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**Committee of Permanent Representatives  
to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme  
Third open-ended meeting: preparations for the resumed  
second session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly  
and midterm review**

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Item 4 of the provisional agenda\*

**Report of the twelfth session of the World Urban Forum and  
preparations for the thirteenth session of the Forum**

**Twelfth session of the World Urban Forum and preparations  
for the thirteenth session**

**Report of the Executive Director**

1. The present report provides a summary of the key outcomes, achievements and impacts of the twelfth session of the World Urban Forum (WUF) and presents the state of preparations for the thirteenth session, to be held in Baku from 17 to 22 May 2026. Section I outlines the context and purpose of the report; section II presents key outcomes, achievements and impacts from the twelfth session (WUF12); and section III introduces the progress made in the preparations for the thirteenth session (WUF13).

**I. Introduction**

2. The World Urban Forum was established by the General Assembly in resolution 56/206 of 26 February 2002 as a non-legislative technical platform intended to facilitate expert discussions during years when the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) did not meet. In its resolution 72/226 of 25 January 2018, the General Assembly reaffirmed the role of the World Urban Forum as an advocacy platform for all stakeholders in the fields of human settlements and sustainable urbanization, based on its non-legislative nature. Following the third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urbanization (Habitat III), held in Quito from 17 to 20 October 2016, the General Assembly, in resolution 71/256, identified the World Urban Forum as one of the platforms that could help support reporting on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

3. At WUF12, held in Cairo from 4 to 8 November 2024 under the theme “It All Starts at Home: Local Actions for Sustainable Cities and Communities”, strong multi-stakeholder participation was showcased, reflecting a global commitment to local actions advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. As the first major United Nations meeting held after the Summit of the Future, at which the Pact for the Future was adopted, WUF12 provided an opportunity to consider the commitments made under the Pact to ensure adequate housing, promote inclusive, just and resilient cities, localize sustainable development and harness digital technologies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The report at hand presents major outcomes, achievements and impacts of WUF12 and the

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\* HSP/OECPR.2025/1.

status of preparations for WUF13, while highlighting the strategic linkages between the two sessions, the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, and the UN-Habitat strategic plan for the period 2026–2029.

## II. Key outcomes of the twelfth session of the World Urban Forum

### A. Driving commitment to local action for sustainable cities and communities

4. The outcome document of WUF12, the Cairo Call to Action,<sup>1</sup> is an action-oriented declaration translating the discussions at WUF12 into urgent calls for advancing local action for sustainable urban development. Grounded in the principles of the New Urban Agenda, it reinforces the role of local action in addressing global challenges and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In the Call to Action, participants at WUF12 emphasized the importance of priorities such as tackling the global housing crisis, unlocking local finance, strengthening local decision-making and fostering inclusive cities. Reflecting the collective voice of diverse stakeholders, the declaration includes concrete steps towards resilient, sustainable and inclusive cities, has been translated into the six official languages of the United Nations, and will be widely disseminated, including at relevant multilevel forums in 2025, to advocate its key messages and build momentum towards WUF13.

5. *WUF12 Perspectives* will be a groundbreaking publication that synthesizes substantive insights from the discussions held at the twelfth session. For the first time, UN-Habitat conducted an in-depth analysis of nearly 600 events to capture the diverse perspectives and voices of WUF participants. Focusing on localization, the central theme of WUF12, the publication will advance knowledge and extend the impact of WUF12 beyond its five-day duration by leveraging the wealth of insights generated. Combining analysis driven by artificial intelligence with human expertise, it will enrich understanding of localization and play a significant role in driving the digital transformation of UN-Habitat. *WUF12 Perspectives* is expected to be released at the first session of 2025 of the Executive Board of UN-Habitat. Findings from the publication will be promoted in order to inform global policymaking, guide stakeholders' actions and shape the strategic direction of UN-Habitat.

6. The *WUF12 Report* will provide a comprehensive overview of proceedings at the session, including an executive summary, participation statistics and highlights from the main sessions. The report will serve as an official record, documenting the scope and scale of the Forum. It will further document sustainability, inclusivity and accessibility measures introduced at WUF12, as well as their impacts. Expected to be launched at the first session of 2025 of the Executive Board, the report will be publicly available online and on social media, and will highlight key data to enhance understanding of discussions at WUF12 and their relevance to urban development stakeholders.

### B. Mobilizing global stakeholders to advance sustainable cities and communities

7. WUF12 was the largest session to date, with more than 37,000 registrants and 24,000 in-person participants from 182 countries. High-level representation of Member States was unprecedented, with four Heads of State, one prime minister, four deputy prime ministers, 60 ministers and 45 deputy ministers, along with representatives of at least 96 local and regional governments from 84 countries. More than 700 partner- and UN-Habitat-led events explored the Forum's theme, fostering knowledge exchange and actionable solutions on housing, inclusive urbanization and sustainable cities. For the third time, the Forum achieved gender parity in its panels, with 50.6 per cent of speakers at the main sessions being female. In addition, 46.4 per cent of WUF12 participants were female. Prioritizing sustainability and accessibility, at WUF12 plastic waste was reduced by 13 per cent, full on-site waste sorting was implemented, and comprehensive access was ensured through the use of sign language, real-time transcription, and facilities for persons with disabilities.

8. The communication campaign for the twelfth session achieved significant results in terms of media outreach and audience engagement, with more than 120 million impressions across 50 countries. A record 905 media representatives from 36 countries registered, and more than 500 attended in person. Activity and engagement on social media platforms grew significantly, with millions of mentions of WUF12 on major platforms, notably X (formerly Twitter), with 72.5 million impressions.

9. A survey was conducted after WUF12 to gather participants' feedback on the Forum. Of the 924 respondents, 75 per cent said that their perspective on localization had changed after their

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<sup>1</sup> <https://wuf.unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/files/cairo-call-to-action-wuf12.pdf>.

attendance. That impact underlines the key role of WUF in shaping narratives and concepts related to sustainable urban development. Respondents particularly highlighted the need to increase the sharing of knowledge about local action and to promote solutions tailored to local contexts. Ninety-three per cent of respondents said that they were very satisfied or satisfied with WUF12, and 94 per cent said that they were likely or very likely to attend a future session.

### **C. Sustained intersessional engagement for greater impact**

10. Building on the momentum of WUF12, efforts are under way to amplify the key messages of the Cairo Call to Action globally. Dissemination activities will leverage international platforms, United Nations meetings of legislative bodies, intergovernmental meetings, and regional and national dialogues to spread the key messages of the Call to Action, such as the urgent need to address the global housing crisis, enable local action to achieve global goals, and unlock finance for local actors. Targeted outreach to national and local governments and stakeholder groups will strengthen ownership of the document and the actions needed for its implementation. In the lead-up to the thirteenth session, an inclusive consultation process will invite diverse stakeholders to provide input to the outcome document of the session, ensuring that the Baku Call to Action reflects their priorities, regional perspectives, and actionable commitments in regard to advancing the right to adequate housing and resilient, inclusive and safe cities.

11. Intersessional stakeholder engagement is essential to shape the substantive streams, or “tracks”, of the work of WUF, understand its impact for participants and expand outreach. Stakeholder engagement towards WUF13 aims to engage stakeholder groups in regular consultative sessions in order for them to actively contribute to substantive preparations for the session; to the drafting of the final Call to Action; and to the reporting on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 11. This engagement will leverage existing UN-Habitat partnerships, stakeholder advisory groups, thematic networks and advocacy campaigns, as well as regional and national urban forums. It will also use digital surveys and focus group discussions to grasp stakeholders’ expectations, areas of interest, perspectives on key urban challenges and ideas for action that they take away after attending sessions of WUF.

12. Multilevel urban forums play a crucial role in mobilizing partners towards WUF. They serve as preparatory platforms that engage stakeholders at various levels, including Member States, local governments, international financial institutions and United Nations system entities. They facilitate inclusive dialogues, gather local and regional perspectives and align national urban policies with global urban agendas. With technical support from UN-Habitat, these forums help identify priority issues, share best practices and generate actionable recommendations that feed into discussions at WUF. They also foster collaboration between governments, civil society, the private sector and academia, ultimately contributing to more informed, context-specific and impactful urban solutions that can be leveraged at WUF. In the lead-up to WUF13, UN-Habitat will follow a road map of interconnected initiatives and activities to disseminate the outcomes of WUF12 and make use of a global ecosystem of multilevel urban forums and stakeholders to shape narratives and actions. This engagement is also key to involving Member States and the urban community in reporting on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, as 2026 is the midpoint of the Agenda and the year of publication of the third quadrennial report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Agenda.

13. The WUF Alumni Network is a key mechanism for connecting WUF sessions and maximizing the Forum’s impact. It provides advisory services to future hosts on both substantive and operational aspects, while demonstrating and promoting good practices for achieving global urban goals. The Network plays a crucial role in raising awareness about WUF and the New Urban Agenda in members’ regions and in mobilizing stakeholders to participate in WUF. The Network is also expected to play a significant role at WUF13, particularly in the celebrations marking the midpoint of New Urban Agenda implementation – the “Quito+10” moment (discussed in more detail further below). Ahead of WUF13, the Network will be mobilized to advise the Government of Azerbaijan on relevant matters and to leverage national and regional initiatives that contribute to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

## **III. Preparations for the thirteenth session of the World Urban Forum**

### **A. Logistical arrangements and substantive preparations**

14. The official handover to WUF13 took place during the closing ceremony for WUF12. Anar Guliyev, Chairman of the State Committee for Urban Planning and Architecture of Azerbaijan,

accepted the responsibility of hosting WUF13 on behalf of Azerbaijan. WUF13 will be held from 17 to 22 May 2026 and preparations are under way. Two UN-Habitat missions to Baku have already taken place. The first was a scoping mission during the twenty-ninth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which was held in Baku from 11 to 14 November 2024, to assess logistics, branding and sustainability matters. The second mission took place from 25 January to 5 February 2025 and focused on the negotiations of the agreement of logistical arrangements for implementing WUF13. Two key milestones will be achieved in March 2025: the selection of the venue and the selection of the theme of WUF13. UN-Habitat is collaborating with the Government of Azerbaijan to develop a meaningful and strategic theme that will guide discussions at WUF13 while enabling the identification of solutions to key urban challenges.

15. In parallel with these logistical arrangements, UN-Habitat started its work on the strategic, substantive and operational tracks of WUF13. An internal task force, comprised of leadership staff and programme officers, is being appointed and will begin work in March 2025. The task force will oversee strategic, political and substantive matters, starting with the theme of the session, its programme, and the main substantive components, such as tracks on housing and on the New Urban Agenda. The task force will also oversee the delivery of high-level engagements, including the Quito+10 celebrations. An operational technical team is being appointed and will lead the delivery of logistical aspects.

16. The preparations for WUF13 will draw on lessons from WUF12 and seek to respond to interests and priorities expressed by stakeholders, including a strong call for a strengthened focus on practices and solutions, in order to better connect those seeking solutions with good practices and the practitioners leading them. UN-Habitat will establish a dedicated “practices track” at WUF to showcase real-world solutions and proven approaches to urban challenges. Recognizing the high demand among WUF participants for practical and implementable solutions, this track will strengthen the role of WUF as a global platform for turning ideas into action and for sharing tested and validated practices. The practices track will offer guidance on implementation, scaling and replication to ensure that successful policies, initiatives and projects can be adapted and applied in diverse contexts. The track will amplify the impact of the Forum by positioning WUF as an action incubator.

17. Operating in more than 90 countries, UN-Habitat will keep leveraging its global presence to expand outreach in the lead-up to WUF13. UN-Habitat offices work closely with national and local governments, international financial institutions, civil society, the private sector and other United Nations agencies to implement urban development projects, provide technical assistance and promote policies that are aligned with the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. To expand outreach, regular information sessions and updates on the preparatory process of WUF13 will be organized with this extensive network. Galvanizing its position as a leader on matters related to housing, land and basic services for all, UN-Habitat, through WUF, is undertaking targeted stakeholder mobilization, in coordination with the United Nations system, and aligning efforts and joint initiatives that support Sustainable Development Goal 11, New Urban Agenda reporting and the UN-Habitat strategic plan for the period 2026–2029. Collaboration with international financial institutions strategically mobilizes financial resources, technical expertise and policy support for urban development within but not limited to the global presence of UN-Habitat. Other advocacy and outreach initiatives, such as the urban campaigns and Urban Thinkers Campuses, further strengthen mobilization by raising awareness, gathering regional perspectives and fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships that contribute to the World Urban Forum.

## **B. Strategic alignment with the New Urban Agenda and the UN-Habitat strategic plan for the period 2026–2029**

18. The year 2026 will mark the midpoint of the period covered by the New Urban Agenda, which was adopted at the third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development in Quito in 2016, and the third quadrennial report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda will be published. As is noted in paragraph 175 of the New Urban Agenda, the third quadrennial report will “take stock of the progress made and challenges faced in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda since its adoption and ... identify further steps to address them”. Effectively, therefore, 2026 represents the Quito+10 milestone.

19. To celebrate this milestone and restore momentum, UN-Habitat will mobilize global engagement with and publicity about the New Urban Agenda midpoint leading up to WUF13 in 2026. Multilevel urban forums will be leveraged fully in order to galvanize the momentum and growing engagement on the New Urban Agenda before WUF13, utilizing the Global Urban Monitoring

Framework to develop innovative methods, approaches and guidelines for data collection, analysis, monitoring and implementation and harnessing the Urban Agenda Platform to share progress, action and knowledge resources on sustainable urbanization. At WUF13, the Quito+10 moment will be marked in several different ways, including high-level engagement involving representatives of Member States and other stakeholders. The New Urban Agenda will be integrated and mainstreamed into as many sessions as possible at WUF13, and a series of dedicated events are planned, including for capacity development, advocacy and stakeholder mobilization and inputs. A revamped participatory New Urban Agenda platform will also be introduced, featuring celebrations that encourage community involvement. The engagements and outcomes related to the New Urban Agenda emerging from WUF13 are expected to provide valuable insights ahead of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the midterm review of the New Urban Agenda, to be held in New York immediately before or after the 2026 high-level political forum on sustainable development.

20. WUF13 is a critical advocacy and stakeholder engagement platform to enhance the impact of the work of UN-Habitat, and the Programme took the opportunity at WUF12 to engage stakeholders on the strategic priorities of its draft strategic plan for the period 2026–2029 through a survey. The purpose of the survey was to assess the relevance of the proposed strategic focus. A total of 610 respondents representing international organizations and United Nations agencies (31 per cent), national Governments (29 per cent) and local and regional governments (29 per cent) shared their views and validated the proposed focus on housing, land and basic services. Most respondents found the issues of housing, land and basic services to be very relevant or relevant focus areas for the UN-Habitat strategic plan for the period 2026–2029 (91 per cent); considered housing, land and basic services a priority in their country (81 per cent); and fully agreed or agreed that it was not possible to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals without resolving the global housing crisis (81 per cent).

21. WUF13 will take place soon after the entry into force of the strategic plan for the period 2026–2029. Thus, the strategic focus of the new plan will be taken into account in the programmatic and substantive preparations and curation of WUF13. Given the urgency of addressing the housing inadequacy faced by 2.8 billion persons globally, and, in the light of the strategic focus of the strategic plan for the period 2026–2029, WUF13 will aim to place specific emphasis on issues of adequate housing, land and basic services. This will be done in several different ways, including through the thematic focus of events, data and practice illustrations, and communications and messaging. Further, UN-Habitat will seek to assess stakeholder perspectives and priorities as they relate to the strategic plan for the period 2026–2029 through dedicated engagement initiatives, including surveys and consultations, to gather feedback and identify future opportunities for collaboration.

### **C. Scaling the impact of the World Urban Forum to accelerate progress in achieving urban and global agendas**

22. Looking ahead, UN-Habitat will continue to place emphasis on scaling the impact of WUF to maximize its benefits for global stakeholders and accelerating progress towards the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. This will be guided by the mandates granted to WUF by the General Assembly. In this respect, efforts will continue to ensure that WUF serves as a leading global platform for advocacy for and visibility of adequate housing and sustainable urbanization. Through an integrated approach to advocacy, communication and stakeholder engagement, UN-Habitat aims to foster a global ecosystem of partners, actors and champions of the urban agenda. At the core of this will be sustained engagement and efforts in the period between sessions, allowing for an incremental and inclusive role for stakeholders in the Forum.

23. Maximizing impact in terms of shaping and driving action will remain an important priority for WUF and it is intended that its momentum, outcomes and the commitments made at its sessions will inform policy decisions, actions and interventions by all relevant stakeholders in adequate housing and sustainable urban development. Discussions held at WUF will be transformed into actionable knowledge that informs global urban development efforts. Robust urban policy knowledge emanating from WUF will be generated and disseminated to help leaders, experts and all stakeholders to drive transformational change worldwide. Building on the *WUF12 Perspectives* experience, UN-Habitat will continue to leverage digital technologies to analyze and synthesize the wealth of insights shared during the World Urban Forum.

24. Furthermore, UN-Habitat is committed to diversifying, balancing and expanding partner engagement and participation while ensuring a more inclusive and geographically representative forum. It is hoped that all 193 Member States will be represented at WUF13, along with national and local governments, United Nations entities, and major groups and other stakeholders. This would enhance regional, sectoral and partner type diversity by actively engaging underrepresented groups and other urban actors that specialize in areas that are priorities for UN-Habitat, but that do not

currently engage with the Programme, especially digital and innovative stakeholders. Special attention will be given to balance among organizers of partner-led events and speakers to promote equitable representation from the global South and other less represented partner types. In addition, insights from partners and data analysis from event management systems will help identify underrepresented and emerging key actors. Efforts will concentrate on broadening partnerships by engaging stakeholders from various sectors, such as line ministries not traditionally focused on urban issues and financial institutions, while also enhancing collaboration with parliamentarians, academia and the private sector.

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