

# World Urban Forum 12. It All Starts at Home: Local Actions for Sustainable Cities and Communities

The 12th World Urban Forum (WUF 12), held in Cairo, brought together over 24,000 participants from 182 countries under the theme "It All Starts at Home: Local Actions for Sustainable Cities and Communities". This forum, convened by UN-Habitat from November 4-8, focused on the localisation of the SDGs, highlighting the local actions needed to mitigate current global challenges, including unaffordable housing, rising costs of living, climate change, lack of basic services, displacement, and ongoing conflicts.

At the beginning of the conference, parallel assemblies were held representing: Local and Regional Governments; Business and Foundations; Grassroots Organisations; Women; and Children and Youth. Six high-level dialogues addressed key concerns related to: housing; climate action; partnerships and inclusiveness; finance; the social impact of digital technologies; and migration and displacement. There were also special sessions and roundtables for action-oriented discussions, as well as other events.

On the final day, delegations adopted the Cairo Call to Action, pledging to act with urgency to address the global housing crisis as well as leveraging local action to achieving global goals and targets.

## Key Highlights and Achievements

The [Cairo Call to Action](#), adopted at WUF 12, emphasizes transformative local action for sustainable urbanization. Key priorities include tackling the global housing crisis, ensuring equitable access to urban opportunities, and promoting inclusive urban planning with localized approaches. It highlights the urgency of unlocking finance for cities, leveraging grassroots data, and fostering coalitions for impactful local action. Cultural heritage and climate resilience are identified as critical pillars for sustainability. The declaration urges all stakeholders to align efforts across levels and sectors to advance equity, justice, and climate goals in urban development. WUF 12 also showcased a strong commitment to actionable goals. Over 50 countries pledged to increase investments in urban climate resilience, with particular attention to affordable housing powered by renewable energy. Additionally, agreements were reached to enhance local governments' access to international climate finance, addressing a critical barrier to implementing climate adaptation projects. The forum highlighted that urban areas, which generate 70% of global emissions, must be at the forefront of climate solutions. It was the most numerous WUF to date, with attendance of over 24,000 participants from 182 countries. In all, over 63,000 people, in person or online, attended more than 700 events from 1,500 organisers.

## EU takeaways from WUF 12

European Commission was represented by DG INTPA, JRC, DG RTD, and DG ENER. Many of the sessions of interest to INTPA addressed the importance of financing bankable urban projects and urbansustainability, covering sectors such as water utilities, urban infrastructure financing, regional urban planning and economic integration, and climate resilience and mitigation.

DG INTPA participated in several sessions and High-level Dialogues, and also co-organised a networking event titled "Cities and Corridors - the importance of an urban perspective for harnessing the development potential of enhanced connectivity", which presented the opportunities for working through a more integrated urban approach offered by the Global Gateway, and the importance of policy coherence between EU internal and external action, including drawing up on the lessons from existing corridor initiatives, where the EU's Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) could offer a valuable insight.

There was a signature event and press conference organised by the EU and UN-Habitat to launch the second phase of the EU-Water Operators' Partnerships (EU-WOP) Programme. With additional EU funding of EUR 14 million by 2030, the EU-WOP Programme strengthens partnerships between water and sanitation utilities.

We established a good co-creation process prior to the WUF, which demonstrated that the urban agenda and local governance are central to several INTPA's thematic areas and the implementation of our strategic priorities in the different regions.

We also took the opportunity to organise a meeting with our Team Europe partners working in the urban sector, with the aim to launch a Global Gateway Urban Platform to discuss how to align efforts to deliver on common objectives.

## Challenges

Despite notable successes, participants expressed concerns about the slow pace of implementing past commitments. Financing gaps remain significant, with only 25% of global urban adaptation projects currently fully funded. Many delegates criticized the lack of concrete timelines and mechanisms for deploying the announced pledges to the cities most in need.

There was also frustration with insufficient focus on small and medium-sized cities, which often lack the institutional capacity to access international funding streams. Furthermore, the forum highlighted disparities in urban climate action, with wealthier cities advancing faster than those in developing nations.

## The Way Forward

Looking ahead, the Cairo Framework calls for its adoption into national urban policies, with milestones set for the next WUF in 2026. A significant focus will be placed on tracking progress and holding stakeholders accountable for their commitments. The outcomes of this WUF also informed discussions within UN-Habitat and the first open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group on Adequate Housing for All, celebrated from 9 to 11 December 2024. The forum underscored the urgency of collaboration between governments, private sectors, and civil society to achieve sustainable urbanization. While Cairo showcased promising frameworks and commitments, the success of WUF 12 will ultimately depend on how well its ambitious goals are translated into tangible actions in the years ahead.