

WORLD  
URBAN  
FORUM  
THIRTEENTH SESSION



## KEY MESSAGES

# WORLD URBAN FORUM 13

Baku Olympic Stadium, Baku, Azerbaijan, 17–22 May 2026



# The World Urban Forum

The World Urban Forum is the premier global conference on cities and sustainable urbanization, established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2001. Held every two years, it is convened by UN-Habitat, the United Nations entity promoting adequate housing and sustainable urbanization.

The thirteenth session of the World Urban Forum (WUF13) takes place in Baku from 17 to 22 May 2026. Co-organized with the Government of Azerbaijan, it is the first time the event is being held in the Caucasus region.

Its theme is: **Housing the world: Safe and resilient cities and communities.**

For six days, WUF13 will host thousands of people from all parts of the world – including ministers, regional governors, mayors, urban planners, the private sector, community leaders, civil society, academics and UN agencies, among others.

The Forum is an unparalleled opportunity for those interested in all aspects of housing and urbanization to shape how cities are built, planned and managed.

It is the primary place to share the ideas and solutions that will end the global housing crisis and make a reality of the declaration that housing is a human right for all.

With 58 per cent of the global population living in cities and towns, the world is more urban than ever and the World Urban Forum has never been more critical. WUF13 has added importance as it coincides with the midterm review of the New Urban Agenda, the global framework adopted in 2016 to guide sustainable urban development, and the 2026 global review of SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities.



# Key Messages

## Overall campaign messages

- Human dignity, security and well-being depend on a stable home
- A global housing crisis calls for global solutions
- 2.8 billion people lack adequate housing – that’s 2.8 billion too many
- 1.1 billion people live in slums – that’s 1.1 billion too many
- Failing to transform informal settlements and slums is not an option

### Before the event:

#### highlighting the problem and its urgency “We need...”

- We need to house the world before it is too late
- We need homes for human dignity
- We need homes that offer opportunity
- We need inclusive housing solutions
- We need to transform slums now

**#housetheworld**  
**#endthehousingcrisis**  
**#homesnotslums**

### During the event:

#### highlighting agency and action “It’s time to...”

- It’s time to house the world
- It’s time to turn policies into homes
- It’s time to build homes that can weather all storms
- It’s time to put housing at the centre

**#housetheworld**  
**#endthehousingcrisis**  
**#transformslums**

### After the event:

#### highlighting momentum and calls to action “Housing the world...”

- Housing the world isn’t a dream – it’s a plan
- Housing the world starts now
- Housing the world starts with transforming slums
- WUF13 turns housing commitments into action

**#housetheworld**  
**#endthehousingcrisis**  
**#transformslums**

## General thematic messages

### **End the global housing crisis by providing access to adequate and affordable housing for all:**

Housing is a human right which we are failing to fulfil. Today, we are in the midst of a global housing crisis affecting more than 2.8 billion people, including 1.1 billion in informal settlements and slums and more than 300 million experiencing homelessness. The crisis affects every part of the world, not only low-income countries. Climate change, conflict and humanitarian emergencies are contributing dramatically. To respond, we must advance solutions that strengthen existing communities, improve living conditions, secure tenure, upgrade informal settlements and slums and ensure access to services. We must protect people's health, safety and dignity. We must house the world.

**Failing to transform informal settlements and slums is not an option:** As of late 2022, more than 1.1 billion people – one in eight people on Earth – live in slums. Without intervention or action, millions more will remain trapped in inadequate housing by 2030. Advancing climate action, preventing health and education gaps and reducing generational poverty, inequality and social inclusion are incumbent on addressing informal settlements and slums in the world's cities and human settlements.

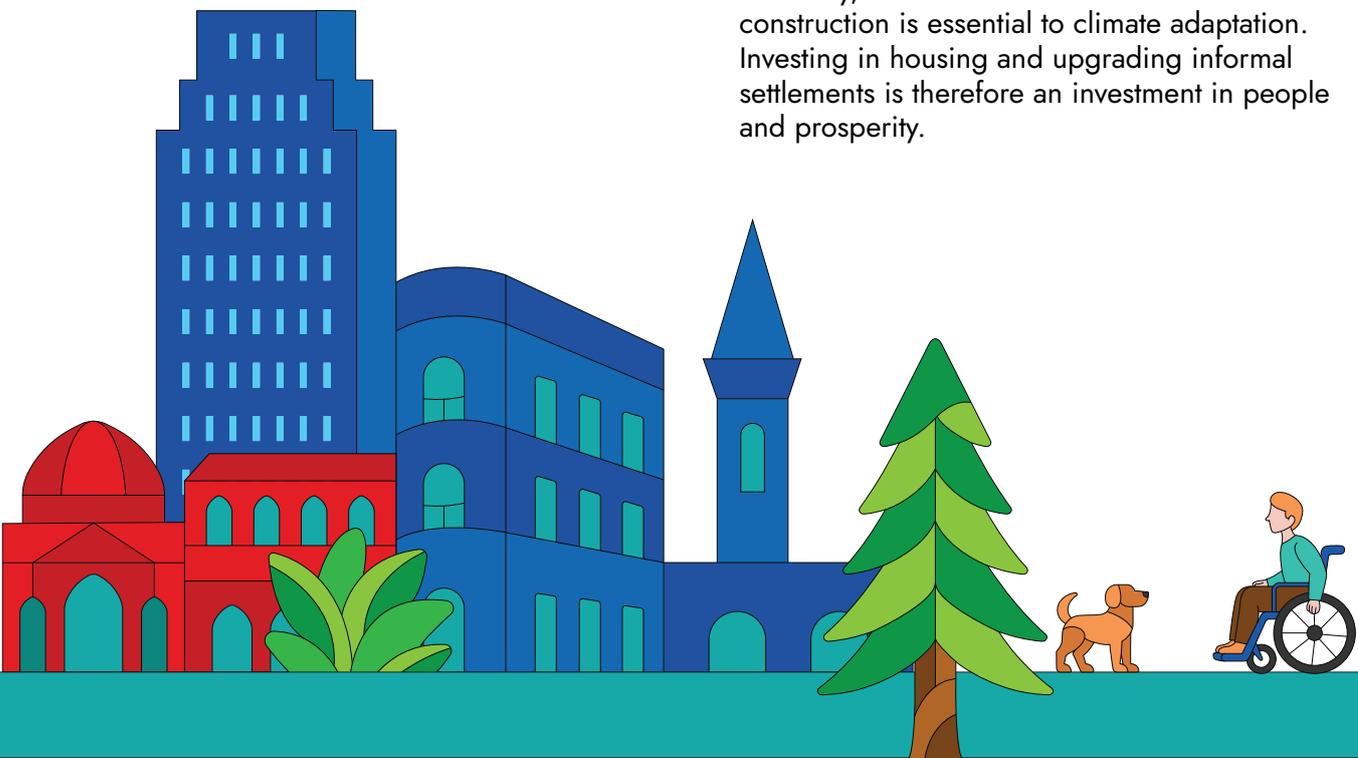
**Housing cannot wait:** With less than five years to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the need to deliver adequate, safe and affordable housing and to upgrade informal settlements is more urgent than ever. World leaders have already reaffirmed the centrality of adequate housing, through the Pact for the Future and the Doha Declaration on Social Development among other agreements. WUF13 will offer a critical moment to translate commitments into action to improve lives, shape the cities of tomorrow and promote solutions to the housing crisis.

### **Housing is the foundation of sustainable development:**

Housing shapes access to education, health care, jobs and social protection. Yet it is often overlooked in development planning and financing. We must shift from treating it as a standalone policy and sector. Placing housing at the centre of national and local policies unlocks progress across multiple goals, from gender equality to poverty reduction, and supports more equitable, sustainable futures.

### **Housing makes for a better world:**

Adequate housing enhances quality of life, reduces poverty and reduces environmental degradation. It provides stability for women, children and youth and entire families, and is an important source of identity and belonging. It is a major contributor to a successful economy, while sustainable and resilient construction is essential to climate adaptation. Investing in housing and upgrading informal settlements is therefore an investment in people and prosperity.



**Housing needs diverse delivery and tenure models:** People access and improve their homes in different ways, including self-help, incremental processes, collective solutions and community-led initiatives, and they inhabit them through a range of tenure arrangements, from rental and ownership to cooperatives and community-based systems. Recognizing and supporting this diversity is essential for inclusion, stability and the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing.

**Housing is intrinsically linked to basic services** – water, sanitation, waste management, sustainable energy and transport and mobility. We need these services in cities and towns to create safe, healthy and liveable neighbourhoods. Reliable services protect public health and uphold dignity, particularly in informal settlements and slums where service gaps translate into disease risks, unsafe living conditions and exclusion. WUF13 will reinforce the role of cities and local service providers in delivering SDG 6 and advancing the commitments of the New Urban Agenda. This work will continue at the 2026 UN Water Conference later in the year.

**UN system-wide coordination is critical to support action on adequate housing.** Multistakeholder partnerships are key to advancing progress in achieving adequate housing. Given the scale and complexity of the global housing crisis, global stakeholders must collaborate effectively. No single actor alone can deliver change at the speed and scale required. The UN system plays a fundamental role in advancing these objectives through supporting and aligning the efforts of Member States and stakeholders.



# Why Baku?

## Baku as a strategic hub

A global meeting point bridging East and West, and Asia and Europe, Baku blends cultural heritage with cutting-edge urban development, offering a unique setting where history meets innovation and tradition engages with contemporary design. The city's balance between legacy and aspiration captures the spirit of WUF13.

WUF13's debut in the Central Asia and South Caucasus region offers an exceptional opportunity to align local priorities with global goals and elevate the region's role in shaping urban futures. As a vibrant, cosmopolitan capital, Baku is set to play a vital role in advancing sustainable urbanization and strengthening resilience across the cities of the region.

## A city in transformation

Once an oil capital, Baku is embracing sustainable growth, transforming into a smart, environmentally friendly city and attractive tourist destination with a forward-looking urban vision.

## Sustainable mobility

Baku is expanding pedestrian zones, cycle lanes and eco-friendly public transport – making the city cleaner, safer and easier to move around. It is not only improving infrastructure but enhancing quality of life: creating vibrant public spaces and connecting communities through sustainable, people-first design. Baku is shaping a healthier, more inclusive city.

## Architectural heritage

Icherisheher, the Walled City of Baku, is a UNESCO World Heritage site inhabited since the Palaeolithic period and home to iconic landmarks such as the Shirvanshah's Palace and the Maiden Tower. It embodies the dialogue between eras and cultures, where rich historical heritage harmoniously intertwines with bold examples of futuristic architecture, such as those redefining the city's seafront.

## Built for global exchange

With world-class infrastructure and a proven track record of hosting major events across sports, culture, diplomacy and innovation, such as COP29, World Habitat Day, the European Games and the Eurovision Song Contest, Baku is ready to welcome the world, with seamless logistics, state-of-the-art venues and renowned Azerbaijani hospitality.

## Vision for the future

Azerbaijan is embracing a future where cities are sustainable, inclusive and driven by innovation. Baku stands at the forefront – showcasing solutions that are shaping the cities of tomorrow, where technology, heritage and community thrive together.

## WUF13 in Baku: a milestone moment

- Celebrating 50 years since Habitat I in Vancouver, which founded UN-Habitat.
- Marking 30 years since the Habitat II conference in Istanbul, which confirmed the world governments' commitment to improving standards of living in urban environments.
- The midpoint of the New Urban Agenda, which lays out standards and principles for the planning, development and management of urban areas.
- A key opportunity to assess and accelerate progress towards the SDGs, promoting cross-sectoral, regional and interdisciplinary partnerships that engage all stakeholders.



# Programme

WUF13 will feature hundreds of different events, including an opening and closing session, assemblies, dialogues, special sessions, roundtables and an extended Urban Expo, alongside opportunities for networking and informal exchange.



**Assembly sessions** take place before the official opening of the Forum and convene major stakeholders to translate their inputs into urban policies.



**Dialogues** are high-profile events that set the agenda for policy and action and include active engagement with the audience. They provide a platform for thinkers, practitioners and decision makers to share insights and solutions on major issues.



**Special sessions** are co-curated by UN-Habitat and a range of stakeholders and offer a dynamic platform for exploring pressing urban development themes that might have been overlooked in the main programme. Each session is crafted to inspire action and foster sustainable solutions.



**Roundtables** are action-oriented events that bring together peers to exchange views and opinions on key urban issues.



**Partner-led events** are the heart of the World Urban Forum and provide a platform for stakeholders to share experiences, innovations and solutions. Led by stakeholders, seven event categories will be featured: Networking Events, One UN, SDGs in Action, Urban Cinema, Urban Library, Voices from Cities, and the WUF Academy.



Through the **One UN track**, the World Urban Forum brings together the United Nations system to coordinate actions for adequate housing and sustainable urbanization aligned with Agenda 2030 and the New Urban Agenda.



**Urban Expo** is the exhibition space of the World Urban Forum, where countries, cities, businesses and organizations showcase innovative solutions and ideas for sustainable, resilient and inclusive housing and urban living.



A highlight of WUF13 will be the **Practices Hub**, a new space dedicated to showcasing tested solutions, innovations and best practices from cities and countries around the world.



Another novelty, the **WUF Academy**, will bring together universities, training institutes and partner organizations to host learning sessions throughout the Forum designed to build skills and capacities to address urban challenges.



## Ministerial Meeting on the New Urban Agenda

The Ministerial Meeting on the New Urban Agenda preceding WUF13 offers a moment for ministers to take stock of progress made over the past ten years and to look ahead to what is needed to fully implement the New Urban Agenda by 2036. The meeting will provide space to reflect on achievements, challenges, and key priorities especially for the next ten years of implementation, with a particular focus on housing, in line with the WUF13 theme “Housing the world: Safe and resilient cities and communities.” It will also help build momentum towards the United Nations General Assembly midterm review of the New Urban Agenda at the 2026 High-Level Political Forum.

Together, these innovations will make WUF13 more interactive, inclusive and action-oriented than ever before.

## WUF13 Dialogues



### The global housing crisis: what is the plan?

[#endthehousingcrisis](#)

The global crisis in housing affects about 2.8 billion people. It is driven not only by rising costs, but by inadequate access to serviced land, secure tenure and resilient housing, especially in informal settlements. The dialogue will look at how governments, the private sector, non-profits and communities are responding, with efforts to upgrade existing neighbourhoods and expand adequate, affordable and well-located housing solutions. It will highlight successful initiatives and investigate what it takes to shape housing systems that are inclusive, resilient and fit for the cities of tomorrow.

### Transforming informal settlements and slums

[#homesnotslums](#)

Nearly 1.1 billion people live in informal settlements and slums, including 350 to 500 million children, often in precarious, overcrowded, unhealthy and insecure conditions. Structural gaps in formal land, housing, planning and service delivery systems are limiting access to alternative affordable housing. This dialogue will explore how these urban areas can be transformed through inclusive and in-situ approaches that build on residents’ existing investments, social networks and economic contributions. It will examine how cities can shift from penalizing informal housing to recognizing and leveraging informality as part of the urban fabric, and how higher quality and accessible services and infrastructure, as well as tenure security, can be expanded.

### Housing at the centre of crisis recovery and reconstruction

[#housingrecovery](#)

By the end of 2024 there were more than 123 million people, often the most vulnerable, displaced by conflict, disasters and the effects of climate change. The dialogue will explore how we can redefine reconstruction after a crisis to put access to adequate housing and land at the centre of the conversation, and how cities can embed the challenges created by displacement into their planning and housing policies.

## The climate-housing nexus *#housingtomorrow*

Housing has been called the frontline in the fight against climate change. From floods to extreme heat, the climate crisis is already reshaping how people live – especially in informal settlements and slums and underserved areas. With buildings and infrastructure responsible for over 30 per cent of energy demand and greenhouse gas emissions, housing remains one of the most overlooked areas of climate policy despite a marked increase in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) mentioning housing and informal settlements. With local governments already delivering practical solutions, this dialogue will ask, among other questions: how can we scale what is working and ensure that decarbonization and housing resilience do not increase evictions or deepen exclusion?

## The social and economic power of housing *#housingpotential*

Housing accounts for 13 per cent of the world's GDP and the employment of 7.7 per cent of the working population. Despite the social and economic value of housing being felt by households and society more broadly, the benefits are not equitable, with 2.8 billion people living in inadequate housing. The dialogue will include discussions on how to reconcile the dual role of housing as a driver of economic growth and prosperity, while simultaneously ensuring social rights and benefits across geographies, populations and economies, and the role local government could play in realizing this objective.

## A new deal for housing finance *#housetheworld*

Between 50 and 80 per cent of people in low- and middle-income countries cannot access formal sources of housing financing, while public investment in housing has remained inadequate over recent decades. While mortgage markets have been deepening, conventional housing finance has its limitations. Alternatives to conventional housing finance have emerged but remain underrecognized in national housing strategies and financial frameworks. This dialogue will discuss what a new deal in housing finance that is inclusive, sustainable and responsive to diverse needs could look like.





### **Housing at the centre of global coalitions**

*#housingaction*

Housing is increasingly recognized as a shared priority across global coalitions—from the G7 and G20 to BRICs and regional ministerial platforms. Yet political recognition alone will not close the gap faced by the 2.8 billion people living without adequate housing. This Special Session brings together ministers, mayors, international financial institutions, and representatives of global coalitions to examine how political commitments can be translated into financing, data systems and implementation at scale. The discussion will identify practical actions to strengthen cooperation and accelerate progress toward SDG 11.1, while also highlighting how innovative financing instruments and climate-aligned investments can be scaled up to support affordable, resilient and sustainable housing worldwide.

### **Advancing waste management towards circular economy**

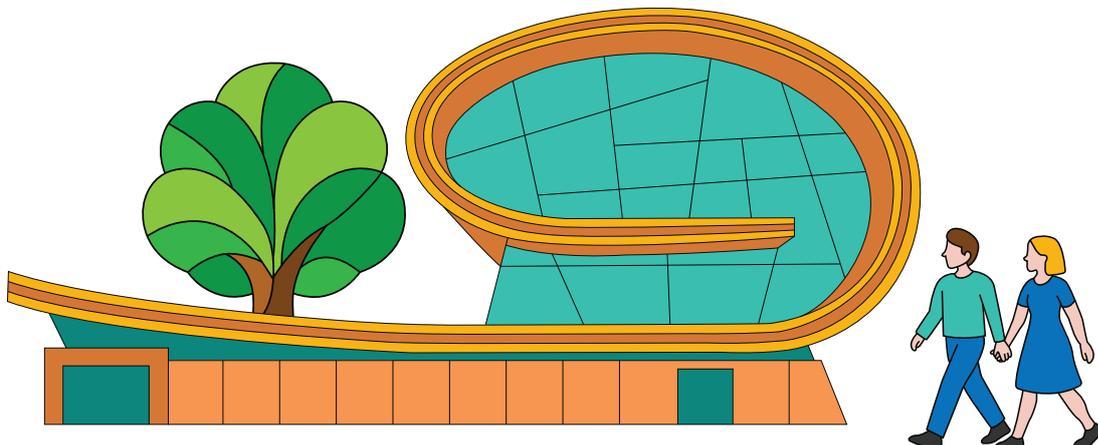
*#circulareconomy*

Cities are struggling with unprecedented levels of waste driven by rapid urbanization, rising consumption and inadequate infrastructure. This Special Session explores how integrated solid waste management can anchor the transition to a circular economy while improving public health, reducing climate risks and expanding livelihoods. Drawing insights from all continents, it brings together mayors, community leaders, researchers, industry representatives and development partners to share practical models and investment pathways that local governments can adopt. Participants will gain concrete guidance and discover new opportunities for collaboration through Waste Wise Cities, the African Clean Cities Platform and global circularity partners.

### **Inclusive urban resilience, blue economy and sustainable tourism in SIDS**

*#islandresilience*

Small Island and Developing States are at the forefront of urban resilience thinking and planning. Rising sea levels, land scarcity, climate displacement and housing vulnerability are reshaping cities across the Pacific and Indian Oceans and the Caribbean. This Special Session will bring together ministers, mayors, urban planners, local communities and regional agencies to present practical solutions for resilient and affordable housing, grounded in traditional knowledge and adapted to extreme environmental conditions. Through performances, visual displays and high-level exchanges, the session will showcase policy and planning innovations that strengthen housing systems, protect coastal communities and support the blue economy.



## **Cities as playing fields** *#sportinthecity*

The session will explore how sport can serve as an essential urban service that strengthens inclusion, health and community resilience. It will illustrate how cities can integrate sport into planning, infrastructure and financing decisions in the same way they do housing, mobility and public space. With a mix of striking audiovisuals, performances and stories from Kigali, Medellín, Paris and more, participants will learn how local investments in movement, recreation and play support regeneration and social cohesion.

## **Pulse of healthy homes** *#housingforhealth*

Housing and basic services are framed as vital signs of urban well-being, shaping not only physical health but also emotional safety, belonging and social connection. This Special Session will highlight how housing and services shape well-being and why addressing this is vital for inclusive, climate-resilient cities. It will present evidence and storytelling – from digital innovations linking housing to health to community-led upgrades – to foster new partnerships and solutions with voices from WHO, UN-Habitat, governments and grassroots groups.

## **Africa affordable housing compact – deal room investor Special Session** *#housingcompact*

The African continent faces a housing deficit exceeding 51 million units, expected to rise to 130 million by 2030 as urbanization accelerates. This Special Session will bring together ministers, global financial institutions, investors, developers and innovators to spotlight Africa's affordable housing market as a major investment opportunity. It will explore financing models, de-risking strategies and partnerships that can accelerate the delivery of sustainable, scalable housing solutions across the continent. A central feature of the session will be the "high-level investor deal room", where selected developers will pitch bankable projects and receive direct feedback from financiers and the audience.

## **Rethinking cultural heritage and inclusive urban regeneration** *#inclusiveheritage*

Heritage-led regeneration is emerging as a practical solution to strengthen identity, expand economic opportunities, and improve living conditions in historic neighbourhoods. This Special Session brings together UN-Habitat, UNESCO, UN Tourism, development banks and national governments to showcase how cultural heritage can become a driver of inclusive, climate-responsive urban transformation. Participants will discover scalable approaches that combine

community participation, sustainable tourism, affordable housing upgrades and innovative financing. The session will feature immersive storytelling, live performances, high-level dialogues, and contributions from city leaders, cultural experts and development partners across regions.

## **Stories from the frontline: advancing the urban climate legacy** *#resilientcities*

This session explores how cities facing rising heat and water are shaping a new urban climate legacy. It examines how climate finance, including loss and damage mechanisms and national climate plans, can accelerate resilience in housing, public space, land security and basic services. At its heart is the Urban Climate Action Time Capsule, bringing real-time reflections from people around the world into the room and inviting speakers to respond with clarity, courage, and commitment. Grounded in frontline experiences, particularly from Amazonian and other climate-vulnerable cities, the session blends storytelling and practical insight to shape shared priorities for people-centred, climate-resilient urban futures.

## Outcomes

### The Baku Call to Action

[#bakucalltoaction](#) [#endglobalhousingcrisis](#)

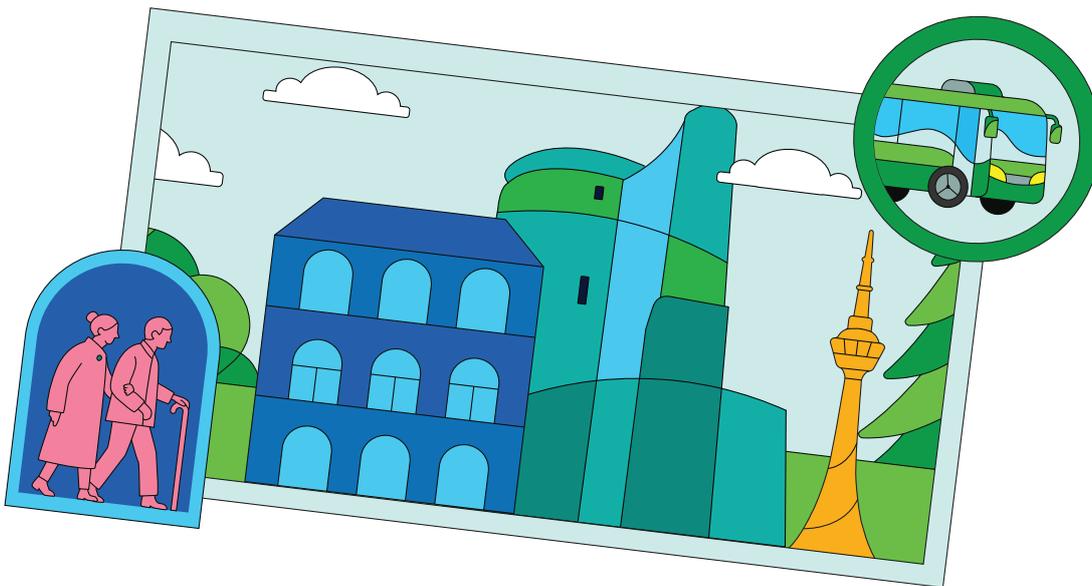
The global challenges faced in cities today – from housing shortages to the impact of climate change and inequality – need collective action, collective responsibility and collective solutions. All voices matter at the Forum, so the wealth of perspectives shared by attendees will feed into the Baku Call to Action, the official outcome of WUF13. The Call to Action will be a united statement on how to accelerate progress to address the housing crisis with co-designed solutions.

## Further background

The World Urban Forum is the largest non-legislative UN event open to all, established by the United Nations in 2001 to examine rapid urbanization and its impact.

First held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2002, the World Urban Forum has since been staged in a different major city around the world every two years; over 25,000 people attended WUF12 in Cairo.

UN-Habitat, the United Nations entity responsible for sustainable urbanization, has programmes in more than 90 countries supporting policymakers and communities to create socially and environmentally sustainable cities.



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### Contact

UN-Habitat headquarters  
PO Box 30030-00100, Nairobi, Kenya  
Email: [unhabitat-info@un.org](mailto:unhabitat-info@un.org)

[wuf.unhabitat.org](http://wuf.unhabitat.org) | [unhabitat.org](http://unhabitat.org)

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