# Press kit

UN-HABITAT


# Launch of the World Cities Report 2024: Cities and Climate Action

## Introduction

UN-Habitat is launching the 2024 edition of its flagship publication, the *World Cities Report*, at the twelfth session of the World Urban Forum (WUF12). Published biennially, this report serves as a global reference on sustainable urban knowledge.

The 2024 edition of the *World Cities Report* takes an in-depth look at the intersection of climate action and urbanization, offering insights into how cities are both contributing to and impacted by the climate crisis. As rapid urban growth reshapes global landscapes, the report delivers critical findings and practical strategies to guide cities towards resilient and sustainable futures.

## Event details

**Date:** 5 November 2024
**Time:** 9:00 - 9:45
**Location:** Press Centre, Egypt International Exhibition Centre at the twelfth session of the World Urban Forum (WUF12), Cairo, Egypt

UN-HABITAT

# What to expect

The *World Cities Report 2024: Cities and Climate Action* highlights the escalating impact of climate change on urban areas, focusing both on the severe challenges and transformative opportunities they present. With rapidly growing urban populations, particularly in high-risk regions, cities are increasingly vulnerable to climate hazards. By 2040, if emissions remain unchecked, over 2 billion urban residents could face annual temperatures exceeding 29°C.

A critical theme of the report is the significant funding gap for resilient urban infrastructure. Cities need an estimated USD 4.5-5.4 trillion per year to build and maintain climate-resilient systems, yet current financing stands at just USD 831 billion — only a fraction of the required amount. This shortfall leaves cities, and especially their most vulnerable populations, exposed to escalating risks.

Join this press conference for exclusive access to insights and experts, as well as information on region-specific insights, case studies on innovative climate solutions, and commentary on the path forward for achieving sustainable and resilient urban development.

# Key panelists

## Moderator

**Katerina Bezgachina,**
Chief of Communications,
UN-Habitat

## Speakers

**Anacláudia Rossbach,**
United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN-Habitat

**Ben Arimah,**
Chief, Global Reports and Trends Unit, UN-Habitat

**Edlam Abera Yemeru,**
Acting Director, External Relations, Strategy, Knowledge and Innovation, UN-Habitat

**David Dodman,**
Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies

UN-HABITAT



# Key messages

## 1 Climate change is becoming increasingly urbanized

As more people move into cities, often settling informally in hazard-prone areas, the exposure of lives and assets has expanded rapidly while local ecosystems have become steadily more precarious. For example, since 1975, exposure to riverine flooding has grown 3.5 times more in cities than in rural areas. This situation is likely to intensify in the coming decades as urbanization continues, though the extent and severity will depend significantly on the decisions we make today.

Assuming the world continues to follow a high-emission pathway, more than 2 billion people currently living in cities could be exposed to a temperature increase of at least 0.5 degrees Celsius by 2040. In this scenario, as much as 36 per cent of the global population in cities could experience mean annual temperatures of 29 degrees Celsius or above. In this scenario, less than 1 per cent of the population in cities worldwide would be spared higher temperatures.

**In a high-emission scenario, less than 1% of the population in cities worldwide would be spared higher temperatures**

## 2 Urban climate action remains grossly underfunded

Though the costs of climate changes for cities are already considerable, these are likely to increase exponentially in the next few decades unless adequate steps are taken. According to one projection, 136 of the largest coastal cities could incur annual losses exceeding USD1 trillion by 2050 even with moderate levels of sea-rise, without additional investments in adaptation and risk reduction.

While any expenditure now to strengthen urban resilience will likely pay itself many times over, cities are still struggling to access even a fraction of the funding they require. While urban areas currently require an estimated USD 4.5-5.4 trillion every year to invest in new or retrofitted climate-resilient infrastructure, in 2021-2022 they secured only USD 831 billion per year for climate action—less than 20 per cent of the amount needed.

**Cities receive less than 20% of the finance required for effective climate action**

## 3 Despite their climate benefits, urban green spaces are shrinking

The last 30 years have witnessed a decline in green spaces in urban areas around the world. On average, the share of green spaces in urban areas globally decreased from 19.5 per cent in 1990 to 13.9 per cent in 2020. The decline is even sharper when measured in terms of the available green space per capita: while in 1990 each urban resident had an average of 66.9 $m^2$ of green space worldwide, by 2020 this had more than halved to 30.6 $m^2$. These global averages, however, conceal extraordinary disparities between different regions. In Northern America and Europe, urban residents still enjoy on average 81.4 $m^2$ of green space each—more than 12 times the average of 6.4 $m^2$ in Western Asia and Northern Africa.

Besides its implications on the environment, both in terms of climate change and biodiversity loss, the decline of green spaces has implications for human health and social impacts. However, this trend was by no means universal: though most cities have seen a reduction due to urban expansion or poor planning, some have managed to increase their share of green space through targeted policies such as mangrove restoration and revegetation.

**On average, urban residents have access to just 30.6$m^2$ of green space each, less than half of what they had 30 years ago**

UN-HABITAT



## 4 The most vulnerable are often excluded from climate action

Cities are only as resilient as their most vulnerable communities. Without inclusive policies that include all residents, particularly those traditionally excluded from the benefits urban areas can offer, cities will continue to be exposed to potentially catastrophic impacts as a result of climate change. This is reflected in the fact that low-income and informal settlements are frequently the worst hit when disasters do occur.

Despite this, very little of the limited expenditure on climate action in cities is going towards adaptation specifically, though this is typically what vulnerable communities need most in the immediate term to protect them from the worst effects of climate change. For instance, in 2021-22, only USD10 billion or just over 1 per cent of the USD831 billion spent annually on urban climate action went towards adaptation. To make matters worse, many urban climate interventions are either failing to protect the most vulnerable. The construction of sea-walls and dykes, for instance, if implemented without proper consideration of all communities, can leave nearby settlements even more exposed to the risk of flooding.

**Just over 1%**
**of expenditure on urban climate action is going towards adaptation, despite the urgent need among poor communities for these investments**

## 5 Cities offer a way through the climate crisis

Though urban areas account for a large share of global emissions, it is important they are not seen just as part of the problem, but part of the solution too—even if their full potential has yet to be realized. Already, some of the most exciting and progressive response to climate change are emerging from cities and communities who are taking action, in many cases with little or no national and international support, to strengthen their collective resilience and reduce their emissions. This includes bottom-up interventions by communities themselves, including informal settlements.

Furthermore, while urban areas continue to be a major driver of climate change worldwide, accounting for between 70 and 80 per cent of global emissions, in many developed countries urban emissions per capita are now lower than national averages. Contrary to the perception of cities as polluting, countries are not condemned to face rising emissions while urbanizing: net zero or low-carbon pathways can be achieved through appropriate climate-responsive planning choices.

**While urban areas still account for between**
**70% and 80%**
**of global emissions, in many developed countries urban emissions per capita are now lower than national averages**

## Media contact

For inquiries or additional materials, please contact:
Ekaterina Bezgachina, Chief of Communications
ekaterina.bezgachina@un.org

### Note to media

**The *World Cities Report 2024* will be available for interactive viewing and download on the UN-Habitat website following the launch.**