



## URBAN OCTOBER CONCEPT NOTE

August 2023

# 31 days to promote a better urban future

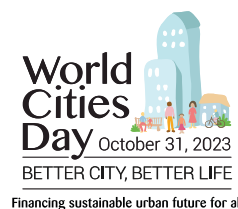
Urbanization presents some of the most significant opportunities and challenges in the world today. Cities are centres for economic growth and development but also face demographic, environmental, economic, and social challenges.

The United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 – “to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” – identifies sustainable urbanization as one of the key priorities for global development. The adoption of the new Urban Agenda by the United Nations in 2016 has seen national and local governments around the world embark on a transformative path towards making SDG11 a reality.

### **“Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” Sustainable Development Goal 11**

By engaging all stakeholders, cities have the ability to harness transformational change and improve the life of their inhabitants. However, in many places, cities lack the capacity to enact this change. Ensuring cities have the capacity, capability and tools to address the challenges posed by urbanization has become a pressing global issue.

*With nearly 70% of the world’s population  
living in cities by 2050, the future of  
humanity is urban*



# Urban October:

## 31 days to promote a better urban future



Urban October was developed to raise awareness, promote participation, generate knowledge and engage the international community in creating a better urban future.

Every October UN-Habitat and partners organize a month of activities, events and discussions on urban sustainability. Urban October is an opportunity for people around the world to join the conversation around the challenges and opportunities created by the fast pace of change in our cities and towns. National and local governments, universities, non-governmental organizations, communities, and other stakeholders in sustainable urbanization are encouraged to hold or participate in activities, events, and discussions.

Urban October begins with World Habitat Day at the start of the month and ends with World Cities Day on 31 October. Activities to mark Urban October take place around the world on these specific days and throughout the month. Different cities around the world host the global observances of World Habitat Day and World Cities Day each year.

*By engaging all stakeholders, cities can harness transformational change and ensure a better life for all in an urbanizing world*

## World Habitat Day



World Habitat Day is held on the first Monday of October and launches Urban October. The day centres around the global observance, which is held in a different country each year with keynote speakers and roundtable discussions focused on a specific theme.

In 2023, the World Habitat Day will take place in the city of **Baku, the Republic of Azerbaijan**. This is the first global observance of the day in this region. The theme '**Resilient urban economies. Cities as drivers of growth and recovery**' will focus on the role that cities play in the recovery after crises, be it COVID-19, economic downturns, conflicts, or climate emergencies. It will explore ways in which cities can position their economies to benefit residents and create resilience.

The pandemic, recent conflicts and natural disasters have reversed years of progress made in the fight against poverty. 2023 has been a particularly challenging year for urban economies. Global economic growth itself is declining to about 2.5

percent and, apart from the initial COVID-19 crisis in 2020 and the global financial crisis in 2009, this is the weakest growth experienced since 2001, according to the IMF.

In 2022, the number of people forcibly displaced by persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing public order grew by 21 per cent standing at an estimated 108.4 million. More than 60 percent of the displaced people are looking for new opportunities in urban areas.

Tackling urban poverty and inequality have become an urgent global priority. Cities and local governments play a front-line role in responding to crises as well as in planning for an inclusive, resilient, and green future. Cities all over the world have already embarked on this journey by implementing various green recovery models and frameworks.

## Objectives:

Our aim is to convene various city stakeholders to discuss the ways in which cities can be primed for recovery following the global intersecting negative economic shocks of COVID-19, ongoing conflicts and climate disasters.

A global observance ceremony will be followed by a series of roundtables – with representatives of national governments and local and regional authorities as well as various stakeholder groups and civil society representatives – to look at how to use cities to drive national economic recovery and growth.

## Expected outcomes:

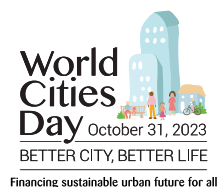
- Broach the different dimensions of economic slowdown that cities are currently experiencing and identify actions that cities can take to boost economic recovery.
- Share experiences among different cities on how they are positioning themselves to tackle inflationary pressures and other tight global financial conditions.

## Scroll of Honour Award

As part of the World Habitat Day celebrations, UN-Habitat presents its Scroll of Honour award. **Launched in 1989**, the award is one of the most prestigious sustainable urbanization awards in the world. It aims to acknowledge initiatives that have made outstanding contributions in the field of human settlements, the provision of housing, highlighting the plight of people living in poverty or who have been displaced, and developing and improving human settlements and the quality of urban life.

Winners in each of the five categories travel to the host city to take part in the global observance. They receive plaques engraved with the name of the winning individual, city, or institution.

## World Cities Day



World Cities Day brings Urban October to an end on 31 October each year. As with World Habitat Day, a global observance is held in a different city each year and the day focuses on a specific theme.

This year's global observance is planned in the municipality of **Üsküdar, Istanbul, the Republic of Türkiye** under the theme **'Financing sustainable urban future for all'**. It will aim to identify ways to unlock transformative investments in urban planning and achieve adequate fiscal decentralization. Many cities and local governments continue to be restrained in their capacity to borrow money and raise revenue for large projects. They need access to finance to fund sustainable urban transformation.

The global observance of the World Cities Day will be preceded by a closed-door meeting of thought leaders and investors tasked to develop recommendations for UN-Habitat and UNDP on local finance for sustainable urban development and SDGs.

The official global observance ceremony will be followed by a series of moderated Davos style roundtables to explore the topic in depth. The celebrations will conclude with a post-event, a meeting of the Zero Waste Initiative Advisory Board on 1 November 2023. This body was set up by the UN Secretary-General to advance zero waste initiatives. The board consists of eminent people championing recycling and zero waste concepts and it is chaired by the First Lady of Türkiye Emine Erdoğan.

## Objectives:

Our aim is to first identify concrete tools and services available for cities to unlock investments for financing sustainable urban development. Second, to fashion ways to improve these tools and services consistent with the recommendations received from the month-long discussions on city economic recovery. And finally, to recommend how these tools may be deployed for the benefit of cities.

## Expected outcomes:

- Outline a local financial framework that will best position cities for economic recovery.
- Implement that framework along with relevant tools and services available to ensure the financing for cities is transformative, sustainable, and scalable.

