WORLD URBAN FORUM
THIRTEENTH SESSION

Baku Call to Action - Stakeholder-led Zero Draft for public consultation

Inspired by the action-oriented nature of the 13th World Urban Forum, the Baku Call to Action aims to present a set of propositions grounded into practice to inform a collective commitment towards reprioritizing the right to adequate housing through a people centered approach.

This call to action is the result of a collective and inclusive process. The document presents a set of diverse contributions from stakeholders across sectors and levels of governance, including civil society organizations, activists, practitioners, researchers, policy and decision makers, local authorities, and other actors working across the housing continuum. It seeks not only to call on Member States to act, but also to provide a roadmap for shared commitments and collective responsibility. The Baku Call to Action acknowledges the capabilities, knowledge, and expertise of different actors working in diverse regional and political contexts to address the global housing crisis.

PREAMBLE

An estimated 2.8 billion people are affected by inadequate housing globally, with between 1.6 and 3.4 billion lacking access to adequate housing. The global housing crisis has reached a tipping point. The reality is that the current approaches have failed and the poor are carrying the burden.

The global housing crisis is not accidental, but a result of structural failures. The crisis is driven by complex yet interconnected factors, many related to historical context and current market realities. Speculative practices, exclusionary market conditions and weak multilevel governance are making housing unaffordable for large segments of the population. At the heart of the current housing crisis is the erosion of the social function of housing, compounded by the increasing financialization and the treatment of housing as a speculative commodity. We must recalibrate the housing system to ensure the fulfilment of the right to adequate housing for all.

The global housing crisis has differentiated challenges across territories and contexts. Some cities struggle with basic services, land and infrastructure; others face growing pressure related to affordability, homelessness and insecure rental markets; while many are managing influxes of displaced people; At the same time, cities are exposed to the impacts of climate change and the urgent need to adapt housing systems.

Despite the growing scale of the crisis, housing has sharply fallen down the political priorities of many governments. Housing can no longer be deprioritised. The response to the crisis calls for a concerted effort, through renewed global, national and local commitments backed by political leadership, long-term financing, and implementation capacity.

This call to action is not in vacuum. We recognize the continued commitments that have shaped multilateral action on housing, from the Habitat Processes to the 2030 Agenda and the Pact for the Future, and which are further reinforced through the UN-Habitat Strategic Plan 2026–2029 and ongoing intergovernmental processes, including the Open-Ended Intergovernmental Expert Working Group on Adequate Housing for All (OEWG-H). Rather than introducing new commitments, we call for accelerated and urgent action to implement existing ones through renewed prioritization of housing and strengthened multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Many countries are still urbanizing at an unprecedented pace, further intensifying already critical housing shortages. Yet, despite these circumstances, local communities are transforming our cities by building their own homes and shaping urban reality. In many parts of the global south, the physical manifestation of urbanization is the proliferation of informal settlements. In some regions, informal housing accounts for up to 80 per cent of residential construction, highlighting both the scale of need and the central role of communities in housing provision.[1] Informal settlements are not simply a failure of urban planning and recognition; they are also evidence of the resilience and adaptive capacity of communities responding to systemic exclusion from formal housing systems.

Global demography is rapidly changing. By 2030, 60% of urban populations expected to be under the age of 18. In other cities, we experience predominantly older persons as the predominant demography. In the global south, many intermediary and secondary cities are

[1] World Cities Report 2026

growing at a much faster rate than megacities, presenting new infrastructure, housing and governance challenges.

Conflict and climate displacement are significant drivers of this crisis, especially impacting vulnerable groups such as women, young people, older and Indigenous Persons. By the end of 2024, more than 123 million people were forcibly displaced globally, while an estimated 64 million people were displaced from informal settlements over the past two decades alone. Ongoing geopolitical conflict, wars and destruction are making housing increasingly precarious in urban areas and often resulting in mass displacement and homelessness. We appeal that civilian homes, schools, hospitals and other amenities should not be collateral damage in such conflicts, and civilian displacement and homelessness must be avoided at all costs.

Moreover, the changing climate is leading to unprecedented shocks forcing us to rethink our approach to urban development, livability and housing, as well as to advance adaptation.[2] Climate-related hazards are projected to destroy 167 million homes by 2040, with disasters already causing an estimated US$280 billion in losses in 2023 alone.[3] Housing justice and climate justice are inseparable. Those most excluded from adequate housing are often the most exposed to environmental risks, reinforcing cycles of vulnerability and inequality

Forced evictions and unlawful demolitions are increasing globally, and it is time to have a global mechanism to monitor and prevent them. These have material, social and emotional impact on families with precarious tenure, especially Indigenous Peoples and communities. We must protect vulnerable communities and avoid forced evictions at all costs. We also call for addressing homelessness through a housing first and social support framework.

Beyond these contributing factors, the governance of housing sector is failing us. In many contexts housing strategies are lacking or inexistent and often, if they are in place, they tend to be siloed, without fiscal, policy and implementation coordination among departments and spheres of government, nor alignment amongst the multiple sectors and actors essential for the flourishing of thriving housing ecosystems. Housing should be approached from a systemic view, leveraging a broader interplay between housing, land, planning, health, transport, education and other public services. Local and regional governments stand at the

[2] World Cities Report 2026

[3] World Cities Report 2026

frontline of these challenges, bearing primary responsibility for responding to housing needs while often lacking the powers, resources and institutional recognition required to act effectively.

Empowering people and communities is key to delivering affordable and sustainable housing. There is a need to evolve beyond predominantly top-down planning approaches towards more people-centred models that better integrate self-built housing, cooperatives, and community land trusts.

A home is not just a structure with four walls. It is a place of dignity, identity and secure future. We must make the home a human right!

OUR CALL TO ACTION

These calls to action are organized into three categorized areas: recognizing the underlying rights and drivers of the housing crisis, responding to its direct manifestations and transforming housing systems for a just, inclusive, resilient and sustainable future.

RECOGNISE UNDERLYING RIGHTS AND DRIVERS

1) Support our human rights!

Across contexts, housing continues to be treated as a commodity rather than a right, with evictions, demolitions and displacement undermining dignity, security and livelihoods. Rights-based commitments exist but are often weakly enforced. We call for the full adoption of a human rights approach to housing, leveraging instruments that ensure the fulfilment of the social function of housing; such as embedding legal safeguards including for widows, women-headed households, preventing forced evictions, strengthening tenure & tenant protections, and institutionalizing community-led and participatory approaches within national and local housing systems.

2) Protect our homes!

Many forcibly displaced people move to cities as refugees or IDPs, often settling in insecure or substandard housing where they face further displacement risks. In many instances housing responses remain short-term, fragmented and disconnected from long-term development. We call for integrated approaches that link humanitarian response, recovery

and long-term housing systems, enabling adaptive and incremental solutions, supporting displaced populations, and strengthening resilience to respond to future shocks. We further call for the protection of housing and essential civilian infrastructure as a fundamental obligation, preventing destruction, safeguarding communities and strengthening mechanisms to uphold these protections.

3) Recognise our diversity!

Housing systems continue to overlook the diverse realities of those most affected by the crisis, reinforcing exclusion. Understanding how gender, ethnicity, age, disability, legal status, sexual orientation and migration shape access to housing is critical to ensuring safety, dignity and inclusion for all. We call for intersectional approaches to housing that place people at the center of policy and delivery, recognizing diverse groups as co-creators, engaged in participatory approaches that strengthen women's tenure rights, integrate care and accessibility, and ensure housing systems remain inclusive, adaptable and responsive over time.

4) Make our homes climate resilient

Climate change is increasingly affecting where and how people live. While coastal communities are directly impacted, many marginalized & vulnerable communities are disproportionately exposed to its effects. Climate impacts are accelerating housing insecurity and displacement, particularly in informal settlements where adaptive capacity remains limited. Continuing energy poverty, access to basic services, waste management make matters worse. We call for housing systems that contribute to climate resilience, mitigation and justice, including the use of sustainable and local materials, nature-based solutions, community-led solutions for accessing water and generating solar energy and climate-responsive planning, while prioritizing the upgrading and retrofitting of existing housing stock and strengthening disaster preparedness and community-led responses, including safeguards to ensure that adaptation efforts do not deepen inequality or trigger displacement and strengthening local knowledge, livelihoods and social networks.

RESPONDING TO DIRECT MANIFESTATIONS

5) Ensuring homes are affordable for all!

Housing is becoming increasingly unaffordable due to rising land values, property speculation, short term rentals, insecure labor markets, limited supply and unequal access to finance; forcing families into homelessness or overcrowded, insecure and inadequate living conditions. We call for targeted and sustained measures to improve affordability, including expanding rental and social housing, inclusionary zoning, strengthening subsidies and cost-reduction strategies, and mechanisms that regulate speculative practices and ensure access across income groups, particularly for those most affected. This includes strengthening non-market and limited-profit housing, diversifying tenure options, protecting households from rising rents, repurposing old housing stock and vacant dwellings and introducing mechanisms to ensure security of tenure.

6) Unlock the home as a key to opportunities!

Housing is too often located in isolation from infrastructure, services and broader spatial systems. Urban sprawl and poorly coordinated planning continue to push low-income households into peripheral areas far from jobs, services and opportunities, reinforcing exclusion, pressuring urban transport systems and, therefore, aggravating the climate crisis. We call for the integration of housing within spatial planning and service provision, using the full scope of participatory planning tools to manage land, reduce costs, promote mixed and inclusive neighborhoods, and ensure that housing supports access to services, mobility and livelihood opportunities as part of the right to the city. Well-located affordable & universal access housing should be integrated into serviced urban areas and transit corridors rather than concentrated in peripheral and disconnected locations.

7) Build homes without discrimination!

Neighborhoods go beyond their physical shape & location. They are spaces of care, social connection, safety and collective life. We call for housing approaches that integrate safety, wellbeing and social inclusion, including addressing gender-based violence, improving public and shared spaces, and ensuring that universal housing design and policy contribute to dignity, livability, health and community belonging and wellbeing for all. Inclusive and mixed-use environments can strengthen social cohesion, reduce isolation and improve safety.

8) Stop unlawful evictions!

Forced evictions and displacement constitute gross violations of a range of internationally recognized human rights. They continue to undermine housing security, destroy livelihoods, aggravate the climate crisis, erode dignity and weaken community systems, often without adequate safeguards or alternatives. We call for stronger protections against evictions and displacement, including legal safeguards, monitoring mechanisms and preventive approaches that ensure the security of tenure. Priority should be given to in-situ upgrading, community-led approaches and adequate compensation and alternatives wherever relocation cannot be avoided.

TRANSFORMING HOUSING SYSTEMS

9) Move away from standardised approaches!

Millions are already shaping cities through self-built, incremental and informal housing systems, yet these realities remain excluded from policy and legal recognition. More than 1.1 billion people live in informal settlements today. Further, we recognize that housing needs exist across a continuum, from homelessness and emergency shelter to transitional and incremental housing, social and rental housing, and market-based solutions. We call for a transition from exclusionary and standardized models toward diversified housing systems, recognizing and supporting community-led approaches, universal access design, enabling incremental development, and expanding access to a range of housing models and typologies that respond to different contexts and realities. This includes upgrading informal settlements, rental housing models, cooperatives, community land trusts & inclusionary housing recognizing diverse tenure arrangements, and supporting co-production as a legitimate and scalable pathway to adequate housing.

10) Secure land for homes!

Rising land costs, property speculation and weak land governance systems are driving exclusion, spatial inequality and insecurity of tenure. The growing financialization and commodification of land and housing continues to undermine affordability, increase segregation and weaken the social function of housing. We call for stronger public stewardship of land systems, including regulating land markets, curbing speculation, securing tenure, and using tools such as land value capture, public land banking, inclusionary and participatory planning to ensure equitable access to serviced land, while

strengthening all women's and Indigenous Peoples' tenure rights and protections. This requires recognizing diverse and collective forms of tenure and strengthening protections for communities subject to displacement and exclusion.

11) Encourage a holistic approach!

Housing cannot be separated from mobility, employment, public health, education and climate resilience and social protection. A strong housing system must rely on trust, social cohesion, community development and durable people centred processes, including Indigenous Peoples' Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). Fragmented planning systems continue to reinforce exclusion, spatial inequality and inefficient urban growth. We call for an integrated and system-based approach that links housing with land, infrastructure, transport, livelihoods and essential services. Housing policies should be embedded within broader territorial and urban planning frameworks that promote well-located, connected and people-centered communities.

12) Strengthen multilevel governance

Effective housing systems require strong cooperation and coordination across all levels of government. Yet local and regional governments are often tasked with implementation without the mandates, financing or institutional support required to deliver effectively. We call for strengthened multilevel governance frameworks that clarify responsibilities, improve coordination across institutions and sectors, and empower local and regional governments through decentralised financing, participatory planning tools and strengthened implementation capacity. Collaborative governance systems are essential to deliver housing responses that are locally grounded and nationally supported.

13) Provide money where the need is!

Housing finance systems remain fragmented and inaccessible, with limited public investment, unequal access to credit and mechanisms that fail to reach low-income households and communities. We call for a restructuring of housing finance systems to prioritize inclusion and scale, strengthening private, public and municipal finance, enabling community-led financing, improving access to credit, and establishing predictable, long-term financing frameworks that are territorially grounded and accessible to those most in need. This includes expanding non-market and limited-profit finance models, microfinance, blended finance instruments, low-income credit facilities, incremental housing finance and

cooperative approaches that ultimately support long-term affordability and reduce speculative pressures. We need hosing finance that goes beyond production of new housing units to include subsidies for piloting initiatives, in-depth research, movement and capacity-building.

14) Be accountable and deliver on commitment!

Commitments to housing are not lacking, but delivery continues to fall short due to weak coordination, limited capacity and ineffective systems. We call for implementation-focused housing systems, with clear pathways, measurable targets and strong monitoring and reporting mechanisms. Housing delivery systems must move beyond top-down implementation toward co-production, accountability and shared decision-making with communities and civil society. Moreover, we encourage to draw-upon the vast networks of faith based institutions, academics, researchers, professional associations and knowledge and capacity-building communities to work on identifying and addressing capacity gaps at the implementation level. We encourage the recognition of housing as Official Development Assistance (ODA) given its central role in the economy, climate resilience and adaptation, public health and social stablitity.

15) Use data for public use!

Housing systems often operate with limited or outdated information, reducing their ability to respond effectively to changing realities and needs. Many of those most affected by inadequate housing remain invisible within official data systems, limiting recognition, investment and policy response. We call for leveraging local & community led data, digital tools and innovation, including spatial, climate risk data, enabling real-time monitoring, adaptive decision-making and the scaling of effective solutions. This includes developing local data systems and indicators, and working with communities in data generation, analysis and oversight to ensure that knowledge informs policy and implementation.

16) Build local capability!

Achieving sustainable and inclusive urban development and housing requires both an adequate number of qualified real estate actors including urban planners and architects, and strong professional capacity aligned with environmental sustainability, climate resilience and social inclusion. We call for investment in education, training and continuous professional development systems that equip planners and designers with the skills needed to address rapid urbanisation, particularly in fast-growing cities and countries. This includes integrating

climate-responsive design, inclusive planning practices, and community engagement approaches into curricula and professional standards, as well as strengthening local institutions to attract, retain and support skilled professionals capable of delivering people-centred and future-ready urban development.

DISCLAIMER

The Baku Call to Action is a stakeholder-driven outcome document from WUF 13 based on contributions from and consultations among participating stakeholders and partners. The document does not constitute a negotiated intergovernmental outcome and does not necessarily reflect the views or official positions of Member States or the Secretariat of the United Nations. The purpose of the outcome document is to capture and summarize some of the main messages emerging from the Forum, and to serve as inspirational inputs to other relevant processes on sustainable urban development and to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.