

GLOBAL CITIES HUB STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2025–2028



In an increasingly urbanized world where global challenges (i.e., climate change, sustainable development, digitalization, public health, human rights violations, etc.) are numerous and significant and cannot be managed by States only, cities and regions can no longer be considered merely as administrative and economic territorial entities. Local and regional governments have become full-fledged political actors on the international stage to tackle global challenges with local solutions; to urge States and other stakeholders to act; to forge alliances and partnerships with other cities and regions and advance on urban issues; to cooperate directly with international organizations to enhance the well-being of their residents.

To support this new reality, the Global Cities Hub (GCH), created in 2020 by the City of Geneva, the Canton of Geneva and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, contributes to a more inclusive multilateralism vis-à-vis local and regional governments and ensures that urban issues are at the heart of intergovernmental debates, with a special focus on the multilateral ecosystem in Geneva. It is one of the best places to promote inclusive and effective multilateralism, given the diversity of stakeholders and their capacity to evolve and innovate.

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Our Vision, Mission and Values

Our Vision

Local and regional governments (LRGs) are recognized as full-fledged actors in multilateral governance and actively strengthen its overall effectiveness to respond to global challenges.

Our Mission

- **Contribute to a more inclusive and effective multilateralism** by strengthening LRG's influence in Geneva-based multilateral processes that remain largely State-led.
- **Promote the "urban" on the agenda of the Geneva-based international community** by providing it with a space to discuss urban issues.

Our Values

Inclusion: We support more inclusive multilateralism, where LRGs are part of international discussions and negotiations.

Effectiveness: We advocate for impactful multilateralism that incorporates the roles and perspectives of LRGs to offer more effective solutions to global challenges.

Relevance: We are committed to addressing the most relevant urban issues facing the international community.

Partnership: We collaborate with a broad array of actors, including LRGs, city networks, States, international organizations, NGOs, academia and other experts.

Our Strategic Objectives

Over the next 4 years, the GCH will organize its work around the following strategic objectives:

- **Becoming the main platform for international urban diplomacy:** The GCH will provide a space for LRGs, city networks, States, international organizations and NGOs, to discuss urban issues, promote the urban dimension of the work of international organizations and for Geneva to become a multilateral hub for LRGs and their networks. In addition, the GCH will invite cities and regions hosting multilateral organizations who support the cause of more inclusive and effective multilateralism to join as new members.
- **Increasing LRG's influence at the international level:** Through its advocacy in various multilateral processes, the GCH will strive to give more visibility to the role and perspectives of LRGs within the Geneva ecosystem and beyond. It will encourage States and international organizations to better engage with LRGs and their networks.
- **Identifying future international trends that matter for cities:** Thanks to its involvement in international affairs and its extensive network, the GCH can anticipate issues that will be at the forefront of the international community's agenda and that bear significance for LRGs.

How We Will Achieve Our Strategic Objectives

In order to reach its strategic objectives, the GCH will run its activities following the 4Cs: Convening, Connecting, Championing, Capacity-building.

Convening

The GCH will convene targeted *events* to promote the development of a more inclusive and effective multilateralism, to raise awareness about the urban dimension of global challenges, to provide more visibility to the urban expertise of international actors and foster exchanges on urban issues within the Geneva ecosystem. Events will take various formats (open to the public or targeted audience, in-person or online, panels or workshops, etc.), address relevant issues to both LRGs and international stakeholders, and be co-organized with a broad range of partners.

Connecting

The GCH will identify *entry points to connect LRGs and their networks to the UN and other international organizations*. In doing so, the GCH will determine opportunities where LRGs can participate, will provide policy advice or support LRGs' collective mobilization to that effect, and also help LRGs with logistics to attend in-person meetings, when required. As a result, LRGs will be able to take part in international meetings and to directly engage with international organizations and States on a wide range of topics (environment, sustainable urban development, human rights, etc.).

Championing

The GCH will *advocate in favor of LRGs' role and perspectives in relevant multilateral processes*. Thanks to its multilateral expertise, the GCH will take part in these processes and encourage States to

better acknowledge LRGs, for instance by suggesting specific language on LRGs in international negotiations. Further, in cooperation with city networks, the GCH will call upon States to formalize the participation of LRGs, for instance by establishing a new status enabling LRGs to speak in their own capacity, instead of being part of national or NGOs delegations.

Capacity-building

The GCH will establish itself as an *information hub and a reliable resource for insights and advice on relevant urban topics and actors*. To do so, the GCH will rely on its : i) "Mapping" of international organizations which address urban issues and collaborate with LRGs; ii) Directory of international city networks, which facilitates connection between international city networks and the international community; iii) Policy work offering reflections on opportunities and challenges, as well as recommendations on ways and means for LRGs to meaningfully contribute to global governance; iv) Broad network of contacts within the international community in Geneva, enabling the GCH to stay updated on multilateral developments and consult relevant experts. In addition, the GCH can offer new tailored services and advice to cities wanting to:

- present a Voluntary Local Review (VLR) to assess where they stand on SDGs' implementation. As such, the GCH could explain what a VLR is; what benefit a city could draw from such exercise; liaise with relevant UN entities; and help coordinate municipal services to develop such VLRs.
- engage with international organizations as new partners or donors on specific projects, for instance.

Our Thematic Engagement

The GCH will seek to accelerate SDGs locally and prepare cities and regions for the post 2030 Agenda. To do so, it will run activities in the three areas that stand at the heart of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, i.e. People, Planet and Prosperity. Under each of these areas, the GCH will focus on specific topics as follows:

1. People

All human beings should be able to fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment. To that effect, the GCH will engage on:

- *Human rights*: The GCH will identify entry points for LRGs in various human rights processes (such as the UN Universal Periodic Review), so as to provide more visibility to LRG's good practices and to encourage States to better consider the role and perspectives of LRGs in setting human rights standards and implementing them. To do so, the GCH will collaborate with Member States of the UN Human Rights Council, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, city networks and other relevant stakeholders.
- *Health*: The GCH will continue to engage in the pandemic treaty negotiations until an agreement is reached among States, but also beyond, to ensure that LRGs are aware of the treaty provisions. It will advocate for the role and perspectives of LRGs to be acknowledged to ensure better pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. The GCH will also identify opportunities to engage more broadly with the World Health Organization on urban health and to support an enhanced engagement of LRGs and their networks at the World Health Assembly, which takes place every year in Geneva.

2. Planet

Our planet needs to be protected from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, better managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change. To that effect, the GCH will engage on:

- *Environment*: The GCH will continue to follow the negotiations for a new treaty against plastic pollution until an agreement is reached among States, but also beyond, to ensure that LRGs are aware of the treaty provisions. It will advocate for the role and perspectives of LRGs to be acknowledged, in particular when it comes to waste management, which is most often a local competency. The GCH will also support an enhanced engagement of LRGs and their networks at the UN Environment Assembly which takes place every second year in Nairobi, as well as in other environment-related processes. To do so, the GCH will collaborate with States, city networks (in particular ICLEI) and the UN Environment Program and in particular its Cities Unit, with which the GCH has close ties.
- *Climate change*: Adaptation to and mitigation of climate change are priorities for most cities worldwide and these also feature among the main issues on the agenda of the international community. The GCH will therefore address climate change and its various dimensions (extreme heat, water management, disaster risk management, food security, etc.) through events, advocacy and policy, focusing on its impact in urban environments and local solutions thereto. The GCH will also consider enhancing its engagement in relation to future Conference of Parties of the Paris Agreement, in cooperation with various city networks.

3. Prosperity

All human beings should enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and economic, social and technological progress should occur in harmony with nature. To that effect, the GCH will engage on:

- *Sustainable urban development*: The GCH will continue to partner with all UN Regional Economic Commissions to promote and organize the annual “UN Forum of Mayors”, where mayors can participate in a UN formal body in their own capacity and discuss progress on the implementation of SDGs at local level. As the Forum embodies a more inclusive multilateralism, the GCH will consider it as a main priority to contribute to its development as a global body. The GCH will also engage in the work of the Habitat Assembly to support enhanced engagement of LRGs and encourage States to better consider the role and perspectives of LRGs, when discussing sustainable urban development. Further, as the international community prepares for the post-Agenda 2030, the GCH will follow the State-led negotiations and advocate in favor of LRGs in relation to this important process.
- *Smart cities*: The GCH will put the limelight on the importance of digitalization in cities and how these latter can be smart, while respecting human rights and enhancing their resilience. For instance, the GCH will advocate in favor of the institutionalization of a segment dedicated to smart cities at both World Summits on the Information Society (in particular through the WSIS+20 review in 2025) and on AI for Good. Close cooperation will be envisaged with States, the International Telecommunications Union and relevant city networks.

People

Human rights

Health

Planet

Climate change

Environment

Prosperity

Sustainable urban
development

Smart cities

Our Contribution to More Inclusive and Effective Multilateralism

All of GCH's thematic engagement should support a broader objective: fostering a more inclusive and effective multilateralism in the UN context and beyond.

Through various international bodies, organizations and events on climate change, human rights, global health, digitalization or sustainable urban development, the GCH will aim to establish meaningful precedents for LRGs to engage in State-led multilateral settings. Such precedents may include: LRG's participating in or speaking at events; LRGs' contributing to a negotiation process and negotiated texts reflecting the role and perspectives of LRGs; LRGs being included in national delegations; LRGs being provided with some status to formally take part in multilateral meetings; or intergovernmental events focusing on the urban or local dimension of specific challenges.

These precedents will help GCH build support among States for expanded LRGs' involvement at the international level. In particular, the GCH advocates for a new status for LRGs to take part in the UN work, in their own capacity, and not as part of a State national delegation, nor of a city network (which are currently classified as NGOs within UN settings).

Building a compelling narrative on the value of LRG's participation in global governance will be crucial to gain States' support and open the multilateral system to LRGs. For instance, at the UN, only States can propose, negotiate and adopt resolutions. For LRGs to be provided with a new observer status at the UN, one or more States will need to sponsor a resolution on the matter through the UN General Assembly or the ECOSOC. Undoubtedly, creativity will be needed to establish such a status. In this context, the evolution of the Forum of Mayors will be crucial and the GCH hopes to rely on it to leverage this debate.

Acknowledging that achieving immediate consensus on such a significant and bold reform may be challenging, the GCH will, in the meantime, follow a thematic and incremental approach. By engaging in diverse thematic multilateral processes and building effective partnerships and alliances, the GCH will slowly build the foundations to achieve its long-term objective: a dedicated status for LRGs.

Our Partners

The GCH will work in close collaboration with various partners to organize events, to connect LRGs to the international community, to champion their cause and gather relevant information. Depending on the issue, the GCH may prioritize collaboration with specific partners. Its partners include:

- **First and foremost, cities and regions** who are willing to engage at the international level, in particular those hosting multilateral organizations.
- **Then, States**, mainly through their Permanent Missions to the UN in Geneva.
- **International organizations:** UN Habitat, UN Regional Economic Commissions (UNECE, UNECLAC, UNESCWA, UNESCAP, UNECA), UNEP, WHO, OHCHR, ICRC, IFRC, ITU, UNCTAD, UNHCR, FAO, WFP, WEF, etc.
- **International city networks** are crucial partners, because they have expertise, resources and capacities to engage at multilateral level. They can support cities and regions that often lack these capabilities, strengthening their role on the global stage: Global Parliament of Mayors, AIMF, ICLEI, WeGO, UCLG and the Global Taskforce of LRGs, MMC, Strong Cities, etc.
- **Other organizations and experts** dealing with LRGs and/or urban issues (NGOs, academic institutions in Geneva and beyond).





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