

Annex II

Chair's Summary of the fifth meeting of UN Forum of Mayors

1. The fifth meeting of the Forum of Mayors took place in Geneva, on 6 and 7 October 2025. Under the theme “Cities Shaping the Future”, it gathered over 80 cities, 50 of which were represented at the mayor or deputy mayor levels. These cities had come across the United Nations Economic Committee for Europe (ECE) region and were joined by representatives of member States, international organizations, civil society, academia, and the private sector. The Forum provided a platform for local leaders to exchange practical solutions, showcase commitments, and engage in dialogue with the international community as well as to adopt commitments and recommendations for member States.

2. The meeting opened with a statement by the Chair of the 2025 Forum of Mayors Bureau and City Leader of Glasgow Council, who stressed the importance of multilevel collaboration to address global challenges. Welcoming remarks were also delivered by the Executive Secretary of ECE, who highlighted the Forum's role as a unique platform for cities to officially contribute to intergovernmental discussions. Opening speeches followed from Assistant Director-General of ILO, Secretary General of Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Vice-Mayor of Geneva, Ex Officio member of the 2025 Forum of Mayors Bureau, President of the Global Cities Hub, Secretary General UCLG, each underlining the significance of local leadership in achieving the SDGs.

3. The Forum also heard from Ms. Ruth Dreifuss, Spokesperson of the fifth meeting, the Former President of Switzerland and the founding member of the Global Commission on Drug Policy. Ms Dreifuss reflected on crucial role of inclusive and compassionate city leadership, guided by evidence, in addressing health inequities, fostering resilience, and advancing sustainable development.

4. This opening set the tone for discussions, stressing the role of cities as crucial partners in building resilience, equity, and inclusive governance, thereby enabling mayors to address the following topics:

1. Good health and well-being (SDG 3)
2. Gender equality (SDG 5)
3. Decent work and economic growth (SDG 8)
4. Climate Finance Mechanisms
5. Housing-related Challenges
6. Voluntary Local and Sub-national Reviews (VLRs, VSRs)

5. Each thematic discussions included an introductory presentation by an international organization specialized on the given theme, including WHO, UN Women, ILO, ECE, UN Habitat and UCLG.

6. On **Good health and well-being (SDG 3)**, discussions reaffirmed that cities are at the forefront of tackling today's most pressing health challenges, from air pollution and climate-related

risks to access to care and mental health. Participants stressed that health is inherently urban, with COVID-19 having exposed both the vulnerabilities and resilience of local health systems. Mayors highlighted efforts to integrate public health into urban planning – through expanding green spaces, promoting active lifestyles, improving air quality, and supporting vulnerable groups such as the homeless and elderly. Many underlined the urgency of addressing staff shortages in healthcare and emergency services, improving living conditions in informal settlements, and ensuring that health services reach all residents equitably. The importance of preventive approaches, particularly for children and youth, was also emphasized, alongside the need to combat early pregnancies and gender-based inequalities that undermine long-term well-being. Participants called for stronger partnerships with WHO and other agencies to integrate health expertise into local policymaking and for greater empowerment of municipalities to manage essential infrastructure and public health systems.

7. On **Gender equality (SDG 5)**, mayors highlighted their commitment to creating inclusive, safe, and equitable cities that empower women and girls across all sectors. Many cities are addressing persistent gender gaps through targeted initiatives in education, employment, digital innovation, and safety. Efforts are being made to enhance women's participation in technology and leadership, with several cities introducing quotas, training, and mentorship schemes to ensure equal representation in governance and the workforce. Local authorities are also tackling gender-based violence through legal aid centres, safer public spaces, and zero-tolerance policies in nightlife and sports environments. Education and early childhood initiatives are seen as key entry points for promoting equality, while partnerships with civil society and international organizations strengthen the reach and impact of local action. Beyond representation, cities emphasized the importance of building environments where women can exercise real influence – economically, socially, and politically.

8. On **Decent work and economic growth (SDG 8)**, mayors underlined the central role of local economies in driving innovation, employment, and inclusive prosperity. Many cities are rethinking how to sustain economic growth while ensuring that no one is left behind. Innovation and digital transformation were recurring themes. Cities are increasingly fostering environments where young people, women, and vulnerable groups can access decent work opportunities, viewing employment not only as a source of income but also as a foundation for dignity and community development. Several examples highlighted how education, particularly through new universities and vocational training, serves as a catalyst for long-term growth and resilience. The role of social economy in terms of integrating marginalized groups into the workforce was recognized, while others emphasized the importance of international cooperation and integrity in governance in attracting sustainable investments.

9. On **Climate finance mechanisms**, mayors reiterated that cities are on the front line of the climate crisis and urgently need access to predictable, affordable, and inclusive financing to accelerate the green transition. Many cities are already implementing innovative solutions – from smart water management and energy-efficient building systems to nature-based projects and large-scale recycling initiatives. Yet funding gaps continue to hinder progress. Access to green finance remains especially challenging for cities in developing regions, where limited credit and administrative capacity restrict participation in global climate funds. Mayors underlined the

importance of international partnerships, public-private collaboration, and the development of clear legal and financial frameworks to support long-term climate investments and the resulting job creation. Across the board, local leaders stressed that climate finance should not only focus on figures and emissions targets but also on improving people's living conditions, ensuring that the transition to sustainability is both just and inclusive.

10. On **Housing-related challenges**, mayors underlined that access to adequate housing is not only a basic need but a fundamental human right that underpins dignity, social inclusion, and well-being. Yet, cities worldwide face rising housing costs, growing inequality, and increasing pressure from migration, urbanization, and climate-related disasters. Many noted that while urban areas are on the front line of housing crises, local governments often lack the legal, financial, and institutional tools to respond effectively. Across regions, cities are implementing diverse solutions – from social and cooperative housing models to community-led developments and public-private partnerships – to expand affordable housing, renew old or unsafe buildings, and integrate sustainability and resilience into urban planning. Several cities are reclaiming their role as developers through municipal housing companies, ensuring that new housing contributes to broader goals such as climate adaptation and social cohesion. Others stressed the importance of preventing speculation, promoting mixed-income neighborhoods, and securing tenure rights for residents in informal settlements. Despite these efforts, local leaders agreed that national and international support remains essential to scale up inclusive and sustainable housing solutions.

11. On **Voluntary Local and Subnational Reviews (VLRs and VSRs)**, discussions highlighted their growing importance as political instruments that go beyond mere reporting. Mayors underlined that these reviews serve as concrete commitments, showcasing local innovations, attract funding, and foster transparency and a sense of belonging to the international community. While tangible results have been achieved and frameworks established, common challenges persist, including lack of data, limited financing, and insufficient human resources. Mayors emphasized the need to align reporting systems and build municipal capacities to measure progress effectively. In times when SDG implementation is lagging, VLRs and VSRs can bring local realities into global governance, bridging the gap between local and international action.

12. The last session focused on the **final negotiation and adoption of the outcome document of the Forum of Mayors**, containing commitments and recommendations on the topics addressed at the meeting. The draft had been prepared through a consultative process which included two rounds of informal consultations with city representatives prior to the Forum. The Forum reviewed and refined the outcome document prior to its adoption. The outcome document, as adopted by the Forum of Mayors is available on the ECE website and annexed to the report of the eighty-sixth session of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management.

13. Additionally, UNECE launched a City-to-City Cooperation Platform to connect municipalities seeking support with those offering expertise, helping cities co-develop SDG-aligned, investment-ready urban projects in areas like housing, mobility, and spatial planning. Cities are invited to contact the Secretariat (forum-of-mayors@un.org) to contribute their expertise and preparatory funding—or request support to address their priorities.

14. Finally, the Forum elected its new Bureau to prepare the sixth edition of the Forum. The Mayor of Heidelberg, Germany was elected as Chair of the Bureau and the Mayors of Bristol, United Kingdom and Hradec Králové, Czechia, as Vice-Chairs. It was also decided that the Deputy Mayor of Geneva would remain as an ex-officio and observer of the Bureau, to continue providing support to the Forum on logistical matters, in its capacity as host city.

15. In the margins of the 5th meeting of UN Forum of Mayors, 6 side events were held, with support of partners. Further to the event “Woman and Mayor” held on 6 October co-organized with the Permanent Mission of Italy to the UN in Geneva, women mayors present in Geneva adopted the ‘*Women Mayors’ Declaration for Safe and Inclusive Governance*’, reaffirming the essential role of women leaders in building resilient, inclusive, and sustainable cities.