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**Preparations for the thirteenth session of the World Urban
Forum**

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Report of the Executive Director

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 56/206 and subsequent resolutions, in which the Assembly reaffirmed the mandate of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) to convene the World Urban Forum as a non-legislative platform on sustainable urbanization. It provides an update on the status of preparations for the thirteenth session of the Forum, to be held in Baku from 17 to 22 May 2026 and co-organized by UN-Habitat and the Government of Azerbaijan.
2. The thirteenth session will be convened under the theme “Housing the world: safe and resilient cities and communities”. The theme aligns with the strategic focus of UN-Habitat for the coming years, which places housing at the centre of the global sustainable development agenda and responds directly to the urgency of the global housing crisis, in which almost 3 billion people face some form of housing inadequacy, lack access to basic services or experience homelessness.
3. The thirteenth session will take place at a critical moment for sustainable urban development, coinciding with the midpoint of the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the lead-up to the 2026 global progress review of Sustainable Development Goal 11, on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Taking advantage of this important timing, the session is expected to place housing at the centre of policy discussions and elevate the housing crisis as a critical policy priority for all stakeholders. It will provide a space to share practical solutions and good practices from different contexts, highlighting what is already working and what can be scaled up. Work at the thirteenth session will also focus on strengthening partnerships and encouraging joint commitments, including in financing and policy reform. The session is expected to result in clear and actionable outcomes that will be captured in the “Baku Call to Action”.

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

4. The programme for the thirteenth session will combine high-level policy dialogue with thematic and stakeholder-driven discussions. It will feature a ministerial meeting on the New Urban Agenda, 6 high-level dialogue sessions, 10 special sessions, 6 stakeholder assemblies (including the Global Water Operators’ Partnerships Alliance assembly) and 12 round-table discussions, as well as

* HSP/EB.2026/1.

approximately 350 partner-led events, and various exhibitions at the Urban Expo. Programme preparation is guided by the Forum’s background paper,¹ which presents the global housing challenge in its current scale and complexity, as well as relevant global frameworks such as the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. A high-level overview of the draft programme² has been published, outlining the schedule for the session.

5. On 18 May, after the official opening of the session, the Government of Azerbaijan, in its capacity as host, will convene the first-ever Leaders’ Summit, aimed at bringing together Heads of State and other world leaders to reflect on the theme of the session and present their perspectives on the opportunities and challenges it provides. This gathering is expected to amplify political commitment and galvanize momentum around addressing the global housing crisis and advancing the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

A. The New Urban Agenda at the thirteenth session

6. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 71/256, the quadrennial report of the Secretary-General on progress in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda should build on the World Urban Forum, among other platforms and processes. Accordingly, the thirteenth session is being positioned as a pivotal platform for advancing the implementation of the Agenda, at the midpoint of the Agenda’s implementation period. Since its adoption in 2016 as a 20-year framework for sustainable urban development, the Agenda has been implemented amid increased urbanization, proliferation of informal settlements and slums, intensifying climate impacts, an affordability crisis, rising conflict and displacement, and tightening fiscal conditions.

7. On 17 May, the day before the official opening, a full-day ministerial meeting on the New Urban Agenda will be convened, bringing together ministers responsible for housing, urban development and related portfolios to reflect on progress made and to present priorities for the second half of the Agenda’s implementation period. The morning session will be dedicated to national statements, providing ministers with an opportunity to share perspectives and priorities, while the afternoon session will consist of thematic high-level discussions facilitating conversation among ministers and other stakeholders.

B. Housing the world

8. Anchored in the theme of the thirteenth session, “Housing the world: safe and resilient cities and communities”, the main dialogue sessions are designed to address the key dimensions of the global housing crisis and its links to sustainable urban development in the context of broader global challenges.

9. The six dialogues will focus on topics that are central to the core theme of the thirteenth session and on related or cross-cutting topics, in the following areas:

(a) Dialogue 1, “The global housing crisis: what is the plan?”, 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;

(b) Dialogue 2, “Transforming informal settlements and slums”, will explore how informal areas of urban centres can be transformed through inclusive and in situ approaches that build on residents’ existing investments, social networks and economic contributions. Participants will examine how cities can shift from penalizing informal housing to recognizing and leveraging informality as part of the urban fabric;

(c) Dialogue 3, “Housing at the centre of crisis recovery and reconstruction”, will explore how to redefine reconstruction after a crisis in such a way as 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;

(d) Dialogue 4, “The climate–housing nexus”, will examine the links between housing and climate change, including the impacts of climate-related hazards on living conditions, particularly in informal settlements and underserved areas. Participants will consider the role of housing in energy

¹ Available at <https://wuf.unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/pdf/wuf13-background-paper.pdf>.

² Available at <https://wuf.unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2025-10/files/wuf13-full-programme.pdf>.

use and emissions and explore how climate and housing policies can better support resilience and decarbonization;

(e) Dialogue 5, “The social and economic power of housing”, will feature discussions on how to reconcile the role of housing as a driver of economic growth and prosperity with the need to ensure support for social rights and benefits across geographies, populations and economies, and the role that local government could play in realizing that objective;

(f) Dialogue 6, “A new deal for housing finance”, will examine gaps in housing finance, including limited access to formal financing and the constraints of conventional mortgage systems, and will explore more inclusive and sustainable financing approaches that are responsive to diverse needs.

10. In addition to the dialogues, the thirteenth session will include a series of special sessions, co-curated by UN-Habitat and a range of stakeholders, offering a dynamic platform for exploring pressing urban development themes that are not featured in the dialogue sessions. The special sessions will address cross-cutting and thematic issues related to housing and sustainable urban development, including affordable housing and investment platforms, housing-centred global coalitions, inclusive urban resilience, circular economy approaches, healthy homes, urban regeneration and cultural heritage, and region-specific priorities.

11. The dialogues and special sessions will be preceded by five assemblies, which will provide structured platforms for major stakeholder groups to articulate priorities and contribute to Forum outcomes, and by 12 action-oriented round-table discussions that will bring together stakeholders to exchange views, share experiences and identify practical responses to key urban challenges. These sessions will be designed and co-curated with diverse groups of stakeholders through a structured engagement process.

12. Stakeholders and partners will also be provided with space at the session through the partner-led events track, which will enable them to design and convene sessions related to the theme in order to share experiences, innovations and solutions that advance sustainable urban development. The application period for partner-led events began on 2 December 2025 and ended on 3 February 2026, with submissions made through the UN-Habitat Global Event Management System. A total of 1,432 partner-led event submissions were received across seven categories: “Networking events”, “One United Nations”, “Sustainable Development Goals in action”, “Urban cinema”, “Urban library”, “Voices from cities” and “World Urban Forum Academy”. The submissions will be reviewed by an internal selection committee comprising senior leadership, thematic experts and regional focal points.

13. The thirteenth session will also feature the Urban Expo, which will serve as the Forum’s exhibition platform and provide space for countries, cities, organizations and partners to showcase initiatives, tools and practices related to housing and sustainable urban development. Applications for the Urban Expo were launched on 15 December 2025 and will close on 31 March 2026. The Urban Expo is expected to function as a marketplace for the exchange of ideas and solutions, bringing together a wide range of exhibitors and other stakeholders, including national and local governments, United Nations entities, development banks, civil society organizations, academia, foundations, businesses and innovators. It will include dedicated feature spaces such as the World Urban Forum Academy Campus and the Practices Hub, a pavilion for startups to present practices and facilitate exchange among partners.

C. Stakeholder engagement and global mobilization

14. In 2025, UN-Habitat launched a global stakeholder engagement process for the thirteenth session to ensure inclusive dialogue and mobilization well before the start of the session. As part of that process, a series of global stakeholder dialogues with the Executive Director, stakeholder consultation meetings and working group meetings were convened to inform the substantive focus of the session and to support inclusive participation across major groups and other stakeholders, including local and regional governments, professional organizations, academia, civil society, grass-roots organizations, the private sector, women and youth. Through these engagements, more than 1,000 stakeholders have been involved to date.

15. The stakeholder engagement process has generated a consolidated set of priorities and perspectives that are informing the design of the programme of the thirteenth session and its expected outcomes. Across the consultations, stakeholders emphasized the need for the Forum to prioritize tangible, action-oriented solutions grounded in local practice and capable of being scaled and replicated. Stakeholders also emphasized the need to advance affordable, climate-responsive and inclusive housing, including informal settlement upgrading, tenure security and the use of local and

nature-based solutions. They highlighted the importance of reliable and disaggregated data to inform planning, monitor the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 11 and strengthen accountability under the New Urban Agenda, and called for inclusive approaches and sustained follow-up through mechanisms for putting the outcomes of the thirteenth session into practice.

16. The engagement processes have been complemented by a global advocacy campaign aimed at outreach, amplification of key messages and participant mobilization. These efforts included exhibition booths at global forums such as the World Social Summit, held in Doha from 4 to 6 November 2025, and the celebration of World Cities Day in Bogotá, on 31 October 2025, as well as the organization of events related to the thirteenth session that brought stakeholders together to reflect on the session's theme and share perspectives that could inform substantive preparations for the session. In addition, dedicated briefings for diplomatic missions and the media have been organized as part of the outreach and advocacy efforts for the thirteenth session, in collaboration with the host country. Briefings were held in Baku, Geneva, Nairobi and New York to provide updates on preparations for the thirteenth session, outline the structure and focus of the programme and highlight opportunities for engagement.

17. Regional mobilization activities have been conducted across all UN-Habitat regions to promote the thirteenth session and support stakeholder mobilization at the national and regional levels. These efforts have included country-level seminars and promotion events, integration of the thirteenth session into existing regional and global platforms, thematic dialogues with regional stakeholders, virtual information sessions, and briefings with sectoral ministries and development partners.

18. Mobilization and engagements have also been conducted with the host country through a national urban campaign in Azerbaijan launched at ADA University, Baku, on 6 October 2025, coinciding with World Habitat Day. The Azerbaijan Urban Campaign 2026 continues to build strong national momentum towards the thirteenth session, mobilizing young people, professionals, institutions and communities. Recent activities have highlighted youth leadership, inclusive urban development, and innovation, notably through the Azerbaijani Youth Forum in Khankendi. Design workshops, heritage walks, seminars and thematic discussions are engaging students and practitioners in rethinking public space, mobility and green corridors. The campaign is advancing inclusivity through focused actions on gender-responsive cities and opportunities for persons with disabilities. Partnerships with universities, embassies, civil society and international organizations continue to expand the campaign's reach and visibility. Several upcoming events, including Baku Urban Week (11–17 May), will further strengthen national dialogue and citizen engagement ahead of the thirteenth session.

D. United Nations system coordination and engagement

19. The thirteenth session has been positioned as a convening platform to bring together United Nations system entities in support of more integrated and coordinated engagement on housing and sustainable urban development, in accordance with the objectives of the UN80 initiative. The Forum provides a shared space for United Nations entities to engage with Member States, local and regional governments and other stakeholders, facilitating exchange across policy, normative and operational work. United Nations system engagement is being advanced through contributions to the Forum's main sessions and stakeholder modalities, as well as through dedicated coordination mechanisms designed to strengthen collaboration and reduce fragmentation.

20. Coordination across the United Nations system will also be supported by partner-led events in the "One United Nations" category, enabling joint programming and presentation of integrated approaches by United Nations entities. This category provides space for United Nations system partners to align messaging, share experiences and engage collectively with external stakeholders on cross-cutting priorities related to housing, urban development and the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, with a particular focus on country-level relevance and delivery.

21. Furthermore, the "One United Nations" round-table discussion will continue to serve as a dedicated space in which United Nations development system entities can convene during the World Urban Forum and engage with key stakeholders to strengthen coherence in strategies, policies and programming, particularly at the country level. During the discussion, housing will be addressed as a cross-cutting entry point for United Nations system collaboration, highlighting its central role in advancing multiple Sustainable Development Goals and integrated national development priorities. The discussion will bring together United Nations entities, resident coordinators, multilateral development banks and national government representatives to support closer coordination in joint programming, financing approaches and pooled resources, and alignment with country-level priorities as articulated in United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. Building on the

collaborative momentum of previous sessions of the Forum, the discussion will contribute to a shared understanding of the guidance provided in the New Urban Agenda and support accelerated delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals through more coherent, system-wide United Nations engagement on housing and sustainable urban development.

E. Transforming capabilities for action

22. At the thirteenth session, strong emphasis will be placed on strengthening implementation capacities and translating dialogue into action. The Forum will therefore include dedicated spaces and processes aimed at linking policy discussions with practical experience, applied knowledge and learning. Through the Practices Hub and the World Urban Forum Academy, the thirteenth session will support exchanges on what works in different contexts, help to address identified capacity gaps, and contribute to sustained follow-up beyond the session in support of the New Urban Agenda and the strategic plan of UN-Habitat for the period 2026–2029.

23. The Practices Hub will provide a dedicated space at the thirteenth session for highlighting practical and proven housing initiatives that contribute to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 11. In June 2025, UN-Habitat issued a global call inviting Member States and stakeholders to submit successful and impactful housing practices for consideration. The call focused on initiatives demonstrating evidence of implementation, measurable change and potential for learning, replication or upscaling. A total of 272 housing practice submissions have been received. Selected practices will be presented through the Practices Hub during the Forum and, where relevant, reflected in UN-Habitat knowledge platforms and reports.

24. The World Urban Forum Academy initiative is aimed at instituting a dedicated learning and capacity-building track as part of the thirteenth session, complementing the Forum’s policy dialogue with structured opportunities for learning and knowledge exchange. The Academy will include targeted training sessions and workshops aligned with the session’s main themes, hosted within an Academy Campus that forms part of the Urban Expo, in order to support academic exchange. Through this initiative, universities and research institutions will participate in dedicated booths, lectures and knowledge-sharing sessions.

F. Capturing the essence of the thirteenth session and sustaining engagements

25. As a non-legislative platform, the World Urban Forum places emphasis on translating dialogue into concrete and actionable outcomes that can guide policy, support implementation and sustain engagement beyond the session itself. The thirteenth session is therefore being designed to consolidate its substantive contributions through a set of outcome products that will capture stakeholder perspectives, priorities, commitments and actions emerging from the Forum.

26. A key outcome of the thirteenth session will be the “Baku Call to Action”, which will capture stakeholder perspectives on accelerated responses to the urgency of the global housing crisis. The outcome document is intended to serve as a practical tool to guide policies and actions at the local, national and global levels, while advancing the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in its second decade (2026–2036). The document will be developed through inclusive stakeholder consultations and informed by the insights of participants in the sessions.

27. The outcomes and proceedings of the thirteenth session will be captured in the session report, which will provide a consolidated account of the Forum’s programme, participation and key messages. In addition, an analytical product on “WUF13 perspectives” will be developed, drawing on discussions across the main sessions, assemblies, round-table discussions and partner-led events. The publication will distil key policy messages, highlight emerging trends and identify areas requiring continued attention, thereby supporting ongoing dialogue among Member States and stakeholders beyond the session.

G. Next steps and key milestones

28. Preparations for the thirteenth session will continue in accordance with the delivery plan, prioritizing the substantive programme, completing the evaluation and selection of partner-led events and practices, and advancing preparations for the ministerial meeting, dialogues, assemblies, round-table discussions and special sessions. Work will also continue on stakeholder engagement and regional mobilization. In parallel, preparations for the Urban Expo, Practices Hub and World Urban Forum Academy will be finalized, alongside remaining organizational arrangements in coordination with the host country.

29. In the period leading up to the session, key milestones will include the confirmation of programme elements, the issuance of formal communications, the publication of updated programme information and the completion of on-site preparations. During this time, preparations for the “Baku Call to Action” will also advance through structured consultations ahead of the thirteenth session, with arrangements to capture input during the session. Following the session, priority will be given to finalizing and disseminating the outcome document and related products.
