

Summary Report of the Twelfth Session of the World Urban Forum, 4–8 November 2024



About the World Urban Forum

The WUF provides opportunities for debate and discussion about the challenges of urbanization and operates as an open-ended think tank.

The WUF aims to further advance the outcomes of several UN conferences on sustainable development, including the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and the associated [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), and the [New Urban Agenda](#) (NUA) that was adopted at the Habitat III conference in Ecuador in 2016.

Objectives

UN-Habitat organizes and runs the WUF every second year as the world's leading gathering on urban issues. Each session of the Forum focused on the following objectives:

- 1) Raising awareness of sustainable urbanization among stakeholders and constituencies.
- 2) Improving the collective knowledge of sustainable urban development through inclusive and open debates, sharing lessons learned, and exchanging best practices and good policies; and

- 3) Increasing coordination and cooperation between different stakeholders and constituencies for the advancement and implementation of sustainable urbanization.

WUF12 was the largest in the Forum's history, with participants at the venue and online totaling more than 63,000 people from 182 countries and more than 700 partner-led events. The Forum also marked a return to the African continent after 20 years. The opening ceremony featured four heads of state, from Yemen, Sudan, the State of Palestine, and the host country Egypt. Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, President of Egypt, noted that WUF12 comes at a time of crises and wars, and called for halting the destruction of settlements, supporting poor communities, and developing new projects to provide housing for all. As discussions progressed during the week, panelists and participants highlighted access to adequate housing as a human right; yet almost three billion people worldwide face housing inadequacy, and 1.1 billion still live in slums and informal settlement managing the impacts of displacement due to war and conflict; promoting social cohesion and inclusivity through urban planning and design; and addressing environmental sustainability concerns, amongst other human-centered solutions.

WUF12 events took place in dialogues and other high-level events, that included panel discussions, live performances and audience participation, roundtables of WUF's partner constituencies. UN-Habitat also launched its flagship World Cities Report 2024 during the Forum. WUF12 was, therefore, an opportunity to lend momentum and solidify key global commitments for sustainable development.

Key outcomes

By the end of the conference, several themes emerged. The urgency to manage the housing crisis; the need for financing to achieve better urban planning, land use, and sustainability; the value of sharing and learning from existing practices to accelerate action; and the power of partnerships, a call for collective action to influence policy change and create an enabling environment for sustainable urban development. Daily reports of the WUF12 events can be found here <https://enb.iisd.org/world-urban-forum-wuf12>

Migration and Displacement agenda

While forced displacement was not a central theme of the WUF, several key dialogues took place bringing together leaders from government, business, academia, multilateral and international organizations, and civil society to discuss the intersection of forced displacement and urbanization. Some of the key

- The potential for migration and displacement to boost productivity, enhance local economic development and strengthen urban-rural economic and social linkages. Discussions led by the International Institute for Environment and Development focused on pathways to establish scalable, sustainable and transformative solutions to forced displacement both internally displaced people and refugees, through their integration in inclusive territorial and urban development strategies. The proposed Framework "Towards inclusive solutions to urban internal displacement" developed by UN-Habitat was also presented.
- How to apply the HLP policy in displacement in urban settings, with reference made to UN-Habitat's new publications including "Housing, Land, and Property Solutions to Resolve and Prevent Displacement"; and "Durable housing, land and property solutions for customary displacement

contexts.” While poorly managed urban migration can lead to gaps in the provision of basic needs and in the denial of adequate housing, education, healthcare, or decent work, well-designed and resourced urban integration of migrants and inclusion systems facilitate greater economic and social outcomes for the entire city. A deeper understanding of what it means to remake a home in displacement is also critical for aid actors and city authorities in the investments they make.

- An event hosted by UN-Habitat highlighted the movement of people internally displaced changes human settlements across territories and accelerates urbanization. The event outlined the challenges of ensuring local integration and social cohesion, including through inclusive access to housing, security of tenure, adequate infrastructure and basic services and touched upon the important linkages between solutions to internal displacement and inclusive urban planning and development.
- Need for emerging practices and innovative policies driven by local governments and urban changemakers that facilitate effective regular migration pathways, accelerating replicable and scalable solutions for migrants' inclusion and integration in cities leveraging the positive impact of migration for sustainable urbanization.
- Advocate for inclusive approaches: Promote the inclusion of affected communities and local actors in the development of solutions plans that respond to their needs and priorities.
- At a side event focused on the loss of home, speakers highlighted the fact that 80% of displaced people live in cities, predominantly in low- and middle-income countries. Speakers called for medium- and long-term investment in refugee-hosting communities, not just short-term humanitarian aid. Other speakers discussed the impacts of climate change and conflicts on food security and the economy, which are driving migration to urban centers at an accelerated pace. They stressed: long-term resilience and the need for collective rebuilding of communities, not just houses, to reduce competition for resources; securing land tenure for displaced people; and providing benefits, resources, and opportunities to both displaced people and the host communities to make resettlement a positive experience. Raouf Mazou, UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), explained that the organization is changing its focus to long-term development solutions, in view of the increasing numbers of displaced people and increasing length of displacement. He stressed that the return of displaced people must be voluntary, and that resettlement must include the creation of housing and livelihoods.

Some of the dialogues can be accessed through <https://wuf.unhabitat.org/event/wuf12/flagship-4-shaping-solutions-forced-displacement> , <https://wuf.unhabitat.org/event/wuf12/global-local-how-data-can-inform-urban-solutions-displacement>, <https://wuf.unhabitat.org/event/wuf12/building-inclusive-migration-pathways-drive-sustainable-urbanizationm>, <https://wuf.unhabitat.org/event/wuf12/remaking-home-displacement>

Learnings from IRC side event:

The IRC Re:BUiLD [Supporting the Integration of Refugees in Cities event](#) took place on 7th November 2024 from 1:00 pm to 2:30pm with 29 physical participants drawn from policy makers, practitioners, researchers, and the donor community. The panelists from Impact Initiatives, INTPA, R-SEAT, Koboko

Municipality and IRC outlined the distinct challenges faced by urban-based refugees as well as how municipal, national and international actors can better support them, including by better accounting for displacement affected communities' voices in research and urban profiling.

IRC opened the panel by providing an overview of Re:BUILD, as well as by presenting key findings and recommendations from the [How Donors Can Better Support Urban Refugees](#) released earlier this year.

R-SEAT highlighted the tenets to be employed in meaningful participation to ensure refugees are actively involved in the economic and social development of the cities where they reside, such as advocating for cities to ensure that refugees have a genuine voice in shaping policies and accessing services that directly affect them.

The **Mayor, Koboko Municipal Council**, Uganda highlighted collaboration with the national government around efforts to integrate refugees in the 5-year development plans within the city and illustrated how development actors can ensure their interventions are successful for displaced populations, namely in secondary cities like Koboko. He mentioned 4 areas of transitions:

- Transition from state building to peace building
- Transition from top down to bottom-up planning impressed by donors
- Transition Local governments to move in the face of integration
- Transition from state oriented to whole of society approach advocating to move from institutional approaches to non- institutional approach like conflict mitigation measures.

Impact Initiatives, while demonstrating how the principles of area-based assessments applied particularly in complex settings like Niger's Diffa region and Burkina Fasso, emphasized the advantages of adopting a needs-based approach that looks at a territory as a whole for service delivery, regardless of the population's status. The panelist also highlighted how city authorities can incorporate refugees into their city planning and urban profiling. Additionally, he highlighted the importance of:

- Proactively overcoming politics and biases in data and information management
- Learning how humanitarians can contribute to municipal planning and avoid unsustainable measures through early warning

INTPA referenced Koboko municipality as a case study and offered lessons on what donors should consider when providing support to municipalities to ensure the success of integration and inclusivity initiatives, including how donors can balance humanitarian and development goals. He further emphasized the need to have local authorities manage and subgrant capacity to RLOs and municipalities.

Some of the floor interventions from UNHCR and questions from plenary included:

- How should success look like in terms of integration?
- Participation should be sustainable, transformational and meaningful
- Nexus approach is key as is investment to cities to enable people programme for themselves
- Why we aren't dealing with systemic challenges?

- How to support refugees holistically?
- Many communities still feel there's more to be done

Call to Action

The ten-point [Cairo Call to Action](#) reaffirms participants' commitment to promote sustainable urbanization through the NUA and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Call refers to the current humanitarian challenges and the role that local governments play in responding to the needs of those who have been forcibly displaced from their homes. Of relevance to Re:BUILD , the Call urges:

- 1) Empowering local actors to achieve global goals; Transforming global goals into a reality at the local level requires effective localization in line with national frameworks and communities' priorities anchored in multilevel governance through meaningful collaboration among all stakeholders, coordination across sectors for alignment of policies and implementation.
- 2) Sustaining systemic representation of local actors in local and national decision-making. Sustained localization and systematic representation of communities as political actors in local and national decision-making processes and representation of local and regional governments.
- 3) Delivering better outcomes through participatory urban planning, including a holistic approach to the social, ecological, and economic functions of land, including land rights, and the promotion of "people-centered smart cities"; Effective urban planning is the backbone of delivering inclusion, resilience, accessibility and sustainability in cities and communities.
- 4) Unlocking and increasing finance for cities and communities, through accessing financial markets and other untapped sources of revenue; addressing the financing gap to meet urban development needs is urgent. This requires increased flows of financing to local and regional governments and to communities.
- 5) Ensuring equity and justice, including climate action for sustainable cities prioritizing the needs of marginalized and underserved communities in urban planning and resource allocation is essential. Co-producing and using local, grassroots, and disaggregated data in decision making; Localized data is a pathway to empower communities. Bottom-up data should be recognized and integrated in urban planning, also leveraging technology, to enhance the people's voices.
- 6) Scaling up local action through coalitions and alliances to scale local impact. The magnitude and interconnected nature of urban development challenges and opportunities requires stronger collaboration for progress. Local action is more impactful when driven by coalitions that bring together communities, local and national governments, the private sector and civil society.