

2025 SDG Cities Conference

*Innovative Development towards People-Centered
Smart Cities*



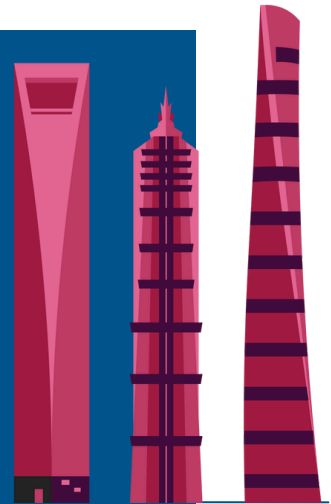
Register

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26-27 October 2025
The Starry Sky Hall of the Grand Halls
Shanghai, China

Background



Nearly a decade after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, cities stand at the frontline of global transformation. With 55% of the world's population living in urban areas and an additional 2.5 billion urban residents expected in the next 30 years, city planning, development, and management are increasingly central to ensuring global well-being and sustainability. Yet a radical shift is needed – from siloed, short-term and uncoordinated development to holistic and locally anchored approaches fostering multistakeholder dialogue and systemic change for local communities. Local governments have already successfully adopted integrated urban solutions and generated positive impact. To address the global housing crisis, guarantee dignity, reduce poverty, and ensure universal access to basic services, cities must be better planned, inclusively managed, and sustainably developed.

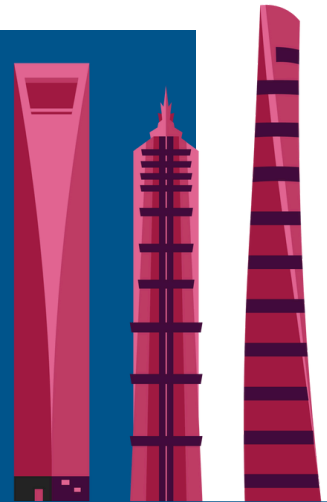
It is in this context that the **SDG Cities Initiative** has worked for years to harness the solutions and innovations developed by cities and provided a dynamic space for exchange, partnerships, and capacity building for local governments worldwide. Implemented by UN-Habitat, and embedded within the Local2030 Coalition, SDG Cities offers a holistic, flexible and modular approach aimed at ***making things easy for cities*** – simplifying their path toward prosperity by translating the SDGs into a practical tool guiding local development.

Anchored on three tracks – ***data, planning and investment***, SDG Cities accompanies local governments through a step-by-step process strengthening their capacities to collect and analyze data, take strategic decisions based on evidence, and invest where the potential to produce positive and wider systemic change is higher. With the ambition of ***transforming 1,000 cities and improving the lives of 1 billion people***, SDG Cities combines UN-Habitat's services to cities and expertise on sustainable urban development under a single umbrella.

SDG Cities is a cornerstone of **UN-Habitat's 2026-2029 Strategic Plan** delivery. Endorsed in May 2025, the Strategic Plan reinforces the connection between the SDGs, multilevel governance, and integrated urban development as a key means to tackle the global housing crisis and deliver basic services and land for all. Anchored in the operational work of UN-Habitat's Regional and Country Offices, SDG Cities maximizes impact.

SDG Cities' mandate and efforts are embedded in the **Local2030 Coalition**, the UN system-wide initiative on localizing the 2030 Agenda – permanently co-chaired by UN-Habitat. The Coalition ensures coherence and impact across the UN's work on localization, while engaging local governments, civil society, and the private sector to collectively advance SDG implementation.

Background



SDG Cities' longstanding partner, **Shanghai**, has long been a pioneer in advancing the localization agenda. Beyond serving as the birthplace of World Cities Day, the city has partnered with UN-Habitat and China to develop flagship contributions to global urban knowledge and practices, such as through the ***Shanghai Award for Sustainable Development in Cities***, the ***Shanghai Manual***, and the ***Global Urban Monitoring Framework (UMF) - Shanghai Adapted Index***.

Building on the results of the previous three editions, the **2025 SDG Cities Conference** aims to be a dynamic space for technical exchanges, action-oriented dialogue and capacity building, anchored on UN-Habitat's Strategic Plan. Contributing to the World Cities Day 2025 and the global observatory, the conference will offer a space to discuss cities' solutions: how cities have adopted and tailored the SDG Cities process to their needs and transformed it into a guiding framework for streamlining decision-making, amplifying impact and delivering systemic changes for local communities. In addition, the Conference will feature special sessions to deep dive into three critical issues for cities' future development: Adequate Housing, Green Transitions, SDG Localization and Digital Governance.

As the international community builds momentum toward the **13th World Urban Forum** (17–22 May 2026, Baku, Azerbaijan), the SDG Cities Conference will also serve as a critical milestone in the “Road to Baku” – as promoted by the Local2030 Coalition. It will strengthen interregional cooperation – with particular emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region – promote scalable solutions, and renew global commitment to empowering cities as the driving force of sustainable urban development.

Organizers

The 2025 SDG Cities Conference is organized by Shanghai Municipal People's Government and UN-Habitat and co-organized by Shanghai's Municipal Commission of Housing, Urban-Rural Development and Management.

Overall objectives

01

Strengthening Global Collaboration on Sustainable Urban Development:

Establish a platform for city leaders, industry experts, and scholars to exchange knowledge, share practices, and accelerate progress towards the UN 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda.

02

Showcase Shanghai–UN-Habitat Cooperation: Highlight joint initiatives and outcomes.

03

Advance Housing and Basic Services as a Central Pillar:

Support SDG Localization by prioritizing adequate housing, land, and basic services, in line with UN-Habitat's Strategic Plan.

04

Promote the SDG Cities Integrated and Innovative Approach to Sustainable Cities:

Foster knowledge-sharing, innovation, and dialogue across economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, aligned with World Cities Day's vision of "Better City, Better Life."

05

Provide access to UN-Habitat coherent approach to Cities:

Combining UN-Habitat's services to cities and expertise on sustainable urban development under SDG Cities single umbrella.

Expected Outcomes

01

Advance SDG Localization by consolidating practical tools, governance mechanisms, and capacity-building approaches into integrated outcomes. This includes new methodologies for planning, financing, monitoring, and multilevel governance, aligned with SDG Cities, while strengthening multistakeholder engagement aligned with the Local2030 Coalition.

02

Highlight concrete progress on housing as a driver of sustainable urban development, with particular attention to adequate housing, land management, and universal access to basic services. Discussions will emphasize innovations in Social Housing and Housing Finance, and how the SDG Cities process contributes to scaling solutions in these areas.

03

Provide hands-on workshops and peer-learning opportunities for local and regional governments, focusing on the SDG Cities' integrated approach – data, planning, and investment. These exchanges will also showcase scalable and replicable approaches that have delivered systemic change and demonstrate how they can be adapted across diverse urban contexts.

04

Facilitate the understanding of UN-Habitat approach to city development combining UN-Habitat services for sustainable urban development under the umbrella of SDG Cities.

05

Highlight Shanghai's global contributions (Shanghai Award, Shanghai Manual, UMF–Shanghai Adapted Index) as models for innovation and replication. This outcome will also connect global processes, World Cities Day, the Local2030 Coalition, and preparations for WUF13, framing their relevance for accelerating local action and advancing the 2030 Agenda.



Description and Agenda

The 2025 SDG Cities Global Conference will be structured around three Cities' Solutions Sessions and three themed Sessions, with activities held concurrently, including the Shanghai International City and Architecture Expo, and social activities.

City Solutions Sessions

SDG Cities Impact: Solutions for Systemic Change at the Local Level:

In times where “impact” is the name of the game, the panel will foster discussion on and among cities’ practices and innovations delivering systemic change for local communities. Panelists will be invited to critically reflect on how to make things easy for cities, specifically following the practical and integrated urban development approach proposed by SDG Cities. Connecting with the Local2030-led Bilbao Blueprint, the aim of the session will be to identify new solutions to streamline decision-making, foster strategic planning and create inclusive processes enabling the identification and delivery of catalytic projects. Last but not least, panelist and public will be invited to reflect on how the SDG Cities can facilitate combination and access of UN-Habitat services to cities and be fit for purpose – delivering tailored and contextualized support with clear added value based on on-demand requests.

SDG Cities Data: Shanghai Adapted Index and UMF Ongoing City-Level Applications:

Technical panel exchange on cities’ experiences in strengthening data environments, including the results of the UMF application by cities worldwide, and how data innovation (dashboards etc.) is transforming evidence-based strategic planning at the local level.

Themed Sessions

I. Adequate Housing for All: Equitable Housing for Livable Cities:

“Equitable Housing” is central to building livable cities, linking adequate housing with spatial planning, quality standards, and community development. First introduced by China’s Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development in 2023 and incorporated into the Government Work Report in 2025, it reflects a shift from ensuring basic shelter to promoting quality living. The concept signals a transition in housing policy from quantity to quality, providing systematic solutions that improve residents’ well-being and advance sustainable urban development. Closely aligned with UN-Habitat’s vision and the outcomes of the Open-Ended Working Group on Housing for All, with emphasis on Social Housing and Housing Finance, “Equitable Housing” also showcases China’s contribution to the global sustainable urban agenda.

II. Green Transitions Toward Resilient Cities:

A resilient city is the goal, and green, low-carbon development is the means. Together, they form a virtuous cycle that drives sustainable urban development. The green transition shifts cities from high energy use and pollution toward a low-carbon, circular, and eco-friendly path, reducing resource consumption and environmental impacts while fostering harmony between the economy, society, and nature. A resilient city can anticipate, adapt, and recover from shocks such as climate change, disasters, or health emergencies, while safeguarding essential functions and minimizing risks. Globally, advancing this transition will ease environmental pressures, support inclusive economic growth, and enable resilient cities. This is especially timely as the international community moves toward the 2026 mid-point review of the New Urban Agenda and accelerates delivery of the 2030 Agenda, with cities at the forefront of climate action, prosperity, and resilience.

Themed Session

III. Digital Governance for Smart Cities:

Digital governance is a vital enabler of innovative and inclusive cities, where technology, such as artificial intelligence, geospatial tools, or big data, enhances transparency, accountability, and participatory urban management. In line with UN-Habitat's people-centred smart cities approach, digital governance can strengthen coordinated urban operations, environmental monitoring, and equitable service delivery. It can also play a key role in ensuring adequate housing, secure land tenure, and access to urban basic services for all. Ultimately, digital governance should empower communities, reduce inequalities, and foster sustainable and smart urban development that is inclusive, resilient, and responsive to the needs of all people.

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