

# GLOBAL CITIES HUB 2023

SUMMARY OF THE  
ANNUAL REPORT



# Introduction

In a world that continues to urbanize rapidly, and where the challenges are too numerous and important to be managed at international or national level alone, cities and regions can no longer be considered as mere administrative and economic territorial entities. Local and regional governments (LRGs) have become players in their own right, engaging on the international stage to tackle global challenges with local solutions, call upon their own states to act, forge alliances and partnerships with other cities and regions to move forward on urban issues, and cooperate directly with international organizations for the well-being of their residents.

That is why the Global Cities Hub (GCH) (formerly Geneva Cities Hub) is committed to ensuring that the international community becomes more inclusive towards LRGs and that urban issues are also at the heart of international debates. The GCH pursues two objectives which have remained unchanged since its creation:

- i. Better connect LRGs to the United Nations (UN) and other International Organizations to increase their influence within state-led multilateralism.** To do so, the GCH identifies relevant multilateral processes and encourages States and the UN to create more space for LRGs. It also encourages LRGs to strengthen their engagement in this respect. The aim is to ensure that the results of these multilateral processes can be effectively implemented on the ground. In the long term, the GCH favors the creation of a new status for LRGs, so that they can participate in UN work in their own capacity.
- ii. Promote the urban agenda within the Geneva ecosystem,** so that the latter adapts its of thinking and mode of action in an increasingly

urbanized world. To achieve this, the GCH facilitates exchanges between international players on their respective urban activities and amplifies these within the Geneva ecosystem and beyond. It also promotes the urban work of Geneva-based players and explores urban issues of relevance to the international community.

The GCH seeks to reach a wide and heterogeneous audience, including: the LRGs which are of very different sizes and driven by priorities largely dependent on their political and geographical context; States, whose Permanent Missions primarily follow themes discussed in Geneva; city networks, all based outside Geneva and pursuing widely differing priorities; as well as international organizations, which are naturally focused on their mandates. In implementing its mission, the GCH contributes to nurturing the Geneva ecosystem and developing inclusive multilateralism with States, international organizations, civil society, the private sector and, of course, LRGs.

The annual report (see French full version) covers all activities and developments in 2023. It demonstrates the relevance of the GCH, which provides a platform for collaboration between local and international players and strengthens the voice of LRGs within multilateralism. This excerpt presents some key elements.

The GCH has developed thanks to the support of its partners. We would like to express our deep gratitude to the City and Canton of Geneva, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, as well as to the many LRGs with whom we have collaborated, States, international organizations, city networks, NGOs, academic experts and other stakeholders who have all played a key role in shaping the GCH.

# Priority areas for GCH engagement

In 2023, the **GCH's work focused primarily on six multilateral processes** offering concrete entry points to LRGs and having strong ties to international Geneva: the Forum of Mayors (in cooperation with the five UN Regional Economic Commissions), the Human Rights Council and its Universal Periodic Review, the negotiations on a new Pandemic Agreement, the topic of smart cities within the International Telecommunication Union, the negotiations on the new treaty on plastic pollution, as well as the Global Refugee Forum. Given that these 6 processes address themes relevant to LRGs (sustainable urban development, human rights, health, digitalization, environmental protection and migration/refugees), it is important that States take into account the role and perspectives of LRGs, as well as solutions developed at local and/or regional level, to advance international debates. While these processes are all different in form, the **GCH has managed to find entry points for LRGs in each of them**, whether by supporting their participation in these international events, by highlighting the importance and contribution of LRGs in the aforementioned themes, or by submitting language proposals in relation to LRGs in international texts negotiated by States.

The **GCH relies heavily on silent diplomacy to make progress in the six priority areas** mentioned above. Indeed, it is by creating networks, dialoguing with States, engaging with multilateral bodies and processes, working with city-networks and various experts, as well as by connecting all these actors that the GCH advances its mission.

Silent diplomacy helps the GCH develop a narrative aimed at creating more space for LRGs, put forward language proposals in texts negotiated by States, and create an urban community to promote exchanges and elevate the issue of inclusive multilateralism on the agenda of international Geneva.

**City networks are key players in strengthening LRGs' international engagement**, as they mobilize cities, enable exchanges between them, strengthen their multilateral knowledge and capacities, and coordinate their actions. This is why the GCH has always sought to closely cooperate with several of them since its creation. Among the hundreds of city networks, the GCH focuses on those sharing the same objectives, i.e. strengthening LRGs international positioning, including: Association internationale des maires francophones (AIMF), Global Parliament of Mayors (GPM), ICLEI-local governments for sustainability, Mayors Mechanism, Mayors Migration Council (MMC), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), World Smart Sustainable Cities Organization (WeGO). In addition, the GCH has established contacts with other city networks to better understand their priorities, whether and how they engage at multilateral level and identify potential partnerships. That has been the case with Cities Alliance, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Eurocities, German Marshall Fund Cities, Human Rights Cities Network, Strong Cities, Peace in our Cities, and Metropolis.

# New name and potential new members

In 2023, the **Geneva Cities Hub changed its name to “Global Cities Hub”** to better reflect the fact that cities and regions are much more than mere administrative and economic entities, but rather global players on the international stage, engaging in the global governance of common challenges. Further, the new name also better explicit that the scope of GCH’s work is global. Nevertheless, GCH will continue with its two main objectives (see introduction above) and to focus primarily on Geneva-based multilateral processes and organizations.

In addition to the change of name, the GCH has also adapted its Statutes to open up to new members. As a first step, it has approached Swiss cities to gauge their interest in becoming members of the GCH. The GCH also intends to approach other cities and regions beyond Switzerland.

# Perspectives

After 4 years of existence, the GCH has succeeded in carving out a place within Geneva's international community and beyond. In the future, it will continue to call on the various international players to **take greater account of the role and perspectives of LRGs in multilateralism**. It will also pursue its objective of elevating the urban agenda in debates to encourage States, international organizations and NGOs to adapt their thinking and modes of action, and better integrate the "urban". The GCH will carry out this work in close collaboration with numerous partners, including the LRGs themselves, city networks sharing similar objectives, States, international organizations and NGOs.

With partners, **the GCH will continue in 2024 to engage in priority areas**, including the Forum of Mayors, the Human Rights Council, smart cities within the World Summit on the Information Society, as well as the negotiations on future pandemics and plastic pollution (both intergovernmental processes are due to end with the adoption of new treaties in 2024). The next Global Refugee Forum should be held again in Geneva in 2027.

2024 will be a particularly important year for engaging the LRGs in a more inclusive multilateralism, with preparations for the **UN Summit of the Future** (September 2024, New York). At this Summit, States will agree on a "Pact for the Future" which should address how to transform global governance and reinvigorate multilateralism. In this respect, particular attention will be paid to how the UN system can better include a wider diversity of actors beyond States, such as LRGs, while maintaining the intergovernmental character of the UN.

The GCH will seize every opportunity during preparations for the Summit to encourage States to **establish a new status for LRGs in the UN** (similar to the ECOSOC status for NGOs) to enable them to participate in the work of the UN in their own capacity. The GCH will also promote the Forum of Mayors – the 4th edition will focus on the Pact for the Future and the contribution of mayors in this respect – and its potential to become a key entry point for local governments at the UN. These two points will be reaffirmed by the GCH in various fora in which it will participate in the future, as they help to implement its mission.



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