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Preparations for the thirteenth session of the World Urban
Forum

Status of preparations for the thirteenth session of the World Urban Forum

Report of the Executive Director

I. Introduction

1. The present report provides a summary of the status of preparations for the thirteenth session of the World Urban Forum (WUF13), to be held in Baku from 17 to 22 May 2026. Section I outlines the context of the report; section II presents the preparations made and key milestones achieved to date; and section III introduces the expected impact of the thirteenth session of the Forum.
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) does not meet. In resolution A/RES/72/226, of 25 January 2018, the General Assembly reaffirmed the role of the 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 Forum as one of the platforms that could help support reporting on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.
3. The Forum has now become the world's premier gathering of stakeholders on matters of adequate housing and sustainable urban development. Participants include national, regional and local government representatives, civil society organizations, grass-roots communities, the private sector, international organizations and academia, among others. The twelfth session of the Forum (WUF12), held in Cairo from 4 to 8 November 2024, gathered more than 25,000 participants from 182 countries and culminated in the Cairo Call to Action.¹
4. WUF13 provides a unique opportunity for UN-Habitat to engage with stakeholders on its strategic plan for the period 2026–2029, adopted by the UN-Habitat Assembly at its resumed second session, which was held on 29 and 30 May 2025. The Forum is a key platform for dialogue and partnerships with stakeholders on the priorities of the strategic plan, including housing, land and urban basic services, and the strategy's impact areas, such as inclusive prosperity for poverty eradication;

* HSP/EB.2025/16.

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

preparedness, response, recovery and reconstruction; and environmental and climate action. The Forum is particularly important for UN-Habitat to fulfil its global advocacy role of mobilizing and scaling broader actions for sustainable urbanization at all levels and by all stakeholders.

II. Preparations for the thirteenth session of the World Urban Forum

A. Overview

5. WUF13 will take place at the Baku Olympic Stadium, Baku, from 17 to 22 May 2026. UN-Habitat is working closely with the host country and other stakeholders to advance preparations, including logistical arrangements, substantive programming, and multi-level advocacy, mobilization and engagement efforts, to ensure inclusive and impactful participation.
6. The theme of WUF13, “Housing the world: Safe and resilient cities and communities”, aligns with the focus of the strategic plan for the period 2026–2029. The theme reflects the urgent need to address the global housing crisis, which is a major threat to development targets, in both the global North and South. Nearly 3 billion people face housing inadequacy, more than 1.1 billion live in informal settlements and slums, and more than 300 million experience homelessness.
7. A dedicated internal task force, chaired by the Executive Director of UN-Habitat, has been set up to ensure a coordinated and strategic preparatory process for WUF13. Its objectives are to provide leadership and guidance on the political and substantive aspects of the preparations, and to monitor the alignment of WUF13 with the strategic plan for the period 2026–2029. The task force advises on innovative and strategic approaches to maximizing the impact of WUF13 for all stakeholders, while ensuring the use of the Forum as a platform for advancing implementation, monitoring and reporting in relation to the New Urban Agenda. An internal operational technical team has also been established to manage day-to-day operations and on-site preparations for WUF13.
8. UN-Habitat is collaborating closely with the host country on substantive and technical preparations, with the Government of Azerbaijan putting in place key arrangements for the organization of WUF13. An organizing committee has been established as the main organ guiding preparations, bringing together different government institutions and ensuring alignment with UN-Habitat. A national coordinator has also been appointed to act as the principal focal point, with responsibility for coordinating national preparations, liaising with ministries and agencies and ensuring coherence across activities. To manage the operational and logistical aspects, the host country has designated an operating company, which will work with UN-Habitat on matters such as venue design, infrastructure, branding and services.

B. Programming

9. A WUF13 background paper, to be made available on the web page of the session in October 2025, will unpack the key dimensions of the theme and its relevance in today’s global context, and highlight key facts, challenges, emerging trends and policy trade-offs related to access to adequate housing. It will also identify the high-level thematic tracks that will serve as the session’s core thematic pillars; define the rationale behind each dialogue, including setting out the critical questions each will raise; and outline the key issues to be explored throughout the session.
10. UN-Habitat will curate high-profile events, including assemblies, round tables, dialogues, special sessions and gatherings at the UN-Habitat Arena, a stage for highlighting flagship projects and partnerships. Further, approximately 350 partner-led events will explore the theme of the session, fostering knowledge exchange and actionable solutions on housing, while underscoring the decentralized contributions that characterize WUF.
11. The selection of partner-led events for WUF13 will be guided by principles that ensure strong alignment with the session’s overall theme, balanced regional, stakeholder and gender representation, and a direct, specific focus on housing. Events will aim to include a demonstration of practice or solutions relevant to their designated event category; promote geographical balance and cross-regional collaboration with multiple partner organizations; and adopt formats that go beyond traditional panel discussions, such as debates, interactive sessions and other creative and innovative approaches. All events selected will generate tangible outcomes, including reporting, in accordance with WUF13 requirements.
12. Further, building on the momentum behind the New Urban Agenda, at WUF13, a dedicated first-of-its-kind ministerial meeting will take place to reflect on the progress, achievements and challenges of the first decade of the Agenda’s implementation and on priority actions for Member States towards achieving its vision by 2036. The full-day ministerial meeting will be structured to

enable representatives of Member States to present national statements outlining their vision and the actions to be taken to 2036 as well as substantive discussions on the implementation of the Agenda in relation to the adequate housing agenda. The ministerial meeting will also present opportunities in relation to the midterm review of the New Urban Agenda and the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the midterm review, to be held in 2026. In addition, WUF13 has the potential to advance the global progress review of Sustainable Development Goal 11, for presentation to the 2026 high-level political forum on sustainable development.

13. WUF13 will be curated in such a way as to integrate practices and solutions for adequate housing across its programme. Specifically, a new World Urban Forum solutions hub will be introduced to showcase effective practices from around the world to enable learning, exchange and uptake. A global call for the submission of information on housing practices has gathered solutions related to access to adequate housing for the preparation of the hub.

14. WUF13 also offers considerable opportunities for partnerships within the United Nations system on promoting adequate housing and sustainable urbanization. UN-Habitat will seek to scale and expand its collaboration with United Nations entities through specific entry points, including through the joint curation of special sessions; “One UN” partner-led events; high-level engagement; mobilization of the United Nations country team in Azerbaijan; and numerous other opportunities across WUF13 programming.

C. Global advocacy and mobilization

15. UN-Habitat has launched a global stakeholder engagement process for WUF13 to ensure that inclusive dialogue and partner mobilization take place well ahead of the session, reflecting the commitment of UN-Habitat to diversifying, balancing and expanding partner engagement and participation while ensuring a more inclusive and geographically representative Forum. The process will enable collaboration on the priorities informing relevant events and outcomes of WUF13 in order to enrich and strengthen the role of the Forum as an effective and meaningful platform for stakeholder engagement that can strengthen the impact of UN-Habitat work.

16. The preparations for WUF13 are supported by coordinated strategies on communication, global advocacy and regional mobilization, making full use of the UN-Habitat regional and country office network to ensure coherence, broaden outreach and expand participation. Together, they form an integrated approach that combines messaging, visibility and engagement at global, regional and local levels. A communication strategy will be launched for WUF13 to advance global engagement and mobilization about the session and its theme and position UN-Habitat as a convener and expert authority. The strategy will include media briefings and features, social media drives, and corporate communication integration, leveraging strategic core messages on the theme of the session. The objective will be to help sustain momentum, maximize visibility and ensure accurate information is accessible worldwide.

17. Importantly, UN-Habitat will aim to build synergies and opportunities between WUF13 and the thirtieth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Multisectoral Actions Pathways to Resilient and Healthy Cities (MAP) initiative launched in November 2024 by the presidency of the twenty-ninth session explicitly calls for linkages between United Nations climate conferences and the World Urban Forum and encourages host Governments to appoint a special envoy for urban climate action. It also underlines the important contribution that the Baku Continuity Coalition on Urban and Multilevel Climate Action can make to aligning urban initiatives of the Conference of the Parties, such as the Sustainable Urban Resilience for the Next Generation (SURGe) initiative, the Coalition for High-Ambition Multilevel Partnerships (CHAMP) for Climate Action, and MAP, on the road to future sessions of the Conference of the Parties.

18. Systematic briefings for the diplomatic corps and the wider United Nations system advance mobilization efforts. Those partners are expected to play a key role in promoting WUF13 within their countries and entities, in increasing participation, and in contributing to events. Their involvement will expand ownership and strengthen the diversity of representation at WUF13.

19. At the national level, preparations are being closely coordinated with the host country, which is co-leading outreach, mobilization and awareness-raising efforts within Azerbaijan, including the Azerbaijan Urban Campaign (AUC2026), to raise the national visibility of WUF13, engage stakeholders across sectors, and promote the WUF13 theme. The Campaign will leverage initiatives implemented by government institutions, national media, the diplomatic community, United Nations agencies, academic institutions, think tanks, civil society and the private sector to ensure widespread participation and national ownership in the lead-up to WUF13. AUC2026 will culminate in

“Baku Urban Week”, a host city public programme curated by UN-Habitat with local partners in the days immediately preceding WUF13 that will open the session up to residents and visitors through citywide activities, such as public talks, workshops, exhibitions, installations and tours, and may include the inauguration or launch of a legacy intervention in a public space.

III. Seeking strategic impact

20. WUF13 will build on the achievements of WUF12 to advance tangible outcomes. Its main document will be the “Baku Call to Action”, an action-oriented declaration addressing the urgency of the global housing crisis. The Call is intended to be a tool that guides actions and policy at local, national and global levels. To ensure comprehensiveness and broad ownership, stakeholder consultations will be organized ahead of the session, allowing diverse voices to contribute to the drafting process. The inclusive approach will help align the Call to Action with real needs and strengthen its impact beyond the Forum.

21. WUF13 will accelerate and serve as a defining milestone in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in its second decade (2026–2036). By reaffirming political commitment at ministerial level and engaging stakeholders throughout the session, WUF13 will not only help to consolidate accountability for past commitments but also set the pace for scaling up successful policies and actions while addressing persistent gaps. The deliberations will provide an opportunity to align national and local urban agendas with broader global priorities on poverty eradication, climate action and social inclusion, as well as other matters. The outcomes of the session are expected to inspire concrete commitments, strengthen multilateral cooperation and mobilize the partnerships needed to ensure the delivery, in the second decade of the Agenda’s implementation, of tangible improvements in housing, urban sustainability and the well-being of urban residents worldwide.

22. By consolidating knowledge, partnerships and practices, WUF13 is expected to leave a lasting legacy at local, regional and global levels, advancing access to adequate housing and sustainable urban development. At the local level, it will foster engagement of host country institutions, cities, the private sector and civil society actors, enhancing their visibility and role in shaping a sustainable urban future, with specific legacy projects to be developed in Azerbaijan. At the regional level, it will catalyse peer-to-peer exchange and cross-border cooperation, particularly through multi-stakeholder dialogues that strengthen alignment across contexts and priorities. At the global level, WUF13 will reaffirm collective commitment to the New Urban Agenda for its second decade of implementation, while placing housing at the centre of development agendas and goals. Coalitions, partnerships and networking opportunities generated through the Forum will play a critical role in sustaining and scaling those legacies.

23. WUF13 will help shape the operationalization of the strategic plan of UN-Habitat for the period 2026–2029. As its theme focuses on housing, the session will serve as a testing ground for innovative approaches and strategic partnerships, contributing to the implementation of the vision of housing, land and basic services in the strategic plan. The outcomes will inform the development of normative guidance and knowledge products while orienting countries’ priority-setting. By engaging Member States, local authorities and partners in shaping actionable priorities and initiatives, WUF13 will ensure that the strategic plan is anchored in tested practices, responsive to demand, and positioned to deliver measurable results in advancing access to adequate housing, land and basic services.