



## UNESCO World Cities Day 2019

*Changing the world: innovations and better life for future generations*

### CONCEPT NOTE

31 October 2019, UNESCO Headquarters

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#### BACKGROUND

The United Nations General Assembly has designated the 31<sup>st</sup> of October as World Cities Day<sup>1</sup>, to explore issues around global urbanization, encourage cooperation among countries and to contribute to sustainable urban development. **This year's theme** is: ***“Changing the world: innovations and better life for future generations”***.

Many trends are affecting cities: rapidly growing populations, particularly in the developing world; changes in demographics; increased citizen engagement and participation for more robust, inclusive policies; the advent of new technologies and their impact on the creative economy; and greater risk of disaster, including as a result of climate change.

UNESCO advocates for more people-centred development models, including in the area of urbanisation where we aim to “re-humanise” cities. The Organization’s long-standing experience in the sciences, education, culture and communication and information provides insights into the multifaceted transformations of our urban spaces.

For many years, UNESCO has been pivoting many of its activities and research towards challenges in urban communities, in step with changing demographics. UNESCO’s multidisciplinary approach offers a unique added value to international debates on development, and creates real, positive change at the heart of communities.

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an important opportunity to build on UNESCO’s long-standing transversal experience. As part of UNESCO’s response to the 2030 Agenda, UNESCO recently strengthened its comprehensive approach to working with cities through the establishment of a dedicated UNESCO Cities Platform, which gathers eight UNESCO networks and programmes. The UNESCO Cities Platform reflects the transversal approach of our work with cities towards implementing the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://undocs.org/a/res/68/239>

UNESCO will use the opportunity of World Cities Day in 2019 to showcase the Organization's full range of resources, programmes and networks that directly contribute to the attainment of SDG11 on sustainable cities and communities. In line with the theme of 2019 World Cities Day, the UNESCO Cities Platform will organise this year's event that will include thematic panel discussions, networking opportunities and audio-visual presentations.

Innovation is at the heart of UNESCO's role in working with stakeholders to devise policies adapted to contemporary challenges. Today's youth, who will be tomorrow's leaders, are key interlocutors, as outlined in UNESCO's [Operational Strategy on Youth](#).

City actors are the true engines of sustainable development at the city level, with valuable success stories and experiences to share. They are the best placed to describe the transformative practices taking place within their communities. As such, this event will be an opportunity for peer-to-peer exchange on the innovative good practices being implemented by city partners across UNESCO's programmes and networks. The innovative format will be led by cities and urban stakeholders, and put the spotlight on emerging trends and practices within cities.

The themes that will be covered during UNESCO's celebration of World Cities Day reflect some of the most pressing issues facing cities: climate action and social inclusion, as well as the nexus between cities and the 2030 Agenda. There will be a strong emphasis on innovation in policy-making that capitalises on the ideas and energy of youth actors.

## THE EVENT

### Provisional programme: "Urban Dialogues"

9:00 – 9:30	<b>Launch of UNESCO's celebration of World Cities Day 2019</b>
9:30 – 11:00	<b>Panel 1 – Cities 4 the Sustainable Development Goals: Championing UNESCO cities for the SDGs</b>
11:00 – 13:00	<b>Panel 2 – Cities 4 Climate Action: Bridging education, environment and innovation at the city-level</b>
LUNCH	
14:30 – 16:00	<b>Panel 3 – Cities 4 Communities: Urban regeneration for social inclusion and accessibility</b>
16:00 – 17:30	<b>Panel 4 – Cities 4 the Future: Cities as springboards for innovation</b>
17:30 – 18:00	<b>Announcement of the winners of Netexplo Smart Cities 2020</b>
18:00 – 18:30	<b>Closing remarks</b>

### **Opening of World Cities Day 2019 and Launch of the UNESCO Platform on Cities (UCP)**

Welcoming remarks will be delivered by a UNESCO high-level representative. A high profile "champion" for cities should also be invited to set an inspirational tone of the event.

### **Panel 1 – Cities 4 the Sustainable Development Goals: Championing UNESCO cities for the SDGs**

The seventeen goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030 have given fresh impetus to efforts to strengthen the linkages between the social, economic and environmental areas of development. Goal 11 in particular aims to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable". Whilst many countries have struggled to make

progress on the seventeen goals of the 2030 Agenda, cities have often proven to be more agile and innovative. Cities are unique hubs of multistakeholder partnerships which hold the capacity to exchange, explore and experiment. Moreover, well-designed policies in cities can also have positive effects on neighbouring, rural areas, meaning development in cities resonates beyond municipal boundaries.

For many years, UNESCO has been pivoting many of its activities and programmes towards challenges and opportunities in urban communities, in step with changing demographics and in line with its multidisciplinary mandate in education, the sciences, culture and communication and information. This cities related work has focused on water systems, World Heritage, lifelong learning, resilience to disasters, creativity, biodiversity, advances in information and communication technologies, as well as combatting discrimination. This panel will discuss the challenges and opportunities related to this transversal approach of the work with cities. It will focus on how to strengthen interdisciplinary linkages at all levels of policy-making.

***Panel 2 – Cities 4 Climate Action: Bridging education, environment and innovation at the city-level***

Cities play a vital role in tackling climate change. For one, they are major contributors to climate change, producing 75% of greenhouse gases. Furthermore, hundreds of millions of people in cities across the world are increasingly susceptible to the extreme weather events that are the result of climate change - these are often the most vulnerable populations. Marginalised groups more often face the threat of water scarcity also in city space, often paying extortionate rates to meet their basic needs. In addition, many urban UNESCO World Heritage Sites – important depositories of human history – are suffering degradation due to climate change.

Climate action is essential for transformative sustainable development. UNESCO programmes and networks, in collaboration with our city partners, offer unique opportunities for mitigating and adapting to the consequences of climate change. UNESCO scientific programmes and networks provide research and advice to cities on water management through the Megacities Alliance for Water and Climate. This network of municipal policy-makers and researchers aims to share best practices on adapting to climate change by minimising urban water and energy footprints. Education for sustainable development is also a key vector for changing behaviours that contribute to climate action and the work of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities demonstrates how effective learning projects can be to stir behavioural change in urban spaces. Similarly, the iconic status of urban World Heritage sites, urban landscapes and cities, as well as the creativity of contemporary artists – many of whom are based in urban areas – are mobilizing forces to counter climate change. Finally, cities, with their dense populations, present an opportunity for inclusive policy-making to ensure that all citizens can contribute to making the decisions that affect the future of their urban neighbourhood, as well as accessing the information necessary to devise adaptive measures via digital technologies.

***Panel 3 – Cities 4 Communities: Urban regeneration for social inclusion and accessibility***

Cities are not only becoming bigger but also more diverse. The rapid social transformations of our cities, driven by the compounded impact of economic and social crises, can result in undermining social cohesion. Overpopulated cities can be conducive to increased inequalities notably vis-à-vis vulnerable groups such as youth, migrants, internally displaced people (IDPs), and elderly people, often excluding them from civic life, which may further degrade trust in public institutions, peace and prosperity. Some vulnerable segments of society, particularly

those in the newer slum settlements, indeed lack basic services such as access to sanitation and water, making them even more exposed to the consequences of disasters. Often the education system is unable to respond to the demands placed upon it, for example, in the case of protracted crises.

Diversity can add advantages and competitiveness to cities by building social cohesion, enhancing economic vitality, fostering cultural belonging, increasing engagement, driving innovation and promoting creativity. To realize this potential, equity and inclusion must be fostered in every aspect of civic life. UNESCO enables cities to share experiences of public policies that sustain social inclusion and accessibility, in order to make positive social change. The International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities brings together cities in the common struggle against racism, xenophobia and other forms of prejudice and discrimination often through tackling the systemic barriers to social inclusion, as well as encouraging collective decision-making. Broader, more inclusive, consultation on public policy can ensure more sustainable city infrastructure and services, thereby promoting urban regeneration. Valuing heritage sites can foster a sense of collective identity, whilst creativity can create a vibrant city life, serve as a platform for diverse cultural expressions and generate income and enhance people's well-being and resilience. A city's ability to adapt to an uncertain future is vital for its resilience and creating lifelong learning opportunities for all, including safely making the most of digital technologies.

#### ***Panel 4 – Cities 4 the Future: Cities as springboards for innovation***

Innovation is fundamental to achieving sustainable development in all spheres of human activity, given the unprecedented, ecological, demographic and technological challenges the world faces. Investments in research and development strengthen resilience and help build cohesive societies. Research and development equally provide new perspectives to address contemporary challenges by stimulating creativity and problem-solving to adapt to the evolving world. Encompassing both the challenges and the opportunities of sustainable development, cities are accelerators of innovation and laboratories of experimentation for sustainable solutions. Innovation can be present in public policies to foster greater inclusion, technological solutions to natural hazards or educational strategies to prepare the public adapt to the consequences of climate change.

The *UNESCO Cities Platform* is a way of bringing several issues together to be able to examine them from a holistic perspective, and propose fresh ways of tackling emerging issues. Science, technology and innovation policies in cities may provide enhanced capacities to engage, to connect, to act and to be resilient. Investing in creativity at the heart of local economy triggers innovative approaches in public policy, embraced by the *UNESCO Creative Cities*. The members of the *International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities* and the *Global Network of Learning Cities* are pooling experiences of innovative public policies to reach marginalized populations and ensure lifelong learning opportunities for all. Cities, which are highly connected through digital technologies, can also use innovative ways of raising awareness about Media and Information Literacy. These are just some of the best practices underpinning UNESCO's work, in cities and more broadly. This panel will explore novel and cutting-edge ways of thinking about policy-making.