

Geneva Declaration

Advance Local Innovation and Collaboration for a Resilient and Sustainable Urban Future

November 5, 2025

1. Today, 300+ delegates from 40 countries, including international organizations, diplomats, various levels of local governments, parliamentarians, civil society, the private sector, professionals and practitioners, scientific and academic communities, and other relevant stakeholders, have gathered from around the world at the headquarters of the World Meteorological Organization in Geneva, to attend the 20th Annual Session of Global Forum on Human Settlements (GFHS 2025) which is co-organized by 22 international organizations. Centered on the theme “Advance Local Innovation and Collaboration for a Resilient and Sustainable Urban Future”, we jointly release the Geneva Declaration.
2. We are collectively confronted with a world fraught with multiple challenges and enormous uncertainties: climate crisis and related disasters, environmental degradation, economic downturn, rising unilateralism and trade protectionism, geopolitical conflicts, and weakening social cohesion. Peace and a better future seem to be fading from view.
3. We recognize that the climate crisis is the greatest threat facing human society in the 21st century. Global carbon dioxide emissions reached 41.6 billion tons in 2024, hitting a record high. According to WMO, 2024 is the hottest year on record, with global temperatures 1.55°C above pre-industrial levels, while ocean heat content and sea levels have both reached new record highs. Extreme weather hazards including floods, storms, droughts, and heatwaves are intensifying, making integrated climate action and disaster risk reduction imperative at all levels. However, countries cool on climate action.
4. We note that the United Nations report in July this year indicates that among the 169 targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), only 35% are on track, nearly half are progressing slowly, and 18% are regressing. Globally, 800 million people still live in extreme poverty, 1.1

billion reside in slums or informal settlements, and billions lack access to safe drinking water and sanitation services. At this pace, it will be difficult to achieve all the SDGs within the next five years.

5. We note that recently, the United Nations negotiations on plastic pollution in Geneva have also reached an impasse due to significant disagreements among member states.
6. We recognize that the new technological revolution, represented by new energy, internet, artificial intelligence, and robotics, is still unfolding and is rapidly and profoundly reshaping our economy, society, way of life, and urban landscape. The speed, breadth, and intensity of innovation are unprecedented. Cities are at the center of this innovation storm, holding potential for leveraging technology to enhance disaster preparedness, early warning systems, and risk-informed urban planning.
7. We recognize that by 2050, the global urban population is projected to increase from 56% in 2021 to 68%. On this urbanized planet, sustainable cities and sustainable urbanization are key to addressing current challenges, salvaging the SDGs and the Paris Agreement, and serve as the main arena for enhancing human well-being, protecting planetary health, and creating lasting prosperity.
8. We recognize that future-proof urban development exhibits trends such as decoupling, decarbonization, decentralization, digitalization, polarization, and metropolitanization, presenting both opportunities and challenges.
9. The international community has already reached considerable agendas and developed effective solutions. The New Urban Agenda also provides a vision and a systematic implementation plan for sustainable cities and human settlements for all, though the task remains challenging and long-term. Political will and capacity are prerequisites, the determination to endure short-term pain for long-term benefits is crucial, and only sustained action can achieve our common goals.
10. We recognize that forward-thinking local governments and urban leaders play a crucial role in harnessing the power of innovation while upholding fundamental principles, integrating local wisdom with global knowledge, and strengthening international cooperation at the local level. By establishing enduring and effective multi-stakeholder partnerships, they can catalyze large-scale local innovation and proactive action, enabling cities to accelerate transformation and thrive amid uncertainties, thereby

ensuring a more livable, adaptable, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable urban future for all.

Herein, based on current priorities, we jointly propose the following initiatives:

Strengthening Inclusive Urban Governance and Stimulating Innovation

1. We call upon all countries to leverage inclusive, enforceable, and participatory urban policies to promote coordinated multi-level governance systems. This includes appropriately decentralizing powers, empowering local governments, and enhancing their capacity to implement effective multi-layer governance across administrative boundaries for metropolitan areas and urban clusters. Such efforts will facilitate the flow of resources and stimulate innovation.
2. We urge all countries to strengthen political will and determination to accelerate the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the climate targets. This requires fully integrating these goals into local development planning, formulating policies and feasible action plans, regularly assessing and publicly reporting progress to ensure sustained action and tangible outcomes.
3. We encourage the establishment of transparent, efficient, and inclusive local governance systems and the implementation of a systematic approach to ensure policy coherence and effective implementation across sectors and administrative levels. Participatory approaches that are age-sensitive and gender-responsive should be adopted throughout the entire process to ensure policies reflect diverse needs and actively foster an innovative culture. We are well aware that the key to innovation lies in talents. Only an inclusive culture, abundant development opportunities, and a livable environment can attract, educate, and nurture talents.
4. We recommend that national and local governments prioritize inclusive disaster risk reduction governance frameworks that empower local authorities, civil society, academia, and the private sector. This includes increasing investments in local risk-informed planning and scaling up community-driven innovations that are context-specific and culturally grounded. We also urge the development of urban resilience hubs that function as centers for knowledge exchange, innovation testing, and technology transfer.

5. We call upon all countries to adopt inclusive approaches for financing large-scale innovation at the local level, ensuring policy coherence across local, regional, and national tiers—a process that should be guided by the "whole-of-government" approach—to enable effective implementation among all sectors and levels of government and successfully advance the 2030 Agenda.
6. We urge the international financial system to incorporate local government perspectives into decision-making processes, ensuring that innovative financing mechanisms are adaptive, inclusive, and genuinely reflective of local sustainable development and disaster resilience needs. Simultaneously, national governments and international actors must streamline funding mechanisms and optimize regulatory procedures to facilitate direct investment in innovation, granting cities greater autonomy to effectively implement innovative policies.
7. We recommend enhancing the capacity of municipal institutions in project preparation, financial management, and risk assessment by providing specialized training for officials and technical staff. This will ensure that local innovation projects are financially viable, investment-ready, and aligned with global sustainable development goals, including disaster risk reduction and resilience.

Enhancing Environmental Sustainability and Resilience and Harmonizing with Nature

8. We recommend that cities adopt ecosystem-based and adaptive management approaches, integrating nature and cost-effective and replicable nature-based solutions in urban planning and development. This should be coupled with aligning local climate action plans and disaster risk reduction strategies to protect biodiversity and enhance urban sustainability and resilience.
9. We emphasize the need for prudent planning and higher standards in urban infrastructure development to improve disaster resilience. Greater adoption of compact urban forms and decentralized infrastructure should be encouraged, along with green infrastructure utilizing nature-based solutions to reduce investment and maintenance costs, and foster harmony with nature.
10. We recognize that water fundamentally determines a city's vitality and development potential while also posing significant disaster risks such as

floods and droughts. Using comprehensive urban water environment management as a lever, optimizing water resource management, including rainwater harvesting, improved drainage systems, reducing flood risks, improving environmental quality, and enhancing flood and drought resilience are priority strategies for boosting urban sustainability and resilience. This approach can rapidly revitalize public spaces, elevate residents' quality of life, promote waterfront land value appreciation, and foster positive development in commerce and tourism.

11. We emphasize that protecting pollinators and improving their habitats can effectively enhance biodiversity and safeguard ecosystem services. By empowering citizens to actively participate in conservation efforts, we can foster a culture of collective responsibility, ensuring tangible benefits for both ecosystems and residents through local actions.
12. We urge all countries to demonstrate stronger political will and intergenerational responsibility by committing to transform the paradigm of plastic pollution governance and end all forms of plastic pollution. This requires enhancing source control, supporting the development and deployment of affordable and functionally viable alternatives to plastic products, strictly implementing the consumer-pays principle, strengthening law enforcement to prevent the disposal of plastic waste into waterbodies, oceans and natural environments, and promoting public awareness campaigns towards sustainable life styles. Coastal cities, being both sources of and solutions to plastic pollution, must play a pivotal role.
13. We recommend that cities with adequate capacity adopt integrated approaches for synergistically treating multiple types of municipal solid waste—including domestic waste, construction and demolition waste, garden waste, sludge, human and animal manure—to promote efficient resource and energy recycling, reduce carbon emissions, and advance towards “circular” and “zero waste” cities.

Spatial Planning as the Guide for Building Green, Smart, and Carbon-Neutral Cities

14. We reaffirm that planning is crucial for a city's healthy development and future success. Sustainable spatial planning, based on a compact polycentric urban model with enhanced connectivity and proximity, efficiently shapes urban growth through rational form, manages land in a demand-driven manner, and improves livability through quality public

spaces and mixed-use neighborhoods. This ensures orderly urban development and decouples growth from resource consumption. Well-planned green and smart cities also enhance business convenience, promote agglomeration effects, innovation, and economic development, making them more attractive to international investors and tourists.

15. We recognize that emerging technologies – including renewable energy, the internet, e-commerce and express delivery, autonomous vehicles, low-altitude aviation, artificial intelligence, and robotics – alongside frequent extreme weather events and diverse disasters, are exerting profound impacts on urban spatial forms as well as economic and social structures. Sustainable spatial planning must therefore adopt a more forward-looking and holistic vision, encompassing surface, subsurface, and aerial dimensions. It should integrate different sectors, departments, and regions through "integrated planning", ensuring consistent implementation under one unified blueprint, that incorporates disaster risk reduction. Only in this way can it lead the way towards a green, smart, resilient, and carbon-neutral urban future.
16. We call for rational control of urban scale, urging some developing countries to avoid the model of excessive expansion of single megacities and instead guide the development of urban clusters and metropolitan areas. Megacities should transition from resource-intensive sprawling growth to connotative development that emphasizes quality improvement, resource efficiency, thereby driving urban renewal and comprehensive socio-economic transformation.
17. We recognize that effective communication must transcend verbal expression to engage large and diverse populations. We recommend a new planning language—"Sensory and Imaginative Planning"—a non-verbal form of planning. Unlike traditional community engagement methods, the process of participatory planning is enjoyable, multi-sensory, and locally grounded. They also attract more women and children into the planning and design fields, infusing them with collaboration, empathy, and creativity.
18. We recommend strengthening public-private partnerships and triangular cooperation (government, scientific and research organizations and business sector) to accelerate the green and smart transformation of the building sector through a three-tiered "Reduce-Shift-Improve" strategy. This includes: Reduce: Minimizing material consumption, designing for disassembly, and reducing waste; Shift: Shifting to renewable materials,

increasing the use of renewable energy, and developing a circular economy; Improve: Advancing the greening and decarbonization of traditional materials, intelligent construction and management methods, and improving operational processes. The goal is to achieve near-zero emissions and sustainable development in the building sector.

19. We recommend leveraging buildings as primary platforms for deploying distributed renewable energy systems and implementing vertical greening and urban agriculture, thereby advancing toward carbon-neutral and self-sufficient communities.

Promoting Social Equity and Inclusive Growth

20. We urge addressing housing inequality through policy housing, rent control, and public-private partnerships to ensure affordable housing for all. Promote the development of mixed-income communities and improve social security systems to guarantee equal access to public services for low-income groups, migrants, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable populations, leaving no one behind.
21. We recognize mobility as a fundamental enabler of social equity and opportunity, thereby we commit to integrating universal accessibility principles into urban transport planning, ensuring that transport-sensitive people—such as the elderly, children, women, low-income groups, and persons with disabilities—can move safely, affordably, and with dignity.
22. We emphasize creating multicultural spaces to enhance social cohesion and identity. Foster inclusive employment and skills development to ensure fairness, sustainability, and respect for human rights during the urban transition. Guide youth to embrace self-reliance, innovation, and green lifestyles, preparing them to become future leaders.
23. We recommend embracing technological innovation by leveraging opportunities in the digital economy and smart city development. Strengthen data-driven decision-making, optimize resource management, and enhance urban operational efficiency, while ensuring the fairness and age-friendliness of technology applications.
24. We recommend vigorously supporting the green economy, digital economy, and silver economy by providing policy and financial support, strengthening guidance for startups, expanding venture capital, promoting industry-academia-research collaboration to facilitate the transformation of scientific and technological achievements, advancing innovation in

green supply chain management, supporting community-led sustainable development projects, and fostering localized solutions.

Advocating Global Responsibility and Deepening International Cooperation

25. We reaffirm that addressing global challenges requires revitalizing multilateralism, upholding the UN Charter, and building a "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind". At the sub-national level, cities bear significant responsibilities and possess greater flexibility. They should vigorously promote "city diplomacy" and strengthen international cooperation at the local level to counter the rise of unilateralism and seize opportunities presented by the restructuring of the international order.
26. We emphasize the urgent need for collaborative governance that unites local actors, national institutions, and international partners. True collaboration must go beyond infrastructure and financing. It must embed inclusiveness, equity, and climate justice, ensuring that vulnerable groups and communities are not left behind in the global transition.
27. We are convinced that no city can thrive in isolation, and recommend enhancing exchanges and cooperation between cities across different countries, promoting the establishment of sister-city relationships, facilitating mutual visits, knowledge sharing, experience exchange, and cultural appreciation, fostering economic and technological collaboration, and contributing to the regional and even global peace.
28. We recommend improving infrastructure connectivity between adjacent cities in different countries, enhancing the flow of factors of production and business convenience, and advancing the coordinated development of cross-border urban clusters or metropolitan areas. We advocate enhancing transnational cooperation based on comparative advantages, jointly developing sustainable, resilient, and replicable industry-city integration projects, fostering shared prosperity, and setting exemplary models for international collaboration and innovation.
29. We recommend that local governments establish platforms for international investment and economic cooperation, provide high-quality services, vigorously improve the business environment, protect the legitimate rights and interests of investors, and ensure benefits are shared by all people.
30. We recognize that cities are the frontline implementers of the *"Pact for the*

Future", an international agreement adopted by United Nations Member States at the Summit of the Future on 22 September 2024. We recommend that local governments translate the Pact's principles into concrete local policies, regulations, and urban strategies, advance SDGs localization by aligning city plans with the Pact's goals, champion local climate action through net-zero strategies, nature-based solutions, circular economy, enhance resilience against disasters and climate-related risks, protecting people and ecosystems, among others.