

GLOBAL CITIES HUB
2024
ANNUAL REPORT



Table of contents

Introduction	2
The Global Cities Hub	3
Priorities	4
2024 Highlights	5
Events	5
Policy work	6
International advocacy	6
Quiet diplomacy	7
Mapping & International City Networks Directory	8
Partnerships	8
Communication	9
Institutional developments	10
Governance	10
Membership	10
Funding	10

Introduction

This annual report presents the Global Cities Hub's five priority areas of work through selected highlights of its 2024 activities. It demonstrates the relevance of the Global Cities Hub (GCH), which provides a platform for collaboration between local and international players and strengthens the voice of Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) within multilateralism.

The GCH has grown over the years with the support of its founders and partners. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the City of Geneva and the Canton of Geneva, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and the numerous LRGs with whom we have collaborated, as well as to the States, international organizations, city networks, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic experts, and other stakeholders who have all played a vital role in shaping the successful journey of GCH.



The Global Cities Hub

In a world where urbanization shapes our future and cities are on the frontlines of global challenges – ranging from climate change and sustainable development to digitalization, public health, and human rights – the GCH was founded with the conviction that cities and regions must play an active role in global governance, alongside States, international organizations and other stakeholders.

In 2024, the GCH consolidated its role as a key platform for city engagement on the international stage. Building on its growing network and influence, the GCH promoted a multilateral system that is more inclusive vis-à-vis LRGs. In doing so, the GCH mainly focused on the international ecosystem in Geneva, given the diversity of its stakeholders and their capacity to evolve and innovate.

Since its establishment in 2020 by the City of Geneva, the Canton of Geneva, and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the GCH has been pursuing 2 objectives:



1. **Connect cities and regions to the United Nations (UN) and other international organizations to enhance their influence in State-led multilateral processes.** 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 favours the creation of a new status for LRGs, so that they can participate in the UN work in their own capacity.
2. **Promote the « urban » on the agenda of the international community.** Because our future is urban, the international community must adapt its thinking and mode of action in an increasingly urbanized world. To achieve this, the GCH facilitates exchanges between international stakeholders on their respective urban activities and amplifies these within the Geneva ecosystem and beyond. It also promotes the urban work of Geneva-based actors and explores urban issues of relevance to the international community.

At the end of 2024, the GCH adopted a new strategic framework (2026–2028) to guide its work over the next 4 years, through 2028. This document provides GCH's partners with a clear blueprint about its vision, mission and values, along with its objectives and how to achieve them.

Priorities

In 2024, the GCH focused its efforts on five multi-lateral priorities relevant for both LRGs as well as Geneva-based international stakeholders. These include the UN Forum of Mayors, which has become a formal UN body over the years, as well as four other topics which stand at the heart of the agenda of International Geneva: human rights, health, digitalization & smart cities, as well as environmental protection and climate change.

These priorities were advanced through a combination of events, international advocacy, policy work, quiet diplomacy, and the development of reference tools, such as its Mapping and the International City Networks Directory. These priorities are showcased with a few highlights outlined below. All GCH activities were carried out in collaboration with a diverse range of stakeholders, including LRGs, city networks, States, international organizations, NGOs and other experts.

Five key priority areas of GCH

Cities are key to protect the **environment** and combat **climate change**

Local and regional governments are critical actors in **advancing human rights**

The **UN Forum of Mayors** enables mayors to directly engage with the UN

Cities and regions shape the **health** of their residents

In an urbanizing world, **smart cities** influence how we live, work, and interact

2024 Highlights

Events

Convening events remains one of the main means to achieve the GCH's aforementioned objectives. In gathering various stakeholders during targeted events, the GCH seeks 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. In 2024, GCH events took various formats (open to the public or targeted audience, in-person or online, panels or workshops, etc.), addressed relevant issues to both LRGs and international stakeholders, and were co-organized with a broad range of partners.

- The UN Forum of Mayors is a key priority for the GCH, as it is the only formal body through which LRGs can have their voices heard in the intergovernmental work of the UN. The 4th Forum took place on 30 September - 1 October in Geneva, bringing together more than 50 mayors from all over the world to discuss the local ramifications of the UN Pact for the Future and to convey recommendations to States in relation thereto. The GCH was involved in all the preparatory phases of the Forum (the GCH took part in the Bureau of the Forum) and it cooperated closely with all UN Regional Economic Commissions to make the Forum more global. To this end, the GCH positioned itself as an important interlocutor and source of information for LRGs wishing to participate in the Forum of Mayors. The GCH



facilitated the selection and participation of mayors from the Africa, Asia, Latin America and Middle East regions. It also organized four thematic events during the Forum, including a high-level meeting between Heads of international organizations and mayors.

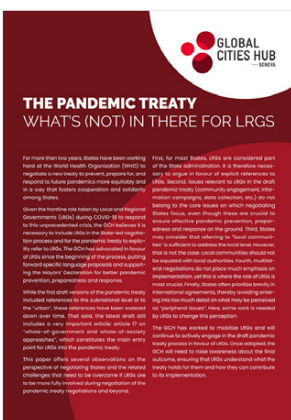
- In May, the GCH was invited by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) for the third consecutive year to organize a Smart City Leaders' talk in the framework of the World Summit on the Information Society. Representatives from cities - London (UK), Dhaka (Bangladesh), Geneva (Switzerland), Seberang Perai (Malaysia), Dschang (Cameroon) and Quelimane (Mozambique), from international organizations (Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN-Habitat) and from WeGO (an international city network) discussed how to achieve sustainable, people-centred smart cities. The event was a model of inclusive dialogue between international organizations and cities on the forward-looking topic of smart cities.

2024 Highlights continued

Policy work

In 2024, the GCH produced policy papers with substantial insights on the opportunities and challenges faced by LRGs in multilateralism and with recommendations on how LRGs can effectively contribute to global governance. These papers are based on the GCH’s own experience, i.e., through its participation in various multilateral processes.

- After more than two years of intergovernmental negotiations for a new treaty on countering future pandemics at the World Health Organization (WHO), the GCH gained valuable insights from this interstate process. In 2024, the GCH therefore published a policy paper titled “The Pandemic Treaty: What’s (not) in there for LRGs”, sharing its reflections on both the negotiation process and the content of the draft treaty. The paper specifically highlighted the challenges of including explicit language on LRGs and their relevant issues, as well as the obstacles that must be addressed to ensure better integration of LRGs in future negotiations.



- Building on its experience in the field of digitalization and smart cities, the GCH published a policy paper titled “The ethical use of artificial intelligence in cities”. In this paper, the GCH examined both the opportunities and challenges posed by the use of artificial intelligence in cities and outlined guiding principles to ensure its ethical use. The GCH stressed that LRGs must be able to integrate their needs and expectations into the broader regulatory processes surrounding artificial intelligence.

International advocacy

As part of its mandate, the GCH advocates in favour of LRGs’ role and perspectives in relevant multilateral processes. This is crucial to encourage the UN and its Member States, through formal UN decisions and resolutions, to work with LRGs. Leveraging its expertise in multilateral affairs, the GCH has a thorough understanding of how these processes operate. It identifies opportunities for LRGs and their networks to contribute, offer policy advice to them, support collective mobilization, and encourage States to better recognize LRGs, including by proposing specific language on LRGs in international negotiations. As a result, LRGs have been able to amplify their voices at the international level and directly engage with international organizations and States in various processes.

- The GCH co-founded the Coalition of Local and Sub-national Governments to End Plastic Pollution, led by Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) with the governments of Quebec and Catalonia, and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), in cooperation with UN-Habitat, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), C40, and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation. Launched



2024 Highlights *continued*

in April, the coalition aims to unify the voices of LRGs to influence intergovernmental negotiations on a new treaty against plastic pollution. Among its key messages, the coalition is calling on governments to include LRGs in the negotiations, as they will play an essential role in implementing the treaty, and to adopt an ambitious treaty covering the entire life cycle of plastics. A series of briefings were organized by the coalition, notably to raise awareness about the role that LRGs can play to influence the intergovernmental negotiations.

- In response to the call for contributions from the co-facilitators of the UN Pact for the Future, the GCH submitted proposals focused on improving the inclusion of LRGs to promote a more inclusive and effective multilateralism, aligned with States' objectives of transforming global governance and creating a "UN 2.0." Specifically, the GCH highlighted the importance of establishing a new status for LRGs and elevating the UN Forum of Mayors within the UN structure to serve as the primary formal entry point for cities to the UN. This was unfortunately not retained in the final language of the UN Pact for the Future, due to political sensitivities by States.

Quiet diplomacy

"Quiet diplomacy" remains an important part of the GCH's work. This includes participating in meetings to understand the dynamics and the space that can be created for LRGs, establishing a network of people within relevant organizations who can help the GCH fulfil its mandate, facilitating private discussions behind the scenes, contributing to relevant initiatives, and informally reflecting on ways to increase the influence of LRGs in multilat-

eralism, particularly toward the long-term goal of creating a new status for LRGs at the UN.

- The GCH maintained regular relations and convened several meetings with States to provide substantive input during the drafting process of relevant resolutions and joint statements at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). The HRC resolution on "Local Government and Human Rights" led by the Republic of Korea, Chile, Egypt, and Romania was adopted without a vote and co-sponsored by 56 other States from all regions. This broad support reflects a growing consensus on the recognition of the role local governments play in the protection of human rights. Importantly, the resolution provides the mandate to the UN to engage with LRGs on human rights issues. Further, the GCH also supported the processes led by States to adopt two joint statements on local governments and human rights and on smart cities and human rights, that were both sponsored by more than 50 States at the HRC.
- During its annual retreat, the GCH brought together representatives from cities, regions, city networks, States, and international organizations to discuss the future of multilateralism and how to make it more inclusive of LRGs. A forward-looking exercise enabled participants to collectively reflect on how to collaborate practically with LRGs at the international level, following the UN Summit of the Future and in anticipation of the post-2030 Agenda on sustainable development. It was highlighted that the contribution of cities and regions is valuable in a context marked by significant polarization among states and a weakened intergovernmental multilateral system.

2024 Highlights continued

Mapping & International City Networks Directory

Since its inception, the GCH has developed and maintained two key reference tools that are central to its identity and the services it offers to various international stakeholders in International Geneva and beyond. Through these tools, the GCH website aims to be a resource for LRGs, international organizations, States and all other stakeholders interested in urban issues:

- The Mapping outlines international organizations that address urban issues and collaborate with LRGs. For example, it introduces the urban-related activities and programs of WHO on urban issues and highlights the tools that this organization can offer to LRGs (such as practical guides on urban health).
- The Directory of International City Networks offers a concise overview of city networks, their areas of focus, and contact details to help establish connections with actors in International Geneva. While it is not exhaustive, the directory will continue to evolve.

Partnerships

The GCH works in close collaboration with a wide range of partners to organize events, to produce policy work, to advocate in favour of LRGs at the international level, to support diplomatic initiatives and to develop reference tools. Its partners include:

- **Cities and regions** worldwide who are willing to engage at the international level and share their experience in international events, advocate in favour of more inclusive multilateralism or influence the international decisions taken by States at the UN.
- **International organizations**, including: UNECE and UN-Habitat, ITU, UNCTAD, WHO, UN Regional Economic Commissions (UNECLAC, UNESCAP, UNESCWA, UNECA), UNEP, OHCHR, IOM, FAO, IFRC, UNDP, WEF, OHCHR. In 2024 GCH signed a Memorandum of Understanding with ITU and renewed its agreement with UN-Habitat.
- **States** from all regions. Collaboration was focused on specific issues, such as negotiations related to the protection of the environment and of human rights.



2024 Highlights continued

- **International city networks**, including: Association Internationale des Maires Francophones, German Marshall Fund Cities, Global Parliament of Mayors, ICLEI, Strong Cities Network, UCLG, WeGO.
- Other **Geneva-based platforms** such as the Geneva Environment Network, the Geneva Human Rights Platform and the Geneva Peace-building Platform.

Communication

Events organized throughout the year are an important vehicle through which to convey several messages and to discuss important issues with the right audience. In 2024, the GCH partnered with various stakeholders to organize 27 events, reaching out to LRGs, States, international organizations, NGOs and other experts:

2024

27 events

organized by the Global Cities Hub

Among the participants to these events:

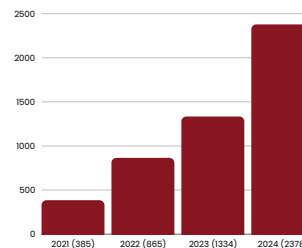
157 cities or city networks

222 entities of International Geneva

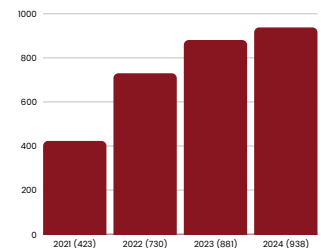
(States, International Organizations, NGOs & others)

Yearly numbers as of 31 December 2024

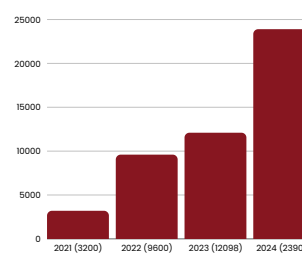
Evolution of the number of followers on LinkedIn 2021-2024



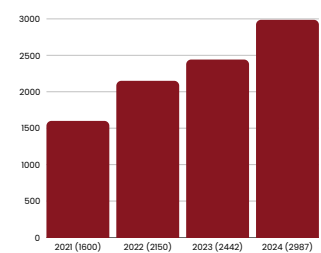
Evolution of the number of followers on X/Twitter 2021-2024



Evolution of the number of sessions on the website 2021-2024



Evolution of the number of subscribers to the newsletter 2021-2024



The GCH places great importance on sharing its messages and activities with a broader audience. In 2024, it continued its communication efforts through its website and social media with notable success, as engagement and follower numbers continued to grow. This was particularly evident on LinkedIn, where GCH gained nearly 900 more followers than the previous year, and on its website, where the number of users doubled from approximately 12,000 to nearly 24,000, with over 86,000 page views. As for its newsletter (with 21 issues published in 2024), steady growth continued, with over 500 new subscribers that year, bringing the total to nearly 3,000.

Institutional developments

Governance

The GCH is a Swiss non-profit association governed by a General Assembly, chaired by an elected official from the City of Geneva. In 2024, the General Assembly met twice to approve the budget and financial statements. The GCH Board, led by a representative from the Canton of Geneva, met regularly throughout the year to define the strategic directions and oversee the association's activities.

Membership

The City of Geneva and the Canton of Geneva are the founding members of the GCH, and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs is a strategic partner. The GCH adapted its statutes in 2023 to open up to new members interested to engage in and defend multilateralism. Nairobi City County

(Kenya) became the first new member of the GCH at the end of 2024. Other cities may follow suit. New members will enable the GCH to consolidate its position as a global organization and draw on their perspectives to better promote the role of LRGs on the international stage.

Funding

Since its creation, the GCH has been financed mainly by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the City of Geneva and the Canton of Geneva. Other contributions come from ad hoc partnerships with international organizations. With the increasing workload, the GCH aims to enhance its human resources by adding two additional positions to strengthen communication activities and deepen its thematic work in the field of humanitarian affairs and human rights.





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