

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)

STUDY GUIDE

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TOPIC:

**Managing Rapid and Unplanned
Urban Growth: Building Inclusive,
Resilient, and Sustainable Cities**



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Introduction to the Committee

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) is the United Nations entity responsible for promoting sustainable urbanization and improving human settlements worldwide. Mandated by the United Nations General Assembly, it serves as the principal UN focal point for issues related to cities, urbanization, housing, and human settlements. Its mission is to promote socially and environmentally sustainable cities and communities while working toward adequate shelter and improved living conditions for all (United Nations Human Settlements Programme [UN-Habitat], n.d.-a).

The origins of UN-Habitat reflect the growing international recognition of the challenges created by rapid urbanization. In 1976, the United Nations convened the First United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat I) in Vancouver, Canada, where governments formally recognized that poorly managed urban growth could have serious social, economic, and environmental consequences. The conference produced the Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements and the Vancouver Action Plan, which called on governments to strengthen policies concerning land use, housing, infrastructure, basic services, and urban development (UN-Habitat, n.d.-b).

Following Habitat I, the General Assembly established the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, commonly known as Habitat, in 1977. The international urban agenda was further strengthened at Habitat II, held in Istanbul in 1996, where participating governments adopted the Habitat Agenda and reaffirmed two major objectives: ensuring adequate shelter for all and promoting sustainable human settlements in an increasingly urbanized world. In 2002, General Assembly Resolution 56/206 strengthened the organization's mandate and transformed the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements into the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) (United Nations General Assembly [UNGA], 2001; UN-Habitat, n.d.-b).

Today, UN-Habitat works with national and local governments, civil society, communities, the private sector, and other international organizations to address urban challenges through policy development, technical assistance, data collection, capacity-building, and international cooperation. Its work includes urban planning, adequate and affordable housing, land and basic services, sustainable mobility, public spaces, climate resilience, reduction of spatial inequality, and responses to urban crises (UN-Habitat, n.d.-a).

UN-Habitat's contemporary mandate is closely connected to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11): Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. UN-Habitat serves as the custodian agency for several SDG 11 indicators and assists governments in collecting data and monitoring progress on urban development. Its work also contributes to other Sustainable Development Goals because decisions concerning housing, transportation, infrastructure, water and sanitation, climate resilience, poverty, and inequality are closely interconnected within cities and human settlements (UN-Habitat, 2019).

Another fundamental framework is the New Urban Agenda, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador, in 2016. The New Urban Agenda establishes a shared international vision for how cities and human settlements should be planned, developed, financed, governed, and managed. It recognizes that well-planned urbanization can contribute to economic opportunity and sustainable development, while poorly managed urban expansion can intensify inequality, inadequate housing, environmental degradation, infrastructure deficiencies, and vulnerability to disasters (United Nations, 2017).

UN-Habitat is governed through a three-tier structure consisting of the UN-Habitat Assembly, the Executive Board, and the Committee of Permanent Representatives. The UN-Habitat Assembly includes all 193 United Nations Member States and provides a universal forum for governments to discuss global trends, establish priorities, and develop international guidance concerning sustainable urbanization and human settlements. The Executive Board provides operational oversight, while the Committee of Permanent Representatives supports preparations for the Assembly and contributes to the implementation of its decisions (UN-Habitat, n.d.-c).

For the purposes of this committee, delegates should understand that UN-Habitat does not directly govern cities or determine national and local urban policies. Decisions concerning land use, transportation, housing, infrastructure, and urban development remain primarily the responsibility of national and subnational governments. UN-Habitat instead promotes international cooperation, develops policy guidance and technical standards, supports capacity-building, facilitates the exchange of successful practices, and assists governments in implementing internationally agreed urban-development commitments (UN-Habitat, n.d.-a).

Background on the Topic

Key Terminology

Understanding the concepts surrounding urban growth and sustainable development is essential for meaningful debate. Although terms such as urbanization, urban growth, and urban sprawl are sometimes used interchangeably, they describe different processes and can require different policy responses.

Urbanization

Urbanization is the process through which an increasing proportion of a country's population lives in urban areas. It is generally associated with demographic change, migration, economic transformation, and the expansion of cities and towns. Urbanization can create important opportunities by concentrating people, employment, infrastructure, services, and innovation. However, when urban growth occurs faster than governments can provide adequate housing, transportation, infrastructure, and basic services, it can also intensify existing inequalities and environmental pressures (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA], 2019; United Nations Human Settlements Programme [UN-Habitat], 2022).

Rapid Urban Growth

Rapid urban growth refers to a significant increase in the population or physical size of an urban area within a relatively short period. It may result from natural population growth, rural-to-urban migration, international migration, economic development, territorial expansion, or a combination of these factors. Rapid growth is not inherently negative. When effectively planned and managed, expanding cities can generate employment, improve access to services, encourage innovation, and contribute to economic development. Problems arise when the pace of growth exceeds the capacity of institutions and infrastructure to respond effectively (UN-Habitat, 2022).

Unplanned Urban Growth

Unplanned urban growth occurs when urban expansion takes place without adequate coordination of land use, housing, transportation, infrastructure, environmental protection, and public services. It can result in fragmented development, inadequate road and transportation networks, insufficient drainage and sanitation, unequal access to essential services, settlement in environmentally vulnerable areas, and increasing distances between homes, employment, education, and healthcare.

Unplanned growth should not be understood simply as the absence of a formal urban plan. Cities may possess planning instruments but still experience poorly coordinated or inadequately regulated development. Effective urban planning therefore requires not only plans and regulations but also

institutional capacity, financing, enforcement, public participation, reliable data, and coordination among different levels of government (UN-Habitat, 2022).

Urban Sprawl

Urban sprawl generally refers to low-density and dispersed expansion of urban development into surrounding areas. Sprawl can increase the distances residents must travel and raise the cost of providing roads, public transportation, water, sanitation, electricity, and other infrastructure. It may also contribute to automobile dependence, loss of agricultural or environmentally valuable land, and greater greenhouse-gas emissions (UN-Habitat, 2022).

Informal Settlements

Informal settlements are residential areas in which inhabitants often lack secure land or housing tenure and where housing may not comply with formal planning or building regulations. Many also experience inadequate access to safe water, sanitation, transportation, drainage, electricity, healthcare, education, and other essential services. Informal settlements frequently emerge where rapid urban growth and housing demand are not matched by sufficient supplies of affordable and adequately serviced land and housing (UN-Habitat, 2022).

Urban Resilience

Urban resilience is the capacity of an urban system and its inhabitants to withstand, adapt to, and recover from different forms of stress and disruption while maintaining essential functions. These pressures may include floods, storms, earthquakes, extreme heat, economic shocks, public-health emergencies, infrastructure failures, or population displacement. Resilience therefore involves not only emergency response but also long-term planning that reduces vulnerability before crises occur (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [UNDRR], 2017).

Sustainable Urban Development

Sustainable urban development seeks to balance social inclusion, economic opportunity, environmental protection, and effective governance in the development of cities and human settlements. Sustainable cities should provide equitable access to housing, transportation, public spaces, basic services, employment, and opportunities while using land and natural resources efficiently and reducing environmental risks (United Nations, 2017).

Historical Evolution of Urbanization

Cities have existed for thousands of years, but the scale and speed of contemporary urbanization are historically unprecedented. Industrialization accelerated urban growth during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as employment and economic activity increasingly concentrated in cities. In many regions, improvements in transportation, infrastructure, and industrial production further encouraged population concentration in urban areas.

During the second half of the twentieth century, urbanization expanded rapidly across Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Economic transformation, demographic growth, rural-to-urban migration, and the concentration of employment and public services contributed to the expansion of metropolitan areas. In many cities, however, population growth occurred more rapidly than formal housing markets, infrastructure systems, and public institutions could accommodate, contributing to the expansion of informal settlements and unequal access to urban opportunities (UN-Habitat, 2022).

A major global demographic transition followed. In 2007, for the first time in history, the world's urban population exceeded its rural population. According to United Nations projections, approximately 68% of the world's population could live in urban areas by 2050, with most future urban population growth expected to occur in Asia and Africa (UN DESA, 2019).

This transformation means that decisions made about cities today will shape patterns of development for decades. Housing constructed without adequate infrastructure, transportation systems based primarily on private vehicles, development in flood-prone areas, and poorly connected neighborhoods can create problems that become increasingly expensive and difficult to correct as cities expand.

Why Do Cities Grow Rapidly?

Urban growth does not have a single cause. Different combinations of demographic, economic, environmental, and political factors influence the expansion of cities.

Population Growth and Migration

Natural population growth contributes to the expansion of many urban areas, while migration can accelerate this process. People may move to cities seeking employment, education, healthcare, security, and improved living standards. Others may be displaced by poverty, armed conflict, natural hazards, environmental degradation, or declining economic opportunities in rural communities (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2024).

Migration itself should not be treated as an urban problem. Migrants can contribute significantly to urban economies and communities. Difficulties emerge when housing, transportation, employment opportunities, and public services do not expand sufficiently to accommodate population change.

Concentration of Economic Opportunities

Cities frequently concentrate universities, hospitals, industries, government institutions, financial services, commercial activity, and employment. This economic concentration attracts population and investment but can also create pressure on land and housing markets.

When economic activity is highly concentrated in a limited number of metropolitan areas, rapid growth can overwhelm existing infrastructure while smaller cities and rural areas experience comparatively limited investment and employment opportunities.

Housing Shortages and Land Markets

Rapid population growth can increase demand for housing faster than formal markets can provide affordable options. High land prices, limited access to credit, inadequate social housing, complex regulations, and insufficient serviced land can push lower-income households toward informal or peripheral settlements.

The resulting problem is not simply a shortage of buildings. Housing location determines access to employment, schools, healthcare, transportation, and public services. Consequently, affordable housing located far from economic opportunities can still reinforce inequality and increase transportation costs and commuting times (United Nations, 2017).

Weak Urban Planning and Governance

Urban development often involves national governments, state or provincial authorities, municipalities, transportation agencies, utilities, private developers, and local communities. When responsibilities are fragmented or poorly coordinated, decisions concerning housing, roads, public transportation, drainage, water, and land use may be made independently from one another.

Limited municipal finances, insufficient technical capacity, outdated land-use regulations, weak enforcement, and inadequate public participation can further reduce the ability of local authorities to manage urban expansion effectively (UN-Habitat, 2022).

Climate Change and Displacement

Climate change is increasingly influencing patterns of human settlement. Sea-level rise, drought, flooding, extreme heat, storms, and other climate-related hazards can damage livelihoods and contribute to population displacement. At the same time, rapidly expanding cities may themselves become increasingly vulnerable when development occurs in floodplains, unstable slopes, coastal zones, or other high-risk areas (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2022).

Urbanization and climate change are therefore closely interconnected: cities must accommodate growing populations while simultaneously adapting infrastructure and development patterns to changing environmental conditions.

Major Challenges Associated with Rapid and Unplanned Urban Growth

Housing and Informal Settlements

Access to adequate housing is one of the most visible challenges associated with rapid urbanization. When formal housing is unaffordable or unavailable, households may settle in areas lacking secure tenure, infrastructure, or public services. UN-Habitat estimates that more than one billion people currently live in slums or informal settlements, and this number could continue increasing without significant improvements in housing and urban development policies (UN-Habitat, 2022).

Mobility and Transportation

As cities expand geographically, residents may live increasingly far from employment, education, healthcare, and commercial centers. Without effective public transportation and integrated land-use planning, this can produce traffic congestion, long commuting times, air pollution, automobile dependence, and unequal access to opportunities.

Sustainable urban mobility therefore concerns more than reducing traffic. It involves designing cities in which people can reach essential destinations safely, affordably, and efficiently through combinations of public transportation, walking, cycling, and other mobility options (United Nations, 2017).

Infrastructure and Basic Services

Rapidly growing cities require major investments in water supply, sanitation, drainage, electricity, waste management, roads, digital connectivity, schools, healthcare facilities, and public transportation. When infrastructure expansion does not keep pace with population growth, inequalities between neighborhoods can become deeply entrenched.

Infrastructure decisions also have long-term consequences. Roads, housing developments, transportation networks, and water systems constructed today may influence urban development for generations.

Environmental Pressure and Loss of Natural Areas

Urban expansion can consume agricultural land, forests, wetlands, and other ecosystems surrounding cities. The replacement of natural surfaces with buildings and pavement can reduce water absorption, increase runoff and flooding, contribute to urban heat, and reduce biodiversity.

Protecting green and blue spaces—including parks, wetlands, rivers, urban forests, and other natural systems—can therefore form an important component of sustainable urban planning and climate adaptation (IPCC, 2022).

Inequality and Spatial Segregation

Urban inequality has a geographic dimension. Wealthier and poorer populations may live in areas with dramatically different access to transportation, schools, healthcare, employment, public spaces, environmental quality, and infrastructure.

This spatial inequality can reinforce broader socioeconomic disparities because where a person lives affects the opportunities and services available to them. Inclusive urban planning therefore seeks not merely to improve cities overall, but to ensure that the benefits of urban development are distributed more equitably (UN-Habitat, 2022).

Climate and Disaster Vulnerability

Poorly planned urban expansion can place increasing numbers of people and infrastructure in areas exposed to floods, storms, landslides, extreme heat, and other hazards. Lower-income communities are often particularly vulnerable because affordable housing may be concentrated in higher-risk areas and households may have fewer resources to prepare for or recover from disasters (IPCC, 2022).

Urban resilience consequently requires governments to integrate disaster-risk reduction and climate adaptation into decisions concerning land use, housing, infrastructure, transportation, and public investment.

Why This Issue Matters Today

Urbanization is one of the defining transformations of the twenty-first century. Cities generate economic activity, innovation, employment, cultural exchange, and opportunities for millions of people. They can also make public services and infrastructure more efficient by concentrating populations and economic activity.

The central challenge is therefore **not how to stop urbanization, but how to manage it**.

When urban growth is adequately planned, cities can improve living standards, expand economic opportunity, reduce some forms of resource consumption, and support sustainable development. When growth is poorly managed, however, the same process can increase housing shortages, congestion, infrastructure deficits, environmental degradation, disaster vulnerability, and socioeconomic inequality (UN-Habitat, 2022).

The consequences of today's planning decisions are also difficult to reverse. Once settlements, roads, transportation networks, and infrastructure have shaped patterns of urban development, changing

those patterns can require enormous financial and political resources. Planning for future growth is therefore as important as responding to existing urban problems.

Relevant International Frameworks

Sustainable Development Goal 11

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all UN Member States in 2015, established SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Its targets address several issues directly relevant to this committee, including:

- adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services;
- accessible and sustainable transportation;
- inclusive and sustainable urbanization and participatory planning;
- protection of cultural and natural heritage;
- disaster-risk reduction;
- urban environmental impacts;
- universal access to safe and inclusive public spaces; and
- stronger connections between urban, peri-urban, and rural areas (United Nations, 2015).

SDG 11 provides delegates with one of the principal international frameworks for evaluating proposed solutions to rapid and unplanned urban growth.

The New Urban Agenda

Adopted by Member States at Habitat III in Quito in 2016 and endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly, the New Urban Agenda provides the principal international framework specifically addressing sustainable urbanization.

It promotes compact and connected urban development, adequate housing, sustainable mobility, effective land-use planning, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, resilient infrastructure, participatory governance, and stronger coordination among different levels of government (United Nations, 2017).

Importantly, the New Urban Agenda recognizes urbanization not merely as a challenge but as a potential instrument of sustainable development when it is properly planned, governed, and financed.

Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction emphasizes reducing exposure and vulnerability to disasters through risk-informed development, stronger governance, investment in resilience, and improved preparedness. Its principles are particularly relevant to cities experiencing rapid development in areas exposed to floods, storms, earthquakes, landslides, heat, or other hazards (UNDRR, 2015).

Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement on climate change also has important implications for urban development. Cities are major centers of energy consumption, transportation, construction, and economic activity, while urban populations and infrastructure are increasingly exposed to climate-related risks. Sustainable urban planning can therefore contribute simultaneously to reducing greenhouse-gas emissions and strengthening adaptation to climate change (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC], 2015).

Together, these frameworks demonstrate that managing urban growth requires more than constructing additional infrastructure. It requires coordinated policies connecting land use, housing, mobility, basic services, environmental protection, disaster-risk reduction, social inclusion, financing, and governance. For delegates, the central question is therefore how international cooperation can help national and local governments anticipate urban growth and build cities that remain functional, equitable, resilient, and sustainable as they expand.

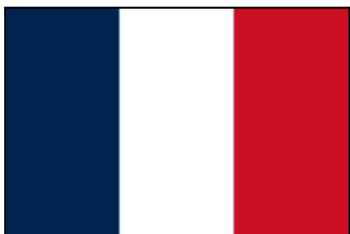


Key Stakeholders and Positions

Urban development is shaped by national governments, local authorities, international organizations, development banks, private-sector actors, and urban communities. Within UN-Habitat, however, Member States remain the principal negotiating actors. Delegates should therefore distinguish between the urban problems their countries face and the policy approaches their governments support.

COUNTRY	POSITION
United States of America 	The United States faces housing shortages and affordability pressures alongside suburban sprawl, infrastructure needs, homelessness, and climate-related risks. Federal programmes provide financing to states and local governments while land-use decisions remain strongly decentralized. The United States is therefore likely to support increased housing supply, local decision-making, infrastructure finance, private-sector participation, community redevelopment, and resilient development rather than highly centralized international planning standards (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD], 2025).
Russian Federation 	Russia maintains major launch, satellite, and military space cThe Russian Federation emphasizes state-directed spatial development, modernization of urban infrastructure, housing construction, and the development of urban agglomerations as instruments of regional and economic policy. National planning frameworks have increasingly focused on improving the quality of the urban environment, upgrading utilities and transport infrastructure, expanding housing, and reducing territorial disparities between major metropolitan centers and other regions. Russia is therefore likely to support international cooperation on infrastructure, urban modernization, resilient cities, and the exchange of technical expertise, while emphasizing national sovereignty, state responsibility for territorial planning, and flexibility for countries to determine their own models of urban development (Government of the Russian Federation, 2024; Ministry of Construction, Housing and Utilities of the Russian Federation, 2025).



People's Republic of China 	China's current urban policy has shifted from large-scale expansion toward higher-quality, people-centered urban development, including urban renewal, improved housing, infrastructure modernization, public services, resilient cities, and better metropolitan coordination. China is likely to support strong state planning, major infrastructure investment, smart-city development, and national flexibility in determining implementation strategies (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2025, 2026).
French Republic 	France promotes sustainable urban development, controlled land consumption, ecological transition, energy-efficient buildings, soft mobility, urban regeneration, and climate adaptation. It is likely to support stronger environmental standards, compact and connected development, public transportation, social inclusion, and international cooperation on resilient cities (Ministère de la Transition écologique, 2025, 2026).
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland 	The United Kingdom currently places strong emphasis on increasing housing supply, reforming the planning system, regenerating urban areas, developing brownfield land, improving transport connectivity, and strengthening local and regional development. Recent policy has also sought to give local and combined authorities greater responsibility for strategic planning and infrastructure while encouraging development around transport networks and existing urban centers. The United Kingdom is therefore likely to support housing expansion, urban regeneration, sustainable mobility, public-private investment, and stronger local governance, while favoring flexible national implementation rather than highly prescriptive international urban-planning standards (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2024, 2025).
Bangladesh 	Bangladesh combines rapid urbanization with significant exposure to flooding and other climate hazards. Its recent sustainable-construction initiatives emphasize low-carbon development, energy efficiency, stronger urban resilience, institutional reform, and greater climate financing. Bangladesh is therefore expected to advocate international financial and technical assistance for resilient housing, infrastructure, and rapidly growing cities (UN-Habitat, 2024a).

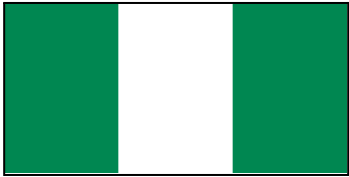
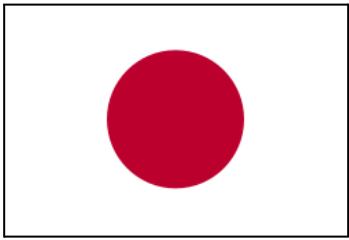


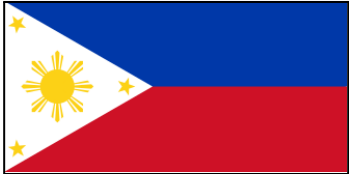
Indonesia 	Indonesia views cities as major engines of national economic development but faces housing shortages, land constraints, congestion, and infrastructure pressures in metropolitan areas. Current policy places increasing emphasis on adequate housing, infrastructure, and more productive urban development. Indonesia is likely to support investment, housing supply, metropolitan planning, sustainable infrastructure, and partnerships with development institutions and the private sector (World Bank, 2025c).
Kenya 	Kenya's rapid urbanization has contributed to major housing and infrastructure gaps and substantial growth of informal settlements. National and international initiatives have focused on settlement upgrading, tenure regularization, infrastructure, and improved planning capacity. Kenya is likely to advocate affordable housing, basic services, settlement upgrading, technical assistance, and greater access to international urban-development financing (World Bank, 2020).
United Arab Emirates 	The United Arab Emirates promotes planned urban expansion, sustainable infrastructure, green buildings, technology, and long-term urban development through strategies implemented by individual emirates. Abu Dhabi's planning framework, for example, integrates land-use planning, environmental protection, growth boundaries, sustainable construction, and infrastructure. The UAE is likely to advocate smart-city innovation, private investment, sustainable construction, and strategic long-term planning (United Arab Emirates Government, 2024).
Netherlands 	The Netherlands combines ambitious housing expansion with long-standing policies on compact development, public transport, cycling, climate adaptation, and integrated water and land management. Its current government also links new housing development to accessibility by public transport and other mobility systems. The Netherlands is likely to advocate integrated land-use planning, resilient infrastructure, sustainable mobility, and nature-based urban solutions (Government of the Netherlands, 2023, 2026).

Arab Republic of Egypt 	Egypt faces substantial housing demand and rapid metropolitan growth while pursuing large-scale social housing and new urban development. Its Housing for All Egyptians programme places particular emphasis on affordable formal housing for lower-income households. Egypt is therefore likely to support large-scale housing and infrastructure investment, improved transportation, and international financing while maintaining strong national control over urban-development priorities (World Bank, 2026).
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 	Saudi Arabia is pursuing large-scale urban transformation under Vision 2030, including new residential communities, major infrastructure investment, expanded green spaces, pedestrian environments, and quality-of-life improvements. It is likely to promote planned urban expansion, major public and private investment, technological innovation, and integrated new-city development (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2025).
United Mexican States 	Mexico is highly urbanized and has faced significant urban sprawl, peripheral housing development, spatial segregation, mobility problems, and unequal access to services. Recent urban-development approaches increasingly emphasize regeneration, improved housing quality, better-connected neighborhoods, sustainable mobility, and stronger territorial planning. Mexico is therefore likely to support compact development, housing near services and employment, sustainable transportation, and stronger federal-state-municipal coordination (UN-Habitat, n.d.-b, 2021).
Argentine Republic 	Argentina is highly urbanized and has identified urban sprawl, inadequate infrastructure, mobility problems, and unequal access to land and services as important urban challenges. Its National Urban Policy emphasizes territorial balance and more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable cities. Argentina can therefore support stronger urban planning, infrastructure investment, housing inclusion, and cooperation that strengthens municipal capacity (UN-Habitat, n.d.-a).



Republic of Colombia 	Colombia has increasingly emphasized housing improvement, neighborhood upgrading, community participation, and support for vulnerable households, including communities receiving migrants. It is likely to advocate inclusive housing policies, integrated neighborhood development, public space, sustainable mobility, and participatory approaches to improving informal and underserved areas (World Bank, 2023).
Federative Republic of Brazil 	Brazil places strong emphasis on social housing, upgrading precarious settlements, and improving access to urban services. The renewed Minha Casa, Minha Vida framework prioritizes affordable urban housing and increasingly favors locations with better access to existing public facilities and services. Brazil is likely to support settlement upgrading, affordable housing, integrated urban development, and stronger South-South cooperation on urban policy (Ministério das Cidades, 2025).
Federal Republic of Germany 	Germany emphasizes sustainable urban development, affordable and adequate housing, climate adaptation, energy efficiency, and strong municipal planning. Germany is likely to favor integrated long-term planning, environmental standards, public transportation, local-government capacity, and international technical cooperation (OECD & UN-Habitat, 2024).
Commonwealth of Australia 	Australia's National Urban Policy promotes cities that are liveable, equitable, productive, sustainable, and resilient, with cooperation among national, state, territorial, and local governments. Australia is therefore positioned to support integrated urban planning, housing supply, sustainable transport, climate resilience, and coordinated metropolitan development (Australian Government, 2024).

Nigeria 	Nigeria is experiencing extraordinarily rapid urban growth, accompanied by urban sprawl, housing shortages, informal settlements, infrastructure deficits, and climate vulnerability. Its National Urban Development Policy was updated in 2025, while major planning and financing gaps remain. Nigeria is therefore likely to advocate substantial infrastructure financing, affordable housing, stronger urban-planning institutions, improved basic services, and international technical assistance (World Bank, 2025d).
Republic of India 	India's rapidly growing cities face major infrastructure, housing, heat, flooding, mobility, and service-delivery pressures. Current policy discussions emphasize integrated planning linking housing, land use, transportation, municipal services, resilience, and urban finance. India is therefore likely to advocate large-scale infrastructure investment, resilient and affordable housing, stronger municipal institutions, and greater access to public and private development finance (World Bank, 2025a, 2025b).
State of Japan 	Japan promotes compact urban development, integrated public transportation, walkability, efficient land use, disaster resilience, and accessible communities. Its experience with compact-city policies and transit-oriented development makes it likely to support long-term integrated planning, resilient infrastructure, sustainable mobility, and international technical cooperation (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism of Japan, 2025).
Canada 	Canada's current urban policy strongly connects housing affordability, public transportation, active mobility, climate resilience, and transit-oriented development. Canada is likely to support integrated metropolitan planning, increased housing supply near transportation infrastructure, sustainable mobility, and predictable financing for local governments (Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, 2026).

Philippines 	The Philippines combines rapid urban development with significant housing needs and high exposure to climate and disaster risks. Its expanded Pambansang Pabahay Para sa Pilipino (4PH) programme promotes adequate, sustainable, resilient, and affordable housing and includes different tenure and social-housing models. The Philippines is therefore likely to prioritize resilient housing, inclusive urban development, disaster-risk reduction, and financing for vulnerable communities (Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development, 2025).
Singapore 	Singapore's urban-development model emphasizes long-term integrated land-use planning, public housing, transportation coordination, efficient infrastructure, climate resilience, and careful management of scarce land. It is likely to advocate strong planning institutions, compact development, sustainable mobility, technological innovation, climate adaptation, and international exchange of urban expertise (Centre for Liveable Cities Singapore, 2024).
South Africa 	South Africa's urban policy is strongly influenced by persistent spatial inequality inherited from apartheid, including separation between housing, employment, services, and economic opportunities. It is likely to prioritize spatial integration, informal-settlement upgrading, affordable housing, public transportation, improved basic services, and urban policies designed to reduce historic inequalities (Parliament of South Africa, 2017).

Regional and Supranational Organizations

European Union (EU)

The EU promotes integrated and sustainable urban development through policies addressing housing, mobility, climate neutrality, energy efficiency, territorial cohesion, and urban resilience. It generally supports compact development, sustainable transportation, stronger local governance, and financing mechanisms that help cities implement environmental and social objectives.

African Union (AU)

Rapid urbanization is a major development priority across Africa. Through Agenda 2063 and related frameworks, the AU promotes better urban planning, infrastructure, affordable housing, basic services, climate resilience, and stronger local governance. African states frequently emphasize that sustainable urbanization requires greater access to development and climate finance, technology, and capacity-building.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

ASEAN promotes sustainable urbanization through regional cooperation on smart and sustainable cities, connectivity, infrastructure, environmental management, resilience, and technological innovation. Its approach generally emphasizes knowledge-sharing and locally adapted solutions rather than uniform regional urban policies.

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

ECLAC examines urbanization through the broader challenges of inequality, sustainable development, housing, mobility, territorial planning, and climate resilience in Latin America and the Caribbean. It promotes more inclusive urban development and stronger coordination between social, economic, environmental, and territorial policies.

International Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations

World Bank Group

One of the world's largest multilateral financiers of urban development, the World Bank works with national and local governments on infrastructure, housing, land management, municipal finance, resilience, and institutional capacity. It emphasizes strengthening local financial systems and mobilizing public and private investment so rapidly growing cities can expand infrastructure and services sustainably (World Bank, 2026).

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

UNDP supports cities through programs involving local governance, poverty reduction, climate adaptation, disaster resilience, digital transformation, and inclusive development. Its role is particularly relevant where urban problems intersect with inequality, institutional capacity, and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

UNEP contributes to sustainable urban development through work on air quality, resource efficiency, ecosystem protection, pollution, climate action, sustainable buildings, and environmentally responsible infrastructure. It can provide expertise for proposals addressing the environmental consequences of urban expansion.

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)

UNDRR promotes risk-informed urban planning and implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. It is particularly relevant to cities facing flooding, storms, earthquakes, extreme heat, landslides, and other hazards.

ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability

ICLEI is a global network of more than 2,500 local and regional governments in over 125 countries working on sustainable urban development. It promotes peer exchange, capacity-building, evidence-based planning, climate action, resilience, nature-based solutions, and cooperation between local, national, and international levels of government (ICLEI, 2026).

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)

UCLG represents local and regional governments internationally and advocates greater recognition of cities in global decision-making. It promotes decentralization, inclusive local governance, sustainable urban development, public services, and stronger participation of municipalities in implementing global development commitments.

Civil-Society and Community Organizations

NGOs, neighborhood associations, organizations representing informal-settlement residents, professional associations, universities, and community groups contribute local knowledge and advocate adequate housing, access to services, environmental protection, accessibility, and public participation. Their involvement is particularly important because urban-development decisions can directly affect land tenure, housing, mobility, livelihoods, and community networks.

Previous United Nations Actions and Resolutions

The United Nations has addressed the consequences of urbanization for several decades, gradually moving from a primary concern with housing and basic services toward a broader understanding of cities as interconnected systems involving land use, mobility, infrastructure, environmental sustainability, social inclusion, resilience, and governance. The following initiatives provide the principal international framework for addressing rapid and unplanned urban growth.

Habitat I and the Vancouver Declaration – 1976

The First United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat I), held in Vancouver, Canada, in 1976, marked the first major global UN conference dedicated specifically to human settlements. Governments adopted the Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements and an accompanying Action Plan, recognizing that rapid urbanization, inadequate housing, unequal access to land, and insufficient infrastructure required coordinated public policies.

Habitat I helped establish the principle that governments have an important responsibility for planning human settlements and ensuring access to adequate housing, infrastructure, and basic services. The conference ultimately contributed to the establishment of the institutional structures that later became UN-Habitat (UN-Habitat, n.d.).

Habitat II and the Habitat Agenda – 1996

Twenty years later, the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) was held in Istanbul, Türkiye. Governments adopted the Habitat Agenda, centered on two major commitments: adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world.

Habitat II expanded international attention beyond housing construction to issues such as land management, infrastructure, environmental protection, participation, poverty, local governance, and the role of cities in sustainable development. It also strengthened recognition of local authorities, civil society, and communities as important partners in managing urbanization (United Nations, 1996).

2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 11 – 2015

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represented a major milestone by establishing a Sustainable Development Goal specifically dedicated to cities.

SDG 11 calls on Member States to:

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Its targets directly address many of the issues before this committee, including adequate and affordable housing, upgrading informal settlements, sustainable public transportation, participatory urban planning, disaster-risk reduction, environmental impacts, public spaces, and stronger urban-rural connections (United Nations, 2015).

Of particular importance is Target 11.3, which calls on countries to enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and strengthen capacity for participatory, integrated, and sustainable human-settlement planning and management. SDG 11 therefore provides delegates with measurable international objectives against which proposed solutions can be evaluated.

Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction – 2015

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 strengthened international recognition that development decisions can either increase or reduce vulnerability to disasters.

For cities, this means integrating risk assessments into land-use planning, infrastructure development, housing, and public investment. Governments are encouraged to prevent the creation of new risks, reduce existing risks, strengthen resilience, and improve preparedness for disasters (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [UNDRR], 2015).

The framework is particularly relevant to rapidly expanding urban areas where construction may extend into floodplains, unstable slopes, coastal zones, or other areas exposed to natural hazards.

Paris Agreement – 2015

Although the Paris Agreement is primarily a climate agreement, its objectives have significant implications for urban development. Cities concentrate population, infrastructure, transportation, buildings, and economic activity while also facing increasing exposure to floods, extreme heat, storms, sea-level rise, and other climate-related hazards.

The agreement strengthened international commitments to both climate mitigation and adaptation, encouraging governments to incorporate climate considerations into long-term development. For UN-Habitat, this reinforces the importance of climate-resilient infrastructure, sustainable mobility, efficient buildings, and risk-informed urban planning (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC], 2015).

Habitat III and the New Urban Agenda – 2016

The most important international framework for this committee is the New Urban Agenda, adopted by Member States at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador, on 20 October 2016 and subsequently endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly.

The New Urban Agenda establishes a shared international vision for cities and human settlements and recognizes that well-planned and well-managed urbanization can be a powerful instrument for sustainable development. It promotes integrated urban planning, adequate housing, sustainable mobility, public spaces, environmental protection, resilience, social inclusion, effective land management, and stronger urban governance (United Nations, 2017).

Rather than treating housing, transportation, land use, infrastructure, and environmental protection as separate issues, the New Urban Agenda emphasizes their interdependence. This approach is particularly relevant to rapid and unplanned urban growth because decisions in one area can produce long-term consequences in others.

The Agenda also emphasizes cooperation among national, subnational, and local governments, together with civil society, communities, the private sector, academia, and other stakeholders.

UN-Habitat Assembly Resolution 2/5: Urbanization and Climate Change Resilience— 2023

At its second session in 2023, the United Nations Habitat Assembly adopted Resolution HSP/HA.2/Res.5, Enhancing the interlinkage between urbanization and climate change resilience.

The resolution strengthened recognition that urban development and climate policy must be addressed together. It encourages governments and other stakeholders to integrate climate mitigation and adaptation into urban policies and planning and to strengthen the resilience of cities and communities (UN-Habitat, 2023a).

For delegates, this resolution provides an important basis for proposals concerning flood resilience, extreme heat, green infrastructure, climate-sensitive land-use planning, and protection of vulnerable urban populations.

UN-Habitat Assembly Resolution 2/7: Adequate Housing for All – 2023

Resolution HSP/HA.2/Res.7, Adequate housing for all, reaffirmed housing as a central component of sustainable urban development. The resolution addresses access to adequate housing, homelessness, informal settlements, security of tenure, and the need for housing policies capable of responding to growing demand (UN-Habitat, 2023b).

This is particularly relevant to rapidly growing cities because housing shortages and unaffordable formal housing can contribute directly to peripheral development and the expansion of informal settlements.



UN-Habitat Assembly Resolution 2/8: Urban Planning and Sustainable Infrastructure—2023

Resolution HSP/HA.2/Res.8, Urban planning and sustainable infrastructure, is one of the instruments most directly related to this committee's agenda.

The resolution encourages Member States to identify urbanization needs through evidence-based analysis and territorial and urban profiling and to make greater use of integrated and inclusive urban planning and sustainable infrastructure. It also requested the development of a global technical digital platform to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, tools, and good practices concerning urbanization and infrastructure development (UN-Habitat, 2023c).

The resolution reinforces the principle that governments should anticipate urban growth rather than respond only after infrastructure, housing, and service deficits have emerged.

UN-Habitat Assembly Resolution 2/9: Human Settlements Resilience – 2023

The Habitat Assembly also adopted Resolution HSP/HA.2/Res.9, calling for the creation of a human settlements resilience framework for early warning, foresight, risk reduction, crisis response, and post-crisis recovery and reconstruction.

This resolution recognizes that cities and settlements must prepare not only for gradual pressures associated with urban growth but also for sudden crises and disasters. It strengthens the connection between urban planning, risk reduction, preparedness, recovery, and long-term resilience (UN-Habitat, 2023d).

2026 Midterm Review of the New Urban Agenda

The 2026 midterm review of the New Urban Agenda represents an especially relevant development for MUNARJÍ XIX. Through General Assembly Resolution A/RES/79/214, Member States decided to convene a high-level meeting in 2026 to assess progress since the adoption of the New Urban Agenda and identify priorities for accelerating implementation during its second decade.

The review examines progress and remaining challenges across the Agenda's three transformative commitments:

- sustainable urban development for social inclusion and ending poverty;
- sustainable and inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all; and
- environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development (UN-Habitat, 2026).

The midterm review is significant because it shifts the international discussion from establishing principles to evaluating whether those principles are actually being implemented. Ten years after Habitat

III, challenges involving housing affordability, informal settlements, infrastructure gaps, climate vulnerability, financing, and urban inequality remain substantial.

What Has the International Community Already Agreed Upon?

Previous UN action demonstrates considerable international consensus around several principles:

- urbanization should be planned rather than merely accommodated after growth occurs;
- everyone should have access to adequate housing and basic services;
- transportation and land-use planning should be coordinated;
- local communities should participate in urban decision-making;
- informal settlements require inclusive and sustainable responses;
- urban planning should incorporate climate adaptation and disaster-risk reduction;
- national and local governments require stronger institutional and financial capacity;
- urban development should reduce rather than reinforce social and spatial inequality; and
- cities should contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

The central challenge facing delegates is therefore not the absence of international principles. The greater problem is the gap between commitments and implementation.

Limited financing, weak institutional capacity, fragmented governance, insufficient data, competing development priorities, rapid population growth, and inadequate coordination among levels of government continue to hinder progress.

Delegates should consequently use existing UN frameworks as the foundation for their proposals while concentrating negotiations on how implementation can be strengthened, financed, adapted to different national circumstances, and translated into effective action at the local level.

Current Challenges and Debates

Ten years after the adoption of the New Urban Agenda, progress toward inclusive, resilient, and sustainable cities remains uneven. The 2026 midterm review concluded that the central challenge is no longer establishing international principles, but accelerating their implementation at national and local levels. Rapid population growth, inadequate housing, infrastructure deficits, limited municipal finance, climate change, and inequalities continue to place significant pressure on cities, particularly in rapidly urbanizing regions (United Nations Human Settlements Programme [UN-Habitat], 2026a).

Managing Urban Expansion: Compact Cities or Continued Sprawl?

One of the central challenges is determining how cities should physically accommodate population growth. For decades, urban land expansion frequently occurred faster than population growth, contributing to longer travel distances, higher infrastructure costs, environmental degradation, and greater automobile dependence. Recent UN data suggest that land consumption and population growth have become more closely aligned, but pressures from urban expansion remain significant (United Nations Statistics Division [UNSD], 2026).

Compact development can make public transportation and infrastructure more efficient and reduce the consumption of surrounding land. However, increasing urban density can also place pressure on existing infrastructure and contribute to rising land and housing prices if housing supply and services do not expand accordingly.

Key debate: Should governments encourage denser development within existing urban areas or allow cities to continue expanding outward? How can urban growth occur without increasing congestion, housing costs, or environmental pressures?

Housing Affordability and the Growth of Informal Settlements

Housing has become one of the most urgent global urban challenges. In 2026, the United Nations reported that more than 3 billion people lacked safe, adequate, and affordable housing, while more than 1 billion people lived in informal settlements and slums. SDG data indicate that approximately 1.16 billion urban residents lived in slums or slum-like conditions in 2024 (UN-Habitat, 2026b; UNSD, 2026).

The controversy concerns not only how much housing is built, but where it is located, who can afford it, and how it is connected to employment and services. Governments may expand public or social housing, subsidize home ownership or rent, encourage private construction, reform zoning, release public land, or combine these approaches.

Informal settlements create additional dilemmas. Relocation may be necessary when communities occupy areas exposed to severe environmental hazards, but poorly designed relocation programs can

separate residents from jobs, transportation, schools, and social networks. In-situ upgrading may preserve communities but can be difficult where land tenure is disputed or infrastructure cannot easily be provided.

Key debate: Should governments prioritize building new housing, regulating housing markets, upgrading existing informal settlements, or relocating vulnerable communities? What responsibilities should private developers have for affordable housing?

Mobility: Private Vehicles or People-Centered Cities?

Rapid urban expansion frequently increases travel distances between housing, employment, education, and services. Where public transportation is insufficient, residents may become increasingly dependent on private vehicles, contributing to congestion, pollution, road expansion, and unequal mobility.

Global access to public transportation improved from approximately 53% in 2020 to 62% in 2025, but major regional inequalities and problems involving reliability, capacity, safety, and accessibility remain (UNSD, 2026).

Governments must therefore decide how limited urban space and infrastructure investment should be distributed among roads, automobiles, buses, rail systems, cycling, and pedestrians.

This can become politically controversial. Restricting automobile use, reducing parking, reallocating road space, or introducing congestion charges can improve urban mobility but may face strong public opposition. At the same time, public transportation cannot become a realistic alternative unless it is safe, affordable, reliable, and sufficiently extensive.

Key debate: Should rapidly growing cities continue expanding road infrastructure or redirect investment toward mass public transportation, walking, cycling, and transit-oriented development?

Financing Urban Transformation

Many cities know what infrastructure they need but cannot afford to build it. Sustainable urbanization requires investment in housing, transportation, water, sanitation, drainage, energy, public spaces, waste management, and climate resilience.

Local governments, particularly in developing countries, may have limited tax revenues, borrowing authority, technical expertise, or access to international finance. Climate financing presents a similar problem: UN-Habitat estimates that cities currently receive less than 20% of the financing required for effective urban climate action (UN-Habitat, 2024).

Possible sources include national transfers, municipal taxation, development banks, climate funds, land-value capture, municipal bonds, public-private partnerships, and private investment. Each raises questions concerning debt, affordability, accountability, and control over public infrastructure.

Key debate: Who should pay for sustainable urbanization? Should international financial institutions provide greater concessional financing to rapidly growing cities? How much should governments depend on private investment and public-private partnerships?

Climate Change, Resilience, and Development Priorities

Cities are increasingly exposed to flooding, extreme heat, storms, drought, sea-level rise, and other climate-related hazards. Rapid urban expansion can increase these risks when housing and infrastructure are constructed in floodplains, coastal areas, unstable slopes, or other vulnerable locations. Climate impacts also disproportionately affect poorer and marginalized communities, which often have fewer resources to prepare, relocate, or recover (UN-Habitat, 2024).

At the same time, developing countries may argue that climate requirements should not prevent them from meeting urgent housing and infrastructure needs.

This creates a significant international debate over climate justice and financing. Highly vulnerable developing countries frequently require substantial investment to make rapidly growing cities resilient despite having contributed comparatively little to historical greenhouse-gas emissions.

Key debate: Should climate-vulnerable cities and developing countries receive preferential access to international urban and climate finance? How should governments balance immediate development needs with long-term environmental resilience?

Infrastructure and Basic Services

Urban growth requires infrastructure to expand alongside population. Yet many cities experience significant gaps in access to water, sanitation, drainage, electricity, waste management, transportation, healthcare, schools, and digital connectivity.

The problem is especially difficult in peripheral and informal areas where development may have occurred before infrastructure was installed. Retrofitting roads, drainage, sanitation, or transportation into already established settlements can be substantially more expensive than planning infrastructure before development occurs.

This raises a central issue for the committee: cities must move from reactive to anticipatory planning. Governments need to estimate where future growth will occur and reserve land and resources for infrastructure before urban expansion makes intervention more difficult.

Key debate: Should governments prioritize upgrading existing underserved neighborhoods or constructing infrastructure in advance of future urban expansion?

Public Space, Green Areas, and Competing Uses of Urban Land

Urban land is limited and politically valuable. Governments must balance demands for housing, roads, businesses, infrastructure, parks, wetlands, public spaces, and other uses.

UN data indicate that only about 17% of urban land in the cities studied is currently allocated to streets and public open spaces, and convenient access to open spaces has declined despite continuing urban population growth (UNSD, 2026).

Green and public spaces provide recreational, social, environmental, and climate benefits. Wetlands and urban forests can also help manage flooding and heat. However, governments facing housing shortages may encounter pressure to use available land for residential or commercial development.

Key debate: How much urban land should governments protect for parks, wetlands, public spaces, and environmental functions when cities simultaneously face housing and infrastructure shortages?

National Control or Stronger Local Governments?

Urban problems are experienced locally, but municipalities do not always control the financial or legal tools necessary to address them. National governments may control taxation, infrastructure budgets, housing programs, environmental standards, or major transportation investments.

The 2026 midterm review of the New Urban Agenda specifically called for stronger local and regional governments and greater financing for sustainable urbanization (UN-Habitat, 2026b).

Greater decentralization can allow cities to respond more effectively to local conditions, but it can also produce unequal capacity among municipalities and fragmented metropolitan policies.

Key debate: Should national governments transfer greater financial and planning authority to cities, or is stronger national coordination necessary to ensure equitable and coherent development?

Smart Cities, Data, and Technology

Digital technologies are increasingly used to manage transportation, utilities, land use, energy consumption, emergency services, infrastructure, and urban planning. Geographic information systems, satellite imagery, sensors, digital twins, and data analytics can help governments identify risks and anticipate future development.

However, technology does not automatically make cities sustainable or inclusive. Smart-city projects can be expensive, increase dependence on private technology companies, create cybersecurity and privacy concerns, or direct resources toward technologically advanced districts while poorer neighborhoods continue to lack basic infrastructure.

Key debate: Should rapidly growing cities invest heavily in smart-city technologies, or should limited resources first address housing, transportation, water, sanitation, and other fundamental services?

Participation versus Speed of Development

Large urban projects frequently affect existing neighborhoods, businesses, landowners, and communities. The New Urban Agenda promotes participatory urban planning, and recent UN-Habitat discussions have called for stakeholder participation to become a meaningful part of planning, budgeting, implementation, and accountability rather than an occasional consultation (United Nations, 2017; UN-Habitat, 2026c).

Nevertheless, extensive consultation can lengthen planning processes. Governments facing severe congestion, housing shortages, or infrastructure deficits may argue that projects must proceed rapidly.

Key debate: How can governments ensure meaningful community participation without preventing or excessively delaying infrastructure and housing projects needed by rapidly growing populations?

The Central Challenge for Delegates

The current debate over urbanization is not simply between development and sustainability. Cities require both.

The more difficult question is how governments can accommodate millions of additional urban residents while simultaneously ensuring affordable housing, mobility, infrastructure, public services, environmental protection, resilience, and social inclusion.

The 2026 review of the New Urban Agenda reinforces this urgency. With the global urban population expected to continue increasing toward 2050, the international community has emphasized that the next decade must move from commitments toward implementation, investment, stronger local institutions, and measurable results (UN-Habitat, 2026a, 2026b).

Delegates should therefore consider not only what policies they support, but also who will implement them, who will finance them, how their effectiveness will be measured, and whether they can realistically be adapted to countries with very different economic, geographic, and institutional conditions.

Case Studies

Urban growth produces different challenges depending on geography, population, institutional capacity, economic development, and historical patterns of settlement. The following cases illustrate contrasting approaches to managing urban growth. They should not be understood as models that can simply be replicated elsewhere. Rather, they demonstrate both the possibilities and limitations of different urban-development strategies.

Curitiba, Brazil: Integrating Land Use and Public Transportation

Curitiba is frequently cited as an important example of integrating transportation with long-term land-use planning. Beginning with its 1966 Master Plan, the city structured development around major transportation corridors rather than treating transportation as a separate issue after urban expansion had already occurred. Higher-density residential and commercial development was encouraged along these corridors, while the city's Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system became a central element of its urban structure (UN-Habitat, 2014).

The importance of Curitiba's experience lies not simply in the creation of a successful bus system. Its broader contribution was recognizing that where people live and work determines how transportation systems function. By coordinating land use, road networks, and public transportation, the city sought to direct growth toward areas that could be served more efficiently. UN-Habitat has consequently highlighted Curitiba as an example of transit-oriented development and integrated land-use and transport planning (UN-Habitat, 2013, 2014).

Nevertheless, Curitiba's experience also demonstrates that successful urban policies require continuous adaptation. Population growth, metropolitan expansion beyond municipal boundaries, increasing automobile ownership, and changing housing patterns can place new pressures on systems originally considered innovative.

Lesson for delegates: Sustainable mobility requires more than building transportation infrastructure. Land-use decisions, housing location, population density, and transportation planning must be coordinated from the beginning.

Medellín, Colombia: Mobility, Social Inclusion, and Integrated Urban Development

Medellín provides a different approach to urban transformation. During periods of rapid and unequal urban growth, many low-income communities developed on steep hillsides with limited access to transportation, public spaces, and other urban services.

Rather than addressing transportation alone, Medellín increasingly adopted an approach often described as integrated urbanism or social urbanism. The city's Metro system was expanded through Metrocable, beginning in 2004, to connect hillside communities with the broader transportation network. Transportation investments were accompanied by public spaces, pedestrian infrastructure, libraries, schools, community facilities, and neighborhood improvements (World Bank, 2017, 2018).

Community participation also formed part of integrated neighborhood planning. The objective was not simply to move residents more efficiently but to connect previously marginalized communities with employment, education, services, and the rest of the city. The World Bank has identified Medellín's combination of transportation, public spaces, social infrastructure, and community-based planning as an important example of inclusive urban transformation.

Medellín nevertheless continues to face socioeconomic inequality and other urban challenges. Its experience should therefore not be treated as evidence that infrastructure alone can eliminate structural inequality.

Lesson for delegates: Urban mobility can function as an instrument of social inclusion when transportation investments are integrated with public spaces, services, community participation, and neighborhood development.

Singapore: Long-Term Planning in a Land-Constrained City

Singapore illustrates the role of long-term and integrated planning in managing urban growth where land is extremely limited. Since the 1960s, the city-state has coordinated land use, housing, transportation, economic development, and infrastructure through long-term planning.

Transportation planning has been closely linked to the location of housing and employment. New residential towns and commercial centers were developed with public-transport connections, while development around Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) stations has allowed residential and commercial activities to be concentrated around transportation infrastructure. Policies limiting excessive dependence on private automobiles have complemented investment in public transportation (Centre for Liveable Cities Singapore [CLC], 2025).

Singapore's experience demonstrates the advantages of anticipatory planning: governments can reserve land and coordinate infrastructure before development occurs rather than attempting to retrofit transportation and services after neighborhoods have already expanded.

However, Singapore's relatively small territory, centralized governmental structure, strong institutional capacity, and financial resources distinguish it significantly from large federal countries or rapidly expanding cities in developing states. Its policies therefore cannot necessarily be transferred directly to other national contexts.

Lesson for delegates: Long-term planning can reduce future infrastructure problems, but urban strategies must reflect each country's institutional capacity, political system, geography, and financial resources.

Indonesia: Upgrading Informal Settlements Instead of Starting Over

Indonesia provides an important case for examining one of the committee's most difficult questions: What should governments do when urban growth has already occurred without adequate infrastructure?

Rather than relying exclusively on demolition or relocation, Indonesia has a long history of upgrading existing urban communities. More recently, the National Slum Upgrading Project (KOTAKU) sought to improve infrastructure and basic services in informal and underserved areas while involving communities and local governments in planning and implementation.

The program supported improvements involving roads, drainage, sanitation, waste management, water, and other neighborhood infrastructure. World Bank reporting indicates that the project ultimately improved living conditions for millions of residents and upgraded thousands of hectares of settlement areas (World Bank, 2024, 2026).

A significant feature of the approach was its attempt to combine community participation with city-level planning. Local governments were placed at the center of planning and implementation while community-based mechanisms helped identify local priorities.

Indonesia nevertheless continues to experience significant urban challenges, including rapid metropolitan expansion, infrastructure gaps, and exposure to flooding. Its experience demonstrates that settlement upgrading is not a complete substitute for preventing poorly planned growth in the first place.

Lesson for delegates: Where informal settlements already exist, governments may achieve better results by integrating and upgrading communities rather than automatically removing them. Prevention and anticipatory planning, however, remain essential.

Villahermosa, Mexico: Planning an Ongoing Metropolitan Transformation

Villahermosa provides a particularly relevant contemporary case because the city hosting MUNARJÍ is currently undergoing a significant urban transformation.

The Government of Tabasco presented the Villahermosa 2030 Master Plan in 2025 as an integrated initiative intended to address mobility, connectivity, territorial planning, public transportation, infrastructure, and future urban development. Official planning documents identify congestion and lengthy and costly commuting as existing challenges and propose using mobility infrastructure as an axis for broader territorial and urban development (Gobierno del Estado de Tabasco, 2025a).

The plan includes the modernization and extension of Paseo Tabasco, a new bridge over the Carrizal River, road interventions, an integrated public-transport network, hybrid buses, new transfer infrastructure, and proposed river-transport routes. It is also connected to new development in the western part of the metropolitan area and other major public and private investments (Gobierno del Estado de Tabasco, 2025a, 2026a).

An especially relevant dimension concerns the Villahermosa-Nacajuca conurbation. In 2026, authorities reported that approximately 101,000 people lived in this conurbated area, representing almost 12% of metropolitan Villahermosa. A new urban-development program is being prepared to regulate and coordinate growth across territory shared by the municipalities of Centro and Nacajuca (Gobierno del Estado de Tabasco, 2026b).

This metropolitan dimension illustrates an important challenge discussed throughout this guide: cities do not necessarily stop growing at administrative boundaries. Housing, transportation, infrastructure, employment, and environmental systems can extend across several municipalities, requiring intergovernmental coordination.

The case is also relevant because government authorities have acknowledged that parts of the conurbated area expanded for decades without sufficient planning or basic services, while current initiatives seek to connect infrastructure improvements with more comprehensive urban planning (Gobierno del Estado de Tabasco, 2025b).

Villahermosa 2030 should not yet be evaluated as either a successful or unsuccessful model. Major components are still under development or construction, and their long-term effects cannot yet be established. Instead, the project provides delegates with a real-time example of the choices governments confront when attempting to reorganize mobility and infrastructure while simultaneously directing future metropolitan growth.

Lesson for delegates: Urban planning is not only about solving existing problems. Governments must anticipate where cities will grow, how new areas will connect with existing neighborhoods, which infrastructure should come first, and how different municipalities can coordinate metropolitan development.

Possible Solutions and Future Perspectives

Managing rapid and unplanned urban growth will require more than responding to problems after they appear. As cities continue to expand, governments increasingly need to anticipate where growth will occur, coordinate housing and infrastructure, strengthen local institutions, mobilize financing, and ensure that urban development remains socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable.

There is no single urban-development model that can be applied to every country. Solutions must reflect differences in geography, income, governance systems, population growth, climate vulnerability, and institutional capacity. Nevertheless, several policy approaches provide important areas for international cooperation.

Strengthening Integrated and Anticipatory Urban Planning

One of the most important strategies is shifting from reactive to anticipatory planning. Governments should identify areas likely to experience future population and territorial growth and plan transportation, housing, water, sanitation, drainage, public spaces, schools, healthcare, and other infrastructure before development becomes consolidated.

Urban planning should also integrate policies that are often treated separately. Housing developments constructed far from employment and public transportation can increase congestion and household transportation costs, while roads constructed without considering land use can encourage additional sprawl. UN-Habitat therefore emphasizes integrated urban and territorial planning as a major priority for 2026–2029 (UN-Habitat, 2025a).

International cooperation can support governments through technical assistance, planning tools, geographic and demographic data, training, and exchange of successful practices.

Expanding Adequate and Affordable Housing

Housing policy must address both quantity and location. Building additional homes will not necessarily reduce urban inequality if lower-income residents are displaced toward distant peripheral areas without transportation, employment, schools, or essential services.

Possible approaches include:

- expanding social and affordable housing;
- increasing the supply of serviced land;
- improving access to housing finance;

- encouraging mixed-income development;
- adapting land-use and zoning regulations where appropriate;
- bringing vacant or underused urban land into productive use;
- strengthening security of tenure; and
- locating new housing near employment, services, and public transportation.

UN-Habitat's Strategic Plan 2026–2029 places adequate housing, land, and basic services at the center of sustainable urbanization, reflecting the growing international recognition that housing policy influences poverty, inequality, mobility, resilience, and economic opportunity (UN-Habitat, 2025a).

Upgrading Informal Settlements Through Inclusive Approaches

Where informal settlements already exist, governments should consider in-situ upgrading where conditions allow rather than automatically relying on demolition and relocation.

Upgrading can include water and sanitation, drainage, electricity, roads, waste collection, public spaces, transportation connections, housing improvements, and stronger tenure security. Community participation can help identify priorities and reduce the risk that redevelopment separates residents from employment, education, and social networks.

Relocation may still be necessary where settlements are located in areas of extreme environmental or disaster risk. In such cases, governments should seek to ensure adequate housing, access to livelihoods and services, consultation, and appropriate protection for affected residents.

UN-Habitat's current strategy specifically identifies the transformation of informal settlements and slums as part of the international effort to expand adequate housing, land, and basic services (UN-Habitat, 2025b).

Connecting Land Use, Housing, and Sustainable Mobility

Transportation planning should be coordinated with decisions about where housing, employment, education, and commercial activity are located.

Transit-oriented development (TOD) can concentrate mixed-use and higher-density development around public-transport corridors and stations, reducing travel distances and improving access to opportunities. Governments can complement mass transit with safe walking and cycling infrastructure and better connections among different transportation systems.

Such strategies require attention to affordability. Improvements in transportation can increase nearby land values and potentially displace lower-income residents unless housing and land policies are incorporated into transportation planning.

The World Bank has identified transit-oriented development and land-value mechanisms as potential ways to combine sustainable mobility with urban financing and more efficient development (World Bank, 2015).

Expanding and Diversifying Urban Finance

One of the largest obstacles to sustainable urbanization is the gap between the responsibilities assigned to cities and the financial resources available to them.

No single source of funding can meet urban infrastructure needs. Governments may therefore need combinations of:

- national and subnational budgets;
- municipal taxes and fees;
- intergovernmental transfers;
- development-bank financing;
- climate funds;
- municipal bonds where appropriate;
- carefully structured public-private partnerships; and
- land-value capture mechanisms.

Land-value capture can allow governments to recover part of the increase in property values generated by public infrastructure and reinvest it in transportation, housing, or other public services. The New Urban Agenda specifically recognizes the potential of capturing increases in land and property value created through public investment, while emphasizing appropriate safeguards (United Nations, 2017).

International financial institutions can also help cities strengthen creditworthiness, develop viable projects, improve financial management, and gain access to longer-term financing.

Integrating Climate Resilience into Urban Development

Climate adaptation should become part of ordinary urban planning rather than a separate policy implemented only after disasters occur.

Governments can use risk mapping and land-use regulation to limit development in highly vulnerable areas and incorporate resilience standards into housing and infrastructure. Cities can also invest in nature-based solutions, including wetlands, urban forests, permeable surfaces, restored waterways, and green spaces that can reduce flooding and extreme heat while providing environmental and social benefits.

UN-Habitat emphasizes that climate-resilient urban development should be locally appropriate, inclusive, and integrated with broader development objectives. It also warns that climate interventions can unintentionally contribute to displacement or “green gentrification” if improvements increase property values without protecting vulnerable residents (UN-Habitat, 2024).

Strengthening Local and Metropolitan Governance

Urban areas frequently extend beyond municipal boundaries, while transportation, housing markets, watersheds, waste systems, and infrastructure networks operate at metropolitan scales.

Governments can strengthen coordination through metropolitan planning bodies, shared transportation authorities, intermunicipal agreements, common data systems, and integrated territorial plans.

At the same time, local governments require sufficient authority, technical capacity, and financial resources to fulfill the responsibilities assigned to them. UN-Habitat's current strategy therefore identifies participatory multilevel governance as one of the principal mechanisms for improving urban development (UN-Habitat, 2025a).

International cooperation can assist by strengthening municipal institutions and facilitating exchanges among cities facing similar challenges.

Using Data and Technology Responsibly

Better urban planning depends on understanding where people live, how they move, which areas lack services, where future development is occurring, and which communities face environmental risks.

Governments can use population data, geographic information systems (GIS), satellite imagery, transportation information, digital mapping, and other technologies to support

evidence-based planning. Digital tools can also improve service delivery and help authorities monitor infrastructure and urban growth.

However, smart-city technology should be a tool rather than an objective in itself. Investments should respond to actual urban needs and should not divert scarce resources from basic housing, water, sanitation, transportation, or infrastructure. Governments must also consider affordability, privacy, cybersecurity, digital inequality, and dependence on private technology providers.

UN-Habitat's 2026–2029 Catalogue of Solutions emphasizes practical tools, data, methodologies, and capacity development that governments can adapt to their particular circumstances (UN-Habitat, 2026).

Increasing Community Participation

Urban-development projects are more likely to respond to local needs when affected communities participate meaningfully in planning and implementation.

Governments can use public consultations, participatory planning, neighborhood councils, participatory budgeting, digital consultation tools, and partnerships with community organizations. Particular attention should be given to groups whose perspectives may otherwise be underrepresented, including residents of informal settlements, women, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, migrants, and low-income communities.

Participation is particularly important when governments consider redevelopment, infrastructure construction, settlement upgrading, or relocation.

UN-Habitat's research on urban climate action emphasizes that community-led and participatory approaches can strengthen both resilience and social inclusion (UN-Habitat, 2024).

Strengthening International Cooperation and Knowledge-Sharing

Cities across the world face similar challenges but possess very different resources and institutional capacities. International cooperation can help governments adapt lessons from other cities without assuming that one model can simply be copied everywhere.

UN-Habitat, development banks, UN agencies, regional organizations, city networks, universities, and technical institutions can support:

- capacity-building for planners and local officials;
- exchange of urban-planning practices;

- technical assistance;
- urban data and monitoring;
- development of financing mechanisms;
- climate-risk assessment;
- housing and settlement-upgrading programs; and
- South-South and triangular cooperation.

The objective should be adaptation rather than replication. Curitiba, Medellín, Singapore, Indonesia, or other cases may provide useful principles, but successful policies must be adjusted to local geography, institutions, financial resources, and community needs.

Future Perspectives

The future of sustainable urbanization will depend increasingly on governments' ability to plan for growth before it occurs.

UN-Habitat's current direction reflects a shift from treating housing, transportation, climate resilience, infrastructure, and inequality as separate urban problems toward addressing them as interconnected components of urban development. Its Strategic Plan 2026-2029 combines housing, land, and basic services with integrated planning, multilevel governance, data, capacity-building, partnerships, and resource mobilization (UN-Habitat, 2025a).

Climate change will make this integration even more important. UN-Habitat estimates that cities currently receive less than 20% of the financing required for effective urban climate action, demonstrating that future progress will depend not only on better policies but also on substantially stronger financing mechanisms and institutional capacity (UN-Habitat, 2024).

Technology will also influence how cities are planned and managed, but the success of future cities should not be measured primarily by how technologically advanced they become. A sustainable city must ultimately be judged by whether residents can access adequate housing, move efficiently, obtain essential services, participate in community life, live safely in the face of environmental risks, and benefit equitably from urban development.

For delegates, the central objective should therefore not be to design an ideal city. It should be to determine how UN-Habitat and the international community can help governments transform rapid urban growth into planned, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable development while respecting different national circumstances and local priorities.

Guiding Questions for Delegates

When preparing for the committee, delegates should consider the following questions from the perspective of the country they represent:

1. How rapidly is your country urbanizing, and what are the principal urban challenges it currently faces?
2. What factors contribute most significantly to rapid or unplanned urban growth in your country? Consider population growth, migration, housing shortages, economic concentration, weak planning, displacement, or other relevant factors.
3. How does your country currently manage urban and metropolitan growth? What roles do national, regional, and local governments play in urban planning?
4. What policies does your country support to increase access to adequate and affordable housing and improve conditions in informal settlements?
5. How should cities balance higher-density development with outward urban expansion? Which approach is most consistent with your country's circumstances and policies?
6. What role should public transportation, walking, cycling, and transit-oriented development play in reducing congestion and improving access to urban opportunities?
7. How can rapidly growing cities expand infrastructure and basic services before population growth exceeds their capacity?
8. How should cities incorporate climate adaptation, disaster-risk reduction, green areas, and nature-based solutions into future urban development?
9. How should sustainable urban development be financed? What roles should national governments, local authorities, development banks, climate funds, private investors, and public-private partnerships play?
10. Should local and metropolitan governments receive greater authority and financial resources to manage urban growth, or should national governments retain stronger control and coordination?
11. How can governments use data, digital technologies, and smart-city tools while protecting privacy, ensuring accessibility, and avoiding greater technological inequality?
12. What forms of international cooperation should UN-Habitat prioritize to help countries manage rapid and unplanned urban growth? Consider financing, technical assistance, capacity-building, technology, urban data, knowledge-sharing, and South-South cooperation.

Suggested Readings and Resources

Essential Resources

UN-Habitat – Official Website

The principal source for UN-Habitat publications, programs, resolutions, policy documents, urban data, and information on sustainable urban development. Delegates should use this portal as a starting point for understanding the mandate and current priorities of the committee.

[UN-Habitat official website](https://unhabitat.org/)

New Urban Agenda

The most important international policy framework for this committee. Adopted at Habitat III in 2016, it establishes global commitments concerning urban planning, housing, mobility, public spaces, resilience, social inclusion, land management, and multilevel governance (United Nations, 2017).

[Read the New Urban Agenda](https://unhabitat.org/new-urban-agenda/)

United Nations – Sustainable Development Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

Provides the targets and indicators associated with making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Delegates should pay particular attention to Targets **11.1, 11.2, 11.3, 11.5, 11.6, 11.7, and 11.a**.

[UN Sustainable Development Goal 11](https://unhabitat.org/sustainable-development-goal-11/)

UN-Habitat Strategic Plan 2026-2029

Explains UN-Habitat's current priorities and is particularly important for ensuring that proposed resolutions remain consistent with the organization's actual mandate. The plan places housing, land, basic services, integrated urban and territorial planning, participatory multilevel governance, knowledge and data, partnerships, and resource mobilization at the center of UN-Habitat's work (UN-Habitat, 2025).

[UN-Habitat Strategic Plan 2026-2029](https://unhabitat.org/strategic-plan-2026-2029/)

Reports and Data

UN-Habitat – World Cities Report 2024: Cities and Climate Action

One of the most useful contemporary reports for this topic. It examines the relationship between urbanization and climate change, including flooding, heat, inequality, informal settlements, infrastructure, climate finance, community participation, and urban resilience. It also contains international examples that delegates can use when developing solutions (UN-Habitat, 2024).

[World Cities Report 2024](https://unhabitat.org/world-cities-report-2024/)

United Nations Statistics Division – SDG 11 Data and Progress

Provides official UN indicators and statistics on housing, informal settlements, public transportation, urban expansion, public spaces, disaster impacts, and other dimensions of sustainable urbanization. This is

particularly useful when delegates need reliable statistics for position papers and speeches.

[UN SDG Indicators Database](#)

World Bank – Urban Development

Provides research, data, policy analysis, and project information concerning urban infrastructure, municipal finance, housing, land, resilience, transportation, and rapidly growing cities. It is particularly valuable for researching the financing dimension of proposed solutions.

[World Bank Urban Development](#)

Urban Resilience and Climate Change

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction – Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030

An essential framework for understanding how land-use planning, infrastructure, governance, and investment can reduce disaster risks in rapidly growing cities.

[Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#)

UN-Habitat – Urban Climate Action Resources

UN-Habitat provides reports and tools concerning climate-resilient housing, nature-based solutions, local climate action, urban vulnerability, multilevel governance, and financing. Its recent work emphasizes that urban climate policies should also address poverty, inequality, and vulnerable communities rather than treating resilience solely as an infrastructure issue.

[UN-Habitat World Cities Report climate resources](#)

Urban Planning and Mobility

UN-Habitat – Urban Planning for City Leaders

A practical introduction to urban planning that explains density, streets, public spaces, land use, infrastructure, and planned urban expansion. It is especially accessible for delegates who have little previous knowledge of urban planning.

[Urban Planning for City Leaders](#)

UN-Habitat – Planning and Design for Sustainable Urban Mobility

Examines the relationship between transportation, accessibility, land use, urban form, and sustainable development. It is particularly useful for delegates researching public transportation, automobile dependence, transit-oriented development, and mobility inequality.

[Planning and Design for Sustainable Urban Mobility](#)

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