through universal design is possible in the built environment. Overall gender parity was achieved in terms of participation, with 47 per cent of participants being women and 53 per cent men. Parity among panel members had been achieved at the tenth session of the Forum, and the Executive Director of UN-Habitat and the Government of Poland ensured parity at the eleventh session as well, with women representing 52 per cent of the more than 630 speakers at the main sessions.

8. In terms of outreach and advocacy, events covered live by United Nations Web TV streaming (webtv.un.org) received a total of 46,145 views. Considering that United Nations Web TV handled competing United Nations events during the same period, including the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development (Ocean Conference) in Portugal, the fiftieth session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva and Security Council meetings on Ukraine, as well as other events in New York, the online audience for the Forum sessions was robust. More than 350 media representatives were registered, including around 200 who attended in person. During the period 26–30 June 2022, the week of the Forum, more than 2,000 news items mentioning UN-habitat were featured in various media channels. Social media platforms such as Twitter showed a 400 per cent spike in items mentioning UN-Habitat, while coverage on online news platforms was up 500 per cent and newspaper coverage up 200 per cent.

9. As had been recommended by the advance mission for the Forum and requested by the Executive Board, the Forum featured the Extraordinary Dialogue on Urban Crisis Response and Recovery, during which the need to transform local systems to increase their efficiency in addressing the crises of health, human-induced conflict and natural disasters was highlighted. Speakers were invited to reflect on the nature and scale of urban crises; on how recovery could offer opportunities to accelerate the necessary transformative change towards sustainable development; and on the role of mayors as first responders and leaders of urban transformation. During the dialogue, a UN-Habitat representative called for fit-for-purpose systems that enhanced biodiversity and addressed housing and equity issues, and a representative of the London School of Economics pointed out that wars were shifting to cities, where civilians suffered the highest casualties and must be better protected.

10. The President of the United Nations Habitat Assembly of UN-Habitat convened a joint meeting of the bureaux of the governing bodies of UN-Habitat on 29 June 2022. The members of the bureaux exchanged views on Member States’ oversight of UN-Habitat and on opportunities to further strengthen the oversight role of each governing body as well as their coordination. The meeting was also an opportunity to share and discuss preliminary expectations for the second session of the UN-Habitat Assembly, to be held in June 2023 at UN-Habitat headquarters in Nairobi.

11. The World Urban Forum Alumni Network held a working meeting during the Forum, on 28 June 2022, to decide on activities and initiate planning for those activities. Alumni members agreed on activities within five broad workstreams and identified members to act as workstream focal points. The workstreams were presented at an open session with the participation of the Executive Director and ministers from the host countries of the Forum’s twelfth (Egypt), first (Kenya) and eleventh

(Poland) sessions, along with a high-level representative of the host of the tenth session (United Arab Emirates). The five workstreams are: global think tank; technical advisory; knowledge management; voluntary local reviews; and global projects. The outcomes of the activities will be geared towards evaluation of the Forum and development of the programme cycle for the next edition of the Forum.

12. To assist the Executive Director in the conduct of the World Urban Forum, a multi-stakeholder advisory group met daily to discuss the key ideas arising from the discussions at the Forum. The advisory group was co-chaired by a representative of the Government of Poland and the President of the UN-Habitat Assembly. At the closing ceremony, the President of the UN-Habitat Assembly read out a document entitled “Katowice Declared Actions: Transforming Our Cities for a Better Urban Future”. The document sets out Forum participants’ voluntary actions and commitments for the next two years and beyond, including to:

- (a) Move from incrementalism towards fundamental shifts in urban environments, systems of governance and forms of habitation, in line with human rights treaties;
- (b) Focus on imminent urban crises such as climate and biodiversity emergencies, pandemics, violence and conflicts, and other natural and human-induced disasters that all converge in cities and surrounding territories;
- (c) Reconfirm culture as a core component of local identity;
- (d) Reaffirm that accessibility and universal design are an integral part of the solution to the challenges of urbanization;
- (e) Encourage all development actors to mobilize their capacities in the United Nations Decade of Action and appeal to governments to better fund UN-Habitat.

13. Furthermore, as was conveyed by the President of the UN-Habitat Assembly, participants in the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum:

- (a) Encouraged all development actors gathered in Katowice to mobilize their respective capacities in the decade of action by tracking progress through a monitoring and reporting mechanism;
- (b) Made an urgent appeal to all Governments to better fund UN-Habitat to ensure that its elevated mandate is met by enhanced resources and capacity of UN-Habitat;
- (c) Called upon all stakeholders to continue to submit their declared actions until 31 July 2022 through the Urban Agenda Platform, highlighting the transformative nature of their commitments;
- (d) Thanked the Government of Poland, the city of Katowice and UN-Habitat for convening the Forum and committed themselves to providing ongoing cooperation to the hosts of the next Forum, namely the Government of Egypt and the city of Cairo.

14. At the ministerial round table, the keynote speaker gave an overview of collaboration with the United Nations Secretariat to increase the momentum of New Urban Agenda implementation. The Executive Director of UN-Habitat asked ministers to focus on New Urban Agenda implementation in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, housing and social security, climate change, urban displacement and finance. Ministers agreed that affordable and sustainable housing was not only key to many dimensions of sustainable urbanization, including social security, safety and health, but also a fundamental question of human dignity. Representatives of Member States highlighted the need to meet the rapidly growing demand for housing, which had accelerated amid recent crises. Regarding urban displacement, several ministers drew the link between rural development and migration, stressing that people everywhere should have access to basic services and adequate housing. Regarding climate change, participants showcased projects to expand green spaces and plant trees alongside efforts to support public transport in order to reduce emissions.

15. Messages conveyed during the local and regional governments round table included that local and regional government were an “ally for multilateralism”, with the key message that “a culture of peace is the basis for development”. Decentralization was a priority: it was essential for communities to have localized data to access resources needed to mobilize action. Decentralization meant sharing power and strengthening communities by ensuring that they received necessary services. Sufficient resources needed to be made available at the local level to provide vital services. That required rethinking forms of government, with an emphasis on decentralization, green development, caring for vulnerable groups, a renewed emphasis on women’s rights and sheltering those experiencing homelessness, and direct, non-sovereign finance, such as municipal bonds for water and large-scale equity partnerships.

16. During the Forum round tables, the Executive Director emphasized the strength of national urban policies in fostering intersectoral and interregional coordination. In the run-up to the eleventh session, UN-Habitat co-organized more than 30 national urban forums in all regions, with a focus on helping Member States track the implementation of their national urban policies. To date, 56 countries have instituted national urban policies supported by UN-Habitat, and 26 have submitted national reports on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. At the eleventh session of the Forum, ministers and high-level European officials focused on national urban policies through the lenses of, among other things, innovation and technology, highlighting the importance of data for effective decision-making; housing, underscoring the urgent and widespread need for affordable, sustainable and secure homes; and mobility, noting the need for sustainable, efficient and safe transportation systems.

17. Participants in the round table on persons with disabilities highlighted the fact that city dwellers and other persons with disabilities were not homogenous groups. They discussed the importance of accessibility legislation and standards; of genuinely engaging persons with disabilities; and of universal design in promoting equity. They also noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had disproportionately affected persons with disability and called for the collection of disaggregated data to shape social policies; building of inclusive technology solutions by industry; and tailored employment opportunities to reduce labour market access barriers.

18. At the “One UN” round table, participants voiced support for improving coordination across agencies and developing joint programmes to achieve sustainable urbanization. Inclusivity and participation emerged as key themes. The need to include residents alongside public authorities and private-sector partners in urban planning and development was also emphasized.

19. Discussions during the round tables on women, academia, professionals, foundations and philanthropies, children and youth, civil society and grassroots organizations, and trade unions and workers highlighted a range of urbanization aspects, including safety; quality housing design as a connector between science and user needs; professionalism in accelerating the incorporation of the Sustainable Development Goals into services; the ability of foundations to invest in the “upside of risk” and explore new approaches to impact; and youth-led work on localizing the Sustainable Development Goals and the need to replace the “tokenization” of youth.

20. At the business and industries round table, a panel of experts discussed ideas for overcoming challenges to private-sector participation in sustainable urban development, including increasing cities’ capacities to absorb public funding and private investments; designing social contracts articulating a long-term vision that could survive electoral cycles; incorporating sound performance metrics and local sustainable development indicators to improve transparency and accountability; engaging stakeholders around solutions rather than projects; involving all stakeholders, including the private sector, as early as possible in planning to ensure that the right solutions were found; mobilizing local capital; and introducing digital ecosystems for knowledge sharing to allow scaling of successful projects.

21. National Urban Forums are an integral part of the World Urban Forum, presenting an inclusive, national-level platform that brings multiple stakeholders together around a common vision for sustainable urban development. They provide an opportunity to partner with diverse stakeholders and key urban actors to address the challenges of sustainable urbanization. The key focus of the new cycle of National Urban Forums in the lead-up to the twelfth session of the World Urban Forum is to press for a paradigm shift to translate National Urban Forums into national urban policies and then into practice (forum – policy – practice).

22. In the coming two years, the World Urban Forum will continue to call for action and mobilization and track progress on the Katowice Declared Actions. The goal will be to ensure that the actions which participants in the eleventh session committed to undertaking are realized, and that the most positive results possible are delivered to the communities that need them most in the run-up to the twelfth session of the Forum, to be held in Cairo in 2024.