
PRESS RELEASE

Eleventh Session of the World Urban Forum opens in Katowice, Poland

Katowice, Poland (27 June 2022) – The leading global conference on sustainable urbanization opened with a call to double efforts to tackle the challenges presented to cities by COVID-19, the climate emergency and conflict.

The World Urban Forum, a biannual event convened by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), is taking place at a critical juncture for urban development. With only eight years to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 11 of making cities and human settlements “inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable,” urban areas and residents around the world are facing acute pressure.

Those strains will only rise as the share of the global population living in urban areas is set to rise from 56 per cent in 2021 to 68 per cent in 2050, a further 2.2 billion people, mainly in Africa and the Middle East.

“While the current reality is undoubtedly very difficult, we must maintain our focus and double our efforts on sustainable development,” said Maimunah Mohd Sharif, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-Habitat.

She said that the theme of the Eleventh Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF11), Transforming Our Cities for a Better Urban Future, “could not be more fitting”.

“We urgently need innovative solutions for urban areas to respond to this triple C crisis of COVID, climate and conflict, which are having a devastating impact on cities, leaving people and places behind,” she added.

“But a better future remains possible. We know how to get there. Governments and cities already have the roadmap - the Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda, and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Now we need real action to implement these commitments, and cities must embody a new social contract – with universal basic income, health coverage and affordable housing.”

The forum will take place from 26-30 June in Katowice, Poland. It is co-organized with the Government of Poland and the city of Katowice.

Katowice was chosen for the first staging of the event in Eastern Europe in large part because of its successful transition from a center of the coal and steel industries to a city based on technology, culture and events.

The programme has been significantly modified to reflect the conflict in neighboring Ukraine. More than three million Ukrainians have taken refuge in Poland since the conflict started. There will be contributions from both international

figures on urban crisis recovery and response, and a special session has been organized by the Polish government on the post-crisis and post-disaster reconstruction of urban spaces and population return.

Grzegorz Puda, Minister of Development Funds and Regional Policy of Poland, said: "The Polish government is proud that Poland and Katowice are hosting an event where the future of cities is being shaped. This is a region that has come a long way – from communist rule, which had little regard for human life, let alone its quality, to democratic governments working for the common good."

"We must also remember all those who are facing crisis at the moment in countries affected by war and disaster, such as Ukraine. In this context, we decided to include the topic of rebuilding cities after crises in the WUF11 programme," said Małgorzata Jarosińska-Jedyna, Secretary of State at the Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy and Government Plenipotentiary for the preparation of the World Urban Forum in Katowice in 2022.

Marcin Krupa, Mayor of Katowice, said: "Our city has undergone enormous changes in the last two decades. I believe that cities are the engines of change towards creating a better world – one that is safer, more sustainable and inclusive. WUF11 will provide fertile ground for fruitful discussions and serve as an inspiration for action."

This will be the first big international gathering organized since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 16,000 people expected at Katowice's International Congress Centre, built on the site of a former coal mine. Attendees will include more than 50 government ministers and deputy ministers, more than 800 government officials and representatives. There will be more than 400 speakers across dozens of events discussing and devising innovative policies and solutions.

WUF11's five days will conclude with the Katowice Declared Actions in which representatives of government, civil society, the private sector and stakeholders of the New Urban Agenda, a roadmap to sustainable urbanization adopted in 2016 in Quito, will state their commitment and plans to support sustainable urbanization.

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About the World Urban Forum

The World Urban Forum (WUF) was established in 2001 by the United Nations to address one of the most pressing issues facing the world: rapid urbanization and its impact on people, cities, economies, climate change and policies. Held every two years, the Forum is convened by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). It is designed as a high level, open and inclusive platform for addressing the challenges of sustainable urbanization. Each session is staged in a different city - the Eleventh Session in Katowice from 26-30 June, 2022, will be the first in eastern Europe.

wuf.unhabitat.org

About the United Nations Human Settlements programme (UN-Habitat)

UN-Habitat is the United Nations agency for human settlements. It has programmes in over 90 countries that support people in cities and human settlements and focus on socially and environmentally sustainable cities and towns.