

United Nations



Forum of Mayors Fifth meeting

“Cities Shaping the Future”



BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND GUIDING QUESTIONS

6 - 7 October 2025

Palais des Nations, Geneva

Background and Guiding Questions

General guidance on the interventions by mayors/deputy mayors

- Mayors/deputy mayors are encouraged to actively participate throughout the meeting by requesting for the floor under any of - and as many of - the thematic segments on the meeting programme they would wish to intervene (by raising their city's nameplate placed before them). The Chairperson will give them the opportunity to speak.
- A mayor/deputy mayor may choose to intervene **either from his/her seat or from behind a lectern** by the podium.
- To ensure that all participating mayors have the chance to speak, each intervention should be concise, **not exceeding 2 minutes**, and **be directly related to the topics discussed**, covering (some of) the key questions and aspects outlined in this document and in the draft outcome document for the fifth meeting « Cities Shaping the Future » (ECE/HBP/2025/4) available at: <https://land.unece.org/forumofmayors/>.
- Interventions can be made in one of the official languages of UNECE: **English, French, or Russian**, or in two other UN languages: **Arabic and Spanish** – as interpretation is provided for these 5 languages.
- To ensure that the contributions are accurately reflected by the interpreters and recorded in the summary of the event, the mayor's office may wish to email the UNECE secretariat (forum-of-mayors@un.org) **1-2 bullet point(s) per intervention** highlighting the most important points and take-aways. This would be appreciated **by 1 October**.
- Aside from the participating mayors (i.e. one officially selected city per country), other meeting participants (representatives of: other attending cities, member States, partner organizations and academia) may also intervene (for max. 2 minutes/intervention) – time allowing.

Segment 1 | Good health and well-being (SDG 3)¹

Background

Urbanization is a defining trend of the modern era and significantly impacts health and environment. Currently, over 55% of the world's population live in urban areas – a proportion that is expected to increase to 70% by 2050. As urban population continues to grow, urban health - involving physical, social, and mental well-being of the urban population at all ages- will become more important for governments at all levels. Urban health also affects other societal goals through: the economic, labour, and other repercussions of ill health; connections to other urban sectors and systems (e.g., transport, housing, land use); and relevance to diverse issues like climate change, pollution, sustainable development, resilience, and justice.



Photo by Samson on Unsplash

The dynamism and diversity of urban areas offer both unique challenges and opportunities for public health. Well-designed and managed, they can create and sustain vast improvements in health and well-being, including in terms of: access to health care and other essential services (clean water, sanitation, education); access to adequate housing; green and safe urban environment; healthier urban lifestyles; and improved traffic safety, while also bringing social, economic and environmental benefits.

On the other hand, inadequately planned and managed urbanization can generate serious health challenges and inequities as well as social, economic and environmental harms.

While much remains to be done to achieve global targets on health and well-being, mayors and local governments are leaders in driving progress. They are the sphere of government that is well positioned to innovate and act on the social, spatial and environmental determinants of health within an integrated, holistic and multi-scalar approach.

Local governments around the world have already developed and implemented innovative and practical measures to improve the health of their citizens. These include measures related to preventive, sustainable and inclusive urban planning; data and evidence; resources; partnerships; coordination among all levels of government; capacity building; education and awareness raising. Local and regional governments play a crucial role in managing healthcare within cities by overseeing hospitals, health centers, and community-based services to ensure accessible and responsive medical care. They also serve as frontline actors in addressing global health challenges like pandemics by implementing localized public health measures, coordinating emergency responses, and ensuring effective communication and resource distribution.

[1] The information in this note on good health and well-being is mainly provided by the World Health Organization.

Segment 1 | Good health and well-being (SDG 3)¹

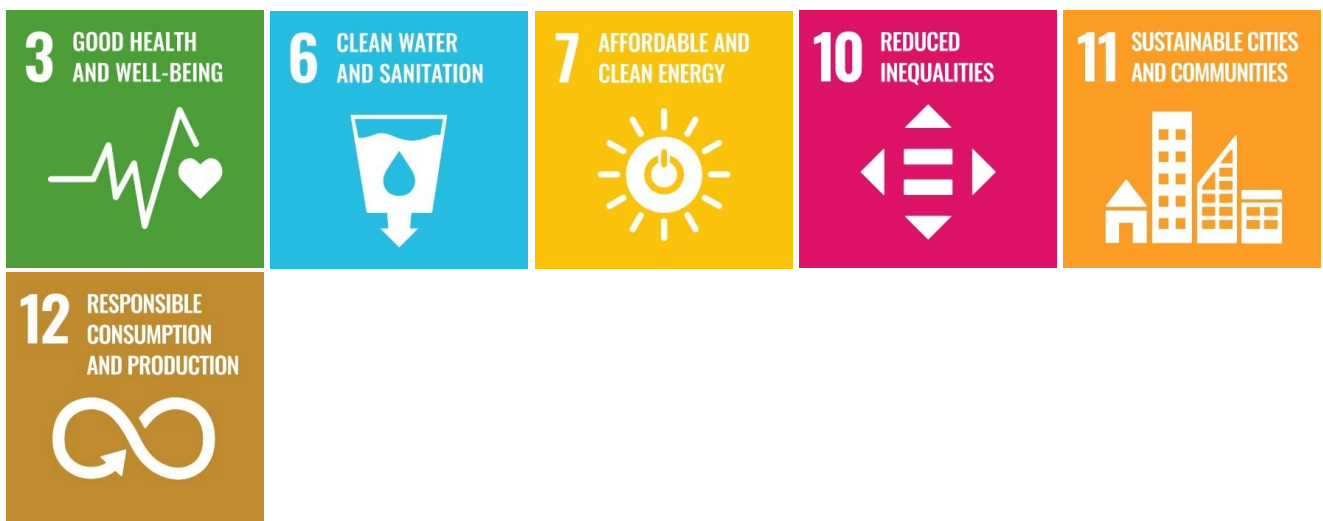
Expectations

In this segment, mayors/deputy mayors will exchange experiences, highlight practical examples (good practices/success stories, challenges), and discuss existing and planned strategies and actions, collaborative efforts and innovative approaches related to good health and wellbeing. They will explore opportunities, needs and recommendations for policies and interventions improving health and well-being for all the urban dwellers at all ages and resulting in multiple co-benefits.

Guiding Questions

1. What is the most critical urban health challenge in your city?
2. What challenges or obstacles have you/your city faced in putting health at the core of your local interventions?
3. Which are the principle challenges in managing health systems at the city level?
4. What good practices, policies, or partnerships have proven to be effective to address the above challenges?
5. What capacities do you think policymakers and practitioners need to have to ensure a successful implementation of health policies at the city level?
6. Please provide an example where the whole-of-government approach was effectively implemented in your city to produce a positive outcome on health and well-being?
7. What next steps, improvements, or recommendations would you suggest?

Related SDGs



Segment 2 | Gender equality (SDG 5)²



Photo by Mart Production on Pexels

Background

Gender equality and women's empowerment are essential for sustainable development. Empowering women and ensuring their rights are realized contributes to safer urban environments, inclusive public services, drives innovation, enhances service-sector performance, and fosters more cohesive and peaceful societies.

As the world marks the 30th anniversary of the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#), investing in gender equality and women's empowerment at all levels is more critical than ever as it sets a direct path towards accelerated progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. The [2025 review and appraisal of the implementation of the Platform for Action](#) shows progress has been made but critical gaps remain. The [UNECE regional synthesis report](#) for Beijing +30 mirrors this trend.

To accelerate progress towards achieving SDG 5 and other SDGs with gender specific targets, the Beijing+30 Action Agenda sets forth six key action areas that are also relevant for regional and local governments and contain a cross-cutting agenda on youth. These include:

1. Poverty eradication,
2. Digital inclusion, climate justice,

3. Ensuring zero violence for all women and girls,
4. Freedom from poverty,
5. Women's full and equal decision-making power,
6. Peace and Security for all women and girls, including accountability for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

Institutions of governance at the sub-national level can be engines of change for gender equality when they intentionally design inclusive systems that integrate gender considerations into policy, planning, budgeting, and governance. Policies on social protection, access to quality health services, education, adequate housing, access to clean water and sanitation, and decent work, including in the care and informal economy is crucial in addressing structural inequalities and discrimination in society and ensuring that no one is left behind.

Despite their contributions, women's full engagement in local governance is still limited. Data from 145 countries show that in 2023, women constituted more than 3 million (35.5 per cent) of elected members in local deliberative bodies, up from 33.9 per cent in 2020.³



[2] The information on gender equality in this note is prepared by UN Women.

[3] UN Women Facts and figures: Women's leadership and political participation <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-womens-leadership-and-political-participation>

Segment 2 | Gender equality (SDG 5)²

In 2025, women's representation in local government stagnated at 35.5 per cent after an average annual increase of 0.4 points since 2020.⁴ Women also continue to face multiple and intersecting challenges, and their contributions are often unacknowledged, minimized, or under-resourced. Addressing these challenges requires addressing structural and societal discrimination that limits women's economic involvement.

To realize a sustainable and resilient future, local governance must strengthen institutions, address accountability gaps, elevate women's voices, close financial gaps, harness technology, and shock-proof services and infrastructure.⁵ Integrating gender-responsive policies into urban planning, ensuring women's voices are represented in decision-making, and committing to long-term investments that empower women is not only a matter of justice and human rights but also a strategic move towards building stronger, more inclusive urban economies.

Expectations

In this segment, mayors/deputy mayors will exchange experiences, highlight practical examples, and discuss strategies and actions related to gender equality and women's empowerment. We encourage cities to reflect on women's contributions to sustainable cities, identify barriers to women's empowerment in all spheres of life, and share strategies to address them.

Guiding Questions

1. What policies and initiatives exist to ensure that women and girls can reap the benefits of the digital revolution at the local and regional levels, including those related to bridging the digital gender gap, skills development, civic participation, and providing equal access to digital technology, financial services, markets and networks?
2. What policies are in place to address women's poverty, including those related to social protection, women's health, girls' education and care systems?
3. What institutional or legislative policies are being implemented to ensure safe cities and safe public spaces for women and girls? How are these policies monitored?
4. What measures are local governments taking to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls in public spaces, including support for victims and survivors?
5. What steps are being taken or have been taken to increase women's meaningful participation and representation in local government leadership and decision-making roles, including young women and those from marginalized communities?
6. What initiatives exist the local level to ensure climate justice, including youth and women's engagement in climate and disaster risk reduction decision-making processes?

Related SDGs



Gender equality is also foundational to all other SDGs.



[4] The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025 <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2025/>

[5] Women's rights in review 30 years after Beijing, UN Women, 2025 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2025/03/womens-rights-in-review-30-years-after-beijing>

Segment 3 | Decent work and economic growth (SDG 8)⁶

Background

SDG 8 calls on the international community to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”.⁷ It thus captures two strongly interlinked main themes: economic growth and employment and decent work. Putting job creation at the heart of economic policymaking is a virtuous circle that is good for the people, the economy and the planet.

With the rapid urbanization, 70% of the global population is expected to live in cities by 2050.⁸ Cities are therefore crucial for advancing the SDG 8. As was observed in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, cities are essential actors of territorial resilience, contributing to the protection of public services; to employment creation as well as to the development of small and medium scale enterprises.

Cities are also at the heart of economic and social innovation. They contribute to providing access to employment, including for youth, women, and people with disabilities and vulnerabilities. They are also key actors in the reduction of global inequalities, ensuring equitable access to public services, training and capacity building. Through local economic development and integrated economic planning, they develop local innovation, stimulate economic diversification and foster ecosystems favorable to entrepreneurship. Through public procurement, they are also in a position to support their territories. Cities formulate strategies for digital inclusion. When investing in green infrastructure, energetic renovation, they are key actors in a just and equitable green transition.



Photo by Hoan Ngoc on Pexels



[6] The text in this segment is provided by the International Labour Organization.

[7] A/RES/70/1 - Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

[8] UN DESA 2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects <https://www.un.org/en/desa/2018-revision-world-urbanization-prospects>

Segment 3 | Decent work and economic growth (SDG 8)⁶

Expectations

In this segment, mayors/deputy mayors will have an opportunity to discuss how their cities are engaged in the implementation of SDG8, and how their work for the promotion of decent work and economic growth is interlinked with progress in other SDGs. Cities are encouraged to focus on: specific current or future projects or policies; address challenges encountered during implementation; and potential solutions to overcome these challenges.

Guiding Questions

1. Which local policies or initiatives has your city implemented to promote decent work and economic growth?
2. How has your city addressed barriers to employment for vulnerable groups, such as youth, women, migrants, or persons with disabilities?
3. What strategies has your city used to support the transition from informal to formal employment and improve working conditions?
4. How do you engage local stakeholders—including entrepreneurs and workers organizations together with academia, and civil society—in advancing SDG 8?
5. What challenges have you encountered in financing, implementing, or monitoring SDG 8-related initiatives, and how have you addressed them?
6. How do you measure and share the outcomes and lessons learned from your SDG 8 actions with other cities or networks?

Related SDGs



Segment 4 | Climate Finance Mechanisms⁹

Background

Climate change is recognized as one of the greatest global challenges, requiring enhanced coordination and cooperation at all levels.¹⁰ The consequences of climate change, including more frequent and severe weather events, are already being felt and are expected to intensify over time. If left unaddressed, these effects could reverse the development progress made over the years as well as trigger conflicts over resources and force people to relocate.

In this context, climate finance mechanisms are essential in fostering global efforts to support climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. By mobilizing, managing and distributing funding, these instruments aim to enhance the capacity to effectively address

climate-related challenges, especially in developing countries. Such mechanisms come from a mix of public, private, bilateral and multilateral sources and include grants from multilateral funds, loans from financial institutions, sovereign green bonds issued by national governments, and funds raised through carbon trading and taxes.

Climate finance for cities has become a critical area of focus, as over half of the world's population lives in urban areas, generating 80% of its total economic output and accounting for 70% of global CO₂ emissions.¹¹ Despite global climate finance commitments and the active role that cities play in achieving climate goals, they often struggle to access climate finance which is crucial for investing in climate adaptation and mitigation.



Photo by Pixabay on Pexels

[9] The text in this segment is authored by the Sustainable Energy Division of UNECE.

[10] A/RES/72/219 - Protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind

[11] <https://www.citygapfund.org/>

Segment 4 | Climate Finance Mechanisms⁹

Expectations

In this segment, mayors/deputy mayors will exchange experiences, highlight practical examples, and discuss strategies and actions related to local climate finance mechanisms. The discussion focuses on how to mobilize and direct resources towards climate action at the local level, including via mechanisms that bridge the gap between public and private funding, such as Green Bonds, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), and carbon credits, or via innovative approaches such as crowdfunding, debt-for-nature swaps, and Payment for Ecosystem Services.

Guiding Questions

1. Please provide an example of a local project to adapt to or mitigate the impact of climate change for which you have managed to get international, national or private funding?
2. How did you go about convincing these international (international finance institutions, multilateral development banks), national or private actors to provide funding?
3. Have you benefited from innovative approaches (derisking/PPPs/crowdfunding/ carbon credits) to access funding for your city-led adaptation or mitigation project?
4. What is most crucial in your view to enhance the mayors' ability to finance sustainable urban projects?

Related SDGs



Segment 5 | Voluntary Local and Sub-national Reviews (VLRs, VSRs)¹²



Photo by Hugo Magalhaes on Pexels

Background

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, national governments have been working closely with local and regional authorities to achieve SDGs. Through its follow-up and review mechanisms, the 2030 Agenda encourages UN member States to "conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven" (para. 79).¹³ Additionally, paragraph 89 of that document calls on major groups and other stakeholders, including local authorities, to report on their contributions to the implementation of the Agenda. In this spirit, local and regional governments are increasingly engaging in such sub-national reviews of SDG implementation, also known as Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Sub-national Reviews (VSRs). These are the local and subnational equivalents of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) conducted by national governments.

Although VLRs have not yet been fully integrated into the official review process for the 2030 Agenda, they are rapidly gaining popularity and have already demonstrated their value for monitoring and promoting sustainable development. Conducting these subnational reviews provides numerous benefits for all parties involved and has the potential to contribute to the localization of SDGs, making them more concrete and actionable. Additionally, VLRs also help to identify local priorities and challenges, align policies between local and national governments more effectively, encourage community involvement, and increase accountability and transparency in local governance.

[12] The information in this segment is from the Global Cities Hub.

[13] A/RES/70/1 - Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Segment 5 | Voluntary Local and Sub-national Reviews (VLRs, VSRs)¹²

Expectations

In this segment, mayors/deputy mayors will exchange experiences, highlight practical examples, and discuss strategies and actions related to developing and managing a Voluntary Local Review (VLR) of SDG implementation at the local level. They will discuss adequate ways to address the technical, human, and organizational gaps with a view to building the local institutional capacity required for the SDG implementation and VLR preparation. Information sharing on the development of expertise, including peer networks and inter-municipal partnerships is crucial in this regard.

Guiding Questions

1. What challenges have you/your city faced or currently face to produce a voluntary local review (VLR)?
2. Do you have a dedicated strategy to generate, collect and manage localized, disaggregated data needed to track progress on SDG indicators, especially in areas like social inequality or environmental impact?
3. If your city has completed a VLR, what have been the main benefits or outcomes from the process? Has it helped guide or influence investment decisions in your city?
4. Do you coordinate with your national government regarding the voluntary national review (VNR) prepared by your own State? If so, has your city's VLR been reflected or considered in the VNR?
5. How do you ensure meaningful participation from civil society, private sector, and marginalized groups in policy implementation, including possible VLR, to translate the global SDG framework into locally relevant targets and actions?

Related SDGs



Segment 6 | Housing related challenges¹⁴

Background

Adequate and affordable housing is a human right and critical for the well-being of society. Yet, reports of a global housing crisis are increasingly widespread, with distinct regional drivers and manifestations, including lack of access to affordable and adequate housing, homelessness, evictions, displacement caused by climate change and conflict, and the expansion of informal settlements. The provision of adequate housing contributes to local, national and global inequalities.

In the UNECE region, housing stress is experienced by over one third of households belonging to the lower 40% of income distribution.¹⁵ While the severity of housing affordability issues varies significantly between countries, many households across the region face housing costs that exceed 45% of their income. The poorest households are the hardest hit, with in some countries, housing costs reaching around 60-70% and even up to above 80% of income. The failure to address the situation can prevent households from meeting other essential needs such as energy and food and pose barriers to accessing education, transportation and more. The lack of affordable housing pushes many into substandard homes which are typically overcrowded and concentrated in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, perpetuating a cycle of poverty.

Globally, over 2.8 billion people lack adequate housing of whom 1.1 billion live in slums.¹⁶ These figures are growing in most regions.

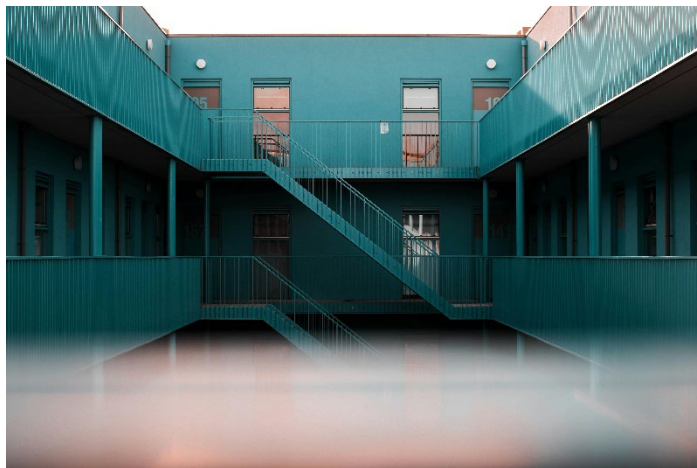


Photo by Longxiang Qian on Pexels

For those not living in slums, a lack of basic services, poor maintenance of the building fabric, housing costs, weak security of tenure and inappropriate locations are frequently cited as challenges. Climate change impacts, such as thermal properties and increased environmental risks, are also becoming more prominent.

Urbanization and population growth are accelerating. Urbanization is projected to reach 68% by 2050, up from 55% today, adding around 2.2 billion people to urban areas. Critically, 90% of this growth will occur in South-East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, where housing systems are already under strain.¹⁷ The focus is very much upon cities, both in identifying the challenges and in providing the solutions.



[14] This segment is authored by UN-Habitat, with information by UNECE regarding the UNECE region.

[15] United Nations publication, Challenges and priorities for improving housing affordability in the UNECE region (ECE/HBP/225) available in English and Russian at: <https://unece.org/publications/housing-and-land-management>.

[16] UN-Habitat 'Rescuing SDG11 for a resilient urban planet' <https://unhabitat.org/rescuing-sdg-11-for-a-resilient-urban-planet>

[17] World Population Prospects 2022: Summary of Results <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/World-Population-Prospects-2022>

Segment 6 | Housing related challenges¹⁴

In regions where urbanization or urban population growth may not be dominant, national trends, economic, political and environmental change can place greater pressure on, or change the nature of challenges to, adequate housing. Particular towns and cities may experience rapid growth, or decline, in population. Climate change may increase the risks of some locations. Cultural or economic change may influence the demand for, or the supply of, particular types of housing and, quite often, these factors and political choices also influence the means of delivering housing that are available to policy makers.

A quantitative lens alone is insufficient when looking at the estimated shortage of affordable housing units. The challenge is not just one of delivering volume/quantity, but of affordability, sustainability, inclusivity, tenure security and access to services. An overemphasis on the quantitative deficit also risks underappreciating the diversity of housing solutions created by cities and communities.

Expectations

In this segment, mayors/deputy mayors will discuss the nature of the challenges their cities face to the achievement of universal access to adequate housing. Cities are encouraged to focus on specific projects or policies that have delivered, or that have contributed to, successful outcomes, and what have been their benchmarks for 'success'. They are also welcomed to highlight the nature of multi-level governance or cooperation with national governments, or other partners.

Guiding questions:

1. What are the main challenges that your city, or your local government, faces in achieving universal access to adequate housing? Could you identify the root causes? For example, do the challenges relate to the number of available housing units, their location, their habitability or quality, their rental or purchase cost or something else?
2. What projects or policies has your city implemented to address its identified adequate housing challenges and what lessons have been learnt from these experiences? What were your objectives or benchmarks for success in these projects or policies?
3. What has been the role of multi-level governance, cooperation with national government or with other partners in delivering adequate housing at scale?
4. What are your priorities for housing policies or projects in the immediate future?

Related SDGs:





FORUM OF MAYORS 2025

Cities Shaping the Future

For all meeting-related documentation and information, please see:

<https://land.unece.org/forumofmayors/>

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